Putting the Baby IN the Bath Water: Give priority to prevention and first 1001 days

Citation for published version:

Link:
Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer

Document Version:
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

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Putting the Baby IN the Bath Water:
Give priority to prevention and the first 1,001 days

Collective supplemental evidence submitted to the Scottish Parliament about the Children and Young People Bill

The Scottish Parliament is currently considering the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill. Stage 1 of this process is due to end by 29 November 2013. In September 2013, the following collective statement and recommendations were developed and agreed by a wide range of respected organisations and distinguished individuals. It was then submitted to the lead committee for this Bill (the Education and Culture Committee).

There is still time to influence this important legislation in ways that will increase its positive impact upon the first 1,001 days of every child’s life across Scotland. Please read this statement and consider what you can do to help. It includes how to get further information or become involved.
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This document offers the shared views and recommendations of a wide variety of organisations and individuals (listed at the end). All the signatories appreciate the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government’s desire to enact legislation that will move our nation closer to becoming ‘the best place to grow up’. We all share that goal and understand that the Children and Young People Bill is the one major legislative proposal since the Scottish Parliament was created that directly focuses on children’s rights, children’s services and the wellbeing of children and young people. It represents a crucial and welcome window of opportunity. We propose five additional ways to make the most of this opportunity.

It is a complex Bill of many parts. Our view is that when seen as a ‘jigsaw puzzle’, one fundamental piece is missing. The Bill does not provide a robust statutory foundation for positive action during the first 1,001 days of life (from pre-birth to age 2).

There is a disconnect between the case made for the Bill in its accompanying Policy Memorandum and actual provisions proposed within the Bill. We think this Bill, as introduced, should be amended to connect the dots between its Policy Memorandum and the Bill itself. Its excellent analysis of the wisdom of investing in the earliest years through preventative spending is not reflected in what this legislation actually proposes to do.

We do not believe that primary legislation is the only, or always the best, way of advancing policy, and to reinvent and reinvigorate the health visiting profession as an indispensible part of a healthy, fair and successful Scotland take their rightful place on the ‘must do’ list for public policy and governmental action.

Put simply, there now is compelling evidence that: a) beyond genetics, parent/child relationships, in general, and the quality of attachment, in particular, shape brain development; b) such brain and central nervous development in very early childhood shapes lifelong attitudes and values; and, c) these attitudes and behaviours shape everything from school success to employability to mental health problems or substance abuse.

Many of the signatories to this supplemental evidence have already provided such data and research findings to the Education Committee. Upon request, we can provide additional information – as well as specific suggestions about how and where to build our recommendations into this Bill. Prevention, preparation and support for the earliest years of life are matters that should no longer be subject to the changing preferences of, and pressures upon, successive national and local governments. Only as part of Scots law can these cornerstones of a healthy, fair and successful Scotland take their rightful place on the ‘must do’ list for public policy and governmental action.

In summary, we, collectively and individually, encourage the Scottish Parliament to literally ‘put the baby IN the bath water’ by adding these missing elements to this Bill. Doing so will make preventative spending and pragmatic, positive action during the first 1,001 days of life a reality, rather than remaining a good intention outwith its boundaries.

September 2013
Signatories for collective supplementary evidence on pre-birth to age 2

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Advisor to England DH on Healthy Child Programme

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Kathleen Marshall
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Professor Philip Wilson
Professor of Primary Care and Rural Health
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Dr Suzanne Zeedyk
Developmental Psychologist
The Science of Human Connection

WAVE Trust is acting as the coordinator of this collective statement on behalf of the signatories. If you would like further information or to become involved, then please contact Dr Jonathan Sher at jsher@wavetrust.org or on 07443 333 1953.