

## Cymorth Cymru consultation response

### National Assembly for Wales Children, Young People and Education Committee

#### First 1000 Days

The extent to which Welsh Government policies and programmes support the early parent role, before birth and during the first 2 years of a child's life, and crucially how effective these are in supporting children's emotional and social capabilities and development.

#### About Cymorth Cymru:

Cymorth Cymru is the umbrella body for providers of homelessness, housing related support and social care services in Wales. Cymorth Cymru acts as the 'voice of the sector', influencing the development and implementation of policy that affects our members and the people they support. We work in partnership with members and other stakeholders to prevent and reduce homelessness and improve the quality of life for people who are marginalised or at risk of housing crisis across Wales.

Cymorth has around 120 members across Wales, made up of third sector organisations, housing associations and local authorities. Our members work with a wide range of people, including people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness; families fleeing domestic abuse; people dealing with mental or physical health problems; people with learning disabilities; people with alcohol or drug problems; refugees and people seeking asylum; care leavers and other vulnerable young people; and older people in need of support.

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#### Dear Committee Members,

While much of this consultation will no doubt focus on policies and programmes that specifically target children and parents, we would like to highlight broader policies and programmes that support a variety of vulnerable groups in Wales, including but not limited to people with children and those who may be expected to have and/or raise children in the future. Although specific parenting and early years programmes are crucial, ensuring that a wide range of policies and legislation support a holistic approach to wellbeing is also a valuable approach to improving child development.

#### A holistic, cross sector approach to child and parent wellbeing

We support a holistic, cross sector approach to improving the wellbeing and development of children, which recognises the need for:

- Safe, secure, good quality housing for children, parents and future parents
- Education, training and employment opportunities for current and future parents
- Quality, accessible health and social care for children, parents and future parents

The first 1000 days agenda is crucially important, but the success of this approach will stand or fall by the engagement of different services throughout this period. If we do not acknowledge the interlocking, interrelated issues and the need for different services to work together, we will not be able to make the required impact on the lives of young people and their families. The Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act and the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act set the foundation for this approach but there is still some way to go to ensure joined up services that meet the needs of parents and their children, particularly those who face multiple disadvantages.

## **Adverse Childhood Experiences**

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In responding to this consultation, we are looking at the issue through the helpful lens offered by Public Health Wales (PHW) and their report on Adverse Childhood Experiences, namely two of their three priority areas for preventive action:

- A. Building resilience across the life course and settings
- B. Addressing wider economic, social and environmental determinants of health.

We have used the PHW report to draw out key areas to discuss, identified below. PHW's report looks specifically at "*ensuring a good start in life for all*" as part of building resilience, explicitly mentioning the first 1000 days. It also notes the importance of the mother's health before, during and after pregnancy; poor early year development; poverty and deprivation. We would classify this as: **protecting a mother's health and ensuring support for families is in place as early as possible.**

PHW also note the significant impact of mental ill health, and how a greater proportion of women (16%) self-reported mental ill health, than men (10%). The economic, physical health and other negative impacts of mental ill health are clear. PHW suggest investment in mental health interventions for children which we would agree with, but we believe that there needs to be consideration of the following: **protecting against mental ill health and its impacts on the family in the first 1000 days.**

Another vital area in terms of building resilience is addressing domestic violence. In 2011/12, 11% of women and 5% of men experienced domestic abuse. Sexual violence affects women on a vastly disproportionate basis, with 3.2% of women experiencing sexual violence, compared to 0.7% of men. 16% of adults responding to the Welsh Adverse Childhood Experiences survey reported witnessing domestic violence when they were growing up. These statistics, shared by PHW, lead us to another priority: **preventing, or reducing the impact of, domestic abuse.**

PHW also identify alcohol and substance misuse as a key challenge for Wales. This is an issue that does affect children and young people, and families. There is evidence that suggests that vulnerable groups of young people are more likely to take drugs, including "young people with parents with drug or alcohol problems". This means we need to: **prevent and reduce the impact of substance misuse on parents.**

PHW have also drawn out the need to address the wider economic, social and environmental determinants of health. This link between poverty and health needs to be acknowledged, and services need to address this where possible, and policy approaches need to challenge it as a matter of course. In particular, the impact of worklessness and wider deprivation is striking, with disparity between those in wealthier areas an unacceptable state of affairs. It means more needs to be done to **meet the economic challenges of the most vulnerable and marginalised.**

## The Supporting People Programme

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Many of our members, and other provider organisations across Wales, meet the needs of people in the areas identified above. In particular, we would like to draw attention to the Supporting People Programme, which works with over 60,000 of the most vulnerable people in Wales. Whilst a proportion of these are older people, or supported living for learning disabilities, most of the funding is allocated to vulnerable and marginalised groups.

For instance, Supporting People directly supports:

- 1078 women experiencing domestic abuse
- 2248 people with mental ill health
- 155 people with alcohol substance misuse and 580 with drug substance misuse
- 109 single-parent families
- 693 families
- 4,758 people in need of general floating support to prevent homelessness

Whilst some of the above may have a 'lead need' that is not specifically related to the *1000 Days* agenda, the support provided by Supporting People services will enable many of them to rebuild their lives, become more resilient to care for current and future children, and reunite with families and children.

These services all support people to live more independent and fulfilled lives, and:

- Prevent homelessness, which can have a significant impact on children
- Prevent the acute health crises and hospitalisation, which would have a negative impact on parents and children
- Prevent the need for social care interventions, which could lead to children being removed from their parent's care.
- Prevent domestic abuse, which could have an extremely damaging and even life threatening impact on women and children – and can increase when a woman becomes pregnant. More than 30% of this abuse starts in pregnancy, and existing abuse may get worse during pregnancy or after giving birth.
- Preventing alcohol and substance misuse, which can harm parents, children and unborn children.
- Prevent interaction with the criminal justice system, which can lead to children being separated from their parent(s).
- Improve access to education, training and employment opportunities, which will enable a parent to improve their family's income
- Improve financial circumstances, by helping people deal with debts and/or access their full social security entitlements.

All of the above help to contribute to improve wellbeing of parents and children, increasing their chances to live fulfilled lives and reach their potential.

The Supporting People Programme clearly meets the needs of people from each of the areas identified above, and this reinforces the need for services to work closely together during the first 1000 days. Supporting People services are often, located as they are between housing and social care departments, able to leverage in additional support to what has been contracted. The philosophy of the Programme and the providers that deliver against it, is one of independence

and resilience, and so should be seen as a key pillar in delivering services to those who most need it in the first 1000 days.

In addition, many of the third sector organisations who are responsible for delivering Supporting People services are well placed to link up statutory health, housing and social care services. This flexible. Many of our members, who also provide these services, offer other support from other funding sources – it means they can provide value for money, but also a sharp focus on what matters to people who need support.

The Supporting People programme in Wales is envied by many people working with vulnerable people across the border in England. In Wales, consecutive Welsh Governments have chosen to ring-fence the Supporting People budget, ensuring that vulnerable people have access to homelessness and housing related support services. In England, the ring-fence was removed, leading to a significant decrease in provision in many areas. People working across the border also draw parallels between the increase in homelessness and the removal of the ring-fence (Homeless Link, 2013; IPPR 2015).

The Supporting People budget for 2017/18 has been protected at the same cash levels as the previous year. This has been welcomed by the sector, which has become leaner over the past few years in order to absorb funding cuts. However, this protection is only for one year. In order to maintain the preventative work outlined above, the funding needs to be protected – and if possible increased – in order to continue meeting the needs of vulnerable people in Wales, including parents, children and future parents.

### Other housing and homelessness policies and programmes

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Homelessness, overcrowding, insecurity, housing that is in poor physical condition, and living in deprived neighbourhoods has been shown to have an adverse impact on children's health, education and employment opportunities. Shelter's 2006 report *Chance of a Lifetime: The impact of bad housing on children's lives* showed that bad housing led to:

- Up to 25 per cent higher risk of severe ill-health and disability during childhood and early adulthood
- Increased risk of meningitis, asthma, and slow growth, which is linked to coronary heart disease
- A greater chance of suffering mental health problems and problems with behaviour
- Lower educational attainment, greater likelihood of unemployment, and poverty

As a result, it is crucial that the Welsh Government continues to pursue policies that aim to improve the standard of housing and reduce homelessness, including:

- **Welsh Housing Quality Standard.** The annual statistical releases show an increase in the proportion of houses within the social rented sector which meet this standard. However, there is still some way to go in order to achieve the ambition of all social housing meeting this standard by 2020.
- **Housing (Wales) Act 2014: Homelessness prevention.** This introduction of the 56 day homelessness prevention duty in the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 was welcomed across the sector. While implementation is still in its early days and there are still challenges to overcome, some of the early indications show that the preventative approach is having an impact.
- **Housing (Wales) Act 2014: Rent Smart Wales.** The aim of this is to improve standards in the private rented sector by requiring landlords and letting agents to register or become licensed

and attend training. Again, this has only been implemented for a few months but has the potential to improve housing standards and practices across the private rented sector.

- **Homelessness Prevention Grant.** The Homelessness Grant Programme is a revenue funding stream and assists voluntary organisations and local authorities to alleviate homelessness in Wales.

It is important that all of the implementation of these policies and legislation continue to be funded and evaluated to ensure that they are having the intended impact. Housing is a critical factor for health, wellbeing and supporting children and their parents reach their potential. Good quality, secure housing – and housing related support when necessary – should provide a strong foundation to support the health, wellbeing and development of children and parents.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this consultation.

Yours sincerely,



**Katie Dalton,**

Interim Director, Cymorth Cymru