

## **PE1838/G**

Shared Parenting Scotland submission of 3 February 2021

Shared Parenting Scotland supports the petitioners in drawing attention to the extraordinary and unacceptable situation in which an adult whose identity, qualifications and PVG status are not known may be spending time alone with children as young as 4 years old over many months without the knowledge or permission of one of the child's parents or any form of due process. The basis of their interaction with the child is not transparent, nor the therapeutic purpose of the intervention nor the clinical plan for assessing whether that purpose has been achieved.

Shared Parenting Scotland has a number of clients who have discovered that their children have been spending time with such a worker but found their attempts to engage or even find out basic information rebuffed.

As noted by the petitioners and by our service users, some advocacy is being provided to children who it is asserted may have been affected by domestic abuse. Of course we agree that children who have been affected by domestic abuse should be supported.

However, unregulated children's workers operating in the shadows of due process seem to make no effort to investigate the veracity of claims made to them. They risk becoming complicit in creating a false narrative for the children as well as damaging the relationship between a child and one parent.

We remind the Committee of Lady Hale's statement from a UK Supreme Court judgment included in the original submission): *"No child should be brought up to believe that she has been abused if in fact she has not, any more than any child should be persuaded by the adult world that she has not been abused when in fact she has."*

We also agree with the comments of Christine Grahame MSP at the meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> January: *"... when those services go wrong, they can go very wrong for individual people, and, at the moment, there appears to be no way of undoing that wrong."*

We therefore share the petitioners' view that it would be perverse at a time when the system of regulating and supervising the activities of child welfare reporters is underway not to take the opportunity to bring non-statutory child advocacy services into transparency, oversight and accountability. Support for children in genuine cases would not be affected.

A number of parents who use our service have told us how their children have been treated inappropriately by non-statutory child advocacy services. We asked some of them to share their experience but because of the word limit on this submission can only give a brief flavour of their stories. All of them had unmodified PRR. None had any charges or prosecutions for domestic abuse.

*Father A: I discovered my son had been seeing someone on school premises for months. I asked the head teacher for information on what enquiries he had made to*

*establish the identity of this person, what risk assessment he had made about allowing an unrelated adult to spend time alone with my son and what he understood to be the purpose of these meetings. He said I should submit an FOI. When the (late) response came everything had been redacted, even my own e mails to the school about it.*

*Father B: Before separation I was the main carer for my child because of his mother's shift work. I had a good relationship with the nursery. However, after we separated, I discovered he was having 'sessions' with a worker. He was 4 years old. This poisoned my relationship with the nursery who now became very distant. This worker wrote private letters to the sheriff to say it was too dangerous for my son to spend any time with me. My contact was stopped. It was a nightmare. Eventually the court ordered an expert child psychologist to investigate. He said my child was 'remembering' things he could not possibly have witnessed, that the children's worker activities were negligent and should stop immediately. I was lucky I could afford to pay for report. Not everyone could.*

*Father C: I was not notified about this intervention, which took place during school time. I asked what it was that they were informed of that would trigger this service to be offered. I was told that the person providing the service couldn't comment and there are no notes or reports kept from these sessions. I was also told that if there are any concerns that are significant arising from these sessions, they will inform the referring mother and social services. I asked what would happen if my child discussed concerns about her mother and was told they would contact social services - it wasn't a service for men so they wouldn't contact the father. I thought it was supposed to be a service for the child.*