The Children’s Society in the West Midlands
Innovating and investing to change children’s lives

A better childhood. For every child.

www.childrenssociety.org.uk
The West Midlands is both a dynamic place and one with challenges around the life chances of its children and young people. Ever since The Children’s Society first began working in the area in 1893 we have been helping and supporting some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged young people.

Now, in a climate of tightening public sector resources, rising levels of childhood poverty and adolescent neglect, we consider it to be our duty as a national charity with a strong local presence to do more – as a direct deliverer of services, and as a children’s charity that campaigns and advocates.

We know that increasingly organisations concerned with the welfare of children – local authorities, health partners, schools, the voluntary and community sector – are working together to improve outcomes.

In this document we set out the vision and ambition for our work in the West Midlands, outlining how we will deploy all of the assets of our organisation – our staff, volunteers, supporters and partners – to bring about real change in the lives of children and add significant value through partnership and collaboration.

Matthew Reed
Chief Executive

May Day, Handsworth Home for Girls, 1911
A national charity with a local focus

We are a leading children’s charity, already influencing and responding to the national agenda for children and young people. However, we know that many areas of the country are seeking new and innovative ways of addressing local needs and of empowering local communities to participate in finding solutions.

At The Children’s Society, we recognise the potential this has for tackling the causes and effects of childhood poverty and adolescent neglect – our strategic themes. Children are more likely to thrive if the context in which they live – their relationships, social structures and community – is geared towards giving them every chance to grow and succeed.

Children who suffer can best be helped if those same local structures come together to create an environment in which the needs of children come first. That is why we are reshaping our local services and infrastructure to become more strategically focused on the needs of regions such as the West Midlands.

Childhood poverty and adolescent neglect

We are committed to tackling childhood poverty and adolescent neglect through our direct services, campaigning and advocacy work.

We believe that childhood poverty can be prevented, resolved and its worst effects avoided. We want to help families:

- get the help they need – before things spiral out of control;
- overcome barriers to work by accessing quality, affordable, childcare;
- fulfil their children’s potential through learning opportunities and having health needs met.

Through our approach to adolescent neglect we will ensure young people’s needs for support and guidance are met and they receive the love, care and emotional support they need. Our priorities are:

- early intervention and family support;
- to tackle institutional neglect so that young people in the care system, in families subject to immigration control, young carers and those involved with youth justice, are supported;
- to promote and support positive mental health for vulnerable young people.
Why we’re taking a new approach

To address some of the challenges set out here it is important we take a more strategic approach in our biggest cities, to become greater than the sum of our parts. By being a more coherent organisation we can raise our profile, extend our influence and do more work on the ground.

Establishing the West Midlands as a priority area will allow us to work collectively and more effectively with all our partners, supporters and the church. It will enable us to better target our efforts, avoid duplication, enhance internal collaboration and project a clear and unambiguous message about our commitment to improving the lives of children and families in this area.

Why the West Midlands?

Children in the West Midlands are likely to suffer the effects of poverty and neglect more than many other areas in the UK. The number of benefit claimants in four of the seven urban West Midlands local authority areas is over 5% higher than the national average. Childhood poverty stands at over 30% in Birmingham, Sandwell and Wolverhampton, and is highly prevalent in all seven urban authorities in the region.

The majority of poverty in the West Midlands is linked to poor adult qualifications and a lack of employment opportunities. The Children’s Society is committed to supporting families in the region so that local children can thrive in spite of these challenges.

Our work in the area dates back over 120 years. We have a history of giving vulnerable and neglected young people support and hope. We currently have 13 projects in the region and last year worked with over 3,000 local children.
Evidence of need

The Children’s Society in the West Midlands is committed to providing services and supporting children in every part of the region, but our initial priority is to the seven urban authorities that have higher levels of need.

Of the 5.6 million people living in the area, 1.1 million are children under the age of 16. Not all have the same opportunities.

In six of the seven authorities, the average weekly gross pay is lower than the national average.

In Birmingham, unemployment is over 14%, almost twice the national average.

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In some wards over 50% of children live in poverty.

The average rate of teenage pregnancy (15–17-year-olds) stands at 50 per 10,000 in four authorities, and above the national average.

Across the West Midlands region, fewer than two thirds of looked-after children have had a health assessment, compared to the national average of 86%.

The rate of looked-after children is considerably higher than the national average in all seven local authorities.

There is strong evidence of childhood poverty and adolescent neglect in the seven urban authorities of the West Midlands.

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Our vision for The Children’s Society in West Midlands

We want the West Midlands to be a place where:

- poverty is no longer a barrier to children getting a decent start in life;
- families and communities are strong enough to nurture children as they grow up so that neglect is not a factor;
- children no longer face unacceptable risks in their lives without support, be that parental or institutional.

We will achieve this by:

- working alongside and investing within communities, directly supporting them, their families and their children;
- working with like-minded organisations to maximise positive impacts for children across the area;
- working tirelessly to challenge and change the conditions that stop children from thriving – systemic, political and attitudinal – within the local area and nationally.

Where are we going?

Our ambition is to be a significant strategic and operational partner in the West Midlands.

We aim to:

- develop key strategic relationships so we can work together to find ways of identifying innovative solutions for the issues in each area;
- tackle childhood poverty by introducing Children and Family Zones (CFZs) in wards where the demographic is typical of poverty in the West Midlands area;
- develop an evidence-based model of provision which will add depth and quality to our services for vulnerable children and young people;
- significantly increase our engagement with local schools and churches;
- build up a younger supporter base to complement the committed and long-standing supporters we already have;
- work collectively and collaboratively with our supporters, with the church and with other local partners to develop innovation and to drive growth and investment to change children’s lives for the better.
The importance of early intervention in securing better outcomes for children and families is well documented.

Our approach to tackling this problem is to sharpen our focus even further by creating Children and Family Zones (CFZs) in specific areas where communities can come together to shape the provision they want and need.

We have looked at what works internationally and have been particularly influenced by the Harlem Children’s Zone which has dramatically improved the lives of children in that part of New York.

We are delighted that our first Children and Family Zone nationally will be in North Solihull, and we will work in partnership with Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council and the local community to develop the area so that all children and, particularly, disadvantaged children achieve and have positive outcomes in their lives.

What we will do
We have four priorities for the West Midlands:

1. **Put the voice of children and families at the centre of the fight against childhood poverty and adolescent neglect.**

   Last October, The Children’s Society launched The Children’s Commission on Poverty, an 18-month project led by young people, investigating the causes and impact of poverty on children and young people. In the West Midlands, work on childhood poverty will be a major priority and we will work closely with The Children’s Commission wherever appropriate. We will also seek to develop further initiatives in partnership with others to ensure that children, young people and families who are in poverty in the region receive our full support.

   We are being commissioned by local authorities in the region to bring together the voices of young people to help inform and shape services.

   We run advocacy and independent visitor services in four of the authorities in the region and we support and advocate for families who have no recourse to public funds and/or who are destitute. This advocacy work is not easy and we recognise that in supporting some families it will draw us into conflict from time to time with Local Authorities and NHS providers.

   Our research and Good Childhood teams will work closely with education and early years’ partners to complete well-being surveys with local children. These will cover a wide range of circumstances, from family relationships and school experience through to ideas about improving the area where they live.

   We can replicate this offer across the region, to help all authorities assess the well-being of children on a regular basis, and benchmark findings against our national research.

2. **Roll out the Children and Family Zone model to improve the lives of children and families in the most deprived areas.**

   We are keen to develop this work further and to continue listening to children and young people in every service and in every setting – and to campaign for children where we believe that services and opportunities need to improve.

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We already have a strong supporter and volunteer base across the West Midlands with over 15,000 people supporting our work, so we are in a good position to harness this for even greater impact.

We will strengthen local support through an integrated supporter and volunteering strategy for the region, based on in-depth research into the experience of existing supporters and volunteers across our organisation. In the West Midlands, we will grow the number of young supporters and volunteers, and develop a student unit to engage social work, psychology and youth in community students in particular.

Working closely with the local community will impact on how we campaign and how we fundraise. Recent campaigns from The Children’s Society have included Fair and Square - our drive to ensure that every school child in poverty should be entitled to a free school meal. In the future, we will run tailored campaigns that enhance our national voice while speaking to the needs and issues of the West Midlands.

We will also look to commission new West Midlands-specific campaigning work to influence local attitudes and ensure the voice of children and young people is heard and acted upon.

The development of key strategic relationships is of the utmost importance. We will work together with authorities and other service providers to identify innovative solutions to meet the needs of vulnerable children and families in the region.

We will build on our excellent work with vulnerable young people to plan new services, to work with authorities to ensure that support for young people is joined up, robust and effective. Improving adolescent support services, particularly for young people on the edge of care, is a key priority. We are concerned about the mental health needs of young people and we want to develop new services working with communities and institutions to prevent and tackle young people’s mental distress.

We also have a core range of skills and expertise in working with young refugees, asylum seekers and destitute families who have no recourse to public funds. This area of work is particularly challenging and makes partnerships with Local Authorities even more vital but, in our view, children affected by migration are some of the most vulnerable children anywhere. This work needs further support and partnership development to enable these children to move forward.
We currently provide 13 types of services across the West Midlands. These are supporting over 3,000 children and young people.

**Children’s Centres**
In the West Midlands we have a network of three children’s centres in Solihull, which have become focal points of the communities they serve. Our children’s centres give children and families the support they need to thrive and the life skills and opportunities to play an active part in society.

“You guys have done so much for me, I am humbled by the support I have received from the children’s centre, I will definitely tell my friends about it.” *Parent*

**Young refugee and asylum seekers, and destitute families**
War, persecution and torture force many children and their families to flee to this country. At The Children’s Society in Birmingham and Coventry, we run youth groups for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people, giving them a place to meet and group work to help develop their life skills. At one of our groups, we also offer a stay and play facility for young people and their parents in a homelessness hostel.

Our Helping Further project works with destitute families across the region. We work with families who have no recourse to public funds in Coventry, Birmingham and the Black Country, and have been very successful in engaging with Roma communities across the region.

“Children’s rights and advocacy services”
Advocacy can be life-changing for a young person. For many children and young people in the care system, it may be their only chance to have a real say in decisions that profoundly affect their lives. Advocates work directly with them to ensure their views are heard and acted upon. We know that children and young people particularly seek support with issues such as placement, taking part in their reviews and leaving care.

Our advocacy services are complemented by independent visitor schemes in many areas. These are volunteers who befriend young people, build up positive, long-standing relationships with them and help them to develop new skills, enjoy life and make new friends.

We currently run these services in the following areas of West Midlands:
- Dudley
- Sandwell
- Walsall
- Wolverhampton

“I’m happy here. It helps my depression and loneliness.” *Young person, Stone Road asylum hostel, Birmingham*
Missing from home services and sexual exploitation

Across the country and the region, we provide a range of targeted and specialist services for runaways and victims of child sexual exploitation. These include one-to-one support and advice, drop-in services and family mediation. We also run group work, training and consultancy for both young people and professionals, to help raise awareness of the risks and indicators of running away and sexual exploitation.

Shops

We currently operate one shop in Walsall, and have plans to expand our retail network over the next three years. Our goal is to open three shops within the West Midlands area in 2014/15, and a further three in 2015/16.

Fundraising and supporter engagement

We have over 15,000 supporters across the region engaged in campaigning, volunteering and fundraising.

Our regional fundraising teams work together with our very committed local groups to raise the money that is so vital to our work in the area.

Working with the church

We have strong church relationships in the West Midlands, allied to a great local support from congregations in the regional churches. Over 80% of churches in the region have fundraised on our behalf.

Schools

We have strong links with schools, having contact with three quarters of schools in the region. Of these, 66% have donated to our work and 31% have engaged with our online school resources.

Volunteers

In the West Midlands we have around 400 dedicated volunteers working tirelessly in our services on activities such as befriending children in care and in our shops. Their equivalent value to us is more than £1 million per year. Our goal is to extend our volunteer network and demographic across the region.

‘Thank you for the work you did with Ruby. I believe she gained good insight into the risk she had put herself in and this will be a valuable lesson for the future. Ruby is a different girl to the one we saw originally and appears happy and settled.’

Youth Offending worker

‘I know now not to go up to strangers.’

Young person aged 14

‘The work of Streetwise is very much valued in supporting Coventry City Council to tackle the issues of sexual exploitation in the city. They have been integral to a key investigation and continue to be actively involved in identifying and responding to concerns where both individuals and groups of young people are suspected or known to be exposed to significant risk. [They] have been a very influential third sector partner in tackling issues related to missing young people and risks related to child sexual exploitation (CSE). They work very flexibly in addressing the issue of risk and its impact on children and young people aged 11-18 years of age within the city.’

Service manager, Coventry City Council Children’s Services
## The Children’s Society in the West Midlands

### Birmingham
- Hub Support – The Children’s Society in the West Midlands
- Regional Fundraising – The Children’s Society in the West Midlands
- Destitution programme (also operates in Coventry)
- My Place and Counselling service
- Birmingham Missing from Home
- Birmingham Child Sexual Exploitation programme (also operates in Walsall)

### Coventry
- My Place
- Coventry Streetwise
  - The Children’s Society in Coventry
  - St Peters Centre
  - Charles St
  - Coventry
  - CV1 5NP
  - Tel: 02476520111

### Walsall
- Shop
  - The Children’s Society
  - 153 High Street
  - Bloxwich
  - Walsall
  - WS3 3LG
  - Tel: 01922 711108

### Solihull
- Castle Bromwich Children’s Centre
  - Hurst Lane
  - Castle Bromwich
  - B36 0EY
  - Tel: 0121 248 7661
- Kingshurst Children’s Centre
  - Kingshurst Primary School
  - School Close
  - Kingshurst
  - B37 6BN
  - Tel: 0121 248 7659
- Yorkswood Children’s Centre
  - Yorkswood Primary School
  - Kingshurst Way
  - Kingshurst
  - B37 6DF
  - Tel: 0121 248 7638

### Wolverhampton
- Black Country Advocacy (also operates in Dudley, Sandwell and Walsall)
- Destitution programme (also operates in Dudley, Sandwell and Walsall)
- Sandwell Emotional Health (B:Well)
  - The Workspace
  - All Saints Road
  - Wolverhampton
  - West Midlands
  - WV2 1EL
  - Tel: 01902 877 563
  - Referrals: 0800 6523839

### Sandwell
- Sandwell Emotional Health (B:Well)
If you would like to find out more about The Children’s Society in the West Midlands, to work with us or support us in any way, please get in touch:

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