

Scottish practitioners are used to embracing change

Hazel Whitters

I quickly downloaded this month's publication by CELCIS as I was keen to read the views of the two contributors to the named person debate. Recent months have seen sporadic and intensive coverage from the media on behalf of Government, parents, professionals and interested public. The articles in CELCIS were presented as two sides of a discussion on this significant topic, however, as a reader I identified a great deal of common ground between the authors. I detected a shared passion, the same goals, and a sense of anxiety from Mike Burns and Maggie Mellon.

I have practised and studied for over 30 years in the field of child care and education. I am sure that both authors would agree that legislation has always directed practice; but learning which leads to development of service-users and service-providers occurs through localised implementation of statutes within an organisation, and in the context of a community. My experiences have taught me the importance of professionals and parents seeking, and sharing, knowledge and understanding, educating and being educated, accepting and questioning, respecting and responding – team skills in the parent-professional partnerships.

Scottish services have been challenged and ultimately enhanced by 'new approaches' in the last decade in the form of the Curriculum for Excellence, Pre-birth to Three, and our National Practice Model – Getting It Right for Every Child. Whether your role is strategic, operational or that of a service-user, or interested party, you will have experienced the negativity, confusion, miscommunications, stress, and positive outcomes associated with these examples.

I have to disagree with the comment by Mike Burns that the term GIRFEC is 'obscure professional jargon'. The abbreviation GIRFEC in the context of daily practice has become synonymous with the optimum care of children and their families. The term GIRFEC is applied with pride in organisations as it encapsulates the ethos associated with pedagogy which regards each child as an individual – a unique human being whose interpretation and perception of his or her world is paramount to the responsive care by professionals and parents.

Maggie Mellon acknowledges that the responsibilities, as appointed to the 'named person', are incorporated within professional roles but she questions the lack of detail within the current guidance, and the necessity for legislation. Legislation is the foundation of knowledge and understanding which contributes to consistency of good practice throughout Scotland. Partnership working,

respect, parental rights and sharing confidential information are already embedded in the role of every SSSC (Scottish Social Services Council) registered practitioner, and it seems to me that these details are implicit to professional status which includes the 'named person'.

Maggie Mellon raises concerns about the 'named person' in association with child protection but parents have always sought advice and guidance from health visitors or teachers due to generic concerns about their child's social, physical and emotional health – this will not change. Humans have needs at different times of life and seeking support is active parenting, and a public demonstration of a parent's will to succeed in this most important role. Professionals have always sought information from parents, and multi-disciplinary colleagues in order to respond to parental or professional concerns – this will not change. Sharing information does not automatically elevate a need to a context of child protection.

However, I am not contributing to this debate in order to create fodder for controversy – I welcomed these heartfelt comments from each perspective. I think that it is important to review the issues surrounding this debate with, and without the emotion associated with children's care, education and wellbeing. Scotland is a nation of many cultures, and families may be distant from one another due to socio-economic, cultural or personal issues. Legislation is not trying to replace family values with professional expertise but to provide an accessible system of services to enhance each child's life chances, and to celebrate parenthood. I echo the comments by Mike Burns that relationships are key. My experience of practice and research has shown me that parents and professionals can forge positive relationships with which to communicate effectively and respond quickly to needs.

Scottish practitioners are used to embracing change. It makes our vocations exciting, stimulating, exacting, challenging and rewarding. I can assure both authors that despite any differences in opinions of this legislation, practitioners will continue to practice conscientiously, and reflectively in support of all children and families. I urge policy makers, professionals, parents, and the public to remember our shared goals and our passion. Please use your power and expertise to help the next generation to enjoy childhood and to become resilient, educated, and caring young adults.

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