

## Children's Charities Priorities

### NGO briefing paper to Children and Young People's Committee Meeting March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012

The Committee invited the directors of the five main Children's Charities in Wales, together with Children in Wales, to produce a paper as the basis for a round table discussion focussing on the jointly-agreed five key issues for children and young people living in Wales.

The following papers focus on the jointly agreed five key issues for children and young people in Wales.

The issues identified are

- Poverty
- Neglect and early intervention
- Integrated working
- Commissioning
- Collaborative-working and co-terminus boundaries

Annex 1 contains a brief summary of the current work of each organisation.

## Poverty

Poverty damages children's life chances. It prevents children and young people accessing their wider rights to entitlements such as a good education, health and leisure.

Despite initial progress from UK and Welsh Government in reducing child poverty, levels have increased steadily since 2006. More than one third of children in Wales, approx. 200,000, are now growing up in poverty. When compared to other UK countries, Wales has the highest rates using the after housing costs measurement. The UK Government's target of halving child poverty by 2010 was missed and unless investment and urgent action is taken, the target to eradicate it by 2020 will not be met. The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) projects child poverty rates will rise further after 2013 to 4.2million children in the UK by 2020. The UK Government's Welfare Reform Bill and its implications for low income families and support services in Wales is a particular area of concern at present. In addition public sector job losses in Wales are likely to have a greater impact than most parts of the UK and this will contribute to increased levels of child poverty.

The Welsh Government's Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010, which places a statutory duty on local and other Welsh authorities to tackle child poverty, reaffirms the commitment to eradicate child poverty by 2020 with the Child Poverty Strategy (February 2011). It identifies 3 strategic objectives, including reducing inequalities in health, education and economic outcomes for children, and reducing the number of families living in workless households. The Welsh Government's Programme for Government commitments and flagship programmes of Families First, Flying Start, Schools Effectiveness Framework and Communities First (presently being revamped) should provide greater impetus for driving forward delivery at a regional and local level, but it has to be recognised that these are difficult and challenging times for children and families, and every concerted effort has to be made if we are to break the upward trend and lose another generation.

The financial pressures on low income families from the economic downturn and increasing levels of unemployment, particularly amongst young people, have been well documented yet are presenting additional challenges for frontline services. The increasing demand for services from children and families seeking support, advocacy and advice is taking place at a time of reduced budgets and a climate of 'doing more for less', which places increasing pressure on services to maintain high standards of delivery and the need to support an ever increasing pressurised workforce.

The Programme for Government outlines a commitment to develop a Tackling Poverty Action Plan by Spring 2012, with a desire to bring all the levers across Government together. Though we have not yet had sight of the draft plan, we welcome a coherent, unified and integrated approach across all strands of Government to help ensure effective delivery and improved outcomes for children and young people. We will continue to seek assurances that child poverty will feature as a central priority within the unified plan. We must ensure that the issues for children and young people, and their right to access services, opportunities and to participate in society, does not get subsumed or lost within a broader agenda. The opportunities presented through the Rights of Children and Young Persons Measure, which recognises through the UNCRC the uniqueness of children with their own specific needs, attributes and characteristics, must be harnessed and adopted in the context of this agenda.

## **Neglect and Early Intervention**

Neglect ruins lives, impairs development and prevents children from reaching their potential. Severe emotional neglect or lack of emotional care or supervision that would place a child at risk was the most common child maltreatment suffered by one in ten children. The UNCRC gives children the right to be protected from all forms of neglect.

Neglect is the most prevalent type of maltreatment across all age ranges. Unlike other forms of ill treatment, it is not necessarily intentional. The cumulative and corrosive nature of child neglect often does not meet the significant harm threshold and so neglected children suffer for longer before action is taken. Neglect is the most common category for children being made subject to a child protection plan but local authorities and government do not know how many children experience neglect.

Safeguarding and Child Protection systems are struggling to provide an effective and swift response to neglected children. Children are left in situations that impair their development for an unacceptable length of time.

Whilst poverty itself is not a cause of neglect, the pressure it brings increases the risk to children and young people. One explanation is that the factors associated with social deprivation can increase parental vulnerability to stress, particularly when combined with domestic violence, substance misuse or mental health issues.

Research has shown that professionals increasingly feel children are recognised but not helped at an early enough stage.

All agencies must work together to ensure sufficient provision of services to support families from the earliest opportunity.

The law and guidance surrounding child neglect must be reviewed to ensure action is taken early enough to safeguard children.

We recommend the committee urgently conduct a full inquiry into child neglect in Wales.

## **Integrated-working**

The policy shift towards a preventative approach and the focus on outcomes is to be welcomed but there remains a need to close the gap between policy and implementation.

Uncertainty, financial restraint and structural changes across agencies at the same time as introduction of single plans are creating a very challenging environment. There is scope for positive change but the dismantling of some strong structures, combined with an extremely pressurised timescale is creating poor staff morale and undermining the relationships and knowledge built up over a considerable period of time.

The pace of change in policy, structures, programmes and service delivery affecting children and young people is swift and simultaneous. In some areas there is a sense that the existing infrastructure and processes have been removed prematurely and before the new systems have become fully operational. This has had a particular impact on the third sector and the people who use our services.

Cymorth was an important development in building collaborative, multi-agency working, despite some acknowledged short-comings. Learning from this programme must not be disregarded. A perception that all Cymorth “was bad” and all Families First “is good” is being perpetuated and is preventing learning, experience and good practice from being transferred to new programmes to inform service delivery.

There are still significant gaps between programmes which result in children and vulnerable families struggling to access services. Some are trying to bridge the gaps to create seamless services but the models do not sit easily being based on different types of interventions, sometimes different geographical remits, age ranges that are not necessarily compatible and all against a back drop of increasing pressure on Children’s Services to deal with increases in referrals. We are also experiencing a sense of thresholds creeping ever upwards.

The Children’s third sector in Wales has a proud history of working in partnership on mutually agreed priorities and sharing expertise, and through joint commissioning projects. Though this remains strong, reduced funding from national, local and through charitable donated sources is placing pressure on services to continue to deliver high quality provision in an economic climate of uncertainty and risk.

## Commissioning

We find the process of commissioning services is far from perfect. An immature commissioning environment across services for children is leading to unsafe and immensely time consuming processes. The complexity of process, and the resource investment required, frequently outweighs the value of contracts.

Even the largest of the voluntary providers has to dedicate a disproportionate amount of time and resources to responding to commissioners' demands

Welsh Government is not beyond criticism, for example, the recent CFOG process was convoluted, incoherent and unnecessarily repetitive. The reduced funding of this grant to a two year cycle poses challenges for services in long term planning and does not provide the stability which is necessary in which to develop, deliver and embed effective practice.

Whilst tendering for services, we have experienced:

- Tenders issued before Welsh Government sign off on Families First Action Plans
- Notices being submitted and withdrawn frequently on Sell2Wales
- Partnership submissions required within unrealistic time frames
- Perceived lip service to role of third sector by Welsh Government, Local Authorities and Health
- Lack of attention by Welsh Government to local commissioning/decommissioning e.g. Cymorth Services
- No understanding of TUPE and its huge implications (e.g. pension commitments)
- Poor and varied use of the portals
- Technical and legal confusion
- Lack of understanding of structures in the voluntary sector
- Lack of acknowledgement of the cost and time and legal framework required to establish and manage partnerships
- Delay in the issuing of guidance from Welsh Government has led to short term contracts being imposed on third sector providers with repercussions on workforce stability, morale and the ability to plan and deliver a service effectively
- Commissioning and competitive tender processes put undue pressure on organisations and on interagency working in times of budgetary cuts.

We are also concerned that participation structures and delivery are being threatened in Wales following changes to funding arrangements and structural changes locally.

Following the delayed guidance and other issues around transition to Families First, a transitional year would have been welcomed to enable commissioning of services based on needs analysis. A number of local authorities haven't waited before progressing.

## **Collaborative-working and co-terminus boundaries**

The essence of effective partnership working includes establishing strong working relationships between partners and having a shared vision for the population they are jointly serving.

We believe there are currently too many differences in the boundaries of the organisations and programmes and there is not enough coherence creating the potential for confusion for service users.

We welcome the shift to an outcomes focus. Welsh Government has an opportunity to facilitate more effective collaboration by delivering a set of population outcomes for Wales for all other outcomes frameworks to feed into.

Local Authorities have an opportunity to join up and develop collaborative working and reduce duplication of tendering activity which should result in efficiencies and more effective services across boundaries. For example the commissioning of Families First services on a regional or dual local authority basis.

Despite the work on pioneer areas within Families First, the commissioning is mostly taking place within the current foot print of the 22 Local Authorities. Commissioning is therefore being undertaken in isolation.

The uncertainty about how the future may look is impacting on strategic planning across the Local Authorities with increasingly seemingly fragmented processes. Families First commissioning ploughs on largely unilaterally while Children's Services and Education are proceeding with various aspects of collaborative working. Those aspects are in themselves lacking coherence as they are varying across themes and timelines. The potential for confusion is significant while the time being invested in discussions and planning for the jumble of proposed collaborations is considerable.

Our respective agencies have a wealth of experience of working across boundaries with a range of agencies and we are used to managing change. The inherent difficulties come with the uncertainty and planning for unknown future structures but not collaboration in itself

## **Annex 1**

### **Action for Children-Gweithredu dros Blant**

Action for Children-Gweithredu dros Blant has been delivering services for children and young people in Wales for more than 100 years. We currently provide 120 services from around 36 project bases right across Wales.

We are the largest provider of family support services in the voluntary sector in Wales. This ranges from intensive family support with children at risk of becoming looked after to drop in services for parents in their community. We also provide extensive services for children with disabilities, a large proportion of which are for residential short breaks. We provide children's homes for local authorities in north Wales and fostering placements across south Wales. In addition we provide support for young parents and tenancy support.

As part of a major UK children's charity we have a comprehensive policy and campaigning team which supports our work on Child Neglect, including recent research which indicates that people are better at identifying neglect but there are still not enough services for professionals and families to access to address the issue. We will launch our findings for stakeholders in Wales on March 21st.

All Action for Children-Gweithredu dros Blant's services are outcome-focussed, ensuring service-users have a strong voice from the start of their involvement with us. We are committed to evidencing the difference we make in children's lives. Our latest figures show we have had a positive impact for 96 per cent of the children and young people we work with.

## **Annex 1**

### **Barnardo's Cymru.**

Barnardo's Cymru has been working with children, young people and families in Wales for over 100 years and is one of the largest children's charities working in the country. We currently run 88 diverse services across Wales, working in partnership with 20 of the 22 local authorities. Last year, we supported approximately 8,000 children, young people and families in Wales.

Barnardo's Cymru services in Wales include: care leavers and youth homelessness projects, young carers' schemes, specialist fostering and adoption schemes, family centres and family support, parenting support, community development projects, short breaks and inclusive services for disabled children and young people, assessment and treatment for young people who exhibit sexually harmful or concerning behaviour and specialist services for children and young people at risk of, or abused through, child sexual exploitation.

Every Barnardo's Cymru service is different but each believes that every child and young person deserves the best start in life, no matter who they are, what they have done or what they have been through. We use the knowledge gained from our direct work with children to campaign for better childcare policy and to champion the rights of every child. We believe that with the right help, committed support and a little belief, even the most vulnerable children can turn their lives around.

## **Annex 1**

### **Children in Wales**

Children in Wales is the national umbrella organisation in Wales, for those working with children and young people in Wales, bringing organisations and individuals from all disciplines and sectors together to:

- Make the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child a reality in Wales
- Fight for sustainable quality services and fair shares for all children and young people
- Ensure special attention and treatment for children in need
- Give children and young people a voice

Children in Wales has over 200 organisations in membership, including the major voluntary children's agencies, professional associations, local authorities and health bodies, as well as many smaller community groups.

Children in Wales works to meet the following objectives:

- to support and develop strong networks
- to produce and disseminate information
- to represent and consult with members
- to develop policy, practice and research
- to raise public, political and professional awareness
- to support new and existing initiatives

Children in Wales works in partnership with the National Children's Bureau in England, Children in Scotland, and internationally with Eurochild and the International Forum for Child welfare.

## Annex 1

### National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) aims to end cruelty to children in the UK by fighting for their rights, listening to them, helping them and making them safe. Our services include the NSPCC Helpline, for adults worried about a child, and ChildLine, the UK's free, confidential helpline for children and young people.

As part of the NSPCC's Strategy to 2016 we are reshaping our services to be more innovative, distinctive and designed to capture and disseminate learning. Through providing cutting edge new services we hope to better understand the real issues and challenges in prevention, protection and the treatment of abuse.

The NSPCC in Wales currently delivers the following services to vulnerable children and young people in three Service Centres across Wales in Cardiff, Swansea and Prestatyn.

- Neglect: Evidence-based decisions in complex neglect cases, Improving Parenting-Improving Practice (early stages, not currently up and running)
- Looked After Children: Connecting with Children in Care
- Under ones: Pregnancy, Birth and Beyond, Non Accidental Head Injuries
- Physical Abuse in High Risk Families: Caring Dads-Safer Children, Family SMILES (Simplifying Mental Illness plus Life Enhancement Skills), Domestic Abuse-Recovering Together
- Sexual Abuse: Letting the Future In (therapeutic service), Good practice guide for the assessment and treatment of known or alleged adult sex offenders not in the Criminal Justice System and Change for Good (treatment manual for children who sexually abuse others).

The NSPCC in Wales sits on the End Child Poverty Network and the UNCRC Monitoring Group. We strongly support the campaign to remove the defence of "reasonable punishment" of children under the law on assault.

The NSPCC is an independent social work agency. The Children Act 1989 gives the NSPCC the power to make certain applications to the family court to safeguard the welfare of children at risk of significant harm.

## **Annex 1**

### **Tros Gynnal Plant**

Tros Gynnal Plant (TGP) is the Wales based NGO established with the help of the Welsh Government to take over the work of the Children's Society when it left Wales in 2002. TGP has successfully developed innovative culturally sensitive advocacy services and family support across Wales and is now a well established charity in its own right.

## **Annex 1**

### **Save the Children**

Save the Children is a leading international UK children's charity working for the most vulnerable children in Wales. Our work focuses on Child Poverty, Education, Child Rights and Participation.

In Wales today over 200,000 children live in poverty and our research shows 96,000 are living in severe poverty. This is the highest rate of any nation in the UK.

Living in poverty dramatically affects a child's life chances. Poorer children can expect fewer qualifications, lower-paid jobs and shorter lives than their richer classmates. Growing up in poverty has a huge impact on a child's health, education and economic future - in fact, their life.

Save the Children believes that no child should be born without a chance to thrive and develop to their full potential. Across Wales we are working with decision makers, families, children and young people to bring about the changes needed to end child poverty.

In our programme work:

- We run innovative projects that help tackle the causes and mitigate the effects of poverty.
- We support local groups to take an active role in improving their communities

By promoting and raising awareness of Children's Rights and the participation of children and young people we make sure that the views and experiences of those directly affected by poverty are not ignored.

Our policy work calls on the UK and Wales governments to ensure they take positive and urgent action to end child poverty. We promote policies to change the lives of the poorest children, policies removing barriers to employment for parents in poverty, making the tax and benefits system work better for families and breaking the link between poverty and educational achievement.