

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 Cymdeithas Cyfarwyddwyr Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol | From Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS)

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16th February 2023

Dear Jayne

Care Experienced Birth Parents

I write in response to your letter dated 14th December, and further to (i) a meeting with colleagues from the authorities who were involved in the preparation for the Petitions Committee evidence session in April 2021 on a similar subject, and (ii) consultation by email with All Wales Heads of Children's Services (AWHoCS).

Firstly, and most importantly, we would like to extend our thanks and recognition to the Committee for their excellent work in this hugely important area.

The Association of Directors of Social Service Cymru (ADSSC) entirely support the incredible work being shaped and delivered by Children's Services in Wales which is aimed at increasing the numbers of children who remain safely with their families. We recognise that there is further to go in this work, and are committed to continuing our focused attention in that endeavour and working alongside stakeholders as we do that. The Committee will understand that we are operating in a constrained context where we continue to respond to families' needs despite increasingly severe workforce pressures, increasing demand, and funding challenges.

For your information and reassurance, we will be including the importance of the work in this area in our evidence submission for Radical Reform, inviting authorities across Wales to work jointly to the same improving and high standards in delivery.

ADSSC and AWHoCS remain committed to hearing young peoples' voices and making them matter. It is helpful to know that the Committee are carrying out further work and meeting with young people. As the people with responsibility for the services, we are distressed to learn again that the young people you have met feel that their experience of care has led to professionals reaching biased judgments in their assessments, particularly as we are alert to the work that is underway to counteract that. We have been advised that there is no opportunity to alert relevant authorities

to the practice that you point to as the sessions were confidential with non-attributable recording. Please accept our assurance that each Director and Head of Service is committed to challenging such practice where it exists. We welcome the opportunity to work alongside others to ensure that there are no missed opportunities to improve in that regard.

Committee has asked us to comment on why care experienced young people feel prejudged. Committee Members will understand that we have not been afforded the opportunity of hearing the experiences at first hand which makes it difficult for us to comment. However, we draw upon the key points brought to the Petition Committee's attention in April 2022. That is that relationship based work is essential, and that trauma, re-trauma and complex trauma makes for a complicated relationship-making environment, but it is not insurmountable, and is our chief professional duty to work in a strength based way. Add to the trauma the jeopardy of being separated or at risk of separation from your child, and it provides some context to parents' experiences. We accept the research evidence in this area, and understand that for those care experienced young people who are not living with their children, where there is no plan for reunification, this represents a colossal trauma, and sense of broken trust. We cannot explain why individual practitioners might develop unconscious bias in this regard without understanding more of the detail. However, we agree that it's essential that we continuously work to reduce both the impact of trauma for care experienced young people and the numbers of care experienced parents whose children access safeguarding services as we increasingly connect parents to effective support.

Child-parent separation is a step only taken when all opportunities for avoiding separation have been assessed, and there is no alternative but to exercise a lawful safeguarding duty. These decisions are not taken in isolation, are always subject to multi-agency consideration, and with the involvement of the Court. We accept the burden of responsibility in relation to people's rights and follow all steps in relation to the Public Law outline including promoting parental advocacy.

That said, when we met to give evidence, we also provided examples of services that are establishing and maintaining safe and trusted relationships with parents and achieving great outcomes alongside families. We respectfully recommend that Committee consider visiting some of the teams and projects that we will bring to your attention, with a view to understanding more about our work with parents including care experienced parents whose children have a care and support plan where the children either live at home or are the subject of a reunification plan.

I am sorry that I am unable to provide all of the data you have requested and hope that the outline below is helpful:

1	The total number of care leavers that were known to your authority who are 21-25 yrs	An information request is being co-ordinated by ADSS Cymru for this data as at 31.12.22, and will be made available by 10.2.23.
2.	The total number of care experienced young people who are parents	We do not gather this information in this way, and as some young people opt not to maintain

		contact, reliable data would be difficult to provide.
3.	The number of these young people who have had one or more children removed from their care or have a child removed from the register	We do not gather this information, partly because we do not include parental care experience in the data we capture for children with care and support needs. However, we understand this to be important evidence for the Committee, and recommend discussion about this with the Government's Social Care performance colleagues. In capturing this evidence it would be important to consider whether the parents' care experience was in the recent past (possibly 5 years), to include both mothers and fathers, alongside the additional detail of whether the care experience was in the home or another authority. It would also be important to consider the rate at which children have a plan for reunification. On the whole, updating qualitative research about parents' experience of barriers in service is much more valuable in understanding problems and driving improvement.

It is our overriding view that we need to work together in Wales in a solution focused and co-operative fashion, sharing information about problems in a way that maximises every opportunity co-produce solutions. In order to achieve change, we need to be inclusive and systemic in our approach.

Yours sincerely



Annabel Lloyd
Chair of AWHoCS

Children, Young People and Education Committee

Care Experienced Birth Parents

Authority	Number of care leavers aged 21-25 years
RCT	173 aged 21-25 years as at 31.12.23
Powys	46 aged 21-25 years
Conwy	133 aged 18–25 years
Vale of Glamorgan	7 aged 21-25 years
Swansea	190 aged 21-25
Flintshire	80 aged 21-25 years
Caerphilly	64 aged 21-25 years
Denbighshire	15 aged 21-25 years
Pembrokeshire	8 aged 21-25 years
Blaenau Gwent	33 aged 21-25 years (7 are parent/preg)
Ynysmon	39 aged 21-25 years
Newport	271 aged 21-25 years
Neath Port Talbot	159 – up to age of 25
Bridgend	128 aged between 21-25 years
Merthyr	45 aged between 21-25 years

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