

3. Action for Children

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1. Introduction

We invite the Conference to thank God for the vision, values and commitment that drive our work and for all that is being achieved through Action for Children as the children's charity of the Methodist Church. Our Annual Report (published September 2013) is available from our website and hard copies can be found at the Action for Children stall at the Conference. The Annual Report provides a snapshot of services we provide together with consolidated accounts for the year.

The current UK economic situation has profoundly impacted increasing numbers of children, young people and families and we have seen a marked increase in those who need our services. For Action for Children itself, it has brought an imperative to focus even more clearly on our core purpose: always to be there for the most vulnerable and neglected children, in local communities across all nations of the UK, both through our services and through campaigning for change.

Our priority continues to be to focus as many of our resources as possible to the front line so that we can continue to support the most vulnerable children and young people, for as long as it takes to make a difference in their lives. We have also undertaken careful consultation with those we serve in order to identify the key areas for our on-going campaign work which we urge Methodists to support in the coming months.

2. Making a difference together

We are deeply thankful to so many people who have supported the work of Action for Children. Our Methodist supporters have always been there for us – just as we try always to be there for the children and young people who need us most. Methodists regularly give of their time, their know-how, their energy and their prayers. We value our partnership together and in what follows, supplement the Annual Report with a brief update on the development of aspects of our work where our partnership with the Methodist Church is especially important and productive.

We welcome feedback on any aspects of our report and work at Action for Children.

3. Partnership with the Methodist Church

During the last year we have continued to develop our cooperation in areas that can be of mutual benefit. These have included:

- I. our Campaigns and Public Affairs Team and the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) sharing briefings and where possible working together to plan and support campaigns to influence national governments. We were pleased to make a small contribution to the JPIT report *'The lies we tell ourselves: ending comfortable myths about poverty'*, and congratulate the JPIT on the effectiveness of that report.
- II. cooperation around safeguarding policy and practice continues through contact between lead connexional and Action for Children staff together with support also being provided in some districts.

- III. the designation by the Church of the second Sunday in July to celebrate Action for Children Sunday. Many churches use worship resources that Action for Children prepares and we are pleased to provide staff to speak briefly about our work.
- IV. our creative partnership with the World Church Relationships Office of the Methodist Church has enabled us to support child care work through partnerships with Methodist Churches in Southern Africa (MCSA), and Zimbabwe.
- V. Methodist support for a wide range of fundraising activities never ceases to amaze us. Our Partnership Fundraising Team is pleased to both extend thanks and to offer their expertise and support for fundraising initiatives that Methodists wish to undertake.

4. Campaigns and public affairs

Our campaigns are rooted in our experience, and the work we do directly with children and young people gives us the insight, expertise and authority to campaign on their behalf. We include children and young people at every level of our campaigning and help them to speak for themselves as often as possible.

We are asking the Government to review the Children and Young Persons Act 1933, which applies to England and Wales, because it is no longer fit for purpose. You can support our campaign to change the law on neglect by emailing your MP and asking them to write to the Secretary of State for Justice, Chris Grayling, about our campaign.

Following workshops in which we listened to the concerns and issues that most trouble the children and young people we work with, we are campaigning to stop the financial exploitation of young people by loan sharks and pay-day lenders; for a decent home for all care leavers; and for better services for neglected children. For further information and to support the latest actions in our campaign please visit our website www.actionforchildren.org.uk/campaigns

5. Farewell and welcome

At last year's Conference we welcomed John O'Brien as the new Chair of Action for Children's Council. In December 2013 we bade farewell to our Chief Executive, Dame Clare Tickell, after nine years leading the charity. Clare's tenure came during some of the most turbulent and difficult years that the charity sector has witnessed as public sector finance has been increasingly squeezed and the need for our services has grown. The Conference is invited to record its thanks to Dame Clare in resolution 3 at the end of this report.

In March 2014 Sir Tony Hawkhead joined Action for Children as Chief Executive. Sir Tony was previously Chief Executive of the environmental charity Groundwork UK. Both Tony and John will be attending the Conference and will be available to speak with Conference representatives during the lunch break on Monday 30 June.

6. International partnership

The partnership strategy agreed by the Council of Action for Children and the Methodist Council enables us to make the best use of our joint knowledge and experience. We can assist in developing professional child care policy and practice, and support locally-delivered services as effectively as possible. Action for Children helped the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) to initiate child care projects in Swaziland, Lesotho and Botswana. It is encouraging to see the development of such vital local ministries. Action for Children's present support is for work MCSA is undertaking in

Namibia particularly among displaced communities; and to Matthew Rusike Children's Home (MRCH) operating as the child care arm of the Methodist Church Zimbabwe where we have facilitated professional in-service social work training for staff through the School of Social Work at Harare University, and training courses have begun for outreach development volunteers in rural communities. We have also worked with the Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury District to support its partnership with the Amizero Centre, in Rwanda.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

3/1. The Conference received the General Report of Action for Children.

3/2. The Conference noted that the trustees of Action for Children for the current year are:

- **Chair: John O'Brien (2012)**
- **Vice Chair: Catherine Dugmore (2006)**
- **Methodist Church Appointee: Ruby Beech (until the 2014 Conference)**

In addition, the following nine people:

- **Allan Burns CBE (2010)**
- **Les Clifford (2011)**
- **Stanley Goudie CBE (2011)**
- **The Revd John Howard (2011)**
- **Andrew McDonald (2007)**
- **Heather Schroeder CBE (2008)**
- **Paul Snell CBE (2009)**
- **Joe Barrell (2012)**
- **Helena Feltham (2013)**

3/3. The Conference thanked Dame Clare Tickell for her hard work and inspirational leadership as Chief Executive of Action for Children between 2004 and 2013.