

Families Matter:
Supporting Families in Northern Ireland

Response from Home-Start



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March 2007

(Please tick box)

I am responding: as an individual on behalf of an organisation

Home-Start NI did consult internally with schemes and this response represents the views of over 60 staff and over 1000 volunteers (trustees and home visiting volunteers) across 26 schemes in Northern Ireland. Schemes have individually commented on the Strategy and their responses which reflect the views of the local community are being sent to the DHSS&PS on a scheme by scheme basis.

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Supporting Families

1. Do you agree that the aims stated are the right aims? (Please tick)

YES

NO

Additional Comments

Home-Start fully endorses the Strategy aims. Can parental choice/participation be added as a key aim is one of empowerment? Parents have the choice of a range of services. Stronger endorsement could be achieved by stating that the aim would be achieved through the promotion of integrated partnership working to support parents.

Services must not be prescriptive and the element of choice should be emphasised.

2. Do you agree that the vision stated is the right vision? (Please tick)

YES

NO

Additional Comments

The Strategy rightly addresses the importance of children and young people within the family. The Vision statement additionally needs to incorporate the role of parents to enable children/young people to reach their full potential.

3. The document lists 10 principles that underpin the strategy. Do you agree with the principles stated? (Please tick)

YES NO

Additional Comments

The 10 principles are absolutely critical to children/young people achieving their full potential.

Home-Start considers that another key principle should be added stating that parents have the right to access support in that they need to know about services that are available.

The principles should additionally refer to the inclusion of parents to inform services.

There should be an additional reference to families in the 3rd principle.

The value of parent to parent support in promoting social inclusion should be recognised in the principles.

The contribution of "volunteer" parent to parent support should also be recognised.

4. The document lists 7 outcomes from the Children and Young People's Strategy, 'Our Children and Young People - Our Pledge'. Do you agree that these are the right outcomes for this strategy? (Please tick)

YES NO

Additional comments

Can you consider adding -that where children/young people have suffered abuse/harassment etc - services to support them will be accessible and tailor made.

The outcome - making a positive contribution gives negative examples - 'uptake of community resources reduce incidence of anti-social/offending behaviour' is more positive.

Measurement of outcomes is required.

5. The focus of this Strategy is primarily on preventative and early intervention to support parents at particular times of need and at particular stages in the development of their child. Do you think that this is the appropriate scope for the Strategy? (Please tick)

YES NO

Additional comments

The scope of the Strategy is holistic, inclusive and well balanced. Home-Start entirely agrees that this is an appropriate scope.

The Strategy should additionally focus on outcomes using hard (quantitative) and soft (qualitative) evidence to indicate how supporting parents helps them in supporting their children/young people to reach their full potential (e.g. Last year over 90% of the parents Home-Start supported said that the support made a positive contribution to their lives. Parents say the kind of support Home-Start offers is unique and makes a real difference).

Priority Themes

6. Do you agree that Theme 1 - Parental support is an appropriate theme? (Please tick)

YES NO

Additional comments

Good parenting should be described as the *main* way of preventing difficulties. Government in partnership with the voluntary/community sector has a crucial role to play in helping parents to gain the necessary skills.

Need to add in further categories to include:

- ❖ Hard to reach (i.e. reluctant users of services)
- ❖ Socially isolated families

Parent to parent support gives parents the confidence to overcome barriers. Having another parent whose role is to listen and being supported by someone who is there just for them -someone who will not judge them and

who does not bring with them professional concerns or stigma. Being supported by a parent who has often experienced and overcome the challenges faced by the family and having someone who shows concern about the well being of the family - through parent to parent support of this kind parents tell us that the kind of support Home-Start offers is unique and makes a real difference.

By providing families with volunteer parent to parent support (either through home visiting or in group work) in a way that they want it and for as long as they need it can:

- ❖ reduce family isolation and increase social support networks
- ❖ strengthen parent/child relationships
- ❖ improve parents' physical health and emotional well being
- ❖ help parents to appreciate the joys of parenting and improve parenting skills
- ❖ improve the home environment
- ❖ improve children's health, well-being and development
- ❖ improve access to health and community services

Home-Start provides support at levels 1, 2 and even 3 of the Hardiker levels of need.

7. Do you agree that the actions suggested in Theme 1 are appropriate actions to take under this theme? (Please tick)

YES NO

Additional comments

Home-Start wholeheartedly endorses the role of the Health Visitor. Sure Start is vitally important to the development of parental support - however there are many tried and tested services which work alongside Sure Start to provide parental support and these are not mentioned in the Strategy. The significant contribution of voluntary and community based organisations requires recognition within the Strategy.

Positive parenting should continue to be a high priority item within the Strategy and Home-Start welcomes this emphasis. We would like to see here (as mentioned previously) the inclusion of parent to parent support to empower parents to take up opportunities for networking and increasing the take up of community facilities. Outreach home visiting and group to group work offering parent to parent support is the key to empowering parents to

take up opportunities within the community - additionally it provides parents with a role model which enhances learning.

Home-Start welcomes the emphasis on the further development of family mediation and child contact centres - volunteers within contact centres should also be recognised for work they do.

8. Do you agree that Theme 2 - Access to information is an appropriate theme? (Please tick)

YES NO

Additional comments

Theme 2 in itself is an appropriate theme but we would stress the importance of carrying out a comprehensive mapping of existing services within both the statutory, voluntary and community sector to list services available for parents. Services offered should not be prescriptive and information given should provide for flexibility and choice. Once again the model of parent to parent support needs to be included in this theme as services and information may not be accessed without the offer of support to encourage parents' uptake.

9. Do you agree the actions suggested in Theme 2 are appropriate actions to take under this theme? (Please tick)

YES NO

10. Do you agree that Theme 3 - Assessment of Needs is an appropriate theme? (Please tick)

YES NO

11. Do you agree that the actions suggested in Theme 3 are appropriate actions to take under this theme? (Please tick)

YES NO

Additional comments:

Home-Start as a voluntary organisation wholeheartedly supports the introduction of a common assessment framework through the introduction of UNOCINI. However we would advocate for the timely introduction of a comprehensive training programme for multi-agency partners in order to promote a fully integrated approach.

12. Do you agree that Theme 4 -Information Sharing is an appropriate theme? (Please tick)

YES NO

13. Do you agree the actions suggested in Theme 4 are appropriate actions to take under this theme? (Please tick)

YES NO

Additional comments:

Home-Start fully agrees that information sharing is an appropriate theme. We want to continue to work with Government to ensure that guidance and protocols are introduced in order to make appropriate decisions - these should be developed in consultation with agencies working to support children and their parents so as to address the concerns around data protection and confidentiality. The rights and welfare of the child remain of paramount importance.

14. Do you agree Theme 5 - Integration and Multi-Agency Working is an appropriate theme (Please tick)

YES NO

Additional comments:

Home-Start welcomes the inclusion of integration and multi-agency working. We would however want the theme to be further developed by providing a fuller endorsement of the benefits of parent to parent support (as previously mentioned in our response). Additionally the Strategy should promote the theme of multi-agency working (sharing of skills, resources,

timely access to appropriate services, and cost effective use of existing resources).

Home-Start welcomes the endorsement of its partnership work with Sure Start as this has been developed and strengthened since Sure Start began in 2002. Home-Start in England has had very positive experiences of working with Children's Centres to provide the family outreach support services requires and so welcomes the introduction of this initiative in NI.

15. Do you agree the actions suggested in Theme 5 are appropriate actions to take under this theme? (Please tick)

YES NO

Equality Impact - Questions 16 -19

Home-Start considers that there are no actions or proposals within the document which would have an adverse impact on equality of opportunity or good relations.

20. Do you have any other comments, which you think might be relevant to the development of this Strategy?

Continuing to secure appropriate resources to implement this Strategy must remain a priority for Government - we welcome the announcement of an initial budget to undertake planned actions but would advocate strongly for an increased year on year budget to commit adequate resources to the maintenance and further development of services for families.

This Strategy must remain a high priority on the Government's agenda as 'stable family life' is the foundation to building strong local communities within Northern Ireland.

Heather Knox
Home-Start Director in Northern Ireland
March 2007