

Rt. Hon. Ed Balls MP  
Secretary of State for Children, Schools & Families  
DCSF  
Sanctuary Buildings  
Great Smith Street  
London. SW1P 3BT

18 March 2010

**By email**

**Cc: Nick Lawrence - Deputy Director, Head of Families at Risk Division, DCSF**

Dear Ed,

**The role of family intervention services, and Family Intervention Projects in particular, in delivering better outcomes for children and young people and their families**

You asked me to convene a national group to review the potential role of family intervention services, and Family Intervention Projects (FIPs) in particular, in delivering better outcomes for children, young people and their families. I thought it would be helpful to write to you at an early stage to provide some early messages emerging from our work.

My response reflects:

- a) the views of National Family Intervention Strategy Board members in the light of an analysis of the available national data and recent research. Board members were as follows:

**Kim Bromley-Derry**, President ADCS (Chair)

**Julie Jones**, Chief Executive, SCIE

**Christine Davies**, Director, C4EO

**Clare Tickell**, Chief Executive, Action for Children

**Adrian Rabot/Ann-Marie Crowley**, Superintendent Metropolitan Police/ACPO

**Helen Johnston**, Programme Director for Children and Young People, LGA

**Helen Williams**, Assistant Director, Neighbourhoods (National Housing Federation)

**John Dixon** Executive Director Adults and Children and Deputy Chief Executive of WSCC, ADASS

**Jo Webber**, Deputy Director of Policy, NHS Confederation

**Bob Ashford**, Head of Youth Justice Strategy, Youth Justice Board

- b) responses to the ADCS and C4EO's joint call for examples of effective local practice, validated on our behalf by C4EO.

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**The Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd**

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## Views of National Family Intervention Strategy Board members

Our ambition was to attempt to identify effective practice which could be adopted more widely. We paid particular attention to children and young people who are on the 'edge' of the care system and therefore most likely to increase pressure on statutory services both in terms of workload demand and expenditure.

At this stage we want to stress that much more needs to be done to draw definite conclusions from this evidence. This is why ADCS and C4E0 made their joint call for examples of local practice earlier this year and the Board will be working with other national professional and sector organisations over the coming months to establish what advice can be given to local partnerships seeking to improve service effectiveness in the face of financial challenge.

However, what we do feel able to say at this early stage is that we believe:

**Supporting families is the job of anyone who works with children, young people and their families and helps to improve outcomes for children and young people.**

*Parental interest and encouragement has a greater influence on attainment by age 16 than socio-economic background and is a major protective factor to growing up in poverty or risky environments.*

**Intensive family support services such as Family Intervention Projects may reduce the need for higher cost statutory interventions** by helping families with complex needs:

- take advantage of support available within universal settings
- protect children and young people from the impact of poverty and crises that might arise in their lives.

*A meta-analysis of over 40 studies conducted in 2003 showed family-based interventions had substantial desirable effects<sup>1</sup>. A review by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence highlighted the value of parenting programmes in improving the behaviour of children with conduct disorder<sup>2</sup>. Eleven out of fifteen studies showed statistical long-term effects (between one and ten years). Intensive intervention programmes such as Family Intervention Projects (FIPs) provide a cost-effective way of tackling the problems of the most challenging families. Average costs per family, per year, range from around £8,000 to £20,000 when compared to cost savings estimated by one CLG study as amounting to £250,000 and £350,000<sup>3</sup> per family per year.*

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<sup>1</sup> Farrington and Welsh, *Saving children from a life of crime*, 2007; Farrington and Welsh, meta analysis in ANZJC, 2003

<sup>2</sup> NICE, SCIE *Parent-Training/education programmes in the management of children with conduct disorders*, in NICE/SCIE Technology appraisal guidance 102, 2006

<sup>3</sup> Communities and Local Government (2006) 'Anti-social Behaviour Intensive Family Support Projects: An evaluation

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**Family intervention should be prioritised where one or more children, or young people or a parent, is facing a critical life event.** This might include a child or young person being taken into or released from care or permanently excluded from schools, a parent facing imprisonment, or needing acute or intensive health care due to mental health or substance misuse problems, or the family is facing eviction from the family home due to anti-social behaviour.

**Better outcomes can be achieved by balancing support, challenge and enforcement in ways which the assessment of individual and family needs suggests is most likely to secure positive outcomes.** However the need to protect children, young people or others who could be at risk is paramount.

**Local services should avoid 'going it alone' with untried and untested practice.**

A growing body of research guidance, existing practice, experience and support which is now available provides a significant platform on which to base service development in localities. However, where new innovations in practice are developed they need to be supported by research to ensure the robust measurement of effectiveness and enable wider dissemination to take place.

**Continued investment in early and family intervention could reduce future demands on statutory services.** Without this investment, service costs are likely to continue to increase year on year which may inhibit the capacity of the system to continue to improve outcomes.

*By comparing national data on the numbers of children in need and children in local authority care we found that authorities which have identified more children in need per head of population have comparatively fewer children looked after.*

**Responses to ADCS's and C4EO's call for examples of promising local practice**

This highlighted some useful **early messages** from an analysis from case studies of local practice validated as excellent or deemed promising. This is attached. Emerging common key characteristics of effective early intervention include:

- (1) a pervasive culture that respects both families and other professionals, and engenders strong relationships and integrated working;**
- (2) schools and other universal services at the hub of a 'continuum of support' and family intervention;**
- (3) recognition of the importance of outreach work to support vulnerable groups;**
- (4) creative ways for building capacity to sustain positive change; and**
- (5) evaluation to discern the impact of interventions is at a relatively early stage.**

In particular the review suggests that:

- a) **Universal services can marginalise those who are already disadvantaged,** because they are less able or willing to access the provision offered, and that this needs to be mitigated by effective outreach or targeting strategies and by finding out what kinds of support and help such families would value and use.<sup>i</sup>

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- b) **Services which parents, carers, children and young people in need of support value and take up are: easily accessible, culturally sensitive, have practitioners who are approachable, responsive, pay attention to strengths as well as needs and focus on supporting both child, young person and their parent or carer<sup>ii</sup>**
- c) **Working together with other agencies and maintaining a focus on the family as a whole increases the network of support for families.**
- d) **Professional and managerial culture which values the development of good working relationships is needed for good inter-disciplinary and inter-agency work with families.**<sup>iii</sup> Professional time was identified as the most important resource for services, because time was needed to develop effective working relationships with other professionals and that good inter-disciplinary and inter-agency work.

## **Concluding Remarks**

Board members agreed that it was critical for Government, in partnership with national and local organisations such as those that they represent, should do what they can to support the establishment of early and family intervention as a fundamental plank of the public service 'offer'.

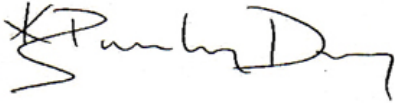
The Board recognised the commitments in the DCSF Families and Relationships Green Paper 'Support for All' and proposed DCSF consultation on early intervention, which includes proposals to ensure every local authority will be able to offer an intensive family intervention service for families with the most complex needs; to establish a national training programme for family intervention key workers and to consult on the measures that need to be in place so that families, where appropriate, receive an assessment, for family and parenting.

Board members also felt that that the Government should set out to:

- 1) Systematically gather and disseminate what is and is not effective practice in working with families, and the correlation between intervention, outcomes and costs.
- 2) Encourage the dissemination of professional practice and training for those carrying out, planning or commissioning family intervention in addition to or as a main part of their day to day role.
- 3) Ensure all Government Departments actively encourage co-operation and co-ordination between national and local agencies and services supporting children, young people and adults within the same family.
- 4) Engage regulators to work intelligently in identifying how work with families can be measured and valued.
- 5) Support investment in family intervention where these can be shown to deliver value for money by reducing pressures on statutory services and reduce service costs whilst still improving outcomes for children, young people and their families.

With kind regards

Yours sincerely



**Kim Bromley-Derry**  
**President of ADCS and Chair of the National Family Intervention Strategy Board**

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- <sup>i</sup> Statham J and Smith M January 2010. *Issues in Earlier Intervention: Identifying and supporting children with additional needs*. Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London.
- <sup>ii</sup> Referenced in Statham J and Smith M January 2010. *Issues in Earlier Intervention: Identifying and supporting children with additional needs*. Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London.
- <sup>iii</sup> Katz I and Hetherington R 2006. *Co-operating and Communicating: A European Perspective on Integrating Services for Children*, Child Abuse Review Vol 15: 429-439