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 Platfform | Evidence from Platfform

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

Please outline a maximum of three top priorities for radical reform of services for safely reducing the number of children in the care system.

Priority 1

More support for early years, with a particular focus on the first 1000 days of a child's life.

Priority 2

Going upstream and responding to social determinants of wellbeing such as poverty.

Priority 3

Public sector professionals to receive robust training around childhood trauma, attachment theory, and relational health.

In care: Quality services and support for children in care

Please outline a maximum of three top priorities for radical reform of services for children in care.

Priority 1

More reliable and consistent support with less placement and staff transitions. If there is a need for a young person to move on, consider wrap around options where support teams can continue to move with the child/young person to support transition. There must be improvements in move on support.

Priority 2

Limit the amount of profit that can be made from private residential care for young people.

Priority 3

Ensure that co-production is put at the heart of care, and professionals must share decision making with young people, using a 'doing with' rather than 'doing to' approach.

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

Please outline a maximum of three top priorities for radical reform of the on-going support provided when young people leave care.

Priority 1

Provide a seamless transition from child to adult mental health services to ensure that young people do not slip through the net once they leave care, and continue to get the support that they need.

Priority 2

Pilot a 'health passport' for care experienced young people so that they have full knowledge of their health history.

Priority 3

Implement a universal basic income for care experienced young people to provide them with the best start to their adult life.

Anything else

Platfform is a charity for mental health and social change.

We are a platform for connection, transformation and social change. We're driven by the belief that a strengths-based approach is the foundation to sustainable wellbeing for everyone. We do not believe that people or communities are "broken" or in need of fixing.

Our work takes a trauma informed approach to understanding mental health and emotional distress, and we see the current mental health, and wider health, social care and public sector systems as no longer fit for purpose. Based on illness and deficit models, they deny people the hope and agency to heal.

We believe that to create a more mentally healthy Wales, we need to be going upstream to understand the root causes of mental health challenges many of which lie within social determinants such as poverty, racial injustice, and a lack of a sense of belonging within your community. Current services are continually stuck trying to rescue people out of the river after they have fallen in. It's time to go upstream and find out why people are falling into the river in the first place.

It is through this lens that we make the above recommendations. We know that certain socioeconomic circumstances increase the likelihood of a child entering the care system and therefore there needs to be a concerted effort to ameliorate the issues that lead to this. Particular focus needs to be placed on the first 1000 days of a child's life, as these days influence the outcomes of that young person for their entire life course. As such, there needs to be improvements in early years support so that children can be born into a family and a wider community, that is safe, supported, and stable. Public sector professionals, particularly within the health and social care sector, should receive training to gain a better understanding of how trauma, poverty and other social determinants contribute to children's mental health, and should feel confident to work in a way that is trauma and relationally informed.

Should a child enter the care system, we need to make sure that this 'helping system' is indeed helping and supporting them. To do this, there needs to be an evolution in residential care. Residential care has become a money-making operation, with profits soaring over the last 3 years due to the pandemic. Our helping systems should not be based on making profits, but instead supporting their service users to live the lives they want to lead. We are calling for a limit to the amount of profit that can be made in residential care settings, and for more shared decision making within these settings so that young people are put in the lead in deciding their own support.

Finally, we are calling for innovative solutions to issues that face young people after they leave the care system. We understand that the transition from child to adult mental health services can be challenging, so it is essential that young people are fully supported during this time. An issue that young people face once they leave care is that they do not have a full understanding of their health history, which can make accessing health services difficult. Every person should have a right to know their full health history, and therefore, we are calling for a 'health passport' for care experienced young people so that this can be achieved. Understanding, as we do, that social determinants can have an impact on mental health, we are in full support of a universal basic income for care experienced young people so that they can begin their adult life with financial stability that will support them to lead a happy and full life once they have left care.

We would welcome any opportunity to discuss our response further.