

Book Review

These are our bairns: A guide for community planning partnerships on being a good corporate parent. The Scottish Government.

Edinburgh, The Stationery Office, 2008. 100 pp, ISBN 978 0 7559 5822 1

The term 'corporate parent' has been used with increasing frequency. But what do we mean when we talk about a 'corporate parent'? This short guidance document is designed to provide some answers to this question in a Scottish context. Written as a user-friendly guide to corporate parenting, it acknowledges the importance of partnership between agencies in order to deliver the best experience for the looked-after child.

The book sets the scene by outlining some broad information about how the Scottish Government sees corporate parenting. It addresses a chapter to each of the component 'parts' of the corporate parent. For example there are chapters for police, housing, social work and education. More importantly, however, it addresses chapters to elected members and chief executives, emphasizing their importance in the corporate parenting process.

The need for good corporate parenting is evident in the guidance. Adam Ingram, the minister for children and early years, states that one of his aspirations is that children 'are not damaged by the system' (p.2). What does this say about the current level of faith in the system? Similarly, housing services are exhorted to 'meet the needs of care leavers without resorting to homelessness legislation' (p. 50). That such a statement has to be written in a public document in order to ensure better outcomes for the most vulnerable young people in our society is shameful. These examples demonstrate the need for this guidance.

The book is colourful and the chapters are short and snappy in style. Each chapter has a quote from a young person near to the beginning. In this way, it makes some attempt to acknowledge the real feelings and wishes of looked-after children. Each chapter also lists what needs to be done to improve outcomes, and indicates how each of the participants in the corporate parenting partnership will know when they are succeeding. The book also has four useful appendices, covering the policy and legislative context for corporate parenting, the values and principles of Getting it right for every child and a list of useful websites.

The guidance has some specific points which should be taken on board by residential units. In terms of education, it states that residential staff should get involved in local school councils. In terms of wider practice, it says that care staff should have sufficiently delegated authority to meet day-to-day costs and flexibility to make speedy decisions. This is something no residential worker

would argue with, given the bureaucracy around budgets! It also says that looked-after young people should be able to experience risk and gives examples such as cooking, traveling independently and staying with friends. In an even wider sense, it states that all staff should be fully trained, well supported, properly rewarded and SSSC registered.

So how will these outcomes be achieved? The Scottish Government believes that better outcomes will arise from community planning partnerships. The rationale of these partnerships of relevant agencies will be underpinned by the Concordat and the National Performance Framework (NPF). Local authorities will have a Single Outcome Agreement with the Scottish Government which will determine their budget. This agreement must show how the authority is working in partnership to meet the objectives laid down in the NPF. However, it should be noted that the NPF does not specifically mention looked-after children. Could this be a problem for corporate parenting? Only time will tell. In the meantime, *These are our bairns* provides a focus for those who want to take corporate parenting seriously.

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