

## **Briefing for Members Debate on Universal Children's Day in the name of Rod Campbell MSP**

**17<sup>th</sup> November 2015**

### **Introduction**

Barnardo's is the UK's largest children's charity, and Barnardo's Scotland works with more than 26,500 children and young people in over 122 specialised services across Scotland. Our services work with families and children who are living in poverty and facing multiple disadvantages. Many of our services are aimed at providing early intervention and support to families in the first stage of vulnerability. Children's rights underpin all of our work and are a central part of the wide range of services we provide to vulnerable children and their families

### **Putting children's rights first**

We welcome and congratulate Rod Campbell MSP for securing this debate recognising the importance of Universal Children's Day on November 20<sup>th</sup>, and hope this debate helps secure greater prominence for day in Scotland. We strongly agree that protecting and promoting rights will help ensure that children can survive and thrive, learn and grow, have their voices heard and reach their full potential.

We have a strong track record in Scotland of embedding children's rights in legislation in Scotland. New rights set out in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill and those included in the Education (Scotland) Bill currently being considered by the Parliament are good evidence of this. We also very much welcome, and have actively supported the work of the Commissioner for Children and Young People.

### **The rights of vulnerable children**

Given that the majority of our services provide support to children who are vulnerable and living in poverty Articles 26 and 27 of the UNCRC are particularly relevant for our work. Article 26 states that *children and young people should get financial support from the State when their parents or guardians are unable to provide them with a good enough standard of living by themselves*. Article 27 states that *children and young people should be able to live in a way that helps them reach their full physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social potential*.

The reality for many of the children and young people we work with is that these rights are not being met, despite the good work being undertaken as part

of the Scottish Child Poverty Strategy. This is a direct result of the cumulative effect of benefit sanctions, benefit delays, and price rises in basic commodities such as food and energy. These factors are tipping more families into crisis and aggravating pre-existing difficulties such as mental health problems, substance misuse and relationship breakdown with all of the subsequent difficulties this causes for children and young people.

## **Experience of our services**

In a recent report<sup>1</sup> carried out with NSPCC the services of both organisations painted a picture of growing levels of need with families facing multiple adversities. Some Services report that caseloads are increasingly complex, with a growing number of issues involved.

It is our experience that that more families are presenting in a state of crisis. As a result of this even where services were funded to provide early intervention and preventative help they have to deal with the impact of the crisis before even considering other issues. The focus for staff is meeting basic need material needs and helping to bring some stability to the family before intensive family support work can begin.

Our family support services report that in general terms the families they work with, in receipt of benefits, find great difficulty managing their finances. There is an increasing reliance on extended family, charitable donations and foodbanks to supplement income. Sanctions are a significant issue for parents.

## **Potential of Universal Children's Day**

On Universal Children's Day it is crucial that we recognise the importance of the rights of all children to thrive and to meet their full potential. It is also crucial that we make every effort to tackle the poverty and inequality that prevent so many children and young people from leading a life where all of their rights are met.

The key to this is effective early intervention. Even in times of financial pressure it is crucial to intervene as early as possible to support the long term wellbeing of children. Failure to invest in early intervention will only lead to more serious problems for children and families at a later stage. We hope Universal Children's Day will act as a reminder of the need for effective partnership working to ensure that Scotland becomes the best place in world for children to grow up.

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<sup>1</sup> Challenges from the Frontline <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/research-reports/challenges-frontline-scotland-multiple-adversities-report.pdf>