

Russell George MS
Chair, Health and Social Care Committee
Senedd Cymru
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

10th January 2022

Dear Russell George MS,

Re: Impact of the waiting times backlog on people in Wales who are waiting for diagnosis or treatment – consultation response

Barnardo's Cymru welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation at such a critical time for health and social care services across Wales. We wanted to take this opportunity to share some insights from our services that support children and young people in the event of a physical or mental health diagnosis.

Our services are required to provide support to families that are on a long NHS waiting list, whilst also managing the unavoidable fact that many of our services have waiting lists of their own.

One unexpected impact of the pandemic and moving much of our support online is that for many families, particularly parents/carers, the idea of being on a waiting list has been significantly reimagined by the creativity of Barnardo's staff.

Atebion: Bridgend Disability Support Service offers support to children with a disability and their families, whether they are diagnosed or going through the process of a diagnosis. The support provided will be tailored by a support plan developed in partnership with the family. The service provides short-term support to build families' resilience and coping strategies.

During the pandemic, the Atebion team moved to working virtually and as such have a bespoke, online programme that families can access in full

whilst on the waiting list. Families have been able to use this information to begin making changes in the home – to routines, family dynamics and many other issues – that can bring about improvements in advance of getting one-to-one support from a support worker. This is incredibly important given that Atebion was established to support approximately 50 families per year, but we currently support in the region of 200 families a year.

We believe this is a clear example of how action can be taken to mitigate the impact of long waiting lists, and that the voluntary sector is at the forefront of such innovation. Although this helps and supports families, this does not replace the support that they are waiting for on a one-to-one basis.

Despite this change, Barnardo's staff report that families are dealing with a significant amount of distress and anxiety because of their time spent on long waiting lists – both for treatment from the NHS and from other providers.

Whilst our teams have worked tirelessly and innovatively to ensure that we reach as many families as we can in the shortest possible time, we are only mitigating some of the harms caused by long waiting lists for families waiting on a diagnosis for their child.

Additionally, we know that children and families are receiving little support in the event of a diagnosis of a disability. We believe that there is a need to support families earlier on in their diagnosis rather than waiting for them to come to Barnardo's Cymru. The only way we can do this is by working with our colleagues in the NHS to deliver a bespoke service in addition to working alongside early help teams to deliver this, but it needs funding for us to achieve this aim.

Beyond the Blue is a Barnardo's Cymru service operating in Neath that provides counselling and mental health support to children and families. Beyond the Blue staff are seeing a need for lengthier support times, where families require intensive, longer-term sessions to manage their emotional and mental wellbeing. We are recognising higher levels of mental ill health in our parents/carers and distress in our children and young people, much of which is attributable to the long waiting lists that these vulnerable families find themselves on.

Historically and at present, our Barnardo's services have been given extra funding. Recently in Oct-Dec 2021/22 we received Welsh Government funds to help drive down waiting times within our services where there was high demand. This funding has been extremely welcome but unless it is maintained in the longer term, the problem it seeks to ease will rebound with ferocity and we will continue to see families on a long

waiting list which has a negative impact on their emotional and mental wellbeing.

At Barnardo's Cymru we take our role in supporting families and helping to alleviate the impact of long waiting lists seriously. We are huge supporters of the dedicated NHS services that we work alongside, but there is no doubt that long NHS waiting lists can have damaging consequences for families across Wales. It is our hope that the voluntary sector can bring our expertise and specialism to help mitigate these issues and meet our shared ambition of ensuring that more families are supported as quickly as possible.

I would be happy to provide more information if that would be useful to you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Sarah Crawley', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Sarah Crawley
Director of Barnardo's Cymru