



Royal  
National  
Children's  
Foundation

IMPACT REPORT  
MARCH 2015

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This research was conducted by the Royal National Children's Foundation in December 2014 with the kind cooperation of beneficiaries, their parents, guardians, head teachers and teachers. It was undertaken by Imogen Schon a graduate from the University of Cambridge.



# Executive Summary

The RNCF supports the UK's most vulnerable children and young people, primarily by co-funding places for them to attend boarding school. This is known as Assisted Boarding and it helps them escape a range of challenging issues their home life may present.

Assisted Boarding works by offering them the opportunity to benefit from the high levels of pastoral care, individual attention and structured living offered at boarding schools.

For various reasons, including local authority budget cuts, the number of children requiring the type of support offered by Assisted Boarding is rising year on year. The RNCF is therefore committed to increasing the number of vulnerable young people it supports. By 2017 it targets to increase the number of beneficiaries from the current 373 to 500.

This report aims to demonstrate the positive impact of its work as a way to generate further interest and financial support. Primary research was conducted on a number of target groups:

- Current beneficiaries
- Beneficiaries' families
- Head teachers, teachers and school staff
- RNCF alumni

Secondary data was also examined to evaluate the potential wider social impact of the RNCF's work.

The findings show clearly that the RNCF's work has a clear impact upon beneficiaries, their families and at a wider societal level.

From an individual perspective, there is evidence from current beneficiaries of: increased personal security and self-esteem, improved quality of relationships and heightened aspirations. Together, these findings were common to both the current beneficiaries and the alumni, indicating that the life changing impact is long-lasting.

The vast majority of families surveyed reported that their own lives were positively impacted by their child being away at boarding school.

There is also the benefit of Assisted Boarding to the wider society in financial and social terms. Firstly, assisted boarding is on average a quarter of the cost of care for a young person in a residential home.

Secondly, there are many more positive outcomes for those who are given the opportunity of Assisted Boarding as compared to local authority care. Care leavers are disproportionately likely to go to prison, become homeless, and incur major health expenses far above the norm. These outcomes are extremely unlikely for those leaving Assisted Boarding.

*“... there are many more positive outcomes for those who are given the opportunity of Assisted Boarding”*



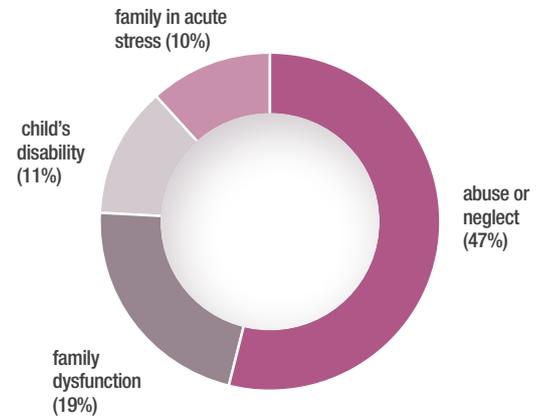
# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

In 2014 the number of children and young people in England referred to local authorities and judged to be 'in need' was 397,630. The most likely reasons for referral included abuse or neglect (47%), family dysfunction (19%), child's disability (11%) or family in acute stress (10%).

The NSPCC believes that due to budget cuts, the proportion of vulnerable children and young people helped by local authorities has diminished, a trend they predict will continue. The threshold at which local authorities accept referrals for children in need has repeatedly risen. The Local Authorities Association also reports that serious cases are slipping through the net for this same reason.

It is here that the RNCf steps in, supporting vulnerable children and young people who may not now qualify for local authority support, but who are nevertheless at serious risk.



## 1.2 The Royal National Children's Foundation



Case study - Molly

When Royal National Children's Foundation's case worker met Molly aged 7 for the first time in September 2013, she was being cared for by her grandmother, Anne aged 60, in a small one bedroom council flat.

Molly had been removed from her mother's care by police in June 2013 and Anne was granted a residency order taking Molly up to the age of 16 years old. Molly's mother was known to Children's Services whilst pregnant with Molly, due to her long history of drug and alcohol abuse. Molly was made subject to a Child Protection plan from birth under the categories of neglect and harm.

In June 2013, neighbours were becoming increasingly worried about Molly being left alone all night whilst her mother went out drinking. When the police visited the flat, Molly answered the door and they found her mother in a comatose state in the living room. The kitchen was filthy with dirty cat litter and rubbish scattered on the floor. Neither the fridge nor the oven was connected to the electricity supply and the only food stuffs in the kitchen were dry pasta and rice.

The flat was strewn with empty beer bottles and dirty dishes. The bathroom had no toilet paper in it and Molly had no bedding on her bed.

Molly's father was released from prison after serving a 4 year sentence for GBH in June 2013 but had not made contact with Molly's mother.

Anne was providing Molly with a safe and loving home life but was not coping well with looking after a young child full time due to her own ill health. Anne suffers from emphysema, panic attacks, depression and double incontinence due to internal injuries caused through abuse. She was brought up in five children's homes and had a troubled marriage.

When asked what her feelings were about boarding school, Molly said "I would go tomorrow if I could".

RNCf worked with Molly and Anne to find a suitable school for her. A year on, Molly is now thriving and happy. She has new friends and enjoys seeing her "nana" in school holidays.

The RNCF supports the UK's most vulnerable children and young people like Molly. Very often the lives of beneficiaries before Assisted Boarding are challenging due to the struggles of their parents and guardians. Issues may include: parental illness, problems with drugs and alcohol and domestic violence.

A place at boarding school therefore improves the emotional wellbeing, stability and safety of the child, by providing a supportive and enabling environment away from these challenges. At the same time, the RNCF's work supports the needs of other family members. With their child safely at boarding school, parents and guardians have the time and space to address the issues they are facing in life, which otherwise prevent them from meeting the needs of their child.

The RNCF's work aims to keep families together. It keeps in regular contact with beneficiaries' schools and families to monitor each situation on a case by case basis. Though parents and guardians are often unable to look after and support their children day to day; with the pressure of full-time care removed, the quality of time spent together, for example during holidays, is much improved.

The RNCF has partnerships with many different trusts, charities and charitable endowments within boarding schools themselves. We play a vital role in bringing these different philanthropic agencies together and co-ordinating this investment. As a result, every pound donated to the RNCF is matched at least five times over. Through co-ordination we are able to maximise the financial commitment to each child.

Additionally, 100% of all donations go directly to pay for beneficiary school fees.

## 1.3 How Assisted Boarding Works

Assisted Boarding offers vulnerable children and young people the opportunity to benefit from the high levels of pastoral care, individual attention and structured living offered at many boarding schools.

## 1.4 Introduction to the Research

With the numbers of children needing the type of support Assisted Boarding can offer rising year on year, the RNCF is committed to increasing the number of vulnerable young people it supports.

By 2017 it targets to increase the number of beneficiaries from 373 to 500. To help achieve this, it is aiming to raise awareness

of the charity's work, expand its advocacy role and increase collaboration with government and local authorities.

We believe it is important to demonstrate the effect of our work. This research assesses the impact of the RNCF's work upon the lives of its beneficiaries, their families and society. It was conducted in December 2014 by Imogen Schon, a graduate from Cambridge University.

The research was conducted via a number of methods. These included studying the RNCF's available data from:

- 97 beneficiaries prior to Assisted Boarding
- 58 current beneficiaries
- 52 beneficiaries' families
- 31 head teachers and 66 teachers
- 18 RNCF Alumni
- It reached just over a third (37%) of the total number of RNCF beneficiaries.

Secondary data was also examined to evaluate the potential wider social impact of RNCF's work. The findings are summarised in the sections below by impact on individual beneficiaries, impact on beneficiaries' families and the potential impact on wider society.



<sup>2</sup>Family Life and Alternative Care (2014) Children's Rights Alliance for England. Page 5. Available from: [http://www.crae.org.uk/media/75120/SOCR\\_2014\\_FAMILYCARE.pdf](http://www.crae.org.uk/media/75120/SOCR_2014_FAMILYCARE.pdf)  
<sup>3</sup>How safe are our children (2014) NSPCC. Page 6. Available from: <http://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/research-and-resources/how-safe-are-our-children-2014/>

## 2. Research Findings

### 2.1 Impact on the individual

The findings from available RNCF data, current beneficiaries, their parents, head teachers and teachers indicate beneficiaries experience a series of really strong benefits as a result of Assisted Boarding. These include increased security and self-esteem, improved relationships and heightened aspirations. These, in combination, suggest a positive impact in individuals' lives via the charity's work. Evidence from alumni of the RNCF's work indicates this impact is enduring.

This section will examine these benefits in more detail.

#### 2.1.1 Increased Level of Security and Self-Esteem

It was evident amongst survey respondents that Assisted Boarding had an effect on their personal security. This is central to the RNCF's work because it shows the long term growth of self-esteem and confidence while giving each beneficiary the opportunity to reach their potential, both emotionally and educationally. Just 14% of respondents described themselves as 'secure' or 'very secure' prior to the Assisted Boarding placement. Beneficiaries and their head teachers explained how these insecurities manifested themselves.

*"[I had] intimacy issues...took offence to things easily and cried a lot"* Current Beneficiary

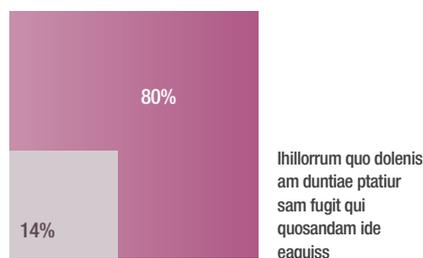
*"I didn't like to touch anyone or shake their hands... I hated myself and felt completely alone"*  
Current Beneficiary

*"I found it hard to socialise with my peers and others around me"* Current Beneficiary

*"It gives [Beneficiaries] stability which for whatever reason may not always be possible in their home life"*  
Current Head Teacher

Once at boarding school, findings suggest levels of security dramatically increased - 90% of current beneficiaries described themselves as 'secure' or 'very secure' having experienced Assisted Boarding. Almost 80% of surveyed beneficiaries also explicitly judged boarding school to have had a positive impact upon their levels of self-esteem. Respondents were asked to expand upon the greatest effect Assisted Boarding had had on their lives. This increased security and self-esteem was evident in their comments.

*"I am now comfortable and feel care and love towards me"* Current Beneficiary



As part of this study, Alumni of RNCF's work were consulted about their experiences and the effect they felt Assisted Boarding had had on their lives. Almost all of those spoken to felt boarding school had strongly and positively influenced their lives today and reinforced the above finding that security and self-esteem were boosted through the Assisted Boarding placement.

*"I wouldn't have the confidence that I have now. I would have given up at the first hurdle if someone told me I couldn't do it"* Alumni Beneficiary

*"[Boarding School] provided a safe and relaxed environment. A secure place when it was not safe for me to go home... [It] rebuilt my confidence which had been lost"* Alumni Beneficiary

*"Helped me to rebuild my self-confidence - through support from staff and emotional support which I hadn't had"* Alumni Beneficiary

#### 2.1.2 Improved relationships

A second notable improvement reported by respondents was the quality of relationships they experience in their lives. More than 80% of surveyed beneficiaries noted boarding school had a positive impact on both relationships with adults (86%) and peers (83%). This was reiterated in the responses of parents as well as in speaking to RNCF alumni. As one alumnus described.

*"The friends and relationships that I have built will last a lifetime"* Alumni Beneficiary

#### 2.1.3 Heightened aspirations

More than two thirds of survey respondents (69%) reported boarding school had changed their conceptions of their futures. Of these, almost half (45%) felt boarding school had given them the ambition and motivation to achieve their goals and a third (38%) noted boarding school had broadened their knowledge of the opportunities open to them. When questioned, many alumni beneficiaries agreed with this finding as did some head teachers.

*"Boarding has affected so much of me that I feel like I can go anywhere! With the skills and nurturing I am glad I have received, it has helped me realise that there are lots of things I can accomplish with effort and determination"* Current Beneficiary

*"There are things that I am doing now that I never knew I could achieve"* Alumni Beneficiary

*"In my experience [beneficiaries] get caught up in a culture of achievement and aspiration, so they not only exceed expectations but continue to aim higher in later life - in terms of university and career"*  
Current Head Teacher

Almost three quarters of beneficiaries surveyed (72%) indicated they would be aiming to complete further studies upon graduation. Though not directly comparable due to methodological differences, the national average seeking further education is 68%.

#### 2.1.4 Long lasting impact

The culmination of these benefits suggests RNCf's work does indeed impact upon its beneficiaries. Speaking to alumni of Assisted Boarding, 100% were "very pleased" to have attended boarding school and 89% felt that the experience had strongly or very strongly influenced their lives today suggesting this impact is long lasting.

## 2.2 Impact on family

The primary reasons for the vulnerability that brought each of the young people in this research sample into contact with the RNCf concerned issues with parents and guardians. For example, parental illness (37%), parental problems with drugs and alcohol (10%), child abuse, neglect and harassment (11%) and domestic violence (5%).

94% of parents and guardians consulted felt boarding school had had a positive or very positive impact upon family life. Describing this impact, many referenced their inability to cater for their children's needs at home and the influence of the school environment upon the child's ability to flourish.

*"I am able to get the rest I need and my son hasn't become my carer"* Current Beneficiary Parent

*"To see my daughter 'grow' in herself and positively flourish has been such an amazing experience for me. It has actually 'kept me going' at times, knowing that if she can do it, so can I"* Current Beneficiary Parent

This positive influence upon the family was echoed when speaking to RNCf alumni. The vast majority felt their family life had been positively impacted, mainly by increasing the space and time for families to cope with their own personal challenges.

*"[Boarding school] gave my mother the space and time to care for our youngest sister who had physical and learning disabilities. [My sister] now lives independently and works part time. I am not certain this would have happened if mum had to look after all three of us full-time"*  
Alumni Beneficiary

*"Boarding allowed my mum to know we were in a safe place and provided her the confidence to leave my alcoholic dad"* Alumni Beneficiary

## 2.3 Impact on wider society

This research also studied secondary data available concerning the wider social context within which Assisted Boarding sits. At a time when vulnerable young people are increasingly likely to fall through the gap of local authority care provision, the RNCf not only plugs this gap, but offers a solution that is not only more valuable for the beneficiary but, potentially, for society as a whole. This increased benefit is in terms of both financial input and social outputs.

Even at its most expensive, Assisted Boarding is a significantly more cost effective means of providing care for vulnerable children and young people than alternative state provided options.

For example, the cost of care in a residential home for seven years at £978,796 is almost four times as much as the cost of an Assisted Boarding placement over the same period of time.

The wider use of Assisted Boarding therefore means that more children and young people can be helped. This in turn could reduce the burden on the overstretched Local Authority provision.

In addition, there are potentially more positive outcomes for those who experience Assisted Boarding as compared to local authority care. Care leavers are disproportionately likely to go to prison, become homeless, and incur major health expenses over and above the norm.

Over one quarter of the adult prison population has been in care, and nearly a third of the British homeless population were in care for some part of their childhood.

RNCf understands from alumni, that the outcomes, having experienced Assisted Boarding, are significantly different. The vast majority of those alumni still known to RNCf are either in employment, education and training. Though not directly comparable just 34% of care leavers are in a similar situation. The findings above also demonstrate Assisted Boarding raises aspirations amongst beneficiaries, with almost three quarters (72%) aiming to embark on further studies or a clear and ambitious career path. As a comparative indication, just 6% of care leavers go to university having left local authority care.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p.4 <sup>5</sup> Living in Children's Residential Homes (2010) Department for Education: Research Report DFE-RR201. Page 4 Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/184079/DFE-RR201.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/184079/DFE-RR201.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Couldn't Care Less (2008) Centre for Social Justice. Page 152. Available at: <http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/UserStorage/pdf/Pdf%20Exec%20summaries/Couldn%27tCareLess.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Stein, M (2010) Increasing the number of care leavers in 'settled, safe accommodation'.

C4EO. Available from: [www.c4eo.org.uk/themes/vulnerablechildren/careleavers/files/increasing\\_care\\_leavers\\_in\\_safe\\_accommodation\\_full\\_knowledge\\_reviepf.pdf](http://www.c4eo.org.uk/themes/vulnerablechildren/careleavers/files/increasing_care_leavers_in_safe_accommodation_full_knowledge_reviepf.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Statistical Briefing: Looked after children and care leavers 2013. Catch 22 NCAS Briefing. Available from: <http://resources.leavingcare.org/uploads/9b7793d8be6ffc05a501df3df4a1ef5f.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Children looked after by local authorities in England: year ending 31 March 2011. Department for Education Statistics. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-by-local-authorities-in-england-year-ending-31-march-2011>

## 3. Conclusions

The research here has highlighted some very important issues and underlined the real impact the RNCF is having on the lives of the young people that we assist. This impact is not only felt by the individuals we help, but also on their family and wider society in general. Assisted Boarding empowers beneficiaries to transform their lives, equipping them for the future and providing an environment which is conducive to breaking the cycle of neglect and abuse.

### Impact on individual

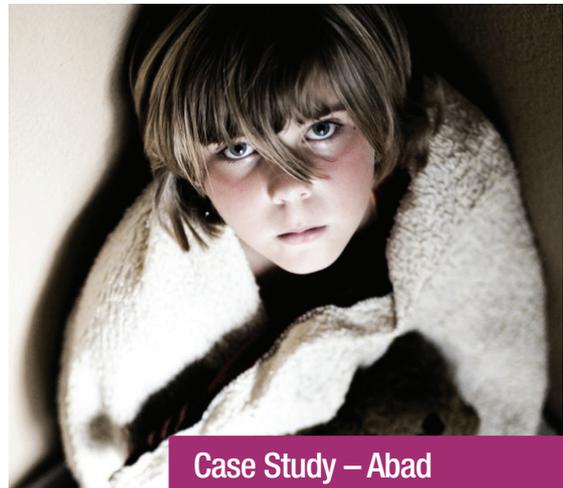
The RNCF Beneficiaries' experience a series of very powerful benefits as a result of Assisted Boarding, particularly related to increased security and self-esteem, improved relationships and strengthened aspirations. When one reads the case studies of many of our beneficiaries, like Molly shared above, the true effects of our work are outstanding. Only 14% of respondents described themselves as secure prior to assisted boarding. However, 90% of surveyed beneficiaries, once at boarding school reported feelings of security.

### Impact on family

Almost all (94%) of current parents and guardians feel that their own lives have been very positively impacted by RNCF's intervention. The presence of their children being away at boarding school very often allows the parents and guardians to rebuild their own lives.

### Impact on wider society

Assisted boarding is considerably cheaper than the alternative local authority full care. In addition, the full care alternative leads to a disproportionate number of young people becoming involved in criminal activities, going to prison, becoming homeless and /or incurring major health issues.



Case Study – Abad

RNCF's case worker visited Abad, aged 11, and his four older brothers in their home in 2011. Abad had been on the "At Risk" register for neglect at pre-school, then the "Children in Need" register at primary school. Social Services were involved and Abad and his closest brother in age, Omar, were at risk of going into care.

Abad's father, an Imam at the local mosque, had passed away two years earlier after a series of heart attacks. Abad's mother, Badai, was not coping well and was being treated for mental health issues.

Although the family had been re-homed recently, the house was filthy and all of the boys were sharing two damp loft rooms because the

other bedrooms had been filled from floor to ceiling with black bin bags and other rubbish. There was no working fridge and the boys were frequently eating cold food out of tins. Abad had rickets and was taking daily medication. When they ran out of money for the gas and electricity meters, the family used candles for light.

Despite all these challenges, they were a tight knit loving family. Abad was quiet and polite and said that it would be "a dream come true" to go to boarding school.

RNCF currently funds Abad and his brother at the same boarding school. They are thriving within the nurturing and caring environment offered and their health is greatly improved.