



O blaid gwell
iechyd meddwl

For better
mental health

Consultation – The Proposed Vulnerable Children LCO Committee

Mind is a leading mental health charity in Wales and England. We work for a society that promotes and protects good mental health and wellbeing for all, and that treats people with experience of mental distress fairly, positively and with respect. Mind Cymru is Mind's presence in Wales. Mind Cymru's key messages are that:

- People with experience of mental distress inform all that we do.
- Because people with experience of mental distress inform all that we do, we know what the real issues are.
- We are determined to improve society's recognition, understanding and acceptance of people with experience of mental distress.
- We value diversity and ensure inclusion is at the heart of our work.

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to this process and have read the responses of other contributors, and endorse the comments made by Gofal Cymru in respect of children with mental health problems. In addition we are concerned about those young people who care for adults and/or siblings with mental health problems. Recent, relevant statistics about young carers show that:

- The average age of a young carer is 12.
- The 2001 census shows that there are 175,000 young carers in the UK, 13,000 of whom care for more than 50 hours a week.
- More than half of young carers live in one-parent families and almost a third care for someone with mental health problems¹.

¹ www.barnardos.org.uk/what_we_do/working_with_children_and_young_people/young_carers.htm

Given the difficult nature of quantifying data it is likely that the real figures would be somewhat higher.

The Welsh Assembly Government has, through Right to Action², outlined seven core aims for children. The impact of having a caring role disadvantages children in regard to these seven core aims, in particular education and learning opportunities and access to play, leisure, sporting and cultural activities.

In my experience, many young carers are reluctant to talk about their caring role, for fear of repercussions. The stigma attached to mental health problems exacerbates these fears in families. One example from South Wales is of two young people of primary age caring for their mother, who were very reluctant to talk to teachers let alone social workers, as they and their mother feared the children would be removed from the family. After much negotiation and reassurance they began to receive family support from social services in the home. A recent example in North Wales is of a young carer who is accessing an adult carers support group, because there is no support available locally specifically for young people.

As there are well established links to poverty and poor mental health and wellbeing, and given the high levels of incapacity benefits being claimed in Wales, for example Merthyr Tydfil has the joint highest level of claims in Britain at 20.5% of people of working age³; the needs of young carers in Wales must be recognised and addressed.

Mind Cymru welcomes the proposed LCO but would strongly recommend that young carers be brought into the definition of vulnerable children in order for this, often forgotten group to be supported appropriately in Wales.

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² Right to Action, Welsh Assembly Government 2005

³ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/4217648.stm>