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Believe in
children**



**Barnardo's
Cymru**

**Children and Young People Committee
Inquiry into Adoption in Wales**

**Additional information requested of
Barnardo's Cymru following
oral evidence session of
23rd May 2012**

SUBMITTED BY:

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A. ADOPTION BREAKDOWN

1. You both say that we need better monitoring of the rates of adoption breakdown. How can we better record and share information on the causes?

In our view, it is essential that any data that is collected via improved monitoring is accurate and consistent and that all agencies involved need to be clear in what they are recording and why. It is not just the recording of breakdown numbers that are important but we need to have a clear record as to the reasons for the breakdown, as this is how we learn what works and what doesn't (eg was adoption the right placement choice for the child?) To improve our understanding of placement breakdowns, factors which could be monitored/recorded could include age at time of placement; pre-placement history (ie previous number of moves/breakdowns); length of time waiting for placement; level of support available and utilised during placement etc. It would also be important to record whether the placement was within the agency or inter agency.

2. Should the Welsh Government commission research on adoption disruption rates in Wales?

Yes. Barnardo's Cymru would support such a proposal if this is designed to usefully inform us about disruption/breakdown characteristics from which policy and practice can be improved. The research would, therefore, need to look beyond just the adoption disruption rates and focus on the reasons for, and causes of, placement breakdowns.

It may be of interest to the Committee that renowned adoption expert, Dr Julie Selwyn (Director of the Hadley Centre for Adoption and Foster Care Studies at Bristol University) is currently conducting a large scale piece of retrospective research on placement disruption. When she completes the work, it is likely that many of her findings will be transferable to the Welsh context.

B. WELSH GOVERNMENT PROPOSALS FOR A NATIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE

1. What are your main concerns, if any, about the Welsh Government proposals for a National Adoption Service?

Please see our written submission for more detailed information on our view of a National Adoption Service (NAS) for Wales.

We are generally supportive of the proposal but our overriding concern is that Voluntary Adoption Agencies, such as Barnardo's Cymru, could be marginalised under any new arrangements and that the valuable role we play in providing quality adoption placements could be minimised or sidetracked into peripheral areas.

Barnardo's Cymru is an agency with a wealth of adoption experience and we currently provide the full range of services offered by local authorities apart from having responsibility for pre-placements for the looked after child. Although, as we are also a fostering agency, we are able to offer this and are very keen to develop concurrent planning and placement work, building on our expertise in independent assessment work with families and in foster care. We want to continue to offer our services, as we feel we add to the range of choice in placements and thereby add to the diverse pool of adopters who want to offer adoptive placements for those children in Wales who need them.

We are very happy to work in partnership with Welsh Local Authorities (we already do this successfully via 88 projects in our overall portfolio of children's services across Wales) as long as we feel there is a 'level playing field' (ie if we recruit and assess adopters, we would want to ensure that their skills and strengths are the basis of a successful match to meet the needs of any child or sibling group rather than there being the possibility of local authorities preferring in-house or inter-local authority placements because they are perceived to be cheaper or 'home-grown').

Selwyn and Sempik ('Recruiting Adoptive Families: the cost of family finding and the failure of the inter agency fee', British Journal of Social Work, June 2010) found that one possible factor in the decline in adoption numbers in England was the reluctance of local authorities to use adopters approved by Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAAs) and this may have led to children not being placed.

'There is a perception that VAA adopters are expensive because a high inter agency fee is charged. Meanwhile many VAA adopters are waiting for a placement'.

The aim of the study was to consider whether the inter agency fee was a good reflection of the expenditure incurred by local authorities and VAAs and Selwyn and Sempik examined the adoption team accounts of ten local authorities and 17 VAAs. They found that average expenditure was similar, as were overhead rates. However, this expenditure was 'substantially more than the inter agency fee', thereby evidencing that the fee had 'failed in its

purpose to encourage inter agency co-operation and provide full cost recovery’.

We are continuing to strengthen our relationships with local authority adoption services in Wales and would, therefore, welcome the opportunity to work even more closely with them in helping to deliver a NAS. We would wish to contribute to any system that improves the quality of the adoption experience for both prospective adopters and the children and young people themselves.

2. What implications will the creation of a National Adoption Service have for your organisation?

Please see our written submission for our views on the proposed NAS. Please also see above response to Question 1.

We would wish to reiterate that, in our view, the NAS has the potential to significantly improve the adoption process in Wales. This would include improved timeliness, planning and permanency in addition to more co-ordinated placement provision. We would, therefore, see the setting up of a NAS for Wales as a positive move.

As outlined above, we would wish to be part of any improved adoption service in Wales but we would also want to ensure that our extensive adoption experience is not lost within any new arrangements and that the status of Barnardo’s Cymru as an Adoption Agency is fully recognised and accommodated within the new NAS.

3. St David’s say that the creation of a National Adoption Service will lead to a ‘marked increase in the number of children being referred’. What evidence is there to support this view?

We feel this question has probably arisen from the written evidence provided by St David’s and we are unsure as to what evidence (if any) there is for a projected increase. This question, therefore, is probably better for St David’s to respond to rather than us.

The important element would be a requirement for local authorities to refer all children needing placement in a timely way and for all agencies to make families available. Under the current system, children may remain waiting ‘in house’ while a voluntary agency may have a potentially suitable family.

C. CONCURRENT PLANNING

We have been requested to provide the Committee with some information about concurrent planning.

Concurrent planning is a well established process which can help provide early stability for children who may be adopted. Where local authorities use this approach, prospective adopters who are also approved foster carers, care for the child from soon after the child enters care, and work with the local authority to see if a child can return home, assessing the birth parents' capacity to care for the child and maintaining contact. Concurrent planning has been introduced in several London authorities including Harrow, Islington and Camden in partnership with Coram. Almost all concurrent planning placements have resulted in the baby being adopted by the carers with whom they have lived, in most cases, from just a few weeks old. Concurrent planning means that children get a stable loving home as early as possible and that the risks of disruption are taken by adults rather than children.

We would like the principles behind concurrent planning to be used more widely and for children as well as infants. Whilst there can be no question of pre-empting a court decision, we would like to see local authorities working with family finding teams as early as possible to find potential permanent carers for children, and children with families who may, if the court agrees, go on to adopt them.

Please see Appendix 1 for an outline of a potential model for a Barnardo's Cymru concurrent planning service.

Please see the attachment with this document for an information leaflet for a concurrent planning service run by Barnardo's in the North East of England.

BARNARDO'S CYMRU ADOPTION AND FOSTERING SERVICE

Concurrent planning – potential models of service

The UK Government has highlighted the need for tackling delay for children within the care system who need adoptive placements and is encouraging local authorities to increase the use of concurrent planning either in-house or commissioned from an adoption agency. This service could be provided at a realistic cost to the local authority.

Barnardo's, as a national adoption agency delivering local services across the UK, is committed more than ever to work with local authorities to address the issue of delay. The importance of placing children at the earliest opportunity is well researched if children are to have a chance of forming secure relationships and attachments. Concurrent planning can clearly meet the needs of very young children, but can also be developed to offer similar positive opportunities to older children and disabled children.

Such is our commitment to working with local authorities to address the issue of delay, we would be very interested to work in partnership with local authorities in providing a range of services which will assist in progressing the plans for children. We believe this can be achieved through concurrent planning.

This is a new opportunity for us in Wales that enables us to draw on the learning and experience of Coram, which currently operates a concurrent planning project, and our Barnardo's colleagues in the North East of England who are also setting up such a service. By working in partnership with local authorities and pooling our collective experience, we believe we can achieve a range of streamlined services, which will help avoid delay and provide the best outcomes for the child.

The core model can operate with individual local authorities under the auspices of the proposed new structure for a Welsh National Adoption Service. It can also be adapted to meet changing local need.

Barnardo's Cymru - Potential concurrent planning project

We could offer three elements to reduce delay that can be developed in partnership with local authorities in Wales:

- 1. Provision of concurrent carers:** Carers are trained, assessed and supported by Barnardo's Cymru during the placement. This will continue should the child be rehabilitated with birth parents or proceed to adoption.
- 2. Parenting assessment:** We will provide qualified and experienced workers to undertake an assessment of the parents placed with concurrent carers, which will be used to progress the plan for the child through court. This could be independent of the local authority.
- 3. Facilitate contact:** Contact will be undertaken at an appropriate venue, facilitated and supervised by contact workers. Observations will be recorded to inform the assessment and the assessor undertaking the parenting work will attend as appropriate.

Outcomes and Benefits

- Looked after children will be afforded the best possible chance to form settled and secure relationships and not experience sequential placements.
- Local authorities will be able to address the issue of delay in a cost effective way.
- Local authorities will be working in partnership with a credible and highly regarded children's charity which has a strong campaigning and influencing reputation.

Challenges

- There would be a number of challenges to overcome to establish an effective service but these could be overcome by joint planning and interagency co-operation.