

MEDIA RELEASE

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Major Scotland, UK, Ireland and Norway conference on improving childhoods prioritises international perspectives

A major conference for Scotland, the rest of the UK and Ireland will bring together international perspectives on how to improve childhoods.

The conference, *Building better childhoods: understanding and developing the reform agenda*, held on 6 and 7 September at Aviemore Highland Resort, will discuss varied approaches to building better childhoods, improving services for children, and how to learn from international examples.

The Children in Scotland conference is held with Highland Council and NHS Highland, and hosted by the Scottish Executive.

Bronwen Cohen, chief executive of Children in Scotland, said: "The conference will highlight the richness of international perspectives on how to improve childhoods and develop better services for children. Through delegates meeting and comparing experiences, and learning from each other about the best approaches, it will demonstrate the value of continuing exchange, discussion and dialogue."

The conference will include a visit from Norwegian policy makers and practitioners to children's services in Scotland, following a recent Scottish study visit to Nordland in Norway.

Bronwen Cohen added: "The conclusions from our recent study visit and the contributions of our Norwegian guests will be central to the content of the

conference. We will be looking at the Norwegian approach to children's services and the community in detail, including the value of upbringing plans, planning across childhoods and across agencies, and using community as the basis for place-based learning."

The study visit resulted in a new publication, *Northern Lights: Building better childhoods in Norway*, which will inform discussion at the conference. *Northern Lights* was written to encourage policy makers, professionals and practitioners in Scotland to ask questions about our own approach to service delivery.

The conference will also highlight the results of recent research undertaken into the development of integrated services for children in Highland.

The report, 'Delivering Integrated Services for Children in Highland: an overview of challenges, developments and outcomes', the largest study of its type ever undertaken in Scotland, looked at the implementation of the Integrated Community School Approach, services for children on the autistic spectrum, youth offending, family support and services for Gypsy/Travellers. It found generally positive outcomes across most areas of service for these groups.

Bill Alexander, Head of Children's Services in Highland, said:

"The landscape of children's services has transformed in recent years, bringing new challenges, aspirations and possibilities. This reports sets out where we have got to in Highland, and confirms that we are leading the way in Scotland."

"It provides a strong platform for the development of new systems and processes, that will help professionals work even more effectively together, to help achieve yet better outcomes for children and families. We look forward to some of the key issues and ideas raised by the report being explored at the conference."

Preceding the conference, senior Norwegian government officials, local authority officers and practitioners from Nordland, together with senior local government officials and academics from Scotland, will meet to discuss the major themes of the conference at a special symposium.

Fiona Hyslop, Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Education & Lifelong Learning, will address the symposium, and will be interviewed by a group of Highland young people for the conference.

She said: "The Scottish government is pleased to be able to support this important international conference. We are looking forward to setting out our policies, priorities and ambitions for all children and young people in Scotland, in particular the development of our early years strategy and to learn about what is happening

elsewhere in the UK, Eire and Norway.”

**For more information on the conference visit
www.childreninscotland.org.uk/bbc**

Members of the Norwegian delegation and senior local authority officials and academics from across the UK will be available for interview.

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Notes for editors:

The symposium, held from 5-6 November, will cover some of the following themes:

1. Developing strong and safe communities: what are the key issues?

What is the role of schools, other services and the community? How do we achieve the World Health Organisation’s definition of a healthy community as one with good social networks, a culture of mutual respect and understanding and where people feel empowered to make decisions?

2. Protecting children: how do we ensure the right balance?

How do we understand and react to risk as individuals, families, organisations and sectors? What factors need to be considered in assessing and managing risk in services and communities?

3. Universal and targeted services: what is the right balance and what are the most effective models in building better childhoods for all children?

How do we best meet the needs of the ‘whole’ child in as simple and effective way as possible? What are the best ways of providing additional support?

The study visit will include visits to children’s services in Glasgow, Stirling and Highland.

Northern Lights

In 2006 a small group of highly experienced individuals, all involved in different ways in the planning and delivery of childhood services in Scotland, travelled North to view a snapshot of service delivery in a country that shares so much with Scotland, yet appears to have succeeded in achieving higher levels of child well-being.

Northern Lights has been written as a record of this visit to Norway and to encourage many more policy makers, professionals and practitioners in Scotland to ask questions about our own approach to service delivery. It focuses on: Norway’s national political landscape; local planning for children, youth and family services in

Norway using “*oppvekstplans*” – translated into English as “upbringing plans”; Norway’s consistently proactive work to advance children’s rights and promote participation; the benefits of ‘universal services’; maximising local resources in education; and nature as a resource in services. **Northern Lights is part of the ‘Building better childhoods’ series** – titles that highlight innovative policies and practice in Scotland, throughout Europe and beyond. As we strive to improve childhood experience, sharing ideas and practice at national and international level can inspire change for the better.

For more information about Northern Lights contact Nicola Pay:
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Children in Scotland is the national agency for voluntary, statutory and professional organisations and individuals working with children and their families in Scotland. It exists to identify and promote the interests of children and their families and to ensure that relevant policies, services and provisions are of the best possible quality and able to meet the needs of a diverse society.