

Believe in  
children



Barnardo's  
Scotland

5<sup>th</sup> March 2014

## **Barnardo's Scotland written response to the Health and Sport Committee call for written evidence: Health Inequalities – Early Years**

There is cross-party recognition of the importance of supporting children in their youngest years, and of the long-term benefits that this brings. This goes back to the first Scottish Executive's programme for government in 1999 which stated within their 'Making it Work Together' document that '*Our children are the future of Scotland. We need to give them the best possible start in life so that they have the opportunity to play their full part in Scotland's future. Getting it right in the early years lays the foundation for the whole life of a child*<sup>1</sup> and more recently the development of the Early Years Framework. This ongoing commitment has been further manifested in a number of more recent initiatives that have had cross-party support, including the Early Years Collaborative, the Early Years Change Fund and the Early Years Taskforce.

On this basis, Barnardo's Scotland warmly welcomes the establishment of this inquiry by the Health and Sport Committee. Health inequalities can become apparent at an early age, and what a child experiences in their early years can impact on their health for the rest of their life.

The Growing Up in Scotland research (2010) reported on health and inequalities. The report noted a number of significant links between the health outcomes of children and parental health and behaviours like smoking. It also highlighted a strong association between parenting confidence and health outcomes, as well as the links between increased family attendance at baby and toddler groups and better health outcomes. Since then, the Scottish Government's National Parenting Strategy<sup>2</sup>, as well as the Early Years Task Force, has recognised that greater support to parents is a key part of supporting children in their early years.

The importance of supporting children and their families in their earliest years is also backed-up by the latest developments in neuroscience. A strong body of academic research has identified the importance of the first few years in the brain development of children. In this period the relationship between the child and their main care giver(s) is particularly important – a high quality relationship between the carer(s) and the child, in which the child feels connected, safe and responded to, results directly in the child experiencing better brain development.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/158140/0042788.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Scottish Government's National Parenting Strategy  
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2012/10/4789>

Barnardo's Scotland provides a number of early years and family support services across Scotland. Both with these services, and with our work more generally in Scotland, we have been considering how we can change what we do, to reflect the latest scientific evidence and put a greater focus on the Early Years.<sup>3</sup> Some examples of Barnardo's Scotland services that support the early years are provided at the end of this evidence paper.

### **Importance of approach in early years services**

Barnardo's Scotland provides a number of early years and family support services across Scotland. These early years family support services use a variety of different approaches. As well as using some of the specific programmes mentioned in the National Parenting Strategy, approaches developed in partnership with other organisations are also utilised.

However, in our view it is often not so much the particular type of programme that is delivered, but rather the way in which it is delivered, that matters most and makes the biggest difference for families. Our programmes are effective in delivering outcomes because our work:

- Focuses on the strengths and assets of parents,
- Focuses on the relationships and attachment between care givers and children,
- Prioritises the strength of relationships between our staff and the people they work with,
- Takes a holistic approach to the family and considers the impact of the wider community on the family,
- Works with families to identify and overcome practical barriers (with appropriate additional external support if necessary), especially those arising from poverty, inequality, poor housing, and so on,

We believe that focussing on the *way* programmes are delivered, rather than particular programme types, is a key point to highlight to all those organisations, including local authorities and health boards, who are involved in directly supporting parents and commissioning services to support parents. We would warmly welcome the highlighting of this by the Health and Sport Committee as part of their inquiry into Health Inequalities and the Early Years.

### **Planning of Children's Services**

The Scottish Parliament recently passed the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, which created a new requirement for health boards and local authorities

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<sup>3</sup> Mary Glasgow, the Barnardo's Scotland's Assistant Director for Children's Services with a lead responsibility for Early Years has written on this subject in the most recent edition of Scottish Policy Now - <http://www.scottishpolicynow.co.uk/article/children-putting-policy-into-practice>

to plan children's services together. As set out on the face of the Act in section 9 (2) (a) (ia), there must be a focus on early intervention in children's services planning. Barnardo's Scotland has warmly welcomed this provision, and it is important that this is translated into practice throughout the Scottish Government's programme of change for public services.

### **Shifting public spending**

It is important that local authorities continue the shift of core funding towards the early years, so that support in the early years is seen as a core function of public services. This is particularly important when things like the Early Years Change Fund eventually come to an end.

The Finance Committee's report on the Scottish Government's Draft Budget 2014-15<sup>4</sup> raised a number of concerns in relation to the Early Years Change Fund, including:

*"64. The Committee is concerned about the limited contribution which some local authorities appear to be making towards the EY Change Fund and asks the Government to provide details of how much new money has been provided."*

Barnardo's Scotland is concerned that, given the pressure on local authority funding, the Early Years Change Fund appears to be being used in some cases to fill existing budgetary gaps in some areas rather than to bring about a fundamental shift in the way that public services in Scotland are delivered. As a number of organisations and local authorities pointed out during evidence on the budget, the Early Years Change Fund is important because it acts as 'bridging funding', allowing crisis-response services to continue to mitigate immediate problems, whilst allowing new preventative services to begin to kick-in. Nevertheless, the long-term sustainability of the preventative agenda will only be achieved through a whole-system shift in what local authorities and other parts of the public sector are doing.

Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) were required, for the first time, to produce returns to the Scottish Government, detailing their financial contribution to the Early Years and the activities that they were undertaking. However, the Scottish Government's own report found that it was hard to aggregate the spending across CPP areas, because of inconsistencies in the information contained in the returns<sup>5</sup>. Indeed, in the report it is hard to form any picture of what activities are being carried out as a result of spending on early years across Scotland, because of the inconsistencies in what spending CPPs included in their returns to the Scottish Government.

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<sup>4</sup> Scottish Parliament Finance Committee report on the Scottish Government's Draft Budget 2014-15 [http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4\\_FinanceCommittee/Draft\\_Budget\\_2014\\_response.pdf](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_FinanceCommittee/Draft_Budget_2014_response.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Scottish Government summary report on the Early Years Change Fund to the Early Years Taskforce, Paragraph 7. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0043/00437798.pdf>

## **Wider cultural change**

Specialised services, like those provided by Barnardo's Scotland, are able to provide intensive support to particularly vulnerable families. However, for the Scottish Government's aim of making Scotland the best place to grow up to be fully achieved, there also needs to be a wider cultural change in Scottish society's attitude to children. A public awareness campaign, perhaps delivered in collaboration by Scottish Government, public bodies and civic organisations, to support families across Scotland with positive parenting would be warmly welcomed by Barnardo's Scotland.

## **Multiple adversities**

A lack of a good quality relationship between parent and child can on its own have a significant impact on the current and future health of a baby. However, this is compounded by the presence of multiple adversities. Barnardo's Northern Ireland produced a report in 2012 on families experiencing multiple adversities.<sup>6</sup>

Barnardo's Scotland has been pleased to have the opportunity to engage with the Scottish Government as they developed their Child Poverty Strategy. We hope that this positive engagement will result in a stronger revised Strategy, one that remains focussed on the goal of eradicating child poverty in Scotland. As already mentioned, our services endeavour to support families to overcome practical barriers, including those resulting from poverty, it is therefore vital that all family support services are focussed on addressing child poverty.

We also believe that there is a developing need for more focussed early years services for families where one or more child has a disability. There has been a positive shift towards earlier diagnosis of many conditions, but there now needs to be a resulting shift in the kinds of services that are resourced. For example, it is possible for a parent to achieve a very positive connection with a child who has autism. However, this requires the parent to be attuned to the specific communication needs and preferences of their child, and this may require more specialised support for the parent in order to support them with getting to know the specific communication needs of their child.

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.barnardos.org.uk/14796\\_ni\\_pp\\_briefing\\_paper\\_literature\\_review\\_lr.pdf](http://www.barnardos.org.uk/14796_ni_pp_briefing_paper_literature_review_lr.pdf)

## **Barnardo's Early Years Services**

Barnardo's Scotland provides a number of early years family support services across Scotland. These services provide a range of supports to families with young children across Scotland. However, further specific details on two of these services are provided below.

### **Nurturing Inverclyde Project**

The project is based in Greenock, but covers the whole Inverclyde area. It is a partnership between the Inverclyde Community Health and Care Partnership (CHCP) and Barnardo's Scotland, with the additional support of CVS Inverclyde (the local volunteering centre) and the Scottish Government.

The project is a wrap-around single access service that provides support from pre-birth through to 18, to a large number of local children, and their families, who are facing multiple adversities, including poverty. The project delivers early interventions to prevent the children and families needing more intensive statutory interventions later in life. The service also works with volunteers from the local community who are included in the project, so there is an important element of community capacity building that is part of the project.

The project is funded in part from the Early Years Change Fund, as a Public-Social Partnership, partly from the Big Lottery Fund, and partly from the Lloyds TSB Foundation for Scotland.

The service is in part co-located with a Barnardo's Scotland/CHCP partnership service which provides family support services to children and families between the ages of 0 and 18 who are affected by disability. Many of these families are also experiencing multiple adversities and/or severe economic disadvantage.

### **Barnardo's Threads Paisley**

An early years family support service supporting approximately 200 young parents and their babies. The project offers holistic, intensive support to improve relationships and the outcomes for children. The project also supports a number of peer support groups to address a number of specific adversities, including poverty, inequality and drug and alcohol use, in order to reduce the impact of these on the children. The project uses an attachment approach, based on the latest neuroscience research

A specific part of the project works with young parents, especially fathers, who are part of families affected by domestic abuse. The project works with the young parents to develop healthy and respectful relationships and to develop their understanding of the impact on the physical and emotional health of their babies.

The service also collaborates with the local NHS special needs and pregnancy midwives to provide ante-natal support to expectant young parents who are unlikely to seek traditional forms of support, but who are able to access support through the Barnardo's Threads Service.

Across the service young people will have been referred from the Local Authority, Education services, the NHS or people are able to self-refer to the service. The project is funded by a combination of the Local Authority, donations from the public to Barnardo's Scotland and the Lloyds TSB Foundation for Scotland.