

NSPCC Cymru/Wales

Response to:

Climbing Higher: Creating an Active Wales A 5 Year Strategic Action Plan

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About us:

The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) is the UK's leading charity specialising in child protection and the prevention of cruelty to children. The NSPCC's purpose is to end cruelty to children. We seek to achieve cultural, social and political change - influencing legislation, policy, practice, attitudes and behaviours for the benefit of children and young people. This is achieved through a combination of service provision, lobbying, campaigning and public education.

The NSPCC exists to end cruelty to children through a range of activities designed:

- to help children who have suffered abuse overcome the effects of such harm;
- to prevent children from suffering abuse;
- to prevent children from suffering significant harm as a result of ill-treatment;
- to help children who are at risk of such harm; and
- to work to protect children from further harm.

The NSPCC has more than 180 teams and projects throughout Wales, England and Northern Ireland. Their work includes:

- family support, assessment, counselling and therapy to children and families experiencing abuse;
- investigations into allegations of child abuse; and
- work within schools and other youth organisations to provide a voice for children and advocate their rights.

Since February 2006 NSPCC has also delivered the ChildLine service, the UK's free, 24-hour, confidential helpline for children and young people.

Introduction

NSPCC Cymru/Wales welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation on the next stage of the Climbing Higher strategy. We wholeheartedly support the Welsh Assembly Government's aims to encourage more children and young people to become active, as it plays a crucial role in their development.

The NSPCC's Child Protection in Sport Unit in Wales commenced in 2003 and provides consultancy and advice to Welsh sport bodies. The Unit has been working closely with the Sports Council for Wales to ensure that organised sport is safe for all children and young people. The Unit was established to help sporting organisations to:

- recognise their responsibility to protect children and young people left in their care
- develop strategies and standards to protect children and young people
- identify and respond to adults who are a threat to children and young people
- develop child protection knowledge and skills among all staff and volunteers.

To date there have been limited research studies into child abuse in sport. As a result, there are insufficient statistics available to give an accurate estimate of the extent of the problem. Even the limited statistics that do exist give an incomplete picture because:

- harassment and abuse often go unreported for a wide variety of reasons
- some abuse that is identified may not be recognised as sports-related
- there are no generally accepted professional definitions of what constitutes harassment or abuse in sport.

A number of high profile cases have prompted many sporting bodies to address the problem, and to develop positive steps to reduce risk of abuse and improve their response to allegations of abuse. It is important to note that whilst sport does not present any more risk than a wide range of other activities that children take part in, we believe it is important that policies and procedures are in place. In order to achieve this we have sought to build positive relationships in Wales with many organisations including the national governing bodies of sport and the Sports Council for Wales

Our response to this consultation focusses on where safeguarding and child protection fits in the wider strategy of encouraging more children and young people to become involved in organised sport and related activities.

Safeguarding and Sport

NSPCC Cymru/Wales is concerned that there are no references within this consultation to ensuring that sport and other activities are safe for children and young people. We know that the key to children's continued participation in sport or organised recreational activities is that the activities are both enjoyable and safe.

In 2004 we provided written and oral evidence to the Safeguarding Vulnerable Children Review, which had been established in 2003 by the Minister for Children, we raised the importance of ensuring that sport and other activities are safe for children and young people. The final report acknowledged that whilst some sports had engaged there was a lack of consistency and recommended:

The Sports Council for Wales to review its present policy regarding child protection and make grant funding to sports organisations conditional upon child protection procedures and routine CRB checks being in place

Since then we have worked very closely with the Sports Council for Wales to enable them to deliver against this recommendation. In June 2009 we launched, with the Sports Council for Wales, *A framework for safeguarding and protecting children in and through sport in Wales*. The framework consists of five standards that a sports organisation should demonstrate at all levels of its sport. The framework can be downloaded via:

http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/cpsu/Resources/Publications/FrameworkForSafeguardingEnglish_wdf65596.pdf

Over the next two years we will be piloting this framework with ten sports and if successful it is our view that this framework should be adopted by all Welsh Assembly Government or Sports Council for Wales funded programmes. The framework also recognises the importance of the role that people in sport play in identifying children who are at risk of or are experiencing abuse at home or in their community. The framework recognises this in its title by including safeguarding in and **through** sport. Those adults, both professionally employed and volunteers, organising and taking part in activities need to be able to recognise when a child is distressed and feel confident in knowing what to do.

We recognise that ensuring sport and other activities are safe and that those organising and supporting these activities are fully trained has a resource implication. NSPCC Cymru/Wales strongly believes that further resource needs to be allocated to this area to ensure that activities are safe for children and young people. At present this work is being undertaken from existing resources, but with the imminent new vetting and barring system being introduced there is a need to resource these developments.

We have been greatly encouraged by our partnership with the Sports Council and their desire to reflect safeguarding and protection in all aspects of their work. In view of this we strongly believe that safeguarding should be a priority theme within this strategy and that the piloting of the framework should be acknowledged in the actions section relating to Theme 2: Children and Young People. This ensures that activities are safe for children and young people, as well as recognising the proactive partnership that the Sports Council has undertaken with us.

NSPCC Cymru/Wales strongly recommends that safeguarding and protection of children and young people is included as a priority theme within this strategy and that relevant actions, such as the piloting and implementation of the framework, are included in the section relating to children and young people. Further we believe that consideration needs to be given to whether current resource levels are adequate to deliver improved systems, procedures and training.

It is crucially important that safeguarding and child protection are not simply viewed as the responsibility of organised sport and the governing bodies in Wales. Children will have their first experience of organised activity at primary school, continue through secondary school and then through external leisure facilities, organised sport and even elite sport. Local authorities may also contract companies to deliver sports in schools or as informal sports participation and there is a need to ensure that consistent safeguarding standards are in place and applied. We are aware that some work on this has been undertaken by the Welsh Football Trust.

It is essential that there are minimum operating standards in place for all activities in which children and young people participate in, regardless of whether these are provided by statutory sector or third sector providers and regardless of the setting. This is both to ensure that statutory obligations are met and that parents can be reassured that their children are attending high quality safe activities.

Further to ensuring that there are systems and structures in place across all activity and sports providers, including schools, it is also crucial that these systems can communicate with each other and operate consistent safeguarding practices and procedures. There are currently no mechanisms for ensuring this across the sporting landscape in Wales. Within this consultation there is no reference to how sporting bodies will interact with local safeguarding and protection agencies, such as children's services or Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs). The section relating to local delivery should include reference to local safeguarding

structures and the importance of sport and other bodies linking in with local safeguarding activity.

NSPCC Cymru/Wales strongly recommends that the final strategy acknowledges the importance of all activity for children and young people being safe and that this is a theme throughout the strategy. Minimum operating standards should be developed for all activities to ensure that there is a minimum expectation of safeguarding practice across activities. The final strategy should also include a clear statement around the need for local activities or sports to link in with local safeguarding structures, including LSCBs.

The imminent introduction of the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act should be acknowledged within this strategy, as the impact of this legislation, not only on sport but across the sector providing activities for children and young people, is hugely significant. Currently enhanced level CRB disclosures in sport require an assessment of 7% of disclosures which contain offence or other relevant information. The new legislation widens the range of roles for which ISA registration will be required and places new legal requirements on sports clubs. National Governing Bodies of Sport will need to invest time and resources on communicating about the scheme and on implementing it. This strategy needs to acknowledge that some resource and time needs to be allocated to ensuring that those agencies providing activities for children and young people are meeting their legal requirements under the new legislation.

NSPCC Cymru/Wales strongly recommends that there is an acknowledgement within the strategy of the need for sport, and those other organisations providing activities for children and young people, to prepare for the legislative changes emanating from the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act, including the new vetting and barring arrangements, and that appropriate resource is provided to enable these organisations to meet the new requirements.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with officials developing this strategy to look at how our experience can be utilised to ensure that the safeguarding and protection of children and young people who are taking part in activities can be prioritised.

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