

This is a request to your organisation for support for The Children First Alliance by endorsing or actively participating in its campaign for a Cabinet Minister for Children and Young People.

The case is summarised in our letter to the new Prime Minister of 29/7/19.

I write on a matter that is almost as urgent as Brexit and at least as important – the health and wellbeing of our children and young people.

The Children First Alliance is a new organisation. We have rapidly gained the support of more than 160 organisations...Our aim is to encourage politicians to act in the best interests of children. It is vital that we succeed for we seem to be heading towards the least healthy adult population in living memory.

The CFA has grown out of an All-Party Group that has published 13 in-depth reports over the last 5 years examining many aspects of child health and wellbeing. The reports detail the growing challenges faced by children and families, which are clearly evidenced by the statistics on child physical and mental health. Poor physical and mental health are more the symptoms of the problems than the cause.

The inescapable conclusion is that firefighting on individual policy fronts will be insufficient to reverse the continuing powerful negative trends and may we therefore urge you to appoint at Cabinet level a senior Minister to take ownership of these issues and develop and implement solutions across Departments that will really make a difference?

You would gain enormous support from the sector if you were to take on this challenge and I know that you will be aware of the massive cost to the NHS of treating obesity, mental health and the many other consequences of a poor start in life.

May we also encourage you to consider incorporating the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into domestic law? It is many years since the UK ratified the Convention and this would be a strong signal of serious intent and a recognition that in order to have a productive and healthy adult population we must start at the beginning.

I know from your statements that these matters are very important to you. Please appoint someone senior to deliver on this vital issue.

Below you will find the case set out in more detail (inc. 55 bullet points of supporting evidence) and further information about The Children First Alliance and its campaign.

If you are happy to endorse and/or support the campaign contact [phil@royalpa.co.uk](mailto:phil@royalpa.co.uk). Please let us have your name and position and we will be in touch.

### What is the problem?

‘What sort of society are we becoming when four and five year- olds are starting school unable to utter more than a few words, understand basic instructions or even use the toilet?’ (‘The Daily Mail’, 1st June, 2018).

Ofsted Head, Amanda Spielman, categorises children as either born ‘lucky’ or facing ‘disadvantage right from the start ... unable to follow what’s going on. Unable to keep up with their classmates. Unable to reach their potential.’

Menaced by five 21st century ‘evils’

- obesity and physical inactivity
- adverse childhood experiences
- rising mental health issues
- dominance of social media and screen time influence
- socioeconomic disadvantage and cultural/ethnic divide

our children may become the least healthy adult population in living memory.

### Roots of The Children First Alliance

The Children First Alliance has grown out of a report entitled ‘Physical Activity in Early Childhood’ sponsored by Water Babies and published in October 2017 by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on a Fit and Healthy Childhood (the APPG). The Chair of the APPG is Steve McCabe MP, the co-Chair is Baroness (Floella) Benjamin of Beckenham.

Not content to let the report ‘sit on the shelf’, Steve Franks, CE of Water Babies, committed to an independent campaign in support of children and young people with the vision of a world where the physical and emotional development of every child and young person is supported and nurtured from birth to adulthood.

### Lessons from the APPG reports

The APPG has published 13 in-depth reports since 2014 on many aspects of policy affecting children and young people. The clear conclusion to be drawn

from the reports is that the dramatic deterioration in the childhood experience would continue without a significant shift in political priorities.

The further lesson was that 'firefighting' this deterioration on individual policy fronts, whilst valuable and worthy, was not going to hold back the tide of increasing negative pressure on children and young people and that a champion was needed at the very heart of Government to take ownership of the issues and drive improvements across Departments.

### A Cabinet Minister for Children and Young People

The Children First Alliance therefore adopted as its flagship policy a call for a Cabinet Minister for Children and Young People. This, of course, is a first step only. What that Cabinet Minister actually does will be the key to reversing negative trends and unlocking the potential of our children and young people.

The current junior Ministerial post in the Department for Education cannot drive with the requisite authority an integrated cross-Departmental response to the challenges.

This strong voice for children at Cabinet level would work in the same way that the interests of women are served by the current Cabinet Minister for Women and Equalities. Similarly, a Minister for Loneliness at Cabinet level has been in post since July 2018.

### The Purpose of The Children First Alliance

- Champion the importance of our children and young people
- Improve their physical and mental health
- Push equality and inclusiveness
- Inspire the potential of the next generations
- Press policy-makers to put children and young people at the heart of all decision-making

### Rolling out the Campaign

Children First sought views from the sector and received a very positive response with over 150 organisations confirming their support for the flagship policy and a series of meetings with influential MPs and Lords followed. All acknowledged 'the problem' and were open to discussion as to the solutions.

A reception in the House of Commons hosted by Lucy Powell MP took place in January 2019 bringing together supporters in the sector and supportive politicians.

Anne Longfield, the Children's Commissioner for England, and Shirley Cramer, the CE of the Royal Society for Public Health, agreed to address the meeting.

We are immensely grateful for the wholehearted and consistent support of Baroness (Frances) D'Souza who has agreed to become the President of The Children First Alliance.

A planning dinner with key supporters took place in the House of Lords in June.

### Sponsorship Opportunities

The Children First Alliance campaign has been financed entirely by Water Babies. Water Babies are fully committed to continuing their support for the Campaign.

Activity has been driven by personal commitment and the excellent voluntary action of supporters without the support of full-time staff. Efficient and economic use of resources has brought us to this point yet inevitably we have not been able to do everything we would like to.

There are three target audiences:

- Policy-makers and politicians
- Organisations and professionals in the sector
- The general public

We seek a change in political attitudes. Active support from the sector has been built but requires further growth and co-ordination to make the most impact upon policy-makers. The vocal support of the general public also impacts upon politicians.

There are several steps we would like to take that are currently difficult to fund and so there are sponsorship opportunities. Please get in touch for further details.

### The Evidence

The following is a summary of fully-referenced evidence that supports The Children First Alliance campaign

#### **Obesity/overweight issues**

- Nearly a third of children aged 2 to 15 are overweight or obese and younger generations are becoming obese at earlier ages and staying obese for longer. Obesity in 22% of 4-5 year olds rises to 33% at ages 6-7; projected life-spans are decreasing for the first time in history

[\(Hardy LR, Harrell JS and Bell RA, Journal of Paediatric Nursing, Mar 2017\)](#)

- Annual spend on the treatment of obesity and diabetes is greater than the amount spent on the police, the fire service and the judicial system combined, and the UK-wide NHS costs attributable to overweight and obesity are projected to reach £9.7 billion by 2050, with wider costs to society estimated to reach £49.9 billion per year. ([Public Health England, Mar 2017](#))
- The number of children and teenagers admitted to hospital for obesity-related problems is increasing – up from 676 admissions in 2014-15 to 905 in 2016-17 ([Department of Health, Mar 2018](#))
- Britain is starting to overtake America in obesity rates, with the latest figures showing that more children in England are classed as obese at the age of 11 than in the US. The proportion of US children aged 9 to 11 who are obese is 18.5%. The figure for children in their final year of primary school in England is at a record high of 20%. Secondary-school children are also more obese. In the [Health Survey for England](#) (Dec 2018) 23% of children aged 11 to 15 were obese in 2016. In America, 20.6% of children aged 12 to 15 were obese (US National Health and Nutritional Examination Survey 2018)
- The [Annual Health Survey for England](#) (Dec 2018) states that amongst the areas for the highest recorded levels of child obesity are Barking and Dagenham (29.2%), Sandwell (27.8%) and Copeland and Cumbria (25.1%)
- The proportion of children in Year 6 (aged 10/11) presenting as severely obese has reached an all-time high of 20% ([Public Health England, Jul 2018](#))
- The toxic, interrelated mix of severe obesity and widening health inequalities is persistent and entrenched: 'These trends are extremely worrying and have been decades in the making – reversing them will not happen overnight,' [Dr. Alison Tedstone, chief nutritionist at Public Health England](#), Jul 2018

### **Physical activity/play**

- Only 17.5% of children are meeting the Chief Medical Officer's guidelines of more than 60 minutes of activity a day, every day of the week, and 32.9% do fewer than 30 minutes of physical activity a day ([Sport England Survey, Dec 2018](#))

- [The Children's Commissioner, Anne Longfield](#) (Sep 2018) said: "Children are spending two or three hours online every day, but only four hours a week playing out. The result is a generation that is the least active ever. Only one in four boys and one in five girls in England do the recommended 60 minutes of activity each day".
- The Persil/Unilever Project '[Dirt is Good](#)' campaign found that most primary school age children spend less time in outdoor play than prisoners are required to have by law.
- [A report written for the UK National Trust](#) (2012) stated that the area where children are allowed to roam unsupervised around their homes has shrunk by 90% since the 1970s.
- Recent education policy changes have restricted the amount of learning through play and increased pressures on children at school with very high stress levels reported related to examinations, and a strong relationship was reported between loss of free play opportunities and increases in mental health problems ([Rodway C, Tham SG, Ibrahim S et al, 2016](#) and [Gray P, 2011](#))
- There is compelling evidence of play's effectiveness in treatment of mental health conditions. A study of the introduction of a structured play regimen in an Indian orphanage reported highly significant gains on motor, cognitive and social function measures. ([Taneja V, Sriram S, Beri R, Sreenivas V, Aggarwal R, Kaur R. 2002](#))
- By 2020/21 there will have been a decrease in spend on play facilities of 44% since 2017/18. In 2016/17 local authorities closed 63 playgrounds and in 2017/18 a further 70 playgrounds have been closed. Since 2014 local authorities have closed a total of 347 playgrounds across England. ([Association of Play Industries "Nowhere to Play" Mar 2018](#))
- A [recent study](#) by Swim England (Jul 2017) highlights that a third of school pupils aged 11 will finish Year 6 unable to swim despite a national requirement that every Year 6 leaver be capable of unaided swimming over 25 metres. 53% of primary schools either provide no curriculum-guided swimming lessons or fail to achieve any of the three required goals (be able to swim unaided over 25 metres, use a range of strokes effectively and be able to perform self-rescue techniques in various water-based situations).
- [The Breaktime survey](#) by the Nuffield Foundation shows that the amount of time that schoolchildren are permitted outside to play or participate in organised physical activities during a school day has decreased with each passing decade. The main reason given is to create more time for teaching and learning and to manage poor

behaviour of students. Primary schools with a higher proportion of pupils in receipt of free school meals and/or in urban areas tended to have less total time for breaks (May 2019).

## Health

- The UK has the fifth highest mortality rate for babies under one year out of 19 European countries and one of the highest rates for older children and young people. There are around 130 more deaths of one to nine years olds in the UK every year than the European average. The leading causes are cancer, injuries and poisonings, congenital conditions and neurological and developmental disorders ([Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health 2017](#))
- The number of hospital admissions for tooth decay for children aged 5-9 increased for the second consecutive year from 25,923 in 2016-2017 to 26,111 in 2017-2018. Tooth decay remains the number one reason that children aged 5-9 are admitted to hospital. Almost one in three (31.5%) 5-9 year olds did not visit an NHS dentist in the 12 months leading up to 30 June 2018 ([Royal College of Surgeons](#), Sep 2018)
- The number of children and young people currently receiving treatment for type 2 diabetes in England and Wales has risen from 507 to 715 in four years according to an [audit](#) published in Aug 2018 by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health.

## Mental health

- The current system of child mental health is funded, commissioned and supplied by many differing organisations. Lack of collaboration and fragmented care, waiting list pressure and the infrastructure of allocated funding all add up to a service in crisis. The overall picture is challenging, as illustrated by statistics supplied by Young Minds ([Young Minds Annual Report: 2015](#)):
  - Approximately 850,000 children and young people have a clinically significant mental health problem
  - 1 in 10 children between the ages of 5-16 years (3 in every classroom) have a diagnosable mental health problem
  - 1 in 4 children showed evidence of mental ill health (including depression and anxiety)
  - Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are, on average, turning away nearly 25% of child referrals
  - 75% of mental health trusts between 2013/2014 and 2014/2015 have had budgets cut or frozen; CAMHS budgets have been annually depleted in this way since 2010
  - Only 0.75% of NHS budget is directed to children's mental health; 6.36% of total NHS mental health-spend.

- The number of girls under the age of 18 treated in hospital in England after self-harming nearly doubled over 20 years, according to NHS figures. The figure reached 13,463 in 2017 against 7,327 in 1997. In comparison, the figure for admissions of boys who self-harmed rose from 2,236 in 1997 to 2,332 in 2017. The number of girls treated for attempting a substance overdose increased more than tenfold to 2,736 in 2017 from 249 in 1997, while the number of boys treated increased from 152 to 839 last year (The Guardian, [Aug 2018](#)). There has been a dramatic rise in the number of extremely young children (some aged just three) who are self-harming ([ITV News](#))
- The NSPCC provided young people with 15,376 counselling sessions in 2017; equivalent to 42 per day (The Guardian, [Aug 2018](#))
- The [Care Quality Commission Review of Children and Young People's Mental Health Services](#) found that children were waiting up to 18 months to receive treatment for their mental health conditions
- Three large-scale studies involving 1.1 million American adolescents concluded that 'iGenerators' (born around 1995) are on the verge of the most severe mental health crisis for young people for decades ([Twenge, J.M et al 2018b](#)). There was a sudden decrease in psychological well-being after 2012 and links to screen time and the rise of smartphone technology were found.
- [Sigman \(2016\)](#) proposed the possibility that intensive routine exposure to certain screen activities during critical stages of child brain development may alter gene expression in the brain, resulting in structural and functional changes that could lead to Screen Dependency Disorders. These may include internet addiction disorder, internet gaming disorder, video game addiction, mobile phone dependence and social network site addiction.
- The latest [National Education Union \(NEU\) survey](#) of over 8,000 teachers connected to the mental health of children and young people showed 83% had seen an increase in the number of pupil/student mental health problems in the past two years (NEU, Apr 2019)
- [A study by researchers from the University of Liverpool](#) found that obese seven-year-olds are at greater risk of suffering emotional problems, such as anxiety and low mood, when they reach 11. The researchers analysed information on more than 17,000 children born in the UK between 2000 and 2002, using statistical modelling to measure the link between obesity and emotional problems.<sup>1</sup> (Apr 2019).
- A 2016 [Department for Education \(DfE\) survey](#) found that nearly a quarter of teachers (23%) did not feel equipped to identify behaviour linked to mental health issues and more than a third (34%) felt ill-

prepared to teach children in their class who have mental health issues. Young Minds has said that more proactive accessible support is needed in schools so that children's wellbeing is prioritised within the education system.

## Nutrition

- From a total of 98 snack products aimed at young children, one quarter were fruit-based snacks (dried fruit pieces/gummies) 22% were biscuits, 17% rice cakes, 15% crisps or puffs, 13% were bars, 6% vegetable-based snacks and 55% crackers or breadsticks. These provided little more than a basic source of fuel. ([Derbyshire 2017](#))
- Young children are presently under-consuming vegetables compared to sweeter fruits. Fruit intakes are 44.31% and 35% higher than vegetable intake for one, two, and three year olds respectively. This is inadvertently developing a sweetened palate ([Derbyshire 2017](#))
- In a new report, Public Health England (PHE) said a Government crackdown was needed to tackle misleading claims and to cut the amount of sugar children consume from shop-bought foods (Jun 2019)
- A study by [Cancer Research UK](#) found that the more junk food adverts seen on TV by young people, the more they eat, Seeing just one extra broadcast advert per week predicted a large amount of HFSS (products that are high in fat, sugar or salt) eating and drinking: around 60 HFSS items more per year (Mar 2018).

## Emotional needs

- Children whose emotional needs are unmet by their parents are likelier to have behavioural problems and poor educational outcomes, and are more likely to incur extensive costs from health, education, social and criminal justice services throughout the life course ([The Sutton Trust 2014](#))
- Maternal mental health problems have been found to have negative physical and emotional impact upon children including child anxiety and depression, symptoms of ADHD, conduct disorder and prenatal stress ([NCBI, 2007](#))
- In 2016-17, around 1 in 3 children lived with at least 1 parent reporting symptoms of emotional distress (over 1 in 5 with a mother reporting symptoms of emotional distress and around 1 in 8 children with a father, and 1 in 28 children lived with both a mother and father reporting symptoms of emotional distress). There was an increase across all indicators compared with data from the previous year. ([Public Health England, Mar 2019](#))

## Poverty

- The Institute for Fiscal Studies predicted that between 2015-16 and 2021-22, absolute child poverty would increase by around 4 percentage points (on the government's official measure). Of that increase, around three-quarters (equivalent to 400,000 children) is attributable to benefit changes ([Inst for Fiscal Studies, Nov 2017](#))
- Children growing up in low income groups typically live in neighbourhoods with a denser supply of fast food outlets; less availability of fresh fruit and vegetables and fewer safe places for physical activity. Fruit and vegetables can be 30-40% more expensive in poor neighbourhoods ([NCH, The Children's Charity, 2004](#))
- Disability Rights UK has estimated that 40% of disabled children are living in poverty. Families with disabled children can face additional barriers to avoiding poverty, for example, parents can be less able to work and find it more difficult to access childcare ([Papworth Trust, 2018](#))
- There are now constituencies in the UK where more than half of the children are growing up in poverty. Among the twenty parliamentary constituencies with the highest levels of childhood poverty, seven are located in London, three in Birmingham and three in Manchester. ([End Child Poverty: Jan 2018](#)). The top five constituencies are Bethnal Green and Bow, 54.18%, Birmingham Ladywood, 53.46%, Poplar and Limehouse, 52.75%, Birmingham Hodge Hill.51.46% and Manchester Gorton, 47.97%.
- Statistics from the [Race Disparity Audit](#), updated March 2018, show a firm correlation between ethnic background and poverty in the UK: 'Asian and Black households and those in the 'Other' ethnic group were more likely to be poor and were most likely to be in persistent poverty,' and 'Around 1 in 4 children in households headed by people from an Asian background or those in the 'Other' ethnic group were in persistent poverty, as were 1 in 5 children living in Black households and 1 in 10 White British households'.
- The health gap between rich and poor is growing in England, according to the Department of Health. In key areas the gap has widened since 2010 after narrowing over the previous decade. Taking into account 15 indicators, rates of death from cancer, heart attacks and strokes are rising among residents of the poorest places compared with those in wealthy areas. The gap between rich and poor in relation to "healthy life expectancy" – defined as a life free of disease or disability – has recently widened to almost 20 years. ([The Guardian, Aug 2017](#))

- The average price of holiday childcare is £133 per week in Britain, which is a 4% rise since 2017. Prices in Scotland and Wales are about £10 per week less. There are significant regional variations within England: prices in the East of England are 35% higher than in Inner London and the West Midlands. Parents face considerably higher prices during the holidays than during term time: holiday childcare costs are almost two and a half times as much per week as an after school club. ([Family and Childcare Trust, 2018](#))
- Childcare in England risks becoming the preserve of the wealthy, unless a £660m funding gap in a free childcare scheme is plugged, MPs are warning ([BBC News Jun 2019](#))
- [The Millennium Cohort Study](#) found that persistent poverty affects one in five UK children and compared with children who never experienced poverty, those in persistent poverty were at three times greater risk of mental health problems, 1.5 times greater risk of obesity, and were almost twice as likely to suffer a long-standing illness. The research team noted that in 2016/17, 30% (4.1 million) of all UK children were reported to be living in poverty, up from 27% in 2010/11. By 2023/24, the figure is expected to hit 37%, affecting an extra 1.1 million children (Jun 2019).

### **The care system**

- Looked after children are almost four times more likely to have a special educational need (SEN) than all children, and are just over nine times more likely to have a statement of special educational need or education, health and care (EHC) plan than all children. In 2018, 55.5% of looked after children had a special educational need, compared to 45.7% of children in need and 14.6% of all children. ([DfE Mar 2018](#))
- Half of all children identified as being in need of help by councils have witnessed or experienced domestic violence. Cuts to local services mean councils are struggling to cope with an avalanche of child protection referrals with a child referred to children's services every 49 seconds. In 2017, councils began more than 500 child protection investigations every day – up from 200 per day in 2007 ([The Guardian, Feb 2018](#)).
- An unprecedented 72,670 children were recorded as being in care in 2017 ([DfE, Sep 2017](#))

### **Food poverty**

- [A Sheffield Political Economy Research Institute British Political Economy Brief](#) in March 2018 showed that in almost half (20/45) of families surveyed, parents reported eating less than they felt that they

should or skipping meals so that others could eat. In around a third of households in which parents were sacrificing their food intake to protect their children, at least one adult was in paid work. In 13/45 families, children said they sometimes or often went hungry at times and also sacrificed their own food intake to protect younger siblings or parents.

- In a [National Union of Teachers \(NUT\) survey](#) in 2017, 51% of respondents said that pupils at their school were affected by holiday hunger. Almost two-fifths (39%) of these said it was affecting more than a quarter of pupils in their school, with 12% saying half or more of their pupils experienced holiday hunger. Holiday hunger is a growing problem, with 80% of respondents reporting that the numbers affected had increased over the last two years. Almost three quarters (73%) said that their pupils' education was being negatively affected as a consequence of holiday hunger.
- An analysis by the BBC Radio 4 programme, 'You and Yours' of Trussell Trust data covering half a decade, found that demand from children at food banks at Christmas has tripled and looks set to rise further. Typically in December, a higher-than-average 40% of food parcels go to children as demand from single parents and families rises, and school holidays cut off access to free meals ([Trussell Trust, Dec 2017](#))
- Children on free school meals are more likely to be placed in lower sets, have access to less qualified teachers and have lower expectations set for them by the school. They achieve almost half a GCSE grade less progress in 'Attainment 8' core subjects than better-off pupils ([Social Mobility Commission, Feb 2017](#)).

### **Benefits/services**

- The Institute for Fiscal Studies' [Poverty and Inequality in the UK](#) Report in June 2019 found that reductions in working-age benefits pushed down incomes of poorer households by 1.6% in 2017.
- [Policy in Practice](#) predicted that the combined effects of the freeze of benefit rates, the roll out Universal Credit and higher living costs, including rents, will make low-income families worse off by £2,500 a year in 2020. Larger families in work and in the private rented sector will be among the hardest hit.
- Local councils in England have closed more than 500 children's centres since 2010 ([Government response to written parliamentary question from Tracey Brabin MP, Feb 2018](#))

- Research by the Equality and Human Rights Commission into the cumulative impact of Government changes to taxes and social security from 2010-2018 on various groups across society in 2021/22 found that an extra 1.5 million children will be living in households below the relative poverty line with the child poverty rate for those in lone parent households increasing from 37% to more than 62% ([Equality and Human Rights Commission, Mar 2018](#)).