

**NSPCC Response to the Children's Plan: Time to Talk
(Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2007)**

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October 2007

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Introduction

The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) is the UK's leading charity specialising in child protection and the prevention of cruelty to children. The NSPCC aims to end cruelty to children by seeking to influence legislation, policy, practice, attitudes and behaviours for the benefit of children and young people. This is achieved through a combination of service provision, lobbying, campaigning and public education.

The NSPCC believes that, given the will, all cruelty can be prevented. In order to achieve this, it is vital that all children, whatever their needs, have a range of services that are flexible and offer them support and protection. The NSPCC has more than 180 services in the UK and the Channel Islands. These services aim to:

- Prevent children being abused by working with parents and carers in vulnerable families to improve their knowledge and skills in safeguarding, and giving children and young people someone to turn to through the provision of our Listening Services.
- Protect vulnerable children and young people from abuse by providing direct services in a number of settings, including schools and young people's centres. We also protect them by providing Listening Services for adults to ensure they have someone to turn to with their concerns; by ensuring that abused children and young people are identified and effective action is taken to protect them, and by working with young people and adults who pose a risk to children and young people to reduce the risk of abuse.
- Help children and young people who have been abused overcome the effects of abuse and achieve their potential.

In drawing together this response, we have consulted with a wide range of practitioners who directly provide services and support to children and young people. We have also consulted with children and young people through There4me.com which is a website for 12-16 year olds who are worried about something and need some help.

Summary

We welcome the commitment to improve the lives of children and young people in England with the creation of a plan for the next 10 years which will set out long-term goals to ensure that every child has a safe, loving, healthy and happy childhood, free from harm and the chance to make the most of their talents and fulfil their potential. The Children's Plan and the *Staying Safe* strategy provide an excellent opportunity to put in place a new generation of policies and priorities to protect and safeguard vulnerable children and young people.

The Children's Plan must include every child, including children in the youth justice system, disabled children, children who are trafficked and asylum seeking children. Ensuring that every child grows up free from abuse must be a national priority and the Children's Plan is an opportunity to focus on preventing, identifying and overcoming abuse as an important element of helping children to enjoy and achieve, both in school and in other aspects of their lives.

The development of the plan also provides a timely opportunity to review the aims, objectives and the initial outcomes of the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda which has guided children's policy since 2003/4. Although significant steps have been made to improve the safety and protection of children, many children are not respected and treated as equal citizens with rights of their own, but as adjuncts of their parents. The NSPCC considers that the ECM programme and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) should provide the basis for the development of the Children's Plan and the *Staying Safe* strategy. Many countries which score highly in terms of children's wellbeing indicators, particularly but not exclusively Scandinavian countries are those which have adopted a rights framework for children's policy, where the core principle of promoting the best interests of the child is a primary consideration in developing policy for children.

The ECM agenda has been welcomed by all those who work with or are involved with children. However, Local Safeguarding Children Boards need adequate funding and resources to enable them to fulfil their functions and to protect children at risk of significant harm. Since the inception of the ECM agenda resources have tended to focus on the broader aim of safeguarding with greater multi-agency working, cooperation between agencies and inter-agency discussion about children who may be at risk of significant harm or in need of support and services. However, this has led to increasing pressure on thresholds and discussions between LSCB members about appropriate levels of intervention and at what level thresholds should be set.

The challenge now in social care practice is to link universal and specialist services to establish and develop thresholds which are sufficiently sensitive to identify children who may be maltreated or abused at an early stage to respond to their needs without bringing them into the child protection system. In particular, further work needs to identify examples of good practice where professionals who can identify signs and symptoms of abuse work within

universal services such as extended schools to provide safeguarding advice and interventions for children in need. This can include parenting support services in extended schools or encouraging social workers and child psychologists to work in education settings. It is also essential that all professionals working with children receive robust training on the Common Assessment Framework and the role of the lead professional to ensure that children who need safeguarding receive appropriate and timely responses services.

It is essential that the Children's Plan focuses on groups of children who are not in mainstream education or are at the margins of society, such as asylum-seeking and refugee children, disabled children, young offenders, runaways and children from black and ethnic minorities. The plan should also acknowledge that children growing up today are influenced not only by their parents but also by other powerful influences such as the media, internet, advertising and peers.

To be genuinely described as a Plan focused on the needs of children, the Plan must be radical in proposing that every child:

- Has their rights respected by enshrining the UK's obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into UK law
- Can rely on a statutory framework which puts the child's best interests, protection and developmental needs of children first and is sufficiently well funded to realise this aim
- Is cared for by well-supported parents or carers with sufficient income to meet their needs and enable them to reach their potential
- Has someone to turn to for support and is listened to when they express fears or disclose abuse
- Is supported by skilled, properly trained and supported professionals working together effectively to safeguard children
- Is provided with quality services which prioritise their protection and meet their safeguarding, therapeutic and other needs.

Child abuse is a significant challenge and tackling it must be a priority

Most children lead happy, contented lives and are well looked after and are protected by the people with responsibility for their care. However, a significant minority are not. Given the will, all cruelty can be prevented. In order to achieve this, it is vital that all children, whatever their needs, have a range of services that are flexible and offer them support and protection.

Every full double-decker school bus, seating 60 people, at the end of the day is likely to be taking home around seven seriously unhappy children. Most of the lower deck would at some time during their childhood have been going home to serious worries. Approximately 10 children may be going home to a 'double-shift' of cleaning, laundry, shopping and preparing meals, and two or three will be in fear of violence between their parents while they were out, or of what might happen that evening.

- Between April 2006-2007, ChildLine counselled more than 165,500 children. This total refers to 1st time callers, in addition there were around 10,200 follow up calls giving a total of 175,700 counselling contacts with children. The top problems were: -

- Bullying: 37,542- 23%
- Family relationships (including divorce & separation): 21480 -- 13%
- Physical abuse: 14,561 -- 9%
- Sexual abuse: 11429 -- 7%
- Facts of life: 10502 -- 6%
- Concern for others: 9325 -- 6%
- Pregnancy: 6895 -- 4%

- 23% of children counselled were aged 5-11. 56% were aged 12-15. 20% were aged 16-18.

In 2000, the NSPCC conducted the first UK prevalence study¹ of child abuse and neglect. A nationally representative sample of 2,869 young adults aged 18-24 was interviewed for this work and results showed that:

- 16% of children experienced serious child maltreatment by parents.
- Physical Abuse – 21% of respondents experienced some degree of physical abuse by parents or carers with 7% to a serious level. A further 3% experienced aspects of childrearing which could give 'cause for concern'.
- Neglect - 18% of young adults indicated they has experienced some absence of care in their childhood. For 6% this was serious absence of care and 5% experienced serious absence of supervision.
- Emotional Abuse - 6% of children experience frequent and severe emotional maltreatment.
- Bullying – 43% of young adults reported being bullied, discriminated against or being made to feel different with 31% experiencing bullying during childhood.

In-depth studies of children known to child protection services have found a pattern of serious relationship problems, with parents having very negative views of their children, and often a history of long term physical and mental health problems of their own. Family problems at this level require intensive, long-term support and it is unlikely that short-term solutions such as mediation or parenting classes with make much impact on most of these families.

Children are also abused by people outside the family. The most common form is sexual abuse. Some children and young people experience physical

¹ Cawson, P (2000) *Child maltreatment in the family: the experience of a national sample of young people*, London, NSPCC

assault in the community. The extent of these problems suggests it is ingrained in UK culture and again, not one amenable to short-term solutions.

The child protection system has effectively protected many children but others have been failed by it, and others are never known to the system. One to two children are killed by their parents or carers every week. In spite of many inquiries and changes to child protection practice over the last 30 years, child deaths from abuse and neglect have not decreased. Parental dysfunction, in the form of mental health problems, substance misuse, and/or domestic violence, is a key factor in such deaths such as the two recent child deaths this summer in Barking² and Haringey. The interface between adult and children's services must be strengthened to address the risks posed to children living in such households.

1 What have been your best experiences of support for children, young people and their families?

The NSPCC provides a range of services and projects working with children, young people, families and communities to provide preventative, therapeutic and assessment services, all focused on ending cruelty to children. We currently provide more than 180 projects across England, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Channel Islands working in partnership with local authorities, health services and many other statutory and voluntary agencies. We also provide helpline services such ChildLine, the National Child Protection Helpline and There4me. The NSPCC has configured its services around seven core aims including:

1. Children and young people are care for safely by adults
2. Children and young people have someone to turn to for effective safeguarding support
3. Vulnerable children and young people receive help to prevent or protect them from abuse
4. Adults concerned about the welfare of children and young people have someone to turn to with their concerns
5. Abused children and young people are identified and effective action is taken to protect them
6. The risk of children and young people being abused by adults and young people is reduced
7. Children and young people who have been abused achieve their potential

We recommend these aims provide a strategic framework to help end cruelty to children: Examples of our services which provide a range of preventative, therapeutic and assessment services include:

Cardiff Domestic Violence Abuse Service tackles the issue of violence in the home. The strong links between domestic violence and child abuse led to the development of the service which works with children and young people who are at risk from the direct and indirect effects of domestic violence in

²<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/london/6945455.stm><http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/london/6945455.stm>

order to reduce the impact that their experiences have on them. The project also runs the Caring Dads project which provides assessment and intervention programmes for the parent/carer who is the victim of the violence as well as for the perpetrator of the abuse. Individuals work as part of a group or on a one-to-one basis. The project offers training and consultation to professional groups on all aspects of domestic violence.

Parkside Assessment Project works in partnership with the Central and North West London Mental Health Trust using a range of models including psychodynamic and systematic family therapy models. All work is based on knowledge of normal child development and the impact that abuse, neglect and trauma can have on children. Specialist multi-disciplinary family and parenting assessments are provided for court proceedings or where decisions need to be made about a child's care in cases where the child's welfare and safety are of serious concern. Reports are produced for the court, which include overall assessment of the family and parenting, as well as in individual needs assessment for each child. The project also offers consultation where there are complex abuse and neglect issues affecting the child, the family and the professional system.

The Bal Raksha Project offers family support services to Asian communities. The project receives referrals directly from service users as well as professionals from other agencies such as social care, education and health, other voluntary agencies and community groups. The project offers a range of services to local parents and their children through project-based services and community outreach programmes. These services include drop-ins, play schemes, parenting programmes and one-to-one work with children and families. Families are also seen within their home environment and parenting programmes are delivered in a variety of settings to suit individual needs. By working closely with the local media the project helps to raise awareness of abuse and protect children from harm. New areas of work that are being developed include:-

- an outreach service in four local school
- group work with single parents
- domestic violence work
- a toy library.

The NSPCC Bristol and Somerset Schools Team provides a counselling, support and advisory service. The service is provided to children, young people and adults in designated schools within Bristol and Somerset, by providing a counsellor/therapeutic social worker in school one or two days per week, in term time. The service offers a package to schools which includes child protection awareness training, direct work with children and consultation and advice to the adults in the school. Children and young people have the opportunity to receive individual, peer and small group counselling as well as more general advice and support. Specific issue group work is also undertaken in designated schools where issues have arisen either through the counselling advice and support work or at the request of the school. For example, disability inclusion and emotional resilience are two general topics

which the team has worked on in the last six months. Where appropriate, children and young people are offered a continuous service throughout the school holidays. The service is provided mainly on a self-referral basis, although there are also assisted referral and direct referrals from school staff, family members and other professions. At times, members of the public drop in to the office with child protection related concerns. The helpline details are given and where necessary a duty service is provided in order to safeguard children. Currently the team provides a service to eight senior schools (including a special needs school) across Bristol and Somerset. The team also works in two junior schools in Bristol which includes working with parents/carers.

NSPCC Derbyshire Child Protection Team receives referrals for sexually harmful behaviour work from social services departments and youth offending teams. Work is undertaken on an individual basis with children from 4-17years within a multi-agency child protection plan. Increasingly, workers employ creative media in addition to more traditional verbal approaches when undertaking this work. For therapeutic work referrals come from social services departments, education, health and direct from carers and young people. A range of approaches are offered including talking-based counselling, drama, art and play therapies. Key services provided by the team include:

- individual and group therapeutic work with children and young people who have experienced abuse
- assessment and therapeutic work with children and young people who display sexually harmful behaviour
- case consultation and advice linked to these services to other professionals, and on a range of child protection issues
- training courses for other professionals on child protection issues
- a rapid response system which has provided carers with support and advice when their child has disclosed abuse; this empowers them to help and support their children.

Bfree and Street Matters are based in East London and work with young women up to 18 years of age around issues of sexual exploitation, including abuse through prostitution. Both projects offer a mix of individual work, group work and outreach, as well as providing training to professionals. Bfree offers support to young women found in the west end of London, including emotional support, raising awareness around risk, advocacy and practical assistance. Bfree works in partnership with Social Services, the police and other voluntary organisations.

The York Therapeutic Team provides a therapeutic service for children who have been abused. It uses a range of different approaches and creative therapies to help children come to terms with what has happened to them. The team also runs support groups for couples and for carers of children who have been sexually abused.

Helpline Services We welcome the Department for Children, Schools and Families contribution of £30 million towards the NSPCC's free 24 hour helplines, including ChildLine, which was announced earlier this year. The NSPCC helpline services include:

- **ChildLine** is the UK's free, 24-hour helpline for children in distress or danger. Trained volunteer counsellors comfort, advise and protect children and young people who may feel they have nowhere else to turn. Over 1,000 volunteers provide a counselling service, supervised by a team of professional supervisors and managers. Every day around 4,000 children call ChildLine.
- **There4me.com** is an NSPCC service that offers advice, support and information for young people aged 12 -16. Its target audience is the two thirds of young people who have been abused but do not take advantage of current services to speak about their abuse.
- **NSPCC Child Protection Helpline** is a 24 hour service which covers England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The majority of calls are from adults concerned about the welfare of a child, with a smaller proportion coming from children themselves. About 28% of calls relating to the welfare of a child involved children at serious risk of harm, and resulted in referrals to the appropriate child protection agencies for further investigation.

2 What would you stop or improve about support for children, young people and families?

Our response to this question is covered in detail in responses to questions 3 and 5.

3 What needs to happen so that support is tailored to meet the needs of individual children and young people?

Independent advocacy

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) 1989, states that '*... the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly or through a representative or an appropriate body ...*'. As part of the *Care Matters* consultation, the Government proposed to reinvigorate the roles of independent visitor and independent advocate. We welcome this proposal but it is essential that these roles should not be merged.

Furthermore, children and young people in care must have direct access that is access without recourse to an intermediary, to the services of an independent advocate.

The independence of both independent advocates and independent visitors must be rigorously guarded. Some local authorities provide '*in-house*'

advocacy services. All advocacy should be externally commissioned and provided by a body with appropriate expertise, that is independent of the authority responsible for providing a child's care.

School-based counselling services

Creating a safe learning environment includes having effective arrangements in place to address a range of issues that pupils may experience, and to ensure children are safeguarded and their welfare promoted. Under these arrangements all children who need emotional and welfare support should have access to school-based services, including counselling services. To ensure that all children are able to reach their full potential, all children in the UK should have access to such services.

School counselling services give children and young people access to an adult who can help them if they are experiencing or witnessing bullying, abuse or domestic violence. It can give them the tools to help themselves and build their resilience and self-esteem and also refer children for more specialist help such as therapeutic services.

Therapeutic services

Providing comprehensive therapeutic services for abused children is core to achieving the government's Every Child Matters outcomes for children, for fulfilling the government's National Service Framework for Children and Young People and for realising its obligations under the UNCRC.

If the mental and emotional well-being of children and young people is to be achieved, comprehensive and sustainable implementation of this NSF standard is imperative, both to help children and young people come to terms with their immediate experiences, and to prevent them from experiencing longer-term damage.

4 What do you think your role is and what more could you do for children to be happy, healthy and safe?

The NSPCC is the UK's leading charity specialising in child protection and the prevention of cruelty to children. We have been protecting children from abuse for over 100 years. We are the only children's charity in the UK with statutory powers, enabling us to act to protect children at risk.

Most of our work is with children, young people and their families. We also work to achieve cultural, social and political change - influencing legislation, policy, practice, public attitudes and behaviours and delivering services for the benefit of young people.

We want to see a society where all children are loved, valued and able to fulfil their potential. To do this, we have four objectives:

- To mobilise everyone to take action to end child cruelty.

- To give children the help, support and environment they need to stay safe from cruelty.
- To find ways of working with communities to keep children safe from cruelty.
- To be, and be seen as, someone to turn to for children and young people.

5 What is the role of parents – mums, dads, carers - and what more support do they need?

Parents role is to provide unconditional love and to ensure their children are safe, healthy and able to make informed decisions appropriate to their age and competence at each stage of their lives, based on a firm set of pro-social values.

However, parents are not a homogenous group and there are many who will need to receive support at different times of their child's life and to cope with difficult circumstances such as poverty, substance misuse, poor mental health and domestic violence.

Children and young people are cared for safely by adults

Physical neglect is more likely to reflect mental health and other serious health problems in the family. Serious and multiple abuse in the family, affecting 16 per cent of the child population, is associated with fundamental problems in relationships between parents and children and with violent family cultures.

Parenting and family support provision is fundamental to improving parent-child relationships and for reducing the potential for child abuse.

There should be clear expectations and understanding of helpful and nurturing parenting practices, and those that are harmful. Section 58 of the Children Act 2004 should be repealed and children must be given equal protection under the law on assault. This must be accompanied by widespread public education about positive parenting. Both these measures are needed; neither, alone, is sufficient to achieve cultural and behavioural change.

We are also concerned about the damaging effect which reality television programmes such as 'Bringing up Baby' can have on babies and young children. They can which cover parenting methods which publicises outdated and potentially harmful methods of parenting and caring for a baby which pay little attention to parents' natural instincts about their infants or the wealth of research that has shown the importance of early sensitive care for health and well-being. We would urge TV executives to be more careful when making such programmes.

Universal parenting services

Without universal services that include such things as routine invitations to attend parenting classes, parents can either feel stigmatised in seeking help, or do not appreciate that they need help. The government should foster a

social norm that encourages any parent to seek help and support. This must be matched by outreach services to engage isolated and mistrustful parents with support services that can help them.

Parental programmes must help parent understand their child's developmental needs and how to respond to these appropriately. They must also help parents develop positive and effective ways of encouraging better behaviour and be clear that physical punishment and harsh criticism can be damaging to children.

The current piloting of the intensive nurse visiting scheme, based on the David Olds model in the US, is very promising and hopefully will lead to such work being widespread. The finding from the Sure Start evaluation that the projects have resulted in less use of physical punishment and warmer relationships between parents and children is very important, and work such as this should be a priority, particularly given the increasing evidence that children who are emotionally intelligent thrive better in school. This results principally from having nurturing and empathetic parenting, which needs to start early and continue throughout a child's life.

Preparation for parenthood should begin much sooner. Child development and parenting education should be provided in schools, for boys as well as girls, as part of the National Curriculum and not an 'optional extra'.

Specialist parenting support

Universal parenting services should be supported by a range of specialist services that include domestic violence, substance misuse and therapeutic services for adult survivors of abuse. There should be good links and common referral agreements between them, as well as links with community health services, and with mental health services for adults and children.

We recommend that:

- The role of midwives and support for new parents needs particular emphasis. This is of crucial importance emotionally, for helping to establish an attachment between mother and child, and also for developing parents' awareness of the physical needs and vulnerabilities of babies.
- Universal ante-natal and post-natal support services must be maintained and strengthened.
- Health professionals must be trained to understand the particular vulnerabilities of babies and introduce programmes to make parents more aware of these.
- Therapeutic services for adult survivors of abuse who become parents should be provided as a specialist support service.
- Parenting teenagers can be especially challenging, and this area needs greater resources.

Internet safety

More resources need to be devoted to outreach with parents so that they can engage with and support their children's use of the internet. There is also a need to ensure that all schools are teaching internet safety as part of PSHEE

and that teachers are adequately trained. Children and parents should be better educated so that fear of the Internet does not deprive children of the valuable educational opportunities it can provide. Some of this work is currently being carried out by Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) but this needs ongoing work and support.

6 What is the role of the local community and what more could they do?

Inquiry reports into child deaths have identified attempts by relatives and members of the public to alert social services and the police to their concern about a child's safety. Many children, such as Leticia Wright have been harmed, often in horrific ways, in full view of the community³.

To properly protect and promote the welfare of children the wider community should be mobilised to protect children. Yet few people are willing to tell professionals or feel able to intervene directly. When they do, they fear repercussions from the abuse or that their concern will prove unfounded. Poor levels of communication, trust and understanding between the public and professional agencies exacerbate this.

There needs to be a greater awareness of child maltreatment within the community and a clearer idea of what people should and can do if they are concerned about a child.

There is a need for public education about the realities of child sexual abuse which shows children and adults where the risks are likely to lie and which prepares them to take protective action. Most sexual abuse occurs in families and when offending does take place in the community it is rarely random, and usually works through a grooming relationship. Public education should also include education for children and young people about appropriate sexual behaviour and potential abuse within relationships.

7 What is the role of Government and what more could they do?

The government's role is to provide the legislative, strategic and outcome framework to safeguard and protect children. This is delivered through the Children Act 2004 and Every Child Matters – Change for Children agenda. The government's role is also to develop and disseminate public education campaigns on the prevalence of abuse and maltreatment, who children should turn to if they are being abused and who adults should contact if they are concerned about the welfare or safety of a child.

In particular the Government should give children equal protection under the law on assault by removing Section 58 from the Children Act 2004.

The government must adopt a rights-based approach to children when developing policy and legislation for children. Children are often seen as recipients of services rather than active participants who must be consulted and involved in the development of policies and legislation. The government

³http://commentisfree.guardian.co.uk/jonathan_gornall/2007/08/a_death_that_could_not_be_foretold.html

must as a priority remove its reservation to Article 22 of the UNCRC which effectively legitimises unequal treatment of vulnerable children by both central government and local service providers⁴.

We welcome the *Staying Safe* consultation published by the Government which sets out how safety of children and young people can be improved. However, the document tends to focus on children in mainstream education and only sparingly mentions safeguarding policies and strategies for children on the margins of society or excluded groups of children. The NSPCC has strong concerns about the following groups of children and young people:

a) Children in the youth justice system

A high proportion of young people who go through the youth justice system have been maltreated or suffered very traumatic life experiences. Offending behaviour and anti-social behaviour are common outcomes from early maltreatment in particular where the young person has not received therapeutic interventions. There are few services for young people in YOIs to address their needs. There is much evidence that young people are subject to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment while in custody including strip-searching, solitary confinement and pain compliant/restraint techniques.

We would like the Children's Plan to

- i) Prohibit the use of painful restraint techniques, strip searching and solitary confinement for children. Ensure that a comprehensive assessment of the young person's needs is introduced using the Framework for Assessment (s. 17).
- ii) Apply the framework of the CRC and Children Act 2004 five outcomes to youth custody settings and ensure that Youth Offending Teams have a clear understanding of their duty to cooperate to improve children's well being.
- iii) Raise the age of criminal responsibility
- iv) Ensure that every youth custody setting has dedicated access to the ChildLine telephone counselling service.

b) Children who are trafficked

The government must better identify and protect trafficked children and ensure they are provided with care within a clear child protection framework regardless of their immigration status.

c) Asylum-seeking children

Children are being locked up in Immigration Removal Centres with their families when they have done no wrong.

While in detention they do not receive adequate education and healthcare and there is much evidence from Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons (HMCIP), which demonstrates that child protection procedures are completely inadequate. Sections 11 and 28 of the Children Act 2004 does not apply to the Immigration and Nationalities Directorate (IND), nor does the UNCRC, so detention centres are not breaking the law. Children in detention show signs of depression and changes in behaviour, however, and require help.

⁴ Joint Committee on Human Rights (2004) *Joint Committee on Human Rights Third Report* JCHR, London

d) Ending Child Poverty

Child cruelty will not be eradicated unless child poverty is ended. The harmful effects of poverty on children are well documented. There is an established association between poverty and prenatal and infant mortality, malnutrition and ill-health, child accidents, low educational attainment, delinquency and teenage pregnancy, although not all children living in poverty are affected in these ways. This disadvantage is very often reinforced across generations. Black and minority ethnic children are particularly disadvantaged and are disproportionately represented in the poorest fifth of the UK population.

e) Working with different communities

Some communities may be less willing to talk about and report child abuse. Research we conducted earlier this year found that out of 500 British Asians interviewed, over two-thirds said they thought reporting child abuse would have a negative effect on the 'honour' of the child's family. 37% of the sample had suspected a child was being abused – 42% of those who had suspicions had done nothing about it.

Services must be able to work flexibly to meet the needs both of different communities and of different groups within these communities. Any communications to encourage people to see children's safety as a collective responsibility will have to consider how best to reach minority communities.

f) Disabled children

Disabled children are at increased risk of harm, including abuse and neglect as well as bullying. Although progress has been made on improving the life chances of disabled children, there needs to be a national strategy on child protection and disabled children in consultation with disabled children and adults and organisations advocating on their behalf. This should include the collection of statistical information concerning disabled children and child protection, the allocation of resources to promote the safeguarding of children, training strategies to ensure professionals are equipped to promote safeguarding of disabled children and safety and awareness programmes.

8 What more needs to happen to keep children and young people out of trouble?

This question suggests that a significant number of children and young people are in 'trouble', either in or outside school or with the law which is very stigmatising and demonising. Many children and young people who are in trouble often need help and usually have not had their welfare needs met. In March 2007, the number of children and young people in the secure estate was 2,870 down from 3,036 in September 2006⁵. There are no easy answers to this but it does require children and young people being given more information, education and help to keep them safe and learn how to deal with risks.

Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHEE) is crucial in safeguarding children. It helps them to learn about personal safety and

⁵ Youth Justice Board (2007) *Annual Reports and Accounts 2006-07* London: Stationery Office

improve their understanding of pro-social and respectful relationships, including parenting and family relationships, as well as abusive behaviours. It also helps them develop the skills to ask for help. This can contribute to a reduction in childhood abuse and neglect⁶. Similarly evidence shows that PSHEE is an important intervention for preventing bullying⁷. Children and young people who use our There4me.com service want to be taught more about risks and how to stay safe and have told us:

'I think children need to be taught about child abuse in school in PSE. As many children don't understand what is happening to them. If I had been taught about it, it would have helped a great deal as maybe would have sorted my life out sooner.'

'There is definitely not enough taught in schools. A friend of mine lost her mother at a young age and didn't learn about the dangers of drinking excessively. Two years ago she died crossing a busy road just eye-sight away from where I live. She had had quite a bit to drink and didn't think before crossing. If only someone had taught us about safety before she crossed that road maybe she would still be here today living her life for the beautiful young girl she was thanks for listening.'

'I think there is not enough information about internet safety. Most people on the internet think that they can post stuff online and nobody can touch them. I think there needs to be a lot more warnings on the internet about how dangerous it can be.'

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) must be used as a basis for teaching PSHEE and we are keen for this curriculum area to be more rights-based. This Convention is a unique international legal instrument, ratified by 191 of the 193 UN member states, and covers civil and political rights as well as cultural, social and economic rights, so has implications for the teaching of PSHEE and can help fulfil the right contained under Article 17 to ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health.

We welcome the announcement made by Ed Balls, Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, introducing the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) programme into schools from September 2007. The SEAL framework and programme and resources will help deliver social and emotional skills within the personal well-being curriculum.

There is a vital need for more teacher training in PSHEE for primary and secondary schools. At focus groups discussions we have held, young people felt that PSHEE was not taken seriously by teachers and was often taught by teaching staff who had not been specially trained to teach the subject. Young

⁶ Harries, J (2006) *Promoting Personal Safety in PSHE*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing

⁷ Office of the Children's Commissioner (2005) *Journeys: children and young people talk about bullying*. London: Office of the Children's Commissioner.

people also tell us that much of the content of the lessons was not very interesting and did not engage them in the issues discussed.

We recommend that PSHEE is a statutory requirement in the national curriculum for all key stages, giving it the same status as other foundation subjects such as mathematics and English, to ensure that children learn about appropriate behaviour and how to stay safe in relationships from an early age. It is essential that teachers who specialise in PSHEE receive proper training to enable teachers to use different strategies to help children and young people develop necessary skills and understanding, to resolve conflict without resorting to violence and able to build their self esteem and make informed choices in later life. We would also like schools to use counsellors outside the school to talk to children about staying safe in sexual relationships, drugs and alcohol. Many children and young people feel that teachers are not the right people to talk to children about these issues and that both they and the teacher are embarrassed about speaking about these issues.

PSHEE cannot just be taught to pupils but must be an active process of learning. Drama and role-play can help engage and help children and young people explore issues which relate to values and morals. Pupils need to be encouraged to express their ideas, thoughts and feelings and to be able to discuss them.

Resilience can also be developed through school counselling services giving children and young people access to an adult who can help them if they are experiencing or witnessing bullying, abuse or domestic violence. It can give them the tools to help themselves and build their resilience and self-esteem and also refer children for more specialist help, such as therapeutic services, if they need this. We welcome the Government's recent announcement of £60m to provide mental health services and promote emotional well-being in schools in England. However, the funding is earmarked for 8-13 year olds who have demonstrated or are at risk of mental health problems. To ensure that all children are able to reach their full potential, every child in the UK should have access to comprehensive school counselling services, and the NSPCC would like the announcement made by the Government to be widened to achieve this.

Although physically located in schools, such counselling services should be independent from schools, thus ensuring that difficulties are dealt with separately from a child's education. The opportunity to use such services must be available to all children including those with specific communication needs, such as signing and communication techniques for children with learning disabilities. School-based counselling services should also provide advice and support for teachers and non-abusing parents.

Specialised services should include individual support, group work and counselling with skilled practitioners. Direct work with children should help them to cope appropriately with the bullying or abuse they have heard or witnessed, and help them learn not to blame themselves for what has happened.

It is also important that children who are not in the education system have access to resources to help them build resilience to harm. Peer support schemes can help do this and provide them with 'someone to turn to' whom they can trust. For example, CHIPS (ChildLine in Partnerships) works with schools and other youth settings to provide adults and young people with opportunities to improve the support available to young people. CHIPS' ethos is that children and young people can play a part in making changes to improve their own lives and the lives of other young people. It does this through training opportunities and resources in areas such as anti-bullying and peer support and works with a network of schools and youth settings across the UK to share ideas and good practice.

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