

January 2009

Action for Children Scotland policy briefing

Youth services

Children and young people are most vulnerable at times of change, such as moving from primary to secondary school, becoming teenagers, going through disruptions in their family life, and dealing with death or serious illness in the family. With the right support, children and young people can get through these difficult times. Without it, such events can present serious problems – particularly if the young person is already vulnerable.

Action for Children Scotland works with vulnerable children and young people who can face greater difficulties at these crucial times in their lives. This includes looked-after and accommodated children and young people, young carers, children affected by parental drug and alcohol abuse, disabled young people, young asylum seekers and refugees, and young offenders or those at risk of offending.



What Action for Children Scotland wants to see

We would like to see the Scottish Government set targets that are based on positive measures of emotional wellbeing – not just the reduction of harmful behaviour. Therefore we welcome the Scottish Government’s commitment on issues relating to emotional wellbeing, and hope to work with the Government to build on this commitment and to ensure these issues are addressed. Equally, we welcome the Scottish Government’s commitments to improve outcomes for looked-after and accommodated children and young people, to reduce youth offending and not to demonise young people in trouble, and to empower families involved in anti-social behaviour to break the cycle of their behaviour.

Action for Children Scotland would like to see the media portray children and young people in a more positive way. Thousands of children and young people make a real contribution to our society, but the media too often portrays young people as anti-social, out of control and threatening. Such portrayals adversely affect how most children and

young people feel about their lives. More recognition should also be given to the fact that young people are more likely to be the victims of crime and anti-social behaviour than the perpetrators. It should also be highlighted that young people who offend are often both victims and perpetrators of crime and anti-social behaviour. We need to have a positive portrayal of what it means to be young today, and we welcome the Scottish Government’s statements in this area.

Action for Children Scotland also welcomes the Scottish Government’s commitment to improving outcomes for young people not in education, employment or in training. Action for Children Scotland’s Glasgow Great Eastern Youthbuild project, the Govanhill Youthbuild project and the Inverclyde Youthbuild project are providing training and employment opportunities in the construction industry for some of the most excluded and disadvantaged young people in our society. We welcome the Scottish Government’s support for these innovative projects.

What we would also like to see

We want agencies and organisations to talk to children and young people about how the services they provide can help young people to develop their emotional wellbeing. In Scotland, children and young people have statutory rights to participate in decisions that affect their lives in a number of significant areas. We are committed to working with the Scottish Government, local authorities, health boards and other key agencies to ensure that more children and young people have opportunities to exercise these rights. As well as being consulted, Action for Children Scotland also believes that children and young people must be listened to, and have someone to talk to about their thoughts and feelings.

Action for Children Scotland wants to see the development of new services that help children cope during critical times in their childhood. We would like age-appropriate services to be available to children and young people, especially during key transitions when they need support the most. This is particularly

vital where the changes impact upon vulnerable and difficult to reach groups.

We want to improve every child and young person’s access to regular structured activities. Evidence suggests that structured activities provided by youth work providers, including local authorities, voluntary and other organisations, can reduce the likelihood of drug and alcohol problems, aggression and anti-social behaviour, and of becoming a teenage parent. They have also been shown to improve mental health and emotional wellbeing. The Scottish Commissioner for Children and Young People’s consultation on policy issues also confirmed the strong support among young people for ‘having more to do’. We welcome the Scottish Government’s strong commitment to implementing the proposals outlined in *Moving Forward: A strategy for improving young people’s chances through youth work*, and we hope this will lead to children and young people enjoying greater access to structured activities.



Who we are

Action for Children Scotland is one of the leading children's charities in Scotland, working in partnership to run more than 65 services for more than 7,000 of Scotland's most vulnerable children, young people and their families. Across the UK, we run nearly 450 services. Action for Children Scotland's services include family centres and services for care leavers and young people who are homeless. We also support children and young people who act as carers and those with additional support for learning needs, and we offer alternatives to custody for those in trouble with the law.

Our services

Action for Children Scotland works with some of the most vulnerable and difficult to reach children and young people in Scotland through our 34 projects focusing on youth services. These include counselling and mentoring services, housing support services, services that support young people with substance misuse issues, young carers' services, Youthbuild services and youth justice services.

Gael Og Mentoring Project, Inverness

This service provides support through mentoring to young people who are at risk of developing, or who currently have, a substance misuse problem. It aims to reduce the likelihood of young people misusing substances, to enable young people to make positive life choices and to reduce the harm caused by substance misuse in local communities.

New Horizons Project, Haddington

New Horizons provides supported accommodation to young single homeless people. It offers counselling, support and practical assistance with a view to achieving long-term solutions for young people. It aims to encourage the young people accessing the service to develop independent living skills, and to help them find long-term solutions to their homelessness. It also supports young people in seeking and maintaining employment and training opportunities.

Chances Project Initiative, East Ayrshire

At the Young Scot Awards ceremony in March 2008, Linda Fabiani MSP, Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture, presented young people involved in Action for Children Scotland's Chances Project Initiative in East Ayrshire with a Young Scot Heritage Award. This recognised their achievements in creating and developing the Auchinleck Miners' Memorial Gardens.

On 13 June 2008, the Minister also visited the Auchinleck Miners' Memorial Gardens, and gave the keynote speech at an event recognising the young people's achievements and the positive impact the new gardens have had within the local community. An achievement award was also given to the young people by the Provost of East Ayrshire Council, Councillor Stephanie Young, on behalf of the council.



Our services (continued)

Youthbuild

Scotland has one of the highest rates in Europe of unemployment among young people. Action for Children Scotland, therefore, welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to provide more choices and more chances for young people in Scotland, particularly the most excluded and disadvantaged. Action for Children Scotland is working in partnership with a number of local agencies to show how the problem of youth unemployment can be positively addressed for the benefit of the young people concerned and their communities, and for the wider economy, through Action for Children Scotland's Youthbuild projects.

Action for Children Scotland's innovative Youthbuild model offers training and employment opportunities in the construction industry for disadvantaged young people. This model offers a better future for disadvantaged young people, while helping to address labour shortages in the construction industry. The young people involved in Youthbuild come from difficult backgrounds, and face multiple challenges in finding work. This can include poor family support, issues around leaving care, homelessness, specific learning difficulties, alcohol and substance misuse, offending, and poor social and personal skills. Our Youthbuild services have proved successful in getting young people into work, and in helping them to move forward in their lives. An independent evaluation of the first group of 16 to 25 year olds using our Youthbuild services in Glasgow and Inverclyde found that more than two-thirds have either secured an apprenticeship or full-time employment.

Action for Children Scotland currently runs three Youthbuild services: the Glasgow Great Eastern Youthbuild, the Inverclyde Youthbuild, and the Govanhill Youthbuild, with other Youthbuild projects currently under development. These projects work on local regeneration developments and, along with local housing associations such as the Oak Tree, Cloch, Milnbank, Shettleston and Govanhill housing associations, aim to give the young people work experience on local sites where they are building homes. Other partners include Glasgow City Council, Glasgow Community and Safety Services, the European Social Fund, Inverclyde Council and Scottish Enterprise. We are also actively working with 20 large construction companies.

Edinburgh Intensive Probation Project

The Edinburgh Intensive Probation Project works in partnership with the City of Edinburgh Council's social work department. The service operates in conjunction with probation as an alternative to custody. Participants attend as a condition of a probation order and must therefore comply with the project rules or return to court for re-sentencing. The programme at the project focuses on group work, but individuals are also offered individual work where need arises. It deals with a number of issues, including offending, drugs, alcohol, relationships, gender, parenting, violence, and the consequences of offending (victim awareness).

Please contact Andrew Girvan, Action for Children Scotland's Director of Children's Services, or Paul Carberry, Action for Children Scotland's Operational Director of Children's Services, on **0141 550 9010**, if you require more information or if you would like to discuss any of the issues we have raised.

www.actionforchildren.org.uk

as long as it takes