

Achieving The Best Start In Life

Crowne Plaza Hotel 9th September 2008

This one day conference organised by Children in Scotland was chaired by Alan Sinclair, a Visiting Fellow from The Work Foundation.

He stressed that in Scotland we are well behind in early years welfare. He went on to stress the importance using the analogy of Judy Murray, Scotland's best ever women's tennis player bringing on two successful sons to improve on her success.

International Research & Reviews

1 Unicef Report Card 8- what can we learn? EVA JESPERSEN, chief, monitoring social and economic policies, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

- Data previously kept had not identified younger years but this has now changed.
- Convention in 1999 outlined the rights of younger children and five years later all governments were urged to take cognisance of these.
- Importance of parents in very early years and understanding appropriate supports for vulnerable groups.
- United Kingdom below average public expenditure on child care and preschool education services.

2 Implications for national strategies. JOHN BENNETT, co- author of Starting Strong II and consultant to UNICEF report card 8.

- At least we have started
- Norway started with 15% childcare provision in 1971 now have 91%
- Children learn all the time – doesn't start at age of 3
- Importance of quality of service as poor service can do more harm.
- Needs require to be monitored for effectiveness
- Those in greatest need not attending
- Must have a childcare mindset – must be included in education
- Governments must fund adequately

Questions were then taken but unfortunately no one was able to supply answers on how to improve only reiterating that it must be done.

Developing a European Approach

3 Introduction to San Miniato and its services for young people. BRONWEN COHEN, chief executive, Children in Scotland

- Norway similar size and economics to Scotland should next year have full childcare coverage
- Importance of nature in education
- Child is subject not object of care
- Italian children start school at 3
- San Miniato has been developing over 25 years and works with families with the child in the centres.

4 Lessons from an Italian local authority. ALDO FORTUNATI, developmental psychologist and early childhood specialist, San Miniato

- Level of provision for very young children in Italy far exceeds the target set by the EU's Council of Ministers in 2002
- Holistic approach – care & education are inseparable
- Child is in charge of the learning
- Families play an active part and encouraged to participate
- Means tested
- Priority given to children with additional support needs.

Aldo then answered the many questions from the floor

NB The book *Young children in charge: a small Italian community with big ideas for children* is available from Children in Scotland and gives a full account of this wonderful project.

Scotland's communities: aspirations and plans for the future

5 Delivering integrated services to meet the holistic needs of children and families. MARGARET DORAN, executive director of education and social work services, Glasgow City Council

- Service affected by poverty
- Number of children in Glasgow requiring care
- Everyone involved require to understand each others role i.e. education, social work, police etc.
- Every service challenged to positive aspects and lowering of barriers
- Children & families needs must be first not services needs
- Short term initiatives require evaluation
- To take children out of poverty must support parents
- Funding of appropriate projects

- Workforce Training must continue

6 Building parenting and family capacity through services for young children. GILLIAN TEE, director of children and families, Edinburgh City Council

- Evidence required in order to shift funding from crisis management to early years
- Parental support often requires to be done before child is born
- Creative, confident parenting groups
- State's job is to get alongside parents – family led conference work – families know what they need not necessarily the professionals
- Must keep learning & checking that we are meeting families needs
- Outcomes for children in care not meeting needs

7. Questions and Panel Discussion

There were many questions, comments and discussion around many subjects including

- Funding
- Best practice
- Current schemes
- Limited resources
- Framework to guide not dictate policies
- Targets

8. Ministerial Address ADAM INGRAM, minister for children and early years, Scottish Parliament

- Need a cultural change – must be bold -won't happen overnight
- Common set of values for everyone working with children
- No new money funding will have to be diverted from other things but still deal with those in need now
- Norway changed from committee to child centered system which we must follow

There were then questions from the floor which indicated that everyone in the hall agreed that early year's intervention but were concerned re funding and inconsistencies.

The minister advised that only outcomes will decide and should be relatively easy to see how each authority is doing from the statistics published. He also asked everyone to suspend their cynicism and let the Parliament try to get it to work.