

SUBMISSION FROM CHRISTINE BROWN

1. I implore each member of the Education Committee not to be swayed by the recent appearance of the proposal of a "Strategy" from the Minister for Health, Shona Robison. Autism is not a health issue. It is an education and support issue. A strategy is no use. What's needed is for Mr O'Donnell's Bill to go forward and become law. A "strategy" would be a cheap way out, giving lip service to the needs of ASD children. In the not so long term it will be Social Services who have to pick up the bill. A false and unjust economy. I can think of many better ways to save money in these difficult times. Just ask me.

Christine Brown
17 September 2010

SUPPLEMENTARY SUBMISSION FROM CHRISTINE BROWN

1. I write as a former principal teacher learning support, thereafter an assistant head teacher with a remit which included learning support, special educational needs and children with emotional and behavioural problems.
2. I am also the grandmother of an autistic boy.
3. I wish to commend and support Mr O'Donnell's Bill for the following reasons—
4. The current provision for primary and secondary children is at best wonderful and at worst almost non-existent. Some young adults are still being diagnosed in their 20s before getting any support at all.
5. There are many examples of good practice in both the primary and secondary sectors. The problem is that provision is patchy and resource dependent. The KEY FACTORS are where the parents live and how determined they are to insist, complain and even pester. They are, of course the able and articulate middle class parents. Then there are the rest who take what they are given. This Bill would guarantee a "strategy" that would be a good first step towards equitable provision for all children and young adults with autism.
6. We already have the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Acts 2004 and 2009 and the aspiration of *Getting it right for every child* (GIRFEC). **It is not happening.** I have direct, not hearsay, examples of this from various people since my grandson was diagnosed.
Child A – put in to big sister's class when too hard to handle in own class;
Child B – only gets two or three days at school due to "shortage of resources";
Child C - parents moved to another region in the hope of better provision.
All the above are from different regions.
7. Local authorities do their best but do not have the resources they need, viz—

- Sufficient educational psychologists. At the moment, diagnosis is often delayed due to this scarcity. No diagnosis may mean no need to take action or make provision;
 - More specialist staff, especially primary, with an interest in, and knowledge of, autism.
 - In service training for all staff in all sectors. For example, there is an *Autism Toolbox* in every school, but I have yet to meet or hear of a practising teacher who has heard of it far less uses it. What a sad waste of an excellent existing resource.
 - There has to be a legislative requirement on each local authority to ensure that the principles stated in the 2004 and 2009 legislation apply to autistic children too.
8. The Scottish Government's response is a dismal and dispiriting document driven more by financial considerations than anything else. If decent and equitable care for these blighted lives is going to be expensive, just imagine the chaos and cost to Social Services as they try to accommodate the needs of broken families, unfortunate siblings and the still rising number of children on the autistic spectrum. Even in these difficult times there are many ways to make savings. It is a question of priorities. **Spend money to save money.**
9. The BBC Radio 4 journalist, Michael Blastland, is the author of a book about life with his severely autistic child. I commend it to all involved in the decision about whether or not to proceed with this Bill. It is a warm, thoughtful and even encouraging book called *Joe: the only boy in the world*. It shines a light on how all autistic children feel. They are unaware of their impact on those around them. They do not know how to be sociable. They are different. As they grow older, they get bullied, picked on and ignored by their peers. Many could, with early and continued support, do useful, even productive work. They are loved unconditionally by their families. They need and deserve more support.

Christine Brown
1 October 2010