

DEVELOPING CHILDREN'S ZONES FOR ENGLAND

"If poverty is a disease that infects an entire community in the form of unemployment and violence, failing schools and broken homes, then we can't just treat those symptoms in isolation. We have to heal that entire community."

Barack Obama, 2007

SUMMARY

Despite the efforts of successive governments, many areas in England are marked by concentrated poverty and social deprivation. This puts children and young people at a serious disadvantage, particularly in terms of how well they do at school.

To improve children's life chances, the factors that create disadvantages for children and young people need to be tackled. Policies aimed at creating a more equal society and at supporting families living in poverty wherever they live are important. However, they need to be supplemented in the most disadvantaged areas by local initiatives.

Save the Children, with the University of Manchester, is exploring the case for a 'children's zone' model in England. As part of Save the Children's focus on closing the attainment gap between rich and poor students, we want to explore what we can learn from the innovative and successful Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ) in the United States.

Although England has a long history of local initiatives, none of these have been sufficiently wide-ranging, or sustained for long enough, to make a significant difference. Save the Children and the University of Manchester believe that there is a real need for a new and holistic approach to tackling disadvantage in communities across the UK. We believe that children's zones could provide the model for achieving this.

WHY ARE CHILDREN'S ZONES NEEDED?

Numerous studies show that poorer children do less well at school than their better-off peers, regardless of where they live. At Save the Children, we wanted to understand to what extent the clustering of poverty-related factors in different areas affected children's educational attainment. Research by the University of Manchester on Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) – small, similar-sized areas of the country with approximately 1,500 inhabitants – examined five different indicators

of poverty: (ill-) health, deprivation (as measured by the Indices of Multiple Deprivation, or IMD¹), unemployment, barriers to housing and services, and levels of adult education.

Not surprisingly, we found that these factors – particularly overall deprivation, unemployment and low levels of adult education – were associated with low educational attainment. We also found that:

1. Local areas are very different from each other in their levels of disadvantage, and that England retains some highly disadvantaged local areas, with correspondingly low levels of attainment among the children and young people who live there.
2. Larger areas – wards, towns and cities – are likely to contain very varied local areas.
3. Disadvantaged local areas can be very different from each other, with different configurations of the deprivation indicators.

Areas like Manchester, Rotherham, King's Lynn and London are clearly all very different places, but this research shows that small areas within these towns and cities are also different from one another. Therefore, national strategies to improve children's outcomes must also accommodate and be supplemented by very local initiatives.

There is clearly a willingness at national level to tackle the link between disadvantage and poor outcomes for children and young people. The continued drive for school improvement and the targeted funding available through the Pupil Premium are important. However, a focus on closing the attainment gap purely within the school gates will not be enough because this will not tackle the underlying disadvantages from which poor outcomes emerge. Having an excellent school in a deprived area certainly helps, but it cannot compensate for all the challenges that affect children living in poverty. Furthermore, to maximise the impact of in-school improvement policies, we must also look beyond the targeted interventions of individual services.

WHAT IS THE HARLEM CHILDREN'S ZONE?

The Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ) project was initiated in the 1990s and led by Geoffrey Canada as a response to high levels of poverty in New York's Harlem district. Its primary focus is on children aged 0-18 years living in a 100-block area of central Harlem. HCZ's objective is to ensure that the greatest possible number of disadvantaged and at-risk children secure educational and economic opportunities in one of the United States' most deprived communities, and make a successful transition to an independent, healthy adulthood.

The foundation of the HCZ's work rests on a couple of simple but innovative principles:

- that it is hard to raise healthy children in a severely deprived community
- that local institutions can reverse the impact of deprivation by drawing community members together around common interests and activities.

The idea was to address all the problems that poor families were facing in that one area: from crumbling apartments to failing schools, from violent crime to chronic health problems.

¹ The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2010 combines a number of indicators, chosen to cover a range of economic, social and housing issues, into a single deprivation score for each small area in England.

It is **doubly holistic** in that it supports children throughout their lives, from cradle to career (with a strategically planned pipeline of services), and supports the whole child, addressing a wide range of family and community factors, which may prevent their doing well. HCZ secures its own funds, employs its own staff and runs its own schools, and is held accountable by its trustees. Schools are an integral part of HCZ, but do not drive it.

There is good evidence that HCZ is effective in improving outcomes for individual children and families, and good reason to believe that it will have cumulative and possibly area-wide effects. There are, therefore, good reasons for adopting the HCZ approach in England. However, in the absence of final proof of effectiveness, this needs to be done cautiously and evaluated properly.

CHILDREN'S ZONES IN AN ENGLISH CONTEXT

England has a strong foundation from which powerful children's zones could be developed. Ongoing work on children's centres, extended services, 'troubled families' and community budgets, for instance, has considerable potential. Likewise, schools are increasingly working in a range of partnerships with other schools and agencies to improve children's outcomes.

In this context, and given the government's emphasis on local solutions, there is now an opportunity for the emergence of innovative partnerships that tackle educational disadvantage. These would bring schools and other child-focused institutions and service providers together. They would supplement in-school approaches with a more holistic set of interventions aimed at creating supportive contexts in which children can learn and develop.

HCZ offers a way of moving English initiatives from:

- focusing on a **single point in childhood** to creating a **continuous pipeline** of support
- **disconnected approaches** led by individual institutions to a strategy **uniting partners** in the interests of an area's children
- **targeting groups out of context** to exploring how to create a 'tipping point' for the **whole community**.

However, differences between England and the US mean that English children's zones will need to work very differently from HCZ. English children's zones must:

- be about contributing **something extra** to existing service provision
- have a **connective role** – they cannot control partners but will need to find ways to secure their commitment to zone strategy
- be able to **bend existing resources** to support their area focus, as well as attract funds
- have **multi-layered accountability** – within the zone and beyond.

A MODEL FOR ENGLISH CHILDREN'S ZONES

As part of this research, the University of Manchester carried out a national survey of local authorities to identify current 'HCZ-like' developments in England. The findings showed that, in some areas, local policy-makers and practitioners are already exploring the possibilities of developing zone-like approaches and there are promising initiatives across England that could be developed into fully-fledged zones.

The University of Manchester has outlined some basic features of an English children's zone model:

- Zones must focus on a particular area and understand children's needs in the context of that area.
- Zones' target areas are likely to be defined through a combination of local dynamics and the ways in which existing services are configured.
- Zones' strategies should be informed by analysing data about the area and its dynamics, and include community voices.
- Partnership working is crucial and the area's schools must be active partners. Local authorities can facilitate partnership arrangements.

There are therefore a number of elements that would form an essential part of any English children's zone. Schools must have a central role in children's zones. This means they must be locked into an area strategy. Schools coming together to form area-level trusts, social enterprises, not-for-profit companies, or similar, could be the mechanism for this. Other partners can then join these organisations, and it is these organisations – not schools – that drive the zone.

A zone will need to be clear about its mission, in order to determine who its partners should be and how its outcomes should be measured. Zones will need to command significant resources and be able to use them flexibly (a mixed model of resourcing appears the best way of achieving this). Local authorities can support zones by brokering services, holding zones to account, and linking zones to wider strategic concerns. Clear, structured working processes will need to be established to ensure that zones do not simply replicate the practices associated with previous initiatives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **English children's zones should be developed in disadvantaged areas.** They should connect education providers (children's centres, primary schools, secondary schools, further education colleges), so that we see a cradle-to-career approach for all local children. They should also forge strong partnerships between educational institutions and wider public and third-sector services (such as housing, health, parental support), because children do best when they are getting the right support in every aspect of their lives.
2. **Children's zones should plan the cradle-to-career pipeline of support that every child needs** in order to realise their potential (and this will provide a testing ground to see how proven early intervention programmes or classroom approaches complement one another).
3. **The development of English children's zones should be locally driven so that they match local circumstances.** Each zone should find its own way rather than following a central blueprint.
4. **Zones should develop governance and leadership structures that ensure a degree of autonomy** to enable them to respond to local circumstances. In the first instance, leadership can come from anywhere within a wide range of local individuals or organisations. However, groups of schools and headteachers are particularly well placed to contribute to this.

5. **Government should facilitate the development of a small number of pilot zones.**
There are already a number of areas in England that are a few steps away from becoming fully-fledged children's zones. With a little support and encouragement, they could act as pilots for this approach. This does not require large amounts of funding or a major new initiative. It can be achieved through modest amounts of seed funding and the development of what is already in place locally.
6. **Pilot zones should be offered access to technical support, the opportunity to network with each other, and high-quality evaluation.** The task of these zones will be to test the feasibility of a doubly holistic approach in the English context and to disseminate their findings to other interested areas. Rigorous evaluation and shared learning will therefore be essential.
7. **Pilot zones should be encouraged to develop sustainable resourcing models.**
These should draw on the funding and resources already available to public services, targeted funding streams (such as the Pupil Premium), grants and philanthropic donations. The Education Endowment Foundation might be approached to support the costs of evaluation.

Contact:

Chris Wellings, Head of Policy

020 7012 6760 c.wellings@savethechildren.org.uk

Abigail Wood, UK Parliamentary Adviser

020 3215 3373 a.wood@savethechildren.org.uk

**Save the Children works in more than 120 countries. We save children's lives.
We fight for their rights. We help them fulfil their potential.**

Save the Children

1 St John's Lane

London EC1M 4AR

Tel: +44 (0)20 7012 6400

Fax: +44 (0)20 7012 6963