

**Consultation response form:  
INDEPENDENT PROFESSIONAL ADVOCACY-  
NATIONAL STANDARDS AND OUTCOMES FRAMEWORK FOR  
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN WALES**

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Responses to consultations may be made public – on the internet or in a report. If you would prefer your response to be kept confidential, please tick here:

If you are responding on behalf of your organisation please tick here:

This consultation runs from 31 March 2017 until midnight 23 June 2017. Please send your responses to us by the deadline of 23 June /2017.

Responses can come from individuals and groups. You do not have to answer **all** of the questions if you do not wish to; you are welcome to only answer the questions relevant to you and to continue your answers on additional sheets if required.

## About Welsh Women's Aid

Welsh Women's Aid is the umbrella membership organisation in Wales that supports and provides national representation for the 23 independent third sector VAWDASV specialist services in Wales (our membership of specialist services<sup>1</sup>). These services deliver life-saving and life-changing support and preventative work in response to violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, as part of a network of UK provision.

Our primary purpose is to prevent domestic abuse and all forms of violence against women and ensure high quality services for survivors that are needs-led, gender responsive and holistic. We collaborate nationally to integrate and improve community responses and practice in Wales; we provide advice, consultancy, support and training to deliver policy and service improvements across governments, public, private and third sector services and in communities, for the benefit of survivors. This includes advising and supporting commissioners and strategic leads in their development of VAWDASV needs assessments and strategic plans, promoting evidence for innovative new service models, and supporting research into the prevention of abuse.

Some of the many services we deliver for members include facilitating the involvement of member services' in relevant policy, legislative and strategy developments and encouraging co-production in service development; providing advice and information on the development and delivery of promising practice in the sector; providing support with policy and practice matters, and regional and national data analysis reports to support local needs assessments, strategy and commissioning developments.

We also deliver direct services including the Welsh Government funded Live Fear Free Helpline; a National Training Service; the national Children Matter programme of work which, for example, supports local services to help children and young people affected by abuse and to deliver preventative Safety, Trust and Respect (STAR) programmes across Wales, and refuge and advocacy services in Colwyn Bay and Wrexham. We are piloting Survivors Empowering and Educating Services (SEEDS) project which is empowering survivors of violence and abuse to collectively influence and inform services and commissioning frameworks, and help change public and community attitudes.

We also deliver the Wales National Quality Service Standards, a national accreditation framework for domestic abuse specialist services in Wales; as part of a UK suite of integrated accreditation systems and frameworks with which we collaborate.

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<sup>1</sup> Our membership of 23 third sector VAWDASV specialist services in Wales, with whom we have national partnership agreements to ensure our work is coordinated and integrated: *BAWSO, Hafan Cymru, Safer Wales incl. Dyn Project, Llamau, Cardiff Women's Aid, Cyfannol, Newport Women's Aid, Port Talbot & Afan Women's Aid, Swansea Women's Aid, Threshold, Atal Y Fro, Women's Aid RCT, Calan DVS, Carmarthen Domestic Abuse Service, West Wales Domestic Abuse Service, Montgomeryshire Family Crisis Centre, Aberconwy Domestic Abuse Service, Bangor & District Women's Aid, Clwyd Alyn Housing Association Domestic Abuse Service, Domestic Abuse Safety Unit (DASU), Glyndwr Women's Aid, Gorwel (Grwp Cynefin) and North Denbighshire Domestic Abuse Service (NDDAS).*

<b>1. Will this framework help advocacy providers and advocacy commissioners ensure the consistent quality of their service across Wales?</b>		
<b>Yes</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>No</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Unsure</b> <input type="checkbox"/>
Please comment:		
<p>The guidance goes some way to ensuring consistent quality of children and young people advocacy providers and advocacy commissioners to deliver services across Wales. There are clear quality assurance guidelines in many areas to achieve the standards required. While the requirement to meet quarterly and report annually on the advocacy standards by both commissioners and advocacy providers is encouraging, this needs to be monitored and there needs to be consequences for not meeting the quality standard, or the framework will merely point towards quality standards, rather than ensuring the delivery of these standards. Commissioners need to be aware of what good quality advocacy services should look like and the outcomes and monitoring in the framework needs to outline this. In addition, advocacy services will need additional funding to be made available to commissioners and service providers as the framework places new expectations on services.</p> <p>Welsh Women's Aid's National Quality Service Standards (NQSS) form a set of accredited criteria against which dedicated violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (VAWDASV) specialist services addressing domestic abuse can evidence their quality of provision. We are concerned that there is no indication of how these Independent Professional Advocacy national standards will join up with the VAWDASV specialist sector with regards to the VAWDASV indicators, outlined in the National Strategy on Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence – 2016-2021.</p> <p>It needs to be considered how these standards will relate to the forthcoming VAWDASV statutory commissioning guidance, and whether the final guidance will recognise the rights of children and young people affected by their experiences of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, to access professional advocacy when pursuing their rights as children in need or in the care system. Clarity is needed on whether VAWDASV specialist services could be commissioned to provide this advocacy for children and young people impacted by abuse.</p>		
<b>2. Will this framework help deliver a clear understanding of what can be expected of independent professional advocacy services for children and young people who use them, thereby making a positive difference to their lives?</b>		
<b>Yes</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>No</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Unsure</b> <input type="checkbox"/>
Please comment:		
<p>Good quality advocacy that is readily available for children involved with social services is very important as children's own feelings and wishes are often overlooked. There has been a significant increase in the costs of social services for children and</p>		

families over recent years.<sup>2</sup> This could have a knock on effect of reducing the amount of time that social workers are able to spend with clients, including children. In addition, the number of children and young people looked after by local authorities increased by more than a third between 2003-2012, projected to rise further<sup>3</sup>, therefore the need for high quality advocacy service has never been more significant. The child-friendly guidance (and consultation) is a welcome document. Both frameworks outline what a quality advocacy service should look like and what children can do if they need to make a complaint or feedback to commissioners. Communicating the services available to children and young people at the right time will be imperative if the framework is to make a positive difference.

The framework is quite vague about how this should be done and the MEIC helpline is not mentioned within the framework itself, though is named in the 'Active Offer' guidance.

Welsh Women's Aid would like to see IPASs working with the bilingual 24/7 Live Fear Free helpline, which includes the webchat service. This should be promoted at every opportunity, ensuring that children and young people affected by all forms of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence can access information and support. It should also be noted within the guidance that professionals, including advocates, can use the Live Fear Free helpline services themselves for advice and insight into violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, to support their work and their understanding of clients' individual experiences.

**3. Will this framework help those who commission independent professional advocacy services to ensure the quality of their commissioning arrangements and provide a means of evidencing high quality and effective advocacy provision?**

<b>Yes</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>No</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Unsure</b> <input type="checkbox"/>
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If no please specify:

The requirements for both advocacy services and commissioners to review their practices in line with the standards every quarter and report annually is a positive step towards ensuring high quality standards are achieved. Certainly, the guidance will enable both commissioners and advocacy services to hold one another to account to a certain degree. However, the consequences of not achieving high quality and effective advocacy provision is not discussed, despite the matter being paramount to effective outcomes.

The framework does offer a basis for looking at the standards expected of an independent advocacy service for children, yet it is not clear how these standards would interact with other quality standards, for example those of the violence against women, domestic abuse and specialist sector including the National Quality Service Standards (NQSS) for specialist violence against women services, accredited through

<sup>2</sup> M. Jeffs, 'Future Pressures on Welsh Public Services: Financial, demand and other cost pressures to 2025 and a review of potential response – Summary Report', *Wales Public Services*, 2013, pp. 7.

<sup>3</sup> M. Jeffs, 'Future Pressures on Welsh Public Services: Financial, demand and other cost pressures to 2025 and a review of potential response – full report', *Wales Public Services*, 2013, pp. 27.

Welsh Women's Aid. Independent advocacy services for children who have experienced or witnessed violence against women, domestic abuse and/or sexual violence are accredited under the NQSS.

The framework measures quality as "being able to respond without delay" but services should ensure that pressure to do this does not undermine the quality of the advocacy provided. Funding also needs to be made available to ensure that this can and does happen. It is not clear what is meant by 'respond'. For example, a response might mean putting a child or young person 'on hold' for advocacy, in which case, it needs to be considered whether there is adequate support for individuals who may have to wait for advocacy support.

Having a minimum expected standard for training advocates is important and will encourage services to ensure that they offer high quality training. Welsh Women's Aid recommends that in order to provide quality and appropriate advocacy for all children and young people, advocate training also engages with violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, in order that a full understanding and appropriate response can be ensured for children who have been affected by these issues.

Through the National Training Service, Welsh Women's Aid can provide this by working with the advocacy training providers. This will not only enable the effective implementation of the Social Services and Wellbeing Act (Wales) 2014, it will also promote the ambitions of the Well-being and Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, and those of the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015. For all of these ground-breaking pieces of legislation to fulfil their potential, implementation must not be siloed, and must instead be consistently interwoven. The guidance under consultation clearly promotes the wellbeing goals for a more equal, resilient and healthier Wales, aiming to make the already good quality advocacy services available to all children and young people.

The Welsh Government National Strategy on Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence – 2016-2021 has two highly relevant objectives:

**Objective 5:** Relevant professionals are trained to provide effective timely and appropriate responses to victims and survivors [of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence];<sup>4</sup>

**Objective 6:** Provide victims [of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence] with equal access to appropriately resourced, high quality, needs led, strength based, gender responsive services across Wales.<sup>5</sup>

Welsh Women's Aid can facilitate the joining up of both objectives within the context of children and young people receiving appropriate advocacy services, by offering expert training to advocacy staff and raising awareness of the relevance of this within Local Authorities through 'Ask & Act' via both the National Training Service (facilitated by Welsh Women's Aid) and through the National Training Framework, as part of the

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<sup>4</sup> *National Strategy on Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence – 2016-2021*, Welsh Government, 2016, pp. 19.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

implementation of the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015.

**4. Do you think the active offer of independent professional advocacy support will ensure children and young people are well informed about the availability of advocacy and better placed to access it when they need to?**

Please specify:

Yes. Many vulnerable children and young people do not currently know what an advocate does or how to contact one. The active offer would help children and young people to understand what the role of an advocate is and make an informed choice about whether to use an advocate. An “active offer” could also include further information about support that they could access alongside advocacy provision, for example local specialist services or the Live Fear Free helpline, for support related to violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, as well as through the MEIC helpline which provides information to children about their local advocacy services. The “active offer” should be made regularly, not just once, as a child’s needs may change over time. While this is stated within the appendixes, this needs to be monitored closely, and the “active offer” regularly made to those children and young people currently without an advocate.

**5. Do you think this framework will help ensure the active offer of advocacy is delivered consistently and coherently across Wales?**

<b>Yes</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>No</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Unsure</b> <input type="checkbox"/>
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Please specify:

The guidance does state that it aims to deliver consistent and coherent standards across Wales, to eliminate a post-code lottery that all too often affects service users of all kinds in Wales. As a result of the guidance, local authorities will have a clearer idea of what the statutory expectations are.

However, there are no clear indications of how this would be achieved. Different geographical areas have different challenges and resources, including skills-set of advocates. For example, in order to achieve consistency and coherence across Wales, advocacy services will need to be able to quickly support children and young people with additional learning needs or language requirements (whether this is Welsh or one of the many minority first languages spoken in our schools, colleges and wider communities) regardless of geographical location or Local Authority area. Such a commitment requires investment, yet it is important that all children and young people can access their rights, as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Relying on relatives or someone who is not impartial and connected to the child is inappropriate and entirely undermines the confidentiality of the relationship between the advocate and the child, and offers an ill-considered solution to a resource issue. See for example, The National Strategy on Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence – 2016-2021: “Involvement of family members in interpretation

and support to access services [...] defeats the purpose of confidentiality and elevates risk of harm.”<sup>6</sup>

The "active offer" needs to be made in an appropriate manner to each and every child. It should be made in a safe environment, in a manner than is not triggering of emotional distress, away from others who may be the source of complaint, by well trained and informed staff who have the knowledge to offer solutions, referrals and ensure that the child or young person feels believed and supported. If it is not done appropriately the "active offer" becomes tokenistic and detrimental to the child or young person. It must also be age specific and adapted to the specific needs of the child, particularly if they have any complex needs. While this will have resourcing implications, it is imperative for the system being fair, efficient and equal.

**6. The Welsh Government is interested in understanding whether the proposals in this consultation document will have an impact on groups with protected characteristics. Protected characteristics are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex, and sexual orientation. Do you think that the proposals in this consultation will have any positive impacts on groups with protected characteristics? If so, which and why/why not?**

**Yes**   

**No**   

Please specify:

The guidance acknowledges the need for specific provisions for children and young people with protected characteristics accessing advocacy. This is a welcome commitment but in order for the guidance to have a consistently positive impact on groups with protected characteristics across the whole of Wales, this must be adequately resourced in all areas, with particular care to not create a postcode lottery of quality service provisions. The requirements for services to respect linguistic, cultural and religious needs could become merely aspirational if services are not allocated additional funding and training. Rather, to deliver a high quality service, there is a need to work with specialist Black and minority ethnic (BME) services with expertise in delivery for specific communities.

Services are expected to support disabled children with communication needs. Additional training and funding might be required to ensure this can happen. Some specialist advocacy services could be developed nationally for local services to buy-in when needed, for example, services for hearing-impaired children could offer advocacy services nationally, to enable quality delivery no matter where children and young people are located.

The framework specifically mentions an outreach strategy for underrepresented groups – this could potentially benefit young people who may not otherwise access advocacy. It is not clear which groups are underrepresented, however. It should also

<sup>6</sup> *National Strategy on Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence – 2016-2021*, Welsh Government, 2016, pp. 14.

be acknowledged that there is an intersectional underrepresentation and lack of provision for certain groups of people. For example, BME communities in Wales already face barriers to accessing support as a result of the under-resourcing of BME specialist services, which is detrimental to children and young people. Specific support needs they might have, which might result in the need for professional advocacy, may include female genital mutilation, forced marriage and so-called 'honour based violence' and support needs to be provided by specialist services with expertise in these areas and in community engagement work. Having a national network of advocates who work in partnership with BME specialist services is a way of meeting this need for support alongside the provision of professional advocacy.

It is important that all advocacy services are gender responsive in their approach, as the needs and experience of male and female children and young people will differ. Gender inequality affects all members of society and the way in which it affects those on the grounds of sex and other intersectional protected characteristics should be acknowledged and understood. Standard 3 should reflect all of the recognised protected characteristics, including sex, religion *and belief*, and *pregnancy*, which are currently omitted from the Standard 3 wording.

**7. We would like to know your views on the effects that the guidance would have on the Welsh language, specifically on**

- i) opportunities for people to use Welsh; and
- ii) on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than English.

**What effects do you think there would be? How could positive effects be increased, or negative effects be mitigated?**

Please specify:

Children and young people should be asked at the first point of contact which language they would prefer for advocacy services. Providing fully bilingual resources and giving children and young people an equal opportunity to use Welsh or English is very important, as everyone should be offered the choice of speaking in the language they find most comfortable, which includes multi-lingual phone/answerphone services. This is particularly important due to the difficult and sensitive nature of the discussions between child/young person and the advocate or advocacy service. Some children are more proficient in communicating in Welsh and/or may have a preference to using the Welsh language. In order to achieve the aim of not treating the Welsh language less favourably than English, adequate resources need to ensure that all children and young people are asked whether they would prefer to speak Welsh and for every child that chooses Welsh, the service should be available for them in the language. This has to be true across Wales. Achieving this requires the time and money for advocacy services to develop resources in English and Welsh, and to recruit and train bilingual staff.

The Live Fear Free helpline is a bilingual 24/7 service, and is an excellent resource for both Welsh language and English language speakers and also supports callers



through LanguageLine and other means to offer a multi-lingual accessible service. The Live Fear Free helpline should be promoted more explicitly within the framework.

**8. We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to tell us about them**

It is unclear whether young people over 18 but still in the care system are included in the guidance. If not, as a child is defined throughout as 0-18 years old, it should be made clear what happens to individuals beyond their eighteenth birthday. An appropriate and coordinated approach needs to be stated within the guidelines so that these individuals' needs do not fall through the cracks as a result of the passing of a significant birthday if they still require advocacy support. This may be addressed through transition agreements and by appointing transitions workers to support young people going from children focused provisions to adult provisions between the ages of 18-25. This model is used in certain areas, such as Bristol, to support Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) services.

**Responses to consultations are likely to be made public, on the internet or in a report. If you would prefer your response to remain anonymous, please tick here:**