

## **Evidence of the Association of Children and Young People's Partnership Support Officers to the National Assembly for Wales' Children and Young People's Committee on Children and Young People's Advocacy.**

The Association of Children and Young People's Partnership Support Officers (the Association) welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence on advocacy to the Children and Young People's Committee (the Committee). In preparing its evidence, the Association has been mindful of the Committee's previous report on Children and Young People's Advocacy and the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG)'s response to it. This evidence has also been endorsed by the Welsh Local Government Association.

### **1.0 Advocacy Development and Performance Unit**

1.1 The Association welcomes the creation of this unit, and appreciates that its main focus over the past months has been to establish the National Independent Advocacy Board, and to implement the Meic information, advice and support service. The Association has understood that the expected publication date for the awaited statutory guidance on advocacy continues to be Summer 2010, and looks forward to its issue in order to gain increased clarity on all statutory requirements relating to advocacy and to inform the commissioning of advocacy services for the future. Some comments on the current Guide have been presented to the unit, e.g. on the definitions of advocacy, and the need to ensure synergy between the Guide and the advocacy elements within the National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services in Wales.

1.2 The Association feels that it is too early to come to conclusions on the relationship between the Meic service and advocacy, information, advice, and other support services which are locally commissioned. Early discussions with WAG would be appreciated in order to ensure that information on both national and local services can be clearly communicated to service users and other stakeholders, and that these services are effectively promoted. It will also be necessary to consider how information collected through the Meic service and its monitoring and review arrangements will inform local strategic commissioning, e.g. needs assessments, gap analyses. The Association would very much welcome an opportunity to be involved in the evaluation and development of the Meic service for the future, as well as in the procurement of this service for the next cycle.

### **2.0 Commissioning of integrated specialist advocacy services**

2.1 The new 'Model for Delivering Advocacy Services for Children and Young People' requires Children and Young People's (CYP) Partnerships to oversee the commissioning of integrated specialist advocacy services.

2.2 The Association believes that it is appropriate for the CYP Partnerships to lead on commissioning arrangements, working with key partners and stakeholders, such as Social Services, Education and Health in order to ensure a robust commissioning process involving planning, analysing, securing services and reviewing. This will include thorough mapping of resources - including workforce as well as funding. CYP Partnerships, owing to their multi-agency representation are also well placed to provide independent monitoring and review of advocacy services.

2.3 Maintaining the independence and ensuring an open and transparent advocacy service is crucial to ensure the confidence of children and young people in the provision.

### **3.0 Regional developments**

#### **3.1 North Wales - Ynys Môn, Gwynedd, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Wrexham**

Led by Conwy CYP Partnership, the North Wales CYP's Partnerships are exploring the possibility of joint commissioning advocacy services for children and young people across North Wales. Following a North Wales workshop (July 2009) which was held to discuss the new WAG model, and to discuss future possibilities, preparatory work is being completed as well as information gathered to provide commissioners with the information needed to make decisions about whether to, and how to proceed with the regional commissioning of advocacy services.

3.2 The project objectives are to:

3.2.1 Agree a standard definition of advocacy regionally across North Wales including a definitive list of formal advocates.

3.2.2 Service profile (map) existing independent advocacy provision across North Wales.

3.2.3 Service profile (map) existing training for formal advocates across North Wales.

3.2.4 Gather background information on existing contracts, other regional commissioning developments and relevant strategies and legislation.

3.3 The anticipated benefits are to:

3.3.1 Ensure value for money and make the best use of resources.

3.3.2 Make sure we are meeting our statutory requirements to provide independent advocacy services for children in need.

3.3.3 Make the best use of formal advocates.

3.3.4 Make the best use of national resources.

3.3.5 Make the best use of local and regional resources.

3.3.6 Provide the best possible service including equality of opportunity and seamless provision of advocacy services for children and young people within the region.

3.3.7 Develop a model/process for regional commissioning in the future.

A Project Initiation Document (PID) for this project is attached. (Annexe1 - Conwy PID, Version 4).

3.4 As the timescale of this investigative work is scheduled to be completed by April 2011 in time for the 2012/13 round of commissioning, discussions have taken place between Gwynedd, Ynys Môn and Conwy to joint commission advocacy provision for 2011/12. However, due to the uncertainty surrounding the future of Cymorth, statutory advocacy provision will be the main priority when looking at the new model. The Children and Young People's Partnership will be the lead in each county to comply with the national model.

#### **4.0 South East Wales [Gwent] - Blaenau Gwent, Monmouthshire, Newport, Torfaen, and Caerphilly**

Recently, the five CYP's Partnerships across South East Wales have agreed in principle to explore the opportunity of joint commissioning advocacy services. There are currently three advocacy providers working across the five CYP's Partnership areas, with each partnership currently commissioning a slightly different service. However, there are areas of commonality which the CYP Partnerships will be highlighting through a 'mapping' exercise, e.g. some partnerships are moving from a Social Services specific service to universal service where all children are able to access the service. A framework for commissioning advocacy services in future will also be explored.

#### **5.0 South West and Mid Wales**

Pembrokeshire and Ceredigion are planning to commission jointly a service from October 2010 that will cover the Looked After Children, Children in Need and children with Special Educational Needs.

#### **6.0 Local developments**

**6.1 Blaenau Gwent** - The key development has been the arrangement with the Team Around the Child (TAC). As part of this, the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) form has been amended to include a question that asks everyone who is the subject of a CAF if they wish to have support from an advocate.

**6.2 Gwynedd** - A Task Group was established by Gwynedd CYP Strategic Partnership to respond to the 'Guide to the Model for Delivering Advocacy Services for Children and Young People' and looked at the current advocacy provision within the county. The Task Group mapped out the current provision in Gwynedd, looking at if the needs of children and young people are met and the weaknesses in the current provision. The Task Group found that a number of issues needed to be considered surrounding providing sufficient resources for providing integrated specialist advocacy services and developing an universal provision. The Task Group submitted its recommendations to Gwynedd CYP's Strategic Partnership. Attached to this is a draft model for providing universal advocacy in Gwynedd for meeting the national model requirements and local needs. This is outlined below, and demonstrates how increased investment in peer and formal advocacy (as defined in the Model) could support wider engagement at an earlier stage, thus reducing the need for independent, specialist advocacy services when situations reach crisis point. The full report is attached in Annexe 2 - Advocacy Task Group Report).

**6.3 Newport** - Within Newport, a range of provision is offered, with the majority still Social Services based. However, the provider of that service is now also in receipt of a supplementary contract to deliver additional services. These are primarily targeted at the specific areas of need within Newport but are a move towards a truly universal service. In Newport, there is also a Children's Rights and Complaints Officer funded through Cymorth, Education and Social Services who advocates with and on behalf of children and young people.

#### **6.4 Powys**

6.4.1 Despite the delay in receiving formal commissioning guidance from WAG, Powys is already working in a way which is in line with the 'Guide to the Model for Delivering Advocacy Services for Children and Young People'. An extended service is in place which reflects the model favoured by the Guide and there are well established and good working relationships with the provider (Tros Gynnal) which both recognise and reinforce the role of advocacy within the county and respect the independence of Tros Gynnal as an advocacy provider which provides specialist services in areas such as disabilities.

6.4.2 Regarding informal advocacy, there is a forum established in Powys which provides a network for organisations offering professional advocacy (Powys Advocacy Network). There is no clear integration between more generic informal advocates and professional advocacy providers although there is a good deal of signposting between services, and referrals for professional advocacy are received from many different sources. As part of the process of re-commissioning the service for the next strategic period, it is likely that Powys will be introducing a workforce development aspect to the specification to enable the service to develop the skills of practitioners and thus their ability to informally advocate on behalf of children and young people.

#### **6.5 Rhondda Cynon Taf**

In Rhondda Cynon Taf, a joint specialist advocacy service is currently out to tender. The service tendered is on a spot purchase basis and covers Children's Services, Health and Education. Service demand information will be closely monitored during the year with a view to

securing a longer term joint contract from September 2011. The development and ongoing monitoring of the service will be reported and monitored through the Fframwaith Commissioning structure.

## **6.6 Vale of Glamorgan**

6.6.1 The Vale of Glamorgan is about to go out to tender on an advocacy service which will initially be on a one year basis to allow time to explore with other authorities the possibility of developing a regional project. There are concerns about the future of Cymorth and surrounding the possibility of developing an universal advocacy service.

6.6.2 As well as progressing towards a formal service, all secondary schools have been offered training for staff and young people on peer monitoring skills via Childline, and there is also a Big Lottery funded project called 'Peered Up'.

## **7.0 Involvement of children and young people within the commissioning process**

7.1 The involvement of children and young people within the commissioning process is integral to shaping services received by children and young people. This is underpinned by the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the Welsh Assembly Government's 7 Core Aims, Shared Planning for Better Outcomes (WAG, 2007), as well as the 'Fulfilled Lives, Supportive Communities' draft commissioning framework and guidance which many partnerships are working to, and which aligns with the Partnership Support Unit/Social Services Improvement Agency's Commissioning Support Package for partnerships. In addition to involving children and young people in needs assessments for the CYP Plans, the following are examples of how CYP Partnerships are working to this:

7.2 A Young Person Advisory Group (YPAG) made up of young people from Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly and Torfaen has been set up where one of the tasks of the group will be to assist with interviews and commissioning.

7.3 Gwynedd has emphasised that their model will include children and young people in every development stage, focussing on a users' panel to begin with. Children and young people will be expected to support and provide help in developing and marketing the service.

7.4 In Newport, there has been involvement of children and young people in the commissioning of services in the past and also in the development of the delivery of these services. The new Commissioning Strategy for Newport has the involvement of children, young people and other service users at its heart.

7.5 The advocacy provider in Powys (Tros Gynnal) has involved young people in strategic appointments and young people are keen to be involved in developing and commissioning advocacy services.

7.6 In Rhondda Cynon Taf, children and young people have been identified to be part of the evaluation process for tenders.

7.7 The proposed jointly commissioned advocacy service for Pembrokeshire and Ceredigion will also ensure that children and young people will take part in the procurement process.

7.8 In both the Vale of Glamorgan and Caerphilly, children and young people will be part of the panels which are involved in the process of commissioning advocacy services.

7.9 The CYP Partnerships will need to ensure that children and young people are involved throughout the strategic commissioning cycle - planning, analysing, securing services and reviewing, and will also need to address the challenge of doing this on a regional basis and securing appropriate representation. This has already been considered as part of the Communication Plan for the regional work in North Wales.

## **8.0 Quality and standards relating to the provision of Advocacy Services**

8.1 The Association welcomes the provision of a training programme for advocates in a portfolio of nationally recognised skills, as well as the train the trainer approach proposed by WAG. Clarity is needed on a timetable for introducing this qualification as part of the required quality standards for staff and any implications for CSSIW/Estyn Inspections. To follow are some examples of how partnerships are ensuring that quality standards are assured:

8.2 In Blaenau Gwent, the advocacy provider adheres closely to the National Standards for the Provision of Children's Advocacy Services (NAfW 2003). Almost all advocates are professionally qualified (e.g. social worker, teacher, solicitor etc). The National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) is also now starting to deliver the new developed National Qualification for Advocacy National Vocational Qualification and four staff in South Wales are currently undertaking this qualification.

8.3 Newport CYP Partnership contracts with an independent provider that adheres to the standards set out in the National Standards. All advocates are Open College Network (OCN) qualified.

8.4 In Powys, Tros Gynnal has always worked to the National Standards, and these have always been central to its work.

8.5 The Vale of Glamorgan has also included the National Standards as well as workforce development within the procurement requirements.

## **9.0 Provision for children and young people to change advocate if they so wish**

9.1 In Blaenau Gwent, the sessional model of advocacy that NYAS uses allows children and young people to change advocate if they so wish, as there are many staff working in the South Wales area. If children and young people are referred to NYAS on more than one occasion, they are able to choose to have a new advocate for each new referral. Where possible, the young people's request for a male

or female advocate is met.

9.2 There is also a provision for this in Newport. If a child or young person requests a change, then this is facilitated, either through the advocacy provider or through the Children's Rights and Complaints Officer. There is also a requirement on the provider to monitor their delivery and that of their advocates in line with the standards of the contract and their own standards. These are discussed at quarterly contract review meetings.

9.3 Powys also has examples where young people have been able to change their advocate at their own wish.

## **10. Conclusions**

10.1 It is hoped that this evidence provides the Children and Young People's Committee with a clearer picture of the current situation in Wales on advocacy. The evidence reflects local work and how this informs current regional developments. It is a particularly pressured time for CYP Partnerships and their stakeholders in Wales due to the uncertainty surrounding the future of Cymorth funding which naturally poses risks for the future of advocacy services in Wales.

10.2 Developing open and transparent collaborative strategic commissioning arrangements for advocacy services is a challenge, due to the complex nature of the funding arrangements across local authority boundaries. However, the Association believes that the evidence presented today demonstrates that there is a clear commitment to planning on a regional basis and that there are also examples of good practice which can be shared between regions.

10.3 The Association welcomes further questions on the development of the work of CYP Partnerships on advocacy services in Wales.