

The Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

25 April 2008

Dear Sir or Madam

Early Years and Early Intervention: A joint Scottish Government and COSLA policy statement

NCH Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to the joint Scottish Government and COSLA policy statement on Early Years and Early Intervention ("the Policy Statement"). NCH Scotland's response draws upon our experience of providing intensive family support and early years services to some of the most vulnerable and difficult to reach children and families in Scotland. NCH Scotland family support projects such as, for example, the Dundee Families project, the Inverness Family Support project, the Ruchill Family project and the Tullibody Family project provide a wide range of positive outcomes for disadvantaged children and families. NCH Scotland also has a number of crises intervention projects where the focus is on early intervention. These include the Primary Support Project in Renfrew which focuses on young children at risk of offending.

In summary the key issues NCH Scotland wishes to raise are:

- **We believe that, if the Early Years and Early Intervention Strategy is to make a real difference to the lives of vulnerable children, it must be accompanied by sufficient funding to support its aims and objectives;**
- **The strategy should highlight the importance of the Community Planning framework in the design and delivery of children's services, and the need for the voluntary sector to be effectively engaged in this process;**
- **We welcome the Policy Statement's recognition that *Getting it right for every child* will remain the 'road map' for Government, local authorities, the voluntary sector and other agencies to improve outcomes for children and young people in Scotland; and**
- **While accepting that increased access to affordable, high quality childcare is essential to encourage more people into work, we believe the strategy should recognise that some parents may prefer to care for their children full-time**

General

NCH Scotland welcomes the Scottish Government's and COSLA's commitment to jointly develop the Early Years and Early Intervention Strategy. NCH Scotland takes the view that this strategy could, if accompanied by sufficient funding to support its aims and objectives, make a real difference to the lives of some of the most vulnerable members of our society. In this respect, it is essential that the strategy contains clear guidance from the Scottish Government and COSLA about the level of funding local authorities, NHS Scotland and other key partners should make

available to implement the strategy. NCH Scotland takes the view that such guidance is necessary to ensure that the quality of services, and the level of support, available in each local authority area to implement the Early Years and Early Intervention Strategy is consistent across Scotland, and does not become a 'post-code' lottery.

NCH Scotland further welcomes the emphasis in the Policy Statement on prevention and on early intervention, and on family support and parenting. This has a strong interface with NCH Scotland's family support and early intervention work with vulnerable and difficult to reach children and families across Scotland. NCH Scotland's Primary Support project in Renfrew, for example, works preventatively with younger children to ensure their inclusion in the community. This project is highly innovative, and has been successful in promoting positive outcomes for younger children, particularly in terms of reducing levels of school exclusions, and in reducing referrals to the Children's Hearings system. The project also provides support for families and parents.

NCH Scotland is also aware that many children's services are designed and delivered through the Community Planning process. It is, therefore, vital that the Early Years and Early Intervention strategy should highlight the importance of the Community Planning framework for delivering such services. In addition, we recommend that the strategy should emphasise the statutory duty placed upon local authorities, NHS Scotland and other key agencies to consult and co-operate with 'community bodies', including the voluntary sector, in the design and delivery of services delivered through Community Planning. We believe this is necessary to ensure that organisations working with children, families and young people are engaged in the planning and delivery of these key services.

NCH Scotland also believes that the Early Years and Early Intervention strategy should highlight the need for longer term Community Plans to be developed, which outline the broad strategic objectives and priorities for the design and delivery of children's services within the local authority area. In addition, the strategy should require each local authority's Single Outcome Agreement to reflect the needs identified in the Community Planning process, and to act as the link between this and the local delivery plans such as the Integrated Children's Services plan. This will help to ensure these plans complement each other and avoid duplication, and provide flexibility in budget planning.

We welcome the Policy Statement's recognition that the approach in *Getting it right for every child* will underpin the Early Years and Early Intervention strategy, and continue to be the 'road map' for Government, local authorities, the voluntary sector and other agencies to improve outcomes for children and young people in Scotland. This will help to promote a consistent, integrated approach to the development of children's services. NCH Scotland welcomes this development, given that voluntary sector service providers, local authorities and other agencies have been increasingly developing and providing services to children, families and young people within the framework of *Getting it right for every child*, especially where partnership working is involved as this is a key aspect of the process.

NCH Scotland further welcomes the Policy Statement's emphasis upon the need for a longer term, strategic approach to early years. We believe that such an approach is essential to tackle issues around poverty, inequalities, health and education, and to ensure that there are lasting improvements in these areas which improve outcomes for vulnerable children and families. We believe, however, that in progressing such an approach, it is important to strike a balance when allocating resources between addressing current social problems and adopting a longer term, strategic approach.

The Purpose of Government

We note the Scottish Government's 5 strategic objectives, and welcome its decision to make early years and early intervention a cross cutting issue, which will contribute to all of these objectives and to most of the 15 related national outcomes. NCH Scotland believes that this can, if supported by sufficient resources, help to maximise the effectiveness of the Early Years and Early Intervention strategy.

Early Intervention

NCH's has launched the *Growing Strong* campaign, which aims to improve the emotional wellbeing of children and young people in the UK. We believe emotional wellbeing has a huge impact on young people's futures and, therefore, welcome the Policy Statement's emphasis upon the need to build the capacity of individuals, families and communities, and to build resilience.

Embedding the Principles of Early Intervention in Policy

NCH Scotland welcomes the recognition that packages of support should be developed at the individual/family level. A significant aspect of NCH Scotland's work involves ensuring that children, families and young people have a say in the design and delivery of their care and/or support packages. NCH Scotland's projects in Perth, for example, take into account the views of all family members as part of our initial assessment, and subsequent service planning and delivery. Wherever possible NCH Scotland will work jointly with partner agencies to carry out this complex work.

Early Intervention for Children and Young People

We note the commitment to improve outcomes for vulnerable and disadvantaged children and families embodied in the three national outcomes referred to at Page 6 of the Policy Statement. NCH Scotland's experience indicates that there are still major obstacles to overcome to ensure that all children in Scotland "have the best start in life and are ready to succeed". One area which requires further consideration in this respect is the continued practice of excluding children who are challenging at times, particularly when the family setting is known to be volatile. NCH Scotland considers that failure to address this issue will make it significantly more difficult to achieve these outcomes.

NCH Scotland broadly welcomes the key actions outlined in the Policy Statement, which strongly interface with the work NCH Scotland's projects are undertaking with vulnerable and difficult to reach children and families. Reflecting this, NCH Scotland's Perth Family project is continuing to develop its solution focused and strength building practice, particularly through having a family focus to its assessments and communication and by using Family Group Conference interventions when agreed with our partners. We believe that this inclusive approach, complemented by the project's group based interventions such as its groups for parents will, "help parents and carers provide a nurturing and stimulating home environment."

NCH Scotland notes the reference to ensuring that young people who need more choices and more chances, including those at risk, have the necessary support to improve their life chances. This is an area in which NCH Scotland is active through our Glasgow Great Eastern Youthbuild project launched by Adam Ingram MSP, Minister for Children and Early Years, and our Inverclyde Youthbuild project launched by Maureen Watt MSP, the Minister for Schools and Skills. NCH Scotland welcomes

the support which the Scottish Government has given to NCH Scotland's innovative Youthbuild model, which offers training and employment opportunities in the construction industry for disadvantaged young people. NCH Scotland believes that getting young people into work can play a key role in helping them to move forward with their lives.

NCH Scotland agrees that action should be taken to improve the availability of child care. We take the view that increased access to affordable, high quality childcare is vital if more people are to be encouraged to work. We also believe, however, it is important to recognise that some parents may prefer to care for their children, and that this should be reflected in the Early Years and Early Intervention strategy.

Getting it right in the early years

NCH Scotland broadly welcomes the Scottish Government's and COSLA's proposed key tasks for taking forward the early years framework. As previously mentioned, we take the view that the progress made in developing this framework will depend upon the level of resources available to fund these key tasks.

Please do not hesitate to contact either myself on 0141-550-9010 or Ann Darlington, NCH Scotland's Assistant Director on 01463-729405, if you require more information, or would like to discuss any of the issues raised in our response further.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew S. Girvan', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Andrew S. Girvan
Director of Children's Services
NCH Scotland