Partnership Working to Address Neglect

David Derbyshire
Head of Performance Improvement & Consultancy
Action for Children

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Why Neglect?

An Action for Children commissioned literature review: *Neglect: research evidence to inform practice* (2008) found that neglect in its many forms remains an under-researched area, despite being the most pervasive form of child maltreatment in the UK. The area in which research is particularly lacking is evidence to guide practitioners in the development of interventions to prevent or reduce neglect.

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Why Neglect?

The review found some evidence of promising interventions including programmes of home visiting, parent training, school-based social workers, social network support and therapeutic approaches. It notes that intervening in neglect is likely to be costly, requiring intensive, long-term, multi-faceted work by a highly skilled workforce using relationship as a vehicle for change. But provision of such services is likely to be hampered by the short-term nature of much funding available for new initiatives, and by a desire for quick results. Neglect is characterised by multiple contributing factors at personal, interpersonal, social and societal levels.

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Why Neglect?

- An Action for Children poll of public attitudes (February 2009) found that: a quarter of adults admit to having worried about a child they feared could be the victim of neglect. But more than a third (38%) of these people failed to report their concerns. The poll highlighted public confusion and misunderstanding around child neglect.
- A poll of 2,000 primary school, pre-school, nursery and health professionals (October 2009) found that more than half of those surveyed (55%) said being able to report less serious suspicions earlier would be helpful when dealing with suspected child neglect.

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Why Neglect?

- Our poll of police and social workers (February 2010) found that over a third (37%) of social workers and police officers have felt powerless to intervene in cases where they suspected a child is being neglected. When asked what would help them half (50%) said being able to intervene earlier on, and 57% would find it helpful to be able to spend more time with families and less time on paperwork.
- We undertook a poll looking at children's perceptions of neglect (October 2010). The findings echo concerns over the prevalence of the problem with 60% of children being aware of many of the warning signs of neglect and of a child who was being neglected.

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What are we doing to address neglect?

Further research

- Longitudinal study of effectiveness of interventions
- Research into the ways in which local communities can be enabled to improve understanding of and responses to neglect
- Annual review of the state of neglect in the UK- *volunteers welcome!*

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What are we doing to address neglect?

Action and innovation

- Development of the Family Partners initiative- interim results March 2011 and review report September 2011
- Development of national neglect training materials for DfE and offer of delivery with University of Stirling
- Strengthened our service core offer around targeted children's centres and intensive family support services

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Longitudinal Neglect Research Project 2008-12

- Undertaken in partnership with University of Salford
- Involves 10 Action for Children services across UK offering a range of interventions, such as outreach to vulnerable teenagers, assessments for courts, early targeted assessments and interventions, and ongoing supports to families with chronic support needs.
- Baseline needs charted and progress against outcomes tracked over 4 years. Tracking involves staff reporting, service user reporting and partner agency reporting alongside measurement of ‘harder’ evidence around contact with statutory services, educational and health information.

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Longitudinal Neglect Research Project 2008-12

Interventions

- Analysis using an adapted version of the Graded Care Profile
- Personal relationship-based assessments and interventions
- Use of centre-based activities with whole families, parents and children
- Links to regular health and school support services
- Use of outreach support to access services for parents who find service access difficult

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Longitudinal Neglect Research Project 2008-12

- Interim Report published in September 2010. Final report in July 2012. Findings to date:

1. Expediting the move into care: the outcomes for some children show that some parents are often unwilling or unable to make the required changes to lifestyle and parenting behaviour, and the result is that the children are taken into care. Action for Children services clearly assists statutory agencies to reach earlier conclusions about the need for children to enter alternative care arrangements whether with agreement of parents or through securing court orders.

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Longitudinal Neglect Research Project 2008-12

2. Preventative intervention: a lowering of concern related to the early interventions applied by Action for Children services. Families in the second group show engagement with project workers, and are able to make changes in carefully planned steps, often relapse temporarily and often disclose additional problems during engagement, but tend to transition successfully into targeted services.

3. Relationship: The importance of workers establishing effective, trusting relationships with families and gaining access to homes was critical in enabling change.

4. Provision of multi-faceted approaches: These combine practical assistance with support for vulnerable parents to confront both personal and environmental aspects of neglect- these approaches are highly correlated with success elsewhere in research and are proving effective in our services.

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Longitudinal Neglect Research Project 2008-12

Implications so far:

1. Need to concentrate on use of relationship with vulnerable parents and children and understand more what are the components of this kind of relationship- working with York Consulting on this in 2011
2. Services need to run for long enough to enable relationship and dealing with deep-rooted psycho-social origins of neglect
3. Services need to deal with the personal and the practical
4. There is no single magic solution- different options are needed for different families
5. Engagement of parents and children in practical tasks provide routes for achievement and improved self-esteem

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Cost Effectiveness

- Need to demonstrate that longer-term relationship-based support services achieve not only positive outcomes now but also sustain their value into the future and reduce demand for services elsewhere
- Our use of Social Return on Investment (SROI) methodology has already demonstrated significant savings available from early and targeted interventions. The ‘Backing the Future’ report undertaken with the New Economics Foundation, showed that for every £1 spent on support services there was a return within 2 years of between £4.50 and £7.20 in overall public expenditure

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More information on our campaign

www.actionforchildren.org.uk/content/623/Child-neglect-information-hub

Interest in training, annual neglect review, more research information or other services, contact:

david.derbyshire@actionforchildren.org.uk

Tel. 0203 1240651