

National School Report 2005

Dunblane

Notes by Gill Bayfield & Angela
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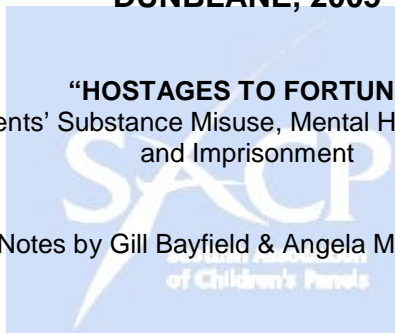
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**REPORT FROM CHILDREN'S PANEL NATIONAL SCHOOL
DUNBLANE, 2005**

"HOSTAGES TO FORTUNE"

The impact on Children of Parents' Substance Misuse, Mental Health and Domestic Violence Problems
and Imprisonment

Notes by Gill Bayfield & Angela McGroarty



The theme of the school of the impacts on children of parental problems; drugs, imprisonment, domestic abuse, poverty and mental health problems by concentrating on children's welfare and wellbeing and their ability to cope in these difficult situations was introduced by Gordon Watt.

“The effects of poverty, culture, drugs and mental health problems on children in school” Liz Whyte, Edinburgh North Primary School Headteacher

Liz has had many years of experience of education and children's panels with 18 years as a class teacher before becoming headteacher in Royston, a deprived area of Edinburgh. She talked about her experiences by talking about the kids in her school and the difficulties they presented.

- These included children that appear and disappear and are lost track of even in this day and age.
- Traveller children who have attended 5 schools in Edinburgh since February 2005!
- One child who was left in school by his mother, a 'working girl' who eventually ended up in the care of his army father whom he had not seen for 7 years!
- A father who was convicted of sexual abuse of a 3 year old. A father with mental health problems who was continually telling tales and the child's inability to tell fact from fiction.
- A little girl from Poland who had been enrolled in 3 other nursery schools and the difficulties faced by authorities trying to harness the appropriate supports for children before they are whisked off yet again.
- The case of a mother with bi polar depression and a schizophrenic father, the wee boy crying and nobody wanting to touch mental health because it is too difficult to deal with.
- The worst job ever; having to tell a wee boy his mother had died after a drugs overdose.
- And finally the babies with babies; young mothers keeping their babies strapped into buggies in order to cope.

Liz painted a vivid picture of life at the sharp end that these children had to cope with and the role of the school in providing routine, warmth, normality and support for them and their families and accessing support services wherever possible.

The second session looked at two topics – research into both the impact of parental substance misuse and that of mental health issues.

Impact of Parental Substance Misuse

Dr S Wilson, Centre for Research on Families & Relationships, Edinburgh University

This research reported on resilience and transition among young people and the high numbers of children having to cope with parental substance misuse (alcohol & drugs). The focus was on resilience, not so much as a fixed trait, but the quality that may be displayed when sufficient support of the right kind helps someone to withstand a major problem. The study chose 38 respondents (20 females & 18 males) aged 15-27 (although most were 16-19), mostly from the Central belt. The parents of these youngsters used alcohol (22), drugs (11) – mostly heroin & other opiates, and drugs & alcohol together (5).

Some youngsters did not think substance use was a problem and showed huge loyalty, sometimes with a lack of expectation of what their parents might do for them. Many associated misuse with family crisis, where it was used as a support. The study found that there were lots of accounts of physical abuse (20 cruelty, 5 verbal, 3 sexual & 14 domestic violence – mostly fathers involved here). Being without drugs caused tension in the family and some young people preferred the parent to cut down

rather than stop the substance use, as they “can’t live with him when he’s not on anything”. Emotional abuse & neglect was very difficult to deal with and sometimes led to role reversal. The stigma and embarrassment seemed to be greater with drug use – preferred to be “alcoholic’s son rather than junkie’s son”. There were feelings of loss of childhood, family & relationship with the parent & it was felt important for youngsters to have a sense of self.

The study also looked at how youngsters managed, got by & found help. Many said they had tried challenging the parental use, but had quite often given up. Some had thrown the substance away, but had been beaten up & the parent had simply bought more. The young people used avoidance strategies to help them cope such as physical & auditory avoidance – going either into bedrooms or outside, as well as using school & extra-curricular activities. School was a haven for some, but an area of violence for others, (bullied), especially males. Support came too from siblings & extended family, however there could be loneliness also & the breakdown of these supportive relationships – “I love my sister, but she would keep challenging Dad – why couldn’t we just have a nice day?” The report showed the importance of close friends & the unobtrusive support from friends’ parents. There were, however, difficulties getting support within the school context as they did not want to be seen as having a problem. They did, though, have appreciation for teachers who gave support. These youngsters needed practical help to, e.g., get a job, qualifications, work experience, volunteering, do awards schemes as well as moving away from home with access to supported tenancies. These tenancies were seen as positive by those who used them, but accommodation was a huge problem. Education was seen as an escape route for some. The youngsters were appreciative of drop-in services and their informality rather than having appointment times. They were glad of being able to build trusting relationships.

All in all, this was a limited study but it did give a glimpse into problems young people face when living with parental substance misuse. They did show remarkable resilience, but what the study showed was the need for greater support from others to help them through this transient time into their adulthood.

The other topic covered during this session was the impact of mental health and this was displayed using a video entitled “Michelle’s Story” made for the Channel 4 series “My Crazy Parents”. This extremely emotional video was set in Glasgow and showed how three children coped with their mother’s illness. This illness had originated in depression for which she was prescribed drugs by her G.P. Unfortunately these drugs led to an addiction with side effects. This led to Michelle’s mother self harming and being admitted to psychiatric units periodically to try to break the addiction pattern. During this time the younger two children went to live with foster carers, whilst an older brother of 17, who was very often the main carer of all, was left to cope alone with no help from social services, eventually also becoming depressed and prescribed the same drugs from the G.P. This was a very moving video, expressed through the words of all the family members and gave a powerful insight into the problematic homelife of children whose parents suffer from mental health problems.

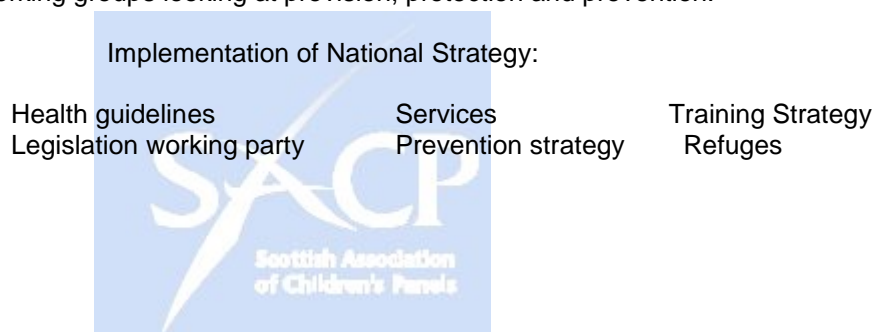
“Children’s and young people’s experiences of domestic abuse”
Heather Coady, National Children’s Policy worker, Scottish Women’s Aid.

ABUSE is controlling behaviour and power and includes emotional, financial and sexual abuse. **Scottish Women’s Aid** is an umbrella organization for 39 different organizations that work in training and prevention in schools and have 30 years of harbouring women and children.

- 100,000 children and young people are living with domestic abuse in Scotland.
- 90% of children are in the same room as attack on their mother.
- 1/3 of children try to intervene.
- 40 – 60% of children whose mothers are abused are abused by the perpetrator.
- On average a woman is assaulted 35 times before seeking help from outside agencies.
- Domestic abuse is least likely to be reported to the police. Only one in three crimes resulting in injury is reported.
- 44% of all incidents reported by women to the British Crime Survey were domestic abuse incidents.
- 2 women a week killed by partners in UK

EFFECTS	LOSSES	MATERIAL EFFECTS	FEELINGS
	Pets Family Friends Possessions	poverty homelessness social exclusion disruption to schooling	fear anger guilt isolation
	PHYSICAL HEALTH Injury Exhaustion Bedwetting Asthma & eczema	MENTAL HEALTH anxiety, low self esteem self harm withdrawal depression	
Also feel	intense terror or rage Fear of death Loss of parent		guilt sense of responsibility for abuse

National strategy is to address domestic abuse in Scotland which involves a multi agency approach in 32 areas and the establishment of a national group to address violence against women, with working groups looking at provision, protection and prevention.



“Prison without Bars” – the impact of imprisonment on families of those in custody
Elaine Stalker, Support and Development Officer, ‘Families outside’.

- The key goals of ‘Families Outside’ is to raise awareness of the impacts imprisonment has on families.
- The children and relatives of prisoners are more likely to go to prison.
- If good family ties are maintained prisoners are 6 times less likely to reoffend.
- Families feel punished and stigmatized.
- Families not given the information they need to make sense of their situation and begin to cope.
- Families feel unrecognised, unsupported and disempowered.
- The remaining adult is under extreme stress.

Impacts on Children

- 13,000 children separated from 1 parent.
- Children not told in advance, 1/3 receive a fudged version of the truth.
- Physical and mental health, 2/3 of children not coping well, risks to wellbeing.
- Low self esteem with increased health problems and regression ie bedwetting.
- Feel isolated, not supported.
- Adolescents take on parenting roles.
- Visits, children do not understand procedures, the checking of clothes and shoes or why a prisoner cannot get up and participate in play with child or accept drawings (doesn't daddy want it?).
- Too often these children are like disenfranchised griever unable to understand or deal with their grief.
- Child offends because there is an offender in the family.
- Afraid when family member about to leave prison.

- Often have to go into foster care, move schools and exhibit physical signs of stress; headaches, psoriasis, self harming.

What do they need?

- Good care Emotional support Contact with parent in prison
- Explanation of imprisonment How to tell other people
- How to ask for help face to face.

What can help

- To be kept informed and involved.
- To have a place to talk without taking sides.
- To understand from others the complex range of emotions they are going through.
- Acknowledgement of the major impact on many aspects of their lives.
- Practical help and support and ways of building self esteem
- Friendly mental health services
-

Raising awareness

- Based on experiences young people going through.
- Peer support.
- Training and awareness raising (education/SW).
- Embedding and sustaining the learning.

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The final session of the School looked firstly at “Chaos & Control: Adapting and Surviving”. This was delivered by Annette Webb, a training consultant & practitioner.

Children could be seen to have different roles – the hero, scapegoat, mascot, enabler, protector, mediator as well as that of the ‘lost child’.

Hero – This child proves that the family is normal and goes out of their way to ensure this. Tends to be the oldest child and performs very well socially. Unable to relax or play, but outwardly cheerful and positive. Inwardly has feelings of inadequacy and failure.

Scapegoat – Draws attention away from family – delinquent behaviour, truanting, being different. They believe they are bad or to blame and have low self-esteem and confidence.

Mascot – Family entertainer – ‘show must go on’. They avoid reality of family situation and have an inability to confess to feelings of sadness and despair. Unlikely to take themselves seriously (very hard to work with this group), but they do benefit from positive attention.

Enabler – Enables order and routine to avert family crisis. They enable family to function in a normal way. The intense responsibility is a burden for some. Child effectively becomes the adult. Feelings of anger are subsumed.

Protector – This child is ready to step between parents to diffuse tension, with the possible risk of injury.

Mediator/Confidant – Assumed or ascribed. The pay offs can be considerable to the child. There is intense conflict of loyalties and inappropriate worries and concerns can be hard to manage. This can contribute to the development of an over-adult persona, e.g. often parent tells intimate details to them.

Lost Child – Very quiet and unassuming, they effectively disappear. These children quite often end up self-harming, have bulimia, etc. They have feelings of pain and loneliness.

All of the above types of children can develop coping strategies. These can be problem focused, have practical and tactical interventions or be emotion-focused. This can be avoidance or escape, keeping watch (truanting to keep eye on parent), internalisation (mainly girls), externalisation (mainly boys – like bullying).

Ms Webb stressed the need to look at the emotional damage done. Often we only see the physical damage and concentrate on this, forgetting to really take account of the emotional (longterm) damage.

The final presenter was Maggie Mellon, Director of Children's & Families Services, Children 1st – "What helps? Family Support Services/Young Carers"

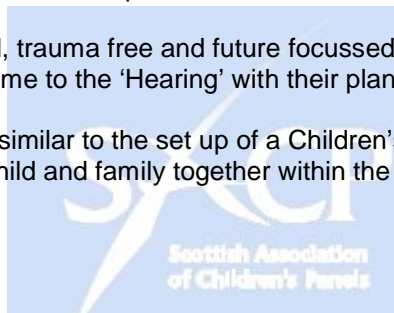
This presenter explained about the main areas Children 1st dealt with in relation to the above. These included supporting parents and families, including helping them to recover from abuse and trauma and protecting children at home and in the community. They did this with therapeutic support services and this included Story Works, which helped children develop their own stories. They used befrienders in certain areas and ran a training and consultancy service which dealt with child protection and had a Family Group Conferencing Development Unit. This provided training evaluation and consultancy.

This new area of Family Group Conferencing had several aims and principles:

Child's voice and needs central
Multi-purpose & multi-agency
Empowers families & professionals
Brings family resources to the table
Builds services round the actual needs & plans of real families.

They felt this was child-centred, trauma free and future focussed. It allows the family to make safe plans for the children and to come to the 'Hearing' with their plan.

This conferencing looked very similar to the set up of a Children's Hearing, but they hoped that it was a further way of supporting the child and family together within the community with the support of agencies.



This National School was an excellent arena for strongly stressing both visually and by words the impact on children of their parents' substance misuse, mental health problems and domestic violence issues. It gave Panel Members a much greater and clearer insight into the problems and daily life of these youngsters and delegates were able to better understand what they need in order to grow and develop their full potential. This impacts greatly on practice in Hearings where we have to bear in mind the emotional as well as the physical damage caused to these children.