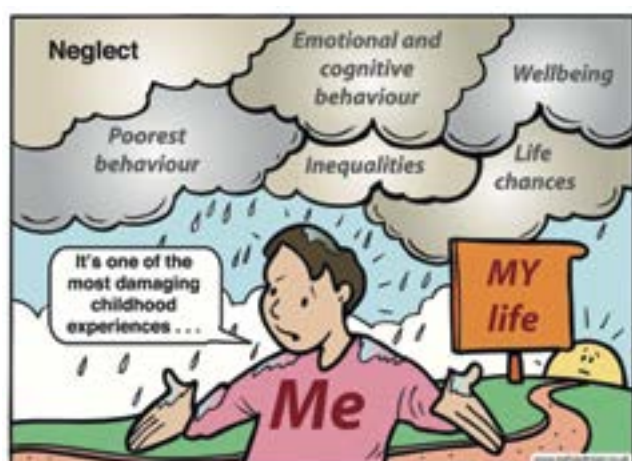


June 2016

Child neglect, wellbeing and resilience: Adopting arts based practices



Neglect remains the most common form of child mistreatment in the UK, with studies suggesting that one in 10 children suffer from neglect, while it is the most common reason for a child being subject to child protection measures (Burgess et al., 2014). According to the 2012 review of child neglect in Scotland, 'for every 100 children living in our communities, someone has a concern that one child is experiencing some degree of neglect' (Daniel et al., 2012, p.5). In the UK and specifically Scotland, it has consistently been found to be a background factor in children and families whose circumstances formed the subject of Significant, or Serious Case Reviews (Brandon et al., 2012; Vincent and Petch, 2012).

Neglect is not only damaging in early years, (Stein et al., 2009) and children who have experienced neglect may be affected to some degree for life (Taylor, 2015). In acknowledgment that work around neglect constitutes a priority for child protection, an



interdisciplinary seminar series was held between October 2015 and March 2016, to explore notions of neglect, wellbeing and resilience, the role of arts based approaches in this discussion and in the context of policy, practice and research.

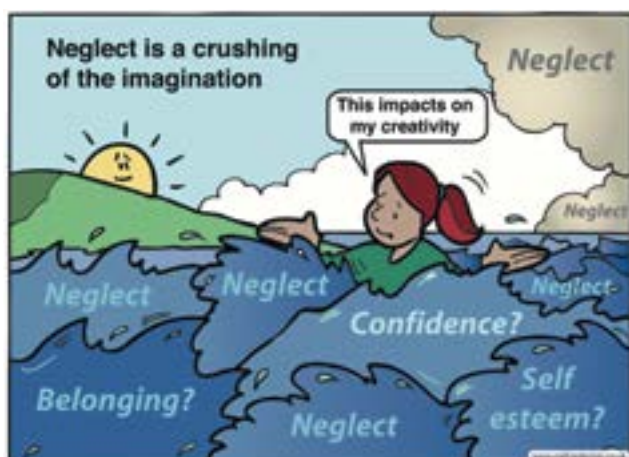
The first event of the Scottish Universities Insight Institute funded seminar series, in conjunction with WithScotland, Stirling University and Dundee University was devoted to research methodologies and arts based approaches to resilience and neglect; the second and third events provided space for practitioners and researchers to showcase their approaches when working with these issues while the final seminar explored delegates' suggestions for a set of shared national priorities for research, policy and practice. This report provides a brief summary of the discussions held during the four events; key presentations and additional materials are available on our website.

<http://withscotland.org/news/arts-based-approaches-for-tackling-child-abuse-and-neglect>

and on SUII website

<http://www.scottishinsight.ac.uk/Programmes/Programmes20152016/ChildNeglectArtsBasedPractices.aspx>

Neglect, wellbeing and resilience



Neglect was discussed in terms of needs not being met and most delegates referred to Maslow's work to describe the many levels of physiological and psychological needs that must be met for a person to achieve self-actualisation (Maslow, 1943). Echoing the extant literature which highlights the far reaching implications of neglect (Daniel and Taylor, 2006; Daniel, 2015; Taylor et al., 2015), children who have or are experiencing neglect were described as withdrawn, lonely, sad, lacking in confidence, exhibiting behavioural difficulties, not understanding boundaries or consequences, having no fear of consequences, seeking attention, or being rather 'invisible'.

On the whole, it was felt that physical neglect is easier to work with in comparison to emotional neglect which was reported as more complex. Neglect was also discussed as a symptom and delegates felt that questions must be asked about the reasons behind its occurrence, the perpetrators and the context within which it occurs. Neglect was said to often co-exist with child sexual abuse and/ or other forms of family dysfunction. However, it was also discussed as occurring before the child is born, especially in cases where parents may not fully appreciate the impact of their lifestyle on the unborn child. Intergenerational influences on child rearing practices and level of knowledge – or lack of – around such practices were also reported in this context.

On a different level, linked with poverty and social class, neglect was discussed in terms of whole communities. In this discussion, the political context of the stigmatisation of the poor was put forth. Delegates also proposed a different view on neglect, one that stems from funding cuts and results in services offered to children and young people – especially adolescents – being put under huge pressure. Not surprisingly, this was highlighted as a bigger problem in less affluent areas.

Wellbeing was discussed as a rather fluid and inclusive concept, very personal and unique to the individual, encompassing a wide range of personal attributes but also environmental characteristics. Delegates felt that the Getting it right for every Child approach (GIRFEC), and the wellbeing indicators included in GIRFEC (Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active Respected, Responsible, Included) provide a well-balanced view of the concept (The Scottish Government, 2008; 2012). Indeed, GIRFEC has been said to be a holistic, child-centered approach where the concept of child wellbeing has a central place (Coles et al., 2016). The day's discussion suggested that achieving wellbeing is linked to effective coping mechanisms, the notions of confidence and responsibility, the ability to accept and give affection, a sense of belonging as well as the ability to communicate and express opinions. In addition, the opportunity and ability to engage, play and explore were

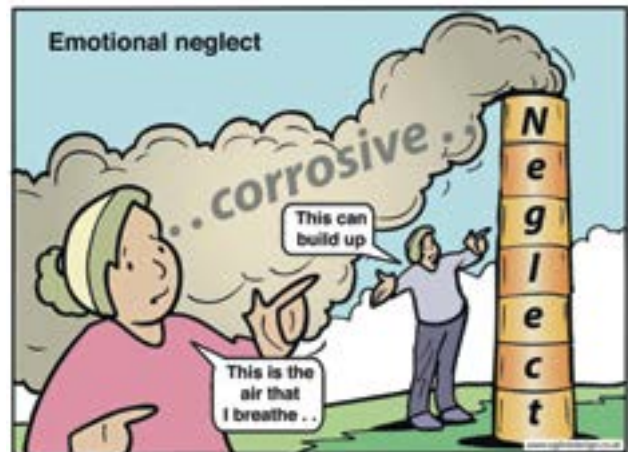


deemed important. Being active, achieving emotional intelligence, being 'a whole' or 'thriving' child, were also some terms connected to the concept of wellbeing.

The importance of the family, school, community and wider society in achieving wellbeing were noted. This resonates with the extant literature on the importance of social capital - social networks and connections (Bourdieu, 1993) but also the quality of relationships, to children's subjective wellbeing (Goswami, 2012). However, the key concept mentioned was love from various sources; love as unconditional acceptance, love as a sense of belonging, consistency and safety.



Resilience was described as the ability to thrive, especially so in the face of adversity, an 'emergent property from the experience of adversity and the demonstration of relatively good outcomes' (Daniel, 2010: 238). It was conceptualised as effective learning from



challenges, or self-regulation and was said to be different for everyone. Resilient children and young people were described as taking responsibility for their behaviour and having the capacity to reflect on their experiences and shape their future. Finally, the ability to draw on protective factors both internal but also external including the school, the community or the family, was also mentioned. Delegates felt that resilience is a skill that can be learned and made specific reference to the need for a diverse, creative and supportive environment to aid this process. Attachment and parenting styles were both deemed influential in terms of developing resilience, as were opportunities for positive route for expression. Resilience was also discussed as the responsibility of the community; it was proposed that we - as communities- need to foster resilience, although it was also widely acknowledged that community resources were said to be suffering because of austerity, leaving those most 'at risk' with no resources at all.

The role of arts based approaches in fostering resilience and wellbeing

Delegates working in the research, practice and policy fields felt that creative arts can promote the capacity for neglected children to say 'I have', 'I am', 'I can' by fostering a sense of belonging and creating safe spaces for them. Engaging in arts has been associated with a positive impact on physical, emotional and social wellbeing, as well as social relationships and social cohesion for people of all ages including children and young people (Jindal-Snape et al., 2014). Delegates highlighted that arts based approaches constitute a transformative experience for all involved, as they were said to foster connections between children and practitioners. In addition, as highlighted by research, they were described as having a particular advantage in gathering information (Deacon and Piercy, 2001). Delegates offered many examples of arts based approaches that were deemed successful in nurturing building blocks of resilience; community volunteer programs, mentoring programs, organic community programs and intergenerational programs.

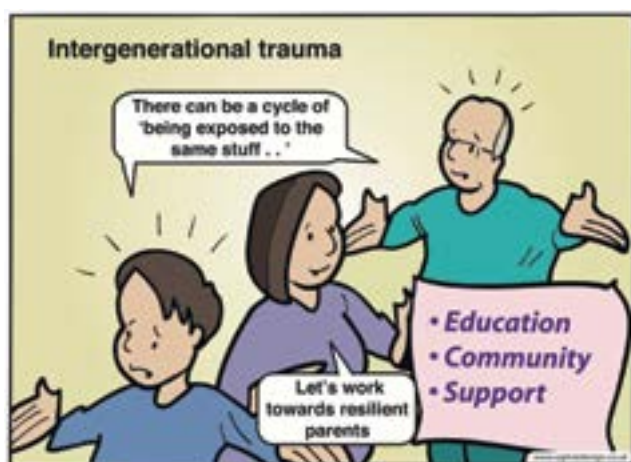
In terms of specific approaches, examples included variations of different board games, the use of symbols, or sticky notes, web-based mind maps, PhotoVoice, talking mats, music, films, monologues, and using analogies to represent how children feel or using group animated stories. Messages written on paper boats were reported as both enjoyable and



as having the added value of 'making the messages sail away'. Visual approaches involving the making of videos or short films were deemed very effective in helping peers reflect on issues but also as a training resource for staff. Drawing, painting and doodling were described as helping the child or young person concentrate, providing 'the infant gaze' as well as a view of the future but also very effective in terms of diffusing. Delegates also spoke of the importance of being able to provide choices in terms of activities and person-centred planning in which children or young people actively participate in order to ensure a sense of ownership of the process.

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Challenges to adopting arts based approaches



According to delegates, one of the biggest challenges to adopting arts based approaches relates to securing funding in order to organise such activities. Other practical aspects, such as the required time, space and material, were also deemed challenging. Prior level of knowledge when choosing a particular approach as well as the actual competencies/skills required to deliver such approaches were also mentioned as was the need to hire skilled people. Delegates also spoke of the difficulty in justifying the time allocated and spent on art-based approaches in the context of outcome driven organisations.

Relatedly, negative attitudes by colleagues or managers who may not fully understand such processes were also noted. Making arts based projects a 'safe' place for children and young people was deemed demanding, especially so because participation in such projects was seen as sometimes triggering subconscious issues and impacting on children and young people in unexpected ways.

A further challenge related to children or young people being reluctant to engage, or lacking the confidence to engage in novel approaches, discussed in the context of past experiences having a negative impact on trying new things. Taking into account children and young people's individual preferences, traits and skills but most importantly the need for reflexivity towards the chosen project, were all reported as crucial and potentially challenging. In the discussion of resources and support needed in order to adopt the use of arts based approaches, delegates spoke of the need for training to develop the required skills and level of expertise to both deliver such approaches but also interpret information gathered in such ways. Facilities, material, funds to buy quality resources and resources kits as well as to hire people to run projects were also mentioned, as was support at managerial level. Relatedly, delegates discussed the lack of funding for approaches whose effectiveness is evidenced through qualitative studies because the evidence base is not considered robust enough.

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The way forward

If we were to summarise the message of the seminar series in one sentence, that sentence would read:

‘the voice of the child, young person, their families and communities need to be heard and included’.



Indeed, there was widespread consensus on the fact that the views and experiences of neglected children and young people should be reflected in policies, research or practice that addresses their needs and impacts their lives. Similarly, it was felt that any way forward should also involve the full participation of families, carers and, more widely, whole communities.

Inequalities that exist, and have traditionally existed, within society were also reported as being mirrored in hindering access to arts and arts based approaches and therefore, need to be addressed.

Relatedly, delegates felt the inter-generational trauma is highly pertinent in discussions of child neglect, wellbeing and resilience and needs to be at the focus of policy, research and practice that aims to create opportunities for change.

Policy priorities

Delegates clearly felt that policies need to be informed by a clear vision for Scotland's children, social justice values and an understanding of inequalities. This sense of

fairness for everyone should also be reflected in education policy and the curriculum for excellence. Delegates expressed their desire for policy to promote understanding and be informed by, and share the voice of the children and young people. The need for policy initiatives that support existing practice but also promote the development of practice in a sustainable way, was put forth. In addition, the need to meaningfully engage with research was highlighted.

Delegates reported that although resilience approaches are helpful, they don't work in isolation and hence a holistic approach is required, coupled with the realism about enduring challenges across the life span. It was also proposed that policy initiatives have to be more coherent and integrated so people don't fall through the cracks. Specifically addressing the issue of lack of funding, delegates felt that a percentage of 1 % of the budget should be allocated to community/arts projects and generally an increase in taxes for the wealthy in order to support such efforts was highlighted by many.



Practice priorities

As expressed above, delegates felt that practice needs to be informed and shaped by the accounts of young people and children in order to effectively address their needs. It was also suggested that within the field, there should be a clear discourse of social solidarity. The need for knowledge exchange and training on all levels was highlighted with specific reference to support and training on neglect for arts workers. In addition, it was proposed that the arts based approaches should be integrated into the skill set of practitioners, including teachers, with ample opportunities for practitioner professional training that will help develop their confidence. Delegates also felt that links should be made amongst voluntary and statutory agencies to share resources, knowledge and expertise but also to avoid duplication and reduce competition for funding. A call was made to those who have already adopted arts based approaches to share examples of good practice and thus inform the evidence base. Finally, on a general level, suggestions were made for a radical re-design of the practice field as it was deemed to be over-medicalised.

Research priorities

Echoing previous suggestions, delegates highlighted that research needs to be collaborative and cross-sectorial, with a strong focus on involving and engaging communities and having children and young people as co-producers. Artists as well as researchers should collaborate with children and young people. Research should aim to collate and synthesise what is already happening by adopting creative approaches that are fit to capture the 'messiness' of arts based work rather than focusing on dry evaluations. Relatedly, it was proposed that the ways of collecting and understanding evidence needs to be changed, or rather revolutionised, and different questions need to be asked. These



new ways of knowing could focus on stories, the notion of confidence, holistic approaches, dimensions of attendance, inspiration, ways of understanding and expressing one's self, while they should not necessarily focus on issues of representatives and replicability. In addition, delegates reported that the evidence based needs to be built and practitioners should reconsider their role in this process as it was felt that the links between research and practice should be improved. An example of such an effort involved the fact that practitioners don't always record evidence that could be used in evaluation studies. Finally, it was highlighted that research activities should strive to be more than an academic exercise and focus on real life impact for all those involved.

The seminar series highlighted the complexity of the notions of child neglect, wellbeing and resilience, within the context of social disadvantage and an era of strained government budgets where everybody is asked to do 'more with less'. The four events brought together delegates from the statutory and voluntary sector, from research, policy and practice and offered an interdisciplinary viewpoint on all issues discussed, highlighting the usefulness of creative approaches in dealing with highly demanding and complex issues.

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