

CHILD PROTECTION

With reference to your letter of 4 May 2006, this response is in our capacity not only as a key voluntary children's organisation and a promoter of children's rights, but also as a major provider of social care services, including services for children and families.

Systems

We are well aware of the issue of children adversely affected by drug misuse and are confident that Quarriers' Standards for Excellence, including the Standard on Protecting Children and Young People from Abuse, provide an effective framework. All staff working in children's services undertake a rigorous training programme in child protection and are proficient at identifying circumstances where children may be adversely affected by parental difficulties, including drug misuse, and taking steps to address the risk, which may include referral to statutory agencies.

Planning

Every child that is supported by Quarriers has a care plan, appropriate to their needs, age and individual situation, including any child protection issues, which is agreed by all pertinent parties. The plan is reviewed regularly to ensure continued relevance in changing circumstances. This is an operational requirement across all Quarriers' services, including those supporting adults at risk.

Regular operational audits ensure consistency across services, maintenance of high quality standards and enable early identification of any gaps.

Barriers

Inter-agency work remains challenging, with cultural and attitudinal differences between different professions and agencies causing real difficulties. In addition, genuinely collaborative, multi-disciplinary interventions may require shared resources, including pooled budgets, and there is significant aversion amongst statutory authorities to this. We also have concerns about the lack of real involvement of voluntary organisations in Child Protection Forums, where there is a distinct reluctance to listen to voluntary sector providers. Whilst there are already adequate legislative and regulatory frameworks in place, more remains to be done to ensure effective implementation of integrated working at every level.

In our experience, the review of the Child Protection Committee structure and function undertaken over the last two years has failed to achieve real involvement of the third sector in many Local Authority/CPC areas, demonstrating another example of variable and inconsistent application and implementation of allegedly standardised reforms or changes to the child protection process.

However, for the majority of children, we would contend that, overall, existing child protection measures are generally effective and working well and whilst serious incidents are, and should always be, viewed with major concern, they do tend to be isolated instances. Risk exists in everyday life and no amount of legislation, regulation or bureaucracy can totally eradicate this. The Scottish Commissioner for Children & Young People consulted widely with children and young people across Scotland last year in the most extensive consultation ever undertaken with children and young people, and this highlighted children's concerns about proportionate

protection. The main objective should be to find better and more effective ways of working at all levels, including practitioner, to minimise the risk to all.

Finally, it should be noted that, whilst we view drug misuse as a major concern in itself, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that it is a symptom of societal dysfunction with a myriad of causes and impacts, and effort must be made to tackle the significant issues which have such devastating consequences.

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