

# Briefing Paper 12

## Substance Misuse

### National Assembly Elections 2007

*“Substance misuse in Wales is a complex, dynamic and multi-faceted problem. It involves both illegal and legal substances and its effects are far reaching. Not only does it impact upon the lives of those who misuse substances, from those who experiment to those who are heavily dependent, but also upon their families and communities.”*

Tackling Substance Misuse in Wales  
WAG 2000



**Save the Children**

Achub y Plant



**NSPCC** 

**Dim mwy o greulondeb i blant. DIM.  
Cruelty to children must stop. FULL STOP.**



**Barnardo's  
Cymru**

**RHOI'R DYFODOLYN ÔL I'N PLANT  
GIVING CHILDREN BACK THEIR FUTURE**

## **Children, Young People and Substance misuse**

Article 33 of the UNCRC gives every child the right to protection from narcotic and psychotropic drug use. There are 2 strands to consider in realising this right:

- Children and young people who are substance misusers, who under Article 24 of the UNCRC have the right to the highest standard of medical care.
- Children and young people who are affected by parental/carer substance misuse who through Article 18 of the UNCRC have the right to be raised by their parents, with state support if necessary.

### **What has been achieved since 2003?**

There has been a gap in the provision of treatment services, resulting in some children and young people attending inappropriate adult based substance misuse services. We are therefore pleased that the Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration has made additional resources for appropriate child treatment services a key priority.

In 2003 'Hidden Harm– Responding to the needs of children of problem drug users', was published after an inquiry by the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs. There have been delays in the Assembly's response, but we welcome the Welsh Assembly Government's Advisory Panel on Substance Misuse developing a "Framework for Action" and the implementation of this framework across Wales.

The Assembly has secured £300k to implement the 5 aims of the Framework, including the training of GP's, Health Visitors and Midwives who are working with Substance misusing parents. A key achievement is that substance misuse will feature high on the agenda of collaborative working between Local Safeguarding Children's Boards and is included in the October 2006 guidance for the boards.

A key priority in 2006 has been support for the improvement of the knowledge, skills and competency of the workforce in understanding needs, assessing, and delivering services for substance misusing parents and their children. We look forward to the establishment of an all Wales network and the implementation of a collaborative centre for the promotion of excellence for education, training and development in substance misuse.

The children and young people's module of the Substance Misuse Treatment Framework is currently out for consultation and, although delayed since last year, we are pleased that the Assembly have produced a "children/young people's friendly version" of the consultation document and are planning workshops to consult on the module. We also welcome the proposal for the evaluated early intervention pilot. We hope that the findings from the pilot will be used to inform future developments in this area.

We share the Ministers frustration with regards to plans to develop accommodation for young people, particularly as funding has already been made available. We are very interested in the development of the project and hopeful that the issues regarding local opposition to schemes can soon be addressed.

### **What are our current concerns?**

- Despite Hidden Harm's publication in 2003 and national launch events, the response to Hidden Harm in Wales has been slow. The impetus for this work may have been lost and resources allocated to conflicting priorities.

- There is a lack of substance misuse services for children and young people. Children and young people who are misusing substances are either not accessing services or being inappropriately treated by adult services.
- Children and young people who have both substance misuse and mental health problems are receiving little or no support as there are very few specialist services to meet these needs.
- Due to stigma and legal issues the children of parent/carer substance misusers are hidden amongst an already hidden population.
- There is a lack of joint working and information sharing protocols between substance misuse services, children's services and criminal justice services.

### **Recommendations**

We call on the Welsh Assembly Government to:

- Appoint a children's representative to the Assembly Panel on Substance misuse.
- Establish a coordinating body to take forward the cross cutting themes of Hidden Harm and the Framework for Action, with recognition that this is not just a substance misuse issue.
- Promote and support the need for children and young peoples' substance misuse services within each local authority.
- Target funds for specialist CAMHS services to address the co-occurring substance misuse/mental health problem among young people.
- Recognise and support the importance of young carers in relation to parental/carers' substance misuse and to provide sustained funding streams to support young carers.
- Give urgent consideration to the children of female substance misusing offenders who are given custodial sentences.
- Provide independent counselling services in every school in Wales and ensure that every child and young person is aware of services that can help and provide them with support if they have problems or worries, e.g. Childline.

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