



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government



Radical Reform Summit

DECLARATION

Contents

1	Foreword
2	Background and Statements
4	The Vision
9	The Commitment

Foreword

In the 22 years since devolution, successive Welsh Governments have prioritised the rights and needs of children and young people and there have been some major achievements. In 2001, in response to the Waterhouse Report, the office of the Children's Commissioner was established; the first in the UK. In 2011 the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure was passed, partly enshrining The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into Welsh law. In 2020 the Abolition of the Defence of Reasonable Punishment (Wales) Act was passed, giving children equal protection from violence under the law in our nation.

As a nation, Wales can be proud of these and other achievements but there is much more to do to allow our care community to aspire and to achieve their full potential.

Welsh Minsters and Young Ambassadors, who are here today to represent the national voice of our care experienced community of children and young people, met today to address this issue.

This Summit today has discussed steps necessary to promote the rights – based on the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child, (UNCRC) – and well-being of care experienced children and young people.



Background Statements

Welsh Government

In our Children and Young Peoples' Plan, this Welsh Government sets out our ambition:

'We want Wales to be a wonderful place to grow up, live and to work, now and in the future.'

The Plan goes on to say:

'We believe all our children and young people have the right to:

- have the best start in life
- take part in and enjoy learning and have the best education possible to expand their knowledge, develop their creativity and fulfil their potential
- enjoy healthy lifestyles and be protected from harm, abuse, neglect, and discrimination
- be able to play and have fun
- be listened to and treated with respect
- have a home and a community that is a nice place to grow up
- have enough financial and material support for that they need.'

The Plan goes on to set out some of the many actions that the Welsh Government will take, with others, to put that belief into practise and make those rights a reality.

We owe care experienced children and young people a particular duty of care to ensure that their rights are fully realised. This is a major area of concern for us.

We know that many children and young people have positive experiences in the care system and do well in life. They thrive and grow, cared for and supported, and go on to achieve their full potential. We have seen positive changes in recent years. For example, far more care experienced young people are now going to university than ever before. We are proud of young people's achievements and resilience, and we are grateful to all those who care for and support them. But far too many care experienced children and young people do not have their rights realised. Far too many care experienced young people experience homelessness. The percent of care experienced young people leave school with five good GCSE or more is still too low.

Care experienced children and young people are stigmatised, and often do not receive the support they need to overcome the trauma that they have experienced.

To us, the Government of Wales, this is unacceptable. In our Programme of Government – the document where we set out our promises to the people of Wales – there are a number of promises to care experienced children and young people and their families that we have begun to keep. For example, we have introduced a Basic Income Payment for care leavers to give them a better start into their independent lives and we have begun the process of stopping companies making big profits out of caring for children and young people. But we know this is not enough.

We have made a bigger promise in our Programme of Government. We have promised to:

'explore radical reform of current services for children looked after and care leavers.'

This Summit is a big step forward in exploring what radical reform of services could mean for care experienced children and young people.

Young Ambassadors

We, the Young Ambassadors, have been working with other care experienced children and young people to explore what radical reform means. We started with the dictionary. Radical has two meanings; through, complete, total, entire: and revolutionary, progressive, reforming. Reform means improve, make better, mend. These are great words.

We are glad that Welsh Government understands the need for radical reform. Some of us have been involved in consultations before, and we haven't always felt that we were listened to and our concerns we acted on. But we are proud of the work we have already been doing with

this Welsh Government – for example around developing the Basic Income Pilot – and we believe we are being listened to now. We have been working with other care experienced children and young people to understand their experiences of current services and what needs to change. We have come to this Summit with our ideas about what radically reformed services could look like and deliver for care experienced children and young people and their families. We have shared these ideas, to help create a vision of what radically reformed services will look like and deliver. A Vision that we and Welsh Government can agree.



The Vision

Welsh Government

We have listened to what the Young Ambassadors have told us about their experiences and the experiences of other care experienced children and young people.

We have heard their ideas about what radically reformed services should look like and should deliver for care experienced children and young people. Together we have developed this Vision, which we support.

Young Ambassadors

Welsh Ministers have listened to our experiences and our ideas for a Vision of what radically reformed services could look like and deliver.

We support the Vision set out below.

Here is some of what will be different:

- All children and young people who are affected by the care system will be spoken with and listened to at every stage. People listening to them will understand that it can sometimes be hard to express your views or tell the whole truth. They will support children and young people, including little ones, to speak out. When children and young people's wishes about where and with whom they live can't be agreed to because they need to live somewhere else so that they can thrive, what is happening and why will be properly explained to them.
- No child or young person will be taken into care unless everything possible has been done to help their family look after them well, unless there is an emergency.
- Families whose children might be taken into care will all have an independent advocate to help and support them and make sure their voices are heard. Children and young people in the family will have their own independent advocates too (see below), to make sure their voices are heard.
- When a child or young person is taken into care, services will work with the family and the child or young person to do everything possible to help the family be able to come back together, if it is possible to help the family support the child or young person to thrive. Children and young people will be listened to if they say they don't want to go home, and their wishes and feelings will be considered. When children and young people do go home professionals will check in regularly to make sure everything is going well and help if needed.
- When children and young people are taken into care, they will be supported to stay in touch with their birth family if this is possible. Their views about contact with their birth family will be listened to and acted on if possible. No child or young person will be pressured into contact that they do not want.
- When children and young people are taken into care professionals will continue to work with the family. This is important because these families may have more children, and because when care experienced young people are old enough, they often want to be in touch with, and sometimes live with, their birth families.



- When care experienced people become parents they will be helped and supported to look after their babies and children. Babies and children will never be subject to child protection action just because their mother or father is care experienced.
- When children and young people are taken into care, they will all have a fully independent advocate to help them get their voices heard when decisions are being made about them and their care. They will be able to stay in touch with their advocate if they wish, so they do not have to keep explaining things over and over.
- When children and young people are taken into care, they will be able to stay close to their family and friends in their own communities and their own schools. They will only be sent far away if they are in danger or at risk.
- Everyone working to support care experienced children and young people will understand that being taken into care throws children and young people into trauma/crises. We as a nation need to understand how trauma affects us as individuals and as a community.
- There will be more foster carers, so children and young people who are taken into care can find the right people to take care of them straight away. Care experienced children and young people will not have to move time and time again, from home to home.
- When foster carers are recruited care will be taken to ensure that they have the right values and behaviours to support children and young people to grow and thrive.
- Foster carers will be trained to understand trauma and how it effects children and young people. They will get regular training and support.
- Foster carers will be trained to support all children and young people. They will understand the different needs of children and young people with protected characteristics and know how to support them.
- Foster carers will all be paid fairly. Kinship carers will not be paid less, and cares will not be paid more if the child or young person they are looking after is 'difficult.' Care experienced children and young people will not be labelled like that.

- There will be enough staff with the right values, skills, and experience to support care experienced children and young people. They will be provided with all the training and support they need and will show empathy and understanding at all times. Care experienced children and young people will be able to access support when they need it, not just between 9 and 4 on weekdays.
- If foster care is not right for a care experienced child or young person there will be a range of options available to them so they can live a life that suits their needs.
- Children and young people living in residential settings will have the same rights as children living in foster care.
- Care experienced young asylum seekers will be supported in ways that work for them. They will have more access to interpreters to help them express their needs and do practical things like making appointments with the health service. Online translation doesn't always work.
- Care experienced young asylum seekers will have the same right to an education as every other child and young person. They will be supported to learn English quickly and will be able to decide whether face to face or online learning works for them.
- They will be able to learn life skills to help them understand the community they are living in, and if, they are old enough, will be able to undertake work experience placements to help them find work when they are able to.
- Care experienced young asylum seekers will have the same support as that which is provided to other care experienced children and young people. They will be supported to develop lasting relationships with adults they can trust. They will have the same support wherever in Wales they are looked after. They will receive the same financial support as other care experienced children and young people.
- Professionals working with care experienced children and young people will communicate well with each other. For example, social workers will make sure schools know about changes for a child or young person. Children and young people will never have to explain these things themselves, and they won't have to keep telling their stories over and over again.





- Organisations that plan and provide care will not make lots of money and give that money to the people who own the organisations. All the money that is spent to provide care for children and young people will be used to provide that care and to make that care better. No child or young person will be left without a home that is right for them if their care home closes or changes because of this, and all the money saved by not paying profits will stay in the system to care for children and young people.
- If children and young people raise concerns about how they are being cared for they will be listened to and believed. There will be a proper investigation of their concerns. Children and young people will never be left in placements when they have said they feel unhappy or uncared for.
- Care experienced children and young people will be supported to take part in activities in their communities, including youth work opportunities. Youth workers will be trained to understand the challenges that care experienced young people may face and will know how to support them.
- Schools and colleges, and everyone who works in them, will really understand care experienced children and young people. They will know that they might need extra support sometimes to learn and be happy, and schools and colleges will make sure they get that support. They will understand that care experienced children and young people often experience discrimination because of stigma, and they will work hard to bring that stigma to an end.
- Care experienced children and young people will do as well at school and college as other children and young people, getting good qualifications and access to opportunities.
- Care experienced young people will be just as likely to go to university as any other young person.
- Care experienced young people will be just as likely to get an apprenticeship and a good job as any other young person.
- All care experienced young people will be supported by their corporate parents until they are 25. There will be support available to those young people who want it after that age.
- All care experienced young people will be able to stay with their foster carers until they are 25 if they choose, and there will be enough money for the foster carers to carry on supporting them. Young people who are living in residential care when they reach 18 will be supported to continue to live in the community near the Home if they want to and be able to stay in touch with staff and turn to them for support.
- Young people leaving care will begin to learn to live independently long before they have to do so. They will be supported to plan for the future they want, and that support will be there for them for as long as they need it. They will not be made to live independently until they are ready.

- No care experienced young person will ever be homeless when they leave care. They will be supported to find not just anywhere to live but a comfortable home where they can learn to be independent and happy. They will be supported to keep that home. They will never be evicted if they have nowhere to go. They will be supported until they can manage.
- Young people in care and young people leaving care will be no more likely than any other young person to get in trouble with the law. If they do end up in trouble with the law, they will be treated exactly the same as any other young person. If they end up in prison, they will continue to be supported so that when they leave, they can find a home and have a chance to start again.
- Care experienced children and young people will be able to get help to support their mental health whenever they need it, as soon as they need it.
- They will never lose support when they become 18 and move to adult services. Professionals will make sure that children and young people, and their carers know what support is available and how to get it.
- How well care experienced children and young people are cared for and supported will never depend on where they live.
- People who decide things about care experienced children and young people's lives will know them and understand them. They will meet them often and they will listen to them and act on what they say.

Welsh Government and Young Ambassadors

This is just the beginning of the Vision. This is a living, growing Vision. It will grow as we work with and listen to more care experienced children and young people and those who work with them and support them now. We will learn more. There will be more things that we can make better, and more ideas as to how to do that.

The principle behind everything that we have set out and will set out in the Vision as it grows, is that care experienced children and young people should have the same chances as every other child or young person to have their rights (as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and therefore in the Welsh Government's Children and Young People's Action Plan) realised.

The Commitment

Young Ambassadors and Welsh Government

We have learned from each other today. We know that there are good things being done to provide good services for care experienced children and young people and we can learn from and build on these. We know that the changes needed to deliver on the Vision, and grow it, are huge.

We know that not everything can change overnight, but we also know that things can change quickly when everyone works together.

We trust each other to play our part in making those changes. Below we set out our commitments to the next steps.

Welsh Government

These are our commitments:

1. Delivering the Vision will be one of our main priorities – one of the things that is most important to us – in the next four years.

2. We will work closely with everyone who currently delivers services for care experienced children and young people to work out how we will deliver the Vision.

3. We will help them do it and we will make sure they do it.

4. We will make sure that delivering the Vision is placed at the heart of all actions to deliver the Children and Young People's Plan.

5. We will make sure that all Welsh Government Ministers who are not here today meet with care experienced children and young people to help them understand how their portfolios can support Welsh Government to deliver the Vision.

6. We will put in place systems to make sure we keep checking on whether the Vision is being delivered and how.

7. We will make sure that there are enough staff, with the right values, training and skills, to support the delivery of the Vision. We will make sure that they are fairly paid and supported so that they will stay in their jobs.

8. Where we need to, we will change the law, so that organisations supporting care experienced children and young people will have to provide the right services and support. If they do not, we will support care experienced children and young people to use the law to make sure that they do.

9. We will make sure that every child or young person who is care experienced has their rights realised and duly acted upon wherever they live in Wales.

10. We will work closely with care experienced children and young people, and those organisations which support them to have their voices heard and to ensure that Vision is being delivered. We will listen to them and act on what they tell us. We will work with them to grow the Vision and to make sure that we truly deliver radical reform to improve the outcomes and eradicate all stigma associated with our care community in Wales.

11. We will meet again with care experienced children and young people in 12 months at a Follow Up Summit to review the progress on delivering this very exciting Vision.

Young Ambassadors

We speak here for the care experienced community. It may not be us as individuals, but there will be many, many others who will commit with us to taking this journey with Welsh Government to ensure that the rights of care experienced children and young people are fully

realised in our nation, and that the experiences of the next generation of care experienced children and young people are better than many of ours. We are proud of what we have already done and are looking forward to helping deliver big changes – radical reform.

These are our commitments:

1. We will continue to work with Welsh Government to grow the Vision, working with care experienced children and young people and those who work to support them.

2. We will meet with those Ministers who were unable to be present at the Summit to support them in developing an understanding of how their portfolios can contribute to delivering the Vision.

3. We will work with Welsh Government to share the Vision with all those responsible for delivering services to care experienced children and young people and to help them understand the Vision. This will enable them to work to deliver services that we can all be proud of, ensuring children and young people in their care are not part of a system that does not appear to care, building services that help us develop long-lasting, loving relationships. We will work with our collective corporate parents and with our corporate grandparents, our Ministers, our Government.

4. We will continue to work with care experienced children and young people throughout our nation to ensure that their experiences and ideas are fed into the growth of the Vision and all subsequent work to ensure that the Vision is co-delivered with children and young people remaining at the heart of the journey.

5. We will meet with Welsh Ministers in 12 months at a Follow up Summit to review progress on delivering our Vision.

We will work with Welsh Government on the basis of trust and mutual respect enshrined in the UNCRC, setting out the key principles of a children's rights approach that will be central to this incredibly important and historic journey. Some of us are concerned that we might do this work and change may still not happen. But we believe in the good intentions of Welsh Government and the commitment and dedication of our First Minister, Mark Drakeford. We thank him for his strong commitment to improving our lives and our futures, and those of future generations.

Because of his commitment, and that of other Ministers across Welsh Government, we believe that, this time, radical reform can truly be delivered.

Signed on behalf of the Welsh Government:

Signed on behalf of the care experienced Young Ambassadors:

Young Ambassador

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Young Ambassador