A world view

The Post-2015 Development Agenda offers a unique opportunity to carve a positive future for children based on a holistic approach to early childhood development – but early years practitioners need to make sure their voices are heard. Dr Eunice Lumsden explains

The past 17 years have seen Early Childhood Education and Care increasingly become the focus of policymakers and researchers nationally and internationally. In England, we have seen unprecedented investment in workforce reform and indisputable evidence that if a society invests in its youngest children the rewards are lifelong and intergenerational.

Indeed, as we enter 2014 there has never before been a time of such cross-party support for the importance of a holistic approach to early childhood development (ECD) and early intervention – see box for the petition launched by Tessa Jowell and Ivan Lewis and cross-party manifesto The 1001 Critical Days.

Yet there are still barriers for policymakers in actually articulating the knowledge we now have into integrated education, health and social care policy that is able to weather changes in political ideology.

The start of 2014 gives all those involved in developing and providing services for children and their families the opportunity to shape a different future that builds and acts on an ever-increasing evidence base about the importance of ECD. There is no other area where economics, neuroscience and the social sciences all come to the same conclusion – ECD is important.

As the world debates how to build on the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Post-2015 Development Agenda provides an opportunity that will not be seen again for 15 to 20 years: for ECD to be a goal in its own right with targets that all countries must meet.

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She wrote, ‘Those who suffer multiple adverse childhood events achieve less educationally, earn less, and are less healthy, making it more likely that the cycle of harm is perpetuated in the following generation’.

The realisation that these messages are not being heard or acted on has led to a growing global voice for ECD. The call is for there to be a specific measurable goal for the Post-2015 Development Framework (see the University of Northampton’s short film http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n6twHsJD864). As Dr Pia Britto, senior adviser for ECD at UNICEF, clearly voiced this happen’ (Britto, 2013).

Following the APPG, Baroness Walmsley tabled a question in the House Of Lords asking the Government what it was doing to promote ECD as part of the Post-2015 Development Framework. Her presentation at the debate stressed why ECD needs to be a specific goal in the new framework.

‘Early childhood holds the long-term solutions to solving the economic and social problems of intergenerational poverty, and to achieving world peace and our environmental survival,’ she said.

‘That may sound like a very big claim, but mountains of evidence from almost every discipline come to one conclusion: the earliest years of life can give us the strongest foundation for individual, societal, national and global sustainable development (Walmsley, 2013, lines 13-15).

**PLAY A PART**

Everyone working in the early years knows just how important ECD is. There has never been such an opportunity for everyone in the UK to come together with their early years colleagues globally and have their voices heard collectively.

We now have the chance to make an impact on national and international policy by calling for a specific goal of ECD to be included in the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

**So how can you help?**

- Sign the petition launched calling for ECD to be central to the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Ten thousand signatures are needed by February 2014 and we need 6,000 more, so your signature will count. See http://chn.ge/1fbsmgZ
- Watch the short film by the University of Northampton supporting this UNICEF campaign. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n6twHsJD864
- Ask the staff and parents in your settings to become involved by sharing the petition and short film.
- Invite your local MP to your setting or meet with them to ask them to write to the Prime Minister on your behalf, asking him to advocate for ECD as a specific goal in the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

Dr Eunice Lamudsen has just been appointed head of early years at The University of Northampton. Prior to her new role, she was the programme leader for the BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies Degree at the university. Her doctoral research focused on Early Years Professional Status.

**REFERENCES**

- Speech at the All Party Parliamentary Group meeting on Conception to the Age of Two the first 1001 Days, by P Britto, 7 November 2013.
- Reflecting, Celebrating and Shaping the Future: the importance of early childhood development by N Ulkuer, given as an annual children and young people’s lecture at the University of Northampton (6 November 2013).

**We now have a chance to make an impact on national and international policy**