

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Summary and Recommendations

Following the screening of the 'Resilience' documentary at the October meeting of the Children and Young People's Board, this report summarises key research about Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in Scotland and highlights the role for local authorities in tackling their impacts.

This paper invites members to:

- i. Note the increasing prominence of ACEs in the development of public policy and the recognition of the role of ACEs in contributing to the outcomes for children and young people
- ii. Agree the position set out in paragraphs 9 to 11

References

- COSLA Children and Young People's Board– Resilience Screening - October 2018

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Date considered 23rd November 2018

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Purpose

1. At the October Children and Young People Board meeting, Members viewed the “Resilience” documentary and panel discussion on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). The Board asked that a paper on ACEs and the role of local government was brought to the November meeting. This paper has a focus on local governments role in the prevention and reduction of ACEs, and the need to maintain a focus on Getting It Right for Every Child in order to do so.

Current COSLA Position

2. Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) is the national approach in Scotland to improving outcomes and supporting the wellbeing of our children and young people. COSLA are represented on the GIRFEC National Implementation Support Group (NISG) and have been fully supportive of the GIRFEC approach as it applies to all services for children and young people
3. Wellbeing is central to the GIRFEC approach and should take into account that a young person’s experiences and circumstances will have an impact on all of their needs and life chances, therefore support should be tailored to them and their family.

What is changing

4. The Scottish Government’s 2018/19 Programme for Government highlighted that ‘preventing and mitigating adverse childhood experiences is a moral imperative [and] requires our public services to work collaboratively, and with communities, across early years, education, health, justice, social work and more’
5. The “Resilience” documentary and ACE studies, set out ten widely recognised adverse childhood experiences: physical abuse, sexual abuse, verbal abuse, emotional neglect, physical neglect, growing up in a household where there are adults with alcohol and drug use problems, mental health problems, domestic abuse, adults have spent time in prison, or parents have separated.
6. In recent years there has been a research into ACEs and their impact across Scotland. 'Polishing the Diamonds', a report by Scottish Public Health Network estimates that between 500,000 to 750,000 people in Scotland have been affected by one or more ACE, and are therefore two times more likely to binge drink and have a poor diet; three times more likely to be a current smoker; five times more likely to have had sex while under 16 years old; six times more likely to have had or caused an unplanned teenage pregnancy; seven times more likely to have been involved in violence in the last year; or eleven times more likely to have used heroin/crack or been incarcerated

7. 'Polishing the Diamonds' also set out a number of methods for tackling ACEs in Scotland. Including:
 - Increasing awareness- in particular highlighting the wider socio-economic context linked to ACEs, as opposed to a focus on individual circumstance when discussing children's welfare
 - Preventing ACEs- tackling the context in which families live in (including the impact of poverty and social isolation) , tackling parental and family risk factors, tackling household adversity (including problems such as domestic violence, parental substance use and criminality)
 - Building Resilience- using a range of methods to build resilience within children and young people.
8. There is an inextricable link to poverty when considering the ACEs agenda. CELCIS, Children 1st and Social Work Scotland's briefing '*Addressing Poverty and Child Welfare Intervention: What do we need to do differently in Scotland?*' highlights research from around the world that links poverty and ACEs. Whilst noting the challenges faced when moving towards a more preventative approach to the ACEs agenda, the briefing also highlights that City of Edinburgh's investment in Family Group Decision Making has saved over half a million pounds in a year. With the introduction of statutory targets relating to child poverty there are opportunities for action by all public sector partners in reducing the risk of ACEs.

Proposed COSLA Position

9. The reduction of even one "ACE" can make a significant difference to children's outcomes, at the time and as they get older.
10. Local authorities and their partners are key in minimising the risk of children and young people experiencing ACEs. This can be achieved, in part, by ensuring that GIRFEC remains the central approach to supporting and caring for children and young people who use public services. There is a direct link between the GIRFEC approach and reducing the risk that a child or young person suffers from ACEs
11. The life course perspective is critical in considering where the ACE agenda fits with local government. It is important to recognise that there is currently a strong foundation of understanding among those working with children and young people that experiences in early life will have an impact on life chances in later life. This has been a driver for how public services are delivered. Given that local authorities have responsibility for services that affect people throughout their whole lives, understanding and being "ACE aware" not only in terms of children but for people of all ages is important.

Next Steps

12. COSLA Officers will continue to work with professional advisors in policy development across all children and young people's areas to build on the understanding of the impact of poverty and adversity in contributing to ACEs, and how practice under the GIRFEC approach can contribute to better outcomes for children and young people.
13. Work continues to restate the GIRFEC approach as the key driver in assessing children's well-being needs and delivering support to address them. Officers will continue to engage in this process.

Date considered: 23rd November 2018