

**P-05-1161 Routine collection and publication of data of how many babies/children return to their care experienced parents care at the end of a Parent and Child Placement, Correspondence – Children’s Commissioner for Wales to the Chair, 03.09.21**

Comisiynydd  
Plant Cymru  
  
Children’s  
Commissioner  
for Wales

Jack Sargeant MS, Chair  
of the Senedd Petitions  
Committee

**By email only**

3rd September 2021

Dear Chair,

Thank you for your request, on behalf of the Committee, for my views on the petition to routinely collect data on how many babies/children return to their care-experienced parents’ care at the end of a Parent and Child Placement. My Office has previously been contacted by the petitioner and one of my Policy Officers has met with her to discuss the petition and the intentions behind it.

Parent and baby placements are used to assess parenting skills and are also designed to support (predominantly) mothers who are new parents. Placements can be made subject to Section 38(6) of the Children Act 1989, as residential assessments in the course of care proceedings. The progress of such placements and assessments is therefore overseen by the court and the parties to the proceedings, including CAFCASS Cymru and the child’s guardian on behalf of the child. Alternatively placements can be entered voluntarily, without the need to issue court proceedings. In such cases, the local authority remains responsible for oversight of the progress of the placement.

It is for local authorities to monitor the success and operation of such placements as the commissioning and funding organisation, and to work through any shared challenges to make the placements as effective as possible. I am not aware of any independent oversight of such placements collectively, other than individual monitoring by judges in each case that is before the courts.

There are national minimum standards for residential family centres of this nature to uphold, and the court should only be ordering such assessments and placements where these are deemed to be necessary, and at suitable and



Tŷ Llewellyn/Llewellyn House  
Parc Busnes Glan yr Harbwr/ Harbourside  
Business Park  
Heol yr Harbwr/Harbourside Road  
Port Talbot SA13 1SB  
01792 765600

post@comisiynyddplant.cymru  
post@childrenscommissioner.wales

**comisiynyddplant.cymru**  
**childrenscommissioner.wales**

approved settings. Some registered foster carers also accommodate parent and baby placements.

Where the parent is also care experienced, particularly where they are under 18 and remain subject to a care order themselves, the local authority has to manage its dual responsibilities to the child as the subject of the case but also to the parent for whom they share parental responsibility.

I am aware that at times these placements can result in parents being separated from their often limited support networks, with a lack of available placements resulting in parents and their children being placed a significant distance from their home communities. Parents can become caught between their own support needs and needing to prove their parenting skills in unfamiliar surroundings, often whilst under intensive scrutiny or assessment.

In research by the CASCADE research centre, the support challenge faced by care-experienced parents has been explored in broader terms.<sup>1</sup> Often, care-experienced parents have limited support networks, are under greater scrutiny as new parents, and face a challenge of asking Local Authority Social Services for support due to fears this could be construed by those undertaking the assessment as a poor reflection on their ability to parent. This is in contrast to non-care experienced parents, who are more likely to have a stronger support network around them. One clear example is that young parents who are not care-experienced are more likely to be living with family and can rely on this type of support, whereas care-experienced parents are unlikely to be living with a family member. My Office has previously raised the need for improved support and accommodation options for all care leavers.<sup>2</sup>

The ultimate aim of parent and baby placements should be to support families to remain safely together wherever this is possible, and to test this out in a safe environment for both the parent and the baby. Such placements could therefore be one important tool in supporting local authorities to achieve their stated policy intentions to safely reduce the numbers of children in the care system along with enhanced, preventative community support. However, as raised by the CASCADE research, a lack of data and understanding of the rates of intervention and outcomes for parents and their children, is contributing to underdeveloped responses to this important area of service provision.

It should not automatically be assumed that a care-experienced parent will require additional scrutiny and social services involvement from the outset. However, often care-experienced young people who become parents are overrepresented in care and child protection proceedings. Research by

---

<sup>1</sup> [NimbusRomNo9L-Regu \(cardiff.ac.uk\)](https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/nimbusromno9l-regu)

<sup>2</sup> [Hidden Ambitions - Children's Commissioner for Wales \(childcomwales.org.uk\)](https://www.childcomwales.org.uk/hidden-ambitions)



CASCADE<sup>3</sup> and the Nuffield Trust<sup>4</sup> have helped develop an understanding of the complex needs of care-experienced parents, and have highlighted that often these needs result in parents who are care-experienced being more likely than other parents to be involved in statutory interventions that could result in their children being removed from their care. This research also demonstrates the breadth of support that parents may require, and suggests that current offerings of support are at times falling short in effectively helping parents and preventing the need for children to be taken in to care.

In regards to the mental health concerns of parents raised in the petition, the 'Born into Care' Research followed the experiences of 1,000 mothers in Wales<sup>5</sup>, and found that over half of pregnant women at risk of care proceedings had reported a mental health condition and 77% had a mental-health related GP or hospital contact or admission prior to their child's birth. It has also helped to dispel myths that mothers are routinely concealing pregnancies, as the study found that 63% of mothers had booked an initial assessment by the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy. This helps suggest that timely support could help prevent the need for mothers to enter care proceedings with their children.

Due to the current focus on the need to reduce the numbers of children entering the care system and a Welsh Government's commitment to radically reform Wales' care system, it is important we reflect on all areas of the system to understand the effectiveness of the support and services provided. Mother and baby placements are integral to this, but there is also a need to reflect and enhance other types of support available to all young parents, and to better understand how specifically, services respond to young parents who are care-experienced.

In terms of next steps for the Committee I would recommend that you;

- seek further evidence from young people who have experienced such placements and/or early social services involvement as a result of them being care experienced. I would suggest that you contact Voices from Care, NYAS, TGP Cymru and Children in Wales in the first instance to see if they have members or young people they are working with who'd like to share their experiences.

---

<sup>3</sup><https://orca.cardiff.ac.uk/123919/1/Roberts%2C%20Louise%20When%20young%20people%20in%20and%20leaving%20state%20care%20become%20parents.pdf>

<sup>4</sup><https://www.nuffieldfjo.org.uk/resource/born-into-care-wales>

<sup>5</sup><https://popdatasci.swan.ac.uk/study-highlights-vulnerabilities-of-pregnant-women-living-in-wales/>



- further engage with local authorities to help develop an understanding of the breadth of support available to young parents (including those who are in or are leaving care) to ensure there is consistent access to effective support. This can help to share best practice and to identify gaps in services. This should include alternatives to parent and baby placements and specific support for fathers.

Yours sincerely



Sally Holland  
Comisiynydd Plant Cymru  
Children's Commissioner for Wales