

MINUTES of
Cross Party Group for Children & Families
17 January 2023, 10.30am to 11.30am

1. Welcome & Apologies

Jane Dodds MS welcomed everyone to the meeting, in particular the Deputy Minister for Social Services, Julie Morgan MS. Apologies were noted.

2. Edge of Care Services across Wales – Amy Bainton & Ceri Evans, Barnardo’s Cymru

Amy began by giving a brief background to her role and the work of Barnardo’s Cymru in terms of edge of care services. Her colleague, Ceri Evans, then went into more detail about the Reflect project. He also mentioned how successful the Newport Strategic Partnership arrangement is, which includes family services; Baby & Me project; family group conferencing and the Rapid Response Team.

The Rapid Response team is a key part of the strategic partnership between Newport City Council and Barnardo’s Cymru. This team takes referrals where a family is at risk of breakdown and can respond within 24 hours to offer support to the family to help stabilise the situation, and wherever possible, support the family to remain safely together. Intensive support is offered, including working with the family daily where necessary. This is a small project with 3 Family Support Workers operating alongside the Newport City Council Safeguarding Hub to immediately respond to family need.

The last quarter’s reporting on the work of the Rapid Response team shows the following:

- Between July and September 2022, the Rapid Response team received 24 referrals. There has been a small increase in the numbers of referrals compared to the previous quarter. All families engaged with the Rapid Response service
- Rapid Response has accepted all referrals made without the need of any of them being picked up within the wider Newport Family Support Service.

Of 24 referrals in the past quarter:

- 9 cases have been closed with the child remaining at home with the family members
- 3 cases have been absorbed into FSS for longer term work
- 12 cases remain open with child living with family members (all of these children were already living with the family members at time of referral)

- We are currently waiting for MYST to work with one of our open cases which is very complex
- There have been no children coming into local authority care during the involvement of rapid response
- There have been no re-referrals of rapid response cases in this quarter
- Potential cost saving to the local authority is between £64,800 - £576,000 (this costing is based on a six-week provision of local authority care which is the same length of time as the rapid response intervention)

Barnardo's reporting outside of this individual quarter demonstrates that:

- 100% of families said that they would recommend Family Support Service to other families
- The Rapid Response service has supported 91% (65) of children and young people to remain at home

A couple of concerns were raised however, including:

- Length of time available to work with families. Ideally this needs to be long-term so relationships can develop and trust formed
- Sustainable funding
- Long term commitment needed from government

Jane Dodds thanked Amy and Ceri for their presentation and handed over to the Deputy Minister.

3. Response to Barnardo's presentation by Julie Morgan MS & Deputy Minister for Social Services

The Deputy Minister confirmed her commitment to the third sector and that she shared the same vision for the future of edge of care services and their role in helping to safely reduce the number of children coming into care in Wales. She was particularly struck by the Baby & Me project and the Rapid Response Team.

Question –

How exactly does the Rapid Response Team work?

Amy noted that they're a small team and only work in Newport city. They can respond immediately with no waiting lists at present. They focus on developing trust and positive relationships with the whole family, so that the "unit" can stay together.

Question -

Is the Rapid Response Team available across Wales?

Amy and Ceri confirmed that they were not sure about this as different local authorities may call their service by a different name. They did mention that Bridgend has the Rise project (which is part of the Reflect Network) and RCT and Merthyr are trying their own services. It was raised that the consistency of service needs to be monitored if the service is to be rolled-out across Wales.

Action: The Deputy Minister confirmed that her office would follow up the situation around Wales and information passed to Jane Dodds. She also agreed to

provide the Chair with up-to-date figures of the number of children in care in Wales

Jane Dodds asked group members if they had any questions.

Question – Cath Lewis, Guide Dogs Cymru:

Do you work with any families who have disabled children as they may have differing needs?

Ceri confirmed that these issues do need to be considered.

Jane Dodds thanked the Deputy Minister for attending and taking the time to find out more about the good work that is taking place at present. She also mentioned the themes for future CPGs and would be pleased if the Deputy Minister attended future meetings around 1001 Days and/or Child Poverty. She confirmed she would like that.

4. Step Up, Step Down Programme, Jade Irwin & Liz Bryan, The Fostering Network

Jade talked the group through her presentation slides and gave detailed information about the very successful Step Up, Step Down project which has foster carers at the core in Northern Ireland, and plans for the programme to be introduced in Wales. Please see slides attached.

Question – Jane Dodds:

Are any of the foster carers involved in the programme salaried?

Jade confirmed that they are and follow two strands of work – short respite breaks and mentoring/supporting families.

Question – Jane Dodds:

Is this programme being rolled-out within all local authorities in Wales?

Sarah Thomas of The Fostering Network confirmed that they are currently taking Expressions of Interest from local authorities and are in further discussion. They hope to have one local authority from North Wales and one from the South, with different needs and pressures, and to implement the first phase from April 2023. A catchy strapline is currently used by the programme and Jane Dodds asked that a Welsh one be created. Sarah confirmed that this is in the pipeline and are working with the Welsh Language Commissioner.

Jane thanked members of The Fostering Network for presenting and asked for updates on this work.

5. Parent Advocacy Programme, Daljit Kaur Morris & Nadia Lovell, NYAS Cymru

Nadia took group members through their presentation slides and confirmed that their Parent Advocacy Programme is proving successful. It currently only operates in Gwent, but statistics show that it's working positively to reduce the number of children in that county entering care.

An evaluation is currently being undertaken by Prof Clive Diaz of CASCADE, Cardiff University and further information is available [here](#).

Jackie Murphy of TGP Cymru confirmed that they are working together with NYAS to ensure there is roll-out of parenting advocacy services across Wales. They have recently obtained funding from WCVA to work with black and minority ethnic families.

Question – Jane Dodds:

I am fascinated that the programme is able to pull families back from the Pre-Proceedings and Public Law Outline procedures. Is there any links made with Care Progression Managers?

Nadia confirmed that there is no current link, but a connection would be very beneficial.

Question – Jane Dodds:

How is the work funded?

Nadia confirmed that the work is Welsh Government funded and has been extended to 2025.

6. Any other business

Jane Dodds confirmed that this had been a very successful meeting, with innovative presentations around the work that's being carried out to keep children in Wales out of the care system through edge of care services. All presentation slides would be distributed to group members and further statistics from Welsh Government/Foster Wales would be forthcoming.

Sian Thomas of the Senedd Commission confirmed that a consultation is currently live around services for care experienced children. Read more here: [Services for care experienced children: exploring radical reform \(senedd.wales\)](https://www.senedd.wales/en/consultations/services-for-care-experienced-children-exploring-radical-reform)

Jane Dodds confirmed that the Equality & Social Justice Committee, that she is a member of, looked recently at funding and sustainability and she's had assurances that the sustainability element is confirmed for the next three years.

Action – group members to let Jane know of any funding issues that they may be experiencing for any of their projects. She may be able to offer some assistance. Email: jane.dodds@senedd.cymru

7. Date of next meetings

26 April 2023, 10.30am to 11.30am, hybrid meeting – room at Ty Hywel and online. Theme: First 1000 Days

27 September 2023, 10.30am to 11.30am, hybrid meeting – room at Ty Hywel and online. Theme: Child Poverty (in conjunction with CPG on Poverty)

29 November 2023, 10.30am to 11.30am, hybrid meeting – room at Ty Hywel and online. Theme: ACEs