

# PYOG

Grŵp Prif Swyddogion Ieuenctid Cymru  
Wales Principal Youth Officers' Group

## Parliamentary Review of Health and Social Care - Call for Evidence

### **Written evidence submitted by The *Wales Principal Youth Officers' Group***

The *Wales Principal Youth Officers Group* (PYOG) is the representative group of officers nominated by each local authority as the professional and strategic head of the youth service. The Group has an established role in advising on the strategic development and delivery of youth services and other associated initiatives and is a sub-group of the *Association of Directors of Education in Wales* (ADEW). The PYOG also has a strategic connection with the *Welsh Local Government Association* (WLGA) via the Lifelong Learning Policy Officer (Youth).

The PYOG welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Parliamentary Review of health and Social Care, particularly given the **valued contribution which youth work makes to the emotional and physical well-being of young people aged 11-25 years via an educational approach in a variety of settings.**

### **Executive Summary**

- Emotional well-being is the main concern of young people in Wales
- Good Health and Social Care is a crucial issue for us all with a number of sectors contributing to these goals, particularly those that are health related
- In a context of austerity and reduced services, more innovative solutions need to be found
- As service provision reduces, there is a greater need for innovation, pooled resources and collaborative approaches with the service user at the forefront
- The role of children's and youth support services in prevention/early intervention needs greater recognition
- An increasing number of young people who are not currently on the 'radar' of CAMHS providers are exhibiting concerning levels of emotional health and well-being.
- Services need to be mapped and better articulated as part of a continuum of provision
- Short term funding presents challenging issues and can be counter-productive when seeking sustainable solutions

## **Introduction**

1. Youth work is widely recognised as having a crucial role to play in developing **young peoples' ability to transition successfully to adulthood**, in becoming positive members of their local communities and recognising their place in and contribution to the global community. It is based on a voluntary, trusting relationship developed over time with young people between the ages of 11-25 years of all backgrounds and abilities. Youth work has a valuable contribution to make to the health and well-being of these young people, which will be described in further detail later in this submission.
2. Youth Work in Wales is now (from 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2017) a registered profession (with the Education Workforce Council) and has for some time had its own qualifications framework and National Occupational Standards, which define its key purpose as to:

*"...enable young people to develop holistically, working with them to facilitate their personal, social and educational development, to enable them to develop their voice, influence and place in society and to reach their full potential."*

## **Some key issues as identified by young people and Youth Workers**

3. Understandably, national debate and discussion around health and social care in recent years and for the foreseeable future has been and continues to be focussed on an ageing population and the level of preparedness of society to respond to this. What is of great importance and needs to be clearly recognised however is that, in order to achieve this, we need to invest wisely in our young people as much of this responsibility will inevitably fall on our younger generation. As a minimum requirement to provide strong foundations for them to thrive, young people need to be happy, healthy (physically and emotionally) and resilient. However, our ambitions for them and our wider population for sustainable, healthy and productive communities are higher than this – in order to make a positive contribution to society and sustainable communities, our young people need to develop the tools (e.g. leadership and innovation, empowerment, resilience, self-efficacy) to rise to these challenges.
4. Whilst parents and communities have a crucial role to play in this process, schools and children and youth support services provide formal, non-formal and informal learning opportunities and wrap-around support as children and young people develop and transition to adulthood. Whilst delivery in and by schools is perhaps more widely and clearly understood, **a broad variety of provision is offered by Youth Support Services generally and by the Youth Service (the framework through which youth work is delivered) in particular. Youth services are also open at times when schools are not.** Targeted interventions for vulnerable young people, including teenage pregnancy advice, work with young people not in

education, employment or training, substance misuse and homelessness support are each important.

5. However, **a more comprehensive youth work 'offer' is that which is accessible in a variety of settings and at appropriate and relevant times, including community locations and schools. Open access services**, including a range of leisure, cultural, sporting and educational enrichment activities provide a non-stigmatising environment and the two approaches (targeted and open-access) in this context often can't necessarily be separated. In 2011, the Westminster Education Select Committee reported that:

*One thing about open-access youth work is that it is not stigmatised. People are not referred to a youth worker; they take part in youth work provision and their needs are identified ... It is not like you are going to the place where the naughty boys go.*

6. Whilst the present large amount of formal evidence has been collected in recent years in relation to the main concerns of young people in Wales, young people also report through their Youth Workers and other professionals that **one of their main concerns is that of emotional well-being**. The recent pressures on CAMHS services have been well documented but **there is also a real concern across the sector for a high number of young people who do not necessarily require more acute service intervention but do require a level of support**. Young people consistently express concern around availability of and access to services such as leisure centres, swimming pools, gymnasiums, sexual health clinics etc., with lack of transport options in some areas a further barrier to accessing such facilities.
7. Whilst the contraction of the youth support sector is a real concern, the reduction of services is one of a series of challenges in the context of seeking more innovative solutions to modern demands and needs. Youth services - which traditionally have been flexible, responsive and have worked with a number of partners in improving outcomes for young people - are playing their part in this; **the role of youth work has been recognised as being critical in the continuum of emotional well-being/support services via the Together for Children & Young People (T4CYP) programme**, particularly in relation to early intervention and prevention. Where there is provision however, much of this is via **short term funding**, which presents a risk to good quality, sustainable provision. As services establish themselves and become well used by a local population (often through word of mouth), it can be quite a blow (in the short, medium and/or long term future) to a community to see it removed. Short term funding can also have a negative impact on recruitment and retention of good staff.

## The case for change

8. In developing the previous point about innovation, it is perhaps worth considering the quote by Henry Ford:

*"If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got".*

The issue of young people's health and pressures on Primary Mental Health services in Wales and the UK has been prevalent and widely reported for some time. The analogy of preventing people falling into the stream near its source, rather than dealing with them further downstream, when they are getting into more severe difficulties/exhibiting greater needs is particularly relevant – as we take our 'eye off the ball' in relation to preventative services, too many (young) people are requiring more acute/more expensive services e.g. as sport and leisure opportunities reduce, the challenge of obesity becomes greater. Youth work is one such service provision, which has **a strong preventative focus in diverting young people from requiring more acute and more expensive services further 'down the tline'.**

9. Targeted youth work has a place in the broader youth work 'offer'. However, a number of young people e.g. those who are deemed as 'engaged', often **academically capable with no obvious or overt behavioural symptoms may be just as in need of a Youth Work intervention** but may be overlooked or, where/when identified (or made known via self-referred), provision may difficult to identify as services are increasingly targeted.
10. In this regard, the approach taken by T4CYP is welcomed by the sector, in that it recognises a broad range of services provided by a number of relevant professions, who play a part in maintaining and improving the health and well-being of children and young people. It also puts a level of emphasis back on the school teacher, the G.P., the social worker (at a time when traditional social work relationships with young people are becoming more rare), the youth worker – whoever is in touch with and trusted by a young person – to recognise they have an important role to play in improving health and well-being. The challenge now is to ensure that these services are fully complementary of each other as elements in a **continuum of provision**, are working together productively and efficiently and are identifying and offering appropriate interventions in a timely fashion, whilst **ensuring that the voice of the young person is taken into account** along this journey.
11. Improvements have been and continue to be made around joint working; for example, the introduction of **Enhanced Access**, where CAMHS services in each Local Health Board area provide a **single point of access** for

professionals to discuss open cases and/or other young people causing concern is a very welcome addition. However, there is a great deal more that can be done in recognising the depth and breadth of provision for children and young people - mapping provision and raising awareness amongst the general population but also the workforce of **what services are available and improving skills to better match provision to need**. This includes statutory, non-statutory and voluntary sector service provision at local, regional and national level.

## **Opportunities**

### **Education**

12. Welsh Government and the education sector in Wales are currently developing a new curriculum, which is designed to better reflect the demands of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning, the needs of employers and the needs of children and young people. There are real opportunities for the education family - in its broadest sense – to work closer together but also with other agencies such as health providers in making a more comprehensive/holistic contribution to both its development and delivery.
13. Whilst all four of the main purposes of the new curriculum have the well-being of learners implicit throughout, one of the four is that of *Healthy, Confident Individuals*, with a specific 'area of learning' being that of *Health & Well-being*. Building Block 3 of the proposals is to 'extend and promote learners' experiences', which presents opportunities for schools and communities to work together in providing a rich suite of opportunities for learning. The aim is to make the new curriculum available by 2018, with all schools ready to deliver it by 2021.

### **Social Care**

14. As already mentioned, Youth Services act as an important preventative service, often keeping a young person from getting to a critical point where further interventions e.g. social services, housing, CAMHS, police etc. are required. By working closely with a young person, helping them navigate through their difficulties and experiences, **the need for more acute and expensive interventions is often avoided**. However, many young people using youth services are already disengaged from mainstream services and are often vulnerable. Some are currently in the care of social services, others perhaps need to be but do not have the motivation or ability to seek help. As well as assisting young people to become self-sufficient and interdependent, **youth workers are also competent advocates**, acting in the best interests of the young person whilst aiding the skills developments of that individual.
15. Some other areas where youth workers can contribute towards the demands of the *Social Services & Well-being Act* are:

- Participation – influencing service provision by service users e.g. via Youth Councils
- and Youth Forums
- Providing accurate and up-to-date information, advice & assistance in accordance
- with the *Wales Youth Information Standards*
- Work with young carers
- Work with young parents

### **Well-being of Future Generations**

16. As the name indicates, the WFG Act is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales, as applicable to all citizens but with a particular view to providing a better quality of life for future generations. Working with the young people who can help shape this future, the Youth Service contributes to all seven well-being goals (a prosperous Wales; a resilient Wales; a healthy Wales; a more equal Wales; a Wales of cohesive communities; a Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language; a globally responsible Wales). Not all young people will need or want to access youth work support but many do and will either do so continually or may dip in and out when they need it. Whilst underpinned by its core set of values, the Youth Service has a history of being flexible to the needs of young people and has a tradition of successful joint working with numerous partners in both the voluntary and statutory sectors in improving outcomes for young people.

Should you have any further queries about this submission or the work of the Youth Service generally, please do contact Jo Sims, Chair of the Wales Principal Youth Officers' Group, EVI Cultural Centre, Ebbw Vale, Blaenau Gwent NP23 6BE/ [jo.sims@blaenau.gwent.gov.uk](mailto:jo.sims@blaenau.gwent.gov.uk) tel. no. 01495 357866.