Specific questions

1. How effective are early years interventions in addressing health inequalities?

Research clearly indicates that early years interventions are very effective in minimising health inequalities. However, it should be acknowledged that early interventions within an early years context have the biggest impact on improving outcomes for children. This should not be looked at in isolation but addressed within the context of a child’s wider world ie family and community.

Taking early intervention approaches within the early years across all contexts will, therefore, address health inequalities.

2. What are your views on current early years policy in Scotland in terms of addressing health inequalities?

All current early years policies are moving in the same direction and saying the same thing ie the overall aims are:

- Our children have the best start in life and are ready to succeed.
- We have improved the life chances for children, young people and families at risk.
- Our young people are successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.

However, there is now the need to pull everything together and embed GIRFEC, the Children and Young People Bill and the work of the Early Years Collaborative. This will provide the platform required to ensure all policies and approaches are cohesive and consistent.

3. What role can the health service play in addressing health inequalities through interventions in the early years?

Embedding the role of the Named Person is the fundamental foundation of the health service addressing inequalities. This should be done within the context of strong partnership within CPPs, which will include children and adult services. Particular attention requires to be given to information sharing and working effectively with early years and childcare establishments.

Continuing to build and develop the foundations established of multi-agency working, training and reflective practice, networking and fostering positive and professional relationship is required. Clear and consistent leadership messages are needed to support practitioners at all levels, in particular, when working in multi-agency environments.
4. What barriers and challenges do early years services face when working to reduce health inequalities?

Overcoming cultural attitudes is proving to be a challenge, particularly within the context of information sharing. However, GIRFEC and the Early Years Collaborative are providing the platform for these challenges to be tackled.

The Early Years Collaborative Improvement Science has allowed health practitioners and partners to work together in tests. For example, sharing Police Scotland VPRs with the Named Person to support improved outcomes for children involved is currently being tested in Falkirk.

Resource issues are an ongoing challenge, especially around the establishment of the role of the Named Person and the implementation of the 600 hours early learning and childcare provision. Increasing the role and remit of the Named Person is causing anxiety around the volume of record keeping, in addition to other practical issues such as calling, attending and administering meetings.

Adding to the quantity of early years provision will not, on its own, improve inequalities. Strong consideration has to be given to the quality of service and the planning for individual children to ensure positive outcomes are achieved.

5. Are there any specific initiatives or research evidence from Scotland, UK or internationally that you would wish to highlight to the Health and Sport Committee?

Strategic drivers within Falkirk are:

- Falkirk Children’s Commission
- Falkirk Integrated Children’s Services Plan
- Corporate Parenting Strategy
- Equally Well in Falkirk – framework for improving health and reducing inequalities
- Poverty Strategy
- Family Nurse Partnership
- Single Outcome Agreement
- Lets make Falkirk More Active – a multi-agency group which coordinates local action plans for physical activity promotion. For example, “Buggy Walking Project” and the “Helix Park Project”
- Bairns in the Wood – which promotes outdoor learning and play in natural environments
- Psychology of Parenting Project (PoPP) – which targets parents of children aged 3-4 whose behaviour is causing concern
- You First – a groupwork programme by Barnardo’s for young parents who have a child under the age of 1 and are in a SIMD area
Some suggested research evidence:


Falkirk Children’s Commission
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