

Issue 4

Spring 2006



End Child Poverty Network Cymru

# Newsletter

## ***The Reality of Children's Rights in Wales***



***Here Rhian Croke, from Save the Children outlines how the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child's (UNCRC) reporting framework is used to provide an interim analysis of how far children's rights have been realised in Wales.***

Righting the wrongs: The reality of children's rights in Wales uses the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child's (UNCRC) reporting framework to provide an interim analysis of how far children's rights have been realised in Wales. The UNCRC has the highest level of acceptance of any human rights instrument and is the most complete, including civil, political as well as economic, social and cultural rights. Since ratification of the UNCRC by the UK Government (1991), the non-governmental (NGO) sector has striven to develop the potential of the monitoring and reporting element of the Convention, as a mechanism for driving the achievement of children's rights. The UNCRC is one of the few conventions that confer a formal role on NGOs. This is in recognition of the expertise that these groups have, to provide an alternative analysis of children's experiences as well as relevant and reliable information on areas, which may be covered inaccurately, or inadequately by the government's report.

Children in Wales prepared the first Wales NGO alternative report to the UN Committee (1994) and the second (1999) was the outcome of a partnership between Children in Wales and Save the Children. In 2002, the Wales UNCRC Monitoring Group was established. This is a national alliance of agencies and academic institutions convened by Save the Children and tasked with monitoring the implementation of the UNCRC in Wales.

In preparing "Righting the wrongs" the UNCRC Monitoring Group invited a diverse section of the NGO and academic community working with and for children and young people, to comment on the extent to which law, policy and practice in Wales has progressed in achieving compliance with the UNCRC. The process of preparing the report has presented the unique opportunity of strengthening the engagement of NGOs and the academic sector in developing an understanding of the Convention, becoming involved in the monitoring and reporting process and establishing an important constructive, yet critical collective voice that monitors the Welsh Assembly Government's obligation to realise the rights of children and young people. The report has been compiled as a genuine collaborative act by a range of agencies and disciplines providing the scope and depth of analysis that the process of analysing the progress of children's rights in Wales deserves.

Using the Concluding Observations of the latest report (2002) by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child each of the contributors provide detailed analyses on the diverse but indivisible domains of the Convention: Participation, Corporal Punishment, Child Protection, Child Poverty, Health Inequalities, Education and Citizenship, Asylum Seeker Children, Disabled Children, Looked after Children, Sexual Exploitation, Juvenile Justice; as well as measures taken to implement the UNCRC in Wales. "Righting the wrongs" therefore marks a significant landmark in the coalition's ability to respond to the UNCRC monitoring and reporting process in a practical and focussed way.

*Ctd page 2*



Coordinated by  
Children in Wales

It is no coincidence that this development has occurred alongside the rights-based agenda of devolved government in Wales. Government policy as regards children has increasingly diverged from the approach of the Westminster Government, most clearly seen when the Welsh Assembly Government within the limits of its powers adopted the Convention as the basis of all its policy making for children and young people in 2004. There is much agreement between government in Wales and the NGO sector on the aspiration of turning children's rights into a reality and about using the Convention as the guiding light to achieve this goal.

*Righting the Wrongs* highlights areas where UK Government policy is purposely working against the grain of the Convention in areas of the physical punishment of children, the status of children seeking asylum and in areas of juvenile justice. It also highlights the long-term issue of the incorporation of the Convention into law and a potentially proactive role for Welsh Assembly Government in this regard.

The report notes areas where the Welsh Assembly Government has yet to adequately develop its policy, for example in response to the sexual exploitation of children, child impact assessments, annual reports on the well-being of Wales' children and the potential of children's budgets analysis. In other areas despite a commitment to ensuring that rights based entitlements exist at a policy level, the current reality of children's experience falls well short of what they could expect in a prosperous and developed nation. For example, there is a gap between the Welsh Assembly Government's high aspirations and the experience of children and young people living in poverty. *Righting the wrongs* recommends that the child poverty strategy be given higher priority and more urgency given to developing its action plan, which has been slow to materialise. The level of service in mental health and the poor outcomes for looked after children (compared with their non-looked after peers) also fall into this category; that is where children's rights are not yet a reality.

The report quite rightly reminds us of areas of real progress, for instance in the field of participation, in the establishment of the Children's Commissioner's Office and in some policy frameworks (for example the National Service Framework and the Children and Young People Framework Partnerships). In many of these areas there is a sense of a real commitment to 'getting it right' for children in this country.

Wales along with the other countries of the UK is due to be examined by the UN in 2007 on the progress it has made in implementing the UN Convention. We have a lot still to do in Wales but *Righting the Wrongs* will place Wales in a much stronger position as we approach the beginning of the next reporting phase. The report sets out a clear agenda for action which we hope will inform policy and practice development in Wales over the coming years.

**Rhian Croke is UNCRC Monitoring Officer at Save the Children & Wales UNCRC Monitoring Group**

E:mail: [r.croke@savethechildren.org.uk](mailto:r.croke@savethechildren.org.uk) Hard copy of report e: mail [infowales@savethechildren.org.uk](mailto:infowales@savethechildren.org.uk), PDF of report accessible at [www.savethechildren.org.uk](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk)

1. 192 countries have ratified the UNCRC. USA and Somalia have signed but not yet ratified.

2. Current UNCRC Monitoring Group Membership: Aberystwyth University, Amnesty International Wales, Barnardo's Cymru, Cardiff University, Children in Wales, Funky Dragon, Nacro Cymru, NSPCC Cymru, Save the Children (Chair), Swansea University. Observers: Children and Families Division, Welsh Assembly Government, Children's Commissioner for Wales.

## ***Quarter of a century of fighting homelessness***

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In 2006 Shelter Cymru marks a quarter of a century of fighting homelessness. Many things have happened in that time: in 1981 Wales was still building council houses and the cut price housing sale had only just started, 20k would give you your pick of 60% of the houses on the market in Wales, the devolution question had not long been settled, and the buzzwords of social exclusion and community cohesion were not even glints in a spin doctor's eye. The need to combat homelessness had only recently been recognised in the 1977 legislation and in '81 over 4,500 households were in priority need in Wales.

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There have, of course, been many positives: devolution is a reality and the Assembly Government is leading on the specific approach in Wales, we've had new legislation, a more 'connected' approach to social policy, new strategies...then less strategies, guidance and ubiquitous partnership working. Outside the housing clique though, homelessness is still a sideline issue.

Homelessness destroys health and blights educational achievement but progress with the health sector is splutteringly painful and the education report card is still 'could do better'. While homelessness is carefully referenced in strategies and plans across the social justice spectrum, real and practical investment in tackling its impact on physical and mental health, crime and re-offending, family life and neighbourhoods, and on the educational attainment and life chances of children is still inadequate.

In 2004, over 53,000 people were part of households that applied as homeless in Wales – double the population of Rhyl. In 2004, the 10,071 households with a priority need under homelessness legislation was the highest since records began in 1978. Over 8,500 dependent children were part of homeless families in 2004. Approximately 20,000 children live in poor housing in Wales.

In 2006 Shelter Cymru is continuing to drive forward the message that homelessness and bad housing wrecks lives. The Building Future Lives campaign aims to destroy the perception that homelessness only affects 'certain' people on the margins of society, and demonstrate its far reaching impact on the social and economic future of individuals, families and neighbourhoods in Wales.

Central to the campaign is an Inquiry into the effects of homelessness and poor housing on children and families. The Inquiry will: explore the detrimental impact on physical and mental health, educational attainment, life chances and inclusion; and raise public and political awareness of the strategic importance of delivering enduring solutions to homelessness. In short, how the lack of priority and resources for tackling homelessness undermines the achievement of a wide range of social policy targets and the damage to children and families.

The recruitment of the Inquiry's commissioners introduces new experiences and fresh perspectives to the debate. We have squeezed out of the housing straightjacket and brought together people from diverse backgrounds and expertise to provide new insights into policy, services and political and cultural barriers at both local and national levels. Their outlook could well lead to challenging questions and innovative, possibly provocative, ideas on policy and practical responses.

The Inquiry is chaired by Dr Barry Morgan, Archbishop of Wales. We are taking the debate to public venues across Wales, giving people who are experiencing or have experienced homelessness or poor housing, professionals and policy makers, and the public an opportunity to express views and give evidence. You can even text in and have your say.

As a central part of Shelter Cymru's work, the Inquiry is a crucial contribution to exploding the myth that homelessness is a marginal problem and aims to raise awareness of its longer-term economic and social effects on Wales as a whole. Raising public awareness and influencing local and national decision makers is imperative and the Inquiry will be a significant step forward in this and, consequently, contribute to the case for increased and better targeted resources.

For information on the Inquiry contact Joanne Morris – [joannem@sheltercymru.org.uk](mailto:joannem@sheltercymru.org.uk) Tel: 01792 483075 or 07960952239. For information on Building Future Lives contact Liz Derrick – [lizd@sheltercymru.org.uk](mailto:lizd@sheltercymru.org.uk) Tel: 01792 469400.

**John Pritchard is Policy Manager at Shelter Cymru**

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# Poverty and Families with Disabled Children

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Disabled children and their families are at particular risk of suffering the consequences of poverty, which is reflected in the fact that each year financial worries attract the largest number of enquiries to the Contact a Family Wales office and our UK free phone Helpline.

This article summarises the issues highlighted by recent research into the experiences of families with disabled children. All parent quotes are from Contact a Family research.

## Families of disabled children are significantly more likely to be living in poverty -

- 55% of families with disabled children live in, or at, the margins of poverty
- 73.3% of families with disabled children have an income below the UK mean income
- 21.8% of families with disabled children have an income below 50% of the UK mean income
- Families with disabled children are four times more likely to owe in excess of £10,000 than the average UK household (15.7% as compared to 4%)
- Families with disabled children have costs up to three times higher than other families, including; travel and other costs relating to hospital appointments and admissions, bedding or laundry equipment, extra or replacement furniture, heating and specialised equipment and adaptations.
- Over half of households with disabled children lack some of life's basic necessities because they can't afford them.
- Minority ethnic families are less likely to claim benefits, are refused more often when they do and are routinely given lower rates than white families.
- Children from lower income households are more likely to report long standing illness or disability and mental health issues, reflecting a two-way relationship between low income and disability.

## Parents of disabled children face significant barriers to accessing paid employment -

- Mothers of disabled children are much less

likely to be able to work than other mothers, only 3% work full time (compared to 22% of others) and only 13% work part-time (compared to 39% of others).

**There are significant challenges to combining work and caring** – including the availability of appropriate child care, taking time off for appointments and hospital admissions, financial problems in the benefit system and lack of understanding from employers.

“We had used up all our savings. The doctor suggested I stopped working as we'd be better off financially. We could then both look after our twins, one each. My boss also told me I was better off not working”

Despite recent changes in legislation which recognise the extra needs of parents of disabled children, parents are often unaware of their rights to parental leave and flexible working.

“I tried to work nights so I could be there in the day to support my wife but then I got no sleep either and ended up having to ask my employer if I could come off night shifts having asked to go on them. It felt like a no win situation”

Childcare is a particular problem for families with disabled children -

Child care for disabled children is expensive and difficult to find. Despite the recent expansion in child care provision, there is still very limited choice for parents of disabled children. Parents describe difficulties in finding information about suitable child care in their area, as well as problems finding child care staff with relevant experience and training in caring for their disabled children.

“We have a 17 year old with a rare disorder. She is physically too old for childcare yet mentally not old enough to be by herself in the summer holidays, or go to activities for adults. This is a large challenge and pretty frustrating. Even when she is at school, we have to fit work and meetings around bus pick up and delivery times.”

Parents report that problems with child care make it difficult to balance work and caring, often leading to a reduction in working hours or leaving work all together.

There are very few specialist nurseries, childminders with accessible premises and appropriate training and expertise to look after children with complex needs.

“Finding appropriate care is almost impossible, even though she is a pleasant easy going child. Her medical needs are just too complex and many people have been unwilling to watch her due to fear of what might happen, as illness comes on suddenly and seriously.”

"I am really struggling with this issue now. I need to work to help to support my family but my son needs me to be at home. I want to finish my degree as well but guilt is taking over."

## ACCESS TO WIDER SUPPORT SERVICES

**Social activities** - disabled children are still excluded from many play, sport, leisure and arts activities.

"My son needs a companion to support him in mainstream activities"

**Housing** - three quarters of families with a disabled child live in an unsuitable home.

**Social services** – The Audit Commission Report (2004) – Services for Disabled Children covering England and Wales found

~ a lottery of provision, dependent on where people live and on how hard they can push for services,

~ too little being provided too late, with long waits for information, equipment and treatment

~ a maze of services that frustrates and confuses families

"There needs to be more respite and greater flexibility, respite is given on the Local Authority's terms, not on a flexible basis in consultation with parents."

**Health-** Travelling to and from hospital can place a considerable financial burden on families with disabled children.

"I live in West Wales where there is no neurology service for children. My daughter has uncontrollable epilepsy and we travel to Great Ormond Street Hospital in London frequently. I would like to see changes that incorporate assistance with costs for families travelling outside their Health Authority area."

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Contact a Family Wales welcomes the Welsh Assembly Government's current focus on child poverty, A Fair Future For Our Children (2005) and the recognition it gives to the extra needs of families with disabled children. The Implementation Plan must now explicitly address the specific needs of families with disabled children in Wales to achieve the aims set by

the Strategy.

The Welsh Assembly Government should continue to work with the UK government to :-

- Increase in the amounts allowable for child care to parents of disabled children through the Tax Credits system.
- Urgently review the levels of financial support available to families of disabled children who need to travel long distances to frequent hospital appointments and admissions.
- Review the regulations which prevent those on carers allowance studying full time, which is a particular barrier to mothers of disabled children accessing re-training for employment.
- Look at extending flexible working rights to enable parent carers to request flexible working from when they begin a new job.
- Increase funding to child minders and other child care staff to develop their skills and experience in caring for disabled children, to ensure a substantial increase in the availability of all types of child-care provision for disabled children across Wales.
- Ensure that all extended school activities are accessible to disabled children.
- The Welsh Assembly Government needs to work with employers, trade unions and the Citizens Advice Bureau to promote awareness and uptake of the extra entitlements to parental leave and flexible working available to parents of disabled children.
- Any benefit take-up campaign must specifically target families with disabled children.
- Any review of the provision of money advice services should consider the role voluntary organisations in the field can play in reaching families with disabled children. As well as considering increasing the provision of home visiting and out-reach services to access families of disabled children.

References for all the findings are available on the full briefing available from Contact a Family Wales.

**Keith Bowen is Wales Manager at Contact a Family Wales, Email: [wales@cafamily.org.uk](mailto:wales@cafamily.org.uk), [www.cafamily.org.uk](http://www.cafamily.org.uk)**

## Callers to Government Advice Lines Charged at Premium Rates

Most people living in poverty have a greater than average need to have contact with various government agencies and local authority services, in order to ensure that they are receiving their fair share of benefits and other services which they are entitled to and rely upon.

The cost of running one's own transport, or of using public transport is often beyond the means of people living in poverty. This is especially true of those living in rural areas of Wales, where the nearest centres of population large enough to support the existence of these offices may be a considerable distance from where the claimant lives.

This leaves a limited number of options for contact with the agencies. For those relying on the royal mail, the amount of time it takes to send a letter and receive a response can easily be in excess of one week. For problems of non-payment of benefit, this is clearly not a useful way to get a quick response. People living in poverty are generally living week to week if not day to day, and a weeks delay in receiving funding or help could make life more impossible than it already is, and even potentially be seen as putting a child's well-being at risk.

Email represents a quicker option, but of course computer ownership is often not an option for those living in poverty. And although there may be an internet café locally, or a BT internet access kiosk, these can be at least four times more expensive to use than the cost of sending a letter. Plus the cost of logging back on at a later date to check whether a reply has been sent.

For these reasons, the telephone generally represents the most convenient and immediate means to access benefit offices or other agencies who the claimant may have to deal with.

However, when we look at the most common numbers in use by government agencies, a disturbing picture emerges. All government agencies (and an increasing number of businesses, including banks) now use either 0870 or 0845 numbers. These are

erroneously advertised as "local rate" or "lo-call", but they are in fact "premium" numbers, charging the subscriber at a far higher rate than "geographical" numbers (prefixed 01 or 02).

0845 numbers cost 3p per minute during the day – this prefix is used by the CSA, Child Benefit Agency, Working tax credits, child tax credits, DWP Jobcentreplus. 0870 numbers cost 7p per minute during the day – this prefix is used by DfES, DoH, Immigration & Nationality Directorate, (and ironically many Citizens Advice Bureaux). More and more local authorities are also providing 0845 numbers for the public to access their services.

Not only are calls to these numbers more expensive, but the agency actually receives revenue from calls made to these numbers, so in effect the caller is actively helping to subsidise the service as well as paying for the call.

For anyone with a standard home phone package, whether BT or another provider, you can call anywhere in the UK for around 3p, regardless of duration of call. These packages however specifically exclude 0845 and 0870 numbers from their deals, along with all other premium rate numbers. The organisations that use these numbers do not like to refer to them as "premium rate" as the implication of the term is generally used for numbers with an 09 prefix which can charge up to £1.50 per minute. However, although the "cut" taken by the government agency is far smaller, it is based on a vast amount of usage by the public and represents a considerable subsidy of the service by the consumer.

The costs to the consumer increase again if calls are made from a public payphone, or a mobile. For example calling a "geographic" (01 or 02 prefix) from a payphone, would cost 30p for 15 minutes. To call an 0870 number from the same phone for the same amount of time would cost £1.80. And of course the costs would rise again if a mobile was being used to make the calls.

There is an excellent website that gives geographical alternatives to many 0845/0870 numbers, thus allowing the consumer to save money: [www.saynoto0870.com](http://www.saynoto0870.com)

All in all, the use of these numbers by government agencies is yet another example of stealth taxation on the public, with the greatest effect being felt by those who are least able to afford it, yet have the greatest need of the services provided.

**Jonathan Green, ChildLine Cymru**



## ***Editorial***

This quarter, we say a temporary goodbye to ECPN's coordinator, Lucy Atkhar, who has done tremendous work in establishing this newsletter and child poverty bulletins, organizing October's child poverty conference and putting together Tackling Child Poverty in Wales – a Good Practice Guide for schools. (This has now been printed and distributed).

Many thanks to Lucy and welcome to Sean O'Neill, who is covering her post for the next few months. Sean is already busy organising a consultation session with parents and young people living in poverty. This is part of research being conducted by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and is a consultation on the recommendations they will be making to central government.

This quarter's newsletter highlights some of the key areas of child poverty which need to be addressed more effectively – homelessness and poor housing, the additional costs of bringing up a disabled child, and poor mental health outcomes for children in public care, for example.

On the positive side, Righting the Wrongs also shows that much has been achieved in the implementation of children's rights. We think that our government in Wales has policies which are more compatible with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child than the policies of the UK Government. Youth Justice and Asylum are two non-devolved areas which continue to cause great concern.

Another issue for the UK government is the cost to people on low incomes who need to contact Government advice lines. The general public is probably unaware that the poorest people have to pay high charges for these calls and would agree with us that this position is scandalous.

***Jayne Isaac, ECPN Cymru Editor, Public Policy Officer, NCH Cymru***

## One-stop-shop for public health and health promotion information

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The internationally recognised specialist library service for public health and health promotion in Wales dealt with more than 5,500 information requests last year. The service produced and distributed 6 issues of a Library Newsletter to keep people up-to-date, as well as publishing 6 New Books Bulletins on the resources added to the library.

Four 'Research Bulletins' were published on 'Schools and Young People', 'Mental Health' and 'Accidents and Injuries'. Each bulletin contains summaries of graded journal evidence, and details of relevant publications held in the library. Bulletins are available as PDF documents on the web or in print.

Services are provided to 'Charter Mark' quality standards putting the customer first. Free membership is available for anyone in Wales. Members access valued added services that include lending facilities with a free post delivery and return, and choice in how services are delivered.

The resources we collect are wide and varied to reflect the health promotion agenda. We have material relevant to child poverty specifically, as well as poverty more generally, as well as information on social inclusion, families, parenting, schools and young people, community development and regeneration, disability amongst many others. We also hold some children's books on health issues, and material in community languages and for people with learning disabilities. We are a World Health Organization Resources Centre, and hold all WHO European material.

A range of training and learning opportunities is offered to increase customers' skills in accessing and

using public health and health promotion information. The 'Learning and Training Services Guide 2006' is available in print or on the web site.

Customers book sessions for training and coaching support as listed in the guide at a time and date convenient to them. The sessions can be delivered on an individual, group or organisational basis.

Marketing of library services is a key part of our work. We regularly attend health promotion and public health conferences, providing book exhibitions on the conference themes. Last year 12 exhibitions were provided at events across Wales. Library marketing flyers can be provided for organisations for onward referral to the service.

To find out more and how to join contact us at Health Promotion Library Freepost CF2429 Cardiff CF14 5GZ or telephone our enquiry line 029 2068 1239, fax 029 2068 1381, minicom 029 2068 1357 or email us at [hplibrary@wales.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:hplibrary@wales.gsi.gov.uk) Find us on the web at

<http://www.cmo.wales.gov.uk/content/library/index-e.htm>

<http://www.cmo.cymru.gov.uk/content/library/index-w.htm>

**Sue Thomas is Librarian at the Health Promotion Library, Welsh Assembly Government**

## Staff change at ECPN Cymru

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From 14 March 2006 Lucy Akhtar will be leaving the Coordinator post of the End Child Poverty Network Cymru to cover the Par-

enting Development Officer post whilst Eleri Griffiths is on maternity leave. Sean O'Neill will be covering in

Lucy's absence and can be contacted at Children in Wales in the same way.

**For further information** about membership or any of the articles in this newsletter contact Sean O'Neill, End Child Poverty Network Cymru, Children in Wales, 25 Windsor Place, Cardiff, CF10 3BZ, Telephone: (029) 2034 2434, Facsimile: (029) 2034 3134, E mail: [sean.oneill@childreninwales.org.uk](mailto:sean.oneill@childreninwales.org.uk) Visit our website at [www.endchildpovertycymru.org.uk](http://www.endchildpovertycymru.org.uk)