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CSJ The Centre for
Social Justice

PEOPLE
NOT
PROBLEMS

*Politicians respond to five
experiences of severe and
multiple disadvantage*

*Edited by Ben Cooper and Olivia Bailey, with
contributions from Labour and Conservative MPs*

Lankelly Chase
CONNECTED

Lankelly Chase is a charitable foundation with a mission to change the systems that perpetuate 'severe and multiple disadvantage'. By this, we mean the way social harms cluster in the lives of some people and the contribution various systems make to that.

We come to this work with urgency, hearing as we do every day about the reality of life (and death) for people facing severe and multiple disadvantage. A sense of urgency, however, is not the same as understanding what to do. These essays reveal a level of political interest in severe and multiple disadvantage that is an encouraging basis for a renewed focus on the issue. The challenge is that the various actions proposed, while they would undoubtedly make a difference, draw on worldviews that can be hard to reconcile. This is not only attributable to the party political positions of the authors, it also reflects longstanding tensions found across the political spectrum about what causes severe and multiple disadvantage and how change happens.

Among these tensions are those between authors who place a central importance on place, communities and trusting relationships and others who highlight the science underpinning, say, early years' interventions. Between authors who advocate a strong national focus and others who believe in ground-up responses. Between authors who see well-funded and joined-up public services as the solution, others who want a new compact between state and citizen and others who continue to believe in a greater role for the private and voluntary sector. And between authors who emphasise the role of strong families and others who emphasise structural economic factors.

In the UK, we have care and support systems made up of a patchwork of ideas, initiatives and policies that are legacies of different eras of political thinking. We have grown so used to their coexistence that we scarcely notice the incoherence they represent. This doesn't mean that one worldview should determine the whole response. Messiness in systems is unavoidable, and a diversity of approaches is usually healthy. What lets people facing extreme disadvantage down is the lack of any attempt to make the whole add up to more than the sum of the parts.

At Lankelly Chase, we see many outstanding initiatives focused on severe and multiple disadvantage pursued by gifted people. But there is rarely any dialogue between them on what an effective overall system might look like that isn't based exclusively on their own ideas. We all, not least politicians, feel that we should be able to deliver clear and convincing answers to complex problems. No one is free to admit that we don't have the whole solution, that each of us is capable of believing quite inconsistent things about the same issue, and that perhaps the answers lie between our different perspectives.

Lankelly Chase is increasingly convinced that the outcomes we seek rely on the healthy functioning of systems rather than on the individual parts. No one is served well by people working in defensive silos, no matter how perfectly evidenced the silo. Achieving better outcomes in the future is going to require us all to get better at attending to the health of the whole. As this publication demonstrates, this includes working with the inevitability of often conflicting ideas.

We may not think that all of the authors here have got it right, but if we recognise that each one might hold a small and necessary proportion of the truth that might allow a more hopeful conversation to emerge. Where that takes us to is the need for trusted spaces for dialogue between very different actors, including those with lived experience of severe and multiple disadvantage. Where people can identify their contribution to the whole, rather than trying to define it on their own terms. It also takes us to the skills and tools needed to work with complexity. In other words, it takes us towards a more 21st century approach to age-old problems.

FOREWORD

By Andy Cook and Andrew Harrop

PEOPLE HAVE POTENTIAL to be developed, they are not problems to be solved.

As politicians, policy-makers and governments, we too often look at a person's situation and come up with strategies to fix it. Too rarely do we listen - really listen - to their stories, lives and experiences and form policy based on a true understanding of the complexity of disadvantage and the tools that people have to overcome it.

That's why this report starts with five stories: five people talking us through what multiple disadvantage really looks like.

As they do so, several things become immediately clear.

First, the problems of severe multiple disadvantage start young and demand early intervention. Take Lucy, who was placed with 19 foster families before she was eight years old; or Keith who had left education and served his first prison sentence by age 15; or William who grew up in an abusive household.

By the time we are looking at healthcare interventions, welfare support, and the criminal justice system we are already years too late.

Second, the stories highlight that governments may work in silos but people do not. Governments may deal with mental health, education, and disability through several different departments. But they all factor into the single daily struggle of children like Louise, growing up in difficult circumstances.

When public services fail to work together, it's not simply that people fall through the cracks, it is that the support agencies provide cannot relate to real life.

And third, we see that everybody has assets - strengths you can build on. Too often our services do things to people, leaving them powerless in their own lives. Enabling people means building on what they do have, not pointing out what they don't.

William speaks emotionally of how his family supported him in his darkest days; Rebecca talks about how an acting part as a dancer in a play transformed her confidence; and Lucy talks about her ambitions for her education and her future. These are building blocks for better futures.

It is these five stories that form the foundations for the 10 essays by politicians that follow, ensuring that their topics, ideas, and policy proposals draw on real lived experience.

We send our enormous thanks to the 10 MPs who have contributed their thoughts to this publication. There are obvious differences in approaches, from different authors and from different parties, which you can read for yourself. But there are also areas of great agreement.

In an age of increasingly polarised public debate it is heartening not only that groups of Labour and Conservative MPs are happy to write together in the same report, but that for all of the political disagreements they have, there are also areas around which they can all rally.

It is good to see consensus around early intervention, joined-up services and agile responses to complex problems.

We hope that you enjoy reading this report as much as we enjoyed collating it as a joint initiative between our two think tanks. But more than that, we hope that within its pages politicians, policy-makers and governments of any colour may find ideas that can truly support and empower those most disadvantaged in society to reach their full potential.
Andy Cook is chief executive of the Centre for Social Justice and Andrew Harrop is general secretary of the Fabian Society.

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Introduction

This report sets out the real-life challenges of those facing severe and multiple disadvantage and asks policymakers to respond, as *Olivia Bailey* and *Ben Cooper* explain

THIS REPORT IS about the tens of thousands of people who face multiple complex problems such as homelessness, drug and alcohol misuse, experience of the criminal justice system, serious mental health problems, and cycles of violence, abuse or trauma. These problems and experiences coincide with each other and complicate the ability of public services to provide support. Too many people fall through the gaps between different types of help or have their problems exacerbated by ill-suited support from ill-equipped public services.

Governments, service providers, campaigners and charities have all adopted different phrases to describe this challenge: 'complex needs', 'multiple needs', 'deep, chronic or extreme social exclusion', or 'severe and multiple disadvantage'. The latter is the term this report adopts.

Severe and multiple disadvantage is defined by Lankelly Chase[i], a foundation that campaigns on these issues and the funding partner for this report, as describing the 'interlocking nature of [severe] social harms'. [ii] The foundation says the term helps to avoid focusing on specific needs and implying that the challenges people face originate from their own personal characteristics rather than being caused by systemic disadvantage.

The challenge of systematic and interlocking disadvantage is not new. Successive generations of policymakers have grappled with the root causes of poverty and unemployment, violence and trauma, family breakdown and neglect. While some interventions have had success, the problem today is in many ways worse than it has ever been. Austerity has contributed to an increase in child poverty, rough sleeping and drug deaths. Stretched public services are struggling to provide the necessary level of help, with charitable provision failing to fill the gaps.

This report centres on the experiences of five people with experience of severe and multiple disadvantage: Lucy, Rebecca, Keith, Louise, and William. Fabian Society and Centre for Social Justice researchers spent time with each person and - while we've changed key details to protect their anonymity - the opening essays in this report tell their stories. The clear theme running throughout is the failure of public services to provide effective and appropriate support.

The experiences of Lucy, Rebecca, Keith, Louise and William are instructive for policymakers, and in the second half of this report we give politicians a chance to respond. The Fabian Society and the Centre for Social Justice asked one Labour and one Conservative MP to write an essay in response to five public policy challenges which emerged from the case studies. The five challenges and the MPs' responses are summarised in the box on the next page.

THE CASE STUDIES

Lucy: Fabian researchers met Lucy near the sea where she is currently living. She has experience of the care system, homelessness and mental health difficulties.

Rebecca: Fabian researchers met Rebecca in prison shortly before she was due to be released. She has experienced severe domestic violence, drug addiction and has served a number of prison sentences.

Keith: CSJ researchers met Keith through the charity Recycling Lives. Keith has spent much of his life in prison and with a drug addiction. He now has a job and his own home.

Louise: CSJ researchers met Louise near her home. She has experience of serious mental health problems and alcohol addiction.

William: CSJ researchers met William through the Fife Employment Access Trust. William suffered childhood abuse which ultimately resulted in a mental health crisis.

THE FIVE CHALLENGES TO POLICY MAKERS

Challenge one: Intervene early to give every child the best start in life

Most of the people in our case studies set out on a path towards severe and multiple disadvantage at a very young age. All five had adverse experiences during childhood that contributed to the challenges they faced later in life. These range from abuse and trauma through to falling in with "a bad group of friends". Rebecca identifies her childhood as the "critical juncture" in her life.

We asked politicians to suggest how better childhood intervention can prevent future experiences of severe and multiple disadvantage; with a focus on the importance of family and stability, the care system, and experience of school and education.

Labour response: Lucy Powell MP argues that we need a new national mission to improve the life chances of our most vulnerable children.

Conservative response: Maria Caulfield MP argues that government must focus on a child's first 1001 days, believing in every child's potential.

Challenge two: The importance of relationships and community

The experiences of Lucy, Rebecca, Keith, Louise and William show how critical relationships and community are for recovery. Lucy's example – being forced to move numerous times and never given the chance to lay down roots – is a stark reminder of the importance of belonging. Keith's example shows the significance of the friendship and support offered by a charity at the prison gates in his journey to turning his life around.

We asked politicians to consider the importance of stability in accommodation, the significance of community and roots, and the role of personal support.

Labour response: Lisa Nandy MP argues that places matter because they build the communities and relationships that are so important in times of crisis.

Conservative response: Michael Tomlinson MP suggests government must support families, invigorate communities and give individuals greater security and control over their home.

Challenge three: Public services need to work better together and build trust

Public services too often work in silos, unable to collaborate or coordinate help effectively. Homelessness is dealt by one service, substance abuse by another – and the different teams don't do enough to join their services together. Public services also need to do more to build trust, with the case studies showing that too many services overpromise, under deliver and let people down. As Lucy explains, "loads of people just don't really listen at all [and are] just very dismissive of what you have to say".

We asked politicians to consider how public services can be reformed to ensure that individuals are treated well and empowered by their interactions with the state.

Labour response: Jim McMahon MP argues we urgently need better integration of public services so that we can help the most vulnerable.

Conservative response: John Redwood MP writes that the public, private and third sector must work together to achieve results.

Challenge four: Provide appropriate help to gain skills and get into work

Lucy's ambition is to become an archaeologist. She wants to go to university, and to show that she can be trusted to have her daughter back. Rebecca's dream once she leaves prison is to "make my family proud. Get a job. Have money". People experiencing severe and multiple disadvantage are ambitious for themselves, want to develop their skills and often want to work. But the challenge ahead of them looks insurmountable and there is very little support available. Where this help is provided it can be transformative. We just have to look at Keith's example - Recycling Lives gave him a chance at a job, and he now has "the second chance he always wanted".

We asked politicians to consider what support is needed for people experiencing severe and multiple disadvantage to access education and work, including possible reform to social security.

Labour response: Stephen Timms MP argues that to enable people to work and learn, the state must invest, embrace voluntary provision and enable decisions to be taken at a local level.

Conservative response: Robert Halfon MP writes that everyone in our society must be given the means to learn, grow and thrive.

Challenge five: Support good mental health

Mental health is a key factor across the case studies, with frequent reference to long waiting lists and insufficient support. Experience of abuse and trauma is also commonplace, including harrowing instances of sustained domestic violence and emotional neglect in childhood.

We asked politicians to consider how mental health interacts with domestic violence, substance abuse and the criminal justice system, as well as suggesting ways to improve access to mental health support.

Labour response: Thangam Debbonaire MP focuses on domestic violence, and argues that the interaction of problems makes it harder for services to be effective – but we must tackle these complex situations head-on.

Conservative response: Johnny Mercer MP writes that mental health can exacerbate severe and multiple disadvantage, and argues we must fight for better mental health services.

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The essays from Labour and Conservative MPs underline clear differences in political approach. We already know that Conservatives tend to focus on the role of charity and family, while Labour MPs are more focused on the role of the state. Readers will no doubt disagree with some of the proposals and approaches. Some may think that the ideas proposed are insufficiently bold to address the scale of the challenge. But the essays also give us cause for optimism, revealing clear areas of consensus on which policy change can be built.

One significant area of agreement – and perhaps a surprising one – is the shared belief that the significant causes of severe and multiple disadvantage are structural and not a consequence of personal failure. MPs from across the divide write of 'entrenched disadvantage', 'the cycle of deprivation' and the impact of trauma and hardship. Stephen Timms notes the "resilience of the human spirit and the capacity of individuals to overcome seemingly insuperable odds". It is welcome to see politicians accept that it is the root causes of disadvantage that must be tackled, rather than trying to point the finger of blame at those who have complex needs.

Second, there is agreement that public services need to become more responsive and agile in the way that they support people with severe and multiple disadvantage. Labour MPs point to the very real damage that austerity has inflicted on public services. But they also believe that reform, not just more money, is necessary to improve the support they provide. Meanwhile John Redwood accepts that public services are 'letting too many people down' and argues that the most vulnerable should be at the front of our mind when considering reform.

There is some agreement too on the role of voluntary provision. John Redwood's enthusiasm for an increased role for private, voluntary and charitable provision will be met with caution on the left. But Stephen Timms' approach, which combines a strong state with a willingness to increase collaboration with voluntary groups, might get a warmer hearing.

There is also consensus on the importance of early intervention. Robert Halfon rails against the 'social injustices' which leave disadvantaged children behind their peers, and calls for greater investment in early years. He also calls for action on the soaring rate of school

exclusions, arguing that intervention to stop exclusions would help prevent instances of multiple disadvantage later in life. Johnny Mercer calls for early intervention on mental health, pointing out that early help and support could stop multiple disadvantage developing in the future. Jim McMahon argues that people shouldn't have to wait to get the help they need – and that earlier support will also save the state money.

Too many people who are living with severe and multiple disadvantage are being let down. Public services are siloed, children aren't getting a fair chance, and people are being denied the opportunity to lay down roots. Politicians from across the divide are always going to have disagreements, but on this issue there is also a substantial degree of consensus. A policy agenda that prioritises early intervention, improves the coordination of public services, supports the voluntary sector and challenges the structural injustices in our country has the potential to generate cooperation across a divided house. If politicians who have much they can agree on can work together, we can transform the lives of people like Lucy, Rebecca, Keith, Louise and William.

In real life

For this report, we spoke to people facing severe life challenges about their experiences - and how they might best be supported

LUCY'S STORY

Fabian Society researchers met with Lucy in a seaside location with her support worker from Fulfilling Lives, a programme that works to ensure services are more tailored and more helpful for people with complex needs.

As a child, Lucy craved stability. But her childhood was defined by the opposite: she was placed with 19 foster families before she was eight years old. It was 'inhumane', Lucy described it, 'to uproot somebody so many times'. Her childhood, in her own words, 'was just lots of moving, and lots of people'.

When she was eventually placed in a children's home, Lucy would climb out through the windows to spend time with her friends. She was 'really naughty' at school, she says now. She was excluded from most schools and did not complete any GCSEs.

Lucy has struggled to access the help she needs. Although she was able to stay in care for longer than usual, leaving at 21 rather than 18, Lucy left without the necessary support around her. As she describes it, social services 'literally packed my bags, gave me some food vouchers, and left me near the local church with no help, nothing'.

In adulthood, Lucy found her childhood experiences repeating themselves. Since leaving care four years ago Lucy told us she has stayed in eight different hostels or homes and had three periods of homelessness.

The first hostel she moved to after leaving care was 'a really, really, really badly run hostel' with 20 to 30 people,

one toilet, and one shared bath per floor. Lucy's room was 'tiny' with broken windows and 'pigeons [who] used to literally come in and wake me up in my room'. While pregnant, Lucy stayed in a hostel where 'the woman in the unit opposite me was selling and smoking smack and crack [heroin and cocaine]. Eventually, Lucy was forced to move 100 miles away to live with her new baby in an area she knew little about. She said there was 'no support, no anything.'

> ## 'Social services literally packed my bags, gave me some food vouchers and left me'

With a mental health problem and a child, Lucy needed safety, security, and help – 'a lot of help, because I was doing it all on my own'. She had no family to provide this, and her friends were facing challenges with drugs and alcohol.

Sounding frustrated, Lucy described how social services treated her while she was pregnant. They offered 'loads of help, help for my mental health, help with housing, all sorts', but none of it ever materialised. 'Loads of people just don't really listen at all [and are] just very dismissive of what you say'.

Lucy's daughter, who has recently turned one, has now been taken into care. Lucy has very limited contact but is

determined to prove that she is capable of having her back.

Lucy is very clear about the help she needs. Explaining that she doesn't 'do very well' in shared environments, which can cause her to panic or become angry, Lucy would like anger management classes or cognitive behavioural therapy. Lucy told us she'd never been taught how to contain her anger: "If you haven't shown people ways to control that anger, they're not going to know." But accessing the support you know you want is difficult, Lucy argues, "when you don't know what you're doing, and you don't know any guidelines, and you can't contact the relevant people. It's very tricky".

When asked how services could be different, Lucy prioritised mental health care. It is currently far too complicated, Lucy argued, to access support if you have a mental health problem, because "you need so many bloody referrals". It is easier to access support if you are overdosing than it is if you are struggling with your mental health, Lucy tells us.

Despite an unimaginably tough upbringing and 'just a continuous cycle of being let down by various services', Lucy tells us about her dream: to be an archaeologist and present a programme like Time Team. Her desire to go to university is clear, and her plan to do so is mapped out: she wants to do her GCSEs next year and then study an access course at university, ideally Canterbury. She is determined not to let her past decide her future and to get her daughter back.

REBECCA'S STORY

Fabian Society researchers met with Rebecca in prison as she was preparing to complete her sentence. This meeting was facilitated by Fulfilling Lives who were helping Rebecca prepare for life after prison.

Rebecca was only 13 when she met a much older man. They met at a time when Rebecca was largely avoiding school, getting into fights so she could 'be excluded'. He introduced Rebecca to heroin at a party, eventually encouraging her to shoplift to fund their drug habits. She has been in a cycle of being arrested and imprisoned ever since.

Rebecca managed to leave this first abusive relationship, but soon entered another. Her next partner was also a drug user and, over a period of 16 years, subjected Rebecca to severe domestic violence. He was arrested a couple of times, but Rebecca never talked about it to the police. Early in the relationship, aged 15, Rebecca fell pregnant. By the time she had a baby girl, her partner was in prison and seemingly out of her life. With support from her nan, she was able to 'get clean', 'get a flat', and 'be happy'.

But soon after his release, he entered Rebecca's life once again. In her words, 'I knew that he was using [heroin] in the flat and I put up with it for a little and then it just made me start craving again so I got back on the heroin'. Her life became 'chaotic again'. Rebecca's daughter was frequently left in the care of Rebecca's nan, until she had a stroke and couldn't look after her any longer. Social services stepped in and Rebecca's daughter was taken in to care and subsequently adopted.

These circumstances led Rebecca to have a breakdown, and she was sectioned for four weeks. As a coping mechanism, she smoked crack cocaine. When her baby boy was born, in the maternity wing of prison, he was addicted from birth. He was adopted by Rebecca's sister, and she can only see him at her sister's discretion.

Rebecca continued to experience horrific domestic violence. It culminated one night. Still troubled by the extent of the violence perpetuated, Rebecca said "what I witnessed that night and what I suffered … I can't explain it, it was bad". But she managed to briefly describe some of the events that night: 'he beat me …and the person who lived with us.' After that night, and the horrific injuries she sustained, Rebecca took steps to 'get away from him', ensuring he was found guilty of grievous bodily harm with intent and sentenced to prison.

> When Rebecca's baby boy was born, in the maternity wing of prison, he was addicted from birth

Rebecca suffers from poor physical and mental health, a consequence of years of drug use and abuse. She has suffered pneumonia twice, had nine blood clots, leg ulcers, anxiety, paranoia, and depression. Rebecca found it hard to get help, especially for her mental health. To do an assessment, she had to be clean and struggled to be. Failing to get support, especially for the pain she was in, resulted in more drug use: "I was just in so much pain … that I was using more thinking it was helping the pain go away but I was making it worse".

Rebecca's latest sentence – of more than 12 months – is the longest she has served. Shorter prison sentences, Rebecca claims, did not provide her with the adequate opportunities for the training and education that might have prevented her from reoffending. "When you're in here for a short amount of time nothing really gets done … You've got to wait. You've got to do five days 'lay down' it's called" – an 'induction' into prison life – before you are considered for support or training." For someone like Rebecca, who has multiple experiences of prison life, this is effectively wasted time. Rebecca argued that avoiding lengthy inductions for those in and out of prison would help prisoners access support quicker, encouraging rehabilitation.

This longer sentence, however, was different for Rebecca. She was able to get a job in the kitchen, providing useful skills for after her release. A course on anger management and cognitive behavioural therapy has been extremely helpful, Rebecca told us. An acting part as a dancer in a play, performed to paying attendees, has transformed her confidence.

Looking back over her life, Rebecca identified her childhood as a critical juncture. Better education on drugs would have helped and made a difference to her life, Rebecca argued, because she 'had no real knowledge' of the dangers. Rebecca also felt let down by social services, saying that she had lost trust in them. Explaining she said: "You ask them something and it's 'oh yeah, I'll do it' but it doesn't get done."

Rebecca was released from prison just before Christmas 2018. After 17 years of sofa surfing, staying with drug users in crack houses, and living on the streets, Rebecca will be living in her own accommodation. With her sister and auntie contributing to the rent, Rebecca believes this offers the best chance of a stable life. Her hopes for the future are simple: "Be drug free, sort my mental health out, keep my accommodation … see my children. Make my family proud. Get a job. Have money. Just be happy."

LOUISE'S STORY

Centre for Social Justice researchers met Louise through 1NE, a charity based in London.

Three decades ago, Louise was at school. An unusually tall, slight and rather timid teenager, she was bullied relentlessly. But away from school, her family life appeared to be everything one would hope for: "My dad always worked and the family would take holidays in the summer. There was no abuse at home," Louise said.

However, her mother suffered from depression and Louise felt only she could provide the emotional support her mother desperately needed. For this reason, she felt unable to talk about what was happening to her at school. The stress built up. Louise developed alopecia and started to self-harm.

By Louise's twenties, things appeared to be easier. She worked in the City, with the boozy culture of after-work socials going unquestioned. However, work and socials prevented

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Louise from noticing the warning signs that something was wrong, eventually leading to a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and clinical depression. She said, 'the work keeps you pre-occupied … I didn't notice'.

Louise quickly descended into a darker period of her life. Her marriage was unhappy with routinely hostile encounters. Her drinking escalated. Her mental health declined. Eventually, unable to cope and in deep desperation, she stabbed herself in her leg, severing an artery. Losing custody of her children. Louise's lost her desire to cope and drinking became her terrible refuge. She explained: "I hated what I had done and I hated the drink." But she added: "I drank to black out the hurt I felt about being drunk all the time."

Louise's parents encouraged her to seek help and she went to rehabilitation. She left treatment after months of sobriety but, with little in the way of after care, she was drunk within two weeks. High strength cider costing as little as £2.50 and cheap wine blurred out the months that followed. Looking back, Louise said she was "dead. I was just a body. I can't believe I was that person now".

Ready to give up completely, Louise's local council offered to pay for her detox on one condition: that she attend 1NE for two weeks, a treatment centre in London. She agreed. It changed her life.

> Eventually Louise began to engage and the community helped her live life both in and out of the treatment centre

For the first six weeks Louise said little, she understood little. Eventually, she began to engage and the community helped her live life both in and out of the treatment centre.

Today, more than five years after her last drink and first day at 1NE, Louise is sober and ambitious about her future. She has her kids back and she is helping children to understand the need to talk about their mental health and to disclose bullying.

WILLIAM'S STORY

Centre for Social Justice researchers met William through Fife Employment Access Trust, a charity based in Glenrothes.

William is in his forties, living happily in Fife with his wife and three children. He works for the Individual Placement Support (IPS) service, in conjunction with Fife Employment Access Trust (FEAT), and very much enjoys his job. Life, at the moment, is good for William but things have not always been that way.

William describes his early childhood as difficult. He regularly witnessed his mother suffering physical and verbal abuse at the hands of his father. The break-up of his parents led to him living with his mother for the remainder of his childhood. Although this was a more stable home life it was not a loving one – he was very much made to feel like a stepchild by his stepfather as opposed to a loved member of the family.

William did not only witness abuse as a child. He suffered from it too. Through his childhood he was subjected to serious and sustained abuse by his brother. His abuser died before any action could be taken against him for the crimes he committed, which provided no solace to him. Whilst he was relieved that the

abuse had stopped he was unable to get the closure he needed.

Despite this, William achieved well at school and college and ended up working as a manager at a leading insurance company. It was at work however, that life changed for him, an innocent conversation with a colleague triggered off all that had happened to him as a child leading to a serious breakdown. Despite having the right policies and procedures in place his employer let him down: in place of support came a lack of understanding and pressure – resulting in the company terminating his employment through ill-health retirement.

Left unable to work, and eventually diagnosed with complex PTSD William speaks of the void of not having work in his life. During his hardest times he was hospitalised for three months and had to wait over a year for a referral for psychological support. Medication that he was prescribed helped to numb the pain he was feeling but left him disengaged and distant, unable to support his family in any way. He speaks of the impact his poor mental health had on his ability to function well – significant short-term memory loss and an inability to perform even the most basic tasks and a pronounced loss of confidence and self-esteem.

> During William's hardest times he was hospitalised for over a year and had to wait over a year for a referral for psychological support

During these darkest of days William speaks of the immense love and support of his wife and children throughout this period. He fondly recalls how his wife in particular took on everything to ensure the family was able to keep things together.

With support, William turned his life around. Occupational therapists helped William regain his ability to do, as he puts it 'basic things around the home' such as cooking, and regain his confidence to re-engage with his community – helping him to do things like visit the shops for the first time in a long time. Accessing other services was not always as easy. Eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing (EMDR) which is recognised as particularly useful to people with PTSD was only available privately and art therapy, which proved incredibly useful to him, was taken away when the only practitioner in Fife relocated to Glasgow. He also felt that the emphasis of the services he was accessing was too focused on looking at the past and going over old ground. It helped to talk about it, but he wanted to move on with his life.

An occupational therapist's referral to FEAT helped significantly accelerate William's recovery. Initially apprehensive about attending, the organisation's 'Employ your mind' course helped him think about the future for the first time in years. His outlook changed and he was able to be more optimistic about what the future could hold. Having been out of work for five years, after just six months with FEAT, and following a further referral to IPS William was able to re-enter into employment.

William's journey, particularly over the five years from breakdown to recovery, has highlighted many things that he believes need to change. Crucially, he feels that there needs to be better and faster access to services, and that funding promised by government needs to reach the frontline, often charitable services, that take a personalised approach to make a real difference to their lives.

William remains positive about the future, and although he fears darker days may lie ahead, he has now built up the resilience and the tools to deal with them.

KEITH'S STORY

Centre for Social Justice researchers met Keith through the Recycling Lives company, based in Preston.

Keith has been in and out of prison since age 15. He reckons that has been in 12 different prisons and has committed a total of 152 driving offences.

Born and raised in Liverpool, Keith has lived with his mum for most of his life. Keith's dad left home when he was just five years old. The two never really had a good relationship, they were always fighting, but Keith has always been close to his mum: "My mum means the world to me."

When he was young, he fell in with a bad group of friends. They all showed very little interest in school. By the time he was 15, Keith had left education. He didn't have any qualifications to show. He admits that he didn't really try hard. Most days, he would go in, get the mark for attending, and leave with his friends. His teachers would try and chase him, but it did not change anything.

He just wanted to be like the older kids on his estate. They'd drive around the block with all of the younger kids looking on in admiration. They were his role models. There wasn't much else to do and so eventually he started just copying them. He got a buzz from driving.

His group of mates would club together any money they had and buy old bangers to drive around the block. Back then, the police used to just give out tickets for driving offences. There was not any real deterrent: you'd give in your documents, get a ticket, and move along. So, the first time that Keith was sentenced for driving whilst disqualified he 'shit himself'.

He was sentenced for six months at Hindley young offenders'institution. When he was released, he went back home and his parents tried to lecture him. His dad wanted to give him a 'kick up the arse'. His mum tried to ground him. It did not change much.

Things only got worse. At 16, Keith had started to steal cars. There were two lads on the estate who would sell them on, it was an easy way of making decent money. To get money, he'd either steal or ask friends if they had any work going dealing drugs.

The cycle continued to repeat itself. Keith would be sentenced, go to prison, bump into friends on the wings, be given his discharge grant and return home to start the whole process again. His sentences got lengthier after he started dealing drugs. One time he was convicted for dealing and sentenced for two years and eight months. After serving his time on the inside, he'd returned back to Liverpool only to be sentenced again for another drug offence three weeks after leaving the prison gates.

> Aged 41, Keith realised it was time to sort his life out. He could not keep returning to prison

He had smoked weed on the outside but, after being locked up with an addict in Walton, he began to use heroin. It was whilst at Kirkham that he discovered spice. Keith didn't understand how dangerous this addiction was. He would be walking around the prison, thinking he looked OK, unaware of how badly spice had damaged his body.

Aged 41, Keith realised it was time to sort his life out. He could not keep returning to prison, something had to change. It was at this point that he learned about Recycling Lives. Recycling Lives is a total waste management company, based in Preston. It provides a multitude of rehabilitation projects for offenders, offering prisoners a real opportunity for employment. At present, they operate academies in 11 prisons, provide a rehabilitation project for ex-offenders and homeless people, and run a food redistribution centre to tackle food waste and poverty.

Up until this point, Keith hadn't had much support. When he was younger, the mentality in prison was very much one of keeping your head down and getting on with it. These days, Keith thinks the system is getting better. There are more opportunities to get help if you want it. Prison is far from perfect, but there seems to have been a gradual realisation concerning the importance of rehabilitation.

Keith put himself forward for a place at a Recycling Lives Academy whilst serving a sentence at HMP Lancaster Farm.

After working with Recycling Lives for 11 months throughout his sentence, Keith was offered a place at their residential. This time, upon release, Keith wasn't just sent away with the bare minimum funding for a train ticket. He was picked up by Barry, a Recycling Lives employee, who took him straight to his new home. This was his turning point. If there had not been that support at the gate, Keith thinks it would have been all too easy to slip back into old habits. But something was different this time. He had people who could support him.

Starting out in the canteen, Keith soon moved on to the food redistribution plant and gradually worked his way up to working on site at the recycling company. He finally has a permanent job where he gets to drive forklifts day in day out. He has moved out of his mum's home and finally has his own place. This is the second chance he really wanted.
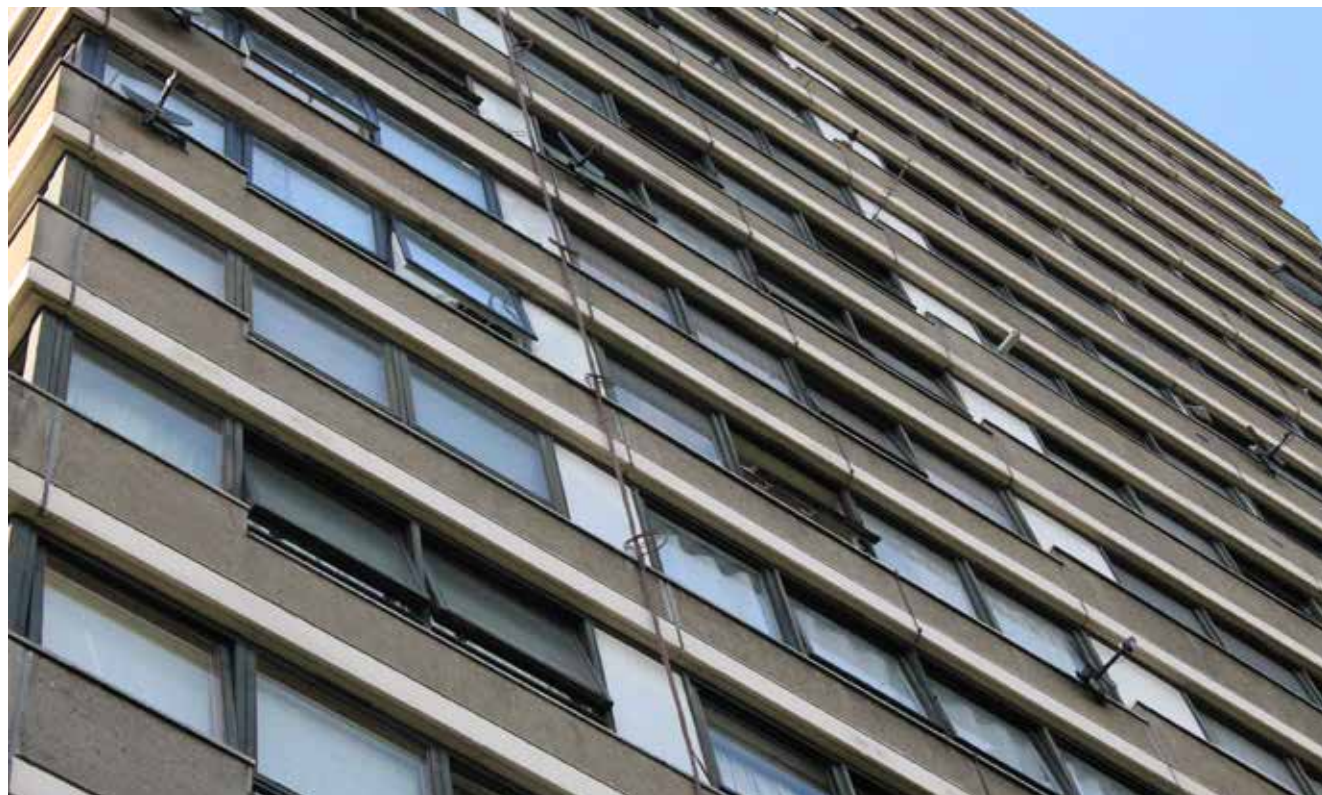
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Every child matters

We need a new national mission to improve the life chances
of our most vulnerable children, writes *Lucy Powell*

*Lucy Powell is the Labour MP
for Manchester Central*

IN THE EXPERIENCES of Lucy, Rebecca, Keith, Louise and William, we see stories of difficult childhoods which are punctuated by trauma, abuse, neglect. We see too a society unable to help these young people to process their experiences and the resulting consequences of criminality, substance misuse, poor mental health and potential wasted.

But what stands out in their experiences is not simply adversity and trauma, but resilience and recovery too. Stories like these show clearly that at every stage of people's journeys, there are chances to step in and provide tailored support to help. Where people have engaged with consistent and appropriate support, they have been able to rebuild their lives despite their personal challenges. Therefore, while we know that trauma has lasting impacts and that wider social determinants like family poverty are strongly related to life chances, we cannot accept fatalism.

Trauma at any age can define life choices and destroy life chances, but the impact on a child's development is particularly long-lasting and damaging as all the evidence from our education and care systems shows. How well you do at school exams as a teen is dictated by the level of your development before you walk through the school gates. Whether you will end up incarcerated, or on the edges of crime, of addiction or of abuse

can often be defined by your experience of parenting and whether you end up in the care system.

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This makes early intervention so important. Early intervention simply means providing the most appropriate support at the first opportunity working with a family or young person rather than waiting until statutory thresholds are met requiring costly statist interventions.

There are several themes that particularly stand out from the experiences in this report:

- The importance of relationships and a stable life

- The care system and the challenge of statutory social work trying to change things in isolation

- The impact of school and education or of its absence when a young person is excluded.

Embedding an early help system for families

Many families encounter challenges. Their ability to cope with these challenges depends on how stable and secure their lives are, with factors such as their income level, the nature of their accommodation and employment and their skills level hugely important.

Our current welfare and social care system too often intervenes late to protect children from harm rather than stepping in early to equip families with the tools they need to cope with challenges. We need a system of social welfare and early help – with supporting children and families at its heart – running right across the public sector from schools, nurseries, police and health through to the Department for Work and Pensions and the tax system. This requires early intervention to be embedded as an overarching principle, guiding every budget, every policy decision and every government announcement.

The past 10 years have seen us go backwards when it comes to early intervention funding – with devastating consequences for our future. The Treasury has wielded the austerity axe for almost a decade with little regard for where it falls, creating a false economy where universal services and non-statutory support are cut back or dropped altogether. Innovative local authority-funded programmes have been early casualties of the slash and burn approach towards early intervention funding since 2010.

Government departments that would benefit the most from an 'early help state' don't pay into the system at all. The Department for Work and Pensions, the Home Office, and the Ministry of Justice would all benefit hugely from a reduction in the number of adults unable to grasp opportunities, or steer clear of a life of crime. Yet high-cost interventions later down the line are the norm.

With the cost of a prison place for a year for one inmate roughly the same as the annual cost of the salary of a family support worker able to support multiple families, we need to make smarter choices on early intervention to break the cycle.

The government should reverse funding cuts to early intervention services, with local areas allocated increased funding and devolved powers to develop and embed early intervention services in their localities to tackle disadvantage. By creating an early intervention fund, we could start the process of shifting from crisis to early intervention and an 'early help state' over time.

We know that supporting families works, with the latest Troubled Families Programme evaluation showing improved outcomes. But the £184m per year programme is due to end in 2020[iii] and little is known about what might survive the spending review process. We should learn from the success of this programme and create a family stability fund, supporting families early to work on their issues and to help them provide stability. We could fund this by ending the married couple's tax break. Family support services genuinely joined up at local level, with no barriers between health, education and care should be embedded across the country. Access to targeted and specialist services should be available for families and children at any age and any stage.

Sure Start children's centres should be rejuvenated ensuring that parents are supported through pregnancy and the critical 1,001 days between conception and the age of two, supporting both parents to bond positively with their children and each other to ensure a stable family life from the very beginning.

Life lessons: The care system and the challenge of social work trying to change things in isolation

Our children's social care system is on the verge of crisis.

Unsustainable funding pressures, accompanied by increasing demand, are stretching services and increasing strain on social care leaders and social workers.[iv] At the same time, targeted or specialist services like mental health, drug and alcohol services and homelessness provision are all seeing their budgets reduced.

When we look at the experiences of people like Lucy in this report, we see a pattern of interventions focused on short-term crisis management leading to multiple placement moves and cycles of cared-for children having their own children taken into care. In the stories involving social work interventions, earlier experiences of trauma are displayed through destructive behaviour leading to social exclusion, criminalisation, homelessness and substance misuse.

The Children's Commissioner estimates that around 2.1 million children are living in households with complex needs including domestic abuse and mental health issues. Yet many receive very little support until they reach crisis point through statutory intervention. Relying on statutory children's social work to support children and young people is not enough.

The inequality of outcomes experienced by children in care is stark and shaming. We consistently fail children in care, as Lucy's story shows so clearly. A third of children in residential homes have had six or more placements, with almost half having histories of abuse and neglect. Six in 10 children have mental health difficulties. Children living in children's homes are 13 times more likely to be criminalised than other children according to the Howard League for Penal Reform. The

impact is lifelong and deeply damaging. Exposure to the criminal justice system for already vulnerable children can have further disastrous consequences for their life chances.

Doing the right thing for these children will ultimately save money. It is a staggering 63 times more expensive per year to place a child in a residential home than it is with foster parent which in itself is much more costly than timely successful interventions to prevent families breaking down in the first place.

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It is time we restate that every child still matters. We need a new national mission to improve the life chances of our most vulnerable children through increased resources for local authorities, investment in the social care workforce and more effective holistic support for children in and around the edges of the care system, alongside more focused educational support. As well as improved early interventions services and family support, we must ensure that children have stability of placements, reducing unnecessary moves, and putting the interests of children before any financial imperative. Early help for young people and their families who have faced difficulties is vital if we are to minimise any long-term impact on their lives.

In order to care for children better we need to care for adults better too. Adults with experience of domestic violence, addiction, criminality or unstable housing are likely to struggle to parent effectively. We need to work with families to make lasting changes, rather than intervene in ways which perpetuate cycles of trauma and disadvantage. Providing early help to

children, their parents, and the wider family network can help keep children out of the care system when this is in the best interests of the child. We must not forget that having a child removed is itself a trauma and we should roll out programmes which work with mothers who have had children removed from their care to support them to make changes and reduce the chance of further removals. Any mother whose children are taken into care should receive specialist one-to-one support to tackle the causes of instability and reduce future trauma. As we see with Lucy and Rebecca, these mothers are not the problem, but people who need compassion and support.

But we can't do all this without sorting the funding out. We need to ensure that local authorities can continue to fund a children's social care system which demand necessitates. The fundamental changes needed to move from crisis intervention to early help will not be possible if driven by the need to cut costs in the short term. The government must agree a new compact with local authori-

ties with a long-term, 10-year funding strategy to improve both children's social care and the wider social welfare system it exists within. A children's social care workforce strategy should be developed to ensure all other frontline workers have the skills and resources necessary to support families effectively.

Life lessons: early years and education

The trajectory for our young people starts long before they arrive at school. The development gap between disadvantaged children and their peers can be up to 18 months before they start school, and many do not catch up over their educational life.[v] Our system of early education and care is failing many children, and changes risk entrenching disadvantage. The government's new 30 hours of free childcare is only available to children of working parents. Analysis I conducted with the Social Market Foundation found that three-quarters of new money going into childcare in this parliament is being spent on families in the top half of the income spectrum, with just 2.7

per cent on the poorest children.[vi]

Sure Start has experienced a funding cut of £1bn between 2010 and 2018, with Sutton Trust research showing hundreds of centres have closed and services have been hollowed out. We urgently need to rejuvenate Sure Start and we must also ensure that every child, not just those of often better-off parents, is eligible for 30 funded hours of early education and care. This can be funded through a reduction in the upper eligibility threshold as the education select committee has suggested.[vii]

Schools are being forced to plug the gaps caused by austerity and decimated support services

Our failure to give every child the best start in life is compounded by an education system that fails to

give enough people a second chance. Vulnerable children are falling through the net and too many are being 'off-rolled' - pushed out of mainstream education. As the Education Policy Institute recently highlighted, one in three pupils in social care, one in seven disadvantaged pupils, and one in eight black pupils have left school rolls for unexplained reasons.[viii] We know that this has devastating consequences – with exclusions having a lasting impact on the life chances of young people and making them instantly more at risk of safeguarding concerns. But schools cannot be left on their own to deal with the causes of challenging behaviour.

Because of funding cuts to other public services, schools are increasingly expected to meet a variety of social and health needs of children and their families, as well as too often providing food and clothing for families living below the poverty line. They are being forced to plug the gaps caused by austerity and decimated support services at a time when they too are facing significant funding pressures. Properly funded social welfare built around the principles of early help would ease the pressures on schools and allow proper long-term partnership work across the whole workforce working with children and families.

Whilst school standards have been transformed by successive governments, results for disadvantaged children remain stagnant and in some cases, they are going backwards.[ix] Changes to the accountability regime for schools have meant that many vulnerable children are falling through the net and too many poorer pupils are failing to reach their potential and achieve good results at every life stage.[x]

The high-stakes, low-trust accountability system means that school leaders are increasingly forced to choose between what is best for individual children and what is best for the school.

The increasing scandal of children off-rolled, pushed out of mainstream education, is a consequence of this.

Conclusion

Many of the problems faced by Lucy, Rebecca, Keith, Louise and William are a result of entrenched disadvantage and consequences of painful experiences in childhood. No single policy response could have saved any of these people from the trauma they have faced or helped them to rebuild their lives after their experiences. But their stories do show that with the right support, traumatic experiences can be understood

and processed, enabling people to turn their lives around.

The policies needed to shift the dial on tackling disadvantage are not rocket science. We do not need lots of whizzy new initiatives. Instead it is the long hard road of working with families and children intensively, one to one, whenever and wherever they need it, and for as long as they need support, that will make the real difference. By playing a greater, smarter role in family life, the state can support and enable families to thrive, and helping them to pick up the pieces when problems arise.

This requires consistent, joined-up policy making across the whole public sector and a system which gives local areas the long-term funding, powers and responsibilities to deliver an early help guarantee for all families and children. We will need a new kind of politics, one that builds consensus across the political divide, so that a change in government does not take us back to square one.

Getting all this right means we can enhance the life chances of all, tackle multiple disadvantage and limit the intergenerational impact of trauma and hardship.

The first 1,001 days

Belief in a child's potential must sit at the heart of government early years policy, writes *Maria Caulfield*

Maria Caulfield is the Conservative MP for Lewes

A PERSON'S LIFE CHANCES can be determined by what happens to them from the moment of conception until they are two years old, according to many academics and experts.

These first 1,001 days are the most critical period in shaping future health and wellbeing. They are vital for a child's personal development as an infant's brain and neurological pathways are set for life. International studies have shown that when a baby's development falls behind in the first years of life, they are more likely to fall even further behind in subsequent years. If problems are encountered during this stage of development, the consequences can live with them for the rest of their life affecting their intellectual, social and emotional health and wellbeing. In many cases, left unresolved, the consequences can be passed on through the generations leading to a cycle of deprivation that has tragic consequences as illustrated in the case studies in this report.

If a child in their first 1,001 days experiences any domestic violence, drug or alcohol abuse, absent parent(s), mental health problems, child services, homelessness, or physical or mental abuse, they will achieve less academically, earn less, and will be less healthy, according to the former chief medical officer Sally Davies. The all-party parliamentary group for conception to age two produced a manifesto for the first 1,001 days, estimating that 26 per cent of babies in the UK have been affected by at least one of these factors and that this exposure has long-term effects for both the individual and their family. Tackling these issues must be a social justice priority if we are to ensure everyone has the best possible start in life. As Sally Davies argues: "We know too that not intervening now will affect not just this generation of children and young people but also the next."

Studying Lucy's experiences in the report, while we don't know the exact dates, the fact that she was placed with 19 foster families before she was eight, indicates that significant negative experiences occurred in her first 1,001 days. These have clearly shaped the rest of her life, leading to mental health problems, living in poor housing, low educational achievements and her own children being taken from her because she could not cope.

> Those who experienced problems in school had far too much experience at home of addiction, domestic violence or absent fathers or mothers

While the experience of one example, the pattern of events is frighteningly similar to my own experiences of having grown up in a tough part of south London in the 1980s, where more of my friends ended up going to prison rather than university. Although as children we all grew up in the same area, went to similar schools, lived in similar housing and had similarly low household incomes, those who avoided drugs, crime, unemployment and prison had one thing in common: a stable home life. Those who experienced problems from early on in school already had far too much experience at home of addiction, domestic violence or absent fathers or mothers.

When I became a councillor in Brighton, I represented one of the most deprived council estates in the south east with similar levels of deprivation to Tower Hamlets in London and Moss Side in Manchester. The patterns of experience were very similar to those I had seen growing up and reflected the experiences faced in these case studies, in particular those of William with his experience of domestic violence as a child and the experience of being a child with an absent father. The impact of these life events so early on in life can lead to a form of social exclusion from mainstream society.

In Brighton we found that a significant minority of 1,500 households had people experiencing multiple disadvantage, with 25 per cent of those people concentrated in the most deprived 10 per cent of neighbourhoods. Most of the adults finding themselves in this situation, had themselves been born into this environment. As Brighton and Hove Council wrote in 2009: "Social exclusion was an extreme consequence of what happens when someone does not get a fair deal throughout their lives often because of the disadvantages they face at birth." Through the work that was done to tackle pockets of deprivation in the city of Brighton, we found that the cycle of exclusion was about more than income or poverty. It was also about a combination of problems such as unemployment, poor housing, high crime and family breakdown.

Very few studies have looked at the impact of being born and growing up in an environment where there is no aspiration or where no one encourages you to succeed, whether that be your parents, teachers, social workers or others. In my experience, many children who are born into families with intergenerational social issues are written off at conception. Even if they don't experience any of the life events similar to Lucy's, their life chances are significantly impacted as if they had. For me, a poverty of ambition in the first 1,001 days is as significant as any of the other life events in determining a child's future.

The importance of the first 1,001 days of a person's life and the negative consequences of problems during this time are clear. The key question is therefore how we can mitigate any problems to improve the life chances of those who don't get the best start in life. Previous governments have attempted to come up with solutions and failed. David Cameron's life chances strategy was dropped in 2016 and the social justice green paper that was to replace it subsequently turned into the current social mobility action plan, which critics have said does not address the role played by a person's early years. The focus in the social mobility action plan is on improving chances once a child reaches school age but as we have seen much of the damage has already been done by this stage.

Many experts have made recommendations about how life chances could be improved in the first 1,001 days of a person's life and these can be grouped into two broad categories: specialist support in the anti-, peri- and post-natal stages; and strengthening families. Both of these have at their heart the aspiration that someone's start in life should not determine their destination. For me, this belief in a person's potential is what is missing in current government policy and without it the cycle of deprivation is perpetuated, and lives are written off before they have even begun.

Specialist support in the anti-, peri- and post-natal stages of life is a recommendation that can be found in many reports including the APPG 1,001 critical days report. The evidence suggests that specialist support for expectant mothers needs to include tackling issues such as depression during pregnancy, domestic violence and addiction. Any expectant mother experiencing any of these events is likely to see their child have poorer outcomes throughout their life. Having access to specialist professionals who can deal with these issues not only improves the life chances of the mother but the child she is expecting too.

Unsurprisingly, parenting is incredibly important and a driver of social inequality in a child's development before school, as the education select committee found in its report Tackling Disadvantage in Early Years. The Supporting Families manifesto, produced by a group of Conservative MPs in 2017, identified the family as the most influential factor in a person's life and underlined that a dysfunctional family environment was a predictor of poorer outcomes in life. A study by the Sutton Trust found that children without secure parental bonds were more likely to have behavioural and developmental problems. A home learning environment where reading and language was practised by parents was crucial in improving life chances for children. This proved particularly difficult in those homes where parents themselves struggled with literacy.

To help families, the Supporting Families manifesto recommended a cross-governmental approach with a cabinet minister responsible for ensuring families are supported by every department and that they are central to all government policies, whether that be the government drugs strategy or welfare reforms that keep supporting families staying together.

The experiences of individuals drawn together for this report and wider evidence show that the first 1,001 days of a person's life can be the most influential in determining not only their future but also their children's. Tackling issues of addiction, abuse, family breakdown and mental health problems during pregnancy can transform life chances for those not yet born. Interventions later in life are helpful but interventions in the first 1,001 days can make the greatest difference. While many experts and think tanks have made recommendations about how this can be done, successive governments have failed to put anything into practice that realistically makes a difference. As a result, we have generations of young people not fulfilling their true potential. We have to do better.

In the right place

Places matter because they build the communities
and relationships that are so important in times of crisis.
Lisa Nandy explains

*Lisa Nandy is the
Labour MP for Wigan*

COMMUNITIES AND PLACES matter. That is one of the major lessons from the huge political and social upheaval of recent years. Community forges political and social identities that are essential to understanding the events that have defined the last half decade of British politics.

Brexit revealed a profound geographical divide. Areas that have seen growth were less dissatisfied with the political system and more likely to vote remain while places that have experienced relative decline, with falling populations and a greater frustration with the political system were far more likely to have voted leave.

The discontent was fuelled by the visible decline of our high streets: shops, libraries, pubs and post offices close, bus routes are cancelled and vital services lose funding. The importance of these places and services is in the stability, continuity and support they provide – offering an anchor to families and neighbours in a world that increasingly feels it is spinning out of control.

Behind this deeply-felt sentiment is a demographic shift over several decades. Research by Ian Warren for the Centre for Towns found a migratory phenomenon that has left towns with ageing populations as young people move to urban areas for employment or higher education and find increasingly there is little to return to. Three-quarters of the increase in 45 to 64-year-olds and over 65s between 1981 and 2011 took place in smaller communities including villages and towns; conversely 80 per cent of the increase in 25 to 44-year-olds happened in large cities and larger towns.

This demographic change has undermined once strong communities that enabled young people to stay at home if they chose and the institutions that underpin that social fabric and provide the beating heart of the community – high streets, libraries, pubs, and social clubs that make up the building blocks of a British town. The lack of response across the political system has confirmed to many that they are right to reject the political settlement. What use is a politics that shrugs its shoulders when people lament the loss of these important spaces that connect and root us and form part of our identities?

In times of crisis, this essential feeling of rootedness and belonging becomes a lifeline. In hard times, overcoming multiple disadvantages requires a broader community of support. People who are vulnerable in our society need this support to turn their lives around – and this support often comes from their community, as Louise and Keith's experiences highlighted in this report show.

These cases show us that change is driven by people themselves. Those who face challenges in their own lives know better than anyone what the problem is, see more clearly what strengths and assets they have in their lives and have a deeper understanding of how they might use them to make positive change. The role of the state is not to prescribe what that change looks like, but to create the conditions so people can make change happen. That includes a support base that provides stability and care.

This was very apparent in the time I worked with homeless teenagers at the charity Centrepoint. I saw how a stable home, an income that provides dignity and the freedom to make choices, and most of all healthy relationships with other people are conditions without which change isn't possible. Relationships and the support they provide are central to overcoming disadvantage.

The importance of relationships is exemplified in Keith's story. After serving multiple prison sentences, he found a job and a community with Recycling Lives, a waste management initiative that gives a second chance to former prisoners. An employee called Barry greeted Keith at the gates, and led him to his new accommodation, where he now rebuilds his life. After previous sentences, Keith had no one greet him at the gates and ended up in cycles of crime.

Similarly, Louise, who suffered from PTSD and depression, alcohol abuse and losing the custody of her child, found refuge when her local council paid for detox if she attended a treatment centre. The community at the treatment centre became her rock and the community stayed with her even after treatment.

But in other cases, those crucial relationships were taken away. Like so many children who enter the care system, Lucy was placed under the care of 19 foster families before she was eight years old; social services left her with nothing when she left the system at 21. With a new baby, she was forced to move 100 miles away after having been moved between hostels. With no support, she turned to drugs and alcohol.

The correlative benefits of a place to call home run like a thread through these stories, as they do through the stories my constituents tell me in my weekly surgeries in Wigan. Community and the relationships it provides prevent relapse and create the stability to grow and thrive.

It is a tragedy that the system, and services, very rarely recognise the centrality of strong relationships or provide stability. As these case studies show, local services are diffuse and uproot lives. In recent years the centralisation of services has left rape and domestic violence victims, those with mental health problems and people battling addiction travelling miles to access services away from their support networks. At worst, as is so often the case with children in care, the system drives a coach and horses through the relationships that sustain people at the most difficult times in their lives and compounds the problems they face. Like Lucy, children are moved frequently, often placed hundreds of miles from home and have a high turnover of social workers. Behind this is the reality for thousands of children in care that they lose the relationships that matter most: the teacher, auntie, friend or social worker at the time they need them most.

Services, and the decisions that fuel them, are too centralised. In nearly two decades of working with Whitehall and Westminster I have found they are quick to see problems but slow to see potential. There is a desperate need for local solutions for local disadvantage. This is achieved by dispersing not just service delivery but the decision-making power that shapes those services; by pushing power downwards, so that local services can be responsive to individuals and local circumstances.

> ## Nurturing local services are those that are both well-funded and driven by local communities

Achieving this is not easy. Locally and nationally, politicians, civil servants and service managers do not give power away easily. But there are examples that demonstrate it is possible. In Wigan, the council responded to some of the worst cuts in the country by establishing The Deal, a contract between the council and the people designed together. The council agreed to keep libraries open and protect street cleaning and other valued public services in return for increased recycling, more volunteering and rising rates of fostering. Similarly, Lambeth Council's community youth trust was set up to tackle gang violence after years of failure. Both have relied on the understanding that to empower some people, you have to take power away from others. Lambeth Council gave power to social housing tenants to decide how funding to tackle gang violence should be spent. Working together helped empower the community who opened up their homes to give young people a safe space to go and cut violence rates significantly.

Despite this, the lack of funding for vital services is a major problem. Without long-term funding, staff burnout in services like adult and children's services, homeless and drug addiction charities, foster care and the Job Centre leads to high turnover and those crucial relationships are broken. As Shaks Ghosh, former chief executive of Crisis, put it, what use is a service without the knowledge "that there is someone on the other side who cares if you live or die"? Keith found a service that cared, and that waited at the prison gates; but many – if not most - others find, like Lucy, that they are left to fend for themselves.

Funding of services has to go hand in hand with local services becoming more accountable. Genuinely responsive services are driven by those who need them. Innovative ways have been developed for how to ensure accountability in even the most challenging circumstances. For example, Children England has developed ideas for children's trusts that allow children in care to hold their social workers and councillors, who are their corporate parents, to account. But too often the experience for those who rely on a service is one which strips them of agency - a disempowerment that is often felt, rightly, as a lack of care and respect.

Nurturing local services are those that are both well-funded and driven by local communities. Empowered, resourced communities are where people find the support they need to overcome the varied and multiple challenges in their lives.

Places matter because they foster communities that in turn foster the strong relationships that build strength, optimism and resilience. For too long we have failed to recognise just how important this is and failed those facing the greatest challenges. Putting people and their communities at the centre requires moving power out of Westminster and Whitehall and back to people themselves and the services they rely on. As Abraham Lincoln put it in a time of similar social and political upheaval: "The dogmas of a quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present." It's time for radical change.

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Roots, communities, and homes

We must support families, invigorate communities and give individuals greater security and control over their home, writes
Michael Tomlinson

Michael Tomlinson is the Conservative MP for Mid Dorset and North Poole

READING THE CASE studies compiled in this report, it is impossible not to be struck by the complexity of poverty and moved by the accounts of life on the breadline in modern Britain. It has become something of a mantra on the centre-right of British politics that an effective approach to tackling poverty has to tackle 'root causes', rather than fixating solely on spending money on those in need. The real stories of lives lived in poverty illustrate profoundly that handouts from the state will not be sufficient in and of themselves to tackle these problems.

The title of this chapter directs us to consider the role of 'roots, communities and homes' in addressing the complexities of the lived experiences in this report. Reading these accounts, and stepping away from the Westminster bubble, the word we miss and overlook, but which is in fact shouting from the page, is family. When we talk about our roots, communities and homes, we really mean our families. The collapse of relationships and the break-up of families is vividly described within the five case studies. This is in noticeable contrast to the conversation in Westminster which barely utters the word 'family', as both a potential contributor to poverty, and a solution to it; and when it does, apologetically, it is often dismissed and shouted down by those on the left.

> ## Children growing up in lone-parent families have almost double the risk of growing up in poverty than children living with two parents

Britain is a country where family breakdown falls disproportionately on poorer children. The experience and consequences of family breakdown do not fall evenly, and this inequality should be regarded as just as serious as any other 'injustice' that politicians seek to address in the policy process.

Almost half of all children are no longer living with both their parents by the time they sit their GCSEs. However, in our poorest communities, the same proportion of children have already seen their parents split up by the time they start primary school.

Children growing up in lone-parent families have almost double the risk of growing up in poverty than children living with two parents, with 47 per cent of children in lone parent families living below the official poverty line compared to 24 per cent of children with two parents.

A powerful new and extremely comprehensive study from the Centre for Social Justice finds that young people who experience family breakdown under the age of 18 are more likely to experience homelessness, crime and imprisonment, educational underachievement, alcoholism, teenage pregnancy and mental health issues . Yet this is too little talked about in parliament. Despite the increased poverty risks, it is estimated that the Treasury spends a paltry £1 in prevention for every £6,000 spent responding to the consequences of family breakdown. The total cost to the taxpayer is estimated to be £51bn.

Again, this barely troubles the scorers of Hansard. Under Tony Blair, the issue was considered as much of a taboo as dismissing immigration. We were told that talking about family structures and the impact of family breakdown on children growing up in poor households was moralising and not the business of government. David Cameron blew away many of these assumptions from the New Labour years. He was positively enthusiastic about the role family could play in improving lives – especially for those children who are already growing up poor.

Politicians should not be afraid of this issue. Indeed it could be a popular narrative out there in the real world, where people actively value family. But we cannot rely on families alone, when it is all too clear that often they are so fragile. Conservativism has always championed the importance of communities, civic groups, charities and sports teams, all playing their part in building resilience among the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people in society. 'Community' is a word often overused by political advocates to promote their cause. This distorts the true meaning of community that finds its value in human kindness and generosity. It is these virtues, in people with little political motivation but a strong sense of wanting to help others, which create real communities. This kind of community is an important yet often overlooked provider of welfare.

Parish and town councils could be asked to focus the time of their councillors – and where they exist staff – on community building activities. This could involve using the precept for small grants to support local groups or societies. It could involve organising events to bring the whole community together in a single place. This isn't about setting up rival groups with self-styled 'community leaders'. Instead it is about a civic body representing everybody who lives and works in a recognisable local area. Our sense of community built on shared space is what will matter, not an issue or a grievance. Many larger parish and town councils already quite rightly take their role in organising a local sense of community incredibly seriously. There is probably very little that politicians in Westminster can do to aid a true sense of community. But beefing up our local parish and town councils to create the space for local community to flourish is one thing we could encourage. In some areas of central London, where parish councils have long been abolished, people are now choosing to bring them back. This is a sign of their value as a community convener. They are the political equivalent of the coffee shop in the TV series Friends - a place where everybody knows your name.

None of this is to say that a community-focused layer of local government is a replacement for a welfare state dealing with the big issues of relieving poverty through services and provision of welfare. It is easy to assert that the state is the only means to address poverty and the misery which it brings. Conservatives know better. It is not for conservative thinkers to propose that we increase interference from the state. Rather we should highlight that it is not the only tool within our grasp. There must be a recognition that the way in which we interact with one another, and indeed look after one another, has a direct impact on the state and what it is in turn required to provide in services.

Whilst our sense of home is rooted in families and communities, where people actually live is important. So when considering our approach to poverty and disadvantage, we also need to consider housing and housing tenure for those on the lowest incomes. Rebecca's belief that living in her own accommodation, for the first time in her life, offers her the 'best chance of a stable life' gives us all a powerful reminder why getting housing policy right for the most vulnerable is critical in helping people overcome disadvantage. The private rented sector is now the sector containing the most people living in relative low income. Recent analysis finds that the proportion of people in relative low income living in the private rented sector grew from 15 per cent to 36 per cent between 2000 and 2017. In the

same period, the proportion of people in relative low income in the social rented sector fell from 50 to 39 per cent, and 34 to 24 per cent in the owner occupied sector. Households in the bottom third of incomes across all tenures make up 38 per cent of the private rented sector. And the number of households claiming housing benefit in the private rented sector now stands at 1.2 million.

A survey of more than 2,000 adults in Great Britain, carried out in December 2018 by ComRes, finds that many people value a sense of ownership over their homes, even if that does not include full financial ownership. Large proportions of adults living in the private rented sector associate homeownership with being able to control things like living space, home decoration and when you move. Yet this sense of control has grown increasingly out of reach for thousands of families as becoming a homeowner becomes more difficult. The survey found that while two-thirds (63 per cent) of private renters agree that it is important for them to feel a 'sense of ownership' over their home, only one in five (20 per cent) say they currently do so. This compares to owner occupiers, of whom 87 per cent say that feeling a sense of ownership is important

and 85 per cent currently do.

New stresses have been placed on families as they have experienced the relative instability and insecurity of the private rented sector in greater number. As the charity Shelter has highlighted, one in five of all families has moved at least three times within the past five years. Analysis of government data also shows that moving is much more common in the private rented sector than other tenures, with private renters six times more likely than homeowners to move. A network of 200 grassroots charities working to address child poverty in London surveyed its members on the impact of insecurity in the private rented sector. It concluded that the 'transient and unstable nature of housing affects every aspect of family life', as it 'undermines the health and wellbeing of children and their parents' . Four in five of the voluntary and community sector organisations it surveyed reported that insecurity was harmful to families and our local communities. Those least able to deal with the detrimental impacts of insecurity and instability in the private rented sector are those already facing severe and

multiple disadvantage.

Moving to a new house, either in the private or social rented sector, often means moving away from a community and support structures. This could involve moving schools, GP surgeries, even away from a friendly neighbour. It does not make sense that Lucy was forced to move a hundred miles away to live in an area she hardly knew, and with no pre-existing support networks. That did not help Lucy, and it did not help ensure Lucy's new-born child had the best start in life. We have to focus on bringing real stability to our families and communities, which will help people put down roots and invest in their local communities.

Helping every individual with experiences of severe and multiple disadvantage cannot be solved with a single policy alone. There is no silver bullet. However, supporting families, invigorating communities and giving individuals greater security and control over their home will be vital steps in helping every person, especially those with experiences of severe and multiple disadvantage, overcome the challenges they face.

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People-centred services

Public services need to be better integrated if we are to help the most vulnerable in our society, argues *Jim McMahon*

Jim McMahon is the Labour MP for Oldham West and Royston

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PUBLIC SERVICES ARE about people and the communities where they live. When they are at their best, they act as the foundation of a decent society. But after nearly a decade of Conservative-led governments, it is easy to see that years of austerity and neglect have hit at the very foundations of the essential public services our country needs to thrive.

Analysis by the Institute of Fiscal Studies has found that by 2020, the budget for public spending will have been slashed by up to 40 per cent. These cuts have hit our services severely and left many of them on the brink. The Local Government Association has stated that local councils in England are facing a £8bn funding gap across public services

by 2025. The Conservatives' mantra - 'We're all in this together' - and their claim that the end of austerity is upon us, could not be further from the truth.

Anyone with even the slightest knowledge of public services will tell you that no one service acts in isolation; they are a fragile ecosystem, interdependent on each other. Preventative services which managed demand for other public services are now a shadow of what they once were, which means demand is increasing for already stretched services. The result is clear to see: our NHS, emergency services, social services and local authorities are at breaking point.

Reform is now necessary to protect these services. But reform is also vital

to improve the way these services interact with each other and help the most vulnerable in society like Lucy, Keith, Louise, William, and Rebecca whose stories appear in this report. We must not allow the very real strain our public services are under to reduce our ambition, nor to stop us from focusing on how, even with swingeing cuts, the money which is left in the system can be used to better effect if we break free from institutional and historical shackles.

Public services have, historically, operated in silos, failing to work in a joined-up way. They are often set up to help us with individual problems in isolation throughout our lives, whether that is being seen by a doctor, a support worker or the police. It is mine and the Labour party's belief that we should implement radical reform to eliminate silos in our public services. In this way, people will have the power to act collectively to create and implement successful strategies to help others in their lives. This could mean, for example, allowing services in the social care industry to share information in order to create a plan of action for a struggling parent or school student.

Helping the most vulnerable in our society requires allowing public services

A post-it = a contact or intervention

| Police/ Community Safety | Health | Social Care | Housing | Community Outreach | CAF Co-ordination |
| Barnardos | Attendance Service | Housing Benefit | Family Intervention Project | | |

to collaborate, allowing for successful ways of dealing with an individual's problem before they enter a crisis point. The urgent need for better integration of services is best shown by Rebecca's experiences of abuse from childhood not being identified and dealt with early on and being allowed to fester until it ruins a life. An abusive relationship at 13 led to Rebecca being subjected to domestic violence, drugs and an early pregnancy alongside a plethora of deadly and life-threatening diseases such as pneumonia. These factors led to Rebecca becoming institutionalised, spending time in prison – with one sentence being more than 12 months.

A case like this clearly represents a failure of public services: they failed to identify the factors from early in her life that would contribute to her later challenges and they failed too by not

preventing Rebecca from experiencing them. Rebecca herself believes that her childhood was a critical point in her life. Better intervention and education on consent and drugs could have stopped her from making the mistakes she did. Social services, the education system and the police could have worked together to try and stop events spiralling out of control. Rebecca stands as an example of why we must reform our public services to work collaboratively.

> ### The single point of contact approach will enable our public services to be people-centred

This all requires the single point of contact approach that we believe will enable our public services to be 'people-centred', putting efficiency and expertise alongside saving costs for the state.

Oldham's Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub has analysed cases of domestic violence to see where and when interventions from a different service could have successfully averted the case from going on for as long as it did. One case, between 2003 and 2012, saw more than 100 different contacts or interventions from services including the police, social care, family intervention project and the charity Barnardo's. The conclusions drawn from this, and other cases, have been used to successfully divert those in crisis into the correct care service if the current one is not helpful to someone who is in crisis.

For Rebecca, services attempting

to identify gaps in their knowledge or experience would have saved her years of trauma and abuse, as the correct place to intervene could have been identified by social services. This would have benefited both Rebecca and also the public purse, saving significant sums while still maintaining an empathic approach.

A critical aspect of public services we must reform is the organisational culture of each service. At present across our public services, there is a tendency to treat people as a number, rather than a human being. Lucy's experiences highlighted in this report shows this clearly. A single mother who has struggled since childhood and has needed access to care to help look after herself and her daughter due to a mental health problem, Lucy found herself lost with care promised, but none being provided. She said that "loads of help was offered, help for mental health, housing etc but none materialised". She felt that many she had to deal with did not really listen to her concerns and that she was dismissed at every opportunity.

This demonstrates a lack of empathy within the organisational culture of the care services. This has to change if we

move toward a 'people-centered public services' with services built around how real lives are lived, with all of their complexities and interrelationships.

Too many individuals who use public services, have a lack of trust in them. People are continually let down by services no longer fit for purpose. Another of those featured in the case studies is William, who needed support from a psychiatrist following a breakdown which stopped him from working. However, while William had done well in education and work despite some early traumatic events in his childhood, he was left to wait three months for an appointment with a psychiatrist. This led to William being let go by his employer through ill-health retirement, which left a void in his life that he was unable to fill. It is this waiting time that is a cause for great concern.

We see time and again people unable to access the care that they need, when they need it. This is relevant right across our public services. Cancer can be caught early, mental illness can be picked up and treated early and crimes such as domestic violence can be identified early and dealt with by the

police. Reducing waiting times will act to increase public trust and confidence in services. This is a key part of the Labour party's reform and one I wish to see implemented from day one of a Labour government.

The Fabian Society has presented us with a great opportunity by giving this area the focus it needs. It speaks to the priority shown in Labour's pledge to build a National Health and Social Care service with a shared commitment to single commissioning, partnership arrangements, pooled budgets and joint working arrangements. The new service will move quickly to establish a collaborative and joined-up service that will be both appropriate and efficient in the way it signposts those in need to the correct service, saving the user distress and giving them access to care quicker - all the while saving money for the state.

We have to radically reform and invest in public services in order to significantly reduce waiting times and allow people like William, Lucy, and Rebecca to access help when they need it most. Only then can we ensure that our public services are at their best as the foundation of a decent society.

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Results, not structures

The public, private and third sectors should work together to achieve the best results for those who need them the most, writes *John Redwood*

John Redwood is the Conservative MP for Wokingham

WE ALL COME into contact with public services at some point in our lives. But for many individuals facing severe and multiple disadvantage, that contact is critically important and near constant. From the NHS and emergency services to the police and social services, people facing severe and multiple disadvantage are most affected by public sector reform. They rely on innovative, caring and collaborative services, regardless of how they are provided. What matters for these individuals is results – and, as the case studies show, our public services are letting too many people down. Both Rebecca and Lucy show us the consequences of public services failing to intervene, or intervening but doing so badly. When approaching public sector reform, we have to be wary of radical change that fails to work for the most vulnerable, including those facing severe and multiple disadvantage.

But what defines a public service? In 2002, I wrote a book entitled Third Way, Which Way? about public services – and how we pay for it. The book sought to define what is a public service. The book argued that there were many different ways of paying for and delivering a public service. At one end of the spectrum are services for the public - from supplying bread and water through to providing many of our daily needs for shelter, warmth and entertainment. In the majority of cases, individuals use their own money to buy the goods or service they want from their chosen private sector provider in a competitive marketplace. Individuals who do not have a job or other source of a decent income are provided with money by the state so they can also buy these things from the market. At the other end of the spectrum is the provision of a monopoly public service, like most healthcare or defence, where the service is provided free to the user or beneficiary by the state. It is paid for out of taxation, and the service is delivered by state employees working for a state monopoly.

However, there is also scope for a middle or third way: private sector delivery of public services. This was something that New Labour accepted. It used widespread contracting out and encouraged a bigger third sector of charities and not for profits working away at social problems and public service. New Labour extended contracting out in the NHS by buying in medical capacity for operations and treatments from the private sector, where previous Conservative administrations had confined the use of contractors to areas like meals and cleaning. We should learn from this example and the idea that what matters is results, not the means of achieving them. This is still relevant, and more so for individuals with experiences of severe and multiple disadvantage. Does it really matter who provides the numerous services they need as long as they tackle the challenges they face and improve their lives?

Much of the public remains less concerned about the 'nationalise or privatise' debate around public services than some politicians are. People are more concerned about the big three areas of public services: providing a good quality free education for children, providing free healthcare on demand when needed and assisting with social care for the disabled, older people and other vulnerable groups. Largely, the public do not know or worry if many of their services are maintained and managed by a for-profit company, unless they do it badly – and improvement or change are required. As I argued above, the public are concerned about results. They want high-quality public services which the state should lead and provide and which help the most vulnerable. The state should play a role in coordinating as well as commissioning services and provision, whether that is public, private or from the third sector. This approach could be seen when the last Labour government said that patients could go to a private hospital to get their knee mended or their cataract removed. It expanded NHS capacity, allowed earlier delivery of the treatment people needed and maintained the essential promise of the NHS that the care should be free to the user as the government paid the contractor, not the patient. Most patients were content with this.

The public sector, the private sector and the third sector working together can bring significant benefits, both to the state and to individuals. Take the example of Louise, who struggled with depression and drinking. After one failed experience, her council offered to pay for detox on the condition she attended 1NE. This charity has been successful in helping people tackle drug and alcohol addiction, improving health for participants and reducing the costs of future treatment on the NHS. Another charity, Recycling Lives, shows how we can successfully rehabilitate ex-offenders like Keith, giving them support to change their lives. As Keith said himself, without the support of Recycling Lives "it would have been all too easy to slip back into old habits". The public sector should learn from this example, and work with charities that can help vulnerable people get their lives back on track. The cost – both human and financial – of failing to do so is too high.

More widely, contracting out brings advantages. It can allow access to a range of providers who compete to get the contract, bringing innovation and new thinking to the provision of public services. This can often mean a fall in cost and a rise in quality as the new bidder put their minds to higher quality and higher efficiency in managing the task. Some providers can bring economies of scale as well as greater expertise and experience because of the focus of their activities. Scale can also bring in flexibility to manage staff better. Today it is difficult in some parts of the country to recruit enough GPs to meet rising demand at surgeries. Companies can operate over a broader area and supply the right number of staff hours to provide the cover individual surgeries need, whilst ensuring that GPs do not experience burnout.

Rather than asking the state to choose how public services are provided, sometimes it is easier to provide more money to those who need a particular service and let them choose from a range of providers in the private sector.

Through this we can harness the power of customer choice. If the user of a public service has the right to choose, they have some power over the body delivering the service and are able to demand higher standards and a better performance. No user feels trapped by bad service as there is a way out. For example, people in many areas have a choice of school for their children to attend free of charge, or their child may also be able to win a free place by scholarship at a fee-paying school. There is some choice of GP and dentist within the NHS free provision. Social care works best where individuals or their carers have choices over the type of care and the location of it to be offered. Experiences like Lucy's show how damaging a lack of choice is for people. She was placed in a series of unsuitable, if not dangerous, homes before being moved 100 miles away from her support networks. Lucy was also disappointed with how social services behaved towards her. She should have been able to choose a better place to live and better support from social services.

> **If the user of a public service has the right to choose they are able to demand higher standards**

I support the public in their demand for better public services. Results, not structures, matter especially for the most vulnerable. This will come from both the public and private sectors working together to innovate, offer some choice and above all to provide high standards. Support for the most vulnerable, like Lucy, Keith, William, Louise and Rebecca, will be paid for by the state one way or another. The challenge is for the state to spend the money well to get enough care and better solutions. Quite often charities, energetic individuals and companies will have some of the answers the state needs to embrace to do a good job for individuals facing severe and multiple disadvantage.

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Investing in work

To enable people to work and learn, the state must invest,
embrace voluntary provision and enable decisions to be taken
at a local level, argues *Stephen Timms*

*Stephen Timms is the Labour MP
for East Ham*

THE CASE STUDIES in this report show vividly the severity of hurdles that a significant number of our fellow citizens have to deal with and the impact of the hardship which selfish and evil people inflict on others. They illustrate as well how thinly stretched, after a decade of austerity, are the public services intended to help people surmount these hurdles. But they also underline the resilience of the human spirit and the capacity of individuals to overcome seemingly insuperable odds.

In responding to the case studies, I would draw out three key lessons:

- The city region is the best level to draw together the support offered to enable people to participate in work and learning;

- Substantial investment by the state to enable unemployed people to access employment pays off;

- Local and national government needs to recognise fully the value of voluntary sector provision, including faith-based provision, and enlightened business support in enabling individuals to flourish.

Marshal support at the city region level

It is very easy to point out that people fall, all too often, between gaps in provision and that steps should be taken to plug the gaps. It is much harder to work out how to do it.

Human effort to tackle the challenges we, as a society, face has to be organised in institutions of manageable scale and purpose. But as soon as we establish institutions to fulfil different purposes, gaps between them become apparent, and the call arises for them to work together. In supporting work and learning, there is an obvious need, for example, for employment, education and health services to co-operate.

Having a job is key to overcoming multiple disadvantage

In practice, getting the huge Whitehall departments responsible for these things to work together effectively is very difficult. When I was employment minister, I met regularly with the minister for skills and we always reached agreement. But ensuring that large nationwide bureaucracies, which were accountable to each of us, worked together was much harder than merely reaching an agreement between the two of us.

Getting the local branches of these bureaucracies to work together is much more realistic. For example, Greater Manchester – taking advantage of an early devolution settlement – set up its 'Working Well' project to support into employment people who were out of work on health grounds. It was established in response to the government work programme's failure to provide effective support for people claiming health-related employment benefits. Working Well has brought together employment support, including job centres and independent providers and education, with local colleges and the NHS, including the mental health trust, in an effective partnership focused on helping people get jobs. It is very difficult at national level, but achievable at a sub-regional level.

It cannot be taken for granted that a model which has worked well in Greater Manchester will work well everywhere else. It is not at all clear what the equivalent of the Greater Manchester level is in many parts of the UK, though establishing partnerships just at a local authority level would not be efficient. But marshalling resources at a sub-regional level is most likely to minimise the risks of people falling between the gaps.

The state should invest to enable unemployed people to find work

Having a job is key to overcoming multiple disadvantage. That is clear in four of the five case studies in this study. And I believe it is worth the state's while to invest more in supporting people into work than it has often been prepared to.

We can learn from the success of the Future Jobs Fund, introduced in October 2009 to tackle youth unemployment in the teeth of the global financial crisis. It provided wage subsidies in order to guarantee that unemployed young people could find a job. An independent evaluation published by Department for Work and Pensions in November 2012 showed its effectiveness, concluding that it had delivered 'a net cost to the Exchequer of £3,100 per participant; and a net benefit to society of £7,750 per participant'.

In both case studies involving a prison sentence, those of Rebecca and Keith, the turning point came on getting a job. Recycling Lives, where Keith works, sounds exactly like the kind of organisation which thrived under the Future Jobs Fund. I greatly admire National Grid's programme of training offenders as gas pipeline engineers, guaranteeing that, if they meet the standard, they will be employed on release. The reoffending rate among people leaving prison is a statistic which shames our society, but it has proved far lower among those on the National Grid scheme. We must do more to help those leaving prison find work and provide greater assistance to those employers who wish to hire them.

The contribution of employers is a very important one. The case study of William makes clear that the failure of his employer – despite admirable policies – to support him during a crisis led to five years of unemployment.

The case studies also highlight the importance of accessing mental health support and difficulties in this area feature in the cases of Lucy, Rebecca and William. William's story features individual placement and support, an effective approach to supporting people with severe mental health difficulties into employment. The Centre for Mental Health explains that: "It involves intensive, individual support, a rapid job search followed by placement in paid employment and time-unlimited in-work support for both the employee and the employer." As this suggests, providing it is costly – and virtually impossible within a government employment programme. The NHS does offer it, but availability has been patchy, depending on the priorities of the mental health trust in each area. NHS England made a welcome announcement in April 2019 of a major expansion in its availability, but even then, in five years' time, it will still not be available in 20 per cent of England. Additional government investment in this programme would be worth making, and its importance strengthens the case for collaboration between employment support and mental health services in each area.

Recognise fully the value of voluntary sector provision, including faith-based, provision

William speaks of the 'immense love and support of his wife and children throughout this period'. For those who don't have such family support, is there anything the state can do to make good their absence? The cases of Keith, with a Recycling Lives Academy, and Louise, with 1NE, a voluntary sector treatment centre in Woodford, North East London, illustrate the value of voluntary sector support.

I was also struck by Lucy's account that 'social services literally packed my bags, gave me some food vouchers, and left me near the local church with no help, nothing'. We regularly hear of the decline of religious faith in our society, but it is a remarkable feature of the past decade that, as austerity has caused more and more families to be unable to afford enough food, the churches – through the Trussell Trust network of food banks – have been the one agency with not just the motivation but also the capacity to help. And one of their strengths has been their capacity to deploy volunteers able to build relationships with needy families, as well as simply providing food, and so to provide at least some of the love and support which William found so invaluable. State employees are rarely in a position to give that.

I would like to see state agencies, and particularly local government, overcome current reluctance to work with faith-based groups, for fear (invariably unfounded) that they will end up trying to convert people. I chair the all-party parliamentary group on faith and society which has drawn up a set of principles for local authorities to sign up to, together with the faith groups in their area wishing to work with them, with the aim of encouraging more collaboration.

Tackling multiple disadvantage in the welfare system

The case studies make hardly any reference to the welfare system, but this article would not be complete without a comment on universal credit. In principle, it should represent a step forward, making the financial impact of moving from unemployment into work, and from one job to another, much easier to work out.

In practice, however, the botched deployment of universal credit is making problems much worse. The five-week delay between applying for benefit and being entitled to the cash is the worst single feature. It forces people who are just about keeping their heads above water into debt to the DWP from which it is extremely hard to escape. Technical problems often make the delay in entitlement to benefit even longer. The benefit of clarity in the new system has been undermined by decisions in other departments – the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's insistence on keeping council tax support outside universal credit, and the Department for Education's new eligibility rules for free school meals.

This report is right to highlight the importance of tackling multiple disadvantage. Today – as recent publication of the Department for Work and Pensions' annual statistics on households below average income made clear – the problems are getting worse. It is vital that the next government makes progress in this area a priority and is willing to commit resources to making it happen.

The ladder of opportunity

Everyone in our society should have access to opportunities to learn, grow and thrive, writes *Robert Halfon*

Robert Halfon is the Conservative MP for Harlow and chair of the education select committee

SOCIAL JUSTICE HAS been my compass since I entered politics. I want to bring voice to those who have none; hope to those who are on the margins of our collective vision; and the ladder of opportunity to those who have fallen by the wayside. I believe the best way to do this is to give people the means to learn, grow and thrive. The means to inquire. The means to build their own prosperity. In other words, I believe that the chance to develop good skills and social justice are naturally bound together.

Education has improved

There is no doubt that education has improved in recent years, and I have a great deal of admiration for the work the government has done to improve standards since taking the reins in 2010. Our children's education now has more rigour. We have a system that encourages schools to innovate and raise their game. We are stripping out qualifications that hold no real currency with employers. Exams are more challenging, which is raising our children's skills levels so they can get good jobs and compete in a global skills race. The highest proportion of 16 to 17-year-olds on record are in education.[xi] And we have some of the finest universities in the world.

However, social injustices are endemic and we have a skills crisis.

> An enormous wave of lost opportunity is about to come crashing down on the next generation of employees

Despite the progress that has been made, social injustice is still endemic in every part of our education system. Almost half of children eligible for free school meals are not ready for primary school.[xii] Disadvantaged children are, on average, four months behind at the end of reception, 11 months behind at the end of primary school and 19 months behind by the time they do their GCSEs.[xiii] Just 1.1 per cent of pupils who complete their GCSEs in alternative provision achieve five good GCSE passes including English and maths.[xiv] And the most disadvantaged students are almost four times less likely to go to university than the most advantaged students.[xv]

Our failure to build an infrastructure that works for all means we have 'Nightmare on Skills Street', which stops people from building the skills they need to progress in life. More than a quarter (around nine million) of all working aged adults in England have low literacy and/or numeracy skills.[xvi] An enormous wave of lost opportunity is about to come crashing down on the next generation of employees: quite unbelievably, a third of England's 16 to 19-year-olds have low basic skills.[xvii] And all of this in an increasingly uncertain labour market where 28 per cent of jobs taken by 16 to 24-year-olds could be at risk of automation by the 2030s.[xviii]

Getting the basics right

We must spark a skills revolution and this starts with the basics. Literacy and numeracy are the bedrock of academic and vocational success. The government is right to focus on standards and to do this early; its focus on phonics, for example, has had a significant impact on childhood literacy.[xix]

But we must go further. Almost half of children eligible for free school meals are behind the expected level of development by the time they start primary school.[xx] Good quality childcare can help plug this gap. However, 57 per cent of parents in lower income groups are put off from working, or working more hours, because of childcare costs.[xxi] Meanwhile, we are giving major concessions to wealthier families. The upper eligibility threshold for both 30 hours of free childcare (3 to 4-year-olds) and tax-free childcare is £100,000 per parent. It is not justifiable to provide a couple earning £200,000 with 30 hours of free childcare (and tax-free childcare on top) when disadvantaged children need support. We should reduce the current thresholds for 30 hours tax-free childcare and redirect funding to help disadvantaged parents with childcare support.

As my colleagues on the education select committee have also rightly stressed, we must look after our maintained nursery schools. These institutions perform exceptionally well - 63 per cent are rated 'outstanding' by Ofsted compared to 18 per cent of other provider types.[xxii] They are also more likely to be found in disadvantaged areas, and cater for children with special educational needs, than other providers. The government has provided transitional funding to these schools until it moves to a new funding regime in 2019-20, but there are concerns that some will close soon after if this then tapers away. We must continue to invest in what we know works, and should make sure these prized assets continue to receive the support they need.

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Creating more good quality vocational options

Once they have basic skills in place, children are far better equipped to get on in life. But to do so, they must have a meaningful choice of options that suits their natural talents, whether those are academic or vocational. The government is starting to address this; the introduction of T-levels in 15 different clusters of skills will bring standard currency to technical qualifications in the labour market, something we lack in the thousands of qualifications that exist today.

But we can do much more. As the education committee has pointed out, we must urgently capitalise on the enormous potential of apprenticeships. Apprenticeships change lives - they allow people to grow their skills, increasing employability and earning potential. But we need to be smarter about how we use the new apprenticeships levy. The government should introduce more flexibility in how it can be used, and it should provide discounted travel for apprentices. Businesses, meanwhile, should offer higher minimum wages.

There is, however, no point in creating better vocational options unless people know about them. We also, therefore, need a world-class careers service. At the moment, we do not have this: around one in five schools does not even meet any of the eight Gatsby benchmarks - a series of international markers of sound careers advice.[xxiii] We must transform careers advice into careers and skills advice. We must avoid duplication and redirect the many millions of pounds that support careers advice into a one-stop shop, with a UCAS-style system for further education and apprenticeships and a careers skills passport as designed by Lord Young.

Looking after our most vulnerable students, rather than excluding them

School exclusions have skyrocketed in recent years.[xxiv] And it seems astonishing that we are disproportionately excluding pupils who are least equipped to deal with this: pupils with special educational needs are around six times more likely to be permanently excluded.[xxv] The prospects for excluded children in alternative provision are dire - just 1.1 per cent of pupils who complete their GCSEs in alternative provision achieve five good GCSE passes including English and maths.[xxvi]

Given that we know pretty well the kind of children that are likely to be excluded - those with special educational needs and children in care, for example - it is clear that early intervention is the answer and will prevent experiences of multiple disadvantage later on. But to do this effectively, we need to make sure our mainstream teachers have the skills to support children with special education needs - at the moment, only 46 per cent believe there is appropriate training to enable them to do this.[xxvii] We must support and encourage mainstream teachers to spend time in alternative provision; the knowledge and skills they would acquire would be invaluable to mainstream schools, and would help them manage more complex needs. And schools should be asked to publish exclusions data on their websites. We must also make sure that alternative provision is of high quality in all parts of the country, and that we open up far more options post-16.

Delivering a balanced higher education offer

We have become obsessed with full academic degrees in this country and we need more balance in our higher-level offering so that there are pathways into intermediate and higher technical education. There is enormous opportunity in this. There are skills shortages in several sector, and a need for intermediate skills. And there are millions of people who want to get on in life - preferably without a lead weight of £57,000 of student debt dragging on their feet. FE colleges, which are ideally placed to offer flexible and local options for those who need this, should be better supported to deliver intermediate and higher technical courses.

We can also be creative about blending technical and academic education. Degree apprenticeships are a remarkable example of a vehicle that does just that and could be the crown jewel in a revamped technical offering. Students earn as they learn, they do not incur mountains of debt and they get good quality jobs at the end. The government should incentivise their growth. However, this is not just an issue of supply. Few families are aware of degree apprenticeships, especially from disadvantaged families where the returns could be most profound.[xxviii] Both the existence of apprenticeships and their value should be hard-wired into careers advice.

Making it easier to learn throughout life

For those who are not able to build high value skills the first time around, or whose skills have been wiped out by a fast-changing labour market, it is important that our system offers a way back. Rebecca, Lucy and Keith all show us the importance of providing these opportunities. As the Open University's model clearly demonstrates, flexible learning can be a powerful vehicle for social justice. Its students are not required to have completed A-levels (or equivalent qualifications), and so prior achievement is not a hindrance to personal development. It is able to reach some of the hardest niches within our system and is the primary provider of higher education in UK prisons and secure units. Its flexible online learning model makes higher education possible for those who live in areas where there is no local university.

We need to protect the continuing learning sector and we can start by reinstating the support that existed prior to the 2012 student finance reforms for the most disadvantaged pupils. It is also vital that we create clear routes from further education into higher education; these could be supported through 'Next Step' loans for individual higher education modules. And we must prepare the most vulnerable people in our labour market for the inevitable disruption that will accompany the 'Fourth Industrial Revolution', which we can do by introducing a lifelong learning allowance.

Levelling the playing field when it comes to social capital

Creating a continuum of learning would dramatically improve the life chances of the most disadvantaged individuals in society. However, it would be a mistake just to focus on the more tangible structural elements of the system we want to build. The evidence suggests that children and students also need social capital. Our most disadvantaged pupils could develop this by attending our best private schools - if only they could get to these schools. As Schools Week has highlighted, just 1 per cent of the 522,000 pupils in Independent Schools Council-member private schools receive full bursaries for their school fees (a proxy for the lowest income earners). [xxix] To retain charitable status (and all the perks this brings), private schools must surely do more to reach out to the most disadvantaged pupils. The government should set up a levy to encourage wealthier private schools to bring in society's most disadvantaged pupils, which might include students on free school meals, children in need or foster children. A levy is not a tax and schools would be able to reclaim their investment if they in turn invested in the futures of our most disadvantaged pupils.

Looking forward

We know that, now more than ever, people must have a good education to climb the ladder of opportunity. And, as I have set out in this chapter, it is well within our collective ability to make sure this happens. We must craft a more fluid and balanced system and we must build excellence all along the way.

I invite you to join me in driving this vital agenda forward. To root out social injustice in our education system. To give advantage to the disadvantaged. Until all individuals, whatever their background, can get the education, skills and training they deserve.

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Joining up support

The interaction of problems makes it harder for services to be effective in helping those experiencing domestic violence – but we must tackle these complex situations head-on, writes *Thangam Debbonaire*

Thangam Debbonaire is the Labour MP for Bristol West

SUPPORTING PEOPLE WITH multiple disadvantage requires intense input from a number of different organisations. It is not always easy, but the benefits are significant, both for the individual and for society as a whole. Looking at the individual experiences in this report gives us insights into the challenges facing society in getting support right and the benefits secured when we do.

I want to focus particularly on domestic violence and how it interacts with other forms of disadvantage including substance abuse. We need to reassess how interventions work to protect victims and tackle complex needs. We have to ensure that services helping domestic violence victims collaborate better with, for example, interventions on substance abuse and mental health. Simply dismissing victims as too difficult to help, which happens all too often, has very real costs, and keeps them at risk.

The social contract

Every experience of severe and multiple disadvantage poses challenging questions for us to answer. With our social contract, we have an expectation that we put into the collective pot according to our means and draw out from it according to our needs. For a frail, elderly woman who has been mugged for her handbag we would expect police sympathy and assistance, care from the NHS, as well as concern and probably outrage from the public if her story reaches the news. But what about someone who has perhaps never paid in? Who has, some would say, 'chosen' her substance misuse or her abusive partner, who some would say has 'failed to protect' her child, do they seem like a worthy 'victim' deserving of our support?

> Every person is worthy of public investment to tackle the disadvantages they face, even if that person is difficult to work with

Across the case studies in this report, the state's failure to fulfil its duty to protect individuals from harm, especially if their parents cannot or will not, is clear and so are the consequences of a social contract that fails to assist vulnerable people tackle multiple disadvantage. More effective help could have been provided by public services. It is possible that public services considered the individuals to be too difficult to work with, or that the multiple problems they had were too difficult to deal with.

It cannot be right to abandon those vulnerable people because they do not fit prior assumptions about who the social contract works for. A failure to assist those with multiple difficulties has a strong chance of harming others, especially children and other close family members. Instead of turning our backs, we should respond by expanding our understanding of the social contract. Every person is worthy of public investment to tackle the disadvantages they face, even if that person is difficult to work with. What does this mean in particular for individuals who have experiences of domestic violence, mental health problems, and substance misuse?

Abusive partners and perpetrator programmes

Too often, domestic violence interventions focus only on the victim. Rebecca's case study tells us a lot about her, but it doesn't tell us much about her abusive partners. These men were not only responsible for their abuse of Rebecca but also substance misuse. Interventions with them could have helped Rebecca and her children.

One approach that should be considered in cases of domestic violence is a domestic violence perpetrator intervention programme. This assesses and manages the risk abusive men pose to victims, especially any children or young people, and to others, providing an evidence-based behaviour change programme.

There are many questions, concerns and sometimes misconceptions about domestic violence perpetrator interventions. Some practitioners and policy-makers worry that such programmes are a soft option for the perpetrator, or that they may be ineffective or even increase risk. However, there is now evidence that a well-run perpetrator programme, with linked support for victims and a clear aim of safety for women and children, will assess and manage risk and provide a route to the cessation of physical and sexual violence. Some organisations are developing joint work with substance misuse and mental health interventions, which is welcome, but more is needed.

Alcohol and other drugs are associated with violence, they are not its cause.

We cannot expect a drug treatment programme to solve a domestic violence problem. Nonetheless, if an abuser were still using drugs, it would likely be useless to offer him a perpetrator intervention, no matter how well evidence-based and soundly provided. Chaos and reduced mental awareness impede effective participation in a perpetrator programme which requires weekly attendance at a specific place and time. Participants need to be able to focus, reflect and articulate their thoughts, feelings and memories.

Similarly, working with some individuals to increase their safety and mental health can be tricky without sorting out drug use. We learn that Rebecca was effectively denied mental health help when she was unable to meet the requirement to be free from drugs. Her drug use is intertwined with her experiences of abuse and of relationships and has consequences for how our public services provide help.

Some organisations are developing joint work with domestic violence, substance misuse and mental health interventions, which is welcome, but more is needed. Local government has a role to play in encouraging these services to work together more effectively and overcome barriers to do so. But there is a need to fund these services properly if we want them to work together for better outcomes that help women, especially those facing severe and multiple disadvantage like Rebecca.

Gender expectations of social interventions and perpetrators

In abusive situations, we often expect the victim to take disproportionate responsibility for her situation, a position which is neither fair nor productive. This is based on assumptions around gender, which are ignorant of the power differences in an abusive relationship. In the case of Rebecca, we must factor in her use of drugs and how that is associated with her experiences of receiving abuse.

When a family in which there is domestic abuse comes to the attention of social services, the questions around fit parenting generally focus on the woman. Professionals often ask whether she is protecting her child or whether she exposing her child to the risk of witnessing abuse by remaining with her partner? Is her parenting adequate? Is the child attending school and if not, why is the mother not achieving this? Rarely, in my experience of years of work in domestic violence (until I became an MP in 2015), is the default professional setting to ask the same questions about the perpetrator.

Social care systems and societal assumptions about gender mean that women are expected to take overall responsibility for parenting and the protection from the impact of abuse. This reinforces, to victims and to perpetrators, the assumptions placed on the woman by her abusive partner that she is responsible for care-giving in the family, that she should be the perfect mother, no matter what violence has happened to her. The child protection system expects her to keep the violence away from her children, yet this is something which few victims can achieve as the perpetrator holds the decision-making power about whether, when and in front of whom to use violence.

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Challenges and contradictions in treating social problems in chaotic families

Domestic violence in and of itself tends to have a detrimental impact on mental health, as does substance misuse. Anxiety, depression and self-harm are all too common responses to living with someone who controls ever more of your life every day. But that will often make it much harder to have the strength to seek help for the violence, or for any drug or alcohol use.

People facing severe and multiple disadvantage require the help of several organisations, but chances are none of them will find it easy to meet her complex needs. They may, understandably, refer her on to another organisation or write her off when she fails to make appointments. But dismissing people with these problems as unworthy of assistance is costly, especially if they are parents. If we do not help, a lack of stable parenting has real costs including to the emergency services and social care, to the criminal justice system, and to the childcare and child protection system. For women with experiences of domestic violence, it keeps them in harm's way and at further risk.

Even when public services do try to tackle multiple problems, there can be clashes of culture between different interventions. Most perpetrator programmes focus on violence cessation as a prerequisite, which may not fit with the harm reduction approach of a substance misuse programme. The philosophical framework for such programmes is likely to include taking personal responsibility for change, but this will not work for the victim in relation to the domestic violence – the perpetrator is responsible for this and changing the woman's behaviour is not going to stop him from choosing to use violence.

A co-located or jointly run substance misuse, mental health and domestic abuse service with separate but linked provision for victims/survivors and perpetrators would be really useful to manage risk and offer realistic opportunities for lasting change.

Conclusion

The interaction of problems makes it harder for services to be effective in helping those with experiences of severe and multiple disadvantage. I have specifically focused on domestic violence and how public services need to better help women with these experiences. But issues around gendered expectations, clashes of culture between different interventions, and the willingness of some in public services to write off those who are hardest to help are relevant to a much wider range of issues.

The failure to rise to the challenge of addressing multiple social problems does not make those problems go away and the stories contained in this collection are not isolated outliers. We policy-makers must tackle these complex situations head-on. We owe it to the people experiencing multiple problems as well as their children, relatives, the people trying to help them and the taxpayer funding emergency responses.

Lifting the stigma

Poor mental health can exacerbate severe and multiple disadvantage and we must fight for better mental health services, writes *Johnny Mercer*

Johnny Mercer is the Conservative MP for Plymouth Moor View

Our mental health and wellbeing is a big part of who we are and we shouldn't be surprised to see it as a thread running through all the experiences in this report. They show how mental health problems can exacerbate severe and multiple disadvantage, and how help is too difficult to secure.

Mental health challenges have been a thread in my life too. My own struggles with OCD completely dominated my life for a while and it never fully goes away. You learn your own coping mechanisms and there is lots of help out there but it's a tough illness to have.

Stigma

That's why I fight to remove the stigma around mental health and why it was the first thing I spoke about in my maiden speech in the House of Commons in 2015: "Often, those who struggle with mental health problems cannot shout for themselves and suffer in silence because of the ridiculous stigma placed on mental health. That stigma ends in this parliament. It is not good enough to have sympathy, empathy even, or simply to understand these issues when they affect someone close to us. It is time to get this right and I look forward to starting this crusade in Plymouth [my home]."

The reality is we are improving but it is slow. You have to remember where we

started. It's only 100 years ago that we had soldiers with what we would today term post-traumatic stress disorder - men who weren't able to function for one reason or another - being executed for cowardice. We come from a pretty dark place. And I know that there are people of a certain generation, even within my family, who just don't believe in mental health. It's quite shocking that we have this situation continuing in this day and age.

> Mental health problems are so debilitating. They affect one in four of us, yet we are still fighting to be heard

William's story shows us how far we still have to go to make our country work for those with mental health problems. When William first experienced mental health problems at work, he received a lack of understanding and some pressure from his employer. This is

unacceptable treatment. Rather than supporting William, the company terminated his employment through ill-health retirement.

Mental health problems are just so debilitating. They affect one in four of us, yet we are still fighting to be heard. Fighting the stigma is a tough battle. But it is one worth fighting.

Support

The struggles of William, Rebecca and Lucy in accessing help and support for their mental health problems are all too common across the country. William had to wait over a year for a referral to psychological support, while Rebecca and Lucy talked about help that never materialised.

Access to early intervention can be a game changer for many, but public services often step in too late when it comes to mental health. We have to do better in reducing waiting times for mental health support. When we talk about a parity of esteem between mental and physical health, it has to mean something and be more than just a sentence. We need to stop paying it lip service. Acknowledging it and talking more about it is important, but we must also redress the funding imbalance. We can't allow the strain on other parts of the NHS to constantly undermine this crucial

challenge. We have made progress here, but it must become a higher priority still.

There are also some specific services I would like to see put in place. When you feel unwell, it feels very much like being in a cloud. You feel isolated and it can be an incredibly vulnerable time for people. Some of the most vulnerable moments for people are between 1am and 5am. Most people are asleep. They don't even recognise this world that exists for lots of people. But for others, it is their reality: night after night they struggle with these things. I want more services to help people sleep.

Talking therapies can be a game changer. I have looked around to see what works, not only in other parts of the UK, but also in Europe and the US. One of the best models I have seen is a 24-hour open centre. Psychiatric care is integrated with other services, but the fundamental principle is that professionals are talking to the most vulnerable at their most vulnerable time. It's not meant to be an all-singing, all-dancing solution to everything we do. But it is a place to go. Sometimes for people that are struggling with mental health problems, what matters is simply knowing it is there, whenever you need it.

A holistic view

I am also wary of the over-medicalisation of mental health treatment. We need to stop people thinking that, when they have a mental health problem,

there is simply a medical, pills-based solution to how they feel which is largely what people expect from their doctor. This fundamentally misunderstands the issues around mental health. Yes, there is an aspect to it that you can address by taking medication. However, we need to tackle the root causes of what is giving you that anxiety. What is stopping you sleeping? What is causing your depression?

We must be a lot more joined-up in how we think about mental health. We need to reconfigure how we look at wellbeing – it includes things like having a job, good housing and social networks. We try to tackle these problems in isolation, but no one talks about how they affect mental health. When we celebrate high employment, that is a mental health gain. We must look beyond the NHS to our welfare system and our education system to address our mental wellbeing.

I have been struck by statistics about young people growing up in homes in my constituency in Plymouth where there is no father figure. Their role models are only in the media or online. That is a big problem, because people only see the best side of people on a public platform. A lot of our young people, men in particular, are missing out on seeing that it is OK to have a bad day, and to talk about how you're feeling.

I am a member of the all-party parliamentary group on mental health which regularly calls on government ministers, NHS organisations, health

professionals, research bodies and people with experience of mental illness to give evidence. At a recent meeting I was the only man present and yet there is a huge issue surrounding mental health and masculinity. Does it come as any surprise that despite encouraging recent statistics, suicide remains the biggest killer of men under the age of 45?

Veteran Care

Lastly, I have a specific concern for the mental health of veterans, of whom I am one. Care for those who have served in our armed forces is the second major reason I entered politics. In 2012, we reached a very unwelcome threshold when, tragically, more soldiers and veterans killed themselves than were killed on operational service in defence of the realm.

There are some genuine heroes in our communities and charities up and down this land who work tirelessly night and day to look after and assist those who have found returning to a peaceful life the biggest challenge of all.

But over the years governments of all colours have made a fundamental mistake in seeing veterans' care as a third sector responsibility, in the belief that the great British public, in all their wonderful generosity, support our troops well enough. Any new call for help is met with the response: "Well, there must be a charity for that." That is fundamentally and unequivocally wrong. I am not a charity case and neither were my men. We gave the best years of our lives in defending the privileges, traditions and freedoms that this country enjoys. It is the duty of the nation to look after veterans and their families when they return to civilian life.

Conclusion

We have made important strides in ensuring everyone can access the support they need for their mental health. But we have to go further and keep fighting for better services. The case studies presented in this report – as well as the way we treat veterans - show how far away we remain from getting things right. We must not be content with anything less than parity between services, easily accessible services and no stigma.

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