



How we can make more effective early interventions in vulnerable communities to deliver long-term regeneration?

A Summary Outcomes Paper from a SURF 2010 Open Forum event:

Purpose of this paper: This paper is intended to encapsulate the general flow of this SURF Open Forum event, which comprised keynote speaker presentations and an interactive panel discussion session. The views stated reflect, wherever possible, the broadest consensus or range of participants' views on the keynote theme.

Readers will find it useful to refer to the associated PowerPoint presentations available on the SURF website. A full composite version of the proceedings is also available (see links on page 5).

Open Forum Event Details

Date and venue: 5th May 2010, The Lighthouse, Glasgow

Plenary Speakers and Panel Members:

- Elisabeth Campbell, Team Leader, Early Education and Childcare, Scottish Government
- Karen Grieve, Programme Manager, Health Improvement & Health Inequalities, Scottish Government
- Laura Ross, Social Inclusion Policy Officer, Scottish Government
- Tom Wood, Special Adviser on Early Interventions, Capital City Partnership

Chair:

- Edward Harkins, Networking Initiatives Manager, SURF

Participants: Over fifty participants from local authorities and national government, housing associations, voluntary sector organisations, community groups, higher & further education institutions, private sector companies, employment intermediaries, community enterprises and the NHS.

Main Outcomes of the Open Forum Discussion:

The relevance and need for early intervention

Participants were generally in agreement that:

- The high degree of inequality in the U.K. must be of significance in any discussions on early intervention. Early intervention to address the fundamental causes of unjust inequality afflicting early childhood holds one ‘best hope’ for breaking down deeply embedded intergenerational inequality across the U.K.
- Early intervention is highly relevant in a Scottish social policy context where the Scottish Government’s National Outcome five states that:

‘our children will have the best start in life and are ready to succeed’.
- There is a growing body of international evidence which shows that the greatest scope and the greatest risk to childrens’ development occurs before they have reached the age of four or five (USA psychiatrist Bruce Perry et al). This is reflected in the Scottish Government’s [Early Years Framework](#) where it is stated that:

‘The period between pregnancy and three years (of a child’s age) is increasingly seen as a critical period in shaping childrens’ life chances, based on evidence of brain formation.’
- There is an economic case for early intervention, as well as a moral imperative. Recent research in the UK indicated that for every £1.00 invested in early intervention, some £7.10 is returned in terms of savings. The savings are mainly through the avoidance of the need for later interventions that are more costly and often ineffective.

Current progress and learning

- There were ample presentations at the Open Forum on the evidence and case studies of successful implementation and development work around the Scottish Government’s [Equally Well](#), [Achieving our Potential](#) and [Early Years](#) policy frameworks. These frameworks include an emphasis on learning from the current pilots, test sites, collaborations and partnering etc. – but learning also from earlier experiences, for example with Social Inclusion Partnerships.

- Scottish Government speakers explained how the *Early Years Framework* contributes mainly to the Scottish Government's National Outcome five. Also how, arguably, the framework has an impact on all fifteen of the National Outcomes and a strong impact on at least seven of them.
- Some participants with long experience in the field judged that early intervention in the U.K. had been largely ineffective. This was argued to be because intervention was mostly 'too late' due to statutory constraints. It was further argued that anyone seeking to change the lifestyles and damaging behaviours of target clients had to contend with the materialism and individualism in today's consumer culture. For some participants this was an argument for even earlier intervention – referred to as 'early, *early*, intervention'.
- Action Points in the *Equally Well Implementation Plan* were described as 'going upstream' into early years prevention. In support of this description, the work of sociologist Aaron Antonovsky on resilience was cited. Antonovsky said that understanding the development of people's sense of coherence – their ability to understand their life, manage it, and see it as worthwhile – is necessary. We, furthermore, cannot expect health behaviour change when individuals feel the challenge to change is not worthwhile.
- Participants had, nevertheless, divided views on arguments for early, *early*, intervention. For some, this would offer a welcome return to more reliance on the skills of less senior front-line public service workers. These skills were argued to be effective, borne of real-world experience and to involve low costs and risks.

Other participants, however, worried about the potential for early, *early*, intervention to create negative and self-fulfilling stereotyping or labeling of individuals or families.

- For some participants, the father role was the biggest influence on childhood development. These participants saw a need for more policy on intervention around fatherhood. Other participants mentioned emerging evidence from the Scottish Government [play talk read](#) campaign and the *Equally Well* test sites (Musselburgh and Edinburgh). These sites were reported as showing that 'we need to specifically target fathers in future Scottish Government policies and programmes'.
- Several participants argued that early intervention will not be easy in a time of public expenditure constraints and saw that it would need:

- Fundamental change in policy and practice, with resources being moved from 'crisis-responding' and into early action that has less of an immediately obvious priority
- Clear-sightedness, long term confidence and, above all, strong adaptive leadership

Early years education and support

- Some participants, with reference to other E.U. countries, argued that:
 - The start of education for UK schoolchildren was at too early an age
 - Early years nursery and education field workers were poorly paid and poorly qualified
 - In the UK, the poor quality and quantity of provision of under fives, pre-school, education with financial support, discourages mothers from entering the labour market

In response, it was pointed out that;

- That at least one Equally Well test site was focused on Early years and was working on early development and school readiness;
- On the child workforce skills, all managers of early years facilities must be educated to degree level;
- With regards to the pre-school education, the 2007 [Scottish Government and CoSLA Concordat](#) stated that pre-school provision would be increased from 475 to 570 hours per annum for children aged three and four.

Community Planning and community engagement

Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) were described as 'very important in early intervention policy implementation because they assess local need and match framework policies'. It was pointed out that there was 'a lot of support for CPPs', with, for example, the Scottish Centre for Regeneration (SCR) [Learning Networks](#) for practitioners, and an impending initiative from the [Improvement Service in Scotland](#). There is also a [Learning Network for Equally Well](#).

- Other participants highlighted scope for improvements in engagement between CPP agency partners and other stakeholders from the community and voluntary fields. This was argued to be essential for the engagement of community and neighbourhood level organisations in early intervention.
- For some participants the looming public expenditure reductions meant that many community-level services, such as early intervention, will *only* be viable with the empowerment and engagement of community and neighbourhood level organisations as delivery partners.

Further Information: Speaker presentation slides, a bibliography paper of suggested further reading and a delegates list is available from the SURF website (link below). A fuller composite Outcomes Paper is also available.

Link: <http://www.scotregen.co.uk/knowledge/events.asp?sid=9>

Background to the Forum: SURF delivers a national programme of regeneration networking activities with the aim of offering its networking service to all regeneration practitioners and interested parties across Scotland. This networking activity is funded by the Scottish Government's Scottish Centre for Regeneration. SURF will continue to act as an independent facilitator, bringing together key players, and producing constructive Outcome Papers to help inform policy decision-making and practice. For any clarification or additional information, contact Edward Harkins at SURF. Telephone 0141-585 6850 or email [edward\(at\)scotregen.co.uk](mailto:edward(at)scotregen.co.uk).

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