

## **Barnardo's Scotland briefing on the Scottish Parliament debate on Early Intervention in Health and Education**

Barnardo's Scotland welcomes this debate on early intervention and the early years, and the increased focus that these areas have received from the Scottish Government through the Early Years Framework. Barnardo's Scotland believes that the importance of early childhood development and the impact of early intervention in determining future health, social wellbeing and educational achievement of individuals cannot be understated.

In recent years we have argued for a greater emphasis to be given to early intervention, ensuring that we give families the support they need at an appropriate stage. We believe this is a crucial area of preventative spending, and will realise long term benefits for children and families.

The motion highlights the large and growing body of research that demonstrates the importance of a child's early development for long-term outcomes; the impact of financial hardship on development; the importance of family environment and interaction between parent and child.<sup>1</sup> Supporting parents and working with the whole family to improve the quality of parent-child relationships in the early years and beyond, is effective in improving outcomes and tackling problems early.<sup>2</sup> Parenting and family support programmes are effective early intervention because they raise the self-confidence and self-esteem of socially excluded parents; improve parenting skills and positive and sustained parent-child relationships. Increased confidence results in improvements in children's behaviour, educational attainment and family health, and parental engagement with education and training. The evidence base for parenting and family support programmes is impressive and there is a case for ensuring they reach those who most need them. Any such programmes must be tailored to meet the needs needs of the users, with a flexible approach to both unstructured and structured programmes

However, Barnardo's has also called for more decisive action in responding to families where the support offered does not appear to be improving the outcomes for children, including proper consideration of removal of the child from the family at an early stage.<sup>3</sup> We have also highlighted the problems that come from repeated failed attempts to re-unite families, and from the drift that comes when decisions about a child's permanent future are not taken swiftly enough. In particular, we have identified the very low numbers of adoptions under the age of 2 in Scotland as a key issue, despite this being potentially one of the most positive outcomes for a child that has been removed from their birth family on a permanent basis.

As an example of the work being done by Barnardo's Scotland in supporting children and families in the early years, please find attached details of our You First programme, which is currently in its pilot phase, with courses being run in 10 locations across NHS Lothian,

---

<sup>1</sup> Dyson, A, Hertzman C, Roberts, H, Tunstill, J and Vaghri, Z (2009) *Childhood development, education and health inequalities. Report of Task Group*. Submission to Marmot Review. Hansen, K, Joshi, H, and Dex, S – eds (2010) *Children of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century The first five years*, Policy Press.

<sup>2</sup> O'Connor, T.G. and Scott, S. B.C (2007) *Parenting and outcomes for children*, JRF; and Sylva, K et al (2004) *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Final Report*, London: DfES and Institute of Education, University of London

<sup>3</sup> Ward, H; Brown, R; Westlake, D; and Munro E.R (2010) *Infants suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm: A prospective longitudinal study*

excluding Edinburgh. You First is currently being piloted in partnership with the Scottish Government and NHS Lothian.

For further information, or to discuss You First or any of our other early years work please contact Mark Ballard, Head of Policy, Barnardo's Scotland on 0131 314 6611 or at [mark.ballard@barnardos.org.uk](mailto:mark.ballard@barnardos.org.uk)

## **Barnardo's You Programme service for young parents: Lothians pilot phase**

You First is a preventative 20 week programme aimed at mothers under 21 in the 15% most deprived areas with a baby aged under 12 months. The programme uses a mix of direct financial incentives, group work and one-to-one specialist supports over a 20 week period. Young women on the programme select their priority areas of learning and undertake experiential learning in areas such as budgeting, baby first aid, child development and cooking. You First is currently being piloted across Lothians (excluding Edinburgh) in partnership with the Scottish Government and NHS Lothian

Important features being trialled include the flexible, person centred approach, the achievement of a recognised qualification for completing the course and a direct grant-incentive for participants. This amounts to approximately £20 per week paid into the young parent's bank account. While this 'positive conditionality' approach has been found successful elsewhere (notably New York and South America), it had yet to be tried with first-time parents in the UK. While this is a different approach to encouraging participation, given the difficulties in working with this group it was felt to be crucial to test the effectiveness of ideas that have been found to work in other parts of the world.

In the first phase of the service two test programmes were run in conjunction with NHS Lothian, in areas of Midlothian and West Lothian that were part of the 15% most deprived areas of Scotland according to the Scottish index of Multiple Deprivation. The course participants had to be under 21 with a baby under the age of one. Most of the programme participants were not in education, employment or training, over half had suffered from post-natal depression and nearly half were lone parents.

The outcomes of the two test programmes and early pilot findings are very encouraging, including:

- 70% average attendance
- 83% of participants deferring / saving payments
- 40% of participants deferring to one lump sum at end of programme
- 40% increase in engagement with universal services
- 30% reported improvement in parent / child relationships
- 33% reported improvement in local peer supports

The programme uses a mix of hands-on experiential and group work learning to help improve parenting capabilities and facilitate access to universal and specialist services. The programme covered a range of topics and activities that are central to both child welfare and parenting capacity, including:

- Financial capability and income maximisation (including opening bank accounts and Child Trust Fund)
- Household budgeting and planning
- Experiential learning through grocery shopping, cooking and meal planning
- The importance of play and baby development
- Child and parent health

The current phase of the programme will see a further ten pilot projects being rolled out, including two projects that do not offer a financial incentive, with a full independent evaluation at the end of the pilot phase.