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## PRESS RELEASE FROM THE CENTRE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

## Half of poorest kids start school from broken homes, new report reveals

- 15-year-olds more likely to have a Smart Phone than their dad at home
- One million children lose contact with grandparents as a result of separation or divorce
- Family breakdown costs country £50billion a year
- Bring crucial relationship support to poorest communities
- Give dads the right to be named on birth certificates
- Scrap registry office fees for marriage

The next government must become the first in history to reverse family breakdown and confront a growing culture of disposable dads, says a new report published today.

The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) puts forward a radical package to get to the root causes of Britain's family breakdown shame – including a plan to get urgent relationship help to the country's poorest communities.

The report criticises successive governments for sleepwalking into a family breakdown crisis, saying that 15-year-olds in the UK are now more likely to have a Smart Phone than their dad at home.

"For too long family breakdown in this country has gone unchallenged – despite the devastating impact it has on adults, children and communities," said Christian Guy, Director of the CSJ.

"The next government can't hide from this and needs to raise the stakes, get behind families and promote stability – this report outlines the ways to do it."

The report predicts that by the end of the next Parliament almost half of those sitting GCSEs will come from broken homes. It adds that one million children also lose contact with their grandparents as a result of separation or divorce.

Researchers say crucial relationship support is either often not available or couples don't know where to find it.

The CSJ wants to see the nationwide roll-out of "Family Hubs", which would include relationship support, birth registrations, ante and post-natal services and places where families could get advice on issues like employment and debt.

This new vision, replacing Sure Start Children's Centres, would put vital services under one roof and at the heart of communities.

This will be especially beneficial in poorer areas where levels of family breakdown are higher. By the age of five, 48 per cent of children in low-income households are not living with both parents, according to Government data.

"There is a dangerous assumption that family breakdown is inevitable in modern society – this should be absolutely rejected," Mr Guy added.

"Political rhetoric in this country shouldn't just focus on economic recovery, but much-needed social recovery too – that should start with supporting families."

The CSJ revealed last year that around a million children are growing up without meaningful contact with their father. This in part is fuelled, the CSJ says, by a growing culture of disposable dads.

The independent think-tank wants to see the role of fathers strengthened in society.

It says that laws which mean a mother's approval is needed for an unmarried father to be named on a birth certificate sends out a signal that dads are less important. Crucially this law also strips unmarried fathers of legal and parental rights.

Today's report says these dads should be given the right to be named on certificates.\*

Much more also needs to be done to promote marriage, the report adds.

It says that parents who cohabit are around three times more likely than married parents to have separated by the time the child reaches the age of five.

It highlights that children with separated, single or step-parents are 50 per cent more likely to fail at school, have low esteem, struggle with peer relationships and have behavioural difficulties, anxiety or depression.

The CSJ says lavish "celebrity-style" weddings have put added pressure on people and want to see the Government do all it can to get behind marriage.

To send a positive signal, it says registration office fees of £70 for marriage should be scrapped for couples who attend preparation courses.

It also says the Transferable Tax Allowance – which the Government will introduce next year and allows a person to transfer  $\pounds 1,000$  of their tax-free allowance to their spouse – is set too low and should be increased.

The report criticises the fact there is no cabinet-level champion for families and that central and local government need to provide better leadership.

It says a Secretary of State for Families should be appointed to drive a programme to boost family stability.

The report also backs the work of the Troubled Families programme and says that funding should be ongoing until at least the end of the next Parliament.

This is the second of the CSJ's *Breakthrough Britain 2015* series of reports – which outline a host of policy solutions to tackle the root causes of poverty and deprivation. Reports about education reform, problem debt, addiction and the future of the voluntary sector will be published throughout the summer.

It follows the original *Breakthrough Britain* report in 2007, which set out 190 policy recommendation and to which David Cameron recently singled out as "a major influence on his Government".

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## About the CSJ

The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) is an independent think tank established in 2004 to put social justice at the heart of British politics. In June last year, the CSJ was awarded UK Social Policy Think Tank of the Year 2013 at Prospect magazine's Think Tank Awards.

In 2007 the CSJ published its landmark report, Breakthrough Britain. This publication, which set out 190 evidence-based policy recommendations to tackle poverty in Britain, transformed the social policy and political landscape and was awarded Publication of the Year by Prospect Magazine in 2008.

Since Breakthrough Britain the CSJ has published more than 40 reports which have shaped government policy and influenced opposition parties. These have included the seminal papers Dying to Belong and Dynamic Benefits, which has led the Coalition Government's welfare reforms.

Further to this, the CSJ manages an Alliance of over 300 of the most effective grass roots, poverty-fighting organisations. The CSJ is able to draw upon the expertise and experience of Alliance charities for research work and media inquiries. Journalists wishing to conduct grass-roots research into social problems can be put in touch with front-line charity directors and staff.