



The Forgotten Children

Conference Declaration



Delegates from 25 countries across Europe confirm their support for this Declaration following their participation at the EUFAMI Conference held in Vilnius, Lithuania on 26th and 27th November 2009.

Children of parents with mental illness bear serious burdens which they cannot be expected to carry on their own. They are vulnerable to long term emotional and behavioural problems and do not normally have a say in how they are treated. They and their families therefore need regular support from health, social and school staff professionals as well as an understanding of their situation within their local communities.

- Services provided should focus on the whole family including not only parents and children but others such as grandparents who may assume a parenting role.
- Support needs to start early, from the prenatal stage and especially targeting the first year after birth, and leading into adolescence. The aims must be to help parents develop their parenting abilities despite their mental illness, to keep families together and so prevent the need to take children away from their natural home.
- Good quality parenting by people with mental illness is fully possible if the right support is given on a continuing basis. This may include specialist day care or home help with domestic matters.
- Parents with mental illness are themselves entitled to all the normal rights of citizenship that are generally taken for granted. In particular they should not allow themselves to be stigmatised by others and made to feel guilty as parents. This should form part of public policy to raise awareness and understanding of the problems of mental illness and increase sensitivity towards those who are affected.

This broader approach involves co-operation by a range of people and agencies - schools, childcare services, family organisations and health providers - to give the children of parents with mental illness the support and help they need to flourish as children and go on to develop their full potential as individuals . It should therefore be led and championed nationally by governments and locally by the civic authorities.

Let us all commit ourselves to tackling the problems faced by these forgotten children in our own localities.