

CSV conference re: Volunteers in Child Protection – 28 Nov – Draft 1 (2155 words)

Thank you very much for that kind introduction. And thank you to CSV for inviting me to join you all here today.

"Safety and security don't just happen, they are the result of collective consensus and public investment. We owe our children, the most vulnerable citizens in our society, a life free of violence and fear."

These words were spoken by Nelson Mandela, former President of South Africa, and although I realise he is quoted so often that it's almost become a cliché, I think these words are worth it.

Collective consensus and public investment. Those are the keys to giving children in our society a life free of violence and fear.

This Government is absolutely determined to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and young people in care. From the Prime Minister, right across Government, down into local authorities and out to frontline workers, we all need to focus 100% on achieving better results in the child protection system.

But our efforts will not achieve the results we need without collective action.

By providing an extra set of eyes and ears, ordinary people can complement the work of social workers and bring massive benefits to vulnerable children and their families. And all of this work helps to strengthen the community as a whole.

As your own strapline puts it, "CSV creates opportunities for people to take an active part in the life of their community".

I can't think of a more effective or better-qualified organisation to do this. And on behalf of the Department for Education, I'd like to thank everyone at CSV for all your hard work on behalf of vulnerable children and families.

Everyone has a role in ensuring that risks to children are reduced. Projects that harness local volunteer energy, such as those pioneered by CSV, show the enormous potential for members of the community to contribute to child protection.

We can all be grateful that the overwhelming majority of children in this country enjoy a happy, safe childhood.

But as you all know, there is no room for complacency. Names like Victoria Climbié, Peter Connelly and Khyra Ishaq remind us only too starkly of the horrible consequences when the system fails.

Reforming the child protection system is one of this Government's highest priorities. To ensure that our reforms were well-thought-through, well-researched and well-planned, we launched the Munro Review of Child Protection less than a month after taking office.

Unlike other system reviews and inquiries, Munro was not commissioned as a knee-jerk response to a particular crisis, or in the middle of a media whirlwind.

And we were careful to give Professor Munro all the time she needed to conduct a full and considered review, consulting all the people that matter – including workers on the frontline

and children and young people.

The resulting report rightly addressed every single aspect of the system. It focused 100% on the child; and on the child's journey from needing help to receiving it.

In response to Munro's recommendations, the Government's approach to child protection reform is driven by three key principles:

- trusting the judgement of skilled frontline professionals;
- reducing bureaucracy and unnecessary central prescription;
- and, most important of all, making the system completely child-centred.

Implementing the Munro recommendations now requires a shift in mindset. This isn't a one off set of rules imposed on the sector, but a joint venture between central Government, local agencies, local authorities and professionals.

Changes to statutory guidance are just one part of the solution. We want local areas to use their expertise to develop new, better ways of working.

A multi-disciplinary group is advising us on revisions of *Working Together To Safeguard Children*, and Ofsted have already consulted on a new inspection framework for children's services. We are currently consulting on new guidance for DCSs and Lead Members and we have also recently published a co-produced work programme looking at safeguarding children in the reformed NHS.

While we cut back on red tape coming out of Whitehall, the most effective way to meet the challenge of improving practice is led by the sector rather than dictated from the centre.

And, of course, as I said at the start of the speech, it's important to remember that child safeguarding is not just a public sector responsibility.

Although we rely heavily on the trained and experienced professionals on the front line, who work so hard every day to protect vulnerable children and families, the job is too important for the rest of us to shrug our shoulders and walk on by.

When it comes to keeping kids safe, everyone in society has a role to play – and everyone has a responsibility to stop abuse from going unnoticed or unpunished.

We don't want excessive rules and regulation meaning that ordinary members of the society – people like neighbours, aunts and uncles, lollipop ladies – feel they have to keep quiet and look the other way when a child is being harmed.

A survey by the NSPCC, examining public attitudes to child safeguarding, showed that 83% of people would be personally willing to take action to protect a child, while 55% agreed that they could make a difference.

Obviously I'm not suggesting that professional social workers should step back and leave child protection to busy members of the public.

Volunteers should always be carefully trained and supervised, and the front line of child protection will always be staffed by professionals with the expertise and experience to take responsibility for a vulnerable child.

But I'm very happy to be here today to celebrate the success of organisations like CSV, which work tirelessly with the community and voluntary sectors.

The Volunteer in Child Protection Programme is an outstanding example of work which achieves real results.

A few weeks ago, I met the Bromley Local Safeguarding Board, which has recently piloted the Volunteer in Child Protection Programme with huge success:

- No child on the initial programme returned to the protection register;
- The programme has achieved some great work on early help for families;
- And the CSV estimated that the programme had saved Bromley some £1 million a year.

I am delighted to say that Bromley has taken the decision to continue with the ViCP project, and I hope that it will be followed in due course by ViCP projects all over the country.

That's why, at a time when finances are stretched, we've awarded a grant of close to £250,000 to CSV to expand the project over the next two years.

And I hope that children's service departments will consider ViCP projects as a way of enhancing support to vulnerable families.

Well-researched evidence is essential in helping to make the case for projects like these. I know that Anglia Ruskin University will be sharing the findings of their two year research project of the outcomes of ViCP intervention later today, which will help to illustrate the potential benefits and identify the strengths of this approach.

And I also look forward to CSV's new DVD, featuring families, children, volunteers and commissioners. Now that Downton Abbey has finished, I've got a gap in my viewing schedule on Sunday evening and I'm sure this will fit the bill perfectly.

With the help of high-quality resources and expert liaison organisations like CSV, I feel certain that partnership work and child focused systems are the best way forward for the child protection system. By working better together, we can achieve the best outcomes for the most vulnerable children and families.

I'd like to make the point that this Government strongly believes in funding projects like ViCP – projects which try to make a real difference in the lives of the most troubled families – because we think they are the right thing to do.

But it's also worth repeating that more often than not, what works for the child works for the taxpayer too.

High quality services and early intervention have been proven to achieve great results for families and great savings for taxpayers. For every £1 spent on joined up parenting interventions, some £7.89 is saved on problems which would otherwise have arisen in that family.

Both the Munro Review and Graham Allen's report on early intervention have made this perfectly clear; and Professor Eileen Munro even stated that the economic modelling we are using is 'conservative'. In other words, the benefits of many interventions in child

safeguarding are being routinely under-estimated in financial terms.

Community Budgets have already offered local areas the chance to unlock funding currently tied up in responding to family needs, and use it to prevent problems from occurring in the first place.

In total, local authorities have found that interventions in families with multiple problems have saved between £62,000 and £75,000 a year for each supported family.

The Government is committed to turning around the lives of 120,000 families with multiple problems by the end of this Parliament.

By last March over 10,000 troubled families with troubled kids had been supported through family interventions. 85% of completed interventions were successful, with fewer child protection issues, less truancy, less domestic violence, less anti-social behaviour, and less crime.

One family in Bristol, for example, was referred to a Family Intervention Service because of anti-social behaviour. At the end of the intervention one child, who had previously been skipping college, had an attendance rate of 100%, had started volunteering during school holidays and wanted to attend university. The estimated savings were £80,458 from this family alone.

Beyond the Munro reforms and family interventions, another major priority for me is tackling child sexual exploitation.

And as with any child protection issue, we need everyone – professionals and public – to be alert and vigilant in spotting the signs of child sexual exploitation. As I said before, no one can underestimate the role of the community in keeping our children safe.

Just last week, I announced the launch of our action plan to stamp out this horrifying type of child abuse – going on in every city and town, in urban and rural communities, often beneath the radar.

For too long, the system has failed to support victims and their families. Too many courts have treated survivors casually, and failed to take their specific needs into account. And – perhaps most worryingly – too many local areas have failed to uncover the true extent of sexual exploitation in their communities.

When conducting their 'thematic assessment' of child sexual exploitation earlier this year, CEOP reported a number of practitioners who told them "If you lift the stone, you'll find it". A young victim quoted in University of Bedfordshire research said, heartbreakingly, "it's not hidden - you just aren't looking".

Building on existing guidance, working with departments, agencies, a number of LSCB chairs and DCSs, with the help of organisations like Barnardos, CROP and the Safe and Sound project in Derby, and the invaluable testimony of parents and victims, we have created a new action plan to protect children at risk of abuse, those being abused and those who have survived abuse.

The plan looks at different aspects of sexual exploitation from the perspective of the young person, analysing what can go wrong and what should happen at every stage of the process.

We've identified four key points during an abuse case where we can bring a sharper child-centred focus to local planning and improved interventions:

- Raising awareness with young people, parents and professionals to prevent the issue from occurring;
- Taking effective inter-agency action against exploitation, and helping children who are victims to escape;
- Securing high profile prosecutions and improving court processes so that this serious crime receives serious punishment;
- And ensuring that victims and their families receive the support and counselling they may need, for as long as they need it, until they can get their lives back on track.

The action plan is detailed, comprehensive and based on close collaboration between agencies, professionals and communities, and I truly believe that it is an important step forward in the fight against this vicious and violent crime.

So thank you again to the CSV for all your excellent work in pioneering the ViCP programme, and for inviting me here today.

Child protection can be a difficult and distressing job. We know that some parents and carers don't always respond positively to social work methods and interventions; and that they sometimes see interventions as coercion, rather than collaboration.

I've heard interventions by social workers described as "the velvet glove revealing an iron fist".

As far as I'm concerned, protecting vulnerable children requires a whole community of velvet gloves and iron fists.

And I make no apology for supporting both the velvet and the iron as long as we make a real difference for vulnerable children and families all over the country.

By promoting the involvement of the whole community in supporting experienced and expert social work professionals, we can all achieve a stronger, more reliable and more robust child protection system.

Thank you.