

## **Bereaved families face postcode lottery, says new research**

Over a third of local authorities in England lack a specialist childhood bereavement service where families can directly access the help they need. Findings from a survey presented today by the Childhood Bereavement Network (CBN), based at NCB, reveal the patchiness of provision for children and their families who are seeking help after the death of someone close to them. 3.5% of the population of 5-16 year olds have been bereaved of a parent, brother or sister – that's 252,000 children in England alone.

The findings come from a survey of Primary Care Trusts and Local Authorities, by CBN in partnership with 11 MILLION, the Office of the Children's Commissioner for England.

'Families are very clear about the benefits that childhood bereavement services bring them' said Alison Penny, CBN Coordinator. 'They help them to make sense of what has happened, meet others in a similar situation, and learn ways of coping with the huge changes and challenges that a death in the family brings. They are also a vital resource for professionals such as teachers, social workers and learning mentors, who benefit from training to support the bereaved children they are bound to encounter through their work. These services should be available in every area, for every family to access freely when the time is right for them'.

'While the survey revealed excellent services in some areas, that's little comfort to a family down the road who can't access something similar, or who have to go to their GP or another professional to get their children referred for help, rather than being able to ring a service for support when they are ready.

The survey, based on returns covering 51% of local authority areas in England, also revealed that only 18% of local authorities are picking up the specific needs of bereaved children in their strategic planning for children, despite these needs often differing significantly from those of other vulnerable children.

The findings will be presented today at a major conference 'Telling the Story', organised by the Childhood Bereavement Network and generously supported by 11 MILLION, the Office of the Children's Commissioner. Professor Sir Al Aynsley-Green, who steps down as Children's Commissioner this Friday (26<sup>th</sup> February), will deliver his final keynote speech at the conference. Sir Al has pledged his continued support to bereaved children and young people, and today's conference will also announce his new role as Patron of the Childhood Bereavement Network.

Sir Al Aynsley-Green, Children's Commissioner for England said:

"The findings from our survey are a cause for concern. Around one child in every classroom is affected by the death of a loved one. The lack of specialist childhood bereavement services means that countless children are not being properly supported through their grief.

"This is an issue that is close to my heart as I lost my own father at a very young age. I commend the work of the voluntary organisations who dedicate their time to helping families during these difficult times. However, there is now an urgent need for more trained bereavement

counsellors in schools and in communities to help children and young people to deal with the range of emotions brought on by the death of a parent, sibling or friend. I know from my own experience how important it is to have someone to talk to during these painful moments in life.”

1. The Childhood Bereavement Network (CBN), hosted by NCB, is the national, multi-professional network of organisations and individuals working in the field of childhood bereavement. CBN promotes the interests of bereaved children, young people and their families and encourages the development of quality support for them. For more information, visit [www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk](http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk)
2. NCB's mission is to advance the well-being of all children and young people across every aspect of their lives. As a membership and infrastructure support agency for the children's sector in England and Northern Ireland, NCB provides essential information on policy, research and best practice for our members and the members of our wide range of partnership bodies, which operate under our charitable status and are based in our London headquarters. For further information visit [www.ncb.org.uk](http://www.ncb.org.uk)
3. 11 MILLION, is the organisation that is led by the Children's Commissioner for England. The Children's Commissioner for England was established under The Children Act 2004 to be the independent voice of children and young people and to champion their interests and bring their concerns and views to the national arena. For further information visit [www.11MILLION.org.uk](http://www.11MILLION.org.uk)

**For further information, please contact the NCB Media Office:  
Clare Quarrell/Aoife Allen/Carmen Dafner on 0207 843 6044/6047/6311  
Media Office Mobile - 07721 097033 or e-mail: [media@ncb.org.uk](mailto:media@ncb.org.uk)**