

Growing up in Rural Scotland Annual Conference 2007

CONFERENCE REPORT

14th April 2007

Report By Mary Fawcett

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‘Planning for better childhoods in rural Scotland’

Thursday p.m. (Study visit to Fraserburgh Families):

Fraserburgh is the second largest town in Aberdeenshire after Peterhead. Its main industry is fishing.

- 8.9% of the school role at Fraserburgh Academy is entitled to free school meals compared to 4.6% across Aberdeenshire.
- Attendance at Fraserburgh Academy is currently 88.6% compared to Aberdeenshire average of 91.5%
- Infant mortality is 24% above the national average.
- Suicide/self-harm admissions to hospital 68% above national average.
- Drug related deaths are 70% above the national average.
- Fraserburgh has 50% of Aberdeenshire’s persistent young offenders.

Children 1st operates a service in the Fraserburgh area that works to overcome the disadvantages experienced by young children caused by parental drug or alcohol abuse.

The services include a Breakfast Club, Drop-In, Parenting Skills Classes, Playgroup etc.

The centre also provides Family Group Conferencing and the Assisted Support for Learners (ASL) Mediation service. This service is for parents, carers and young people who may be concerned about the additional support being provided by the school and need an independent mediator to help.

Friday a.m. (Main Conference):

The talks included:

PACERS USA

Dr. Jack Shelton from PACERS USA had worked mainly in Apalachian communities in Alabama USA. His non-profit organisation has implemented a programme of education reform and community enhancement. Some of the points he made included that:

- Partnerships should be **with** children not **for** children.
- A true understanding of the importance of community is that for a child living in the outback, the grade they get doesn’t matter but what your grandmother thinks of you does.
- If schools become centralised and standardised, they are no longer local.

Making rural Scotland a better place to be a child and to raise a child

Bruce Robertson – Director of education for Aberdeenshire identified several key issues that need to be addressed if improvements in rural communities are to be achieved

- Early year provision – central to the sustainability of rural communities
- Transport – Many young people and families experience social exclusion because of lack of transport for example Collieston a small coastal village, that

thirty years ago had four buses a day to Aberdeen and now has one bus twice per week.

- IT and Broadband – Recognition of the importance of IT and also that quite a large proportion of people living in rural Scotland do not have access to Broadband.
- Affordable housing – Again this is key to the sustainability of rural communities.

He also looked at the need for flexibility in the strategic planning of rural communities citing cluster headships of small rural primary schools rather than closure and the use of schools as the heart of community centres which could include libraries, health centres, police station, sports centre, theatre etc.

The BODO Upbringing Plan:

This talk explained the provision of multi-agency family centres that are being introduced across Norway. They are government funded and free so long as you are accompanied by a child. They provide a drop-in service, playgroups, parenting skills classes but also allow parents direct access to educational psychologists, GPs, health visitors, with minimal waiting times and bureaucracy.

A big focus in Norway particularly in pre-school provision is on the outdoors. There are outdoor kindergartens where children play in the woods in the snow and are then brought home asleep on a sleigh at night time. There is drama, art, music in the environment, a big eco focus in the schools and generally a lot more emphasis given to the importance of place and location. There was a feeling at the conference that a lot more could be done in Scotland and that there needed to be less heed to health and safety and endless risk assessments so that more could be made of the environment and countryside that is so abundant in Scotland.

The speaker pointed out that our climate in Scotland was much more clement than in Norway and with the correct clothing there was no need for indoor play.

The remainder of the conference looked at both national and community projects including a presentation from an award winning eco-school, planning a virtual community, a project in Thurso to brighten up an estate and the use of research and statistics in rural sustainability.

Key points:

- The sustainability of rural communities is dependent upon investment in early year provision, transport, IT, affordable housing.
- There needs to be flexibility in planning and recognition of the importance of individuality versus standardised and centralised.
- The importance of the outdoors in terms of health and well-being.
- That true partnerships are **with** people not **for** people.

Mary Fawcett 14th April 2007 on behalf of the Scottish Association of Children's Panels.