



Children's services essay collection

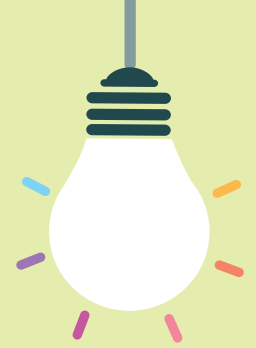
# SHINING A LIGHT VOLUME 2

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## FOREWORD

**Martin Cresswell, Chief Executive and Vice Chairman, iMPOWER**

“There can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way in which it treats its children.”  
– Nelson Mandela

This statement from one of the greatest leaders of recent times must be at the forefront of our minds in the development of children’s social work. This second volume of iMPOWER’s children’s services essay collection brings together a number of insights from some of the leading figures in the sector, and sets out challenges and opportunities for all of us working in this field. For me, this collection brings out the themes of leadership, learning and local politics which are all crucially important. Possibly most important of all is the contribution from **Shannon Corkish**, a recent care leaver, who describes her personal experience of the system. Shannon emphasises the emotional challenges facing children and families; a theme also brought to life by **Nick Barnett** who focuses on the importance of relationships.

**Sue Harrison** raises workforce resilience: something so critical to improving the relationships between care workers and those they support. Sue talks about creating a “living membrane” to provide the right environment where care workers are empowered to influence the system they work within. Too often we forget that we work within a system, and that it’s not just social workers who support children and families, but also teachers, housing officials, health professionals, the police, politicians and the media who all share a role in shaping our children’s futures.

Leadership is also the theme from **Tolis Vouyioukas**. Tolis places a responsibility on local leaders to ensure we focus on the right conversations. By taking a narrow view of the future, leaders will miss the considerable opportunities to improve the lives of many children and their families. Now is the time to challenge conventional thinking, break down the silos across the sector, and drill into the root cause of our societal challenges. We must ask why situations occur today if we are to improve the way we treat our children tomorrow.

This brings us to the role politicians play in determining priorities across the system. As **Cllr Peter Fortune** points out from his own experiences, the day-to-day issues confronting local politicians rarely focus on children in care, and therefore “Councillors are very often operating at a distance from their elected role as a corporate parent”. Championing reform of the system and breaking down existing operational silos will be a key challenge for politicians, but perhaps one that might have the biggest impact of all. This theme is echoed by **Chris Wright**, who rightly places the power to change at a local level rather than nationally. As Chris says, “We must end these artificial silos and come together as whole communities to empower individuals and organisations to solve the social issues that sit on their doorsteps”.

Finally, we tackle the challenge of learning and improvement. **Mark Rogers** suggests that despite the importance of sector-led improvement, this is simply insufficient in the current circumstances. The sector needs to be more imaginative and creative if we are to improve some of the institutional challenges and behaviours inherent in the current system, and Mark helpfully offers some solutions. **Emma Bennett** follows this theme, talking specifically about how her local authority drove improvement in a failing service, enabling a more dedicated focus on improving the life chances of looked-after young people.

This essay collection provides another opportunity to reflect on the focus of our collective efforts and the impact we have on young people’s lives. Solutions lie not in structures or with heroic leaders, but in the local commitment to set a stretching ambition, burst through the barriers that get in the way, and equip all public servants with the necessary skills and responsibilities to do the best we can for our children.



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iMPOWER is not an off-the-shelf consulting company. Since 2000, we have worked exclusively within the public sector to solve complex social problems by changing behaviours. We recognise that re-designing public services requires deeper citizen insight, stronger relationships and better collaboration. Our in-depth knowledge of the public sector and our understanding of the complexities faced in delivering high quality services with shrinking budgets has enabled us to deliver real results for our clients.

iMPOWER is now the country's largest independent consultancy focusing on change and transformation across all local public services. Our success stems from our distinctive approach that combines a deep knowledge of the public sector with a genuine commitment to better outcomes for those accessing public services.

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## INTRODUCTION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**Olly Swann, Director. iMPower**

I am delighted to introduce the second volume of our 'Shining a Light' essay collection, highlighting some of the key challenges facing children's services. The essays set out some thorny issues, capture important insights and share valuable experiences from those at the coal-face of service delivery across the sector.

The challenges faced are considerable and well documented, matched only by the pace at which new ones appear. Since our inaugural collection was launched, demand has continued to escalate, inappropriate cuts to preventative spend have increased, a new Minister for Children has been appointed, and Ofsted have demonstrably recognised the role they need to play in driving improvement.

Probably the most concerning headline of all over the last few months, was the Local Government Association forecasting a £2 billion shortfall in funding for children's services by 2020. This made sobering reading, and has been described by Lord Porter, their Chairman, as "a bigger pressure than adult social care on council budgets". To date, there is little or no evidence to suggest that Whitehall departments are acting on this.

The debates surrounding children's services are not exclusive to the social care community, and this is reflected in the backgrounds of our authors. Diverse in topic, the essays reveal some interesting links and themes. Who is best to lead the drive for continuous improvement? Are local authorities consistent enough in their approach to corporate parenting? Is the market for child placements really broken? Are we equipped with the skills and capabilities needed for systems leadership? Are we creating the right environments for social workers to thrive?

These essays provide some interesting food for thought when considering the debate about sustainable children's services, and some of the broader issues facing the sector. I would like to thank each of the contributors for their time and insights, and without whom this collection would not have been possible: Nick Barnett, Emma Bennett, Shannon Corkish, Cllr Peter Fortune, Sue Harrison, Mark Rogers, Tolis Vouyioukas and Chris Wright. I would also like to thank my colleagues at iMPower, particularly Ebony Hughes and James Edmondson, for their assistance in drawing together such an interesting and diverse group of contributors. Finally, thanks to all of those who continue to download our materials and engage with us so openly; we are immensely proud of the work we do in the sector, but it means little without the mutual support and respect of our many friends and partners.



## TO THE POWER OF FOUR

**Mark Rogers, Collaborate Executive Director**

Some things change; some things stay the same. Often, it's the things that change that attract our attention: new policies, updated inspection frameworks, further reductions in money, etc.

But we should also try hard to stay interested in, and focused on, the things that stay the same – especially the related quests for the most effective leadership and self-assurance of the children's services system.

With children's services now firmly caught in the blinding spotlight of budget cuts, it will be more important than ever to ensure that the decisions about how they are delivered and funded in the future are seen as the business of the whole council and the wider partnership ecosystem in which prioritisation and (dis)investment are considered. There has long been a debate about the implications of the "single point of accountability" enshrined in the statutory role description of the director of children's services, but now that we have more than a decade's worth of experience behind us, it is timely to emphasise the importance of keeping this issue in the forefront of our minds as we deliberate how to crack the code that is continued local government austerity against a backdrop of rising demand and expectations.

My experiences in three different local authorities, including one in statutory intervention, is that at one level the answer is simple. The prioritisation of children's services within the corporate context of how all the council's resources are going to be allocated and spent requires both the keen interest of, and a deep commitment from, the Leader or Mayor and Lead Member, along with the Chief Executive and Director of Children's Services. This quartet of political and officer leadership provides the basic operating environment in which to maximise the likelihood of improved outcomes for children and young people being at the centre of a local authority's decision-making.

Let's be clear, the requirement of a literal single point of accountability has always been a fault line in the 2004 Children Act. The rationale is impeccable – following Lord Laming's review<sup>1</sup> the DCS is the go-to person about all things children: to laud or to lambast. But the reality of implementation has unpicked this reasoning. Successful councils have, as a minimum, the aforementioned quartet of leadership foursquare behind the business. They have recognised that one heroic (or otherwise) leader is not what it takes for sustainable success: you have to sign up the most senior and influential political and officer too. And the counter-factual also exists. Pretty much every report about failure will cite the absence of this hegemony of commitment. Heavens, within months of 'Every Child Matters'<sup>2,3</sup> taking to the road, the Department for Education (DfE), Local Government Association (LGA), the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (Solace) and the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) were working together on an assurance framework that identified the critical success factors for effective children's services. Number one was the starting point of the backing of both the Leader/Mayor and Chief Executive – along, of course with the other two.

This is not to say that lines of accountability shouldn't be clear. But the over-simplification is not helpful. The DCS and Lead Member can, and should, primarily own their respective spaces and be held accountable for them. But only primarily. Chief Executives are, inter alia, heads of paid service and are responsible for leading the officer cadre. Leaders/Mayors sign off manifestos and local policy and resource decisions. Both should be held accountable for the execution of these duties. Exculpating them from ownership of, and responsibility for, children's services is to start down the rocky road of making the business of improving outcomes for children and young people someone else's business – when we all know that safeguarding is everyone's business.



Of course, this alignment of roles is no guarantee of interest and commitment from all four. But it is, at least, symbolic for the council as a whole and the wider partners – let alone communities – that an effort is being made to put welfare and wellbeing at the heart of the council’s thinking and doing. From such a platform, it becomes a little easier to persuade others of the importance of prioritising better outcomes for children and young people because the messages truly come from across the top of the statutory shop.

The other issue here is the one about systems. The policy, resource and leadership dynamics have changed significantly in recent years and there is a degree of consensus (if not yet practise) that change happens when leaders (politicians and officers – and, of course, partners) appreciate the importance of values, purpose and priorities being developed and owned through the seeding of strong relationships that bear fruit in sustainable partnerships. And these things cannot be determined by one voice. Yes, ultimately, they will need to be defined and delivered on, but their conception and iteration are surely a shared mission that, through sophisticated and authentic engagement, brings lasting buy-in. Systems still need to be convened and DCS’s and Lead Members have a clear role in this, supported by their bosses. But the idea of a single point can be troublesome in a world increasingly bought-in to networks (as opposed to hierarchies) if a single point is perceived to be the preserve of the specialists and ‘their’ business.

Linked to the challenge arising from system leadership is the vexing matter of how best to lead the drive for continuous improvement – something that has no sharper relief than in children’s services which are still (rightly) subject to a national performance benchmarking framework courtesy of Ofsted, which ensures that there is a minimum of transparency, public reporting and accountability across England.

Again, for me, there is an essential quartet of involvement and commitment required, but this time starting at the national level. Irrespective of improvement methodology considerations, crucial though they are, I am of the view that the sector cannot just self-regulate. It is absolutely right that the key local government bodies representing the most senior elected and appointed officials should be bound together constructively on this mission – that would bring together the LGA, Solace and ADCS. But this grouping alone doesn’t suffice and it would benefit from jointly commissioning a long-term, non-local government sector, improvement partner. This partner could be a single institution, for example a third sector body with the right track record. Or, preferable in my view, it could be a consortium of partners bringing a blended set of skills, knowledge, understanding and experience to bear on the challenge of creating and sustaining a self-improving system.

Why? Well, self-evidently (despite our best efforts sometimes to convince ourselves to the contrary) we do not have a universally effective early warning and intervention framework and, so, too many councils still get into trouble with little being done to support or challenge them until Ofsted comes a-knocking. At the heart of this problem lies the sector’s inability to be consistently tough on itself. Not always, of course. But there can be a tendency to rely more on support than challenge in part, I believe from direct experience, because we are a local government family that rightly values learning over blame, and wants to think the very best of everyone’s potential and ability. The trouble is, love it or loathe it, Ofsted finds that we are not self-regulating effectively and too often flags up that some council’s self-awareness and/or reliance on peer review is not heading off journeys into ailing or failing territory.





So, let's start to learn from this and, instead of tinkering with an internal-only system, instead give some serious thought to how the sector bodies can strengthen their capabilities and commitments by working with a broader spectrum of partners who can help improve the design and deployment of effective improvement methods, and gain a much greater traction on the sector in terms of an equalisation of support and challenge, aided and abetted by a presumption of transparency and openness when it comes to reporting. Undoubtedly this will require a redefining of relationships within the sector (we have to crack the old chestnut of "you will participate of your own free will"), but also with DfE and Ofsted, who will need to take a more sanguine and tolerant view of the exposure of frailties in order that improvement can be given a chance to thrive before it is prematurely and damagingly measured, and still found wanting.

This is all basic thinking. But we too often forget the basics because of the slew of other issues that need to be addressed day-in, day-out. Children's service ratings appear to be coming out of the Wilshaw-induced slough of despair that unnaturally inverted the performance profile of the sector over the previous five years. With encouraging signs that there might just be fewer 'Inadequate' and 'Requires Improvement' judgements and more 'Good' or 'Outstanding' councils over the next half decade, local authorities at the local level, and their sector bodies at the national level, need to remain awake and smelling the coffee if the prize of effectiveness in improving the life-chances of children is not to be compromised by weak or unfocused leadership and improvement efforts.

Only when it is the case that there is a universal strength of political and officer leadership will the sector rightly be able to say that it is doing all that it can to mitigate the consequences of late-stage austerity and the pressures of growing need.



## REFORM IS JUST A VERB

**Chris Wright, Chief Executive, Catch22**

The word 'reform' carries a lot of baggage. It can be overused and undervalued. At worst, for those in frontline public service it's a euphemism for change that doesn't necessarily entail improvement. Will jobs be at risk?<sup>4</sup> Does it mean privatisation? Is it just the new buzzword which creates unnecessary work while everything remains the same? Or is it the unifying concept for everything we are doing to make services better, more human and local, and unlocking capacity in every part of our communities?

One of the problems facing everyone trying to improve what we do and how, is explaining what we mean, avoiding jargon and doublespeak. But words matter much less than ideas and shared goals. Orwell instructs us in his essay on language to ask ourselves simple questions: What am I trying to say? What words will express it? What image or idiom will make it clearer? Is this image fresh enough to have an effect?<sup>5</sup>

For me, it's simple: we need to think differently about the society we want to be part of. If we are all on a ship of state, facing choppy waters and trying to reach a destination where every child can be the author of their own life story, our mode of transportation is creaking. The crew and passengers are just about keeping the boat seaworthy day-to-day, but no more than that. Most efforts are spent bailing out water and patching up holes.

We need to change our ship and how we run it. We need a different relationship between citizens and the state, and 're-form' our whole way of providing social welfare so that it is more pleasant to work in and experience, more effective, and a better 'return on investment'. I've said it before and I'll say it again - more money isn't the answer. The status quo needs to change.

**We know there's a problem but why is the solution so elusive?** The statistics and the stories speak for themselves: the ones I experienced 30 years ago as a social worker, the ones I hear from my frontline teams now, and the ones splashed across the headlines. We know that there is huge expense, crisis, and 'failure demand'<sup>6</sup>: Local Government Association (LGA) analysis showing 75% of councils exceeding their children's social care budgets by a total of £605m<sup>7</sup>, Action for Children estimating that there are 140,000 children who "have needs that are too great for schools, health or other universal services to meet on their own" but don't meet the threshold for statutory social care, and a stream of damning evidence from the All Party Parliamentary Group for Children's 'No Good Options' inquiry.<sup>8</sup>

We are united in our frustration. No one is in any doubt that early intervention saves lives and money, and that crisis care is an expense of treating the symptom not the cause. The problem is that when money is tight – which it always is – it's rational to cut the supply of the former and meet the demands of the latter. But we could spend the same amount of money so much more constructively, and use it in ways that draws in funding and resource from outside the public sector. In many cases we don't need legislation or even policy to change to do this, we just need the courage and confidence to battle the constraints of an inflexible system.

**What people need doesn't change** In 1968, the Seebohm report on social services recognised the need for social care to be built around the communities in which children and their families live. It said that a social services department should be made up of combined provision from other departments, across health and social care.<sup>9</sup> We've been led by these good intentions ever since, but we have been let down by systems designed for compliance and risk management. Every time we've faced a problem we haven't questioned the system and whether it's fit-for-purpose, but instead have added another layer of bureaucracy. As a result, we have a children's social care system far removed from the children and families we are trying to help. The same story could be told in our prison and probation system, and in health.



What people need hasn't ever changed – having a safe place to live, good people around them, and the tools and skills to make a decent living. From our inception as the Royal Philanthropic Society in 1788 working to support homeless criminalised children, to our work with the Department for Education developing new models of social work today, Catch22 has been consistent in these aims. We piloted a new model of social work for children in need in Crewe which set out to prevent escalating needs, risks and costs. Its innovative staffing and delivery model combined the expertise of social workers with the experience and flexibility of differently qualified frontline staff, including non-social work qualified family practitioners and volunteers, matched with children and families. In the two years since inception, the programme has shown improved outcomes, reduced repeat referrals, and delivered savings on operating costs for the local authority.<sup>10</sup>

This model puts relationships with the family at the heart of the intervention. It combines the experience of a charity, a local authority and a government department into a seamless team, and unlocks community capacity by equipping and enabling volunteers to support the social worker to spend more time with the family. These kinds of practical and simple solutions must be the answer to improving children's care services. It's about bringing together and enabling communities to solve the problems at their front door.

**Fewer agencies, more personal agency** But the only way to unlock the capacity that exists in society is by taking meaningful action – as an individual, but also as a business, a local authority, a Police and Crime Commissioner, and a school governor. It's not easy. Doing something different takes courage, at all levels.

In December 2016, we responded to a Home Office telephone call for help one Wednesday evening, to house 70 refugee boys arriving imminently from Calais, with indeterminate needs. We had no choice but to pick up the phone and ask everyone we knew for help to make it happen and the support was immediate – from the Council, to the outdoor education provider PGL offering a site, a retired doctor offering to restore his licence to help the boys, and a private company providing security staff. Hundreds of families gave their children's clothes, a local factory had a surplus of 1,000 yoghurts, the local arts centre offered itself as a collection point, the Rotary Club collected money and homeless people in Barnstaple worked with a charity to pack bags of things for the children. When you're standing there at 3am, all trying to do the same good thing for the children, organisational labels mean nothing. Private, public and charity organisations, the whole community – everyone came together and delivered. We all took responsibility, and the state enabled it to happen.

Reforming also means more agility to test new ideas, backing them quickly if they work, but also recognising when they are not working and trying something else. Confident reformers, anywhere in organisational hierarchies, can 'test, quit or commit': learn the right lessons from both failures and successes, and share them in a way that builds self-improving systems.

If I have learned anything in the past 30 years, it's that Whitehall doesn't have the monopoly on integrity, charities don't have the monopoly on compassion, and businesses don't have the monopoly on efficiency. We must end these artificial silos and come together as whole communities to empower individuals and organisations to solve the social issues that sit on their doorsteps. It's time to remember 'reform' is just the simple verb we learned at school for making things better. It's not an abstract noun for an even more abstract destination.



## THE INSIDE STORY

### Shannon Corkish, Care Leaver

I've had a lot of first-hand experience with social services. For many years, I had a really bad view of them, and they made me and my family very uneasy. Social workers seemed very cold, like they only wanted to get the job done and were only doing it to earn a living.

These days I realise that not all social workers are bad. I've learned from some of them, and they have supported me a lot too. But when I was younger I didn't fully understand the situations around me.

I never really saw social services be heartfelt or understanding. For example, social services first turned up at my family's home because I stopped attending school. They questioned my parents, asking them what they had done to solve the issue. They thought that my parents had not done enough to discipline me.

Actually, it was my own decision not to go to school, it wasn't to do with my parents. But they didn't ask enough questions to find that out, or ask me why I had made that decision.

I think social workers need to come into the family home with an open mind. They must be willing to work with the family to help them resolve problems. They should be supportive towards the parents, and advise them how they can help their children – working with the parents, not against them. I am a mother now too, and I think this can only benefit the children.

I've had different foster carers, some short and some long-term. Most of them were single women. Looking back, my personal view is that I needed two adults to foster me and help me deal with personal issues. I've also come to the view that social services should place children with foster carers who match with their needs, like they do with adoption. It seemed from my experience, that foster children just went to anyone who fosters. But stuff like this can affect a child because their needs aren't being met. It was important to me that I felt I had things in common with my foster parent. A child needs to feel comfortable and also welcome, so that they can fit into the family environment. Children need to be cared for and loved, they want to feel normal, and wanted. Being from London I feel that this is so important, as we often have to move further away from our families because there aren't enough people in London fostering.

From my experience, some social workers need to improve. For example, the way children are physically moved to a new foster carer could definitely be done better. At one point, I was put in a taxi by myself, and I had no idea where I was going. Another example is how some of them deal with a child who is upset and confused; instead of doing nothing, they should actually work with them to make sure they are ok.

If children have issues or are not coping with a new environment, social workers should not force them to see a psychiatrist if they don't want to. Maybe they have someone else they can talk to if they are stressed and need a new view on things? Not everything should be by the book. These are people's lives, and whatever social workers do affects the children they work with and could damage their wellbeing or mental health.



It isn't easy for social workers. I knew one who was dealing with about 30 cases. Sometimes they don't only deal with children, but also with the elderly and with families in general. They also deal with children and adults with disabilities.

How can one person take all that on - read all the paperwork, make visits, attend meetings, and also be able to spend time with their loved ones? Would you be able to parent 30 children in different parts of England, make big decisions, and do your best for all of these people? Social workers also take a lot of abuse from families, newspapers and their bosses.

Good social workers make sure children are looked after, that they are on the right path and that the child's family isn't in a bad space. For example, I had one social worker who I worked with in Islington for years. We got along, we used to laugh and joke together, but what I didn't know was that my family used to give her hassle. She would listen to issues I had with life in general. One day she surprised me and took me to Southend for a day out. She tried to support me quite a lot like a parent would.

But she took a lot of work on. She used to go on leave a lot, so she was hard to get hold of. Her workload affected her health - in the end she had to quit what she loved doing because it was too much, so I ended up with a new social worker.

I always advise my friends not to do this type of job. It isn't easy, it can consume your life, and most of the time you can't make a difference because you have to follow the rules and do everything by the book. You can't take chances in this job, it is too much responsibility.

I hope that the next generation of children have a better experience than me. Getting a good social worker who is non-judgmental, who you can trust, and who still loves what they do is hard - there aren't many. They say that money can't buy love, but having supportive social workers and foster carers can make all the difference in the world.



## THE IMPORTANCE OF RELATIONSHIPS

**Nick Barnett, Managing Director of The Caldecott Foundation**

“I love this place, it has such a homely feel, I wouldn’t be the person I am now if I wasn’t here.”

The quote above for me is a reflection of what it is all about. It came from one of our young people who was talking to an Ofsted inspector. The fact she was talking to Ofsted is not the point, but I strongly believe it is a function of the relationships within her home and the relational model at play that have enabled her to thrive, and for us to have the joy of seeing that happen.

The children and young people in our care have the right to feel safe, secure and happy. For this to happen we all understand that it takes commitment, resilience, resources and time. Multiple placements, carers, schools and missed developmental milestones add to the complex needs of children, and erodes their trust in the very people trying to make them feel safe and secure. The loss of key attachments with family and others makes the road to recovery a difficult and sometimes lonely journey. Professionals from all disciplines must come together with the shared goal to meet the needs of the child in the ‘here and now’, whilst planning to help them achieve long-term goals.

As most people involved in the provision of care would attest, the road to recovery is very rarely smooth with many obstacles to navigate which can place progress in jeopardy. For an individual carer working in isolation, whether residential or fostering, willingness and endeavour alone hold little contest against the presenting demands of a traumatised child. So what does?

In the context of working with children who have been traumatised in their early life, the critical factor is the establishment of positive, safe and secure relationships. This is a statement which I’m sure most, if not all, professionals would agree. However, after 24 years’ working in residential care, fostering and education, I’ve come to the conclusion that too often individuals will recognise the importance of this statement only in so far as it applies to their own relationship with the child in front of them at that particular time.

Foremost is the relationship between the young person and their carer, but also crucial are those between the professionals around that young person. I believe good relationships between all professionals is the key to making sound decisions that positively impact the children in our care.

However, ‘relationships’ is a term that can often be used too loosely. It is defined as “the way in which two or more people or things are connected; a thing’s effect on or relevance to another.” We shouldn’t just work alongside each other, we need to understand our connections, our relevance and our effect on each other. We also need to understand the effect of what is happening within our relationships on ourselves, so that we can act most effectively in that context. But what does that mean, in practical terms, to make a difference in the lives of children and young people? It means we need to understand and gain insight into who the young person is: not just their presenting behaviours, but genuine understanding to the point that we can respond not just react. It relies on holistic assessment that enables us to uncover a young person’s potential and strengths.

It also means we need to understand the impact of the relationship on ourselves as professionals, not least to help us be resilient in what can be one of the most rewarding, albeit challenging jobs there is. The importance of the relationships within this team can’t be underestimated and so for us, alongside supervision, staff are supported by weekly consultations with our therapy team as well as case management and mentalisation meetings.

We often hear the phrase of ‘a team around the child’, but only when we truly operate as a team does this have the impact it should. As teams working with young people who have experienced trauma, it will only



work if we truly understand our connections and relevance to each other and shared goals. The young person should never have to experience the impact of dysfunction of relationships between professionals.

I would like to share a case of a young person in our care who I will call Sarah. Sarah was originally with us to give her foster family a month of respite. However, when the foster placement broke down her local authority extended her placement with a monthly review. This experience and uncertainty led to an increase in the frequency of Sarah's self-harming behaviour and she began to express suicidal thoughts. Sarah is now settled in the home and mainstream school, enjoying running, and has decided to repeat Year 10 to allow her more success when she takes her GCSEs. Looking back, the consistent theme in this case is the development of relationships with a shared goal that placed Sarah at the centre. First was the relationship with the local authority, ensuring it went beyond a contractual provider or commissioner and reviewer approach, but a genuine dialogue where we urged them to commit to Sarah's care and they supported us to undertake an assessment. This was agreed and the subsequent work undertaken, including clinical psychology and education support, and this has really benefitted Sarah. Mentalisation and supervision from our therapy team equipped the staff to respond, not react, to the presenting behaviours, ultimately strengthening their ability to build relationships, and the relationship with her key worker became very important.

The Caldecott Foundation's relational model of care places the child at the centre of everything we do. Embedding this new model has meant scrutinising our processes through the prism of relationships. Our work starts before anyone from the organisation has met the child. The referral process is a time to gather information, construct a history, and develop an understanding of them as a person. Knowing relatively basic information about a child, such as their likes, dislikes and behavioural triggers, can mean the difference between a smooth and chaotic first few days. An assessment of need at the start of a placement is critical, and conducted correctly, can contribute immeasurably to achieving the best outcomes. Too often we know too little, as the limited assessment work focuses on the containment of risk, and not the real young person that we need to connect with.

For a child's and young person's placement to be successful takes a huge investment of time, resources, and energy, given by all professionals. But success is fragile, support is limited by age, and we risk so much through the withdrawal of care and support at 18. The recent policy report from Centrepoin<sup>11</sup> highlighted that 40% of care leavers surveyed had either 'sofa-surfed' or had slept rough since leaving care. This is just one piece of data amongst many highlighting the inequality of long term outcomes for care leavers.

We want to change the narrative and show the potential and opportunity for young people in our care. However, it is more than housing, financial, and employment challenges. It is clear to me that until we recognise the devastating effect on a young person of severing their key relationships at the same time as their support systems, then long-term outcomes will be effected. We all have a 'duty' to actively track the young people's journeys when they have left our care. It is a critical period in their lives that can result in life-changing decisions being made. Everyone needs someone to fall back on, and go to when things get tough, so we need to ensure that the very people who know these vulnerable young adults are the very people available as a safety net.

I believe that building and developing relationships should be considered as the most important investment that can be made. The potential for positive impact from developing secure human connections with energy, positivity and passion simply can't be underestimated. It is, in my view, the single most important influencing factor for achieving positive outcomes for our children and young people.



## MEETING OUR RESPONSIBILITIES

### **Cllr Peter Fortune, Deputy Leader of the London Borough of Bromley and the Executive Portfolio Holder for Education, Children and Families**

It has become a strange trait of mine to flick through the local newspaper to check I'm not in it. As a councillor, you are always mindful of any story or letter printed in the local press as you need to be aware of issues which might be raised on the doorstep. However, that week in June 2016 I knew what I was looking for. It was the reporting of 'widespread, serious failings' in the Children's Services Department at the London Borough of Bromley where I was Portfolio Holder for Education.

The Ofsted report highlighted numerous systemic failings in the authority, and the Department for Education (DfE) had decided a commissioner, the formidable Frankie Sulke, should oversee our services. In hindsight, it is probably one of the best things that has happened to the Borough.

**Dropping the ball – and picking it back up** Bromley had separated the traditional children and young people (CYP) model into two distinct portfolios; one, Education (my portfolio at the time) and the other, Care Services (encompassing adult social care). After the Ofsted review I knew that I had a responsibility to learn more. I felt angry that a service, in a Council I considered to be of a high quality, had found itself in this position.

I set about reading previous committee papers and tried to cross-reference the findings from Ofsted to appropriate scrutiny meetings. Two things became apparent. The first being that the reports were large and jargon filled – there is no way the layman could properly scrutinise them with the information provided. The second was that I could not see evidence of the highlighted issues being flagged up.

A councillor's inbox fills daily with complaints about bin collection, dog mess and street sweeping. Your life is filled with committee meetings, voluminous briefing packs, resident associations with various fetes, tours and visits. Unless you serve on a specific committee there is every chance that you would not come across some of the more complex areas of the council. The truth is that, with the notable and increasing issue of housing, resident contact regarding social care can be very limited. Despite some knowledge of the service, and the unquestioned view that the social workers and staff do a terrific and difficult job, Councillors are often operating at a distance from their elected role as a corporate parent. By the Council failing its children's service inspection, Councillors had failed in their responsibility to the vulnerable children in care. That upset me and my colleagues and we were determined to act.

**Re-energising our commitments** After the report, and the Commissioner's appointment, the local authority launched into action and various groups emerged, all of which had words like 'taskforce' in their title. The purpose was to ensure that we all understood the failings, that we had a shared ambition and that we could act as critical friends. It was also vital that all partners were bought into this process. Bromley works closely with colleagues in various organisations including; the Clinical Commissioning Group, third sector organisations, police and schools but I think it fair to say that effective communication had not been given the consideration that it should have. So, one of the first things we did was to relaunch our 'Building a Better Bromley' manifesto – jointly signing up to shared commitments and ambitions where correcting Children's Services was the top priority.

**At first progress was slow** The Leader of the Council had taken the view that, in order to reverse the failings, we had to have a thoughtful and considered approach to the reorganisation rather than to simply rush in and chuck tax payers' money at the problem. This was a brave and effective decision.





We were under incredible pressure for ‘heads to roll’ and the opposition party could not sit in a meeting, any meeting, without mentioning the Ofsted result (“Regarding street cleaning in Orpington, and mindful of Bromley’s failed Ofsted review, will Station Road receive an extra sweep?”).

But despite some misrepresentation in the media, what had been highlighted in the commissioners first report was that failings were not due to any financial cutbacks – rather that the organisation was not children-focused, and that the professional and political oversight was not in place. The Leader’s approach was to redevelop the structure and focus of the Council to meet these challenges. A part of this was the re-structuring of the service itself. My role was part of that restructure and Children’s Services was brought under my Education portfolio moving us back to the recognised CYP model.

**Making marked progress and building momentum** We had a new team in place. Ade Adetosoye had joined us as Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director of Education, Care and Health Services. I knew that the relationship between the two of us was vital. My role as the political lead was to hold off the assaults from the opposition, communicate the necessary change with elected members, help to build morale in the department, and convince staff and partners that we were truly committed to change and sustainability. Ade, with his ‘Journey to Excellence’, shared the assessment and we set about making the changes we believed were necessary.

We began a training programme which really dug into Councillors’ understanding of what our role as corporate parents should be. To do this, we met our young people in care, and the interaction with them helped bring to life issues which can sometimes seem cold and distant in reports, including understanding the day-to-day pressures that they faced. There were many things we hadn’t thought of, such as pocket money, and how it feels to have to open up over and over again about experiences you don’t want to. Our Corporate Parent Family Fun Day, which was designed by the young people, got elected members, staff, carers, parents and young people together to further improve bonding and demonstrate a change in the organisation. This helped immeasurably when it came time to ask the Group and the Executive to approve extra spending on the service.

As previously stated, there was no criticism of the funding levels in the service, so some members of the Group had legitimate questions when the Director and I requested an extra £4 million of funding. This was always going to be a hard sell, but I agreed that the spending was necessary if we were to invest in our staff and build enough momentum of change to ensure sustainability of progress. Due to the extra time spent communicating with members and exposing them to casework, we were able to discuss pressures such as high caseloads and the demand-led nature of the service in a way my colleagues could appreciate. The Director and I set out our plans and, after we were put on the rack for a few hours, we got the money.

That money helped us to build morale with staff, as did a couple of ‘quick wins’ like investment in mobile technology and a breakout room for staff. We invested heavily in our people to get them to want to stay in Bromley. Managers adopted open-door policies where any concerns could be raised and incorporated our caseload promise – where we strived to have some of the lowest caseloads in London. These initiatives were designed to demonstrate that Bromley was committed to changing the service. The Leader, senior officers and I made a point of being seen, attending events, and forcefully vocalising our commitment to change.



The Ofsted monitoring visits, which had been critical of our initial pace, were returning positive results. I have to say that, whilst challenging, I know that I and many of the staff almost began to enjoy the visits. Like sitting an exam that you know you have prepared for. Well, maybe 'enjoy' is too strong but, collectively, we knew we were beginning to work as a team and that we were getting the work right.

**Sustaining progress and valuing the service** Of huge concern to me, and to the Commissioner, was ensuring sustainability. I was determined that, after Frankie's six-month review we going to be almost unique in retaining our Children's Services. We had ensured that, at meeting after meeting, the issue of children's services was on the agenda. It was discussed at each Cabinet and Executive meeting. Within a few months, members were asking about caseloads and discussing our 'triple lock'. Our new police Atlas team was in place and partnership working was at a new high with improved relationships all-round. Each school now had a dedicated officer to contact, helping with referrals and increasing understanding of reporting thresholds. Senior officers and members had attended 'Practice Weeks' where they saw the work of the department close up. As we approached the six-month deadline, and a further visit from Ofsted around Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), we were positive about the work we'd already completed and were committed to keep going, driving for ever-improving service. I was proud of the officers and the team.

As I scanned from headline to headline on the week beginning September 11th 2017, I was looking for something specific. Two bits of news were due for release that week; our latest Ofsted review and Frankie's report. This time the report read; "Ofsted praises CSE progress in Bromley" and, later that week; "...a six-month progress report on children's services at Bromley, conducted by the DfE-appointed commissioner for children's services at the borough Frankie Sulke, found that progress has been made, and recommended that control of children's services should remain with the council."

But my favourite bit was "Momentum is established and morale is high within the service". Now, we carry on.



## TALKING WITH OUR YOUNG PEOPLE ABOUT DIFFICULT THINGS

**Tolis Vouyioukas, Executive Director of Children’s Services at Buckinghamshire County Council**

For some young people in care, accepting that their parents will never be able to be there for them is a big mountain to climb. When they experience parenting elsewhere that makes them feel safe and wanted, they begin to form attachments. Being part of a family does wonders to their self-esteem and confidence. For a fair number of these young people, the transition from their past experiences to their present circumstances, with the right support, is difficult but they succeed. They do well in school, and go on to achieve great things in life. With help and in time, they learn how to not let their history define who they are.

But for some young people, especially adolescents, when they begin to form attachments, say in a stable foster care environment, the harsh reality that their mums and dads will never be able to give them what they want, is too much to handle. Their mission in life becomes to get their parents to do better by them. When this does not materialise, their sense of loss doubles in volume. Some of them go missing repeatedly, some get involved with the ‘wrong crowd’, some of them may self-harm to numb the hurt, and ultimately they get caught up in a cycle that is hard to escape from. They are both vulnerable and street smart in equal measure.

Placements break down, placements needs change, missing episodes increase in frequency, and young people get exposed to more risk. We do the best we can to keep them safe and in one place. The young people I talk to tell me that they cannot always pinpoint when they first realised that they were in trouble. They talk about what seems like grieving to me: for what could have been but never will be. In hindsight, they recognise that they just could not accept what life has handed them. And how could they?

I like definitions. They give meaning to words. One online definition of social work is: “a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion and liberation of people”. The definition continues, but I stop there because the word liberation is what I was looking for. For our young people, teaching them how to free themselves from self-beliefs, about who they are and how they got here, is the best thing we can ever do for them. My kids where I work (and they are mine in my eyes, and in the eyes of the law) are some of the brightest young people I have ever known. They are emotionally intelligent and articulate, and they tell it like it is. But some of them feel they are inherently bad and unlovable, and their evidence for that is the experience they had at home. How do you undo that experience? Some of these young people feel compelled to devote their waking hours trying to avoid their reality, often with disastrous consequences.

The question I ask myself, and the team of people I work with, is how good are we at having conversations with young people about loss and grieving at that very first point in time when we begin to suspect that this may be a major challenge for them? Do we know how to ask the questions early enough to help young people accept the reality they want to escape from? Do we always know how important these questions are, and do we always have the time and confidence to ask them? I am not sure.

It is a universal ‘we’ I am referring to in the above sentence. The teacher who spots the withdrawn young person in the back of the classroom; the housing officer who has observed something unusual during a housing need assessment; the police officer visiting a home after a domestic violence incident; or the GP who knows something is not right with the parent who keeps bringing their child to



the surgery. In the context of the current climate of austerity, and the pull of organisational standards that count compliance with timescales very closely, it could be argued that it is less likely that the right questions are asked, and that there is space for individual professionals to think further than the immediate presenting circumstances. The police officer dealing with a domestic violence incident may have half their mind on the next job, the GP may be frustrated with the amount of time the parent takes up, and the social worker dealing with the young person who always goes missing is one of their many urgent priorities.

For many of us the above dynamics do exist. However, the spotlight on the consequences and the costs is not always bright enough to expose what we need to do more of. If the difficult conversations with young people do not happen early enough, then we will never know if we did everything we could to prevent them from making choices based on fear and despair. Absconding, placement breakdown, disrupted education, substance misuse and exploitation, can all quickly occur if young people feel alone and hopeless. Professionally and personally, these scenarios are hard to accept and manage. They are also incredibly expensive.

In the current financial climate, there is a risk that leaders become limited in their thinking as they begin to run out of options to deliver on savings targets. Mental health services do a good job assessing but are not always able to provide the right treatment at the right time. It is a fact that budgets are reducing, and doing more with less is already the usual experience. The great danger that is apparent, however, is that organisations may inadvertently discourage their most valuable and key frontline staff to ask those all-important questions by giving them less time, and meaning that less is done with less. If figuring out why becomes a luxury and succumbs to 'sort the crisis and move on', then it is only a matter of time before asking why becomes a less important priority.

Whilst the young person themselves and those around them become central to this dynamic, the impact on expenditure is also pretty dramatic. The young person who cannot come to terms with their circumstances and past, and receives no opportunities to address their distress, can become the frequent missing person who consumes huge chunks of police time and may become a victim and even a perpetrator of crime. One young person can represent hundreds of thousands of pounds of public sector expenditure. As this expense is incurred, the local authority will end up spending more and more on different placements that simply try, and often fail, to contain the young person. The trajectory of spend on placements can be steep, accelerating from a relative low of £750 per week in a foster placement, past the £2,700 per week basic residential placement, and into the quarter of a million pounds a year 'specialist placement'. The bills for the health economy can be equally substantial, and viable placements at mainstream schools are sometimes distant memories.

I frequently have to stop and ask myself and my staff, if we, without meaning to, are creating the conditions for more expense and poor outcomes to grow and develop, instead of making the time and finding the courage to ask the difficult questions consistently and persistently (which eventually we will have to ask anyway) as early as we can. Young people often tell me how much they appreciate the upfront honesty of their social workers, even if it is uncomfortable and hard hitting.

There is no substitute for having an emotionally intelligent, confident and competent workforce, who are supported to make best use of their skills to the maximum benefit for some of our most precious and worthy young people. The human and economic cost of failure is too high for all of us.



## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A CORPORATE PARENT?

**Emma Bennett, Director of Children's Services, City of Wolverhampton Council**

Recently, numerous spotlights have been shone on the challenges faced by those leaving care. For too long, services responding to the needs of these young people have not been a big enough focus for children's services, or wider councils as their Corporate Parent. We are seeing this starting to change through national policy and campaigns, but I believe that there is a real need nationally to transform how we support those young people in our leaving care services. I would like to share with you our experiences in Wolverhampton.

Our role as a Corporate Parent doesn't end when a child reaches 18 years of age. It could be argued that when a child reaches young adulthood, or leaves the stability of a placement at 18, there is no greater time to have a 'parent' to fall back on.

We know that care leavers nationally are continually over-represented in statistics of disadvantage and social exclusion, including adult prisoners and mental health service users, and chronically lower paid or unemployed. In Wolverhampton, we believed strongly that we needed to change this, and so we established our New Belongings project under the national DfE initiative.

Whilst care leavers have, until recently at least, often been a secondary consideration for transformation and improvement in children's services, we felt it should play a much more central role and be one that the whole council, as Corporate Parent, was proactively involved in.

First and foremost, we want our care leavers to feel valued, and that they have the support of our teams, at a time when they need it. Part of this is to first increase awareness among council employees, services and partners, with regards to care leavers, the issues they face, and the aspirations that the City of Wolverhampton Council has for them as part of corporate parenting commitments.

Our role is the same as that of any parent – to support them practically and emotionally. Following a range of engagements with our care leaver population, we developed a range of flexible support options. As would ideally be the case in any family, this included financial support (paying council tax, gym and leisure membership etc.), practical support on independent living, support with emotional wellbeing, support and guidance in education and employment (including apprenticeships, work experience and mock interviews, etc.), through to being there as a supportive safety net when things aren't on the right track, including the creation of 'crash pads' and ensuring care leavers have access to workers outside of normal office hours.

This commitment to our young people has been reinforced by the whole council through the Care Leavers Charter, Care Leavers Week, formal and regular engagement forums, and a commitment of staff time to support these initiatives.

Whilst these are all good examples of initiatives we have implemented, this has only been made possible through the fantastic support from workers who show a genuine interest in the lives of care leavers, build positive relationships with them, and go above and beyond when it is appropriate and in the young person's best interests to do so. We have worked hard to move away from a deficit narrative to a focus on supporting the considerable strengths and potential of our care leavers.



We have invested in our practice in this area; reflective practice sessions take place weekly and give workers the opportunity to increase their knowledge and skills. These are led by an Advanced Practitioner – a new role we developed as part of a refresh of our social work pathway – who accesses recent research materials, keeps up-to-date with developments in leaving care services, and supports our workers to use tools effectively to understand the needs of young people and build our confidence in working with them. Furthermore, all our workers are being trained in Restorative Practice, enabling a greater focus on building relationships based on high aspirations and high expectations.

From a council perspective, we cannot risk undermining the investment and progress we have made with young people in our care with a withdrawal of valuable support, both practical and emotional, once they reach 18 years of age. As councils are so often judged on how they spend their resources, what is a more important investment than in ensuring those in our care go on to thrive within the city?

There are many wider benefits to strengthening our model. We have seen a real positive impact, not just for our care leavers, but also for our staff. The most notable change within the team is that all positions are now filled permanently. The positive culture, commitment, and motivation within the team is such that workers who were previously with an agency have chosen to apply for permanent positions and every team member is willing to go above and beyond to support our care leavers.

This strong bond between care leavers and staff is summed up in this quote from one of our young people about their key worker: "It's almost like he is my dad. I like that he knows me inside out and tries to support me the best he can, I like that he has been there for me the whole time I have been in care and I hate the fact I'm going to lose him at 18."

The focus and engagement with our young people is really starting to show great outcomes. We were pleased to receive the recognition of the New Belongings project from Edward Timpson, have been rated "Good" by Ofsted and have received numerous other local and national awards. But the real proof is seeing the achievements of our care leavers playing out. Over the last three years we have seen a significant decrease in the number of young people who are not in education or employment, an increase in the number of young people in staying put provision and accessing positive opportunities, and an increase in number of young people at university. We are, quite rightly, a very proud Corporate Parent.



## CREATING A 'RESILIENCE MEMBRANE': A STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP PERSPECTIVE

**Sue Harrison, Director of Children's Services, Central Bedfordshire Council**

In a children's services landscape of rising demand and reducing resource, strategic leaders need to form a 'living membrane' of resilience – protecting their front-line staff from external pressures and creating an environment where they can thrive professionally.

So what factors make up the resilience membrane? There is much research into social worker 'burn out' and reasons why social workers are leaving the profession. It's important to provide some balance by better understanding why our social workers are choosing to stay in Central Bedfordshire Council, and in some cases, converting from an agency worker to a permanent member of staff.

In Central Bedfordshire, the percentage of substantive social workers has increased from 48% of the total number of social workers employed by Children's Services in 2014, to 83% in June 2017. When a council is managing high vacancy rates for social workers, the financial cost of employing agency workers is high. This can lead to additional financial pressures for the council, resources having to be redeployed from other areas, or cuts to services.

From a practice perspective, a high churn of workers is riskier in terms of effectively safeguarding children as there are limited opportunities to provide families with a consistency of workers, and managers have a less robust oversight of decision making. This lack of consistency is referenced as a factor in many Serious Case Reviews.

Therefore, the leadership in an organisation needs to create a 'living membrane' of resilience, protecting and supporting social workers from system pressures whilst, at the same time, empowering them to influence the system and actively participate in developing the service further.

National system pressures include the Ofsted inspection framework and Department for Education performance indicators. The resilience membrane is built by leading strong self-evaluation processes, and focussing on management information that make a difference to children, such as stability factors. Just as important, the culture set by strategic leaders in response to Ofsted inspection judgements and target setting will affect the resilience of staff.

Local pressures include council financial restraints, as budget cuts could ultimately result in fewer resources for Children's Services. With limited resources, increased demand for services, and increased expectations from the public, there is the risk of system breakdown, so exploring how social workers are supported to manage these pressures is key.

In Central Bedfordshire, we have developed a strong Early Help offer, working closely with our school, health, and police partners to intervene as early as possible, working in locality teams to support families and keeping children safe at home. This system approach has led to a reduction of our Looked After Children population, and a reduction of children on child protection plans. There are more Children in Need now, receiving support in their communities.

We are also creating a protective resilience membrane through leadership of the service, developing a structure with small, well managed teams. Because we are managing demand, our caseloads are manageable, and our social workers are able to spend time with children to really get to know and understand their needs.



We now have a learning culture which supports resilience; staff can influence strategy and the future direction of the service. For example, every member of staff was offered the opportunity to join workshops to design our locality team model, and all teams are represented on our Staff Board.

Research into children's services points to high levels of job-related stress, and this is linked to negative staff outcomes, such as physical and psychological ill health, sickness absence, and retention problems. Professional expectations in the UK are that practitioners demonstrate their emotional resilience, but how this should be accomplished is not immediately clear.

What is clear is that organisations need to be more proactive in providing a supportive environment to allow social workers to thrive. I say this in response to the findings in Grant and Kinman's study<sup>12</sup> which suggests that, in practice, social workers may have to be assertive in receiving the necessary support and to be able to recognise when their wellbeing is threatened by a lack of support, supervision or unreasonable working conditions.

This is even more critical for newly qualified social workers. We know that experienced social workers are more likely than students to consider resilience as a multi-dimensional and an ongoing process requiring perseverance.

Therefore, the strategic leadership role must be about sustaining the protective resilience membrane to provide the space for professionals to contribute to organisational resilience. This should be done through delivering good quality services and by building mutual trust with their managers and partner professionals to develop even more effective, child-centred practice.

Working together, across the system, we can empower our front-line staff and managers to focus on supporting our most vulnerable children, and their families, by creating an open and transparent environment with children at the heart of our joint decision-making.





## CONTRIBUTORS

**Nick Barnett** Nick is the Managing Director of The Caldecott Foundation, which provides therapeutic care for children aged 5-18 in its seven children's homes, fostering placements, as well as day and boarding education. The Foundation has over 100 years' experience of caring for children and young people who have experienced early childhood trauma. Nick is a qualified social worker with over 24 years' experience working with children and young people.

**Emma Bennet** Emma is the Director of Children's Services in City of Wolverhampton Council. She qualified as a social worker in 1997, and has worked across a number of local authorities. She has significant experience in Child Protection and Looked After Children services, and has a real passion for promoting transformational change in order to ensure improved outcomes for children and young people. She oversees Wolverhampton's improvement programme, which resulted in a 'Good' Ofsted inspection in January 2017.

**Shannon Corkish** As a care leaver, Shannon has a lot of experience of being on the receiving end of social services, and was keen to tell her story. Shannon wants to make a difference by sharing her experience, and talking openly about what worked for her and what didn't, so that systems and practices can be improved for the next generation. She is a proud mother to a 4-year-old daughter, and is currently doing an internship with iMPower.

**Cllr Peter Fortune** Peter is the Deputy Leader of the London Borough of Bromley, and the Executive Portfolio Holder for Education, Children and Families. He was first elected in 2010 and serves as the member for Hayes and Coney Hall ward. Peter was the first Chairman of Bromley's Health & Wellbeing Board and stood for election in both the 2015 and 2017 general elections. Outside of politics Peter serves on the Board of Clarion Housing Group, and is Chief Executive Officer of Fitness In, a specialist education company.

**Sue Harrison** Sue is Director of Children's Services at Central Bedfordshire Council. She was appointed three years ago, moving across from her post in Blackpool, where she worked for eight years, and led their improvement journey out of government intervention. She leads the transformation journey in Central Bedfordshire, which has recently received a 'Good' Ofsted judgement. Sue has also worked in Manchester and Knowsley local authorities, after beginning her career teaching and leading in schools in Widnes, Warrington and Wigan.

**Mark Rogers** Mark started his career as a teacher, spending 17 years committed to the delivery of an inclusive education for children and young people with special educational needs. He elided into local government where he moved from education services to children's services and, ultimately, Chief Executive of Birmingham City Council, with a mission to spread the gospel of values-based leadership, and putting the citizen first. Most recently, he has sought to mix strategic advisory work on leadership with a commitment to enabling grass-roots social change to reform public services.

**Tolis Vouyioukas** Tolis is the Executive Director of Children's Services at Buckinghamshire County Council. Before joining their team, Tolis worked at London Borough of Sutton as Director of People Services, leading on the council's improvement and transformation journey in children's services, whilst also looking after adult social care, public health, leisure, arts and heritage. A qualified social worker with a background in psychology, Tolis started his career in the UK at Essex County Council.

**Chris Wright** Chris Wright is the Chief Executive of Catch22. He originally trained as a Probation Officer, and in 1999 established Nottingham's first multi-agency Youth Offending Team. From there he moved to the Youth Justice Board as the Head of Performance, where he led on developing and implementing a performance management framework for the Youth Justice System. Chris joined Rainer in 2006, which became Catch22 in 2008.



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