

MEDIA RELEASE

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CONFERENCE DISCUSSES HOW TO ACHIEVE THE BEST START IN LIFE

A major Children in Scotland conference held today (Tuesday 9 September) will examine what can be done at a local and national level to give young children the best start in life.

The conference will draw on and discuss international reviews, research and practice focused on the early years.

It will also see the launch of a new publication which examines how one small Italian local authority has developed its services for children under three as a community project, and hear from Scotland's local authorities about their achievements, aspirations and plans for the future.

The conference comes in the run-up to the publication of the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authority's Early Years and Early Intervention Framework and ten year strategy.

Following the concordat, which gave more power to local councils, the conference will examine how local authorities in Scotland could be inspired by the values and provision of many early years services abroad.

The conference will hear about the model established in this area by the small Italian town of San Miniato, now beginning to attract worldwide attention, and the focus of new publication Young children in charge: a small Italian community with big ideas for children.

The publication is based on a recent study visit to San Miniato in north Italy, where the success of early years services for children under three reflect 25 years of local authority commitment and financial investment.

Keir Bloomer, co-author of the publication and former chief executive of Clackmannanshire Council, said: "San Miniato's example is important for a number of reasons. They have an optimistic view of children, seeing them as capable, active participants in their own learning. Their services for the

youngest children are designed to strengthen society and support families so they are aimed at all children, not just those with additional needs or difficult family circumstances.”

“The approach is firmly child-centered: activities arise from children’s interests and natural curiosity, not from any pre-determined programme. Looking at distinctive and successful examples from other countries causes us to reflect on our own practices in ways that can only be helpful.”

Bronwen Cohen, chief executive of Children in Scotland and co-author of the publication, said: “The powerful values that drive service development in San Miniato, and the local authority’s unwavering commitment over the past 25 years, is a shining example that other local authorities across Europe can learn from. A remarkable feature of many strong early childhood education and care systems across Europe has been their ability to learn from and with other countries.”

“San Miniato offers many models in values, provision and thinking that are instructive as we assess how to deliver better early years services for children here. One of these models is the contribution made by the Nidi – nurseries offering a holistic approach to meeting the needs of children under three. The Nidi place a significant emphasis on collaboration with families and are viewed as distinctive but complementary environments to the home, strengthening parents in their roles.”

The conference will hear from the authors and contributors to UNICEF Report Card 8, including Eva Jespersen, chief, Monitoring Social and Economic Policies, Unicef Innocenti Research Centre; the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development’s report Starting Strong II, and Children in Europe’s policy paper Young children and their services: developing a European approach.

Other speakers include John Bennett, co-author of Starting Strong II and consultant to UNICEF report card 8, Aldo Fortunati, developmental psychologist and early childhood specialist, San Miniato, Italy, and Adam Ingram MSP, minister for children and the early years.

The conference is being held today at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, Glasgow.

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Notes for editors

- Young children in charge: a small Italian community with big ideas for children is published on September 9 and is available from www.childreninscotland.org.uk/publications
- 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 provision are of the best possible quality and able to meet the demands of a diverse society. For further information visit: www.childreninscotland.org.uk