

## Third Sector Additional Needs Alliance

Paper for meeting of TSANA and WG meeting on Monday January 26<sup>th</sup>

Article 12 of The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, reflects the view that children have the right to say what they think should happen when adults are making decisions that affect them and that the child's opinions must be taken into account. Listening to children and young people and promoting their active involvement in planning and delivering services and support to meet their real needs, are key elements of Welsh Government policy.

### Group thoughts on process

The group believe that young people's participation or involvement with consultation must be part of the reform process. As noted in our response to the white paper, we were not convinced that the young people's consultation was truly representative of young people with Additional Learning Needs. The young person's version of the white paper was attractive in its form but not useful to the majority of children and young people who will draw on the new system to support their learning.

Planning how children and young people's views are sought must take place early enough to allow that to happen with enough time and at the right time. Although our organisations regularly consult with our stakeholders we will not be able to represent all views and specific consultation with young people with additional needs is a resource intensive activity which must be considered financially in the process.

Outlining how Welsh Government plan to consult at each point in the process is important. Examples of how young people can be involved include: consulting with existing networks of young people, school councils, youth groups, youth forums, and Committee review of transition arrangements for young disabled people (Why are disabled young people left until last? Welsh Assembly Government Equalities Committee and Barnardos, 2008)

Key messages from disabled children and young people when consulting with them, highlighted in the report "Are You Listening? What disabled children and young people in Wales think about the services they use" (2003), are: -

- The attitudes of others and not a child or young person's abilities can prevent disabled children and young people from getting involved.
- Parents and staff can both help and hinder disabled children and young people's participation in consultations.
- Disabled children and young people want adults to ask them questions and to listen to what they say.
- The starting point for consultation work is where children and young people are at, on their terms and in their environment.
- Disabled children and young people want to participate in decisions about their individual care and the services they use.
- Disabled children and young people feel worried and anxious when they do not understand what is happening.
- While disabled children and young people may make small day to day decisions, adults still appear to make the more important decisions on their

behalf and there are few examples of disabled children and young people shaping services in Wales.

### **Written consultation for young people:**

- Please employ a specialist professional to produce the child and young person friendly version of the consultation.
- Please ensure that the language is plain English or clear Welsh.
- Pictures/diagrams can be helpful. However, it should never be assumed that a reader with a sight problem can see an image. All images should either support the main body of the text, or should be accompanied by a text caption explaining their significance.
- Make sure that the consultation is available in a variety of formats – large print, audio and Braille and Easy Read for example.
- Please do not presume that children and young people have an in-depth understanding of the existing systems. At present, many young people have no experience of being involved in the Statementing process.
- Provide appropriate, straight-forward and accessible ways for young people to ask questions/provide feedback.

### **Planning any focus groups with children and young people:**

- Please work with a range of disability groups, considering different need levels within each disability group. E.g. the following factors could have a big impact on a child/young person's experience:
  - Mainstream/ Resource Base/ Specialist out of county placement
  - Age range - birth through to 25.
  - Level/type of need. For example, a temporary/moderate/severe/profound hearing loss or communication method (e.g. signing/hearing aid).
  - Children who have no other additional needs/children who have multiple Additional Needs.
- There can be challenges in trying to consult with disabled children and young people from a broad range of abilities and ages. All children can be however be included and enabled to express their wishes and feelings. Sensitivity and openness to different ways of communication is needed as well as time and a willingness to try a range of different approaches.

The children least likely to be involved in consultations are those with severe learning disabilities, short attention span and challenging behaviours. This can be because of a difficulty in believing that more severely disabled children can make a contribution, or being at a loss to know how to make this happen.

- Please work with children from a range of geographical areas.
- In seeking the views of young children, always spend some time explaining the background first to ensure they fully understand.
- Please use professionals who understand how to consult with children and young people effectively.
- Some young people with additional needs may have limited experience of having the opportunity to make decisions and to express their views. They will require support to understand the process and encouragement that their views are important.
- Please ensure that when meeting young people, you are able to fully meet their support and/or communication needs (i.e. do you need a signer?)

Depending on the situation it is worth considering whether to use a communicator who works with the child on a regular basis or to use an external communicator. I.e. with the former, the communicator will have a good understanding of any individual needs, but the latter may be required if the young person will be asked to express views relating to the current support they receive or the people working with them.

However the presence of another person can have a negative impact on the participation process. E.g. the adults answer on behalf of the child or young person, challenge what they say, or show disapproval if the child or young person said something that the adults believe is wrong or false. Additionally, children and young people can censure what they say when adults are listening in.

- Please include children and young people who are first language Welsh speakers. It is worth considering Welsh speakers from across different counties as experiences can vary across different regions.
- Provide appropriate, straight-forward and accessible ways for young people to ask questions/provide feedback.
- Recognise the young people's contribution to the consultation by providing appropriate and accessible feedback about how their contribution has affected change.

Issues of consent: careful monitoring of the children and young people's willingness to be involved is needed and the difficulties of getting informed consent from some children have to be balanced with not excluding them from taking part.