

NSPCC CYMRU/WALES

RESPONSE TO:

THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR WALES' CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO PARENTING IN WALES AND THE DELIVERY OF THE PARENTING ACTION PLAN

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 NSPCC Cymru/Wales welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence for the Children and Young People Committee's follow-up inquiry into parenting in Wales and the delivery of the Parenting Action Plan.
- 1.2 The NSPCC aims to end cruelty to children in the UK over future generations. In pursuit of our vision, we will:
- Create and deliver services for children which are innovative, distinctive and demonstrate how to enhance child protection most effectively.
 - Provide advice and support to ensure that every child is listened to and protected.
 - Provide advice and support for adults and professionals concerned about a child and if necessary take action to protect the child.
 - Work with organisations which work with children to ensure they effectively protect children and challenge those who do not.
 - Campaign for changes to legislation, policy and practice to ensure they best protect children.
 - Persuade everyone to take personal responsibility for preventing cruelty to children.
 - Inform and educate the public to change behaviours and attitudes to protect children.

2. General comments

- 2.1 NSPCC Cymru/Wales welcomes the decision by the Welsh Assembly Government to base all its policies relating to children and young people on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). With regard to the provision of parenting support Article 18 of the UNCRC is the most relevant section, which states:

State Parties shall use their best efforts to ensure recognition of the principle that both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child. Parents or, as the case may be, legal guardians, have the primary responsibility for the upbringing

and development of the child. The best interests of the child will be their basic concern.

For the purpose of guaranteeing and promoting the rights set forth in the present Convention, State Parties shall render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child rearing responsibilities and shall ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children.....

We are pleased that the Welsh Assembly Government has put parenting and family support services at the centre of its agenda to eradicate child poverty and to meet the seven Core Aims for children and young people in Wales. We believe that the publication of the Parenting Action Plan has been an important strategic step in highlighting the importance of provision of parenting support services locally. The Children and Families Measure also contains a provision which gives local authorities powers to secure or provide services currently funded through the Flying Start and Cymorth grant programmes in relation to parenting. Welsh Ministers may issue guidance about how this function is to be performed. We would urge the Welsh Assembly Government to maximise the way in which local authorities can exercise this power through the guidance issued by Welsh Ministers.

- 2.2 NSPCC Cymru/Wales provides a variety of services which involve direct or indirect work with parents in a variety of settings across Wales, including our NSPCC Helpline (bilingual service). Reference is made to these services throughout our written evidence though we would be happy to provide more information if required.
- 2.3 NSPCC Cymru/Wales is also a member of the Fforwm Magu Plant Steering Group, hosted by Children in Wales and we responded to the initial consultation on the Parenting Action Plan in June 2005.
- 2.4 NSPCC Cymru/Wales believes that parenting and family support services are essential both to support parents in their parenting role and in order to prevent families reaching the point of breakdown and the children within them being put at risk of harm. All parents should have access to support when they need it. Families are different so meeting the needs of all families requires a range of different types of services to be in place. This should include high-quality, evidence-based non-stigmatising support services.

- 2.5 We will use the recommendations of the Children and Young People's Committee Report of May 2009¹ in order to measure progress achieved to date on the parenting agenda in Wales.

RECOMMENDATION 1

The Committee recommends:

The Welsh Assembly Government should appoint a "parenting champion" to:

- *Raise the profile of parenting;*
- *Ensure stronger leadership;*
- *Eradicate stigma associated with parents asking for parenting support and advice: and,*
- *Develop a recognised "National Parenting Brand" for all activities undertaken to support parents, including a national bilingual line for parents, a free standing, national website with parenting advice for parents run in partnership with voluntary sector organisations, and a positive parenting information campaign. NHS direct provides a model for such branding.*

NSPCC Cymru/Wales understands that the Welsh Assembly Government supports the idea of raising the profile of parenting but is keen to implement recommendations and practices that can be measured in milestones and can have a direct impact on making a difference.

We support the rationale behind this approach but would like to stress that a single, coordinated campaign on parenting issues, with an easily identifiable parenting champion does have benefits. We feel particularly strongly about the need to eradicate the stigmas associated with parents asking for parenting support and advice. NSPCC Cymru/Wales conducted research in 2004 that fed into our initial consultation response to the Parenting Action Plan in 2005. This revealed that stigma and fear were the two biggest barriers to accessing parent support. We found that parents may not want to be associated with the misconception that the family are attending parental support programmes because of breakdown rather than because they are seeking healthy and natural support. Also, some families were fearful that they might become involved in the child protection process if they access parental support. We believe that little has been done to break such barriers for parents who feel they would benefit from support. We urge the Committee to examine what has been undertaken to tackle these specific barriers to parental support.

We feel that a single coordinated campaign has also more potential to help the hardest to reach parents. We welcome the Assembly Government's commitment to "reach parents living in difficult circumstances with multiple

¹ National Assembly for Wales Children and Young People's Committee: Parenting in Wales and the Delivery of the Parenting Action Plan, May 2009

and complex needs and to apply resources to help parenting especially through difficult circumstances.” We urge the Committee to look specifically at how this commitment will be translated into support for parents who are most in need of it, for example parents in prison/custody, foster carers, and parents who have experienced or are experiencing abuse, as the Government’s response disappointingly did not include any indication of how resources will be invested to meet this aim.

We are pleased that the Welsh Assembly Government is committed to further promote the participation of parents and carers in local planning. This needs to be done in view of the Wales Audit Office report of 2008², which found that of 11 councils that responded to its review six were using the guide, four were not and one planned to.

RECOMMENDATION 2

The Committee recommends:

2.1 The Welsh Assembly Government should say whether there are any outstanding actions from the Parenting Action Plan that it no longer intends to take forward and give reasons why they will not be taken forward.

2.2. For those actions the Welsh Assembly Government does intend to take forward, from the original Parenting Action Plan, the Welsh Assembly Government should set out clear timescales for their delivery. These should, in particular, include:

- A national, confidential 24-hour, well-publicised, positively promoted, free, bilingual parenting telephone helpline, developed in partnership with voluntary organisations. This should provide a confidential service. It should be able to provide parents with information about parenting services in their local area and should, at a parent’s request, be able to refer parents to a particular service. The bilingual helpline should be branded with the National Parenting brand.*
- Distributing parenting booklets developed through the Parenting Action plan (including “From Breakfast to Bedtime”, “Over the top behaviour in the under tens” and “Help at Hand”) through the ante-natal process, and at a child’s first day at school. Booklets should be branded with the National Parenting brand.*
- A dedicated, stand-alone website, which is not part of the Welsh Assembly Government’s own website, with information on parenting skills for parents. This website should contain the bilingual helpline’s number. It should contain information on local parenting services. It should contain simple signposting, without a requirement that users have to go through multiple pages to get to information. It should be branded with the National Parenting brand.*

² Wales Audit Office, “Review of the Assembly Government’s Parenting Action Plan”, October 2008

Bilingual Helpline

In relation to the establishment of a national bilingual helpline for parents, NSPCC Cymru/Wales notes that there has been no progress since the publication of the Parenting Action Plan.

NSPCC Cymru/Wales provide a free, bilingual Helpline service based in Prestatyn, which is available to all who are concerned about the welfare of a child or young person or would like some advice and support.

Parents form a significant percentage of the calls received by the Helpline, both highlighting concerns about other children and also seeking advice and support on how to deal with any issues they themselves are facing. From May 2009 to April 2010, 28% of callers to our Helpline about child welfare issues (which includes parenting issues) were parents themselves and 73% of these calls were for advice. This evidence clearly indicates that the Helpline provides parents in Wales with an accessible source of support and advice when needed.

NSPCC Cymru/Wales has also now removed “child protection” from the name of our Helpline in recognition that this may be a barrier for some adults in using the service. This demonstrates our commitment to providing a non-stigmatising advice and support service to all who need to access such provision. We anticipate that this may impact on the number of calls we receive and we have therefore put in place the appropriate monitoring systems to examine this. This name change is also part of the ongoing development of all our listening services, including ChildLine, to increase our accessibility and responses to adults, children and young people in need of advice and support.

We believe that good practice from the various sources of advice and support for parents in Wales, such as our Helpline, must be explored and shared. We believe that resources must be appropriately used and meet the needs of parents and carers themselves. Consultation and wider participation with children, young people and their parents/carers will help identify the issues they themselves feel ought to be prioritised.

NSPCC Cymru/Wales supports the development of a variety of advice and information services that can meet the needs of the Welsh population. Alongside this there also needs to be a clear understanding of what is already available and how parents are signposted to existing resources for advice and support. It is important that routes to support and advice are clear and streamlined to prevent any confusion over which service to access. NSPCC Cymru/Wales would recommend that as part of the development of any future action plan the scoping of existing services that provide support and advice to parents are taken into account before new resource is allocated to ensure that work is not being duplicated.

Parenting booklets

NSPCC Cymru/Wales would like to commend the Welsh Assembly Government on its progress to date in developing and distributing a series of booklets for all new parents in Wales. We believe the booklets are accessible and deal with the subject matter in a supportive and sensitive way.

Whilst the booklets are a positive step forward in providing parents with support NSPCC Cymru/Wales would also recommend the piloting of other ways of interacting with parents. The issue of literacy levels has been one that has been frequently raised in meetings, and there is a need to ensure that all parents can access advice and support when they need it.

We were pleased to be given the opportunity through Children are Unbeatable! Cymru/Wales to help in the production of the Welsh Assembly Government funded "Help at Hand" booklet. We believe that the promotion of positive parenting and alternative forms of discipline to physical punishment is vital to help safeguard the welfare and rights of children and young people.

The NSPCC has produced information and practical guides both for parents and professionals on positive discipline and parenting. These aim to educate parents and the public about why physical punishment is an inappropriate or ineffective form of discipline and offers practical support and advice for alternative methods of discipline.

Parenting Website

NSPCC Cymru/Wales is disappointed that a stand-alone parenting advice and support website has to date not been established. We remain concerned that information keeps being uploaded onto the education pages of the Welsh Assembly Government website, as this is not accessible or user-friendly for parents looking for tips.

In saying this we would like to take this opportunity to highlight the issue of parents and carers unable to access the internet. In such circumstances, a facility like Parentsnet would not be a viable source of information. These parents could be the hardest to reach who need the most support. Again we would highlight the need to look at a range of advice options and for the Welsh Assembly Government to explore what information and advice services are already available in Wales to ensure that parents and carers are properly signposted.

RECOMMENDATION 3

3.1 The Welsh Assembly Government should produce an overarching Parenting Strategy and a refreshed Parenting Action Plan.

3.2 The refreshed Parenting Action Plan should incorporate the outstanding actions, still to be completed in the Parenting Action Plan (see recommendation 2).

3.3 The Strategy, and refreshed Action Plan, should also take into account new policies to draw parenting work together.

3.4 The refreshed Action Plan should also set out specific actions to provide support to fathers; grandparents; parents and partners of parents in prison or in custody; young parents; parents involved with substance misuse; and parents from black and minority ethnic communities. It should also include foster carers as appropriate.

NSPCC Cymru/Wales is disappointed that the commitment given by the Welsh Assembly Government to produce an overarching Parenting Strategy in its response to the Children and Young People's Committee report in June 2009 has not been followed up by anything concrete. As mentioned previously, we feel that a coordinated strategy and campaign is a better way to help hard to reach parents and makes it easier to measure progress against agreed action points. We would urge the Committee to look into any developments in relation to the proposed Strategy and to keep pushing for it to remain on the Welsh Assembly Government's agenda.

Grandparents

Setting up a working group on grandparents is an outstanding action point from the Parenting Action Plan. NSPCC Cymru/Wales is pleased that the Welsh Assembly Government recognises the role played by grandparents to strengthen the family in its guidance on intergenerational approaches. This complements the Strategy for Older People, which seems to concentrate on the role of grandparents as carers.

Evidence from our bilingual Helpline shows that 20% of the total number of child welfare contacts (which all have some element of parenting issues) came from relatives, some of whom were grandparents. This suggests that there is a clear need to provide advice and support services which are accessible and promoted amongst grandparents in Wales.

RECOMMENDATION 4

The Committee recommends:

The Welsh Assembly Government should ensure that the overarching Parenting Strategy and refreshed Parenting Action Plan are fully and appropriately resourced, with a clear identification of the sources of funding for action points' delivery.

RECOMMENDATION 5:

The Committee recommends:

The Welsh Assembly Government should identify the overall level of expenditure on parenting support and ensure there is greater transparency

and clarity about spend across departments at national and local level as part of the yearly budget setting and allocating process.

We will consider those two recommendations together, as they deal with funding of the parenting agenda.

NSPCC Cymru/Wales is concerned that the Welsh Assembly Government has not indicated how it is planning to fund its commitments in terms of parenting issues.

There is a great deal of uncertainty in relation to many of the funding streams which currently finance parenting support initiatives in Wales, such as Flying Start and Cymorth.

It is essential that the parenting strategy is not only appropriately resourced but that the funding is sustainable. Short-term funding puts intense pressure on staff and volunteers providing a service and can lead to recruitment difficulties and lowered staff morale. Vulnerable parents who rely on parenting support programmes need continuity and consistency.

RECOMMENDATION 6:

The Committee recommend that:

The Welsh Assembly Government should conduct a major public information and education campaign required to promote positive parenting and non-violence towards children to the wider population. This should signpost parents to information on practical support services for parents in their local area. This should be branded with the Parenting Champion's brand. It should also clearly publicise the bilingual telephone helpline.

NSPCC Cymru/Wales welcomes the stance taken by the National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Assembly Government in supporting children and young people's right to have equal protection from physical punishment. This progressive stance has been widely acknowledged outside of Wales. We further welcome the financial support the Welsh Assembly Government has provided to the Children Are Unbeatable/S'dim Curo Plant campaign in Wales and the development of the positive parenting leaflets, which have now been distributed.

Obviously NSPCC Cymru/Wales are disappointed that the support for equal protection in Wales has not led to the removal of the defence of reasonable punishment and we would urge the Welsh Assembly Government and the Committee as a whole to continue to put pressure on the Westminster Government to remove this clause of the Children Act 2004. NSPCC responded to the Westminster Government review of Section 58 of the Children Act 2004 and our response can be downloaded from:

http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/policyandpublicaffairs/Consultations/2007/s58_wdf49990.pdf

We would further urge the Welsh Assembly Government to continue to explore ways in which it can reduce the use of physical punishment, help support professionals who are promoting the message of positive parenting and ensure that children and young people receive their right to equal protection. NSPCC Cymru/Wales would also draw the committee's attention to the written evidence from CAU Cymru, which outlines the progress made in Wales and also the views of the steering group.

RECOMMENDATION 7

The Committee recommend that:

7.1 Following a national campaign to raise awareness with parents and carers about the information available to them through Family Services across Wales, the Welsh Assembly Government should monitor awareness of Family Information Services amongst the public of Wales.

7.2 The Welsh Assembly Government should also enable Family Information Services to be branded with the Parenting Champion's brand.

NSPCC Cymru/Wales welcomes the action taken by the Welsh Assembly Government to raise awareness of Family Information Services, which are a very useful source of local information for parents.

Any re-branding should take place in consultation with FIS, as they have recently launched their own logo.

RECOMMENDATION 8

The Committee recommends:

The Welsh Assembly Government should provide clear, statutory guidance, giving direction to local authorities and schools about involving parents in schools, taking account of many parents' daytime working patterns.

NSPCC Cymru/Wales is unaware of any significant progress being made around the participation of parents within the school setting. Not all parents wish to be governors or want to spend a lot of time in school.

Our service experience here informs us that parental involvement is varied across schools in Wales. We believe that the Welsh Assembly Government, having prioritised this as one of their main action points, should be clearer about roles and responsibilities here and provide sufficient help and resource to schools as necessary to develop this practice. We welcome the initiatives outlined by the Welsh Assembly Government as part of the School Effectiveness Framework, the Community Focused Schools and Better Schools Funds grant programmes and RAISE. However, we would wish the

Welsh Assembly Government to ensure that good practice is firmly embedded in school policies and practice after funding such as RAISE finishes.

In February 2008 NSPCC Cymru/Wales ran an anti-bullying campaign in Wrexham, which aimed to raise awareness of the effective solutions to prevent and deal with bullying, with a particular focus on cyberbullying. Alongside this goal the campaign aimed to promote a partnership approach whereby teachers, parents and children and young people work together to prevent bullying. We would like to take this opportunity to not only raise awareness of our success in engaging parents in the planning and organisation of our campaign, and our significant campaign outcomes in Wrexham but to also highlight that many of the parents we spoke to had not been engaged in this type of work before. This clearly demonstrates that more work needs to be undertaken to actively engage parents.

Part of the campaigns legacy in Wrexham has been to develop a 'Top tips for Parents on bullying' booklet which could be used as an example of good practice across Wales. We would be happy to provide the Committee with further information about the campaign and/or the booklet as appropriate.

RECOMMENDATION 9

The Committee recommends:

The Welsh Assembly Government should commission long-term, qualitative studies about a range of parenting programmes. It should use the same criteria to evaluate and compare parenting programmes. In particular, it should put resources into evaluating Home –Start projects in Wales.

NSPCC Cymru/Wales commends the Welsh Assembly Government for its commitment to ensuring that programmes are evaluated and demonstrate results. Parenting and family support is central to the NSPCC's mission to end cruelty to children. We run a range of family and parenting support services including parenting programmes, both across Wales and the UK. Our services aim to work with families and help empower them to develop ways of resolving any problems they may experience. NSPCC services work with some of the most vulnerable families, including those who have experienced past abuse, neglect or domestic violence.

As part of our aim to ensure that children and young people are cared for safely by adults, we have adopted a range of evidence-based parenting support programmes to meet the variety of needs presented to us by parents and carers themselves.

We believe that any further expansion of parenting support should now consider evaluating a range of parenting programmes that are being used by different agencies across Wales. Progress needs to be continually mapped, as appropriate, by the Welsh Assembly Government and the knowledge and experience of such needs to be shared across Wales. It is vital that new methods of support are able to develop to ensure that innovation is not stifled

and that a range of programmes can be used to meet the needs of all family structures and both female and male adult carers. NSPCC Cymru/Wales believes firmly that the needs of parents and carers should govern the service offered and provided rather than structures.

We also believe that the involvement of children and young people in the design and delivery of parenting programmes may prove fruitful in allowing professionals to consider issues not necessarily identified by adults. Children and young people, in their capacity as family members and ultimately those which parenting programmes will directly effect, have a right to be involved in all aspects.

NSPCC Cymru/Wales believes that there is often a gender distinction in take-up of services. A view shared by Fforwm Magu Plant/Parenting Forum in Wales, we believe that fathers often feel that services are aimed at mothers not fathers and that services are overly feminised. NSPCC Cymru/Wales provides a Domestic Violence Prevention Service across South Wales. The service, based in Cardiff, works with children and young people who are at risk from the direct and indirect effects of domestic violence in order to reduce the impact that their experiences have upon them. However, the service also works with the mothers of children affected by domestic abuse and men who present a risk to children. This aims to highlight the approach of seeing the family as a whole and working with all members, as appropriate. Currently, the Domestic Violence Prevention Service is running an innovative groupwork programme 'Caring Dads' in several areas across Wales. Caring Dads seeks to challenge attitudes that support abusive behaviour towards women and children, increase awareness of children's needs and improve men's relationships and behaviour with their children. We would be happy to provide the Committee with further information if necessary.

RECOMMENDATION 10

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Assembly Government should explore strengthening arrangements for sharing good practice across Wales and identifying and sharing good practice from international examples.

NSPCC Cymru/Wales supports the sharing of good practice across Wales. We feel that Children in Wales would be an appropriate forum to disseminate and share good practice examples.

RECOMMENDATION 11

The Committee recommends:

The Welsh Assembly Government should make a clear statement that, in determining whether to breach confidentiality to protect the child or other children from a risk of serious harm, professionals should set aside

preconceptions based on parents' economic or social backgrounds and make decisions based on a case by case basis.

NSPCC Cymru/Wales feels that the welfare of the child is paramount, and should override any other consideration when following up any concerns. We agree that preconceptions should not have any bearing in deciding whether to make a referral. However, it is worth looking at the family as a unit in order to decide whether the child is at an increased risk of harm, and to provide appropriate support and possible intervention early to avoid reaching crisis point. This is why we support the new arrangements for Integrated Family Support Teams who will offer earlier support to families with complex needs.

We agree with the Welsh Assembly Government that responsibility for protecting children must go wider than the statutory agencies and to society as a whole and that the public have a pivotal role to play.

OTHER AREAS FOR CONSIDERATION

NSPCC Cymru/Wales feels that parenting support services must recognise the multiple needs of parents and their families and work with a multi-agency approach to offer appropriate support. This could ensure that parents receive the support they need for all issues, not only parenting. This approach should empower families to deal with future issues as they appear.

We believe that families need access to a flexible continuum of family support services to include universal drop-in advice and parenting classes through to targeted short term time limited interventions and long term support to meet multiple and complex needs. Depending on the priorities of local authorities and Children and Young People's Partnerships, some communities have Integrated Children's Centres and a network of services; families who live in Flying Start areas and have a child under 4 have access to a range of universal support services, but for those who have children over the age of 4 or live outside Flying Start areas it is a 'postcode lottery'.

Children and family centres are a key part of community based networks to support children and families with a wide range of needs, from universal provision to targeted interventions. However, in the absence of purpose built premises, a network of services with outreach activity can maximise service access by families. Robust outreach services, where staff make contact with individual families in their own homes, is essential to make a reality of access for those families who are seen as being the most 'hard to reach'. Universal provision reduces stigma about services, particularly when provided by the voluntary sector who can more easily engage with the most vulnerable families.

'Intensive support can make a positive difference to the lives of children and their families even in the most challenging circumstances. Targeted support is not seen as stigmatising by parents and young people, who welcome a

personalised approach to their problems’³ Families should be able to access targeted family support services via self referral or by referral from agencies and if families return we feel it is a mistake to view the ‘revolving door’ as an indicator of service deficit; that families return for further support with a problem is more likely to maximise positive outcomes. The Intensive Family Support Teams when fully operational will meet the needs of families with multiple and complex needs. However these teams will not meet the gaps in universal and lower tier preventative family support services for families who live outside of Flying Start areas and without an Integrated Children’s Centre.

Every community in Wales should have a network of community based services to support parents/ carers with a wide range of needs, from universal drop-in advice and parenting classes to targeted short term interventions.

Conclusion

NSPCC Cymru/Wales welcomed the development of the Parenting Action Plan in 2005 as an important step in creating a strategic approach to the delivery of parenting support in Wales. Whilst the action plan has raised the profile of parenting services and the valuable role that they can play in improving the lives of children and young people, we are disappointed at the apparent slow progress in fully delivering many of the action points within the plan. We would urge the committee to ensure that any future action plan or strategy has sustainable funding and that delivery of any future action points are closely monitored.

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³ Action for Children (2009) An Evaluation of the delivery of targeted family support by Action for Children Children’s Centres