



IMPACT REPORT

2023–2024

// Foundations

What Works Centre for Children & Families

foundations.org.uk

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Country of Registration:

England and Wales

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Martin Pilgrim MBE *(Resigned 28*

February 2024)

Josh MacAlister *(Resigned 22 May 2024)*

Current Trustees

Sam White *(Chair, appointed 7 October 2024)*

Reshard Auladin, OBE *(Interim Chair from*
23 May 2024)

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Chief Executive

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Foundations – What Works Centre for Children & Families was incorporated as a company limited by guarantee on 2 August 2019 under the name What Works for Children’s Social Care. Following a merger of the company on 15 December 2022 with the Early Intervention Foundation the name was temporarily changed to What Works for Early Intervention and Children’s Social Care and then to Foundations – What Works Centre for Children & Families on 25 May 2023.

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CHAIR'S MESSAGE



I am delighted to be stepping into the role of Chair at Foundations and to have the opportunity to present this report looking back at what has been a landmark first year for our organisation.

I want to begin by expressing my gratitude to my predecessor, Josh MacAlister, for his exceptional leadership as Executive Chair during Foundations' inaugural year. Josh made an outstanding contribution to setting up and chairing Foundations over its first 18 months and we are extremely grateful for his insight, experience, analysis, expertise and creativity. On a personal note, I am grateful to him for the generous advice he has given me as I get up to speed in this role. I also want to extend my thanks to Reshard Auladin for his service as interim Chair following Josh's departure.

I also want to acknowledge the board members of the two legacy organisations, Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) and What Works for Children's Social Care (WWCSC). Their commitment and vision laid the groundwork for the impact we're poised to achieve in the years to come. We are very grateful to the former board members who continue to support us on our governance committees and to our existing board members who play such a key role in setting our new strategy and supporting our ongoing organisational development. I have been impressed by the work of the board, Jo and the senior leadership

team in reshaping the organisation to deliver its new strategy.

Above all I want to thank the many excellent people working for Foundations. Your work, expertise and passion are what make this possible. It's an incredibly exciting time to join this organisation, and I am eager to help steer Foundations through the next phase of its journey.

The timing of my appointment coincides with a pivotal moment in our political landscape. The recent change in government – the first in many children's lifetimes – presents a unique opportunity to reset and refocus on the most pressing issues facing children, young people, and families. The new Labour government's focus on breaking down the barriers to opportunity and strong commitment to tackling child poverty, offer an initial sense of the transformational change that could be achieved going forward.

Beyond these foundational commitments, the new government's focus on prevention and early intervention to address knife crime, youth violence, young people's mental health, and violence against women and girls (VAWG) aligns closely with our



mission at Foundations. These issues affect the futures of too many children and young people, and we are excited by the opportunities to contribute to meaningful change in these areas.

Foundations will advocate for evidence-based policymaking to be at the heart of the new government's mission-driven approach. We will work with government to increase access to family services that have been shown to make a positive difference, especially where support at the earliest opportunity can prevent problems from arising in the first place and can stop them from escalating when they do.

Similarly, where policies and approaches are already showing promise, Foundations will advocate for their continuity. The National Kinship Care Strategy, for example, highlights the importance of supporting kinship carers, helping more children stay with their families and out of care. Along with our partners, Foundations has made large strides in the Kinship arena, and has published our first Practice Guide on this topic. This is one of a suite of Practice Guides that will serve as the equivalent to the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines used in medicine, for the children's social care sector.

Conversely, there are still significant areas where we lack sufficient knowledge about how best to intervene or provide support. While the new

government's commitments to tackle VAWG are crucial, we don't yet fully understand the best ways to prevent domestic abuse or support those children affected. Addressing these gaps requires perseverance and investment in promising services, alongside rigorous evaluation to ensure services truly make a difference. The Researching Effective Approaches for Children (REACH) plan that Foundations published just before the general election sets out a roadmap for how these critical evidence gaps can be filled.

While the new government has a significant opportunity to address the pressing challenges facing children and families, Foundations will be ensuring that we remain strategically aligned with the evolving policy landscape. Securing long-term funding is essential for the ongoing sustainability of Foundations and the board is dedicated to supporting this effort by demonstrating how we, as a What Works Centre, can be an invaluable resource for the new government.

This is a pivotal moment, and the opportunities before us are immense. My fellow Trustees and I are committed to playing our part in this vital work, and I am honoured to lead the board at this crucial time.

Sam White

Chair of the Board of Trustees

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S MESSAGE



I am proud to present Foundations' first impact report – a milestone that marks the beginning of our journey as the new What Works Centre for Children & Families.

This report offers us the opportunity to reflect on a truly foundational year, where we balanced building a strong new organisation from the merger of the EIF and WWCS with the crucial task of establishing ourselves through our work as an authoritative and ambitious partner in the sector.

As a What Works Centre, our role is to generate and champion actionable evidence that improves services, expands support, and transforms outcomes for children and families. We operate at the intersection of academic evidence, Whitehall decision-making, and the local leadership driving change on the ground. In many ways, our goal is akin to the work done by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF). We want to bring the same level of rigour and evidence-based practice to children's services that has long been standard in medicine and education.

The past year has been a transformative period for us. We've brought together two well-established organisations, each with a deep commitment to using high-quality evidence to improve the lives of vulnerable children. Foundations draws on the rigorous evaluation

methodologies of WWCS and the experience from EIF of evidence synthesis and using evidence to drive change in policy and practice for children and families. We have retained our focus on providing support at the earliest possible stages and remain deeply rooted in children's social care practice. By merging these sister organisations, we have created a unified and ambitious new team dedicated to delivering on our shared endeavour.

Our first year as a new merged organisation saw us launching our strategy and of course our new name and brand. Our new strategy, Building the Foundations, sets out our vision, mission, guiding principles, and five key priority areas for the 2023–2027 period. This strategy reflects our commitment to focusing on a small number of major themes so that we can generate actionable findings that can shape and improve services. I am extremely grateful to our key strategic partner, the Department for Education (DfE), who have supported the organisation to flourish in its first year, working closely with us to ensure that our strategic direction aligns with government policy priorities.

In our work this year, we have

continued to generate robust evidence to inform what works – and what does not – in family services. We published results from our landmark evaluation of Family Group Conferencing (FGC) which showed that FGCs at the pre-proceeding stage can keep children out of care, and safely with their families. We estimated that if FGCs were consistently available at pre-proceedings over 2,000 children could be able to remain safely with their families each year, which would have a huge impact on the lives of children and their families, and could save over £150 million within the first two years. This evidence has significantly strengthened the case for use of family group decision making to keep children out of care and with their families. Further details on this important work can be found on page 30.

Also significant was our evaluation of the Social Workers in Schools (SWIS) intervention which aims to reduce the need for children's social care services by embedding social workers within secondary schools. We carried out one of the largest randomised controlled trials (RCTs) ever undertaken in UK children's social care which revealed that while SWIS was well-received by social workers, school staff, and students, it showed no significant impact on reducing the number of children entering care and was not cost-effective. This evaluation underscores the importance of early

testing before implementing activities at scale, highlighting how evidence can prevent the rollout of costly interventions that fail to deliver on outcomes for children.

Alongside our external work, we focused in our first year on building strong internal foundations. We established three core directorates – Evidence, Impact, and Operations – led by a newly formed Senior Leadership Team. This reorganisation was a crucial step in ensuring that we are fully equipped to deliver on our ambitious strategy.

We launched a new culture code for Foundations that defines the values and behaviours that underpin everything we do as an impact-driven organisation that is committed to high performance, fairness, and transparency. As part of this, we launched a new pay framework to underpin a culture of accountability, autonomy, and support, so that our staff are empowered to do their best work. Only then we will be a trusted voice for vulnerable children and families.

Crucially, we renewed our commitment to champion Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Equity (EDIE) in everything that we do. We know that the children and families we serve are affected by disadvantage and discrimination that directly reduces their chances of living in a

loving and stable family environment. Understanding how services and interventions work for everyone, and actively seeking out what works for specific groups of people, will help us achieve our mission and vision. We have committed to considering what can be learnt about racial disparity in every study we carry out and we have developed an EDIE action plan that has guided our progress in addressing racial disparities in family services. This plan also aims to ensure that our workforce reflects the diversity of the communities we serve.

As we look ahead, I am filled with optimism about the positive change Foundations will continue to drive. Our work is only just beginning, and I am excited to see the progress we will make together in the years to come.

Dr Jo Casebourne
Chief Executive



ACHIEVING IMPACT

Strategy overview



Our priorities

Our role is to generate and champion actionable evidence that improves services, expands support, and transforms outcomes for children and families.

Putting evidence front and centre has never been more critical. Ongoing financial challenges for public services mean that we simply have to direct more investment to approaches that have been proven through rigorous evaluation to improve outcomes.

Our strategic focus is on the vital importance of secure foundations for vulnerable children and young people. For us, ‘foundations’ refers to the foundational relationships that children and young people need to thrive, whether they are living with their parents, with kinship carers, in foster care or in other care settings. Strong foundations can be provided by parents, by extended family networks, or by other supportive adults when children cannot live safely with their families.

Our strategy focuses our efforts on five priority areas:



1. Supporting parenting

Understanding and driving use of well-evidenced approaches to support parents in families where children are at risk of poor outcomes. This includes those with the most significant family risk factors – including serious parental mental health problems, parental substance misuse, abuse or neglect.



2. Strengthening family networks

Understanding and driving use of how best to ensure that children who are experiencing risk at home can either live safely in their family environment or as close to a family environment as possible, and where alternative care is required, how to support those carers and how to return children home safely.



3. Domestic abuse

Making the case for urgent investment in evaluation of the most promising approaches to preventing domestic abuse and supporting child victims.



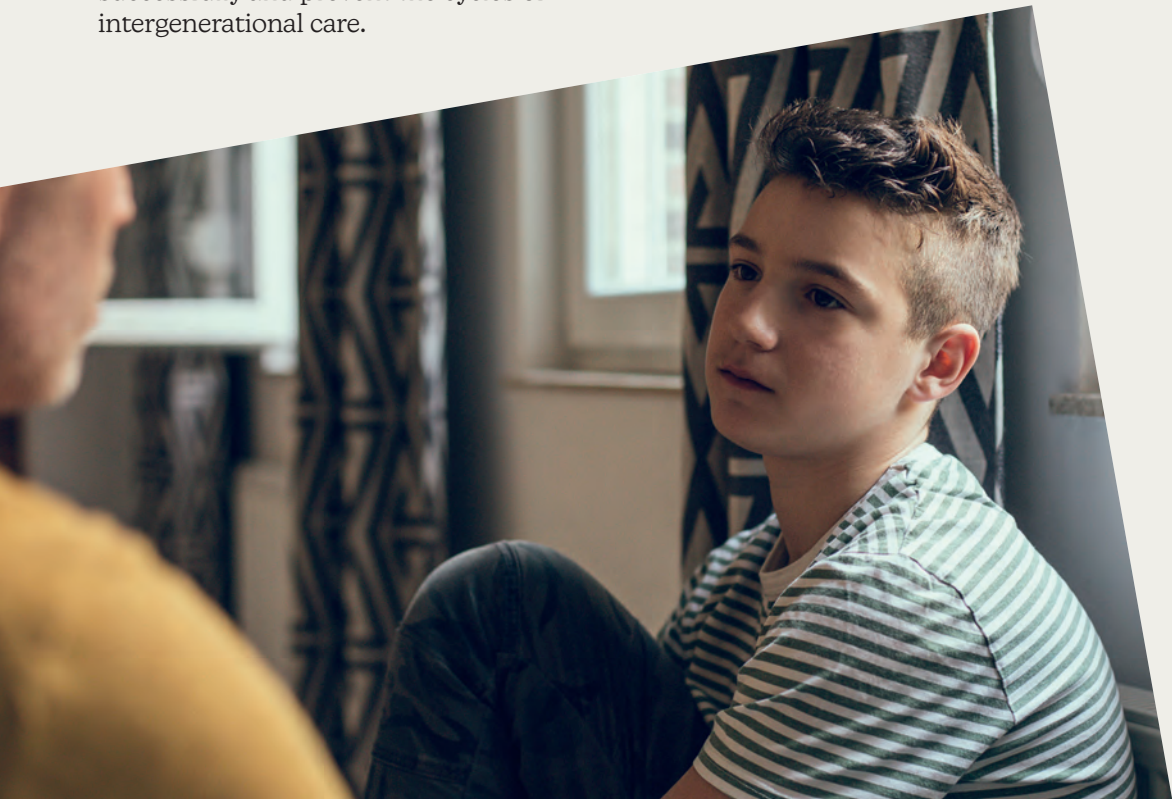
4. Relationships for care experienced children

Understanding and driving use of the evidence around supporting foundational relationships for children in care (and care leavers), to ensure that they are able to navigate the world successfully and prevent the cycles of intergenerational care.



5. Service and practice models

Exploring the effectiveness of different ways of organising the multiple agencies that work together to help support a child and their family, and driving take-up of the most effective approaches.



2023–2024 YEAR IN REVIEW

We are proud of the progress we made over our first year as a new organisation. We have set ourselves some ambitious long-term goals in each of our priority areas and have taken important steps towards achieving these.

SUPPORTING PARENTING



By 2028, our overarching, long-term impact goal is to see:

A significant increase in the availability of evidence-based parenting support.

We know that evidence-based parenting support, carefully matched to parent and child needs, can make a significant difference to children's mental health, behaviour, attainment, and a range of other outcomes.

Evidence-based parenting support programmes should be an important part of any local offer for children and families. The evidence base here is good. There are lots of programmes which have been rigorously tested and shown to have an impact on child outcomes. However, these programmes are not widely available. For example, Family Nurse Partnership (FNP) has been shown in five RCTs to improve multiple outcomes for children. At its height, FNP operated in 80 local areas, reaching 13,000 mothers, but it is now only offered in around a third of local authorities.

We need concerted action to increase the use of evidence-based interventions. We also need to generate evidence in areas where we know less – for example, how best to support parenting in the context of child protection concerns.

In 2023–2024:

We officially launched the Changemakers programme, in partnership with the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF). This programme is designed to increase the use of proven models of parenting support by funding and supporting local leaders who work to embed evidence-based programmes locally. The Changemakers programme is partnering with four pilot areas (York, Merton, Stockport and Wirral).

We commissioned major systematic reviews on parenting interventions for families with multiple and complex needs and pre-adolescent children (average age of 0–10) and on parenting interventions for parents and carers of disabled children, or children with severe mental illness. These reviews are being carried out by teams of leading international academics and researchers. The findings will be turned into practical recommendations for local system leaders as part of our suite of Practice Guides. Practice Guides will set out what we know from current evidence about how best to achieve the outcomes and deliver against

the expectations of the Children's Social Care National Framework. For the first time, senior leaders across statutory children's services will have quick and easy access to guidance and recommendations for service delivery based on high-quality research evidence. Read more about our Practice Guides work programme on page 32.

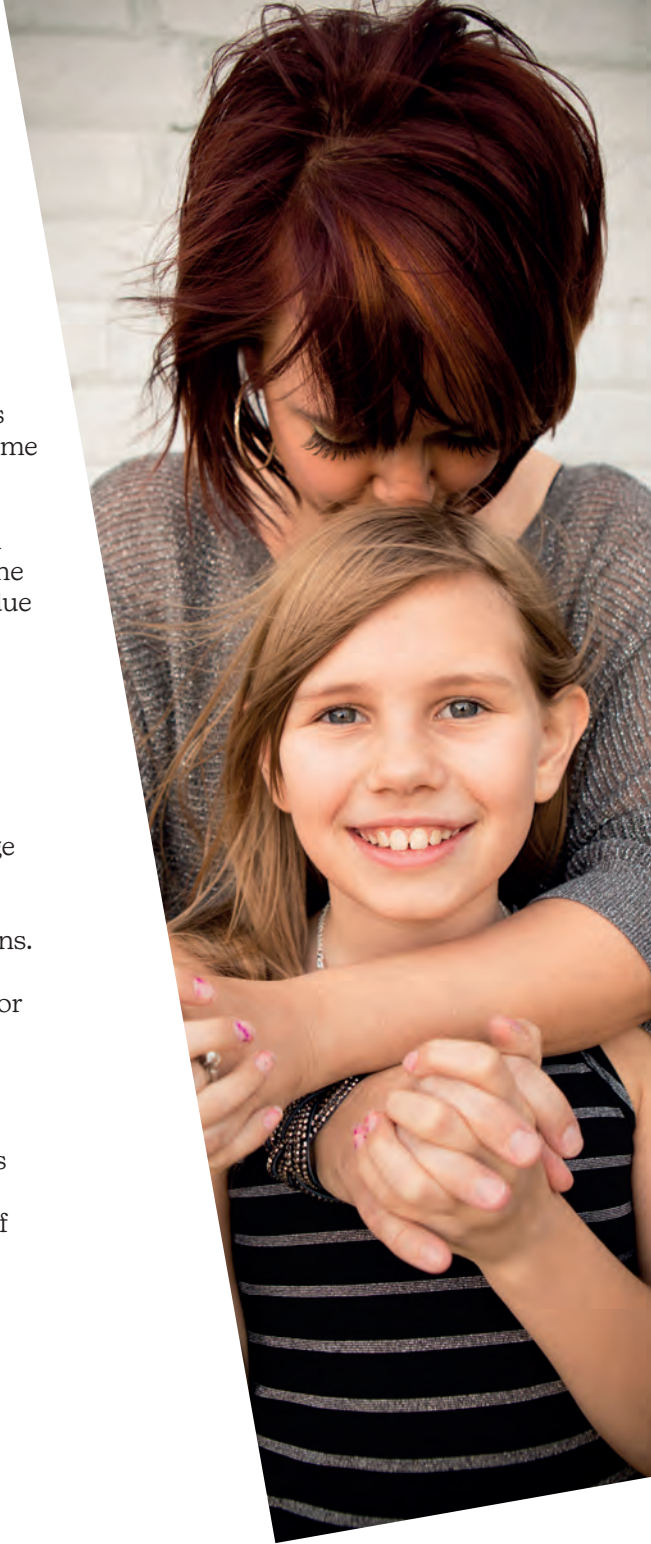
We also have studies underway to fill critical evidence gaps such as how best to work with fathers in families where there are safeguarding concerns. In March 2023, we launched an RCT of ISAFE (Improving Safeguarding through Audited Father-Engagement), which is a training and development intervention for social workers, designed to improve skills, practice, and engagement with fathers. Our delivery partner is The Fatherhood Institute, which developed the intervention with CASCADE (Centre for Children's Social Care Research and Development, Cardiff University), and the evaluator is Ipsos UK. The evaluation will assess how effective ISAFE is and will include a total of 48 teams, with approximately 10 social workers in each team. The final report will be published by the end of 2024.

In September 2023, we launched a feasibility study of the Southwark Fathers Group intervention, which aims to support fathers of children with a social worker, encourage closer father–child relationships and improve

outcomes for children. The programme offers weekly group sessions, which consist of check-ins and psychoeducation. The programme was developed for families in early help and child protection. The delivery partner is London Borough of Southwark and the evaluator is the Anna Freud Centre. The project is due to be completed in early 2025.

In 2024–2025:

We will publish a Practice Guide on parenting interventions for families with multiple and complex needs and pre-adolescent children (average age of 0–10) and work with the DfE and local authorities to support the implementation of recommendations. We will commission a systematic review on parenting interventions for families of pre-adolescent children with multiple and complex needs (average age of 11–19) to underpin a further Parenting Practice Guide to support leaders and commissioners in local authorities to design and commission services on the basis of robust evidence.



STRENGTHENING FAMILY NETWORKS



By 2028, our overarching, long-term impact goals are to see that:

All eligible families have access to a Family Group Conference before they go to court.

The evidence base on how best to support kinship carers is strengthened by findings from at least one high quality impact study.

Our recent trial found that children referred for an FGC at the pre-proceedings stage in England were less likely to go into care than children whose families were not offered an FGC. This is powerful evidence, and we want to use it to drive change.

More than 140,000 children across the UK are being raised by relatives or family friends, and we know that this is often the best option for them if they cannot stay safely with their parents. Given that children in non-family care settings experience worse long-term outcomes than their peers, kinship care is an option that works for children and families, and an option that works for local authorities struggling to manage the cost of care placements.

We need to support kinship carers so that more children can stay out of care and with the people who already know and love them. Kinship carers often step in at short notice to support a family member, and frequently struggle to access the support that they, and the children they care for, need. This lack of support can lead to the

breakdown of kinship care placements and to children being taken into local authority care.

We know that there is significant variation in the support offered to kinship carers by local authorities. Much of the strongest evidence for what works is currently from outside the UK. The most promising interventions are financial support, and specialist support to access and navigate services. Both would benefit from evaluation in the context of the English care system to understand more about the impact that they have.

In 2023–2024:

Our FGC trial has had a significant impact on DfE policy. The 2023 National Kinships Care Strategy committed the department to “collaborate with Foundations and the sector to work towards every family being offered access to high-quality FGCs at pre-proceedings stage...”.

We have been working closely with the DfE policy team to make this happen, including through advising on options to mandate or otherwise set clear expectations about the use of FGCs at pre-proceedings stage.

We have also commissioned work to develop options for routinely collecting data on access to FGCs across England. This work has been led by Coram in partnership with other key sector partners and will be published

in the autumn of 2024. This work is already informing policy conversations with the DfE about a future indicator on FGC use in DfE monitoring systems.

We have also had considerable influence on policy relating to kinship care, informed by our systematic review of the literature on support for kinship carers. We conducted a survey of local authorities to assess the support available to kinship carers. The results revealed significant variation both between and within local authorities, depending on the category of kinship carer. Comparing the survey findings with the findings from the systematic review has highlighted whether the types of support backed by evidence are available in England as well as how far support available for kinship families is based on evidence or is unevaluated.

In 2024–2025:

Our programme of work to support increased access to FGCs is continuing throughout 2024–2025. We will continue to work closely with DfE to deliver our shared ambition to ensure every eligible family has access to an FGC at pre-proceedings stage. We will publish a report making the case for FGCs aimed at local leaders in 2024 which will provide guidance to senior leaders in local authorities on the importance of implementing high-quality FGCs at the pre-proceedings

stage. The FGC data monitoring project will be used to advise the DfE on how data collection on FGCs might be taken forward.

We will tackle the lack of data about family experience of FGCs and how to encourage uptake through new qualitative research which will begin in 2024 to understand families' perceptions of being offered and receiving FGCs, with a particular focus on minoritised ethnic groups. This work will address an identified gap in the evidence base.

We have published a Practice Guide for local leaders, setting out what is known from the best available international evidence about how best to support kinship carers. We are keen to test the strongest models in a UK context and so will launch an impact evaluation of a support programme for kinship carers.



DOMESTIC ABUSE



By 2028, our overarching, long-term impact goals are to see:

The identification of at least one intervention that works to support children affected by domestic abuse.

A wider programme of evaluation with an additional 5 “best bets” being evaluated for impact.

The harm caused by domestic abuse to children is well-documented. It can negatively affect children’s physical, mental health, behaviour and ability to form positive relationships. It is also extremely prevalent affecting up to one in five children and is the main reason for referrals to children’s social care. Yet, whilst there are a wide range of programmes and services which aim to improve outcomes for those who are affected or to stop it happening, our work has shown a lack of robust impact evaluation evidence. There are no services that we know of in this country which have yet been rigorously evaluated and proven to have an impact on children’s outcomes and so we cannot say with confidence what works to support children affected by domestic abuse, or to prevent it happening in the first place.

In 2023–2024:

Over 2023–2024, we raised awareness about the lack of evidence on what works to support those affected by domestic abuse among politicians, policy makers, and sector organisations.

We have been making the case to government to tackle this crucial evidence gap through a new programme of sustained investment into delivery and evaluation of the most promising approaches. We ran cross-government meetings to consider the problem and ways forward which built broad consensus on the need to tackle this lack of evidence and the need for a 'route map' to set out how to significantly improve the situation.

We have already begun to tackle this evidence gap. We have six evaluations underway: Three pilot studies ([For Baby's Sake](#), [WeMatter](#) and [Bounce Back 4 Kids](#)) and three early-stage evaluations ([Restart](#), [Breaking the Cycle](#) and work to transport and adapt [Fathers for Change](#) from the US).

We published several reports throughout the year, including a systematic review of interventions for children experiencing domestic abuse on the edge of care and a report providing evidence on the knowledge and skills of the Early Help and Family Help workforce in relation to domestic abuse.

In 2024–2025:

In May 2024, we published our REACH (Researching Effective Approaches for Children) five-year plan. This is an ambitious plan which would enable us to become the first country in the world to have identified a set of programmes which work to support children affected by domestic abuse.

We are now working to operationalise our REACH plan, including through securing funding, and intend to commission new evaluations in 2025–2026 as part of this work.

We have also commissioned an academic consortium led by University College London (UCL) to develop and operationalise outcome measures for domestic abuse interventions and evaluation. We will seek to develop and build consensus around the evaluation methods which are the strongest and most appropriate in these services and the best outcome measures to use.

RELATIONSHIPS FOR CARE EXPERIENCED CHILDREN



By 2028, our overarching, long-term impact goals are to see:

The identification of at least one intervention that works to support relationships for children with care experience.

Valid and reliable data on care leaver wellbeing being collected nationally in England, serving as a call to action for policy makers.

Strong, healthy, and caring relationships are critical for children and young people's development, stability, and mental health. Children and young people with experience of care can lack these strong and supportive relationships. Building supportive relationships for care experienced children is a key protective factor and improves outcomes for the most vulnerable children. Our vision is a care system that prioritises young people's wellbeing and enables them to develop these hugely important, enduring relationships. We are a long way from that, but there are steps we can take that could be transformational.

In 2023–2024:

Over the course of the year, we published several reports within this priority area. This included a rapid review on levels of school non-attendance of children with a social worker in the UK, and a feasibility study across 15 local authorities on how to robustly evaluate the impact of the Staying Close programme.

We have highlighted the need for greater focus on improving care leavers' emotional wellbeing and published qualitative research in collaboration with the McPin Foundation exploring the wellbeing needs of care leavers including challenges faced when transitioning out of care, relationships and other barriers. As part of our work with experts by experience, the research was conducted by four McPin peer researchers, individuals with personal experience of leaving care who were recruited, trained and supported by Foundations to carry out qualitative research for this project. Building on this we also published a zine following a creative workshop with care experienced young people, researchers and practitioners in May 2023, to voice their thoughts, feelings and responses to some original research. This research, published that same month, looked at the services available across local authorities, and the barriers and facilitators to accessing these services.

In 2024–2025:

The work described above has helped make the case for better national monitoring and data to track care leavers' emotional wellbeing. We are taking forward work to develop a measure for care leaver wellbeing which will contribute to the development of a wider outcomes framework for our work and inform the development of DfE monitoring systems.

We will launch a Practice Guide on Mentoring and Befriending in 2025 and will explore further impact evaluation based on the recommendations.

Further work in this priority area for 2024–2025 is focussed on generating evidence needed to inform services in this area. We are aiming first to understand the evidence base on relationships for care experienced young people, as well as on interventions to support relationships, and those with relationships as an outcome. We are exploring options, including evidence synthesis, a programme of funding and evaluation, and wider policy and influencing work. Discussions with potential partners are already underway, and we have begun the process of identifying potential interventions for evaluation, such as social prescribing and innovative models of foster care matching.



SERVICE AND PRACTICE MODELS



By 2028, our overarching, long-term impact goal is to see:

The identification of at least one multi-agency/whole-system model that works to improve child outcomes.

Outcomes for children and families can be directly influenced by how services are organised. There is huge variation in service delivery approaches across local authorities, and little is known about which services and practice models work best, particularly those which involve a multi-agency or system-wide focus. We will generate new knowledge about what works best in terms of structuring multi-agency and multi-disciplinary support for children and families and assess which of the many variables are linked to improved outcomes.

In 2023–2024:

We commissioned UCL and Newcastle University to conduct an Implementation and Process Evaluation (IPE) of Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH) and other similar multi-agency integrated front-door services within children's social care. This evaluation aims to understand and explain how and why MASH contribute to better outcomes for children, young people and their families.



We also began processing the data collected for our Strengthening Families, Protecting Children (SFPC) evaluation. This is a long-term, large-scale impact and Implementation and Process Evaluation of promising practice models in children's social care. The data processing for the No Wrong Door and Family Safeguarding impact evaluations is on track for final analysis. For the Family Valued evaluation, the DfE and the SFPC board approved Foundations' proposal to terminate the RCT due to unexpected contextual obstacles that would have reduced the trial's robustness. Lastly, we commissioned Tavistock to conduct the cost-benefit analysis of No Wrong Door and Family Safeguarding which will be completed in 2025.

In 2024–2025:

Our evaluation of SFPC will continue and is due to conclude in 2027. The No Wrong Door IPE will be finalised and published this year.

This year the IPE of MASH across three local sites will be conducted, including data collection, data analysis and reporting. The cross-government steering group for MASH will be involved throughout the evaluation. An interim findings report will be shared in October to coincide with planning for reform of the Working Together policy which will be updated in 2025. The final report is due in December 2024.



CROSS CUTTING WORK

We have a number of projects that cut across our priority areas. These projects aim to develop capacity and standards in the sector and enhance the impact of our work..

In 2023–2024:

We provided expert advice to the DfE as needed. This included:

- Work to support the development of outcomes in the National Social Care Framework

- Work to support the development of measures in the Children's Social Care Dashboard linked to the outcomes in the Framework

- Supporting the Families First for Children Pathfinders, both in terms of advising on the evaluation and the work done by the pathfinder sites to undertake population needs assessment.

In 2024–2025:

Over the next year we will continue to work on the following cross-cutting work streams:

Stakeholder engagement and public affairs:

We are focusing our efforts on ensuring that our work has influence with the new government and supports the delivery of the Opportunity Mission and the Safer Streets Mission – with its commitment to halving rates of violence against women and girls. We have a critical opportunity, with a new government, to revitalise evidence-based policy making. The government's Missions are about long-term transformation and not short-term fixes. We will be working actively with the Cabinet Office to seize the moment and ensure that evidence about what works to improve outcomes for children is embedded within the Missions from the start.

Experts by Experience Panel:

We will establish an Experts by Experience panel to provide us with

“critical friend” support and to help us ensure that what we do and say achieves our intended impact. Our panel will be formed of young people aged 16–25 who are care experienced, or had experience of Early Help, Child in Need and Child Protection plans, and parents and carers; including birth parents, kinship carers, foster carers, adopters, with experience of a range of services from early intervention onwards.

Foundations’ Toolkit:

We are redeveloping Foundations’ web-based clearinghouse function to encompass the former EIF Guidebook, WWCS evidence store and Practice Guides.

Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Equity:

We strive to be sector leaders in EDIE, but recognise we have some way to go before achieving this. We have taken the first steps by developing an EDIE Action Plan that addresses what we will do in our work programme and as an employer.

Our work programme will seek to understand the risk factors disproportionately affecting certain groups and EDIE will be considered in all projects through the entire project cycle. We have agreed that in our future work programme:

- We will explore funding and evaluating interventions by and for minoritised groups, which may include a bespoke funding call.
- We will target local areas with diverse populations for large-scale impact evaluations, giving more diverse samples and also making more sub-group analysis possible, to address the fact that what works evaluation methods provide average effect measurements, which may not reflect outcomes for minoritised groups.
- We will use mixed methods when answering EDI research questions, for example, qualitative methods to understand people’s experience of interventions.
- We will use evidence synthesis to understand what works for minoritised groups, given the issues with limited availability of data and small sample sizes.
- We will produce nuanced messages for policy and practice to recognise that broad messaging about what works may not be true for minoritised groups.
- We will consider rapid reviews on different communities and their experiences of services and what has been successfully tried inside and outside of the UK to increase inclusion.

As an employer, we made improving EDIE a priority and established an internal working group to lead changes. The cross-organisational group is responsible for holding us to account for delivering our action plan and bringing voices from every team into discussions about how we can improve.



REACH: RESEARCHING EFFECTIVE APPROACHES FOR CHILDREN

Domestic abuse is stubbornly prevalent, and has serious, long-lasting consequences for children. In spite of this, and its role as one of the biggest drivers of demand on children's social care, we know very little about what works in the UK, either to prevent domestic abuse in the first place, or to support child victims to recover and go on to thrive.

Services are under enormous pressure due to funding constraints. They often lack the means to engage in evaluation. As far as we are aware, there has been no high-quality evaluation of services designed to improve outcomes for children in the UK.

Impact evaluation in this sector is hard, but we think it is possible with the right investment. In May 2024, at the suggestion of a cross-government group set up to grapple with this problem, we published our REACH (Researching Effective Approaches for Children) plan. This ambitious plan sets out the steps that we need to take to get to the point where, in five years' time, we have some answers to the question of 'what works to support children affected by domestic abuse?'

REACH calls for significant and sustained investment in the delivery and evaluation of the most promising approaches. It is founded on four key principles:

1. We will work alongside the sector. We have no interest in rushing providers to impact evaluation before they are ready, which is unlikely to result in successful trials or positive findings. Our plan includes the time and resource for intensive work with providers to develop their services so that they can be evaluated.
2. As a What Works Centre, our focus and our 'end goal' is robust impact evaluation. This will usually be an RCT, although we recognise the value of other evaluation designs for some interventions. Again, we will work closely with programme providers to decide on the approach to impact evaluation that is appropriate and acceptable to them.
3. We will look across the spectrum from prevention to recovery. Domestic abuse is not a problem that will be solved by a single service or intervention. To break

RESEARCHING EFFECTIVE APPROACHES FOR CHILDREN REACH

A five-year plan to
find out what works
to prevent domestic
abuse & support
child victims



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cycles of domestic abuse and keep children safe, we need to identify a set of evidence-based services that can be part of and enhance a local service offer. These will include prevention services, family-based interventions, recovery and therapeutic services.

4. The voices of victims and survivors are central to this work. The experiences and views of people who have experienced domestic abuse – either as children or as adults who have sought help for their children – will be critical to the success of this plan. We will work with partners who have experience of engaging victim survivors to harness the power of existing survivor networks. We are committed to ensuring that victim survivors inform our work and are given power in decision making.





The REACH plan has landed well with government and sector stakeholders. The lack of what works evidence related to children and the barriers to evaluation are not new problems, but REACH has successfully shone a light on the issues and has persuaded a number of key national and local stakeholders to join with us to advocate for our aims. Shifting the narrative and gaining recognition of a problem that needs solving is a key first step in achieving significant investment or change.

The REACH plan received significant national media attention through extensive exclusive coverage from the BBC. The launch of the plan was featured on BBC Radio 4's Today programme and on BBC News (broadcast and online). This national coverage amplified our messages, reached a broad and diverse audience. The exposure reached key audiences we aim to influence more specifically, including policymakers, and the cut through put a poorly understood and often overlooked issue on the national agenda.

We have already commissioned evaluation work with six domestic abuse programmes, which represents one of the most substantial portfolios of domestic abuse research ever launched in the UK. Three projects

comprise an early evaluation portfolio, including a Theory of Change development project, adaptation of an intervention from abroad, and a feasibility study. With the support of funding provided by the government's Evaluation Task Force, we have also commissioned pilot RCTs of a further three domestic abuse programmes. These projects will help build the evidence base around promising practice and generate findings for how to rigorously evaluate domestic abuse services with vulnerable populations. We are using these learnings to further inform and improve future evaluations within REACH.

We are now focused on securing the investment we need and putting the structures and plans in place to start to operationalise the broader plan in 2025–2026.

MAKING THE CASE FOR FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCING

Family Group Conferencing (FGC) is a family-led decision-making approach used in children's social care in the UK and internationally. It involves a family-led meeting in which the family network, which can include family members, friends and/or practitioners who know the family, come together to make a plan for a child when there is concern for their wellbeing or safety. In 2023, we published important new evidence showing that FGCs could contribute to keeping children out of care.

The study was an RCT carried out by Coram, in partnership with Daybreak. It became the largest RCT of FGCs in the world, and it found that children referred for an FGC at the pre-proceeding stage were less likely to go into care than children whose families were not referred. The study also found FGCs at the pre-proceeding stage to be cost-effective. The estimated economic savings for local authorities are substantial; if FGCs were offered to every family at this stage, this could mean over 2000 fewer children going into care per year, with a saving of over £150 million.

This is important evidence in the UK context because the number of children in care is rising. We know that, unfortunately, care experienced children generally have worse long-term outcomes than their peers. Although many local authorities

do currently offer FGCs at the pre-proceeding stage, we know that access to, and quality of, FGCs varies significantly across England. As a result, not all children at risk of going into care are offered a high-quality FGC. We are committed to improving equitable access to FGCs across England.

In response to the positive findings from our study, the previous government made a public commitment in the 2023 Kinship Strategy to partner with us and the sector to “work towards every family being offered high-quality FGCs at pre-proceedings stage”. We are now working with the DfE and the sector to achieve this goal.

As part of this work, we also have several projects currently underway.

- We are supporting local authorities to take local action to expand and improve their local FGC offer. We have developed a resource for local authorities which outlines five key actions to help them realise the potential of FGCs, which include developing workforce capability and implementing monitoring and evaluation arrangements.
- In the autumn of 2024, we will publish a report which explores how local authorities are recording and reporting on FGC data. We commissioned a consortium team, led by Coram and including Family Rights Group, Daybreak and Data2Insight, to investigate local FGC data practices and propose options for collecting FGC data on a national level. Currently in the UK, there is no data routinely collected on FGCs. This means we do not have a national picture of how many FGCs are offered, how many families accept, and what their outcomes are. The report found that data recording and reporting practices vary significantly across local areas and proposed three possible options for routinely collecting this information

across England. These recommendations will support our discussions with DfE.

- We are also focused on conducting further research on FGCs to build the evidence base and improve service delivery across England. We have recently launched a research project which will explore the barriers and enablers to increasing family access to FGCs at the pre-proceeding stage. An evaluation partner will be commissioned to conduct this research and will use the findings to provide recommendations to make access to FGCs more equitable. Foundations is also hoping to conduct another evaluation of FGCs at an earlier stage in the system, before pre-proceedings, to test their effectiveness. This is important research, as we know many local areas offer FGCs at this stage as a form of early intervention.

PRACTICE GUIDES: BRINGING EVIDENCE-BASED GUIDANCE TO CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Practice Guides will set out what is known from current evidence and practice expertise about how best to achieve the outcomes and deliver against the expectations of the Children's Social Care National Framework.

The Children's Social Care National Framework aims to support the sector to strengthen support for children, young people and families through drawing out the principles and purpose of children's social care, as well as the factors which can enable good practice. It is crucial that local leaders and commissioners have access to the strongest evidence about how to achieve the outcomes in the new Children's Social Care National Framework. We are producing a set of Practice Guides, based on high-quality research evidence.

For the first time, senior leaders across statutory children's services will have access to guidance and recommendations for service development and delivery based on high-quality research evidence.

Every Practice Guide is underpinned by a systematic review, which rigorously pulls together the best international evidence. This includes not only considering quantitative evidence from RCTs, but also high-

quality qualitative evidence that captures the views of children, families and professionals.

In line with our strategy, it was crucial from the outset to seek advice from a diverse group of experts. Our Guidance Writing Advisory Group includes a range of stakeholders and topic-specific advisors. While a strong research evidence base is essential, understanding the local context and systems is equally important. This approach ensures that the principles and recommendations in the Practice Guides can be implemented effectively in current local systems, ultimately leading to a positive impact on the lives of children and families.

Alongside this, we have worked closely with organisations such as Ofsted and the DfE to reflect the recommendations in wider systems and standards set for local authorities across the country.

Foundations' first Practice Guide, focused on Kinship Care, was published in autumn 2024. This is a significant step forward, as it brings together the most reliable evidence to support leaders and practitioners in the sector and sits together with the Kinship Strategy and statutory guidance.

There are three other systematic reviews currently in progress. These are:

- Parenting interventions for families with multiple and complex needs (ages 0–10) due for publication in early 2025
- Mentoring and befriending interventions for children due for publication in spring 2025
- Parenting interventions for parents and carers of disabled or with severe mental illness due for publication in the second half of 2025.



We are also due to shortly seek partners to undertake two further systematic reviews, with the intention of those Practice Guides being ready for publication in 2025–2026.

The Children’s Social Care National Framework recognises the importance of evidence-based practices across the sector, calling for leaders to confidently use evidence, practice supervisors to stay informed of emerging research, and local areas to consistently implement evidence-based programmes. However, significant work remains to support the sector in achieving these goals, and Practice Guides are a crucial piece of the puzzle.

By presenting high-quality evidence in an accessible format and offering actionable recommendations tailored to the current context, we aim to equip senior leaders with the tools they need to design services that effectively address the needs of specific populations facing specific challenges.

As the What Works Centre for Children & Families, we are committed to championing the better use of evidence across the sector, while also acknowledging the challenges of implementing more evidence-based approaches. Our aim is that Practice Guides, alongside the Children’s Social Care National Framework, will help advance this objective. We remain dedicated to working closely with our partners in the sector to ensure that our contributions are both meaningful and practical.

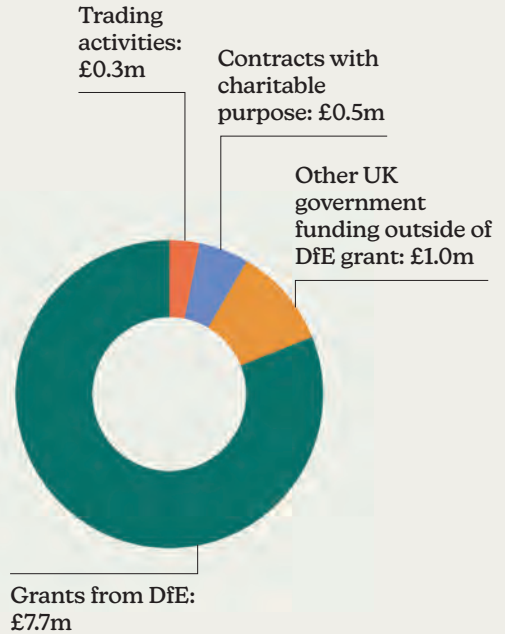
Find out more about our Practice Guides: <https://foundations.org.uk/practice-guides/>



MANAGING OUR RESOURCES

Income

In 2023–2024 Foundations’ total income including grants and trading activities was £9.5 million. This included £7.7 million in core funding from the DfE, with a further £1 million of UK government funding outside of the DfE. While this forms the majority of our funding, we continually aim to diversify our income sources. To this end, we secured £0.5 million on a commercial basis from our contracts for services, all of which further our charitable purpose. Income from our trading activities amounted to £0.3 million.



Thank you

We could not have delivered our work in 2023–2024 without the support of our funders.

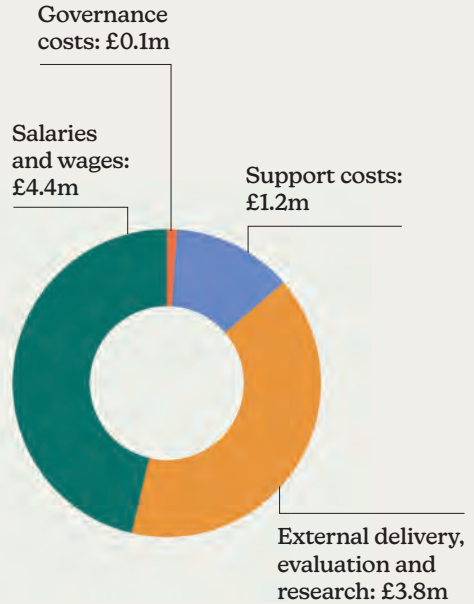


Expenditure

Foundations' total expenditure in 2023–2024 was £9.5 million. Expenditure on external delivery, evaluation and research totalled £3.8 million, of which £3.6 million was disbursed on project costs. This was funded by our six grantors.

Support costs of £1.2 million include double running costs related to the merger which were eliminated during the course of the year.

Foundations employs people with a variety of skills in the field of evidence-based policy and practice, some of whom are subject experts in the field of early intervention. Foundations provides excellent value for money and does not employ any fundraising staff.



The financial statements were approved by the Board of Trustees on 17 July 2024 and were signed on their behalf by:

Reshard Auladin OBE, Interim Chair

The summarised accounts presented here are extracted from the Report of the Trustees and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2024. The report of the auditors on these accounts was unqualified. The summarised accounts do not contain sufficient information to allow for a full understanding of the financial affairs of Foundations. A copy of the full documents can be obtained from the charity commission's website or Foundations' registered office.

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What Works Centre for Children & Families

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