

Consultation response



Review of Mental Health Improvement Policy in Scotland March 2007

1.0 Introduction

Children in Scotland welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the review of mental health improvement policy in Scotland. The National Programme¹ has done much to promote mental health and well-being. In particular, *The Mental Health of Children and Young People: A Framework for Promotion Prevention and Care*² and the establishment of HeadsUp Scotland demonstrate a commitment from the Scottish Executive to promote child and adolescent mental health. However, more work is required to ensure that child and adolescent mental health is a priority and that the *Framework* is fully implemented. We believe that a network of universal services for young children, accessible to all and with staff with a higher level of qualifications than is currently the case, would contribute greatly to the health and well being of all children, facilitate far earlier diagnosis and recognition of problems, and offer a non stigmatised means of providing support.

Much of the work around mental health is still in its early stages of development. More time is needed for recent child and adolescent mental health policies to have real effect, to identify how they are working and to ascertain what still needs to be done. It would be useful to map the changes being made and to commission more child-specific mental health research. Changing people's perceptions and awareness of mental health and well-being, eliminating stigma, and embedding mental health and well-being into wider policies is a long-term process. Time also is needed to spread the good practice already in existence and to develop work on emerging areas, such as infant mental health. Crucially, *increased investment specifically for child and adolescent mental health services is required.*

2.0 Children in Scotland's work on mental health

Children in Scotland has been closely involved in the development of child and adolescent mental health services through HeadsUp Scotland (the national project for children and young people's mental health). We work in partnership with Penumbra and Barnardo's on the Participation Partnership Group (PPG) to take forward work in relation to involving children and young people in issues that affect their own mental health and well-being.

Our PPG work included a modest survey of agencies around Scotland, that revealed significant disparities in terms of the level and frequency of involvement – and also indicated that consultation

¹ National Programme for Improving Mental Health and Well-Being, Scottish Executive 2001

² *The Mental Health of Children and Young People: A Framework for Promotion Prevention and Care*, Scottish Executive 2004

on mental health with children and young people happens at the individual level much more frequently than at the policy/service level.

We also closely monitored and contributed to the Parliamentary progress of the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) Act³. Furthermore, we are represented on the Child Health Support Group, have been a member of the Scottish Executive Advisory Group on Children and Young People's Mental Health, and have included various articles on mental health in our monthly magazine. In December 2006, we organised HeadsUp Scotland's annual conference.

3.0 Implementation

The Mental Health of Children and Young People: A Framework for Promotion Prevention and Care sets out clear responsibilities for people working with children and young people. However, for the *Framework* to be a success, it must be rigorously implemented. Continued commitment from the Scottish Executive to ensure implementation of the *Framework* is essential to facilitate a long-term improvement in child and adolescent mental health.

4.0 Participation

We applaud the work that HeadsUp Scotland has undertaken to meaningfully involve children and young people in issues that affect their mental health and well-being. The *In Ma Heid, Oot Ma Heid* conference that was organised by and for young people in November 2006 is a good example of this consultation/participation work. This is keeping with the Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (i.e., the right of children to be heard and heeded on important issues affecting their own lives).

We urge the Scottish Executive to do more to encourage the meaningful involvement of children and young people, and to provide the resources to facilitate this involvement. Involvement at both the individual and strategic levels is important for children and young people of all ages. Children and young people are more likely to use and benefit from services that have been developed in direct and non-superficial consultation with them.

5.0 Prevention and early years

We welcome Sure Start as a means of assisting families with young children who are most in need and we are pleased that early years was selected as a priority area for the National Programme, but we think that mental health policy needs to give more attention to infant mental health. A network of accessible universal services for young children which is staffed with professionals with a higher level of qualifications than is currently the case would contribute greatly to the health and well being of all children. We believe that this would facilitate far earlier diagnosis and recognition of any problems, and offer a non stigmatised means of providing support. Whilst work is being done around health promotion, **the Scottish Executive needs to accord greater priority and additional resources to prevention and early intervention**, as this is the key to achieving a long-term improvement in the mental health of children and young people throughout Scotland.

Infants are greatly affected by experiences around them and disruptive experiences can have detrimental effects on their mental health later in life. Consideration needs to be given to how the

³ Mental Health (Care and Treatment)(Scotland) Act 2004

mental health needs of young children and their families can be met. School nurses and health visitors can be an effective way of reaching children at an early age and may be able to pick up on problems early (such as foetal alcohol spectrum disorder).

6.0 Joint Working

Critical to early intervention and prevention is joined-up working. The interim Scottish Needs Assessment Programme⁴ (SNAP) report highlighted the importance of developing a joined-up, multi-agency child and adolescent mental health service that, as a matter of priority, focuses on early identification and intervention.

It is important that mental health policy promotes links between services and sectors. Those implementing the *Framework* must take responsibility for creating and maintaining such links. This is crucial for early intervention and family work.

For example, staff working in the early years must remember to link not only with other early years staff and agencies but also with schools and health services. Equally, it is crucial for health and education to work together. Further work could also be done around promoting links between the voluntary and statutory sectors. To help prevent mental health problems, the Scottish Executive needs to ensure that all services involved with children and young people are on board, including family support, childhood services, pre-school, and social work. *Getting it Right for Every Child*⁵ has the potential to progress joined-up working in important ways.

7.0 Age appropriate

Children in Scotland believes that further investment is needed in age-appropriate services. We welcome the Scottish Executive's commitment, in *Delivering for Mental Health*⁶, to reduce the number of admissions of children and young people to adult beds by 50% by 2009. Children and young people have quite different needs to adults; therefore, it is essential that there are a variety of services available designed specifically for them. During the progress of the Mental Health (Care and Treatment)(Scotland) Act through Parliament, Children in Scotland called for age-appropriate services for children and young people. However, there are still gaps in age-appropriate service provision for children and young people. Age-appropriate services are required not only for inpatient services, but also for all mental health services, and should be provided by professionals specifically trained to work with children and young people.

8.0 Transition to Adulthood

Children in Scotland encourages the Scottish Executive to act of the fact that the transition to adulthood is one of the most challenging, but least supported, periods for both young people and their parents. During this period, young people are faced with challenging educational, employment and social pressures/expectations. Many young people manage to successfully navigate their way to adulthood, but it is also the case that too many acquire new mental health challenges or exacerbate existing ones as result of problems associated with this transition.

For example, 13.2% of 16-18 year-olds in Scotland are classified as NEET (not in education,

⁴ *Scottish Needs Assessment Programme (SNAP)*, NHS Scotland 2003

⁵ *Getting it right for every child: Draft Children's Services (Scotland) Bill*, Scottish Executive 2006

⁶ *Delivering for Mental Health*, Scottish Executive 2006

employment or training) and this negative status/situation increases the likelihood of them having mental health problems.⁷ There has been a marked increase in suicide rates among 15-24 year-olds in recent years, particularly among young men⁸. However, it is important not to forget other issues that affect young people's emotional well-being, as well as their mental health. These can range from drug and alcohol misuse to sexual health issues. There is a particular need for services *specifically developed* for young people aged 14-25 year-olds. In mental and emotional health terms, young people are neither children, nor fully-mature adults. Their needs (and the strategies that succeed with them) often are different than those for younger or older populations.

9.0 Training

Children in Scotland welcomes the work achieved in relation to training (for example, the Young Minds training for carers). Barnardo's has also carried out their snakes and ladders training through the PPG. For implementation of the *Framework* to be a success, *staff members working with children and young people must receive appropriate training on working with these age groups in relation to mental health and well-being*. Training to help facilitate the participation of children and young people should be funded, as well as joined up training to help facilitate a shared understanding of child and adolescent mental health and well-being issues.

10.0 Funding

Fragmented and unstable funding sources contribute to the fragmented nature of mental health services, particularly in the voluntary sector. Longer-term funding for projects is required to ensure that policies to improve child and adolescent mental health and well-being will have a longer-term effect. Projects need adequate time and money to make an impact. The Executive needs to ensure that when a project is successful the funding continues. Children's and young people's mental health has been moved to the mental health department of the Scottish Executive and children's services currently have to compete within the general mental health budget for financial support. **Significant investment specifically for child and adolescent mental health services is essential, as is ring-fenced funding for further child-specific research.**

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⁷ *Employability Framework for Scotland*, Report of the NEET Workstream June 2005

⁸ *Evaluation Of The First Phase Of Choose Life: The National Strategy And Action Plan To Prevent Suicide In Scotland*, Scottish Executive 2006

Children in Scotland is Scotland's national agency for organisations and professionals working with and for children, young people and their families. It exists to identify and promote the interests of children and their families and to ensure that policies, services and other provisions are of the highest possible quality and are able to meet the needs of a diverse society. Children in Scotland represents over 450 members, including all major voluntary, statutory and private children's agencies, professional organisations, as well as many other smaller community groups and children's services. It is linked with similar agencies in other parts of the UK and the European Union.

The work of Children in Scotland encompasses extensive information, policy, research and practice development programmes. The agency works closely with MSPs, the Scottish Executive, local authorities and practitioners. It services a number of groups such as: the Cross Party Parliamentary Group on Children and Young People; the National Children's Voluntary Forum; the National Early Years Forum, the Rural Advisory Group and the Additional Support Needs Network. Children in Scotland hosts Enquire, the national advice service for additional support for learning.