



Help *at* Hand



Help at Hand annual report

December 2025

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Foreword from Dame Rachel de Souza



"I love to learn and be around other children every day. I miss my old friends, which makes me feel sad. I have been looking forward to making new ones, so I don't feel lonely."

These are the words of an 11-year-old boy, 'Jack', who contacted my advice and support service, Help at Hand. Jack, whose story is captured in detail in this report, had been in care for many years and at the time he got in touch with my team, had been out of school for four months as professionals argued back and forth over how best to support him – ultimately failing to find him an appropriate school place for seven months.

His words illustrate precisely why Help at Hand, made up of just three child's rights experts, is such a vital lifeline for so many children, especially those living away from their loved ones, or whose social care placements have broken down and the services around them are unable to reach an effective solution that meets their needs.

The role of the Children's Commissioner is set out in statute as promoting and protecting the rights of all children, with particular regard to children who are living away from home or receiving social care services. This includes children who are in care, leaving care, staying in hospital, or remanded in youth custody, as well as children in need who are living with their families. Help at Hand fulfils the Children's

Commissioner's statutory duty as set out under section 2D of the Children Act 2004 to intervene on behalf of these children to provide advice, assistance, and representation. This responsibility is fulfilled by the Commissioner's Help at Hand service.

While the scope of Help at Hand's advocacy has not changed in the last 10 years, its caseload continues to grow rapidly year on year. This year, my team of three advisors handled more than 1,100 new cases – an increase of nearly 20% from the previous year. These come from children in unsafe or unsuitable care placements to those navigating homelessness or immigration systems, while highlighting the system-wide changes required to prevent such cases in the future. One quarter of the cases supported by Help at Hand related to housing concerns, while 21% relate to complaints about support from a public service, 12% relating to care leaver support and 11% relating to education.

The involvement of Help at Hand in a child's case can be transformative. Some of the real-life stories of children who contacted the service are featured in this report – they illustrate just why support from a collaborative group of services across education, health and care is essential. Too often, my team and I see examples where, instead of putting the child at the centre of a solution and asking 'how can we help you?', the professionals involved dither and delay with decisions, shift responsibility back and forth and focus too narrowly on the problems to be overcome.

More than 29,000 children in care currently live in local authorities judged to be less than good by Ofsted. This casual tolerance of low standards would simply never be allowed in the education sector, where I spent 30 years of my career. Failure in children's social care means putting a child's safety and wellbeing, perhaps even their life, at risk – this is not acceptable.

For so many of the children who contact Help at Hand, the conversations with one of my team at the end of the phone may be the first time an adult has properly listened to them, much less advocated on their behalf. In the majority of cases, Help at Hand's support can change these children's lives: they remain in a loving home surrounded by people who care for them, or a false debt that should never have been given to them is written off, or they return to education with a suitable school place.

These children's experiences are at the heart of my work as Children's Commissioner. With a system that is set up to properly meet children's needs, perhaps the work of Help at Hand might become less urgent. Until then, their stories will continue highlighting where there are gaps in the system, where children are repeatedly being failed by those with power over their lives, and where reform is urgently needed to help children achieve and thrive.

Summary

Background

Help at Hand is a small team of child rights advisers working for the Children's Commissioner to provide support to children in care, children in need, those living away from home, and care leavers up to the age of 25, to fulfil the Commissioner's specific duty to offer advice and assistance to these groups.¹ This includes all children and young people who are in foster care or children's homes, youth custody or hospital, as well as unaccompanied children seeking asylum, children with disabilities (both at home or in care), homeless children, and care leavers.

The team offers support and representation to children and care leavers whose rights have been breached. This may involve contacting their social workers and responsible children's services managers, NHS professionals, staff in secure settings and, where necessary, government officials in departments with responsibility for children, for example in the Department for Education and Home Office. In the most serious cases where a resolution has not been found, the Children's Commissioner writes personally to the local authority's Director of Children's Services, or the responsible directors in other agencies.

The team can be contacted by phone, email, or via the Children's Commissioner's office website, either directly by children, or by their advocates, professionals, or family members on their behalf.

Summary of case work September 2024 to August 2025

Help at Hand received 1,181 inquiries between 1st September 2024 to 31st August 2025. This is an increase of 18 per cent on the previous year, when the team managed 1001 inquiries.

This report looks at the issues that were raised in the last year through the lenses of **home**, **education** and **voice**. These are all cornerstones of a happy childhood, but too often Help at Hand sees that children are being deprived of happy homes, adequate education and a way to get their voices heard.

Wider work of Help at Hand

In addition to Help at Hand's day-to-day work helping individual children, the team has also undertaken the following work:

- Help at Hand provided training to frontline staff and advocates working with care leavers on care leaver rights. The team provided this training because often we have care leavers needing Help at Hand's assistance due to the professionals around them not being fully aware of their rights or the impact of poor decision making. This was Help at Hand's way of seeking to bring about systemic change. We had 386 participants. The feedback Help at Hand received from participants after the sessions included:

"Thank you. Brilliant, informative training session."

"This training was very useful for me as a new PA."

"I have found this really interesting and informative!"

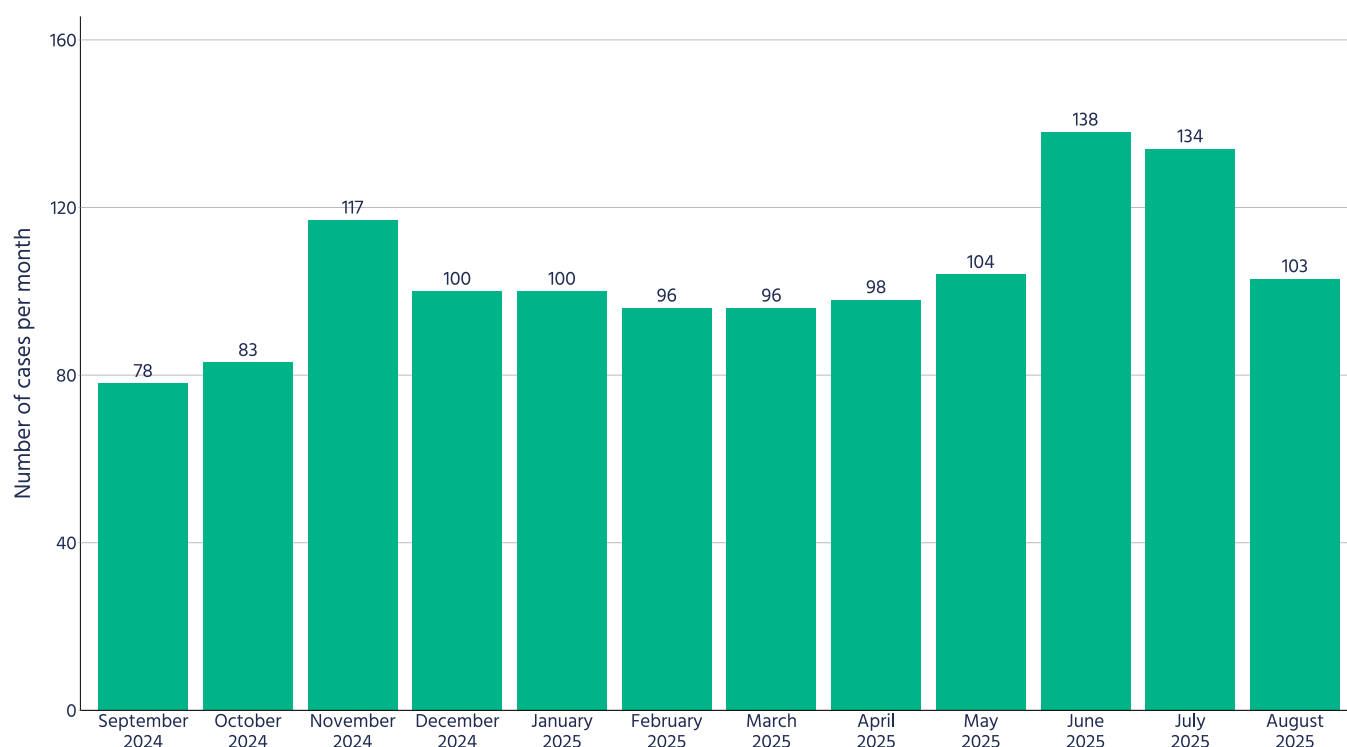
"Some really useful information shared. Thank you very much."

- Help at Hand undertakes a range of visits to children living in institutions. In the past year the team visited all the accommodation provided solely for unaccompanied children seeking asylum who were waiting to be allocated a local authority by the National Transfer Scheme between January and August 2025. Help at Hand also visited the detention facilities at Manston, Western Jet Foil and Kent Intake Unit, which hold people arriving on small boats.
- In the summer of 2025 Help at Hand began a programme of visits to secure children's homes that will continue into 2026. There are two reasons for these visits. First, in 2022 Help at Hand carried out a review of the service, part of which was to consult with children in secure settings who said they wanted to hear about Help at Hand in person²; and second, the team wanted to hear about their experiences to inform the wider work of the office.
- Help at Hand developed a new case management system, which went live on 1 April 2025. This system provides a more efficient way to record the work we do and will provide more data to track our impact.

Help at Hand's work in figures - September 2024 to August 2025

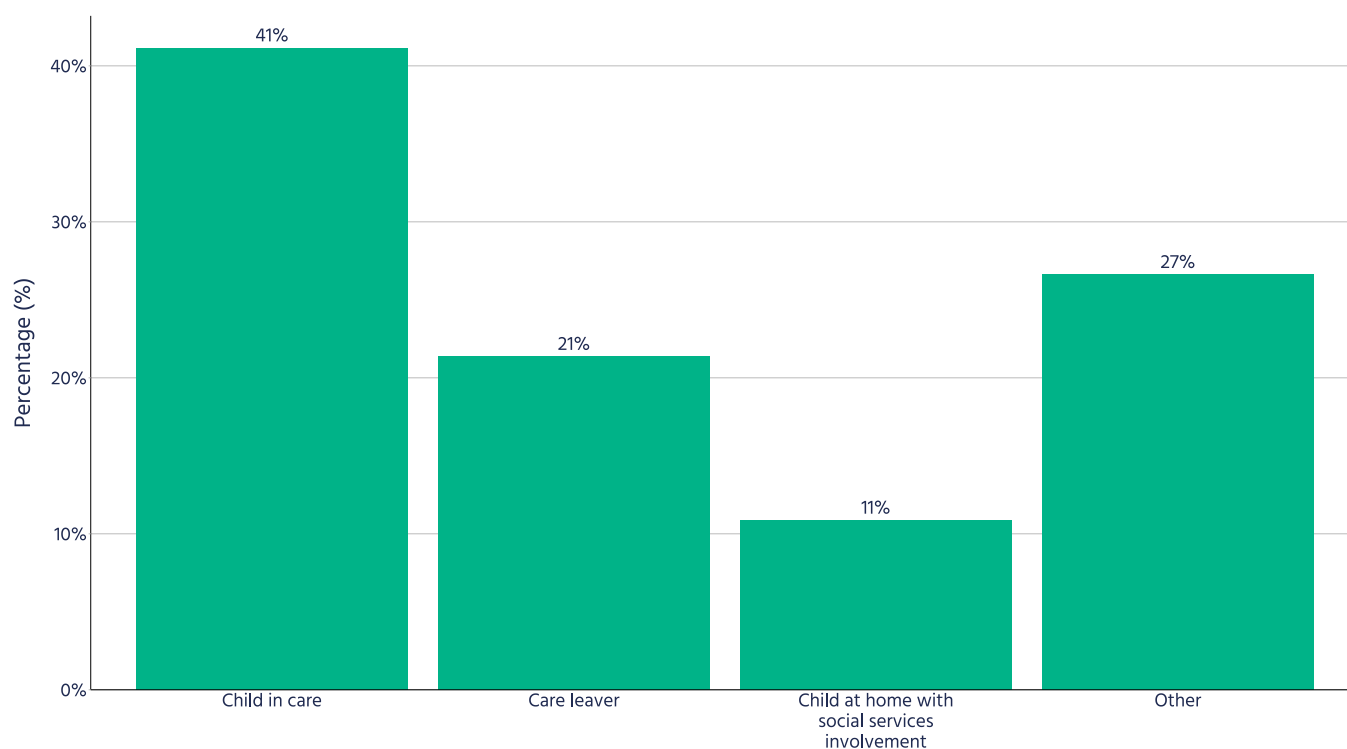
Help at Hand is now receiving around 100 new enquiries per month (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Number of new enquiries to Help at Hand from 1st September 2024 to 30th of August 2025, by month.



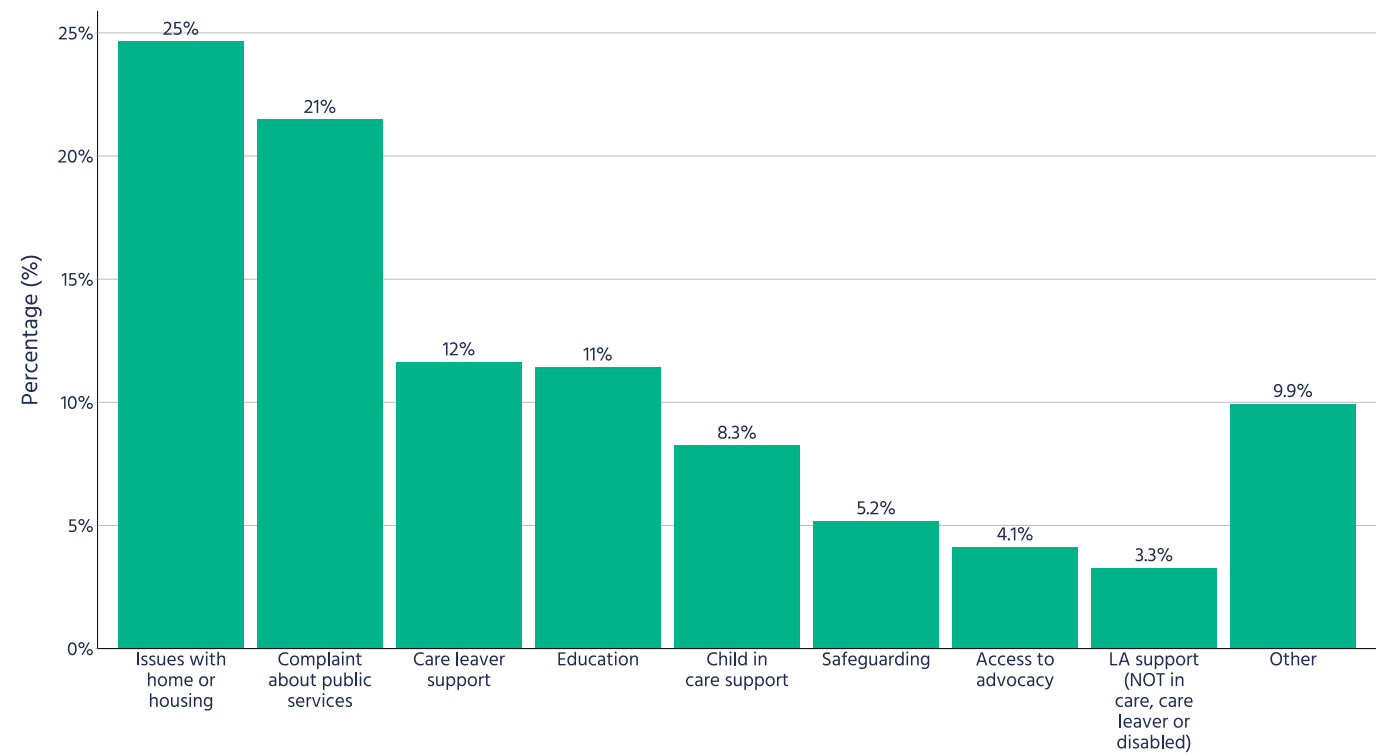
Similarly to last year, the majority of inquiries relate to children in care and care leavers. Last year this made up 75% of inquiries and this year 62%. There has been growth in the 'other' category, though this could be explained by some initial teething problems when Help at Hand began using a new case management system in April.

Figure 2: Percentage of Help at Hand inquiries from 1st September 2024 to 30th of August 2025, by legal status of the child



The most common reason for someone contacting Help at Hand is an issue with a child's home or housing, but cases cover a range of presenting issues (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Percentage of Help at Hand cases from 1st September 2024 to 30th of August 2025, by primary presenting issue



Some feedback from the year

“Thank you so much for your help and assistance with this case. Myself and [name] truly appreciate and value your support.” – Advocate (November 2024)

“It seems that, since your email, they [the local authority] have taken this very seriously and [name] has been visited by his PA [personal assistant] already. They said by Monday an accommodation will be found for him. Many thanks for your support with this.” – Charity worker supporting an unaccompanied child seeking asylum and facing homelessness (November 2024)

“Thank you very much for your help, since I called you, professionals are communicating and speaking to each other to help me. I finally have a PA and the lady you referred me to (advocate) is also helping. The issue isn’t solved yet, but I can see things moving.” – Care leaver (November 2024)

“I would just like to thank you and your team for your support and input with recent cases – we have had several positive outcomes, following escalation to yourselves – although it remains disappointing that things have to get to this stage in the first place.” – Young Offender Institution resettlement manager (December 2024)

“I wanted to take this opportunity to thank you for all your support for this vulnerable care leaver.” – Advocate (December 2024)

"I would like to extend my sincere gratitude for all the support you have provided me." – Care leaver, regarding housing assistance (March 2025)

"Someone is coming out on Monday [...] to do a full review and to see how best they can help us. Just want to say thank you so much for all your help." – Special Guardian (March 2025)

"Thank you so much for your support in resolving this matter" – Mother of child with disabilities in residential care regarding access to health care (March 2025)

"[Name] asked me to pass on his thanks to you for all you have done. He said it was a massive weight off his shoulders, and he can now get on with his life." – Advocate for a care leaver (June 2025)

"I wanted to extend my sincere thanks for your assistance in resolving this matter. [Name] and I truly appreciate your incredible support." – Independent Mental Health Advocate for child transitioning to adult services (July 2025)

"Thank you so very much for your support with this complaint. It has really helped, and I am now hopeful things can move forward at a pace." – Advocate (November 2025)

Key themes from our work with children and young people this year

*All names in case studies have been changed to protect children's anonymity.

Home

"[Name] has now been accepted to be able to bid on properties, which is amazing news... Thank you so much for all of your help with this." – Personal Advisor from leaving care team (May 2025)

Context

It is difficult to think of a more important factor to a child's ability to thrive than having a safe and secure place to call home, along with love and support from those who care for them. Problems with the home environment are consistently among the most significant issues in Help at Hand's work, whether that is a child living in squalor with their parents, a care leaver who is sofa surfing, or a child in care being moved again and again. The theme across every one of these sad situations is the lack of appropriate homes for the most vulnerable children in our society.

Case examples on the theme of home from September 2024 to August 2025

'Luke', a child in care

Luke is 11 and has been in care for several years, having sadly been removed from his parents due to their substance abuse and neglect. He was originally placed in foster care, but unfortunately this broke down in a traumatic way, and Luke was moved to a small, therapeutic children's home, which was a long way from his home area. Luke made excellent progress and after two years he was ready to return to long-term foster carers closer to home, so that he could have a more normal life and maintain contact with his mother, who was doing well.

A match was found, and Luke met his new foster carers. Though he loved his children's home, he was ready to go. Unfortunately, there was a long delay while the local authority sought a place at a school nearby, and in the meantime another child was placed with the carers in an emergency. While the plan was still for Luke to go there, his social worker couldn't tell him when this would happen, and he grew increasingly upset and frustrated about not being able to move to his new family. There was also a risk that his new school place would be lost due to the delay.

The manager of his children's home contacted Help at Hand to ask for assistance to move this along for Luke. He told the team that he felt like 'a bottle of fizzy drink, ready to burst out of the bottle' because of all the emotions inside him. The Help at Hand team contacted the local authority and continued to follow up, focusing on the impact of the delay on Luke, and the importance of stability and permanence in a family for him. Finally, once the other child was moved to suitable alternative carers, Luke was able to transition to his new foster home and school. This was done in a planned way, with a very positive goodbye to his children's home. He was happy in the end, but he just wished it had happened much sooner.

'Hamed', a child in need

Hamed's primary school contacted our Help at Hand team to ask for help with getting Hamed and his father out of the overcrowded home they were living in. Hamed and his dad were renting one room of a house shared with other adults. Hamed could not use the bathroom or the kitchen alone because the other residents in the flat shouted at him if they found him there, so he had to be with his dad at all times. Additionally, the other residents were noisy at night, which would often wake Hamed up and interrupt his sleep, resulting in him getting to school exhausted. Hamed's school reported him as being highly emotional and dysregulated due to the separation from his mother and the stressful conditions in his new home

At the time that Help at Hand was contacted, the only people helping Hamed were his school. The local children's social care would not help, and he and his father had languished for several years on the waiting list for social housing.

Help at Hand highlighted Hamed's case to children's social care, the housing team and Hamed's MP and the housing application is now progressing, with social care assisting the family.

'Anna', a care leaver

Anna is a young person with disabilities who uses a wheelchair. She was placed in care following a disclosure of abuse from a family member. Her family did not accept the disclosure, and she was moved out of the area for her own safety, to adapted supported accommodation.

On turning 18, Anna wanted to stay in the accommodation or to move to alternative, stable accommodation in the same area (ideally social housing). Anna's local Leaving Care Team was unwilling to continue to fund the accommodation but told her she would be unlikely to access social housing in the area, as she is not a care leaver for that authority (she would have some priority due to her disability and need for ground floor accommodation, but this would only be applicable if she moved out of the current suitable property to present as homeless, which would be a very stressful experience). In her parent local authority, she would automatically have Band A priority as a care leaver and would be offered social housing, but she felt very strongly that she didn't want to go back there, due to the trauma and risk of being in her hometown.

Anna's advocate contacted Help at Hand for support on this and together they liaised with Anna and her local authority to ensure that appropriate, safe housing was provided for her, including referring her to a solicitor. Thankfully, the local authority accepted her wish to stay in the new area and offered her an alternative adapted property nearby, which she was happy to accept. Her Leaving Care Team will continue to offer her support but will not expect her to move back to her home area.

Policy and research on the theme of home

The Children's Commissioner's office has continued to be informed by the findings of *The Big Ambition* survey, published in March 2024 and carried out between September 2023 and January 2024. This had almost 14,000 responses from children with a social worker, 390 children in secure settings, and 300 in mental health hospitals.³

In pushing forward the ambition that every child in care has a loving and stable home, the office has recommended more direct investment in children's homes from the Department for Education to increase the supply of good quality homes, and a children's social care capital building fund to support

local authorities to boost their own in-house provision of children's homes, alongside a national foster care recruitment campaign.⁴ The office has also consistently called for all accommodation for children to provide care, not just support, including settings for 16- and 17-year-olds, rather than the current position where children placed in 'semi-independent' or 'supported' accommodation can legally be provided with just support, not care. This was reiterated in the office's recent report, *The Children's Plan: Vision for Care*⁵ and will remain a key theme of the Children's Commissioner's policy work.

The office has this year repeated the data collection request to all local authorities in England on the number and characteristics of looked after children who have been placed in unregistered children's homes. The report is due to be published in early 2026 and the findings will again highlight the use of illegal settings for the most vulnerable children, which the office regards as unacceptable and a key area in need of reform.

The Commissioner's goal is that every looked after child who cannot live with foster carers has a place in a high-quality, registered children's home, and the office will continue to call for substantive change, closer scrutiny of the sector and an end to profit-making provision. The office has also continued to build on the recommendations of its November 2024 report, *Children with complex needs who are deprived of liberty*⁶, in particular on the use of inappropriate settings for this group, working with the government and stakeholders to ensure the new provision set out in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill is sufficient to meet their needs and is delivered in a timely way.

In particular, the office has called for a shared pot of high-needs funding – using social care, health, education, and justice budgets – to be created to strategically commission and provide high needs residential placements for children with complex needs at a regional level.

The office has argued that this funding should also be used to increase the availability of local authority accommodation for children on remand. In its November 2025 report, *A production line of pointlessness: Children on custodial remand*⁷, the office found that far too many children are still being remanded into custody, and that there is significant local variation in practice.

Education

“Thank you so so so much for your help these last couple months. I have received my bursary now.” – Care leaver doing an apprenticeship (April 2025)

Context

The right to an education is fundamental for all children and is enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 28). For the children who are assisted by Help at Hand, receiving a quality education, which takes account of their specific needs and situation, is a crucial element in securing a better future, so it is a matter of concern and frustration for the team that access to education remains an issue that comes up repeatedly. This is particularly acute for children that have additional needs, be that learning difficulties, behavioural difficulties – which are often linked to their childhood trauma and instability experienced during their time in care – or wider challenges in their lives. The children Help at Hand supports have often been out of school for a long period of time, and the impact of this - not only on their potential for educational achievement, but also on their wellbeing, social skills and confidence, as recognised by professionals, and even by children themselves – makes the lack of improvement in this area very disappointing.

Case examples on the theme of education from September 2024 to August 2025

'Jack', a child in care out of school

Jack is 11 years old and has a mild learning disability. He has been in care since a young age and was moved to a children's home out of his local area after his long-term foster placement broke down. Jack had been doing well in his previous special school and was sad to leave, although he settled well into his new children's home. Unfortunately, Jack's Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) had been written during the breakdown of his foster placement, when he was exhibiting distressed behaviours.

After his plan was transferred to the SEND team in the new area and sent for consultation, the team were unable to find a school that felt it could meet his needs. Jack had tutoring in his children's home, but really wanted to go back to school, particularly as he was in a solo placement.

With the support of his children's home manager, he wrote a letter to the Children's Commissioner, explaining 'I love to learn and be around other children every day. I miss my old friends, which makes me feel sad. I have been looking forward to making new ones, so I don't feel lonely'. By the time he wrote the letter, he had been out of school for almost four months and had no school place ready for after the summer holidays.

The Help at Hand team wrote to Jack's social care and SEND professionals asking them to work together to find him a school place as soon as possible. There was some frustration from his social care team, who said they were relying on the SEND team, as he was out of area, and that communication had been difficult. Unfortunately, it took several more months to resolve this for Jack, even after a suitable special school was found, as it was an independent school and there was disagreement about which local authority would cover the cost. The Help at Hand team continued to advocate for Jack and, after seven months out of school, he was able to take up his new place, where he is now reportedly doing very well.

‘Mohammed’, an unaccompanied child seeking asylum, out of school

Mohammed arrived on a small boat as an unaccompanied child seeking asylum aged 15. Local authority X was assigned as his parent local authority, and they placed him in foster care in local authority Y. Mohammed was very keen to be in education and to do well. However, no school place was found and although some online learning was offered, there was a problem with delivering a computer, so he could not take this up. Mohammed had nothing to do with his days and was bored and unable to progress.

He contacted Help at Hand, and the team was able to talk to him over the phone and via an interpreter. The office made representations to his social work team and his Virtual School Head, and referred him to an advocate. Mohammed was eventually enrolled in a face-to-face English course.

‘Jozef’, a care leaver

Jozef wanted to stay with his foster carers, where he felt at home, while he attended university under the Staying Put scheme. His local authority said that if he took this option, they would not pay him his higher education bursary. This put Jozef in an impossible position, choosing between his home and his education.

Help at Hand made representations on his behalf to his parent local authority, and they made the right choice and provided Jozef with his higher education bursary while allowing him to stay with his foster carers.

Jozef said: “You managed to get this resolved in a matter of days which is incredible. Particularly because I have been fighting this for months, and had two meetings with my PA and manager, who told me in both meetings that I am not entitled to the HE Grant because I am in Staying Put.”

Policy and research on education

The Children's Commissioner has continued to work with government and to advocate for a resolution to the current crisis in SEND, drawing on the experiences and views of children who been supported by Help at Hand, as well as the office's Youth Ambassadors and SEND Advisory Panel.⁸

This year the Commissioner used her powers to take a census of schools in England and published *The Children's Plan: The Children's Commissioner's School Census*.⁹ The recommendations in the report include a national statement of ambition for children's education that puts attending, engaging, attaining, and excelling at the core, a new focus on a broader range of additional needs for those who need support inside and outside the classroom, extra help for schools to deliver targeted and specialist support where needed, and a new approach to statutory education support, provided through a Children's Plan. Under this proposal, some children will require an Education Plan, some may require an Education and Care Plan (for example those with a social worker or who are at risk of extra-familial harm) and those with acute or chronic health conditions, or mental health challenges, will have an Education and Health Plan. Where children have comprehensive needs across all three categories - including lifelong or life-limiting conditions (Down's Syndrome, Fragile X Syndrome, or a terminal diagnosis, for instance) - an Education Health and Care Plan would be issued automatically. This should be delivered via a new digital platform where families and professionals share information about children's needs and support and underpinned by the single unique ID, as introduced in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill. The Commissioner's view is that no child should lose their existing support, even as reforms take hold.

The office continues to have deep concerns about school attendance and has published several pieces of analysis looking at this issue over the year. These include looking at the impact of transitions from primary school to secondary and whether schools with poor attendance are the most worried about levels of absence.^{10,11,12,13,14}

Attendance is a particularly pressing issue for the children supported by Help at Hand. In particular, children like Jack above, who do not have a school place to attend. Virtual Schools have told the office they find many schools are reluctant to admit children in care and this causes significant delays in getting these children into school and attending.

Voice

“Thank you so very much for your support with this complaint. It has really helped, and I am now hopeful things can move forward at a pace.”

- November 2025, advocate

Context

The Children Act 1989 and associated guidance emphasises the importance of consulting the ‘wishes and feelings’ of children when services make decisions about them. There are built-in safeguards aimed at ensuring this happens, including the statutory complaints process for children’s social care and the statutory entitlement to advocacy for children in care and care leavers. However, while these provisions are important to making sure children have the opportunity to challenge decisions about their care, the Help at Hand team regularly sees cases where children have not had access to advocates and have been unable to pursue to the proper complaints process.

Case examples on the theme of voice from September 2024 to August 2025

'Sammy's experience of the complaints process

Sammy arrived in the UK at 16 as an unaccompanied child seeking asylum. His parent local authority placed him out of their area, where he settled and did well. Sammy contacted Help at Hand when he was 21, after he found out he had a very large council tax debt. This was unexpected because he was told that, as a care leaver, he did not have to pay. However, it was not explained that his parent local authority had not considered that he was living outside their area. Sammy, with the help of his advocate, made a complaint.

At stage 2 of the complaints process, the independent investigator upheld his complaint and recommended that the local authority should pay his council tax bill and provide the same exemption that it applied care leavers who had not moved to a different area. Five months after these recommendations had been made, the local authority had failed to act on them, and Sammy was being harassed by bailiffs.

Sammy and his advocate contacted Help at Hand, and the office wrote to the local authority. Within two weeks, it was confirmed that they were repaying the arrears and working on an agreement for how council tax will be managed Sammy until he reaches 25.

‘David’, a child with disabilities needing advocacy

David is a 12-year-old child with profound autism, who is non-verbal. He was placed in a children’s home far from his local area following care proceedings. After taking some time to settle, he made great progress and developed positive relationships with the care staff.

His children’s home manager contacted Help at Hand for assistance when, after two years, his local authority found a residential special school place in his home area and decided to move him back. Staff were very worried about the impact of taking David out of his home to a new environment, and they were concerned that his wishes and views hadn’t been sought by a specialist independent advocate before the decision was made.

The Help at Hand team contacted the local authority, who explained the reasons for the move and why they felt it was in his best interests. However, they agreed to pause the move while an advocate was allocated to gather his wishes, provide an independent view on his best interests, and join professionals’ meetings regarding decisions about him.

The advocate accepted that a move would be positive for David in the long-term, but they suggested a longer transition period to ensure he could get to know his new home and staff, and so he could end his relationships with his current home in a positive way and in touch after he moved. The local authority agreed to this and progressed with the move in a more gradual and planned, which was right for David and went well.

'Charles', a child in care not being heard

Help at Hand is regularly contacted by children who have been told, often at the last minute, that they are being moved and they don't want to go. Before a move, a child should be consulted and their wishes and feelings should be considered. There should be a review meeting, and the child should have the opportunity to speak to an advocate and make a complaint if they wish. Unfortunately, these rights are not always respected.

Charles, aged 12, called Help at Hand in distress. He had been told that morning that later the same day he would be moved three hours away by car to a new permanent foster care placement and that he would be separated from his siblings.

Charles told Help at Hand *"I am not going" and "I will run away if they take me."*

Help at Hand immediately wrote to an urgently to the Director of Children's Services. The move was stopped and an apology was given to Charles.

Policy and research on the theme of voice

The Children's Commissioner's December 2023 report *The State of Children and young people's advocacy services in England*¹⁵ called for independent advocacy for children, on an opt-out basis for children in care and an opt-in basis for children in need. The office continues to communicate with the Department for Education regarding the publishing and implementation of new Advocacy Standards, which were due in 2025, including assurances that this will include standards for non-instructed advocacy for disabled children.

The office has continued the commitment to ensure that children's voices are at the heart of its policy and research by recruiting a new group of Youth Ambassadors who provide their views on the issues that are affecting them now, as well as on specific pieces of work being undertaken by the office and wider policies affecting children in England. These include opportunities to attend meetings with government officials and other stakeholders. This year the office has also introduced a SEND Panel,

which includes children with a range of disabilities and additional needs, to provide views and ideas based on their lived experience. The panel was instrumental to informing the office's position on key issues, including on SEND reform and the Assisted Dying Bill.¹⁶

The Help at Hand team, along with policy and research colleagues, has also continued to visit children in a range of secure settings, including Young Offender Institutions, secure children's homes and Tier 4 mental health settings, to speak to these children about their experiences, and gain their views on how they could be better supported, both in their current setting and in the community.

Looking ahead

The number of children and young people receiving assistance from Help at Hand has been increasing fast, as the figures in this report show. The Children's Commissioner's office will continue to make the case that more funding is needed to ensure that this demand is met with a high-quality service.

Help at Hand will be completing its programme of visits to every secure children's home in England over the next few months to hear the views of children, staff and advocates on how children deprived of liberty in these settings could be better supported. Visits will also be arranged to more Tier 4 mental health settings and residential special schools, to increase our understanding of these children's needs and views, so they can be reflected in the office's work over the upcoming year.

Help at Hand will be providing expertise for the Children's Commissioner's upcoming reports on children in hospital for long periods, children living in council-owned bed and breakfast accommodation, and the office's Annual Mental Health Briefing for children, along with new work to be set out in the Children's Commissioner's Business Plan for 2026-27, Dame Rachel de Souza's final year in office.

The Help at Hand team will continue to hear the voices of children in care, children with a social worker, and care leavers on an individual basis, and will work hard to resolve the issues they face when approaching for support, as well as ensuring they are heard and understood by the professionals working directly with them. The team will provide input and ideas to the Children's Commissioner and to policy and research colleagues, based on the experiences of these children and young people, to ensure that the work of office, and the platform the Commissioner has, can be used to effect change for the children and young people in England who need it most.

References

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Help at Hand is the Children's Commissioner's advice and assistance service for children in care, children who have a social worker or are working with social services, children living away from home and care leavers.

Children, young people, or their advocates can get in touch with Help at Hand for free by phone, website or email.

0800 528 0731 (9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday)

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