



Report of 1st Policy Forum held on Wednesday 25 January 2006 at EVOC, 14
Ashley Place, Edinburgh from 11am - 1.30pm

Present:

Ella Simpson (Chair)	NE Committee member, The Rock Trust
Pam Orchard	Edinburgh Cyrenians
Helen McKinnes	Scottish Association of Childminding
David Hill	Aberlour Child Care
Robert Boyter	The Boys' Brigade
Liz Notarangelo	Home Link
Rob Heasman	Lothian Association of Youth Clubs
Graham McCulloch	Lothian Association of Youth Clubs
Dale Masters	Lothian Association of Youth Clubs
Ruth Morgan Thomas	Scot-Pep
Sally Street	Firsthand
Juliet Wilson	National Playbus
Carol Shoek	Edinburgh Mediation
Charmaine Brown	Firsthand
Daniel Winstanley	LGBT Youth Scotland
Andy Baker	Canongate Youth Project
Frances Young	Home Link
Val Goodwin	Home Start Edinburgh South Central

Main Topic for Discussion: Child Protection

1. Presentations on Child Protection

Rob Heasman, the voluntary sector representative on the Edinburgh Child Protection Committee (ECPC), set the scene with his presentation on the structure and role of the ECPC, the related groups and the role of the voluntary sector in these.

Structure: (also see attached structure map) Strategy development and implementation of child protection is conducted via a three tiered system i.e. **Edinburgh, Lothian and Borders Executive Group (ELBEG); Edinburgh, Lothian and Borders Child Protection Co-ordinating Group (CPCG); and Child Protection Committees (referred to as Local Committees)**

Edinburgh Child Protection Committee is one of the five Local Child Protection Committees across Edinburgh, Lothian and Borders.

Role: The purpose of the Edinburgh Child Protection Committee is to implement the Quality Indicators and Framework for Standards for Child Protection and to implement the Edinburgh, Lothian and Borders inter-agency strategy for child protection at local level. ECPC is engaging with the voluntary sector in effective partnership to protect children and young people and seeking to maximize the contribution to the protection of children by the voluntary sector. Where one does not exist, it is intended to establish a Child Protection Forum (locality sub-group) to engage with the voluntary sector in the area more closely.

At present, in line with the new legislation, the Committee is revising the current guidelines that date back to 2001.

Voluntary Sector: The voluntary sector does not have a statutory responsibility to implement the child protection legislation but has to support the process. The local authority has the responsibility of ensuring that the voluntary sector is informed of any changes in child protection services, policy and practice and legislation. The voluntary sector will also have access to advice and training and its processes, with regard to child protection, will have to be consistent with the Child Protection Committee practice.

Although the voluntary organisations rarely have to directly deal with child protection cases, they will still have to apply the quality standards and be subject to inspections. In other words the organisations will have to have a policy document and a code of practice for dealing with child protection.

The second presentation by **Frances Young**, the Home Link Manager, focused on her organisation's experiences with regard to child protection. Home Link has been in operation for 20 years and often comes across families with a child/children on the child protection register. Until recently, Home Link, in accordance to its child protection policy, has participated in such cases by sharing information relevant to a child's well being and safety with child protection agencies. However, in the last 5 or 6 years, due to changes in child protection legislation, a shift has occurred in that now Home Link staff are asked to contribute to the decision-making processes.

More and more, Home Link feels under pressure to participate in child protection case conferences and be part of the decision making body, for, as stated by the Scottish Executive and generally agreed, "child protection is everyone's business".

Home Link finds that this new responsibility does not fit well with its original position of a befriending agency, giving personal and home based support to

parents. It works with hard-to-reach families - families who may be somewhat suspicious of the statutory sector but may regard the voluntary sector as non-threatening. Now, with the shift to being "part of the jury" they fear that the clients may not see voluntary organisations as impartial and wholly on their side.

Liz Notarangelo, also of Home Link, gave an example of a family whom she had helped and later had to participate in the child protection case conference for the children from the family. Subsequently, the children were put on the child protection register. There are a number of issues which Home Like had to consider as an outcome of such events:

- Will people be more reluctant to engage with organisations like Home link if they see them as part of the establishment, participating in the decision-making processes?
- Will clients deem the organisation betraying their trust if their child ends up on the register?
- If an organisation does not engage with the processes, does it lose credibility with the statutory partners?

Liz was of the view that if the situation is handled properly, the clients will continue to engage with the organisation, which is trying to help them.

2. Main Issues of Concern

The question-answer session and the discussion amongst the participants brought to the fore the following concerns:

- Within the statutory agencies there exists a lack of understanding of the size, range and role of the voluntary sector.
- There is sometimes a lack of inter-agency communication
- Often finding a route to the relevant local authority section/personnel and access to support proves very difficult
- Many voluntary groups are experiencing conflict between being neutral/independent and being part of the establishment.
- Many organisations that have a clear advocate role find themselves being pushed into the role of 'jury'
- While the voluntary sector wishes to be open it does not want to be seen as playing on both sides
- There are a number of voluntary groups who would be well suited to working in partnership on child protection issues and would like to play a role in the inter-agency work but are not invited to do so
- Many organisations are not familiar with child protection issues as they hardly ever have to deal with them

- The already vulnerable groups could become even more susceptible if they were to lose trust the people/organisations who are working with them
- Terms of engagement between voluntary sector and the statutory agencies in relation child protection are non existent or at best ambiguous
- Not all organisations feel confident about child protection. If they are confident, then they can give more reassurance to the families involved
- The voluntary sector is increasingly being drawn into the enforcing role and there is a real danger that it could be seen as an ASBO enforcer
- In this climate of decreasing funding, putting a child on the protection registration could easily be used as a tool to get more resources for child/family as a priority
- In 2004-05 835 referrals were made of which 350 were put on the child protection register. Currently there 270 children on the register. Are children being taken off the register due to a shortage of resources?
- There appears to be a fundamental lack of trust between the statutory and voluntary agencies leading to reluctance in sharing information
- A huge variation across the city in the way child protection and other relevant agencies operate and relate to voluntary groups leads to some excellent to very poor practices in inter-agency working
- Child protection is everyone's concern but there is a shortfall in the understanding of the issues and the ability to implement the policies in the voluntary sector.

3. Recommendations

High-quality collaborative work between some voluntary groups and some statutory agencies is already happening. There is a will in the voluntary sector to expand this good practice. To assist the voluntary sector improve their input in the field of child protection, a starting point, the Forum participants believe, would be to address the concerns outlined above collectively with the statutory sector. Therefore the recommendations are that the following be undertaken as a matter of priority:

1. Raising awareness amongst the statutory sector partners with regard to the range, breadth, and diverse role of the voluntary organisations working with children, young people and families
2. Provision of joint training that is more fitting to the needs of both the voluntary and the statutory sector agencies involved in child protection
3. Establishment of a consistency of approach across the city with regard to the statutory agencies communicating, information sharing and involving voluntary organisations in child protection
4. Development of comprehensive terms of engagement for voluntary sector involvement in child protection

5. The Eke-Out Project to record good and bad practice/experiences of Network organisations involved in child protection issues with statutory partners on a regular basis.

The above recommendations will be reported to the Network Executive for action at the March 2006 Committee meeting.

4. For Information

The City of Edinburgh Council has two officers working directly on child protection issues:

Martin Henry
Child Protection Officer
Edinburgh City Council
Tel: 0131 554 4301

Ann Mitchell
Child Protection Training
Edinburgh City Council
Tel: 0131 469 3377

Child Protection Structure

Edinburgh, Lothian & Borders Executive Group
(ELBEG)

Co-ordinating Group

Child Protection Office
(covering Edinburgh, Lothian & Borders)

Edinburgh Child Protection Committee

Locality Sub-Groups

e.g Training Sub-Groups