

Getting it Right for Every Child

scotland's vision for all children and young people



Marilyn Nicholl

Marilyn Nicholl discusses the national context for GIRFEC and its implementation in Edinburgh.

Attending to the principles and values of *Getting it right for every child* (GIRFEC) is not only for those working as counsellors or therapists in schools, in voluntary sector organisations or in the NHS; it has relevance for all those who work to support families in our broader society and in particular for those who work with the most vulnerable individuals.

Therapy often implies a one-to-one context, in a bounded, contained space, but of course we do not work in isolation and this paper invites us to consider our work alongside the Scottish Government's national vision of "building a society where our children are safe, nurtured, achieving, healthy, active, responsible and respected, and included."¹

Getting it right for every child is part of Scotland's response to the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. GIRFEC implementation is already underway in at least nine community planning partnership (CPP) areas. The Scottish Government is encouraging every CPP to commit to implementation, so that it becomes the foundation for all work which affects children and young people, including work in adult services where parents and carers are involved.

What do we mean by "getting it right for every child"? We mean culture change, systems change and practice change. The policy will help services work better in partnership, towards improved outcomes. Systems change means striving to reduce bureaucracy, working with shared paperwork and shared aims. Alongside this, there is an important focus on culture change – a focus on how we manage and engage in our work together as we implement changes in practice. It asks us to look at how we are attached to (and are loyal to) the concepts and formulas which underpin our ways

of being when we are at work – and to be open to changing them.

In a move from 'doing to...' to 'doing with...' GIRFEC is about an approach which seeks to promote all aspects of growth and well-being. That includes mental health, which is increasingly understood as a fundamental building block of healthy development and sound education for the young. A key element of the approach is to include children, young people and their families as partners in a process, partners who have a right for their view to be part of the decision-making around supportive interventions.

Emotional intelligence is recognised as being key not only to the well being of children and young people but also to the staff who work with them. Getting it right for every child aims to bring solution focussed and emotionally intelligent practices more strongly into everyday communications.

So how can we engage with GIRFEC?

Whether we work as single workers or within an agency, we can use the principles and guidelines of GIRFEC to sustain our work wherever it relates to children and young people or to adults who are parents/carers. And by working collaboratively within our communities the aim is to focus resources most effectively and where they are most needed.

Getting it right for every child means developing a shared understanding of what helps, so that we can:

- build solutions with and around children and families;
- enable children, young people and their families to get the help they need when they need it; and
- ensure practitioners and agencies work together and support each other to best effect.

GIRFEC in Edinburgh

Community planning partnerships are in different states of readiness to introduce GIRFEC as the basis for their service provision. Highland was the Scottish Government's first GIRFEC pathfinder and helped shape, develop and test the GIRFEC model and its implementation. Edinburgh University's evaluation of the positive progress they have achieved in supporting children and young people has helped to inform CPPs²

Edinburgh has also taken a strong lead in strategic level partnership, working as a fundamental element of the move to more integrative services.

There are a number of areas within the city with a history of strong multi-agency working and the Edinburgh partnership aims to consolidate such areas of best practice and facilitate their extension across the city. There is some way to go to establish the most effective multi-agency practice – and the context is one of national, financial restraints. Edinburgh is, however, determined to rise to these challenges and to support staff with differing professional and cultural traditions in working together to provide supports from within a shared set of principles and using a common language.

The aim is for a city wide, solution-focussed approach with the following stakeholders:

- Children, young people and their families
- The City of Edinburgh Council
- Scottish Council for Independent Schools
- Scottish Children's Reporter Administration

Operational Policies: How do we all work together?

As in other authorities the implementation of *Getting it right for every child* in Edinburgh will be founded on 10 core components which can be applied in any setting and in any circumstance, with a focus on outcomes (see additional information section). These are at the base of putting GIRFEC into practice and can provide a benchmark against which one will be able to determine the development of best practice in one's own agency.

The Edinburgh approach builds from the foundations available in the family, in the community and universal services. Examples of proposed shared paperwork which agencies are encouraged to use are available to download. Important basic concepts in the Edinburgh model include:

- A named person, who will act as the initial point of contact in universal services to coordinate services if there are concerns for a pregnant mother, child or young person. That person will be: – From pregnancy to 11 days: midwife – From 11 days to primary school entry: health visitor
- Primary school and secondary school: head teacher
- A lead professional, who will be identified if the complexity of needs is greater, and who will take up overall co-ordination when several agencies are working together to assist a child or young person.

As GIRFEC rolls out across Edinburgh, a range of multi-agency training opportunities is available to support the implementation.

GIRFEC across Scotland: Will we need to change?

Wherever you are located and whatever your CPP's particular 'take' on GIRFEC, the aim will be to build on existing best practice. It may well be that your agency's current codes of practice already reflect GIRFEC values. To determine what you may need to further develop, in terms of your agency's rules and procedures of professional conduct, there are national and local GIRFEC guidelines (see additional info. section). Relevant adjustments may be made to your current procedures, depending on the services and client groups your agency represents.

The *Getting it right for every child* practice model promotes recording information consistently, in a way that allows it to be collated when needed to provide a shared understanding of the needs of the child or young person. Confidentiality is always an important consideration for agencies in their client work. Within this framework of confidentiality, agencies will wish to look at how informed consent by service users may improve the support they get, by allowing a careful sharing of information with other agencies. In the question of consent, the child or young person's safety remain paramount and it is important to note that current Child Protection Procedures remain unchanged.

Shared values and principles underpin the approach and agencies may want to ensure that their policy documents demonstrate a consideration of GIRFEC. These build on the Children's Charter and reflect legislation, standards, procedures and professional expertise, bringing meaning and relevance at a practice level to single-agency, multi-agency and inter-agency working. There is a common platform for working with children and young people which all practitioners and professionals can draw from, as

all are working towards the same outcomes.

The theories which inform much of our own listening based and client-centred practice are echoed in the current values and principles which inform GIRFEC implementation. Moves are taking place to increase active participation with service users. GIRFEC is about multi-agency working and about systems and practice change, but essentially it is also about building relationships which make it easier to provide help when it is needed.

References and additional information

¹www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Young-People/childrenservices/girfec

²www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/11/20094407/0

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UN Convention of the Rights of the Child
www.unicef.org/crc/

Getting it Right for every child in Edinburgh:
www.edinburgh.gov.uk/GIRFEC

Edinburgh Central Implementation Team.
E-mail: GIRFEC@edinburgh.gov.uk

For the latest news on the Scottish Government's national implementation plan, including new implementation guidance:
www.scotland.gov.uk/gettingitright

GIRFEC Learning Community:
www.scotland.gov.uk/gettingitright/

LearningCommunity Practitioner Pages:
www.scotland.gov.uk/gettingitright/PractitionerPages

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