



ASSOCIATION FOR IMPROVEMENTS IN THE MATERNITY SERVICES

www.aims.org.uk

August 2016

Statement on the proposed 'Named Person for Every Child' scheme.

AIMS has been in existence for more than 50 years. Our aim is to help and inform women about pregnancy and birth and in so doing we are in contact with mothers across the UK. We are seriously concerned that the 'Named person for Every Child Scheme proposed in Scotland will not achieve its aims of safeguarding children's health and well-being but will compromise the well-being of many families by creating anxiety and undermining parents.

Through our helpline we have been made aware since the Children Act came into force 23 years ago not only of the huge increase in the number of children referred to Social Services, but also of the damaging effect on families of the threat of referral. According to statistical analysis by the University of the West of England, (Devine 2016), referrals to social services have risen by 297%, assessments have risen by 359%, but the proportion of identified cases of abuse has plummeted from 24% to just under 8%. The threshold for risk assessment has been set low since child protection was brought into focus by the death of Peter Connelly, or Baby P. and now when up to 5% of families are referred for assessment each year, many, many more are made intensely anxious by the threat of referral. The result has been that families are suspicious and sometimes reject help from health visitors, midwives and others, and children's services are stretched even more thinly causing danger to children who are in need of protection. For many families now the normal process of pregnancy, childbirth and looking after young children is being distorted by the need of health professionals to show that they are vigilant about child protection.

The available evidence suggests that the proposed intervention could result in harmful outcomes. Where long-term data is available it is clear that even when there is enthusiasm and good intention at the start, such interventions fail to improve children's lives. In a landmark 30 year follow up by Professor Joan McCord (1992) of a randomised trial from the USA on a project where boys from housing projects were assigned mentors and other positive interventions, she showed significant negative outcomes despite the fact that the original intervention was well designed and popular with the participants and their families.

In our view the Named Person for Every Child Scheme has different connotations today and may be deeply unpopular and interpreted as surveillance rather than support. We are seriously concerned that the proposed scheme in Scotland would undermine families and divert resources that would otherwise go to supporting families in need. We ask the Scottish Government to conduct randomised trials before setting up a scheme that could fundamentally change the relationship between parents and the state.

References

Devine, L. (2016) Key interim findings from transformative research: Rethinking child protection strategy. In: ESRC Presentation Workshop, Economic and Social Research Council, 23 February 2016. Available from: <http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/28186>

McCord, Joan (Ed); Tremblay, Richard Ernest (Ed), (1992). Preventing antisocial behavior: Interventions from birth through adolescence, New York, NY, US: Guilford Press, xv, 391 pp.

For further information contact Beverley Lawrence Beech
Tel: 020 8390 9534 email: chair@aims.org.uk