



VALUING CARE

Improving the life chances of children in care

THE PROBLEM

The best outcomes for children in care are achieved when Children's Services departments within local authorities tailor their support to meet each child or young person's unique needs.

However, in Children's Services departments across the country, the links between needs and the level of spending are weak, and there is often no evidence that the best outcome has been delivered.

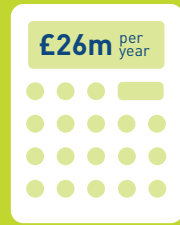
This is clearly not intentional. Staff working with children and young people always want to deliver the best outcomes for their users. Without a clear and shared understanding of needs, costs and outcomes, however, there is a significant impact on children's life chances.

Furthermore, a significant communication breakdown has occurred. Social workers, procurement professionals and providers cannot describe the nuanced and complex requirements of children and young people in care using a shared language. A new approach is needed.





Spent looking after children in care¹



Average council spend

Lack of connection between the individual needs of children, desired outcomes and the resources provided to support them



Increasingly complex needs of young people without accompanying development of provision in the market



No correlation between spend and the outcomes that are measured

The impact:

Significant funds invested in young people without delivering the best outcome for each individual

Focus on short term containment of risk rather than creating futures

Children for whom no carers or placements can be found

Inability to create more suitable supply for emergency and last-minute placements

A market that is not guided to support the needs of children in care

Commissioning relationships and the wider market have now broken under the strain.

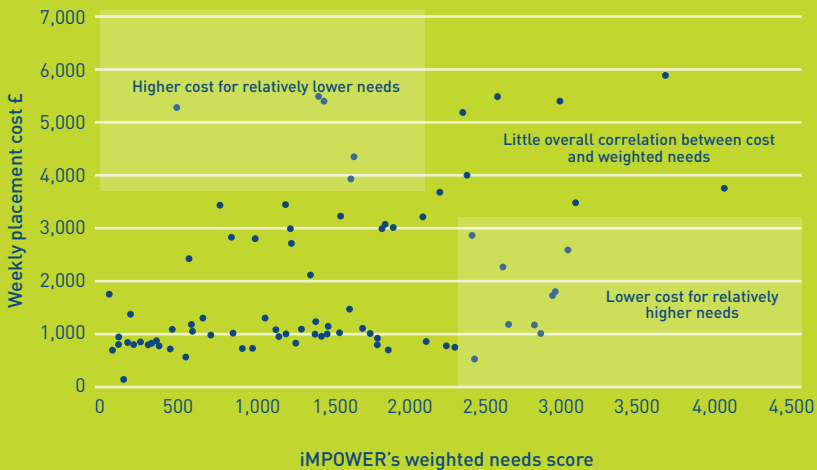
¹ DFE, local authority and school finance statistics

THE SOLUTION

iMPOWER's Valuing Care programme helps councils to improve the life chances of children in care by strengthening the links between children's needs, the outcomes being pursued, and the resources available.

By better capturing and reviewing the needs of looked after children, councils can make better decisions on support, placements and commissioning.

Example analysis of cost versus weighted needs within sample of external placements²



For less than the cost of an average residential placement, Valuing Care enables greater transparency and fairness over how resources are used across the system to improve the life chances of children in care. In doing so, it makes sure that every pound spent makes a positive difference.

Valuing Care enables councils to:

- Assess, analyse and consistently codify the needs of children and young people in care
- Show patterns of need by prevalence and complexity
- Understand how resources are currently used to meet these needs
- Identify actions to reduce cost without harming outcomes
- Develop a commissioning approach and tools that support a targeted allocation of resources, linked to needs and a demonstration of outcomes
- Review and strengthen their Sufficiency Strategy based on evidence of need, and develop a clear action plan to deliver it
- Work with a range of stakeholders including social workers, commissioning, finance and providers to strengthen placement decisions and improve their outcomes
- Provide a new footing for provider relationships, helping to re-shape the market
- Apply behavioural insight to support the required change in culture



THE RESULTS

“Valuing Care gives us a tool to describe and quantify need. It looks across the whole child rather than focusing on particular, usually narrow, areas of risk. It will, over time, help us evidence reduced need, hopefully across all our outcome domains.

It’s a great tool for our social workers to think about, and record, the needs of their children and we are starting to run reports which give us a ‘needs profile’ across our care population, something we have never been able to do – relying instead on anecdote about complexity. We also anticipate that it will lead to new conversations with children and young people, with our own foster carers and with independent providers.”

Marion Ingram

Operations Director Specialist Services, Hertfordshire County Council





“Through this project we’ve seen the importance of changing the way that social workers, commissioners and providers think about and approach providing care and support to children and young people. The tools and methodology developed through Valuing Care give us the means to capture and use intelligence about our children in a different way.

But what really made the difference was us challenging ourselves to think differently about care placements and support. It is helping us to put the focus fully on the child and their outcomes, needs and life chances in a way that transcends procedural boundaries and our ‘day jobs’ as social workers, commissioners and providers. This is a change that we have witnessed at all levels of the organisation – from frontline officers to senior managers.”

Sue Harrison

Director of Children's Services, Central Bedfordshire Council

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ABOUT IMPOWER

Since 2000, iMPower has worked exclusively within the public sector to solve complex social problems by changing behaviours. We recognise that re-designing public services requires deeper citizen insight, stronger relationships and better collaboration. Our in-depth knowledge of the public sector and our understanding of the complexities faced in delivering high quality services with shrinking budgets has enabled us to deliver real results for our clients.

iMPower is now the country's largest independent consultancy focusing on change and transformation across all local public services. Our success stems from our distinctive approach that celebrates the power of deep knowledge of the public sector and commitment to better outcomes for those accessing public services. Most of our consulting staff have previously worked in the public sector and all of our staff are passionate about driving improvements in our communities.

Find out more at www.impower.co.uk and follow us on Twitter @iMPowerconsult