



**Northern Area Children and  
Young People's Committee**

# **NORTHERN HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES BOARD**

## **FAMILY SUPPORT STRATEGY**

**August 2005**



## **INTRODUCTION**

This paper sets out the Northern Health & Social Services Board's proposed strategy for the continuing development of family support services for children and families during the next 3 years. The strategy has been developed in consultation with parents, children and partner agencies from across the voluntary, statutory and community sectors. It takes account of the legislative framework and recognises that the development of family support services needs to be closely aligned with a range of other strategic developments.

**“Every child and young person deserves the best possible start in life, to be brought up in a safe, happy and secure environment, to be consulted, listened to and heard, to be supported as they develop into adulthood, and to be given every opportunity to achieve their full potential”.**

This is the Government's overall vision for all children and young people as outlined in “Every Child Matters” and it is a vision which the Northern Board shares locally.

The family is the natural environment for the care and upbringing of children. The most important investment for the future is that made in their health and well-being. Parents play a vital role in providing a safe and secure environment in which children's physical, social, emotional and educational development is nurtured. Parenting is a life long commitment but many parents no longer have immediate access to traditional community networks. It is therefore important that support is provided throughout the parenting cycle and that it is seen as routine, acceptable and available to all.

‘Family support’ describes any activity or services provided by family, friends, statutory, voluntary or community sector agencies to families with children and young people. It has as its emphasis the needs of all the family in order to enhance parental capacity and help children to reach their full potential.

Family includes any person who has parental responsibility for a child and any other person with whom a child has been living. We recognise that many children and young people are not able to live

with their birth families. Where parents are unable to provide care on either a temporary or a permanent basis additional support or alternative care should be provided.

## **STRATEGIC CONTEXT**

The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 places considerable emphasis on providing support for children in need and their families to ensure as far as possible that parents are able to bring up their children. Boards and Trusts have a duty to identify the extent to which there are children in need in their areas and to provide services to make it possible for them to achieve the same level of development as other children.

Children's Services Planning provides the multi-disciplinary/inter-agency framework for developing family support. The Northern Area Children and Young People's Committee is responsible for setting out a coherent strategic direction in relation to services for children in need, vulnerable children and their families based on shared objectives across all participating agencies. Development of a co-ordinated strategic approach to family support is one of the core objectives of Children's Services Planning.

The Northern Ireland Family Support Model has been developed through Children's Services Planning to provide a four tier model which underpins the 2005/08 Children's Services Plan and the basic framework within which family support will be developed.

During 2004 the DHSS&PS acknowledged that investment in family support measures provide for improved health and social care outcomes for children and their families. To that end it intends to develop a Family Support Strategy and Boards and Trusts will be invited to participate in its development. The Board, for its part, recognises that there is a need to ensure that all those responsible for planning, commissioning and delivering services to children and young people agree a co-ordinated approach at a local level.

## **AIM OF STRATEGY**

The overall aim of the strategy is to:

**“Improve life chances of all children and young people by:**

- **Working together to ensure they receive the help and support they need, when and where they need it;**
- **Producing a coherent approach to planning and commissioning of family support services, taking account of all strategic initiatives so that family support can be developed and pursued at all levels”.**

The objectives of this strategy are to:

- **Set out in detail our collective vision for all our children and young people, a vision to which all statutory agencies and partners can work;**
- **Set out some common principles which we believe should underpin all policies and services for children and young people;**
- **Define in more detail what we believe all children and young people should experience (our aspirations);**
- **Recognise that some children and young people are more vulnerable or “at risk” than others to poor childhood experiences which prevent them achieving their potential;**
- **Describe how all the partners to this strategy, (statutory, voluntary, community and business), will work collectively and collaboratively together to identify and meet the needs of the most vulnerable children and young people and help them to achieve their potential through the existing Children’s Services Planning arrangements.**

The Strategy will be accompanied by a more detailed Action Plan (Commissioning Strategy), which will describe how the vision,

principles and aspirations set out in the strategy will be put into action to improve the life chances of children and young people and, in particular, those most vulnerable or “at risk”.

Information about family support services, collected during the development of the strategy, will be refined and made available on the Children’s Services Planning Website for use by service providers and parents.

We recognise that there is much work to be done to realise our shared vision, enhance parenting capacity and improve the life chances of children and young people. Too many children still experience poverty, family breakdown and suffer harm. There are also a number of well known barriers to families seeking access to family support including parents with particular difficulties. There is a lack of up to date information and in addition, services are not easy to access due to inflexible working hours. There is also a particular stigma attached to accessing social services and specialist mental health services. This is reflected in the consultation exercise undertaken with parents and others in preparation for the development of this strategy. There are strengths to build upon too. Increasingly service to children and young people and their families, particularly those most vulnerable, are being developed and delivered through new partnerships, harnessing the skills and strengths of statutory, voluntary and community sector partners.

## **VISION FOR ALL CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

It is important that all organisations share a common view about what we want for our children and young people if they are to fulfill their potential. Services must be based on shared objectives across all participating agencies and must share the same aims as families and local communities. In order to help us achieve this we have drawn up nine statements which describe the life we would like for all children and young people:

1. All children and young people have a stable upbringing;
2. All children and families live in safe supportive communities;
3. All children and young people live free from poverty;
4. All pregnant women, new parents and babies thrive;
5. All children are ready for learning in school;
6. All children and young people enjoy and succeed during school years;
7. All children and young people are involved in decisions that affect them;
8. All children and young people make a positive contribution that is valued; and
9. All children and young people make a safe transition to adulthood.

Our thinking has been influenced by “Every Child Matters” the Green Paper which proposed that 5 broad objectives should drive services for children and young people:

- Being Healthy;
- Staying Safe;
- Enjoying and Achieving;
- Making a positive contribution; and
- Economic well-being.

## **PRINCIPLES FOR FAMILY SUPPORT POLICIES AND SERVICES**

Set out below are the principles for all services to children and young people which we will expect public services, and those services commissioned by them, to adhere to. These principles take into account the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. We believe that all policies and services for children and young people should be:

### **1. Centred on the needs of the young person**

The best interests of the child and young person should be paramount, taking into account their wishes and feelings.

## **2. High Quality**

Policies and services should aspire to and reach high standards of quality for the benefit of their users.

## **3. Family Orientated**

Full recognition must be given to family members, including extended families and significant others, who contribute to the well-being of children and young people.

## **4. Equitable and non-discriminatory**

All children and young people should have access to services which respect diversity and their individual needs.

## **5. Inclusive**

Policies and services should be sensitive to the individual needs and aspirations of every child and young person, taking full account of race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability, disability, age and social class.

## **6. Empowering**

Children and young people should have a role in the design of delivery of policies and services.

## **7. Results orientated and evidence based**

Monitoring and review should ensure that decisions that affect children and young people are well informed.

## **8. Coherent in design and delivery**

Services should be woven together in a coherent, integrated and cross sector form, where it is evident how progress and change expected for children and young people will be achieved.

## **9. Supportive and respectful**

Policies and services should be delivered in a manner that is respectful and supportive of children and ambitious for their future.

## **10. Community enhancing**

Communities should be empowered to make positive changes for children and young people, so that improvements can be owned and sustained locally. Services should promote community cohesiveness.

## **ASPIRATIONS**

The aspirations set out below are the result of widespread consultation with children, young people, parents and carers, and professionals who work with them and their families. They are based on the outcomes for children contained in the Green Paper; “Every Child Matters”, published in late 2003. More importantly, they are also based on the consensus of what people consider to be the really important things we need to know about how well children and young people are doing and will be listed in the Action Plan/Commissioning Strategy as outcomes to be achieved.

### **1. Health and Emotional Well-being**

- We want all children to feel good about themselves, their relationships with others and their lives generally. We want all our children to be as healthy as possible, to suffer less from avoidable disease and for their lives to be disrupted as little as possible by the consequences of illness.
- We want all children to receive all recommended immunisations, to adopt healthy lifestyles; in particular, to have healthy diets and regular physical exercise. We want children and young people to refrain from smoking, drug taking and excessive consumption of alcohol. We want children and young people to acquire awareness of behaviours that promote sexual health.

## **2. Protection/Staying Safe**

- We want our children and young people to be as safe as possible from maltreatment, accidental danger, bullying, harassment and crime, having regard to children's wishes for reasonable freedom and need to take some risks in order to learn. We want our children to feel safe.
- We want children and young people, as they grow up, to learn how to look after themselves and keep themselves safe from harm, to enjoy good parental supervision and to have access to good role models, mentors and advice.

## **3. Fulfillment**

- We want our children and young people to enjoy their childhood and to have a healthy balance between getting the most out of their childhood and preparing for their future. We want childhood to be valued in its own right and not simply as a period of development for adulthood.
- We want children and young people to have every opportunity to fulfill their own personal ambitions. We want them to experience achievement that matches or exceeds their potential academically and in whatever other skills they have. We want them to have aspirations that can be fulfilled and for frustration at under achievement to be minimized. We want them to grow into socially included and productive adults.

## **4. Social Engagement**

- We want children and young people to have a positive experience of social engagement in their communities, appropriate to their age. We want them to be able to participate in making decisions that affect or concern them. We want to diminish antisocial behaviour. We want young people to engage positively with democratic institutions.

- We want all children and young people to experience effective parenting that promotes positive social attitudes and protects them against developing antisocial behaviour. We want them to learn appropriate social skills and sound moral judgement to enable them to become engaged citizens as adults.

## **5. Material Well-being**

We want children and young people to live in circumstances that are safe and comfortable and do not exclude or stigmatise them. We want families to have sufficient income to permit their children to enjoy a range of common popular experiences.

We want children and young people's life chances not to be curtailed by living in a household with persistent low income. We want children and young people's horizons and aspirations to be lifted by the reduction in the numbers of low income families or households.

## **6. Child and Young People's Participation, Voice and Influence**

We want children and young people to be actively encouraged and supported to participate in, share views and influence the planning, design and delivery of services. We also want children and young people to be meaningfully consulted and involved in decisions that affect their lives.

## **KEY CHALLENGES**

The Board recognises that delivering on these aspirations and outcomes for children and young people and their families will prove a significant challenge and listed below are the priorities that will be addressed within the Board's area:

- Improvement of the physical and emotional well-being of children and young people;
- Reduction of risk through effective prevention;

- Raising the educational aspirations of children and young people and improve their achievements;
- Reduction in the number of children and young people being looked after by HSS Trusts;
- Safeguarding children and young people from harm;
- Reduction of the risk of offending by children and young people;
- Improvement of the life experiences of disabled children and young people; and
- Active participation of children and young people in decision making that affects them.

To enable the Board to deliver positive outcomes against these key challenges it will be necessary to learn from good practice and, where appropriate, establish multi-agency responses. The Board will support a variety of innovative approaches in responding to children and young people's needs. In particular the Board will focus on 4 priority areas:

- Practical support tailored to parents at critical stages in the family or child's life;
- Support for the mental health and resilience of family members;
- Help families/carers to keep children safe; and
- Support families reuniting following a crisis where a family member has been away from home for a significant period.