



Overcoming disadvantage: A six-point programme from Family Action to the next government

Family Action has been a leading provider of services to disadvantaged and socially isolated families since 1869. We work with over 45,000 families a year by providing practical, emotional and financial support through over 100 community-based services across England. Additionally in 2008-2009 we distributed 3,235 grants totaling over £641,000 to families and individuals in need throughout the UK. Family Action won the 2009 Charity Awards Foundation award for effectiveness. It is based on this experience that we are calling on the next Government to do the following:

1. Disadvantaged families and individuals must not pay the price for this recession.

Without investment in public services their needs will spiral in the long-term. Responding to the current financial climate by cutting public services to vulnerable adults and children will therefore be a false economy. The next government must invest in both high quality children's centres and targeted professional parenting support in the home for the most vulnerable and socially isolated families

2. Families with multiple complex needs must not be allowed to fall through the gaps in public services.

The next Government should ensure that all public services receive sufficient resources to Think Family, and that all types of family are treated equally. Most children are best cared for in their own homes by their parents, but some parents need help to parent their children safely and with confidence. Also, too many public services see individuals with mental health problems or physical disabilities as one-dimensional when most have families. Support for vulnerable adults should also mean support for their wider family networks or other carers. Policies and public services should not discriminate against families because they are single-parent led or led by a kinship carer such as a grandparent. The latter may fulfil an important role in ensuring children do not require "stranger care" in foster or residential placements

3. Invest in breaking the cycle of disadvantage early in children's lives.

Very disadvantaged and vulnerable families must receive professional support while the children are still young. Children's Centres are an excellent service for most families but there are a small number of families (often called 'hard-to-reach') many of whom need help the most, and need services provided in their own homes. They include parents with mental health problems, postnatal depression, and learning disabilities. There should be more investment in services such as Family Action's Building Bridges or perinatal family support services which have been evaluated and proven to work.

4. Invest in more services to tackle domestic abuse.

Domestic abuse is witnessed by some 750,000 children a year (Source: Refuge). As we know from our frontline services and applications to our grants programme, domestic abuse is a risk to children as well as adults; currently too many vulnerable women and children suffer the impoverishment and upheaval of leaving their family homes to be safe from the abusers. The next government must invest sufficiently in services such as those provided by Family Action to support women and children to remain in their homes safely and ensure the police have sufficient powers to make abusers leave the family home and stay away.

5. Invest in supporting vulnerable adults to strengthen our communities.

We know from working with isolated adults with severe long-term mental health problems that they urgently need high quality personal support so as to live more fulfilling and socially connected lives, including through work. They need services that are ambitious about helping them fulfil individual needs and lead independent lives. This would strengthen communities for everyone.

6. Really tackling disadvantage will mean investing in services *and* incomes for the poorest.

The next Government must set the UK on course for the 2020 target for ending child poverty as enshrined in the new Child Poverty Act. As members of the End Child Poverty campaign we are calling for a minimum wage that is higher and more widely enforced; more investment in tax credits, the Social Fund and child care; and better access to legal, affordable savings and loans. Whilst work is the solution to poverty for most people we should recognise some people need a great deal of help and support to get to work. They should not be penalised if this level of support is not available to them.

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