

Our children are our future^[1]

Joseph Rowntree centenary lecture, delivered by Chancellor Gordon Brown

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Speech^[2]

Excerpts from the speech:

It is a privilege to be here today to deliver the Joseph Rowntree Foundation Centenary Lecture and let me begin by paying tribute to one hundred years of service to our community by the Rowntree Foundation.

In 1904, Rowntree described that tragic life cycle of poverty during childhood, poverty for parents when they had children and poverty during old age. A lifecycle of poverty broken only by the short periods where you were an adult before your children were born or an adult whose children had grown up and left home.

And the striking truth about what we found in 1997 was how firmly and how widely this 'life cycle of poverty' had returned.

And in addressing these great challenges, our objective must be to ensure not only dignity for the elderly in retirement and the chance for all adults to realise their potential but that every child has the best possible start in life.

It is on the needs of children and the challenges ahead that I want to concentrate my remarks on policy today.

Anyone reading reports on the condition of Britain will be shocked by one straightforward but disgraceful fact.

When we came into Government one in every three babies born in Britain were being born into low income households. Born not into opportunity but into poverty.

This is the 'Condition of Britain' question we had to confront one hundred years after the Joseph Rowntree Foundation was set up.

But during these years when child poverty grew so too did our understanding of all that we had to do to tackle child poverty - and in particular just how crucial the first months and certainly the first years of a child's life are in determining life chances.

I believe that action to eradicate child poverty is the obligation this generation owes to the next.

I can tell you today that in the spending review next week we will set out the detail of the target for 2010 - to halve the number of children in households in relative low income compared to 1998.

We have come to recognize that central to tackling child poverty - as well as to the importance of helping families balance work and family life - is the provision of adequate child care. And while we have since 1997 created over a million more child care places, the greatest help for low income families has been the third element of tax credits that we have introduced --- the tax credit for covering the costs of child care - up to £95 each week for families with one child in qualifying childcare and up to £140 for those with two or more children....

And as we approach the spending review next week and advance to the pre budget report, I can tell you that what I have described this morning can only be the start of what we have yet to do.

Building on Sure Start, the next stage is to fund the creation of new children's centres across the country - again providing a combination of good quality childcare, early years education, family support and health services. By 2006 650,000 children will be covered by Sure Start or children's centres. And there will be new funding - despite our other representations - to ensure 1700 children's centres by 2008 - one in each of the 20 per cent most deprived wards in England, as we advance towards our goal of a children's centre for every community. But Sure Start - and related services - point the way for a new agenda for services for young children:

- Greater encouragement for local initiatives and community action in the war against child poverty;
- Offering government money to back non-government initiatives to tackle disadvantage;
- Partnership with both the biggest voluntary and community organisations and the smallest;
- The emphasis on prevention not simply coping with failure;
- Greater parental involvement in the running of services.

It is not usual for government to welcome the growth of pressure groups that will lobby, demonstrate, embarrass, expose and then push them to action. But I welcome the new alliance for children - the broad coalition of community organisations, voluntary and charitable

sector determined to push further to end child poverty.

For the emerging evidence - and the growth in a nationwide public opinion - emboldens me to believe it can indeed be this generation of campaigners, charity workers, child carers, Sure Start organisers, working together, that will right the social wrongs that impelled Joseph Rowntree to action and ensure every child has a fair start in life.

Region: Europe ^[3]

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