THE CENTRE FOR CHILD WELLBEING AND PROTECTION

Annual Summary 2017
Welcome

It has been a successful and exceptionally rewarding first year for the Centre for Child Wellbeing and Protection.

As we look forward to the future, we wish to reflect on our Centre’s research to date but also to outline our key priorities and commitments for the year ahead.

Children and young people, who are the ultimate victims of policies that promote austerity and inequality, are still suffering the effects of global movements of people due to war, persecution and exploitation. Children and young people are still facing the additional pressures of digital exploitation, bullying and cynical marketing manipulation. Yet the very existence of our Centre and the continual demand for our research and expertise sadly echoes the extent that children and young people’s wellbeing and protection needs are not yet being met.

Scotland’s framework for children’s services and its commitment to reducing child poverty and the impact of inequalities places it prominently on the world stage. As our Centre’s already established national and international partnerships continue to strengthen and the generation and dissemination of our research continues to increase, we are confident in our initial commitment to supporting Scotland’s ambitious yet critical objectives.

Our vision

Our vision continues to be that children and young people at risk of compromised development, in Scotland and beyond, benefit from research and professional education and development inspired and led by the University of Stirling.

Our strength lies in the potential we have to enhance the lives of children who are vulnerable to compromised development stemming from a range of personal, familial and social adversities.

The focus of our Centre will remain on three key disciplines that support children - health, education and social work. We will continue to bring together internationally recognised experts in child protection, education and maternal and child health to support our holistic and integrated approach to research. Through our research, our aim is to continue to address the issues that affect children’s development at an individual, family and structural level from pre-birth through to school and beyond. Our Centre will also continue to work closely with research units such as Nursing, Midwifery and Allied Health Professions Research Unit (NMAHP), which undertake applied research to improve the health and wellbeing of Scotland’s population.

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Our work
Throughout this past year, the CCWP team has been involved with a range of research projects and has developed many interesting collaborations and partnerships.

The Rose Project: Best for Babies research project was a collaboration between Aberlour and the Centre. The project explored issues surrounding babies in prison and more specifically how they are supported to stay with their imprisoned mothers when this is in their best interests. Interviews with professionals and with mothers provided valuable insights into the practical and emotional realities of supporting a baby in a prison environment and of determining whether or not a baby should be in prison in the first place. The research concluded that improved environments, staff support and custodial alternatives may help more babies to stay in their mothers care.

The Seamless Services project exemplified the benefits of our multidisciplinary research in bringing together perspectives from education, social work and health on the complex concepts of integration and wellbeing. Our work on perinatal mental health also advanced from the collaboration between health and social work and our research relating to child welfare inequalities has drawn thought provoking parallels with educational inequalities. Similarly, our discussions with our stakeholders: Aberlour Child Care Trust, Action for Children, Children 1st, Children in Scotland, Social Work Scotland and NHS Forth Valley has invariably enriched our research approach and outputs.

Identifying and Understanding Inequalities in Child Welfare Intervention Rates: Comparative studies in four UK countries was a major collaboration for us, led by Coventry University. This was a comparative four-nation study, which aimed to establish child welfare inequalities as a core concept in policy making, practice and research in the UK.

The report revealed a stark finding that in Scotland, children in the most deprived 10% of small neighbourhoods are 20 times more likely to be looked after away from home than those living in the 10% least deprived and 18.5 times more likely to be named on the child protection register. Together with the research team, we are committed to driving change forward to eradicate these inequalities.

Some of the CCWP team were also involved in the Child Protection Improvement Programme on the Working Group chaired by Catherine Dyer and also provided supporting contextual and background papers that looked specifically at what current research recommends for children and families who may be experiencing neglect.

Knowledge Exchange and Research Development Events
We’ve held some fantastic seminars and events on issues such as poverty and maternal and infant mental health, which were very well attended and generated much discussion.

In February, a team from the Centre participated in the launch of the evaluation of Aberlour’s pilot Perinatal Befriending Support Service at the Scottish Parliament. The event was attended by over 100 participants from health social care and third sector organisations as well as MSPs, mothers and the perinatal befriender service volunteers.

In May, the team and Circle worked with Naomi Eisenstadt, Advisor to Scottish Government on Poverty, to present her report Shifting the Curve.
A few months later, the Maternal and Infant Mental Health Call to Action was issued following a high-level seminar with experts organised in partnership with NSPCC, Aberlour and Maternal Mental Health Alliance. The Centre's Honorary Professor, Joan Forbes, explored children and young people's experiences and views of poverty and inequalities through Poverty and Children: Creating creative spaces for participation.

Looking ahead

At the end of this first year it's clear that there is a real demand for more research to assist those who are working to support the wellbeing and protection of children and young people.

Media interest around the Centre continues to grow. Our activities have been regularly reported in the Herald Scotland and Centre members, including Brigid Daniel, have frequently appeared on Good Morning Scotland and Victoria Live programmes. We are eager to maximise the exposure of our Centre and the research we intend to carry out to address the significant gaps in evidence that we have evidenced – mental health and wellbeing; protecting children and young people; promoting inequalities and policy and systems in practice.

Mental health and wellbeing

The mental health and wellbeing of parents and children are often intertwined and both, in turn, are affected by many wider social factors. Our intention is to focus on generating and disseminating research to on the mental wellbeing of parents and its effect on children and on the mental wellbeing of children and young people.

Protecting Children and Young People

Whilst we are interested in the broader wellbeing of children, we are keenly aware that there are small, but significant groups of children and young people whose lives are seriously compromised by abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Therefore, we will maintain a sharp focus on research that will contribute to the protection of children from harm.

Promoting equalities

Our work on child welfare inequalities has confirmed the extent to which inequalities affect children's life chances. Children who are poor face greater chances of experiencing ill-health, poor educational outcomes and higher risk of involvement with child protection services. We will bring these issues together to undergo a programme of research that integrates this currently rather disparate area.

Policy and systems in practice

With policies such as 'Getting it right for every child', The Early Years Framework, The National Parenting Strategy, Curriculum for Excellence and Better Health: Better Care, Scotland is in a very strong position to improve the lives of children. The Centre will continue to undertake in-depth critical analysis of the impact of policies relevant to children and young people as they unfold in a continually changing and challenging context. The findings will be of benefit globally as other countries aim to develop more integrated approaches.

And finally...

We must thank our collaborators, partners and supporters for what has been an exciting and immeasurably fulfilling year and we look forward developing and strengthening new partnerships as our Centre evolves.