

## Child and Adolescent Mental Health Debate

MS Briefing – May 2022



### Key messages

- In a survey of practitioners, **89% of Barnardo's staff working with children and young people felt that there had been an increase in mental health and wellbeing issues**, compared to before the pandemic.<sup>1</sup>
- Across our services in Wales, staff tell us that there is an **'explosion' in mental health and wellbeing issues** faced by all members of the family.
- The cost-of-living crisis is impacting on the mental health of children and young people who are aware of the stresses on family finances.
- Mental health inequalities play a huge role in the challenges faced by young people and their ability to access support.
- Whilst *Mind over Matter*<sup>2</sup> found that progress had been made on driving down waiting lists for specialist CAMHS, recent data<sup>3</sup> showed that **77.9% of young people waiting for a referral for Specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health** wait more than four weeks for a first appointment, which shows that there is still more work to do to drive down waiting lists in Wales.

### How is Barnardo's Cymru supporting families in Wales?

Ely-based **Cardiff Family Wellbeing Service** offers wraparound support to families based across the city. The service focuses on early intervention and support to families living in Cardiff with children up to the age of 25 and that have an identified need for support in relation to emotional wellbeing and mental health but below the level where they would be entitled to specialist health service and/or statutory care and support.

**Anglesey-based Golau** works across Gwynedd and Mon to work with young people to build resilience and create sustainable coping strategies for mental health and wellbeing issues. It aims to help to prevent re-

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<sup>1</sup> The Quarterly Practitioner Survey is a UK-wide survey completed by Barnardo's practitioners once a quarter

<sup>2</sup> <https://senedd.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld11522/cr-ld11522-e.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://stats.wales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Health-and-Social-Care/Mental-Health/specialist-child-and-adolescent-mental-health-services-scamhs/first-appointment-waiting-times/scamhs-patient-pathways-waiting-for-a-first-appointment-by-month-grouped-week>

referrals into CAMHS and works to prevent readmissions to local Emergency Departments.

**Headroom** is an integrated service delivered in partnership with Cardiff & Vale University Health Board. The First Episode Psychosis Service supports children and young people experiencing psychosis for the first time or those at risk of developing psychosis. We aim to offer help early so that children and young people can recover as quickly as possible. Research shows that the longer these difficulties are left untreated, the greater the impact on the young person's life and the lives of those close to them.

Neath Port Talbot-based **Beyond the Blue** provides a range of therapeutic interventions and counselling to children, young people aged 5 to 25 years as well as their parents on an individual, group and family basis. The service also provides support specific to loss, as in bereavement, parental separation, or parental imprisonment. The service improves the emotional health, wellbeing and resilience of individuals and enable them to better cope with the stresses and difficulties they may face.

## **Barnardo's Cymru priorities for Welsh Government:**

### **1. Invest in the whole-family approach to mental health**

In Barnardo's, many of our services such as Cardiff Family Wellbeing Service and Beyond the Blue (see above) offer to work with the whole family on mental health and wellbeing issues.

Working with the whole family cuts down siloes and enables family members to work together on their wellbeing where appropriate. The process is led by the family, that provides adults and children with the tools that they need to improve their wellbeing together.

47% of adults in Wales have experienced one ACE (Adverse Childhood Experience), whilst 14% have experienced four or more.<sup>4</sup> Adults with four or more ACEs were five times more likely to have low mental wellbeing than those with no ACEs.<sup>5</sup> The case for working with the whole family is a strong one and can have a big impact on families.

### **2. Prioritise community-focused solutions**

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<sup>4</sup> <https://phw.nhs.wales/files/aces/infographic-aces-and-their-impact-on-health-harming-behaviours-in-the-welsh-adult-population/>

<sup>5</sup> Adverse Childhood Experiences and their association with mental wellbeing in the Welsh adult population <https://phw.nhs.wales/files/aces/ace-and-their-association-with-mental-well-being-in-the-welsh-adultpopulation-pdf/>

CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) should adapt their model to reflect the lives of the children and young people that they support. This means extending their availability to outside of school hours and ensuring that services are available on weekends, during the evenings, and in settings that are not off-putting to children and young people. These settings should be in the community and not based in a GP surgery wherever possible.

Barnardo's Cymru advocates for services that are embedded within communities and working in homes wherever possible. CAMHS needs to ensure that they meet the needs of children and young people and meet them where they are, instead of expecting them to come to unfamiliar places that are not conducive to making them feel comfortable. CAMHS should strive not to be in a purely clinical offering, and we believe that there are opportunities for the voluntary sector to support in this.

### **3. Address structural funding issues**

When considering how to develop our mental health support offering, there needs to be a conversation around the level of resource that can sit behind this effort.

Specialist projects are difficult to sustain without predictable, settled funding arrangements and much of the innovation that Wales must prioritise is difficult to achieve without resolving endemic funding issues within the sector.

Barnardo's Cymru also argues that within the systemic changes that need to be made to support children and young people who struggle to access mental health support, there need to be more evidence-based responses that include talk, play and creative responses that are tailored to the needs of children and young people.

### **About 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 provide more than 60 diverse services across Wales, working in partnership with local authorities. Last year we worked with over 10,000 children, young people, and family members.

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