

## **APPG on Social Mobility**

### **Parenting Consultation submission from Parenting UK, part of Family Lives**

#### **Question 1: Is this a good policy area for the APPG on Social Mobility to get involved in as its next major project?**

It would be hugely beneficial for the APPG to focus on parenting and make the explicit link with social mobility, but it is essential that there is a strong link up with the work of other APPGs, and the work of the many other organisations and Government departments which are actively looking at this area. The cross-party nature of the APPG also offers an opportunity to help ensure that the focus on parenting remains strong in the next government.

#### **Question 2: If the APPG were to move ahead on looking at parenting initiatives, what would we need to say and do to avoid accusations of seeking to expand the “nanny state”?**

The Government can offer more parenting support through third party organisations as it currently does, which helps to avoid the worries and stigma of the state intervening, but there also needs to be emphasis and recognition of the Government’s support for parents to ensure the public understand that this is something they recognise the value of. Accusations of ‘nanny state’ could be lessened by ensuring the right language is used, the correct approach and spokespeople. The use of provocative language such as ‘troubled families’ should also be avoided as while lots of good work is happening on the one side, while this terminology continues to be so widely used, it will continue to inflame the stigma which surrounds families receiving state-led support. In fact, we need to understand that any family can be ‘troubled’ at any time, and not turn these families into media sound-bites and vote-winning policies.

Parenting initiatives should also seek to enhance and expand the support which currently exists through the already established community. It would be important to look at initiatives in other countries such as [SKIP](#) in New Zealand which achieved an impact across the country by embedding a universal, preventative model into local communities. We also know that parents are most receptive to support in the early days so it is common sense to encourage that trajectory of learning from antenatal classes to proactively learning about parenting – in whatever format or setting which may work for that parent.

#### **Question 3: Is there a workable model for how government can work with other organisations to promote positive parenting?**

Government should continue to invest in the already existing forms of parenting support and programmes to promote this, such as CANparent. It is vital that any Government support is a long-term investment in organisations and initiatives which people already trust and are more likely to approach than an overtly Government intervention.

The recent changes to an employee’s right to request flexible working are a great sign of the recognition of work-life balance, and it would be good to further promote the link between family and work life and the impact on parenting and family relationships that this can have. There should be further link up with the Department for Work and Pensions to see what more can be done to

encourage employers to create working environments which are beneficial to work-life balance and support their employees as parents as well as workers.

**Question 4: Can we remove the social stigma from the concept of parenting support, and if so, how?**

Initiatives such as CANparent which aims to reduce the stigma around seeking support should continue to be supported as stigma does not disappear overnight. Additionally, as mentioned above, government spokespeople should change the language they use around some forms of family support which seem to further inflame the stigma associated with the state supporting families. Lastly, we need to have patience to give time for initiatives seeking to remove the stigma to bed in, societal prejudices do not disappear overnight, but need time to spread among communities. A greater link up between parenting support and the health sector could also be looked at so that parents can learn about or seek parenting support through their GP or health contacts, as they do when their child is first born. It is more normal to seek support about health-related issues and aligning parenting support more with the health arena may help to further increase the number of parents self-referring to parenting support.

**Question 5: Could the APPG add any value by reviewing the evidence and impact of these and other parenting reports/initiatives to see if further policy recommendations could be made before the next election?**

There is already considerable research and evidence available and further evidence will be available in due course from the CANparent trial. It is more a case of supporting the continuance of initiatives into the next parliament and to not see parenting support as soft skills, rather the crucial skills needed to raise a child. Any evidence review should encompass the full range of parenting support, from universal preventative programmes through to more targeted interventions, with proportional and appropriate evidence expectations for each area of delivery.

**Question 6: If the APPG on Social Mobility decides to do some work on parenting, should it be more focused on the neediest cases or on more universal parenting measures?**

Universal.

**Question 7: Is the move from ante-natal to peri-natal support feasible and/or desired? What sort of uptake could be expected?**

Parents are already actively engaged with self-education at the ante-natal stage and it would seem logical to seek to continue this when they are already willingly engaged in seeking out support and information. We need to be aware however of the disparity presented by the quality of support and information parents receive when attending private ante-natal courses, and the often sparse or absent support offered by the state.

**Question 8: What, if any, less obvious factors that influence parenting should the APPG be focused on?**

**Question 9: Should the APPG seek to integrate its potential new focus on parenting with work in the area of early years education, or do we see these as two separate areas of focus?**

These areas should be integrated as parents are the first and best providers of early years education so we should be seeking to ensure the same quality in the home as well as in early years settings.

**Question 10: What are some other examples or case studies of parenting initiatives that the APPG should consider? This could include initiatives aimed at either especially disadvantaged families or a wider audience.**

There are many international examples of initiatives that could be looked into including SKIP in New Zealand, the Leksand Model in Sweden, the CANparent trial, [Community Mothers in Ireland](#).

**Question 11: Are there any particular individuals and organisations that you would recommend be contacted to provide additional insights relevant to the questions posed in this document?**