



**The Michael Sieff Foundation**

Working together for children's welfare

# **Michael Sieff Foundation Conference**

## **From Conception to Reception**

**22 – 24 September 2008, Cumberland Lodge**

### **Recommendations from Discussion Groups**

#### **GROUP 1: FAMILY CONTEXT GROUP**

To understand a child's needs it is essential to understand their family context and its' impact on parenting and the child.

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Policy developments should encompass the following points:

- Support to parents and the family should start pre-birth with the 'family in formation'.
- We would emphasise the importance of early years universal services which: (a) provide continuity and (b) help to identify those who need targeted services that provide tailored support for parents and families. An excellent example of this would be employers providing work-based opportunities for parenting training and support.
- To recognise the importance of the role of the family context and wider network requires a systemic approach to understanding the family network including their resources and vulnerabilities. We commend the development of approaches which facilitate, understand, use and support the resources that exist within families and note the value of multidisciplinary approaches that use systemic methods to support assessment and service provision
- We support access to a range of interventions that:
  - are evidence-based and therefore have the best chance of being effective
  - where practitioners are trained and supervised to use the interventions effectively
  - where different levels of need are recognised and responded to
- A key factor in effective service delivery is a meaningful and respectful practitioner-parent relationship that (a) supports the development of positive parent-child relationship and (b) which is based on a belief in parents' wishes to do the best for their child



**GROUP 2: EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT**

- 1. Promote Positive Interaction between Child and Parents and Parents and Children**
- 2. Pre-school Day Care which Respects Children**

**1 - PROMOTE POSITIVE INTERACTION BETWEEN CHILD AND PARENTS AND PARENTS AND CHILDREN**

This perspective should be valued within:

- The Community/Neighbourhood
- Universal Services
- Targeted Services

Through a Shared Understanding of:

- Child Development
- What Makes a Child Happy
- Terminology
- The Need for a competent Workforce with Informed Supervision
- How to Protect and Develop Expertise

Neighbourhood/Community includes:

- Media
- Government Information/Public Awareness
- Schools, Health etc

and information should be tailored for:

- people/groups who may be caring for young children e.g. grandparents, private fostering, informal carers etc

Universal Services includes:

- Strengthening Professional Appreciation of Positive Interaction
- Training, Valuing and Retaining Staff (especially HVs)



and must be done effectively in order to:

- Identify children and families in need of additional help

This requires professionals to be able to:

- Describe interactions and other relevant factors when making referrals

**Targeted Services:**

- Assessments must be evidence based, faithful to the particular instrument and include the child's experience of care including interactions
- Interventions must be evidence based, faithful to the particular instrument and include attention to the child's experience of interactions and seek to sustain strengths and repair difficulties

Groups with similar needs may emerge in different geographical locations

**2 - PRE-SCHOOL DAY CARE WHICH RESPECTS CHILDREN**

This should take account of the optimal time for each individual child to spend outside the family and requires:

- Graduate level Pedagogues;
- Supervision and Consultation informed by Practice;
- Prioritisation of the emotional and interpersonal aspects of a child's development;
- The development of creativity as a basis for life long learning;



**GROUP 3: HELPING PARENTS**

- There is a strong public health argument for universal parenting services delivered through multi-modal methods of delivery
  - By this we mean schools, TV, DVD, websites, workplaces, primary health care agencies and written materials.
  - Implicit in this is a statutory commitment to provide such help though it may be delivered by multi-agency services including statutory and voluntary sectors
- Programmes should be multi-layered, to reflect a spectrum of intensity from brief consultation to intensive services
- There will continue to be a requirement for targeted multi-agency services directed to vulnerable, socially excluded and high-need parents
- To increase the number of mothers and fathers who participate in evidence based parenting services

***Nb: recognise the need for training, fidelity in delivery and reflective supervision, but trust that the workforce group will address that***



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#### **GROUP 4: HELPING BABIES**

There should be a coherent evidence-based strategy focusing on prevention, from conception to the first year of life. We recommend:

1. A revitalisation of the universal health visiting service, with at least one pre-birth contact. HVs should be skilled / trained to assess / screen for families who need more targeted and specialist services for physical, psychological and social interventions.
2. There is recognition of the skills required from the relevant professionals who undertake these targeted interventions. A ring-fenced sufficient budget for at least 10 years will be required to underpin this, with cross-party commitment.



## **GROUP 5: THE WORKFORCE**

We would encourage HMG to apply its successes in school reform to the wider children and family workforce. HMG has raised the professionalism of teachers and the skills of the wider school workforce. They are strengthening the professional identity of teachers through the introduction of a masters degree qualification and the National Centre for Excellence in school Leadership.

1. We recommend that HMG concentrates its efforts in educating all professionals working with children and families in the core competencies e.g. child development and parenting, awareness of and respect for the role of other professionals.
2. We recommend that HMG focuses on strengthening the specialisms, the individual professional identities, eg psychology, health visiting, social work, midwifery, and early years, and funds that professional development. This would include strengthening informed clinical supervision. We consider these last two steps as indispensable if practitioners are to work effectively together to deliver improved outcomes for children.
3. We recommend that measures are taken to ensure maximum direct quality time is spent by professional with children and families. Accountability and performance management remains central to evidencing what works though they do need to be balanced with the above. It is important for the workforce that existing policies are allowed to bed down.

## **GROUP 6: RESEARCH**

1. If we are going to change lives for children through early intervention we recommend the appointment of a Chief Scientist or similar driver to build a coalition across the different constituencies in research, policy and practice. An early focus of her/his work will be the identification of critical research questions and the development of methodological skills and approaches mirroring the outcomes identified by Every Child Matters. These should reflect the highest standards of evidence, including normative and epidemiological studies, the development of single point in time data on the well being of children, as well as the range of disciplines including sociology and economics. We are concerned within this to prioritise work on effective and early interventions in family conflict and family discord and to ensure that in our concerns to improve parenting, we retain a focus on the child.
2. An early task of the Chief Scientist will be the provision of knowledge and skills to enable the intelligent interpretation of research and its application in multi disciplinary policy and practice with children and their families. This will need to address culture, systems and practice among senior managers, commissioners and practitioners, with particular relevance to using money wisely.
3. In order to get the answers we need, we are aware that some of the required research will long term and large scale and that patience will be required among commissioners and practitioners who have to operate on an annual basis. Nevertheless we must encourage researchers to be aware that wherever possible, we should identify core principles that can be embedded in all practice.