

Generational neglect and abuse: how one paediatric nurse hopes to break the cycle in 2015

No-one would claim that bringing up children is easy, even in straightforward circumstances. But for those parents who have themselves experienced chaotic or neglectful childhoods, just meeting a child's basic needs can be a challenge.

Out of 12 million children in the UK under the age of 16, one in eight are growing up in an 'at risk' situation^[1]. Drug abuse, alcohol addiction, domestic violence, teenage pregnancy and mental health issues can mean that, for some parents, achieving a stable environment in which children can flourish can be difficult.

Despite this, Stephanie Sollosi - a paediatric nurse and Children's Services advisor on health and social care - is forging a path that she believes will break the cycle. Frustrated with existing residential services on offer for vulnerable families, Stephanie decided to set up her own parenting and assessment centre.

"We know that parenting assessment and intervention can help parents to provide a healthy, safe and secure home environment," said Stephanie. "For example, if you have a young parent who never had their own supportive and committed role model, he or she can't draw on any examples of effective parenting. Similarly, parents who have now worked their way through drug or alcohol addiction, or who have been affected by domestic violence, often need help to create a secure home for their children whilst working to improve their own self-esteem and confidence. That's where residential assessment can really be effective."

However, Stephanie identified a number of challenges in the current system of assessment and intervention that she believes can prevent families from achieving the best outcomes, in particular for children with ongoing health needs. The mum-of-four set up Resolve (www.resolveuk.com) - a new parenting and assessment centre that aims to tackle these challenges.

"If a child has disability or medical needs - such as interventions with their breathing or feeding (tracheostomy or nasogastric feeding), it's almost impossible to find somewhere with appropriately trained and skilled staff to provide the medical support that they need, as well as the ongoing parenting support and intensive intervention. As a nurse, I felt it was particularly important to address this.

"Additionally, having successfully developed new parenting skills and an understanding of their role as a parent, a crunch time can be when the family go back home. Often, they can be left feeling unsupported and isolated."

Stephanie took the unusual step of partnering with two London property developers, persuading them to help her establish Resolve): a child-friendly centre where families could be assessed and receive tailored intensive intervention in purpose-built, modern and secure facilities, private en-suite rooms and - most importantly - indoor and outdoor space for children to play. Safety, comfort and privacy were paramount in the building design.

She then gathered a team of social workers and staff with healthcare backgrounds - including children's nurses, paediatricians, psychiatrists, midwives and health visitors - to ensure that any medical needs could be met. At Resolve, Stephanie ensures that their support doesn't end when the family returns home, offering a community support package to enable staff who have worked with the family and developed trusting relationships to continue to provide support and encouragement at home, liaising with local services.

The Ofsted-registered centre opened its doors in July, accepting both emergency placements and cases with a longer lead in time, and has already helped a number of families.

"It is clear that support and intervention that gives parents the skills they need is vital," said Stephanie. "When a parent can provide their child or children with a healthy, safe and secure home environment, outcomes are better for everyone."

This view is supported by research. Studies show that parents who receive assessment and intervention are found to use play, praise and rewards more commonly with their children. Their children reap the benefits, experiencing reduced levels of behavioural problems and improved academic achievement^[2].

"Better parenting in early childhood, in terms of educational activities and a more structured parenting style, contributes to the child's lifetime success," says Professor John Ermisch of the Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Essex^[3]. Other studies also show that a supportive home learning environment is "positively associated with children's early achievements and wellbeing^[4]."

Stephanie hopes that Resolve's unique approach will help change the future for future generations of families who might otherwise struggle to break the mould:

"If we can equip more parents with the skills they need to lead positive, healthy lives with their children in a safe and comfortable environment, we can really make a difference," said Stephanie.

NOTES

1. Resolve offers families, including those with children with ongoing healthcare needs, tailored intervention and support from its newly renovated, Ofsted-approved residential centres. Families are welcomed and cared for at all times during their stay; safety, comfort and privacy are paramount. For those who do not require residential placement, it undertakes assessment, and intervention and care programmes in the community.

2. About Resolve Director Stephanie Sollosi

Stephanie Sollosi is an experienced children's health and parenting specialist who understands the challenges that professionals face in the ever-changing landscape of health and social care.

Steph has a background as a Registered Sick Children's Nurse and spent many years working with families helping parents cope with the demands and challenges of raising children. She has also worked in strategic roles at local, regional and national levels, developing and monitoring children's services.

It was Steph's desire to give both children and parents better life opportunities that drove her to create Resolve.

[1] Early Intervention: Good Parents, Great Kids, Better Citizens

<http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/UserStorage/pdf/Pdf%20reports/EarlyInterventionFirstEdition.pdf>

[2] Scott et al, "Randomised control trial of parent groups for anti social behaviour targeting multiple risk factors: the SPOKES project (Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 2010)

[3] http://www.esrc.ac.uk/_images/parenting-style-social-mobility_tcm8-20071.pdf

[4] Kelly, Y., Sacker, A., Del Bono, E., Francesconi, M. And Marmot, M. (2011) What role for the home learning environment and parenting in reducing the socio-economic gradient in child development? Findings from the Millennium Cohort Study, Archives of Disease in Childhood, vol. 96: 832-837