



Written Submission – 9th November 2018
Health, Social Care and Sport Committee Inquiry:
Impact of Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 in
relation to Carers

Barnardo's Cymru delivers four specific Young Carer Services. We support parent carers at four services for disabled children and their families; we also support carers of all ages within nineteen other services. Furthermore, within our 27 family support services, we will be supporting carers.

Our organisation has experienced closures and reductions in services for carers in recent years; this can be attributed to the move towards more individualised support and an encouragement to engage carers in mainstream activities. This change, although welcomed in terms of a person-centred approach, has inevitably also had negative consequences for some of the carers we support, as specified later.

This evidence represents the views of managers from services commissioned to support carers, the majority being from the young carer services.

Impact of the Act

Overall the picture is mixed in terms of the impact of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act on carers we support. Although there are positives in terms of an increasing awareness of rights for carers in some cases, many of our services report a lack of funding which can undermine the positive intentions of the Act. Others are reporting no significant change in the lives of carers since the introduction of the Act. There seems to be an inconsistency in recognition of, and provision for, carers across, and at times within local authorities, depending on issues such as local priorities, workforce experience and levels of awareness.

Some of the negative consequences of the Act, or changes reported by our services include:

- Significant reductions in the length of interventions, which has implications on the types of support offered and a move away from relational services
- Less support available overall, leading to a perception that there is an increased need for families to fight and provide more justification for their requests for support
- Loss of peer support opportunities in the case of young carers
- Inaccessible provision in some areas
- An impression that young carers' issues are being overlooked, or diluted, with the introduction of a whole population approach
- Staff shortages
- Burgeoning waiting lists for services in some areas, leading to higher thresholds for support and increases in incidents of crisis
- A reduction in respite care options for parent carers and an absence of opportunities for respite for young carers.

Assessment of need

Again there were reports of inconsistencies in experiences of assessment according to locality and individual professionals. When a thorough assessment had been conducted by an experienced professional with a personable approach and an awareness of the needs of carers, our services reported positively in terms of good information sharing, and families being put at ease in talking about their issues.

However, there are examples of poor experiences of families being assessed. These include intrusive and negative processes, which lead the carer to feel compelled to admit they are failing or cannot cope, which is particularly an issue for parent carers. Other experiences of assessments have led to carers feeling judged or not feeling valued, or supported.

Provision of support, including respite care

Closures and a reduction of services, has had an impact on the provision of support available, leading to increasing caseloads, reduced staff numbers and increasing waiting lists. Budget and staff shortages are resulting in a reduction in the amount and type of support available for those with caring responsibilities.

Although, as an organisation, we welcome a person centred approach, one of the unintended consequences of the Act for young carers, is that they are missing out on opportunities to socialise and make relationships with other young carers – those with whom they share

similar lived experiences. This was always a particularly important, and valued, aspect of young carer specific support services.

That young carers miss out on ordinary leisure, sport and hobby time as well as ordinary, out of school, social lives is well documented.¹ Whilst some young people can take advantage of opportunities available within their communities, assuming they have time freed up through respite care provision for those they care for, others find this more difficult. Opportunities to make relationships with other young carers, to share experiences and build their confidence is an important, sometimes essential, step for children who often experience loneliness, isolation and depression as a consequence of their caring responsibilities.

In some areas the contracted amount of time allocated to supporting carers has reduced from 12 months to six weeks. Although many families may only require shorter timeframes for support, a lack of flexibility in terms of how long a family can receive support, will inevitably lead to some families not receiving the support they require. This limited time frame also reduces opportunities for young carers to take part in development and influencing work, or to feel that their voices are being heard by people who make decisions about them.

Our services report a drastic cut to respite care, which can lead to increasing rates of crisis. Particular issues identified by our service staff, include a lack of availability of respite care for young carers, along with a diminishing provision for adult carers.

Provision of information, advice and assistance

The introduction of Information, Advice and Assistance Officers has in many cases had a positive impact on families with caring responsibilities, as it gives them a point of contact and can improve their access to services. This offer is especially positive when multiagency working is properly embedded, so that communications between organisations are effective and support can be provided earlier. However, again the quality of support is too often dependent on the expertise of the individual and the approach of the local authority. In some areas there is no central point of contact for carers. It has been our experience that although the statutory obligation to provide information, advice and assistance has been positive, funding

¹ <https://carers.org/news-item/research-reveals-80-young-carers-miss-out-childhood-experiences>

shortages mean that there are sometimes limited services to refer into or support that can be offered.

Information collected by local authorities and Local Health Boards on carers and their needs

Although as a third sector organisation, we would not always be party to information collected by local authorities and health boards, our service managers did raise concerns relating to the way data is collected and used, as follows:

- Funding restraints have led to a perception that local authorities may be more protective of the scarce provision available, leading to assessment processes which might be preventing families from requesting support
- Outcomes are not readily shared with families across the board
- An increased emphasis on collecting statistics, has led some to believe there is less of a focus on providing support
- Young carers continue to be overlooked, particularly when the widening criteria for classification as a carer across the population, inevitably leads to more people being identified. Although we would welcome more identification of carers, we are concerned when the funding does not match increasing demand
- Although there is agreement that mainstream and universal provision has a key role to play in early intervention and ultimately better outcomes for carers, these mainstream providers are not yet at a stage where they are equipped to work in this way, leading to concerns that young carers will be missed
- In some areas it has been reported that there has been no increase in awareness and identification of young carers

Additional comments

Below are some quotes from our service managers on the impact of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act on parent carers, young carers and young adult carers:

“I do not think local authorities have adequate funding to meet the expectations set out in the Act. This money should be ring fenced to ensure carers are properly supported.”

“More support for young carers is needed.”

"Young carers money used to be ring-fenced, maybe this needs to happen again."

"Currently, I personally don't feel the Act has offered any improvements to the lives/support offered to young carers or young adult carers within our local authority."

"I feel that it [the Act] has let young carers down in a major way."

"those whose voices are part of the Act have since stated that they feel let down."