

# What Works for Children's Social Care: Our Priority Areas

## 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.

## Our five priority areas

### 1. Risk & Decision Making

This priority includes our work on kinship care and safeguarding under-1s. Building upon the research we carried out to support the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, we are undertaking further research to understand the reasons behind the significant variation in the use of kinship care across local authorities, and an evaluation of different strategies for supporting kinship carers.

Our work on safeguarding under-1s focuses on male carers of infants under the age of 1, and how the safeguarding system can be more effective at engaging these male carers. We analysed a sample of Safeguarding Partnership's annual reports for the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, assessing how different local authorities approach this issue, and identifying examples of good practice. We are currently seeking innovative practices in this area, and plan to evaluate promising programmes.

### 2. Domestic Abuse

We are conducting a rapid review of evidence on the effectiveness of different types of domestic abuse interventions delivered by children's social care (including in conjunction with other agencies) in terms of outcomes for children. We are also evaluating a programme called We Can Talk About Domestic Abuse, which aims to improve the experience of parents and children affected by domestic abuse as they go through social care processes.

### 3. Residential Care

We are currently carrying out an evaluation of Staying Close, which is a programme that provides support for young people leaving residential care and maintains their connection to the children's home. The Independent Review of Children's Social Care recommended that Staying Close be rolled out nationally, and we are in the process of evaluating the impact of Staying Close, focussing on the relationship skills and wellbeing of young people, the rates of young people in suitable accommodation, and the rates of young people in employment, education, or training.

### 4. Children & Young People's Emotional Wellbeing

We are working with local authorities and conducting a review of existing evidence to identify policies and practices that support care leavers' emotional wellbeing. We aim to produce a map of different



services and the evidence behind them to inform decision-makers, as well as producing a resource for care leavers and practitioners that outlines the journey of using different services, and the perceived benefits and drawbacks of each service.

## **5. Workforce**

We are carrying out scoping work to identify different practices that are currently being used to support social workers in local authorities and improve recruitment and retention. In the longer term, we hope to evaluate innovative and promising approaches, creating a map of different policies and practices, and the impact that they have.

## **Major Projects**

### **Social Workers in Schools (SWIS)**

We are evaluating the impact of embedding 146 social workers in 291 schools across 21 local authorities, including ten schools in Lambeth (including St Martin in the Fields and The Elmgreen School in Dulwich & West Norwood). This programme aims to ensure children's social care works more effectively with education colleagues, and with children and families.

We hope to publish findings early next year, analysing children's social care outcomes and evaluating cost and the implementation process. In early 2024, a follow up report will be published, analysing the impact of SWIS on days spent in care, educational attendance, and attainment.

### **Strengthening Families, Protecting Children and Supporting Families Investing in Practice**

WWCSC are undertaking two major programmes of work - Strengthening Families, Protecting Children and Supporting Families Investing in Practice - using robust evaluation methods to look at the impact of the most promising and widely used practices in children's social care. We are the first to do large scale impact evaluations in this space. For this project, this includes a randomised controlled trial of Family Group Conferencing (FGC) which is used throughout the country as an approach to family decision making. The findings from this trial could have a significant impact on service delivery and families' experience of services due to the prevalence of FGC.

Many of the interventions and practice models that are being evaluated under SFPC and SFIP were featured as promising models in the Independent Review, and we hope that the findings will have an important role to play in the development of the National Children's Social Care Framework and the accompanying practice guides.