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 multiple disadvantage. Between authors who advocate a strong national 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.

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 we do 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 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.

Like all publications of the Fabian Society, this report represents not the collective views of the society, but only the views of the individual writers. The responsibility of the society is limited to approving its publications as worthy of consideration within the labour movement.

First published in October 2019

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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 to 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 and charities for which they care 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.

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.
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.

Severe and multiple disadvantage is defined by Lankelly Chase, a foundation that campaigns on these issues and the funding partner for this report, as describing the ‘interlocking nature of [several] social harms’. 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 situations being caused by systemic disadvantage. The challenge of systematic and interlocking disadvantage is not new. Successful 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.

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


The CASE STUDIES

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The EXPERIENCE OF LUCY

Lucy, in her own words:

I live near the coast in north Devon. I’ve been out of prison for a year now, and I’ve tried hard to turn my life around. I’ve been trying to work, get my benefits, improve my health and cut down my drinking and drug taking. But it’s tough. I’ve had to make some big changes to my life both while I was in prison and now I’m back on the outside. The support I need is just not available, and it’s really hard to get to grips with everything all at once.

In her own words:

I’m going to outline my experience of the care system, homelessness and mental health difficulties.

The EXPERIENCE OF REBECCA

Rebecca, in her own words:

I was released from prison in August 2017. It’s been a tough couple of years. I’ve had to turn my life around. I’ve tried hard to get a job and keep a roof over my head but it’s been tough. I’ve lived in five different places in two years and I’ve been homeless over 100 times. I’ve had to take a day job as a cleaner to pay the bills. It’s been really tough. I’ve had to turn my life around.

In her own words:

I’m going to outline my experience of severe domestic violence, drug addiction and prison sentences.

The EXPERIENCE OF KEITH

Keith, in his own words:

I’ve spent so much of my life in prison and with a drug addiction. I’m now trying hard to change my life around. I’m working for a charity that gives people a second chance. I’m trying hard to turn my life around.

In her own words:

I’m going to outline my experience of the care system, homelessness and mental health difficulties.

The EXPERIENCE OF LOUISE

Louise, in her own words:

I’ve had experience of mental health difficulties and alcohol addiction. I’ve been homeless, living on the streets. It’s been tough. I’ve had to turn my life around. I’m trying hard to get a roof over my head and improve my health. I’ve been trying to get a job, and I’ve been out of prison for two years now.

In her own words:

I’m going to outline my experience of severe mental health problems and alcohol addiction.

The EXPERIENCE OF WILLIAM

William, in his own words:

I’ve had experience of homelessness, mental health problems, drug addiction and crime. I’ve been in prison, but I’m trying hard to turn my life around. I’m trying hard to get a roof over my head and improve my health. I’ve been trying to get a job, and I’ve been out of prison for two years now.

In her own words:

I’m going to outline my experience of homelessness, mental health problems, substance abuse and crime.
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 MP’s 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 slow, 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.

LUCY’S STORY

Fabian Society researchers met with Lucy in a seaside location with her support worker from Fufilling 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 16, 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’. She needed help for her mental health, help for her past and help for her future, but the only help Lucy received was ‘a 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.

“Social services literally packed my bags, gave me some food vouchers and left me’

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 an access course at university, ideally Canterbury. She is determined not to let her past decide her future and to get her daughter back.

In real life

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

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**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 her partner. They got engaged when she was 15, although she wasn’t pregnant. 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 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. Looking back over her life, Rebecca argued that avoiding lengthy prison life – before you are considered for training and education that might have helped and made a difference to her life, Rebecca argued, because the ‘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 an aide 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 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 place. Her drinking escalated. Her mental health declined. Eventually, unable to cope and in deep desperation, she stabbed herself in the leg, severing an artery. Losing custody of her children, Louise’s lost hope for her future and she went to rehabilitation. Explaining she said: “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 street 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 INE 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 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 both in and out of the treatment centre.

Today, more than five years after her last drink and first day at INE, Louise is sober and ambitious about her future. She has her kids back and 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 is in recovery from drug and alcohol 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
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母親 had been diagnosed with complex PTSD when William was hospitalised for three months and was being treated for short-term memory loss and an inability to perform even the most basic tasks and a pronounced loss of confidence and self-esteem.

During these darkest of days William’s 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.

Eventually, 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 treatment, and funding promised by government needs to reach the frontline, often charitable services, that take a personal and emotional approach to the people they support to make a real difference to their lives.

William firmly believes 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. His father 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 and move along. Six, the first time that Keith was sentenced for driving whilst disqualified ‘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. But it didn’t 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, so he would steal them. He got a buzz from driving.

Keith finally got a job as a motorman who took him straight to his new home. This was his turning point. If there had 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 project and gradually worked his way up to working on site at the recycling company. He has moved out of his mum’s house and finally has his own place. This is the second chance he really wanted.
I

edges of crime, of addiction or of abuse
walk through the school gates. Whether
as all the evidence from our education
choices and destroy life chances, but
and that wider social determinants like
know that trauma has lasting impacts
personal challenges. Therefore, while we
appropriate support, they have been
have engaged with consistent and
tailored support to help. Where people
trauma, but resilience and recovery too.
mental health and potential wasted.

punctuated by trauma, abuse, neglect.

in the experiences
of Lucy, Rebecca,
and the resulting consequences of
crime, substance misuse, poor
mental health and potential wasted.

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

Our current welfare and social care
to 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 welfare and social care
which provides the most appropriate
and tailored support to help. Where people
have engaged with consistent and
tailored support to help. Where people
trauma, but resilience and recovery too.
mental health and potential wasted.

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 in their lives 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 children affected by trauma
intervene in ways that
are vital if we are
to grasp opportunities, or steer clear of a
life of crime. Yet high-cost interventions
later in their lives are the norm.

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
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.

Children’s Commissioner estimates that around 2.1 million
children are living in households with complex
needs including domestic abuse, mental health and
substance misuse. Relying on statutory children’s social
work to support children and young people
enough, even if it is at all.
...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 our 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. We need to ensure that the funding out. We need to ensure that the funding out. We need to ensure that the funding out.

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.

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.

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.

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. 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. 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.

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.
A person’s life chances can be determined by what happens to them from the moment of conception until the day they die. This is an observation that has been made by 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 because different neurological pathways are set for life. International studies have shown that when a baby’s brain is underdeveloped at birth, it can have lasting effects that may affect how that child will develop. Early intervention in this period can make a significant difference in a child’s life.

During this stage of development, the experiences of children can have a profound impact on their future. The first 1,001 days are critical in shaping a child’s future and are referred to as the “Critical Period”.

For instance, if a child is exposed to violence or poverty during the first 1,001 days, it can lead to physical and mental health problems throughout their life. Similarly, the lack of stimulation and support during this period can lead to educational and social problems.

One of the most important aspects of this critical period is the role of parents. Their actions, behaviors, and the environment they create during these early years can significantly influence their child’s development.

In addition, the quality of care a child receives during the first 1,001 days can affect their future success. For instance, children who receive high-quality care during this period are more likely to have better educational outcomes and social skills.

Not all children have equal access to these opportunities. For example, children from low-income families may not have access to the same educational resources as children from more affluent backgrounds. This disparity is known as the “opportunity gap.”

The first 1,001 days are a critical period in shaping future health and wellbeing. It is important to recognize the significance of this period and to take action to ensure that all children have access to the support and resources they need to thrive.

Conclusion

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In the right place

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

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

Brent 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 vote to leave.

The discontent was fuelled by the visible decline of our high streets: shops, supermarkets and post offices close, bus routes are cancelled and vital services lose funding. The importance of these places is critical in the continuity, centrality and support they provide – offering an anchor to families and neighbours in a time of uncertainty. It is understandably felt as spinning out of control.

Behind this deeply-felt sentiment is a born-again love for local communities. Politicians and 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 and leaves those people feeling that it is often felt, rightly, as a lack of care and respect.

Nurturing local services is 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 community at the treatment centre was able to stop the detox if she attended a treatment centre. 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 specialist support was there to see to it. 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 to local people.

In other places, the community at the treatment centre has a lifeline. Those who face challenges in their own lives know that change is possible. Relationships and community youth trust was set up to understand the problem and change the way services were delivered. 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 prescript 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.

As is so often the case with children in care, the system drives a coach and horses to find a family that suits them, while people at the most difficult times in their lives and compounds the problems they face. Like Lucy, children move frequently, often placed hundreds of miles from home and have a high turnover of carers. As Louise highlights, 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, reflect a profound and decades of working with Whitehall and Westminster I have found they are quick to solve 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 to local people.

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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

The collapse of family. When we talk about 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 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 been 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 associate homeownership with being able to control things like living space, home decoration and when you move. Yet this sense of control has been 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

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.

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 Royton

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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 those 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 ambitions, nor to stop us from focusing on how, even with swinging 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
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. This resulted in a plethora of deadly and life-threatening diseases such as pneumonia. These factors led to Rebecca being dismissed at every opportunity. She was not really listened to and her concerns and the help she 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 wish 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 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 move toward a ‘people-centred 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.
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 services. 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: it is still more so for individuals with experiences of service and multiple disadvantage.

Do not necessarily all 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 not be afraid to purchase from the private sector. The state should play a role in coordinating those purchased services. This can often mean a fall in cost of the contract, bringing innovation and some power over the body delivering the service.

More widely, contracting out brings 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 not be afraid to purchase from the private sector. The state should play a role in coordinating those purchased services. This can often mean a fall in cost of the contract, bringing innovation and some power over the body delivering the service. Lucy was also disappointed with how social services behaved towards her. She should have been successful in helping people tackle drug and alcohol addiction, improving health for participants and reducing the costs of addictions. Recycling Lives, shows how we can successfully rehabilitate ex-offenders. Experiences like Lucy’s show how damaging a lack of choice is for people. Largely, the public would like to choose a better place to live and better support from social services.

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

Results, not structures

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, especially for those who 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.
The city region is the best level to draw out three key lessons:

- the spirit and the capacity of individuals to have to deal with and the impact of the resilience of the human case studies in this report show the severity of hurdles that a vividly the case studies in this study.

Having a job is key to overcoming multiple disadvantage. Having a job is key to overcoming multiple disadvantage. It is very difficult at national authority 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. 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

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 that large nationwide bureaucracies, which were accountable to each of us, worked together as 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.

The case studies also highlight 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 in enabling individuals to flourish.

The state should invest to enable unemployed people to find work. It is very difficult 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.

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SKILLS AND WORK

The ladder of opportunity

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

Social justice has been my compass since I entered politics. I want to bring voice to those who have none; 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. xviii 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.xix

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. xvi 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.xix

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. xlix 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.lix Just 1.1 per cent of pupils who complete their GCSEs in alternative provision xlix deserve free good GCSE passes, including English and maths.lix And the most disadvantaged students are almost four times less likely to go to university than their peers.lix 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 priced assets continue to receive the support they need.

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.lix

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.lix 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.lix 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 (tax-free childcare on top) when disadvantaged children need support. We should reduce the free childcare thresholds, from 30 hours tax-free childcare and indirect 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.lix

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.

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. 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. xlix 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.lix Just 1.1 per cent of pupils who complete their GCSEs in alternative provision xlix deserve free good GCSE passes, including English and maths.lix And the most disadvantaged students are almost four times less likely to go to university than their peers.lix

Education needs to improve, and we have some of the finest universities in the world. However, social injustice is endemic and we have a skills crisis.

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 suit their natural talents, whether those are academic or vocational. The government recently announced this 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 apprenticeships. 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 standard careers advice.xl 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.xli 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.xli 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 GCSEs passes including English and maths.xli

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 that mainstream teachers have the skills to support children with special education needs - at the moment, only 46 per cent believe that their school is well prepared to support these children. 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 apprenticeships. 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 standard careers advice.xl 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.

People not problems

Robert Halfon is the Conservative MP for Harlow and chair of the education select committee.
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 basis for a revolution in 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 technical education. There is enormous growth. However, this is not just an end. The government should incentivise technical education.

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 vulnerable people because they do not have a good education to climb the ladder of opportunity. And, as I have set out in this chapter, it is well worth the 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 get to the disadvantaged. Until all 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.

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 those opportunities. As the Open University’s model clearly demonstrates, learning can be a powerful vehicle for social justice. Its students are not required to have completed A-levels (or equivalent qualifications), and its approach 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.

Getting the right qualifications

We need to support the continuing learning sector and we can start by reinstating the support that existed prior to the 2012 student finance reforms for the disadvantaged. 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.

Leveling the playing field when it comes to social capital

In our society, a lifetime of learning would dramatically improve the life chances of the most disadvantaged individuals in society. However, it would be a mistake 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). 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 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.

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 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 partners 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 helpful to offer him a perpetrator intervention, especially any children or young people, and to others, providing an evidence-based behaviour change programme.

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 even 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 substance 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

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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.

The interaction of problems makes it harder for services to be effective in helping those with experiences of severe and multiple disadvantage. We 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.
Poor mental health can exacerbate severe and multiple disadvantage and we must fight for better mental health services, writes Johnny Mercer

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.

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 Ian and Sam. 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 reconceive 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. 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 we have come from getting things right. We must not be content with anything less than parity between the services, easily accessible services and no stigma.

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 service to 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 we have come from getting things right. We must not be content with anything less than parity between the services, easily accessible services and no stigma.

Johnny Mercer MP
ENDNOTES

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