

# Glasgow Centre for Population Health response to the Scottish Parliament Inquiry on Poverty and Attainment

20th March 2018

The Glasgow Centre for Population Health (GCPH) welcomes this important consultation and the opportunity it gives for stakeholders to contribute to the development of effective policy responses and interventions that can tackle the impact of poverty on the educational attainment of school-age children.

Our submission will focus on relevant GCPH evidence within three main areas as requested by the Chair of the Committee, namely:

- 1. Building understanding of the impact of poverty on educational attainment**
- 2. Tackling the impact of poverty – evidence of effective interventions**
- 3. Barriers to success**

## 1. Building understanding of the impact of poverty on educational attainment

The GCPH has undertaken a wide range of research and analysis to monitor trends and patterns in health and life circumstances within and beyond Glasgow. The Understanding Glasgow [website](#) presents information about the wellbeing of Glasgow's population across a range of domains, including poverty and educational attainment. This work highlights the importance of reducing child poverty to support educational attainment which will in turn support a child's future health, longevity and quality of life.

Although attainment levels in the city have been steadily rising, [one in three children](#) still live in poverty and [wide variations by deprivation in qualifications](#) exist. [Predictions](#) are that child poverty levels are set to increase, and the nature of poverty is also changing, with a rise in 'in-work' poverty and in lone parent households, both of which impact on children.

In terms of educational attainment, evidence generated by the [GCPH](#) and from [elsewhere](#) demonstrates that the gap between children from low-income and high-income households starts early. Lower attainment in literacy and numeracy is linked to deprivation throughout primary school. By age 12–14 (S2), pupils from better-off areas are more than twice as likely as those from the most deprived areas to do well in numeracy. These data highlight the importance of effective interventions and policies that can support and nurture the physical, social and emotional development of babies and young children prior to entering the school system through health and social care pathways, appropriate family/parenting support and equitable access to high quality early learning and childcare. [GCPH research](#) exploring practitioners' views regarding the parenting landscape in Greater Glasgow and Clyde found that although there was agreement that parenting support programmes were firmly embedded as an important component of early intervention across the statutory and third sector, there was growing recognition of the importance of family support which can take account of and respond to a family's economic, social and cultural context.

Families living in poverty are more likely to live in poor quality housing. Evidence from the [GoWell](#) research and learning programme has highlighted the negative impact of poor housing on children's health and their ability to study at home, and associations between attainment and the social mix of a pupil's home neighbourhood. Children and young people living in damp, mouldy homes are more prone to respiratory conditions than those in dry homes. Such symptoms can lead to sleep loss and restrictions on children's daily activities. Living in cold, damp housing may also have an impact on mental health, increasing children's chances of experiencing stress, anxiety and depression. The space available within a home can also impact on educational attainment, for example if there is insufficient quiet, warm space for children to do their homework<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Lawson L, Kearns A. Changing contexts and critical moments: interim outcomes for children and young people living through involuntary relocation. Unpublished manuscript, 2016.

## 2. Tackling the impact of poverty - evidence of effective interventions

The [Healthier, Wealthier Children](#) (HWC) project is an example of an effective early intervention and NHS partnership approach to maximise income for pregnant woman and families experiencing, or at risk of, child poverty. Between 2010 and 2017, the HWC project developed referral pathways between the early years health service and money advice services for pregnant women and families with young children who were experiencing or at risk of child poverty. Early years health staff and welfare advice staff working across Greater Glasgow and Clyde achieved 15,238 HWC advice referrals that led to families receiving £17.6 million gains, as a result. Evaluation learning showed that many were unaware of their rights to entitled financial support.

Lone parents were key beneficiaries of HWC and represent 4-out-of-10 families with children in Glasgow, the highest Scottish local authority rate and expected to rise over the next 20 years. Many lone parent families experience health, social and economic inequalities that can influence their children's educational attainment. From 2013 onwards, the GCPH developed strong partnership links to create various [learning outputs](#) to help tackle these inequalities. In 2014, the [Glasgow Lone Parent Project](#) was set up to improve the way mainstream services support parents. Key successes and outcomes that the project contributed to included low-income families automatically receiving a school clothing grant, instead of having to apply, tackling stigma and ensuring parents' voices influenced work, such as the review of Lifelong Learning undertaken by Glasgow Life.

The [Building Connections](#) programme run by the GCPH and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation is a more recent example of an effective intervention to tackle the impact of poverty. The programme built on approaches to delivering advice services in two general practices and two job centres in north east Glasgow. The services included: financial and debt advice; mental health and addictions support; social security advice; and modern apprenticeship schemes for ethnic minority communities, with the main focus of the programme to improve social and economic outcomes for people living in deprived communities. Nearly £1 million worth of financial gain has been secured through supporting people to access social security payments and £213,000 of debt was identified. This programme has led to a [commitment by the Scottish Government](#) to co-locate the Social Security's local services with other advice organisations

The [Cost of the School Day](#) (CSD) and [Cost of the School Holidays](#) (CSH), both led by Child Poverty Action Group (Scotland), are two educational projects that the GCPH has supported from the outset. CSD involved children, parents and staff identifying cost barriers and taking practical steps to remove them, such as improving communication with parents about financial support, making approaches to lending resources consistent, starting homework clubs with computer access and removing the need for expensive badged sweatshirts. CSD has been extended beyond Glasgow and is a recommended intervention in the Pupil Equity Fund national guidance. The CSH study also showed that school holidays can be difficult for low-income families and may lead to the attainment gap being widened. High quality summer programmes, providing reliable and flexible childcare – particularly for lone parents and those with older children – and preventing holiday malnourishment, especially among children normally receiving free school meals, could help narrow the gap. It is worth noting that North Lanarkshire council has announced that it plans to address holiday hunger through the ["Food 365" programme](#).

Achievement covers learning in other areas outside school, and in the variety of activities children and young people are involved in. Through these activities, they develop important skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work that can be of real value to them as they grow up. We therefore welcome the Scottish Government's recognition of the importance placed on learning from activities outside the classroom. Since 2013, the GCPH has been leading the evaluation of [Sistema Scotland's Big Noise programme](#). The programme uses music-making to foster confidence, discipline, teamwork, pride and aspiration in the children taking part, their families and across their wider community. There is early evidence of improvement in academic-related skills and behaviours and performance in the school setting. The [GCPH survey of the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games clyde-sider volunteer programme](#) also showed that

those aged 16-24 were more likely than older volunteers (25+) to report positive skill-based outcomes after participating, including skills such as communication, organisation and problem solving.

The [Children's Neighbourhood Scotland project](#), currently being developed in Bridgeton and Dalmarnock, is a distinctive place-based approach to improving outcomes for all children and young people in neighbourhoods with high levels of poverty, based on experience and practice internationally<sup>2</sup>. It aims to place a clear area-wide strategic focus on joining up efforts across services and sectors to ensure better co-ordination, integration of local support systems and a coherent set of networks for children and families and the communities in which they live.

### 3. Barriers to success

A [GCPH review of evidence](#) on early years, children and young people demonstrates that parental life circumstances and socioeconomic contexts have a fundamental bearing on the early years and children's outcomes. These factors are also critically related to parents' health and wellbeing, which in turn impact on early years and childhood outcomes. Hence, the health and wellbeing of children cannot be addressed in isolation from the health and wellbeing of parents. Recognising the excess ill-health experienced by young working-age adults in Scotland documented by [GCPH data analysis](#), there is a particular need for services and approaches to be inter-generational, affecting parents/carers as well as children, to reduce the inter-generational transmission of disadvantage. In particular, it is important to support lone mothers since they are more likely to report poor mental health or physical health, than mothers who have partners.

In relation to the health and wellbeing of young people themselves, a [recent GCPH study](#) found that almost 1-in-8 secondary pupils in Glasgow reported providing care, with a third of these stating that no one knew about it. More likely to receive free school meals, live with a lone parent, young carers reported poorer health than non-carers, particularly when caring for someone with mental health or addictions issues. They were also less likely to see themselves entering further or higher education, even when important background factors were taken into account. Local authority and health board requirement to provide a 'Young Carer Statement' could be an important platform to address this particular attainment challenge of ensuring that all school pupils identified as providing care are offered timely and appropriate support to realise their full potential.

[Exposure to adverse childhood experiences](#) (ACEs) represents a direct threat to children and young people's health and wellbeing, attainment and ability to lead a fulfilled adult life. ACEs refer to stressful events occurring in childhood such as abuse, neglect, family conflict, parental drug or alcohol addiction. ACEs can create dangerous levels of stress and derail healthy brain development, which can result in long-term effects on learning, behaviour and health. There is a connection between child poverty, family stress and the likelihood of children experiencing ACEs. There is also clear evidence that family stress is being exacerbated by austerity and welfare reform. We support the Scottish Government commitment to tackling ACEs in the current [Programme for Government](#) and through the [Justice Strategy](#). As a member of the national [ACEs advisory hub](#), the GCPH has contributed to the publication of [guidance for education colleagues](#) on the use of the Pupil Equity Fund to tackle the attainment gap – this guidance sets out a range of practical approaches and actions that will help support children and mitigate some of the effects that ACEs may have on their learning and development.

The GCPH is the lead evaluation partner in a three-year project, [Childcare and Nurture in Glasgow East \(CHANGE\)](#) which aims to establish improved, affordable and sustainable childcare in three Glasgow East communities. Our emerging findings based on surveys, interviews and focus groups with parents/carers and professionals indicate that barriers to accessing childcare include: a lack of information of available childcare; flexibility; affordability; availability; and provision for children with additional support needs. We welcome the commitment by the Scottish Government to increase free access to early learning and childcare but highlight the importance of affordable provision that provides the flexibility and accessibility that parents and families need if they are to be able to take advantage of the childcare offer in their neighbourhood.

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<sup>2</sup> [Henig et al., \(2015\) Putting collective impact in context EPSA: Columbia University](#)

In conclusion, the GCPH believes that child poverty negatively impacts on a child's health, educational attainment, future prospects and health in adulthood. This response has presented a range of effective and promising approaches and interventions that can help ameliorate these impacts. However, we propose that efforts to tackle poverty and improve attainment need to consider all spheres of children's lives drawing on the principles and approach set out in [Getting it Right for Every Child](#). This includes children's family and parental environment, learning environment, neighbourhood, and crucially the socioeconomic circumstances in which they are growing up. We look forward to the findings of the Parliamentary Inquiry in this regard.