



**The
Children's
Society**

Children's lives in Portsmouth

A report by The Children's Society

May 2016

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1 in 5
children living
in poverty feels
like a failure.

Introduction

The Children's Society works with some of the most vulnerable children across the country. This report focuses on issues affecting children within Portsmouth who are at particular risk of abuse or neglect, and those in the poorest families.

There are currently **43,360** children in Portsmouth, with **1,436** of these children being categorised as 'children in need'. This report sets out recommendations on the steps you can take to help them.

Throughout this report, where data is more appropriate we will provide information on a regional basis or from Portsmouth Council.

If you would like to find out more about any of the issues outlined in the report or about the work of The Children's Society, please contact our Senior Public Affairs Officer, **Tom Redfearn** on **thomas.redfearn@childrenssociety.org.uk** or **020 7841 4573**.

Children at risk

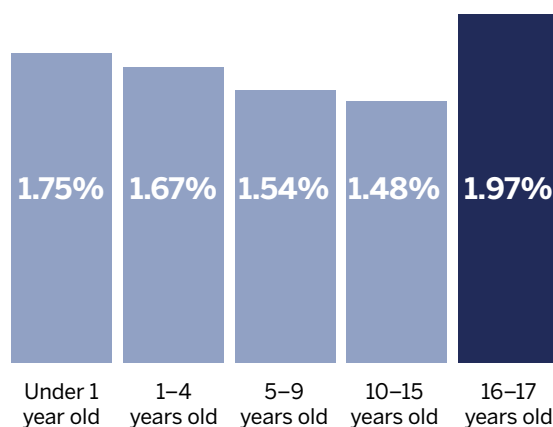
1. Children in need

In Portsmouth, of the 1,436 children classified as 'children in need', 217 are aged 16 or 17.

The Children's Society works with adolescents to help them deal with the issues they face, helping them develop resilience, advocating for their access to services, providing counselling and therapeutic support and educating them to stay safe.

We are particularly concerned about the lack of protection for 16 and 17 year olds who are more likely to experience abuse and neglect than any other age group of children¹ and yet do not receive the same legal protections as younger children. Due to legal changes in education and welfare provision, the number of children aged 16 and 17 who remain dependant on their families for emotional, financial and other support has increased. Over 90% of children aged 16 or 17 now live at home with their parents. While most children will get loving and caring support from their families, we want to protect those who are threatened by abuse and neglect.

Percentage of children in need because of abuse and neglect, by age



Recommendations

- Every child or teenager who goes missing or absent from home or care should be offered an independent return interview.
- Ask your Local Safeguarding Children Board to audit the safeguarding response that agencies provide to 16 and 17 year olds and review thresholds for intervention to ensure they do not discriminate against or fail to assess 16 and 17 year olds.

2. Youth homelessness

Last year in the South East 1890 children aged 16 or 17 presented as homeless. These teenagers are often at serious risk of harm and can be escaping homes where they face problems such as substance abuse, violence or severe overcrowding.

At The Children's Society we run a number of services to help homeless young people. Our services offer family mediation and work with both parents and children to re-open communication between them and help the family make the changes that will allow young people to live safely and happily at home.

In circumstances where a safe return to the family is not possible, we offer advocacy services for these vulnerable young people to help them assert their rights and ensure that they get all the help and support that they want and are entitled to.

Our report *Getting the House in Order*² provides an in-depth view of the challenges faced by homeless 16 and 17 year olds and makes recommendations to improve the safeguarding response of local authorities to these children.

We are pressing Government to strengthen the legal framework to better protect older children and enable them to safely move into adulthood. Local authorities should not classify older children as intentionally homeless, because doing so results in support being withheld. Local authorities should not give up on young people who need help but refuse to enter the care system. Councils need to make sure that the children are in accommodation which is safe and regulated.

When they came to ask
for help one quarter were

sofa surfing
with friends.



Recommendations

- Adopt an explicit policy that no child under 18 can be made 'intentionally homeless'.
- Review the local homelessness protocol to ensure all children under 18 who present as homeless receive a joint assessment from housing and children's services.
- Local authorities, as commissioners of supported accommodation for vulnerable 16 and 17 year olds, should ensure all these settings have effective safeguarding policies in place and are regularly scrutinised by the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

3. Mental health services for young people

In the year 2014–15, total spending on children and young people's mental health spend services (across Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG), local authorities and NHS England) in Wessex was £39,245,000. The average local authority CAMHS expenditure for local authorities in Wessex was £712,000 with the average spend across England being £949,000. In the same period, the average spending by CCG on mental health for children in Wessex was £2,355,000 – compared to the England average of £2,721,000.

According to a recent report by the Health Select Committee, 'there are serious and deeply ingrained problems with the commissioning and provision of children's and adolescents' mental health services.'³ This is supported by the latest available national data which shows that only 6% of the NHS expenditure on mental health disorders in the year 2012–13 was spent on CAMHS⁴.

The Children's Society offers a range of counselling, befriending and emotional support services across the country to some of the teenagers who need it most. Our practitioners tell us that there is a growing need for better mental health support for vulnerable children and young people. They are particularly worried about the lack of services available for older teenagers. We believe that commissioning and funding arrangements for mental health services for young people should be underpinned with robust, up to date

data on prevalence of mental health needs among different vulnerable groups of young people, including those in poverty – and that there should be a greater focus on early intervention.

In last year's budget announcement, the Chancellor committed an additional £1.25 billion – up to £250 million a year for the proceeding five years – to transform and boost CAMHS.

It is important that this new investment is used to fill the gaps in current service provision – such as facilities for older teenagers or therapeutic support for young people experiencing separation, abuse or other traumatic events.

Local areas need to undertake assessments of the level of need in their area including how they will meet the needs of the most vulnerable children and young people.

Recommendations

- Health and Well-Being Boards should ensure local Joint Strategic Needs Assessments explicitly include children and young people's mental health and the needs of different vulnerable groups at risk of developing mental health problems, to assess current and future need and inform commissioning strategies.
- Local authorities – through Local Safeguarding Children's Boards (LSCBs) – should review and monitor access to mental health support for children who have experienced abuse and trauma, ensure that such services are commissioned locally, and ensure that there are policies in place for priority access to services for all children who need it.
- All mental health services should have policies in place on transitions for young people from vulnerable groups between the levels of CAMHS services and to transition to adult services. This would ensure that children do not fall through the cracks of services and that they have continuous access to mental health support. Policies on transitions should outline how CAMHS will work with other agencies in planning transition.

4. Early intervention

The Government allocated £5,860,340 in early intervention funding to Portsmouth Council this year, that's a reduction of £6,695,986 per year compared to 2010. This massive reduction means local authorities are less able to address the problems experienced by children and families at an early stage. Children suffer harm that could have been prevented and the state is faced with greater costs as they are forced to deal with more entrenched, serious and expensive problems at a later date.

The consistent fall in funding nationally and across regions, reflects the stark reality facing local authorities and the scale of challenge they now face in preserving early intervention services in the future.

In 2010, before the emergency budget, £3.2 billion was allocated by central government for local authority early intervention services. By comparison, the 2015 Comprehensive Spending Review stated that £939 million would be provided to local authorities for early intervention services by 2019/20. This would equate to a real terms reduction of 71 per cent for early intervention services between 2010–11 and 2019–20.

These substantial spending reductions mean that in coming years local authorities will

need to put particular emphasis on early intervention services when allocating their annual budgets.

Some local authorities have employed a range of different approaches to retaining early intervention across local communities. Key themes include using programmes with a clear evidence base, taking a multi-disciplinary approach and attempts to retain a degree of universal services.

We run a number of services which intervene early to stop problems developing further. Our services provide one-to-one support to children at high risk of sexual exploitation, teaching them about consent, healthy relationships and staying safe so they can avoid exploitative situations.

44.87%

**Decrease in early intervention grant to
Portsmouth council between 2010–11 and 2015–16**

Recommendations

- Prioritise resources raised through business rate growth for early intervention services, using local needs assessments and open consultation with local residents.

5. Children with irregular immigration status

In the South East, 660 unaccompanied asylum seeking children were in the care of local authorities. These are children fleeing persecution, war and abuse from across the globe. There are also many other children in the region with an irregular immigration status which can cut them from support and leave them with an unsecure future.

Private fostering is an arrangement that is made without the knowledge of a local authority for the care of a child under the age of 16 (under 18, if disabled) by someone other than a parent or close relative with the intention that it should last for 28 days or more.

Whilst it is difficult to determine the numbers of separated migrant children living in private foster care arrangements, partly because the majority of these arrangements exist unknown to child protection authorities, using existing data our research has estimated that between 9,300 and 12,400 migrant children may well be living in private foster care arrangements. The immigration status of who of these children is often unclear and remains unresolved.

If children with an irregular immigration status are within the UK care system, we find that all too often immigration control is prioritised over their welfare and best interests. These children experience low levels of support and an inadequate standard of living which can put them at risk of destitution, homelessness and exploitation.

The Children's Society work to make sure those children we work with do not feel alone and have access to the services they are entitled to. However, the legal system for these children is very complex and difficult to navigate without someone independent of the Local Authority there to help them. We believe that all unaccompanied children seeking asylum should be entitled to an independent legal advocate to help them navigate complex immigration and social care systems.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children looked after at 31 March 2015, by region

England	2630
North East	10
North West	50
Yorkshire and Humber	60
East Midlands	180
West Midlands	150
East of England	280
London	2090
South East	660
South West	40

Recommendations

- Local authorities should ensure the systematic collection of data for separated children with non-asylum immigration claims.
- Local authorities should train social workers and Independent Reviewing Officers in the identification of children who are out of scope of legal aid and in how to best support their legal needs within this new and complex territory.
- Local authorities should develop written policies that offer clarity on the nature and scope of their responsibilities in relation to legal aid for separated children.

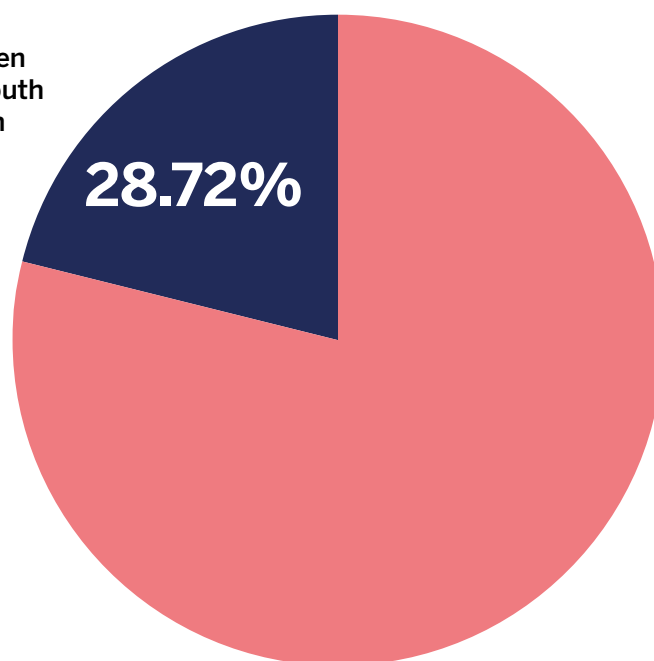
Child poverty and inequality

1. Families living with child poverty

It is unacceptable that any child is living in poverty in the UK, let alone almost 3.7 million children. Poverty has a devastating effect on children, harming their immediate well-being and drastically reducing opportunities throughout their lives. There are 12,451 children living in poverty in Portsmouth.

We have estimated that there are around 314,504 children in the South East who live in a family that is in problem debt. Our The Debt Trap⁵ report revealed that around a third of families in problem debt say they cut back on food within the last month, with a similar proportion saying they cut back on heating, and also on clothing for themselves and their children every month in order to keep up with repayments. Families trapped in problem debt are also more than twice as likely to argue about money problems, leading to stress on family relationships, and causing emotional distress for children.

The number of children in poverty in Portsmouth vs number of children in Portsmouth



Recommendations

- Every local authority needs to have a welfare assistance scheme which does not exclude 16–17 year olds from support.
- Annually monitor the spending on local welfare provision to build up a profile of need in the area.

2. Families in council tax debt

Our Debt Trap research also identified that in 2014–15 there were 6,133 children living in families in council tax debt in Portsmouth. There are 1.6 million children living in families who have faced council tax debt, with 2 in 10 families visited by bailiffs to reclaim council tax. This equates to thousands of children experiencing fear, intimidation and worry at the hands of bailiffs.

We would urge local authorities to protect children by not sending bailiffs round to families with children. Our research has shown that using bailiffs has a particularly damaging impact on the emotional health and well-being of children.

Using bailiffs also incurs an additional cost for families that are already struggling. As such, we recommend that local authorities use alternative collection policies that are available to them, putting in place affordable repayment plans for families.

Our report *The Wolf at the Door*⁶ showed that one group particularly susceptible to council tax debt is care leavers. In 2014, 6,880 young people aged 18 or over ceased to be in the care of their local authority.

Often, when care leavers move into independent accommodation they begin to manage their own budget fully for the first time. Young people in this situation have told us that managing and understanding council tax bills for the first time is frequently a challenge.

To ensure that the transition from care to adult life is as smooth as possible – and to mitigate the chances of them falling into debt as they begin to manage their own finances – we recommend that care leavers should be exempt from paying council tax until they are 21. This is an issue that must be decided at a national level, as is the case for the student exemption. As an interim measure we are asking local authorities to make this group eligible for 100% council tax support until they turn 21.



Recommendations

- Councils should exempt care leavers from paying council tax up to the age of 21.
- Every local authority should have a debt collection strategy which includes measures to address the impact of collection on children.
- Councils should not engage bailiffs for collecting council tax debt from families who are in receipt of Council Tax Support and have children.

3. Families in energy debt

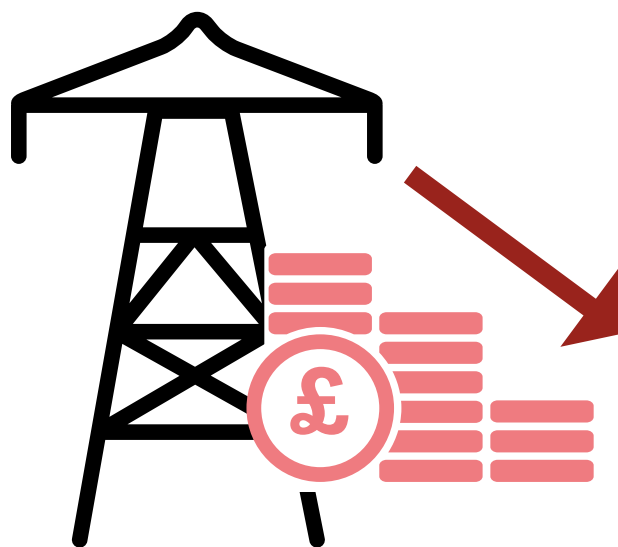
Our report Show Some Warmth⁷ found that there are around 7,032 children in Portsmouth living in energy debt. Children in families in energy debt are three times more likely to have damp or mould in their homes and to have been ill last winter, and are twice as likely to have breathing problems.

Community hubs such as schools and nurseries proved to be a useful location for building engagement with the community, as a number of low income and fuel poor families already access the services available there – meaning staff could build on the support already provided.

Families are often being left with impossible choices between keeping their children warm and paying off debt – feeling they have no alternative to cutting back on hot meals, baths or even heating their children's bedrooms.

Recommendations

- Local authorities should use community hubs as locations to deliver outreach debt advice and fuel poverty work, to ensure hard to reach families are able to access this service and support.
- Local authorities should advertise and promote the Warm Home Discount – a rebate of £140 on electricity bills for the most vulnerable – in services that families access, such as children's centres.



7,032

children in Portsmouth living in energy debt.

4. Tackling child poverty through Universal Credit

The introduction of the new Universal Credit (UC) benefits system will have a profound impact on millions of children and families across the country. Once it has been fully introduced, around half of children in the UK will live in families in receipt of UC.

The new system has real potential to make work pay, and to lift children out of poverty. However the Government must review the introduction of the new system to ensure that it really supports those families that need it most.

Support for children with disabilities and the abolition of the Severe Disability Premium under UC

A recent report from The Children's Society has shown that many disabled children will get considerably less support under UC – for many, the value of the disabled child additions in UC will be worth only half their current value through the disability element of tax credits. This will clearly have a significant effect on their family income and well-being.

The Severe Disability Premium (SDP) currently gives additional support to disabled adults with no other adult to care for them (including disabled single parents cared for by a young carer). This extra support helps to cover the additional costs of living with a disability but no carer.

The Government is abolishing the SDP through the introduction of the Universal Credit. This will cost families with a young carer up to £55.30 per week (£2876 per year). This cut could be equivalent to 20% of household income after housing costs.

Without the SDP, it is crucial that local authorities consider whether the level of support provided through social care services is sufficient to meet the needs of disabled lone parents with young carers.



Reduced work allowances under Universal Credit

Whilst the Government decided to change its proposals to reduce income thresholds within the Tax Credit system, no similar agreement was reached for UC, meaning that many working families will see reductions in support under UC.

The Children's Society calculations showed that in total 2.4 million families with children would have been affected by the Tax Credit changes – about 84% of those households affected. The proportional impact on families with children is likely to be similar in UC.

The impact of payment and administration of Universal Credit on children

There are a number of changes to the payment and administration of UC on families with children. For example, payments will be made monthly in arrears – which could present significant problems to claimants used to budgeting on a shorter term basis.

In addition, payments of UC will not be made to the main carer in the household as standard. There is considerable evidence that the best way to ensure that benefit payments for children are used for the child's needs is to pay the support to the main carer – changes may present risks to this.

In addition, families living in social rented housing will be expected to manage housing payments being made to them directly. Evidence from the Direct Payments Demonstration Project suggested that many families struggled to manage with these arrangements.

Finally, UC will normally be managed online – this could present real challenges for those families not able to use the internet, or who do not possess the means to do so.

'Alternative Payment Arrangements' will be available for those who struggle with the standard payment and administration arrangements – local authorities will have a key role to play in making sure families that need them get this support.

Recommendations

- Local authorities need to consider the impact of changes to disability benefits under UC on families. The loss of the SDP is likely to be particularly severe. There will be a need to reconsider support services in light of this.
- Local authorities have a key role to play in ensuring that families with children that need Alternative Payment Arrangements under Universal Credit are able to receive them.
- Local authorities need to consider access to online provision of UC for local families – particularly for those requiring regular updates to claims, such as parents with childcare costs.

Conclusion and summary of recommendations

The next four years will be crucial for children in your area. We look forward to working with you to promote policies which will help the most vulnerable children and young people.

Our key recommendations for the coming term to help children are:

- Every child or teenager who goes missing or absent from home or care should be offered an independent return interview.
- Ask your Local Safeguarding Children Board to audit the safeguarding response that agencies provide to 16 and 17 year olds and review thresholds for intervention to ensure they do not discriminate against or fail to assess 16 and 17 year olds.
- Adopt an explicit policy that no child under 18 can be made 'intentionally homeless'.
- Review the local homelessness protocol to ensure all children under 18 who present as homeless receive a joint assessment from housing and children's services.
- Local authorities – as commissioners of supported accommodation for vulnerable 16 and 17 year olds – should ensure all these settings have effective safeguarding policies in place and are regularly scrutinised by the Local Safeguarding Children Board.
- Health and Well-Being Boards should ensure local Joint Strategic Needs Assessments explicitly include children and young people's mental health. They should also study the needs of different vulnerable groups at risk of developing mental health problems, to assess current and future need and inform commissioning strategies.
- Local authorities, through Local Safeguarding Children Boards, should review and monitor access to mental health support for children who have experienced abuse and trauma. They should ensure that such services are commissioned locally and that there are policies in place for priority access to services for all children who need it.
- All mental health services should have policies in place on transitions for young people from vulnerable groups between the levels of CAMHS services and the transition to adult services. This will ensure that children do not fall through the cracks of services, and that they have continuous access to mental health support. Policies on transitions should outline how CAMHS will work with other agencies in planning transition.
- Prioritise resources raised through business rate growth for early intervention services, using local needs assessments and open consultation with local residents.
- Local authorities should ensure the systematic collection of data for separated children with non-asylum immigration claims.
- Local authorities should train social workers and Independent Reviewing Officers in the identification of children who are out of the scope of legal aid, and in how to best support their legal needs within this new and complex territory.
- Local authorities should develop written policies that offer clarity on the nature and scope of their responsibilities in relation to legal aid for separated children.
- Every local authority needs to have a welfare assistance scheme which does not exclude 16 and 17 year olds from support.
- Annually monitor the spending on local welfare provision to build up a profile of need in the area.
- Councils should exempt care leavers from paying council tax up to the age of 21.

- Every local authority should have a debt collection strategy which includes measures to address the impact of collection on children.
- Councils should not engage bailiffs for collecting council tax debt from families who are in receipt of Council Tax Support and have children.
- Local authorities should use community hubs as locations to deliver outreach debt advice and fuel poverty work, to ensure hard to reach families are able to access this service and support.
- Local authorities should advertise and promote the Warm Home Discount – a rebate of £140 on electricity bills for the most vulnerable – in services that families access, such as children's centres.
- Local authorities need to consider the impact of changes to disability benefits under UC on families. The loss of the SDP is likely to be particularly severe. There will be a need to reconsider support services in light of this.
- Local authorities have a key role to play in ensuring that families with children that need Alternative Payment Arrangements under Universal Credit are able to receive them.
- Local authorities need to consider access to online provision of UC for local families – particularly for those requiring regular updates to claims, such as parents with childcare costs.

If you would like to discuss with us any of these issues, please contact our Senior Public Affairs Officer, Tom Redfearn, at thomas.redfearn@childrenssociety.org.uk or call 020 7841 4573

Appendix 1

How The Children's Society helps children in England

Nationally, through our network of children's centres, volunteers and targeted services, we worked with over 34,000 children and young people last year, bringing positive changes to children and families and supporting vulnerable children up and down the country.

Much of our work is aimed at providing long term intensive work with the children and young people who need it most. Last year we helped 15,820 children and young people with intensive support.

We know these services are having a great impact, with 71% of families and 73% of children and young people showing a positive change in their lives

South West

- Waves Dorset
- Park View Day Nursery (Bournemouth)
- Kingsleigh Children's Centre (Bournemouth)
- Kinson and West Howe Children's Centre (Bournemouth)
- Boscombe Children's Centre (Bournemouth)
- CheckPoint Torbay
- Honiton and Axe Valley Children's Centres (Devon)
- Exmouth and District Children's Centre

South East

- The Children's Society Oxford Young Refugees
- Include programme

East of England

- Essex Young People's Drug and Alcohol Service (EYPDAS)
- Let's communicate together
- C.A.R.E – Young people's drug and alcohol service

London

- Camden Missing
- Camden CSE
- Safe Choices Leaving Custody and Care
- Boys and Young Men Service
- Tower Hamlets Advocacy
- The US project (Understanding Sexual Exploitation)
- Rise (trafficking)
- Step + Connect (emotional well-being)
- Family Voice (refugee and migrant)
- Stand By Me (refugee and migrant)
- Destitution Project (refugee and migrant)

Midlands

- West Midlands Hub
- Stars National Initiative
- Explore Families
- The Children's Society in the Black Country
- The Children's Society in Birmingham and Coventry

North West

- Manchester Missing from Home Programme: Greater Manchester and Oldham
- The Children's Society in Cheshire and Warrington
- Greater Manchester Mental Health Team
- Greater Manchester Hub
- The Children's Society in Lancashire
- The Children's Society in Calderdale
- The Children's Society in Rochdale
- Hope Young Refugee Service

Yorkshire and Humber

- SMILE Project (York)
- Friendship for all (York)
- Future Links (York)
- LEAP Programme

North East

- SCARPA
- SMART (Supporting Migrants, Asylum-seekers and Refugees Together)

References

¹ <http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/news-and-blogs/our-blog/we-need-to-change-the-law-to-protect-16-and-17-year-olds>

² http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/getting-the-house-in-order_PCR025aHousing_Report_LR_final_6_web.pdf

³ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmhealth/342/342.pdf>

⁴ https://www.gov.uk/Government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/414024/Childrens_Mental_Health.pdf

⁵ <http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/resources-and-publications/publications-library/debt-trap-exposing-impact-problem-debt-ch>

⁶ <http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/resources-and-publications/the-wolf-at-the-door-how-council-tax-debt-collection-is>

⁷ <http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/resources-and-publications/show-some-warmth-full-report>

It is a painful fact that many children and young people in Britain today are still suffering extreme hardship, abuse and neglect.

The Children's Society is a national charity that runs crucial local services and campaigns to change the law to help this country's most vulnerable children and young people.

Our supporters around the country fund our services and join our campaigns to show children and young people they are on their side.

Find out more
childrensociety.org.uk



**The
Children's
Society**

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