



Building a Fairer Scotland: Does Understanding Childhood Adversity Help?

JOHN SWINNEY MSP

Deputy First Minister and
Cabinet Secretary for
Education and Skills

Apex Scotland
Annual Lecture

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Previous Apex Scotland Annual Lectures have been delivered by:

5 September 2017

The Rt. Hon. James Wolffe QC
Lord Advocate

6 September 2016

Fraser Kelly
Chief Executive, Social Enterprise Scotland

1 September 2015

Michael Matheson MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Justice

2 September 2014

Professor Lesley McAra
Co-Director, Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions
and Crime, University of Edinburgh

3 September 2013

Sir Stephen House
Chief Constable of Police Scotland

4 September 2012

Jeane Freeman OBE

6 September 2011

Tam Baillie
Scotland's Commissioner for Children and
Young People

7 September 2010

Baroness Vivien Stern CBE
Senior Research Fellow at the International
Centre for Prison Studies King's College London

8 September 2009

Professor Fergus McNeill
Professor of Criminology and Social Work,
University of Glasgow

9 September 2008

Kenny MacAskill
Cabinet Secretary for Justice and
Richard Jeffrey, The Prisons Commission

11 September 2007

Professor Wesley Skogan
Institute for Policy Research (IPR),
Northwestern University, Illinois

12 September 2006

The Rt. Hon. Lord Cullen of Whitekirk

13 September 2005

Cathy Jamieson MSP
Justice Minister

15 September 2004

Duncan L Murray WS
President of the Law Society of Scotland

16 September 2003

The Rt. Hon. Jack McConnell MSP
First Minister

18 May 1998

Henry McLeish MP
Minister for Home Affairs and Devolution,
Scottish Office

Foreword

The 2018 Apex Scotland Annual Lecture was delivered by Mr John Swinney MSP, Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills. Drawing on an extensive knowledge base of the developments in understanding of the impact of adversity in childhood, Mr Swinney talked widely across aspects of Government and social policy to show how an awareness of the effects of trauma on development and behaviour is changing thinking and influencing practice. He also referred to Apex's 2017 lecture quoting us as stating that we need a new discourse around justice, one where success is measured by those we keep out of the system, not how many we get in. Mr Swinney linked this to his topic in saying that an understanding of the causes and contributing factors behind social behaviour is vital if we are to aspire to a fairer and more just Scotland.

In his address he speaks about the well known links between social actions such as school exclusion, care arrangements or justice measures, and subsequent adult challenges including criminality. These negative outcomes, he believes, are demonstrably linked to the experience of adversity throughout a person's development and may be minimised by social reform, which addresses issues such as poverty, family stability, early educational opportunities and improved mental health resources. Referring to the Programme for Government announced just that day, he illustrated how the priorities of the Government are being shaped by an understanding of these issues and announced a number of significant new resources which he hopes will ensure an improved position. These include training on trauma, increased funding for health visiting and mental health services and continued investment in school based programmes and family support.

It was gratifying to note that much of what he cited as best practice and research based activity has been pioneered by Apex Scotland over the past decade in our schools services and more recently in the hosting and promotion of the Resilience documentary and incorporation of adverse childhood experience and trauma informed care into our overall approach. In particular the development of our RE:SET service mirrors the principles laid out by Mr Swinney and we trust that more resources will be made available going forward for embedding some of this activity in mainstream services.

The address itself not only lays out a clear picture of where Government thinking is going over the next few years but also offers a significant endorsement of the work done by Apex and many others to promote the value of trauma informed care and the need to address childhood adversity. The links to the justice programme were explicitly made and indicate a continued direction of travel towards early intervention, diversion from prosecution and a socially progressive approach to criminality. This approach received overwhelming support from the audience and in the subsequent social media analysis of the evening which has been overwhelmingly positive.

As a result of this lecture we hope that a continued growing body of evidence and debate will move thinking across Health, Social and Justice arenas towards a more trauma informed discourse. However, as I noted in my summary, it is not enough to see this as a primarily academic or even public sector issue, but a systemic one in which all sectors, especially the third sector and the media, have vital parts to play. It is important that when tackling a systemic problem, we do not forget to take a systemic or whole systems approach, and Apex is committed to helping that become a reality.

Alan Staff

Chief Executive
Apex Scotland

Introduction

Thank you very much Brian for your warm welcome and good evening ladies and gentlemen. It is an enormous privilege for me to be invited tonight to deliver the Apex Scotland Annual Lecture and to follow in the footsteps of a number of my ministerial colleagues, as well as other commentators and participants, in this vital debate that Apex Scotland has championed over so many years within Scotland, and to follow immediately in the footsteps of the Lord Advocate, James Wolffe QC, who delivered the lecture here last year.

I am especially delighted to be here on the day that the Government has set out our Programme for Government in the Scottish Parliament just down the road, because it allows me to talk openly about some of the further commitments the Government has made and the First Minister has announced in the Programme for Government today. Their effect the topic at the heart of the subject of my lecture tonight and I am grateful for the opportunity to have such a significant platform to do that.

There also could be no more appropriate year for me to be here to deliver this lecture given that 2018 has been defined as the Year of Young People. When we crafted the Year of Young People what we wanted to do was to encourage the country to essentially reconsider our attitudes towards young people; to encourage Scotland to think afresh about our young people and what they contribute to our society, and how we relate to young people within our society. I think Ministers were concerned that we tend to have a public debate and narrative that far too often focuses on the issues that go wrong with young people, or the difficulties that young people find themselves in, as opposed to celebrating the enormously significant contributions that young people make to our society today. The thinking behind the Year of Young People was to essentially encourage, promote and support the development of a range of different activities and interventions around the country which

would give us the opportunity to celebrate and promote the contribution of young people to our society. As I reflect on the events that have taken place during 2018 so far, I could not be more delighted by the progress that we have made in encouraging that sense of reflection within our country on the contribution of young people to our society and, I think, to changing many of the attitudes that prevail about young people in some aspects of our commentary and our society. So it's a particularly appropriate opportunity for me to be with you tonight and to be able to deliver this lecture.

I want to pick up where the discussion left off at the very end of last year's Annual Lecture. Alan Staff closed last year's event calling for the need for a public debate and discourse which sees keeping people out of the justice system as a success and not getting people in. This is a debate and a discourse which I believe has really gathered momentum over the last year as awareness of the impact of childhood adversity has increased and people and organisations have come together to explore collective solutions.

It is also a perspective with which I have fundamental sympathy as a politician and as a Minister of long standing. I sat around the Cabinet table in 2008 as we wrestled with a rapidly increasing prison population at that time and the fact that we were heading in a direction where more of our capital expenditure was going to have to be invested, not just in refurbishing the prison estate, but in expanding the prison estate, and that of course would be at the expense of investing in schools and hospitals and other facilities which we might consider to be more appropriate ways of spending public money for the public good. That focus on the hard question of having to allocate capital resources that could go to other priorities, to instead physically expand our prison estate, prompted Cabinet to think about whether or not the approach that we were taking to the criminal justice system, and to issues such as reoffending, was effectively targeted in making

and delivering the outcomes that we wanted to see. That prompted what I think has been a remarkable story, a remarkable journey, of people in what I affectionately describe as 'the justice family'. Of course Apex Scotland is part and parcel of that justice family because it is not just about the criminal courts, the Crown Office, the prosecution service or about the police service. It is about a whole range of different players looking at what is underpinning and what is driving offending practice and what we can do to try to encourage people to take different courses and, as a consequence, achieve better outcomes.

As a consequence of that we see very dramatic changes in the presentation of offending behaviour in our society today. I had an experience a few weeks ago where I had put in front of me a speech to deliver which included the statistic that, over ten years, there had been a 70% reduction in the number of young people referred to the Children's Panel on offending grounds. I sent the speech back and I said, "You've got your numbers wrong" – as a former Finance Minister I like to think of myself as a numbers guru. But I had the speech sent back to me to be told "The numbers are absolutely right Minister". That is a tremendous achievement of the collective will of the justice family, if I can describe it in that way; to change our attitudes and approaches to how we deal with the presentation of behaviour which causes that disruption and difficulty within our society, but which merits from us a response of a different character today than the one merited ten years ago. I think so much of that debate has been informed by more careful reflection on why people are offending, what is encouraging their offending behaviour and what we can do to encourage a different set of actions and behaviours to try to avoid that presenting in the first place. So the comment that Alan made at the end of last year's lecture of having a public debate and discourse which sees keeping people out of the justice system as a success, and not getting people in, is a sentiment with which I am very much in agreement.

Introducing ACEs

To turn to the substance of the question that I am wrestling with tonight of *Building A Fairer Scotland: Does Understanding Childhood Adversity Help?*, I am very firmly of the opinion that the experiences that we have during our childhood shape who we are and how we interact with the world. If our childhood experiences are harmful, stressful or traumatic and we don't get the right support, the negative effects can be deep and potentially last a lifetime. The first Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) study was undertaken over twenty years ago in the United States, but recently this long standing evidence base has been gaining increasing international interest. In Scotland it has become something of a hot topic but it's certainly not an issue which I think is a surprise to Scotland or a representative of a passing trend. I urge everyone here tonight to consider this issue in a deep and sustained way because the impact of adverse childhood experiences on children, on adults, on services and on wider society are clear to see.

Look across the societal challenges that all of us in this room are seeking to address: to improve health and wellbeing, to improve education and employment outcomes, to reduce offending and to create safer communities, then it's clear that all of us need to be concerned with the underlying drivers of childhood adversity. Abuse and neglect, domestic violence, parents going to prison, parental separation, family mental health problems, or a home blighted by drugs or alcohol – such experiences all impact on the emotional and physical development, the capacity to learn and the capacity to thrive.

Sometimes the term ACEs is used to refer to the key adversities that I have just described but the way I want to consider this question tonight, and the focus of the work that we have in Government, is that all types of adversity can have an effect on children's healthy development. This also includes child poverty which we know creates stress for children and increases the risk of experiencing other adverse childhood experiences. Growing up in poverty

also means less access to things like good housing, to activities, to hobbies, to holidays, which can help buffer the impacts of stress and build children's resilience. Addressing childhood adversity is about tackling poverty and about addressing the wide range of adversities that create stress or trauma for children.

Commitment to Addressing ACEs

So if I can begin by answering the question posed in the title of this year's Annual Lecture, my answer to the question of *Building A Fairer Scotland: Does Understanding Childhood Adversity Help?*, my answer is an emphatic "Yes". I strongly believe that understanding childhood adversity is key to building a fairer Scotland. All of us in this room need to focus on childhood adversity and all of my Cabinet colleagues need to share that understanding and the appreciation of that challenge. I need to be thinking about childhood adversity in my drive to improve the lives of children and young people and to raise attainment. Young people are not going to be able to attain properly and effectively if, before they engage in the process of learning on a daily basis in our schools, they have got to overcome the significant impact of adversity in the home before they have got into the learning environment. How can a young person concentrate in a classroom in a school if their mind is preoccupied by the adversity that they have left and the adversity they may well be returning to, or are likely to be returning to, later on in the day? Our school system has to adapt and adjust to those issues and those factors.

But if we have to wrestle with that in the education system, then the Cabinet Secretary for Justice has got to wrestle with this on offending and reoffending behaviour, and the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport has got to reflect on these issues in her drive to improve the wider health of the population. So my point in expressing those requirements in that way is to acknowledge, and to reinforce very much the point that Brian made in his introduction, that these issues cannot be solved in one neat

little compartment. They must be owned by all of us with all of our perspectives to make sure, cumulatively, we can make the impact on addressing these questions that all of our collective effort will require us to do.

When we formulated our Programme for Government last year, when we got to the point where we were agreeing the contents of it and signing it off as a Cabinet team, I was struck by the comments that the then Cabinet Secretary for Justice, Michael Matheson, made where he highlighted a particular box that appeared on, I think, page 73 which listed the impact of adverse childhood experiences and listed the approaches we needed to take across Government to try to address these issues. The point he made to Cabinet was that there were some of these in the possession of the policy portfolio for the Health Secretary, some in my portfolio in the Education team, some in his portfolio, some amongst our local Government partners, but the moral of the story was if we didn't all get our act together in a cohesive and collective fashion we would not be successful in tackling the impact of those issues and how they present in our society. So it is a challenge that must be owned across the portfolio spectrum of the Scottish Government and owned across the interest in policy debates within Scotland.

As we set out last year, and as we reiterated in the Programme for Government that we just published, we are determined as a Government to do all that we can to better prevent adverse childhood experiences and to support children and adults that are affected by these experiences. Whilst I want to emphasise tonight the significant impact that childhood adversity can have on children and throughout their adult lives, I do not want in any way, however, to be deterministic about this. This is not about placing limits on people's aspirations and achievements. I have had the enormous privilege to meet many children and adults who have suffered adverse childhood experiences but have gone on to show incredible resilience in the face of that adversity. We know that individuals can

overcome these challenges but we also know that giving children the best start in life is best for them and best for our society. So if we are able to eliminate childhood adversity as much as possible, and do all that we can to support healing for children and adults affected, we will be investing in the health and the wellbeing of our society to a significant extent.

So how are we taking forward our commitment to tackle adverse childhood experiences in Scotland? This is very much about the embedding and the understanding of ACEs across all of Government and working collaboratively on our national approach of Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC). In March of this year I hosted an event with the First Minister at Bellahouston Academy in Glasgow along with a range of Cabinet colleagues, again demonstrating that breadth of responsibility and ownership of this challenge across our policy portfolios, to discuss with people working across many different sectors how we can drive forward progress on ACEs. We were all agreed that no one organisation or sector can do this alone. This is very much about all of us bringing a focus on childhood adversity across all the work that we do.

So tonight I want to set out the four key areas I believe we need to focus our efforts on to drive progress on tackling childhood adversity.

1. Providing intergenerational support to parents, families and children to prevent ACEs occurring in the first place.
2. Where ACEs do occur, providing the right support to children at the right time to reduce the negative impacts as soon as possible and help build their resilience.
3. Developing trauma informed workforce and service responses for children and adults.
4. Raising awareness across all of society and supporting action across communities. That is about all of us.

There is one consistent, embedded theme that runs through all four of these areas and that is a relentless focus on preventative intervention.

Intergenerational Support

Let me begin with the first area of intergenerational support to parents, families and children by speaking about our national approach to Getting It Right For Every Child. The interest in, and the attention on, ACEs may be a relatively new commentary within Scotland but I believe it is deeply anchored in our long standing policy commitment to the GIRFEC approach. When I say 'our long standing commitment to the GIRFEC approach', the approach of Getting It Right For Every Child was not an approach constructed by the Government that I have the privilege to serve, but it was constructed by our predecessors in the Liberal and Labour coalition. What we did when we came to office in 2007 was recognise a theme of policy that would be long term in its nature, long term in its effectiveness and therefore the right thing for us to do was to sustain a long term policy commitment that we inherited from our predecessors. So we now find ourselves in 2018 with the best part of about 15 years of policy focus on Getting It Right For Every Child, demonstrating perhaps that, despite the vagaries of the political cycle, politicians can actually come to the conclusion that there are some things worth sustaining from one administration to the next to give that policy consistency. Getting It Right For Every Child empowers services and families to work in partnership to address the needs of children and young people early before they become bigger problems. This is about services working together with the needs of the child or the young person at the very centre. It is about supporting the wellbeing of our children and young people and improving outcomes by offering the right help at the right time from the right people. GIRFEC provides a clear, identified professional for families to go to if they need information, advice or support or access to services; this is the 'named person'. Every child and family should have access to this support, if and when they need it. We understand families must have confidence about how and when their child's information is shared as part of that process, and that is why we are taking care to address

the issues that are relevant to the Information Sharing Bill and related code of practice which I want to ensure provides a clear and consistent way for service providers and practitioners to do this. But fundamentally the character of the named person is about giving access to services for families that really need that support.

Our vision at the heart of the GIRFEC agenda is a drive which comes from the belief that, as a nation, we are equal from birth and, through opportunities, should be equal in life. We invest in many of these steps by the investment we make in policy interventions such as the baby box which is an embodiment of that goal. We value all children equally and we will do everything we can to support and encourage their potential. As announced in today's Programme for Government, we are providing new investment in perinatal and infant mental health. This is about early intervention, supporting the mental wellbeing of pregnant and new mums and working with infants and their parents or carers to prevent early difficulties escalating. We are expanding Family Nurse Partnerships so help is offered to every eligible young mother by the end of this year. We are building a new universal health visiting service that will give families better access to health visitors and employing 500 extra health visitors to make that a reality. We are supporting children and parents by expanding the offer of early learning and childcare. By almost doubling the number of funded hours we will reduce the burden of childcare cost on families; by introducing more flexibility in how the funded hours can be used, we will ensure that it works for families, but our main priority is about providing high quality, nurturing environments for play and development to give all children the best start and to prevent avoidable problems further down the line in the lives of these young people.

I am struck by the experience I had in a discussion with the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists about how we can act early to intervene, to address some of the communication challenges that young people can face in early learning and childcare, and

that play environment is all about encouraging communication and expression. Play and interaction of young people and building those relationships is crucial to building the resilience that children and young people require. I took part in a fascinating discussion with the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists about the communication difficulties that individuals can face and how early intervention can address these difficulties. They talked me through the consequences of a failure to have proper command of communication and the failure to be able to express yourself properly. What that leads to can be difficult behaviour with others: friction, tension, aggression and violence, and before you know it the person who started off with a communication deficit, has then embarked on a life of violence.

In the grouping was a guy in his forties, who said to me "That's me". He chartered his life of how an unaddressed communication difficulty at the age of two had translated into a whole series of events in his life, where one thing led to another, leading to a long period of incarceration and damage and difficulty to our society; it caused along the way many victims, much disruption to people's lives and a huge cost on the public purse. A speech and language therapy intervention that might have cost a few hundred quid at the age of two would have sorted it all out and avoided that spiral happening. So in all of my thinking about baby boxes, health visitors, early intervention, early learning and childcare, it is all about support for new parents and assisting to overcome some of those difficulties that individuals face, and all about trying to get the earliest possible intervention to make sure that children and young people embark on lives that can be most effectively supported by that early intervention.

That thinking is running through all of our actions, whether it's on the experience of children and young people within our education system, or in the work we take forward in tackling child poverty, the actions of which are emerging from the Child Poverty Act which Parliament passed last year, giving us a delivery plan which

focuses the public sector on what we can all do collectively to put in place early intervention to avoid child poverty becoming entrenched within our society. So the principle of ensuring that we have the embedding of intergenerational support to parents, families and children at the heart of our system is crucial in making sure that we have a preventative approach embedded in our policy agenda.

Reducing the Impact of ACEs

The second area I want to cover is about reducing the impact of ACEs for children. We know, sadly, that there are children who need protection from abuse or neglect, there are children living with parents affected by drug and alcohol misuse, there are children growing up with a parent in prison, there are children growing up in a home with domestic abuse, and these will all contribute to adverse childhood experiences. What I want to make sure is that we provide the right support to children at the right time to reduce the negative impacts of these adversities, as soon as possible, and to help build resilience amongst young people. The ACEs discourse underway across Scotland, has shone a light on the way in which early experiences impact the whole of a child's life; their biology, their physical and emotional development, their ability to learn, their ability to regulate their behaviour. It has also shone a light on the critical importance of relationships for all children, but especially children impacted by adversity. Relationships with trusted, supportive adults are key to enabling resilience. This understanding is permeating the actions we are taking across universal services, in particular our schools and our health services, as well as dedicated actions that we are taking to help children most in need of protection and support.

So let me turn first to our universal responses across schools and health services. In June of this year we announced a task force on children and young people's mental health chaired by Dr Dame Denise Coia. This taskforce will review our whole approach to mental health services and is backed by an initial

investment of £5m. Today we've announced further actions we are taking to provide a range of support for children's and young people's mental wellbeing. We're investing in additional school nursing and counselling services; this will create around 350 counsellors in schools across Scotland, ensuring that every secondary school has access to counselling services. We'll have an additional 250 school nurses in place by 2022 providing immediate support for mild and moderate emotional and mental health difficulties. In educational policy overall, there's recognition of the impact that adverse childhood experiences, including poverty, can have on a child's capacity to learn and to thrive in school. That is why we're investing £750m through the Attainment Scotland Fund to support those who are affected, and to close the poverty-related attainment gap for our pupils in the most deprived areas.

This funding is helping schools to deliver a variety of health and wellbeing interventions. Some schools are using their funding to work with children dealing with emotional or social challenges such as investing in educational psychologists, family support staff and counselling services. Nurture approaches, based on an understanding of early life adversity, have been implemented across many of our nurseries and schools. Education Scotland is continuing to build on this effective nurturing practice and developing resources for teachers and pupils on adverse childhood experiences and trauma informed responses to aid the impact of these interventions on young people. We recognise that the problems that children can face sometimes lead to difficulties with behaviour in schools and risk of exclusion, which we know can, in turn, lead to a risk of early offending behaviour. The ACEs evidence underlines the importance of seeing the child and not the behaviour, of asking "What has happened to this child?" rather than "What is wrong with this child?" These are the type of questions we need to ask ourselves. This is why early intervention and prevention are at the heart of our approach and that exclusion is only used as a very last resort.

I had a fascinating conversation with a head teacher in one of our secondary schools who had been in post as a head teacher for about five years. He had realised, to his horror, that his school had the highest exclusion rate of any school in his local authority and he wasn't conscious of the fact that they were acting in that fashion. It forced him and his staff to completely rethink the approach that they were taking in terms of the support and nurture of pupils. By adopting the nurture approach that I have talked about and creating facilities and institutions within the school to enable that behaviour to be addressed and for that support to be put in place, the exclusion rate of that school has collapsed, and the wellbeing of pupils and staff has increased as a consequence. So a head teacher confronting some of the data which he inadvertently did not know was presenting as an illustration of not properly addressing what was the root cause of the behaviour has resulted in a very different set of outcomes being pursued in that particular school.

So the flexibility we have given to schools through the Attainment Scotland Fund and Pupil Equity Fund is enabling schools to address this in different ways in different parts of the country, because these issues will present themselves in different ways in different parts of Scotland. It is equipping them with the resources enabling them to properly intervene at an earlier stage, in supporting young people and assisting them to overcome some of the challenges that they face. All of that is part of the focus that I have on ensuring we achieve excellence and equity for all children and young people in our highly performing education system. So alongside the actions that we are taking across our schools and health services I want to make sure that the approach that we take to protecting children most at risk is deployed effectively within our system and that we take the necessary actions to address the impact of specific adversities in the lives of young people.

The Government is clear that our systems and services must continue to improve the response to children who have suffered abuse or significant harm and we are working in partnership with a range of different organisations to make that happen.

Since 2016 we have been implementing the Child Protection Improvement Programme to ensure that effective protection for all children at risk from abuse and neglect is put in place. We've been learning from international good practice including Iceland's 'Barnahus' (or 'children's house') child-centered and trauma informed approach for child victims of serious and traumatic crimes. We are now beginning to work to develop the Barnahus principles in the context of Scotland's healthcare and criminal justice system. We've committed to developing the Safe and Together model of child protection in a domestic abuse setting. This model, originally developed in the U.S., partners with domestic abuse survivors and intervenes with perpetrators in order to enhance the safety and the wellbeing of children. As you'll be aware, the Scottish Parliament passed groundbreaking legislation on domestic abuse earlier this year, which includes recognising and recording the direct impact that domestic abuse has on children. The ACEs evidence has also highlighted the impact of parental imprisonment on children and we're committed to reducing the use of short custodial sentences. There are, of course, cases where custodial sentences are essential and the prison service is working to reduce the impact on children by developing parenting programmes which support healthy family relationships and positive attachment between parent and child, where that's appropriate, and working with the third sector to provide family friendly visiting arrangements.

Scottish Government funding and partnership working with the third sector is also providing support to children and young people affected by parental substance abuse. Of course we want to prevent substance misuse from happening in the first place. To that end we're developing our strategy on substance use, backed by an additional £20m of investment in drug and alcohol treatment services, to try to make that early intervention that's required in all circumstances.

I believe the increased awareness that we now have of the science of ACEs and brain development is helping to enable us make greater strides towards a compassionate and a fairer society. These aspirations must be embedded in the Children's Hearing System, which was the product of the work that was undertaken by Lord Kilbrandon in his report in 1964. Lord Kilbrandon was a man of great vision who set out a way of doing things differently. His belief was that we should always be driven by the interests of the whole child and that remains a principle at the heart of the Children's Hearing System, which is indeed central to all of the work the Government is taking forward, to create a fairer and more prosperous Scotland for all of this generation and for the next.

As a result of our overall approach to children's services and our move to prevention rather than dealing with the problems once they have arisen, we have seen the number of children referred to the Reporter fall for the tenth consecutive year. The Children's Hearing System is a very highly valued part of our system and the positive difference that the volunteer Children's Panel members make, and professionals make, to the children, their families and local communities is extraordinary. A fundamental principle of the Children's Hearing System is that parents are usually the best people to bring up their own children, they should be encouraged and enabled to do so whenever possible. When that isn't possible, options including foster care, kinship care, residential care and adoption are explored, depending on what is in the best interests of the child. All looked after children will have experienced childhood adversity and they need our support. The Getting It Right For Looked After Children And Young People strategy sets out our approach for ensuring that support is provided and that young people in the care system have the best possible chance to enjoy safe, fulfilling, secure and loving childhoods.

One of the points that has stuck me most as we have wrestled with many of these questions about the care system has been the importance that we must attach. To ensure that at the heart of our

approach to supporting children who have experienced adverse childhood experiences, is that they are able to rely upon strong, robust, engaged and loving relationships, with respected individuals who can provide them with the support that they require. The importance of that has been brought home to us in all of the work that has been undertaken by the independent care review, which will significantly inform the way in which we take forward our public policy agenda. So if we want to get it right for every child, we need to look behind the behaviour to address its causes. That is the most effective way I can see for us to be able to reduce crime, to improve life chances, to promote the good conduct that we require from individual young people, to help them overcome some of those challenges that they have faced. But to enable that to work across the public service we must have a trauma informed workforce and services available to us. That is essential to make sure that the support that we put in place can meet the needs of young people and that we put in place at the earliest possible stage the trauma informed services that will be required.

Trauma Informed Workforce and Services

Understanding childhood adversity means understanding that, for some people, damaging early life experiences have lifelong consequences, and support may be needed throughout life both in childhood and in adulthood.

In June of this year I was pleased to be able to announce funding to create the National Trauma Training Programme. This is part of our strong commitment to ensure that people working in frontline services and across the whole of Scotland's workforce better understand and respond to the needs of children and adults who have had adverse and traumatic experiences. Not all of our workforce and services needs to be experts in responding to adversity and trauma, but they

all do need to be trauma informed. This is about designing services and working in ways which minimise distress, overcome barriers and build trust.

Work is underway by NHS Education for Scotland to implement the National Trauma Training Framework by providing direct training to workers and developing a national trauma training plan to be published later this year. Specific projects have been identified to raise awareness of handling trauma and adverse childhood experiences amongst medical professionals and within the criminal justice system, including work to improve interview procedures for child witnesses.

So I hope the case is made for the importance of ensuring that right across our workforce we have an understanding and an ability to comprehend the impact of trauma, and how that may present in behaviour; to be able to take the early stages of tackling these questions, but then also to be able to have the deeper support in place to ensure that children and young people are able to attract the support that they require to tackle and be able to overcome the impact of adverse childhood experiences. In formulating some of our thinking in this respect, we have been struck by the findings of Welsh research on adverse childhood experiences. In that study, and we're undertaking some research work to complement this, individuals who suffer four or more ACEs were found to be fifteen times more likely to have committed a violent act in the past year, and twenty times more likely to be imprisoned at some point in their life, compared to people with no experience of ACEs.

So understanding childhood adversity is key to preventing people from entering the justice system in the first place and to reduce and prevent re-offending for children, for young people and for adults already in the system. Alongside tough enforcement over the last decade, Scotland has adopted a public health approach to tackling violent crime, focusing on early intervention and prevention. We continue

our investment in the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit which has worked with gang members and their communities and has provided support through education, training and mentoring. That activity illustrates the broader reach of some of our interventions, to ensure that we are tackling some of the consequences and the issues of adverse childhood experiences. We see that in the work that is undertaken through a number of elements of our judicial system, looking at different ways of addressing the root causes of offending behaviour, and how we can assure that measures are taken to address these issues.

Some of that is demonstrated in the work that's undertaken in Polmont Young Offenders Institution where many of these issues present themselves very vividly and dramatically to staff involved in the work there. The work that's involved around Police Scotland's 'positive lifestyle' project is delivering a trauma informed programme in Polmont Young Offenders Institution to help to reduce reoffending. Barnardo's 'here and now' service works with young people affected by trauma, bereavement and loss with the same effect. Looking at adults in prisons we know they've many more health conditions than the general population, including mental health issues and drug and alcohol abuse. It's for these reasons we have to have a combined and effective programme that draws together the work and the activities that can support and encourage and enable early intervention. For these reasons we have to ensure that we have a trauma informed workforce that can think actively about how practice can be adapted and changed and reformed to take greater account of the effect of adverse childhood experiences, and how the actions of public servants can be deployed in a different way to try to tackle these questions.

Societal Awareness and Community Action

Which brings me to the final aspect I want to cover tonight which is about societal awareness and community action because there is a really important dimension to this debate that has to

be acknowledged and understood. This is why I think some of the public commentary about adverse childhood experiences has been so beneficial in our public discourse in recent period, because we have to change society's minds and views on many of these questions. We have to encourage and support a shift of thinking away from dealing with the consequences of adverse childhood experiences and try to encourage a societal debate about how we can avoid the demonstration of some of the behaviours that are commonly associated with the consequences of adverse childhood experiences. So rather than having a debate about, for example, youth disorder and youth damage – which brings me back to where I started about the Year of Young People and recalibrating the country's relationship with our young people – we need to encourage and foster a discussion and a debate about how, as a whole society, we are acting collectively and collaboratively to try to avoid the presentation of the consequences of adverse childhood experiences on the lives of young people. If we do that then we will change fundamentally the thinking of our society to recognise that we must act earlier and in a more focused, compassionate way to intervene and address the experiences that young people will have had to avoid them presenting as deeper problems later in life. The wider public debate and commentary that is taking place around adverse childhood experiences is, in my view, assisting in that process and we need to evangelise further about it.

I saw the Resilience documentary about a year ago. I asked to see it in the company of a range of senior civil servants and also in the company of many of our stakeholders who work in this area of policy, because I wanted everyone to see it and reflect on its contents together; to understand how we have got to deploy our resources and our leadership to change attitudes within our society, to ensure that there is a much broader awareness of these issues and factors. When I look at what is now taking off and the debate on the subject more widely – later on this month

there will be an ACE Aware national conference which will be informed by some of the leading global research and practice on ACEs – it will help to cement some of the changes in attitude that we need to encourage and promote within our society to make sure that, right throughout our society, we are taking the necessary actions to address the consequences of adverse childhood experiences, and to ensure that every young person is able to attract the support and intervention that they require.

So I am optimistic that the debate that we are now having in Scotland as a whole is a really beneficial debate about how, as a country, we need to change our attitudes and our approaches and how that needs to be deeply embedded in our public service practice. We need to recognise this to be a challenge that exists to be solved by all areas of policy within our country. So what I would like to assure you about tonight is that this is an issue which is deeply embedded in a policy agenda that has been present in Scotland for some considerable time, dating back to the origins of the Getting It Right For Every Child agenda, which the Government, of which I am a part, inherited from our predecessors. That we have taken the good international thinking about ACEs and applied that to policy foundations in Scotland that are long standing and robust within our country on Getting It Right For Every Child.

We have related it closely to the agenda that we were given so powerfully by the commission led by Campbell Christie in 2010 and 2011 which fundamentally sent us the message that the earlier you intervene, the more you focus on prevention, the better the outcomes will be in our society. I am now pursuing a very cohesive agenda across Government, whether it's in the field of education or of health, of poverty, justice or of community development, which are all designed to give us the strongest possible opportunity to tackle adverse childhood experiences as they present themselves in our society. And we have to do that because we have set ourselves a pretty

big ambition in the work that the Government has set out recently as we have formulated our policy agenda and as we have published our national performance framework by which we want to be judged. Because at the heart of the national performance framework we've set out an ambition for our children: that they grow up loved, safe and respected, so that we all realise our full potential. Fundamentally, at the heart of how the Government views its leadership role within our society, is a desire to ensure that we can live up to that ambition for children and young people in every respect in our society.

Contribution

Where I would close tonight is by, I suppose, making an invitation to all of you, and to wider Scotland, and it is this: that this is not a journey for Government alone, this is a journey for everyone in the country to think what on earth can we contribute, what can I contribute, towards this agenda. Because if we motivate that contribution within our society we will have a cumulative impact that has the potential to interrupt a problem which has been going on all of my life, which is that, in this country, a good proportion of our children and young people

grow up unable to fulfill their potential and to have the life chances that all of us should be entitled to have. When I look at what the Government is focused on – baby boxes, early learning and childcare, closing the attainment gap, widening access to our universities, ensuring that we can achieve these objectives within our Education policy agenda – I see that complemented by what my colleagues are doing to deliver reduced reoffending, to improve the health and wellbeing of the population or about ensuring that young people are able to grow up in communities that are supportive and inspiring and positive experiences for them.

So the invitation is for all of Scotland to focus on interrupting a problem which has bedeviled Scotland for all of my life. I think the debate about ACEs gives us a unique opportunity to draw all of that together in a powerful agenda which will ensure that Scotland is a better country as a consequence of tackling this very significant issue with which far too many of our children and young people have to wrestle, and which has a profound impact on their lives, for all the days of their lives.

Thank you very much.



Apex Scotland
9 Great Stuart Street
Edinburgh EH3 7TP
Tel: 0131 220 0130
Email: admin@apexscotland.org.uk
www.apexscotland.org.uk



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