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**Dormant Assets Funding – Barnardo’s Cymru Consultation Response**

**Questions**

**Q1. To what extent do you agree that money from the Dormant Assets Scheme in Wales should continue to be spent on supporting children and young people?**

We agree that money from the Dormant Assets Scheme should continue to be spent supporting children and young people across Wales.

Investing in children and young people is investing in our collective future, and in ensuring that some of the most vulnerable members of our society have the support that they need.

**Q2. Are there any specific issues affecting children and young people that you think it is particularly important for dormant assets funds in Wales to address?**

We know that child poverty is increasingly entrenched across Wales and requires urgent action.

Poverty impacts upon families in myriad ways, which means that there are various ways in which dormant asset funding could be utilised to target and mitigate this.

Barnardo’s has carried out research on the impact of bed poverty across the UK. Children need a good night’s sleep in order to thrive, yet our latest research1 shows that families in crisis are having to prioritise essentials such as food, heating and electricity over things like replacing mouldy bedding or fixing a broken bed.

Most of the families we support have been affected by the cost-of-living crisis. They have very little disposable income and are struggling to fund essential items such as gas and electric or food. Furniture is not a priority to purchase.

Our research found that bed poverty can take different forms, including:

* broken beds and damaged bedding: families who could not afford to replace or repair unsuitable beds or bedding, for example bedding that had gone mouldy
* sharing beds and rooms: a number of families in our research were sharing beds with their children as they could not afford separate bedding
* sleeping on the floor: many Barnardo’s practitioners mentioned working with parents or children sleeping on the floor.

One example of an area that could be supported by the allocation of dormant asset funding is care-experienced young people and care leavers. There are two examples of programmes in South Wales which support young people to meet their ambitions.

**Believe: Positive Destinations**

It is well documented that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and those who are care experienced are at greater risk of being NEET.  for 2022 indicates that of the cohort of 748 Year 13 pupils; 25 were not known to be in education training or employment, 14 declined to answer the survey, 2 young people were in education for less than 16 hours per week and 5 were taking time before committing to HE. We also know that there are significantly high dropout rates from training courses and programmes after the first few months. There are many reasons for this including disrupted education through school moves, instability at home and poor mental health due to childhood trauma. Their self-confidence is poor, and often they have left school with little or no qualifications. For these young people accessing the world of work seems like a gargantuan task. With the support of our retail colleagues and partner organisations Believe can provide young people with the opportunity to build up their workplace skills through a 12-week work readiness programme.

The intensive work readiness programme targets those socially excluded/economically inactive young people and parents aged 16-25, who are furthest from the labour market. The provision of dedicated skill building and well-being support through intensive engagement with our Key Workers, supports young people to overcome barriers to learning and skills training.  The programme incorporates work-based learning experiences in one of Barnardo’s retail stores, or in a variety of roles within our Children’s services. The programme includes workshop-style delivery on several different themes, placing specific emphasis on fostering interpersonal skills and life skills such as communication, self-awareness, and relationship-building. Recognising the particular needs of participants these workshops will be complemented by others that will provide them with skills and self-confidence they can use in daily life, these workshops will include goal setting with Barnardo’s Swansea’s Life Coach and managing stress and improving wellbeing through physical activity. The programme ensures young people are familiar with employers' expectations, encompassing workplace standards of behaviour. Work experience/volunteering opportunities are offered in Barnardo’s retail stores and children’s services, with the rationale that young people will be familiar with the setting, staff and services on offer. The comfort and familiarity of their surroundings will alleviate potential stress and contribute to building confidence, allowing them to focus on tasks and interactions, leading to a more efficient and meaningful learning experience.

Quotes from participants:

***“I now feel like I can communicate professionally, I’m more confident and a lot happier. I would recommend this project to anyone, it was amazing and it has helped me so much”.***

***“This course has given me everything I need to know, from how to find a job, to what to wear to an interview, to how to stay motivated in the face of adversity. I would recommend this programme to anyone, its such a rewarding experience, and I’ve been supported all the way, I feel so confident and motivated to take on anything that comes my way.”***

**Bloom**

The aim of the service is to promote, safeguard and enhance the rights of young people to assist them to make a successful transition to adulthood and empower them to be heard and to reduce loneliness and anxiety, develop skills, confidence and self-esteem, and to help young people fulfil their potential. The service works with care leavers aged 18 -25 where there are less services and resources available to support this group of vulnerable young people.

There are three core elements of the project; life coaching, activity club and befriending & volunteer support. Coaching gives young people the power to unlock their own potential for positive change, by providing them with the tools to build resilience, improve wellbeing, and understand themselves better. Coaching empowers young people to think about and move forward positively in their lives, by creating and working towards specific goals.

The service also offers young people regular opportunities to get together to experience activities not easily accessed by care leavers alongside group events and regular clubs.

Volunteers will help with activities and provide an adult mentor where this is considered more appropriate. Befrienders meet the young people in the community and focuses on the importance of addressing loneliness and isolation through helping them build their social skills. All sessions are young person led with cooperation from the befriender, the service encourages young people to try new things throughout this process.

Quotes from Bloom year-end report:

*‘****Working with Bloom has allowed me to see and do so much! I feel like my voice is finally being heard’***

***‘I have enjoyed a lot of activities and tried new things that I wouldn’t normally be able to do! I have been able to meet a lot of new people too which is a bonus’***

***‘They helped me through tough times and helped me organise my life and get to where I am now, Bloom is one of the best things that’s happened in my life’***

Through our work in Wales, we know that young carers take on huge amounts of responsibility when caring for a relative. Opportunities to engage socially and leave their caring roles for activities and events are vital to supporting their mental wellbeing and combat social isolation. As young people in a caring role these opportunities are limited and investment in supporting them often relies on donations. Dormant asset funding could support these young people to access social spaces, activities and events.

There is also a need to support children and young people with disabilities, as well as their families. An example of a service that does this would be ACT Plus, in Blaenau Gwent.

​​The landscape for disability service in Wales is changing and the recent Welsh Government ALN Transformation Programme evidences the need to create a unified system for all young people to 25. There remains a transitional gap between children’s and adult’s services. This transition is often challenging as it combines a change/loss of services and professionals at the very time young people and families are negotiating wider changes to their lives.

​Within Blaenau Gwent families continue to tell us there needs to be more support post-18 – 50% of Barnardo’s survey respondents explicitly mentioned wanting more support in Blaenau Gwent. For example *“Everything stops at 18 I think it should continue till 30 yrs old at least.”*

​ACT Plus will be co-produced with young people and families, as a community of interest, ensuring voices and needs influence service design and innovations. It will provide 1:1, community-focussed and virtual support with the aspiration of building resilience, peer support networks and social integration for families and young people aged 18–25, with diagnosed additional needs, improving wellbeing and social support in communities for them, siblings and families. It will support transitions to adulthood, build resilience, peer support networks and social integration.

​For siblings, who often feel forgotten within disability services, a dedicated group programme will support social and emotional wellbeing, reduce isolation and develop coping strategies. They also tell us they would like to become more confident, resilient and enjoy their ‘downtime’ like peers. The programme will include co-developed and co-organised respite-orientated activities with families, including community events, sensory activities and day trips.

​A constant thread running through ACT Plus will be connecting with partners to deliver life-skills sessions, promote aspirations and increase service reach.

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**Q6. Are there any specific issues relating to financial inclusion that you think it is particularly important for dormant assets funds in Wales to address?**

We know that families are currently struggling with the high cost of living and inflationary pressures. Financial exclusion for children and young people is causing significant barriers.

Supporting children and young people to access sport, leisure and activities that benefit their physical and mental wellbeing and that they would otherwise not be able to afford to attend would make a significant difference to their lives. We know that families are being forced to make difficult decisions as they continue to weather the cost-of-living crisis, and for many, non-essential spending such as extra-curricular activities for children has had to go.

One Barnardo’s practitioner said:

***‘This is not something families can budget their way out of, it has become a way of life. Even the smallest treats – such as a magazine for children – don’t exist anymore. We are trying to help people stretch their money as far as possible, all to cover just the most basic of needs. It isn’t good enough.’***

Welsh Government has previously funded the Summer of Fun and Winter Wellbeing initiatives to help children and young people access enrichment activities across Wales. One use for the Dormant Assets Funding could be to enhance this type of offer to reach more children of every age and ensure that children across Wales are able to benefit from a childhood in the fullest sense of the word.

There are so many children and young people excluded from activities, college and work opportunities due to the costs of transport. We have called before for free bus and train travel for care experienced young people up to 25 years old. Access to free transport can free-up access to skills and employment, ensure that young people are able to maintain their relationships and support networks, as well as accessing enrichment opportunities. We know that it many parts of Wales rurality makes accessing a wide number of services difficult, and ensuring that care-experienced young people do not face barriers due to the cost of transport could have far-reaching outcomes.

**Q8. Are there any specific issues relating to community action that you think it is particularly important for dormant assets funds in Wales to address?**

At a time of unprecedented financial pressure and cuts to services that are designed to support children and young people, and make families safer and more stable, there are a number of community services and projects that warrant investment.

Newport-based Baby & Me is one such example. The service is a health and social care collaboration between Barnardo’s Cymru and Newport City Council which was developed through a long-standing partnership between the two organisations.  This innovative work follows the evidence to work in trauma-informed and relationship-based ways with parents at risk of, or in the wake of, losing care of their infants in public family law proceedings.

**Key research findings1**

* 48% reduction in number of babies entering care in Newport in first 14 days
* A respectful and humane response to mothers at risk of losing their babies
* Wellbeing and protection of infants held in sharp focus, with the team working in close partnership with children’s social care and professionals
* Baby and Me team’s specialist skills and close working relationship with parents enabling increased depth of analysis of issues of concern, increased social worker confidence and evidence-informed assessment and decision making.
* The service is addressing systematic gaps where needs of parents and babies were not otherwise identified or supported appropriately
* Long term partnership and shared vision between leaders at Newport Council and Barnardo’s Cymru is a crucial enabling factor

***“We have very clearly seen a reduction in the number of new-borns who are removed. Absolutely no doubt about that*…*I know that I am seeing considerably fewer ADMs…The numbers of placement orders have dropped significantly”* (Professional, other service)**

***“[It’s been] Life-changing…. We’ve got everything we’ve always wanted, and I never thought we were going to have. We honestly wouldn’t be where we are today without the Baby and Me team…. I don’t think they realise just how much they have changed our lives and how much they have given us yet. We’ll forever be grateful to them” (Father).***

The success of Baby & Me has been independently verified, but is confined to the local authority area of Newport, despite the fact that there is an evidenced need for this level of support across Wales.

Baby & Me has most recently been highlighted as a model of best practice for early prevention and recommended for rollout across Wales by the Children, Young People & Education Committee during their inquiry to ‘explore radical reform of current services for children looked after and care leavers’.

The Committee [recommended](https://senedd.wales/media/1okpjizg/cr-ld15849-e.pdf)2 that ‘The Welsh Government should ensure universal, nationwide access to successful edge of care/early intervention/preventative services, such as Barnardo’s Baby & Me, which have been shown to increase the chance of children being able to stay with their birth parents”. Welsh Government has accepted this recommendation in part, subject to evaluation.

The Baby & Me service has been found to create a successful bridge between parents and statutory services. Of those mothers/parents who were enabled, through the service, to keep their babies with them, the report reflected their experience of Baby & Me as being ‘life-changing’. And for those who were separated, they shared that the Baby & Me service supported them through a ‘time of deep grief and loss’, whereby they felt without this there may have been significant negative outcomes for them including the potential for a return to substance use or mental health crises.

Additionally, the report ‘Paying the Price’ highlights the cost savings of children, where safe, remaining in the care of their parent(s). There are both direct and indirect costs identified including costs to the local authority and legal costs, with more indirect cost potential for the NHS. The average lifetime social cost of adverse outcomes per child who needs a social worker is estimated to be £720,000, for children looked after this increases to £1.2m per child3. The current annual cost for children’s social care services is around £350 million in Wales4.

Dormant Assets Funding could be utilised to ensure that parents across Wales are able to access the level of support offered by Baby & Me by extending the service to every local authority, and ensuring that more families are supported to safely stay together.

Watch the animation: <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/what-we-do/services/baby-me>

**Q9. Please rank the four proposed spending purposes in order of importance and relevance to you.**

Children and young people  1

Climate change/nature emergency   4

Financial inclusion  3

Community action  2

**Q10. If you would like to suggest other potential spending purposes for the Dormant Assets Scheme in Wales please outline them here in line with the criteria specified in section 7.**

Not answered