

# Briefing Paper 3

## Child Poverty

### National Assembly Elections 2007

*"People don't claim free school meals out of embarrassment. I would let people with money go ahead of me in the queue so they wouldn't see."*

Listen Up: Children and young people talk about poverty  
Save the Children



## Child Poverty

Article 27 of the UNCRC gives every child the right to a standard of living adequate for physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development and it is one of the Welsh Assembly Government's core aims for children that they should not be disadvantaged by poverty

### **What has been achieved since 2003?**

The number of children living in poverty in Wales has reduced from 33% to 27%, as a result of UK Government tax and benefit policy, combined with an increase in employment in Wales. The proportion of children in Wales living in low-income households is now the same as the average for Britain. However, there has also been an increase in the proportion of working households in poverty, because of low wages in Wales. Poverty still affects 170,000 children in Wales and they still have the worst overall well-being in the UK.

As child poverty cuts across so many policy areas, only some key anti-poverty programmes will be outlined. Communities First provides targeted support to aid the regeneration of the most deprived communities in Wales and Cymorth provides funding for targeted support for children and their families in disadvantaged areas. In 2003-4, the Cymorth Fund was nearly £40 million. The Assembly Government has agreed an additional £29 million for Cymorth over the period 2005-8. Although Communities First funding has provided facilities for children and young people, it needs to be more focussed on engaging children and young people in their communities. New guidance is being issued to facilitate this.

Other Assembly Government initiatives include free swimming for children in the school holidays, free school breakfasts, development of Children's Centres, education maintenance allowances and grants for Higher education. A recent programme (RAISE) has been announced to tackle underachievement in disadvantaged areas. Half price bus-fares are being piloted for 16-18year olds, as transport has a major impact on education, training, employment and leisure.

Just under £5m has been made available for voluntary sector schemes aimed at tackling homelessness in Wales (compared with £60 million in England and £20 million in Scotland). The Welsh Assembly Government published an updated National Homelessness Strategy in November 2005 which gives a commitment to tackling homelessness in Wales.

Since 1993 there has been a significant reduction in unfit housing in Wales, although Shelter Cymru estimates that over 35,000 children in Wales are living in poor housing with over 43,000 living in overcrowded conditions ('Building Future Wales', Shelter Cymru November 2006). There are around 300,000 households experiencing fuel poverty in Wales: more than double the levels in 2004.

The Welsh Assembly Government's child poverty strategy, launched in February 2005, gives a commitment to eradicating child poverty in Wales by 2020. The strategy has only recently been developed into an action plan with 2010 Milestones and Targets which include income maximisation and debt minimisation programmes, public sector career ladders, more Integrated Children's Centres, and targets for the arts and sports in deprived areas. Actions already in hand include an additional £50 million a year, for two years, targeted at very young children in the most deprived areas of Wales ('Flying Start'). Over the coming year, there will be programme bending, to improve mainstream services in disadvantaged areas and child poverty proofing of all Assembly Government initiatives.

The plan is ambitious in its aims and there are suggestions that primary legislation could be developed to ensure cooperation from public services.

## **What are our current concerns?**

- The percentage of children in Wales leaving school without any qualification has fallen but the rate for both boys and girls in Wales is still the highest in the UK with 7.2% of children in Wales leaving school without any qualification. A high percentage leave without 5 GCSEs at grades A-C. Improvement in attainment has stalled.
- School costs families a lot of money (over £900 per child per year in secondary school) and poorer parents often cannot afford to pay.
- There are still large inequalities in health, with many outcomes for children and young people worst off in deprived areas of Wales. e.g. dental care, teenage pregnancy. There are also poorer primary health services in many of these areas, something WAG has started to try to address.
- Whilst we agree that priority should be given to areas with a high density of deprivation, there are many poor children living in isolated rural areas, excluded from activities, which do not currently benefit from targeted initiatives, or from universal initiatives such as free swimming.
- Homelessness in Wales rose between 1999 and 2004 and the use of bed and breakfast accommodation also increased.
- A third of people in Wales do not have access to a car and public transport is costly and often inadequate to meet need. Public transport does not always connect with places of training or employment at times which would support participation.
- Excellent strategies and standards which would improve services to poorer children (CAMHS strategy, NSF) are inadequately funded.

## **Recommendations**

We support the recommendations in the Child Poverty Strategy and Implementation Plan but, in addition, we call on the Welsh Assembly Government to:

- Investigate ways of improving the situation of poor children in rural areas.
- Closely monitor initiatives such as free swimming and free breakfasts and make the necessary adjustments to ensure that the children in severest poverty are benefiting.
- To reduce the costs of education, particularly school trips and materials for GCSE courses. Initiatives such as uniform grants should be well publicised and WAG should ensure that its grant funding does not replace or reduce what was previously offered by Local Authorities.
- Ensure that the poorest areas receive the best mainstream services. Programme bending should begin to address this, but the needs of small areas of deprivation in rural Wales must be considered.
- Comprehensively resource the NHS and CAMHS Strategies.
- Prioritise addressing the needs of the poorest families – lone parents, families with disabled children, large families including some ethnic minorities, gypsy travellers and parents who are in and out of seasonal work.
- Continue to ring-fence Cymorth funding.

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