



IMPACT REPORT

2025–2026

// Foundations

What Works Centre for Children & Families

foundations.org.uk

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Registered office and operational address

Alliance House
12 Caxton Street
London, SW1H 0Qs

Company registration number

12136703

Charity registration number

1188350

Country of Incorporation

England and Wales

Country of Registration

England and Wales

Trustees

Sam White, Chair
Baroness Hilary Armstrong
Reshard Auladin
Professor Nicholas Pearce
Professor Paul Ramchandani
Rashida Baig MBE (*Appointed 16 October 2025*)
Martin Birch (*Appointed 16 October 2025*)
Krupesh Patel (*Appointed 16 October 2025*)
Jenny Coles CBE (*Resigned 11 September 2025*)
Kelly Beaver MBE (*Resigned 4 August 2026*)

Chief Executive

Dr Jo Casebourne

Auditors

Sayer Vincent LLP
110 Golden Lane
London
EC1Y 0TG

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



Foundations has won 10 more years of funding from the Department for Education to continue delivering the What Works Centre for Children & Families.

This is my second year as Chair of Foundations, and if my first year gave me a sense of the scale of ambition here, this year has shown me what it takes to deliver against it. It has been, by some distance, the busiest and most consequential year of my time on this Board.

This year has also brought one of the most significant shifts in public governance in decades, as the government works to “rewire the state” – moving power, funding, and accountability closer to communities. For an organisation built to strengthen decision making through evidence, this is both an opportunity and a responsibility. As more decisions move from Whitehall to regional and local leaders, the need for good evidence only grows. Devolution succeeds when local leaders have not just greater authority, but the evidence, data, and analytical capability to use it well.

This is where I think Foundations has a critical role to play. We’ve spent years building the evidence base on what improves outcomes for children and families, and the task now is to make sure that the evidence is genuinely accessible and usable at

a regional and local level – helping mayors, strategic authorities and local authorities to direct investment to where it will have the greatest effect, and learn quickly from what works. Evidence alone won’t determine whether devolution succeeds, but it can help leaders make better decisions and spread effective practice faster than they otherwise would. We want to be a trusted partner to regional and local decision makers as they take on these new powers.

Against this backdrop, our funding news is a remarkable vote of confidence in what this organisation has built. It gives us something rare in this landscape: a decade of certainty in which to invest properly in generating evidence and, just as importantly, in getting that evidence used.

It means we can plan how we work with local areas for the long term, rather than year to year. It means we can build deeper, more durable relationships across central government as policy continues to evolve. It gives us a stronger platform to influence other funders to bring more investment into the evidence

ecosystem around children and families. And it gives the partners and projects who rely on us real continuity, at a time when so much else in the sector feels uncertain.

None of this would have been possible without the leadership of Jo and the Senior Leadership Team, who delivered a demanding programme of work this year while simultaneously leading the most significant bid in Foundations' history. The Board is enormously grateful for their skill and resilience.

Looking ahead, our immediate priority for 2026/27 is making sure we are ready for the new grant to begin – putting in place the operational foundations to make the most of what a 10-year horizon allows us to do differently. In 2027/28, we will refresh our strategy to set out how we intend to use that decade well.

We have also strengthened our Board this year. We were delighted to welcome Rashida Baig MBE, Martin Birch, and Krupesh Patel as trustees in October 2025, each bringing valuable expertise to our governance. We are also very grateful to Kelly Beaver MBE and Jenny Coles CBE for their contributions as they stepped down from the Board, and we wish them well. We are also looking forward to formally welcoming members of our Experts by Experience Panel as our first Board Associates – an important step in bringing lived experience directly into our governance.

Finally, our thanks to the Department for Education for its continued partnership and, this year in particular, for its confidence in our future. To Foundations' staff, for the quality and care they bring to their work every day, and for their commitment to the children and families we exist to serve. And to our trustees, for the work they put into securing our future funding and managing risk through a period of uncertainty.

Sam White
Chair of the Board of Trustees

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S MESSAGE



This year, our evidence shaped some of the biggest reforms to children's services in a generation.

Following our strategy refresh in July 2025, halfway through our current strategy, this was a year in which we knew exactly where our energy needed to go – to supporting the government's reforms to children's social care and early intervention.

Our influence on policy has never been stronger. In 2025/26, 69% of published child and family national policy documents referenced our work, from the updated Children's Social Care National Framework to the new Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy. Behind that figure is something simpler: children experiencing family breakdown, domestic abuse, or care, are now more likely to be supported by services that are grounded in evidence of what will actually help them to thrive.

We also took that evidence further into local delivery. Our new Evidence into Practice programme, launched this year, takes a local, regional and national approach to getting evidence into practice. The programme is anchored by nine Partner Places – one in each region of England – each receiving direct funding and hands-on support to embed evidence-led practice in their communities and wider region. A national Department for Education survey found that 44%

of local authorities are now using Foundations' evidence, tools, and resources in their day-to-day work, a sign that the distance between what we know works and what happens in practice is closing.

Practice Guides remain one of the clearest ways our evidence reaches the people delivering services on the ground. We've now published seven of these Guides, and local leaders are using them directly to shape commissioning and service delivery in their areas. Seven further Guides are currently in development, as we continue to increase the number of service areas covered by guidance about what has been shown to improve outcomes.

We also kept building the evidence base itself, launching eight new impact evaluations this year: two full-scale randomised controlled trials (RCTs) of domestic abuse recovery programmes, Bounce Back 4 Kids and WeMatter; two pilot evaluations of kinship support programmes, covering kinship navigator services and therapeutic support for kinship carers and children; a pilot evaluation of the impact of financial allowances for kinship carers across seven Kinship Zones; and three further quasi-experimental evaluations. Together,



these mean we'll keep generating the evidence the sector needs for years to come.

This was also the year we started to take artificial intelligence (AI) seriously as an organisation – recognising its potential as a tool that can genuinely strengthen our mission. We've begun experimenting with how AI can support our work, and building it into how we think about Foundations' future role as a trusted evidence provider in a system that is changing around us.

We also made strides embedding anti-racism in our organisational culture and in the delivery of our work programme this year – evidence of which is threaded throughout this report. On a personal note, this year I've had the privilege of being reverse mentored by Yusuf Shobair, a member of our Experts by Experience Panel, and Miles Carabine from our staff team. Reflecting on the 'why' behind our work has been one of the richest parts of my year.

We know our impact is greatest when we work in step with national government and local areas – with genuine alignment on shared priorities. That collaborative spirit runs through every feature in this report, and it's what gives me confidence that, even against a backdrop of financial pressure and large-scale reform, we can make a lasting difference to children and families.

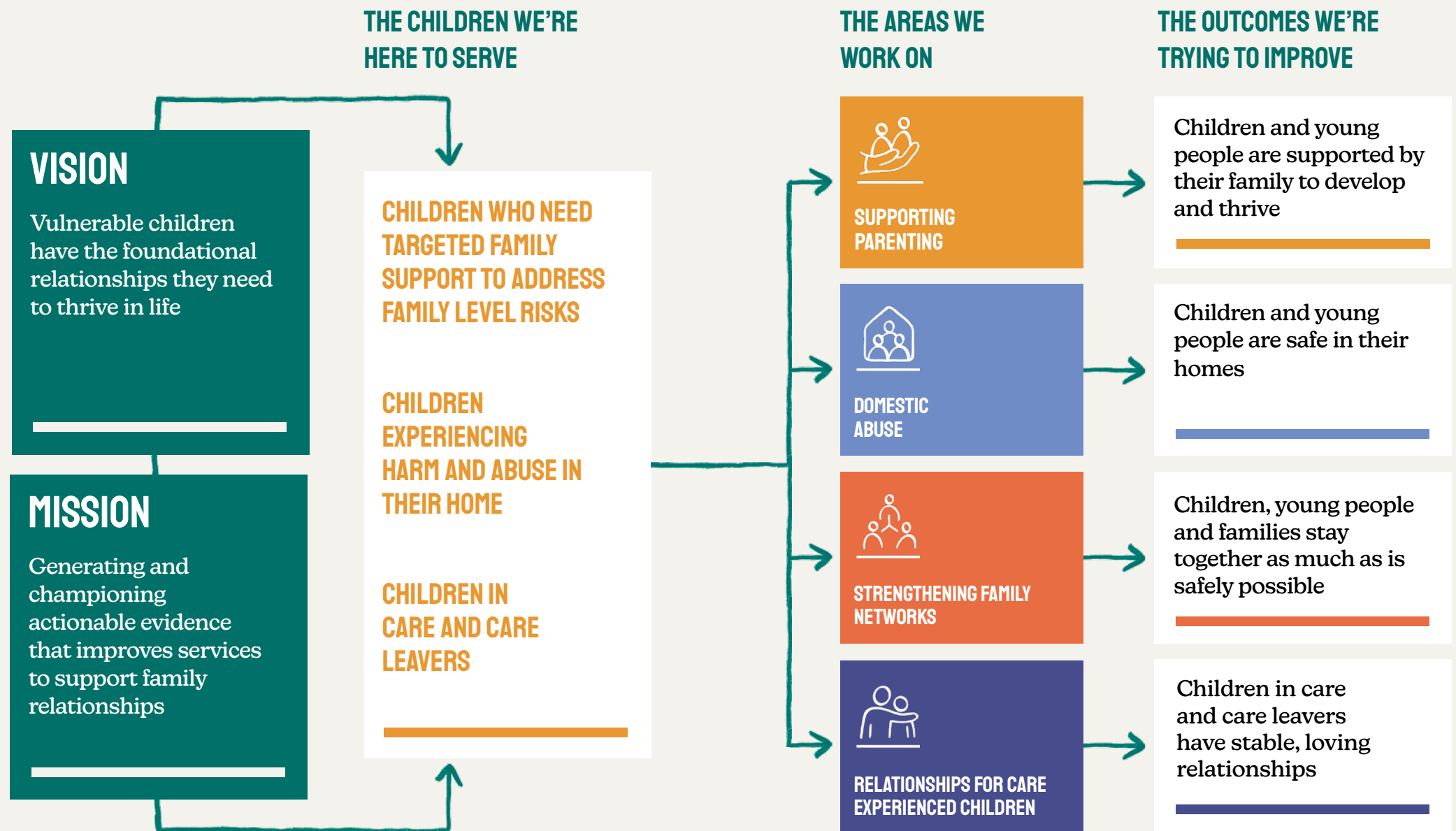
It has been one of the privileges of my career to lead Foundations through the process of securing 10 more years of Department for Education funding to continue delivering the What Works Centre for Children & Families. I am so proud, and so delighted, that I am able to continue leading this organisation into a new decade of funding. Our new 10-year grant begins in April 2027, and the certainty it brings already means we can plan, invest and build with a confidence we've never had before.

None of this would have been possible without our incredible staff team, sustaining this pace of delivery while preparing our biggest ever funding bid. I'm continually struck by their calibre and commitment. And a huge thank you also to our partners across government and the sector, and the many champions who continue to make the case for evidence-led change alongside us.

Dr Jo Casebourne
Chief Executive



STRATEGY OVERVIEW



OUR APPROACH

As a What Works Centre, we are strategically positioned to connect evidence, policy, and practice in ways that drive lasting change for children and families.

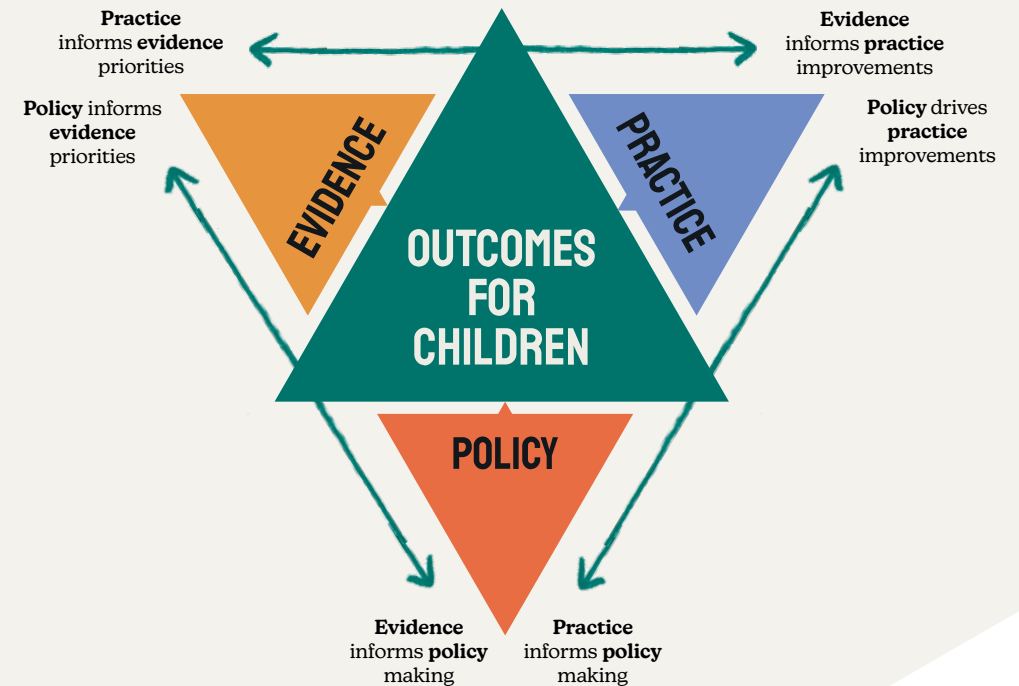
Our role is not only to generate and share evidence, but also to influence how it is valued, used, and embedded across the system.

We work at the intersection of national and local decision making, seeking to shape policy and practice in ways that improve outcomes for children. We build strong relationships across government, the third sector, funders and local areas – creating the conditions for evidence-informed change.

Our approach combines methodological rigour with a deep understanding of practice realities. We translate complex findings into accessible, actionable insights, and we support others to make evidence informed decisions across a range of contexts.

By operating effectively across all three arenas of evidence, policy and practice, we help ensure that high-quality evidence leads to meaningful and sustained improvements in children's lives.

Our approach is best described through our impact triangle model, which connects evidence, policy, and practice. The three elements are mutually reinforcing, with strength in each area supporting progress across the triangle.



EVIDENCE & PRACTICE ACTIVITY ACROSS ENGLAND

Alongside our national policy work, our evaluation and practice activity takes place across all regions of England.

DRIVING PRACTICE IMPROVEMENTS

9 local authority Partner Places work side by side with Foundations to get evidence used. Local Evidence Leaders implement and embed evidence in their areas and across their regions.

EVALUATING LOCALLY DELIVERED PROGRAMMES

64 local areas are involved in Foundations-funded evaluations, helping to build evidence about what works to support children and families.

OUR NATIONAL REACH

Our evidence and practice activity is taking place in **45%** of upper-tier local authorities.

62% of these local authorities are outside London and the South East.

NORTH WEST

Partner Place: Stockport Council
18 evaluations in **12** LAs, including Blackpool and Rochdale Borough Councils, evaluating Kinship Connected, a support service for kinship carers.

[Read more in our feature on Building evidence on kinship care](#)

WEST MIDLANDS

Partner Place: Telford & Wrekin Council
10 evaluations in **8** LAs, including Telford & Wrekin, Walsall, and Dudley Metropolitan Councils, which are involved in the quasi-experimental evaluation of the Family Safeguarding parenting support model.

SOUTH WEST

Partner Place: Wiltshire Council
7 evaluations in **5** LAs, including South Gloucestershire Council – one of the DfE's first Kinship Zones – where we are evaluating the impact of providing kinship carers with financial support.

[Read more on our feature on Building evidence on kinship care](#)

NORTH EAST

Partner Place: Northumberland County Council
5 evaluations in **4** LAs, including a pilot evaluation of the Just Right State programme, in North Tyneside, that works with children and carers in kinship care.

[Read more in our feature on Building evidence on kinship care](#)

YORKSHIRE & THE HUMBER

Partner Place: Bradford Children & Families Trust

2 evaluations in **2** LAs, including a partnership with City of York Council to develop the first Implementation Framework for evidence in children's social care.

[Read more in our feature on Driving local evidence use](#)

EAST MIDLANDS

Partner Place: Leicester City Council
1 evaluation in **1** LA, including one of the DfE's first Kinship Zones, Derbyshire County Council, where we are evaluating the impact of providing kinship carers with financial support.

[Read more in our feature on Building evidence on kinship care](#)

GREATER LONDON

Partner Place: London Borough of Enfield

16 evaluations in **14** LAs, including five London boroughs which are involved in evaluating programmes that support families who have experience domestic abuse.

[Read more in our feature on Delivering on our REACH ambitions](#)

SOUTH EAST

Partner Place: Wokingham Borough Council

19 evaluations in **11** LAs, including the delivery of a full scale RCT of the Bounce Back 4 Kids support programme for parents and children recovering from domestic abuse.

[Read more in our feature on Delivering on our REACH ambitions](#)

EAST OF ENGLAND

Partner Place: Southend-on-Sea City Council

8 evaluations in **7** LAs, including Essex, Central Bedfordshire, and Hertfordshire County Councils, which are taking part in a pioneering evaluation of **For Baby's Sake**, a whole family approach to protecting children born into families where there is domestic abuse.

2025/26 YEAR IN REVIEW

We have set ambitious impact goals across our priority areas, that have guided our work throughout the year. This report details the progress we have made towards achieving them in 2025/26.



SUPPORTING PARENTING

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

Parenting Practice Guides recommendations are taken up by local areas

ACHIEVED

Read more in our 2024/25 Impact Report on **Promoting evidence-based parenting support**

ON TRACK

Read more in our feature on **Driving local evidence use**



DOMESTIC ABUSE

External funding to support the domestic abuse evaluation programme is secured

Impact evaluation of domestic abuse support services is shown to be possible and capacity within the sector to evaluate has increased

ON TRACK

Read more in our feature on **Delivering on our REACH ambitions**



STRENGTHENING FAMILY NETWORKS

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

Kinship Care Practice Guide recommendations are taken up by local areas

DfE policy on kinship is enabling robust impact evaluation, to fill evidence gaps and strengthen service provision

ACHIEVED

Read more in our 2024/25 Impact Report on **Focusing on family group decision making**

ON TRACK

Read more in our feature on **Driving local evidence use**

ON TRACK

Read more in our feature on **Building evidence on kinship care**



RELATIONSHIPS FOR CARE EXPERIENCED CHILDREN

DfE policy on relationships for care experienced children is enabling robust impact evaluation, to fill evidence gaps and strengthen service provision

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

ON TRACK

Look out for updates in our 2026/27 Impact Report

SHAPING NATIONAL POLICY



National policy is one of the most powerful levers for improving outcomes for vulnerable children and families. When national policy is informed by robust evidence, its impacts can reach every local authority in England. Ensuring that evidence sits at the heart of government decision making is therefore central to Foundations' mission.

Over the past year, we have worked to influence legislation, statutory guidance, inspection frameworks, and government programmes to strengthen the role of evidence in shaping the services delivered to vulnerable children and families. Our work was referenced in 69% of child and family-related national policy documents published between April 2025 and March 2026.

Bringing evidence into policy

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act is a significant example of evidence shaping national policy. Our [landmark trial of Family Group Conferencing](#) helped build the evidence base behind new commitments in the Act, designed to ensure more children can benefit from family-led decision making. By supporting families to come together around a child's needs, this approach has the potential to help more children remain safely within their families,

while reducing pressures and costs for local authorities.

Evidence is also now more firmly embedded in the Department for Education's (DfE's) Children's Social Care National Framework. The updated Framework emphasises the Practice Guides, commissioned by the DfE and produced by Foundations, giving local leaders a clear route to implementing services informed by robust evidence. For social workers and other practitioners, this means clearer, more accessible advice on approaches that can help achieve the outcomes set out in the Framework and strengthen the support offered to families.

Our work has also helped strengthen the evidence base on parenting support. The list of proven programmes developed by Foundations for the DfE's Family First Partnership programme guidance gives social workers greater confidence in the parenting support they offer



and provides safeguarding partners with a practical basis for implementing evidence-based interventions through Family Help and wider multi-agency child protection reforms.

This extends to disabled children and children with special educational needs (SEN). The [Parenting Disabled Children and Young People and those with SEN Practice Guide](#), published this year, is helping to shape the delivery of SEND provision through new Best Start Family Hubs. Families accessing early help through Family Hubs can now benefit from evidence-based interventions without having to wait for a formal diagnosis.

Alongside the Practice Guides, tools including our Implementation Framework, Evidence Pie, and Family Hubs Planning Framework can help practitioners make informed decisions about the design and delivery of services available to families across England.

Evidence is also becoming part of how children's services are evaluated. The updated Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) Framework gives Ofsted inspectors new criteria for assessing how local authorities use evidence in decision making and practice, including their use of Practice Guides. This strengthens the role

of evidence, not only in designing services, but in understanding whether those services are being delivered effectively and in line with what research tells us works.

Influencing policy across government

Our policy influence extends beyond children's social care. We have worked with government departments to ensure that wider family policy is both informed by the best available evidence and designed to generate better evidence about what works.

One example is our contribution to the government's Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategy. Ahead of its publication, we worked with officials across government and convened a roundtable to identify opportunities to strengthen the evidence underpinning the strategy. Foundations was subsequently referenced as a source of high-quality evidence on VAWG, while the strategy emphasises the importance of evaluating domestic abuse services and draws on [our randomised controlled trials](#) of support services for child victims.

Our influence does not end when policy documents are published. We have continued to work

closely with the Cabinet Office's Evaluation Task Force and colleagues across government to support implementation of the strategy's commitments and strengthen the evidence available to inform future policy.

Looking ahead, two new Practice Guides will give commissioners and practitioners practical advice on what works to tackle and prevent child sexual abuse. Together, this work demonstrates how we are helping to build a stronger connection between research, policy, and practice – so that the decisions made nationally translate into better support and better outcomes for children and families locally.



DRIVING LOCAL EVIDENCE USE



Evidence can improve outcomes for children and families, but knowing what works is only the starting point. The real challenge is making evidence part of everyday decisions about commissioning, service design, and delivery – and ensuring that effective approaches are implemented well in different local communities.

Foundations is working with local areas to bridge this gap. By investing in dedicated evidence leadership, strengthening implementation capability and connecting national evidence with local expertise, we are helping to build the capacity for evidence-informed decision making where it matters most.

From testing to scale: Changemakers

Since 2024, we have been delivering our Changemakers programme with the Youth Endowment Fund to explore whether embedding local evidence leadership roles can create a culture of evidence-informed commissioning and improve the design and delivery of services for children and families.

Four Changemakers areas – City of York Council, Merton Council, Stockport Borough Council, and Wirral Council – each received funding for a dedicated Local Evidence Lead (LEL) post and

for the delivery of an evidence-based parenting intervention.

These roles provided dedicated capacity to bring evidence into local decision making, support the implementation of effective approaches, and improve access to proven support for families. The evaluation of Changemakers has generated important learning about how local evidence leadership can work in practice, and how evidence-informed decision making can be strengthened, which is very relevant to an increasingly devolved children's services system.

Crucially, learning from Changemakers has not stayed within the four participating areas. It has helped shape the design of our new national Evidence into Practice programme, launched in July 2025, taking what we have learned about local evidence leadership and implementation and applying it at a greater scale.

Evidence into Practice: Building evidence into local systems

The Evidence into Practice programme aims to create a system in which every child and family can access support informed by the best available evidence, alongside local expertise and experience.

The programme works across [three connected tiers](#) – national, regional, and local – to support and strengthen evidence-informed decision making across all parts of the commissioning cycle.

At the national level, Foundations has influenced updates to national guidance and delivered events to widen engagement and strengthen understanding of evidence and how it can be used in programme design and delivery.

At the regional level, we are working through existing networks, including Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliances (RIAs), new Children's Social Care Area Leads, and regional communities of practice. These networks provide an important route for sharing learning, supporting sector improvement, and strengthening the role of evidence across local systems. Foundations is also working with Research in Practice to extend our reach among local government leaders and practitioners.

At a local level we have continued to invest in building evidence leadership. Nine Partner Places each received £100,000 to appoint a Local Evidence Lead, building on learning from Changemakers about the potential of these roles to strengthen evidence use across a local system.





The Local Evidence Leads are working with Foundations to support implementation across children's services, build local partnerships within their areas, and share learning through regional relationships and Foundations' national learning networks. In doing so, they are helping turn evidence from something that sits outside day-to-day practice into a resource that can inform decisions across the local system.

By connecting national platforms and policy influence, regional networks and local partnerships, Evidence into Practice reached 95% of upper-tier local authorities in England in its first year of delivery.

Implementing effectively at the local level

Even when we know what works, implementing new approaches effectively can be challenging.

Born out of our partnership with City of York Council through the Changemakers programme, this year we produced a beta version of an [Implementation Framework](#) for designing and delivering services for children and families.

The Framework provides an evidence-informed methodology that local

authorities and their partners can use to understand their existing systems, bring together the right people, identify priorities, plan implementation, and track progress. It is designed to provide a common approach while allowing local systems to adapt their work to the needs of their children, families, and communities.

In this way, the Framework aims to reduce unwarranted variation in practice while supporting local innovation – helping authorities move from knowing what works to making it work.

At a time when local authorities are navigating major reforms and increasingly complex systems, this practical implementation support is particularly important. We will continue testing and refining the Framework with our Partner Places before publishing a final version in 2027.

Together, Changemakers, Evidence into Practice, and the Implementation Framework represent a shift towards building the systems and capability needed to ensure that evidence informs decisions, effective approaches are implemented well, and children and families benefit from what we know works.

DELIVERING ON OUR REACH AMBITIONS



Around one in five children are affected by domestic abuse, yet we still know far too little about which services are most effective in helping children recover and thrive.

Foundations' [Researching Effective Approaches for Children \(REACH\) plan](#) is designed to change this. Our ambition is to address the national shortage of high-quality evidence about what works to prevent domestic abuse and support the recovery of children and young people affected by it.

This year marked an important step forward. We published an [update on our five-year REACH plan](#), completed the first phase of rigorous evaluations, and began the next phase of large-scale evaluations of services supporting children affected by domestic abuse. We have also continued to work with government, practitioners, delivery organisations, and people with lived experience to strengthen the conditions for generating and using better evidence.

Building the foundations for better evidence

Our [REACH: An Update on Our Five-Year Plan](#) report set out the progress made since 2024 and demonstrated that rigorous impact evaluation – including randomised controlled trials

(RCTs) – is both feasible and ethical in the complex context of domestic abuse services.

The report shared findings and learning from pilot RCTs of two recovery services: [Bounce Back 4 Kids](#), delivered by PACT, and [WeMatter](#), delivered by Victim Support. As well as generating important learning about the services themselves, these evaluations showed how high-quality research can be embedded within frontline domestic abuse service provision.

Three key lessons emerged: the importance of designing and funding services in ways that make evaluation possible; the value of strong partnerships between evaluators, delivery organisations, and experts by experience; and the need for sustained investment in programme development and evaluation capacity across the sector.

Moving to full-scale evaluations

Building on these early successes, Foundations has continued to advance

our domestic abuse evaluations and make the case for more ambitious testing of support services for child victim-survivors.

A key milestone this year was securing additional external funding from the [Evaluation Task Force](#) to support our domestic abuse evaluation programme. This investment helped us take the next step in REACH: moving from pilot studies to larger-scale evaluations of **Bounce Back 4 Kids** and **WeMatter** that can generate the robust evidence needed to understand which approaches make the greatest difference to children and families.

These evaluations, and the need for evidence in this area, are referenced in the government's Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategy. This is an important step towards closing a longstanding gap in the evidence base. Domestic abuse affects large numbers of children and is consistently one of the most common factors associated with referrals to children's social care. Yet robust evidence about which interventions best support children's recovery and long-term wellbeing remains limited.

The scale of the challenge makes building this evidence particularly urgent. Services are supporting





children and families every day, but too often practitioners and commissioners do not have the evidence they need to know which approaches are most likely to make a lasting difference.

These studies will provide an opportunity to generate the causal evidence needed to understand which approaches improve outcomes and represent good value for investment.

Turning evidence into better support

Through REACH, our growing programme of domestic abuse evaluations, and our support for the ambitions of the VAWG strategy, Foundations is helping to create the conditions for more effective services, better-informed decision making, and improved outcomes for children and families affected by domestic abuse.

REACH is about more than conducting individual evaluations. It is about building the conditions for a stronger evidence base across the domestic abuse sector – one in which services can learn what works, improve their practice and give commissioners greater confidence in where to invest.

We are working closely with delivery organisations, practitioners, commissioners, and people with lived experience to make sure our research is grounded in the realities of supporting children and families affected by domestic abuse.

BUILDING EVIDENCE ON KINSHIP CARE



More than 141,000 children in England and Wales are growing up in kinship care, living with a relative or family friend when their parents are unable to care for them.

For many children, kinship care provides stability, love and continuity of relationships and community. But children and their carers also face significant challenges, from stigma and financial pressure to limited access to appropriate support. These experiences can have a lasting impact on children's wellbeing, relationships, and opportunities.

Foundations is working to build the evidence needed to ensure kinship families receive the support that gives children the best chance to thrive. By identifying what looks promising, testing it rigorously, and filling critical gaps in our understanding, we are helping policymakers, commissioners and practitioners make better-informed decisions about where to invest.

Testing what works

In 2025/26, Foundations moved from identifying promising approaches to testing their effectiveness in England.

Our [2024 systematic review](#) and [Kinship Care Practice Guide](#) identified

three forms of support with the strongest evidence: navigator programmes that help families access support, tailored parenting and therapeutic support, and financial support. These findings have shaped the development of our kinship evaluation portfolio, ensuring that our research focuses on approaches with the greatest potential to improve children's stability, wellbeing and long-term outcomes.

We have also used these findings to shape national policy and practice, influencing key publications including the [Kinship Care Statutory Guidance](#) and the [National Kinship Care Ambassador's research](#) on designing local kinship offers.

Helping families navigate support

For kinship carers, finding the right support can be difficult to navigate. Navigator programmes aim to help carers better understand and access the complex range of services and support available to them.





While international evidence suggests navigator programmes can help families access services and secure stable arrangements for children, there is little evidence on whether these models work effectively within England's children's social care system.

To address this gap, in January 2026 Foundations commissioned the first UK evaluation of a navigator model for kinship families. The pilot evaluation of **Kinship Connected**, delivered by the charity Kinship and conducted by the Centre for Evidence and Implementation and Ipsos, will assess whether the approach is feasible, acceptable and can be implemented effectively. The findings will help commissioners and policymakers understand whether and how navigator support could form part of future kinship care provision.

Testing therapeutic and parenting support

We are also strengthening the evidence on therapeutic support specifically designed for kinship families.

Foundations commissioned a pilot evaluation of the **Just Right State**, delivered by North Tyneside Council. The model combines therapeutic support for children in kinship care with peer support and mentoring for their carers.

The evaluation, which is being carried out by Verian, will provide valuable evidence about the potential of this approach and help identify where further testing is needed. As the evidence base develops, this work will help practitioners and commissioners understand which forms of therapeutic and parenting support are most likely to benefit kinship families.

Building the evidence on financial support

Financial pressures can be a significant challenge for kinship carers, and there is promising evidence that financial support could improve outcomes for children and families.

In February 2026, the Department for Education announced a **pilot of kinship financial allowances across seven Kinship Zones in England**. The pilot will provide financial support to thousands of kinship families in England, and, crucially, generate robust evidence about its impact on both children and their carers.

The evaluation, which is being carried out by Alma Economics, will provide the strongest evidence to date on the impact of kinship

allowances in England. Its findings will help inform future decisions about the design, delivery, and potential expansion of financial support for kinship carers.

Understanding experiences that are missing from the evidence

Building the evidence base means understanding not only what support works, but also whether it works for children and families with different experiences and needs.

Our 2024 systematic review identified significant gaps in research on the experiences of children from minoritised ethnic backgrounds in kinship care. Although children and carers from these backgrounds are overrepresented in kinship care in England, there is limited evidence about their experiences of identity, belonging, cultural continuity, and relationships with services.

In February 2026, we commissioned two qualitative studies to address these gaps.

[Kinship Matters](#) explores the experiences of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller children and young people living in kinship care. [Kinship Care, Community, and Culture](#) explores the experiences of children and young people in kinship care living with a relative who does not share their ethnicity or another aspect of their cultural identity.

These studies will bring perspectives that have been largely absent from existing research in this area, helping policymakers and practitioners to develop support that is more inclusive and responsive to the experiences of different kinship families.

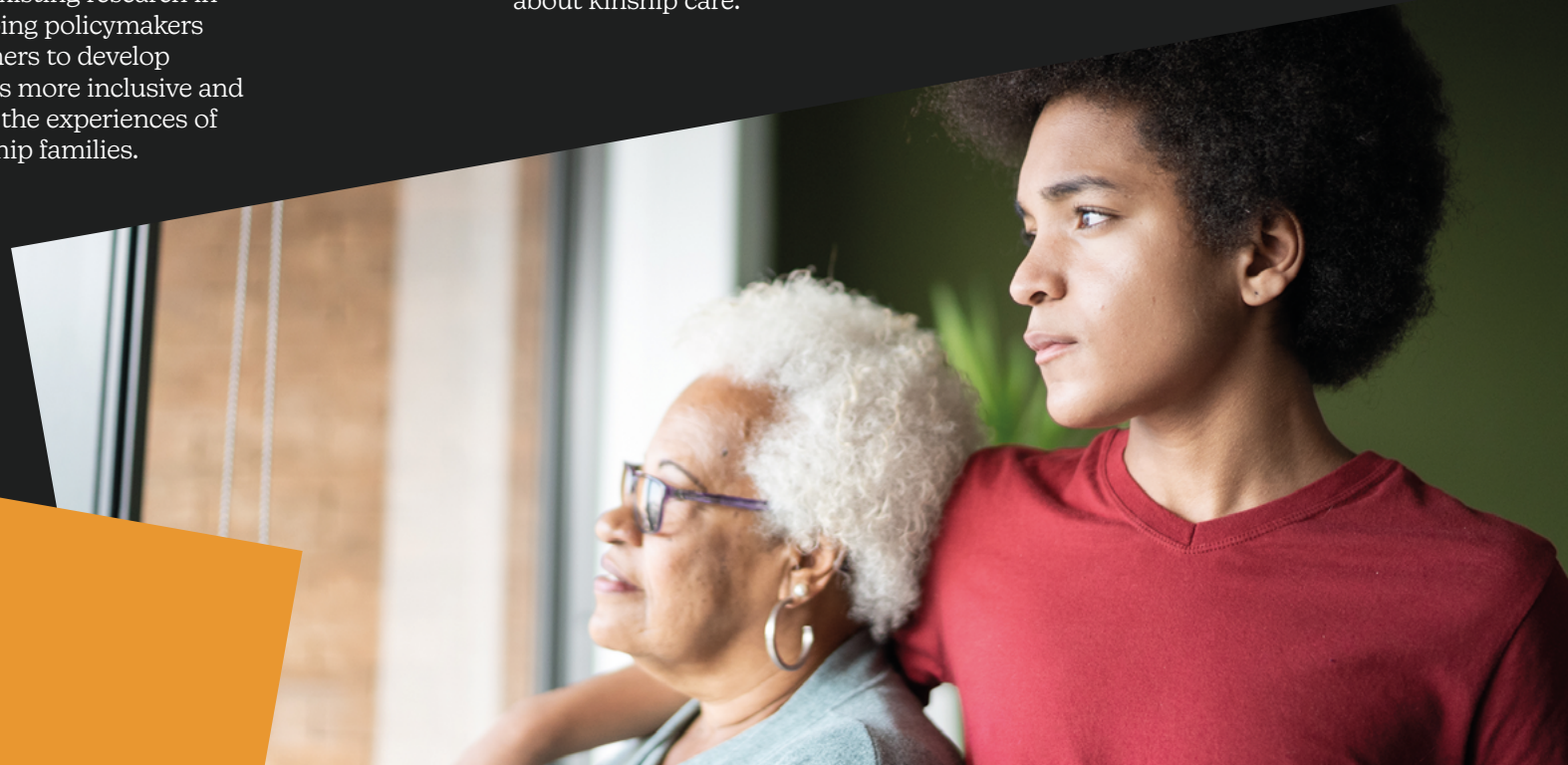
From evidence gaps to better support

This year marks an important shift in our work on kinship care: from understanding where the evidence gaps are to actively building the evidence needed to close them.

By identifying promising interventions, funding rigorous evaluation, addressing critical evidence gaps, and listening to the experiences of children and families whose voices are often missing from research, Foundations is helping to create a stronger basis for decisions about kinship care.

The next stage is to turn this growing body of evidence into better policy and practice. Findings from these studies will be published throughout 2027, while the financial allowances pilot will continue until 2029.

Together, this work will help ensure that decisions about support for kinship families are grounded in evidence, so that more children growing up in kinship care can experience the stability, relationships, and opportunities they need to thrive.



EMBEDDING LIVED EXPERIENCE

Our Experts by Experience (EBE) Panel brings together young people and parents and carers with direct experience of the areas we focus on – from kinship care to domestic abuse to mentoring and befriending – to guide our work and act as a critical friend to the organisation.

This year, we've focused on deepening that relationship: harnessing individual panel members' interests, creating more targeted opportunities to contribute, and strengthening group dynamics so that panel members feel a shared sense of ownership and belonging. It's a space where collective engagement provides real purpose – and one the panel tells us they value highly.

Panel members are spread across the country, so we connect through monthly online meetings to stay engaged with Foundations' work and with each other.

“Whenever we meet online, we take a topic Foundations is working on and get into it together and hear everyone's different points of view.”

CIARAN



“The panel has grown and developed over the past two years, using the experience of individual members to probe, challenge, inform, and represent insights into a diverse range of research and practice, resulting in guidance with more actionable content.”

ANNA



Shaping projects, funding, and evidence

This year, EBE panel members have been directly involved in shaping which delivery and evaluation partners Foundations commissions. In June 2025, Foundations launched a call to evaluate navigator and therapeutic support programmes for kinship care – part of our wider work to fill evidence gaps in this area. Brenda sat on the interview panel and reviewed applications for this work (read more in our **Building evidence on kinship care** feature on page 28).

“

Being part of the panel that helped choose which programmes we'd fund for evaluation meant a lot to me. It was about making sure kinship carers and young people feel heard, supported and valued in decisions that affect them.

BRENDA



Panel members have also shaped how our evaluations are actually carried out. The panel has taken a particular interest in our domestic abuse portfolio, meeting with evaluation teams to help develop research tools that are inclusive and that protect the wellbeing of the children and families taking part. Lilly has been closely involved in this work.

“

I pushed for research tools that are trauma-informed and adaptable, so children and families don't have to fit a one-size-fits-all approach. Getting this right means families can take part safely, and that what we learn actually reflects what different families need.

LILLY



Practice Guide advisory groups

Foundations has now published seven Practice Guides – on kinship care, parenting (for 0–10s, 11–18s, and disabled children and young people), mentoring and befriending, foster care, and reunification. Every guide is developed with an advisory group, where lived experience helps ensure the resulting guidance is genuinely usable by families and professionals. Kaylea is joining the advisory group for one of our upcoming guides, focused on children on the edge of care.



“I’m excited to bring my own experience to the Edge of Care guide, and to make sure it reflects what young people going through that actually need.”

KAYLEA

Influencing policy, practice and sector engagement

This year brought the panel more opportunities than ever to represent Foundations directly. At the parliamentary launch of our Mentoring & Befriending Practice Guide, Michael was a guest speaker, sharing his own experience of being mentored into adulthood.



“Speaking at Parliament was a huge moment for me – a chance to make sure decision makers hear directly from people who’ve been mentored. My own experience showed me what a difference the right mentor can make, and that’s what this guide is about: making sure support isn’t down to luck.”

MICHAEL

At our annual summer reception, co-hosted with the Centre for Young Lives, Sadia met sector representatives and shared the panel’s work firsthand.



“I was so excited to be invited to the summer reception in London. I got to meet the Minister for Early Education and spoke to different people from government and the children’s sector, and told them about the EBE panel and the work we do at Foundations.”

SADIA

And when Foundations met with Kinship Ambassador Jahnine Davis to share our kinship portfolio, Karishma spoke about her role in shaping two qualitative studies exploring the experiences of minoritised ethnic children and young people in kinship care.



“Meeting Jahnine Davis was a powerful moment for me. I’ve had so many opportunities to meet people doing incredible work, but this one stood out because of her own connection to kinship care. It reminded me how much intersectionality and cultural barriers matter in this work – and how much my own family’s experience shapes what I bring to it.”

KARISHMA

Supporting our values

Experts by experience are also central to Foundations' [anti-racism transformation plan](#), with panel members contributing to both the leadership and work programme pillars this year.

Yusuf has spent the past year reverse mentoring Jo, our Chief Executive – supporting her learning on inclusion and anti-racism through his own lived experience, while gaining insight into leadership and decision making himself.



“Reverse mentoring Jo has been one of the most meaningful things I've done on the panel. I get to bring my own experience straight into conversations about leadership and anti-racism, and I've learned just as much from her about how change actually happens inside an organisation.”

YUSUF

In relation to our work programme, Harry was part of a group of panel members who helped design a funding call for evidence on support for minoritised ethnic kinship families, and supported Foundations in commissioning the research teams now delivering it.



“Helping design the funding call gave me the opportunity to help raise the concerns of voices that have been historically underrepresented, and it means a lot I was able to participate in something I am passionate about. I was able to give my input, using my own experiences, to help guide the research to be inclusive and effective.”

HARRY

Building the team

Relationships are central to this work, which is why the whole panel comes together in person once a year in London – a day spent building relationships and workshopping ambitions, both for the panel's own development and for Foundations as a whole.

Looking ahead

We're continuing to embed our EBE panel and wider lived experience across the organisation, and in 2026, we're taking that a step further by welcoming panel members onto our Board of Trustees as Board Associates. The role has been created to bring the perspectives of people with lived experience of children's social care directly into Board discussions, working alongside our Trustees and Chief Executive to shape Foundations' strategic direction.



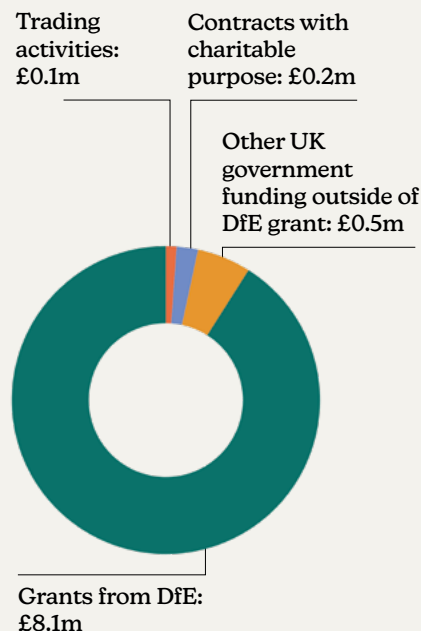
“When the whole panel gets together in London, it feels like a really special opportunity to reconnect, share experiences, and remember that we're part of something bigger than ourselves. Being together in person creates a sense of trust and belonging that's hard to build elsewhere – we can have honest conversations, support each other, and know our lived experiences are genuinely valued. The relationships we've built as a group are something I wouldn't find anywhere else, and being part of this panel gives me a sense of purpose and the chance to help shape change for children and families.”

LAUREN

MANAGING OUR RESOURCES

Income

In 2025/26, Foundations' total income, including grants and trading activities, was £8.9 million. This included £8.1 million in core funding from the Department for Education (DfE), and while this forms the majority of our funding, we continually aim to diversify our income sources. To this end, we have secured £0.5 million in additional funding from other grants, and £0.2 million on a commercial basis from our contracts for services, all of which further our charitable purpose. Income from our trading activities amounted to a further £0.1 million.

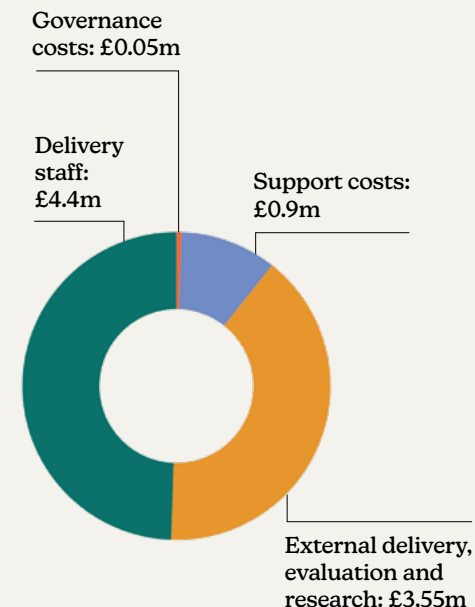


Expenditure

Foundations' total expenditure in 2025/26 was £8.9 million. This included £3.55 million on external delivery, evaluation and research, funded by our three grantors – the Department for Education, the Evaluation Task Force, and the Youth Endowment Fund.

Support costs of £0.9 million covered essential running costs, while governance costs were £0.05 million.

Expenditure on delivery staff was £4.4 million, reflecting our multidisciplinary staff team delivering the three critical aspects of a What Works Centre – evidence, policy, and practice across early intervention and children's social care – and an efficient operations support function. Foundations provides excellent value for money and does not employ any fundraising staff.



Thank you

We could not have delivered our work in 2025/26 without the support of our funders. Special thanks go to the Department for Education, the Evaluation Task Force, and the Youth Endowment Fund. Your ongoing support means we can continue to have an impact for children and families.

The financial statements were approved by the Board of Trustees on 14 July 2026 and were signed on their behalf by:

Sam White, Chair

The summarised accounts presented here are extracted from the Report of the Trustees and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2026. 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.





What Works Centre for Children & Families

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Foundations, the national What Works Centre for Children & Families is a registered charity (1188350) and a company limited by guarantee (12136703).