

GUESS HOW MUCH WE LOVE YOU

Why politicians urgently need to help our children

A Manifesto for Children

Office of the Children's Commissioner

SEPTEMBER 2019

Foreword from the Children’s Commissioner, Anne Longfield



We all want children to have a good childhood. It’s important in itself, and it’s critical for this country’s prospects. Today’s children are our future economic prosperity, our tax payers and wealth producers, our support in our own old ages. But this generation will also need to change the world – to tackle the challenges of environmental degradation, to shape the opportunities of the digital era, and to address global complexity around citizenship, immigration and employment. There is a clear economic and social imperative to do the very best we can by the next generation.

The building blocks of a good childhood haven’t changed – secure relationships, a decent home and inspiring schools. I want politicians to think seriously about whether they are truly prioritising these things. I’ve heard more political conversation about HS2, water nationalisation and tax cuts – and, of course, Brexit – than about children.

Children do not have a vote. Unless political parties choose to listen to them, they do not have a voice. I am the eyes and ears of children in the Whitehall system and I see far, far too often the interests of children being subjugated to the interests of others – of business, or of bureaucracies, or of adults who do have votes and whose views are therefore counted. Children don’t exist in Whitehall as children. They exist as numbers, as strategies, as targets, as sheets of results and reporting indicators, as clusters of duties or responsibilities or of the shirking of both. And they exist in the fault lines between government departments which have grown around adult bureaucratic silos: in the gaps in policy, the unconsidered interest – the unintended consequence. Sometimes, the invisible becomes visible – the kid with a knife, the disruptive child in class, the long long wait for a CAMHS appointment.

We should be ashamed that there are literally millions of kids in England not having the childhood a decent society would want. A million children – around four in every school class – need help for mental health problems. More than 120,000 are homeless and living in temporary accommodation. Over 50,000 children aren’t getting any kind of education, while nearly 30,000 are in violent gangs. Many more are growing up at risk due to family circumstances. These are young carers; kids living in households where the adults are involved in substance or drug abuse, mentally ill and violent; or housed in shipping containers. Many of them are not quite poor enough or mentally ill enough, or their families are not quite troubled enough, to tick a box for one service or another. These children bear the brunt of cuts in public spending and the rationing of services. And while the additional spending on schools is welcome, it won’t solve these problems.

None of this is inevitable: we get the society we choose.

I’ve been shocked by how frightened children routinely say they are today. They tell me about being chased in the streets, videoed by strangers, frightened to walk to school, avoiding being out after dark. Many of the people and places that used to be available to kids in the past, the fabric of a child’s society – from someone to greet you when you got home from school, to welcoming parks and clubs – no longer exist. We must fix this.

I want England to be a great place for all children to grow up. This paper sets out a vision for a more child, and family, focused society. It demands that Government and all political parties take action in their manifestos, in budgets and in the Queen’s Speech – to improve the lives of children **today**.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anne Longfield". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

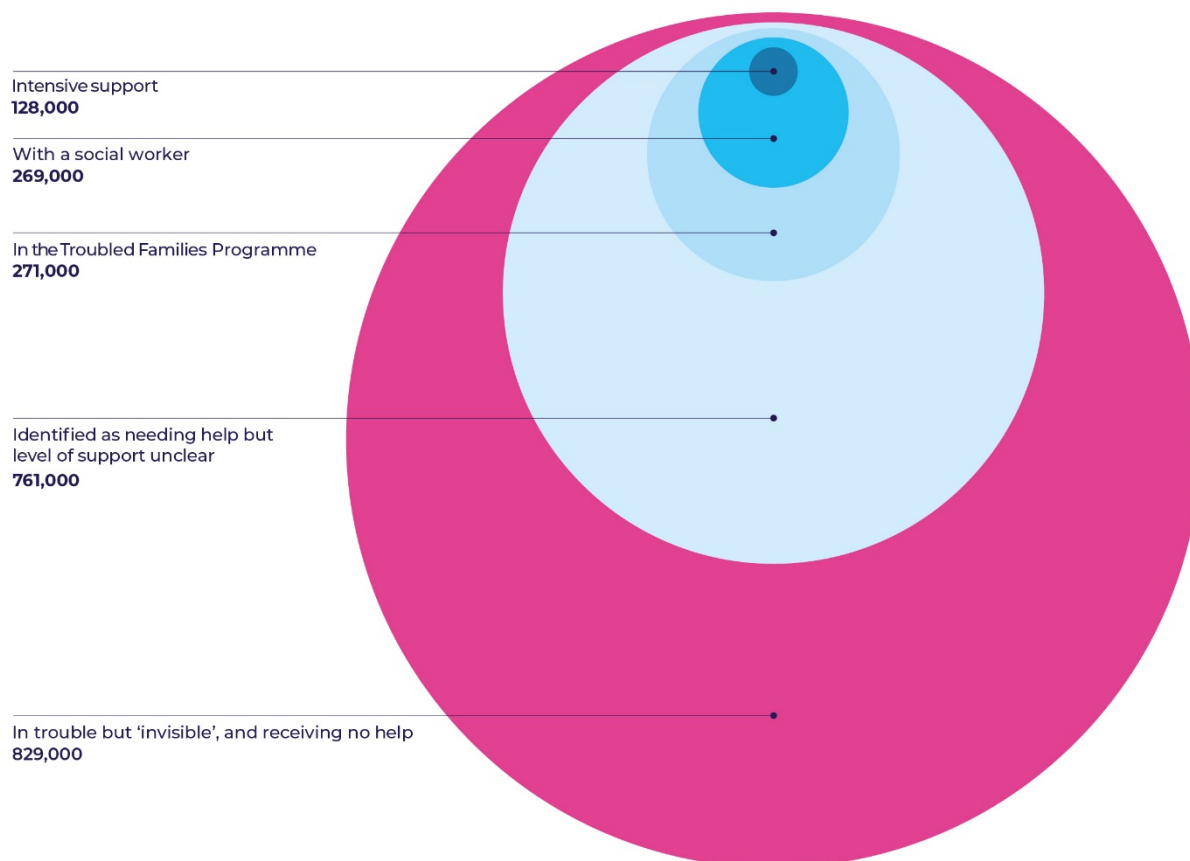
Anne Longfield OBE, Children’s Commissioner for England

Where the Wild Things Are . . . Stronger families

Families increasingly receive support only when they and their children hit crisis point¹. This is not only damaging to children's life chances, it is expensive and harmful to society. One in six children arrives at school having failed to meet half of their expected physical and emotional developmental milestones; in some areas, this rises to a quarter of children². At the other end of the school system, 16% of pupils are leaving compulsory education at 18 without GCSE level qualifications – unable even to start an apprenticeship³.

Many of these children have been forgotten before they even start school and are largely invisible because they are no-one's problem: not at such immediate risk that police or social services have needed to intervene. The lower tier services that should support them are highly inconsistent because responsibility is split between councils and health services and there is no national structure to hold them accountable⁴. The infographic below shows how many children are receiving intensive statutory support, how many some kind of marginal support – and how many we know are having problems at home but are unidentified by services.

Children in trouble



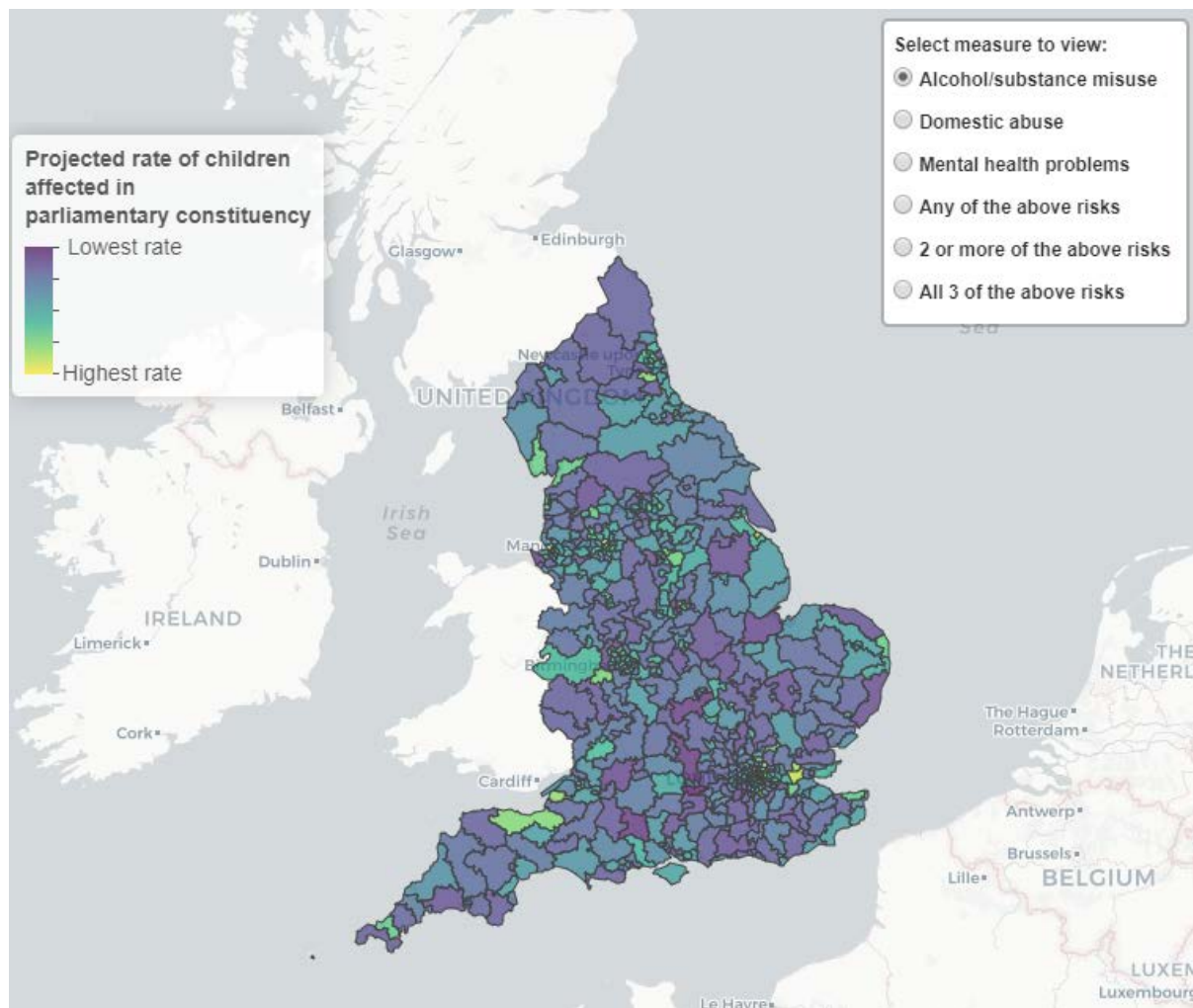
¹ Children's Commissioner, *Estimating Children's Services spending on vulnerable children*, July 2019

² Children's Commissioner, *Growing up North*, March 2018

³ Department for Education, *Level 2 and 3 attainment in England: Attainment by age 19 in 2018*. A Level-2 qualification means 5 GCSEs or equivalent and is the basic pre-requisite for numerous other qualifications.

⁴ Children's Commissioner, *We need to talk: Access to speech and language therapy*, June 2019 and Children's Commissioner, *Early access to mental health support*, April 2019

In every area of the country children are growing up in difficult situations – in dire poverty or in chaotic families; living with parents with mental or addiction problems, or in homes dominated by domestic violence. One in ten of all children in England has needed a social worker in the past six years, the overwhelming majority of these because they were being harmed, neglected or not having their basic care needs met⁵.



*Interactive version of map online here:
<https://childrenscommissioner.github.io/riskmaps2019/>

The Troubled Families Programme was designed to support these families, and has had some considerable success. But funding for Troubled Families ends entirely in March 2021 and the wider network of family support services have borne the brunt of funding pressures in local authorities⁶.

The Children’s Commissioner wants to see family support put at the heart of children’s social care, with an expansion of the Troubled Families Programme to 500,000 households, and an outcomes framework built more around children. This should be delivered through an extended network of family support centres in the most deprived areas, building on existing children’s centres and extended school opening hours; helping families not only with very young children but as their kids grow up.

⁵ Department for Education, ‘Review of children in need’, June 2019

⁶ Children’s Commissioner, *Estimating Children’s Services spending on vulnerable children*, July 2019

Unfortunately, too many families are having additional stress piled on them by the transition to Universal Credit. For many, this has been the trigger which has moved them from ‘just about managing’ to ‘crisis’. Research commissioned by the Children’s Commissioner⁷ shows it is possible to predict in advance who these families will be and offer them support ahead of transition, if the will is there. There must be an immediate assessment of the impact of Universal Credit on children and a guarantee that no child will be worse off under the new system. In the meantime, the Children’s Commissioner wants to see the abolition of the two-child limit and an end to the five-week wait for the first Universal Credit payment, for families with children.

Room on the Broom . . . Decent places to live

It is not right that tens of thousands of children are growing up in shipping containers, office blocks and B&Bs. The housing crisis reaches deep into these children’s lives: from the baby learning to crawl in a shipping container, to the kids sharing kitchens with addicts and criminals, the children whose mother is in constant fear of eviction, and the troubled teenagers for whom a residential placement might mean a series of short-term homes and repeated school moves with constant disruption to education, friendships and family stability⁸.

Stability is at the core of a good childhood. Children in care are crying out for it yet they too often face the reality of repeat placement moves, school changes and social worker swaps⁹. The stock of accommodation for looked after children, particularly older ones and those with emotional and behavioural problems, is totally inadequate. It can be difficult to distinguish between a child in care and a child in jail – and far too often they are one and the same.

Children who need love, care and mental health support deserve to receive them; not be shunted to the margins of society, guarded and managed rather than loved and helped. The Children’s Commissioner believes that except in the most extreme circumstances, no child in England ought to be locked up.

Local authority statutory children’s services must be adequately funded so that the child’s needs are put at the heart of decision-making, and planning has the child at its heart. This will require an expansion of accommodation available for looked after children, together with a review of the market for its provision; and the replacement of our antiquated system of child jails with secure schools, as proposed in Charlie Taylor’s review of the youth justice system.

There also needs to be a specific focus on adequate and stable housing for *all* children. The Children’s Commissioner wants a cross-government ministerial taskforce specifically to address children’s housing needs.

⁷ Policy in Practice and Children’s Commissioner, *The Impact of Welfare Reform on Child Vulnerability*, May 2019

⁸ Children’s Commissioner, *Stability Index 2019*, August 2019 and Children’s Commissioner, *Bleak houses*, August 2019

⁹ Children’s Commissioner, *Stability Index 2019*, August 2019

The Secret Garden . . . Healthy minds

The first national survey of children’s mental health for 14 years¹⁰, published last October, shows that one in eight children has some form of “mental disorder”. In younger children, these are more common in boys; amongst teenagers, more girls suffer. All of these children deserve mental health services. Even ‘lower level’ mental health problems such as anxiety and emotional problems can be crippling, holding growing kids back in every part of their lives. Local services, where they do exist, are patchy, uncoordinated and inadequate¹¹.

The failure to provide this care has clear consequences. Rising numbers of teenagers are excluded, angry, depressed; at worst, suicidal or forced to enter into care. There are now more and more older children entering care, with the age profile of looked after children marching upwards: a quarter of children in care are now over 16¹². These are all signs screaming at society that something has gone wrong.

What children tell the Commissioner they want – time and time again – is access to mental health support, quicker, more conveniently, and ideally delivered in schools where it would attract less stigma. The Government’s commitment to providing mental health support teams ‘in or near schools’ in a quarter to a fifth of the country by 2023-24¹³, is a good one. But the Children’s Commissioner believes this needs to be delivered faster and more widely. Every school in England should have access to a CAMHS-trained counsellor.

In order to address the additional pressures on children brought by social media, high quality digital resilience and digital literacy should form a core part of the school curriculum from age 5 upwards, and any new government must implement the existing policy to introduce a duty of care on social media companies. Until companies are held accountable for what happens on their platforms, children will continue to suffer the consequences of their inaction and excuses. The new government must also ensure that the age appropriate design code being developed by the ICO is laid as a matter of urgency, without delay.

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time . . . SEND support

More than 4 children in the average classroom will have special educational needs and they account for nearly half the 41 pupils permanently excluded from school every day¹⁴. Reforms to the SEND system five years ago were well-intentioned but poorly funded; leaving a £1.8bn shortfall in funding by 2021/22, only £700m of which will be met from the additional funding promised to schools¹⁵.

From the failure to provide early support such as speech and language therapy, to long waiting lists for assessments for children with suspected autism, a paucity of suitable school places for children with high needs, and soaring exclusions, the system is patching up problems and failing kids rather than helping them. The SEND system must be adequately funded.

¹⁰ NHS Digital, *Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2017*, November 2018

¹¹ Children’s Commissioner, *Early access to mental health support*, April 2019

¹² Children’s Commissioner, *Stability Index 2019*, August 2019 and Children’s Commissioner, *Bleak houses*, August 2019

¹³ Department for Health and Department for Education, *Transforming Children and Young People’s Mental Health Provision: a Green Paper*, December 2017

¹⁴ Department for Education, *Permanent and fixed period exclusions in England: 2017 to 2018*, July 2019

¹⁵ Shortfall figures from the Local Government Association, £700m figure taken from Department for Education press release

This would also help address the sharp rise in exclusions, often of children with SEND, from mainstream schools. The next government should implement the recommendations of the Timpson review into school exclusions. And a decent society would pledge that no child will be permanently excluded from primary school.

The Hunger Games . . . Safe streets and active kids

Children complain there is 'nothing to do' and 'nowhere to go'. They tell the Commissioner they no longer feel safe on the streets¹⁶; the area around the home where children are allowed to go unsupervised has shrunk by 90% since the 1970s¹⁷.

The result is a generation of battery children, increasingly static and reliant on technology for amusement and social interaction. This is not what parents want and it is not what children want. If we are serious about tackling childhood obesity, if we want to increase children's social and civic participation and if we want them to have a meaningful alternative to an iPhone, we need to create safe spaces and activities for them.

Instead, in more and more areas of the country, gangs operate openly in streets and parks, and groom increasingly younger children. Those children with most time on their hands – those attending part-time school such as Pupil Referral Units, for instance, or not getting on at home, disengaged and marginalised – are easy pickings for gangs and other trouble makers. But any child may find themselves at a loose end after school: the school day has not kept up with changes in family working patterns which see children returning home to empty houses.

The Children's Commissioner believes all schools should stay open in evenings and weekends and throughout school holidays, to provide a range of activities from sports to arts, drama to digital citizenship; and this could even include high quality youth support. The benefits to such an approach would be wide-ranging: for children, their families and their communities. It would broaden access to subjects being 'squeezed' out of more academic curricula, it would help parents with childcare and be good for children's mental health and social skills.

The cost of this must **not** be borne by schools and teachers. New funding is needed to provide high quality clubs, training and support for children and teenagers; a mix of voluntary, public and private provision. A new model of youth support worker should be introduced along the model of the Frontline/Teach First training for social workers/teachers. They should work with schools to help keep children in education and open up opportunities for them.

Alongside this, security in schools and neighbourhoods has to be a priority for any government. The Children's Commissioner wants to see neighbourhood police officers attached to every school. Parks should be made safer: with low fences so the children can see out (and adults can see in), more lights, more adults, and CCTV – all suggestions made by children consulted by the Children's Commissioner¹⁸.

¹⁶ Children's Commissioner, *Business Plan 2019-20: Consultation with children*, March 2019

¹⁷ Children's Commissioner, *Playing Out*, August 2018

¹⁸ Children's Commissioner, *Playing Out*, August 2018

The Lord of the Rings . . . A Cabinet committee for children

The next government should establish a cross-government Cabinet committee: a committee for children. Children should at last be given the priority they are screaming out for at the top of government. Tackling complex generational problems will not be quick, and it won't be cheap – in the region of £10 billion to implement everything set out in this manifesto. But with enough political will, it can be done.

Now We Are Six . . . Six core demands

1. Extend and expand the Troubled Families Programme or equivalent system of family support
2. A CAMHS counsellor in every school
3. Fully funded help for children with special needs
4. Schools open in evenings, weekends and holidays
5. Police officers and youth workers in schools
6. A Cabinet committee for children

Costs

Firstly, existing services that children rely on need to be put on a sustainable footing. This means:

- > Ensuring the SEND system has adequate funding: £1.8bn (of this, £700m was pledged in the September 2019 spending review).
- > Adequate speech and language services in every community: £150 million¹⁹
- > The LGA believes an additional £3.1bn per annum is needed by 2025 for children's services, to meet rising demand and cost pressures.

Secondly, some existing schemes should be expanded, including:

- > Expansion of the current plan to provide CAMHS support to 20-25% of schools to ALL schools: an additional £750 million²⁰
- > A new family support system, based on but expanding the 'Troubled Families' programme to reach 500,000 families: £800 million²¹

Finally, there should be more provision for children and families within communities. This means an extended range of school-based provision, linked to children's centres and youth services. The starting point for this is ensuring schools can facilitate these activities, which requires 'out-of-hours' co-ordinators. The DfE's previous extended school model was based around this, and their costings suggest it would require²²:

- > £420 million for half of all secondary schools to have an out-of-hours co-ordinator
- > £410 million for half of all primary schools to have an out-of-hours co-ordinator

An equivalent basic infrastructure needs to be developed in the community for those children who are pre-school. This would cost:

- > £600m to enhance the work on child and family centres in deprived areas

At the other end of childhood, for those marginalised or at risk teenagers, a new cadre of high-quality youth workers, trained along the lines of Teach First and Frontline would cost:

- > £250m to train and employ 2,000-3000 new youth workers.

This investment would provide the basic community infrastructure to work with children and families. Funding could incentivise collaboration: a children's centre in a primary school enhances the consistency of the support provided to the child and connects parents to schools.

In addition, funding needs to be available for a range of and activities – creative, sporting and educational – to be delivered through extended schools. This could cost:

- > Up to £1 billion covering anything from breakfast clubs to holiday programmes.

¹⁹ Based on unit costs provided by the Royal College of Speech and Language therapists.

²⁰ This is based on the costs of delivering the Green Paper. It does not include possible savings from scaling the scheme up. Like the Green Paper, it presumes that some of the costs will be borne by the NHS, the £750m does not include the NHS contribution, given NHS funding has already been agreed.

²¹ This figure is based on both an expansion of Troubled Families and a recognition that local authorities currently subsidise the programme.

²² This presumes £100,000 funding per secondary school and £50,000 per primary school

If children don't get help, problems get worse.

Ben is 2.

He lives with his mum and dad. They are living in poverty and are homeless, staying in a B&B provided by the council. Both parents have poor mental health. This home life affects Ben's development, both because his mum and dad spend less time playing with him, and since they are isolated. Ben doesn't get to play with other children.

Children in the same situation:

123,520 Children in England live in temporary accommodation

593,000 Children live in material deprivation and severe low income

900,000 Live with parents that have poor mental health



How can we help?

- **Counselling** for mum and dad
- A **nursery place** for Ben
- Access to a family-nurse partnerships would help mum and dad with parenting

Ben is 5.

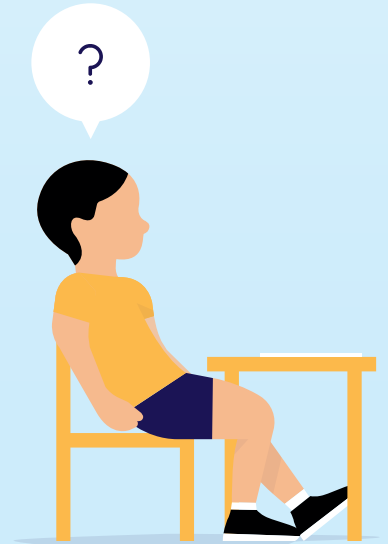
His family didn't get any help and now dad is drinking too much. Ben has started school, but is already behind his classmates: he has failed to meet more than half of his developmental benchmarks. He finds it hard to communicate and manage how he feels, has difficulty understanding things, and loses his temper when he is confused.

Children in the same situation:

81,828 Last year 81,828 children reached less than half of the 'early years' development benchmarks on starting school

150,000 Approximately 150,000 boys aged 5-10 had a "behaviour disorder" (more than twice the rate of girls)

472,000 Children live in families where an adult has alcohol or drug dependency



How can we help?

- **Speech and language therapy** for Ben
- There are a range of programmes for Ben and his parents which can help him and them manage emotions. These have a really strong evidence base

Ben is 12.

He now lives with his mum and step dad. He never received help for his emotional and communication problems, and this has led to angry outbursts and violent behaviour at home and school. He has been expelled from school. He doesn't get on with his parents either, and spends a lot of time out of the house.

Children in the same situation:

7,720 Children were permanently excluded in 2016/17

90,756 Children not in mainstream education

270,572 Boys aged 11-16 have a mental health disorder



Ben is 14.

He is in a gang and 'runs' drugs between areas. His mum and step dad wanted him out of the house because he is aggressive. After a fight where he got stabbed, the council agreed to take him into care. No foster family will take him and so he is placed in a children's home 100 miles away. This is one of three children's homes Ben is placed in within a year.

Children in the same situation:

30,000 Children in England are believed to be in gangs

573 Children were admitted to hospital last year with stab wounds

7,880 Children in care had two or more homes last year



Ben is 16.

He ran away from his children's home, was caught up in a fight and is now in custody. He also has a daughter Chloe, 6 months old. He has no qualifications and no contact with his family. When he gets out of jail next year he intends to return to the area where he grew up. He doesn't know where he'll live.

Children in the same situation:

891 There are 891 children in custody in England

118,100 There are 118,100 16-18 year olds in England not in education or training

6,105 Babies born to parents under 18 last year

47,876 Of children with special education needs fail to get any level-2 qualifications (GCSE or equivalent) by age 19



How can we help?

- **Mental health care** for Ben
- Family-therapy for Ben and his family
- An **educational psychologist** to help him get back to school
- **Youth services** to help Ben outside of school

How can we help?

- Ben still needs help for his mental health
- A stable and therapeutic **children's home**
- A **youth worker** or someone else to develop a relationship with

How can we help?

- Ben needs **support and stability** when he gets out of prison. Somewhere to live, a place at college and someone to help him get his life back on track

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