

## **Barnardo's Scotland response to the Commission for Childcare Reform's Call for Expert Evidence on Reform of Childcare Provision in Scotland**

### **Summary**

Barnardo's Scotland believes that supporting formal and informal childcare, especially for the most vulnerable families in Scotland, is a key part of making Scotland the best place to grow up. Proposals to reform childcare need to bear in mind that even when childcare is provided informally by parents, carers, relatives and friends, these forms of childcare benefit from support from formal structures such as parent-led playgroups, family centres and play facilities. Therefore, consideration of childcare needs to take into account all the ways that children are supported in the early years, not just through paid-for childcare provision or statutorily provided pre-school-age early learning and childcare. However, we also recognise that it is vital that formal paid-for, childcare is inclusive, flexible and high quality.

We have identified five areas where we believe that there are particular challenges:

- All childcare settings, whether supporting others to provide informal childcare or directly providing formal statutory early learning and childcare or formal paid-for childcare must recognise and support the importance of supporting parents and other informal carers in child development
- There needs to be actions to promote and support a greater diversity and variety of childcare models
- Out-of-School Care for school-age children has insufficient priority, relative to pre-school early learning and childcare
- Too few staff are able to make childcare a professional career
- Steps should be taken to increase the number of male role models in the childcare workforce

### **General comments**

It is really welcome that the Commission's terms of reference, when defining excellence and its objectives, lists the child's experience, needs and development at the top of the list. We hope that this is a reflection of what the Commission sees as its priorities, when considering how childcare needs to be reformed. If so, that would be consistent with the current Scottish Government's aim of making Scotland the best place in the world to grow up. Too often, in recent public and political debate, it has not been clear that there is a common understanding of the purpose of childcare. For Barnardo's Scotland this purpose, which we hope others can share, that all childcare, whether formal or informal,

is about giving children the best start in life, in social, emotional and physical terms, and in addressing the stark inequalities that children face from the moment they are born, by focussing support and resources on the most vulnerable children in Scotland.

- **What do you consider to be the most difficult challenges about how childcare provision in Scotland is currently organised, delivered and paid for?**
- **What particular aspects most need reformed? Why would you rate those aspects as having highest priority?**
- **What do you consider to be the best 3-5 remedies that might be applied by governments or others to significantly improve things?**

In order to answer this set of questions, we have set out below what we believe are the five aspects of childcare that present the biggest challenges, and therefore are most in need of reform. At the end of each section we have also suggested potential remedies which we believe are worthy of further consideration by the Commission.

**All childcare settings, whether supporting others to provide informal childcare or directly providing formal statutory early learning and childcare or formal paid-for childcare must recognise and support the importance of supporting parents and other informal carers in child development**

Barnardo's Scotland has closely followed the latest developments in neurological science, which have emphasised how important attachment and a close relationship between a baby and their trusted carers in the first few years of life are, for their future brain development. Whilst these studies emphasise the particular importance and effectiveness of getting things right in the first few years, they also make it clear that brain development continues through later years, and it is 'never too late'. There are at least a couple of implications of this for the childcare system, and the childcare profession.

In particular, when we think of childcare we should think in terms of the breadth of childcare models that include both formal and informal. In formal paid for childcare we should make room, wherever possible, to engage the parent(s) as well as the child. Whilst some very good examples exist in Scotland, this is not yet widespread. For example, funded models of childcare should exist and be available which support parents who have made a positive decision not to return to work, these models should provide parenting support, parental networking or simply opportunities for children to play together with their parents in a facilitated environment. Barnardo's Scotland has welcomed the broader definition of Early Learning and Childcare that has been adopted by the Scottish Government, following the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, and the definition should be broad enough to encompass these kinds of models.

Likewise, for more traditional childcare models, as best practice dictates, there should not be a 'dividing line' created by the nursery gates. Childcare settings should recognise the crucial role that parents play in their child's development, and recognise that they,

as a universal service, can provide crucial support to parents with how they bring up their children. However, this can only take place if traditional childcare settings are able to get to know parents, make parents feel welcome and allow parents to take their time as they collect their children.

Secondly, it means that childcare professionals need to be cognisant of the positive role they can play in supporting parents through the interactions they have with them. This includes modelling behaviour and attitudes towards children, giving positive, supportive advice to parents, and highlighting their parenting achievements.

Thirdly, it means that childcare staff need to have a solid grounding in the theories of attachment and the latest neuroscience. This gives staff the basis from which to support parents but also to improve their own practice. This is partly about the professional qualifications and professional development of staff, but also about having a common understanding and ethos of child development, built on asset-based attachment, throughout the childcare system.

Finally, it means formally recognising that we need to support parents who choose to provide childcare themselves, or through relatives or friends. This kind of childcare is supported by formal structures such as parent-led playgroups, family centres and play facilities, and these are also appropriate venues to discuss attachment theory and latest developments in neurological science. If childcare is about giving children the best start in life, not about supporting parents into employment, and given what science tells us about the uniquely important role that a child's main carers have in their development, much greater attention needs to be paid to supporting those parents who make a positive choice to support their children and not return to work

Regardless, of setting and approach, all parents must be supported in an assets-based way to be the successful parents that they can be, and that they in almost all cases want to be. This means focussing on effectively supporting parents, highlighting to them their successes as parents, rather than dictating to parents how they 'should' parent.

### Potential Remedies

Within our own services we have been implementing the Five to Thrive (The things you do every day that help your child's growing brain) approach, developed by Kate Cairns Associates<sup>1</sup>. The Five to Thrive approach can be used across the board by our early-years staff who work in a variety of settings and ways, and provides our staff with a common language, centred on attachment, for how they support parents and carers, across all of Barnardo's services in Scotland. We have found that a common understanding of attachment amongst all of our staff working directly with parents and young babies is extremely beneficial in supporting parents to be the parents that they want to be; in empowering staff to give parents consistent messages about what is important in the early years; and in supporting parents and carers to strengthen the connection they have with their child.

In the same way, we think that there is a huge benefit to Scotland's early years workforce, including all childcare practitioners, having attachment as the common basis

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for how parents are supported to achieve all of their potential. This does not necessarily mean the direct adoption of the Five to Thrive approach, but we do think it means the Commission should recommend that there should be a common understanding and ethos to child development. This understanding should be grounded in an asset-based approach to attachment theory which spans the childcare workforce in Scotland. Secondly, the Commission should recommend a common language for the childcare profession throughout Scotland, in how they use their personal interactions with parents to support them to be the parents that they want to be.

### **There needs to be actions to promote a greater diversity and variety of childcare models**

Barnardo's Scotland has welcomed the broader, more encompassing, definition of Early Learning and Childcare adopted by the Scottish Government, and set out in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. However, we believe that there is still some way to go before the full benefits of this wider definition are achieved. The Children and Young People Act places a duty on local authorities to consult with parents, in order to develop childcare options that fit families' circumstances. However, for that consultation to give families real choices, there needs to be a variety of models available that local authorities can implement and adopt.

In particular, Barnardo's Scotland believes that there is a need to develop more models of holistic family support approaches which support families together, involving both children and their parents/carers. This in line with our previous comments about the need to support children in informal childcare as well as formal childcare. This all means there needs to be greater supply of flexible options that support the children of working parents, particularly parents who work shifts or irregular hours. We also believe that, so far, there has been too little utilisation in Scotland of the integrated children's centre model, which has been widely utilised in other parts of the UK.

#### *Potential Remedies*

We hope that as the Early Learning and Childcare provisions of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 become fully implemented over the coming years, local authorities develop greater childcare options for parents in their areas. However, we believe it would be helpful for the Commission to consider other ways in which these models might be developed, and to find out what further support local authorities believe they will need, if they are to develop a greater variety of models.

For families who are working irregularly and flexibly, we believe that there is huge potential for child-minding models and other models that deliver childcare solutions in families' homes. However, for the most vulnerable families, these solutions are only likely to be successfully delivered through statutorily-funded childcare, and therefore the Commission may wish to do work to understand what barriers local authorities see to the further development of these models.

We also believe that there is significant mileage in developing community capacity, where communities are able to develop their skills to meet the childcare needs of their own community.

In terms of developing children's centres, the collaborative platform created by the requirement for local authorities and health boards to create joint children's services plans in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act, creates a platform for joint working which could allow public bodies to create service centres in order to meet a range of family needs in the early years, through a single point of access. However, the Commission should seek to understand, with local authorities and health boards, if there are other local-level barriers that exists to these kinds of developments occurring, as well as considering whether national initiatives might help Scotland learn from the experience of developing networks of children's centres in the rest of the UK

### **Out-of-School Care for school-age children has insufficient priority, relative to pre-school early learning and childcare**

Recent developments in pre-school childcare provision, alongside a range of policy commitments from various political parties, will provide important opportunities to improve early learning for pre-school age children and support their parents/carers with making a positive choice, should they wish to return to work or education. This is welcome.

However, despite this political focus on pre-school childcare, there has only been limited debate of issues regarding out of school childcare for school age children. Whilst Barnardo's Scotland has welcomed a new requirement for local authorities to consult on and establish local plans for non-statutory out-of-school childcare, for the families that we work with, out of school care is often a significant barrier to being able to successfully balance work and family commitments. Whilst we understand that the Early Years Taskforce is also considering this issue, we believe it should be a priority for the Commission.

We would particularly urge the Commission to consider options that focus on improving support for more vulnerable families, including families that have limited hours of parental work, families where parents are initially returning to work, or where work is low-paid, inconsistent or irregular. It is these families, in our experience who are most in need of additional support, and are least able to afford privately provided solutions.

#### *Potential Remedies*

The Commission may wish to consider the potential cost and feasibility of the Scottish Government extending free-breakfast entitlement to all those who are entitled to free school meals. The Commission may also wish to consider the feasibility of creating an 'hours entitlement' for specific groups of eligible families (again perhaps based on free school meals entitlement) to a certain number of hours per week of after-school childcare.

We would particularly encourage the Commission to consider how existing public assets, including the school estate, could be used by the public sector or community organisations to provide out-of-school care options.

## **Too few staff are able to make childcare a professional career**

The latest neuroscience also points us further towards the importance of consistency in care from childcare professionals. Only if childcare professionals have sustainable jobs, can those professionals build close relationships with the individual children in their care. Similarly, only if childcare professionals can make their profession a career, can they stay abreast of the latest developments in the understanding of child development and neuroscience.

However, Barnardo's Scotland is concerned that there currently exist a number of barriers that mean for many, childcare is neither a sustainable job nor a long-term career option. Low pay is a continuing issue for many parts of the childcare workforce, and for many childcare staff there is little scope for career progression. Use of short-term and flexible contracts is commonplace. There is a further, more cultural, issue around the social status afforded to those who work in the childcare sector. This associated low social status does not necessarily make childcare an attractive, long-term option for young people considering their career options.

### *Potential Remedies*

The Commission should consider how higher pay could allow more people to see a career in the childcare profession as a positive and viable career option, rather than as a stop-gap job. The Commission should also consider the delivery models that are most commonplace in the childcare sector and whether adapting these models, or the funding for them, would enable greater opportunities for career progression for staff, through making staffing structures less flat.

## **Steps should be taken to increase the number of male role models in the formal and informal childcare workforce**

In order for the Scottish Government's aim of making Scotland the best place to grow up to be fully achieved there needs to be a wider cultural change in Scottish society's attitude towards children. This includes cultural changes in the role that men are seen to have in raising children, recognising that as many men as women become parents, and that everyone as a citizen also has a role in making Scotland a place that has a positive attitude towards children. Gender stereotypes about the role of men in raising and supporting children are still persistent, and need further work to shift. An increase in the number of male role models in the childcare workforce would assist with this.

However, the formal childcare workforce experiences extreme underrepresentation from men,<sup>2</sup> and this represents a challenge for the role of men as fathers, because of the way in which it reinforces gender stereotypes. The experience of our services suggests that positive male role models can be very effective in supporting men to become successful parents. Taking actions to encourage a greater number of men to work in the childcare workforce would help address these persistent stereotypes.

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<sup>2</sup> This data is also in the Scottish Social Services Council workforce data, and the 2012 report suggested that, for the childcare sector, in the region of 95% of the workforce is female. <http://data.sssc.uk.com/data-publications/22-workforce-data-report/76-2012-scottish-social-services-workforce-data-report>

## Potential Remedies

The recent report from the Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce made a number of recommendations about how gender segregation in the workforce and in key parts of the training system could be addressed. We believe that these recommendations need particularly to be implemented in relation to the childcare workforce.

- **In responding, can you specify what role employers, families themselves, or other agencies should play in providing, enabling or paying for high-quality formal childcare provision? Relative to that, what role should governments play in reforming childcare, whether at UK, national or local levels of government?**

### *Employers*

One of the most important roles that employers can play in relation to childcare, is through giving all of their staff flexible working options which help to keep demand for formal childcare down. Additionally, if the focus of our approach to childcare is on the best possible outcomes for children, then the latest brain science suggests that there can ultimately be no substitute for a child spending time with their most closely trusted carers. Therefore, opportunities for staff to work flexibly are one of the most necessary developments in relation to childcare in Scotland.

It is also important, that in implementing statutory childcare, local authorities work with employers to ensure that working parents are able to combine employment and childcare effectively.

### *Governments*

The Scottish Government and Scottish local authorities have a commitment, through the Getting It Right For Every Child approach, to make Scotland the best place in the world to grow up. We believe that childcare is an important element of that, and therefore the Scottish Government and local authorities have a key responsibility to make sure that high quality formal childcare provision exists for the most vulnerable families in Scotland.

**For more details please contact:**

**Mark Ballard, Head of Policy, Barnardo's Scotland**

111 Oxbgangs Road North, Edinburgh, EH14 1ED

[mark.ballard@barnardos.org.uk](mailto:mark.ballard@barnardos.org.uk) / 0131 446 7028