

## 16. Action for Children

<b>Contact name and details</b>	Karis Kolawole Head of Faith Partnerships karis.kolawole@actionforchildren.org.uk
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### 1. Introduction

- 1.1. Action for Children is pleased to bring you this report and invites the Conference to thank God for a year marked with many successes. We thank our Methodist supporters at every level from leadership and staff to church members, who have all supported us in amazing ways. Particularly, we appreciate the Revd Gareth Powell and Doug Swanney who have devoted so much time during the year to our relationship, giving practical support and advice.
- 1.2. In July 2016, we welcomed the Revd Dr Sheryl M Anderson, Chair of the Liverpool District, as a member of our Board of Trustees; she joins Dr Daleep S Mukarji, who also represents the Methodist Church. We value their contribution to the success of Action for Children.
- 1.3. We were delighted to host the Revd Dr Roger Walton and Rachel Lampard, the President and Vice-President of the Conference, at our services in London.

### 2. How Action for Children works

#### By launching a new strategy

- 2.1. This year, we launched a new five-year strategy that will enable us to respond to the challenges of meeting the needs of children, young people and families who require our help. Many charities are under immense pressure due to growing needs and diminishing funding, particularly from local authorities. It is necessary that we find new and sustainable ways to continue to support those who need us.
- 2.2. Our ambition is to ensure that any child who needs help gets help. We asked children what their needs are, and have designed our strategy to help us respond by doing what is right, doing what is needed and doing what works for children. It is framed around the following themes:
  - Making children safer and happier - this is based on what children have told us they need, and we want to have the greatest demonstrable impact we can;
  - Empowering our people - we want to empower our 5,000 staff and 2,000 volunteers to be innovative, flexible and creative in order to develop new solutions;
  - Collaborative working - working with existing and new partners where that offers the best solutions for children and families.
- 2.3. We also introduced a new way of communicating what we do and the difference we make. This will help us raise our profile and increase public support. The more people understand our work, the more people can support it. And the more people who support it, the more children we can help. Introduction of a new communications approach has meant that from January, we adopted 'How Action for Children works' in place of the logo we have used since 2008.

## **By doing what works for children**

- 2.4. We currently support more than 390,000 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 611 services in any other way. While we are proud to have made such an impact, we know there is still a significant number of children and families that need our help.
- 2.5. In order to ensure that we are doing what is right, doing what is needed and doing what works for children, it is important that we base our decisions on sound evidence. Therefore, we are investing in research and drawing on the expertise of our own staff to develop new products and services. Research will enable us to identify where need is greatest and the potential opportunities to meet them in innovative and cost effective ways.
- 2.6. In line with our strategy, we will move from being a funder-led charity, responding to the requests of commissioners, to a strategy-led charity responding to need; this means that we will deliver the services and support children, young people and their families need, based on our direct experience of working in and with communities. To become needs-led we must find new ways of funding the support we know works. This will require us to grow our voluntary income but also to work with other organisations to find new and innovative ways of supporting families with the right help, at the right time.
- 2.7. Our experience tells us that there is a growing need for children, young people and families to receive support to build emotional resilience and get help with mental health issues. We will therefore focus much of our activity in the coming year on developing our offer to these families, working with organisations who recognise this growing need and want to work with us to make a difference.
- 2.8. Local authorities tell us that they experience challenges in finding good, high quality residential provision for children with the most complex and challenging needs. In response, we are working with some authorities to develop a residential care model to meet the needs of these children.
- 2.9. Schools are an important part of childhood and we want to ensure that we support children and young people to get the very best experience from school. Schools are increasingly telling us that they struggle to support children to develop strong emotional resilience and we will be developing an emotional well-being service which will be delivered in schools.
- 2.10. Children need a stable home life. For those living in care, they need to feel confident that the placement they are in can offer them stability. We plan to develop our fostering and adoption services more broadly to promote stability for children and offer choice. Our permanency support will provide a range of services including ones that support children to remain within their family home, or with extended family through kinship placements. We will develop our range of fostering placements to ensure the best chance of children being matched to the right type of placement to meet their needs.
- 2.11. In 2016, we brought nurseries formerly managed by 4Children into Action for Children. In doing so, we are committed to being the foremost provider of quality early years services and we intend to grow and develop this portfolio of work.
- 2.12. Whilst we have plans for developing new areas of provision, we will continue to deliver our existing services, such as children's centres, early help support, disability services, youth support and many others. However the external environment is changing and we need to change with it. So we acknowledge that we may, as the external world and the needs of children and young people change, move away from some areas of service provision.

2.13. To read our impact reports visit [www.actionforchildren.org.uk/who-we-are/our-impact](http://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/who-we-are/our-impact).

### **By speaking out and changing things for the better**

2.14. Our policy and campaigning work has been very productive this year. The Government has made many of the changes we have asked for to make life better for children, young people and families. Some of our results have come from collaborations with other charities, notably NSPCC, Save the Children, The Children's Society and Barnardo's, and coalitions with the Alliance for Children in Care and Care Leavers (which we co-chair) and the End Child Poverty Coalition.

2.15. Some highlights from the past year include:

- Working with other children's charities, we secured improvements to the Children and Social Work Bill, eg introducing Personal Advisors for all care leavers up to the age of 25.
- Securing changes to the Immigration Bill to ensure many more care leavers receive proper levels of support, regardless of immigration status.
- Activating the public and politicians in various ways through the Fair By Five campaign to make early years child development a national priority by 2020.
- Persuading the Welsh Government to help the most vulnerable young people take control of their money through our Fair Deal campaign.
- Publishing research with the NSPCC and Research in Practice on how child neglect can affect children's vulnerability to other forms of harm (eg sexual exploitation) which has fed into the Scottish Government's child protection review.
- Producing a report as members of the National Working Group on Safeguarding Disabled Children is being used by Ofsted to strengthen the protection of disabled children.

2.16. Looking ahead to 2017/18:

- As a member of the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness, we are proud to be leading the conversation on the impact of loneliness and isolation on children and families.
- Understanding the challenges facing young parents will be the focus of new research.
- As members of the Disabled Children's Partnership, we will launch a campaign calling for health and social care services to support disabled children, young people and their families better.

2.17. We are grateful for the efforts of many Methodists who supported our campaigns, bringing public interest to the attention of politicians and other decision-makers. Information about our campaigns is available at [www.actionforchildren.org.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-research](http://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-research).

### **3. How Action for Children works with the Methodist Church**

3.1. Our partnership with the Methodist Church continues to grow as we find new ways to broaden the dimensions of our relationship; this will help both the Church and the charity to positively impact society. We gratefully welcomed various opportunities to work together and to share our expertise including:

- **Safeguarding:** We are working together on historical abuse, including a joint project with Barnardo's and The Children's Society to establish a counselling service for survivors of sexual abuse. We have also worked together to plan the 2017 Methodist Safeguarding Conference, where our Head of Safeguarding ran a workshop.
- **Internships:** We welcomed an intern from the Methodist Church at our Hackney Young Carers project. Internships are a valuable way to get experience of working with children while also impacting lives; therefore, we are developing a framework together that will pave the way for more Methodist interns to gain experience at Action for Children.

- **Delivering workshops:** At 3Generate 2016, *Connecting Disciples* and Methodist Women in Britain's residential weekend we ran workshops.
- 3.2. There is scope to build on this and work closely in other areas (eg schools and young adults) and we will continue to explore this with our partners across the Methodist Connexion.
  - 3.3. Our Methodist supporters raised over £1.2 million during 2016/17 through special services on Action for Children Sunday and at Christmas, Home Collection Boxes (also known as League of Light boxes), and supporter group activities. We were recipients of special offerings taken at the 2016 Methodist Conference and *Connecting Disciples* in March 2017. In addition, we received legacies and other material gifts which are not included in the figures above. We are truly grateful for this which will go a long way to support children, young people and their families.
  - 3.4. The last year has given Action for Children an opportunity to recommit to the vision and passion of our founder to do what is best for disadvantaged children. With the prayers, support and good wishes of Methodists and many others, we are making a difference as we ensure children have a safer, productive and happy childhood and future.

### **\*\*\*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: vacant  
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), Kate Guthrie (2014), Debbie Morgan (2016), Markus Ruetimann (2015), Paul Snell (2009), Yvette Stanley (2015)