

# Families and Schools Together

## Giving children a fair chance at school and in life

### Giving children a fair chance in life

Save the Children has been working in the UK for 90 years to champion the rights of children and to give all children a fair chance in life. In that time, we have made some amazing breakthroughs. During the 1930s, a Save the Children campaign demanded that the government act to improve the diet and health of children living in poverty. This led to the 1944 Education Act, which enabled children to have “free school meals” for the first time. This initiative has since helped millions of children and was recently extended to a further 50,000 children in the 2009 Pre-Budget Report. This was due to the combined lobbying efforts of the End Child Poverty Campaign, of which we are a key member.

We also pressed for all major political parties across the UK to sign up to the target to end child poverty by 2020. The 2020 target is now enshrined in law within the Child Poverty Act. We helped to strengthen this landmark legislation to ensure that future governments will not be let off the hook to meet their promises to make child poverty history in the UK.

### Our focus and priorities

Our model for change is to *innovate* evidence-based projects and to *replicate* these across the UK in order to build a picture of positive impact. We will then *advocate* that governments play their part to enable many more children to benefit from programmes proven to transform their lives, just like we did with Free School Meals.

**“Our vision is that by 2015, it will no longer be seen as acceptable for children to be growing up in severe and persistent poverty in the UK, and that local, national and UK governments will have adopted policies and programmes that are transforming the life chances of the poorest children, and lifting hundreds of thousands out of poverty.”**

### Education as a route out of poverty

The UK is the fifth richest country in the world, but more than one child in three lives in poverty – that’s 4 million children. Living on or below the poverty line often traps children into a cycle of low educational achievement, inferior job prospects, increased chances of poor health and involvement with crime.

There is international recognition that education is a key route out of poverty, but there is still a gaping divide between how well children living in poverty do at school in the UK compared to their wealthier counterparts. This ‘gap in educational achievement’ is already evident by the time children reach 19 months and generally continues to widen throughout a child’s time at school.<sup>1</sup>

- Just under half of children from the poorest fifth of families in the UK were read to daily at age three, compared with eight in ten of children from the richest fifth of families. Those who were read to every day at age three had a vocabulary at age five much more advanced than those who were not read to every day.<sup>2</sup>
- Many of the poorest children in the UK enter primary school, unable to read or write and never catch up with their peers.<sup>3</sup>
- Age 16, privileged children are twice more likely to get five good GCSEs than poorer children.<sup>4</sup>

It is easy to blame schools for this, but 85% of a child’s success at school depends on the type of support and stimulation that their parents provide for learning in the home.<sup>5</sup> This means that we can break the poverty cycle if we intervene early enough to support parents to ensure that their children do not fall behind, but instead develop to their full potential. However, our research shows<sup>6</sup> that there is a critical gap in the UK in terms of accessing *evidence-based* parental engagement programmes, particularly during the time when children are moving from pre-school to primary school and without the need to be referred.

This means that many parents in the UK – often those in most need – are unable to access the kind of community-based preventative support known to make

a difference and to which they should be entitled. For example, support that coaches parents to interact with their child's learning and development in ways proven to improve children's achievement at school.

## What is the solution?

Save the Children is working in partnership with Families and Schools Together (FAST) to improve access to the award-winning FAST parental engagement programme across the UK. FAST has an established track record for 80% retention rates with socially marginalised parents and has already transformed the lives of children in eight countries and 2,000 schools. The three core aims of this evidence-based prevention programme, endorsed by the UN and the Children's Workforce Development Council, England, are to enable children to:

- succeed in school and have stronger life chances because of improved educational achievement in reading, writing and maths, behaviour and better home-school relationships
- live in strengthened families because of improved parent-child bonds, communication and parental confidence
- live in stronger communities with increased trust, participation and reduced social isolation

## The programme – how it works

FAST was developed by Dr Lynn McDonald, Professor of Social Work Research at Middlesex University and is based on the socio-ecological theory of child development. FAST adopts a universal, participatory and experiential eight-week curriculum to build relationships between parents and children, parents and schools and parents and other parents within the local community. After graduation, parents continue to meet on a monthly basis. This maintains the relationships and gains from participating in the eight weekly sessions.

During each weekly session, children and parents take part in activities designed to improve children's outcomes and wellbeing, such as eating a family meal together, family play, learning and communication activities, one-to-one parent-child dedicated support, community building and parent-to-other-local-parent time. Each family also receives a hamper of goods, including books and toys, so that they can continue to support their child's learning and development at home. We are also adapting the tried and tested FAST model so that children and families can take part in Philosophy for Children/Communities (P4C). P4C is an internationally renowned approach to group facilitated discussion, which has been shown to improve children's thinking, reasoning and communication skills.

## What change do we want for children?

By 2014, we will have established over 430 groups across the UK, improved the life chances of 50,000 children and trained over 8,000 new FAST and P4C programme practitioners. We will prove the potential of prevention programmes to break the cycle of poverty by giving disadvantaged children a fair chance to succeed at school and to get a well-paid job with prospects.

This impact will be impossible to ignore and as our evidence base grows, we will demonstrate to all four UK governments how it is possible to implement a cost-effective, inclusive and scalable parental engagement programme for children living in poverty and their parents. We will call for millions more children to be able to benefit from taking part in the FAST programme and for every child in the UK to have equal access to local evidence-based preventative support from birth.

## Further information

[www.savethechildren.org.uk](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk)

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Centre for Longitudinal Studies (2010). *Millennium Cohort Study: Fourth Sweep*. Centre for Longitudinal Studies: London.

<sup>2</sup> Waldfogel, J and Elizabeth Washbrook (2010). *Low Income and Cognitive Development in the UK*. The Sutton Trust: London.

<sup>3</sup> Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009). *National Indicators 93 and 94 – Percentage of Pupils Making Two Levels of Progress in English and in Mathematics between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 in England 2007/08*.

<sup>4</sup> Department for Children, Schools and Families (2010). *GCSE Attainment by Pupil Characteristics, in England 2008/09*.

<sup>5</sup> R, Cassen (2007). *Tackling Low Educational Achievement*. York: JRF

<sup>6</sup> Save the Children (2009). *Supporting Families for Children's Success at School*. London: Save the Children