

Credwch
mewn plant
Believe in
children



Barnardo's
Cymru



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Delivery of Advocacy Services for Children and Young People 0-25 in Wales

Children and Young People's Consultation

Consultation coordinated by Tim Ruscoe



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We would like to thank all of the children and young people who contributed to this consultation. Without their hard work, ideas and honesty we would not have been able to produce this report.

Similarly, we would like to acknowledge the efforts of all the support staff which helped facilitate our contact with children and young people at very short notice. Our thanks go to them too.

BARNARDO'S CYMRU

This consultation exercise has been managed by the Barnardo's Cymru Policy and Research Unit.

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June 2011

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S CONSULTATION ON THE DELIVERY OF ADVOCACY SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE 0-25 IN WALES

Words used in this report and what they mean

WAG	The Welsh Assembly Government (Now the Welsh Government)
Consultation	Asking for people's views, ideas and opinions about something.
Advocacy	The support you need to have your say in things that affect you.

Background to this project

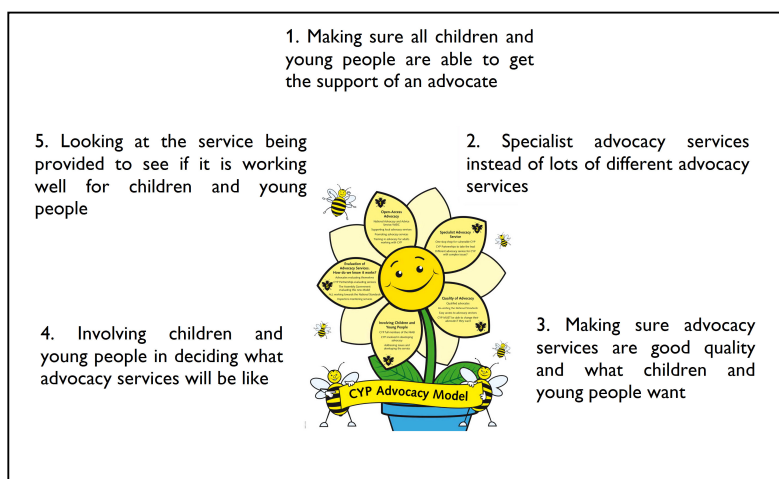
In order to improve the experiences of advocacy for children and young people in Wales, the Welsh Assembly Government, (WAG) has developed its model for the delivery of advocacy services to children and young people in Wales. To make sure this can progress further, the WAG issued a consultation period so that people could say what they thought about the proposed model and if they think it will make a difference to the lives of children and young people. The date of the consultation period was from 24th of January 2011 to 4th of April 2011.

To make sure that children and young people were able to take part in this consultation, the WAG paid Barnardo's Cymru's, Policy and Research Unit to meet with some children and young people from around Wales to hear and report on what they thought about the advocacy model. This happened between March the 18th and the 22nd of April 2011. The final report is to be with the WAG by the 13th of May.

The WAG had previously done some work with children and young people about the advocacy model and last year produced a report to describe to children and young people what this model was all about (Appendix A). They had also produced a picture to help describe what the important bits of the model are and how they all fit together to make a flower.

New Advocacy Model

The five petals of the flower represent the different parts of the new advocacy model. This will be used to help ensure all children and young people will be able to get the support of an advocate when they need it.



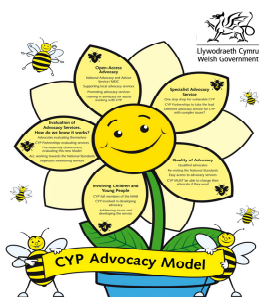
Methodology: How did we do the Consultation?

What we did

We were asked by the WAG to speak to children and young people from all around Wales. We only had a very short time to do this. We spent 4 weeks meeting as many children and young people as we could from different backgrounds. The WAG is hoping to give the findings to the lead Minister in the new government after the elections in May.

The team then set about arranging meetings with children and young people across Wales, splitting the country into 6 sections (see map on page 4).

Methods We Used



We used two different methods to gather information from children and young people.

Method 1: We used art activities to work with groups of children and young people (Appendix B).

Method 2: We used questionnaires to speak to children and young people. Some people completed these as individuals and others in small groups (Appendix C).

The questions for the focus groups and the questionnaires were generated from the WAG document, '*Cymry Ifanc: Young Wales, Advocacy services for children and young people ... someone on your side (January 2010)*', which sets out the 5 parts of the new advocacy model (see flower above) and the original consultation document. Researchers also recorded their own observations.

Steps we took to work respectfully with children and young people (sometimes called ethics)

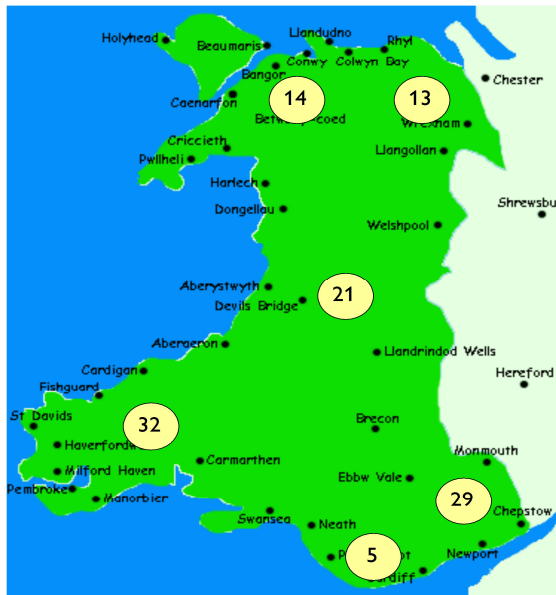
We designed forms for the children and young people to provide information and gain their consent to take part. We also designed forms for children and young people to give to their parents. These forms provided information and also the chance for parents to tell us if they didn't want their children taking part in the consultation (Appendix D).

Who did we speak to?

The team met with 114 children and young people from 5 to 23 years of age. These children and young people use 16 different services throughout Wales. These included

Young Carers' Services, Disability Services, Young People's Consultancy and Inspection Services, Website Management, Youth Services, Advocacy Services, Representation, Secure Accommodation, Mental Health Services, Domestic Abuse Services, Race Equality and Asylum Seekers.

Where the children and young people who contributed came from and how many



73 children and young people took part in focus groups and 41 children and young people took part in answering questionnaires.

58 of the total were male and 56 female although on occasion the groups were predominantly one or the other.

A small number had received training and gained experience as Peer Advocates.

English, Welsh, Kurdish and Farsi languages were used by contributors.

What did children and young people tell us?



1. Open-Access Advocacy that's available to all children and young people

1.1 Little is known about local advocacy services

Almost all the children and young people told us they knew little about local advocacy services. Only 8 out of 73 children and young people taking part in focus groups could actually name a local advocacy service. Others thought they might know of something locally but couldn't actually name what that service was. Out of 41 young people who were asked the question, **'Could you tell me what advocacy means to you?'** the majority were only able to answer the question after the meaning of advocacy had been explained to them. The majority of children and young people said they had not heard of advocacy or were not sure of its meaning prior to the explanation. This included some young people who were using a service which did offer an element of advocacy support.

Comments included:

'I'm not sure what advocacy is'.

'Sorry I don't know. I've never heard of it'.

'Never heard of advocacy before. The information is not getting out there'.

'Last year I was homeless and there was nobody there to help me'.

1.2 Understanding the role of an advocate

We explored with the children and young people what the role of an advocate was. During this process children and young people showed a good understanding of what that role involved.

Comments were:

'Someone who speaks up for you when you can't.'

'When you want to make a point to a 'higher power'.'

'If you feel intimidated dealing with things your self.'

'My voice if I wasn't happy with something and if I needed help they would be there to support me.'

1.3 Understanding of advocacy and information providers

Confusion of the precise nature of advocacy remained with some children and young people viewing it as an information provider.

'Signposting, directing people'.

All children and young people taking part were asked whether they had heard of Meic. Of the 73 children and young people who took part in the focus groups, 12 replied that they had heard of Meic. Only a very small minority of those taking part in the facilitated questionnaires had heard of Meic and knew what the service offered. Those who were aware of Meic were already involved in activities through young people's forums. A small number had heard of Meic, often through sight of a poster, but were unsure of what it provided.

One young person had used Meic on two occasions but reported a negative experience the second time he had used the service.

'I was given incorrect information'.

1.4 How easy was it to find someone to act as your Advocate?

Children and young people are most likely to use the support of formal advocates such as teachers, youth workers, social workers, school counsellors. However, even if using formal support, they often do not realise they are receiving advocacy.

A number of children and young people who were using services which were able to provide an element of advocacy were still unaware of what advocacy meant, stating that they had, 'Never heard of it before'. This was also true of those who had been referred to trained advocates who worked for services they were already using.

Comments included:

'I was found an advocate quickly but wasn't aware what it meant'

'It wasn't easy to find an advocate'.

The majority of children and young people who had no experience of using either a formal or specialist advocacy service felt it would be difficult to know where to find one.

Comments included:

'I think it would be difficult to find a formal advocate'



2. Specialist Advocacy Services:

There were mixed opinions regarding specialist advocacy services and where they should be located.

2.1 Specialist services versus universal advocacy provision

Some children and young people felt that it was important that advocates were specially trained to work with specific groups of people, this included those of different ages and from different cultural heritages.

Comments included:

'It should be done by different people who specialise in helping different groups'.

'Specialists could be trained to work with specific populations of people'.

'Yes but with specialist age, depends on problem, language, culture and religion'.

However, the majority of children and young people felt that depending on what the issues were, and with the appropriate training, all advocates should be able to work with different people in a variety of settings.

Comments were:

‘One advocate could be trained up to work with all different children and young people’

‘Advocates need to be able to work in lots of different situations’.

One young person from a traveller background with experience of the care system felt she was not a priority for advocacy support as she was “only section 17”. Consequently this young person should have had access to specialist advocacy support under the current statute and guidance (National Standards for the Provision of Children’s Advocacy Services 2003 Appendix E) but saw herself as less in need than others and without the right to access because of her status.

2.2. Need for good matching

All the children and young people were in agreement that issues such as age, religion and language should be taken into account and that there should be a good match between the person offering advocacy support and those receiving it. Some children and young people were in favour of advocacy services comprising teams of specially trained individuals of whom the child or young person receiving the service could choose a representative.

Comments included:

‘Should be good matching’.

‘Needs to be flexible to meet needs’

‘Should be young people’s choice’.

‘Evaluation of a person’s needs, advocacy should be matched to the need’.

2.3 The location of advocacy services

a) Specialist advocacy services based together

We asked the children and young people if they would like advocacy services to be based together. The chief concerns of those who were in favour, centred on accessibility to these services. This was of special concern for those living in large county areas.

We were told:

'Should be in one base but able to get to children and young people'.

'Should be in one building so as not to send young people here, there and everywhere'.

'Could be in one location, but with smaller hubs for local access'.

b) Smaller towns and confidentiality

Young people living in smaller towns felt that to have a service in one location may compromise confidentiality, so therefore felt these services would be better spread out across specialist services with advocates being based within these services, i.e.

'Should be across the area for better confidentiality'

c) Younger children

The need to ensure services are easily accessible for children and younger age groups was also highlighted.

'Should be spread out. Distance can be a problem for younger people'.

d) Multiple Difficulties

One young person felt that people's problems are often multiple and having specialist advocacy services based together in one location would help alleviate the issues of someone experiencing multiple difficulties having to seek help in a variety of locations and from several different services.

'Yes in one place. If they are in one place people would know where to go for all their problems. People can have multiple problems like mental health which can lead to drug misuse and possible homelessness'.

e) Outreach

The importance of advocacy services offering flexibility to meet the needs of children and young people across a variety of locations was highlighted. Young people felt this could be addressed through offering an outreach service where advocates were prepared to visit a location more convenient to the child or young person.

2.4 Funding

Most of the children and young people felt that funding for advocacy services should come from a combination of services. This includes the WAG and those partners who make up The Children and Young People's Partnership who are the Local Government or Local Authority, Health, Social Services, Voluntary Sector Organisations, the Police,

Education, Youth Work and Play Work providers. Young people's reasons were that they felt specialist advocacy services should be a shared cost.

One young person felt that as the WAG was responsible for making the laws in Wales that it should be responsible for funding service provision. There was concern about funding coming from 'over stretched' services such as Health and Education.

One young person expressed a concern that there shouldn't be a charge to service users.

Another young person felt that each of the areas of service, such as Health, Social Services or Education, should provide and fund specialist advocates in their fields.



3. Quality of Advocacy:

3.1 Direct experiences of using advocacy services

Positive experiences centred on being provided with the opportunities of speaking up and being heard.

We were told:

'Very helpful to get listened to and it has been very positive'.

'I could speak my mind, say what I wanted through them. There was trust and they put me at the centre'.

'It meant the psychiatrist listened to me'.

Negative experiences were focused upon how services engaged with children and young people and the time this can take.

Comments included:

'There were no real negative, but the main frustration was how long it took to engage a service'.

'It was unhelpful as the advocate was difficult to engage'.

Those young people who had used advocacy services were generally positive about the experience. A number of young people spoke about services being helpful and supportive and that using the support of an advocacy service had helped them to get problems sorted.

'I could speak my mind, say what I wanted through them.'

One young person who had an existing health problem felt she was being 'fobbed off' by medical professionals who would not take her new problems seriously until she was able to have advocacy support.

'He (the advocate) saw both my point of view and the psychiatrist's point of view and could explain things clearly. It meant the psychiatrist listened to me.'

A number of young people could identify a time in their lives when advocacy support could have assisted in helping them resolve problems.

3.2 Skills and qualities needed to provide good advocacy services

Whilst the majority of young people felt that specialist advocacy providers should have relevant qualifications and receive training, their chief concern centred on advocates being skilled at working with children and young people.

Comments were:

'Not necessary to have qualifications but be skilled at listening and talking to children and young people'.

'Should have 'how to speak to young people training.'

'Communication life skill.'

a) What would make children and young people use an advocacy service?

Amongst the qualities which would help young people approach an advocate or advocacy service were:

- Easy access to the service.
- Ensuring information, advice and the appropriate support was provided.
- Knowing that they could trust the person.
- Communication styles were appropriate and accessible for children and young people.
- To not be patronised.

Comments included:

'Knowing them and talking in a way that suits young people'.

'Would have better confidence in a trustworthy adult'.

b) What would prevent children and young people using an advocacy service?

Factors which would stop young people approaching an advocate or advocacy service included:

- Lack of information and lack of knowledge that the service exists.

- The service being in a location with poor transport links.
- Limited availability of service contact hours and opening times.

c) Most important quality of an advocacy service

The qualities of the advocates themselves were once again of chief importance in ensuring young people felt able to approach and be willing to use these services.

Children and young people did not want an advocate to be:

'Too formal'

'Patronising'

'Not committed'

Time taken to build a relationship of trust and consistency of working with the same advocate was also discussed as an essential element of a good advocacy service. Young people felt that if someone was to support them to speak up for themselves or, in some cases, represent them or speak on their behalfs, they must have first developed a strong element of trust in this person.

Comments included:

'I only talk to people I trust'

'I had the same advocate for the last 5 years. This is essential in helping me.'

3.3 Training and payment of advocates and standards

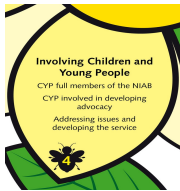
Some young people thought that there could be different levels of training and experience which should be reflected in the payment. One young person felt that advocacy services could comprise of advocates who had a basic level of training around more generic issues. These people could then signpost children and young people needing more specialised support to advocates trained in specific areas of need.

One young person in the first group suggested that Specialists should have Advocacy qualifications, Formal Advocates should have some training, Informal Advocates should have awareness and Peers should have the opportunity for training and qualification. Subsequent groups generally agreed with this.

The majority of children and young people overwhelmingly thought specialist advocates should be paid. Others thought that it was not essential for advocates to be paid as the service could be offered by volunteer advocates. However the importance that these children and young people placed on advocacy services indicates that they believe they ought, and deserved, to be paid.

All children and young people felt strongly that no matter what part of Wales you were living in, you should be able to expect the same level of support from an

advocacy service and there should not be variation from region to region. They also talked about a minimum standard of service which all children and young people should be able to expect.



4. Involving Children and Young People:

4.1 Opinions regarding consultations

Only 8 out of the 41 children and young people who took part in the facilitated questionnaires had previously taken part in any consultancy exercises about advocacy services. Those who had previously taken part were involved in evaluations of the advocacy service they had received or were part of young people's consultancy panels.

Those who had not previously been consulted about advocacy services thought that it would be a good idea if they were to be consulted on matters that affect them.

We were told:

'I think young people have the right to say what affects them'.

'Yes I think it would have been good to have been asked before'.

It was also felt that being consulted provided an opportunity to make sure that children and young people have knowledge about services available to them. One young person made the very valid comment:

'You always seem to find out about these things when you don't need them and you've struggled through things by yourself and then find out from someone else who knew and got through it much easier'.

4.2 Young people and communication with the WAG

The majority of children and young people thought that they should be included as members of a national group that would meet and advise the Welsh Assembly Government. However, concern centred on the WAG not listening to the views of children and young people.

Whilst the majority of children and young people agreed that they should be part of an email group that could give ideas to the Welsh Assembly Government, there were concerns around internet and email safety.

These included:

'Your identity could be compromised, it might not be you on the computer'

'It could be a weirdo at the end of the computer'

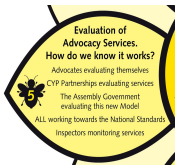
'Good idea but it might be abused'

One young person felt that email as a form of communication might exclude those who have difficulties with reading and writing. Whilst this is the comment of only one person out of the many children and young people we spoke to, it is fair to say that this is a common problem faced by many people with learning disabilities or difficulties. Another young person also felt it was a bad idea as he felt that children and young people already spend too much time on the internet and email.

4.3 Children and young people's involvement in designing (making) local advocacy services

Children and young people's only reservation about being involved in designing (making) the local advocacy service with adult professionals was that they may find it intimidating. It is therefore important to ensure that the process of involving children and young people genuinely welcomes and values their views.

Once again the majority of young people did feel that they should be able to tell their advocacy service when they are not doing things quite right. However, some young people thought that this may be difficult to do in practice. Therefore a process would need to be developed to protect children's and young people's confidentiality, enabling them to express themselves freely if full participation and good quality of services are to be ensured.



5. Evaluation of Advocacy Services – how do we know it works?:

Children and young people felt that service users should be involved in the evaluation of the advocacy services they have received. This process must be fully confidential ensuring the child or young person is able to express an honest opinion.

Varying suggestions were made such as:

- 1) The WAG as an overarching body and the funders of advocacy services acting as evaluators at a national level.
- 2) Those that provide advocacy support either on a specialist or formal level such as social workers, teachers and key workers, acting as peer reviewers of specialist advocacy services.
- 3) Children and young people could be trained and helped to carry out the role of Inspectors.

Those who were in favour of inspectors evaluating advocacy services thought that this could operate along the lines of school inspectors. However, they felt that the inspections should be spontaneous in order to ensure ongoing quality of services

without the advocacy provider being able to 'get their house in order' for the period of inspection only.

Summary Conclusion



1. Open-Access Advocacy

It was felt that for advocacy services to be open and available to all children and young people across Wales, more information must be widely available in places that young people were most likely to see it.

Children and young people's recommendations for getting information about advocacy to them

Amongst the places it was felt information about advocacy services would be seen by children and young people were:

Where young people hang out:

Youth clubs, night clubs, pubs, leisure centres, sports clubs, cinemas, around town, libraries, schools. Life Skills lessons in school was suggested as an appropriate school forum.

Services children and young people use:

Health centres, GPs surgeries, dentists, tattoo parlours.

Some young people did however feel that medical centres and libraries are already over subscribed with information, therefore children and young people may feel slightly 'bogged' down with information at these locations.

Where children and young people are most likely to see and hear information:

Local radio adverts, newspapers, sides of buses, posters, Facebook and Facebook advertisements, Twitter, webpages aimed at young people such as Sprout.

Comments were:

'Everyone has a Facebook'.

'Sprout has over 20,000 viewings a month'.

Where information is actually placed was emphasised as important in order to get noticed by children and young people. Suggestions included the backs of toilet doors, above urinals and next to mirrors in toilets, park benches, at the bottom of beer glasses. One original suggestion was to use adverts instead of music when holding on

the telephone for specific services such as Social Services, Local Authorities and medical services.

People who work with children and young people such as teachers, social workers and youth workers could also be a source of providing information which could include signposting on to professional/specialist advocacy services.



2. *Specialist Advocacy Services:*

Children and young people's opinions were mixed on the question of the location of advocacy services. Some favoured the approach of specialist advocates brought together under one service, whilst others favoured the more universal approach with advocacy support spread across other service providers.

All the children and young people were in agreement that no matter where advocacy services were located the most important factor is that there should be a good match between the advocate and those seeking advocacy.

Children and young people were also unanimous in that advocacy should be a flexible and adaptable service which accommodates service users' needs. Services should be easily accessible to all those needing advocacy support. Outreach services could be a good way to address the problems of confidentiality versus accessibility.



3. *Quality of Advocacy:*

Positive experiences of using advocacy centred on being given the opportunities to speak up and to be heard, whilst negative experiences focused on how services sometimes engaged poorly with children and young people and took too long to deliver the service.

With regard to quality and training, most of the children and young people felt specialist advocates should have relevant qualifications and training. However, of most concern were the skills needed to work with children and young people in a respectful way.

The tiered training suggested, with some advocates receiving a basic level of generic training whilst others receive more specialised training, may ensure multiple difficulties experienced by some children and young people are addressed in one location prior to signposting on to more specialist provision. This may also address the issue of specialist services versus universal service provision.



4. *Involving Children and Young People:*

Opinion was mostly in agreement that children and young people should be consulted on the services they receive. However, there were some concerns about methods of consultation.

- A large number of the children and young people had concerns regarding internet safety with regard to email consultations.
- Communication requiring reading and writing abilities may exclude people with low levels of literacy.
- That children and young people's involvement with adult professionals in making advocacy services could feel intimidating.
- How to get past the difficulties of criticising those providing advocacy services you are receiving.

It is therefore important that the methods used for involving children and young people in designing advocacy services are respectful, confidential and accessible to all. This may require more creative approaches to consultation taking account of literacy levels, language skills, learning and cultural issues.



5. *Evaluation of Advocacy Services – how do we know it works?*

Children and young people made three suggestions of how advocacy services should be evaluated:

- 1) Evaluation to take place at a national level by The WAG and the funders.
- 2) Peer reviews to be carried out by advocates both specialist and formal.
- 3) Children and young people acting as inspectors.

6. *Researcher observational conclusion*

As previously discussed, knowledge and awareness of advocacy depends largely on the children and young people's experience of advocacy. Those who had established long term relationships with specialist advocates were reporting good experiences that went beyond getting heard, to building self confidence and personal skills. Children and young people, who were without this contact, when they did understand advocacy, were able to identify and value the support they had received from formal and informal advocates.

There were different trends, which appeared to be linked to age, about the willingness to go to family or teachers when needing help, advice and support. It appeared that those needing specialist support were more likely to be aware of, and access, available

support when there were good relationships built with people in the formal advocate categories including some foster carers.

The research data suggests that there is a significant need to again review corporate parenting as there appears to be a lack of consistency of experience for those children and young people who are living away from home in accessing advocacy support.

Through conversation and observation it became apparent that there are significant differences in the knowledge and awareness of MEIC amongst the support staff. This varied from no knowledge to a full understanding, and was generally reflected in the visible available information. Some children, young people and workers were reporting local developments that they were more likely to know about and access than national ones.

We are supportive of the ideals of universal advocacy and its potential benefits as it supports a children's rights model. However, the consultation evidence shows that those in vulnerable groups who, under current guidance, should be able to access advocacy, are not. Data suggests that children and young people from vulnerable groups are not universally aware of advocacy or children's rights and neither are they enabled to access available advocacy services.

If these vulnerable groups are not enjoying advocacy support the provision of universal advocacy may not be realistic without an increase in available specialists, recognition of, and support for the formal advocate role, trained peer advocates and volunteer advocates.