



# Children in Wales Plant yng Nghymru

## **Parenting and family support – developing our workforce to meet the challenge**

Children in Wales' Parenting Conference 2017 was attended by over 150 professionals from family support and parenting teams across the voluntary, local authority and health sectors. The focus was on how best to develop the skills of the people who work to support parents and carers. Feedback from delegates indicated that the speakers were considered excellent, that the workshops were relevant and valuable to their work and that the knowledge gained on the day will have a positive impact on how they approach their work.

The conference was chaired by Jenni Rochfort, Lead Parenting Practitioner at Flintshire County Council and the current Chair of the All Wales Parenting Co-ordinators' Network. The conference opened with the screening of a short film that Children in Wales had made in partnership with Curious Ostrich Productions and Bethan Williams, Arfon Projects Co-ordinator, Gwynedd County Council. It featured parents from Gwynedd who gave their views about what makes a good parent support worker. The abiding message was that workers should be kind, caring, non-judgemental and ready to support parents in practical ways, as well as having knowledge about child development and how to manage the demanding job of parenting. We'd like to thank Bethan and the whole Families First and Flying Start Family Support team in Arfon for all their support in getting such powerful messages across.

Keynote speeches were given by Karen Graham, Emeritus Professor at Glyndwr University, Honor Rhodes OBE, Director of Strategy at Tavistock Relationships and Lucy Akhtar, Senior Manager for Parenting at Welsh Government. Workshops focused on restorative approaches in family engagement, supervision as a time to think and feel, lessons about engaging with young parents, working together in schools to support parents, and modelling your service's qualification arrangements.

Karen Graham spoke about how best we can work within existing resources to develop an appropriately qualified and competent workforce to meet the needs of children and families. She suggested that by making informed choices about which qualifications to take, and the unit and module choices that make up qualifications, we can broaden our options or narrow them to become more specialised. Karen also facilitated two workshops in which delegates were supported to identify a path through qualifications to meet their organisational needs and goals. In the plenary she advised delegates that once their qualification structure is agreed managers should consider a

range of units on the Care Council website that will be supportive to staff and which can be used to shape the outcomes managers want to achieve.

Honor Rhodes spoke about the fundamentals of excellent supervision in practice. She noted how excellent supervision and mentoring are critical parts of the success of high performing organisations.

She described the essence of supervision and what makes it effective, how we can measure effectiveness and also the importance of looking after ourselves as supervisors. Honor also facilitated two workshops in which participants considered the building blocks of supervision, how to measure its effectiveness and plan to be great. In the plenary Honor reported the recommendations arising from workshop discussions. These included a call from participants for the establishment of a community of practice for supervisors, offering a safe place where they can think about developing their supervisory roles and experience. It was also recommended that guidance on supervision would be welcome. This should set out the value and content of supervision and reflective practice in working with families. Children in Wales will liaise with Honor to explore how this might be achieved.

Lucy Akhtar gave an overview of the Welsh Government's approach to supporting parents. She explained how the government has stated its intention to continue and develop their parenting programmes within the Families First and Flying Start programmes. She noted how parenting support is crucial in addressing the current focus on reducing adverse childhood experiences. Lucy also described how the government will be seeking cross-party support for the introduction of legislation to remove the defence of reasonable punishment. This proposed legislation will be part of a wider package of measures to promote positive parenting.

All the workshops were well attended and vibrant. Tina Foster, Tros Gynnal Plant and Dr Annie Williams, Cardiff University, delivered an interactive session on Restorative Approaches in Family Engagement. This involved exploring the use of restorative values, skills and training in order to build strengths-based, participatory family service delivery. This approach aims to achieve more sustainable outcomes and promote positive professional relationships, alongside establishing a consistent framework for organisational growth and development. The key message from the session was that working restoratively from the very beginning with families prevents escalation of conflict. This needs to be part of a holistic approach and means a culture change for many in the way that we work. The project is due to end in September 2017 and it is hoped to find ways to continue this work.

Gwilym Roberts and Ray Jones of Relate delivered lessons from Relate Cymru's Foothold Project in working with young parents to build confidence, positive relationships, communication and listening skills. Participants explored tools for workers to use in identifying and expressing emotions. These are available on the Children in Wales website. Feedback from participants indicated that they will find these extremely useful in their work and also in their personal lives.

Sue Peraj, Team Around the Family Manager in Swansea led a workshop about working in partnership in schools. Lessons about the journey made were shared by Sue, Carol Ward, Senior TAF In Schools Co-ordinator, a parent and the Headteacher of Pontybrenin Primary School, Phillip Williams. Their key message is to connect and build empathy with school staff.

The film of the morning talks are available on Children in Wales' website along with the speakers' PowerPoint presentations and a number of other resources that were used in the workshops. If you want to ask any questions about the conference or ongoing work in relation to parenting and family support please contact Geraldine Murphy on [geraldine.murphy@childreninwales.org.uk](mailto:geraldine.murphy@childreninwales.org.uk).

