

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and Education Committee

Gwasanaethau i blant sydd wedi bod mewn gofal: archwilio diwygio radical | Services for care experienced children: exploring radical reform

Ymateb gan Matthew Lewis, Ymgynghorydd Therapiwtig a Rheolwr Gwasanaeth Maethu | Evidence from Matthew Lewis, Therapeutic consultant and fostering service Manager

Before care: Safely reducing the number of children in the care system

Please outline a maximum of three top priorities for radical reform of services for safely reducing the number of children in the care system.

Priority 1

Identification of families with transgenerational histories of abusive family relations leading to child protection procedures and removal from care.

Long term practical and emotional support to be provided to these families to maintain levels of in home safety for adults and children.

Priority 2

Recognition that Attachment difficulties and traumatic early years experience creates a form of moderate / severe learning difficulty in the individuals relational capacity to care for others. Evidence suggests that children do not recover from these experiences and require lifelong support, hence the current approach of providing parenting programs and short term interventions etc has limited impact on those families most impacted by histories of abusive family relationships and the cycle of intervention and removal by SSD continues.

Priority 3

Investment in 'long term' attachment and trauma focussed community support alongside practical pastoral support ie managing money, food , warmth, housing for families to maintain in home safety. Re-orientate current short term child protection culture into one the recognises and supports the developmental difficulties of the adults and children due to histories of abuse across the lifetime.

In care: Quality services and support for children in care

Please outline a maximum of three top priorities for radical reform of services for children in care.

Priority 1

Ongoing protection for traumatised children from the birth parents the source of the original trauma whilst in fostering. Ongoing contact with the perpetrators of significant abuse retraumatizes the victim of the abuse and maintains the dysfunctional early years patterns preventing growth and the opportunity for change. The current rights based system is at odds with what we know about the impact of trauma on the victim. Many children suffer with complex PTSD type symptoms due to the actions of the birth parents this creates long term vulnerability which is exacerbated by ongoing contact with family perpetrators. The system currently creates its own Achilles heel in its current approach which ceases to recognise that the perpetrator can have an ongoing significant impact upon the victim post the abuse, because we frame the abuse within the context of family belonging and the rights of birth parents, a difficult subject to tackle but ultimately in my view the unforeseen consequences of the current approach leads to many breakdowns in care and the return of children to still dangerous and dysfunctional birth family systems, which leads to perpetuation of the original cycle and the increasing growth of the problem.

Priority 2

Recognition that children with histories of trauma and attachment require lifelong support due to the impact upon their brain development in early years. The more severe the greater the impact and we now recognise that children do not recover from these experiences and require intensive support. Many children have what can be described as a moderate to severe learning difficulty in their ability to process emotion and develop secure relationships with others and function way below their chronological age - each child should be assessed as to their individual developmental difficulties and plans drawn up accordingly. Looked after children Team should incorporate the approach and services of the Children with Disabilities Teams.

Priority 3

Education should be developed that meets the child at their relative age and stage of development. Many looked after children function far below their chronological age in the way they process their world therefore the current system sets these children up to fail by expecting them to conform to mainstream expectations and environments. This leads to disruption of fostering families and poor educational outcomes. Investment in specialist nurture provision and a rethink of how we meet traumatised children educational needs is essential if we are to improve global outcomes for the group.

After care: On-going support when young people leave care

Please outline a maximum of three top priorities for radical reform of the on-going support provided when young people leave care.

Priority 1

Allow children to remain in care until they are 25. Children are leaving care too young, many children in care function below their chronological age which the current system is based upon, the children have complex

needs and would be better protected by in remaining fostering families or residential units that can care for them across time and see them into adulthood. The current approach exacerbates the problem by leaving children vulnerable and lacking the correct support, this leads to repeating patterns of young people having their children removed or becoming victimised by family or community members and repeating the cycle that led to them being taken into care. We need to abandon chronologically based view of developing services - they do not fit with the stage of development of traumatised and neglected children and adults.

Priority 2

Community support that offers services across a lifetime - practical, relational and pastoral support that works with the care leavers vulnerability and assist them in the knowledge that their emotional and cognitive difficulties will persist over time and offers them a source of safety ongoing. An expansion of a specialised Adult services to work with this group,

Priority 3

Anything else

