

# A Ban on Physical Punishment

## The Finnish Experience

### Children are Unbeatable! Cymru

#### February 2012

'Sdim Curo Plant!  
Children are Unbeatable! Cymru

In February 2012, Lynne Hill, Policy Director at Children in Wales, visited Helsinki in Finland to learn more about Finland's commitment to respecting children's rights and their protection from all forms of violence, including physical punishment. The visit was organised for Assembly Members Christine Chapman AM, Keith Davies AM and Julie Morgan AM by Peter Newell from the London based Children Are Unbeatable! Campaign.

Finland gave children equal protection from assault under the law in 1983 and has zero tolerance to the physical punishment of children, both inside and outside the home. Surveys carried out with secondary school-aged children in both 1988 and 2008 show violence against children at home has decreased dramatically since the ban was introduced. In 1988 72% of 15/16 year olds indicated that they had been exposed to mild violence perpetrated by parents at home, as compared to 32% in 2008. There are also reductions in severe violence and symbolic aggression. Acceptance of corporal punishment has also dropped. Another survey asked adults if they felt that "corporal punishment is, at least as an exception, an acceptable means of child upbringing." In 1981 52% of men and 44% of women agreed with this statement whereas by 2007 this had dropped to 32% of men and 19% of women.

The visit to Finland was hosted by the National Institute for Health and Welfare who organised two days of seminars to allow the delegation to explore a number of issues including the law and how it is

implemented and enforced, as well as what happens when there is a report or allegation of physical punishment by a parent. They heard from social workers and the prosecutor's office about the process of referral for investigation, at what stage or in what circumstances the police and prosecutors are involved and the policy on charging and prosecution.

There are also a range of support services in Finland, many of them universal services, which parents can access for support. Value is placed on accessible quality childcare and the education system. Finland also has a strategy the *National Action Plan to Reduce Corporal Punishment of Children 2010-2015* which was developed by a multi-agency group set up by the Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. The plan aims to contribute to the reduction in the numbers of children who both experience corporal punishment and who feel it is acceptable when future surveys are carried out. It describes its objective as to "strengthen the child's human dignity and to increase reciprocal respect between the children and parents so that no child would be faced with corporal punishment, but could grow in a favourable, tender, understanding and inclusive atmosphere."

Returning from the visit Lynne Hill commented that, "The visit was very interesting, and gave all of us lots of food for thought. It identified a range of issues to consider in moving equal protection for children forward in Wales."

The ban was introduced through the Finnish Child Custody and Right of Access Act 361/1983 which states that: *"A child shall be brought up with understanding, security and gentleness. He shall not be subdued, corporally punished or otherwise humiliated. The growth of a child towards independence, responsibility and adulthood shall be supported and encouraged."*

#### **Finland's National Action Plan to Reduce Corporal Punishment of Children 2010-2015, proposes the following measures:**

- Reinforce support in social services for fatigued parents to help them cope
- Provide support services for parents with mental health and substance abuse problems, taking into account the children's need for support too
- Organise support for child upbringing at home on a low threshold principle in connection with various existing services and online
- Include the rights of the child in the basic and complementary education of all occupational groups working with children
- Increase children's trust in services
- Focus on services for families with small children at child care clinics and in early childhood education and care in the efforts to prevent corporal punishment
- Strengthen the role of schools in human rights education, specifically in advising that corporal punishment is prohibited by law
- Include the human rights perspective in integration services and liaise with immigrant organisations
- Ensure the continuity of online services providing information for children on human rights and resisting violence
- Conduct an extensive opinion and publicity campaign, 'Children have a right to positive upbringing', in 2011
- Address the reducing of corporal punishment in efforts to prevent intimate partner violence
- Improve cooperation between authorities
- Consolidate practices in the judicial system
- Ensure regular collecting of information on the prevalence of corporal punishment and attitudes to it
- Promote respect for the rights and human dignity of the child and the reducing of corporal punishment in Finland's human rights policy, bilateral relations and multilateral actions at the UN, Council of Europe and EU levels



Children in Wales currently host the Children are Unbeatable S'dim Curo Plant! Campaign. If you would like to become a supporter or have further information, please e-mail: [cau@childreninwales.org.uk](mailto:cau@childreninwales.org.uk) or contact Children in Wales, 25 Windsor Place, Cardiff, CF10 3BZ, Tel: 029 2034 2434