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19<sup>th</sup> August 2020

Dear Johann,

## **PETITION 1627: SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO INQUIRY INTO MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN SCOTLAND REPORT**

I am writing to you in response to the Committee's report following its Inquiry into mental health support for young people in Scotland, which was published on 24 July. The report outlined a number of recommendations for Scottish Government. I will respond to each one in this letter.

I am sure the Committee is familiar with the actions the Scottish Government has taken to improve the mental health support that is available to young people since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. We are clearly operating in a context that was unimaginable at the start of 2020, and much of this response will concentrate on what we are doing to ensure the right support is in place for our children and young people. That ranges from our support to Young Scot to develop enhanced digital content and resources on mental health and wellbeing, to our work on Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) remobilisation.

The Committee outlined its concerns about the lack of support for children and young people who require support for low mood or anxiety. I want to assure the Committee that we are taking steps to improve the support that is available for those children and young people. In March £2 million of new funding was allocated to Local Authorities to specifically support the planning and development of new community mental health and wellbeing services for 5-25 year olds, their families and carers. This was supplemented with a supporting Framework, developed by the Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing Programme Board. The Framework outlines that "each local community planning or children's services partnership should identify and demonstrate clearly any particular local need or priority that should be addressed by community support. Partnerships should actively engage with under-represented and "at risk" groups, including communities who may often find themselves excluded." This will ensure that any services developed are created for the local

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population's needs. Local partnerships were due to start work to develop plans in March. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which has impacted on planned meetings, consultations and staff availability, this roll-out, which had been expected to begin in October, will be delayed. Nevertheless, we are currently working with Local Authorities to ensure these much needed services are ready to start supporting children, young people and their families as soon as possible. Local partnerships are aiming to have the first services in place by the end of the year.

In addition to this work, we have published advice and guidance on the Parent Club website to help parents and carers to support their children and young people's mental health during the Covid-19 pandemic and as they return to nursery and school. We have also provided access to Solihull Online so parents and carers can access this resource for free. The resource supports them to better understand their child and supports the development of healthy relationships.

Furthermore, in June we provided over £1 million to roll out the Distress Brief Intervention programme on a national basis. The programme is now available to those over the age of 16 who are in emotional distress and provides them with specially trained staff to speak to. The programme supports individuals who are in distress, but not requiring clinical intervention.

I will now respond to each of the recommendations in your report that were directed to the Scottish Government.

**Produce guidance, which among other things, should set out the minimum level of service provision in a local area. This will support integration authorities map and plan mental health services for their areas.**

As mentioned above, in March we provided Local Authorities with a Framework on how Community Mental Health and Wellbeing Supports and Services should be provided. The Framework aims to:

- Set out a clear broad approach for the support that children and young people should be able to access for their mental health and emotional wellbeing within their community.
- Assist local children's services and community planning partnerships with the commissioning and establishment of new local community mental health and wellbeing supports or services or the development of existing supports and services, in line with this framework.
- Facilitate the enhancement or creation of services that can deliver support which is additional and innovative wherever these are best placed.

The Framework also details the key components and core principles of how these services should be provided, and this will assist Local Authorities to develop services that work for their local communities.

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## **Work with integration authorities to provide and publish clear pathways to support for young people seeking help for their mental health by the end of 2020.**

As mentioned above, we are already working closely with Local Authorities to support them to develop new community mental health and wellbeing services. This includes ensuring clear pathways to the right support and care for a young person's needs.

The National CAMHS Service Standards describe the range of services and pathways that should be available to children and young people. In addition to this, we will publish the National Neurodevelopmental Service Standards for young people which will describe the pathways to support for those children and young people who have neurodevelopmental support needs

## **Commission work to identify how best to support parents and carers to access information about their children's mental health and signpost them to access the right services.**

We are working across the public and third sector to ensure that support is there for anyone who needs it. What families need will vary, but we are ensuring that there is a wide range of information and support available. For example:

- Our ParentClub website has advice and information on a range of Covid-19 related topics, and its 'Here For You' campaign provides assurance to parents and raises awareness of the expert guidance and parent-to-parent tips available.
- We are working with a range of third sector partners to ensure those most in need have digital access.
- We have funded the expansion of a number of helplines offering support to families, such as ParentLine, as well as those tailored for families with specific needs such as kinship carers.
- The National Parent Forum are members of the Education Recovery Group. We are working closely with the NPFS to provide clear information to parents about the return to schools and on other key issues.

The Third Sector plays a key role in supporting families, and many organisations have successfully accessed the new Third Sector Wellbeing Fund and Resilience Fund to fund the adaption and expansion of their services. We are also keen for organisations to use existing Scottish Government funding flexibly to meet current need, including by agreeing alternative objectives with us where appropriate. We are grateful for the work the sector is doing to ensure families are still getting the support they need. We will continue to monitor research and engage directly with parents and carers to ensure that the right support and advice is available.

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**Conduct a public health campaign aimed at all young people to raise awareness of the possible impact of the COVID-19 public health emergency on their mental health and signpost them to sources of support.**

We agree with the substance of this recommendation and have taken a number of actions during the pandemic to provide children and young people with advice, support and signposting that supports their mental health and wellbeing.

We provided funding to Young Scot to create an information and signposting resource for young people “Aye Feel” <https://young.scot/campaigns/national/aye-feel>. This resource provides information about mental health and wellbeing during the Covid-19 pandemic and sign posts to further resources. There are appropriate links and signposting for young people who may be experiencing mental ill health or distress, to ensure young people can access the right support for their circumstances. The content is created in partnership with young people to ensure the information is relevant and that it is available on the social media platforms that young people use, as well as on the Young Scot website.

In addition, we have also launched a digital resource specifically to help children and young people learn about the healthy use of screens and social media which we know have become a vital resource to stay connected during the pandemic. The resource, developed by the Scottish Youth Parliament and Children’s Parliament, is called ‘Mind Yer Time’ and provides children and young people with advice and support to use social media and screens in a healthy way.

Furthermore, in April we launched “Clear Your Head” to help the population look after their own mental health and wellbeing during the Covid-19 pandemic. The campaign provides people with practical advice during the pandemic on coping with the current restrictions. Last month, the advice was updated to support people feeling worried about going out more and struggling to manage their moods as restrictions start to ease. Signposting to existing advice is included for those who need extra support.

**Raise awareness of how employers in Scotland can support young people in the workforce with their mental health.**

The Scottish Government agrees that all young people should be supported by their employers so that they understand their rights and understand how their employer should support their mental health. We fund See Me, which is Scotland’s Programme to tackle mental health stigma and discrimination, this includes within the workplace. See Me has a workplace strand of work aimed at ending stigma and discrimination in work. An important aspect to eliminating stigma and discrimination is fostering a comprehensive awareness of mental health throughout the whole workplace. See Me’s e-Learning programme provides practical tools and guidance on understanding the impact of mental health stigma and discrimination, people’s rights and legal obligations from recruitment, while in work and when returning to work.

In addition, the UK Government has produced guidance titled ‘Employing disabled people and people with health conditions’ which assists employers to support their workforce with their mental health.

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**Works with COSLA to review the extent to which the provision of school counsellors is delivering its intended policy objectives while achieving best value with the resources available. This review should be reported to Parliament by early 2022.**

The Scottish Government works closely with COSLA on a number of actions to improve the mental health support that is available for children and young people, this includes as joint chairs of the Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing Programme Board. We will therefore continue to work together to consider the impact to children and young people's outcomes as a result of the counselling through schools commitment. We will learn and develop our approach going forward from this.

Counselling is just one of a range of services that helps to support the mental, emotional and social wellbeing of children and young people. We are currently working with COSLA to consider how we better improve outcomes for children and young people through the range of support available.

**Work with relevant partners to develop an online mental health first aid training course for all people who work with children and young people including those who work in educational settings, health settings and third sector organisations. Although the Committee does not consider that this training should be mandatory, it suggests that the Scottish Government take steps to ensure this course is easily accessible to all those who want it.**

A Mental Health In Schools working group has been established to support the Scottish Government's ongoing commitment to supporting positive mental health in children and young people in school. Part of the group's remit is to support the development of a professional learning resource for all school staff which will provide essential learning required to support children and young people's mental health and wellbeing.

The committee also asked to be provided with an update on our commitment to ensure that every secondary school has access to counselling services. We have engaged with education authorities and can confirm that there are a wide range of services in place, both at a whole-school level, and targeted supports available to support children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. These supports will be available to support children and young people when they return to school. Our engagement confirmed that there has been significant progress in the delivery of the commitment to counselling through schools, and almost all authorities have counselling services in place. It is expected that counselling through schools will be fully available in the autumn.

I hope the information I have provided is helpful, and that the Committee is assured that the Scottish Government is taking forward a number of actions to ensure that children and young people's mental health and wellbeing is fully supported during these unprecedented times.

I thank the Committee for its careful and diligent work over the course of this Inquiry.

*Clare Haughey*

**Clare Haughey**

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