

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE: 2 NOVEMBER 2006

EXTRAORDINARY LIVES – CREATING A POSITIVE FUTURE FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN SCOTLAND

Report by the Executive Director of Educational and Social Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To advise Committee of the publication and implications of the Social Work Inspection Agency (SWIA) report “Extraordinary Lives - Creating a Positive Future for Looked After Children and Young People in Scotland 2006”

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Scottish Executive commissioned SWIA to review public services for looked after children and young people in order to ensure that services are able to support looked after children and young people reach their full potential.
- 2.2 The purpose of the review was to demonstrate what good care for children and young people who are looked after by local authorities looks like, to identify good practice and to recommend in what ways care can be further improved.
- 2.3 The review of services undertaken by SWIA involved extensive consultation on looked after children with local authorities, voluntary organisations and health services.
- 2.4 The consultation also included seeking the views of looked after children on their experiences of being looked after by the local authority.
- 2.5 The ‘Extraordinary Lives’ report is the result of this review and it is aimed at all agencies and individuals who are concerned with looked after children and their families.
- 2.6 This includes elected members, local authority staff, staff in voluntary organisations, private providers, foster carers, health professionals and those involved in developing and improving children’s services.

3. FINDINGS OF THE REPORT

- 3.1 The report reviewed the experiences of looked after children against the Scottish Executive vision for all children. That they are: -
 - Safe
 - Nurtured
 - Healthy
 - Active

- Achieving
- Respected and responsible
- Included

The report emphasises the need for outcomes for looked after and accommodated children to be seen in this wider context and not solely related to measures of educational achievement.

- 3.2 The report examines a wide range of factors that lead to children and young people being removed from their families including deprived backgrounds and families where parental substance misuse is a factor. The report also highlights the inequalities experienced by this group of children that results in them having poorer health, educational and social outcomes than the general population of children.
- 3.3 The report sets out suggestions in each section highlighted in Section 3.1 of this report for the ways in which local authorities can improve their role as a corporate parent to ensure that **all** services offer looked after and accommodated children the best standards of care and intervention.
- 3.4 The review identifies a number of factors that contribute to good outcomes for these children including: -
- stable placements
 - a positive experience of school
 - support from adults to develop life skills
 - careful preparation for independence

The review highlights the similarities in need between looked after and accommodated children and the general population of children who are provided for by their own parents.

- 3.5 The review also highlights the experiences of looked after and accommodated children and young people whose testimonies give important messages regarding their feelings of becoming looked after. This includes feelings of loss and sadness at leaving their families and their communities. This also involves feelings of failure because, they believe that negative assumptions are made by professionals and peers about them and their families.
- 3.6 The report identifies six **key** messages as follows: -
- Looked after children can overcome adversity in childhood and lead successful adult lives.
 - Too many adults have low expectations of what looked after children can achieve. Children and young people can do well when they are well cared for.
 - Positive relationships with skilled adults can help looked after children and young people develop successfully.
 - Children and young people looked after away from home need stability and the chance to put down roots. Being moved frequently from one care setting to another is damaging and often restricts their access to education and health care.
 - Tackling the disadvantage and discrimination still experienced by many looked after children requires planning at every level in a local authority and between

them and their partners in delivering children's services. Champions are needed to make sure that local authority's and their partners provide the best possible care.

- Seeking the views of children and young people regarding the services which are provided to them is crucial as this assists care providers in engaging positively with young people and supports long-term service planning for these service users.

4. POLICY/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Extraordinary Lives report presents challenges to the Council in ensuring that the needs of our Looked After and Accommodated children are at the heart of policy and decision making.
- 4.2 The report outlines clear suggestions for local authorities in providing good quality services for looked after children. It is important that these suggestions are fully considered and mapped against the key strategic policy documents of the Council to ensure that these suggestions, where appropriate, are embedded in strategy and practice across East Ayrshire Council.
- 4.3 This process should ensure that planning for looked after children addresses the need to measure outcomes for this group of children and young people across a range of needs including Social, Health, Education, Employment and Training.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The provision of good quality services for looked after children and young people is an essential requirement of being a good corporate parent. The suggestions from Extraordinary Lives may result in financial implications for the Council and these will be reported to Committee as they are identified.

6. COMMUNITY PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The implementation of the "Extraordinary Lives" agenda supports the Council's objectives of eliminating poverty, improving health, improving opportunities and community safety.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 Social Work Committee is asked to:-
- (i) request the Executive Director of Educational and Social Services to undertake an analysis of the suggestions in Extraordinary Lives with particular reference to 4.2 and 4.3 of this report and report on the outcome of this in due course;
 - (ii) note that this report will also be presented to Education Committee; and
 - (iii) otherwise note the contents of this report.

Graham Short
Executive Director of Educational and Social Services
SAK/JB
6 October 2006
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LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

- (1) Extraordinary Lives Report, SWIA, June 2006

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