

Service Provision for Children in Need in England

Who are What Works for Children's Social Care

WWCSC seeks to improve the lives of children and their families through setting standards in research and generating and collating the best evidence in children's social care.

The importance of evidence based policy in children's social care

Children's services are complex, and our research helps policymakers, practice leaders, and practitioners understand how services work and what their outcomes are for children. By understanding which interventions work, and in what context, we can better support children and families, prioritise the most cost effective interventions, and affect meaningful change.

What we did:

As part of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, WWCSC undertook research to understand:

- What are the characteristics of children and families of children who have Child in Need plans?
- What are the reasons children and young people have Child in Need plans?
- What support and activities are families of children who have Child in Need plans receiving?
- Does the support provided match the needs of families of children who have Child in Need plans?

What we found:

Child in Need Plans:

- There is considerable **variation in the use of and the reasons why children were placed on Child in Need plans**, and the length and types of interventions provided.
- Whilst collaboration with parents was heavily emphasised in social workers' accounts of their work, **parents often did not feel involved in the development of Child in Need plans**.
- There is **little understanding of the characteristics of children with a Child in Need plan**

Support Offered to Families:

- A **wide range of support services and interventions were provided** by social workers, family support workers, specialist teams within LAs, and external services
- **Direct work with parents and children was variable** in relation to frequency, approach taken, use of resources, and its recording in case files
- There are **gaps in service provision, including difficulties accessing timely specialist support**, particularly for child and parent mental health

This research highlights the need for increased consistency in use of Child in Need plans and service provision available across LAs. This includes: greater collaboration with families when creating Child in Need plans, improved access to external support provided by multi-agency partners, and improved data collection to establish a greater understanding of the experiences of being on a Child in Need plan.