

Consultation questions

You are welcome to respond to any of the questions in this document. Questions 1-8 ask for general feedback on our approach and questions 9-10 are more detailed. These questions may be more relevant to you if you are a professional, working with victims, survivors and perpetrators of VAWDASV.

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. We currently run more than 60 diverse services across Wales, working in partnership with local authorities. Each year we regularly support more than 10,000 children, young people and families. We aim to secure better outcomes for more children by providing the support needed to ensure stronger families, safer childhoods and positive futures. We use the knowledge gained from our direct work to campaign to improve the lives of children, young people and families by promoting positive change in policy and practice. We believe that with the right help, committed support and belief all children can fulfil their potential.

Since March 2019, we have delivered a whole-family domestic abuse service, Opening Closed Doors¹. Opening Closed Doors works with adult victims, child victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse to support the whole family.

The Opening Closed Doors model, as described in an Institute of Public Care (IPC) evaluation², is based on the premise that working with all family members meets their needs comprehensively, addressing the causes as well as the consequences of domestic abuse; helping to bring about sustainable change.

The Opening Closed Doors Service delivers a spectrum of support in Newport, Torfaen, Monmouthshire and Blaenau Gwent, that enables children and young people to recover from their experiences of domestic abuse, build resilience, strengthen parenting capacity and support system change to improve outcomes for children and their families. We recognise that domestic abuse may be one of many risk factors within the family home, therefore holistic support is offered. Since its inception, Opening Closed Doors has supported 395 children, 435 survivors and 268 perpetrators.

In addition to our specialist domestic abuse service, Barnardo's Cymru also operates early intervention and prevention services which work with young people displaying harmful sexual behaviour.

¹ <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/what-we-do/services/opening-closed-doors>

² <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/research/opening-closed-doors-one-year-evaluation>

Barnardo's Cymru established the Better Futures³ service to support children and young people with harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) in 2000, after starting work on this issue in 1996, and the Seraf service to support children and young people at risk of or who are being abused through child sexual exploitation (CSE) was established in 2006. These were the first specialist services to be established to support the needs of affected children and young people in Wales.

At the same time as providing specialist assessment and support to children and young people at significant risk, already abused through CSE or already displaying harmful sexual behaviour, we continually work to promote the importance of education, early intervention, and prevention to reduce risks and prevent abuse. Barnardo's has also redeveloped a significant educational resource 'Real Love Rocks'⁴ on healthy relationships, consent, grooming, technology, bullying, pornography, sexual harassment and relationship abuse. It is the expertise and specialism that we have developed in delivering this support that we will draw on in our consultation response, and we will focus primarily on the impact of the National Strategy on children and young people.

For victims of domestic abuse, the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns created opportunities for perpetrators to increase their use of isolation and control, for example by using lockdown restrictions as an excuse to move back into the victim's home and control movement within the house and preventing them from reaching out to family or friends. Calls to the Live Fear Free helpline increased by 49% during the lockdown⁵, while calls regarding domestic abuse to the NSPCC's helpline increased by over 50%⁶, and this has been reflected in an increase in referrals to Barnardo's services⁷.

Domestic abuse related crime constitutes 1 in 6 of all crimes recorded by the police in England and Wales and over a third of all recorded violence against the person crimes, while the National Crime Survey for England and Wales shows that 5.5% of adults aged 16 to 74 years (2.3 million) experienced domestic abuse in 2019-2020.⁸ Research has found that 12% of under 11s, 17.5% of 11-17s and 23.7% of 18-24s had been exposed to domestic abuse between adults in their homes during childhood.⁹ Our report '*Not Just Collateral Damage*'¹⁰ shows the huge impact this has on

³ <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/what-we-do/services/better-futures-cymru>

⁴ <https://barnardosrealloverocks.org.uk/>

⁵ <https://socialcare.wales/service-improvement/domestic-violence-and-abuse-guidance-for-professionals>

⁶ <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/about-us/news-opinion/2021/calls-to-nspcc-about-children-living-in-violent-homes-rise-by-over-50-as-we-urge-government-to-support-all-children/>

⁷ <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/news/locked-down-and-locked-out-vulnerable-children-missing-out-vital-support-due-covid-19>

⁸ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabuseprevalenceandtrendsenlandandwales/yearendingmarch202>

⁹ ³ <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/1042/child-abuse-neglect-uk-today-research-report.pdf>

¹⁰ https://www.barnardos.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/%27Not%20just%20collateral%20damage%27%20Barnardo%27s%20Report_0.pdf

their emotional and social development. While the lockdowns may be over, the impact on children who have been subjected to abuse is only just being understood. For these reasons, the VAWDASV National Strategy comes at a critical time for those families, children and young people that are victims of abuse in Wales.

Question 1

We have set out our main priorities in the Objectives. Do you think these are the right priorities?

Yes/No

Barnardo's Cymru supports the objectives that have been outlined.

Objective 1

We believe that challenging a culture of misogyny and sexual harassment is a key part of tackling VAWDASV as a whole and the way it pervades every part of our society. We look forward to playing our part in helping to support this cultural change.

Objective 2

We particularly welcome the objective to ensure that children and young people have an earlier understanding of safe, healthy, and equal relationships. Our Opening Closed Doors service works with children and young people who have been victims of domestic abuse at home using age-appropriate tools from a range of models including DART¹¹ and the Recovery Toolkit¹². Further to this, Barnardo's Cymru works across our services with children and young people on prevention and early intervention, such as in our Newport Partnership who support families where children are on the 'edge of care' often supporting to prevent family breakdown where it is safe and appropriate.

We also recognise the importance of schools and educational institutions as a setting to build greater understanding of healthy relationships and have developed our Real Love Rocks educational resource.¹³ We are grateful to the Welsh Government for supporting us in making it available to Welsh schools in 2022.

Objective 3

We support the move in objective three to work more frequently with perpetrators to tackle VAWDASV. Our domestic abuse service, Opening

¹¹ <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/services-children-families/dart>

¹² <https://rockpool.life/the-recovery-toolkit/>

¹³ <https://barnardosrealloverocks.org.uk/>

Closed Doors, is experienced in working with the whole family, including perpetrators of domestic abuse, which we discuss at length throughout our response. Furthermore, Barnardo's is hoping to create a new post within Opening Closed Doors, through a potential new funding opportunity, to work with adolescents who are displaying signs of abusive behaviour. It is hoped that this work, engaging with young people, will be an asset in preventing VAWDASV at a much earlier stage. This kind of innovative, early implementation work is crucial to ending gender-based violence in Wales by ensuring young people do not continue to use abusive behaviour into adulthood.

To support our work with perpetrators, all staff are RESPECT accredited¹⁴ and have extensive support in working safely with perpetrators, which includes safety planning for the whole family, not condoning perpetrator behaviour but helping them to understand and confront past behaviour and using information to safeguard adult and child victims. This is critical in ensuring that work with perpetrators is done whilst keeping the whole family safe, that any potential risks are managed and mitigated, and that the perpetrator work is successful.

Objective 4

Barnardo's services throughout Wales work with children, young people and families and operate primarily where possible in the early intervention and prevention space. It is our view that retaining access to these services produces better long-term results, including, wherever possible, minimising the impact of ACEs and trauma. We welcome Welsh Government's commitment to continuing to commission services that focus on this.

Objective 5

We agree with the spirit of objective 5, as specialist, trauma-informed practitioners are essential for working with adult and child victims of domestic abuse, as well as perpetrators. In Opening Closed Doors, staff have received trauma informed training as well as specialist training in relation to domestic abuse. Our perpetrator workers are trained by RESPECT, all staff have received DART training (NSPCC) and Recovery Toolkit (Rockpool). Some of our staff are also IDVA trained by SafeLives - this specialism within the service is one of the reasons that it has been so successful.

However, it is important to note that for specialist staff to be retained with services and within the sector, there must be a commitment to sustainable funding. Services across Wales regularly lose dedicated,

¹⁴ <https://www.respect.uk.net/pages/accreditation>

specialist staff with extensive expertise because of the uncertainty around the future of services. Problems with recruitment and retention will continue to be an issue until services can benefit from a settled and predictable funding arrangement. Therefore, whilst we fully support the notion of a specialist workforce, we cannot have this conversation without dealing with the systemic issues around funding.

Objective 6

We would have welcomed more clarity in objective six, and wording that refers to 'child and adult victims' as opposed to 'all victims'. We believe that it is critical that specialist services are commissioned to support child victims of VAWDASV.

We need to ensure that child-centred, trauma informed services that understand and holistically respond to a child's needs are available. Without making sure that children are properly supported, it is our belief that the wider aims of the Strategy cannot be achieved.

For us to meet the aims around reducing childhood ACEs and preventing domestic abuse from becoming a generational issue, it is critical that we provide trauma-informed support for child victims of VAWDASV. Children who are exposed to domestic abuse at home are more likely to experience domestic abuse as adults.¹⁵ Therefore, appropriately supporting children and young people is a vital piece of work in ensuring that we bring an end to VAWDASV in Wales.

It is our recommendation that this objective be reframed to specifically refer to 'child and adult victims of VAWDASV' and therefore to help frame the work of the regional VAWDASV boards over the next five years, given that they will derive their own strategies from the National Strategy.

Barnardo's Cymru would recommend an additional objective related to providing whole-family, specialist support to victims of domestic abuse. The Opening Closed Doors model is based on the premise that working with all family members meets their needs more comprehensively, addressing the causes as well as the consequences of domestic abuse and helps to bring about sustainable change. This was demonstrated both in the experiences of practitioners, in data that was gathered in the independent evaluation of the service¹⁶ and feedback given by the families, which was noted in the independent evaluation:

¹⁵ <https://phw.nhs.wales/files/aces/aces-and-their-impact-on-health-harming-behaviours-in-the-welsh-adult-population-pdf/>

¹⁶ <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-11/Barnardo%27s%20Opening%20Closed%20Doors%20Programme%20Evaluation%20final%20report%20130220.pdf>

“Comments from two fathers may be interpreted as an indication that the process of behaviour change had begun and will help to build the foundations for a safe and stable home in the future:

“I am more aware. I won’t be perfect, but I know how it impacts on everyone else and my son. I was ignorant. I have learned. I recognise it now”

“I didn’t realise phrases I would use and what message it would send. It would hurt.”

Further to this, parents who responded to the interview question, said their self-esteem had improved. For example:

“I was a mouse – I’m not now. I speak up for myself. I was afraid to say anything. Now I do what I need to”.

Given that the objectives within the Strategy will form the basis of the work undertaken by regional VAWDASV boards, a strong steer towards the need for whole-family approaches could help to drive improvements in provision of service delivery. Evaluations of whole family approaches to domestic abuse demonstrates the value in breaking down silos and wider information sharing. Practitioners interviewed for an evaluation of the SafeLives ‘Beacon’ partnership which took a whole family approach to domestic abuse, noted that silos were broken down because of information sharing, alongside the needs of the whole family being considered while bringing them into decision making.¹⁷

We would argue that the whole-family approach to domestic abuse is an effective means of delivering on Welsh Government’s ambitions in this Strategy and is very consistent for the ‘whole society’ approach that this Strategy advocates for. More evidence on the whole family approach can be found below.

We want to contribute towards building a Wales where there is a stronger understanding and acknowledgment of violence against women and children, domestic abuse and sexual violence. This would help destigmatise those who need to ask for help, ensure that support is available easily and appropriately and that we can meet our shared goals around ending VAWDASV.

Question 2

¹⁷ http://clouk.uclan.ac.uk/39447/2/Roadmap_Report_280921.pdf

Do you think the overall approach we will be taking, as set out in the sections on the Blueprint, is the right one to stop violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence?

Yes/No

Please give reasons for your answer:

We have responded to the governance structure itself in our answer to question 8 and will focus here on the overall approach and the issues contained in the blueprint.

We welcome the approach to tackling VAWDASV in a thematic or place-based way, which is an innovative take on dealing with cultural misogyny in Wales, and we look forward to seeing the results that this will produce. We welcome the work on ending bystander culture and on tackling the level of harassment that has been accepted as common place on our streets, playgrounds, workplaces, public transport and in our own homes. Barnardo's Cymru hopes to play our part in raising awareness of Welsh Government's campaign efforts in this regard, and in doing our own work to help educate and inform children and young people.

In our response we will focus on the subgroups related to working with perpetrators, sustainable commissioning, and user engagement.

Working with perpetrators

As we have outlined, working with perpetrators as part of the whole-family approach to domestic abuse is a core part of Barnardo's Cymru work. It has been our experience that the whole family approach is incredibly important and a big part of why the work with perpetrators has been successful, because it is done in the context of the whole family and emphasises the impact that their behaviour has had on their children, which can act as a huge motivator for change.

The whole family approach allows trained practitioners and the family themselves to recognise and explore strengths and weakness when working together in partnership more effectively than when working in isolation. It also further enables the family members to express themselves more clearly to each other in terms of their feelings and values. Where appropriate, and where there isn't potential for the perpetrator to use coercive or controlling behaviour, engaging the whole family in the intervention provides all family members with the chance to be heard.

The overall aim is to help families recognise and draw on their strengths and support networks, which will increase their resilience and reduce the risks of the children coming to potential harm. Our service works with the

concept that families are the 'experts' of their own situations, enabling them to recognise their own risks and identify ways to increase resilience within the family unit, to help them to safeguard themselves through a safety planning process and to ensure the child is at the heart of the work.

During the early stages of the intervention, a safety plan is undertaken with the family as it is important for the whole family to recognise what the risks are to the children and what these risks actually look like to the family. At point of a referral a DASH is carried out, if a victim is deemed high risk, then Barnardo's practitioners refer into MARAC. We attend all MARAC meetings regularly and work with the IDVA service when needed. We carry out safety planning and link in with children services, police etc to manage risks. The DASH is reviewed regularly and any time there is a new incident. This ensures that any and all risks are understood by practitioners and can be managed appropriately.

By engaging the family in a strengths-based approach, the model recognises pre-existing positive coping strategies within the family framework. Although also, it can clearly help to explore new coping strategies by exploring the extended family or other networks for increased support if appropriate. It is crucial that any risks to the children's and adult victim's safety and wellbeing are considered throughout this process, as well as ensuring appropriate Child Protection awareness during the subsequent phases of the intervention. In addition to this, other multi-agency partners are engaged on a very regular basis such as police, housing, education, IDVA. This all varies from case to case and varies depending on need.

An Opening Closed Doors case study on working with perpetrators:

Reason for Referral:

Parents were referred to the service following concerns with regards to the volatile and violent nature of their relationship. At the time of the referral it was reported that L, the adult victim, was pregnant with their first child. The child was placed on the Child Protection Register at birth. A legal planning meeting was also convened and it was agreed that the child would be subject to the Public Law Outline (PLO).

Summary of intervention:

L engaged with the worker to complete the DASH risk assessment before a robust safety plan was agreed and put in place. Following this, C, the perpetrator, was supported to engage in the Suitability Assessment where he demonstrated accountability and motivation to address his harmful behaviour and protect his partner and unborn child. C was therefore assessed as suitable for the RESET programme.

L was supported to engage with the women's programme and successfully completed all sessions. Throughout these sessions, L learned more about the cycle of abuse, the different kinds of abuse and how children are impacted. L engaged well in sessions and was reflective on her past and current relationships.

Outcomes achieved:

C engaged in the RESET programme and had the opportunity to learn more about domestic abuse, further develop his sense of accountability and develop the skills needed to change his behaviour. Throughout the intervention, C has consistently shown positive engagement, has reflected on his behaviour and shown insight into the impact on others. C has demonstrated a good understanding of domestic abuse and has an awareness of how children are adversely impacted and described his commitment to ensuring that his child is safeguarded from this in the future.

Abusive behaviour has stopped – there have been no further police call outs and no further incidents reported, the case has also been closed to children services as risks have reduced. At the end of the intervention (and throughout) the DASH is completed, and the score had reduced.

Sustainable commissioning is an endemic problem felt in many parts of the voluntary sector, and the VAWDASV sector is a prime example of this.

While we share Welsh Government's ambitions to develop and maintain a specialist sector, that can expand its expertise across Wales and deliver impactful services, the fact remains that unless a robust sustainable funding model underpins this ambition, it will struggle to be realised.

Developing specialism within services requires providers to be able to recruit, train and retain specialist staff who develop a huge amount of knowledge, skills and expertise. When so many funding settlements cover only a 12-month period, this is incredibly difficult. In Opening Closed Doors, this has been a periodic problem that staff have faced every year since the service was established, and 2022 is no different. Despite this, Opening Closed Doors staff have continually gone over and above to support families in Gwent, and have held more and more risk, particularly throughout the pandemic – both in terms of numbers of cases in Wales but also the severity of domestic abuse. The disparity between the significance of the work undertaken in this sector and the sustainability and appropriateness of the funding model that underpins it is stark.

We would urge Welsh Government to work with the specialist sector to develop a funding model that nurtures the development of specialist services and allows them the security and certainty that they need to plan for the future and further enhance the rich expertise that we will rely upon to achieve the objectives set out in the National Strategy. We would welcome more detail on how this will be brought about within the Strategy.

User engagement

Barnardo's Cymru welcomes the commitment to produce a comprehensive strategy for user engagement. We would urge Welsh Government to ensure that the voices of children and young people who are survivors of VAWDASV to have a defined and ongoing role within this.

We also welcome the Children and Young People's consultation document that was published with the National Strategy, this is an important piece of work that will allow those children and young people who have been victims of domestic abuse and other forms of VAWDASV to have a say in the way that the National Strategy will impact upon their lives moving forwards.

We hope to see opportunities for children and young people's voices to be heard throughout the five-year implementation period of this strategy. This should be an ongoing, meaningful interaction and not a one-off at the beginning of the life of the Strategy. We would welcome more clarity

on how the user engagement strategy is intended to interact with children and young people on a longer-term basis and would be happy to support on this where possible.

We further hope to see a role for the voices of children and young people within the management structure and have addressed these comments in question 8. This will need to be managed in a trauma-informed way as we do not want to re-traumatize young people having to or feeling the need to recount their experiences.

Question 3

We have set out the principles which underpin the draft National Strategy. Do you agree with these?

Yes/No

Please give reasons for your answer:

Barnardo's Cymru strongly welcome the whole society approach to tackling VAWDASV. We believe that this is recognisant of the reality of how misogyny and gender-based violence plays a part in all our lives, every day. Violence against women and children takes place in every community and so we must tackle it with this in mind.

It is Barnardo's Cymru's view that taking a whole society approach to tackling VAWDASV offers the most realistic opportunities to end gender-based violence and meet Welsh Government's ambition of making Wales the safest place in Europe to be a woman.

It is Barnardo's Cymru's contention that the whole-society approach is part of a continuum that includes the whole-family approach to domestic abuse, and so it is Barnardo's suggestion that commissioning specialist, whole-family domestic abuse services should be at the heart of the implementation of the national Strategy.

An independent evaluation undertaken by the Institute of Public Care (IPC) of Barnardo's Cymru service Opening Closed Doors¹⁸ offered some assessment of the whole family model.

Professionals interviewed for the evaluation specifically referred to the benefits of a holistic approach:

"The whole family offer is really important. There was support for women (and to a lesser extent men and children) already but it was not

¹⁸ <https://ipc.brookes.ac.uk/files/publications/Barnardos-Opening-Closed-Doors-Programme-Evaluation-final-report-130220.pdf>

connected. It supports victims to know that the perpetrator is also trying to change."

Case file analysis identified a number of cases where it was recorded that there had been a positive benefit to both parents. For example, in one case it was noted that the father had benefitted from completing the programme and the mother had noted he was calmer, and their relationship had improved.

There was also evidence from family members interviewed that they had found the linkages helpful.

"They planned for the kids and me at the same time. There was a link between the girls' course and mine" (IWS participant)

"We could all talk together because we were covering the same topics." (IWS participant)

"I am still the same person but I'm glad I know everything about abuse. With the DAPP programme too. It helped us a lot. It is important to both do it." (IWS participant)

Positive evidence that families were showing signs of recovery from domestic abuse were found on 33/42 (78%) of parent's case files where this information had been recorded. Evidence of an improvement in the child's emotional health and wellbeing was also found on 18/19 (95%) of the children's case files. The evaluation found that domestic abuse had reduced or stopped in 12/17 (70.5%) of the IWS case files and 4/5 (80%) of the DAPP files.

The whole family approach enables perpetrators to understand their behaviour in light of the impact it has on their wider family, and to use this to incentivise behaviour change.

Barnardo's Cymru would advocate that a whole-family approach is one of the foundational building blocks of the whole society approach that Welsh Government seeks to achieve in the National Strategy.

Barnardo's also supports the public health approach to tackling VAWDASV, although we would note that this requires a system change in terms of how public bodies, in particular the health system, respond to domestic abuse that is not covered in great detail within the Strategy. We would welcome more information on how this is to be achieved.

Question 4

Do you agree with our immediate priorities?

Yes/No

Please give reasons for your answer:

We welcome the clarity from Welsh Government on what is felt to be the immediate action that will be taken as a result of the National Strategy.

It is our belief that the Strategy would benefit from more information regarding the timelines attached to this immediate work so that progress can be tracked. We would also welcome more monitoring opportunities attached to the work of the Strategy as a whole – but particularly the immediate priorities – for it to be possible to make an assessment of what has already been achieved in the first VAWDASV Strategy and could be extended, what doesn't work and should be addressed, and what gaps there might be in provision. This should include success measures or criteria, and how these will develop over time.

We would further hope to see more clarity on sustainable commissioning within the immediate priorities for this work. For many services, unless a sustainable funding offer is developed soon, important interventions and expertise will be lost by services that cannot continue to fund their vital work. This is a matter of urgency for many voluntary sector services, and we would welcome Welsh Government recognising and matching the level of urgency that many services – and the children, young people and families that they support – feel. It must be a priority to create certainty and sustainability within the sector.

Question 5

What do you think is the most important thing we can do to stop violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence?

We have discussed at length our belief that funding specialist services in a sustainable way must be an immediate priority for this Strategy. We would further recommend that Welsh Government explore the whole-family approach to tackling domestic abuse and how this can deliver on the objectives related to working with perpetrators and educating children and young people on healthy, safe relationships from a younger age, all of which is achieved through the whole family approach.

In addition to this, we would state the need to develop healthy relationships education in schools. We need to achieve societal change, and if we continue to only fund downstream services, we will never resolve the problem that exists upstream. We welcome the recognition of this within the Strategy and look forward to learning more about how that education will be embedded in schools through the new RSE Code and other healthy relationships education.

Question 6

Do you think there is anything we should be doing as part of this Strategy that can have a positive effect on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language?

Barnardo's Cymru would welcome any progress that can continue to be made on ensuring that appropriate services are available for those who communicate in Welsh. It is vital that all those seeking support can do so in their language of choice.

Question 7

Are there any other things you think we should be doing to stop violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, or do you have any other comments?

We would welcome more clarity on the interaction between the VAWDASV National Strategy and the Child Sexual Abuse National Action Plan.

There is a risk that between the CSA Action Plan and the VAWDASV National Strategy there is a crack where children and young people who are victims of domestic abuse can fall, if the VAWDASV National Strategy focuses mostly on the experiences of and services for adults.

It would be our recommendation that a task-and-finish group be appointed to assess the overlap and interrelation of the CSA Action Plan and VAWDASV National Strategy to ensure that there is coherency and interaction where necessary, and that children and young people are adequately catered for in both. This could form part of the workstream for a Children and Young People's Subgroup (see question 10 for more information).

Question 8

How should we measure progress and success in delivering the things outlined in this Strategy?

We would welcome more detail on monitoring arrangements to ensure that we learn from best practice and amend that which is less effective as the process of implementing the National Strategy takes place. There is little detail on monitoring or feedback within the National Strategy, but this is an important element of ensuring that the Strategy is a living document.

We would like to see more detail on how the National Strategy interrelates with the ACEs hub, and Trauma Framework for Wales; and will demonstrate its effectiveness by driving down adverse childhood experiences and the impact of trauma, that are a consequence of VAWDASV.

Barnardo's Cymru would also argue that the footprint of VAWDASV services in Wales and the nature of the work that they are able to do is a clear indicator of the success of the National Strategy. Services should be empowered to grow, strengthen their ties within communities and deliver more successful outcomes for children, young people and their families.

Some indicators of success that were used to evaluate the Opening Closed Doors service were focused on the risk to children and young people that was de-escalated as a result of the interventions, the improvement in mental health for the whole family, the strengthened relationships and bonds within the family and evidence of children and young people who were living in a safer home environment. We would argue that similar indicators should be used to assess the National Strategy on an ongoing basis. We would like to see greater reference to the statutory guidance for commissioning VAWDASV services¹⁹ and the Perpetrator Service Standards²⁰ and the extent to which these are embedded into services and can provide opportunities for monitoring.

Barnardo's Cymru would also recommend that assessing the progress and success of delivering the National Strategy should be informed by the ongoing and meaningful interaction that we would hope the Strategy will have with children and young people. They should be given an opportunity to outline what they feel success would look like and how this Strategy can achieve that.

The remaining questions are more detailed:

Question 9

Do you agree with the scope of the Strategy?

Yes/No

Please give reasons for your answer:

We agree with much of the scope of the Strategy, but we feel that there are some significant omissions.

¹⁹ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-05/statutory-guidance-for-the-commissioning-of-vawdasv-services-in-wales.pdf>

²⁰ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-06/perpetrator-service-standards.pdf>

Firstly, the role of children and young people within this Strategy is unclear and we would welcome better clarity on how Welsh Government envisages that this Strategy will deliver for them. Children are victims in their own right of domestic abuse and sexual violence, and as such need trauma-informed, dedicated support.

Children are victims of VAWDASV both in their own intimate relationships and as a result of living in a household where domestic abuse takes place. Whilst Welsh Government has previously made clear its commitment to supporting children and young people as victims of VAWDASV, we believe it is important for this priority to be outlined within the Strategy to help inform priorities for the regional VAWDASV boards and ensure that this is used as measure of success and progress.

It is well established that children and young people process trauma and events differently to adults, and therefore need of distinct, trauma-informed specialist support. The lack of clarity around children and young people as victims of abuse also creates uncertainty about how specialist services would be designed to support them in the coming five years.

Barnardo's Cymru would recommend clarifying within the Strategy that children and young people are victims in their own right, and making clear that commissioning specialist services for them should be of equal priority to commissioning for adults, for VAWDASV regional boards.

We have recommended in our answer to question 10 that there be an additional subgroup created on children and young people, which we think would serve to answer some of these questions and alleviate uncertainty, as well create a space for a dedicated workstream around understanding the experiences of children and young people and meeting the goal to ending VAWDASV as a generational challenge.

Question 10

We have proposed governance arrangements, which include working with key partner organisation and a number of subgroup/workstreams to tackle specific issues. Do you think working together in this way will improve coordination of work to stop violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence?

Yes/No

Please give reasons for your answer:

As with much of the VAWDASV National Strategy, Barnardo's Cymru believes that the approach is commendable and clearly holds ambition for the delivery of the Strategy.

We agree with the commitment to the ministerial-led National Partnership Board working to oversee and inform the work of the regional boards, although there are still questions arising from this model. Firstly, it is not clear who will populate the National Partnership Board and how the board will ensure that they are equipped to hear voices and understand issues from every part of Wales' population. We would be particularly concerned about how the board intends to organise itself to hear directly from children and young people who are affected by or victims of VAWDASV and would welcome more clarity on this.

We would also recommend that this commitment to the voices of children and young people must be made on an ongoing basis; whilst we welcome the consultation on the National Strategy that has been developed for children and young people, this is only one opportunity at the beginning of a five-year cycle for children and young people to make their voices heard. We would strongly urge Welsh Government to work with the children's sector to ensure that there is regular and meaningful input to the National Partnership Board that ensures the needs, experiences and ideas of children and young people can be a central part of the work that they do.

Secondly, Barnardo's Cymru recommends that the Minister for Education be a member of the National Partnership Board to ensure that the priorities and objectives of tackling VAWDASV are reflected within that portfolio. We learned from Estyn's report on peer-to-peer sexual harassment²¹ that the issues around cultural misogyny and sexual harassment are as present in our schools as in the rest of our society, and therefore the ambitions of the VAWDASV National Strategy must be met in this context.

Thirdly, to ensure the needs of children and young people are fully addressed within the new Strategy, we would suggest the creation of an additional subgroup that creates a workstream around the specific experiences and needs of children and young people who have been victims of VAWDASV. Alongside the Children and Young People's Consultation on the National Strategy (which we warmly welcome) we would be pleased to see opportunities for engagement from children and young people to be an ongoing feature of the five-year strategy.

²¹ 'We don't tell our teachers' – experiences of peer-to-peer sexual harassment among secondary school pupils in Wales https://www.estyn.gov.wales/system/files/2021-12/Experiences%20of%20peer-on-peer%20sexual%20harassment%20among%20secondary%20school%20pupils%20in%20Wales_0.pdf

Whilst we believe that an additional subgroup is an important way to understand and also drive through progress on VAWDASV as it affects children, young people and families, it is important to consider at this stage how the subgroups will operate and any potential issues.

We would welcome more information on the strategic operation and implementation of the subgroups, and what work will be done to integrate the different subgroups and workstreams to ensure that they do not become siloed by focusing on a discrete area of work. To achieve the whole society approach to tackling VAWDASV it is critical that we espouse a whole systems approach throughout the implementation of the Strategy which will require monitoring of the work of the subgroups and their effectiveness at integration where appropriate.

Question 11

Are you a professional, working with victims, survivors and perpetrators of VAWDASV?

Yes/No

Barnardo's Cymru works with victims, survivors and perpetrators of VAWDASV. This is an organisational response.

Question 12

We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them:

Name: Amy Bainton

Organisation (if applicable): Barnardo's Cymru

Email address: Amy.Bainton@Barnardos.org.uk

Responses to consultations may be made public. To keep your response anonymous (including email addresses) tick the box:

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