

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru / National Assembly for Wales
Y Pwyllgor Cyfrifon Cyhoeddus / Public Accounts Committee
Ymchwiliad i blant a phobl ifanc sydd wedi bod mewn gofal / Inquiry into care
experienced children and young people
PAC(5) CECYP - 11
Ymateb gan Unigolyn / Evidence from Individual

Just read your article on the BBC.

I am so pleased you are looking to review the role of the corporate parent in securing the outcomes for children in care.

These are the areas I hope you and your team will look at –

Public perception of social services is that they take children away from families. This is not true. They try to do their utmost to keep families together as they know the outcome for children in the care system can be so poor. As a result families in crisis do not approach social services for help, instead child concern referrals are received which means planning is crisis led. Prevention and education is always the right approach. Parenting and relationship building are something we all get wrong sometimes yet it is expected that everyone can do it!

Too often when children come into care, the work with parents ends. Often these parents have unresolved trauma themselves. What I have found is that often when children eventually leave care they gravitate back to their birth families. Unfortunately nothing has changed for these families and the cycle continues. If parents/birth family were able to benefit from ongoing learning this may break the cycle and even in some circumstances lead to their children being returned even after an order has been granted.

Case load of Social workers – makes the role impossible – burns out good people trying to make a difference – leads to children having numerous social workers – no relationship formed/ further rejection for child. Hardly any intense direct work can be done with families and children by social workers due to time restraints.

CAMHS (therapeutic) support for every child in care from the start – Each child that enters the care system is traumatised to the point I would compare it to Soldiers returning from a war zone. The impact of neglect on the child's emotional development is massive. Children who have suffered neglect are often much younger in their emotional development than their chronological age. Without the right support this impacts directly on their ability to achieve in education and most importantly their social interaction and ability to achieve their potential. They live with guilt, blame and unresolved loss which is often seen in behaviours. As a

society we have to learn what is behind these behaviours which are often linked to their experiences in their past.

Funding of Independent Reviewing Officers. How can it be independent when they are funded by the Local Authority. My feeling is that all IRO's should come under the lead advocate for children in Wales; the Children's Commissioner. They would be able to collate information gathered from children's 6 monthly reviews, look for common issues and challenge the Corporate Parent to better meet a child's needs.

Therapeutic Training and support for foster parents to keep them attuned to the child's needs. Confidence in Care is being rolled out but this is only scratching the surface of the training and support required. Foster parents are often left unsupported and inadequately prepared to deal with traumatised children with complex needs.

Matching children with foster parents – too many children are placed inappropriately i.e. The children's needs are not matched with carers who have the skills to meet these needs. Sadly due to the crisis in Local Authority fostering recruitment, matching does not happen; the child will be placed with whoever has a bed. This along with other unmet needs will lead to children having numerous breakdowns.

We have worked with a number of schools trying to support them to support children in care. Attachment theory training helps education professionals to understand what is behind a child's behaviours.

Ken Skates worked tremendously hard to help change the support for children leaving care with 'when I'm ready'. We worked with Ken to get this through the Assembly. As with all changes to policies it takes time to bed in and there remains inconsistency across the Local Authorities to when I am ready, to the detriment of care leavers. Sadly children in care still lose the support they need when they are most vulnerable i.e. at 18. From my experience children start being told they must start learning to be independent from the age of 15/16 just at the time they have enough stress with their GCSE's. Promises of flats and white goods when really the therapeutic message should be this is your home until you are ready, just as we would do with our own children. They might be chronologically 18 but emotionally they are much younger. This often leads to their outcomes being so poor and why care leavers are disproportionately represented in prison.

I really hope you are successful in making Wales the shining example of how we parent and support every child to reach their potential.