



**House of Commons General Debate on Child Poverty in Scotland – Thursday 1
May 2008**

Key Issues for NCH Scotland:

- **NCH Scotland welcomes the commitment shown by the UK Government and the Scottish Government to reduce child poverty;**
- **Urgent action is required, however, by the UK Government, the Scottish Government, local authorities and by other agencies on an integrated basis to ensure further progress is made in eradicating child poverty in Scotland;**
- **The UK Government has a vital role to play in this process, particularly in relation to its administration of the tax and benefits system and in tackling disability discrimination. We believe future welfare reform should increase support for those most in need, including lone parents; and**
- **NCH Scotland considers more should be done to ensure that increased opportunities are available in education, employment and training for vulnerable and difficult to reach young people, including young people with a disability, looked after young people and those at risk of offending**

Levels of Child Poverty

Although the number of children living in low income households in Scotland has fallen by 100,000, many children, families and young people continue to live in poverty. It is estimated that 250,000 children in Scotland (one in four of Scotland's children) are currently still living in poverty. Furthermore, many of those living in poverty are amongst the most vulnerable members of our society, such as young disabled people. Significantly, more than 80% of parents with a disabled child are unemployed, and disabled children are twice as likely to live in poverty as non-disabled children. There is also a strong relationship between poverty and ill health. The Scottish Government's *Results from the 2005 – 2006 Scottish Household Survey* (August, 2007) confirm, for example, that households with low net annual incomes are "most likely to contain someone with a long-standing limiting illness, health problem or disability: 41% of households with a net annual income of £6,000 or less, and 51% of households with a net annual income of £6,001 to £10,000. In comparison, 12% of households with a net annual income of over £40,000 contain someone with a long-standing limiting illness, health problem or disability".

NCH Scotland welcomes the commitment shown by the UK Government and by the Scottish Government to reduce child poverty. We believe, however, that urgent action must be taken on an integrated basis by the UK Government, the Scottish Government, local authorities and by other agencies to ensure further progress is made in eradicating child poverty in Scotland. NCH Scotland, therefore, welcomes

the UK Parliament's Scottish Affairs Committee's recommendation in its recent *Child Poverty in Scotland* report (2008) that the UK Government, the Scottish Government and local authorities should build upon their existing joined-up approach to maximise the impact of their efforts to end child poverty.

Welfare reform

NCH Scotland believes that the UK Government can make a major contribution to eradicating child poverty through its administration of the tax and benefits system. We believe that any future welfare reform must secure real and significant improvements in the lives of those on low incomes. Action should also be taken to increase the availability of affordable, high quality child care support for families and single parents on low incomes. In this respect, we welcome the UK Parliament's Scottish Affairs Committee's recommendations in its *Child Poverty in Scotland* report that consideration should be given to introducing higher rates of benefit, and that more support should be made available for people who want to move into work or to return to work. NCH Scotland further welcomes the Scottish Affairs Committee's recommendation that more should be done to "increase the take-up of benefits and tax credits entitlements". We believe that action in these areas can help to raise the income of the poorest families and individuals, and to lift more children out of poverty.

Lone Parents

Although many children who are brought up in lone parent families go on to do well, many more will struggle from the difficult start they have in life. NCH Scotland's Factfile report for 2007 – 2008, which pulls together statistics on the state of Scotland's children and young people highlighted that:

- there are now 162,000 lone parent families in Scotland;
- two thirds of teenage mothers are lone parents;
- lone parents are more likely to report poor health – more than a quarter said emotional problems were making their life difficult; and
- lone parent families make up a quarter of all homeless people in Scotland.

The *Results from the 2005 – 2006 Scottish Household Survey* (2007) also confirms that 66% of lone parent households have an income of £15,000 or less; while only 20% of lone parent households have savings or investments compared to 51% of all households. NCH Scotland considers that more action should be taken to improve support for lone parents, including encouraging greater numbers of lone parents to take up their benefit and tax credits entitlement, and increasing their access to affordable, high quality childcare.

Support for young adults

The recent Scottish Government report, *Estimating the cost of Child Poverty – Approaches and Evidence*, suggests "a figure of £0.5-£0.75 billion for the direct cost of child poverty due to extra spending on services". The report also estimates "that the annual knock-on cost to the public purse of young people not in employment, education or training could be as high as another £1 billion". NCH Scotland shares the Scottish Affairs Committee's concern that, failure to improve the financial status of young adults, could significantly jeopardise the long term sustainability of recent reductions in child poverty, given the generational nature of poverty.

Scotland has one of the highest rates in Europe of unemployment among young

people. NCH 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 families, for local communities, and for the wider economy, through NCH Scotland's Youthbuild projects. NCH Scotland's innovative Youthbuild model offers training and employment opportunities in the construction industry for disadvantaged young people. We believe this model offers a better future for these young people, while helping to address labour shortages in the construction industry.

An independent evaluation of the first group of 16-25 years olds to use NCH Youthbuild projects in Glasgow and Inverclyde has found that more than two thirds have either secured an apprenticeship or full time employment. Most had no previous experience of paid work. Indeed, the young people involved in Youthbuild generally come from the most deprived and difficult backgrounds, and face multiple challenges in finding work. This can include poor family support, issues around leaving care, homelessness, specific learning difficulties, alcohol/substance misuse, offending and poor social/personal skills. NCH Scotland believes that getting these young people into work is vitally important in helping them to move forward, and to give them the financial status to ensure their children have the best possible starts in life.

The young people we work with require extra support to take the crucial first steps on the employment ladder. A key aspect of the Youthbuild model is the one-to-one support provided by NCH Scotland staff to the Youthbuild trainees to help them make the move into work. Key elements of the project focus on induction and preparation, work experience, relevant training, personal support, and core skills and development. NCH Scotland's Youthbuild projects are proving successful in securing training and employment opportunities in the construction industry for young people. This shows what can be achieved when different agencies work together to help young people take advantage of the opportunities that are out there.

NCH Scotland currently runs 3 Youthbuild services: the Glasgow Great Eastern Youthbuild, the Inverclyde Youthbuild, and 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 the Scottish Government's Youth Crime Prevention Fund, Glasgow City Council, Glasgow Community and Safety Services, the European Social Fund, Inverclyde Council, Scottish Enterprise and Communities Scotland. We are also actively working with 20 large construction companies.

Young Disabled People

Many young disabled people face material poverty and poverty of opportunity in their daily lives. NCH Scotland believes that, to help young disabled people break the cycle of poverty, more should be done to support them through the transition from childhood to adulthood. This is a difficult transition for all children, and it presents particular problems and challenges for disabled children and young people. NCH Scotland is aware, for example, that, while a great deal of service provision focuses on the needs of children aged 5 to 18, the support in many areas for young disabled people during the transition from childhood to adulthood is minimal. Indeed, apart from the provision of some short term respite care at 18, it is fair to say that young disabled people receive little, if any, support between the ages of 18 and 25. This significantly reduces the number of life opportunities available for young disabled

people, and perpetuates many of the barriers which blight their adult lives later, including poverty.

By way of illustration, NCH Scotland would like to highlight the contrast between the experience of young disabled people who are encouraged to go straight from school, where they have considerable support and a social network, to colleges where they often have little support and feel isolated. NCH Scotland considers that this transition needs to be better managed by key agencies, if we are to ensure that the experience of all young disabled people at college and/or in employment is to be both positive and rewarding. In this respect, we believe that resources must be made available to give young disabled people the necessary support to assist them make the transition from the relatively well supported environment of school to college and/or work. This could be achieved through increasing resources recruiting more experienced social workers and improving training for both staff and social workers, particularly in relation to communication skills and the use of related technology. This would give young disabled people the skills and qualifications to improve their chances of not being condemned to a life of material poverty, and poverty of opportunity.

Increased support for looked after young people

NCH Scotland works with some of the most vulnerable and difficult to reach young people in Scotland, including young people who are looked after or have previously been in care, through projects such as Foster Care NCH – CAPS Glasgow. The outcomes for looked after children upon leaving care are very poor, and NCH Scotland believes that urgent action is required to increase the opportunities available in employment, education and in training for young people leaving care. This is necessary to ensure that greater numbers of these disadvantaged young people fulfil their potential, and avoid the risks of falling into the poverty to which many prove vulnerable. NCH Scotland, therefore, welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to take forward the key issues in *Looked After Children and Young People: We Can and Must Do Better*.

Please contact either Andrew Girvan, NCH Scotland's Director of Children's Services, or Paul Carberry, NCH Scotland Depute Director, on 0141-550-9010, if you require more information about any of the issues raised in this briefing paper.

NCH is one of the leading children's charities in Scotland, working in partnership to run more than 67 services for more than 7000 of Scotland's most vulnerable and difficult to reach children, young people and their families. Across the UK it runs nearly 500 services.