

FOSTERING RELATIONS
WELLBEING

Education Report 2014



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INTRODUCTION

Children's wellbeing is the focus of this third annual education report exploring the experience of the children and young people looked after by Fostering Relations. In this report, as in previous reports, I have endeavoured to gain the views of a representative sample of children and young people fostered within our agency, along with their carers. This was conducted against a backdrop of change at many levels for young people in Scotland. There have been changes in government legislation, (The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 & 2009 and the Children and Young People [Scotland] Act 2014), and policy (GIRFEC), as well as major change within the education system (Curriculum for Excellence), and a move towards greater participation in their own future. For the first time, young people over the age of 16 were given the opportunity in September this year to vote in the national referendum on independence. They showed great enthusiasm and participated in the debate so well that this may lead to constitutional change allowing 16 year olds to vote in general elections in the future.



Research findings

Change was necessary as research showed that the system was failing many children. Based on 2010 figures, a UNICEF study on child wellbeing placed the UK 16th out of 29 developed countries in areas such as rates of further education, young people not in education, employment and training, teenage pregnancy rates and infant mortality. This is an improvement from 2007 when the UK came bottom in a list of 21 countries. (1)

To determine where change was needed in Scotland, the Scottish Government commissioned Growing Up in Scotland, a longitudinal research study tracking the lives of thousands of children and their families from the early years, through childhood and beyond, investigating family and school influences on children's social and emotional well-being. In 2012/13 when their child was seven years old, mothers were asked about the child's behavioural and emotional problems, and children were asked about their life satisfaction. 11% of children were classed as having high levels of behavioural and emotional problems; 25% of children were classed as having low life satisfaction; 4 % of children had both high levels of behavioural and emotional problems, and low life satisfaction. Factors associated with both child mental health problems and low subjective well-being were: greater mother-child conflict and lower parental knowledge of the child's activities or relationships when not at school; child difficulties adjusting to the learning and social environment at primary school; and the child having poorer quality friendships with other children. (2)

The study indicated some factors were associated with both high behavioural and emotional difficulties score, and low life satisfaction. These included parenting factors: high mother-child conflict, low parental knowledge, either of what the child is doing or who he or she is with when not at school. Another major influence was school factors including low child emotional engagement, difficulty with school work, and maternal concern over the child's reading/writing ability. Another crucial factor was poor quality friendships. This issue of friendship was also a major source of concern for our foster carers in previous studies. These findings support the idea that social relationships involving parents, teachers and friends, are of key importance for young children's social and emotional well-being. The study suggests that child social and emotional well-being might be improved by interventions in both family and school settings.

These findings are supported by the ever increasing number of children being referred to agencies such as ourselves in need of foster placements due to family breakdown, especially the mother child relationship. A quarter of children being found to experience low life satisfaction is borne out by the anecdotal evidence of a shift from disruptive behaviour problems, to mental health issues, in school children as reported by members of the Scottish LAAC Education Forum cited in last year's report. The difficulties facing children looked after by our foster families at points of school transition were also the main focus of last year's report. (3)

Parental involvement

GIRFEC, the Children and Young People Act, and Curriculum for Excellence all acknowledge and promote parental involvement as a priority but many parents and carers still find it difficult to find information about help, advice or support services that are available to them. ENQUIRE, the Scottish advice service for additional support for learning, is a Scottish Government funded service offering independent and impartial advice and information to parents, carers, practitioners, children and young people. It provides information and support to anyone concerned about a child with additional support needs (ASN) and campaigns on behalf of children and parents and collects data about the nature of their difficulties and promote what is good about additional support for learning in Scotland. Their research indicates that while numbers accessing the formal complaint procedures are relatively low, these along with the enquiries to their help lines indicate that parents and carers tell of very difficult experiences for some children in Scotland. One of the most painful issues affecting our carers is caused by the lack of clear procedures to access ASN funding for children educated outwith their home authority when councils struggle with their responsibilities in this area in a climate of austerity. Sally Cavers, Manager of Enquire, echoes this view,

“Local authorities are under pressure with increased demand for services and less money available but protecting services for vulnerable children is crucial. Making sure there is greater universality of optimum educational experience with personalised and appropriate outcomes will mean we don’t have so many negative stories to cite.”(4)

Against a backdrop of unemployment and increased poverty, it is now believed that a quarter of Scotland’s children are growing up in workless households. The link between poverty, attainment and outcomes is now widely acknowledged and there is an increasing move to assist parents. Parent power is the aim of organisations such as Parent Network Scotland (PNS) which supports around 300 parents a year with capacity-building programme, “Parenting for All”. Jackie Tolland, director of PNS commented on their impact on issues raised in the Growing Up in Scotland study, *“Programmes also reduced children’s difficult behaviour, suggesting they work by firstly addressing issues with the parents who are then empowered to cope with their child’s difficult behaviour.”(5)*

The National Curriculum for Excellence

The national Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) aims to address many of these issues and has had its share of criticism, particularly with regards to the assessment process, but is undoubtedly ambitious in what it is trying to achieve – “a process to ensure all children and young people develop the attributes, knowledge and skills they need to flourish in life, learning and work helping those in our society become successful learners; confident individuals; responsible citizens and effective contributors.” There is some positive news following on from CfE. Dr Alastair Allan, Learning Minister comments on progress being made through CfE and the renewed focus on literacy with the publication of the Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy. The survey assessed children in years primary four, seven and S. 2 and found that more than 90% of pupils at all stages are working within or above the expected level for reading and writing and 80% for listening and talking. However, this has to be balanced against the findings of the third Additional Support for Learning report to the Scottish Parliament covering the 2012-13 period. This report identified 131,621 pupils as having additional support needs, (19.5%) almost one in five, and an increase of 1.5% on the numbers reported in 2012. Statistics, including the 2013 report, show that children and young people with additional support needs are still significantly more likely to be excluded from school than pupils who do not have such needs. All of our fostered children and young people are considered to have additional support needs in terms of the ASL legislation therefore there are an increasing number of young people trying to access a dwindling level of support as schools close specialist facilities in funding cuts and local authorities replace social workers with social work assistants in an effort to make their straightened finances go further.

The Children and Young People [Scotland] Act 2014

The most recent legislation to improve the wellbeing of Scottish children was the introduction of the Children and Young People [Scotland] Act 2014. In the view of Claire Tinney, member of the Children’s legislation Team at the Scottish Government, *“The Act will contribute to making real Scottish Ministers’ ambition to make Scotland the best place to grow up in, putting children and young people at the heart of planning and delivery of services and ensuring their rights are respected across the public sector groups.”(6)*. The Act includes provisions that will increase the amount and flexibility of free early learning and childcare for 3 and 4 year olds, and 15% of Scotland’s most vulnerable 2 year olds; provide free school lunches to all children in primary 1–3 by January 2015; improve permanence planning for looked after children by extending the right to stay in care until the age of 21 from 2015 and extend the support available to young people leaving care the age of 26; support the parenting role of kinship carers; enshrine elements of GIRFEC in law, ensuring there is a named person, single planning approach for children with ASN; create new duties in relation to the UNCRC and strengthen the Children’s Commissioner role. As with most legislation, the Act has its supporters and detractors, with many, including Kenny Forsyth from Scotland’s Commission for Childcare Reform and CiS, concerned that the developments promised will not be sufficiently resourced to make a real difference in improving children’s lives.

Young people's participation

One encouraging aspect of this legislation was the involvement of young people in the deliberations. (7) Over 2,400 children and young people of a wide range of ages and from diverse backgrounds were involved in the engagement activities and events during consultations on the Bill. Not surprisingly, their views were fair-minded and carefully considered, and showed real desire for their views to be sought and taken into account. Regarding **Wellbeing and SHANARRI**, children and young people indicated strong support for the definition of wellbeing based on **SHANARRI** wellbeing indicators. While children and young people consulted felt the SHANARRI wellbeing indicators generally covered all their wellbeing needs, some were able to suggest additions. The most common suggestions covered areas such as 'Happiness' and 'Love' and 'Friendship'.

There was overwhelming support from the children and young people for the proposal that **Public Bodies should Work Together** to jointly design, plan and deliver their policies and services to ensure that they are focused on improving children's wellbeing. The benefits they hoped would result from this were a reduction in the number of assessments and questions asked by different bodies; the possibility that bodies might contact each other to suggest services that might be of benefit to the child/young person and some resolution to the lack of communication between agencies.

Children and young people conveyed some support for the proposal to provide a point of contact for children, young people and families through a universal approach to the **Named Person** role and the choice of this person received great consideration. There was a consistent preference for them to act as the 'first point of contact' for the child or young person, and their carers, when they are looking for advice or information about their wellbeing. Among other roles, these children also stated that the Named Person should 'talk to me to find out if I have a worry, help you and care about you' and 'fight for you rights'. Many respondents thought the Named Person should 'make sure your views are being taken into account when decisions about your wellbeing are made'. They placed great importance on the Named Person knowing them and their families and children were interested in finding the right person for the job, rather than identifying someone simply because 'they were found in what Government/Services see as the right location'. There was a recurring wish among children and young people to have some say in the appointment of the Named Person. In particular, it was suggested by a number of children and young people that they should have the right to request a change of Named Person if 'you didn't like them or couldn't get along with them'. It was suggested that young people should have the right to choose their Named Person from a range of options 'once they are old enough'. Of particular importance to young people was the issue of confidentiality, with regard to the Named Person role and other professionals working with them. As such, it was strongly felt that the Named Person would have to be someone the child or young person trusted and could confide in, and more clarity was sought on the terms on which the Named Person could share personal information.

There was very strong support for the single planning approach described in the consultation document, with general enthusiasm about the idea of a single **Child's Plan** and a strong desire for direct involvement. e.g. 'Of course I want to have a say. I want to tell what I'm like, what I like and what kind of people I want to go with'. 'I would like a plan that is easy to read' and not to be fobbed off, '[Do] you think that putting a couple of pictures on something makes it child friendly?' Children and young people also stressed the need for the Plan to change as their needs changed, or if the Plan was not working. Again, children and young people felt their involvement in this process was essential. These entirely reasonable and understandable demands have heavy resource implications and are likely to demand increased input from education staff to ensure child accessibility of language and to facilitate full participation.

Regarding **Throughcare and Aftercare**, the general view was summed up succinctly by one young person currently in residential care, who stated that assistance should be available 'as long as needed...until someone is ready'. Similarly, other young people said, 'support us while we need it- help us not need the support'.

While the issue was only addressed by a limited number of young people responding, some strongly felt

that those undertaking the role of 'Corporate Parent' should view themselves as parents. Consequently, they stressed the need to be loved, cared for (fed, clothed) and helped to learn, as well as identifying the need for the corporate parent to 'enjoy their children'.

There was general agreement with the **Kinship Care Order** proposal that, 'Children should be able to stay with a family carer before they have to go to foster care.'

With regard to **Foster Care** proposals within the Bill, just over half the children voicing an opinion expressed support for maximum limits for foster placements reasoning that each child would not receive sufficient time and attention. The only rider being the importance of keeping siblings together. Children with experience of foster care were clear in their view that a foster carer should undergo training and possess a degree of competence. However, more emphasis was placed on the carer being compassionate and loving, and having parental skills. Among children in foster care and the sons and daughters of carers, there was overwhelming support for a standard fostering allowance throughout Scotland.

The conclusion reached by those facilitating the engagement undertaken with children and young people was that it revealed that, "those engaged with have very strong views on the proposal for a Children and Young People Bill. The children and young people had generally positive attitudes toward the Bill's proposals and the impact these could have on their lives. There was clearly an appreciation of the aspirations of the Bill, and broadly support for the specific proposals. Where the children and young people did pose questions or raise issues, these often stressed the need for them to be involved in and consulted on any decisions that affect their lives." (7)

Wellbeing Toolkit

Part of the universally agreed improvement agenda is to improve educational outcomes for Scotland's children and young people through GIRFEC and CfE. Both emphasise that promoting, supporting and safeguarding the wellbeing of children is a responsibility for all staff working in a school or nursery. A wellbeing-focused guide for early years establishments, schools, and agencies, aimed at supporting professional dialogue and self-evaluation is now in use throughout Scotland. It informs discussion at school meetings which I attend to support our carers in their efforts to ensure the best educational outcomes for their fostered child. A comprehensive guide is available to schools which enables them to structure discussion and work through their own audit processes. The guide gives staff a clear understanding of wellbeing and demonstrates the links between wellbeing and the teaching and learning process. It helps them to identify actions to improve the culture, systems and practice in their establishment. While highlighting good practice, the process aids development of improvement objectives based on wellbeing and provides evidence of this improvement as part of an overall improvement plan. (see appendix A)

Young People and Carer Survey

The system also recognises that third sector organisations, such as ourselves, play a significant role in working in partnership with schools and other corporate partners. It is recognised that we can also play our part in promoting, supporting and safeguarding wellbeing for our fostered children and young people. Therefore as part of my work with this year, I undertook to use this tool to explore the wellbeing of eleven of our young people with a representative sample of our children and families (See appendix B). The children and young people, ages ranging from 7 to 16, gave a rating of 1 (not true) to 5 (very true) for each of the SHANARRI wellbeing indicators with a high score indicating increased wellbeing. Their carers were then asked to do the same. The results were encouraging in that no child rated any of the wellbeing indicators below 3.

The most highly rated indicators were Safe and Included, with nine of the eleven children scoring them at 5, two at 4. Next highest was Nurtured with eight scoring it at 5, three at 4, followed by Respected with seven scoring

it at 5, three at level 4 and one at level 3. Achieving came next with six children scoring it at 5, five at level 4, then Healthy with six scoring it at 5, four at level 4 and one at level 3. Last came Responsible with three young people scoring it at 5, five at level 4 and three at level 3 and Active with only two scoring it at 5, six at level 4 and three at level 3.

Primary v. Secondary

Generally, the six primary children's wellbeing indicators scored far higher than the five secondary children. Primary school children were twice as likely to give a 5 rating than a secondary student. When it came to rating the indicators at 3, the just OK level, this occurred with five secondary pupils compared with three primary children.

The survey results indicate that both primary and secondary school children tend to feel school is a safe place, where they belong, and feel confident that those charged with their wellbeing are there to support them, care about them and know them as an individual, though this is seen more so in primary pupils surveyed. Generally, they feel fairly well respected, though some feel that their views could be better sought and taken account of. Scores start to dip when it comes to achieving and some indicate feeling less happy about being supported to do their best, talk about their ambitions or celebrate their success. Again, this is more marked at secondary level. Similarly, scores dip to 3 when it comes to feeling healthy, including areas of mental health with none of the secondary students scoring at 5. Scores really start to slip when it comes to taking an active part in their learning and being given the chance to show responsibility. Six of the eleven children, three secondary and three primary, felt let down, wanting more opportunity to be actively involved in their learning and feeling frustrated at not being able to show their understanding and make decisions about their learning, wishing for more opportunities to help others and take on a leadership role.

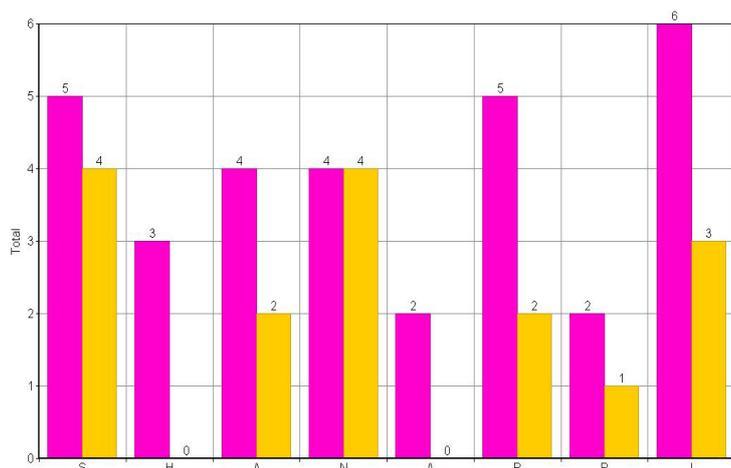
Carers

Eight sets of carers were surveyed for the eleven children scoring similarly on behalf of their fostered children. The highest scoring indicators were for Nurtured, Safe, Respected and Included. These were the same four indicators which came top of the children's league table, but with fewer 5 ratings scored compared to the young people. Indeed, the children gave higher scores than their carers in every indicator except Active. Carers were more convinced of their children being actively involved in their learning plan, scoring at the highest level 5 for five of the sampled children compared to two children rating this indicator at level 5 for themselves. It would appear that the adults were more persuaded of this by school staff than were the children. As with the young people, carers were unconvinced that their fostered child was achieving as well as they could be, and rated only four of the eleven children at level 5 for this indicator. Some thought that they could be better encouraged and stretched to work to the best of their ability, or perhaps there could be more opportunity to share their child's success with them. The fewest number of 5 ratings were scored for Healthy and Responsible, with only two carers scoring at 5 for each of them, and one carer scored their child's experience of Healthy at 2, the only 2 rating from anyone for any of the indicators and this carer also expressed concern over their fostered child's school experience regarding healthy activities and level of assistance with peer relationships. It has to be noted that three or four carers hesitated between a score of 2 or 3 for some indicators but appeared reluctant to damn the school staff.

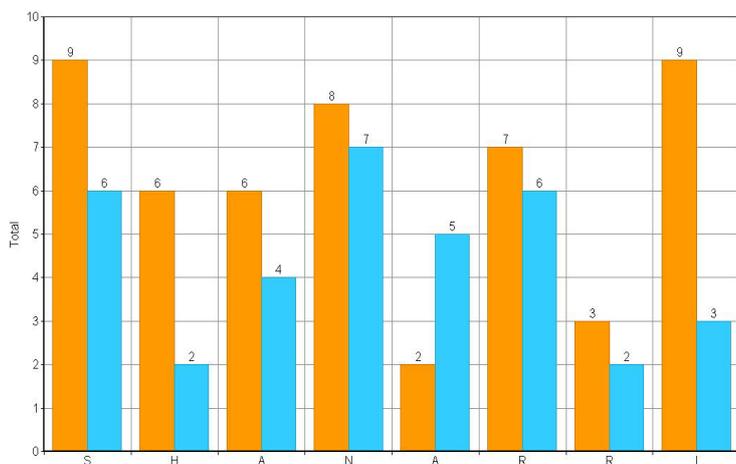
Summary of survey results

This brief snapshot of the views of some of our carers and young people is by no means conclusive, but it does raise some interesting points. The most marked difference between primary and secondary children is the general indication that they were twice as likely to rate wellbeing factors a 5 than their secondary school counterparts. Whilst the numbers surveyed may not be statistically significant, in all areas of wellbeing surveyed, the primary children results indicate an equal, or in the case of six out of eight indicators, a better score than the secondary age children (see appendix C).

As a group, carers tended to give similar overall score as the secondary age group with only a 1 or 2 point difference with the exception that the secondary age children report feeling a bit safer than their carers think. (24/30 v 21/30). A bigger discrepancy comes with the primary age children. Carers had a slightly more optimistic view of their primary foster children being actively engaged in their learning than the young people themselves (27/30 v 24/30). They were less convinced than their primary children that they were being well catered for in the areas of health (23/30 v 27/30) and feeling included (26/30 v 30/30). The young people in primary schools indicated that they felt slightly better about achieving than did their carers (28/30 v 25/30). When it came to looking at individual children and their carers' perceptions of their wellbeing, five children were scored 5 or 6 points at variance with their fostered child; two carers had a more positive view of their fostered child's wellbeing than the child and four had a more negative view than the child, one being at 10 points variance with their child.



Primary
Secondary



Young People
Carers

Conclusions drawn from the survey

It is reassuring to note that none of the children and young people surveyed scored any of the wellbeing indicators below a 3, and there is evidence to suggest that our children feel safe, included, nurtured, helped to achieve and, in the main, respected and healthy. There is also some indication that there is a wish to be given a more active part in their learning and more responsibility for making decisions and the chance to show leadership.

The results of this survey adds some weight to my own view that many of our fostered young people find the secondary system daunting compared to the smaller, more holistic primary school, feel ill-equipped for the challenges it presents, and some yearn to return to primary school, and have voiced this openly at meetings.

Young People's Participation and Advocacy

To complement the GIRFEC self-evaluation tool, **Education Scotland** has developed a resource that supports schools by providing specific activities and practices that assist them in taking account of wellbeing. The resource pack consists of two posters and one booklet which can be used flexibly to support the development of health and wellbeing.

The resource illustrates how CfE links to the wider context of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the GIRFEC approach. It connects the Health & Wellbeing experiences and outcomes to the GIRFEC wellbeing indicators and illustrates how CfE links to the wider context of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In terms of the Children and Young People [Scotland] Act the powers of Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People (SCCYP) are extended so that this office will be able to undertake investigations in relation to individual children and young people. It also has a strengthened role to play in promoting young people's participation and advocating on their behalf with government and other bodies to protect their rights. Young people and those supporting them can access free of charge user friendly resources such as 7 Golden Rules for Participation and Rights in pictures.

The 7 Golden Rules for Participation are a set of principles that can help anyone working with children and young people play a bigger part in decision making. They can help clarify what children and young people want from participation. They can also help children and young people to think about how they want adults to support them to participate. The rules have been through consultation with children and young people from across Scotland. Research into participation has also been used to help make the rules effective.

Rights in pictures are two sets of illustrated guides for children and young people which can help them understand their rights as laid out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in a clear and vivid way. They can all be downloaded from the SCCYP website or requested as a CD (8).

The Care Inspectorate, Who Cares? Scotland, the Aberlour Childcare Trust and game design students at Abertay University have produced a video game, **Far from Home**, aimed at helping children and young people involved in the care system explore issues of trust and the consequences of making a poor decision. This can be accessed at their website (9).

BeXcellent is a website designed by and for young people with the sole purpose of informing, engaging and empowering children and young people about Curriculum for Excellence. It's the only site covering the *Curriculum for Excellence* that is aimed at young people. It's all about being a successful learner, effective contributor, a confident individual and a responsible citizen. It is interactive, informative and fun with games and articles which young people can explore. (10)

Who Cares? Scotland Advocacy Services



Who Cares? Scotland provide independent advocacy services to children and young people with experience of care up to 25-years old in most local authority areas in Scotland. They strive to build trusting relationships with children and young people – so that they open up, tell them their views and feel that they have someone who will listen to them and speak up on behalf of them. Being in care can be a difficult environment for children and young people to cope with. Who Cares? Scotland believe that accessing support from independent advocacy organisations like them can make a huge difference to the day-to-day and long-term experiences which children and young people have whilst in care, and upon leaving care (11).

Conclusion

These are difficult times for children in Scotland, especially for those who are looked after away from their own home. Nationally, there is a concerted effort being made to improve the wellbeing and life chances of these young people by many people from government bodies, to schools, child care services, voluntary groups and agencies such as ourselves. We try to encourage the young people looked after by our foster families to take an active part in shaping our service. They have their own website, are welcomed with information about us and about people and services which might help them. We support their education, ask their opinion, invite them to take part in appointing new members of staff. We are constantly looking for new ways to allow them to participate in shaping the support we offer them. This report has many examples of how willing young people are to play their part in shaping their future. In their own words, 'Of course I want to have a say. I want to tell what I'm like, what I like and what kind of people I want to go with'.

As has consistently been the case in working with vulnerable children for over 40 years, I am humbled and inspired by the straightforward, thoughtful, considerate responses of children and young people when they are encouraged to take part in expressing their views on issues which matter to them. Sadly, I have been less impressed by the considered input from many adults. It remains to be seen if their wishes to play a greater part in securing their hopes for the future come to fruition as the implementation of the new Act attempts to deliver on its stated goals, and we adults employ the tools provided to make it happen.

Roberta Shields

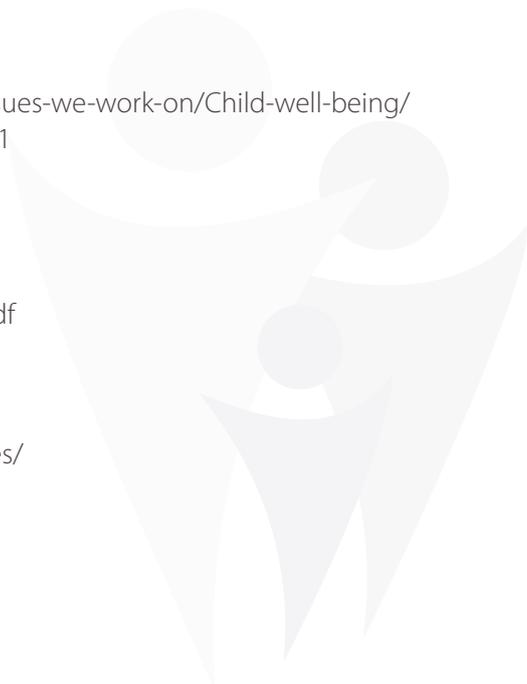
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September 20

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Appendix A GIRFEC Toolkit exemplars
Appendix B Score grid
Appendix C Comparison charts





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