

Welsh Assembly Government's Parenting Action Plan

Evidence to the Children and Young People Committee

Children's Commissioner for Wales



Introduction

The Children's Commissioner for Wales is an independent children's rights institution established in 2001 in line with the Paris Principles. In exercising his functions, the Children's Commissioner for Wales must have regard to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Response

In July 2005 the Children's Commissioner for Wales wrote in a response to the consultation on the draft Parenting Action Plan that we supported this initiative by the Welsh Assembly Government recognising the importance of supporting parents, carers and others involved in raising children.

Most of the questions in the consultation letter were directed at parents and carers and we are not in a position to answer those questions.

We are encouraged by the Welsh Assembly Government's continued support for the eradication of physical punishment of children including their endorsement of the *Help at Hand* toolkit and promotion of positive parenting through various initiatives. We look forward to seeing further work on a public education programme to promote these messages more widely and hope that they will be adequately funded and structured in a way that will ensure optimum effectiveness. The Welsh Assembly Government have displayed their ongoing commitment to the teaching of Personal and Social Education (PSE) in schools with the revised PSE curriculum coming into force in September 2008.

While much of the content of the Parenting Action Plan refers to initiatives already underway, it also contains some significant new initiatives and commitments. However, progress on the implementation of many of the actions within the plan has been slow.

We welcomed the announcement to introduce a bilingual national telephone helpline for parents. In the 2004 - 2005 CCfW Annual Report, the establishment of such a service was seen as a priority. However the introduction and promotion of this helpline has progressed very slowly since 2005 and although

we acknowledge that the obstacles to its introduction may not be entirely under WAG's control, we are concerned that this bilingual service tailored to the Welsh policy and cultural context is still not being provided.

The Welsh Assembly Government undertook to commission a practice guide for Children and Young People's Partnerships on parental participation and empowerment. This guide was due to be distributed mid September 2006, however, we are unclear as to how widely distributed the document was and would be interested to know of its impact on the work of the Partnerships.

The Welsh Assembly Government was committed to continuing to improve Parentsnet which has the potential for being a valuable resource for parents. However during the preparation of this response it became evident that the website appears to be less accessible than before, or even no longer in existence since we were unable to locate it.

We are concerned about sustainability of funding for preventative and early intervention programmes. One example we have been made aware of is the long running Homestart scheme. This scheme is well thought of by parents and by statutory agencies alike.

It has been drawn to our attention that, in some areas, this service is under threat due to funding being withdrawn. We understand that the Bangor Homestart service has closed completely and that the Conwy Homestart service has been told that their core funding from social services will not continue. The service has been running for 25 years but it is likely that the service will have to close by the end of the year.

This is surely contrary to the spirit of the Parenting Action Plan which envisages support for those raising children as a measure to prevent them needing more costly intervention at a later stage when their situations have deteriorated.

The Welsh Assembly Government has continued to fund the Incredible Years Cymru programme. While we welcome this, we feel that the government must also show recognition for a wider range of programmes of parenting support with a proven track record. It is important that support is also provided for those raising older children and teenagers, particularly given that access to many other support mechanisms, such as health visitors, is not usually available to those with older children who may be facing different challenges.

Whilst we are aware of other examples of good practice in some areas such as parenting courses, we feel that the aspirations of the Parenting Action Plan still need to be more consistently implemented.

If you have any questions, you are more than welcome to contact me by emailing monica@childcomwales.org.uk.

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