

'My Rights, My Voice: Celebrating the Rights of the Child' **International Family Day Care Organisation Conference 2015**

22-25 July 2015, John McIntyre Conference Centre, Edinburgh

"The International Family Day Care Organisation (IFDCO) conference was a chance for like-minded childcare professionals to come together and celebrate the rights of the child. I was delighted to welcome so many international delegates to Edinburgh for this event. We took the opportunity to showcase the development in the early years sector in Scotland and learned from colleagues in Australia, New Zealand, Malta, Germany, USA, England, Croatia and Ireland to name just a few.

"The importance of our role in children's lives was reaffirmed by our wonderful speakers and workshop leaders. My thanks to all of them, and to our delegates, whose enthusiasm made this event truly special."

Pam Dunn
President, International Family Day Care Organisation

Opening Evening

Wednesday 22 July, Edinburgh City Chambers

Edinburgh City Chambers provided a spectacular setting for the opening evening of IFDCO 2015. Fiona McLeod MSP, Acting Minister for Children and Young People welcomed delegates to Edinburgh, and admitted the irony of a Glaswegian welcoming delegates to our capital city was not lost on her. Ms McLeod gave us a whistle-stop tour of early years policy in Scotland including updates on the implementation of the Children and Young People Act, Getting it Right for Every Child and Play Talk Read.

Professor Pat Dolan is the joint founder and Director of the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre in Ireland and holds the prestigious UNESCO Chair in Children, Youth and Civic Engagement. He told the delegates of the importance of quality engagement with children and asked how far have we moved from 'seen and not heard' towards respecting children as individuals?

A soothing end to the evening came from Ruth Kirkpatrick, Stories Allways. Ruth passionately believes in the power of storytelling to enrich, empower and heal. She told us the story of Two Eyes, a lonely wee girl who lived with her wicked stepmother and stepsisters. The story is one of many featured in Ruth's book 'Stories Allways: tales for children's well-being'.

Learning and Development

Thursday 23 July, John McIntyre Conference Centre

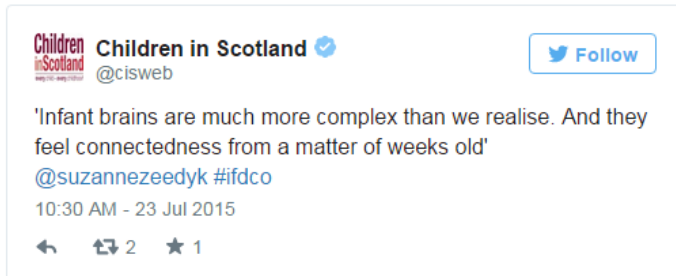
'Learning and Development' was the theme of day two which was chaired by Pam Dunn, IFDCO President.

Maggie Simpson (Scottish Childminding Association) and Jackie Brock (Children in Scotland) were the first speakers to take to the floor. Maggie encouraged all delegates to challenge their own thinking over the course of the conference and use the opportunity to share good practice.

Jackie followed by providing us with an insight into her concerns for Scotland's families in the face of austerity cuts. The cuts, which may lead to 1 in 4 children living in poverty by 2020 was called an

“assault on family life” by Children in Scotland’s Chief Executive. Jackie concluded by reminding us we have achieved a lot, but there is still work to do.

‘The Emotionally Connected Child: how services build brains’ was the focus of Dr Suzanne Zeedyk’s fascinating speech. Always a popular speaker, Dr Zeedyk made clear the significance of connection in the earliest years as babies are born already connected. She went on to explain the detrimental impact on individuals and society when people don’t feel connected.



To find out more about Dr Zeedyk’s work go to suzannezeedyk.com.

Baroness Susan Greenfield further explained the science of connection and the impact our experiences have on young brains in her speech ‘What impact are digital technologies having on the young developing brain?’. “An exciting, stimulating environment will make the brain work harder, help make connections and give the world meaning”, explained Baroness Greenfield who fears the overuse of digital technology contributes to the ‘erosion of childhood’.

Find out more at savechildhood.net and susangreenfield.com.

Following Baroness Susan’s speech delegates went on to enjoy study visits and workshops. Our study visits went to either the Cowgate Under 5’s Nursery or to a childminder’s home.



“Cowgate Nursery – what an inspired place for children to be.”

Day two was rounded off by Tim Gill, author of ‘No Fear: Growing up in a risk averse society’. Tim explained to delegates that our excessive risk aversion has “contaminated childhoods” and shaped

their – and our – experiences. So how do we rectify this? “When deciding on the structures and experiences you want to offer your children, think not just of the risks, but of the risk benefits” urges Tim.

Find out more at rethinkingchildhood.com.

Parliamentary Visit

Kezia Dugdale MSP welcomed delegates to the Scottish Parliament to discuss childcare policy both in Scotland and overseas.



The Importance of Play

Friday 24 July, John McIntyre Conference Centre

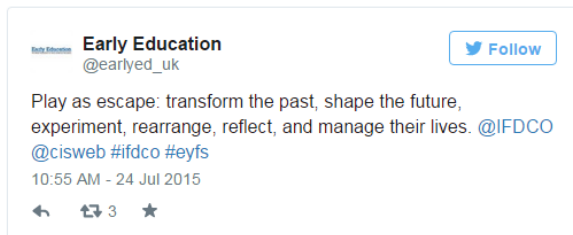
Who better to chair IFDCO day three – ‘The Importance of Play’ than Marguerite Hunter Blair, Chief Executive of Play Scotland? Marguerite welcomed delegates to the day and warned of the serious consequences an ‘indoor childhood’ can have on health and wellbeing.



Carrying on with the theme of play, Froebel Trustees Professor Tina Bruce CBE, Lynn McNair OBE and Jane Whinnett presented a two-part speech titled 'The Importance of Rich Play Experiences'.

The speech included a video of Bella telling her friends a story about a princess. Bella and her friends created their own adventure around the story and utilised the environment around them.

The video of Bella and her friends reminded us that as adults our role is to enable children's play, rather than guide it. We must let our children play in order for them to learn about leadership, inclusion and the making – and breaking – of rules.



Learn more about the Froebel Trust at froebeltrust.org.uk.

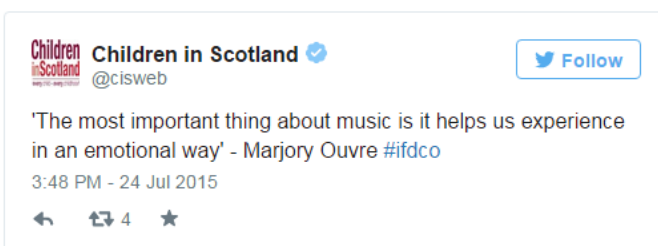
Delegates then enjoyed a range of workshops on topics such as; messy play, dramatic play, documenting children's voices through play and inspired play based learning.

Here's what our delegates had to say about the workshops:

[Today has taught me]..."different methods of recording children's views and learning."

"The humour presented from Alina Dan [workshop leader] – it made the workshop relatable and purposeful."

Marjorie Ouvre closed the day with her talk 'Sounds like playing: singing and music making with young children'. Marjorie explained that our brains love patterns and seek them out which is why connecting with children through singing and music is so important.



Ceilidh

South Hall, Pollock Halls

Delegates were piped into Friday night's Ceilidh by our wonderful 10 year old pipers Greg and Ross (pictured below with our mascot Harris).

After a three course meal, our Scottish delegates taught those from overseas how to 'Strip the Willow', dance the 'Gay Gordons' and the 'Dashing White Sargent'. A great night was enjoyed by all, even the gentleman who expected to be watching a dancing display rather than getting involved!



Participation, Listening and the Right to be Heard

Saturday 25 July, John McIntyre Conference Centre

Louise Macdonald OBE, Chief Executive of Young Scot, chaired the fourth and final day of the IFDCO Conference 2015.

Louise introduced Tam Baillie, Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People. Tam started off by asking delegates to join him in a sing-song – 'Baa Baa Black Sheep' and 'Ally Bally' were his nursery rhymes of choice. Why nursery rhymes? Because we learn these rhymes by singing them repeatedly through our childhood. Our memory of the rhyme is formed during this time and we continue to carry it with us through to adulthood. That's why it's so important to make the experiences children go through repeatedly positive ones.

International children's rights expert Gerison Lansdown followed and treated delegates to a "masterclass" in child participation. Gerison challenged our notion that adults know best in relation to children and young people and explained we need to shift the balance of power in order to engage in more meaningful participation.



Delegates could then choose from workshops on; 'Mindfulness', 'Preserving First Language and Ethnic Identity in Childcare', 'Creative Arts in Early Childhood', 'Affording Participation Rights in Home-based Settings: Rae's story'.

To bring conference to a close and leave delegates inspired we turned to John Carnochan. John is the co-founder of the Violence Reduction Unit and a passionate advocate for the early years.

John began by reminding us that we are all sons and daughters, born connected. Sometimes we focus too much on the policies and procedures and forget the empathy, and even sometimes, to be human.



He concluded by urging us to build resilience in our children, as they will be working in jobs and dealing with technologies that haven't even been invented yet. The best thing we can do is prepare them so they can deal with whatever life throws at them.



Find out more about Saturday's speakers at young.scot, sccyp.org.uk and respondingdifferently.co.uk

Pam Dunn closed the conference with the promise that she was confident that the international friendships made over the four days would continue.

Check out our Storify: <https://goo.gl/sqNrxM>