

'BRIDGING THE GAP 2016'

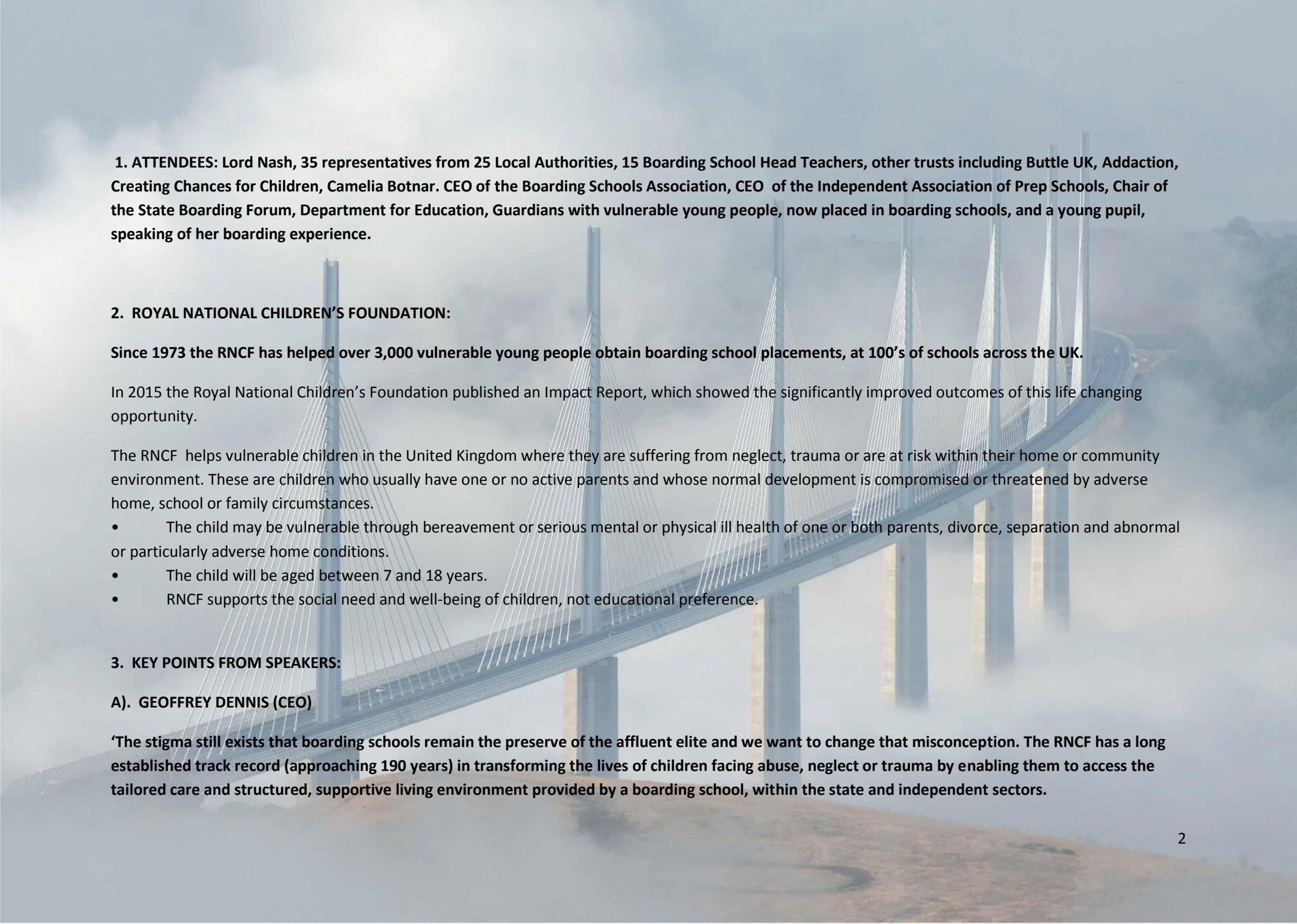
WHY BOARDING SCHOOL?

DEPARTMENT of EDUCATION and the ROYAL NATIONAL CHILDREN'S FOUNDATION held a conference in Westminster on the 10 November 2016. It follows on from the conference 'Bridging the Gap 2015', held in April last year.

AIM: To increase awareness of the many benefits a boarding school could offer to a vulnerable young person.

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 - A) Geoffrey Dennis, RNCf CEO – 'Our charity'
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 - K) Judi Garrett, Norfolk – FUNDING - including case study and guidance
4. FINAL DISCUSSION. BULLET POINTS & ACTIONS



1. ATTENDEES: Lord Nash, 35 representatives from 25 Local Authorities, 15 Boarding School Head Teachers, other trusts including Buttle UK, Addaction, Creating Chances for Children, Camelia Botnar. CEO of the Boarding Schools Association, CEO of the Independent Association of Prep Schools, Chair of the State Boarding Forum, Department for Education, Guardians with vulnerable young people, now placed in boarding schools, and a young pupil, speaking of her boarding experience.

2. ROYAL NATIONAL CHILDREN'S FOUNDATION:

Since 1973 the RNCF has helped over 3,000 vulnerable young people obtain boarding school placements, at 100's of schools across the UK.

In 2015 the Royal National Children's Foundation published an Impact Report, which showed the significantly improved outcomes of this life changing opportunity.

The RNCF helps vulnerable children in the United Kingdom where they are suffering from neglect, trauma or are at risk within their home or community environment. These are children who usually have one or no active parents and whose normal development is compromised or threatened by adverse home, school or family circumstances.

- The child may be vulnerable through bereavement or serious mental or physical ill health of one or both parents, divorce, separation and abnormal or particularly adverse home conditions.
- The child will be aged between 7 and 18 years.
- RNCF supports the social need and well-being of children, not educational preference.

3. KEY POINTS FROM SPEAKERS:

A). GEOFFREY DENNIS (CEO)

'The stigma still exists that boarding schools remain the preserve of the affluent elite and we want to change that misconception. The RNCF has a long established track record (approaching 190 years) in transforming the lives of children facing abuse, neglect or trauma by enabling them to access the tailored care and structured, supportive living environment provided by a boarding school, within the state and independent sectors.

In our recently published Impact Report we highlight that RNCF has a 94% success rate with the young people that we support. It is essential that local authorities and schools work together on this national campaign along with RNCF, other charities and the Department of Education’.

B) LORD NASH

Included in his speech: ‘One of the key successes of boarding school is their diversity, with people from all backgrounds. There is a lot more that we can do to help these young people – many young people are on the edge of care and a boarding school placement can not only help them, but also their families, improving family relationships.

Boarding school may not be appropriate for all young people – whether vulnerable or not, but for the right young person, at the right school, at the right time, boarding school can really be transformativewith high levels of pastoral care, individual attention, structure and security in their lives and a very strong sense of community and that of course is in addition to a high level quality of education, tailored to the requirements of individuals specific needs. It can represent a life changing – and perhaps even life-saving – opportunity for young people whose capacity for normal, happy development may have been prejudiced by seriously adverse circumstances in the home, family or day school environment.

The fact is that - after a period of settling down and becoming accustomed to their new communities – these young people frequently out-perform their new boarding school peers. We should, perhaps, not be too surprised about that because these beneficiaries – who have had a tough and unpromising, start to their young lives – are keen to grasp their golden opportunity with both hands. They are determined to make the most of their promising new life at boarding school.

I want to urge both Local Authorities and Schools to really drive this issue forward...It is not right for every child, but it is certainly not wrong for every child. I’m sure commissioners here today wouldn’t be here if you weren’t open minded but please try and influence any of your colleagues who are less receptive.

In 2017, we will be launching the Boarding School Partnerships programme, a new service that will help make it easier for local authority professionals to assess boarding school options for vulnerable young people. It will be primarily an online information service giving case studies, full background on the experience of state and independent boarding schools, the learnings of the charities and ways of funding placements. It will be an accessible, practical service that will help children’s and young people’s services to deploy the maximum level of expertise about boarding schooling, even though they may only need to consider such placements occasionally.

The service, which will be augmented by statistical information, a conference and printed material, is now in production and will be operational early next year. Access to it will be free of charge to local authority professionals and others involved in child welfare and education. The Boarding School Partnership programme is being led by Colin Morrison, who has just retired after 15 years as chair of the RNCF. Colin, who was himself a one-time beneficiary of boarding school funded by Essex County Council.

My ambition is for the RNCF and the Assisted Boarding Network to help many more vulnerable young people, and to spread our work far and wide. Please do come and talk to Chris Hughes or to other members of the RNCF with any further ideas you have.

Please do work together today to share your views and experiences. This is a really important process and could, after all, significantly improve the lives of many young people.

Thank you for everything you are doing...'

C). CHRIS HUGHES (Director of Operations, RNCF)

There is evidence of a growing interest with the Assisted Boarding Campaign. There is also a better understanding of all that boarding schools can offer, and how very keen these schools are, to help vulnerable young people. In March 2015, it was reported that 52,000 young people were in foster care..... how many of those could have integrated in to a boarding school life, given the chance?

We now need to see developments in this area - meetings being made between schools and local authorities; increased awareness and recognition right through the Social Services sector, from Commissioning Leaders to Social Workers, of the many benefits on offer.

Keep in touch, we are here to offer information and act as an intermediary to encourage these life changing opportunities to become a reality.

D). GUARDIANS – Kate and David: A CASE STUDY

Contacted RNCF, having found their website, and were seeking guidance after being told that their 9 year old niece would be taken in to care, due to emotional and physical neglect brought on by her mother's drug addiction and mental health issues. RNCF immediately became a very strong ally and helped throughout the whole process; while Kate and David realised they had to step up, to help care for their niece. RNCF were able to recommend a

number of schools that they have a good relationship with. RNCF kept in close contact throughout the whole process. A meeting followed with Kate, David and their niece at a Boarding Prep School, many discussions took place, and after a few 'taster' visits to both classroom and boarding house, boarding began. RNCF worked with the local authorities and the school to ensure a full funding package had been provided.

Their niece continues to thrive, after a rather wobbly start in 2013, now aged 12, healthy, happy and enjoying life. RNCF continue to stay in touch, a Birthday card is sent every year and RNCF also paid for a PGL holiday last summer. RNCF offer practical guidance, with genuine care. We are all eternally grateful.

David then read out RNCF's mission statement, and he confirmed that everything was followed through to the letter.

E). IRFAN LATIF - Chair of State Boarding Forum and Head Master of Sexey's School:

We are all here to help transform the lives of vulnerable young children and to enable them to be brought up in a safe, secure and stable environment.

There are a whole host of different school types! From prep schools 8 – 13 years, senior schools varying entry levels, up to 18 years old; single sex schools, co-ed, town and country..... in both state and independent boarding schools. There is a greater collaboration between the two sectors to increase training on safeguarding, staff training and shared facilities.

The working partnerships between charities, schools, local authorities and families is vital to assist with making the right choices at the right time, for these young people.

Provisions from these boarding schools includes not only the academic study, but what else? Children who may need additional help, can receive this at these schools, schools will do all they can to ensure a child reaches their own true potential, and in many cases, exceed all expectations.

These provisions include:

- **Dedicated pastoral teams – look after the well-being of the student**
- **Counselling support – which is on the increase due to necessity**
- **Medical care available 24/7**

WHAT IS BOARDING LIFE ALL ABOUT?

- It's fun!
- It's all about good British, modern boarding
- Children can and do thrive in these environments
- They can develop **strong relationships, making life-long friends within the boarding community**
- They **become more independent** – tidying their bedrooms, making sure they have their kit for sport ready etc, ensuring they have the right books for their lessons
- **Being organised**, and boarding is an environment which allows them to do that

All essential skills for when they leave school-

- **Leadership and taking responsibility**, maybe becoming a mentor for younger pupils..... becoming a Prefect or Monitor.
- **Pursuing hobbies...**
- **Confidence, independence and resilience**
- **Social mobility**

CHILD PROTECTION, SAFE GUARDING and THE WELL-BEING OF THE CHILD IS TOP PRIORITY, all regulated by the ISI, OFSTED and in Scotland THE CARE INSPECTORATE.

Committed to providing the safest, and secure environment

We are all here, to help improve the life chances for vulnerable children.

F). A YOUNG BOARDER:

I started at a boarding school because I used to get in to a lot of trouble and ended up being a school refuser. A hard start, on the first day I walked to the end of the drive wanting to go home, but the House Mistress followed me, offered support and turned in to a good friend. School life is good. There is always someone there for you. I am having many amazing experiences – currently working towards my Duke of Edinburgh's Award, and I am helping out at a local church that supports mentally disabled adults. I have made some very good friends, and have started to play hockey and rounders.

G). GUARDIAN – Pauline

Pauline and her husband have been foster carers for 50 years. In the 1980's they fostered a 2 year old girl. After an adoption breakdown, she returned to this family at the age of 6. A destroyed child who became a school refuser at the age of 13 – drinking and experimenting with drugs. She had a baby at 19, who was brought in to Care at the age of 4, came under the care of Pauline and her husband. 8 years on, a very damaged child, who suffers with attachment disorder, severe ADHD, dyslexia, food issues relating to early years feeding, mild autism, suspected foetal alcohol syndrome, which makes him a very complicated character. His primary school teacher suggested boarding school as an option, and the Royal Alexandra & Albert School were approached. The RNCF became involved, visiting the family home. The young lad started boarding in Year 7 last year. Funded by RNCF, a school bursary and by West Sussex Social Services. Initially he was terribly homesick, he had been totally dependent on Pauline for everything. Pauline and her husband would have struggled with him on a fulltime basis at their age (76 and 81), they therefore wanted to keep him safe and educated; until the age of 18, when he will start to make decisions for himself.

The boarding part of school is fantastic, the school have put in place counselling, therapy, regular discussions on nurturing. He may need additional help with Special Needs, which is being assessed now. Pauline gave very high praise for the school.

Pauline fully supported today's conference, she stated - 'It is all about the right school, at the right time, for the right 'family''.

H). JOHN ATTWATER: – Head Teacher's CASE STUDY

An Islamic mother visited the school, she had 5 boys, all born within 9 years of each other. **The mother had mental health issues and a personality disorder, significantly affecting her ability to look after her children.** 2002 – they had been placed on a Child Protection plan. **The home environment was unsafe and unhygienic, there was lack of food in the house, and there was also concern of physical violence from the absent father.** The mother refused to engage with the local authority within the home, although she would agree to meet at their children's local school. The father died in 2006, but the mother's condition continued to deteriorate. She became more isolated and withdrawn, and by 2008 the children reverted to Children in Need.

The primary state schools were so supportive, buying the boys coats to wear, essential school equipment etc. Care like this would be unsustainable when moving to senior school.

John Attwater contacted RNCF, Buttle UK and the Reedham Trust. Home visits were carried out. John said – 'This was one of the strongest cases I had come across, the home conditions were appalling'. The Mother was a hoarder with boxes of books used as chairs, a broken fridge and dirt everywhere, the home

had an infestation of rats, holes in the floor and no cooking facilities. With 3 charities and the schools bursary, one boy joined the school in September 2011, and then one of his brothers joined a month later, with a third the following year. In 2012 their mother faced an eviction order and was heavily pregnant, Social Services were then engaged. The new born baby was removed from her care and has since been adopted. Her younger children have remained on a 'Child in Need' care plan.

Over the years, the school safe-guarding team, House Master of the Boarding House, and social services have all been in close contact. The school, formed the 'link' between all the support services and the mother.

The boys go home for short breaks, or stay with extended family members.

In school each young lad has become fully committed to boarding life and integrated incredibly well. One was made a School Prefect, is very caring and a role model within the boarding house. One left last summer, achieving 32 points in the IB Diploma, and received a Gold Duke of Edinburgh's Award, and went on to university to read Medical Neuro Science. The Younger brother has just achieved 10 GCSE's and started in 6th form this September, studying A level Biology, Chemistry and Maths.

Their mother does now occasionally attend some school functions, and does engage a little with staff now. **The safe stable structure, the routine, the pastoral care have all benefited her children, and have also to some degree affected/supported her too.**

King Edward's has a large number (over 100) of boarders who receive financial assistance arising from their need for boarding. This is core to the vocation and mission of the school.

I). ALISTAIR RAMSAY: Head Teacher's Case Study

A new case study, since this September, the prep school takes boarders from 7 to 13 years old.

With all applications, **the big question is 'is this right for the child?'** it is a very individual choice and decision for each guardian, and for the school to make.

The child - who will be known as 'Emily' – visited the school in June after extensive discussions with RNCF, who were working alongside Social Services from a London Borough. I met Emily and her twin brother, they were 11 years old. They have a difficult life, **Social Services have been involved throughout the whole of their lives.** Father had committed suicide, mother's partners since then were **drug addicts**, and an older brother, aged 15 was on the brink of

entering crime activities, and being violent towards his younger siblings. The home curtains remained permanently closed and rooms were dark. **There was a huge risk of the children being taken in to Care; or alternatively, could a boarding place be found?**

Boarding school for Emily:

- *Day one* – angry, crying, sat on the floor and blanked out her surroundings.
- First few weeks wanted to go home and stay there.
- Environment – open country, bright, spacious, safe..... ‘different’.
- *Half a Term on* – A happier child, has made friends, has experienced a science trip to Cornwall, by the sea (had never seen the sea before), been in a boat, rock climbed. Spent a day on a tall ship. Sport – loves cross country running, hockey. Sings in the school choir. Weekend activities have really made a difference. Does not miss home so much now.
- Emily visited her old primary school during half term. Teaching staff there commented that ‘there was a very significant change in her whole outlook’ Her Social Worker has said home life has improved too – the mother has ended her relationship with the partner who was addicted to drugs. She has started to decorate the house – has more time to sort things out. There has been a very surprising and very positive reaction from the mother.

The whole process for this placement was incredibly thorough. **Extensive conversations with the RNCF and Social Services, a lot of background information obtained on the family and both of the twins.** Both came to stay at the school for a few days – to **assess academic and social ability**, by a number of staff. Sadly the young boy was assessed as not being able to integrate within the small boys boarding house, due to his behaviour issues.

At a recent Child Protection Meeting, Emily is now ‘off-plan’, for probably the first time in her life.

So early days, but if it all works out, the school will then assist with finding a suitable senior school for when Emily reaches the age of 13.

Schools want to help. Don’t hold back. Ask them to see if they can help.

J). JANE EDWARDS - Buttle UK, Boarding Chances for Children Programme

Jane explained that placements for this project are for Children In Need and those on Child Protection Plans. Buttle UK are offering up to 50 places across England to children **who will enter Year 7 in September 2017**, referrals are now being taken. Both state and independent boarding schools are involved with the Project. The cost to the local authority will be £6,000 per child, per annum, and this cost could apply for up to 7 years. Buttle UK and partners will

fund the rest of the fees, including all fee rises over time. There would also be additional funding beyond the core fees which might include uniform, books, essential field trips etc.

The Education Endowment is funding the research and they have appointed an independent evaluation team from the University of Nottingham. The researchers will follow the journey of the children until their GCSEs. They will report on their academic attainment and their wellbeing. In-depth case studies will be carried out covering the children, families and professionals involved. There will also be a cost-effectiveness analysis.

Boarding school for the right child could prevent them from going into care and this particular project is an early intervention approach. Not only could it save money but the outcomes are very positive. 72% of the pupils we support at boarding school gain 5 or more A*- C grades at GCSE. Only 15% of children in care achieve such results.

K). JUDI GARRETT – SERVICE DEVELOPMENT MANAGER, ALTERNATIVE TO CARE. NORFOLK LOCAL AUTHORITY.

Every local authority is different in how they 'manage' cost, but this is a brief overview from Norfolk.

Is Assisted Boarding a gamble or an investment? Let's see where this goes.....

Children in Care have now reached over 71,000, a continuing increase which is a major concern.

I would say that **most authorities have reduced their early intervention**, everyone has had to make cuts.

Norfolk had to make huge financial cuts a few years ago and are now paying the price.

There is a massive increase in demand for Social Service intervention, referrals relating to Child Protection issues.

Present spending levels on Looked After Children: (numbers revealed at the recent DfES – Department for Education & Skills Conference):

- Increasing about 4.5% every year (2015 – 4.7%)
- *We are therefore talking about billions of pounds, and we need to think how we use that money wisely.*
- Norfolk – are under a 'Notice of Direction' to improve. Not a good authority right now. Not serving the citizens of Norfolk very well.
- *About 5 years ago, financial cuts affected the Youth Service, and every family Intervention Service. We are now paying the price for that.*
- A warning shot to other local authorities to seriously think, before taking similar action.

- *It is currently very tough working in Norfolk.*
- In October 2016, Norfolk had 1054 children within the care of the local authority.
- *Average cost per placement throughout the UK is about £50,000 per year. THAT is where a lot of the money is going.*
- **Norfolk ARE reinvesting in early help. However when cuts were made – the cost of boarding schools remained a priority, and money was not withheld for such placements.**
- **Norfolk currently have a budget for Assisted Boarding of £400,000 per year. Comparatively not a lot of money. DSG (Dedicated Schools Grant) provides £100,000 towards Assisted Boarding. Virtual Schools are involved. £300,000 comes through the Children’s Services Fund.**
- Norfolk currently support around 22 children placed in boarding schools. 4 more are going through the process, and 4 more are being considered for this alternative option of care.
- **On average, a boarding school placement will cost Norfolk £18,000 per year.**
- **An average Looked After Child will cost Norfolk £52,000 per year – including all LAC children.**
- **In total Norfolk save long term around £600,000 per child through boarding school placements.**
- Success rate around 89% - which is pretty good.
- If a child needs to go into local authority care, the boarding placement may continue.
- You need to really understand your children and you need to really understand your schools.
- *Norfolk place around 4 to 6 children per year. On average for every 5 children considered, only 1 will go in to boarding. We are then confident it is the right choice for them. We don’t want it to fail, it needs to be right.*

NORFOLK – CASE STUDY:

Placed in boarding school aged 11, now 15 years old. Mother had long standing mental health issues. Long history of domestic violence in the family. Mother attempted to kill herself and her children. The boy was placed in a Norfolk boarding school.

A good outcome. The young lad has remained in contact with his family, spends some holiday time at home and has done well at school. A very different lad, a lot more confident and looking to go on to university. He has 3 older siblings, who are struggling. Their future is not looking so bright, and are more likely to repeat the cycle of vulnerability. The outcomes for the lad were most noticeable through having experienced:

- **STRUCTURE and ROUTINE**, encouraging high aspirations to do well and building self-esteem.
- **EDUCATION – ATTAINMENT** is looking really good

- **POSITIVE ATTITUDES**

He is still part of his family, and NOT IN CARE.

A FUNDING AGREEMENT IS NOW IN PLACE UNTIL HE IS 18 YEARS OLD

We would hope that HIS children would not be 'in the system' though most likely his siblings children may well end up with local authority intervention.

BOARDING HELPS TO BREAK THE CYCLE OF VULNERABILITY !

POINTS TO CONSIDER WITH BOARDING PLACEMENTS:

- **Norfolk see a boarding school placement as an ALTERNATIVE TO CARE** ie: an early help programme.
- Norfolk do have some LAC in a boarding school placement, where a kinship arrangement is usually in place.
- **You must think about the individual child** – 'not cohorts of children' when considering potential possible placements.
- **A high turnover of Social Workers makes it impossible to make them all aware of Assisted Boarding being an alternative option, as well as having a true understanding of boarding school life.**
- **Case Management** – Once a child is in a boarding school, and everything is going well – do you close the case? Norfolk keep the case open, as a 'Child in Need' – just for security.
- **Additional costs to watch out for !!!!** – Uniform, music lessons, musical instruments, transport, school trips – holiday and educational. They are relatively small cost, but important to the child, so that they are not 'seen to be different', and be excluded from such activities.
- School Heads commented here that some schools – and charities, are able to support such additional cost through bursary funds or exceptional funding pots.
- **This is a LONG TERM COMMITMENT – most cases are for the EDUCATIONAL LIFE OF THAT CHILD (throughout the school years).** Funding may start when the child is 11 years old which may then continue through to 16, or even 18 years old.
- Most placements are made as close to the family home as possible, to ensure the family can easily see the child, and the child can get home relatively easily. There are a number of good boarding schools in Norfolk, and therefore the need to look further is not a priority.

4). SUMMARY OF DEBATE:

Statements, suggested outcomes, and areas for further discussion:

ISSUE	REASON	ACTION / SOLUTION
BARRIERS for placing young people – Anti boarding schools	Lack of awareness by Social Services of: What boarding school life is like, Where are these boarding schools? Create a generic application procedure for such placements?	Set up system within the Local Authority Meetings between LAs and their local boarding schools to initiate working partnership
Communication within Social Services	From Commissioners to Social Workers, and vice versa – the whole team need to consider this alternative option.	To include ‘Assisted Boarding’ in training days and team meetings
Poor media exposure of ‘Boarding School life’	Media focuses on ‘academic’ achievements and fails to recognise the high levels of pastoral care, routine, safe environment and individual support.	LAs to visit boarding schools Increased media coverage to highlight these benefits
The PATHFINDER PROJECT lacked a ‘steering group’	Schools do vary with their academic expectations, seek guidance depending on the individual child’s ‘potential’ Assumed local authorities would identify the ‘Assisted Boarding’ option as a truly beneficial, long term placement.	Seek support from RNCF, Buttle UK, Government website (launch 2017)
Lack of Resources with LAs	Government cut backs	Reassess value of boarding life, move to higher priority level as an alternative option to Care. A designated person is most likely to be needed to liaise between schools & families. To ensure the ‘long term’ commitment is considered, to secure that young person’s place throughout their educational years (up to 18 years old)
Adoption Breakdowns (1 in 3 placements struggle or breakdown)	Attachment disorders Boarding school life can provide respite. Proof this already works. (Case work available from RNCF)	Consider boarding schools to prevent breakdown

Foster Care Placements	An increasing number of foster care placements are breaking down	Earlier intervention may prevent a young person going in to foster care – the majority of the time they are being ‘looked after’ within their boarding house.
Specialist foster carers ?	Already in place with some LAs – where they only look after a young person during holiday time and some weekends..	A good idea?
Holiday and weekends Also emergency care – if a young person is removed from school – if they are ill, or been excluded.	Some homes are too chaotic and too risky, but many are manageable.	Support young person when at home RNCF offer PGL holidays Some young people LIKE going home – don’t forget that LAs can offer additional ‘Home Support’ to enable a young person to spend time with their families. Norfolk stated that with some LAC children, who do attend boarding school, foster carers are also ‘on hand’ to cover such emergencies.
Funding boarding places	Lack of understanding of ‘long term’ cost saving. Pressure on LAs to ‘cut back’ on expenditure. Staffing – LAs only have the ability to care for ‘crisis cases’ and not so much have the ability to consider ‘early intervention’, for the long term outcome.	Increase awareness of long term benefits, not only for the young person, but for the whole family. Funding is an on-going issue between local authorities, schools and charities. EACH INDIVIDUAL CASE SHOULD BE ASSESSED AND DISCUSSED BETWEEN THE LA, the SCHOOL AND the CHARITY.
Asylum Seekers	In need of language support, EFL? Can boarding schools accommodate these young people?	
Culture shock!	For the young person, can be a <i>totally</i> new experience – countryside, outings, routine, care, friendship, boundaries	Schools are aware of this. They work with young people <i>all the time</i> who need support.

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