

Senedd Cymru
Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg

Welsh Parliament
Children, Young People and Education Committee

Ymchwiliad i effaith argyfwng Covid-19
ar blant a phobl ifanc yng Nghymru

Inquiry into the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak
on children and young people in Wales

COV 36
Ymateb gan: SNAP Cymru

COV 36
Response from: SNAP Cymru

SNAP Cymru applaud Welsh Government and Westminster in their actions to save as many people as possible in the UK. Local Authorities schools and other key services continue to make enormous effort in support of the NHS and vulnerable families throughout this current pandemic.

The closure of schools and other educational settings is affecting all children and young people, particularly those with additional learning needs and those who have or continue to experience adverse childhood experiences. We hope the following points will be informative to future planning whilst we wait for the cautions return toward easing the lockdown. SNAP Cymru acknowledge the need for patience, there is a limit to what can be currently achieved. We would expect that the responses by Governments and Local Authorities will consider local circumstances regarding the pandemic.

SNAP Cymru are concerned that children and young people with additional learning needs may be further disadvantaged because of resource capacity to keep them safe, socially distancing as required. Families of children with complex needs have been hugely disadvantaged by the closure of schools and colleges, the withdrawal of a PA service and other out of school activities. Whilst many third sector services have done their utmost to support, the need for face to face contact support has remained constant with a heavy burden placed on parents and carers.

These children and young people need the structure of learning and skills provision delivered by people who are knowledgeable, skilled and committed to give the highest standards of care. SNAP Cymru hope the Welsh Government considers the desperate needs of this particular learner group. We are concerned of their longer term health and wellbeing and the resilience of families having to care 24/7.

We hope that the Welsh Government, Local Authorities and Schools will maintain and build upon the inclusion of all learners and protect placements in mainstream schools and Colleges. Disability discrimination was evident prior to the pandemic, we worry that pressure, resource levels and lack of specialisms will be used to justify discriminatory decision-making. We trust that children, young people, families and professionals will have access to independent advice to ensure equality is maintained throughout this very difficult time.

There is much confusion about statutory reform and we hope that the Minister will move forward to boost the educational opportunities and life chances for all children and young people Wales, particularly those with ALN. .

There are some issues that could be considered and some that require clarification to reduce the anxieties and assist children, young people and their families.

- Some Parents are nervous about the **transition back to school** – particularly from those families where children’s attendance is patchy or poor anyway.
- Anxiety with the return to school, when and how implementation will start, considering the summer holidays.
- There are cases of isolation, e.g. vulnerable parents where the mother had not engaged with anyone – (school included) for three weeks or more and when SNAP Cymru made contact found she’d not been taking essential medication and has young child at home with ADHD. However, we have found that many schools have made significant efforts to support pupils and families and this has increased over the weeks. Best practice found has been school staff ringing homes to speak to individual pupils as well as parents, schools delivering school meals to single parent families. And or making provision for collection at schools.
- Generally accessing food vouchers/ food hubs also have been patchy.

Home learning and digital disadvantages

- Implementing school work at home and accessing the hwb difficulties. Again many schools have made significant efforts using social media and sending work direct to families. Many are finding it difficult to follow
- There are many children completely digitally disadvantaged at home.

- Most do not have enough devices at home for all children to access online learning.
- Parents are worried that they are finding it difficult to engage children in home learning, some are trying to work from home with siblings
- Children may be less motivated, without a group, to participate in distance learning
- Children may tolerate school because they look forward to peer interaction social distancing in playgrounds may be impossible
- There are concerns around carers not having **sufficient information regarding use of their personal budgets**. For example, if their PA's or carers are no longer attending- can they use their money in other ways? E.g. the purchase of play items/technology etc
- Single parent families report being judged when they take all their children shopping, they have no one to shop for them
- Many people need support including **grandparents** who are carers, e.g. to apply for financial support because they couldn't get through on helplines and they were **digitally excluded**.
- There are concerns around carers not having **sufficient information regarding use of their personal budgets**. For example, if their PA's or carers are no longer attending- can they use their money in other ways? E.g. the purchase of play items/technology etc.
- Single parent families report being judged when they take all their children shopping, they have no one to shop for them
- Many people need support including **grandparents** who are carers, e.g. to apply for financial support because they couldn't get through on helplines and they were **digitally excluded**.
- Parents report heightened anxiety, frustration and meltdowns in children's behaviour.
- Parents report experiencing heightened anxiety and frustration themselves in dealing with lockdown and added pressures.
- Parents experiencing relationship strain due to added pressures and living on top of each other, exacerbated where there are teenagers/adult learners

- Anxiety and frustration of not being able to help outside immediate family members who have been taken into hospital.
- Isolation for single parent families reporting poor mental health
- Several local authorities were very quick to have told parents that **statutory education duties have been relaxed** – contrary to the legislation in place at the time.
- Parents report statutory assessment declined because the school had not submitted their paperwork. Surely, Local Authorities should be assisting schools who do not submit before taking the decision to refuse a request. This is most confusing for parents and sets them off on a road to conflict believing that the Local Authority, school, or both do not put children first.
- There are real concerns in meeting children’s needs, of maintaining provision and of reviewing progress. The engagement of children, young people and their families has been building over time and must not be lost now. Annual Reviews of Statements and or Reviews of IDPs will be problematic as face to face meetings are preferable to virtual meetings by many parents. SNAP Cymru will however seek to support families via their regional networks across Wales helping families to continue and build their engagement in planning and decision making with their children and young adult learners.

The crucial input and or continued expertise of health staff and careers into reviews and transition reviews gives cause for concern. How many staff have moved on to meet the pressures of the pandemic? What support will be left for learners with ALN?

Education will be lacking of the expertise to assess, to provide essential therapy, monitoring and instruction, particularly from Health.

Many learners in college placements, particularly residential placements will continue to lose opportunity in education and life chances. There are huge concerns in keeping placements; without doubt, some residential providers and colleges will be in financial crisis. These specialist colleges, particularly those close to home will be crucial in the coming years to avoid longer-term institutional care rising again.

There are likely to be difficulties for all families to face when returning to education:

- Children are unlikely to return full time
- They are unlikely to all return on the same days
- Children and young people in transition years will need preparation and higher levels of support to avoid exacerbating heightened anxieties. Provision will be needed to counteract levels of regression experienced by many learners with ALN.
- Children with problems in social distancing may be further disadvantaged by new rules and may experience exclusion from returning groups
- Some placements may be lost
- Some children in Early Years and other year groups are reliant on Teaching Assistant support for aspects of personal care. Not all children are independent in using the toilet. This is of particular concern in terms of equality. There is a need to give careful planning to the implementation of safety and social distancing and PPE.
- Many children will experience difficulty in half time education, change is often difficult to manage
- Giving laptops will help many learners but may not be the full answer as poorer families will not have internet or spaces to use these effectively
- Where laptops are given there will be a need for prepaid dongles to access internet
- Working at home will be essential for families experiencing intermittent or staggered return to school or colleges

Third sector response to the pandemic:

SNAP Cymru have been proud to work alongside so many community groups and statutory personnel to try and support, to stay connected. Giving practical and emotional support, working collaboratively to identify those most vulnerable in our communities. Local Authorities have been supportive to our responses during the pandemic and generally the communication overall has been open.

The wealth of resources has been amazing and SNAP Cymru have utilised what has been made available as far as the Guidelines have allowed. SNAP Cymru and others have considered families where there are little or no facilities for digital access and or printing and offered age appropriate printed resources and creative accessories. Despite huge efforts from all sectors, it is likely that we will have failed many children and young people. We hope to see them all back to full time learning and play with their peers as soon as possible.