

# POPULATION ASSESSMENT BRIEFING DOCUMENT: CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

## 1. Introduction

Through the Understanding Our Communities project, public services are gaining a better understanding of the good things about communities, what matters to people and how their experiences and what they have to offer can help us to plan and provide services.

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act has been put in place to make sure that public services are doing all that they can to support people using care and support services to have their say and get involved in managing their own well-being. The Act means that public services will need to make sure that the right support is available for the people who need it at the right time and in the right way.

Under this Act, public services must carry out and publish a Population Assessment, which looks at:

- the needs for care and support, and the support needs of carer;
- the extent to which those needs are not being met;
- the range and level of services needed to meet those needs; and
- how services are delivered through the medium of Welsh.

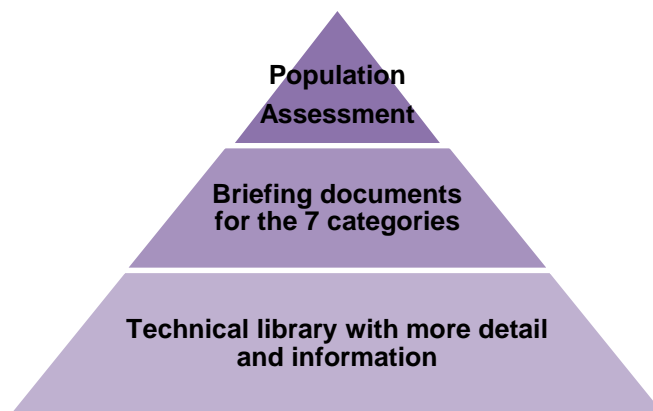
In Cwm Taf, we have been collecting lots of information for the Assessment, from the people making policy and commissioning decisions about services, the people delivering services and the people receiving services. In order to look at all of this information in an organised way, we used the seven 'themes' of the Act;

- Carers;
- Children and young people;
- Learning disability;
- Mental Health;
- Older people;
- Physical disability and sensory impairment; and
- Violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

We then spent some time, talking with these people about the headlines that emerged under these themes and really thinking about how they affect people and what we as public services can do to meet the needs of people using our services, in the best possible way, now and in the future.

A summary of the headlines relating to children and young people in receipt of care and support are contained in this document. The document shows how these headlines fit into the 'bigger picture' and the key messages which relate to *all* themes and what we currently do and/or could do to deal with these headlines.

The overall Population Assessment report contains the headline information across all themes.



The triangle shows the different parts of our work which taken together make up Cwm Taf's Assessment Report. Each level of this Assessment is supported by a more detailed level of data and information. The Assessment Report has been put together like this so that each reader can explore the information we have collected and analysed in as much or as little detail as they would like and can follow up any particular areas of interest. All of the information gathered throughout the project to inform the headlines in this briefing document is also available in an online library.

## 2. Children and young people in receipt of care and support

*Definition: The children and young people chapter includes those aged 0 to 18 as well as those eligible for services until they are 25 including care leavers. Children with disabilities and young carers are discussed in other chapters.*

### Strategic Context:

The Cwm Taf Social Services and Well-Being Partnership Board is developing a statement of commissioning for children and families to ensure clarity of

focus on the priorities that will deliver the aims of the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014.

The purpose of the statement is to set the direction of travel for the provision of high quality, accessible and integrated services that will focus on improving the education, health and well-being of children, young people and families in the Cwm Taf partnership region.

It will align existing service plans and strengthen joint working arrangements between the NHS, local authorities and the voluntary and private sectors.

At the centre of this plan, partners will agree a set of shared objectives, and an agreed method of assessing progress travelled. It will ensure that multi-agency working is encouraged and that all professionals can see how their work contributes to the overall well-being of children, young people and families across Cwm Taf. The strategy will seek to reduce the dependence on intensive interventions in favour of early intervention, prevention and promoting resilient communities.

### 3. The current position in Cwm Taf

Cwm Taf comprises of two local authority areas of Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil. The 2015 mid-population was estimated to be 296,735<sup>1</sup>. Merthyr Tydfil is the smallest local authority in Wales with a population of 59,324 while RCT has the third largest population of 237,411.

The child population in Cwm Taf is estimated to have increased slightly between 2005 and 2015 - up 2.2 percent (6406 people). The growth in the population has been larger in Merthyr Tydfil than in RCT, up 5.3 percent and 1.4 percent respectively.

Cwm Taf has a relatively young age profile with its 62,210 children making up 21 percent of the population (i.e. 1 in every 5 people living in Cwm Taf is under 18). Young adults (aged 18 to 24) make up 9 percent of the population.

Across Cwm Taf the overall population aged 0 to 24 has been declining since 2011, down from 90,442 to 89,772. There has been a similar decline down 0.8 percent over the same period.

#### Children and young people population projections:

The 2014 based population projections show the overall population of people aged 0-24 will decline by 1.6 percent between 2016 and 2025 across Cwm Taf<sup>2</sup>. Nationally the decline is 1.1 percent. Within this age group the number of 16-

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<sup>1</sup> Children and young people population 2015 mid-year pop estimates ([Office of National Statistics](#))

<sup>2</sup> Children and young people population projections 2014 based projections ([Office of National Statistics](#))

24 year olds is projected to decrease the most. Children and young people as a proportion of the total population is likely to increase to 29 percent of all people living in Cwm Taf, this is in spite of the projected decrease in the number of children and young people.

#### Daffodil: Projecting the need for care services:

Both Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil are predicted to see small percentage increases in the number of children aged 0-17 who experience abuse and neglect.

The long standing illness of mothers and their health behaviour lifestyles are predicted to slightly deteriorate across Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Teenage pregnancies are predicted to reduce by 18.5 percent in Merthyr and 9.5 percent in RCT up to 2019.

Overall young carers are predicted to decline across both local authority areas.

## 4. Headlines

*Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) have a tremendous impact on health and well-being later in life.*

Public Health Wales has conducted research which has increased our understanding of the long term impacts that negative childhood experiences can have on individuals and the wider society<sup>3</sup>. The study into Adverse Childhood Experiences in Wales (ACEs) found that children who suffer abuse are more likely to be involved in violence and misuse drugs and alcohol. Many of the health problems we see today in adults can be rooted in childhood. Professor Mark Bells, Director of Policy, Research and International Development in Public Health Wales said "...providing safe and nurturing environments for every child in Wales is the best way to ensure we raise healthier and happier adults who contribute to their communities and the economy."

We know from the information presented in this chapter that too many children in Cwm Taf are in care and for the majority they will have experienced trauma associated with abuse, neglect, loss and separation from family and friends before entering care. Importantly, these experiences affect the way in which looked after children can feel about themselves and increase the risk of mental health problems.

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<sup>3</sup> See Social Chapter for additional information

According to the National Service for Adoption in Wales up to 25 percent of children placed for adoption have experiences in childhood that need specialist or targeted support. As corporate parents we must work to help children recover and repair any damage from adverse experiences such as abuse and neglect through building resilience and addressing mental health difficulties.

Timely access to the right mental health care is crucial. We know from stakeholder feedback that accessing specialist trauma counselling for looked after children looked after is an issue across Cwm Taf. Nationally delays experienced by young people who need extra help with their mental health has been identified as one of the priorities for the Children's Commissioner for Wales.

Adverse childhood experiences are not confined to just those children in receipt of care and support – unfortunately many children from the general population will also be exposed to abuse, neglect and harmful experiences. Prioritising the early years and focussing resources on early intervention and prevention to tackle the root causes of health harming behaviours is critical if we are to ensure every child in Cwm Taf has the best possible start to life.

*Timely access to the right mental health care is crucial if we are to support better mental health among children and young people and reduce pressure on high level need services such as CAMHS.*

Children and young people face many challenges but they warn us that we must not medicalise growing up<sup>4</sup>. The report Making Sense written by young people, advocates support from people they trust - friends, educational counselling services and teachers - as a way to address the majority of children and young people's emotional needs and overall development. The young people highlight the importance of getting appropriate help at the earliest possible opportunity- rather than allowing problems to escalate to crisis point. This finding is very much in keeping with the spirit of early intervention as advocated by both the SSWB Act and WFG Act.

The report consulted 500 CAMHS users and had the following key findings:

- 75 percent of CAMHS users have a negative experience of CAMHS;
- Less than half of CAMHS users agree that the service helped them get better and move on;
- 75 percent of CAMHS users said that the service was friendly and approachable;

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<sup>4</sup> [A report by young people on their wellbeing and mental health](#) - Jan 2011

- 56 percent of CAMHS users would prefer to turn to friends, 44 percent would prefer to turn to education counselling services and 39 percent would prefer to turn to teachers; and
- 29 percent said the best part of CAMHS was getting to talk to someone.

Evidence from a consultation carried out by Eye to Eye, as part of the Create a Voice project in Rhondda Cynon Taf, adds further support to the findings of the Making Sense report. Being able to talk openly in school about why people self-harm or feel anxious and depressed, and having peer support, were echoed in the views of 250 young people aged 14-18 years who took part.

Key findings on the best ways to receive support for self-harm and mental health:

- Self-harm should be discussed in PSE lessons;
- Invite guest speakers into schools to talk about self-harm and mental health;
- Run workshops to help young people learn how to address issues such as self-harm, stress, anxiety and depression;
- Create an angry room for young people to go and express themselves;
- More training for anyone involved with young people about how to deal with someone who self-harms or is coping with stress, anxiety, depression; and
- Peer to peer training - so that friends can better support their friends in need.

*Levels of subjective well-being are found to predict future health, mortality, productivity and income.*

We know that the impact of adverse experiences of children looked after have been shown to have a lifelong effect, making it all the more important to address the well-being of children whilst in care. Good well-being underpins any chance of success in ensuring children in care flourish and move on from traumatic experiences. Levels of subjective well-being are found to predict future health, mortality, productivity and income<sup>5</sup>.

In Merthyr Tydfil we have started to build an evidence base of the subjective well-being<sup>6</sup> of children known to social services. This work will continue into the New Year in order to generate a robust baseline. We can present some preliminary findings from the work carried out to date.

<sup>5</sup> World Happiness Report, 2013 <http://worldhappiness.report/>

<sup>6</sup> [Measuring Well-Being: A Literature Review](#) Children's Society (2015)

Children known to social services had a much lower well-being score than children from the general population. Out of a maximum score of 5, children known to social services had an overall well-being score of 2.87 compared to 3.9 for children in the general population. We measured three different components of well-being and Figure 1 shows how they scored.



*Figure 1 Subjective well-being of children known to social services, Source: MTBCB Performance Team*

Figure 1 above identifies the 'Good Feeling' component of well-being as having the lowest score. This component of well-being is measured by the following statements:

- I've been feeling optimistic
- I've been feeling relaxed
- I've been thinking clearly

Qualitative evidence from boys who are looked after in RCT presents a similar picture of low well-being. They were quite negative about their own experience of their lives and communities.

When asked about what would make things better, they boys talked about the cleanliness of the environment - free of drug paraphernalia, litter, fly-tipping and dog mess. The links between positive well-being and the environment have long been established<sup>7</sup> and these issues are further explored in the Environmental Well-being briefing document, which forms part of the Well-being Assessment.

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<sup>7</sup> [Good Places, Better Health](#)

When it comes to promoting looked after children's well-being, we know that positive stable and trusting relationships are of paramount importance. Research with looked after children also shows that other important factors include having a sense of control and influence over their lives, feeling emotionally and physically safe, and having a narrative about their life which contributes to a secure sense of self<sup>8</sup>. These themes have been reiterated locally by children who are looked after across Cwm Taf.

We also know from our own research in Cwm Taf that children and young people in the general population want to have people in their lives that they can trust; they want to have an influence over their own lives and they want to feel listened to.

As public bodies we need to have a clearer focus on helping children recover from abuse and neglect, and if we are to truly adopt a preventative agenda we must ensure that improving the well-being of all children and their families is prioritised in order to build a Cwm Taf that is more equal, healthier, prosperous, resilient, cohesive, with a vibrant culture that makes a positive contribution globally (The Wales we Want as outlined in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015).

*We need to get better at involving children and young people, seeking their views and actively listening to what they say.*

This headline reinforces that we need to get better at talking to children and young people, seeking their views and actively listening to what they say. One of the key findings in the Rhondda Cynon Taf Viewpoint survey was that pupils felt there were not asked their views, yet they have demonstrated to us during this population assessment that they want to contribute, they want to have a say, and they have ideas about how best to meet their needs. Some quotes from engagement with young people:

*"Important to get young people's views because that's who you are trying to help."*

*"Good to get thoughts out, happy to give ideas on how to improve services."*

*"I have enjoyed being involved. I feel it's important to involve the younger generation."*

*"Good to have our voices heard."*

*"I think it was good as it gives us a chance to make a change."*

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<sup>8</sup> [Children and Young People's Views on Being in Care](#) (2015) Coram Voice



It's time we took notice and start to view children and young people as an incredible asset in the community, an untapped resource that could help us deliver the outcomes we are all working to achieve.

## 5. Links to other headlines and common themes

The things which affect Children and young people in receipt of care and support do not stand alone. The same things are likely to affect other people who use care and support services. Some of the common themes identified through this work include:

### Prevention

Both the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 place a duty on public bodies to focus on prevention. There is an abundance of research evidence to demonstrate the benefits to people and the wider society of having the best possible start in life. Many of the issues identified in this chapter have their roots laid down before birth and in early childhood. It therefore makes sense that we make a commitment to focus resources on preventing problems from occurring or intervening early to prevent them from escalating.

### Language

Research for this chapter has highlighted the importance of meaning and language. Although prevention and preventative services are terms that are widely known they do not have a common understanding among the different organisations and services that are working with children and their families.

Establishing a definition of prevention that is commonly understood by all service providers and organisations across Cwm Taf would ensure that we can confidently refocus resources on activities that will deliver the benefits of working in a way that prevents rather than reacts to problems.

### Data sharing

Public Health advocates that the first 1000 days of life, from conception to age two, as the most significant timeline to make a difference in a person's life. However, conducting this Population Assessment has highlighted that it is precisely during this timeline when data and information sharing is limited. Most of the data we use to profile vulnerable children occurs after the child has been exposed to adverse experiences - yet this profiling work is often described as preventative when in reality it's an early intervention.

## Risk assessment

The lack of a consistent method for assessing risk across Cwm Taf was identified by stakeholders as a barrier to effectively working to prevent problems or being able to intervene early.

## Parenting

Programmes that support effective parenting are evidenced based interventions, but we know from our research that take up of parenting classes in Cwm Taf can be poor, outcomes are unclear, and we are unsure which parenting programmes are the most impactful. Feedback from stakeholders suggests that certain preventative services, like parenting classes, are not palatable to families as they feel stigmatised because they have been targeted. Stakeholders suggest that parenting classes should be a universal service. If we are to raise the aspirations of vulnerable families and increase their resilience, then they need to be exposed to different kinds of families- this will not happen in programmes that only bring vulnerable families together.