

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and Education Committee

Gwasanaethau i blant sydd wedi bod mewn gofal: archwilio diwygio radical | Services for care experienced children: exploring radical reform

Ymateb gan Llamau | Evidence from Llamau

1) Before care: Safely reducing the number of children in the care system

Prevention - Early Intervention

Youth Homelessness is complex with those at risk difficult to identify at first. It can often stem from a young person being exposed to difficult social settings, family conflicts, fragmented statutory systems and disengagement from school.

Upstream Cymru

The first of its kind in Europe, Llamau's innovative early intervention project **Upstream Cymru** aims to identify young people at risk of future homelessness through running carefully developed surveys within participating schools across Wales. These surveys identify key underlying indicators of homelessness such as educational disengagement, family conflict and poor wellbeing; providing a vital starting point to offer a range of targeted support before they hit a crisis point. Ultimately we aim to develop a deeper understanding of the underlying factors influencing youth homelessness in Wales and work with our partners to prevent it from happening wherever we can.

To date, **the project has surveyed over 1800 pupils with 1 in 7 being deemed at risk of future homelessness**, including over **500 not known to statutory services who would otherwise have slipped through the net**. We will continue to support those identified to strengthen their connections within school, family and other natural support networks and remain safely in the family home where appropriate. This process, already trialled successfully in other countries, has seen a dramatic reduction in those becoming homeless or needing crisis interventions in later life.

The project has also reached over 400 pupils in participating schools through delivery of specialist PSHE lessons, with colleagues sharing

awareness-raising resources, challenging perceptions and facilitating open conversations about what causes youth homelessness and where to get help.

Upstream Cymru is a school-based intervention, where students complete a survey that identifies risk of homelessness, particularly as a result of family relationship breakdown, and support is then offered to the young people and their families. The pilot is already demonstrating huge learning and positive outcomes.

However one of the huge benefits of Upstream is that it can identify young people and children at risk of harm far earlier than statutory services. Upstream is therefore perfectly placed to identify children at risk whose families can get support, preventing emergency proceedings.

Family Mediation

Llamau's Family Mediation services have successfully supported young people and their families across Wales for over 20 years, identifying and resolving issues that have led to relationship breakdown – the no 1 driver of youth homelessness. Working with a range of local partners, our highly skilled, experienced mediators work with everyone in the family home to identify the causes of conflict from all sides. We seek to provide a shared understanding whilst providing the tools, resources and support to overcome their issues amicably, and giving families the skills to resolve future issues together. Where sadly this is not safe or possible to achieve, our teams aim to improve relationships with appropriate family members and support moves from home.

369 young people were supported to achieve positive and sustainable housing outcomes through our Family Mediation services last year. **8 in 10 were enabled to remain safely within their family homes.**

EMPHASIS

EMPHASIS outreach project is a successful model of enabling young people at risk of homelessness to re-engage with education and address wellbeing issues such as anxiety. The project was developed over 15 years ago through consultation with young people we supported in our services who told us that help with key issues had been lacking at a crucial early stage in their lives.

EMPHASIS support initially deals with urgent crisis issues before progressing to preventative steps at a pace suited to the young person. Building a respectful and trusting relationship, we identify the underlying reasons for any barriers faced and provide a platform to overcome these together. Our colleagues work with the whole family, offering advice, advocacy and access to pathways for each young person to achieve their aspirations.

Nearly 100 young people were supported by our EMPHASIS projects across South Wales last year, with 94% of young people supported over the last 2 years engaged in employment, education and/or training at the end of support

2) In care: Quality services and support for children in care

Under 16 support.

Many young people in the care system are known to be at risk of future homelessness:

1. Young People whose foster placements have regularly broken down
2. Young people in residential or secure units
3. Young people in mental health services
4. Young People involved with YJS

Too many young people Llamau support have had multiple placement breakdowns in the care system. Currently despite policies which state otherwise, many looked after young people have to be declared 'homeless' and go through the homeless system to access supported accommodation. This causes fear, confusion and a further sense of abandonment.

Llamau believe that young people in the care system who are vulnerable to homelessness, should have a preferred pathway open to them, through the corporate parent. This would ensure young people do not suffer the trauma and bewilderment of being homeless, but have a pathway which includes supported accommodation as an option. This would mean YP would understand where they could be housed and supported as part of their journey into adulthood. They would also be able to have the security of knowing that homelessness is not something they need to worry about as a care experienced young person.

Young people can then work with staff to develop a bespoke moving forward plan, where their own wishes and aspirations will be built in. This model will build up relationships with a range of Llamau colleagues, enabling transitions into more independent supported accommodations. Many young people could move into fully or semi supported accommodation, ensuring there is a seamless pathway and a progression into full independence with an organisation they have built up trust with, whose support staff they know, thereby expanding the supportive team around each young person.

3) After care: On-going support when young people leave care

It is vital that young people leaving care are not left to 'fail' or become homelessness. It is therefore essential that on-going support for young people leaving care includes pathways into accommodation and housing that suits their needs. It is also essential that young people having experienced care are not subject to chronological age restrictions.

It is imperative that young people vulnerable to homelessness are supported with transitions into more independent supported accommodations. With a change in policy or a rigid enforcement of Corporate Parent responsibilities, many young people could move into fully or semi supported accommodation, ensuring there is a seamless transition and a progression into full independence with an organisations/people they have built up trust with.

Some examples

The support from Llamau - Overview

Housing First Merthyr is a specialist young person model of Housing First where young people live in their own flats within a larger purpose built block.

There are four Housing First flats, support is available onsite 24/7 with each young person receiving a tailored package of support which enables them to develop their strengths and overcome the issues that led to them becoming homeless. Young people tend to be here for longer periods (usually between 2 to 5 years) which is reflected in the bespoke model of Housing First for Youth.

The project also provides two additional emergency units of accommodation in order to respond to crisis experiences of young people.

The project started during COVID and this did pose challenges in establishing the project and young people and staff often felt quiet isolated from external services and wider support networks during this time.

For many young people this is their first experience of supported accommodation and many will have experienced multiple placement breakdowns before they arrive. So it can take time for them to settle. Feelings of abandonment and mistrust can present in young people, especially those who have experienced care and the staff team worked in a trauma informed way to build trusting relationships.

The need for the Housing First service is greater than what the service can offer with a high number of referrals.

Leaving care

Social services

Social services can take a step back when the young people come here meaning that the support and relationships between young people and staff in the project become even more important to the young person. This can sometimes present challenges when non-housing related decisions are made in isolation from the project/team/young person, leaving a young person feeling unsettled and angry – often damaging the trust with all adults they see as authority figures.

The project works in partnership with social services, housing and the young person. There is no doubt there are challenges for all partners, high caseloads and demand on accommodation can mean that young people feel unsure of their next step and mistrusting of stability - especially those who are care experienced.

We feel that better planning for the transition of young people as they turn 18, especially utilising the knowledge, relationships and expertise of providers and services such as ours to build on the strengths of each young person and develop transition plans that are reflective of the young person. Often our young people tell us they feel unheard during this process, especially where they see/feel a tapering off of support from other age defined services as they turn 18.

In working with care experienced young people Llamau believe the following needs to improve;

- There needs to be long-term planning for each care leaver and greater involvement of the young person in the design and delivery of their support. There can often be a feeling of 'one size fits all' approach to supporting young people – based on how the system works rather than the individual young person.
- Systems need to think past the immediate needs of the young person and start to take a forward planning approach recognising the skills and support a young person needs today whilst planning for, and protecting the access and availability of support they may need tomorrow.
- We need to better understand that young people who experience care can often have a different starting point as they transition to adulthood than young people who don't. We have seen examples of care experienced young people that due to not having strong

family relationships and support networks means a lack of role models and a safe environment to make the mistakes that are often a natural part of growing up. This can mean the consequence of mistakes can be higher for care experienced young people, i.e, closure of access to specialist services such as mental health, loss of accommodation, isolation from peer networks etc.

- A stronger multi-agency approach to transition planning that recognises the expertise and relational insight housing support teams have when it comes to the young people they support.
- A better, wider understanding of the Housing First for Youth Model - sometimes there can be a confusion from statutory partners around the model of housing first - where the assumption is made that as it's a 24/7 project it means it's the best place to place multiple young people who present with very high risk taking behaviours.

Moving on from residential care

The main concern for project staff is what's going to happen when the young people turn 18. They can move on from unplanned foster placements into residential services. That transition can be very challenging, we have seen young people display signs of feeling abandoned and take additional time to build trust with staff and settle after often multiple placements.

One young person at the project is approaching 25, at which point they will no longer have the right to stay here and will need to live independently. Currently it doesn't look like they will have adult social services to support them as they do not meet their criteria, despite how vulnerable they are. That vulnerability can lead to a cycle of the young person being stuck between systems and thresholds - never really having their needs understood or met. It also means they will be at high risk of repeat homelessness and crisis.

The transitions at 18, in particular, and at 21 are crucial. A young person is likely to see a marked decrease in support from statutory services (either in person support or financial). Many young people are still very vulnerable at that age - and would benefit from sustained levels of support as they transition into adulthood. Especially those young people who do not have close family relationships.

Young Person's Advisors (YPAs)

There is one post-21 YPA service in Merthyr. This is a commissioned service in partnership with the local authority delivered by Llamau. The YPA service supports young people who are care experienced, working directly with the young people to stay in accommodation and access school and wider support services as identified in the young person pathway plans.

But caseloads can be high meaning not all young people have access to this support. It would be positive to see this type of advocate support available to all young people who experience homelessness.

Advocates

If all young people who experience homelessness *had* to have an advocate it would be so much better for them, it would allow them to work with a single person /service that would ensure their voice was always heard.

Where we have seen advocates in action such as the YPA service it's been really positive. It has helped young people understand their rights and gain a sense of comfort with their own personal narrative.

However as young people get older or funding is pulled then this relationship and constant source of support can end. In these cases the young people tell us they feel abandoned, which is a common and recurring feeling for many care experienced young people

Work

Unfortunately, the world of work and gaining employment is difficult for young people, especially accessing secure and fairly paid jobs. This has an added complexity for young people in supported accommodation as it can see a tapering of benefits such as housing benefit – which helps them pay for their rent.

We often see young people being offered really unsecure employment where one day they have a job and the next they don't. This is really confusing for the young person and can often mean that gaining employment carries significant risk of loss/reduction to housing benefit and a young person potentially having to move to cheaper, less supported accommodation options.

In addition, many of the young people we work with no longer access/attend mainstream education. Many have experienced multiple school placements and multiple exclusions meaning their attachment and rapport with mainstream education is poor. As part of our support we developed our Education at Llamau model – focussed on re-setting the relationship with learning for our young people. All the young people in Housing First and wider Llamau support services get access to this specialist learning support

to enable each young person to work towards independent living at their own pace and in a way that suits them.

Mental health

There are significant mental health needs amongst the young people the staff work with. As with other challenges above, access and age are real factors in the challenges our young people face in getting access to services. For many of our young people their physical age does not tally with their emotional age which means beneficial services are no longer available to them and adult mental health and social services are much higher and harder to access post 18.

We often see young people in mental distress but due to additional factors such as substance use they are not given access or assessment to the right health services. For those young people who may benefit from counselling, Llamau is able to provide this in house and our team are able to have support from our in house psychologists and colleague wellbeing coordinators.

Along with our wider package of support we have partner agencies such as Mind Cymru attend the Housing First project to work direct with young people who are experiencing poor mental health. This means that support is much easier accessed for our young people and they can engage in the safety of their own home. Young people are under no obligation to talk to visiting support partners if they do not want to, but many do and tell us they really appreciate the service coming to them in their safe space.

Big changes that are needed

- More focus on early intervention and joined up services - more joined-up thinking when working out how to support young people: charities, local authorities, advocates etc. should work together ensuring the voice of the young person needs are front and centre of all we do.
- Every care experienced young person, and every child who has been on the child protection register, should have an advocate. Someone who's there to champion them and ensure the support and service access they require is made accessible.
- Under 16 Support – pathway into supported accommodation – stop Care experienced young people having to be declared homeless.
- Age transition is key, we have such a better understanding of ACE's and the effect of trauma on the brain and neuro-development. As young people transition to adulthood ensuring that services and support remain accessible and responsive to individual needs is key to ensuring longer term independence and sustainability.

- Young people in Wales would benefit from a 14-25 mental health provision which understands the challenges this cohort face as well as how best to engage with them.
- Timely psychologically and trauma informed support to foster carers and residential home staff to hold on to children and young people and act before placements breakdown.
- Lengthening time all young people leaving care get range of support, including mentoring, ETE support etc.

Information about Llamau

Mission and Vision

Llamau's mission is to end youth homelessness and homelessness for women and their families. That means that we want to make homelessness rare, brief and non-recurrent.

We believe that no young person, woman or family should ever have to experience homelessness.

Llamau's aims and strategy are reviewed annually, to ensure that we remain clear and focused on the work we undertake.

We will achieve our mission through fulfilling our aims;

- Keeping the people we support at the heart of the organisation
- Ensuring the wellbeing of our colleagues is a top priority
- Focusing on the primary prevention of homelessness
- Redressing inequalities which lead to homelessness
- Enabling everyone we support to achieve their full potential
- Delivering sector-leading support
- Recognising and exceeding the expectations of our supporters
- Transforming lives by never giving up

In delivering services to achieve our aims, we recognise that individuals have a range of needs – all of which need to be met. Therefore, we aim to work with the individual to support them in addressing all the issues that matter to them. Consequently, our work demands great and constant flexibility.

Llamau aims to support people to take the right steps to enable them to fulfil their potential and make their own contribution to society. We have a proven track record of working with the most vulnerable and excluded young people and women, no matter how complex their need. Specialist support encourages those we work with to return to education or employment; rebuild family relationships; tackle substance misuse, offending or mental health issues. No matter how challenging the obstacles are for an individual,

we never give up.

Values are at the centre of what we are about

How Llamau delivers support is crucial to our success. Each of our operational colleagues is inducted into the charity with our own psychologically informed support methodology. Llamau is a values-led organisation which puts the people we support at the heart of the organisation. The difference with Llamau is the quality of support and empathy we offer. The following five core values have been distilled from everything we do:

We Respect

We Listen

We Learn

We Encourage

We Don't Give Up

What We Do Works

95% of people reported our support had a positive impact on their lives and 92% of people reported an improved quality of life following our support.

In addition:

- 100% of over 250 women accessing our IRIS service reported feeling safer after our intervention
- 95% of people reported our support had a positive impact on their lives
- 90% of people exiting our support this year accessed safe, suitable accommodation
- 93% of people reporting feeling safer following our support
- 87% of people reported risks were reduced through our support
- 79% of young people supported by Llamau's Family Mediation services safely remained in/returned to their family home, preventing homelessness
- 89% of people engaged with our support positively
- 90% of people exiting our support this year accessed safe, suitable accommodation
- 81% of people with emotional health issues made progress with our support
- 80% of people experiencing issues with self-harming made progress with our support
- Over three-quarters (78%) of learners exiting the programmes progressed positively into EET