

All-Party Parliamentary Group on Wellbeing Economics

'Improving Children's Wellbeing' event on 2 March 2010 in Committee Room 3 of the House of Lords

The meeting started at 3pm

Summary

Jo Swinson MP welcomed everyone to the APPG on 'Improving Children's Wellbeing' and introduced the four speakers.

Prof. Stephen Scott, Institute of Psychiatry:

Prof. Stephen Scott spoke on how the Government is putting more money into disadvantaged areas, but, he asked, to address poverties of what? We are getting richer in absolute terms but not much in terms of happiness. We can buffer kids against external 'bads' by parenting, to teach skills and to get on with people. Anti-social behaviour is what happens when parenting goes wrong. The total extra cost spent on one individual with conduct disorder to age 28 can be up to £70,000. For prevention at a population level there is the SPOKES programmes in schools, which is a parenting programme. This form of parenting support was offered at schools in Lambeth; many parents came with lots of motivation. The programme showed a big improvement on ability to concentrate on work, and children with access to the programme had six months improvement in their reading age by age 6. We need to use evidence-based programmes. However, a lot of money is being spent on programmes where people have not been trained properly and this activity requires a skill base. We also need to incentivise parental involvement.

Senay Camgoz, UNICEF UK:

Senay Camgoz advised that UNICEF works with 190 communities. They support the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; currently working with Baroness Walmsley on the Children's Rights Bill in parliament; and believe that children's welfare will be a key issue at the general election. In order to improve something you first have to measure it - UNICEF's Report Card 7 is an overview of child well-being in rich countries, which looks at material well-being, health and safety, education, family and peers, behaviours and risk, and subjective well-being. The UK scored poorly, may be because it is an unequal society. The Report Card shows that rich countries did not necessarily do better than poor countries. The most shocking aspect of the Report Card is what children thought about their own well-being in terms of; health, sport, life satisfaction – they feel lonely, an outsider. Children in the UK score own well-being much lower than in other countries. UNICEF UK want to build a consensus with all three parties and young people too – a declaration on well-being. UNICEF are now commissioning research because more detailed information is needed on what is underpinning low well-being in the UK. UNICEF UK are exploring implications of latest neuroscience and brain development. It is very important to have one-to-one care in the first year of life. The childcare profession is considered to be low status here, but not in other countries.

UNICEF UK's objectives are that they:

- Want the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child incorporated into UK law
- Champion of Article 12 – respect the views of the child
- Campaigning to end child poverty
- Rights Respecting Schools award – working with 1,000 schools to operate award scheme
- Baby Friendly initiative – with the World Health Organisation they want to increase breast-feeding rates
- Child Friendly communities – embed child rights approach at a local authority level

Susan Blishen, Mental Health Foundation / Paul Hamlyn Foundation:

Susan Blishen advised that she is working with young people aged 16-24 years old on the 'Right Here' project. The focus is on 16-25 year olds with mental health needs. There are 15 service-users and non-service users who are developing the programme and its delivery. Young people must have a say in services which affect them. The aim is to develop a series of demonstration projects which deliver measurable

improvements to well-being in pilot sites, which are just about to be launched. The pilot sites are in Newham, Brighton and Hove, Sheffield and Fermanagh, and will run until 2014. The pilots are a partnership of the statutory and voluntary sector and are guided by a panel of local young people. The pilots are aiming too:

- Improve effectiveness of mental health promotion - tackle stigma
- Improve help for young people – resilience
- Intervene earlier

There will be mental health awareness activities, a focus on specific target groups and a wide range of approaches in delivery.

Gary Watts, Right Here Young People's Expert Board

Gary Watts informed the Group of his experience of mental health and the service provision which he had received as a young person. He said that there had been occasions when the services provided to him had not been appropriate, e.g. during the transition from child and adolescent services to adult services. Gary said that he had been angry, and went from being a passive person to an aggressive person, and now he is a pro-active person. Since then he has had services that he needs, but advised that he has had to fight for it. He explained how he has developed the confidence to talk here today.

Q & A:

Questions were asked on talking therapies, access to services and care plans. Gary Watts emphasised the importance of talking therapies; that his school had refused targeted mental health services, which he was angry about; the need to speak out; and how care plans should be made together.

A question was asked regarding the number of psychiatrists available and Prof Stephen Scott replied saying that trusts are given some money but that it was not ring-fenced.

Gary Watts was asked what three things would have made a difference for him; he said people who talk to one another; having opportunities to talk to someone who is not necessarily a designated counsellor; and social activities you can do with other people.

A question was asked on evidence for early interventions and holistic approaches. Prof Stephen Scott spoke of a whole school approach, communities that care, but it is hard to shift things from individualistic values – how do you intervene? Does the community mind each other?

Susan Blishen advised that the Right Here programme is going to be evaluated by the Tavistock Institute.

Senay Camgoz spoke of the low status and low pay within the early childhood profession, which has a mainly female workforce. There are problems with the way that the media portrays children and how advertising is directed towards them. UNICEF want to monitor and research this issue. There is a need for cultural change.

Prof Stephen Scott spoke of the tiny amount of money that is spent on research in the UK, although much money is spent on parenting initiatives. Research and evaluation are needed. Susan Blishen said that it is important to know what works, and what doesn't work, and to listen to young people.

Jo Swinson MP concluded the meeting at 5pm by thanking the speakers and everyone who had attended.

Susan Lee
Secretariat to the APPG Wellbeing Economics
nef (the new economics foundation)
020 7820 6339
susan.lee@neweconomics.org