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Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

**Y Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb a Chyfiawnder Cymdeithasol | Equality and Social Justice Committee**

Ymateb gan: National Youth Advocacy Service | Evidence from: National Youth Advocacy Service

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## **NYAS Cymru Evidence Submission - Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015: Post-legislative scrutiny**

### **About us**

NYAS Cymru (National Youth Advocacy Service) is a leading children's rights charity providing independent advocacy, support services and legal representation to children and young people across Wales who are subjected to child protection proceedings or are living in local authority care.

We thank the Equality and Social Justice Committee for undertaking an inquiry on post-legislative scrutiny of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act. Our evidence submission has been constructed through a children and young person's lens. We would welcome the issues raised in our submission being considered as part of the Committee's oral evidence sessions.

Children and young people are the future generation of Wales; therefore, it is imperative that all public bodies are responsible and accountable for children and young people having every opportunity to thrive and have a happy, healthy and safe childhood so they can achieve their best outcomes. Through the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act and subsequent wellbeing goals, national indicators and milestones, there are real opportunities to achieve this for children and young people in Wales. Our evidence focuses on key issues impacting children and young people and what actions could be taken to improve the effectiveness of the Act through policy change and reform.

### **Children and young people as the future generation**

Embedding the views, wishes and feelings of children and young people are at the heart of public body and government decision making enriches policy and ensures it reflects the diverse perspectives and experiences of everyone impacted by these decisions. Policy makers must make sure children's voices are embedded at the most senior levels of government, representing their views, holding officials to account, and always asking, "Would this be good enough for my child?". To achieve the national indicators and milestones, and ensure the Act and its objectives are continuing to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of all children and young people in Wales, we would recommend:

- Appointing a Minister for babies, children and young people to put the views, wishes and feelings of children and young people at the heart of Welsh Government.
- Reviewing and expanding the powers of the Children's Commissioner for Wales.
- Fully and directly incorporating the UNCRC into Welsh domestic law and develop a comprehensive children's rights strategy for Wales.

### **Child poverty**

We are concerned that not enough is being done to eradicate child poverty in Wales or address the

interconnection between child poverty and the care system in Wales. Child poverty remains one of the greatest threats to children's rights being fulfilled and there is a distinctive link between child poverty and the number of children entering care in Wales. With Wales having the second highest rates of child poverty of all the devolved nations, it is unsurprising that the rates of children entering care in Wales are also higher compared with those across the UK. Similarly care leavers are at a much higher risk of experiencing poverty and at the point of leaving care, support services are drastically reduced. NYAS Cymru fundamentally believes that care must not be a respite from poverty, nor should children leave care only to enter back into poverty. Until child poverty is completely eradicated in Wales, the Act will not be able to achieve its milestone of reducing the poverty gap between people in Wales with certain key and protected characteristics (which mean they are most likely to be in poverty) and those without those characteristics by 2035. To better work towards this, we would recommend:

- Placing a statutory duty on Welsh Government Ministers to annually publish targets to eradicate child poverty in Wales and monitor the progress of achieving this.
- Devolving the benefits system to Welsh Government to help lift more children, young people and their families out of poverty.
- Increasing the Tax-Free Personal Allowance to help lift young people out of poverty.
- Making all public transport fares free for all children and young people up until the age of 25 in Wales.
- Providing a long-term solution to financially supporting young people transitioning from care by making the Basic Income available for all care leavers across Wales.

## Early intervention services

Early intervention services for children, young people and their families is imperative to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being in Wales. Early intervention is also important for helping to keep families together, wherever is safe to do so and helps to reduce the number of children entering care in Wales. Achieving this requires a shared commitment as well as sustainable long-term investment in preventative, family support and edge of care programmes of support including provision through the Families First programme, parental advocacy and other vital support programs. Making sure all children, young people and their families can benefit from robust, funded and accessible early intervention services as soon as needed is essential to achieving the Act's milestones and well-being goals. While there are some good examples of support already existing across Wales, we believe more could be done to further strengthen the impact of this work through:

- Creating a statutory entitlement of parent advocacy for all parents across Wales who are at risk of entering child protection or are receiving care and support from social services.
- Creating a statutory definition of early intervention and ensure the future of the Sustainable Social Services Third Sector grant by making it a part of core funding to provide a long-term funding commitment to critical third sector led projects and initiatives.
- Continued funding and expansion of the Flying Start Programme.

## Supporting care-experienced children and young people

For care-experienced children and young people, they will often face far greater barriers to accessing opportunities and are more likely to experience inequality, discrimination, structural, systemic and intergenerational disadvantage throughout their lives. It is imperative that these inequalities are recognised and understood at all levels of Government and public bodies, and there are targeted policies in place to both reduce these inequalities and promote equity.

The 'a more equal Wales' wellbeing goal presents a strong opportunity for these barriers facing care-experienced children and young people to be addressed, and to do so, we would recommend:

- Creating more training and work opportunities for care leavers by developing paid internship and apprenticeships schemes across Welsh Government, the voluntary sector and public bodies in Wales, helping to achieve the milestone of 'at least 90% of 16–24-year-olds will be in education, employment, or training by 2050'.
- Continuing to lobby the UK Government to make 'care' a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010 and continue to encourage every local authority in Wales to make care a protected characteristic at local level as part of their corporate parenting commitments, to achieve the 'a more equal Wales' wellbeing goal.
- Undertake a review of the Corporate Parenting Charter by 2028 to understand who has signed up to the pledge, how it has been implemented in practice, whether signing up to the charter should be placed on statutory footing, alongside developing an accountability framework.
- Establish a specialised service to provide all support care-experienced children and young people access to advocacy for any physical, mental or emotional health related issues to help achieve the milestone of 'improving adult and children's mean mental wellbeing and eliminating the gap in adult and children's mean mental wellbeing between the most deprived and least deprived areas in Wales by 2050' and the well-being goal of a 'healthier Wales'.

## Ending intergenerational cycles of care

There is a fundamental and systemic problem in Wales regarding the intergenerational cycle of care. Care-experienced mothers are disproportionately at a higher risk of being subjected to child protection

proceedings or separated from their children, often for no other reason than that they themselves grew up in care. NYAS Cymru's Project Unity service provides intensive wraparound support to care-experienced young mothers or expecting mothers in Wales, with an aim of helping to keep families together wherever possible. The service is currently funded by Welsh Government through the Social Services Sustainability Grant until 2026. Since the service launched in 2020, NYAS Cymru have supported over 500 young women across Wales – in which over 90% of these women were subjected to child protection proceedings.

Making sure all care-experienced mothers can access the right support during and after their pregnancy and ending the disproportionate intergenerational cycle of care and discrimination facing these young women in Wales would help to achieve several of the Act's well-being goal 'a more equal Wales'. For this to happen in practice, we would recommend:

- Developing a statutory active offer of support from Project Unity for all care-experienced young women are pregnant and/or have children in Wales.
- Commissioning an independent inquiry into the disproportionate rate of children born to care experienced young women becoming the subject of local authority child protection proceedings.

For more information, please contact [REDACTED]