

Find out more about the commissioners for the Families and Households Commission.



Chair: Emeritus Professor Janet Walker OBE

A lifelong commitment to understanding the factors that shape people's lives led Janet to study social sciences; practise as a probation officer for ten years with offenders whose lives were extremely troubled; lead over fifty research studies into all aspects of family life and relationships as Director of the Newcastle Centre for Family Studies; practice as a family therapist and family mediator; and hold government appointments in health, social security and justice. Recently, she was the lead adviser to a review for the Ministry of Defence of the support needs of military families. Janet has published widely, and her research has influenced policy and practice in several countries.

Currently, Janet is a lay adviser to police and probation in respect of violent and sex offenders; research consultant evaluating support for naval families; co-investigator on an Anglo-Australian 'Families-Unlocked Study', examining the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on family life and relationships; a trustee of the Naval Families Federation; and President of Relate until November 2021.



Co-Chair: Rt Revd Paul Butler, Bishop of Durham

Paul has been Bishop of Durham since 2014. He leads on Children and Families, Welfare, Education, and Refugee matters for the Lords Spiritual in the House of Lords. He was the lead bishop for Safeguarding for six years. Since becoming a bishop in 2004 Paul has acted as an Advocate for Children amongst the bishops. His ordained ministry has been in South West and East London, Hampshire, Nottinghamshire, and Durham. He has engaged in children's, youth and family work since he was a teenager. This has included leading camps for children from East London for many years. He visits Rwanda and Burundi very regularly. He has published a number of books on children's and family work in and through churches.

He chairs the National Society (education department of the Church of England). He is a patron of the North East Child Poverty Commission, Explore, and Action Foundation, and sits on the board of Reset – a charity that promotes Community Sponsorship of refugees.



Professor Kwame Akuffo, OBE, JP

Kwame is a professor of International and Comparative Law at the University of West London where he has taught since 1986. Kwame has been a Justice of the Peace since 2001, serving as a member of the Adult Criminal Court and the West London Family Court.

In the London borough of Ealing, Kwame has engaged extensively with a broad range of social justice issues, including social security, housing, discrimination, refugees, education, and employability, where he co-founded the free Law Clinic (Community Advice Programme) in 1992. He is Vice-Chair of the West London Equality Centre working in the fields of human rights, equality, and community cohesion.

Kwame previously served as a member of the Social Security Advisory Committee with considerable experience in social policy work. He served on the board of visitors at HMP Wormwood Scrubs and is currently a member of the Queen Elizabeth Commonwealth Scholarship Committee. Kwame has recent direct experience of disability, being visually impaired and wheelchair-bound.

Dez Brown

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Dez Brown

(Commission Member from August 2021)

Dez is the founder and CEO of Spark2Life, a charity working mostly in London with medium to high-risk offenders. He is a qualified Person-Centred Therapist and trains professionals on being trauma-informed; he has served as a therapist in prison and as a sessional Prison Chaplain. He is a gifted communicator delivering bespoke workshops and training sessions for over 20 years in churches, conferences and in prisons.

Dez went through the criminal justice system aged 17 for a violent offence which culminated in him finding faith and becoming an ordained minister. After leaving prison, Dez worked with homelessness for five years and went on to develop and lead a large dynamic Youth Ministry in East London for 13 years. He has been part of local and national church leadership teams and more recently has been invited onto local and national forums around tackling youth violence and disproportionality. Dez is the author of a book called 'Convicted or Condemned', which illustrates his journey to redemption.



David French

David has long experience of regenerating established institutions to meet changing needs - principally in the fields of family, diversity and democracy.

He was director of services at The Children's Society before moving in 1987 to Relate, the UK's leading relationship counselling agency, as chief executive. The twin challenges there were to respond to rapidly increasing demand and to bring Relate's experience to reforming public policy on marriage and relationship support. In a groundbreaking initiative with Newcastle University, he co-founded the Relate Centre for Family Studies; and he helped to shape the 1996 Family Law Act, the first major reform of divorce law for a generation.

His later career was in international development, as chief executive of the Commonwealth Institute and subsequently the Westminster Foundation for Democracy. He is chair of Y Care International, the YMCA aid agency.



Revd Dr Julie Gittoes

Julie Gittoes is the Vicar of St Mary's and Christ Church Hendon and Area Dean of Barnet (Diocese of London). Julie trained for ordination alongside postgraduate studies at Westcott House, Cambridge, before ministering in parishes in West London. Until 2019, she was a Residentiary Canon at Guildford Cathedral where she had responsibility for educational work including lectures on issues in the public square and engagement with art.

Julie is a member of the Society for the Study of Theology and chairs the Church, Ministry and Theology seminar. She is currently writing "Alone Together", a book exploring singleness, loneliness and childlessness within church communities and wider society.

She previously published *Anamnesis and the Eucharist* (Ashgate 2008), co-edited *Generous Ecclesiology: Church, World and the Kingdom of God*; and contributed an essay to *Thinking Again About Marriage* (SCM 2016). Her other interests include politics, film, theatre, art and fiction.



Esther Gregory-Witham

Esther has worked with children, young people and families for over 20 years. Initially, she supported children and young people with additional needs, and she has continued to do this sporadically through her career so far, zigzagging between secular and faith-based roles. This experience was a catalyst for an ongoing passion for true inclusion where everyone is welcomed and involved, in church and community.

Having just celebrated five years since her civil partnership, she currently lives in East Lancashire as a 'clergy spouse'. Although her childhood was spent in the South East, she's moved around since; this is the 10th county she's lived in - each in varying socio-economic environments. While Parish Youth Worker (Cheshire) and then Young People's Officer (Hereford Diocese), Esther gained experience of rural life and ministry. Currently working as a Teaching Assistant and community volunteer, she is back in a parish that is often categorised as a 'deprived' urban area.



Rt Revd Sophie Jelley, Bishop of Doncaster

Bishop Sophie trained for ordination at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford where she gained an MPhil in Christian Doctrine. She has served in a wide variety of contexts in the UK and Uganda. She was appointed bishop in 2020 in the Diocese of Sheffield with responsibility for those exploring their vocation in the church and wider society and chairs the Board of Education. She plays a leading role in responding to climate emergency within the Diocese and working for change to combat racial injustice.

With over 25 years of ministry among children and families, running Holiday Clubs and community events, she has published resources for children and families at school and home and has a deep commitment to supporting marriage and family life as well as those who live alone. She has been a 'Nightstop' Host for homeless young people and Foster Carer and faced the challenges resulting from disability, abuse and bereavement.



Dr Krish Kandiah

Dr Krish Kandiah is a social entrepreneur with a vision to help solve some of society's seemingly intractable problems through building partnerships across civil society, faith communities, government and philanthropy.

He is the chair of the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board where he brings strategic leadership to the finding of permanent loving families for children in the care system working across the sector and advising the English government.

He is also the founding director of UKHK.org, a movement of charities and churches helping to welcome and integrate new arrivals to the UK from Hong Kong.

Dr Kandiah has written 13 books including the catalytic *Home for Good: Making a Difference for Vulnerable Children* and the award-winning *Paradoxology*. Dr Kandiah is a regular contributor to *The Times of London* and *The Guardian* and is a regular broadcaster on BBC Radio 4 and Radio 2.



Dr Carole Kaplan

Dr Kaplan is a retired Child Psychiatrist who has continued to work as Director for Transformation in CNTW NHS Mental Health Trust. She is driven by a desire to continuously improve the care offered to everyone, particularly children and young people and their families, who need mental health support and treatment. This work is within the NHS as well as in other organisations both in the UK and internationally.

In addition to clinical, academic and managerial work in the NHS, she has served on a number of national bodies including the Council on Tribunals, NHS Litigation Authority, Advisory Board on Family Law, Family Mediation Standards Board and Voice of the Child, as well as publishing and teaching widely as an academic.

She currently works in the charity sector as a trustee for National Child Contact centres, Research into Practice (Dartington Trust) and Relate.



Ben Lindsay

(Commission Member until July 2021)

Ben is the founder of PowerThe Fight, a charity launched in Jan 2019 to train and empower communities to end youth violence. Ben is an experienced trainer with more than 19 years spent working with high-risk young people involved in gangs and serious youth violence. Ben began his career developing programmes in some of the most challenging estates in London. He then joined the Lewisham Youth Offending Service, where he developed the ground-breaking knife crime prevention programme 'Double Edge' for offenders of knife crime.

In 2010 Ben developed the gangs and serious youth violence strategy for Camden Council and then worked for the mental health charity MAC-UK. Between 2016 -2020, Ben was the lead pastor at Emmanuel New Cross in South East London. He currently sits on the Mayor of London's Violence Reduction Unit reference group and the cross-party Youth Violence Commission. His book, 'We Need To Talk About Race – Understanding the Black Experience in White Majority Churches' was released in July 2019.



Andrew Selous MP

Ex-Officio Member of the Commission

Andrew is the MP for South West Bedfordshire, first elected to parliament in 2001. He is the Second Church Estates Commissioner accountable to the House of Commons for the Church of England. Andrew founded the All-Party Parliamentary Group for supporting couple relationships and reducing interparental conflict and has worked throughout his time in Parliament to strengthen marriages, couple relationships and family life. He set up a community family trust in his own constituency to take this work forward locally. He is a former Minister for prisons and probation and also serves as the Prime Minister's trade envoy to South Africa.



Dr Elaine Storkey

Dr Elaine Storkey, philosopher, sociologist, and theologian, has held university posts at the Open University, Oxford, Stirling, Kings College London, and in the USA. She is currently a member of Newnham College, Cambridge. Her first job was researching policeman's families in Glasgow. She was a specialist writer in gender studies and families with The Open University and has lectured on issues of safeguarding for women and girls. A Fellow of Aberystwyth University and former President of Tearfund, Elaine has pioneered gender policy changes and encouraged course development on HIV/AIDS prevention in Africa. She has lectured in Africa, Asia, Haiti, across Europe, North America and New Zealand.

For 28 years she served on the General Synod of the Church of England and was a delegate to the World Council of Churches where she contributed to working parties on family studies. She has received several academic awards for her books and lectures.

Dr Sarah C. Williams

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Dr Sarah C. Williams

With particular expertise in British political and cultural history, Dr Williams, a Research Professor in the History of Christianity at Regent College, brings to the Commission a rich understanding of the history of the family. She taught social and religious history at the University of Oxford from 1998 to 2005 and has for many years taught the history of Christianity with a particular focus on cultural expressions of family life, gender and sexuality.

Among her many publications, the following are of particular relevance to the work of the Commission: *Religious Belief and Popular Culture* (OUP, 1999), *Redefining Christian Britain* (SCM Press, 2007), and *Is There a Bible in the House? Gender, Religion and Family Culture in Britain 1800-1940* (Routledge, 2010). Her award-winning book, *The Shaming of the Strong* (Kingsway, 2006 – republished in 2018 as *Perfectly Human*) is widely read by families struggling with the loss of a child.

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