

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales  
Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and  
Education Committee

Blaenoriaethau ar gyfer y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg |  
Priorities for the Children, Young People and Education Committee

CYPE 22

Ymateb gan : FNF Both Parents Matter Cymru

Response from : FNF Both Parents Matter Cymru

**Question 1** – Within the remit set out above: what do you consider to be the priorities or issues that the Children, Young People and Education Committee should consider during the Fifth Assembly?

**FATHERS** – Our charity provides the secretariat to the newly formed Cross Party Assembly Group on fathers and fatherhood. The aims of the CPG are

- To promote research about the role of fathers in Wales
- To influence public policy to improve support for fathers
- To influence public opinion on the value to children of having fathers play an active and positive role

We are therefore asking the Committee to examine the role of fathers in parenting using an outcomes focus in terms of their engagement and satisfaction with the support that they receive.

**CARE APPLICATIONS** – Wales has a higher level of children in care than England. Despite the huge increase in applications in England we still see the levels of applications in Wales at a higher level than across the border.

We are asking that the Committee examines the following areas

- The increase in levels of care applications made since mid 2015
- the huge discrepancies between numbers of children in care in different Local Authorities eg Torfaen compared to Pembrokeshire

**Question 2** – From the list of priorities or issues you have identified, what do you consider to be the key areas that should be considered during the next 12 months (please identify up to three areas or issues)? Please outline why these should be considered as key priorities.

**FATHERS** – The Committee’s predecessor in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Assembly undertook an Inquiry into the Parenting Action Plan [http://www.assembly.wales/NAfW%20Documents/cyp3\\_pap\\_report-2.pdf%20-%2028012011/cyp3\\_pap\\_report-2-English.pdf](http://www.assembly.wales/NAfW%20Documents/cyp3_pap_report-2.pdf%20-%2028012011/cyp3_pap_report-2-English.pdf) that identified that there was a lack of engagement with fathers. Despite the intervening five years we see few examples where this situation has improved despite the introduction of legislation such as the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure and the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act and initiatives such as the Parenting Guidance published in 2014.

We appreciate that this latter guidance coupled with aspirational statements by officials and Ministers points towards the importance of engagement with fathers. We prefer to take a view based on Results Based Accountability in terms of the effectiveness of these initiatives and services funded by Welsh Government. Sadly, there are no statistics about the numbers of fathers and male carers engaged by statutory services or those funded by Welsh Government so we are unable to provide the Committee with comprehensive evidence on this subject.

In 2014 we met with senior officials in Welsh Government to raise concerns about the lack of engagement with fathers – particularly those who are not living with their children all of the time. We were told that figures on father engagement were not available as services funded were not required to record the gender of parents. We found that surprising given the considerable amount of data required from services such as Flying Start or Families First.

To address the lack of data we undertook a research project assisted by Children in Wales to capture data from services. A total of 32

responses were received, capturing experience from all parts of Wales. These services supported a total of 169,000 service users during the financial year to March 2013. The research can be accessed here [https://www.fnf-bpm.org.uk/image/upload/branch/cymru/Male\\_participation\\_in\\_Family\\_Support\\_services\\_March\\_2014.pdf](https://www.fnf-bpm.org.uk/image/upload/branch/cymru/Male_participation_in_Family_Support_services_March_2014.pdf)

The data showed that the average level of engagement with fathers was between 3 and 11%. In Early Years the figure was at or below 3%. This data correlated with the evidence from Children in Wales submitted to the Committee in 2011 based on Flying Start in Cardiff where the engagement figure was stated as less than 5%.

We have sought to engage with Welsh Government to persuade them to simply require services funded by public money to record the gender of parents accessing services. We were told by officials that this would be too difficult. Eventually the First Minister wrote to us in August 2015 to confirm that recording data on this issue would be 'a disproportionate administrative burden' on parenting services. We believe that Welsh Government cannot demonstrate 'due regard' to Article 18.1 of the UNCRC unless or until it starts to require services to record the gender of adult service users.

### **CARE APPLICATIONS**

The Minister for Health and Social Services together with the Children's Commissioner for Wales drew attention to the disproportionate levels of care applications in Wales as well as the higher total numbers of children in care per head of population at the Family Justice network for Wales in January 2016. The following month - February 2016 - saw the highest ever level of care applications in Wales exceeding the number made at the height of the Baby P inquiry in March 2011. Subsequent months have been exceptionally high in historical terms with more than 100 applications in a single month being made for the first time ever in Wales. We understand that Welsh Government have started a working group involving Children in Wales and Voices from Care looking at some of the issues. We are concerned however that the perspective and

experience of parents are likely to be marginalised or ignored and would welcome the Committee's scrutiny.

Data about care applications in Wales is still very limited. Only after extensive lobbying from our charity has Cafcass Cymru published information on a contemporaneous basis – though not as timely as in England where the data is available 10 days after each month's end. Finally we believe that it is unacceptable that children in the care of Local Authorities have an educational attainment on average no higher than those children who have a learning disability.