

**NIROMP**



## **National IRO Manager Partnership**

### **Regional Improvement Alliances for Children in Care and Care Leavers**

This brief paper proposes increased dialogue between ADCS, LGA, Ofsted, DfE, and NIROMP, to consider how the role of IROs can be put to best effect in the current system and under existing legislation.

It is particularly important as organisations locally and nationally transition to new ways of working, that peer and sector-led improvement involves ADCS, LGA, Ofsted, DfE, and NIROMP working together to consider 'what works' (and doesn't).

#### **Context of safeguarding pressures**

The combined findings of the care crisis review research and the latest iteration of ADCS safeguarding pressures research, serve to highlight the impact of increased pressures on services, declining resources and the variable performance of services nationally and regionally.

Austerity measures, increasing demand and a drive for greater local autonomy are encouraging local areas to do things differently, to transform the relationship between services, residents, individuals and communities. Local areas are experimenting with new ways of working, using different partnership and governance arrangements and empowering communities to co-produce solutions. It is clearly a time of significant uncertainty and change. Accepting that a significant step change is required between those who deliver and use services, it is critical that we learn and share ideas about 'what works' / could work (and doesn't).

#### **Service transformation and improvement**

We welcome the governments continued support to work with organisations representing IROs and LAs to consider how the role of IROs can be put to best effect in the current system and under existing legislation.

A number of improvement programmes and peer and sector-led approaches already exist to support local areas to learn from one another. Despite the broad range of programmes on offer, there has been limited dialogue with NIROMP. Given the policy drive for service transformation and improvement at local and national level, this represents a gap and untapped resource.

NIROMP's existing peer-led regional networks cover the nine government regions of England. It should be possible to join-up some of the work of existing alliances, to identify targeted

improvement activities at regional and national level and avoid the risk of perpetuating silos. For example, work we have already undertaken with the West Midlands ADCS group around permanency is going some way to helping to iron out inconsistencies in the quality of practice and service delivery to children in care and care leavers. Our place on the Advisory Council of the What Works Centre for Children's Social Care is another example of how engagement can be increased. The development of the What Works Centre serves as recognition from government that the skills, expertise and experience to improve children's services lie in the sector and IROs continue to have a role in shaping this. Our place on the Board means that we can better help IRO services stay ahead of good practice, to be increasingly responsive to new and different ways of working. We have also continued to work with organisations such as Cafcass to review the effectiveness of the good practice protocol for public law work. It seems right that we should continue to work together to improve care proceedings practice and to divert families away from care proceedings wherever possible.

Our continued engagement with third sector organisations and academic experts has also supported sharing learning and the building blocks for an increasingly robust knowledge base. We are committed to building on our collective knowledge base, so that our practice and service delivery is better informed by the experience and voices of children and families. Importantly this is also shaping our approach to challenge and restorative principles for practice.

## **Conclusion and recommendation**

1. Public services in England are changing and this demands a revisiting of the work of existing alliances, to improve join-up and communication streams.
2. It makes sense that ADCS, LGA, Ofsted, DfE and NIROMP should work together to address improvement priorities at a strategic level, and that we should build on collaborative partnerships to achieve a shared vision.
3. At a time when capacity is declining, and less money is available for service delivery, we cannot afford to keep reinventing the wheel or replicating the same model again and again across the country. At the same time, NIROMP also recognizes that variation is crucial in ensuring that public services meet local needs.
4. Working collaboratively, NIROMP will continue to challenge from a rights based perspective and to call for better funding solutions to tackle disadvantage and inequality. Together with child poverty, parental mental ill-health, problematic substance use, and domestic violence represent the most prevalent and worrying risk factors in children's lives. The unmet needs of parents and our communities are adversely impacting upon children's wellbeing and placed alongside the funding crisis, LAs are also facing impossible safeguarding pressures.
5. It is particularly important as organisations locally and nationally transition to new ways of working, that peer and sector-led improvement evolves and critically, that ADCS, LGA, Ofsted, DfE, and NIROMP work together to consider 'what works' (and doesn't).