



**WE LISTEN, WE SUPPORT,  
WE TAKE ACTION**  
For Scotland's vulnerable  
children and families

# Call for Expert Evidence on Reform of Childcare Provision in Scotland

For 130 years, as the RSSPCC and now as CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup>, we have campaigned for every child in Scotland to enjoy a better start in life and for no child to grow up in fear of abuse and violence. We will continue to be a strong public voice for vulnerable children and young people in Scotland, listening to them, to influence public policy and attitudes. Then, now and for another 130 years, as long as Scotland's children need us.

CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup> has 63 local services and five national services across Scotland, and we work closely with many local authorities as well as working in partnership with other organisations. All our services are child centred and the children, young people and families we support are key partners in all aspects of our work.

CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup> are pleased to provide written evidence to the Commission for Childcare Reform to help shape the focus and strategies of this important long term agenda of childcare reform in Scotland.

## Flexible and family-focused childcare

CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup> believe childcare should be universal, but that this should not come at the cost of more specific services desperately needed by Scotland's most vulnerable families. Mainstream nursery is not the right option for all, especially the vulnerable families that we work with who benefit from specialised support and care.

A clear challenge is to ensure that childcare provision in Scotland is truly flexible and family focused. CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup> know from the work we do with children in their early years and their families, that the most vulnerable families often need more specific supports, including work addressing parenting skills, family relationships, attachment and child development, and substance misuse. This support needs to be flexible, delivered in the home if needs be, and available on a one to one basis. It needs to be asset based and allow the parents to learn and develop from it.

CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup> provide a family support and childcare service to parents and carers in the west of Scotland which supports vulnerable families who may have parenting issues, be subject to substance misuse or who need advice. As part of this service we also provide childcare for children aged 0-5 years alongside a parenting program. The childcare service follows the Pre-Birth to Three curriculum and is registered with the Care Inspectorate, with the children beginning the transition to nursery school at age three in a family room attached to the nursery. This is an important service for vulnerable families who may be concerned and need help with the transition to state nursery. By working with families at their own pace, and recognising their individual needs, we help to make this transition seem less daunting. Additionally, without this childcare provision parents and carers would be unable to attend the parenting programme, which looks to develop parent/child relationships, improve parenting

practices, and encourage friendships between parents. The parents and carers who access this service tell us that it provides a valuable opportunity for their child to communicate with other children, but also provides support to the whole family and takes some pressure off family life.

CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup> provide other services in the west of Scotland that are aimed at new and expectant mothers affected by substance misuse and deal with a wide range of issues including poverty, mental health and domestic abuse. Where appropriate, the services will also target support at other family members including spouses, partners and other children within the household. We know that some parents and carers who have a history of substance misuse don't want to access mainstream nurseries or childcare because they fear being stigmatised. Part of the work we do in here is to build up their confidence, supporting and promoting positive relationships and interactions between a parent and child based on our understanding of the importance of attachment.

For many vulnerable families, these are the types of services that children need to continue accessing if they are to be "school ready" and just as importantly, have a better start in life. Outcomes data for parents who have engaged successfully with our services shows that often they are ready to take up training, further education or work after participating in our parenting programmes and receiving support.

However, staff at our services have highlighted that there isn't enough support of this kind to meet the needs of vulnerable families across Scotland. They told us that some parents and carers living in rural areas have to travel up to 70 miles to access the childcare or specialised services that they require, while the parents themselves told us that 'rural and social isolation' was a major challenge for them and their communities.

CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup> provide the National Kinship Care Service and we know from the work we do that many kinship carers in Scotland have specific childcare support needs. Some children in kinship care have complex support needs relating to the abuse and trauma experienced in early life, with some developing needs relating to attachment. Many kinship carers tell us that due to the support needs of their children, they have had to give up work to care for their children. Here, we could perhaps help these kinship carers by providing the right childcare support which is specific to the needs of the family. Many kinship carers are retired, and some tell us that caring for their children can be a struggle without family support networks and friends and family to help them that younger parents and carers may have. Here, access to respite and affordable after school care, sports clubs and other extra curricula activities for children in kinship care may help support these families.

CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup> would like to see a childcare strategy that takes into account the differing needs of families and children, and the provisions and availability of these services.

### Working in Partnership

CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup> believe that when providing any kind of support to vulnerable children and families it is vital to work with partners in the community, including the

Local Authority, health and education services, and other (third sector) organisations, using all the resources available and avoiding duplication of services. Our childcare service in the west of Scotland operates as part of the Parents in Early Education Programme (PEEP), which helps parents and carers create the best start for their children by offering a range of services including baby massage, bookbug, developmental milestones and bonding classes. Moreover, delivery of these resources is flexible and needs based with staff travelling to homes in rural areas where required. This type of partnership working should continue and be extended across Scotland, ensuring that the needs of communities are met and a range of services are provided to compliment childcare provision.

### Need for a child centred focus

While it is important that childcare provision in Scotland should be flexible for parents and carers, helping both parents be able to work to support their family, it is vital that the approach to childcare provision in Scotland should not just focus on the needs and interests of parents and carers, but also take what is best for the child, and their needs and interests as primary consideration.

Childcare needs to be developed which promotes and safeguards the wellbeing of children. It should develop learning and social interactions and should prepare children for education while taking into account the support needs of each child. When needed it should also provide parents with support as well as the confidence and skills to work when they are ready. Family support services such as those provided by CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup> can be crucial to give vulnerable children a better start in life. All childcare should be provided on the basis of what is appropriate for families' individual circumstances and should be focused more predominantly on ensuring that all children enjoy a better start in life.

### Childcare is not just about Early Years

CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup> provide ParentLine Scotland, the confidential helpline and email service for anyone concerned about a child. Parents and carers who call ParentLine tell us that the need to improve availability of age-appropriate and affordable childcare for older children is also a major issue; childcare is important throughout childhood and is not limited to early years. This also requires policy attention.

Childcare is not just a pre-school issue and arguably, for many families, becomes more acute when their children start school if there is no age-appropriate childcare in their area or no after-school club. Moreover, from our work with vulnerable children, young people and families, we know how difficult accessing appropriate and affordable childcare during school holidays can be. It can have a major impact on the ability of parents and carers to take up and sustain work. What is needed is a child-centred approach to childcare that will enable the provision of "wrap around care" that meets both children's and families' needs.

## Increase availability and affordability of after-school and out of school care and activities

Local Authorities should utilise and develop sports clubs, arts clubs and other extra curricula activities for children out of hours of school. Ensuring that they are cost-effective, and accessible to families can help children's wellbeing, health and development as well as providing a form of "childcare" after school hours for children (albeit this may not help parents and carers work patterns if children cannot be directly transferred from the school to the club).

Through our National Kinship Care Service we know that the issue of respite is very important to kinship carers and will be for other parents and carers too. Respite can be considered in terms of extra support for children, such as provision and free access to breakfast clubs, after school clubs, and access to leisure passes, youth clubs and extra curricula activities. Encouraging schools and the local authority to organise and invest in extra-curricular clubs and activities could offer a valuable source of respite for carers, and improve family relationships. However, clubs made available during the school holidays and over the summer also need to be affordable. It would be appropriate if kinship carers and families on low income could receive discretions to allow them to access these services, if this is not already in place. We know from our services that breakfast clubs can be particularly important to vulnerable families with children who don't have a good breakfast and turn up to school and nursery hungry. It is important that these breakfast clubs are offered as a free service rather than means-tested to avoid issues of stigma.

Additionally, childcare remains too expensive for many families. The increase to 600 hours free early learning and childcare will help as long as this is easily accessible, but more could and should be done to reduce the cost of childcare. The Family and Childcare Trust's Scottish Childcare Report 2014 found that childcare prices are increasingly becoming unaffordable. Over the last year, the costs of all forms of under-fives childcare have risen above the rate of inflation in Scotland, and even part-time childcare costs more than the average mortgage. Moreover, there is a huge variation in childcare costs between local authorities in Scotland, where a parent buying part-time nursery care in the most expensive local authority would pay £3,341 more every year than its cheaper neighbour.<sup>1</sup> Childcare costs in the UK also compare unfavourably with those elsewhere in Europe. In 2012, only Swiss parents contributed a higher share of their salary than British parents, who on average spent 26.6%.<sup>2</sup>

## High quality workforce

Parents and carers who use our services told us they want reliable and consistent childcare that is provided by staff that are trustworthy and approachable. To raise the standard and quality of childcare provision it is vital that staff are highly skilled and have been encouraged to obtain the best possible qualifications. At the same time, it is important that this workforce feel they are valued and rewarded with good pay, to

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<sup>1</sup> [Family and Childcare Trust, The 2014 Scottish Childcare Report, pp. 3-4](#)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2012/may/21/child-care-costs-compared-britain#data>

ensure that there is extra incentive to work to the highest possible standards when delivering childcare services.

CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup> believe that the childcare currently offered in Scotland does not always meet the needs of families and children, particularly those that are vulnerable and require extra support. We need a childcare strategy for Scotland that recognises the needs of individual families with provision that is flexible enough to be offered when and where it is most needed.

Additionally, the focus of any childcare provision should be on how it will benefit the wellbeing and development of the child, rather than focusing solely on getting parents and carers back into work. At the same time, greater attention should be given to providing age-appropriate childcare. Pre-school provision is undoubtedly crucial for many families, but there needs to be more recognition of the childcare needs of older children who are in danger of being overlooked. This can be partly remedied by increasing the availability and affordability of childcare, particularly after school and during school holidays.

Moreover, in order to maximise resources and avoid replication of services, childcare providers should work in partnership with organisations to create a greater range of services for vulnerable families and children, ensuring that they receive the flexible and needs-based care that they require. There are good examples of this currently operating in Scotland, and this should be continued and extended across the country moving forward.

For more information about the issues in this briefing, or about CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup> and any of our services, please contact the policy team at [policy@children1st.org.uk](mailto:policy@children1st.org.uk) or on 0131 446 2300.