



**WE LISTEN, WE SUPPORT,
WE TAKE ACTION**
for Scotland's vulnerable
children and families

CHILDREN 1ST **Response to the PTSD inquiry**

CHILDREN 1ST provided oral evidence in March 2013 for the Health and Sport committee's inquiry into post trauma stress disorder. We are now pleased to be able to comment on the Scottish Government's response.

At CHILDREN 1ST, we listen, we support and we take action to secure a brighter future for Scotland's vulnerable children. Our work is built on 130 years experience as the RSSPCC. By working together with, and listening to children, young people, their families and communities, and by influencing public policy and opinion; we help to change the lives of vulnerable children and young people for the better. We work to safeguard children and young people, to support them within their families and to help them to recover from abuse, neglect and violence.

CHILDREN 1ST provides fourteen abuse and trauma recovery services for children, young people and their families, across Scotland. Our abuse and trauma recovery services support children and young people who have experienced or are experiencing trauma because of sexual abuse, neglect, the impact of living with violence in home, or domestic abuse. We also work directly with both women who have been affected by domestic abuse, to help them recover from that trauma, and with adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse in Aberdeen, Moray and the Scottish Borders.

Services for children who have experienced trauma

The Scottish Government needs to recognise the impact that trauma has on thousands of children who suffer abuse and neglect in Scotland. Children suffer trauma through the impact of parental substance misuse, through living in homes where there is domestic violence, through being sexually, physically and emotionally abused. Out of all our CHILDREN 1ST services, our abuse and trauma recovery services have the highest waiting lists, showing that there is a service gap here at community level. We know the Scottish Government has acknowledged the importance of early intervention, but we are disappointed that their response to this inquiry does not seem to acknowledge the urgent need for more abuse and trauma recovery services for children and young people.

Alison Johnstone MSP has lodged amendment 119 which will be debated during stage 3 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) bill. This amendment will allow discussion to focus on what the Scottish Government is currently doing to uphold Article 19 of the UNCRC; what it is doing to protect children and minimise the risk of harm suffered through abuse, neglect and violence. It therefore also creates the opportunity to discuss what the Scottish Government are doing to ensure children have access to abuse and trauma recovery services.

In its response the Scottish Government state that "*all children and young people who are referred to CAMHS, including looked after children and those living in kinship care arrangements are assessed on the basis of their clinical needs*". However, as was discussed during the inquiry, not all children and young people who are experiencing trauma are referred to CAMHS. Many children and young people experiencing trauma are slipping through the net, and through our experience running the National Kinship Care Service, we know that many children within kinship care families have found it difficult to access CAMHS.

More abuse and trauma recovery services are needed at community level and outwith the health service to help children recover, and there needs to be better links between services to ensure children have access to the support they need.

We are pleased the Scottish Government response acknowledges the need to support families, as well as children within an early intervention approach to prevent abuse and trauma. We welcome Part 9 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) bill, which will ensure that there is a duty placed on local authorities to provide early intervention support to families, for example through parenting support or through Family Group Conferencing (FGC), which involves the wider family in making decision and creating a plan about a child's care. However, a stronger link to CAMHS is crucial here, and it is vital that abuse and trauma recovery services will be included within the early intervention support for children.

Trauma pathway – for children and young people

The Scottish Government has largely omitted to address the gap in trauma related services between health and social services, along with the patchy referral system, as identified by the committee. There is a need to mainstream trauma across specialist children's services.

Training knowledge and awareness in the community

We are pleased that the Scottish Government recognises the need to continue to roll out training related to trauma in the community and will be keen to learn the results of the Rivers Centre project. We are also pleased to learn that the Scottish Government is developing training through NHS Education, however are interested to learn if there are plans for specific training around children and trauma.

CHILDREN 1ST also delivers training related to trauma in partnership with Robert Gordon University which is available to our staff. The CHILDREN 1ST Cedar project based in Moray: works with children and young people who have suffered trauma as a consequence of their experience of domestic abuse. The approach here includes group work with children and with their mothers. It is important to ensure that a wide range of expertise is utilised and involved in training, and not just the public sector. More needs to be done to ensure that professionals who come into contact with children and young people, are trauma informed. We feel that a wider range of professionals need to be trauma informed, including teachers, social workers, health care professionals, GPs.

Kinship carers

The Scottish Government does not acknowledge in its response, the difficulty that many kinship carers have in accessing therapeutic support for their children who are impacted by trauma. More needs to be done to ensure that children in kinship care, who have experienced trauma, are able to access appropriate services. We do however welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to try to help remedy this issue through Part 9 and Part 10 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) bill, and hope that secondary legislation will include specific reference to abuse and trauma recovery services.

The Scottish justice system and trauma – child witness support service

In its response, the Scottish Government does not address the issue we raised regarding the urgent need for a child witness support service, and the lack of therapeutic support available for child witnesses experiencing trauma. A child witness support service would help children and families access all the information and the specific support necessary. We know that currently, many child witnesses do not have access to therapeutic support during the court process, and many families do not receive all the information and support they need.

For more information about CHILDREN 1ST, contact the policy team at policy@children1st.org.uk or on 0131 446 2300