

A new commitment to families in Britain

4Children is asking decision makers throughout the land to make a new commitment to families. At its heart would be a radical change in the approach to working with children and families to achieve longer term generational change over decades to come. This longer term approach will be rooted in understanding how to support sustainable families and will work with the strengths of families through a joined up approach.

Britain needs a culture change in its whole system of support for families that moves from transacting with families to building trusted relationships. It will be backed with a new generation of staff that can positively support the vulnerable children and families they are working with to achieve real change.

A GREAT BRITAIN FOR ALL FAMILIES

- ➔ A family commitment from Government to consider the needs of families in everything they do
- ➔ A comprehensive universal affordable childcare guarantee from 0-14
- ➔ Part time and flexible working with flexible maternity and paternity leave
- ➔ Children and Family Centre Hubs offering help advice and specialist, co-ordinated services for families in greater need

GREAT CHILDHOODS FOR ALL CHILDREN

- ➔ World class support during pregnancy, antenatal and postnatal support
- ➔ Great services for early years and support to help children and young people to develop and learn
- ➔ Safe and inspirational places for children to play and for young people to meet
- ➔ Determined action on bullying, health and child obesity
- ➔ Specialist help to support children with specific needs – Early Intervention to build social and emotional capabilities and intensive turnaround for teenagers in trouble

TRANSFORMING THE LIVES OF VULNERABLE FAMILIES

- ➔ Early help in every community, through Children and Family Centres and Hubs to prevent crisis
- ➔ Intensive help to overcome drug and alcohol dependency, mental health problems and domestic violence
- ➔ Family support for all families who are just coping and to help tackle problems head on before they take over
- ➔ Intensive family support for all families in crisis, to turnaround problems through practical help and challenge
- ➔ A new outcomes-based approach to child protection and care, with intensive support, including kinship care

GOOD PLACES TO GROW UP IN

- ➔ A family commitment to all aspects of the local community, including planning, public spaces and parks, transport and policing
- ➔ A major programme of building to create affordable and social housing.
- ➔ Intensive action to eradicate the issues behind so called 'problem estates' and build positive communities for children and families, including action on gangs

A new approach to help for families - Children and Family Centres

4Children has developed a model for Children and Family Centres, which delivers real change for families. These multi-purpose community "hubs" provide a vital and trusted resource for all local families and communities, from pregnancy through to the teenage years, with extra help for those that need it.

Centres bring together and co-ordinate services – from midwives and health visitors to childcare, out of school and youth support. Universal advice and activities mean Centres are there for everyone, with specialist help on hand for families with greater needs – help with parenting, debt and housing and support

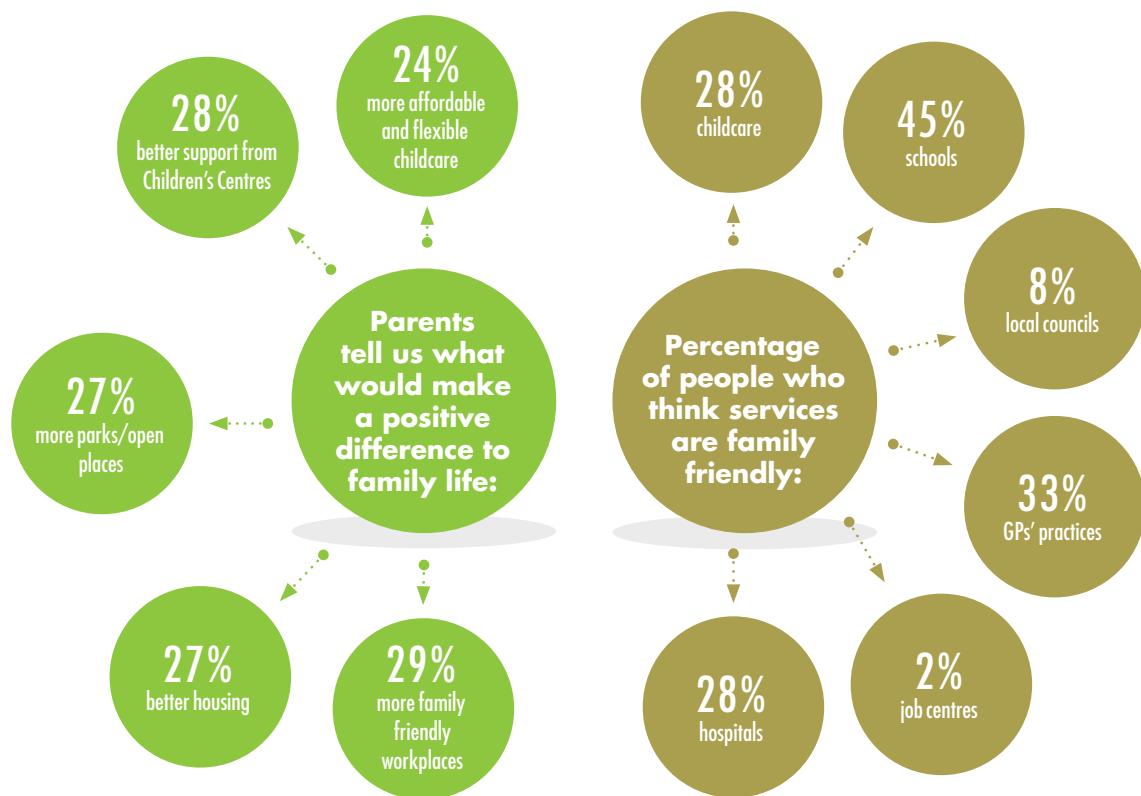
to tackle many of the underlying issues of family crisis – domestic abuse, alcohol and drug addiction and poor mental health for families struggling to cope.

Over a million families now rely on Children's Centres. This could double over the next five years if we extend their reach to older children and their wider families and place them at the heart of the community.



56% of parents think life is harder today than it was 20 years ago. **35% think that it will get worse** for today's children. It is time for all children and families to be given the support they need to fulfil their potential.

Join 4Children in its call for a new commitment to children and families to build a great Britain for the future.



Statistics gathered from YouGov poll on behalf of 4Children - December 2013

"We didn't know where to turn and then 4Children appeared and has stood by us. Now we're starting to feel safe again, I know my young children are getting on as they should and I have emotional support as well as help with the practical stuff. I feel like someone is holding my hand through this terrible time."

Chantel, mother of two

About 4Children

4Children is the national children and families charity which develops, influences and shapes national policy on all aspects of the lives of children, young people and families and works with a wide range of partners to deliver support for children 0-19 and families through Children's Centres, childcare, youth and family support.

Established 30 years ago, the charity works with families, communities, local authorities and governments to develop new policy proposals and deliver solutions, to meet the evolving challenge of supporting children and their families.

Find out about 4Children's wide range of support programmes, campaigns, services, products and events at www.4Children.org.uk.



MAKING BRITAIN **GREAT** FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

As we move beyond the economic crisis, we have an **opportunity** to rethink our **aspirations** for children and families in the Britain of the future.

We must demand a shift in **ambition** across every aspect of life in Britain today.



Rethinking Britain for children and families

As a country, we have choices about the kind of society we want for our children and families. As we look to the end of the current economic crisis, it is time to rethink and reshape our services and communities to enable all families to flourish and to offer vulnerable families the help they need to transform their lives. It is time to take action and to invest in our future. We have the opportunity to make Britain great for children and families for future generations.

This document sets out a radical manifesto for positive change for children and families throughout Britain. Important for all families, this new approach will be vital in transforming the outcomes of the most vulnerable. From improved family support, better communities, more family friendly workplaces and a new approach to tackling and overcoming some of the most complex problems families face, this manifesto sets out a blueprint for action for decades to come.

Life for children and families has changed dramatically over the last 30 years and all evidence shows that policy and decision makers are struggling and often failing to keep up. From the workplace to local communities, services and specialist help, families tell us how they are held back by the lack of affordable and flexible childcare; by unresponsive and uncoordinated services; and by working arrangements and housing that were designed for a different age.

The last 30 years have witnessed some of the most profound economic and social changes for families in the UK; changes to the way we work, care, learn and play that have been set against a backdrop of equally profound changes to family structures and dynamics.

As generations live longer, marry, divorce, remarry and live alone, the diversity of the family unit has changed beyond recognition. Many of us can now work at home; keep in touch as we go; and find out about or watch anything we choose at the click of a button, in the ever growing 24/7 virtual online world we now live in.

Yet the extension of these opportunities also brings its own challenges. Fast paced and expandable lifestyles demand the time and energy from families that they were once able to claim as their own. And the scale of possibility for some families can make the lack of opportunity for others even more profound and difficult to bear.

We enter 2014 as members of a society that is still deeply unequal. One in four children are living in poverty; over one million young people aged 16-24 are not in employment, education or training; and many children and young people have low aspirations and low self-esteem.

A staggering 500,000 families – one in ten – in this country are ‘just coping,’ dropping in and out of crisis with little hope of escape from the vicious circle they are caught up in. We are in danger of failing many of our families, with long lasting consequences that none of us can ignore.

If we want a country in which families are valued and flourishing, we need to change the way in which we support families. We need to listen and respond to what families really want; give all of our children the aspiration and ability to flourish as individuals; radically change the country's system of support for those most in need; and redesign our communities for Britain's children and families of the future.



A great Britain creates a positive environment for all families to flourish with specialist help and early intervention for those who need it to reduce or prevent crisis.

4Children's manifesto for the future, Making Britain Great for Children and Families, throws down the gauntlet to politicians, policy and decision makers, calling for them to reshape this country's public services, spaces and workplaces in response to the dramatic changes to modern family life. It demands that we act now to prevent family crisis and enable all children to flourish.

A great Britain for all families

A COMMITMENT TO FAMILIES DEMANDS:

- ➔ A Government family commitment to ensure that policies work for families
- ➔ A guarantee of universal childcare for all families – for children from 0-14
- ➔ Flexible maternity and paternity leave and extra help back into work
- ➔ Flexible working to help families balance work and home responsibilities
- ➔ Parenting courses for all parents
- ➔ Local grandparents' networks

Local Children and Family Centre Hubs in every community for support and advice. Open to all families, the Centres will co-ordinate specialist services for those families who need extra help

There is no more important, rewarding or challenging job than bringing up children. Whatever your background; whatever your circumstances, as a parent you want the best for your children and you will do all you can to help them flourish.

That is why it is so important that families have as much help to succeed as possible. From the earliest stages of pregnancy to school years and beyond, we know children stand a better chance of succeeding in life if they have a positive and supportive family life; and that children fare best when families are in the driving seat and taking the lead in making decisions about what is right for them.

It goes without saying that families are at the very heart of our communities, but we must also accept that thriving families bring both economic and social well-being. Families are assets.

We have made great strides in this country in supporting families over recent years with better maternity and paternity leave; access to flexible and part time working childcare; and Children's Centres.

However, families still feel that the system is stacked against them – especially those in crisis. They tell us of the impossible choices they have to make between children, family and work; about the bureaucratic maze they have to navigate to get the help they need; and about the lack of understanding, intransigence and inflexibility they too often face.

4Children's research shows that the majority of people do not believe that public services are family friendly, with local councils and job centres faring particularly badly. This must change.

Families want support which empowers rather than diminishes them, but feel the system is not designed to allow this to happen. Families are limited in their potential as a result.

As we look to the future of this country, we have an opportunity to reshape the way we support families.

We must continue to transform our workplaces, so that part-time and flexible working becomes the norm and employment policies respond to the changing work and caring aspirations of both mothers and fathers. There must also be radical changes to our public services, to build a new system of support that is responsive to families; available early to prevent problems developing; and committed to work with the strengths of families if crises occur.

This "inside out" approach puts the needs of the family not the service first. It works with the whole family in a coherent way and, importantly, joins up support and help. Families need the same help whichever professional they are talking to. The professionals of the future need to ensure that they get it – whether it is a health visitor, a teacher, a social worker or a housing officer that is taking the lead.

4Children has long championed the "whole life" support that Children and Family Centres bring in every local community. These Centres are at the heart of a great Britain for children and families.

If we want a country where families are valued and flourishing, we need to change the support we offer. We need to help people to become the best parents they can be, from pregnancy through to the teenage years, with advice and information as children grow up. We need to provide childcare that enables families to work; and ensure support is on hand to prevent crisis whenever it is needed. Achieving this will help make Britain great for families.

56% of us think the state should focus their services on families.

Only 28%
of people say hospitals are family friendly

29%
more family friendly workplaces

24%
of people say more affordable childcare would make a positive difference to family life

67%
of parents say the lack of available childcare is limiting their ability to work

18%
of households say they have a serious burden of debt

67%
of women are now working

Great childhoods for all children

A COMMITMENT TO FAMILIES DEMANDS:

- ➔ World class pregnancy, antenatal and postnatal support
- ➔ Great early years services and support that helps children develop and learn
- ➔ Safe places to play, learn, discover and make friends – from after school and holiday clubs to Scouts, Brownies and Guides
- ➔ Great places for teenagers with inspirational people and mentors
- ➔ A curb on advertising to children to reduce the pressure on lifestyles
- ➔ Action on bullying – at school and online
- ➔ Online safety to ensure that children have the protection they need

Specialist helps to support children with specific needs – Early Intervention to build social and emotional capabilities; specialist health support and intensive turnaround for teenagers in trouble

We all want children to have great childhoods – ones that are filled with love, fun, security and discovery. Research shows that a good childhood can set you up for life: from the importance of loving attachments in the earliest years, when vital brain functions are developing, to the importance of enabling children to grow, as they reach out, explore and take part in the world around them. Children who have good childhood experiences are more likely to form positive relationships in later life; more likely to be in employment; and more likely to be healthy.

Living in one of the richest countries in the world, children in Britain have much that can be taken for granted. Yet, our children continue to fare badly when compared to those in many other parts of the world. Studies tell us that children's prospects in Britain are poorer than those in much of the rest of Europe, with unacceptable levels of inequality. Children growing up in poverty have lower life expectancies, educational achievements and employment outcomes. We do not want this in the Britain of the future.

Life is complicated for children in this country today. They have never had both opportunity and challenge in such excess in their lives. However, with all the opportunities the new digital age brings, comes the ever increasing pressure of 24 hour communication and online relationships that children can find so difficult. And while a plethora of screens open up boundless possibilities of knowledge and discovery for children, they also reaffirm the unattainable ideals of the celebrity lifestyle that we know can be so damaging.

From body image to friendships, children's lives have never been so pressured and the notion of success so narrowly defined. Add to these, the increased complexity of family structures and relationships; of financially pressured households; and the fact that too many families are struggling on the edge of crisis, and it is not surprising that many children are growing up without the self-esteem and social and emotional resilience they need to flourish.

This can't continue. As a country, we need to set our sights high for children and make reaching those aspirations the litmus test of our success.

A Britain that is great for children has the best possible help for every parent and baby, from antenatal and postnatal care, to help and support to bond, nurture and thrive. And as children grow and begin to become actively involved in the world around them, this means supportive environments and positive relationships that help children develop essential skills – communication, sociability and curiosity and eagerness to learn.

The best start in life means having the best schools at the heart of the community, open and engaging with families and providing activities and support for children that go beyond the classroom, including after school and during those long school holidays. And as children move through primary to secondary school, it means providing new opportunities and support that create a positive springboard for life; open up opportunities and horizons; and guide and support young people towards independence.

The bleak reality of Britain's most vulnerable children

Children in care are amongst the most vulnerable in our society, often experiencing abuse, neglect or trauma. Almost 70,000 children are in care ('looked after') at any one time and there were 600,000 referrals to child protection services in 2012 alone. The bleak reality for children in care is that they are four to five times more likely

to have mental health issues than their peers and are more likely to end up homeless or in prison. Only 1% of care leavers go to university, compared to 37% of all young people, and children in care are ten times more likely to be excluded from school than other children. A third of homeless people were formerly in care, as were 23% of the adult prison

population. Over 20% of women who leave care between the ages of 16 and 19 become mothers within a year. Children in care are three times more likely to run away than other children, placing them in further danger of being abused or exploited.

3.5m
children are living in poverty in the UK, 1.6 million in severe poverty

11.5%
of children are starting school without essential behavioural skills

33%
of children entering secondary school in England are overweight

1 in 5
children have a mental health problem. 33% of girls and 20% of boys are 'distressed' by their body image

Over 1m
young people (aged 16-24) are not in education, employment or training in England

46%
of children have been bullied at school and 38% have experienced cyber bullying

Good places to grow up in

While we know that these opportunities will be important for all children, we also know that there are some who will need extra help. The statistics show just how many children are vulnerable:

- 3.5 million living in poverty
- 1 in 5 with a mental health problem
- Over 1 million young people not in education, employment or training
- Almost 70,000 children in care

While these children need help today, we must also understand that many of these symptoms are preventable. Waiting for crisis to happen is no longer acceptable and must not be tolerated. We need nothing less than a dramatic overhaul of our approach to vulnerable children in this country. Failing to do this fails those children whom we know need our help the most.

An ambitious modern country wants its children to have the aspiration and ability to flourish as individuals.

A COMMITMENT TO FAMILIES DEMANDS:

- ➔ Public spaces and parks that are designed and run with families in mind and provide safe places for children to play
- ➔ 'Think family' road and speed restrictions around housing, schools and parks
- ➔ 'Think family' services that operate at times and in ways that work for families
- ➔ Schools and public amenities that involve families as a community resource – throughout the week and at weekends
- ➔ 'Think family' policing in every area

A major programme of building to create affordable and social housing. Intensive action to eradicate the issues behind so called 'problem estates' and build positive communities for children and families, including action on gangs

Estate agents' brochures are full of promise for families in 'desirable' areas – good family houses, schools, nurseries, amenities, parks and transport; a good sense of ownership and community spirit and low rates of crime. Yet the reality is that in most areas of Britain in 2014, the needs of children and families aren't given enough thought by those who are planning and shaping the places we live.

Worryingly, 27% of parents do not think their neighbourhood is a good place to grow up in. In 2014 it is still the case that people living in the poorest neighbourhoods in England will, on average, die seven years earlier than those living in the richest neighbourhoods.

All children and families need good neighbourhoods and communities to grow up and live in and, as we look to the future we must make sure that they do so. Housing and estates designed with families in mind are still sorely lacking in poorer areas and in social housing, as is an understanding of the geography and challenges of our daily family routines, which is reflected in our transport system. It means creating great public and open spaces where families can spend time together – to relax, have fun and play. And it means good schools and amenities that belong to the community.

We need to have stronger, supported communities and services which enable families to take control of their lives. A good neighbourhood to grow up in

provides help and support for children and families that is near to home and is always there. In our commitment to families, the Children and Family Centre will be the hub of this support – with health visitors, parenting, childcare and family support on hand. As children grow up, the Centre will also be the springboard for out of school activities and places for young people that offer specialist support and advice whenever it is needed. We already have the basis for this kind of support in Children's Centres around the country, but if they are at the heart of the community – with intensive support for vulnerable families – they can do so much more.

The need for more affordable and social housing is well recognised. The new Police and Crime Commissioners offer an opportunity to think again about how we make local neighbourhoods safe for families. Once again, it requires services to change the way they operate; to co-ordinate and co-operate; and to think "local" and "family" in all that they do.

Many of these concerns are widely accepted, but families, especially those living in the poorest areas, are not yet getting the priority and dynamic results we know they need.

We need a major shift in ambition if we are going to redesign our communities for Britain's children and families of the future.

75%
of children do not travel to and from school independently

2,500
children have experienced sexual exploitation in gangs with a further 16,500 at risk

27%
of parents don't think their neighbourhood is a good place to grow up in

27%
of parents think better parks and open spaces would make a positive difference to family life

250,000
new homes per year are needed to meet demand over the next twenty years

Only 8%
of people think that local councils are family friendly

Transforming the lives of vulnerable families

A COMMITMENT TO FAMILIES DEMANDS:

- ➔ Early help through Children and Family Centres to deal with problems as they arise to prevent family and intergenerational crisis
- ➔ Family support for all families who are just coping, to help tackle problems head on before they take over
- ➔ Intensive family support for all families in crisis, to turnaround problems
- ➔ World class foster and adoption support for children in care which focuses on outcomes; with intensive support including kinship care
- ➔ Intensive help to overcome drug and alcohol dependency, poor mental health and domestic and family violence

All families need support from time to time, but some families need much more support than others. These families often have complex needs. However, we know that many will be able to turn their problems around if the right help is available. It is estimated that 500,000 families in Britain are highly vulnerable with complex and multiple needs. In Britain today almost 1 million children grow up in a household with domestic violence and 2.6 million with a parent that drinks hazardously. A significant 20% of parents have a mental health problem.

Tackling these underlying issues of crisis must become an urgent priority. To provide the right help, it is important to understand how family crisis works. Families tell us how problems can combine and crises develop if help isn't available.

And they tell how everyday practical challenges can conspire to bring the family down when combined with deep seated problems.

Through our work, we know the effect that crisis has on children, as parents struggle to provide the love, guidance, support and basic nurturing that children need to grow. In 2014, this level of neglect is sadly all around us, too often persisting through generations. We ignore this at our peril in the Britain of the future.

We must address the problems that struggling families face. Families tell us that they want to work with people who 'are there for them' – on their side, offering practical help to achieve real change and challenging them to stick with their ambitions.

A commitment to families would tackle the

problems that struggling families face head on with transformative intensive support to reduce and prevent crisis.

At its heart would be a radical change in the approach to working with children and families to achieve longer term generational change over decades to come. This longer term approach will be rooted in understanding how to support sustainable families and will work with the strengths of families through a joined up approach.

The UK spends around 60% of its children's services' budget, accounting for over £2 billion each year, on the care system. But most children will not arrive at being in extreme need overnight – many children and families move in and out of greater and lesser vulnerability over time and many could be prevented from becoming more at risk if we helped them sooner in a more effective way.

We need a system which sets aspirations high for vulnerable children and which expects and enables all professionals to work together to co-ordinate determined, meaningful action that transforms life changes in response.

The commitment demands that noticing and helping a struggling family becomes part of the day job of anyone who comes into contact with them, from the classroom teacher to the GP; from the police officer to the job advisor.

As the relentless messages from Serious Case Reviews tell us, tragedies will only

be averted if all professionals working with children and families begin to do so in a joined up way – working together to help the whole family.

Changing the way Britain supports its vulnerable families will not be easy, but it is vital. The statistics show the extent of the challenge. However, we know that families can turnaround their problems with the right support and our research shows that 91% of the public agree.

This is not to undermine the vital need for child protection, which has to remain an absolute priority, but to acknowledge that a trusted relationship with a skilled family support worker will really make a difference.

For the children and families who are already in chaos, this kind of support is essential if they are to have any future beyond the revolving door of crisis and care. For those who are just coping, this support is the chance to rebuild and prevent deeper and more complex problems taking hold.

Every year, we spend £9bn on managing and containing the crisis that we have already allowed to escalate and which could have been prevented. In the future, Britain must do this differently and radically change the country's system of support. It is our choice and we must choose to make it better.

120,000
families have multiple and complex problems

500,000
families are on the edge of crisis and 'just coping'

20%
of parents have a mental health problem

950,000
children grow up in a household with domestic violence

2.6m
children grow up in a family with a parent drinking hazardously

70,000
children are in care because their parents can't look after them safely