



Poverty, Power, Prejudice and Parenting:

A short report¹ of a seminar to scope a culture for the UK that will allow maximum benefit for 0-2s from recent neuro-scientific discoveries

This seminar hosted by the Foundation Years Action Group (FYAG) in November 2013 aimed to extend debate on the earliest years beyond matters of service provision to cultural/contextual issues.

Chair: Nick Peacey (FYAG) Speakers: Claire Topping, MCSLT, Dr Sebastian Kraemer Response: Frank Field, MP

1. Claire Topping explored the seminar theme from the asset-based perspective on improving public health. Quoting Morgan and Ziglio (2007)², she explained that a health asset is 'any factor or resource which enhances the ability of communities and populations to maintain and sustain health and well-being. These assets can operate...as protective and promoting factors to buffet against life's stresses'.

2. Claire presented the Search Institute model of *40 Developmental Assets for Early Childhood* as an example of the approach. She suggested that rather than beginning from the question of how services can intervene to get people to do something (for example, develop an attachment to an infant), an asset-based approach would first ask what needs to be in place to help every new parent develop secure bonds with a baby.

4. Sebastian Kraemer's presentation argued that not only can poor conditions have a negative impact on the developing foetus and the new born baby's attachment to its parents, such conditions have a continuing impact on the human lifecycle. He used social, developmental and medical evidence to argue that without support and, if necessary, intervention, many will have few choices that are positive for their children's lives and able to break the continuing cycle of inequality.

5. Sebastian spoke about the mass and range of research that shows us how the baby's biology determines its psychology. He referred to the importance of the first few months and touched on issues relating to parental leave and child-care. He also referred to the work carried out by Conti and Heckman (2012)³ who have demonstrated that investment in the earliest stage of the life cycle produces the greatest return.

¹ The full report with references is available on the website www.fyir.org.uk

² Morgan, A and Ziglio, E (2007) Revitalising the evidence base for public health: an assets model *Global Health Promotion* June 2007 vol. 14 no. 2 suppl17-22

³ Conti, G. and Heckman, J. (2012) *The Economics of Child Well-Being* NBER Working Paper No. 18466, Issued in October 2012

6. Sebastian argued that progress would require a combination of cultural shift and service redesign; since the most equal societies generate the healthiest lifecycles, without a determined effort to turn back the tide of increasing inequality in this country, sustained change in the lifecycle would not occur easily.

7. Participants then worked in groups to identify priority actions and 'quick wins' that should be implemented by an incoming government to address aspects of attitude or culture surrounding the 0-2s that cause concern.

8. A range of cultural issues and attitudes were identified and discussed including:

- Debunking the myth that starting a family is easy and the honesty that is required about what is normal - especially in the earliest years.
- The low value that UK society places on caring for children (care provided either by parents or by paid carers)
- The lack of importance of the father's role
- The alarming cuts in resources at children's centres

9. Actions identified by the groups included:

- Changing the UKs comparatively short levels of maternity and paternity leave.
- Enhancing the qualifications and skill levels of those working with the 0-2 age group.
- The support and funding required for child-care settings
- Investigation and expansion of the Roots of Empathy project (or similar) in the UK <http://www.rootsofempathy.org/>
- Increase public awareness about parenting and the vital importance of the first two years.
- Further investigation of health visiting and how the profession's support for new parents and can be enhanced.
- Looking at lessons can be learned from the Nordic countries.

10. Quick wins identified by the groups included:

- Use existing children's centres to act as central point for all children's services, including registration of births,
- Galvanize the response and consensus from academics
- Persuading pushchair manufacturers to turn their buggies around
- Celebrity/TV Big Mama! Role model parents are needed

11. Frank Field MP listened to the responses from the three groups and made the following points:

- There will be no additional funding in the new Parliament – policy makers will be looking at how existing budgets are better spent.
- We should review how to support a cultural shift in thinking that prioritises the emotional over the material
- We must not see this as an issue necessarily related to poverty.
- We should begin to view the provision of quality childcare as something for the public good. How do we get that message across?
- More openness is required about the essentiality of the father's role.
- We need to promote the discussion about buggies and 'Celebrity Big Mama!'
- We should link with the All Parliamentary Party Group on Sure Start.