

16. Action for Children

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. Action for Children launched a five-year strategy so that we could better respond to the challenges of meeting the needs of children, young people and families who need our help. We are pleased to share with the Methodist Conference the good progress we have made, and ask for your prayers of thanksgiving for our work.
- 1.2. After four years as Chief Executive, we said farewell to Sir Tony Hawkhead in February 2018. During his time, he inspired staff with his leadership, and facilitated changes that have laid the foundation for the charity to remain a viable organisation. He launched our five-year strategy, acquired the 4Children nurseries, and forged meaningful external partnerships. Julie Bentley has been appointed as our new Chief Executive from 1 August. Carol Iddon, our Managing Director of Children's Services, will be our Acting Chief Executive until then.

2. By teaming up with the Methodist Church

- 2.1 In the past year, we have received remarkable support from the Methodist Church, and thank each person that supported us with their time and substance. We are deeply grateful for the strong and inspiring relationship we have the Methodist Church.
- 2.2 We thank the Revd Canon Gareth Powell for his continuous support and for playing a huge part in our annual Stephenson Awards as one of the judges. We would like to thank Jill Baker, the Vice-President of the Conference 2017/2018, for visiting our services in Scotland and bringing great encouragement to our staff. We also had the privilege of participating in Methodist events, such as 3Generate 2017, where we ran workshops and a market stall.
- 2.3 In 2017/2018, donations directly generated from local church fundraising and memorials totalled about £1.3m. Methodists contributed in other ways, for instance, taking part in national events like marathons and leaving legacy gifts. Furthermore, several churches kindly allowed us to use their premises to deliver vital services, and volunteers helped us in our work with children, young people and families. In September 2017, two ONE Programme interns started one-year placements, bringing valuable skills and insight.
- 2.4 We will continue to strengthen our partnership with the Methodist Church and find new opportunities to work together, especially sharing our expertise and engaging young people through 3Generate and schools. Next year, we will celebrate our 150th anniversary, and we have started discussing how to celebrate it with the Church.

3. By still doing what works for children

- 3.1 We currently support more than 370,000 children, young people and families. This includes all who have attended at least one session, been seen by a staff member, received advice from us or used any of our 529 services. We are proud to have made such an impact, but we know that there are still a significant number of children and families who need our help.
- 3.2 While developing our five-year strategy, we identified new areas of support for children and young people that we wanted to develop. These areas include providing mental health support, expanding our work on giving children a safe and loving home through permanency,

including residential support, fostering and adoption, as well as looking at our commercial activity with our nurseries.

Mental health services

- 3.3 Mental health services for children and young people are in crisis. We have been very fortunate to gain some financial support from Royal Mail to launch a new programme working in schools called, the Blues Programme. This programme is an evidence-based support package working with young people aged from 15 to 18. We are working in schools in High Wycombe, Worcester and Cardiff. We are also delivering in pupil referral units (PRU), grammar schools and sixth form colleges. Plans are also underway to deliver the programme in a special school, and in schools in Glasgow, Northern Ireland, and the Western Isles.
- 3.4 We have also received funding from House of Fraser to pilot having a specialist mental health worker in three of our services. This role has two primary functions. In the first place, to support, advise and train our staff in mental health awareness. Secondly, to be on hand to offer direct support to young people with mental health issues. Our ambition is to have a mental health worker assigned to every service, if this pilot is successful.

Residential care and permanency services

- 3.5 Last year, we met with several authorities who had identified that it is difficult to find good, high quality residential provision for children and young people with complex and challenging needs. Since then, we have grown our residential provision in England by acquiring three homes and a successful bid to run seven children's home in the Midlands. In addition, we have re-purposed another service to provide residential care for children with complex needs, including disability. This will bring our residential portfolio in the Midlands to 11 children's homes.
- 3.6 We are also developing our fostering and adoption services and working on our strategy to offer local authorities a permanency offer. This will build on our current placement options and will include our residential provision. Permanency support is about providing a range of options to meet a child's needs and help them to remain in a secure and stable placement, minimising the number of placement moves and reducing their level of trauma.

Nurseries

- 3.7 We have continued to develop our nurseries, creating a bespoke brand, 'Spring by Action for Children'. We developed this brand in partnership with parents. The number of nurseries has increased to 41 and more are planned for this year.
- 3.8 The Methodist Church has been very supportive in several areas of our work. For instance, by providing expert assistance in planning our capital development for our Headlands School, Penarth and supporting a tender for a children's centre contract in Bath by providing us with accommodation. Our Acting Chief Executive has also spoken at a joint meeting of trustees and principals of the Methodist Independent Schools Trust to discuss how we can forge stronger relationships between the two organisations.

4. By seeking justice through our policy and campaigns work

- 4.1 We have continued to raise awareness and persuade the Government to tackle the challenges that disadvantage children, young people and their families. We have conducted intensive research to provide compelling evidence to highlight issues that need urgent attention and action. Some of our work over the last year included:

- 4.1.1 **Revolving Door report:** An estimated 140,000 children have needs too great for schools, health or other universal services to meet on their own, and are ineligible for statutory social care support. Without the early help that they need, they may eventually reach crisis point.
- 4.1.2 **Crisis in funding: Turning the Tide report:** We have been working with The Children's Society and National Children's Bureau to highlight the growing crisis in funding for children's social care. This report shows the significantly lower spending on children and young people's services, and the potential impact.
- 4.1.3 **The Next Chapter: Young People and Parenthood report:** It highlights the challenges young parents, particularly aged between 20-25 face. We found that they face difficulties with continuing education, financial hardship, poor mental health, etc. This can impact on their children too. Our report offers the Government some recommendations.
- 4.2 We are proud to be the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness partner for children and families. Working collaboratively across Action for Children and externally, we have inspired thousands of people to get involved in tackling loneliness, through 'Chat and Play' sessions; launching the 'It starts with hello' report about the impact; and, developing various resources to help practitioners, young people and families (all on our website).
- 4.3 In the coming months, we will focus on our campaign to help give every child the best start in life. Sadly, Government spending on services – such as children's centres – has fallen by nearly 50%, and support for the youngest children in our country is disappearing. We want to persuade the Government to take urgent action.
- 4.4 We are grateful to the many Methodists who have been loyal campaigners, and we would like to invite more people to sign up. For information visit: actionforchildren.org.uk/how-to-help/support-our-campaigns.

5. **By building new faith partnerships**

- 5.1 Our partnership with the Methodist Church and other faith organisations has been testament to the value of engaging faith communities. Over the last year, we have engaged more closely with the Baptist Union, the Redeemed Christian Church of God and the United Reformed Church. They have been instrumental in helping us raise awareness of our work through their communication channels.
- 5.2 We have plans in place to build on our relationships with faith groups, and explore the opportunities available for collaboration. We would welcome the support of District Chairs and local Methodist ministers in forging new relationships at every level.

6. **By being positive about the future**

- 6.1 We are positive and excited about the future as we continue to transform so that we can take bolder decisions to ensure that any child who needs help gets help. We know we can count on the support of the Methodist Church, and ask for your prayers for the continuing success of our work.

***RESOLUTIONS

16/1. The Conference received the General Report of Action for Children.

16/2. The Conference noted that the trustees of Action for Children for the current year are:

Chair: John O'Brien (2012), Vice-Chair: Kate Guthrie (2014)
Methodist Church Appointee: Dr Daleep S Mukarji (2014)

The Revd Dr Sheryl M Anderson (2016), Les Clifford (2011), Richard Cryer (2015), Stanley Goudie (2011), Tracy Griffin (2015), Debbie Morgan (2016), Markus Ruetimann (2015), Yvette Stanley (2015), Josephine Larbie (2017), Fiona Thorne (2017), Patricia Gordon (2017), Gill Ellis (2017)