



What Works *for*  
Children's  
Social Care

# What Works for Children's Social Care

Trustee

Candidate Brief

January 2021

Dear Colleague,

Thank you for your interest in becoming a Trustee of What Works for Children's Social Care (WWCSC). As Chair of Trustees, I am really excited about the opportunity we have to help those who make such a difference to the lives of children and young people.

Every year over 700,000 children and young people, and their families, have contact with the children's social care services in England. Changes in how these services support children and their families can have hugely significant effects on outcomes for children. WWCSC has been created to, generate, collate and make accessible the best evidence on how social work practice can make an effective and sustained difference to the outcomes for children and their families.

WWCSC was set up in 2017 through a consortium, funded by the Department for Education (DfE) and led by Nesta. In August 2019 it became its own legal entity and it is currently in the process of becoming a charity. The newly appointed Trustees will assume their roles once charity status has been confirmed (expected date Q4 2019).

The WWCSC's programme of work is ambitious and visionary with the potential to make a significant contribution to those working to help the children and families they support.

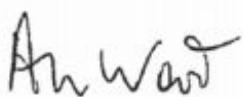
We are seeking new trustees who

- are committed to ensuring children and families in contact with the care system are effectively supported;
- can help WWCSC think long term and strategically;
- have strong communication skills and a critical and curious mind;
- have the ability to influence key stakeholders within their sphere of expertise and more widely; and
- understand how complex systems operate and can be improved.

In particular, we are keen to appoint two trustees at this time, at least one of whom we hope will be a current or former Director of Children's Services.

We are also passionate about improving the diversity of our board of trustees, and especially welcome applications from people who may feel that they are not currently well represented on our board.

More information about the organisation and the role is included with our information pack. I look forward to receiving and reading your application.



Sir Alan Wood CBE  
Chair of Trustees, What Works for Children's Social Care  
January 2021

# Introduction to the Centre

What Works for Children's Social Care (WWCSC) seeks better outcomes for children, young people and families by bringing the best available evidence to practitioners and other decision makers across the children's social care sector. We generate, collate and make accessible the best evidence for practitioners, policy makers and practice leaders to improve children's social care and the outcomes it generates for children and families.

## Who we are

### **Sir Alan Wood, Chair of Trustees**

Sir Alan has over 40 years' experience at both local and national level within the children's sector. Previously he was National President of the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS).

Alan was asked by the Secretary of State for Education to review the national multi agency arrangements for protecting children in England. The 'Wood Report' 2017 led to changes in the statutory framework designed to ensure the police, local government and the health services work together more effectively to protect children.

Alan established, and was Chief Executive of The Learning Trust (TLT), which delivered all of the statutory school education services provided by Hackney Council. In that period, schools in Hackney transformed from the lowest performing in England to one of the highest performing and now receives national recognition for its work. He was the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services in Hackney which designed and implemented the nationally acclaimed model of Reclaiming Social Work.

Information about our other trustees can be found [here](#).

### **Michael Sanders, Chief Executive**

Michael has been Chief Executive of What Works for Children's Social Care for 2 years, including during our time being incubated inside Nesta. During this time he has overseen the establishment of the centre's permanent team, as well as the development of the strategy and the beginning of a series of large scale research projects, including large scale evaluations of Family Group Conferences, innovations on Family Drug and Alcohol Courts, and the roll out of whole system models under the Strengthening Families, Protecting Children programme.

Previously, Michael served as Chief Scientist at the Behavioural Insights Team, where he led evaluations and research projects including four evaluations for the Department for Education's Innovation Programme, and lead analytical projects looking at decision making at the front door of children's social care.

In addition to the role as Chief Scientist he served on the executive team of BI Ventures, a subsidiary of the Behavioural Insights Team, which develops tech start-ups based on behavioural science. Michael is also an academic, serving as a Reader in Public Policy at King's College London.

## The Context

Children's Social Care (CSC) in England often has poor outcomes for many Children in Need and Looked After Children, with profound short and long-term fiscal consequences for the state, and on occasions catastrophic results for children and young people. There is significant variation in

expenditure, in social work practice, and in outcomes between authorities; much of which cannot be understood with reference to local population factors. There is also an extreme paucity of robust evidence on the effectiveness and cost effectiveness of CSC interventions and approaches to the organisation and delivery of services. In part because the sector does not have a strong culture of evidence-mindedness, there is a tendency, even where there is insight into what works, for effective practice to be slow to scale and replicate. The corollary of this picture is that the sector contains extensive opportunities for improvement both in social work practice and in outcomes for the children and families who the sector supports.

Therefore there is a need for WWCSC, an organisation that can generate an evidence base around effective and cost-effective practice, to support the rapid adoption of the insights that result from this evidence, and to help support the social work profession to become more receptive to evidence and its use, and hence better able to improve outcomes for young people and their families. No such organisation currently exists within the sector, which is why the Department for Education (DfE) commissioned the development of a What Works Centre for Children's Social Care.

The Centre was set up by a consortium, led by innovation charity [Nesta](#), with support from the [Social Care Institute for Excellence](#), and is now becoming an independent organisation and applying for charity status. The Centre was awarded c. £5m of set-up funding from the DfE in October 2017 and over the last six months has grown to a team of 18 people. In parallel with this work, the DfE commissioned a Research Partner for the Centre. The Research Partner team, led by Cardiff University also has c. £5m of DfE funding from October 2017 - March 2020. The Centre is also part of the network of What Works Centres, which now number ten, with ever greater influence and profile.

The work over the last 15 months has generated substantial appetite in and around the sector for engagement with the What Works initiative. Our calls to date for partners have attracted interest from over two-thirds of all local authorities; we have secured significant levels of online and face to face engagement; we have developed consistently positive relations with the institutional stakeholder bodies; and, we have identified a wide range of bodies beyond the sector – other foundations, research funders and private companies – interested in the agenda around improving practice in the sector and outcomes for children and families.

Our research looks at the point of referral through to permanence, including adoption, care leaver support and targeted early help. We focus on children's social care practice in England and draw on and share learning at the international level.

Engagement and co-design are central to our approach and we are working in close consultation with leaders, practitioners, children and young people, families and researchers across the sector to:

- Identify gaps in the evidence, and create new evidence through trials and evaluations •  
Collate, synthesise and review existing evidence
- Develop, test and publish tools and services that support the greater use of evidence and inform the design of the future of the organisation
- Champion the application of robust standards of evidence in children's social care research.

To be successful, change must be genuinely transformational to the profession and the individuals they support.

WWCSC is currently undertaking seven small scale evaluations and of particular note is the work we are doing with DfE to support the rollout of three interventions that have shown promise (Family Group Conferences, Family Drug and Alcohol Courts, and the Mockingbird Fostering Model). This will contribute three randomised controlled trials to the body of existing evidence in the space of children's social care, more than doubling the current stock in the UK (only two have been conducted to date). WWCSC is also working with the DfE, leading the evaluation of the Strengthening Families, Protecting Children Programme this will be the largest evaluation of its type anywhere in the world.

## Role Description

As a member of the Board, you will work with the Chair and other Trustees to set strategic direction and shape the work of What Works for Children's Social Care.

The specific duties of the Trustees are to:

- Contribute to all aspects of Board business, governance, and strategic oversight;
- Actively engage with key stakeholders in fields which are relevant to our organisation, acting in an ambassadorial capacity as appropriate;
- Provide specific expertise where the Trustee's contacts and knowledge will be invaluable in supporting our activities;
- Promote the work of the WWCSC as a key agency for evidence based improvement and change.

### Essential criteria for Trustee appointments:

- A successful track record in one or more of the following areas in the UK or internationally:
  - Working across public, voluntary, charitable or private sectors
  - Local government, particularly in Children's Social Care
  - Social investment and social enterprise: working with innovations and other investors for capital or revenue or other collaboration
  - Academia
  - Finance
- Connections to networks of people in the UK or internationally from whose expertise What Works for Children's Social Care may benefit, and a willingness to use those connections for the organisation's benefit.
- A mind-set aligned to the organisation and its Board of Trustees, including:
  - Independent: able to challenge and support
    - Creative and enthusiastic about work that makes a difference
  - Team player: honest and transparent

- A good understanding of, and commitment to, [WWCSC's aims](#) and the ability to meet the time commitment outlined on the next page.

**At least one trustee appointed through this process must be a serving or previous director of children's services**

#### **Desirable criteria for Trustee appointments:**

- Continue the work of establishing WWCSC as an independent and financially sustainable organisation.
- Personal commitment to improving outcomes for children and young people. • Understanding of the context in which Children's Social Care is delivered.
- Understanding of the financial, structural, and human dimensions of a new organisation.
- Understanding of the agenda around What Works Centres and the broader agenda around evidence-based policy and practice in public services.
- Experience of operating as a trustee or non-executive director, or evidence of transferable skills, including:
  - Strategic capability: sharp mind and good judgement
  - Ability to build strong relationships
  - Demonstrable understanding of roles and responsibilities of non-executives and of collective decision-making

## **Terms of appointment**

**Remuneration:** We are a charity, so these roles are non-executive and unremunerated, except for the reimbursement of reasonable expenses.

**Time commitment:** The Board of Trustees meets four times a year. There may also be sub committees, events and functions Trustees will be asked to attend and represent the WWCSC at.

**Length of appointment:** The appointment will be for a term of up to two years, and is anticipated to start April 2021.

**Location:** Board meetings are normally held in Central London.

**Equal opportunities:** We are an equal opportunities employer, and we aim to have a diverse mix of skills and backgrounds amongst the members of the Board of Trustees that can in turn better reflect the sector we work with. We would therefore welcome applicants from all backgrounds, but specifically from ethnic minorities and people with a disability.

## **How to apply**

To apply for this role please email [hr@whatworks-csc.org.uk](mailto:hr@whatworks-csc.org.uk):

- A covering letter which:
  - addresses the essential criteria for the role

- tells us why you want to join the Board
  - explains what difference your contribution is likely to make to the work of WWCSC.
- An up to date record of your achievements

**Deadline: 31st January 2021**