

Briefing Paper for the Scottish Parliament's Education and Skills Committee

November 2016

Action for Children has prepared this briefing paper for the Scottish Parliament's Education and Skills Committee to inform members of our research, evidence base and service delivery. **Key areas of interest include the future of National Training Programmes in the context of the devolved employability programmes, the National Child Protection Improvement Programme, and the Named Person Scheme.**

Action for Children Scotland helps over 14,000 of Scotland's most disadvantaged children and young people every year. Our services include family intensive support, short-breaks for disabled children, employment support for young people and work with young offenders to reduce the likelihood of re-offending. We work in partnership with local authorities and other agencies to ensure young Scots have the best chance to fulfil their potential and make the most of their lives.

Many children and young people in Scotland are suffering because they don't get help early enough. We know that tackling problems before families reach crisis point is better for everyone and can save money, especially at a time when budgets are squeezed. This is why all of our policy change priorities are driven by our deep-rooted belief in early intervention approaches.

1. Supporting disadvantaged young people into employment

In 2015, there were 23,000 16 – 19 year olds in Scotland who were not in education, employment or training.¹ The young people Action for Children works with and supports may face difficult family relationships, the trauma of a childhood in and out of care, early parenthood, or having nowhere permanent to live. Others need extra support because of their disability, or because they care for a loved one. Sometimes, these groups are also disadvantaged because of their treatment by society. We develop and align our services and support with key Scottish Government priorities such as Raising Attainment for All and Developing Scotland's Young Workforce.

Action for Children held a number of workshops with disadvantaged young Scots who required support to find and sustain employment. We asked them to list some of the barriers that they felt were hindering their chances of success.

The **practical barriers** the young people identified included:

- Lack of knowledge and understanding of the CV, application, interview process, and the world of work
- Skills shortage in terms of financial, work and soft skills
- Lifestyle in terms of use of problematic substances
- Not knowing how to handle money and budget properly
- Inadequate careers advice
- Insufficient service access and provision
- Imbalance of support from parents and others.

¹ : Scottish Government, May 2016, Pg 19, "[Regional Employment Patterns in Scotland.](#)"

The **personal barriers** identified included:

- Managing stress, anxiety and demoralisation
- Having a disability or suffering from physical or mental ill-health
- Having to deal with their own or a loved one's problematic substance use
- Having to deal with family breakdowns
- Bad relationships with parents and or siblings
- Violence at home
- Coping with the loss of family members
- Lack of motivation and will power
- Feeling jealous of those who are employed and doing well.

The most disadvantaged young people, who often face multiple challenges, need sustained practical, social and emotional support as they take their first – and hardest – steps toward employment. Scotland's new employability support services are an opportunity to tackle these barriers more effectively.

Recommendation

Action for Children Scotland is calling on the Scottish Government to ensure that all employment support:

- recognises the additional challenges faced by disadvantaged young people
- is flexible and tailored to best meet the needs of disadvantaged young people
- is responsive to the hopes and aspirations of disadvantaged young people.

The above criteria for employment support must also be built into apprenticeships. Funding from the Apprenticeship Levy should specifically provide apprenticeships that offer the sustained practical, social and emotional employment support that the most disadvantaged young people need.

Action for Children service user from West Dunbartonshire said:

“The job centre needs to be aware that if young people have work trials and need travel expenses, then the job centre really needs to put the money into young people's bank accounts on a Friday so that we can lift the money for Monday morning to get to work trials on time.”

Kimberly H

“Employability provision needs to be tailored to meet the needs of young people. Having one to one support enables them to participate fully in the training and take up the opportunity of sustainable employment. We believe this key worker support is what makes Action for Children's employability services successful and continue to have good outcomes for young people sustaining employment.”

Evelyn Rimkus, Practice Team Leader, Action for Children's Youth Build Service

2. National Child Protection Improvement Programme - focus on Neglect

Action for Children has been building the research and practice base on child neglect to improve the evidence base, assisting policy-makers and practitioners alike. Action for Children has a specific interest in the following framework areas which were announced by the Scottish Government in February 2016:²

- a review of the formal structures and processes that underpin child protection
- action to address the impact of neglect on children
- addressing child sexual exploitation.

Action for Children Scotland has been supporting the Scottish Government in its child protection work. Action for Children is willing to assist the committee in its inquiries relating to the National Child Protection Improvement Programme and sharing our knowledge and experience of protecting neglected children across Scotland.

According to the Scottish Government's published 'Children's Social Work Statistics 2014-15,' there were 2,751 children on the Child Protection Register. Concerns about neglect were apparent in 37 per cent of these cases.³ Between November 2015 and October 2016, in Scotland alone, Action for Children had 3354 'open cases' for children with the kind of needs most associated with neglect.⁴

A child experiences neglect when the adults who look after them fail to meet their needs. Neglect can take many forms and can have far reaching consequences affecting all aspects of a child's development. It has negative and long-term effects on brain and other physical development, influences behaviour, educational achievement and children's emotional wellbeing. Furthermore, neglect can be life threatening and often occurs alongside other family problems including mental health issues, substance misuse or living with domestic violence.

Research on child neglect

Over the past six years, Action for Children has been a leader in developing the evidence base on child neglect in the United Kingdom.

In 2012, Action for Children, in partnership with the University of Stirling and with support from the Scottish Government, commissioned a report entitled 'Review of Child Neglect in Scotland.'⁵ The report highlighted some of the factors that get in the way of neglected children being identified in the first place, as well as looking at the barriers to support that continue to exist. The Scottish Government has since asked the Stirling Centre for Child Protection and Wellbeing to update this report so that its recommendations can be revised and implemented.

Action for Children's UK Report 'Child Neglect: The Scandal that Never Breaks' published in 2014 summarises the evidence base and highlights the challenges that have to be overcome to tackle neglect.⁶

² Scottish Government, February 2016, [Statement to the Scottish Parliament](#) on the Child Protection Improvement Framework

³ Scottish Government, March 2016, ["Children's Social Work Statistics 2014-15"](#)

⁴ Figure is taken from Action for Children's internal E-Aspire database for service users

⁵ Scottish Government, June 2012, ["Review of Child Neglect in Scotland"](#)

⁶ Action for Children, March 2014, ["Child Neglect: the Scandal that Never Breaks"](#)

Recently, Action for Children commissioned research with NSPCC and Research in Practice to look at the relationship between neglect and other forms of harm, such as child sexual exploitation.⁷ This found that while there is no direct or straight forward link between neglect and other forms of maltreatment, there are a number of ways in which the impacts of neglect may interact with other factors and adversities to increase children and young people's vulnerability to harm.

Upcoming research includes a collaborative studentship in partnership with the Centre for Child Wellbeing and Protection based at the University of Stirling. This project will examine how a public health approach could take a preventative and population-wide response to effectively tackle child neglect. This is a three-year project which commenced in October 2016.

Evidence based practice

We work at all levels of need, from preventative programmes through to providing therapeutic services to children in the care system. An independent review by the University of Salford in 2010 showed that our targeted family support services removed or prevented concerns about neglect in 68 per cent of cases.⁸

Key to our success is having skilled staff, effective outreach and making effective use of the Action for Children Neglect Tool.⁹ This has allowed us to build on our findings to develop an intensive family support service that addresses early signs of neglect. We record a range of needs for the children and families we work with, some of which can be related to neglect.

Action for Children is committed to sharing our knowledge and expertise. Funded by the Scottish Government, we worked with the University of Stirling to produce training materials to help professionals to identify and respond early to child neglect.¹⁰ Additionally, we were partners in a European Social Research Council sponsored project with the Universities of Stirling and Dundee to ensure that practitioners such as teachers, nurses and social workers are supported to provide the best possible response. Our resultant 'Action on Neglect' pack sets out improved pathways to provide help for neglected children and their families.¹¹

Child Protection in Practice

Action for Children's **Family Support Volunteer Project** helps parents to build their self-confidence while also providing practical support at home. This includes role modelling good adult-child interaction, encouraging parents to provide positive everyday experiences, and developing a routine which encourages quality family time together.

Action for Children's **Family Wellbeing Partnership service** provides support to families 'just coping' who otherwise would not use services. Tailored support is delivered in family homes and focuses on parenting skills, practical skills and improved wellbeing. The partnership has supported 300 families since October 2013, with 70 per cent reporting positive improvements.

⁷ Action for Children, June 2016, "[Child neglect and its relationship to other forms of harm](#) - responding effectively to children's needs"

⁸ University of Salford, May 2012, "[Research shows early intervention in critical to tackling child neglect](#)"

⁹ Action for Children, 2012, "[Working with Neglect: Practice Toolkit](#)"

¹⁰ Action for Children, 2012, "[Training Materials – Childhood Neglect](#)"

¹¹ Action for Children, 2012, "[Action on Neglect Toolkit – a resource pack](#)"

Action for Children's **Clackmannanshire Families, locally known as 'The Blue Hoose'**, is a centre-based and outreach support service for referred families with children aged pre-birth, to 5 years. The service works flexibly, with an integrated multi-agency approach to creating individually tailored packages to meet the needs of each family. Contracted to work with up to 42 different children over the course of a year, we worked with 77 in the last reporting period. Of those, 95 per cent recorded positive improvements on outcomes identified and 85 per cent recording a reduction in identified risks.

3. The Named Person Scheme

As a leading national children's charity, our role and responsibility is to always act and speak out for the best interest of disadvantaged children and young people. Any policy, legislation, strategy and or guidance must make a positive difference for them as we seek to deliver Scotland's collective ambition of Getting It Right for Every Child and being the best place to grow up in.

In September and October 2016, we held a series of focus groups and consultation meetings with children, young people, parents and practitioners that Action for Children work with and supports.

Key points identified from the Action for Children consultation on the Named Person scheme were as follows:

- Action for Children supports the Named Person Scheme, the GIRFIC model, and Scotland's ambition to be the best country to grow up in.
- The Named Person acts to ensure support is available and given to every child and young person who needs it. For those that need extra support, the Named Person exists to fulfil this purpose.
- However, we support a pause in the implementation of Named Person until the Scottish Government has amended the legislation to make it legally compatible and put effective guidance and training material in place.
- There is a lack of knowledge and awareness of the scheme amongst children, young people and parents. This exists to different levels in different parts of the country but, nevertheless, has to be addressed for the implementation and overall objective of the Named Person scheme to be successful.
- There is a lack of communication between practitioners in different disciplines, which is often made worse by having inflexible structures and processes.
- There should be no blanket removal of 16 and 17 year olds or a blanket 'opt out'. Every case should be looked at and carefully examined before a final decision is made.
- While guidance and training material exists, and some feel this to be sufficient, there is a majority view that there is a problem ensuring all this guidance and training material is fully shared between and within professions, agencies and structures.

4. Further Information

If you would like any further information, please contact Usman Ali, Action for Children's Campaigns, Advocacy and Policy Adviser in Scotland on 0141 550 9010 or by email usman.ali@actionforchildren.org.uk