

Media Release

Embargoed for – 21/2/2011

Investment during the early years brings healthy returns for life

A shift from the current model of crisis intervention throughout child and family services to one of early identification and prevention would result in tangible and long-lasting social and economic benefits across Scotland, delegates at the Children in Scotland *Early Years Framework putting theory into practice* seminar, held this week in partnership with Action for Children, will be told.

Although local authority budgets are currently being further tightened, research continues to show the importance of early intervention in laying the foundations for a healthy, safe life, and the event will hear from experts including Detective Chief Superintendent John Carnochan, from the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit, about the social return on strategic early investment and the benefits which result from universal services better able to meet the needs of all children.

Presenting the findings of 'Backing the Future', joint research between Action for Children and the New Economics Foundation, Moira Luccock, Operational Director with Action for Children will make a compelling economic and social case for transforming the way in which intervention is approached, which demonstrates that early action positively affects how children experience their lives.

"Being there early makes a long term difference [throughout society] – children benefit, families benefit and society benefits," Moira Luccock said. "We know that children do well when their parents do well, so we need to work towards a model of prevention that builds on really good universal, as well as additional targeted, services, based on early identification of the issues, and on good support that works around the principles underpinned by GIRFEC, where all partners are outcome-focused and work consistently to deliver services long-term."

Outlining the vital role played by health professionals in children's earliest years, Dr Phil Wilson, Senior Lecturer, General Practice and Primary Care, at the University of Glasgow, who will be taking part in the panel discussion at the event, urged the government and relevant agencies to work together to ensure success.

"The Early Years Framework will have been a waste of time and resources if it does not make a measurable difference to young children," he said. "We need to focus on child-centred outcomes, particularly in terms of language development, which is key to social

and emotional health, and school readiness more generally, and we need robust systems to capture outcome data. In the first three years of life, GPs and health visitors are the only professionals in contact with all children, and it is essential that we engage these professions in generating measurable improvements in child wellbeing.”

Marion Macleod, Senior Policy and Parliamentary Officer with Children in Scotland, who will speak at the conference on practical ways to implement the Early Years Framework, said: “We know that children’s early years see the most significant physical and intellectual developments, and the attachments they form, the way their brains grow, and what they learn before the age of three will have a profound influence on their later health, education and wellbeing.”

“Helping families ‘get it right’ in a child’s early life is one of the most positive steps we can take. Not only will the life chances of many children be better, the community as a whole will also benefit. Crime, poor health and educational failure will all be reduced, and fewer costly, and less effective, interventions will be needed.”

The Scottish Government and CoSLA published their forward-thinking Early Years Framework in 2008, aimed at delivering ‘transformational change’ over a ten-year period. The event will see Children in Scotland and Action for Children provide both strategic direction and practical advice, based on research evidence and real experience, on how to work together to achieve this.

Notes to Editors

1. *Early Years Framework putting theory into practice*, is a one day seminar in partnership with Action for Children, and takes place on Wednesday 23 February at the Thistle Hotel, Cambridge Street, Glasgow, G2 3HN.
2. Copies of the *Backing the Future* report can be obtained on the New Economics Foundation website www.neweconomics.org
3. **Children in Scotland** is the longstanding national agency for the whole of the children’s sector, reaching over 250,000 individuals through our extensive membership of more than 450 statutory agencies, voluntary sector organisations, professional associations and community groups. For further information visit www.childreninscotland.org.uk.

For further information contact Lynn Gilmour

Email lgilmour@childreninscotland.org.uk / tel 0131 222 2443.