



Leaders' Forum 2025

Prevention as a paradigm shift

Speaker Biographies

Biographies have been provided by the speakers

Dez Holmes – Director, Research in Practice and Strategic Director for Practice & Programmes, National Children's Bureau

Dez is the Strategic Director for Practice & Programmes at [National Children's Bureau](#), and is also Director of [Research in Practice](#), a not-for-profit organisation that since 1996 has been supporting those who work with children, families and adults to use evidence in their practice and leadership.

Her practice experience is largely within youth offending services and early help. She is particularly interested in adolescence, transitions, risk and participatory practice. Dez has led Research in Practice's work on adolescent and Transitional Safeguarding, and has recently published two books in this area.

Until recently, Dez was Programme Director for the Tackling Child Exploitation programme ([TCE](#)); she also chairs the [Contextual Safeguarding UK Advisory Group](#) and is a Visiting Fellow at University of East Anglia.

Dez chairs the Advisory Group for [The Staff College](#), which develops leadership capacity across local authority children's services, and sits on a number of Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) policy committees and research advisory boards.

Dez was a member of the Evidence Group, supporting the [Review of Children's Social Care](#), and is also a trustee of [Family Action](#), a large charity providing practical, emotional and financial support to families who are experiencing poverty, disadvantage and social isolation.

In 2024, Dez was awarded an Honorary Doctorate by University of Sussex.

Adam Lent – Senior Consultant in the Leadership and Organisational Development Team, The King’s Fund

Adam Lent is a Senior Consultant in the Leadership and Organisational Development Team at The King’s Fund and Director of the Leadership for Population Health programme. He has worked for the last twenty years on public sector innovation and public service reform with a particular focus on community-led approaches, new models of leadership and organisational culture change. Prior to joining The King’s Fund he was Chief Executive of New Local for over seven years – a think-tank and peer-learning network seeking to deliver a community power vision for public services, society and the wider economy. He has worked previously as Chief Economist at the Trades Union Congress and Director of the Action and Research Centre for the Royal Society for the Arts. He has researched and written extensively throughout his career and he holds a PhD from Sheffield University.

Russell Todd – Community Development specialist
@llannerch (Bluesky and Instagram)

Russell is a Community Development practitioner with over 25 years’ experience. He started in neighbourhood and estates community work in Wrexham, Merthyr Tydfil and the Gwent valleys in his native Wales, before moving into workforce development, training and support. These days he works freelance with a focus on facilitation, evaluation and research. In 2024, he published his first book, co-written with Alan Twelvetrees, *Community Development, Social Action and Social Planning: A Practical Guide* (sixth edition), on Policy Press.

In 2017 he founded The Community Development Podcast to promote the value of CD approaches, share learning, and connect practitioners. He also produces podcasts for a number of academic, non-profit and voluntary organisations.

In 2019, Russell co-founded Grow Social Capital, a social enterprise promoting social capital theory and practice. He is a non-executive director of Benthyc Cymru which supports communities in Wales to develop libraries of things, and is also Festival Director of the Wal Goch Festival of Football Cultures based in Wrexham.

Russell is passionate about promoting the merits of CD approaches outside of its ‘traditional’ realms, for instance in social care, heritage, the foundational economy and foresight studies.

Russell lives in Cardiff with his wife and three teenage children.

Steve Broome – Strategic Development Manager, East Sussex County Council

Steve is Strategy Development Manager at East Sussex County Council. His current work focuses on the development and implementation of a new prevention strategy for Adult Social Care, and on 'healthy ageing' innovations, including a new service to help people prepare for (potential) changes in their lives. He also sits on the Sussex Health and Care Research Partnership Executive, which aims to develop research capacity in the health and social care system.

Prior to his time at ESCC, Steve was Director of Research at the Royal Society of Arts (RSA), and was Visiting Professor and Co-Director of the Centre for Citizenship and Community at the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan). He has also worked for several research consultancies, and in community regeneration.

He is a qualified counsellor and the co-author of several books on mental health and wellbeing issues, and has also been a trustee of a third sector infrastructure organisation.

Richard Selwyn – Service Director for Children's Commissioning, Somerset Council

Richard is an experienced leader with 25 years in local government, health, central government and consulting – the last ten years at Director level. He has led major local and national transformation programmes, such as writing government's vision for whole system demand management in children's services and delivering in both rural and city areas.

Richard lives with his family in the countryside near Monmouth and is currently Service Director for Children's Commissioning at Somerset Council. As a systems thinker, Richard developed policies for Every Child Matters, early help, commissioning and Supporting Families. He continues to lecture for the national transformation academy and is the author of the service design book *Outcomes & Efficiency* and other publications.

Dr Calum Webb – Lecturer in Quantitative Social Science, University of Sheffield

Dr Calum Webb joined the Sheffield Methods Institute as a British Academy Postdoctoral Research Fellow in September 2021 and is currently a Lecturer in Quantitative Social Science at the University of Sheffield. His research explores socioeconomic inequalities in the child welfare system and their relationship to fiscal and social policy using novel quantitative research methods. His most recent project, [Investing in Prevention & Support](#), found that an increase of more than 8,000 children in care could be attributed to cuts to children's services since 2009-10 and that the consequences of each £1 cut from prevention and support for families ends up costing as much as £2.70 in the immediate two years after. Children from minoritised ethnic backgrounds, older children, and boys and young men were disproportionately impacted by these cuts.

Rachael Wardell – President of ADCS, Executive Director of Children, Families and Lifelong Learning, Surrey County Council

Rachael Wardell has been Executive Director of Children, Families and Lifelong Learning at Surrey County Council since December 2020, and was previously DCS in the London Borough of Merton (2018-2020) and West Berkshire (2013-2018). In West Berkshire she 'twin-hatted' as Director of Adult Social Care too. She has worked in local government children's services since 2009 and prior to that had 14 years' experience in non-departmental public bodies including Ofsted (2002 – 2009). Rachael is also a qualified solution-focused coach. Rachael became ADCS President in April 2025.

Jess McGregor – President of ADASS, Executive Director of Adults and Health, Camden Council

In May 2025, Jess McGregor became the President of the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) for 2025-26. She's currently the Executive Director of Adults and Health for Camden Council, having joined them in 2020 after 10 years with Islington council. Jess has always worked in local government primarily in integrated health and local government roles covering homelessness, substance misuse, criminal justice and adult social care. She loves living and working in London and says it's a real privilege to be able to cycle to work every day. Jess lives with her partner and three kids and tries to get to the mountains and sea as often as possible.

Simon Thomas – Lead for Wiltshire's Families and Children's Transformation Programme

Simon is the Lead for Wiltshire's Families and Children's Transformation Programme. He has significant experience of leading whole system reform and transformation projects related to achieving best outcomes for children, young people and families. Specific projects include Transitional Safeguarding, Early Help, youth justice, school improvement, pastoral care in schools, mental health, school attendance and youth/family employment.

Simon is currently employed by Council, Police and Health leading on Wiltshire's system-wide transformation response to the DfE Families First Partnership Programme and ensuring alignment with NHS Integrated Neighbourhood Teams agenda.

Zoya Wallington – Independent Researcher and Evaluator, Rounded

Zoya Wallington is an equity centred researcher and evaluator who has supported leading UK charities, trusts, councils and school groups to capture the impact of their work.

Zoya leads an interdisciplinary team of therapists and researchers working across SEND and mental health. Zoya and her team are learning partners for the DfE SAFE Taskforce in Southwark.

The aim of Zoya's work is that all children and young people can access learning and support which is built on a solid understanding of their everyday lives.

Dr Ron Dodzro – Co-Founder and Director, Psychologists The Streets Deserve

Dr Ron Dodzro is a Clinical Psychologist, a Co-Founder and Director of Psychologists The Streets Deserve, which brings psychology to where it's needed most. He is a member of the senior leadership team at Juvenis, which is a Black-led, grassroots organisation committed to empowering young people, with a focus on Black men and boys, to lead with confidence, creativity, and cultural pride. He is also a member of the Senior Leadership Team at Power The Fight, an award-winning charity which tackles violence affecting young people. He is a trustee of Finding Rhythms and a UK Trauma Council Member.

