

National Assembly for Wales
Children and Young People Committee

Follow up inquiry into parenting in Wales
and the delivery of the Parenting Action Plan

January 2011



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Children and Young People Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

Tel: 029 2089 8149

Fax: 029 2089 8021

email: Children.&YoungPeopleCommittee@wales.gov.uk

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Children and Young People Committee

The Children and Young People Committee was appointed by the National Assembly for Wales to consider and report on issues affecting children and young people in Wales.

In particular, the Committee may examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Welsh Government and associated public bodies and consider reports of the Children's Commissioner for Wales.

Often adults do not take the views of children and young people seriously. As politicians, we have a responsibility to encourage children and young people to voice their opinions and to listen to them. The Children and Young People Committee was established to help do that.

Powers

The Committee was established on 16 October 2007 when a motion to establish it was agreed in plenary. It will exist for the whole of the Third Assembly. Its powers are set out in the National Assembly for Wales' Standing Orders (SOs), particularly SO 21. These are available at www.assemblywales.org.

Current Committee Membership



Helen Mary Jones
(Chair)
Llanelli
Plaid Cymru



Eleanor Burnham
North Wales
Welsh Liberal Democrat



Sandy Mewies
Delyn
Labour



Jonathan Morgan
Cardiff North
Welsh Conservative Party



Joyce Watson
Mid and West Wales
Labour

The following Member was also a member of the Committee during this inquiry:



Lynne Neagle
Torfaen
Labour

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Chair's foreword

Parenting is one of the most difficult, and rewarding jobs there is. In any other job you may do in life, it is reasonable to expect a certain amount of support and training but as parents we are all too often left to find our own way over the various hurdles we meet. For some parents, perhaps those who do not have family or friends close by or those that have additional issues to deal with too, a little help and support at the right time can make a huge difference.

As Chair of the Children and Young People Committee and a parent myself, I welcomed the Welsh Government's Parenting Action Plan which was published in 2005 and set out the government's support for parents. In May 2009, the Committee published its first report on parenting in Wales and the delivery of the Parenting Action Plan. That report concluded that while some of the 10 points in the action plan had been implemented, the progress against others was patchy or non-existent. As we come to the end of the third Assembly, the Committee decided to follow up progress made since that first report and examine if the Welsh Government's support for parents was sufficient to ensure the best outcomes for all children in Wales.

This report highlights some good practice, and some areas that are still in need of further work. The Committee looks forward to receiving the Welsh Government's response to the 10 recommendations made in this report, and calls on the Welsh Government and its delivery partners to do all they can to prioritise support for parents in Wales and promote positive, non-violent parenting during the current economic difficulties and beyond.

The Committee extends its thanks to all witnesses who gave evidence to this follow-up inquiry. We are, as always, grateful to them for sharing their time and expertise so generously with us.

Helen Mary Jones AM
Chair, Children and Young People Committee

The Committee's Recommendations

The Committee's recommendations to the Welsh Government are listed below, in the order that they appear in this Report. Please refer to the relevant pages of the report to see the supporting evidence and conclusions:

Recommendation 1. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government supports local authorities to create political parenting champions, providing guidance and training where needed. (Page 11)

Recommendation 2. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government ensures its Families First initiative is not unintentionally perpetuating the myth that only poor parents have problems with parenting and that all parents from other demographics can be left to raise their children without the need for support or intervention. (Page 13)

Recommendation 3. The Committee recommends that the national project on information sharing prioritises resolving the concerns regarding informed consent in order to secure the commitment of all partners to share information across organisational boundaries. The Committee further recommends that the Welsh Government provides an update to the Assembly on the progress made in implementing the national project on information sharing in April 2012 (Page 16)

Recommendation 4. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government ensures the multi-agency stakeholder forum to publish progress reports on its work to track the commitment and actions of organisations to share information. The Welsh Government should also inform the National Assembly in April 2012, of its progress in delivering a business case for an IT system that allows information to be shared between agencies. (Page 17)

Recommendation 5. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government works with the Incredible Years Wales Centre to develop a standardised set of measures to evaluate the success of parenting programmes across Wales. Such measures should be used to identify best practice and set out basic requirements for outcomes of spend in this area. Once the outcomes are agreed, future funding should be dependent on such outcomes being met. (Page 18)

Recommendation 6. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government includes in future guidance on parenting support the requirement for staff to include the engagement of fathers as part of their core business. (Page 21)

Recommendation 7. The Committee recommends that measures to monitor the effectiveness of parenting support for families affected by disability are included in the set of standardised measures used to identify good practice, as set out in Recommendation 3 of this report. (Page 22)

Recommendation 8. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government includes in future guidance the requirement that parenting support should be offered to grandparents who take on a substantial or main caring role for their grandchildren, and tailored to their needs. (Page 22)

Recommendation 9. The Committee recommends that universally available parenting support, delivered by appropriately trained staff, is recognised as a vital service to families who may otherwise be escalated up the tiers of need. Early intervention and support can reduce the need for costly support further up the tiers and, if accessible to all parents, will reduce stigma and go some way to creating an all Wales ethos of support. Future guidance issued by the Welsh Government should include a clear expectation that early intervention is provided at the earliest opportunity to families in danger of escalating up the tiers of need. (Page 25)

Recommendation 10. The Committee recommends that Children and Young People's Partnerships ensure that all professionals who come into contact with families are made aware of the availability of parenting support, and understand the benefits of positive parenting and a child's right to protection from all forms of violent discipline. (Page 27)

Background

1. In December 2005, the Welsh Government published its Parenting Strategy and Parenting Action Plan. The three year plan ended in March 2008.

2. In May 2009, the Children and Young People Committee published its report 'Parenting in Wales and the Parenting Action Plan.' The report examined the delivery of the plan and the need for further support for parenting in Wales. The report made eleven recommendations which were all accepted, either fully or in principle by the Welsh Government.

3. At the time of the Committee's first report on parenting in May 2009, there were still actions outstanding from the Parenting Action Plan. Because of this, and proposed changes to the way parenting support will be delivered in Wales, the Committee launched a follow up review of parenting in Wales and the Parenting Action Plan. In August 2010, the Children and Young People Committee called for evidence for its follow up inquiry. Three formal evidence sessions were held between October and November 2010.

Parenting as a Strategic Priority

4. In its 2009 report, the Children and Young People Committee noted that ‘parenting is one of the most demanding but rewarding of all jobs. The impact it has on each child is profound and lasts a lifetime.’¹ The Welsh Government’s Parenting Strategy, published in December 2005, recognised that parenting is not a job done in isolation. Children and young people are a part of the wider community and it should be applauded that the Welsh Government set out in 2005 to create the support that parents need when nurturing the next generation.

5. Children and young people who feel supported as they develop and become active citizens in adulthood will benefit the whole of society. Because of this, it is only reasonable that we as a society should support parents in their task.

6. Alongside its Parenting Strategy, the Welsh Government published the Parenting Action Plan, a three year plan due to finish in March 2008. However, no further parenting strategies or action plans have been published by the Welsh Government to date. The Deputy Minister for Children told the Committee that the Welsh Government did not need a successor Action Plan because:

‘we have built further on the foundations of the Action Plan and the Committee report and have developed a new and far broader approach to family support, as underlined by the Families First initiative’²

7. The Deputy Minister for Children set out his vision for the outcomes of Families First, the Welsh Government’s new support programme for parents to the Committee. He said:

‘The idea of Families First is that, for the first time as far as I am aware, anywhere in Europe, we will attempt to construct a completely holistic support network around each individual family. We will prioritise those families whose children fall within the poverty statistics, but we will also move outwards from there towards families who may have higher end needs

¹ Children and Young People Committee, ‘Parenting in Wales and the delivery of the Parenting Action Plan’ National Assembly for Wales: May 2009

² CYP(3)-13-10 : Paper 1

and those with less needs too. The ambition would be to create a universal family support service that sees children and their parents in the context of a family.’³

8. The new support programme will ‘build on the more successful interventions that have been constructed across Wales.’⁴

Parenting Champion

9. In its 2009 report, the Committee recommended that a Parenting Champion be appointed by the Welsh Government. Despite initially accepting the recommendation, the Deputy Minister has since told the Committee that the Welsh Government will not act on that recommendation. The Deputy Minister explained that the Families First approach would ‘build on what we already have rather than construct a new structure, if you like, around a parenting champion.’⁵

10. Children in Wales argued that the appointment of a parenting Champion would ‘act as a focus and more’.⁶ They cited an example of support offered to a wide range of families with teenagers, who were beyond the reach of health visitors and the support they offered. Children in Wales felt that those families with older children would have benefited from a parenting Champion who would ‘fill that gap, who families could identify with, and who they would feel was speaking on their behalf.’⁷

11. Committee Member Joyce Watson AM suggested to the Wales Local Government Association (WLGA) that a political champion in each of the 22 local authorities could act to ensure that good parenting is taken seriously, monitored and possibly funded by local authorities both now and in the future. A locally nominated parenting champion should not dilute the leadership taken by Children and Young People Partnerships, or local schools, but should instead act as a champion for knowledge and monitoring of parenting support amongst peers in local authorities.

³ ROP, 12 October 2010, paragraph 7

⁴ ROP, 12 October 2010, paragraph 10

⁵ ROP, 12 October 2010, paragraph 14

⁶ ROP, 12 October 2010, paragraph 101

⁷ Ibid

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government supports local authorities to create political parenting champions, providing guidance and training where needed.

Joint working

12. The Deputy Minister felt that for those delivering parenting support,

‘the imperative now is that they must not duplicate; they must work entirely together, they must deliver together and build themselves around the family. Apart from anything else, speaking in budgetary terms, it will be the only way in which we can construct anything sensible and deliver.’⁸

13. The Committee has reported previously on children’s budgeting as a way of monitoring the outcomes of spending on children and young people, and identifying duplication of funding for given outcomes. Delivering outcomes with limited resources will be paramount in the minds of both national and local governments in the coming years when budgets are much reduced. The Committee welcomes the Deputy Minister’s recognition that duplication is neither sensible nor cost effective, and awaits further developments on the implementation of children’s budgeting with interest.

Strategic coordination of parenting support

14. Tony Ivens, Fatherhood Development Officer, Children in Wales, told the Committee that a new Parenting Strategy would enhance the purpose of Families First. When asked if the Welsh Government should publish a new parenting strategy for Wales, he responded:

‘I think the answer ... is an unequivocal ‘yes’. I think that it would support the notion that Families First is about... how the whole thing is integrated, how all the different strands are pulled together, how we capture best practice, and how we avoid independent local authorities going their own way and ploughing their own furrow with this work. We feel that a good parenting strategy would overcome those difficulties.’⁹

⁸ ROP, 12 October 2010, paragraph 37

⁹ ROP, 12 October 2010, paragraph 107

15. John Sayce, Assistant Director of Barnardo's Cymru also felt that the Parenting Strategy and Parenting Action Plan was positive:

'One of the useful things when we had the parenting action plan was that we were meeting regularly. We would have six-monthly reviews of where we were getting to. I would say that the first parenting action plan was quite modest, but it was a good start. It tended to focus people's minds...'¹⁰

16. Although witnesses told the Committee that a new parenting strategy was necessary to 'integrate' the different strands, policies and practices together, the Deputy Minister made it clear that the Families First approach had gone beyond the parenting strategy.

17. However, the Deputy Minister also told the Committee that the coordinated approach that the previous parenting strategy had provided would be taken up by a Families Working Group. He told the Committee that:

'A broadly-constituted Families Working Group, reporting to the Child Poverty Programme Board, is currently being established at official level to promote further coordination of support for families across WAG departments.'¹¹

18. Martin Swain, Head of Children and Families Programmes Branch, Welsh Assembly Government, told the Committee that the aim of the group is to 'get an interface between the departments and our delivery partners',¹² but the Assistant Director of Barnardo's Cymru was 'not aware of the work of that group'¹³ in November 2010. This apparent disconnect between the Welsh Government and the voluntary sector must be addressed in order to drive forward the strategic direction of parenting support in Wales.

Reporting structure

19. In order for all families to be able to access parenting support without stigma, it is important to recognise that poverty does not equate to bad parenting. Barnardo's Cymru told us that;

¹⁰ ROP, 2 November 2010, paragraph 19

¹¹ CYP(3)-13-10 : Paper 1

¹² ROP, 12 October 2010, paragraph 30

¹³ ROP, 2 November 2010, paragraph 19

‘The child poverty strategy and the concentration on parents as a route out of poverty are to be welcomed, because many of the parents with the poorest incomes also have the poorest outcomes for their children. However, we know that it is not income based.’¹⁴

20. However, the Families Working Group reports to the Child Poverty Programme Board, creating a clear connection between parenting support and poverty. Stigma is discussed in more detail later in this report, but the Committee is concerned that while the main coordination role for parenting support sits so clearly under the child poverty programme, creating a stigma that will discourage parents in other demographics from seeking support.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government ensures its Families First initiative is not unintentionally perpetuating the myth that only poor parents have problems with parenting and that all parents from other demographics can be left to raise their children without the need for support or intervention.

¹⁴ ROP, 2 November 2010, paragraph 67

Families First

21. The Committee welcomes the Deputy Minister's attempt to;

'construct a completely holistic support network around each family'¹⁵ that will seek to ensure that 'the heavy lifting is done by public agencies or professionals in the field, and that we are not expecting families to do the heavy lifting; in other words, the burden of complexity is taken by the professional and not by the family.'¹⁶

22. The success of this approach depends on all partners working in a joined up way and breaking down some 'longstanding silo mentalities'.¹⁷ The Deputy Minister told the Committee that Flying Start had started that process and two local authorities are acting as pioneers, trying to 'construct that completely integrated support network'¹⁸ that is at the heart of this approach.

Information sharing

23. Information sharing is central to the concept of a team around the family and joined up working. The Deputy Minister told the Committee that 'Families First will not work without information sharing'.¹⁹ However, there are significant barriers to successful information sharing that need to be overcome.

24. Barnardo's Cymru described information sharing as 'a huge and continuing problem'.²⁰ Families are asked to fill in and sign multiple forms to allow professionals to share information, which is inefficient at best and can cause real difficulties for those families with complex needs. But the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) told the Committee that parents and carers should continue to sign multiple consent forms because of the issue of;

'informed consent. Ideally we would like the most efficient and streamlined process possible for parents and carers to sign their consent. However, things can only be done if consent is

¹⁵ ROP, 12 October 2010, paragraph 7

¹⁶ ROP, 12 October 2010, paragraph 37

¹⁷ ROP, 12 October 2010, paragraph 21

¹⁸ ROP, 12 October 2010, paragraph 12

¹⁹ ROP, 12 October 2010, paragraph 43

²⁰ ROP, 2 November 2010, paragraph 23

given in each instance in an informed way. There is a trade-off between the danger of confusion or information overload against the advantages of a streamlined and efficient process of consent.²¹

25. However, Tania Hayward, Parenting Co-ordinator for Blaenau Gwent Local Authority, told the Committee that information sharing with informed consent was possible. She said;

‘We get quite a lot of resistance from professional agencies, which is sometimes to the detriment of the families...The CAF [Common Assessment Framework] and the team-around-the-child model have now been implemented and the family sign one consent form, consenting to the sharing of historic and current information. The process of sitting as a multi-agency panel, which includes the police and social services, is explained to them. Therefore, they are quite aware of the situation: they give their consent once and fill out one assessment. When families work with lots of different agencies, they fill out lots of different assessments. If they have complex needs, it is particularly difficult for them to have to relive it, whereas the beauty of the team-around-the-child model is that there is one assessment, one consent and one-team-around-the-child is implemented, so that all the agencies are working together.’²²

26. Shelly Davies, Partnership Manager for Powys local authority confirmed that information sharing took place in Powys too, although she added that;

‘we still get the odd challenging occasion. There are still issues around training for staff who have historically worked in a certain way, and it is a matter of overcoming barriers for individual members of staff. Information technology systems are a big barrier that we have not solved, as regards sharing our electronic information with others. The protocols and systems are there, but barriers exist with regard to IT and the odd individual who needs some extra training.’²³

²¹ ROP, 16 November 2010, paragraph 135

²² ROP, 16 November 2010, paragraph 138

²³ ROP, 16 November 2010, paragraph 151

27. The problems encountered when trying to share information between agencies has been reported on by the Committee in the past. The Committee report on arrangements for the placement of children into care, published in May 2010, identified systemic and attitudinal barriers to information sharing and the Committee is disappointed that similar problems persist.

28. The Head of Children and Families Programme Branch of the Welsh Government, Martin Swain, told the Committee that 'in all our work so far, everything comes back to the fact that, unless you share information across organisational boundaries, this will not work...We are running a national project on information sharing or the sharing of personal information'.²⁴

The Committee recommends that the national project on information sharing prioritises resolving the concerns regarding informed consent in order to secure the commitment of all partners to share information across organisational boundaries. The Committee further recommends that the Welsh Government provides an update to the Assembly on the progress made in implementing the national project on information sharing in April 2012.

29. The Deputy Minister recognised that IT systems need to be in place that will allow information to be shared, and that individuals need to be committed to the new approach. He told the Committee that;

'We have given ourselves a deadline of, I think, April 2012 to get a business case together to make sure that we have the proper IT structure in place to make this deliverable everywhere. There is a multi-agency national stakeholder forum and, apart from anything else, at the senior level, that is trying to track the commitment to make sure that these sorts of things happen. There are huge issues, as some organisations, particularly the larger ones like the NHS, are used to doing things the way they have always done them, as well as to do with how they interact with other teams.'²⁵

²⁴ ROP, 12 October 2010, paragraph 42

²⁵ ROP, 12 October 2010, paragraph 41

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government ensures the multi-agency stakeholder forum to publish progress reports on its work to track the commitment and actions of organisations to share information. The Welsh Government should also inform the National Assembly in April 2012, of its progress in delivering a business case for an IT system that allows information to be shared between agencies.

Sharing of best practice

30. Children in Wales shared their concerns with the Committee that;

‘there are some very good pieces of work, and it is important that we say that, but there are often local pieces of work that are not shared, or if they are shared they are shared in a very ad-hock way so that people do not get the opportunity to learn from what is often very good.’²⁶

31. The Deputy Minister acknowledged the challenge that exists in capturing and sharing best practice. He told the Committee;

‘In my travels up and down Wales, I have found that one thing is very clear: there is somewhere, in some part of Wales, somebody who has solved almost any problem. For all the multiple problems faced in building an integrated, holistic, support network around the family, there is a part of Wales somewhere where someone has cracked a part of it. The challenge is to make sure that we bring that together.’²⁷

32. There is more work to be done to satisfy all partners that best practice is being captured systematically, but in order to successfully share best practice it is necessary first to identify it. Witnesses from Barnardo’s Cymru, Incredible Years and Children in Wales argued for standardised measures of success to be applied to all parenting programmes to allow for meaningful comparisons of their success. Barnardo’s Cymru explained that;

‘All programmes should use standardised measures. So, if you are working on children’s behaviour, you should use such and such a measure, so that we can measure across and say, ‘why

²⁶ ROP, 12 October 2010, paragraph 97

²⁷ ROP, 12 October 2010, paragraph 11

is it that in Flintshire they can get a much bigger effect than the programme being delivered in Cardiff?’ So, if you are working on parental self-esteem, you would use this one common outcome. You can use as many measures as you like, but we would say that this or that would be the measure to use to do cross-comparisons. That would be very cheap; I cannot see any cost at all...We do it in education; we call them GCSE’s, so that we can compare the results for Denbigh with those for Pembrokeshire.’²⁸

33. The Incredible Years programme has built up a body of evidence relating to the effectiveness of the programme. The rigorous approach taken by Incredible Years to evaluate its parenting programme has allowed it to be very clear about what it feels does and does not work. A mentor is then tasked with monitoring and evaluating delivery of the programme to ensure that the programme is delivered in a consistent and effective way. Dr Bywater is the Deputy Director of the Incredible Years Wales Centre. She told the Committee that;

‘there should be a standard set [of measures] used for parental mental health, child behaviour and parenting competencies or strategies. It is very difficult when you are doing systematic reviews to draw all the data together and carry out the meta-analyses when people have used different measures and have not all come up with the same method.’²⁹

34. The Committee feels that use of a standardised set of measures to identify best practice and allow meaningful comparisons between programmes would be a positive step towards effective sharing of best practice.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government works with the Incredible Years Wales Centre to develop a standardised set of measures to evaluate the success of parenting programmes across Wales. Such measures should be used to identify best practice and set out basic requirements for outcomes of spend in this area. Once the outcomes are agreed, future funding should be dependent on such outcomes being met.

²⁸ ROP, 2 November 2010, paragraph 76

²⁹ ROP, 2 November 2010, paragraph 111

Support for families with differing needs

Support for fathers

35. The Deputy Minister told the Committee that the team around the family approach that Families First advocates should be flexible enough to create a 'universal family support service that sees children and their families in the context of a family.'³⁰

36. Such a holistic approach should be able to recognise the need for support for all members of the family, but the Committee was concerned that parenting programmes might be unintentionally excluding fathers. Incredible Years Wales told the Committee that 'most of the studies that we have carried out have been with mothers, because they are the primary care takers, but fathers are always invited to the groups.'³¹

37. Barnardo's Cymru noted that;

'I think that it would be the case for all organisations – not just speaking on behalf of Barnardo's, but having heard what Action for Children and other organisations say – that we are still focused on Mothers predominantly.'³²

38. It could be argued that as long as parenting support is targeted at mothers who, it is assumed, will be the 'primary care takers', that the status quo will remain and fathers will continue to be for the most part somewhat beyond the reach of parenting support programmes.

39. The Deputy Minister told the Committee that

'the challenge is that there is a single portal for these families to walk through, and the complicated professional relationships that are working in an area to deliver those more specialist interventions are there but they are worrying about the complexity, and this is all going on inside the box.'³³

³⁰ ROP, 12 October 2010, paragraph 7

³¹ ROP, 2 November 2010, paragraph 103

³² ROP, 2 November 2010, paragraph 60

³³ ROP, 12 October 2010, paragraph 50

40. However, the Committee feels that the first challenge is ensure that the single portal is accessible to all parents, including fathers, who require support.

41. Tony Ivens of Children in Wales gave the Committee stark figures regarding parenting support for fathers;

‘Here in Cardiff, recent research for Flying Start revealed that only around 5% of their service users were fathers. This problem is further exacerbated by the occupational segregation which currently exists within the workforce. In excess of 95% of staff delivering parenting support are female.

‘All too often the work is seen as somehow separate, projects will appoint a specific Dad’s worker rather than seeing the work as part of their core business in terms of supporting parents.’³⁴

42. The Committee feels that if parenting programmes are to be successful, that both parents should be encouraged to take part. In 2008, the Welsh Government produced guidance for including fathers in early years services and ‘these have acted as a powerful awareness raiser for staff’,³⁵ but there is clearly more work to be done to ensure that fathers make up significantly more than 5% of service users in the future.

43. Bridget Roberts, Child Psychologist with Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board and speaking on behalf of Incredible Years, told the Committee that;

‘If both partners attend the programme, there is at least a consistent approach and the children are receiving the same kind of principles at home, so the programme is more likely to be successful. There is, incidentally, an interesting programme in Blaenau Ffestiniog where a male leader delivers the programme through a kayaking club for fathers and their children, and he incorporates the Incredible Years principles into the kayaking club. That is successful.’³⁶

³⁴ CYP(3)-01-11 – Paper 4

³⁵ CYP(3)-01-11 – Paper 4

³⁶ ROP, 2 November 2010, paragraph 108

44. The Committee felt that this innovative approach was interesting and would like to see such programmes properly evaluated and best practice shared.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government includes in future guidance on parenting support the requirement for staff to include the engagement of fathers as part of their core business.

Support for families with disabled children or parents

45. The Committee considers it vital that families with disabled parents or children are supported in the most appropriate way for them. The Deputy Minister for Children told the Committee that following discussions with the Minister for social Justice and Local Government and the Deputy Minister for Social Services;

‘The three of us as Ministers are very concerned that what we have is a system that certainly introduces no barriers to access to support, but is also appropriate to the needs of each particular family.

‘The Challenge is that there is a single portal for these families to walk through, and the complicated professional relationships that are working in an area to deliver those more specialised interventions are there but they are worrying about the complexity, and this is all going on inside the box.’³⁷

46. The Committee welcomes the ‘team around the family’ approach, but as noted by the Chair of the Committee, Helen Mary Jones AM;

‘the Committee would be particularly anxious...that we do not lose sight of parenting support for parents with disabled children. We heard that most conventional programmes were not really suitable for them and that their issues, for example, might be more about letting go and allowing their child to be independent as they reach teenage years, whereas for other parents it might be about how you curb a child’s desire for

³⁷ ROP, 12 October 2010, paragraphs 17 and 50

independence. We would be very anxious to make sure that that good practice does not get lost.³⁸

47. The Committee recognises that for most parents of children with disabilities, choice is important. The WLGA told the Committee that in Powys;

‘we offer a mixture of groups for parents of children with disabilities, but an awful lot of those parents also access mainstream groups. So, we offer a choice...We find that parents of children with disabilities welcome being able to go to mainstream groups because it starts to normalise some of the things that they are experiencing.’³⁹

48. The Committee has reported previously on the importance of support for families with disabled children or parents.⁴⁰

The Committee recommends that measures to monitor the effectiveness of parenting support for families affected by disability are included in the set of standardised measures used to identify good practice, as set out in Recommendation 3 of this report.

Support for grandparents

49. The Committee has previously been made aware of the difficulties faced by grandparents who care for grandchildren in seeking parenting support.⁴¹

50. Grandparents often provide much needed childcare for their grandchildren, allowing parents to return to work or training. It is quite reasonable therefore that parenting support should be available to them, and tailored to suit their needs.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government includes in future guidance the requirement that parenting support should be available to grandparents who take on a substantial or main caring role for their grandchildren, and tailored to their needs.

³⁸ ROP, 12 October 2010, paragraph 53

³⁹ ROP, 16 November 2010, paragraph 118

⁴⁰ Children and Young People Committee report, ‘The provision of safe places to play and hang out’, National Assembly for Wales, November 2010

⁴¹ CYP(3) PAP18 – NSPCC, part 6.0

Support for all parents

A Welsh ethos of support

51. The Deputy Minister told the Committee that ‘a shared Welsh ethos of positive parenting is central’.⁴² He went on to describe the intended purpose of Families First;

‘The whole intention of Families First is that there will be no gaps so that, whatever it is that is preventing a family from moving forward, that is holding them back, we deliver to that family the appropriate form of support without stigma and that people in Wales would get used to the idea that this is the way we treat families in Wales, that this is the way things are done in Welsh communities and that it is just part of the normal way in which we support the raising of our children.’⁴³

52. The Committee welcomes this commitment. In its first report on parenting, published in May 2009, the Committee noted that ‘parenting is not given as high a priority as it deserves in UK society. As a result, local and central government’s funding of support programmes for parents may be influenced by a culturally low prioritisation of parenting in the UK.’⁴⁴ The Deputy Minister’s vision that appropriate support should be delivered without stigma or gaps to families in Wales could result in the wider recognition that parenting is a priority in Wales.

Stigma

53. The Deputy Minister told the Committee that to avoid stigma for parenting support, there should be ‘an acceptance that it is no more unusual to get support with parenting than it would be to get a visit from the health visitor.’⁴⁵

54. John Sayce, Assistant Director of Barnardo’s Cymru, told the Committee that in order to provide non-stigmatised parenting support, it was necessary to provide a universal service. Furthermore, he

⁴² ROP, 12 October 2010, paragraph 70

⁴³ ROP, 12 October 2010, paragraph 23

⁴⁴ Children and Young People Committee, ‘Parenting in Wales and the Parenting Action Plan’, National Assembly for Wales, May 2009

⁴⁵ ROP, 12 October 2010, paragraph 60

suggested that offering a universal service ‘in a non-stigmatising manner, before they reach 10 or 11, is crucial.’⁴⁶

55. Tania Hayward, Parenting Co-ordinator for Blaenau Gwent, also pointed out to the Committee that the names given to parenting programmes can reduce stigma. She reported that in Blaenau Gwent, parenting programmes are not advertised;

‘as ‘parenting’ programmes. We mention things like ‘the Incredible Years programme’, which we talked about earlier, and programmes such as ‘Getting on with your child’ and ‘Less shouting – more co-operation’, and, in the run up to Christmas, we will do a Christmas stress busting programme.’⁴⁷

56. The Committee welcomes the simple and inexpensive move to name parenting programmes in a less stigmatising way, but reiterates concerns set out earlier in this report that by aligning Families First with the Child Poverty Programme Board, the Welsh Government runs the risk of stigmatising parents who are not living in poverty.

Funding for early intervention

57. Shelly Davies the Partnership Manager for the Children and Young People Partnership, Powys, told the Committee that funding for universal services should not be seen as ‘easy pickings’, and that;

‘It is important to recognise that, as we try to push families down the tiers to make sure that we are meeting their needs at the lowest level possible, we need a universal infrastructure to be able to do it. Otherwise, we will end up with very targeted and stigmatised services that some parents cannot access. To support that early intervention and prevention, we must have tier 1 and tier 2 investment and infrastructure.’⁴⁸

58. The cost of delivering parental support must include the cost of staff training. Incredible Years told the Committee that it is important to deliver an ‘evidence based’ parenting programme. Bridget Roberts, Child Psychologist at Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, told the Committee that;

⁴⁶ ROP, 12 November 2010, paragraph 83

⁴⁷ ROP, 16 November 2010, paragraph 155

⁴⁸ ROP, 16 November 2010, paragraph 130

‘We need to make sure that we are delivering Incredible Years and that we are delivering it in the best way possible. The three-day training is just the start of it. There needs to be a lot of supervision and consultation that follows it to make sure that we are delivering it in the best way that we can.’⁴⁹

59. However, Children in Wales told the Committee that although;

‘It is probably not an exaggeration to say that [the] skills of the facilitator are of more importance than the content of any given course or programme...there is increasing evidence that training budgets are one of the first areas to be cut during the current financial climate.’⁵⁰

60. The Committee understands that national and local governments have to make difficult financial decisions in order to deliver vital services with much reduced budgets. However, training is a vital part of the delivery of parenting support. Any savings to training budgets should be made through collaborative working and innovative delivery rather than taking the view that suspension of training is an easy way to save money without effecting frontline services.

The Committee recommends that universally available parenting support, delivered by appropriately trained staff, is recognised as a vital service to families who may otherwise be escalated up the tiers of need. Early intervention and support can reduce the need for costly support further up the tiers and, if accessible to all parents, will reduce stigma and go some way to creating an all Wales ethos of support. Future guidance issued by the Welsh Government should include a clear expectation that early intervention is provided at the earliest opportunity to families in danger of escalating up the tiers of need.

⁴⁹ ROP, 2 November 2010, paragraph 140

⁵⁰ CYP(3)-01-11 – Paper 4

Positive parenting

61. The promotion of positive, non-violent discipline should be at the heart of all parenting programmes in Wales. The Welsh Government has recognised the rights of children and young people, as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and has actively supported the promotion of non-violent discipline for some time.

62. The Committee very much welcomes this approach and looks forward to an eventual successful outcome of talks between the Welsh and UK Governments relating to the legal protection of children from violent discipline.

63. If the promotion of non-violent discipline for children is to be successful, it is important to provide parents with alternatives to smacking. The Committee therefore re-iterates the need for universally available parenting programmes that will enable parents to develop the skills they need to discipline their children in a non-violent way.

64. Not all parents will need or want support from a parenting support programme. For some, the ad-hock support of a Health Visitor or other professional will be enough to secure their buy-in to positive parenting. However, in 2008, the 'Children are Unbeatable' campaign told the Committee that;

'Professionals, such as Health Visitors may also promote positive parenting but this is not universally the case. Some professionals may be ambivalent about smacking and therefore not give a consistent or pro-active message to parents about the importance of positive and non-violent approaches to discipline.'⁵¹

65. In 2010, Children in Wales told the Committee that the message is still not being delivered consistently. Tony Ivens of Children in Wales told the Committee;

'I also think that there is a group of what I could perhaps describe as enlightened parents at the top, who buy into this because they believe in it. However, there is a great group of

⁵¹ CYP(3)-PAP-20 - Children are Unbeatable

parents in the middle and they are the parents whom I think we are not getting through to...we need to raise the profile and ensure that that message is getting out there.’⁵²

66. There is a role for all professionals who come into contact with families to promote positive parenting and to signpost families, when necessary, to parenting support. Teachers and GP’s, for example, are likely to come into contact with families when they are lower down the tiers of need and are well placed to identify the need for early support. For such interventions to work, it is vital that parenting support is non-stigmatised and universally available, as discussed elsewhere in this report.

The Committee recommends that Children and Young People’s Partnerships ensure that all professionals who come into contact with families are made aware of the availability of parenting support, and understand the benefits of positive parenting and a child’s right to protection from all forms of violent discipline.

⁵² ROP, 12 October 2010, paragraph 86

Witnesses

The following witnesses provided oral evidence to the Committee on the dates noted below. Transcripts of all oral evidence sessions can be viewed in full at <http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-committees/bus-committees-other-committees/bus-committees-third-cyp-home.htm>

12 October 2010

Huw Lewis AM	Deputy Minister for Children, Welsh Assembly Government
Huw Maguire	Head of Family Support Branch, Welsh Assembly Government
Martin Swain	Head of Children and Families Programmes Branch, Welsh Assembly Government
Lynne Hill	Policy Director, Children in Wales
Tony Ivans	Fatherhood Development Officer, Children in Wales

2 November 2010

Dr Tracey Bywater	Deputy Director, Incredible Years Wales Centre
Bridget Roberts	Child Psychologist, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board
John Sayce	Assistant Director, Barnardo's Cymru

16 November 2010

Dr Chris Llewelyn	Director of Lifelong Learning, Leisure and Information, Welsh Local Government Association
Shelly Davies	Partnership Manager, Children and Young People Partnership, Powys
Tania Hayward	Parenting Co-ordinator, Blaenau Gwent, representing the Children and Young People Partnership

List of written evidence

The following people and organisations provided written evidence to the Committee. All written evidence can be viewed in full at

http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-committees/bus-committees-other-committees/bus-committees-third-cyp-home/bus-committees-third-cyp-inquiry/cyp_3__responses_received_.htm

<i>Name</i>	<i>Organisation</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Judy Hutchings, Professor of Clinical Psychology Director, Incredible Years Wales Centre	Incredible Years Wales Centre	PAP 01 PAP 1a PAP 2 AWE 01
Dr Chris Llewelyn, WLGA Director of Lifelong Learning, Leisure and Information	Welsh Local Government Association	PAP 03 AWE 05
Tim Ruscoe Development Officer, Assembly Liaison and Participation	Barnardo's Cymru	PAP 04
Gail Bennett Parenting Strategy Coordinator	Flintshire Children and Young People Partnership	PAP 05
Paul Apreda, National Development Manager	Families Need Fathers (FNF) Cymru	PAP 06
Lucy Akhtar Development Officer (Parenting)	Children in Wales	PAP 07 AWE 03
Huw Lewis AM, Deputy Minister for Children	Welsh Government	PAP 08 AWE 04
Edwina Hart, Minister for Health and Social Services	Welsh Government	AWE 02