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# A Manifesto for the Senedd Elections 2021

## Early Years Action Group

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# The Earliest Years Matter

A child's experiences in their first days, weeks and years significantly impact the rest of their lives.

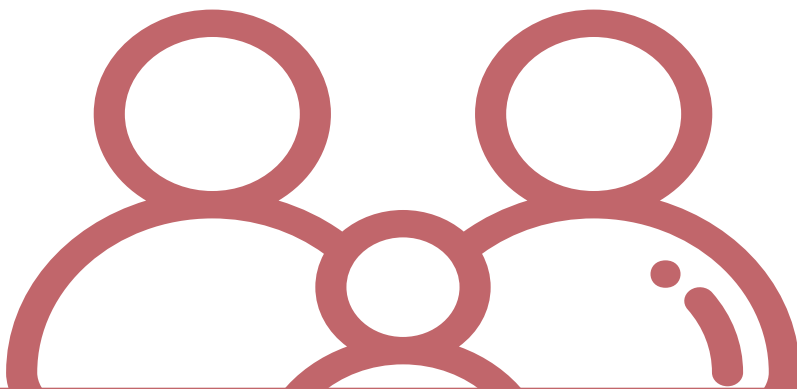
These earliest experiences affect children's intellectual, emotional and social development. They affect their behaviour and future relationships, their educational outcomes, the opportunities that they will have and their physical and mental health.

Quite simply, the things that happen and the relationships that are built in the first 1,000 days – and, indeed, before birth – lay the foundations for a happy and healthy life for every child in Wales.

There is strong moral, social and economic evidence for why it is vital to effectively support babies and their families during this formative stage of life. By complying with the UNCRC and investing early in the emotional wellbeing of babies, we are investing in the future of every child in Wales. The benefits of this can last a lifetime and carry into the next generation.

The early years sector supports children aged 0-7 and their families. Whilst high quality support is needed throughout this time, more emphasis and political commitment needs to be placed on the period from 0-3.

This includes ensuring that every child has a happy and healthy home life, as well as access to services and childcare that are both high quality and reflect the bilingual nature of Wales. To do this we must recognise and value the professionalism and the impact of those working across the full spectrum of services provided in the early years.



# About the Early Years Action Group

The Early Years Action Group includes representatives from BookTrust Cymru, Children in Wales, Early Years Wales, Home Start Cymru, Mudiad Meithrin, Save the Children, NSPCC Wales, Play Wales and PACEY Cymru.

It was formed in 2020 to bring together third sector organisations who have a focus on Early Years, and to establish a collective voice to motivate and activate positive change for the youngest children.

The group is convened by Children in Wales.



**Early Years  
Wales**  
Blynyddoedd  
Cynnar Cymru



**Save the Children**  
Achub y Plant



**NSPCC**  
CYMRU | WALES

**HOME  
START**

**Cymru**

**pacey** | CYMRU

# Making the earliest days count for every child in Wales

We call on all political parties in Wales to...

## ...Put the First 1000 Days at the heart of decisions and investment

- Ensure that the importance of the first 1000 days of a child's life is not just acknowledged but is placed at the heart of government, running coherently as a key priority across policy making and investment.
- Commit to backing this with clear and transparent investment in a range of provision and support for children and families, from conception through the early years. This investment should recognise the wide range of professionals and services that impact on young children's lives.
- Ensure co-ordination, clear accountability and transparency around policy and investment for children in the early years within government. This should include the appointment of a Cabinet lead for children and the establishment of a cabinet sub-committee for children.
- Ensure that the voice of the youngest children, as well as parents and carers, is at the heart of policy and decision making.

## ...Support all those who care for children and work with families

- Ensure all those who work with children receive high quality and ongoing training in child development, with a focus on the importance of emotional wellbeing and development in the first 1000 days.
- Commit to increasing understanding of why the first 1000 days are vital to the future success of children and society amongst parents and carers, professionals working with families and the general public.

- Adequately fund specialist perinatal mental health services so every parent can access perinatal mental health support which meets national standards at the point when it is needed, in every health board area in Wales.
- Invest in supporting parents and carers in the home, as well as through high quality childcare.

*Parents need to be supported to engage in their children's learning and development at home. A happy, healthy home environment with strong adult-child relationships and attachments supports children to meet their developmental milestones. This must be supported by access to high quality childcare including Welsh Language provision for all children.*

## ...Build back better

- Prioritise the needs of babies in decision making about the COVID-19 response and recovery work.
- Ensure that the lessons learnt from COVID-19 inform future policy and practice arrangements. This should include examining the positive experiences some families reported during lockdown to consider how investment and initiatives can support the strengthening of the foundations in other homes.

*Research shows the impacts of COVID-19 have not been felt equally. It has had a disproportionate impact on those who are pregnant, giving birth or at home with a young baby. Spending prolonged periods of time at home has not been a happy and healthy experience for all children. However, for other children the experience of spending prolonged periods at home has been a rich and rewarding one with positive opportunities and outcomes cited.*

