

**THE EARLY YEARS
FRAMEWORK
LEARNING
TOGETHER**

POSITIVE START, POSITIVE OUTCOMES

**A REPORT BY
HM INSPECTORATE
OF EDUCATION**

2009

HMIe

improving Scottish education
leasachadh foghlam na h-Alba

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ISSUES

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Experiences in early childhood are critical to future development and achievement. The negative effects of poverty, poor health, poor attainment, unemployment and low expectations are sadly still too common in Scotland. Together, we need to get it right in the early years to enable vulnerable children and their families to have the more positive early experience which will improve their life chances.

In the HMIE report *Improving Scottish Education 2005 to 2008* we said:

“Individuals, establishments and services cannot on their own deliver what is required in today’s demanding context.”

It went on to include the priorities below for partnership working:

Priority One

Strengthening partnerships across sectors and services in ways which create a unified learning and support system that eases progression for learners.

Priority Two

Ensuring that education plays its full part in taking forward the *Getting it Right for Every Child* (GIRFEC) approach, actively seeking and embedding the behaviours which will sustain effective partnership working.

Priority Three

Enabling parents to play a stronger role as partners in their child’s learning and development.

This document continues the theme of partnership working as fundamental in the delivery of the *Early Years Framework*. It covers two key purposes. First, it sets out issues which need to be taken forward together to turn the *Framework's* ambitions into a reality. Second, it highlights a range of case studies, showing how the principles of the *Framework* are being delivered across services and communities in Scotland. These offer examples of how the lives of children and families have been transformed as a result of dedicated staff working together for improvements. The implementation of the *Framework* is at the very early stages and, therefore, impact on service delivery is still patchy. It is encouraging to note, nevertheless, that much good work is being done already within existing budgets and services.

All those working with young children will want to support the vision and aspirations for children and families outlined in the *Early Years Framework*, using the principles and purposes of GIRFEC to deliver the improvements needed. This document will be of particular interest to councils, services and voluntary organisations when they are looking at ways of taking forward the *Early Years Framework*.

HMIE will continue to evaluate provision, and identify, collate and disseminate good practice in the implementation of the *Early Years Framework*. Further work will focus on specific areas highlighted in children's services, workforce training and qualifications, and collaborative working to ensure consistently high quality in early education and community learning and development.

Graham Donaldson
Her Majesty's Senior Chief Inspector
HM Inspectorate of Education

**“WHAT HAPPENS
TO CHILDREN IN
THEIR EARLIEST
YEARS SAYS MUCH
ABOUT OUR
SOCIETY AND IS
KEY TO OUTCOMES
IN ADULT LIFE.”**

THE EARLY YEARS FRAMEWORK

On 10 December 2008, the Scottish Government and Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) launched the *Early Years Framework*. The *Framework* is intended to improve the life chances of Scotland's children and tackle inequalities by targeting the early years. The *Framework* sets out a radical shift away from a culture of crisis management to early intervention. The key priority is to develop longer-term solutions that support children and parents. This means channelling resources into services for children, young people and families who are vulnerable or at risk, and providing them with support before problems arise or become serious. It also aims to build greater resilience by promoting strong, functional and well-supported families. We know that the early years represent a golden opportunity when positive action can have the biggest influence on a person's life.

Two other frameworks from Scottish Government form part of the drive to create a better future for our

young people. *Equally Well* reports on health inequalities, showing the impact of key factors such as poverty and poor housing on overall health and life expectancy, and identifies the importance of intervention in the very early years. *Achieving Our Potential* tackles poverty and income inequalities with the aim of increasing the overall income earned in Scotland and, particularly, raise it for the lowest 30% of earners.

To support the development and introduction of the *Early Years Framework*, HMIE undertook tasks on each of the key draft themes, made focused visits to centres and analysed inspection evidence from 435 early years inspections, 48 community learning and development inspections and 32 inspections of services to protect children. We also used evidence gathered from inspections of education authorities. This work continued after the publication of the *Framework* in December 2008 through our inspection programmes.

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Publication reference

Early Years Framework
[www.scotland.gov.uk/
 Publications/2009/01/
 13095148/0](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/01/13095148/0)

Achieving Our Potential
[www.scotland.gov.uk/
 Publications/2008/11/
 20103815/0/](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/11/20103815/0/)

Publication reference

Equally Well
[www.scotland.gov.uk/
 publications/2008/06/
 09160103/0](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/publications/2008/06/09160103/0)

INTRODUCTION

At the same time, with an emphasis on exploring the outcomes for families and communities, HMIE also identified the impact of participation in family learning and parenting programmes on raising attainment and wider achievement.

This report shows where effective practice already exists across Scotland in making positive starts for children to help them have positive future outcomes. The examples highlighted show the benefits in learning, inclusion and improved access to services for children, families and communities that result from participation in early intervention and family learning programmes. The report also shows the need for better co-ordination of services and resources.

The *Framework* is ambitious and it will take time to deliver the full extent of its benefits and outcomes. While acknowledging the scale and complexity of the task, there exist many early years centres and other services already working successfully

to deliver the key transformational elements. Scotland's children are entitled to have the best possible start in life. They should have every opportunity to be safe, happy, healthy, active, nurtured and responsible. They are entitled to be included, respected and well educated and be ambitious for their futures¹.

Within the *Framework, Curriculum for Excellence* is seen as an integral part of achieving this success. The principles of the new curriculum set clear expectations of the shift in emphasis for children's and young people's entitlements and achievements in their education.

This report looks at each area in turn of the *Framework* and shows how a coherent approach and more effective collaboration can help deliver better services for children and families. The report contains a number of case studies which exemplify the success of centres, services and communities in taking forward some of the key transformational elements.

Publication reference

Curriculum for Excellence

[www.scotland.gov.uk/
Publications/2008/06/
06104407/0](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/06/06104407/0)

¹ *Getting it Right for Every Child* (GIRFEC), the Scottish Government 2008

In all of the case-studies, staff gave high priority to achieving the best outcomes for children and their families.

The projects, approaches used, and ideas presented here will enhance planning and discussion at council level and in early years centres and schools, and with other key partners working together to deliver the *Early Years Framework* outcomes in line with GIRFEC principles. They will facilitate decision making and priority setting for implementation of the *Framework*. Many of the projects demonstrate how effectively and efficiently education authorities have managed to focus on the early years, particularly in times of increasing demands on resources. Many have successfully re-allocated existing resources to early years services to facilitate a wide range of innovative projects.

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Reference information

Examples of practice can be found on the HMIE and *Journey to Excellence* websites. Links to some of these and to key documents are made throughout the report.

**“A GOOD
BEGINNING
MAKES
A GOOD
ENDING.”**

1 A coherent approach

“It is essential that Government and its partners are working to a coherent agenda so that children and parents receive consistent rather than confusing messages...”

Early Years Framework

All councils have begun the task of planning and prioritising services through their Single Outcome Agreements (SOAs) with Scottish Government. They have aligned and worked with their community planning partners in producing their SOA. This is providing greater opportunities for services to give better support to the needs of children, their families and communities. Already, SOAs across Scotland are making specific mention of the *Early Years Framework* and how the community planning partners plan to work together through the GIRFEC method of delivery towards improving outcomes for children. They are all beginning to align strategic planning across service commitments and link the evaluation of coherent delivery. There is evidence of an increase in family learning and parenting skills programmes.

In implementing the *Framework*, greater consistency of approaches and delivery will be needed across councils and their planning partners. Improved merging of community plans and integrated children’s services plans offer opportunities to bring together health, education, social work, housing, the voluntary (third) sector and economic development. Leadership skills of people and partnerships are critical to manage successful partnership working. Equally essential is the commitment by all of those involved in services to have an understanding of their shared responsibilities. This is being done already in councils which have taken forward audits of the range of their work, and have been successful in involving in the process those who deliver and use the services.

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From practice

The council regularly sought the views of children. With the help of voluntary services, the views of vulnerable children were gathered successfully in imaginative ways, using focus groups, drama and workshops. Children contributed well and influenced the development of the Integrated Children's Service Plan. As a result of this success, a pilot to involve children more in social work policy development was being introduced.

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With clear direction and purpose from council management and the community planning partners, a coherent approach is developing for those working in services and using them. Effective practice in a coherent approach shows how local communities and parents are empowered to take action.

Points for reflection

- How do you integrate with other services in a coherent way to plan and improve outcomes?
- In what ways can you measure improvements through working in a coherent way?

Points for reflection

- How well do you engage all those working in and using services in the decision-making process?

**A coherent approach which supports parents to make a difference for children
Perth and Kinross Council**

CASE STUDY 1

Perth and Kinross council and its partners share a clear and ambitious vision. Their vision reflects local needs through the community plan. They have agreed the Single Outcome Agreement for the area. The council's vision is supported through effective strategic planning founded on an ambitious corporate improvement agenda.

The shared strategic vision is reflected in the council's and its partners adopting a coherent approach to delivering services to children and families. One example of this is the council programme which provides support to children and engages and involves parents at all stages of their child's life. The programme adopts a coherent inter-professional approach, based around common values. It is delivered as a key element within a wider community regeneration development. The regeneration includes building new houses, schools and community facilities and forms part of the community plan and the Single Outcome Agreement. The programme involves the full range of staff in supporting parents, including headteachers, teachers, community link workers, community learning workers, nurture group staff, school support staff and health promotion workers.

Support uses formal contacts with parents such as nursery to P1 transition, parents' evenings, parenting skills groups, and workshops on handling children's and teenage behaviour. The programme also uses informal opportunities that take place in schools and community facilities such as literacy and computing groups, return to work sessions, family learning activities, and clubs and holiday activities for children.

Impact for parents and families
The coherent working approach in this programme has led to benefits for children and families. Parents feel happier and less isolated and better able to overcome times of crisis and worry. Getting support with basic needs has allowed them to give more energy and time to their children. They are more confident in being able to handle change and transitions, and do more things with and for their children. In addition, they have gained skills through adult learning and are now achieving and attaining qualifications.

2 Helping children, families and communities to secure outcomes for themselves

“...for almost all children responsibility for parenting must lie with the parents, supported by communities and services as required.”

Early Years Framework

Local communities are capable of identifying for themselves the type of services they need in their area. Early years centres which work with a wide range of partner agencies in the community to improve the work of the centre have positive outcomes for the community and families.

Success is achieved where agencies work together with parents and the community to create and develop services. This kind of joint working encourages members of the community to work alongside staff and share responsibility for providing a quality service. Families gain an increased awareness and access to community facilities and organisations work together to support the community.

Many education authorities have implemented a range of successful initiatives to involve and increase groups of parents in supporting their children’s learning. Examples include partnership working with libraries, encouraging fathers to play a more active role in their child’s learning, and support to families and children for whom English is an additional language. Through this kind of involvement, families are encouraged to increase the number of activities they share and enjoy, such as reading together, visiting the library and visiting new places of interest. They improve their capacity to communicate with their children.

From practice

Challenge Dads was successful in involving fathers in actively supporting their children’s learning. It developed the self-confidence of parents involved, in enriching their relationships with their children, and in supporting their progression to further education, training and employment.

Learner’s voice

“For me it was life changing. My lack of drive and focus has turned around completely and now I feel so positive about my life. Instead of accepting my fate of being a robotic single parent, I have an amazing amount of ambition and determination to succeed. Instead of wishing I had a better life, I am making a better life for myself.”

Family learning can have a positive impact on children and families, with benefits that extend beyond adults, children and families and into the local community. These benefits can be seen in helping parents in their parenting role and promoting social inclusion. Critically, parents develop more confidence to tackle family situations. Parents, particularly single parents, gain confidence and self-esteem and, in some instances, their employability skills improve. Gaining more understanding and knowledge of the education system leads parents to become more interested and involved in their own children's education. Their increasing understanding of children's development helps them to recognise and support their children's educational progress. The family as a whole can benefit from one or more members taking part in family learning activities.

Although the main motivation for many adults' participation in family learning is the support of their children's learning and development, participants often go on to address their own learning needs. They improve their own skills in the areas of parenting and communication, in literacy and numeracy, and develop an interest in and commitment to learning.

Children can then benefit from 'positive role model effects' when their parent undertakes further learning. Children are likely to gain from an increase in household income if their parent moves into employment as a result of participation in family learning.

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Points for reflection

- How knowledgeable are you about the range of adult learning facilities in your area?
- How can you share this information with parents and families?
- How well does your service organise and welcome parent and family involvement in learning?
- In what ways could you encourage more parent participation in learning?

**Woodlands Nursery Centre
and Family Unit
Fife Council**

CASE STUDY 2

Woodlands Nursery Centre caters for children aged two to five years. It has two nursery buildings with a Family Unit housed in a separate building within the nursery grounds. The unit also provides vital early entrant places for children under three. Partnership with parents and effective working with a wide range of agencies provides high-quality support for children and families. Significantly, support is also given to families in the community whether or not their children attend the centre.

The Woodlands Family Unit works to address consequences of social issues such as deprivation, unemployment, low expectations and lack of confidence.

There is a positive impact on the development and care of young children and families. Work undertaken by the Unit includes parenting skills, health and nutrition support and budgeting advice. It supports access to a 'credit union' and a community food cooperative.

Impact for parents and families

Family Workers in the Unit have established effective links with a wide range of local support services and voluntary agencies. The Family Unit recognizes the importance of engaging with parents at the earliest stage in a child's life to allow appropriate support strategies to be identified and implemented. The effects of this are longer lasting than the length of time families are involved with the nursery and, in turn, make Woodlands Nursery Centre a vital community resource.

Publication reference

[www.ltscotland.org.uk/
curriculumforexcellence/
sharingpractice/
hmieltsgoodpractice/
index.asp](http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/curriculumforexcellence/sharingpractice/hmieltsgoodpractice/index.asp)

**(PEEP) Parents Early Education
Programme Child Development
and Learning course**
Workers Education Association

CASE STUDY 3

PEEP includes *Making the most of your children*, an SQA-accredited programme, closely aligned to the national *Birth to Three* guidance. It offers support for community parent groups and gives formal recognition to the vital role parents and carers play as the most influential educators in the early years. The programme explores parenting and child development in the context of the family. It encourages personal development through the natural interest parents have in their children's learning and in using the home as a learning environment. Essential to the success of the programme has been the development of a comprehensive training unit. This training unit advises Community Learning and Development (CLD) managers and practitioner trainers on how best to deliver PEEP within community programmes.

3 Breaking cycles of poverty, inequality and poor outcomes in and through early years

“The period between pregnancy and three years old is increasingly seen as a critical period in shaping children’s life chances. It is therefore a critical opportunity to intervene to break cycles of poor outcomes.”

Early Years Framework

Inequalities appear early. Social issues, such as deprivation, unemployment and low expectations, impact on the development and care of young children and families. Crime statistics show correlations on the influences on crime where, for example, a high percentage of those who have committed murder were from broken homes, had been in care and had problems in school. This reinforces the message that vulnerable children, including looked after children, need particular support and nurture in their early care and education.

Identifying and intervening at the early stages is much less costly than waiting until the young people are in their teens and needing crisis interventions. The average cost per week for a secure placement for a young person in Scotland in 2007/08 was £4,500. Saving even a fraction of these costs can release significant

resources for reinvestment in prevention and early intervention. Teenagers who have had poor experiences themselves of the care system, and those with no qualifications are more likely to become pregnant at an early age. More recent developments have focused on early and effective intervention to match children’s needs with appropriate, proportionate and timely support. These include improving outcomes for looked after children, following the *We Can and Must Do Better* report and the implementation of GIRFEC approach. When early intervention works well, support workers are available to respond flexibly to meet the individual needs of families who are experiencing difficulties in caring for their children. Families can then engage with and establish relationships with a range of agencies, including health and social work. Benefits accrue for children when their parents and families are supported pre- and post-birth and when the baby has a placement at a nursery centre.

Publication reference

Looked After Children and Young People: We Can and Must Do Better

[www.scotland.gov.uk/
publications/2007/01/
15084446/0](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/publications/2007/01/15084446/0)

From practice

Midwives in one health authority identified a high number of women with a range of social problems and complex needs in pregnancy. As a result, they developed a joint health and social work partnership programme. Midwives worked very closely with addiction and mental health staff as well as social workers and support workers. They identified risks and needs and planned individualised support for the women to improve outcomes for children. Pregnant women received a range of support through a local one-door service. Risks to unborn children were assessed and plans put in place to protect them and meet both their own needs and those of their families.

Health for All (Hall 4) has been a key policy change which re-focused the health visitor service on more vulnerable children and families, while still retaining an element of universality. However, not all vulnerable families access the support of regular health visitors. Younger parents are less likely to attend ante-natal contacts and classes. Their babies are less likely to be breastfed, and more likely to suffer asthma, have accidental injuries and be subjected to tobacco smoke in the home. By age three, there can be up to a year's difference in child development and there is a strong link to deprivation. NHS Quality Improvement Scotland is taking the lead on behalf of Scottish Government, in developing for vulnerable children and families a multi-agency and multi-disciplinary approach to accessing better 'pathways' to ante-natal, post-natal and early years support.

Points for reflection

- What creative ways have you found successful in reaching out to families at a very early stage?
- How successful is your service in working with vulnerable parents in their homes?
- How can you develop the support for vulnerable families and children in your own service?

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Paisley Threads, supporting teenage parents
Barnardo's

CASE STUDY 4

Paisley Threads is a Barnardo's Project which runs a service for young people under 21. One very important aspect of the work is support for prospective and new mothers. The project was set up to respond more effectively to the particular needs of teenage mothers who feel unable or lack confidence to use the regular pre-natal service. The pre-natal group in the project draws on support from health service midwives and group workers at Paisley Threads. Young mothers-to-be are given support through their pregnancy and in preparation for parenthood. The joint working approach with health visitors has been very successful in helping

new, young mothers to be more confident as parents.

Paisley Threads also helps young mothers to address a range of social issues such as financial and housing advice, and return to education or into employment.

The work undertaken has enabled a number of young mothers to continue their education. Effective partnerships with other agencies, access to childcare and encouragement to return to school or college is a significant positive feature of the work of Paisley Threads.

M's Story

M was 16 weeks pregnant and still at school. She was referred to the project by her mother who had heard about the work through a friend. M was an achieving student but was having difficulties at school from her peers. She was embarrassed about being pregnant and had been in denial. Project workers established positive relationships with her, at all times being supportive and non-judgmental. M began to attend the pre-natal group to build her confidence and self-esteem. M also had support with education. She had thought, initially, about leaving school to go to college due to issues with her school peers but, by the end of her pregnancy, she was more confident and was supported to stay on at school. After the baby was born, project staff provided help with child care which was essential for M to continue her studies. M is a strong advocate for Paisley Threads and has helped by organising a successful peer led breastfeeding group at the project. She has gone on to university much more confident about her future career path.

R's story

R was 15 and several weeks pregnant when referred by the family home link worker. Home circumstances were difficult. R's mother was anxious about the impact of the baby on their situation. She was supportive of R's education but needed to work and would be unable to help R with childcare. Project staff supported R to come to the pre-natal group, which she did regularly, finding the support and practical help invaluable. A nursery place was organised when the baby arrived and this was to be provided as long as R remained at school to gain Higher awards. R's financial situation and home life has stabilised with advice and support from project staff. Her confidence has grown and she feels more empowered to take control of her future education and career as a result of her connection to Paisley Threads. R has returned to school to complete her 6th year with a view to working towards a university place to study Community Learning and Development.

Publication reference

[www.ltscotland.org.uk/
curriculumforexcellence/
sharingpractice/
hmieltsgoodpractice/
index.asp](http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/curriculumforexcellence/sharingpractice/hmieltsgoodpractice/index.asp)

4 A focus on engagement and empowerment of children, families and communities

“At the heart of what needs to change is a new attitude to the importance of parents and parenting, particularly in the period before birth and the very early years of life. Parents themselves must understand the importance of that role for their children’s well-being and development.”

Early Years Framework

Information on this element of the *Framework* highlights issues in supporting and encouraging ‘hard-to-reach’ parents and families. Tackling the issues involves working with parents, carer grandparents, and other kinship carers who are experiencing difficulties in the home or community and in engaging with services.

Positive examples of support exist and can be replicated in other areas using practical approaches with families, parents and their children. At an early stage, health visitors are able to establish links with families in their own home and, through this, to identify priority areas to support. This may involve, for example, nursery staff helping the parent and child to access care and education. This joint approach provides families with the opportunity to establish relationships with key

workers in their own surroundings where they feel most comfortable.

It also enables the visiting agencies to see family/child relationships within the home. Support services need to work together in innovative ways to engage ‘hard to reach’ families and source necessary funding to deliver appropriate services.

Parents’ services initiatives in health promotion, speech therapy and parenting skills are being introduced in many councils. Parents are offered and provided with a range of materials, ideas and parenting workshops to encourage early involvement in support services and help them to support their children’s learning at home. Early years/ family centres can also offer a non-threatening location for parents to access services from other agencies such as police, health visitors, dieticians, and oral hygienists.

Positive relationships and trust between pre-school staff and parents have proved beneficial in working with individual families on strategies to support play and deal with children’s challenging behaviour.

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OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

Staff have been able to help families and carers in using the strategies by visiting at home, discussing, modelling playing with their children and providing encouragement. Parents and families become more confident in dealing with their responsibilities for child care and more aware of child development. Parents have a better understanding of the role of different agencies and are less anxious when interacting with a range of professionals.

Continuing the involvement and support can be difficult to sustain as children and families move through the 'system'. Joined-up practice between early years provisions and schools is not consistent and the good practice started in pre-school may not be in place to maintain the benefits of support into the school years. Sustainable funding is also an issue for employing family support workers in early years centres and in nursery classes. Private and voluntary providers find it more difficult to organise their own family link worker, or access council family support workers.

Quote from member of staff in centre

"Families experience difficulty in engaging with multiple agencies for the same issue. They have to 'tell the same story' to a number of agencies such as housing, benefits, social work. This causes frustration and can lead to disengagement. It increases the workload of staff as they are often the link between the agencies."

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To be successful, such approaches have to be flexible to meet the needs of individuals and families as they change over time. Ongoing training in multi-agency approaches, in line with GIRFEC, is essential for all agency workers if they are to provide:

- A more child-centred system with heightened focus on the child's needs
- A greater focus on effective outcomes for children
- More effective collaboration between agencies
- A more integrated approach across agencies
- The reduction of institutional, cultural and procedural barriers to joint working

Points for reflection

- How well do you support the whole family in your services?
- Do you check that your provision and links with other agencies change to meet current needs of your users?

Points for reflection

- How are users of your services involved in planning early intervention?

Whitdale Family Centre
West Lothian Council

CASE STUDY 5

Whitdale Family Centre is in an area of deprivation. It caters for children birth to five years and also offers an out-of-school care service for children up to eight years of age. Over a period of time, there had been a significant number of families with social problems. The experienced headteacher had built up strong partnership working with a range of other professionals and services.

The headteacher realised that many families with very young children would benefit from support to ensure that they had the best possible start in life, including help to take full advantage of opportunities such as pre-school education.

She also recognised the importance of joint working between education, social work, health and relevant voluntary organisations. She wanted to ensure that the specific needs of families with children aged birth to three were met within a more cohesive service for all parents and children. A further target was to improve the health, wellbeing, development and education opportunities of children and families by creating a flexible, needs-led service accessible to all families and adopting a multi-agency approach in the community. The centre wanted to ensure high quality education experiences for young children and also to improve their life chances and achieve social inclusion.

The range of services in the centre was planned to meet, in a single location, the needs of the targeted and vulnerable as well as the universal population. Parents and families were identified in a variety of ways, including by professionals in consultation with parents, health visitors or midwives, and by parents self-referring. Through advertising, all parents in and outside the catchment area were made aware of groups on offer within and beyond the centre. Partnership working provided the opportunity to plan and implement a wide range of activities at all levels which led to effective outcomes for all parents and families. Importantly, a multi-agency steering group, comprising the headteacher, social policy managers, health staff and senior managers from education, monitored progress towards effective joint working to ensure the building of parenting and family capacity.

Impact on parents and families

Delivering care services and family support (targeted at the under threes) in the same building as pre-school provision for three and four years olds blurred the distinction between targeted and universal provision and helped to remove any perceived stigma from using services. This resulted in improved parental confidence and self-esteem leading to parents feeling more empowered. Parents became less anxious about interacting with professionals and saw them as there to help. The centre is able to 'signpost' parents to any other service they might require to support their child.

**Mellow Parenting
Inverclyde Council**

CASE STUDY 6

One of the key priorities of the Integrated Children's Services Project in Inverclyde was the development of integrated family support services. Initial discussions between services highlighted the need for an expanded range of parenting programmes for highly vulnerable families. After examining several options, Mellow Parenting was chosen as an appropriately intensive programme. Social services commissioned the delivery of Mellow Parenting training, resulting in a pool of 24 facilitators from psychological services, health visiting, the voluntary sector and family support workers from early years and social work services. Three intensive 12 to 14 week

programmes were developed; Mellow Babies, Mellow Mothers and Mellow Fathers. Each group involved three cross-agency facilitators.

Impact on parents and families

All parents taking part in the programme were very positive about its benefits. They said that it had helped them understand the influence of their own childhood experiences and significantly improved their parenting abilities. They felt calmer. In turn, their children were calmer. Parents were confident they had a wider range of strategies to manage their children's behaviour and could interact with their children in a more positive way. In particular, fathers were helped to realise the contribution they could make and gained new confidence and skills to build positive relationships with their children. Parents spoke highly of the supportive and positive relationships they had built with staff in the groups.

5 Using the strength of universal services to deliver prevention and early intervention

“The power of universal services in securing engagement is key. Too much of recent investment has gone into small-scale projects bolted on to universal services rather than build capacity of the core services that children and families come into contact with on a regular basis.”

Early Years Framework

The *Early Years Framework* sets out high ambitions for early years and early intervention at a time when education authorities cannot rely on large amounts of new money being available to implement the framework. The *Framework* outlines the disadvantage for children from vulnerable groups and the necessity for early years preventative and early intervention services to reduce this disadvantage. Universal services, particularly health and education, have the potential to reach all children and families.

The vast majority of parents want to do the best for their child. Sometimes they may not know what the best is or how to achieve it. It is crucial that parents know and understand that

parenting is the most important, as well as the most difficult job that they will do. All parents need access to support them being good parents, as and when they need it. This is not about taking over the role of parents, but rather supporting them in their role and making best use of the family, peers and the community. Improved partnership working across universal services provides the opportunity to deliver effective outcomes for all parents and families.

The range of services in early years centres varies considerably and can often meet the needs of both targeted and vulnerable groups, as well as the universal population. For example, in many establishments the introduction of Nurture Groups provides extra support to children with social and emotional difficulties and helps raise their self-esteem.

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Nurture groups offer a carefully planned programme of broad-based experiences in an environment which gives children security, routines and clear boundaries.

Peer mediation and mentoring schemes operate successfully in many primary and secondary schools and help young people to develop a sense of responsibility towards others. The establishment of Early Years Teams within education authorities has led to improvements in service delivery and positive outcomes for children. Staff on these teams share good practice through visits to establishments, and implement effective professional development programmes. Examples include assistance in developing early numeracy and literacy strategies, as well as workshops to explain how parents could support their children's learning.

Sustainability of such joint working depends on the quality of relationships among the professionals working directly with children, young people and families. This is particularly the case for health and education workers and police supporting families in school and in the community. All professionals working with young people aged 14 to 25 need to be aware of the importance of early intervention at this stage, with the potential for improving employability and health and reducing teenage pregnancy and crime.

Developments, such as the expansion of pre-school hours, have the potential to benefit all children, but they are particularly valuable in increasing the capacity of universal services to intervene early. High quality pre-school provision is essential in supporting those most at risk of missing out.

"substantial numbers of children and young people from vulnerable groups do not sufficiently develop their skills, attain or achieve qualifications".

HMIE ISE2

The Impact of Nurture Groups in Primary Schools

[www.hmie.gov.uk/
documents/publication/
ingps.pdf](http://www.hmie.gov.uk/documents/publication/ingps.pdf)

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Areas for support will include family planning, parenting capacity and skills, health (including mental health), childcare, education, family learning, employability, play and leisure and to build resilience at every stage.

A number of education authorities and establishments have successfully introduced effective measures to monitor children's progress at individual and group level, with a clear focus on identifying and taking action in relation to the lowest-achieving 20% of young people. Effective practice has to be developed in making mainstream services focus on inclusion and be more responsive to meeting learning needs. The presence and deployment of resources such as community link workers, home-school partnership officers, and Joint Support Teams is too patchy and inconsistent across council areas. The quality of transition from one sector to another impacts

on the continuity of support, particularly for vulnerable children and their families. Careful and well-planned support for children moving from pre-school into primary school is particularly important. The early level of *Curriculum for Excellence* will help staff deliver more coherent outcomes and experiences for children aged three to six.

More needs to be done through prevention and early intervention to reduce the impact on children of parental substance misuse. Partnership working is crucial in such circumstances between early years centres, schools, police, primary health care and specialist services to reduce addiction. There needs to be the capacity to provide additional support and early intervention for families facing greater challenges, whether on a temporary or more long-term basis.

Points for reflection

- How can you ensure inclusion and meeting needs are at the forefront of your work?
- Are there ways to reduce the inconsistency of access to key resources in local authorities, including staffing?

Points for reflection

- How are you planning to use *Curriculum for Excellence* to deliver high expectations and coherent support for vulnerable children?

**Early Learning Unit, Hamilton
South Lanarkshire**

CASE STUDY 7

The Early Learning Unit caters for children from six weeks to five years and is open all year round. It houses both a mainstream and specialist provision which work very closely together. The centre is particularly focused on providing an integrated service within the community. It caters for children who have mild and more complex and severe needs, as well as providing mainstream provision for children aged three to five years. Staff within the unit have received specialist training in additional support needs and also in caring for children who require medical assistance throughout their session. A very wide range of multidisciplinary services work with the unit, including speech and language therapy, visual impairment and other specialist learning support teachers, psychological services, occupational therapy and physiotherapy, community nurses, a paediatrician, social workers and parent and child support workers.

The unit provides a supportive environment for children with the earliest identification of any additional support that may be required. It offers an effective, inclusive, early years service which embraces the role of parents and supports them with high quality services. Specialist, trained staff ensure a range of medical needs can be supported within the unit. Because their children have full-time centre places at the centre, these parents have been able to go out to work. Home-visiting services support parents in recognising their child and family needs and how to access relevant services.

Parents of children with additional needs can experience many barriers. Friends and relatives may have difficulty in understanding the issues the parents face as well as the needs of the child. The Parent and Child Support Group within the unit was set up by parent and child support workers to provide a positive forum for families to support each other.

Campus Police Officers
Glasgow City Council

CASE STUDY 8

Strathclyde Police identified a need to help children feel safer within their schools and local communities. In particular, it aimed to improve its engagement with a small, hard-to-reach group of young people and to reduce offending and anti-social behaviour. Campus Police Officer posts were established in selected secondary schools within the council area. The posts were jointly funded and recruited by Strathclyde Police and the education service. Campus Officers Forums included education service staff and provided opportunities to agree on local priorities for action.

Campus Police Officers played a full part in the Integrated Support Teams within their schools. This provided valuable opportunities for them to share their knowledge of individual children and families within the wider community with staff from other key services. As a result, planning for vulnerable children was better informed. The involvement of the Campus Police Officers strengthened the impact of restorative practices in some schools. The Officers had set up a number of effective diversionary activities, including cycling clubs. As a result, a number of children have learned new skills, gained confidence and reduced offending behaviour.

Transitions At All Levels
Laburnum Nursery Centre
North Lanarkshire

CASE STUDY 9

The staff team at Laburnum Nursery Centre recognise and value the importance of having positive and smooth transitions for children at all stages. There is an emphasis on putting into practice very successful transitions for children starting nursery, moving from one room to another, to a new establishment and when going to primary school.

Before a child starts at nursery, staff offer parents either a home visit or an open day to meet the child and their family and begin to form positive relationships. This approach provides the child's key worker with the opportunity to engage in play with the child, pass on relevant information to parents and discuss the child's learning at home. This information is used to build on children's previous learning to ensure that they get off to a positive start.

Staff continue to share information about each child's achievements ensuring continuity and progression in children's learning. Staff development is an ongoing feature of work within the nursery whereby staff are encouraged to extend their knowledge and qualifications.

Regular opportunities are planned for staff within the centre to share good practice and engage in reflective discussions about how to improve the work of the nursery.

Very effective multi-agency working and planning assist in providing a positive transition when a child is moving to another establishment. There are effective approaches in place to support children who are moving on to primary school. Nursery staff play an integral part in supporting children in this move. A particularly successful transition calendar ensures key events are planned for and take place throughout the year. Visits are arranged for P6 children who are 'buddies' to come and read to the children and support them when they move to school. Mutual arrangements are in place for staff to work together in the nursery and in school. In this way, teachers can meet the children and work with key workers to support the children in their first days at school. Nursery staff have made a major contribution to discussions and good practice on active learning through play in the early stages of the primary school. This has had a significant impact on children's learning, achievements and attainment in P1. Staff use consistent and effective approaches which enable all children to transfer smoothly from pre-school to P1.

Publication reference

[www.hmie.gov.uk/
documents/goodpractice
1.%20GP1%20-%20
Transitions%20at%20all%20
levels%20Laburnum%20
Nursery%20Centre.doc](http://www.hmie.gov.uk/documents/goodpractice1.%20GP1%20-%20Transitions%20at%20all%20levels%20Laburnum%20Nursery%20Centre.doc)

6 Putting quality at the heart of service delivery

“Early years research consistently highlights the quality of services and relationships as being the single biggest contributor to outcomes from early years services. Poor quality services waste resources and are a missed opportunity. The skills, knowledge, attitudes and qualifications of the workforce are a key focus in improving quality, and the mix of those skills is also critical. We want the best people working in early years where they can have the biggest impact on outcomes.”

Early Years Framework

At present, staff working with children in pre-school centres have a range of levels of qualifications. A stronger focus is needed on developing a wider skills set to prepare staff to work with other professionals and engage in partnership working to support families and communities. Continuing professional development has to reflect the new skills set needed within the voluntary, private and council sectors. There are early signs of staff accessing training to help support their skills in working with other agencies and build on partnership working. Benefits to staff and children are evident when staff have a strong commitment to continuous professional development. Through attending certificated courses as well as non-certificated training, staff develop their expertise and learn about new initiatives. In best practice, they share their learning and expertise with others to improve

outcomes for children and families. An increasing number of early years staff are pursuing nationally accredited additional qualifications. There are improvements in the range and quality of professional development opportunities across some councils. The introduction of degree-level childhood practice standards is already resulting in significant numbers of manager-level staff accessing these work-based courses. The registration requirements and Continuous Learning Framework of the Scottish Social Services Council for all staff working in early years services has been a key driver in staff seeking qualifications. There are signs of staff increasing their engagement with *Curriculum for Excellence*, taking a lead in developing flexible and challenging learning experiences for children. There is continued need for higher level and relevant qualifications for staff to deliver this curriculum.

Clare's story

Clare has been working in Early Years for 13 years. Her studies began in college where she gained national qualification in Childcare and Education. Her studies and ongoing commitment to continuing professional development has developed her approach to working in early years to improve the quality of children's experiences and learning. This commitment led Clare to undertake a BA degree in Childhood Practice. She soon found herself immersed in a range of new information. Clare recognised the impact this was having on the way she was working with children. She shared with her colleagues the knowledge gained from her BA studies about the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the importance of Article 12 (children's right to participate and be heard). As a result, she and the staff team understood more fully the importance of consultation with young children. This helped develop their approaches to the involvement of children, including forming a 'Children's Council' in the nursery.

To embark on degree study takes passion, enthusiasm and commitment as well as support from colleagues and council. Clare is proud of her achievements in this part of her journey and has grown in confidence about her own role and the importance of working with others.

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LEGAL ISSUES**

Curriculum for Excellence needs teachers and other well-qualified staff to engage fully in the implementation of principles and practice, as well as the outcomes and experiences in this transformational national initiative.

Scottish Government is committed in its concordat with local government to improving early years provision with access to a teacher for every pre-school child. Recent guidance for local education authorities makes this clear. Education authorities are, overall, supporting this commitment. However, there are still inconsistencies in whether teachers are deployed, the extent to which each child has access to a teacher and how teachers' skills and expertise are used to support other staff in centres. Some councils have removed full-time teachers from pre-school settings in order to share their expertise across a wider number of partner centres. This, in turn has meant much reduced access in some centres to a teacher. Many partnership centres have only limited or inconsistent access to a teacher with much variability in the contribution and impact of the teacher when present.

The early years is a sector where parents can make their first steps to training and gaining qualifications which can then lead to a career in childcare. Helping in their child's playgroup or nursery can nurture the enjoyment of working with groups of children. Across Scotland, many workers in the early years sector have started in this way. Many others come into the early years direct from school, often with few school qualifications but with the ambition to work with children. This approach can be very positive in supporting people into work and, in turn, result in benefits to the economy. However, their training needs to take place in high-quality centres or services with highly effective practitioners and leaders to ensure the best professional development takes place.

Points for reflection

- What steps can you take to build expertise and skills in your role?
- How well do you support employees or colleagues to achieve relevant training and development and secure qualifications?

Points for reflection

- What opportunities can you take to share in training with colleagues in allied professions?
- To what extent are staff engaged in professional development to implement *Curriculum for Excellence* as part of supporting the *Framework* principles?

**Training parents as
crèche workers**
Midlothian Council

CASE STUDY 10

This high quality training programme had provided an opportunity for many adults to take a first step to re-engage in learning and employment. Community Learning and Development (CLD) staff organised the training and provided very effective support and guidance for learners. Participants gained a qualification which led to employment as crèche workers. Many had moved on to other learning as a result, including further and higher education. They reported gains in confidence and self esteem and improved family relationships. They were able to use their experience to enhance their own parenting skills through a greater understanding of child development.

**Using the collective skills
of staff to support families,
Springvale Nursery
North Ayrshire Council**

CASE STUDY 11

Springvale Nursery Centre offers a high quality service to children and families from various backgrounds. The experienced staff identify needs and empower vulnerable families through universal and targeted services. By using North Ayrshire Council's Integrated Assessment Framework, staff adopt a systematic approach to meet individual family needs. Parents, nursery staff and other professionals are continuously engaged in planning and evaluating services to ensure the best possible outcomes for families.

Individual work with families can take place in the family home, local community or within the nursery centre. Time spent with individual parents or carers provides support in a variety of ways, for example accessing resources, modelling adult-child interactions, referring to appropriate agencies, using the advocacy service, accessing health appointments and accompanying parents to local community groups and further education.

Parents and carers are able to get further support and advice through joining specific groups such as fitness classes, play sessions, computing classes, healthy lifestyle group, Fit Ayrshire Babies and health visitor groups.

As a result of this skilled intervention, the nursery can demonstrate improved support by targeting services to vulnerable children and their families. Respect and effective collaboration is the key to their success in working with families to make a more positive impact on children as learners.

Publication reference

[www.hmie.gov.uk/
documents/goodpractice
1.%20Springvale%20NC%20
0Good%20Practice.doc](http://www.hmie.gov.uk/documents/goodpractice1.%20Springvale%20NC%20Good%20Practice.doc)

7 Services that meet the needs of children and families

“The availability, accessibility and flexibility of services are key components in meeting the needs of children and families.”

Early Years Framework

There are a number of ways that staff from local authorities and community planning partners can work with children and families to develop services that meet needs. In best practice, there is a willingness to engage and listen to the voices of children, young people, families and communities. This willingness needs to happen at strategic levels and allow service users to be involved in the development and design of services. It is important to keep to the principle that it is the **child who should be at the centre of the service** and to consider and reflect upon the nature and experience of child-centred services from the child’s point of view.

A willingness to listen to and engage with distinct groups of service users can lead to the development of new, more tailored services to meet needs and aspirations in line with GIRFEC principles. The Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 has considerable potential to increase family involvement in learning in schools and in other family learning programmes.

From practice

CLD staff in home-school partnership programmes had significantly improved learners’ confidence and their ability to engage in learning. This increase in confidence had, for example, led a small number of individual parents to assist in the development of the school parent council in their local primary school. Others were currently training to be classroom assistants with a view to gaining future employment. As a result of participation in the programme, learners were now starting college and engaging in voluntary activity.

Publication reference

The Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006

www.opsi.gov.uk/legislation/scotland/acts2006/pdf/asp_20060008_en.pdf

EFFECTIVE PRACTICE IN THE TEN ELEMENTS OF TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE

The examples highlighted in this section show a range of practice where service providers engage with their users and their local community to innovate and develop new services. The continuing challenge is to learn from these innovations and spread practice across professional groupings and community planning partnerships.

Points for reflection

- How flexible and accessible is your service to respond to the needs of users?
- How well do you balance the needs of parents with the needs of children in your provision?

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**Involving parents in the design
and development of services**
Aberdeenshire Council

CASE STUDY 12

The establishment of Esslemont School is an example of partnership working across professional boundaries, agencies and disciplines. It involved the Early Years Forum, the Autism Network and the community-based adult learning group among others. The area has an above average number of children on the autistic spectrum and the school was developed in response to the need identified by parents for local services.

Partnership working was essential in collating and analysing information to identify need and support the joint resourcing of provision at Esslemont School. This included pinpointing a suitable venue, working together on fund raising for equipment and commissioning and supervising the refurbishment and adaptation of the building. The development also led to professional development to enhance staff's skills for this highly specialised area of work.

***Daisy Drop In* community shop
West Lothian Council**

CASE STUDY 13

Many parents had been unaware of the services available to them in the Craigshill area and identified the need for a central information point. Parents were invited to 'dream something better' for the community and then write their thoughts on a large duvet cover. A shop unit in the local Craigshill shopping centre was rented and a launch event of the *Daisy Drop In* took place. Over 400 local people, on the mailing list for locality planning, were invited. The appearance of an actor from a well known children's television programme helped to draw a large crowd. The *Daisy Drop In* has since developed in partnership between parents and services in the Craigshill area. It is staffed by a coordinator and provides a central location where parents and children can attend activities and access information on all services relating to early years work in Craigshill. Parents who engage in this service have a stronger sense of community as a result.

More positive outcomes for the neighbourhood of Craigshill include the increased confidence of local people to engage with service providers and to manage services themselves. This new confidence is further evidenced by the creation of a community council for the area, something which had never existed before. The West Lothian Children's services Management Group Early Years plan has also been heavily influenced by the Craigshill locality planning process.

**Coffee Groups at Goodlyburn
Integrated School
Perth and Kinross Council**

CASE STUDY 14

The *Coffee Groups* at Goodlyburn Integrated School offered parents a well designed, progressive and supportive structure to facilitate their return to learning. The groups used personal learning plans and negotiated learning content to suit learners' needs. These projects provided learners with appropriate challenge. For example, in the *Coffee Plus* group, learners were undertaking peer review of their learning and were developing curriculum vitae in preparation for employment. While some parents were moving into employment opportunities in education as classroom assistants, others were finding employment in the wider labour market.

8 Improving outcomes and children's quality of life through play

"We need to ensure that parents, communities and professionals recognise the value and long-term benefits of play and to promote how critical play and the arts are for children's development."

Early Years Framework

Play is a central part of the development of all children. The parent and family are the first playmates for the child and it is here that the child learns through watching, participating and experimenting in the home. The children's learning through play builds from interactions with parents in the home to exploring the wider world. It then develops in learning activities in playgroups, nurseries and in the early years of school.

For the child, play is natural and encourages a sense of experimentation on their own as well as interaction with parents, family, peers and the wider community. The world of play can be a natural setting for introducing and encouraging early literacy and numeracy as well as socialisation with others.

Play takes place in settings that must be safe yet encourage the child to take carefully controlled risks. For many parents, this can present a challenge as personal circumstances may mean that the child is growing up in an environment where there is a high risk of accidents. As a result, many parents do not feel confident enough to play with their child and to encourage learning through play.

From practice

The nursery offered parents and carers a short programme on home safety with the pre-five age group. It also provided a well-stocked bank of equipment such as safety gates, socket blocks and cupboard locks that parents could use in their own homes to enable children to play safely. This service was highly valued by families who were unable to afford this equipment.

Creating spaces for play

The process of engaging the wider community to support play and provide interesting spaces for play and playful learning is essential. The importance of Play is recognised in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in which Article 31 enshrines the child's right to play. There are clear benefits from providing and maintaining public play space in the community for children. Many children in urban environments have few opportunities to play outside. Areas set aside for that purpose help children to become confident in an outdoor setting and learn how to take risks while keeping themselves safe.

It prepares them for more challenging out-of-school activities, such as sport or joining one of the uniformed organisations for young people. The successes and wider achievements can lead to award programmes such as the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme and establish a positive habit of engaging in outdoor pursuits that can last into adult life. Some councils have worked with charities and the community to provide new facilities in the local neighbourhood. Others are supporting schools and pre-schools in initiatives such as forest schools.

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**Housing partners developing
play spaces
North Lanarkshire**

CASE STUDY 15

At Gartlea, the community council set up a separate group, Gartlea Children Playing Safely, to progress the project. In Petersburn, the local housing association (Link Housing Association) brought in their charitable arm, Link Wide, to consult with the community on the play provision that the association needed to offer as a planning condition. Out of this, the Petersburn Development Trust was formed, supported by the council's CLD and Play Services staff as well as Link Wide workers. At Caldercruix, there was an existing youth and community development project that wanted to improve the play facilities in the village and, at Craigneuk, it was an existing Community Regeneration group who identified the lack of play provision as an important issue for them.

Parents engaged in a variety of activities dependent on the existing skills and experiences of the group. Examples included committee skills training and the CVS financial management course. Other activities were more specific to the project such as consultation events and community surveys, research about play generally and play area design. Such activities included site visits and meeting other groups who had built and managed community play areas. Parents developed their play area design with Play Services and a landscape architect, met potential funders and submitted successful funding applications.

**Clentry Nursery School:
learning outdoors**
Fife

CASE STUDY 16

Clentry Nursery School wanted to ensure that children had regular high quality learning experiences outside as well as inside. They extended children's learning by developing an exciting and challenging programme of daily outdoor learning experiences. As a result, staff are able to support children's progress even more when outside in a wide range of areas.

Staff include frequent visits to Blairadam Forest where children are encouraged to be active, use their senses, take risks, make mistakes and learn from them. They enjoy trying new activities like orienteering where they can use their literacy and numeracy skills to help them look at simple maps and signs. Staff encourage children to experiment with science and technology resources outdoors.

Children gain movement skills in more challenging balancing and climbing activities. They learn how to be safe using the hill slide and when riding wheeled toys on their own marked roadways and roundabout in the nursery grounds. Parents are keen supporters of all of these activities and often work alongside staff to support their children.

Staff see the benefits of learning outside where children can experience real life and imaginary situations. Children learn to use different strategies and develop positive attitudes to the outside world around them. Staff know that by engaging children and their families in meaningful outdoor play they grow in confidence, have better self esteem, social awareness, independence, and improved physical and mental wellbeing. Parents are learning to respond to their children's needs and interests and they now feel more confident about involving them in outdoor activities.

9 Simplifying and streamlining delivery

“If we are to improve outcomes, then community planning partners will need to place a particular focus on joining up delivery around children and families.”
Early Years Framework

There are many examples of effective multi-agency delivery from councils across Scotland where staff from different professional backgrounds in family centres, schools or nurseries and short-term projects. Each profession takes the lead on its specialist area of activity, for example education professionals leading on educational programmes.

What are less common at present are inter-agency approaches where staff re-think methods of working together with hard-to-reach groups or challenge existing professional mindsets that can act as barriers to achieving positive outcomes for children.

Professional training has a key part to play in supporting inter-agency work at strategic level. The work of multi-agency committees and Chief Officers Groups involved in child protection offers useful insights into possible future developments. Funded pre-school education for three-to-five year olds means that almost all of this age group come into contact with universal services and any intervention and support can be coordinated. However, this is not the case for the younger age group from birth to three.

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Traditionally, this is the age range where younger and less experienced staff have been deployed in day care provision. Much more needs to be done to bring the expertise of the early years staff and services together to ensure vulnerable children are not missed at this very early stage of their development. Particular improvements in support for birth to three services are highlighted in the *Early Years Framework*. The *Equally Well* programme takes this area of work further with opportunities for local authorities and their community planning partners to explore.

Taking the service into the community through a community development approach is an emerging area of work. This approach does not focus upon the service professionals but is based upon the development of the child at the centre of the whole community.

However, family learning is not included as part of the outcomes of Community Learning and Development in *Delivering Change: Understanding the outcomes of CLD*, produced by Communities Scotland in 2007. The Community Empowerment Action Plan 2009 makes limited mention of early years and family learning work. This leaves room to develop understanding of the role of family learning programmes in delivering outcomes for community engagement and empowerment further. Traditional forms of community work with the focus on small groups of adults need to broaden and reach out to engage with the wider work that is ongoing with children, families and communities.

Points for reflection

- How well do you work in an inter-agency approach?
- What model of working would best meet the needs and circumstances of children, families and communities in your area or service?

**Hailesland Child and
Family Centre
Edinburgh Council**

CASE STUDY 17

Hailesland Child and Family Centre is a community-based resource committed to promoting the welfare and early learning of vulnerable children and families by providing an inclusive, flexible service, maximising individual potential. Referrals to the centre are made through other agencies. Vulnerable children are identified through partnership arrangements with the local nursery school and through the centre's work with families in the community. Admission of children to the centre is through the admissions panel.

The centre has a strong interagency approach. Services are tailored to meet the individual needs of children and families. The families who use the centre are invariably 'hard to reach' and may not have had positive experiences of contact with services. Many are affected by drugs and alcohol addiction, mental health issues, family breakdown and isolation and high levels of poverty. Parental involvement and engagement has improved assessment and early intervention to improve outcomes for children.

The centre has developed creative ways of addressing the needs of children and families in a holistic and integrated way. Services are delivered flexibly and through careful case planning. Senior staff identify and use the skills and expertise of individual staff to maximise the impact of the centre's work. Staff development and training is integral to this. At points of transition in and out of the centre, reviews are conducted and information handed over, for example, to the nursery school. The nursery school headteacher can then make decisions about resources to deliver the levels of support needed for children and families.

North Ayrshire Council

CASE STUDY 18

The local council has extended its provision for children aged birth to three and now provides very effective support for a significant number of children requiring a priority nursery place. Multi-agency partnership forums have been set up to ensure that professionals can work together to plan more effectively the support for children. Community nurseries provide safe, stimulating and fun environments for young children and also offer support for parents either as individuals or as groups. Programmes for parents involve colleagues from health, social services and addiction prevention services, thereby streamlining access and delivery of services.

10 More effective collaborations

“There is an almost universal view that partnerships between the public and private and third sector providers could and should work better.”
Early Years Framework

This report started the ten elements of the *Early Years Framework* with a Coherent Approach. This tenth element returns to the theme of working together. This report has highlighted the range of work that is ongoing at local level. A significant proportion of work in early years, early intervention and family learning is undertaken with the community and voluntary sector, in particular in childcare and childminding. Much of this work has developed to meet local needs and circumstances with support from charitable foundations that work with children in the early years. Partnership with parents and effective working with a wide range of agencies can provide very good support for children, parents and families within the community. However, it does not always allow children, families and communities to connect to the wider range of support services available at local or national levels.

Better partnership working is needed across statutory and community/voluntary sectors to share and access services for children and families. To develop this approach, strategic integrated working will have to increase with the community and voluntary sector. There is still further work to do to build upon the GIRFEC regional and thematic pathfinders.

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This approach to partnership is likely to become increasingly prevalent. The financial situation for councils is challenging and likely to remain so for the next several years. The relevant partnerships present a number of challenges in that they do not always link to the strategic planning frameworks such as single outcome agreements or community Plans. For councils and their community planning partners, this may require building a more strategic form of Service Level Agreement with an associated focus on service commissioning for community and voluntary services.

Scottish Government is presently seeking to direct the community and voluntary sector and other parts of the Third Sector, such as social enterprises and local co-operatives towards increased links to Community Planning Partnerships. At the same time, Scottish Government is seeking to quantify the impact of these types of partnerships using tools such as Social Return on Investment³, to gauge the social return on the public pound. *Equally Well* will also take us into new territory of both strategic approaches and delivery mechanisms.

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Points for reflection

- In what ways can you work more closely with the community and voluntary sector?
- How can you help to move from a patchwork of services to a more strategic and collective approach?

3 Strategic return on investment. Policy into practice. American Public Human Services Association (APHSAs) tools for organisational effectiveness.

Borders Parenting Programme
Borders Youth Trust

CASE STUDY 19

This programme was led by YMCA Scotland in partnership with three primary schools and one secondary school, with parents, with Scottish Borders Council (as part of its More Choices More Chances Strategy) and with the Robertson Trust. Through the programme, young people who were at risk of disaffection with school were identified in primary schools. Those identified were then referred during their P6 school year to *Achieve Your Potential* programme. Their parents were engaged in the same programme.

Successful management and delivery of the work was achieved through training and supporting teams of volunteer youth mentors and family monitors. Strong, supportive relationships were developed between volunteer youth mentors and children. Alongside this, family monitors were established in each family to support parents and keep an eye on the progress and development of the young people over each school term.

Teams intervened where appropriate to remove obstacles to healthy development and provide support for parents when requested. A key principle to the success and positive feedback from all involved was in maintaining the relationships and support programme over the two year programme. Collaborative working had the direct benefit of helping the children involved to achieve their potential.

Summary

It is very encouraging to report on the good work already being done across Scotland and in the range of sectors and services involved. Key lessons can be learned from this work which in many cases was under way before the final publication of the *Early Years Framework* in 2008. Others will be encouraged by the variety of approaches in the case studies to build on their own practice to improve the outcomes for children.

Success in improving children's lives means everyone has to acknowledge the rights of the child as enshrined in United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Too often the needs of the adult or the profession get in the way of putting the child at the centre in health and wellbeing.

The report has shown where improved capacity can provide additional support and early intervention for families facing greater challenges. Staff working in all mainstream services for children

and young people must recognise their responsibilities and also have the expertise to meet the needs of those at risk of exclusion. Dependence on short-term support will not deliver the results. Sustainability is key to supporting vulnerable children and their families. A commitment 'to be in for as long as it takes' is needed to prevent the initially high level of effort and investment dwindling as 'at risk' children move through universal services from birth to school.

The importance of the early years is widely recognised. Extensive research findings exhort policymakers and providers to give our young children the best provision and support. But the reality is still that many of our youngest and most vulnerable children are looked after in services with the most inexperienced and least qualified staff. The developments of improved qualifications for the early years workforce in recent years are very encouraging and over time can make a difference to the quality of management and services.

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SUMMARY

That will not happen overnight and support from well qualified staff will continue to be needed to bridge the gap. Those professionals currently working in the sector need to be able to share their expertise, particularly where services need to improve.

Higher expectations, better training for staff and coordination of community support will help communities to help themselves. The essential is positive partnership working across different services involving frank and open dialogue, and a recognition that no single service can meet all needs. This will need a stronger focus on staff developing the right skills set to work effectively with other professionals to support families and communities.

The report gives due recognition to those already committed to delivering the very best for children and their families, often in challenging circumstances. The work of these individuals, services and voluntary groups already benefits many children and families. The time is right to share their successful strategies more widely.

Scotland's future economic prosperity requires all those working with children and families to have the knowledge and skills to help children and young people develop socially, emotionally and educationally in order to thrive in this 21st century.

Curriculum for Excellence provides everyone with a common direction for this work, with its emphasis providing every child with a broad general education with high quality learning and achievements in and beyond the school. All have an important part to play in giving Scotland and Scotland's children the excellence which they need. All who work with and for children have to take collective responsibility as a community of educators. Working together and making best use of opportunities will ensure that each child can have a positive start with positive outcomes.

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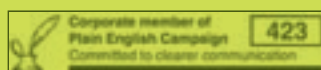
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