



*Action for  
Children*

***More safe  
and happy  
childhoods***

**Our strategy**



# More safe and happy childhoods

We want to rewrite the future for vulnerable children across the UK.

A lot has changed since we began in 1869, but our ambition – to give children safe and happy childhoods – shines just as bright. Our vast experience has given us a unique insight into the issues facing children, young people and families. We know what needs to be done and, crucially, our frontline staff have the expertise to deliver.

Today, we have over 400 services across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. We provide support to families from pregnancy, through childhood and into young adulthood. Our services intervene early to help families stay together. And, through our children's centres and family hubs, we make sure children and young people get the best start in life. We care for children and young people in our children's homes and through our adoption and fostering services. Our internationally acclaimed Blues Programme gives young people the tools to look after their emotional wellbeing. And our award winning service Parent Talk offers free, down-to-earth advice for parents. These are just a few of the many exceptional services we provide to help children thrive.

In 2021-22, we supported over 671,000 children, young people and families, and although we've achieved incredible things for them, we know there is still more to do.



We were a vital lifeline for many during the pandemic. As we learn to live with Covid, the ongoing effects – social, health and financial challenges – are still being felt. We've seen an increasing number of children and young people struggling with their mental wellbeing following lockdowns. And the cost of living crisis is further compounding these challenges.

We've applied all our of experience and expertise to develop our ambitious new strategy to help address these challenges. It lays out what we'll do to reach more vulnerable children and young people through our services, in schools and online. And how we'll achieve this by building on our strong and dedicated workforce, our processes, our reputation and our income generating ability.

Our ambition is big. But we believe in the passion and ability of everybody in the Action for Children family – whether they be our staff, volunteers, supporters or partners – to give more vulnerable children a safe and happy childhood.

## Our vision

Our vision is that every child and young person has a safe and happy childhood, and the foundations they need to thrive.

## Our mission

We protect and support children and young people. We do this by providing practical and emotional care and support. We make sure their voices are heard. And we campaign to bring lasting improvements to their lives.

## Our values

In everything we do, we are: **passionate, ambitious, collaborative and inclusive.**

## Our strategic goals

Our seven goals will help us become stronger and more sustainable, so we can ensure more children are safe and happy. They are underpinned by our commitment to put the voice of children and young people at the heart of our work, and to embed our diversity and inclusion strategy.

### What we'll do for children, young people and families

#### Our four core service areas



**Family support**  
Supporting families to make sure children and young people get the best start in life.



**Children in care**  
Caring for children and young people to give them a safe, stable and loving home.



**Disabled children**  
Supporting disabled children, young people and their families.



**Mental health and wellbeing**  
Building children and young people's emotional resilience to help them overcome challenges.



**Grow our services to help more children and young people**



**Increase the impact of our work with children and young people**



**Influence policy decisions to improve the lives of children and young people**

### How we'll achieve it



**Attract, develop and retain brilliant staff and volunteers**



**Inspire greater support for our vision and mission**



**Increase our financial contribution from fundraising, nurseries and childcare**



**Deliver best value for children and young people by improving efficiency**



# About our core service areas

Our strategy will focus on developing our services in four core areas. This will allow us to evolve and support more vulnerable children, young people and their families, now and in the future.



## Family support



Supporting families to make sure children and young people get the best start in life. Services include:

- Parenting support and early help for children and young people, as well as intensive services to improve family functioning, and avoid care or family breakdown
- Parent Talk, offering free, advice for parents both online and via parenting coaches.
- Support for children and young people who have caring responsibilities.
- Youth services such as employment programmes, services to reduce involvement in anti-social behaviour, crime and substance misuse, and support to help build resilience, skills and networks.
- Spring nurseries and Spring Oscars providing nurseries and childcare.

## Children in care



Caring for children and young people to give them a safe, stable and loving home. Services include:

- Adoption and fostering services.
- Children's homes providing residential care for children and young people.
- Youth services providing advice and support to young people for independent living and housing provision, as well as statutory leaving care services.
- Children's rights and advocacy support, and independent visits.
- A school for children and young people with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and those with profound and multiple learning difficulties.

## Disabled children



Supporting disabled children, young people and their families. Services include:

- Children's homes offering overnight, medium and long term residential care for disabled children and young people.
- Short breaks for disabled children and young people in children's homes, providing respite, independence and access to new opportunities.
- Community support such as leisure, social, out of school and holiday activities for disabled children and young people, as well as in home care, drop in services, community social work and advice services.
- Overnight support or day-care for disabled children in an approved foster carer's home.

## Mental health and wellbeing



Building children and young people's emotional resilience to help them overcome challenges.

- Services provide early help and preventative support to children and young people who are suffering from, or at risk of developing, depression and other mental health problems. Services include:
- One-to-one and group programmes providing therapeutic support to help at an early stage, delivered through schools or the community.
  - Programmes supporting wellbeing and reducing anxiety and depression, including The Blues and Bouncing Back.
  - Mental health literacy programmes to support teachers and other professionals, reduce stigma and increase access to support, such as The Guide.



**“Action for children  
have helped me  
so much.”**

**- Kirsty, young carer**



## **Strategic goal 1**

**Grow our services to help more  
children and young people.**

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To make a real difference to the increasing number of children, young people and families that need us, we will deliver targeted growth in our four core service areas. And we'll make sure that our charity remains financially sustainable as we do so, to allow us to continue keeping children safe and happy in the future.

By shaping our services with children, young people and families wherever possible, we'll make sure we deliver for their needs. And we'll work collaboratively alongside local authorities and other partners, so services deliver for their needs, ultimately helping more children to thrive.

**To achieve this, we plan to:**

- Expand our family support services, particularly in areas where we have less presence currently.
- Increase our residential care service by setting up more high quality children's homes that provide stability for children and young people.
- Develop our disability services based on need and set up more short break homes to provide respite, give children and young people the chance to develop independence skills and improve their access to social and leisure opportunities.
- Extend our mental health support for children and young people by creating new services and ways of working with key agencies.



We'll expand our services across the UK, with a focus on growing in England, while also supporting strong growth opportunities across Scotland, Wales and Ireland.

**“I have been in care for nine years and been supported by the transition worker for a year. The impact that she has had in my life has been amazing. This woman is essentially my fairy godmother; there is nothing she can't do and I have really benefited from her help, if I didn't have her support or care I would be stuck.”**

**- Young person**



## Strategic goal 2

Increase the impact of our work with children and young people.

We're passionate about giving more children safe and happy childhoods. But as we expand our services it's critical that we also work to achieve even better outcomes for children, young people and their families.

To improve our impact we'll continually learn and adapt, tailor our services to individual and local needs and adopt proven practices.

We'll gather data that will help us shape and build on our services, focus our support where it's needed the most, inform our policy influencing and raise awareness of the work we do. So that children and young people have the opportunity to thrive.

To achieve our goals, we'll:

- Continue to improve our services focusing on impact, quality and innovation, by gaining and using evidence and developing our practices.
- Develop a new impact assessment framework, using the data to aid decision making.
- Gain external accreditation for the high standard of our services.



***“The support from Action for Children has just helped me come out of my shell. I am happy to talk to people and tell them my story and make friends. I never could’ve even done this if it wasn’t for their support.”***

**– Charlie\***

\*while the name has been changed, the story is real

## Strategic goal 3

Influence policy decisions to improve the lives of children and young people.

Our services on the ground do incredible work to directly support children, young people and their families. But by influencing policy and public attitudes, we have the opportunity to create change and improve the lives of all children in the UK.

We'll use our expertise and experience in supporting children, young people and their families to make a positive impact on policy areas including early help, early years, poverty and mental health. And we'll work collaboratively with other organisations to achieve the maximum impact.

For example, we'll aim to secure policy change to increase funding for early help services, to protect more children from harm. And influence the roll out of family hubs, to ensure they provide families with the highest quality parenting support.

To make sure we focus our work on the issues that matter most to children and young people, their views will be central to our work and will inform our decision making on influencing policy and beyond.

To achieve our goals, we'll:

- Build our evidence base to influence public policy, by capturing data from our frontline services and commissioning research on key policy areas.



- Increase the impact of our campaigns with the public and our influencing activities with officials and parliamentarians, to build public support and political backing, locally and nationally.
- Integrate the voices of children and young people across the organisation, so they are truly represented in all our work.

***“As a care leaver, I feel like we're thrown to the side, we're forgotten about after the experience of foster care.”***

**– Rachel, care-experienced young person visiting parliament as part of the Day of Action led by Action for Children**

## Strategic goal 4

Attract, develop and retain brilliant staff and volunteers.

Our staff and volunteers are the heartbeat of our charity. Having the people and skills we need enables us to deliver the best services and achieve amazing outcomes for vulnerable children, young people and their families.

Whilst recruiting and retaining staff and volunteers in the current environment is challenging, our strategy will put us in the best position to meet our business needs.

We'll focus on leading the way in attracting and developing a workforce with the skills, capabilities and behaviours that will help us deliver on our vision of more safe and happy childhoods. Building on our already strong reputation in the children's care sector and across supporting functions, will help us to fill vacancies. And we'll support all staff, empowering them to develop and achieve their potential.

This will help us as we create an inclusive and supportive working environment that motivates staff to stay at Action for Children.

To achieve our goals, we'll:

- Become an inclusive and pro-actively anti-racist charity, with diverse representation at all levels, where staff and volunteers can proudly be themselves.



- Enable colleagues to achieve their potential by supporting their professional development and helping them progress in our charity.
- Develop our leaders, championing a culture and behaviours which are positive and fair, with a focus on wellbeing and opportunities for all.
- Build our reputation as a great place to work, by more effectively communicating the benefits of working at Action for Children.

***“Before I was in Action For Children, I wasn't doing too well. Since coming here, they've helped me a lot. They're obviously really good at choosing staff to hire.”***

***– Rhys, Tan y Bryn care resident***

## Strategic goal 5

Inspire greater support for our vision and mission.

To transform what we do for vulnerable children and their families, we need to make sure people know who we are, what we do and why they should support us.

Our work will help us stand out, drive interest in our cause, build trust and inspire people to take action.

We'll amplify the voices of children and young people in our communications, be inclusive in everything we do and make sure we are flexible enough to adapt to changes in the external and internal environment.

To achieve our goals, we'll:

- Evolve our communications approach to help create one Action for Children family, ensuring everything we do helps deliver more safe and happy childhoods.
- Work collaboratively to develop compelling campaigns, content and communications that drive awareness and engagement.
- Engage our staff, supporters and networks to champion our cause and fundraising efforts.



***“Action for Children was a real lifeline for us when things were looking pretty bad. They really will help you in any way that you need help.”***

***– Sarah, parent***



## Strategic goal 6

### Increase our financial contribution from fundraising, nurseries and childcare.

As well as helping to fund our work in local communities, income from fundraising, nurseries and childcare has enabled us to offer fresh, innovative services like The Blues Programme and Parent Talk. These award-winning services have made a huge impact on the lives of vulnerable children, young people and their families.

To grow and develop such impactful services, it's vital that we continue to raise funds from donors and through our nurseries and childcare. This contribution also helps us stay financially stable, so that we can be resilient enough to keep supporting children during the tough times.

We aim to increase our fundraising income by building on our existing campaigns and focusing on longer term opportunities. We'll make sure our activities continually move with the times and harness the power of like-minded people to support us in our goals.

By expanding our nurseries and out of schools services we'll provide more of the high quality, good value childcare we're known for, whilst generating funds that will enable us to help more vulnerable children and young people.



#### To achieve our goals, we'll:

- Evolve and develop our fundraising activities and ways of working, taking a digital first approach. And scale up our campaigns to generate more funds.
- Grow our capabilities to raise income from legacies, major donors, trusts and partnerships, to help fund priority initiatives such as Parent Talk, wellbeing programmes and the Crisis Fund.
- Expand our high quality nursery and childcare services, by adding to and filling the places available, giving us greater potential to invest in the wider charity.

***"[Blues] taught me that I don't need to be so hard on myself and equipped me with coping strategies and mechanisms that I can use whenever something is bothering me."***

***– Esther, Blues Programme participant***

## Strategic goal 7

### Deliver best value for children and young people by improving our efficiency.

To maximise the impact we have on children, young people and their families we need to make sure we work as effectively as possible across the organisation. Central to this will be having the best systems and processes in place, as well as access to high quality data.

In the coming years, we'll reduce administrative pressures, improve our systems and streamline our ways of working. And we'll continually review and improve our property portfolio to deliver the best value.

This will mean that more time and money can be spent supporting the children, young people and families who need our help.

#### To achieve these goals, we'll:

- Simplify, automate and integrate our technology and processes to reduce workload for staff and lower costs.
- Replace our finance and people systems, creating one more efficient integrated system. And implement a new children's services recording system that better harnesses data and helps us improve our services for children.
- Make the best use of our property portfolio, by assessing it's effectiveness on an ongoing basis and taking action as needed.



***"We worked with Action for Children for a number of years and have always been really impressed with their services and staff. The outcomes for children and young people are always their focus and they make a huge difference, while offering good value to us as a local authority."***

***– Bury Council***



# Making it happen

Our strategy gives us a clear direction, so that everyone in the Action for Children family can come together and build on the amazing work we're already doing. It sets out the priorities and ways we need to develop to maximise the impact we have and help more vulnerable children, young people and their families.

We know our goals are ambitious, but we believe if we pull together we can make them happen. Everyone has an important part to play in bringing the strategy to life. With the help of the Action for Children family - our staff, volunteers, supporters and partners - we can make the strategy a reality.

If we do this, then the strategy can provide the focus and inspiration for us to work together, passionately, ambitiously, collaboratively and inclusively, to create more safe and happy childhoods.





# More ways to get involved

Everyone in the Action for Children family is passionate about our cause: helping more vulnerable children stay safe and happy. There are so many things you can do to help us achieve our ambitious goals:



**Shout about us.** Sharing our posts with your networks will help to raise our awareness and, in turn, help us to be there for more vulnerable children.



**Campaign.** A cause to shout about. Speak up to add your voice and together we can make changes that affect vulnerable children's lives.



**Fundraise.** Challenge yourself to run a marathon. Host a bake sale. Whatever you do, you'll raise vital funds for vulnerable children.



**Volunteer.** Mentor a young person. Work alongside like-minded people at one of our events. Join an Action Squad. There are so many ways you can help to support vulnerable children.



**Donate.** Small change, big difference. Donate online or consider leaving a gift in your will. Every pound propels us toward helping more vulnerable children.



**Partner.** Get in contact if you know a business or organisation that could help change the lives of vulnerable children by partnering with us or joining an exclusive event.

Visit [actionforchildren.org.uk](https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk) to find out more.