

# Consultation response



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## **Towards a Mentally Flourishing Scotland: The Future of Mental Health Improvement in Scotland 2008-11 February 2008**

### **1.0 Introduction**

Children in Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation, *Towards a Mentally Flourishing Scotland: The Future of Mental Health Improvement in Scotland 2008-11*. The publication of *The Mental Health of Children and Young People: A Framework for Promotion Prevention and Care*<sup>1</sup> and the establishment of HeadsUp Scotland demonstrated a commitment from the previous administration to promote child and adolescent mental health. There is an opportunity in *Towards a Mentally Flourishing Scotland* to further this successful work. We support the population-based approach to mental health that is taken in *Towards a Mentally Flourishing Scotland*. Addressing the needs of the whole population whilst at the same time targeting particularly vulnerable groups such as children, young people and families would benefit mental health improvement efforts in Scotland.

We strongly welcome the importance given to early years, young people and families in *Towards a Mentally Flourishing Scotland*. In particular, we applaud the priority that early intervention and support for parents received. We believe that a network of universal services for young children, accessible to all and with staff having a higher level of qualifications than is currently the case, would contribute greatly to the health and well-being of all children. More time is needed for recent child and adolescent mental health policies to have real effect and to ensure that the Framework is fully implemented. Time is needed to identify which policies and services are working well, as well as to ensure that those that are succeeding are supported and funded properly. More child-specific mental health research is needed, as is funding specifically for child and mental health services.

### **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

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<sup>1</sup> *The Mental Health of Children and Young People: A Framework for Promotion Prevention and Care*, Scottish Executive 2004

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

*Working it out: Developing the children's sector workforce*<sup>2</sup> discusses the children's sector workforce and how it can work together to benefit the health and well being of all children. It explains child centred working and recognising the needs of the whole child. It suggests a new profession of Scottish pedagogue which would be an element in all initial education and would be delivered by Continual Professional Development. We are also hosting a conference on this theme in April.<sup>3</sup> More information about childhood services across Europe and beyond can be found in our Building Better Childhoods series of publications.<sup>4</sup>

Children in Scotland has also been involved in promoting the arts and the role that this can play in encouraging mental wellbeing. Issue 14 of Children in Europe considers the role and use of the arts in services and the community for children aged 0-10.<sup>5</sup> *Picture this... Young children and the arts*<sup>6</sup>, an international two-day conference, organised in collaboration with Children in Europe partners from across Europe, will consider the significance of the arts in learning, social and emotional development and communication.

We also closely monitored and contributed to the Parliamentary progress of the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) Act<sup>7</sup>. 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. Just over a year ago, we organised HeadsUp Scotland's annual conference (*In Ma Heid, Oot Ma Heid*).

### 3.0 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 and we believe that the need for more work of this kind should be promoted in *Towards a Mentally Flourishing Scotland*. One of the main themes to arise from the Scottish Needs Assessment Report (SNAP) 2003<sup>8</sup> is participation and involving young people and families in shaping mental health services. Furthermore, Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that all children have the right to be heard and heeded on issues that affect them. The *In Ma Heid, Oot Ma Heid* conference that was organised by and for young people in 2006 is a good example of this consultation/participation work.

The SNP manifesto and the Scottish Government's policies support the UNCRC. We urge the Scottish Government to do more to encourage the meaningful involvement of children and young people, and to provide the resources to facilitate this level of involvement. Introductory training in participation is available, but more attention needs to be given to

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<sup>2</sup> *Working it out: Developing the children's sector workforce*, Children in Scotland 2008

<sup>3</sup> For more information visit [http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/html/tra\\_tshow.php?ref=1093](http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/html/tra_tshow.php?ref=1093)

<sup>4</sup> For more information on the Building Better Childhoods series visit [www.childreninscotland.org.uk/publications](http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/publications)

<sup>5</sup> To subscribe/buy online visit [www.childrenineurope.org](http://www.childrenineurope.org)

<sup>6</sup> For more information visit [http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/html/tra\\_tshow.php?ref=1065](http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/html/tra_tshow.php?ref=1065)

<sup>7</sup> Mental Health (Care and Treatment)(Scotland) Act 2004

<sup>8</sup> *Needs Assessment Report on Child and Adolescent Mental Health: consulting children, young people and parents*, NHS Scotland 2003

the next level training and the 'how to'. 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 more-than-superficial consultation with them.

#### **4.0 Prevention and early years**

The National Programme<sup>9</sup> selected early years as a priority area and we are glad that this was reflected in *Towards a Mentally Flourishing Scotland*. We are especially pleased that the document recognises the need to combat poor foetal development. However, we think that young children should be included in the list of targeted groups on page 5 of the consultation document (point 6.1) and in the prevention section at Action 2 on page 11. This would emphasise further that it is crucial to identify and address problems in infants.

Intervening at an early stage in life is key to the prevention of mental health problems later in life. School nurses and health visitors can be effective in reaching children at an early age and may be able to identify problems (such as foetal alcohol spectrum disorder) so that an effective response can be developed. A network of accessible universal services for young children (if staffed by 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-stigmatising means of providing support.

#### **5.0 Families and parenting**

We strongly welcome the attention given to families and parenting in *Towards a Mentally Flourishing Scotland*. We particularly welcome the suggestion to also engage with parents when working with children and to provide greater holistic support for parenting, especially in families who are notably at risk.

We believe that more consideration needs to be given to how the mental health needs of young children and their families can be met. The needs of families are complex. Sectors, and services within sectors, need to work together to meet those needs. We welcome Sure Start as a means of assisting families with the young children who are most in need. However, we believe that a network of universal services for children and their families would contribute to the long-term improvement of the mental health of children in Scotland.

Services that are working with children, young people and their families will need to adhere to the new Gender Equality Duty, which calls for greater equality in the delivery of public services, including health services. It means that unless there is a specific legal or child protection reason for excluding a parent, mental health services must ensure that all parents (mother and father, biological or non-biological and resident or non-resident) are treated equally with regards to parental involvement in their child's health and healthcare decision-making.<sup>10</sup>

#### **6.0 Joint working**

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<sup>9</sup> National Programme for Improving Mental Health and Well-Being, Scottish Executive 2001

<sup>10</sup> For more information on the Gender Equality Duty see *Making the Gender Equality Duty real for children, young people and their fathers*, Children in Scotland 2007

We welcome the recognition in *Towards a Mentally Flourishing Scotland* of the links between mental health and drug and alcohol misuse, violent behaviour, self-harm and suicide, obesity and poor sexual health. Likewise, we agree completely that not only the healthcare system that should be involved in promoting mental health, but also education, housing and social work. However, we think that *Towards a Mentally Flourishing Scotland* needs to give more focus to promoting links between services and sectors.

Joined-up working is critical to early intervention and prevention. The interim Scottish Needs Assessment Programme<sup>11</sup> (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 early intervention.

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 encouragement and tangible support should be given by the Scottish Government to strengthening links between the voluntary and statutory sectors. To help prevent mental health problems, the Scottish Government 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*<sup>12</sup> has the potential to progress joined-up working in important ways.

## **7.0 Age appropriate services**

Children in Scotland believes that *Towards a Mentally Flourishing Scotland* should specifically commit to further investment in age-appropriate services. Children and young people have quite different needs than 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 Young people's mental health and the transition to adulthood**

We believe that *Towards a Mentally Flourishing Scotland* should give more focus to young people's mental health. Young people are mentioned only briefly in the targeted groups section and not specifically in Action 3 on suicide and self-harm. There has been a marked increase in suicide rates among 15-24 year-olds in recent years, particularly among young men<sup>13</sup>. 13.2% of 16-18 year-olds in Scotland have been classified as NEET (not in education, employment or training) – now reframed as young people in need of 'more

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<sup>11</sup> *Scottish Needs Assessment Programme (SNAP)*, NHS Scotland 2003

<sup>12</sup> *Getting it right for every child: Draft Children's Services (Scotland) Bill*, Scottish Executive 2006

<sup>13</sup> *Evaluation Of The First Phase Of Choose Life: The National Strategy And Action Plan To Prevent Suicide In Scotland*, Scottish Executive 2006

choices and more chances'.<sup>14</sup> By any name, this negative status/situation increases the likelihood of developing new, or aggravating old, mental health problems.<sup>15</sup>

Children in Scotland encourages the Scottish Government to act on 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.

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

Whilst *Towards a Mentally Flourishing Scotland* recognises the importance of good child and family mental health, it is not clear how the workforce will be equipped to meet their needs. 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. Children in Scotland applauds the results achieved through appropriate training (for example, the Young Minds training for carers and the Barnardo's 'snakes and ladders' training, as funded through the PPG). 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

Children in Scotland welcome the recognition given to evaluation on page 8 of *Towards a Mentally Flourishing Scotland*. Projects need adequate time and money to make an impact, and the Scottish Government needs to ensure that (when a project is found to be successful after evaluation) the funding continues. 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 positive effect. Significant investment specifically for child and adolescent mental health services is essential, as is funding for further child-specific research.

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<sup>14</sup> *More Choices, More Chances: A Strategy to Reduce the Proportion of Young People not in Education, Employment or Training in Scotland*, Scottish Government 2006

<sup>15</sup> *Employability Framework for Scotland*, Report of the NEET Workstream June 2005

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**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.