



**Title:** **Inquiry into Poverty in Wales**

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## **1. Information and working context of Barnardo's Cymru**

Barnardo's Cymru has been working with children, young people and families in Wales for over 100 years and is one of the largest children's charities working in the country. We currently run 88 diverse services across Wales, working in partnership with 19 of the 22 local authorities, supporting in the region of 8,500 children, young people and families last year. Barnardo's Cymru services in Wales include: care leavers and youth homelessness projects, young carers schemes, specialist fostering and adoption schemes, family centres and family support, parenting support, community development projects, family support for children affected by parental imprisonment, domestic abuse and parental substance misuse, short breaks and inclusive services for disabled children and young people, assessment and treatment for young people who exhibit sexually harmful or concerning behaviour and specialist services for children and young people at risk of, or abused through, child sexual exploitation and young people's substance misuse services.

Every Barnardo's Cymru service is different but each believes that every child and young person deserves the best start in life, no matter who they are, what they have done or what they have been through. We use the knowledge gained from our direct work with children to campaign for better childcare policy and to champion the rights of every child. We believe that with the right help, committed support and a little belief, even the most vulnerable children can turn their lives around.

- **This response may be made public.**
- **This response is on behalf of Barnardo's Cymru.**

## **Inquiry submission: Strand 1: poverty and inequality**

Barnardo's Cymru works with families, children and young people across Wales. This work includes provision of Families First services, provision in Communities First areas and work with specific groups who are particularly vulnerable to poverty such as families with disabled children, young carers whose parents are disabled or have issues such as substance misuse, children affected by parental imprisonment, young parents, care leavers and homeless young people.

### **1. Consideration of how effectively the Tackling Poverty Action Plan, Strategic Equality Plan and other government strategies work together.**

- 1.1.** The current Welsh Government Child Poverty Strategy was published in 2011. The final published version of the Strategy was significantly different from the draft that was widely consulted on in 2010. The consultation draft was accompanied by a Draft Child Poverty Delivery Plan which adopted a child rights approach framed within the 7 Core Aims for children and young people which in turn were related directly to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). However a decision was then made that a Child Poverty Delivery Plan would not be issued and that delivery of the Child Poverty Strategy would be included in the Tackling Poverty Action Plan which after numerous delays was published in June 2012.
- 1.2.** The children's third sector and the Children's Commissioner for Wales voiced concerns at the loss of a clear and strong children's rights framework in the final Child Poverty Strategy (2011) and the decision not to publish a specific Child Poverty Delivery Plan. Further, there was criticism that the integration of action on child poverty into the Tackling Child Poverty Action Plan 2012 had resulted in a clear loss of focus on the child within a child's rights approach.
- 1.3.** In 2013 Welsh Government published 'Building Resilient Communities: taking forward the Tackling Poverty Action Plan' and the Tackling Poverty Action Plan 2012-16 that do have a stronger emphasis on children and young people than the 2012 Tackling Child Poverty Action Plan. However a child right's framework directly related to the UNCRC is absent. This is in contrast to the earlier Child Poverty Strategy of Welsh Government (A Fair Future for Our Children, 2005) and the 2010 consultation drafts of the Child Poverty Strategy and the Child Poverty Delivery Plan.
- 1.4.** Welsh Government have recently delayed publication of a consultation on Revised Child Poverty Strategy in light of Ministerial changes. Officials have engaged positively with the sector in the development of the revised Strategy and there is a stronger focus on children's rights and the UNCRC. However in meeting an objective to align the revised strategy with the Tackling Poverty Action Plan the revised Strategy still does not go as far as earlier strategic documents in presenting child poverty as a child rights issue.
- 1.5.** We have recently submitted evidence to the Environment and Sustainability Committee Inquiry on the Well-being of Future Generations Bill in which we raise concerns about the integration of specific strategic planning duties

towards children into a population wide planning model. The Bill provides that the duty to publish Children and Young People's Plan (under the Children Act 2004) and to produce a Child Poverty Strategy (under the Children and Families Measure 2010) will now be covered under the Bill and may be satisfied by inclusion in local Well-being Plans.

- 1.6.** The introduction of Single Integrated Plans (SIPs) provided for the discharge of duties that were previously discharged through the production of Children and Young People's Plans. Children and Young People's Plans used the framework of the Welsh Government's 7 Core Aims for all children and young people which were in turn directly related to the UNCRC. The majority of local authorities fulfilled the duty to have a Child Poverty Strategy through action on Core Aim 7 within Children and Young People's Plans. The Children's Commissioner for Wales published his Child Poverty Strategy Progress report in October 2013.<sup>1</sup> The Children's Commissioner reported that he had assessed the SIPs published by local authorities in terms of how far they demonstrated a commitment to tackle child poverty. The Children's Commissioner found that the majority of SIPs included a focus on child poverty and actions on reducing the number of children in poverty. However he was also found that a small number of SIPs had a focus on poverty but did not specifically prioritise child poverty. The Children's Commissioner for Wales also reported concerns that only around a third of SIPs included reference to the UNCRC and/or Welsh Government's 7 Core Aims.
- 1.7.** We are concerned about the dilution of a clear strategic and implementation framework which specifically addresses child poverty as a child right's issue. Child poverty is the result of family poverty. However, we share the view of the Children's Commissioner for Wales as set out in his Child Poverty Strategy 2012 that: *'A child poverty approach puts the child at the centre of all policy measures and acknowledges the child as a rights bearer with rights that extend beyond the family. Once framed in a child rights context, based on the UNCRC the distinctiveness of a child poverty approach becomes clear and should drive all policy initiatives to combat child poverty.'*
- 1.8.** The Committee will be aware that children are not protected by virtue of age under the Equality Act 2010 although they are protected where they have a protected characteristic. In this regard then the Strategic Equality Plan and objectives 2012-2016 has limited application to children who do not have protected characteristics. The Strategic Equality Plan includes content on the UNCRC and the duty of due regard contained in the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011. The Strategic Equality Plan also states that *'it is important moving forward that strong links are made between equality, inclusion and human rights with Welsh Government'*. This supports the need for a direct link between tackling child poverty and the UNCRC.
- 1.9.** A person's socio-economic background remains a key factor in determining their life chances and there is a clear link between the risk of socio-economic disadvantage and protected characteristics. The introduction of a socio-economic duty in Wales would contribute significantly to driving forward efforts to reduce the impact of child poverty and to improve equality of outcomes for children and young people in Wales.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.childcom.org.uk/uploads/publications/402.pdf>

## **2. The impacts of poverty, particularly destitution and extreme poverty, on different groups of people.**

- 2.2.** The Welsh Government 'Evaluation of the Welsh Child Poverty Strategy' 2014 evidences that the percentage of children in relative poverty after housing costs (33%) and in-work poverty after working costs (21%) is worse than in the baseline year of 2005. Evidence from the Institute of Fiscal Studies published in 2014<sup>2</sup> suggests that losses from the tax and benefits reforms as a whole will be larger for non-working families, especially among those with children. Non-working lone parents are set to lose £40 per week, non-working couples with children are set to lose £55 per week and single earner couples with children are set to lose £32 per week.
- 2.3.** This suggests that income poverty for families with children is a persistent and growing issue. Members of the Committee will be familiar with evidence on the impact of poverty on children in terms of reduced opportunities for them to realise their rights and enjoy the same outcomes as their peers. There is strong evidence on the relationship between socio-economic disadvantage and gaps in education attainment, poor emotional, mental and physical health, limited opportunities to engage in play and social opportunities related to child development, educational outcomes and health and the impact of environmental conditions such as fuel poverty and poor housing. The Welsh Government 'Evaluation of the Welsh Child Poverty Strategy' 2014 demonstrates that key indicators such as the attainment gap at KS4 are worse now than in 2005.
- 2.4.** Much of the work that Barnardo's Cymu services provide across Wales is directed at improving the well-being of children and young people affected by poverty so that the negative impact of material deprivation on their opportunities to realise their rights and enjoy good outcomes can be mitigated.
- 2.5.** Many of the issues that our Barnardo's Cymu services report in relation to income poverty are well rehearsed in evidence in relation to child poverty. These include for example difficulties coping with school related costs for trips, extra curricular activities and equipment, limited access to play and social activities because of travel and access costs, poor housing conditions, fuel poverty, debt and the impact of not being able to afford travel costs.
- 2.6.** However our services also report a notable trend in increased need in relation to families presenting with food poverty, fuel poverty, inability to afford or to replace essential items (e.g. bed mattresses, washing machines) and children's clothing and school uniform). They are working with families who have been affected by the welfare reforms through the bedroom tax, gaps in benefit following change and the cap on the number of times a family can access the discretionary fund.
- 2.7.** In Cardiff our family support service (which receives Families First funding) delivers support to promote the well-being of children living in areas of

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/7258>

social deprivation and to increase opportunities for better outcomes. Last year the service saw a marked increase in food poverty with more and more families needing support in times of crisis to feed their children. As a result the service applied to Cardiff Food Bank to become authorised distributors of food bank vouchers. Since this time there has been a steady increase in families who access other Barnardo's Cymru services in Cardiff accessing the food bank voucher scheme from the service. The impact of benefit changes and periods during which claims are being processed leaves many of the families with complex needs that we support in cycles of absolute food poverty. The service has also provided essential items for families who cannot afford the basics including bedding, beds, mattresses, school uniforms and sleepwear. One family the service supports was in a position where bed wetting meant that mattresses needed to be replaced but without the means to do this the children were stigmatised in school and this led to a position where a mother and her three children were sharing one bed.

- 2.8.** Barnardo's Cymru are providers of the Merthyr Multiple Intervention Assistance (MIA) (which receives Families First funding) and in 2013-14 poverty was the most common reason for referral into the service. During that period the service accessed grant aid funding to provide direct support to 153 families requiring essential items like school uniform, bedding etc. Families can also access Food Bank Vouchers via the service and 85 families accessed food vouchers in 2013-14. The service is able to evidence improved outcomes in relation to education, parenting, health and well-being, play and leisure and a safe home for a sizable majority of the families supported. Support with food poverty, essential items, accessing benefits, managing housing costs and managing debt are common and growing needs across the families referred into the service.
- 2.9.** Barnardo's Cymru Cabin Bach family support service in Blaenau Ffestiniog reports similar issues among the families it supports however these are further exasperated by the impact of rurality. The towns that the service serves only have more expensive food retail outlets and families do not have access to private vehicles or the cost of public transport to access larger and cheaper super market outlets. There has been an increase in Food Bank use but some families are also unable to access Food Banks because of location and transport costs. Access to the benefits agency and council buildings is also prohibitive in terms of travel costs and families cannot afford internet access or landlines in order to contact these crucial services with many families using our service landline or internet to make essential phone calls of this nature and complete on-line forms etc. Limited gas supply access means that many families are dependent on more expensive forms of fuel which increases fuel poverty yet further and impacts on their ability to keep their homes warm and damp free. The service also notes considerable in-work poverty as a result of seasonal labour demands and low pay in rural areas. The service is working with one family which has four children, including young twins with developmental delay. The children need to access a Ysgol Feithrin to develop their language and interaction skills and Barnardo's Cymru has secured a grant for them to attend as the family are in poverty with considerable debts. However the nearest Ysgol Feithrin is 4 miles away and the bus journey will cost £5 a day which the family cannot afford. These children will start school at a distinct disadvantage if they are unable to access the pre-school education they need.

- 2.10.** Our Up2u Substance Misuse service in Cardiff have reported the issues faced by families where there is parental substance misuse or alcohol misuse. One family they have worked with where both parents had substance misuse issues were unable to secure their own accommodation as a result of debt and lived in overcrowded conditions with relatives, this in turn meant that there were difficulties with their benefit entitlement. The family were only able to meet the children's basic needs and there were issues with travelling to school costs, school equipment requirements and opportunities to pay for community activities for the children. Another family the service have supported involved a father with alcohol misuse issues which lead to a relationship breakdown. The mother found herself with two children under 10 years old, a mortgage and bills to pay and a lost income as a result of the father moving out. This was a source of great stress and anxiety.
- 2.11.** Evidence from a number of Barnardo's Cymru services has been presented here but a similar picture of increasing need in relation to basic needs such as food poverty is clear across our services. For young people such as care leavers and young people who have been homeless coping with the essentials of eating and heating are also becoming more and more difficult. The film 'Hope' was made with young people in Wales struggling to live independently on low incomes as part of Barnardo's ['Below the Breadline'](#) campaign back in 2009. This situation has not changed and in fact the young people we support who are unable to live with families are facing increasing levels of hardship.
- 2.12.** Austerity measures, increased living costs and low wages affect the majority of the families that Barnardo's Cymru support. Our services continue to provide support which aims to secure better opportunities and outcomes for children in living in poverty. However increasingly our services also need to provide direct support to ensure that families can feed and clothe their children.