

WORKING TOGETHER FOR CHILDREN'S WELFARE

A RESIDENTIAL CONFERENCE
HELD AT CUMBERLAND LODGE
SEPTEMBER 1989



Report No.4: Restoring Confidence in a Context of Change and Confusion

The many recent cases of child abuse have highlighted the difficulties of restoring confidence, given the prevailing context of change and confusion, and this year's theme was chosen with the aim of strengthening the understanding of the need for restoring confidence, and the methods of effectively restoring confidence, and of producing some constructive guidelines for dealing with child abuse.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations and statements submitted to the Department of Health:

As a result the conference endorsed a number of statements and recommendations:

- Child abuse will not be prevented until the whole community acknowledges children's rights and needs. The prevention of child abuse is a community responsibility and not the prerogative nor the responsibility of any single professional group or agency.
- Current educational reforms provide an excellent opportunity for including personal and social education in the national curriculum for all children.
- All professional groups need to give urgent attention to the implications of the forthcoming Children Act for working together in a co-ordinated inter-disciplinary way. **Special attention needs to be given to:**
 - ensuring that procedures are developed for undertaking assessments of children, where appropriate under the terms of a child assessment order and that urgent responses are available for emergency protection orders.
 - developing an inter-professional definition of significant harm and the criteria within care proceedings.
- All agencies must recognise that there will be anxieties in dealing with the new legislation and must develop strategies for dealing with them. They should identify where extra resources will be needed and act accordingly. Area Child Protection Committees should forthwith consider how to give effect to the need for training on the new

legislation and how to ensure that, in a time of change and uncertainty, standards of inter-professional co-operation do not decline.

- The Department of Health should gather and disseminate, and agencies should be required to provide, reliable information, within a short space of time, so that it may be used expeditiously to inform and develop current policy and practice.

Examples of such information would be:

- statistics about the movement of children in care
- outcomes for siblings in care
- numbers of cases of children at risk not allocated to a social worker
- the existence of policies on trans-racial adoption or fostering.
- To facilitate proposal 5 the Department of Health should set up a Resource Centre to collate and disseminate information and draw together current work, under the guidance of a National Advisory Group.
- Each agency with responsibility for the health or welfare of a child should appoint a person at senior management level, responsible for keeping abreast of, and critically appraising, research, government circulars and guidelines and changes in the law. This person should advise the head of the organisation of the relevance of these matters to the policy and practice of the organisation and ensure that information about changes is disseminated and understood.
- Greater attention should be given to the views and wishes of users (both children and their families) in the planning of new developments, the monitoring of existing services and the redirection of out-dated facilities.
- Agencies must give training a central position in their organisation rather than a peripheral one. The objectives of the agency need to be congruent with training for all levels of personnel. Consumers of services relating to children should notice that there is a difference in the service provided as a result of the training.

- A multi-disciplinary group should be appointed to undertake the monitoring and evaluation of training programmes in relation to child care on behalf of central government. It is important that one department is made responsible for this and that it receives the active support of other departments.

CONFERENCE SPEAKERS

David Mellor QC MP, Minister of State for Health
Arnon Bentovim and Gerrilyn Smith, Institute of
Child Health Training Project, The Hospital for
Sick Children, Great Ormand Street

Alan Gilmour, recently retired Director, NSPCC

The Hon. Mr Justice Johnson, Family Division

Adrienne Jones, Director of Social Services,
Birmingham

Barbara Kahan, Chairman, National Children's
Bureau

Andrea Pound, District Psychologist, The
London Hospital

Alison Norman, Locality General Manager, Health
Visitors' Association, *Primary Prevention*

Brian Roycroft, Director of Social Services,
Newcastle

Wendy Stainton-Rogers, Institute of Health, Welfare
and Community Education, The Open University

Paul Sutton, Project Director, Birmingham Action
for Child Care

Bill Utting, Chief Inspector, Social Services
Inspectorate

Richard White, solicitor