

William Powell AM

Chair, Petitions Committee

National Assembly for Wales

3/12/14

Dear Mr Powell



PETITION FOR CHILDREN & FATHERS - P-04-588

Thank you for the opportunity of responding to the letter of the 18th November from the Minister for Communities & Tackling Poverty and the Minister for Health & Social Services.

We are happy to acknowledge that the Welsh Government has the best of intentions and that supporting children and families is the fundamental purpose of the Families First and Flying Start programmes. The difficulty however is the disparity between the aspirations and the reality. We understand the Welsh Government's commitment to driving forward delivery and focussing on outcomes and so in normal circumstances we would simply ask for the data around the success of these services in engaging with men as parents. On this occasion that would be unfair as we know that Welsh Government does not have this data.

DATA AROUND MALE ENGAGEMENT

In 2013 we raised with officials in the Welsh Government Family Support team the issue that our male service users across Wales were reporting to us that they felt disempowered, marginalised or excluded by family support services. We were told that these concerns could not be verified as data about the gender of the parents that services worked with was not collected.

To address this lack of data we undertook a small research project helped by Children in Wales to reach family support providers across Wales to enquire about their experience of engaging with men. Many services (particularly Flying Start) reported to us that they could not complete the survey as they did not record the gender of the parents they work with. We sought clarification on this point from the Welsh Government Family Support team and received a response from Lucy Akhtar on 11th September 2013 stating ‘

‘The Welsh Government does not ask for information from local authorities in relation to the engagement with fathers and other male carers for Flying Start or Families First’.

We would therefore ask how the Welsh Government is able to evidence that it has had ‘due regard’ for Article 18 of the UNCRC as required under the provisions of the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011?

FNF BPM MAPPING SURVEY

In March 2014 we completed our summary report from the research we undertook. A total of 32 responses were received from family support providers covering 169,109 service users. Responses were received from 14 different local authority areas as well as some services that operate on a regional as well as a whole Wales basis. We have attached the 3 page report with this response.

The headline findings were that the average level of engagement with adult male service users was between 3 and 11% - with some services reporting no male service users. In addition a range of qualitative responses were received which indicated that professionals believed that barriers to inclusion by men included 'Apathy by men' 26%, Mothers as gate-keepers 59% while perhaps more worryingly 19% reported a 'Lack of interest by professionals in working with men'.

WELSH GOVERNMENT PARENTING GUIDANCE

We acknowledge the opportunity that was given to us to comment on the new Parenting Guidance issued in September of this year. We offered to provide specific help to officials in the development of the Guidance in relation to engaging fathers on several occasions but this was never taken up. When we received the draft text approximately three weeks before publication we raised concerns around the misunderstanding of Article 18 of the UNCRC as well as drawing attention to our own mapping survey (mentioned above) and to the specific commitments made by the Scottish Government in relation to engaging with fathers in Section 6 of the Scottish National Parenting Strategy <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0040/00403769.pdf> that are clear, outcome focussed and measurable. Despite these concerns being shared during the consultation period no material alterations were made to the document. It is our view that in relation to fathers the document is not fit for purpose as it is high on aspiration and entirely devoid of any measurable outcome that would provide for an improvement on the current situation.

WHOLE FAMILY APPROACH

At the launch of the Families First National Learning set in Cardiff in January 2013 we raised the problem of the absence of definition of the 'whole family' approach that lies at the heart of the Welsh Government aspirations in this area. This allows practitioners at local level to determine who is and who is not deemed to be part of 'the family'. We had previously shared with officials our concerns that a lack of definition resulted in the exclusion of 'Non resident parents', who are predominantly male. We conducted a short telephone survey of six local authorities that highlighted the problem with responses from two local authorities that stated that Non-resident parents would only be involved with the specific consent of the Resident parent and the children. Given that Welsh Government have specifically chosen not to require data about gender of the parents engaged by services it is of course impossible for them to evidence how successful services have been in fulfilling the aspiration of a 'whole family' engagement approach.

FAMILY JUSTICE NETWORK FOR WALES

In relation to the Family Justice Network we have raised concerns from its inception about the lack of engagement of service users in a meaningful way as set out in the National Principles for Public Engagement <http://www.participationcymru.org.uk/national-principles> . The purpose of the Family Justice Network was set out in a Written Statement to the Assembly by the Deputy Minister, Gwenda Thomas here <http://wales.gov.uk/about/cabinet/cabinetstatements/2012/familyjusticereview/?lang=en>

When we questioned the lack of any service user representation in the Family Justice Network we received a response from Julie Rogers – then Deputy Director, Legislation and Policy Division in Welsh Government in October 2012 who stated that -

'Given a number of third sector/service user organisations are also members of the CAF/CASS Cymru Advisory Committee, it was also agreed that CAF/CASS Cymru would provide a conduit for such input from this Committee into the Family Justice Network.'

We do not feel that Cafcass Cymru – a division of Welsh Government – is the most appropriate body to represent the voice of service users in the Family Justice Network.

We are mindful of the commitment to placing the citizen at the centre of service re-design and delivery which flowed from the Beecham Report and the Welsh Government's response in Making the Connections -Delivering Beyond Boundaries

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20060715141954/http://new.wales.gov.uk/dpsp/publications/policies/delivering/Responsee?lang=en>

'Putting citizens first and involving them in the design of public services is central to achieving radical change. We can deliver real improvements -improvements that people can recognise and understand - by engaging them in shaping and scrutinising our services.'

Section 2.1

'We need to strengthen the active partnership between services and citizens to achieve better outcomes - for example, in recycling household waste, improving outcomes for children and young people, and in helping disabled people or those with chronic health conditions to achieve the best quality of life. Success depends on teamwork between citizens and those providing the services.'

Section 2.2

It would be useful to hear the views of the Minister as to why the Family Justice Network should be exempt from the normally inclusive approach that characterises Welsh Government.

PARENTAL ALIENATION AS EMOTIONAL ABUSE

We are happy to acknowledge the offer to present a paper in which we asked the Welsh Government to officially recognise 'Parental Alienation' as a form of emotional abuse of children. In the paper we were able to draw attention to the two consultation events (in Cardiff & Llandudno Junction) that we had undertaken with professionals to discuss the concept and to test their understanding of the concept. We contend that an understanding and recognition of 'Parental Alienation' (PA) is fundamental to ensure the protection of children from abuse when the importance of their voice is being elevated to greater significance in Family Justice as in many other areas of public policy in Wales. Our presentation also referenced many Judgements in recent Family Law cases which demonstrated the acknowledgement of the concept by the Judiciary. Sadly we learned that the Family Justice Network was not prepared to recognise the concept and we remain concerned about the safety of children in Wales as a result.

CAWAC

It is helpful that the Minister's letter references the Children and Adolescent Welfare Assessment Checklist (CAWAC) in relation to the concept of PA. We have sought to gain a better understanding of the way in which this assessment tool operates and how it might recognise PA. We sought to obtain information about the detail of this tool through our membership of the Cafcass Cymru Advisory Committee but were initially advised that there were copyright issues that prevented this.

Subsequent requests elicited the response that the copyright was wholly owned by Welsh Government so could not be an issue in this context. After several months we requested that one of our Trustees, Mark Isherwood AM should approach the Deputy Minister with a view to him obtaining a copy of the assessment framework. In a letter from the Deputy Minister dated 21st August the request was refused on the basis that

'The CAWAC toolkit is solely the property of Cafcass Cymru and the contents are not to be passed or shared with any person or body outside of Cafcass Cymru. I am therefore unable to provide a copy.'

It would therefore appear that Members of the Assembly are not able to assure themselves that the assessment tools used by Cafcass Cymru with their own constituents are 'fit for purpose'.

We have been concerned for some time that our service users were reporting a sense of 'being CAWAC'd' – in that they heard that a particular assessment tool was going to be used with their children but that they had no understanding of what or how this would be done. We shared these concerns with Cafcass Cymru through the Advisory Committee and a draft one page leaflet was produced. We shared this draft leaflet with our service users who overwhelmingly responded that they felt it did nothing to address their concerns over the mechanisms and outcomes that could be expected by the use of the tool. Sadly this feedback was rejected by Cafcass Cymru and a leaflet was produced which failed to address any of the concerns of service users.

SUMMARY

We deeply regret that the Welsh Government seems not to wish to engage with us on these issues in a collaborative way that recognises the concerns of our service users across the whole of Wales. We do however remain ready to offer assistance both to the Assembly in relation to the scrutiny of these issues and to the Welsh Government in terms of policy development and delivery.

Regards

Paul Apreda

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Member of

advice UK

ATTACHMENT

Mapping Male Participation – report – April 2014





MAPPING MALE PARTICIPATION IN FAMILY SUPPORT & PARENTING PROGRAMMES

Project by FNF Both Parents Matter as part of the Children & Families Organisational Grant outcomes for 2013/14.

Methodology –

A Survey Monkey questionnaire with a set of 8 questions was created to capture data on the level of participation and engagement by men in family support services and parenting programmes during the period 1st April 2012 to 31st March 2013.

We asked for responses from generalist family support or parenting programme providers – excluding those who had a particular focus eg disability, domestic abuse, dads projects etc. We also asked for details of ADULT service users to avoid counting of male children in the figures. However 3 responses received were from dads projects, one was focussed entirely at children & young people and didn't record gender of adult carers – while two had a disability focus.

A notable factor was the lack of recording of engagement by gender within some services. Several that were approached and would have liked to contribute were unable to disaggregate the data. It was subsequently confirmed by a senior official that ***'The Welsh Government does not ask for information from local authorities in relation to the engagement with fathers and other male carers for Flying Start or Families First'***.

Questionnaire Distribution –

Having previously attempted to gain responses on a similar exercise within Cardiff we took the decision to target a small number of services we were already in contact with directly but rely on Children in Wales' distribution network to reach other providers.

Responses -

To 26th March 2014 a total of 32 responses have been received. The geographical spread is as follows:

Cardiff – 6, Bridgend – 5, Denbighshire – 3, Anglesey – 2, RCT – 2, Caerphilly – 2 (*), Conwy 2, Ceredigion 2, Torfaen 2, Newport 2

Gwynedd, Carmarthenshire, Blaenau Gwent (*), Neath Port Talbot (*) – 1 each

All Wales 1, North Wales 1

(*) one service covered Caerphilly & Blaenau Gwent, while another covered Bridgend & Neath Port Talbot. Each response has been counted against both Local Authority areas.

Numbers of service users analysed

The total number of service users from the various projects was 169,109. The figure included one service where the number was 165,000 - a health visiting and school nursing provider. Other services varied from a minimum of 4 service users to a maximum of around 700.

Male engagement (numbers and percentages)

Excluding the three dads projects the highest percentages of male engagement were 50% at a child contact centre in South Wales and a North Wales Family Information Service.

Denbighshire stood out in terms of participation as two of the three projects that reported in the county had 25% and 30% male engagement. Whilst one of the projects only had 12 service users in total another achieved engagement with 25% male service users out of a total of 141.

Bridgend was highly engaged in the survey with a total of 5 responses. Two of those covered services with higher levels of need with one identifying itself as ‘an intensive intervention service operating at Tier 3 and 4 of service delivery’ and had a 39% engagement rate with men (15 from 39 service users) The other had a 48% engagement level (19 from 40 service users) and described itself as dealing with child protection issues. Within services which were more universal with lower levels of need one project achieved a 25% engagement out of a total service user population of 700.

Gwynedd saw one service achieve a 25% male engagement from a total of 40 service users whilst a Ceredigion parenting service achieved a 15% rate from a total population of 140.

Qualitative feedback

Respondents were asked to identify one or more reasons from a list of six as the greatest barrier to successful engagement. (% figures rounded to the nearest whole number)

Getting men to see parenting as their responsibility	48%	Creating an environment that appeals to men as well as women	63%
Apathy by men	26%	Mothers as 'gate-keepers'	59%
Lack of interest by professionals in working with men	19%	Lack of ability by men to successfully parent	4%

In addition respondents were asked to identify any other issues. Their responses included:

‘Fathers normally work during the hours that the parenting sessions run. Sessions in the locality are run during office hours. Fathers struggle to take time off to attend sessions. Fathers feel uncomfortable at attending sessions where the majority are females. Work is the priority for them especially during the period where there is a new baby as mums income has often dropped due to maternity leave. Fathers often work extra hours to generate more income for the family. Fathers make an assumption that the sessions are focused on the mother and the groups are for women only and parenting is a priority for mothers.’

'Lack of contact with absent fathers who do not appear to have any role within their Child's life, therefore offer of support cannot be provided.'

'The clientele is overwhelmingly female. The men locally tend to work during opening hours'

'All female workforce and their perceptions of fathers'

'working times often do not fit mens needs'

Conclusions

There was a clear pattern that emerged from the data. Services targeting both the higher levels of need, or, where access was universal eg FIS or Contact Centres saw the highest levels of engagement. The lowest levels were in early years and in generalist (i.e parenting support or services that targeted lower levels of need) where the engagement rate with men was disappointingly low.

The majority of mainstream projects achieved from 0% to 11% engagement.

It will be important to follow up with the successful projects to learn lessons from the successes.

The evidence shows that there is a significant problem with male engagement. Professionals assume men cannot be engaged as they work during the normal office hours that parenting support operates. There is also a perception that men choose not to engage. Interestingly almost 60% identify 'mothers as gate-keepers' as a significant barrier precluding male engagement. More research in this area needs to be undertaken to find ways to significantly increase engagement – including courses / services in the evenings as well as a strategy to engage men even if women seek to block this.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Welsh Government require all family support services to record the gender of the adults they engage with and support
- Services should be encouraged to set a target (KPI) for the level of engagement with men
- Welsh Government should assess to what extent it is currently having 'due regard' to Article 18 of the UNCRC incorporated into the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 in relation to family support policy.
- Services should be able to access training and other support to assist them in improving engagement with fathers
- A review of the gender of staff employed in front-line delivery of family support should be undertaken to determine whether a targeted programme of recruiting more men into these roles may have a positive impact on engagement levels.
- Specific proposals should be considered to overcome barriers to male engagement identified by professionals – i.e 'Mothers as gate-keepers' / getting men to see parenting as their responsibility / creating an environment that appeals to men as well as women

Paul Apreda, National Manager, FNF Both Parents Matter Cymru – March 2014

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