

The Scottish Parliament Cross-Party Group for the Prevention and Healing of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Committee Room 2, Scottish Parliament, 13th June 2018, 6-8 pm

Welcomes and introductions

MSPs in attendance:

- Gail Ross, MSP for Caithness, Sutherland and Ross (SNP)
- Elaine Smith MSP for Central Scotland (Labour)
- Rona Mackay MSP for Strathkelvin & Bearsden (SNP)
- Mairi Gougeon MSP for Angus North and Mearns (SNP)
- Liam Kerr MSP for North East Scotland (Conservatives)
- Liam McArthur MSP for the Orkney Islands (Lib Dem)
- Emma Harper MSP for South Scotland (SNP)
- Jenny Gilruth MSP for Mid Fife and Glenrothes (SNP)
- John Swinney, MSP for Perthshire North; Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (*attending as guest speaker*)

Other attendees:

- Sara Dodds, Adviser on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) at The Scottish Government
- Janine Rennie, Wellbeing Scotland
- Emile Van Loo, With Kids
- David Mitchell, Rossie Young People's Trust
- Dr Nicola Wylie, Rossie Young People's Trust
- Gary Broadway, Fife Council: Kirkcaldy High School
- Louise Slorance, RCPCH Scotland
- James Docherty, Violence Reduction Unit (VRU)
- Chloe Riddell, Children 1st
- Kate West, Social Finance
- John Medley-Hallam, Social Finance
- Christine Carlin, Chief Executive at The Salvesen Mindroom Centre
- Linda Brown, 70/30 Ambassador for Cumbernauld
- Karen Law, 70/30 Ambassador for Angus
- Julia Morton, 70/30 Ambassador for Stonehaven
- Anne Macdonald, Co-Convenor of CPG for Adult Survivors Of Childhood Sexual Abuse
- Nicki Wray, Barnardos Scotland
- Jock Hutchison, Horseback UK
- Martha Abbasi, 70/30 Ambassador for Glasgow
- Sara Martinez Calvo, Coordinator of WAVE Trust's 70/30 Campaign
- George Hosking, CEO WAVE Trust

Apologies:

Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP, Johann Lamont MSP, Gillian Martin MSP, Jenny Marra MSP, Suzanne Zeedyk, Rachel Love (NSPCC Scotland)

Confirmation of Office-bearers and Secretariat:

The meeting agreed on the following appointments:

Convener of the CPG: Gail Ross MSP

Vice Convener: Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP

Treasurer: Chloe Riddell, Children 1st

Secretariat: WAVE Trust

Confirmation of Group Name:

Cross-Party Group for the Prevention and Healing of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Discussion re future meetings

The overlap with a number of other groups, including the 'Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse', was noted. The view was taken that this is positive, and that we can work in a complementary way with any such group.

Discussion with Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, John Swinney.

In advance of the meeting it was proposed to the Deputy First Minister that we explore two questions:

a) whether Scotland should commission an ACE-study, similar to those carried out in Wales and England, to establish a baseline for ACEs in Scotland; and

b) the value of promoting adoption of Trauma-informed schools in Scotland.

Mr Swinney opened his contribution by expressing his support for the establishment of the group. He said that he wanted to signal the openness and willingness of the government to engage with this group (as with others). The purpose and objectives of the CPG fits with a long-term trend in Government thinking, including and preceding the current government. Mr Swinney also stressed how important it is to address these adverse experiences. He assured the group that the principle of trauma-informed care was very much in line with the consistent thinking of the Scottish government, which puts at the forefront of its policy the nurturing and wellbeing of Scotland's children.

A concern to prevent ACEs fits with the GIRFEC agenda, and is directly related to the aspirations of GIRFEC. He described ACEs as a "broad policy question that has to be addressed". He said that what is needed is an integrated policy focus that interrupts the cycle of ACEs and in turn, prevents them from affecting future generations.

To achieve current policy objectives, such as closing the attainment gap, reducing re-offending, improving public health, ensuring more active participants in the economy – all of these require collaboration to tackle ACEs.

Hence, the Programme for Government last year included a range of approaches to tackle the prevalence of ACEs, and the circumstances that give rise to ACEs. This in turn led to two landmark events:

- 1) In November 2017, a hosted Resilience showing in St Andrew's House. The film articulated the issue. This led to an open discussion 'what next?' There was optimism that many of the necessary building blocks were already in place – e.g. GIRFEC and an emphasis on child well-being. It also became clear that stakeholders wanted to see tangible progress.
- 2) In March 2018, there was the ACE event at Bellahouston Academy in Glasgow. Several Ministers attended, together with attendees from the private, public and third sector. Questions included: 'what are the challenges we face? Are we aligned to tackle them? What needs to be addressed?'

A key point to emerge was that **all** policy initiatives of the Government need to be aligned on the needs of the child. That focus will give us the means to succeed. We must have nurses, teachers, etc. aware of ACEs and their impact.

There are also many adults with ACEs, and this acts as an impediment to their full involvement in society.

Mr Swinney concluded by emphasising the importance of clearly aligned policy programmes, and a focus on the individual. It is the Government's hope to close the poverty-related attainment gap in Scottish schools in this Parliament. Government will support expectant mothers and will support reducing the impact of poverty on school education. "We will throw the kitchen sink at this cohort..."

Discussion

A number of attendees raised points in response to the Deputy First Minister's talk. Jock Hutchison recommended his therapeutic programme of engagement with horses for people affected by trauma. Julia Morton told the story of the experience of her daughter Poppy in a school which had let Poppy down and did not provide adequate standards of child protection or Get It Right For Every Child. Julia stated the importance of schools ensuring that all children are 'feeling safe to learn'. Julia presented a letter, written by Poppy, for the First Minister raising the case.

Mr Swinney stated that group meetings like this are a very important way of ensuring that individual cases meet the standards set by the Scottish Government and ensure any such case is addressed. Mr Swinney took the letter for the First Minister.

George Hosking stressed the crucial importance of having meaningful measures in place to prevent ACEs before they happen. He also commended the potential contribution – after ACEs have occurred – of Trauma-informed Schools. He recounted the successful results (better attendance, fewer exclusions, fewer children in care, better academic results) achieved by an ACE-informed school system in Bridgend in Wales, and the successful adoption of Trauma-informed schooling in Blackburn in Lancashire. US research in San Francisco also showed a shift to trauma-informed schooling resulting in improvements in school attendance, behaviour and academic results.

Gary Broadway described, as a case study, the experience in Kirkcaldy High School, where an ACE-informed approach had enabled the school to move from having the highest local rates of school exclusion to having the lowest rates. Elaborating on this later, after Gail Ross asked how we could re-engage those who are disengaged from education, Gary described

how some of the school's pupils had 6 or more ACEs, and how various steering groups in Fife were working together on how to address trauma. Gary explained that they use the local YMCA centre to teach those who won't sit in a classroom setting to learn and teachers provide out-of-hours teaching for those who find a classroom and a school with 1000+ pupils daunting. Gary also took the opportunity to share with us the intention of the school to produce their own version of the Resilience documentary. This film is due to be ready by September.

Jock Hutchison used his Horseback UK programme as a way to explain how there are other ways of teaching children out of the classroom. Mr Swinney added to this the efforts of a teacher in a school he had visited recently who, through her background with expressive arts, has used dance as a way to engage those hard-to-reach pupils. Numeracy and language were taught through dance. Football clubs were also mentioned as an effective way of engaging those pupils less engaged with classroom teaching.

Anne Macdonald, on behalf of Adult survivors of child sexual abuse, expressed support for the Trauma-informed schools model, and a Public Health approach.

Mr Swinney responded sympathetically to these points. He said that sometimes there was a need to tackle public attitudes and cited examples relating to prison. He described the case of an offender he had met, who was costing £44,000 p.a. in prison. This man's essential problem was an inability to communicate. £3,000 spent on speech therapy at age 3 might have avoided massive cost later.

Nicola Wylie raised the point that we have no study of prevalence of ACEs in Scotland to provide a sound understanding of scale and nature of ACEs in this country. Mr Swinney responded that there was data in existence, through the 'Growing up in Scotland' data and health surveys.

Later in the exchanges, quoting Harry Burns, Emma Harper added her voice to those who saw value in establishing a 'base line measurement' of levels of ACEs.

Sara Martinez (70/30 Campaign) suggested to the Deputy First Minister that if we are to create lasting, nurturing learning environments for our children then ACEs and childhood trauma should be a core element of the teacher training programme (ITE) for those people entering the profession today. In response, Mr John Swinney said that it is a challenge to cover a lot of material in a limited time in teacher training. There is a responsibility to cover Health and Wellbeing – this may be the route to address ACEs. He would be happy to discuss this with schools and education authorities.

Christine Carlin said her organisation (Salvesen Mindroom Centre) was passionate about ACEs, and that it was critical that teachers know about ACEs, without losing sight of other things which may equally be the cause of issues facing children.

The role of the whole family was also discussed. The point was made that we need to ensure we encompass the whole family in our trauma-informed strategies, not just the child. The child goes home at the end of the day, often to environments that are the cause of the child's trauma, so we need to engage effectively with the parents and the wider community in our approach. Questions are – how do we educate parents? How do we engage parents?

Mr Swinney said the care these vulnerable children receive must “stretch beyond the school gate”.

Chloe Riddell (Children 1st) shared a story of children she is currently working with whose parents are homeless and in and out of temporary accommodation. She explained they had been in 9 different Bed and Breakfasts in 9 weeks. No mental health support is provided because they have no fixed address and so their unresolved trauma is not addressed.

Other contributors mentioned the value of play therapists, and support for teachers who can have their own mental health issues.

The meeting then expressed formal thanks to the Deputy First Minister for his interest, support and attendance, after which Mr Swinney left.

Discussion on possible topics for future meetings

Community understanding of ACEs: Karen Law (70/30 Ambassador for Angus) spoke about her own experiences of ACEs. She shared the struggles her now-deceased mother and her sister, who suffers with borderline personality disorder, faced in their day-to-day lives as a direct result of inadequately addressed early childhood adversity. This results in it being left to develop and worsen over time. Karen said the main message to take away from this is that everyone needs to know about ACEs, because until whole communities understand childhood trauma and recognise the signs, we cannot begin to address the issue correctly.

Mairi Gougeon MSP commented that the early Mental Health workers – e.g. in schools – are no longer there. Often, Government mental health strategy is not being implemented on the ground.

Baseline data study: A number of attendees spoke up in favour of a comprehensive Scottish ACE study to establish baseline data on levels of ACEs in Scotland. The meeting agreed that relying on the ‘Growing up in Scotland’ survey was not adequate. Our ask is that the Scottish government conduct an ACE study, similar to that done in Wales and England but including data identifying levels of ACEs amongst specific groups of people, such as the homeless, those with mental health problems, and those in the criminal justice system. Note: the English study only includes households. Homeless people and those without a fixed address, e.g. in prisons, were not included.

Trauma-informed schools: A number of attendees suggested that we should devote more time to the issue of how to establish Trauma-informed schools in Scotland. Nicola Wylie suggested there should be a comprehensive strategy for Trauma-informed schools. Later, Louise Slorance (Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health) suggested it would be useful to speak to schools which did not feel they could become trauma-informed, so that we can understand what stops people from adopting the approach.

Sara Martinez (70/30 Campaign) brought up the idea of creating some form of accreditation for Scottish schools to become officially ‘trauma-informed’. How this may look requires further discussion among the group; however, it was suggested this could take the form of a set of 10 core principles that the schools need to meet to be recognised officially as trauma-

informed. Perhaps there could be a certificate given to each schools that meets the criteria so they can proudly identify as a trauma-informed school?

Gail Ross suggested that each MSP could visit or email all schools in their area and ask what they are doing in response to the drive for ACE-informed approaches.

Frequency of meetings

It was agreed that meetings should normally take place once every two months.

Should meetings of the CPG be themed around different ACEs issues?

This was discussed but without resolution. Gail Ross suggested there could be value in having meetings that focused on specific topics such as talking to schools, COSLA, Mental Health, Health, and Justice. Chloe Riddell of Children 1st cautioned against a 'silo' approach, as it is the same children who appear with issues in schools, mental health, housing. She suggested an alternative approach based on (a) Prevention, (b) Protection and (c) Recovery. Gail noted this, but pointed out that if we bring specific Ministers to a meeting, we cannot avoid focusing on their area of responsibility. She suggested a meeting on Mental Health, one on Prevention and one on Justice. Another suggestion was that we split time, in 2-hour meetings, between an hour on general issues and an hour on a specialist theme. Anne Macdonald said that meetings of the CPG for Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse were used to work towards a strategy for their issue. Emma Harper said that the CPGs on Stroke and Heart Disease had used meetings for formal Inquiries. Christine Carlin, speaking as a former civil servant who has sat in CPGs with her Minister, suggested that meetings with Ministers at which specific real life stories were presented tended to be a very effective approach.

Any Other Business:

Emma Harper expressed her concern and disappointment that no one from the South of Scotland was coming to these CPGs.

James Docherty (Violence Reduction Unit), speaking with the lived experience of growing up with 9 ACEs, made the point that the phrase 'flipped your lid' described how the emotional brain has taken over from the neo-cortex. We have to adopt Trauma-informed care across services and communities. The language of ACEs has unified the country. Many hardened prisoners are actually very compassionate. When kids join gangs 'these kids aren't joining something, they're escaping something'. In his 'crew' when he was younger, none of them had fewer than six ACEs. 'These children gravitate to each other in the nursery.' They don't look to their caregivers for guidance, they look to their peers.

Referring to alcoholism in Scotland, he commented: 'We don't have an unhealthy relationship with alcohol in Scotland. We have an unhealthy relationship with ourselves, and we pour alcohol down our throats to cope with it'. He also made the point that you can't cure attachment disorder with punishment.

Next Meeting:

The next CPG meeting will take place in late September or early October and will focus on a continuation of the discussion on trauma-informed schooling. We hope to use some of our time at that meeting to see a preview screening of Kirkcaldy High's version of the

Resilience film. James Docherty may be invited to speak. It was suggested that we all read Carol Craig's book '*Hiding in Plain Sight*' in advance of the meeting. It was also suggested that Gail Ross make a list of all those CPGs whose focus overlaps with the issue of ACEs and invite them to work with us going forward.