



# parenting

across scotland

supporting families to support children



**REPORT ON WORK  
UNDERTAKEN  
2005-2007**



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## Introduction

Parenting Across Scotland (PAS) is a unique partnership of voluntary organisations funded by the Scottish Executive to:

- \* Research the issues and concerns affecting parents and families in Scotland.
- \* Co-ordinate and improve the information and support available.
- \* Gain greater recognition for the important job parents and families do in bringing up Scotland's children.
- \* Represent the views of parents in policy.

## PAS Vision

PAS believes that we should acknowledge and value the major contribution made by parents and families in helping children achieve their potential. PAS recognises that children are raised in all sorts of 'families' and that it is the quality of parenting and caring that counts. Parenting is both rewarding and challenging but is especially challenging when families live in poverty or experience discrimination. PAS believes that there should be greater support for family relationships given that they underpin all aspects of parenting. Parents and families deserve the best possible information and support to help them care for their children throughout childhood and into adult life.

## PAS aims to:

Promote a positive view of parenting in Scotland and help parents and families to achieve greater recognition for the important work they do.

Work with parents, families and others to secure improvements to policy and services so everyone is better supported in their parenting role.

## PAS Partners

The PAS partners support the planning and delivery of all PAS activities.

- \* Aberlour Childcare Trust [www.aberlour.org.uk](http://www.aberlour.org.uk)
- \* Capability Scotland [www.capability-scotland.org.uk](http://www.capability-scotland.org.uk)
- \* Children 1<sup>ST</sup> [www.children1st.org.uk](http://www.children1st.org.uk)
- \* Family Mediation Scotland [www.familymediationscotland.org.uk](http://www.familymediationscotland.org.uk)
- \* One Parent Families Scotland [www.opfs.org.uk](http://www.opfs.org.uk)
- \* Relate Scotland [www.relatescotland.org.uk](http://www.relatescotland.org.uk)
- \* Scottish Adoption Association [www.scottishadoption.org](http://www.scottishadoption.org)
- \* Scottish Marriage Care [www.scottishmarriagecare.org](http://www.scottishmarriagecare.org)
- \* Stepfamily Scotland [www.stepfamilyscotland.org.uk](http://www.stepfamilyscotland.org.uk)





## Parents and Families in Scotland

Almost 1 in 3 adults in Scotland are parents of children aged 16 and under<sup>1</sup>. Forming 27% of the population, they are responsible for bringing up most of Scotland's children. However, many people contribute to the parenting effort even although they themselves are not the biological parents. Parents generally do a fantastic job and find parenting hugely rewarding but being a parent is probably the most challenging role that adults face. Most parents will need advice and support at key stages in their children's lives for example – the early years, starting school and the teenage years. Research by PAS and others<sup>2</sup> has identified that:

- \* Parents worry about their parenting abilities and most feel that parenting is more difficult now than in the past.

- \* Balancing work and family life places considerable pressure on parents.
- \* Many parents feel that government and the media are too critical of parents and that there is a growing emphasis on punishing rather than supporting parents.
- \* Parents have a range of information and support needs but many parents don't know what is available.
- \* Provision of information and support for parents is patchy and even where sources of information and support exist, parents often find it difficult to access.
- \* Whilst support for parents is considerable in the early years, there is much less support once children are older, especially during teenage years.

PAS partners currently support thousands of families through the provision of a wide range of services including parenting projects; family centres; family conferencing; relationship support, counselling and mediation. Recent research by PAS found that 77% of parents in Scotland would consider counselling or mediation to help with problems relating to their children and 68% for difficulties with their partner<sup>1</sup>. Given the significant evidence base linking the quality of relationships in families to the overall health, well-being and achievements of both adults and children<sup>3</sup>, PAS would like to see more support available to families. PAS and partners gave evidence to the Parliament's Justice 1 Committee during the passage of the Family Law (Scotland) Bill 2005 and welcomed the subsequent report by the Committee<sup>4</sup> which identified the variable provision of family support services across Scotland. PAS and partners gave evidence on other legislation approved by the Scottish Parliament during 2005/07 including the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Bill 2006 and the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006.

<sup>1</sup> PAS Ipsos/MORI Poll 2007

<sup>2</sup> PAS MORI Poll 2004

<sup>3</sup> Quinton, D (2004) Supporting Parents - Messages from Research, London, Kingsley; Rodgers and Pryor (1998), Divorce and Separation: the outcomes for children, York, Joseph Rowntree Foundation

<sup>4</sup> Reporter's Report on the Inquiry into the provision of Family Support Services in Scotland, Justice 1 Committee, Session 2 (2006)



## PAS Activities 2005-2007

All of the work summarised in this report has been undertaken collaboratively either within the PAS partnership as with the gateway telephone helpline or with other organisations as with the PIP programme. PAS has also developed stronger links with a wide range of national and local organisations working to support families in various ways. In addition, PAS convened two special interest groups – one on parenting and family health and another on parenting information to bring together key organisations to progress collaborative work on key issues which affect parents in Scotland.

PAS activities in 2005-2007 came under the following headings:

- \* Researching the information and support needs of parents.
- \* Piloting new ways of getting information to parents and families.
- \* Encouraging parents' involvement in public policy.

## Researching the Information and Support Needs of Parents

### Ipsos/MORI Poll 2006

PAS commissioned a second MORI poll following on from the first poll conducted in 2004. The survey involved telephone interviews with 1,250 parents of children aged 0-16 years from across Scotland. The survey sought to explore the experiences of parents and identify their key concerns and support needs. The key findings were:

- \* Instilling discipline, steering children in the right direction and time pressures were the three biggest challenges facing parents today.
- \* The main worries parents have for their children in the future include employment prospects, education and drug and alcohol abuse.
- \* Just over four out of ten parents said there was no support or very little available in raising their children.
- \* A majority of parents (77%) said they would consider counselling or mediation to help with problems relating to their children and 68% for difficulties with a partner.
- \* Parents are most likely to turn to health visitors/doctors, schools, the internet or their own parents for advice and support and most parents (88%) rate their neighbourhood as being very or quite family friendly.
- \* The vast majority of parents (89%) preferred to discuss issues calmly with their child when problems arose although 1 in 5 parents said they smacked or hit their child at least once or twice in the past year.
- \* Every parent had praised their children when they had done something good and the most rewarding thing about being a parent was watching children grow and develop and seeing children learn and become successful.

### Scottish Parenting Research Network

PAS worked in partnership with the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships (CRFR), University of Edinburgh, to explore ways in which collaboration on parenting and family research could be improved. The following initiatives were established:

- \* Electronic parenting research discussion site.
- \* A review of evaluations of parenting support programmes undertaken by CRFR.



## Getting Information to Parents and Families

The MORI Poll commissioned by PAS in 2004 found that two out of three adults in Scotland were not aware of any organisations that provided advice and support to parents. The MORI poll also identified widespread support for the provision of telephone helplines, web-based support and printed material for parents and families. The audit of electronic information on parenting undertaken the same year found that there was no generic website for parents and families to access and although local websites provided excellent information, they were not instantly accessible. In light of these findings, PAS developed OK to Ask, a pilot parent information initiative to explore and evaluate new ways of getting information directly to parents and families. OK to Ask comprised a gateway telephone helpline, internet gateway and parent information sessions (PIP). OK to Ask was designed to encourage parents to ask for information and support and to reinforce the message that there was no stigma in seeking help.

### OK TO ASK Gateway Telephone Helpline

The OK to Ask telephone gateway pilot ran from April 2006 – March 2007 and was externally evaluated by SMCI Associates. OK to Ask involved a collaboration between PAS partners Parentline Scotland, One Parent Families Scotland and Capability Scotland. The gateway comprised a single entry point through the Parentline Scotland number which provided an initial 'listening ear' with direct and indirect referrals between the participating partners. The aims of the OK to Ask telephone gateway were to:

- \* Provide an improved service to parents and families through a collaborative approach to helpline support.
- \* Provide a single point of telephone contact for parents and families seeking advice.
- \* Increase the accessibility of support and information for parents.
- \* Increase awareness of support agencies.
- \* Improve the effectiveness of referrals between agencies.

Staff and volunteers from the partner agencies involved in delivering the gateway service attended joint meetings and training sessions prior to the launch of the gateway and were involved in focus groups towards the end of the pilot. Many people felt that the

greatest benefit from the gateway was the development of relationships between the organisations.

**It's all about communication – it's easier to refer someone onto an organisation if you know the face.**

Key findings from the evaluation included the following:

- \* Calls from parents to all partners increased overall from 53% to 59%.
- \* The peak call month for partners was May 2006 when OK to Ask was launched to coincide with the Family Law (Scotland) Bill.
- \* Parentline Scotland made 25 direct transfers during the pilot, the majority of which were to National Lone Parents Helpline Scotland.
- \* Callers, call-takers, helpline managers and strategic staff all thought the gateway was a good idea.

The gateway provided a positive opportunity for the partner organisations to work more collaboratively although the actual number of direct transfers was small. Areas which were found to be problematic included:

- \* Lack of clarity over the nature and purpose of the gateway.
- \* Lack of clear and established protocols which led to a degree of mistrust among partners.
- \* The different opening hours of the partner agencies were identified as problematic.

**We seldom get directly through so we just need to give [the caller] the organisations number and opening times.**

The evaluation made a number of recommendations including:

- \* Developing a shared vision for the gateway.
- \* Reviewing the gateway partnership.
- \* Facilitating user-involvement.

## PAS Website

The PAS website and OK to Ask database provide internet links to a wide range of web-based information sources for parents. The gateway provides a search facility and information on a range of topics such as childcare, behaviour and discipline, health and family change. The gateway went live in May 2006 with visits to the website increasing each month and a clear peak in traffic at the launch of OK to Ask in May 06. The schoolbag campaign in December 06 involved PAS distributing 8,000 seasonal greetings cards carrying the Ok to Ask number to parents and families across Scotland just before Christmas. This resulted in a build up of visits through the early months of 07 with a peak at over 33,000 hits, constituting over 6,000 visits to the site. The most popular parts of the PAS website in April 2007 were the news and influencing change pages and the Ok to Ask database.

## Ok to Ask Database

The OK to Ask database has increased from 30 to 100 searches a month. However, the resources on OK to Ask are accessed much more frequently as they are found by other search engines. In January and February 2007, over 8,000 visits were made to Ok to Ask resources. Every month searches are examined, and resources are added, or catalogued to reflect the search terms parents who visit the site are using.

## Parent Information Points (PIP)

In addition to the OK to Ask gateway helpline and website, PAS piloted a PIP programme between May and November 2006. The PIPs were based on a model developed by the Family and Parenting Institute and, like the gateway telephone helpline, were externally evaluated by SMCI Associates. The key aim of the PIPs was to deliver a universal, user-friendly, non-stigmatising information service for parents focusing on the transitional stages i.e. starting primary or secondary school. PIPs were delivered in a single two hour session in collaboration with local schools. Five PIPs were delivered - four focused on high schools (2 in Edinburgh and 2 in Glasgow) and one on a pre-school project in Edinburgh with a local coordinator appointed in each area. The main features of the PIP sessions were:

- \* A marketplace of representatives of local support services.
- \* A top ten tips presentation about child development at the relevant transitional stage.

- \* Presentations or workshops from other agencies on subjects relevant to this age group.

The PIP model proved difficult to attract parents although the evaluation confirmed that those parents who did attend were very positive about the experience and all said they would recommend the PIP session to friends. Key findings from the evaluation included the following:

81% of parents who attended the PIP found it helpful and informative.

**“It was fantastic – very well organised and I was able to talk to people about my concerns.”**

100% of parents who attended would recommend PIP to a friend.

**“It’s a fantastic concept, not focusing on parents steeped in problems. I’ve phoned friends to say that they should have been there.”**

78% of all participants (parents, agencies and helpers) thought that there was a good range of information.

**“It’s an ideal opportunity for parents to get information on a wide range of problems they think they could encounter - forewarned is forearmed.”**

86% of participants felt better informed about services for families with 70% saying they were likely to use services they found out about at the PIP.

**“How helpful everyone was – they were willing to involve us in conversation rather than just standing and offering us leaflets.”**

100% of parents found the marketplace useful.

**“There are so many resources and information out there - it’s good to have everything in the one place.”**



66% of parents said they found the workshops helpful and enjoyable.

**“The workshops provided information that parents could take away and access after the PIP. The support didn’t finish on the night.”**

One of the key issues to emerge from the PIP pilot was the difficulties for parents in attending PIP sessions given the timetabled structure which did not offer sufficient flexibility to meet parents’ needs.

**“I missed most of the talks - they didn’t say it was all timetabled.”**

Most of the agencies who participated in the PIP pilot had low expectations of turnout and both coordinators and head teachers felt that providing support to parents of teenagers was particularly difficult.

**“There is a huge role for parents during the teenage years, a very difficult role...parents often have information overload, are working and busy.”**

Recommendations from the evaluation included the following:

- \* Embed the provision of parent information support in local communities.
- \* Involve parents in shaping events and clarify the role of all participants at the outset.
- \* Support the development of partnerships between agencies to provide parent information support.
- \* Build on the energy created by PIP working groups to explore delivery of parent information support in local communities.

## Encouraging Parents' Involvement in Public Policy

In October 2005, PAS conducted a telephone poll of over 150 parents to explore the extent to which parents engage with the political and policy making processes.

The poll looked at whether parents had contacted their political representatives; whether they had responded to consultations; whether they felt they had been informed about policy changes and the extent to which they think parents can influence the decisions politicians make that affect them and their families. The key findings were:

- \* 2 out of 3 parents had never contacted their MSP or local Councillor and of these, over half don't know who, when or how to contact them.
- \* 2 out of 3 parents had not responded to any government consultations on issues that affect them as parents.
- \* Most parents felt they were not adequately informed of changes in policy that affected them.

Following the results of the Poll, PAS organised two events at the Scottish Parliament which brought parents and politicians together to discuss their experiences of parenting and family life. Over 100 people attended the parliamentary events which were chaired by broadcaster Lesley Riddoch. Around 13 MSPs participated, sharing stories and experiences with the parents and families who attended about their own family life. In addition, young people from Drumchapel in Glasgow performed a drama production for the parents and politicians who attended the second event.



## PAS Future Work 2007-10

PAS will build on the work undertaken to date over the next three years continuing to research the issues and concerns affecting parents and families in Scotland; improving the information and support available and representing the views of parents in policy. Specifically, PAS will:

- \* Build on the collaborative work undertaken by PAS partners to further develop the OK to Ask parent information initiative ensuring that parents and families in Scotland are aware of the information and support available to them.
- \* Play a key role in brokering relationships between agencies to pilot opportunities for parents and families to access 'one stop shop' service provision.
- \* Identify key trends in policy and research which impact on families, producing briefings; promoting best practice and organising seminars as necessary.
- \* Provide opportunities for parents to engage in the political process to ensure that parents' views are represented in policy debates.
- \* Demonstrate the impact that PAS is having by continuing to evaluate its work.



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Parenting Across Scotland (PAS) is a multi-agency voluntary sector partnership funded by the Scottish Executive to provide a focus for issues and concerns affecting parents in Scotland.

**PAS partners:**

- Aberlour Childcare Trust
- Capability Scotland
- CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup>
- Relate Scotland
- Family Mediation Scotland
- One Parent Families Scotland
- Scottish Adoption Association
- Scottish Marriage Care
- Stepfamily Scotland