

A Charter for Change: Protecting Welsh Children from the impact of poverty



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I'd also like to recognise the work of Dr Rhiannon Lane, for her thematic analysis of the experiences and views of children and young people, parents and carers, which has formed the basis of this report.



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Foreword by Sally Holland

This report has been formed from the experiences and views of children and young people who are or have experienced living on a low income. Children and young people we spoke to told us they miss out on the things they need to fully participate at school, that they don't get the food they need throughout the day, that they miss out on opportunities to socialise and take part in activities, and that they have a poorer quality of life, wellbeing and self-image.

Children and young people living in poverty in Wales miss out on their most basic human rights of having their food, shelter and health needs met. The costs of attending and participating in school leads to an inequality of opportunity for children and young people living in poverty. These children and young people also feel socially isolated because of a lack of opportunities available to them in their local community.

We asked children and young people, their parents or carers, and professionals working with families, what they would want to see in a Charter for Change to help families living in poverty. Those suggestions helped us form our own Charter of recommendations to Welsh Government and Local Authorities, and resources for schools.

I am calling for the Welsh Government to publish a Child Poverty Delivery Plan which sets out short to medium-term actions which will drive tangible changes to the lives of children and young people living in poverty, across Welsh Government, local authorities and schools. While this report does not address all of the issues facing children and young people living in poverty, it has been designed with the intention to provide a useful basis for such a Plan. This plan could complement the higher-level objectives of the Welsh Government's Child Poverty Strategy. It may also generate discussion about the need to review this strategy in light of this report and changes to the policy landscape in UK and Wales since the strategy was last reviewed in 2015. Welsh Government must regain the ambition which led to the child poverty eradication target, which was dropped in 2016^[1].

I aspire to a Wales where all children and young people have an equal chance to be the best that they can be. The purpose of this report is to ensure Wales, and in particular Welsh Government, owns this problem, and attempts to address the social inequalities which are so prevalent in some of our children and young people's lives.

^[1] Welsh Government (2016) *Child Poverty Strategy: Assessment of Progress 2016*. Available at: <http://www.assembly.wales/laid%20documents/gen-ld10867/gen-ld10867-e.pdf>

Introduction

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) sets out the rights to which all children are entitled. For children living in poverty in Wales, many of these rights are simply not met. Children and young people in Wales are going hungry, are unable to access the basic clothing and equipment they need for school, and are missing out on the social, recreational and cultural opportunities of their wealthier peers.

This is the world's fifth richest economy, yet around 185,000¹ children in Wales are living in poverty, representing around 28% of the population of children in Wales². It is estimated that the cumulative effect of recent UK government welfare and tax reforms³ will mean that this will increase to close to 40% of children in Wales by 2021-22⁴⁵. In addition, Wales' predicted typical household disposable income growth after housing costs (2016/17 — 2022/23) is significantly lower than Scotland, and every region in England⁶, at 4.8% compared to an average of 8% across the UK. The introduction of Universal Credit, and its 'two-child limit' on payments, means that children in larger families will lose out significantly compared to their peers in smaller families through no fault of their own⁷. We know that certain types of family are also hit harder, with lone parents in the UK spending nearly £5 more every day on each child, compared to a couple with children⁸.

This report will highlight ways in which Welsh Government, local authorities and schools could do more, here in Wales, to improve the lives of children and young people growing up blighted by poverty. This report aims to suggest practical steps that can be taken to address issues of poverty and inequality affecting children and young people in Wales.

It does not aim to be a comprehensive report on all issues affecting families living in poverty - it is primarily a response to the views of children and young people experiencing poverty, and their families, which have been expressed directly to us.

¹ Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2018) *Poverty in Wales 2018*. Available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/poverty-wales-2018>

² Welsh Government (2018) *Poverty Statistics*. Available at: <https://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/households-below-average-income/?lang=en>

³ Beatty, C. and Fothergill, S. (2016) *The Uneven Impact of Welfare Reform – The Financial Losses to Places and People*. Available at: <https://www4.shu.ac.uk/research/cresr/sites/shu.ac.uk/files/welfare-reform-2016.pdf>

⁴ Institute for Fiscal Studies (2017) *Living standards, poverty and inequality in the UK: 2017–18 to 2021–22* (appendix). Available at: <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/10030>

⁵ Equality and Human Rights Commission (2018) *The Cumulative Impact of Tax and Welfare Reforms*. Available at: <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/cumulative-impact-assessment-report.pdf>

⁶ Resolution Foundation (2018) *The Living Standards Outlook 2018*. Available at: <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2018/02/Outlook-2018.pdf>

⁷ Child Poverty Action Group (2017) *The Austerity Generation: the Impact of a Decade of Cuts on Family Incomes and Child Poverty*. Available at: <http://www.cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/Austerity%20Generation%20FINAL.pdf>

⁸ The Money Charity (2018) analysis of: Child Poverty Action Group (2017) *The Cost of a Child in 2017*. Analysis available at: <https://themoneycharity.org.uk/media/June-2018.pdf>

Much of this report discusses the school experience of children and young people. This is because costs associated with school made up a significant amount of the issues raised with us by children, young people and their families living on a low income.

While at times this report paints a bleak picture, it also aims to highlight the work that is done across Wales to try to help families living in poverty. It has not been possible to feature more than a handful of the practice examples we heard about during this project but all of the information that we have gathered through our fieldwork and consultation has informed the drafting of the report and its recommendations.

As well as hearing directly from families facing poverty, this project has shown us that children and young people who are not themselves living in poverty are acutely aware of the fact of child poverty in Wales, and want to work together to make a difference. We have created resources which we hope will help children and young people to make that difference in their school and in their local community.

A key message from our work on this project has been that a child living in poverty benefits most from a truly multi-agency approach. Welsh Government and local authorities in Wales must take the lead on this.

This report will not ask Welsh Government and local authorities to come up with all the answers, though - rather to create an instructive and supportive structure upon which schools and communities can assess the needs of their population, properly taking into account the experience and needs of children and young people living in poverty before making changes to benefit them. There are many positive examples to be lauded, but there are equally examples of children and young people whose personal circumstances have not been properly recognised, who are disciplined by their school or socially excluded in their school or local community because of the fact that they come from a family living in poverty.

Professionals taking part in our consultation highlighted many initiatives, which involve a wide range of actors such as Welsh Government, local authorities, large national charities, small local charities, individual schools, community organisations, church groups, social enterprises, small, local, start-up private social businesses, and many more. These initiatives utilised a wide range of funding streams, and often involved collaboration between partners. Unfortunately, there is not space within this report to present all of these initiatives and acts of community-spirited kindness, but it is encouraging to hear of all of the brilliant work which does go on to help families struggling to make ends meet. We believe that the Welsh Government and local authorities can do more to support, harness and coordinate this work for the benefit of vulnerable children and young people.

Recommendations to Welsh Government, Local Authorities and Schools are made throughout this document, and form our Charter for Change. Our Charter's recommendations can be found in the [annex](#).

A Child Poverty Delivery Plan

Welsh Government should publish a Child Poverty Delivery Plan that is ambitious, comprehensive and includes practical steps to improve the lived experience of children and young people in poverty as soon as possible. This Delivery Plan should lead to the setting up of a multi-agency, cross-policy task force which as part of its work looks to consider and to implement the recommendations of this report.

The Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 places a statutory duty on Welsh Ministers and local authorities to publish child poverty strategies. The Welsh Government publishes a progress report on their child poverty strategy every three years, and with the last update published in 2016, we are now due a further progress report. A Child Poverty Delivery Plan would be based upon the short to medium-term steps outlined in our recommendations, and would complement the higher-level aims of the strategy or a reviewed strategy were this to arise

Despite the obvious restrictions that we face in Wales of having the levers of welfare sitting in London, we can make a difference, but this can only be achieved with both a bold vision and a deliverable action plan — a cabinet and a government where child poverty runs through every relevant portfolio and every relevant department. This cannot be achieved through guidance and warm words alone — the First Minister and his Cabinet must engrain tackling child poverty in their daily working structures.

This report will highlight specific policies which such an approach could be applied to, but it is our intention that future reviews of existing policies, and new policies, will benefit from consideration through the lens of a new Delivery Plan.

The Welsh Government has set national indicators towards achieving the seven well-being goals as laid out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. These indicators include healthy life expectancy between the most and least deprived; improving healthy lifestyles; the educational attainment gap between those who are and are not eligible for Free School Meals; the percentage of children living in households in income poverty; disposable household income; the percentage of people who feel able to influence decisions affecting their local area; and the mean mental well-being score for people. All of these indicators reflect inequalities identified within this report. We are aware that the Welsh Government is currently consulting on new national milestones, which will measure progress against a selection of the national indicators. We believe that such a Child Poverty Delivery Plan would therefore complement the new milestones, and that the Indicators could be mapped against the new Plan.

The sections of this report and the recommendations from each should form the basis of a Child Poverty Delivery Plan that is informed by children and their families, and would be centred on a children's rights approach.

A note on definitions and terminology

When discussing poverty in this report, we are referring to poverty as defined in the Welsh Government's 2011 Child Poverty Strategy:

A long-term state of not having sufficient resources to afford food, reasonable living conditions or amenities or to participate in activities (such as access to attractive neighbourhoods and open spaces) that are taken for granted by others in their society.

Given the inherent potential for stigma around this topic, we wanted to be careful and considerate with our choice of language from the outset of this work. We found that children and young people felt that the term "poverty" best reflected what we were trying to address, in line with the definition above. We also used the term "families living on a low income" or "families who do not have enough money for the things they need" during our consultation as part of a sensitive and age appropriate approach. The use of these terms in this report is reflective of this.

What We Did

This report draws on:

Workshops and conversations with over 550 children and young people across both schools and community settings, ranging in age from 5 to 21.

A survey of nearly 300 parents/ carers, and workshops and conversations with around 20 parents/ carers.

Workshops and conversations with over 40 professionals working with children and young people in poverty, including teachers, health professionals, play workers and representatives of third sector organisations.

While these findings are taken from consultation with children and adults from a mix of socio-economic demographics, we approached settings where venues or services worked with a relatively high proportion of families living in poverty.

This work included conversations with:

- Both boys and girls
- Children and young people attending primary schools, secondary schools, college,
- Children and young people who were not in formal education at the time of contact
- Children and young people from English-medium, Welsh-medium and bilingual schools
- Children and young people who identify as members of an ethnic minority community
- Children and young people with learning disabilities
- Children and young people with physical disabilities
- Children and young people who are 'looked after' by a local authority
- Children and young people who are young parents

Activities included; asking children and young people what they felt was difficult to afford in their lives, and what is good and bad about their community. We asked groups to draw maps of their community expressing these aspects. We did not define the term community, leaving it open for participants to discuss what they see as their community.

Activities with larger groups included an exercise asking children and young people to 'put themselves in someone else's shoes', and presenting them with a character called Ceri who represents a child or young person whose family live on a low income. Ceri has been chosen because it is a gender neutral name. As outlined later in this report, we have produced resources for schools and community settings, which encourage children and young people, teachers and governors to use a similar approach to identify the ways their

school or community could make things easier for children and young people living in poverty.

With all groups of children and young people, and groups of parents/ carers, we asked participants to contribute to a 'Charter for Change', where they drew up their priorities for what would help struggling families. These priorities have fed directly into our recommendations.

What We Are Doing: resources for schools and local communities

To accompany this report, we are publishing resources which we hope will help schools to consider carefully the impact of both the costs of the school day, and the 'calendar of costs' over the school year.

We have also created a resource for youth clubs and community groups to involve children and young people in thinking about and identifying priorities to improve their local community.

We would like to acknowledge the work of both Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) in Scotland's Cost of the School Day project and Keep Wales Tidy's Eco-Schools programme which have helped to inform these resources.

Cofia Ceri / Check with Ceri

We listened to hundreds of children and young people about the costs of going to school, and asked them to imagine how missing out on certain elements of school life might make children feel. We used these feelings to create Ceri, a fictional character who represents a child or young person whose family do not have enough money to afford the things they need, and who may miss out on their rights under the UNCRC because of this.

Check with Ceri is a resource made up of three variations, for key stage 2 pupils, key stages 3 and 4 pupils, and staff and governors at schools. The activity will help them think about what costs might be difficult for Ceri and their family to afford both over the course of the school day, and over the school year, by asking them to 'put themselves in Ceri's shoes'. The final part of this resource asks CYP and staff to come up with ideas for what more the school might be able to do to help and then for this to be taken forward as an action plan by a 'Ceri's Champion', who could be a governor or a member of the staff body. This role should be properly accountable to the children and young people who have helped form these actions.

The 'Revolve' Project

School uniform was the most commonly mentioned burden on families' school-related finances.

The resource is made up of two variations, for children and young people in key stage 2, and for key stages 3 and 4. It focuses on the environmental impact of clothing production, rather than the cost of uniform. We think that by shifting the focus away from money, and by making re-using uniform everyone's issue, we can help alleviate any stigma felt by pupils and families who struggle to pay for their uniform. It encourages pupils to think about school uniforms, and how many items are thrown away every year, before they are

asked to come up with ideas for trying to tackle this issue. Children and young people will want to consider how a recycling scheme would work best — whether this is in the school or the community, and what would make people more likely to use it.

Community Activists

This resource encourages children and young people take part in a community mapping exercise, linking amenities and facilities in their local community to their Rights under the UNCRC, before being asked to consider what a child or young person (using the character of Ceri) would find difficult to afford or to take part in. The children and young people will then be encouraged to make a plan for making changes to their local community, including engaging with local decision makers such as the local authority or their local Assembly Members.

“All I could afford was one sandwich OR a fruit and drink — never a meal.”



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Meeting Basic Needs

Under the UNCRC, children and young people have the following basic human rights:

The Right to life, survival and development (article 6)

The Right to access adequate, nutritious food, clean water, and the best possible healthcare⁹ (article 24)

The Right to an adequate standard of living (article 27)

During the course of this project we have heard that some children and young people in Wales are missing out on or are at risk of missing out on these most basic of needs. Teachers have told us of children and young people coming to school hungry; parents have told us about the struggles of providing food over the holidays; and children and young people themselves have told us about their experiences of being unable to afford basic clothing and hygiene products.

“Starving until lunch time” - Hunger at school

Food poverty is a significant issue in Wales as displayed by the necessity of, and increase in, food banks, and the increase in ‘holiday hunger’ initiatives. 31.6% of households in Wales need to spend over a quarter of their disposable income after housing costs to meet their food needs, a figure higher than any other UK nation¹⁰.

Not Meeting the Free School Meal Threshold

We heard from children and young people and their parents/ carers who both received free school meals, and those who did not. Several children and young people and parents/ carers told us that they fell just outside of the Free School Meal threshold, but still struggled to afford food. Professionals we met with also told us that many of the families they work with were also in this situation. Despite not qualifying for Free School Meals, we were told that these families were often unable to feed their children because of housing costs, other essential costs such as bills, and because of paying back arrears.

⁹ United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2013) *General Comment No.15 – the Right of the Child to the Enjoyment of the Highest Attainable Standard of Health*. Available at: https://www.crin.org/en/docs/CRC-C-GC-15_en-1.pdf

¹⁰ The Food Foundation (2018) *Affordability of the UK’s Eatwell Guide*. Available at: https://foodfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Affordability-of-the-Eatwell-Guide_Final_Web-Version.pdf

One parent whose family did not qualify told us:

"School dinners are so expensive, to make sure mine can have a snack too I go to B&M and buy big boxes of cereal bars and drinks for them to take in for the morning break and then they have £2 a day. That's still a lot for all three of them." (Parent/ carer, South Wales).

We heard from professionals that, in some local authorities in Wales, children who did not qualify for Free School Meals had been refused meals at lunchtime because their payment cards had not been topped up. This is extremely concerning. Professionals also raised with us the fact that children from asylum-seeking families who have no recourse to public funds are not eligible for Free School Meals, meaning that they are further disadvantaged.

Free School Meals - Coming Up Short

For those children and young people who did qualify for Free School Meals, several told us that their allowance did not cover the cost needed for a proper meal at lunchtime. While free school meal vouchers/credits were positively valued and necessary for those without the means to afford school meals, they were often described as insufficient to provide adequate sustenance for a full school day. Some described having to choose between a meal and a drink, since both would not be affordable on Free School Meals. Additionally, the Free School Meal funds were described as not providing sufficient funds for a break time snack in addition to a lunchtime meal.

For instance, one school pupil reported getting a Free School Meal allowance of £2.05 per day, but that a pizza slice costed £1.95, leaving an insufficient amount for a break time snack or drink. Similarly, another stated:

"All I could afford was one sandwich OR a fruit and drink — never a meal." (Child/ Young Person, West Wales). Another told us that they "just had to starve until lunch time while everyone else could buy what they wanted".

Healthy Choices

We know that children and young people living in poverty are more likely to have poorer diets and be more susceptible to ill health as a result. Among 4-5 year olds, for example, the gap between obesity prevalence in the most and least deprived communities has increased from 4.7% in 2015/16 to 6.2% in 2016/17¹¹. Making healthy and ethical food choices was also described as an impossibility for many. Some children and young people and parents/ carers mentioned that due to the higher price of healthy meals, they would opt for less healthy but cheaper options (such as chips).

As one young person commented: “Carrots cost a £1 and you can get a big bag of crisps for 50p, I know which one I’d prefer” (Child/ Young Person, South Wales).

Children and young people from one school reported that a decision had been taken by their school to turn off the water fountains, and that they were having to purchase water in school for £1, since there was no water fountain. This then impacted heavily upon their ability to buy sufficient food. This is particularly concerning as it contravenes Welsh Government guidance.¹² If all schools ensured that children have free accessibility to tap water during the day and at lunchtime, and refrained from selling drinks in bottles and cartons, they would be promoting healthier choices, reducing plastic waste and ensuring that children on free school meals or low incomes are able to concentrate all of their resources on buying food.

Take-up of Free School Meals

In addition to the issue of those children and young living in poverty who are either not reaching the threshold for Free School Meals or whose funds do not cover the food they need, take up of Free School Meals is well below where it should be in Wales. We have heard that reasons for not taking up Free School Meals included ‘pride’ and the complexity of the application process. A few respondents noted that cultural values and differences could be an obstacle to accessing support when in poverty, e.g. “Cultural pride stopped my parents from accessing free school meals which meant I had no food at all” (Child/ Young Person, South Wales). Another child/ young person alluded to the stigma attached to having free school meal vouchers: “Dinner tickets are embarrassing — people would always try and nick them.” The use of electronic payment cards or fingerprint technology is now widespread across Wales, and can help to reduce stigma around Free School Meals significantly.

¹¹ Public Health Wales (2018) *The Child Measurement Programme for Wales 2016/17*. Available at: <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/888/page/67795>

¹² Welsh Government (2014) *Healthy Eating in Maintained Schools: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities and Governing Bodies*. Available at: <http://learning.gov.wales/docs/learningwales/publications/160226-healthy-eating-maintained-schools-en-v2.pdf>

Breakfast Clubs

Free breakfasts are available to primary school pupils in Wales, if the school provides them. Local authorities must provide schools with free breakfast if a school requests them, unless it is deemed 'unreasonable' to do so¹³. Where breakfast clubs are available, we have heard that the clubs can become oversubscribed, with children being turned away.

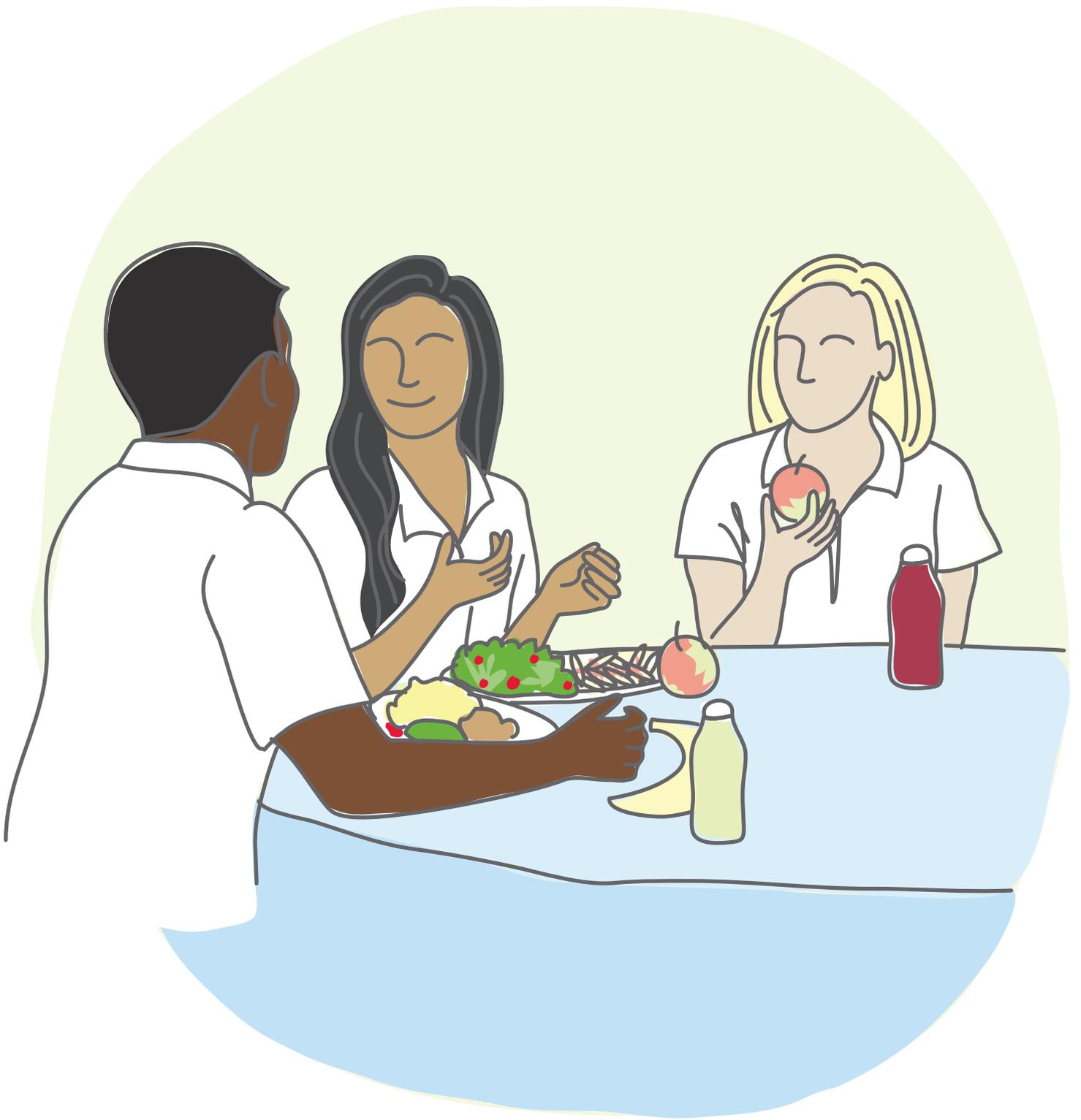
While free breakfasts are available in many primary schools in Wales, we heard from secondary schools who had voluntarily set up breakfast clubs (reliant on the good will of teachers, local organisations and intermittent small grants that they have applied for), as well as breakfast clubs set up using Pupil Deprivation Grant funds.

Some of the positive outcomes of these clubs were the increased ability for teachers to support children who came in to school hungry, both through the supplying of food, but also to identify needs such as washing of uniform or the need for replacement recycled uniform. Teachers also reported that the clubs offered children and young people suffering from social isolation, in several cases children with additional needs, the opportunity to make friends with children and young people they might not otherwise have been in contact with.

One girl commented that "I miss out on friends. This [the breakfast club] is where I meet friends".

Teachers also reported a noticeable difference in attention spans and general behaviour in school.

¹³ Welsh Government (2015) *Free Breakfast in primary Schools*. Available at: <https://beta.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-03/free-breakfast-in-primary-schools.pdf>



What we think needs to happen

- **Welsh Government should review the eligibility criteria for Free School Meals, with a view to extending the threshold to include more families.**
- **Welsh Government and Local authorities should work together to assess local Free School Meal allocation to ensure each child or young person has sufficient funds for a nutritious, balanced meal.**

Some children and young people whose families in Wales who do not qualify for free school meals still go hungry. Those children and young people who do qualify for Free School Meals told us that this often doesn't cover the cost of the food they need.

- **Welsh Government and local authorities should work together to find a way to establish automatic enrolment of eligible families for both Free School Meals entitlement and the new PDG Access grant¹⁴.**

While there is likely to be some work needed around data-sharing, Welsh Government and local authorities should consider the example of Glasgow City Council, who have awarded payments of their school uniform grant automatically to families on the basis of eligibility for housing benefit and council tax — information which local authorities in Wales also hold and use to request that schools contact their parents/ carers to opt-in. We are calling for a system where eligible families are automatically enrolled for both Free School Meals and PDG Access payments if they qualify, without having to fill out any forms. They can then opt-out if they wish to.

- **Local authorities should review the current provision of free breakfasts at primary schools to ensure that the scheme is available to all families that need it.**

¹⁴ PDG Access is a Welsh Government grant which replaced the School Uniform Grant in 2018. PDG Access makes £125 available to looked after children or children eligible for Free School Meals, who are either entering reception or year 7, The grant can be used towards the cost of 'school uniform, equipment, sports kit and kit for activities outside of school'.

“A long six weeks” - Hunger at home and Holiday hunger

We know that some struggling families in Wales rely on donations of food to feed themselves. There has been a 13% increase in the use of food banks¹⁵ in the last year across the UK. While food banks are not a sustainable structural answer to food poverty¹⁶, we know that many families in Wales rely on their help to survive. Many of the children and young people and parents/ carers we spoke to mentioned food banks as potential sources of help.

The school holidays can be a particularly difficult period for families who qualify for Free School Meals, as a regular meal is lost that they must replace. However, it is also true to say that, across the UK, only around one third of those at greatest risk of holiday hunger qualify for free school meals¹⁷ as their families incomes are deemed ‘too high.’ Food banks are not always easily accessible for families living in poverty, and we have heard of some providing a delivery service for those with mobility problems. We also heard of local authorities paying for the transport costs to the food bank and back for those who simply did not have the money on that day.

Charitable Food Donations

Many respondents (both adults and children and young people) spoke positively about schemes providing free food for families, such as food banks and other forms of charitable food donation. We have visited schools and youth centres across Wales who have worked with local charities to provide food on-site. We heard about schools stepping in to provide food hampers for families who they know will struggle over the holidays. One youth group based in North Wales reported running a ‘Holiday Hunger’ programme in partnership with a local church during the summer holidays. The Church supplied them with packed lunches consisting of a sandwich, a juice, and a piece of fruit, which the youth group made available to local families. The group also reported having a scheme linked with the Salvation Army, whereby the team would identify families in need and deliver toys and food hampers provided by the Salvation Army. The group have also reached an agreement with a local supermarket to distribute surplus food at the youth club at the end of the day.

¹⁵ The Trussell Trust (2018) *Mid-Year Stats 2018*. Available at: <https://www.trusselltrust.org/news-and-blog/latest-stats/mid-year-stats/>

¹⁶ Lambie-Momford, H. (2018) The Growth of Food Banks in Britain and What They Mean for Social Policy. *Critical Social Policy*. Available at: http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/128336/3/Lambie-Mumford_%20The%20Growth%20of%20Food%20Banks%20in%20Britain%20and%20what%20they%20mean%20for%20social%20policy%20.pdf

¹⁷ Forsey, A. (2017) *Hungry Holidays – Report of the APPG on Hunger*. Available at: <https://feedingbritain.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/hungry-holidays.pdf>

Holiday Hunger Schemes

There are several schemes across Wales which aim to help tackle holiday hunger. The Welsh Government-funded Food and Fun programme, for example, is coordinated by the WLGA, and is evaluated by Cardiff University. This scheme operates across most local authorities in Wales, and provides thousands of children across Wales with a lunchtime meal, alongside a day of activities. We have also heard from schools, community groups and religious organisations who have led projects providing food during the holidays for children and their families.

A Food and Fun group in South West Wales was highly regarded by parents and children who used it. This was a 3-week programme over the summer holidays running every week day between 08:30 — 12:30. The scheme invited parents to attend on Fridays, providing a meal for both parents and children. It also provides a learning experience for children around nutrition and healthy food preparation. Parents spoke of the enjoyment their children had experienced during their time at the programme, which provided opportunities for fun and socialising which would have been normally unavailable during the holidays. Children and young people and their parents/ carers told us that the advantages of these schemes stretch far beyond providing food during the holidays. The sessions over school holidays provide vital socialising opportunities, with parents telling us that the “long six weeks” of the summer holidays can provide a daunting experience in terms of providing children with regular healthy meals, securing childcare, and keeping children entertained and active.

Parents that we spoke to all emphasised the social aspect of the scheme, with reports that children wouldn't see their friends at all over the summer if it wasn't for this programme. Parents also told us that advantages include the routine that the initiative involves, with going back to school in September coming as less of a shock to their children as morning routine had been maintained.

Parents described the Food and Fun programme as “taking the pressure off” them for the three weeks of the summer it ran for, knowing their children will be well fed and entertained for a half-day 5 days of the week. One parent told us that “because my two have a big meal at dinner time, it takes the pressure off a bit at tea time”. One parent told us she had to give up work because the family cannot afford childcare despite her husband working full time, so this initiative was very welcome. The children themselves told us that they had tried all sorts of new foods, “like kiwi and couscous”, and had learnt about nutrition as well as taking part in fun educational sessions including astronomy and making paper bots through this initiative.

Case Study — Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council youth services, Merthyr Tydfil Housing Association and StreetGames: Fit and Fed Programme

Funded by Merthyr Tydfil's Community Capacity Grant, this programme engaged with over 600 different children and young people in the Merthyr Tydfil area. Sport and physical activities are offered for a minimum of one hour, with a balanced meal provided, as well as healthy snacks. These sessions included a wide variety of activities, which included picnics, walks, beach days, free running, DJ skills lessons, dance lessons and barbeques.

Encouragingly, both boys and girls engaged equally in this project.

Some of the additional impacts of this scheme are that four young people gained food hygiene qualifications, five young people used the project to gain their Youth Achievement Award, and eight young people took up a BTEC in Home Cooking Skills.

What we think needs to happen

- **Welsh Government should continue to provide for holiday hunger and extend its reach as far as possible across Wales. Welsh Government should continue to evaluate their Food and Fun programme and other initiatives to ensure the best value for money and as wide a reach as possible for places on the scheme.**

We are pleased to see the commitment shown to this work. However, it is not yet widely available everywhere in Wales and the existing scheme structure can mean some children from a family can attend but their siblings cannot because of their age. I call on the Welsh Government to ensure that has any holiday hunger schemes it supports have as wide a reach as possible and are as accessible as possible to those families that need it most.

“Sometimes, when I was younger, I used to sit in the bath when I was on my period because I had no pads. I’d miss school and my brother would bring my homework home for me and there I’d be just sitting in the bath.”



“Periods are not a choice” - Health & Hygiene

‘Period poverty’ was raised with us in several settings by girls and young women. There were some concerning reports of girls and young women missing school because of their periods, due to being unable to afford sanitary products. This was reflected both by professionals working with children and young people in poverty, and from children and young people themselves. Some of these accounts were particularly harrowing:

“Sometimes, when I was younger, I used to sit in the bath when I was on my period because I had no pads. I’d miss school and my brother would bring my homework home for me and there I’d be just sitting in the bath” (Child/ Young Person, South Wales).

“I once had to use a sock stuffed with tissue instead of a pad because we couldn’t afford it.” (Child/ Young Person, South Wales)

In some cases, schools were reported to provide free sanitary towels to pupils, and pupils described individual female teachers keeping sanitary products in a desk drawer for those that needed them. A youth club we visited in South Wales had sanitary products available in the toilets, with girls and young women attending telling us that this made a big difference for them. There were suggestions from children and young people that schools should supply free sanitary products to female pupils. As one child/ young person forcefully argued:

“Boys don’t miss out on education just because they are bleeding! You get free condoms. Sex is a choice, periods are not!” (Child/ Young Person, South Wales).

Cultural barriers for girls and young women were also identified as an issue. One young woman commented on the difficulty of accessing sanitary products during menstruation due to both the inhibitions surrounding discussions of menstruation within her culture and unequal gender hierarchies: “it’s taboo to talk about periods and the men hold all the money so you would have to rely on school having pads and tampons” (Child/ Young Person, South Wales). These examples show the importance of having sanitary products available in both school and community settings.

The Welsh Government has provided £1 million funding over two years to local authorities to provide free sanitary products for girls and young women who cannot afford them. While this is very much welcomed, concerns have been raised with us that this money has been provided on a one-off basis, and that there is uncertainty as to how services will be sustainable into the future. Concerns were also raised around the variance in approaches that local authorities are taking to rolling out their provision, with fears of a postcode lottery in availability of sanitary products. There also appears to be variance in the level of consultation undertaken with children and young people, and the suitability of schemes employed for distribution.

Case Study — Newport City Council

With their allocated funds from Welsh Government, Newport City Council has undertaken a survey of all high schools in the local authority area, both students and staff, to find out more about young women's experiences, the level of need, and perceived levels of knowledge around menstrual health.

Following this consultation process, the City Council distributed free sanitary products to all High Schools in Newport, and are developing an education resource pack for schools and community settings. They will also be delivering training in schools and community settings, while also targeting less formal settings, working with charities to target families affected by homelessness or domestic violence, as well as targeting ethnic minority communities.

General Health and Disability

There were also some responses in relation to the affordability of health treatments. For example, the cost of braces, attending the opticians and purchasing glasses. Cost associated with travelling to healthcare appointments were also described as difficult by some. We also heard from parents who told us that there should be greater awareness and support for families of children with disabilities or additional needs. One parent said she has 'never heard of ASD', and that this made it very difficult as a single mother to find out what benefits and grants to apply for. This highlights a need for multidisciplinary advice services in local communities.

Hygiene and Sexual Health

Children and young people in South Wales told us of their struggles to afford hygiene essentials such as toothpaste, soap and antiperspirant; while teachers have told us that they used their own money to provide these products to their pupils. Professionals working with children and young people in poverty also told us about the value of the C-Card scheme, which operates in local authorities across Wales, and means that children and young people can access free confidential advice on sexual health, and free contraception.

What we think needs to happen

- **Welsh Government must take a strategic, long-term approach, in the context of other actions within their Delivery Plan, to the provision of sanitary products for girls and young women in Wales. The government should monitor how local period poverty schemes are being rolled-out, and how they can continue to fund them at a sustainable level.**

We welcome the Welsh Government's commitment to tackling period poverty, but we need a long-term vision for future provision. Local authorities across Wales are developing their own schemes responding to local need. However, the Welsh Government must continue to monitor how these schemes are being rolled-out locally.

- **Through our 'Cofia Ceri' / 'Check with Ceri' resource, schools should assess whether pupils have access to products to meet their basic hygiene needs. If the school believes that some pupils may not have access to the basic products they need then the school should explore whether these products can be provided.**

Some schools already provide their students with hygiene essentials when they realise that they need them. However, this is often down to the kindness of individual teachers. Through our 'Cofia Ceri' / 'Check with Ceri' resources, we are asking schools to audit all the costs that affect the experience of school for children and young people living in poverty. It may be that schools identify this as a particular issue through this process, and may wish to make contact with local supermarkets and community charities, through their Ceri's Champion, to source these products.

“Never-ending circle of scraping by”: Housing, homelessness and paying the bills

Many respondents expressed concern regarding housing problems and levels of homelessness (both adults and children and young people), highlighting the need for more to be done to help those without homes, such as increasing social housing and the number of homeless shelters.

Advice, Information and Support

There were also requests for increased advice and advocacy on matters such as housing issues, debt, finances, and benefits. The complexity of forms associated with housing applications was highlighted as an issue for families by professionals, with one school telling us that they do what they can to help parents/ carers with these forms. Early intervention in both school and community settings has been emphasised as particularly important to avoid youth homelessness¹⁸. Advice on housing, financial management and debt should be available alongside a range of advice services in the community setting, as a ‘one-stop shop’.

Both children and young people and parents/ carers spoke about wanting to learn more about money management and broader life skills. As the new curriculum develops this could be incorporated into the Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLE) in a variety of ways, to deal with the basic skills themselves and related considerations of poor emotional health and well-being due to money worries.

Homelessness

Sadly, even without accurate figures, we know that thousands of children and young people experience homelessness across Wales every year¹⁹. One parent reported having been in debt crisis and evicted from her home with her young children. They were placed in a hostel for nine weeks, followed by temporary accommodation. She was unable to get onto a housing waiting list until the entire debt was cleared (School Parents Club, South Wales). It is highly concerning that children and young people go through these experiences. While the Welsh Government’s Housing First initiative is welcome, and sees children and young people being placed in bed and breakfast or hostel accommodation as a last resort, it is unacceptable that it still happens.

¹⁸ Wales Centre for Public Policy (2018) *Preventing Youth Homelessness: An International Review of Evidence*. Available at: <https://www.wcpp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Preventing-Youth-Homelessness-full-report.pdf>

¹⁹ National Assembly for Wales (2018) *Statement by the Minister for Housing and Regeneration: Investing in Early Intervention and Cross Government Approaches to Tackle Youth Homelessness*. Available at: <http://record.assembly.wales/Plenary/5365#A46917>

The Rental Market

It is well known that there is not enough social sector housing being built in Wales. Much more must be done to increase the housing stock for affordable rent. Professionals also highlighted the issue that when social housing is built, there is often poor access to amenities and community facilities, without consideration of the importance of social connections for families. Renting privately is often the only viable option available for many families who, even in what appear to be very extreme circumstances, are not able to rent from the social rented sector. We heard from professionals that several problems for families struggling to rent included the proliferation of short-term tenancies, with some families up-rooting every 6 months. Uncertainty over short-term Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs), which are designed to make up the shortfall between housing benefit and rent for those that meet the criteria, can further jeopardise families' tenancies. This is particularly concerning as some local authorities in Wales are underspending²⁰. We heard of the impact of tenants being asked for rent in advance, when they have had their Universal Credit payments delayed. For these families, the advertisement and provision of DHPs and other discretionary payments such as the Discretionary Assistance Fund are more vital than ever.

As the private rental property market becomes increasingly competitive, a concerning development highlighted by professionals we spoke to is that advertisements which include the familiar 'no DSS, no pets' are now including 'no children'²¹. The Welsh Government and local authorities must do more to ensure that these families are not excluded from a rental offer on this basis. We recognise and welcome the efforts of Welsh Government over recent years to strengthen tenants' rights through legislation and the establishment of Rent Smart Wales, and ask them to consider what further action can be taken to protect families and increase the stability of rental tenancies.

For young parents, the transition into adulthood is of course very challenging. A young parent who attended a youth club in South Wales told us that paying rent for her and her young family was very difficult. There is also the risk that young people could be exploited by their landlords. This can particularly be the case for young people leaving care, for example. It is important that young people are given the information that they will need when they access the rental market. It is of course also important that parents/ carers living on a low income can access this information in as straightforward a way as possible. One parent told us that services that work with families on low incomes "should be put under the same umbrella", and that this would "help to build bridges between communities and organisations".

²⁰ Department for Work and Pension (2018) *Use of Discretionary Housing Payments: Financial Year 2017-2018*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/use-of-discretionary-housing-payments-financial-year-2017-to-2018>

²¹ Shelter Cymru (2018) *For rent: 3-bed family home, no DSS, no pets... no kids*. Available at: <https://sheltercymru.org.uk/for-rent-3-bed-family-home-no-dss-no-pets-no-kids/>

Fuel Poverty, Bills and Debt

For many families, the costs of gas and electric and other household charges constitute a large chunk of their income. Children and young people are very much aware of the high costs associated with fuel and energy bills. A large majority of the children we spoke to in year 6 at a school in South Wales, for example, identified fuel and energy bills as 'very expensive' when asked what Ceri's family would have to pay for. From professionals, we heard about food banks offering fuel and energy vouchers or credit alongside their food provision service, for those families in need of it.

For parents/ carers, the stress associated with financial worries such as debt was raised several times by adult respondents, although less frequently alluded to by children and young people. One parent spoke of "not living, just existing" (School Parents Club, South Wales). Another parent referred to the 'never-ending circle of scraping by' for years because of the costs of rent, council tax, bedroom tax, gas, and electricity etc. Participants at a school parents club in South Wales also spoke about these costs having an impact on their ability to improve their children's quality of life, their own feelings of guilt about not being able to take their children on trips out where cost is involved, and the impact of this upon their own mental health, well-being and self-esteem. The effect of poverty related stress on the quality of life of parents/ carers and its potential consequences for children and young people was also mentioned, as illustrated by the following extract:

"Most of the poverty we see is in working families...families have s**t jobs with s**t pay and get up at 5am for that — it means that parents are absent and knackered and barely making ends meet. It's soul destroying." (Youth Worker, North Wales).

What we think needs to happen

- Welsh Government should regularly monitor the effectiveness of investments made in youth homelessness programmes to ensure that the target of ending youth homelessness by 2027 will be achieved.
- The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) should take a lead in monitoring local authorities' spend on Discretionary Housing Payments and, where DHP is underspent, working with those individual authorities to improve the advertisement of the availability of this payment, as well as other payments which may assist families living on a low income.

"Keeping up with Joneses" — Social pressures, well-being and social isolation

While mental health and well-being are not the explicit focus of this report, the impact of living on a low income on the quality of life and well-being of children and young people was a common theme emerging from consultations. The stress caused by poverty and the potential effect on a person's sense of self and quality of life were widely recognised as likely effects of poverty. Children who have experienced persistent poverty are more than three times as likely to fall out with friends 'most days'; over four times as likely to fight with or bully others; over twice as likely to be frequently bullied; more likely to play alone; less likely to have a good friends; less likely to be liked by other children; and less likely to talk to their friends about their worries, compared to children who have not experienced poverty²².

Well-being and Social Isolation

The themes of emotional well-being and social isolation emerged in children and young people's responses to 'In someone else's shoes' whereby groups were presented with the story of 'Ceri', a fictional child/ young person living in poverty. Responses to this story commonly emphasised the social and emotional aspects of poverty, with young respondents listing feelings such as stress, depression, sadness, and anger. They also emphasised the potential for feelings of stigmatisation and social exclusion, listing feelings such as humiliation, embarrassment, isolation, and feeling left out. These terms suggest that a child/ child/ young person's self-image and identity can be strongly influenced by the experience of poverty, since a young person's ability to conform and live up to the standards set by peers (and at times by adults) could significantly impact on a child/ young person's sense of self. Children and young people taking part in this exercise often linked a lack of material possessions with likelihood of being bullied, and feeling left out, as well as the Ceri character feeling jealous of their peers.

One child/ young person stated in response to Ceri's story, "I would feel extremely sad as other people would be able to do things I can't; moreover, I'd feel envious of others as they can afford things easily" (Child/ Young Person, South Wales).

²² National Children's Bureau (2016) *Poverty and Children's Personal and Social Relationships*. Available at: https://www.ncb.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/Research_reports/poverty_and_children_s_personal_and_social_relationships_-_final_report_-_march_2016.pdf

Social Status and Stigma

As an indicative marker for wealth and social class, the affordability of clothing was a commonly raised concern for both children and young people and adults. As one youth worker emphasised, the experience of poverty extends beyond the financial, touching upon all aspects of children and young people's lives, since it results in a social stigma which derives from tendencies for children and young people to be compared with one another on a material basis:

"It's not just about money, it's every way that young people have to live, like having no clothes like proper winter coats. It's all the layers of poverty that mean that young people can be compared. Like 'keeping up with the Joneses'." (Youth Worker, North Wales)

In addition to being unable to afford suitable and practical clothing (such as a warm winter coat), children and young people are also subject to pressures to conform with their peers and to keep up with existing fashion trends. The difficulty of affording branded clothing was mentioned by several children and young people, and some told us of experiences of witnessing bullying and social exclusion caused by the lack of access to fashionable clothing.

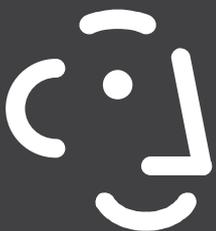
In addition to fashionable clothing, other desirable items for children and young people were reported to be difficult to afford, such as Xbox and PlayStation consoles and games, iPhones and other electronic devices. Also, with many now playing games online, this adds to the cost — with an Xbox online subscription reportedly costing £50 per year. For some, there was a feeling of being left behind friends who could afford expensive goods such as iPhones whilst those on lower incomes must wait and save.

What we think needs to happen

- **Welsh Government should take note of this report's findings on the effect that living in poverty has on social participation and access to community facilities, and ensure that their upcoming Loneliness and Isolation strategy takes specific actions to mitigate this.**

Welsh Government's Loneliness and Isolation strategy is currently being considered. In my response to the consultation I urged the Welsh Government to consider the 'pinch points' of costs for families living on a low income, such as school uniform, transport, school trips, activity days, in-school and outside-of-school sports and activities clubs, how these costs can be reduced as far as possible and, importantly, how families living on a low income can be supported to maximise income and be as prepared as possible for future costs.

“Schools are far too expensive for people who can barely afford food.”



Comisiynydd
Plant Cymru
Children's
Commissioner
for Wales

The School Experience

“Schools are far too expensive for people who can barely afford food”

Experiences at school framed much of what children and young people, and their parents/carers, discussed with us in our consultation sessions. This project has raised many concerns over the school experience and the multiple costs of attending school for children and young people experiencing poverty. While the following section will go on to describe those additional costs which hold children and young people back from making the most of their school experience in comparison to their wealthier peers, the resulting impact on the emotional well-being of our children and young people due to both the practical realities of living in poverty, and the social stigma and bullying they encounter, was also a key theme from children and young people. We heard both directly from children and young people who were experiencing life in a low income family, and from children and young people who we asked to ‘put themselves in someone else’s shoes’, who described feelings such as embarrassment, humiliation and sadness at not being able to afford the costs of the school day.

A child’s right to education on the basis of equality of opportunity (article 28 of the UNCRC) is put at risk in multiple ways because of the significant barriers faced by families. Some of the costs which were identified as the biggest barriers are:

- School uniform and PE kits
- School meals
- School equipment
- School trips and other additional costs throughout the school year such as special events

We know that, in terms of reading and numeracy, children in Wales who are eligible for free school meals are 3 times less likely to achieve an average score for their age; and are twice as likely to achieve a below average score²³²⁴.

We know that many schools are already doing lots to try to address inequalities. Across the UK, schools are stepping in to fill gaps in provision for children in poverty. In a survey of 908 teachers from England, Wales and Northern Ireland, over half say they personally supply school equipment at least on a termly basis to students whose families can’t afford these items. Over a third said they personally supply food to pupils at least on a termly basis²⁵. This was certainly reflected in our findings, with several examples of teachers taking

²³ Welsh Government (2018) *National Reading and Numeracy Tests and entitlement to free school meals*. Available at: <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/national-reading-numeracy-tests-entitlement-free-school-meals/?lang=en>

²⁴ Welsh Government (2015) *Calculating Learners’ Scores – Welsh Reading Tests, Years 2-9*. Available at: <http://learning.gov.wales/docs/learningwales/publications/150703-calculating-learners-scores-reading-welsh-e.pdf>

²⁵ National Education Union & Child Poverty Action Group (2018) *Child Poverty and Education: a Survey of the Experiences of NEU Members*. Available at: <http://cpag.org.uk/content/child-poverty-and-education-survey-experiences-neu-members>

washing home, organising the provision of free uniforms, providing food, sanitary products and school equipment. However, more must be done to address the inequalities of the school experience of children and young people so that students from poorer families can have a more level playing field when they enter their school grounds.

“The walk of shame” - School Uniform & Clothing

The Costs of School Uniform

The cost of school uniforms was a consistent concern raised by many children and young people, and parents/ carers. Some schools were recognised for their reasonable approach to uniform price and policy. Some schools however insisted upon expensive compulsory items of clothing such as blazers, tailored and logoed trousers, skirts of a specific length, and jumpers and polo-shirts with stitched school logos. Often these items could only be purchased through the school shop. Several respondents mentioned that both their PE kits and regular uniforms were required to have stitched school logos, thus increasing the cost of items. Uniforms in some schools were also only reportedly available to purchase from a specific retailer, meaning that parents/ carers could not buy the more affordable uniforms sold in other outlets such as supermarkets. Parents/ carers even told us that their school uniform was only available in one place; a neighbouring school also sold through the same shop but, because their uniforms were sold in another shop too, competition had lowered the prices for the second school.

One parent from South Wales who had children attending different local comprehensives reported on the large difference in uniform price and policy between the two schools. Costs of between £40 and £50 for school blazers were reported regularly. In one school, a parent reported having to pay £27.99 for a rugby top, stating “If you don’t have it you can’t play”.

The cost of uniforms was noted to disproportionately impact upon families on a low income, leading to increased stigmatisation (and at times punishment by the school) for those who are unable to afford the correct uniform.

“I am one of 5, it would cost my mam £1000 a year to buy us uniforms. I’m not talking about fancy stuff: Tesco shoes, Tesco trousers.... In our school, we had to have trousers with school logo on them and they cost £60 so my mam would buy Tesco and sew a badge on and we’d get sent home for that.” (Child/ Young Person, South Wales).

The inability to purchase an appropriate uniform was noted to impact upon a child/ young person's self-image and ability to participate in school life. For instance, one child/ young person told us: "I had the same pair of shoes for 5 years and my parents would buy a uniform that would be too big, it would always end up looking frayed and messy." Another hinted that having a shortage of uniform items might be impacting on their ability to play, due to the need to keep their uniform clean: "We only had one uniform to last the week, so I couldn't get messy" (Child/ Young Person, South Wales).

The below case study gives an example of the cost of one school's uniform requirements, against the cost of these items if bought from a major supermarket chain.

Case Study: Example Costs of School Uniform

Uniform items	Example school shop cost	Example supermarket cost
Shirts x 5	£40.00	£7.50
Jumpers x 2	£25.00	£12.00
Trousers x 2	£35.50	£10.00
Tie	£4.00	£4.00
PE Kit - socks	£5.75	£5.75
PE Kit — outdoor top	£17.00	£4.00 (pack of two)
PE Kit - shorts	£10.00	£6.00
PE Kit — Polo shirt	£12.75	£3.50 (pack of two)
Total	£150.00	£52.75

The Welsh Government's PDG Access Grant offers £125 towards school uniform and equipment for school for reception and year 7 students who qualify for free school meals, and looked after children. While this grant is very welcome, the case study demonstrates that while the grant is available for more than just uniform, for some schools £125 does not cover uniform alone, let alone the costs of equipment for school.

Strict Uniform Policies

We heard stories of unnecessarily punitive action taken against non-adherence to uniform rules, without individual circumstances being properly taken into account. There have been recent high-profile examples of punitive action taken against children who do not adhere to strict uniform rule. Several pupils cited the tendency for schools to adopt punitive policies with regards to uniform non-adherence, and several advocated a more flexible approach to school uniform policy (e.g. allowing polo shirts without the school logos). Children and young people reported various forms of punishments for not adhering to school uniform standards, such as being told to remove their coats, or being denied the chance to have break times or lunchtimes. One pupil even described having to perform a 'walk of shame' in assembly if caught not wearing the correct school jumper: "if you don't have a jumper on you have to do a walk of shame in assembly to sit at the front" (Child/ Young Person, South Wales). These strict school policies on uniforms were reported as being particularly unfair for those on a low income, as the following child/ young person comments: "If you don't have the right uniform in school you have a week to get it sorted before you get a punishment. It's hard to get it sorted in a week if your parents don't have the money to buy new stuff." (Child/ Young Person, South Wales).

Making Uniforms more Affordable

During the course of this project, we heard many examples of individual schools, community organisations, and local authorities leading on trying to make uniform cheaper for children and young people. This was sometimes achieved through collaboration with other organisations.



Case Study: Denbighshire School Uniform Recycle Scheme

Working with Citizens Advice Denbighshire, Denbighshire's uniform recycle scheme provides recycled uniforms in community centres and through pop-up shops. One of several initiatives offered in Denbighshire is the opportunity for parents to buy a blazer for £15, and be reimbursed the £15 when the blazer is returned when they need to buy the next size up.

In 2017/18, the scheme helped 900 children with their uniform, with 300 families being provided with follow-up details for advice.²⁶

Several schools across Wales operate 'uniform banks', 'uniform cupboards' or 'pre-loved uniform racks' for donated second-hand uniform, with some utilising lost property which had not been collected by adding this to the donations. A school in North Wales provided a rail with blazers to be picked up at the start of the day and dropped off at the end, for those that needed them. Some schools charged a small fee of around 50p to £1 to cover the costs of washing. Schools also encouraged year 11s who no longer needed their uniform to donate their uniforms once they had left. We also heard about collaborations with local shops and charity shops where second-hand uniform is sold at a fraction of the price of new uniform.

We also heard from several schools where teachers took uniforms home with them to wash for children and young people whose families struggled to wash uniforms regularly, as well as providing shoes and socks for those children whose families could not afford these items.

²⁶ Citizens Advice Denbighshire (2018) *Annual Report 2017/18*. Available at: [https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/Local%20\(members\)/Downloads/Denbighshire/CA%20Denbighshire%20annual%20report%202017-18.pdf](https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/Local%20(members)/Downloads/Denbighshire/CA%20Denbighshire%20annual%20report%202017-18.pdf)

Recycling and Environmental Concerns

Some schools have chosen to specifically link the concept of school uniform recycling with environmental concerns in order to encourage children and young people to support the idea of recycling uniforms. The eco-schools network, for example, have emphasised the environmentally-friendly aspect of re-using uniform. Some schools in Wales have embraced this concept by ensuring items of their uniform are fair trade. We have taken on this link to environmental concerns with our 'Revolve' resource for primary and secondary schools.

"Running from the Prices" - Additional costs throughout the school year

Children and young people and parents/ carers reported numerous additional costs associated with school attendance. Paying for supplies such as books, technology, arts and craft supplies, stationery, school bags, the costs of attending special events at school, school trips, and fundraising initiatives all added extra financial strain upon families on lower incomes and create a 'calendar of costs' for families. Children and young people and parents/ carers also discussed the costs of after-school clubs where the option of a free bus from school is not available. We heard that this can mean that families on a low income, or who rely on public transport, are excluded from these activities. As one individual stated, **"Schools are far too expensive for people who can barely afford food."** (Parent/ Carer, South Wales).

Case Study: Children North East's 'Poverty Proofing the School Day' Project, England

The 'Poverty Proofing' initiative in the North East of England is an audit for schools, which aims to remove barriers to learning by targeting areas of the school day which can be stigmatising for children and young people in poverty.

Examples of this work include providing children with reusable plastic water bottles, banning individual pencil cases and introducing plain school bags. There is evidence of 'improved attendance and attainment, greater take up of free school meals, more effective use of pupil premium funding, a less costly school day, and an increase in the uptake of school trips and music tuition by the most disadvantaged pupils' where poverty proofing has taken place²⁷.

²⁷ Mazolli-Smith, L. & Todd, L. (2016) *Poverty Proofing the School Day: Evaluation and Development Report*. Available at: <https://democracy.leeds.gov.uk/documents/s168342/Newcastle%20University%20-%20Evaluation%20Report.pdf>

Equipment required for school

While some schools provide free equipment to their students who needed it, children and young people described having to trade in an item of their own property if they wanted to borrow equipment for a school lesson, while others told us that the only way they could use equipment at school that they did not own was to buy it from the teacher. Parents/ carers in one primary school in South East Wales told us that they felt pressurised to attend and spend at school book fairs. While they understood these books are important for their child's learning and that there is some benefit to the school from the scheme, books could often be found cheaper elsewhere. We were also told by one young man that while he was able to use textbooks for free while at school, he was not able to take the textbook home, putting him at a disadvantage to his peers who owned their own copies.

Access to Technology

Children and young people and their parents/ carers also reported missing out due to a lack of technology available to them in the home. Those parents/ carers who cannot afford what is now often essential technology in the home will often need to use local facilities such as libraries. However, these are not always available, with certain communities particularly isolated from these facilities. Additionally, these facilities might not always be useable. During a consultation with a primary school parents club in South Wales, one mother stated that she would not feel safe enough to take her children to the library after dark due to the anti-social behaviour in the area, reporting that windows had been smashed in the children's section of the library. Concerns were raised with us by professionals that schools are sometimes not receptive enough to the needs of children from low income families when it comes to access to technology. An example was given of schools insisting homework is emailed, when this was simply not possible for a particular student. Initiatives to provide access to technology were highlighted with us, however, including one through the Families First initiative where laptops with dongles to access the internet were given to children and young people that needed them.

School Trips

School trips were referred to by many children and young people and their families as a huge expense for families on a low income. We heard some examples of costs stretch into thousands of pounds, but many more which were well over £500. These costs can put immense pressure on families whose children wish to go. Comments from the professionals' workshop included that there is a 'sense of competition' between schools as to who can create the most extravagant trip.

Children and young people themselves told us about their personal experiences of missing out on school trips. As a teenage girl from South Wales told us:

"I never get to go on any school trips as mum can't afford it".

This girl highlighted the end of year trip as the one she feels she misses out on most as almost everyone at school goes. We also heard from professionals working with children and young people with additional needs who had been told that their attendance on trips (with mainstream school) was not possible because of the additional costs of care to cover potential risks.

Special Events

Several parents/ carers told us that special events at school which are not part of the ordinary school day present real challenges of affordability to families living on a low income. As a result of these costs, those children and young people without the means to afford appropriate supplies are at risk of experiencing stigma and exclusion, by not having access to the same opportunities and material goods as many of their peers. These include the expense of school photos, school plays, school concerts, music lessons, themed costume events as part of school work such as Tudor or Victorian events. For instance, during a discussion regarding costumes for school plays, one child/ young person commented: "I'd either never have one (school costume) or I'd be wearing bloody curtains", while another admitted: "A lady once took pity on me and made me a costume — it should never have to come to that." (Child/ Young Person, South Wales). One South Wales based youth group also discussed the costs associated with Prom attendance; children and young people in the group explained that there was an enormous pressure to spend extra money on hair, make-up and outfits. Although they felt that attending the Prom was exciting and important to them, it cost a lot of money and they reported knowing of individuals who had been unable to attend due to the cost. We also heard from many respondents about the impact of predictable 'pinch points' in the year, with an example being given of costs at Christmas with Christmas jumper days, Christmas lunch, costumes, and visits to see Santa. There are also the costs of additional equipment and clothing for outdoor activities, with a parents/ carers group discussing the need to buy wellies for their primary school-aged children which they would grow out of by the time of the next outdoor activity, and would not have used regularly in between.

Fundraising

Fundraising projects within school were also identified as sometimes being a source of pressure or embarrassment for parents/ carers who struggled to make a contribution. While fundraising for charity was viewed positively, it was felt by some that the amount of fundraising activity appeared to be excessive, with parents/ carers feeling pressured. Some children and young people also mentioned having to pay a 'school fund', which was compulsory for all pupils at the beginning of each term. The following child/young person attempted to avoid this: "I tried to do a runner, but they chase you for it!" (Child / Young Person, South Wales). There were occasional complaints regarding the lack of understanding shown by teachers and schools, as emphasised by the following statement, "There was no allowance in school for the fact that we had no money!" (Child / Young Person, South Wales). Children and young people also told us that teachers would read out a list of names in class and note who had not yet paid.

Family Holidays

The cost of going on family holidays was something that was raised with us often. It was also highlighted as an area where children and young people miss out when compared to their peers. We heard of some flexible practice in primary schools — with one school offering a '5 day holiday allowance' which can be taken during term time if attendance is sufficiently good.



Case Study: Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland's 'Cost of the School Day' Project

In Scotland, Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) is supporting schools and local authorities to understand and tackle the barriers that cost creates for children from low income households. The Cost of the School Day projects works directly with school communities and also provides training, support and advice to practitioners and local authorities looking to mitigate the effects of child poverty in schools. They have created the national Cost of the School Day Toolkit, an online resource for schools to help them work with children and young people, families and staff to consider the costs of the school day. The online resources also include a practice hub showcasing good practice examples from across the country.

The project has also been involved in the development of the Facing up to Child Poverty in Schools National Practice Network, chaired by NHS Health Scotland, for local authority education representatives to meet regularly and exchange practice on tackling costs of the school day, offer peer support, and help to facilitate national level support.

What we think needs to happen

- **Welsh Government should extend the eligibility criteria of the PDG Access grant, such as making this grant available to more key stages.**

Welsh Government provides welcome and valuable funding for school uniform and other costs in the form of PDG Access. However, for parents/ carers on a low income whose children are in either reception of primary school or year 7 of secondary school, and for looked-after children, this does little in the longer term as the grant often fails to cover every item of clothing required.

- **Welsh Government must ensure that school uniform policies across schools in Wales are fair, flexible, and limit costs for families.**

If school uniform is made more affordable, the PDG Access grant could be used by families who qualify to spend on other items of equipment for school, as it is intended, rather than only covering some items of school uniform.

- **Welsh Government should work with local authorities to establish how the new proposed statutory guidance on school uniform and appearance is to be monitored, to ensure governing bodies are adhering to it.**

This project has exposed the fact that, despite guidance being issued to schools in Wales on making uniform affordable, this is simply not the case for a very large number of schools. The principles of the proposed statutory guidance are welcome, but there is currently no established mechanism for ensuring that schools adhere to it.

- **Welsh Government should take the lead on tackling the costs of the school day, and the 'calendar of costs' over the school year. This should start by urging schools to use our resource through the Hwb website. Going forward, the Welsh Government should consider working with Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG), taking into account the resources they have created in Scotland, which could be replicated here in Wales.**
- **Welsh Government should coordinate a Practice Network for local authorities to share their approaches to tackling the costs of the school day, and the 'calendar of costs' over the school year. This Network should feed into an online Practice Hub, showcasing approaches from across Wales.**

We are aware of work that Welsh Government is currently undertaking with Children in Wales to produce guides for schools on the costs of the school day. This is very welcome and would, we believe, complement our resources published alongside this report.

In Wales, we know that there are many brilliant examples of work undertaken in schools to address issues of poverty. However, this practice needs to be exchanged between local authorities effectively.

- Schools should use our 'Check with Ceri' / 'Cofia Ceri' resource to give consideration to pupils' reasons for not adhering to uniform policy, or for not being equipped for the school day, as well as to look at ways to support costs of the school day over the school year.
- Schools should create a 'Ceri's Champion' role within their school. This could be someone within the school's governing body, or within the school staff body, who takes a lead on analysing the costs of the school day and costs over the school year, as well as creating an action plan to reduce the financial burden on families.

Using our resources, schools should undertake an assessment of both the costs of the school day, and the 'calendar of costs' across the school year. This should include the needs of all children, making provisions for those that need additional support to go on trips, for example.

- As part of their Cofia Ceri / Check with Ceri work, schools should explore innovative ways in which to involve parents/ carers in their work to address issues of poverty and inequality.

We would like schools to communicate as effectively as possible with parents/ carers the likely costs over the school year, which include school trips and special events, so that they can budget for these as much as possible. During this process, we hope that schools will identify certain costs which could be reduced, either through changes in their operation, or by identifying funding opportunities. When schools develop effective ways to involve families in work to address issues of poverty and inequality we want others to hear about it. You can also share a case study of your approach with the Children's Commissioner for Wales.

We also believe that parents/ carers who experience living on a low income should have more of a say. In some schools we visited had parents' 'clubs' or 'coffee mornings'. Parents/ carers expressed positivity around learning from other parents/ carers, and sharing their tips, on what deals on school clothing were currently available or news about local community events, for example. These meetings also provide an opportunity for parents/ carers to feed into the work of the school. One school in West Wales had set up a 'Professional Learning Community' with pupils, parents, governors and staff all contributing.

- **Local authorities where uniform recycling schemes are not already in place should work with schools in their area using our 'Revolve' resource to explore the creation of uniform recycling schemes using council-run buildings and resources in their area, drawing on the experiences of successful schemes such as in Denbighshire.**

Our 'Revolve' resource is a lesson plan for schools which highlights the environmental impact of clothing waste, and encourages children and young people to explore how their school and community could do more to recycle school uniform. Feedback from our project suggests that the stigma of second-hand uniform is a difficult hurdle, but that this may be reduced where opportunities to get second-hand uniform are more informal. Ideally, parents/ carers would have a choice of location within their community so that they could go to where they feel most comfortable, whether this is the school, civic centres or local shops. Local authorities should work with schools to provide council-run buildings and resources for these schemes.

“I didn’t realise hoovers had bags in them!” - Skills for the future

When asked for ideas for a ‘Charter for Change’, many parents/ carers and professionals in particular told us of the importance of life skills being taught to children and young people experiencing poverty. Some children and young people told us they wanted to learn how to cook, in particular. This included young carers, who often have had to learn to cook without having the assistance they need to provide for themselves and their family.

Schools Savings Schemes

Parents/ carers from a South Wales primary school mentioned their ‘School Savings’ scheme run with a local credit union. This scheme for both parents/ carers and children was run by parent volunteers and involved making weekly deposits (of any amount), with the aim of saving for activities, such as school trips and holidays. Children at the school were encouraged to count money and think about budgeting at these savers clubs.

Credit Unions across Wales work with schools to create savings schemes. These are run by children and young people themselves, with support from volunteers. Children and young people are involved in the practicalities of counting money, and entering details into a savings book. One Credit Union told us that while the scheme is very effective in primary schools, it can be more difficult for secondary schools. This is disappointing, as it is essential that children and young people are prepared with the skills they need to budget.

Moving on from School

For older young people, moving from school to the world of work or to College was identified as a difficult transition point in terms of budgeting. A group of young people from North Wales told us:

“When you move to college they don’t understand what it’s like to be poor. You have to balance a job as well as college to be able to afford books and equipment...I know there is help out there but it never feels like enough”

A group of care leavers in West Wales told us that they had to learn quickly about how to budget for shopping, paying bills and domestic skills. One child/ young person told us that they hadn’t realised a Hoover needed Hoover bags, for example.

What we think needs to happen

- **Welsh Government and Local Authorities should work with Credit Unions to widen the network of School Savings schemes, particularly amongst secondary schools.**

There are examples of good work in local communities in this area, some of which originate from former Communities First projects. Resources to develop children's understanding and skills to cook, budget and eat healthily are available on the Hwb website, and the focus on real life experiences in the developing curriculum offers an opportunity for schools to develop an understanding of all of these skills in a way that is relevant to their pupils. Government and local authorities should resource schemes that engage families in this learning so that it is extended beyond the classroom and has increased potential to create change.

“I had the same pair of shoes for 5 years and my parents would buy a uniform that would be too big, it would always end up looking frayed and messy”.



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Inclusion and Opportunity in the Community

Under Article 31 of the UNCRC, all children have the right to have rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to their age and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts. Children and young people who we spoke to during this project valued their local community, and were passionate about the opportunities they did have to play, socialise, and take part in physical activity. They were equally passionate about where these services were missing.

Sport Wales' School Sport Survey State of the Nation Report 2018²⁸ presents the results of a survey of 118,893 children and young people in years 3-11. The results of the survey on participation in extracurricular or community sport at least three times per week showed a significant difference between each socioeconomic quartile identified (based on the percentage of pupils' eligible for free school meals within each school). The results for 2018 show a gap of 13% between the highest and lowest quartiles. This is a 2% increase on the last two surveys in 2015 and 2013, and a 4% increase since 2011.

We asked children and young people what costs they found expensive in their local community, and what they felt they missed out on. Youth clubs and open-access play facilities are generally free or very low cost, in stark contrast to many other sport, leisure and cultural activities. Youth work was particularly valued by young people in this project, but they were aware of constant threats to funding and had experienced closures.

"Nothing's free": opportunities to socialise and engage in play, sport, leisure and cultural activities

A report published in 2018 by my office on Article 31 of the UNCRC²⁹ found that children often felt that their local area offered few places to spend free time in a safe and enjoyable way. This was particularly the case for those aged over 13.

²⁸ Sport Wales (2018) *School Survey Report 2018: State of the Nation*. Sport Wales. Available at: http://sport.wales/media/1985082/state_of_nation_2018_final_eng_002.pdf

²⁹ Children's Commissioner for Wales (2018) *Spotlight Report – Article 31: the right to have rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities and to participate in cultural life and the arts*. Available at: <https://www.childcomwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Play-FINAL.pdf>

Social Isolation

Social isolation was described as a further side effect of poverty by some in this consultation exercise; as mentioned previously this may be exacerbated by feelings of stigma or experiences of bullying. Often, however, isolation was reported as being a consequence of limited opportunities to engage in leisure activities, which were frequently reported as being too expensive. As one child/ young person described their situation: “we are barely affording the essentials, so it leaves you isolated from your community as you can’t enjoy the nice fun stuff like going out and socialising” (Child/ Young Person, South Wales). Isolation and boredom were noted to be particular problems during the school holidays, in part due to the unaffordability of leisure activities.

Expenses in the Community

When asked what was expensive within their local communities, some of the most common responses related to physical activities and sports, such as gyms, swimming pools, and sport clubs of various kinds. Sports activities were frequently stated to be expensive and less accessible for those on a low income, although in a few cases helpful local schemes were mentioned making these more accessible (such as leisure centres offering reduced swimming sessions during the week). As several respondents pointed out, sports activities often involve additional costs in the form of club membership fees, sports kits, equipment, travel and competition attendance. These costs could also make participation in school sports difficult for those without the means to afford the extra equipment and money needed to travel to sporting events with their school teams. There was a definite desire for more affordable opportunities to participate in physical activity expressed by the children and young people consulted. Access to these facilities within the community was seen as particularly important over the school holidays. Opportunities to engage in leisure pursuits (particularly outside of school) were noted to be unequal, impacting upon children and young people’s ability to participate in activities, with a need for more freely available, low-cost activities and improved access to playgrounds, parks, and other safe spaces for children to play and socialise requested by both children and adults.

Leisure, Entertainment and Cultural opportunities

Children and young people told us that entertainment, cinema and the arts should be made more affordable and accessible. A group of children and young people with a range of learning, physical and sensory disabilities in West Wales told us that they valued highly days out, and trips to art centres and museums. Despite having the opportunities to participate in these trips, they felt that their local town did not provide enough for them to do in their leisure time. A positive example that was given was Cardiff Museum, who have offered opportunities for children with palliative care needs to visit, working with a charity to cater for these children’s needs. It was reported that families felt more confident to visit the museum independently as a result.

Parents/ carers also spoke to us about the effect on them of not being able to afford leisure, social or cultural experiences for their family. One parent reported feeling depressed because of their lack of ability to afford to go out as a family, forcing them to stay at home much of the time. One young parent aged under 18 who attended a youth club stated:

“I’ve only got ‘T’ (14 months); once I’ve paid for food and my bills I can’t afford to go out anywhere. Buying new socks is a luxury for me. There’s not many places I can go for free; toddler group on a Wednesday is free but now he’s over 1 there’s not so much. I even have to pay for swimming.”

The Welsh Government’s scheme offering free swimming for children during school holidays and at weekends was valued by families across Wales, but as this quote suggests, the cost for parents/ carers to go swimming with their children is often high. It is also the case that swimming pools aren’t always accessible, with provision having decreased in recent years.

Collective Community Activity

Freely available spaces to play and spend leisure time such as parks and skate parks were also referred to frequently as positive spaces in which children and young people could gather and socialise within their communities. One child/ young person in South Wales proudly told us that they had helped design their local skate park, for example.

Case Study: Creative Play Space, Llandudno

As part of an environmental regeneration scheme on a housing estate in Llandudno, an empty patch of grass has been transformed into a creative play space with sloping banks, mushroom chairs and a 'boulder caterpillar'.

The design was chosen through consulting with children living on the estate.

We also heard about initiatives to work with local authorities to make space available for sport and games, such as a disused multi-story car park in Cardiff.

Examples of work to promote collective community activity were given included Time Credit schemes, which are used across Wales to provide rewards, often in the form of days out or leisure and sport activities, in return for a child/ young person providing a service of social good — such as helping others with litter picking, gardening, fundraising and befriending.



“It needs to get better and easier”: Transport

The cost and availability of transport was something that children and young people felt passionately about. This was particularly the case for children and young people in rural areas, but was evident for those living in city or town suburbs too.

Cost and Quality of Public Transport

Poor quality and expensive public transport was deemed to restrict mobility and life opportunities for those on low incomes. Many of those we spoke to highlighted the expensiveness of public transport such as bus and train travel, with one child/ young person stating that they spent £700 per year on bus travel. More than being an inconvenience, this was stated to have significant implications for children and young people and their families, making it difficult those on a low income to socialise, to attend healthcare appointments and to find work.

As one child/ young person commented, “It needs to get better and easier, so we can get jobs” (Child/ Young Person, North Wales). A youth group worker argued that: “by having bad and expensive transport links it makes it impossible for the young people to get jobs in town it’s effectively like saying to them “you stay here, where you belong with no hope.” (Youth Worker, North Wales)

The cost and poor quality of public transport was a particular problem for those living outside of city/town centres without access to a car. Parents/ carers told us of the cost of public transport to leisure or cultural activities restricting their ability to provide stimulation for their children. There were also several reports of children and young people having to pay for travel to school, for instance when attending a school outside of their catchment area, or within two miles of their own home. For older young people moving into the world of work or going to college who we spoke to in North Wales, the ability to use affordable, frequent and reliable public transport was essential for attending work or college, with a day ticket for the bus in their local area costing £4.50, for example.

Help with Transport Costs and Accessibility

Free public transport or reduced fares, where available, were very important to the families we spoke to. Several mentions were made of the Traws Cymru service, for example, which provides free travel on the weekends. Families from North Wales described using this service to travel from Wrexham to Barmouth in the summer, while the Merthyr Tydfil to Cardiff service was frequently used on the weekend by the children and young people we spoke to in the South Wales Valleys. The My Travel Pass scheme, which offers 1/3 off bus fares for 16-21 year olds, was mentioned by several professionals as a helpful reduction in costs. Professionals working with children and young people living in poverty who also found the experience of using public transport difficult, such as those on the Autistic spectrum, highlighted the Orange Wallet scheme, which helps those children and young

people communicate through words and pictures written and drawn in the wallet. The wallet also contains emergency contact details.

“Everyone knows everyone”: Youth Clubs and Community Centres

The most commonly mentioned positive aspect of communities for children and young people we spoke to were youth clubs, which were consistently cited as invaluable sources of affordable support and opportunity for leisure and socialisation. Youth clubs were described as safe spaces in which children and young people could access support from peers and /or adults, and where they could socialise and have fun. They were often reported as being free to access or reasonably priced, making them more accessible than many other local facilities. However, the accessibility, opening hours and facilities of youth clubs vary widely.

The Value of Youth Clubs to Children and Young People

Several spoke passionately about what their local youth club meant to them, with one child/ young person stating that their youth club was “like my second home” (Child/ Young Person, South Wales) and another telling us that: **“If we (the youth club) had closed down last year, I don’t know what I would have done”**. (Child/ Young Person, South Wales).

Another young person stated: “It was easier for me to talk to people at my youth club about bullying and racism. Knowing that you’ve always got help, that’s what keeps you going when you are poor.” (Child/ Young Person, North Wales).

One child/ young person who attended a youth club in South Wales where around 80 children and young people attend every week night told us that **“if we didn’t have the youth club we would be out causing trouble”**. Another child/ young person posed the question of where the large number of children and young people would go if they didn’t have their youth club.

Youth clubs were seen as particularly important for older young people. One teenager in South Wales commented that **“there isn’t anything going on for us older ones. The council is selling things on because they can’t afford them”**.

Case Study: The Venture, Wrexham

The Venture is an Integrated Children's Centre, offering an adventure playground, youth club, nursery, community centre and holiday hunger programme in Wrexham.

The Venture caters for children and young people of all ages, and their families. It also provides donated food for families in the local community who need it.

This setting is an example of a youth centre which provides multiple services in one place. There was support for this concept from many of the respondents.

Social opportunities and inclusion

Having friends and a strong community where (as one child/ young person commented) “everyone knows everyone” was a positive aspect of community life listed by several respondents. One teenager told us that “on a council estate in the summer everyone gets together and has a laugh”. This further reinforces the importance of providing children and young people with safe spaces in which they can socialise with friends in their local areas.

It is important that youth clubs are as accessible as possible to all children and young people living in the local area. The Mixtup Project in West Wales, for example, provides games in an existing youth club setting which is fully accessible for children and young people using wheelchairs and other mobility aids.

Fears for the Future of Youth Services

Many responses highlighted the impact of reduced funding to local services and the potential threat of further cuts on children and young people’s access to services and opportunities. This concern was particularly voiced in relation to community youth clubs and groups, which were greatly valued by respondents. When asked what was good about their community one child/ young person responded:

“Nothing — the council have taken everything away, we had a hut that we hung out in and they took it away” (Child/ Young Person, South Wales).

One parent with a young child commented, “There’s only really this [the youth club] which is great, and we come together to socialise; if I had come on my own today though I would have gone home after 15 minutes because it’s freezing. There’s nothing to do indoors with art or anything especially in the winter.”

At the time of the consultation this particular youth club was unable to use its indoor space due to budget cuts, resulting in an insufficient number of staff to open both the inside and outside space safely.

There was a considerable sense of anxiety associated with the risk of potential funding cuts for these initiatives, as highlighted by one youth worker: “Funding problems are really scary for organisations like us who work with so many children and young people” (Youth Worker, South Wales).

Another written response testified, “There are risks every day of our local youth centre getting shut down. We need more funding.” (Child/ Young Person, South Wales).

What we think needs to happen

- **Local authorities should use our ‘Community Activists’ resource to involve children and young people in their planning processes when this involves space and facilities that they will use frequently as recommended in our Article 31 Spotlight Report³⁰.**

Whilst there is a requirement for children and young people to be involved in local authorities’ play sufficiency assessment processes, last year I called for the recently revised Planning Policy Wales document to include a section on participation of children and young people. Unfortunately, this was not taken forward by Welsh Government. Play sufficiency is part of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 and is a key part of this legislation’s anti-poverty agenda. Welsh Government and local authorities must not underestimate the value of play and recreation, as highlighted in the above feedback from children and young people.

School and community facilities, such as 3G pitches, which are not routinely open to the public, should form part of local authorities’ plans to extend accessibility to these facilities, with consideration of low or no-cost access to local children and young people. The ‘community schools’ model, of which there are several examples in Wales, also provides some potential for better utilisation of the resources of schools, such as sports facilities.

- **Local authorities should explore specific mechanisms to involve children and young people in their planning processes when this involves space and facilities that they will use frequently.**

Children and young people should be involved in the design of space in their local community. Local authorities need to do more to make sure that children and young people are properly involved in decisions which affect them. Consultation should be inclusive, taking account of the needs of all children and young people.

- **Further investment from Welsh Government should be made in youth services and play opportunities in Wales, to ensure that these services are available to as many children and young people as possible.**

Unfortunately, as a non-statutory service, youth service provision has been squeezed in local authority budgets. This needs to be addressed, and Welsh Government must work with local authorities to secure this provision which is of benefit to many children and young people, particularly those living in poverty.

Local authorities undertake play sufficiency assessments to assess and secure play opportunities for children in their area. This project has highlighted that many children and

³⁰ Children’s Commissioner for Wales (2018) *Spotlight Report – Article 31: the right to have rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities and to participate in cultural life and the arts*. Available at: <https://www.childcomwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Play-FINAL.pdf>

young people do not feel that enough opportunities are available in their local area, and local authorities need more funding to be able to make more opportunities available to their population of children and young people.

- **Welsh Government and local authorities should extend their investment in free or affordable and accessible transport schemes for children and young people, and look to make these more regular, covering both rural and more metropolitan settings.**

Much more needs to be done to create a regular, reliable and affordable transport service for all communities in Wales. The Welsh Government has recently consulted on legislation aimed at improving the integration and flexibility of public transport planning. This must prioritise regularity, reliability and affordability of public transport for the most vulnerable, particularly in isolated communities.

Conclusion

This report has outlined some of the lived experiences of children and young people living in poverty in Wales today. Some of the stories we heard were of children and young people going to school hungry, not being able to afford the clothes they need or the equipment they need for school; missing school because they cannot afford sanitary products; or missing out on the social and cultural experiences of their peers.

This report has also highlighted some of the initiatives which exist in Wales to help children and young people living in poverty, and the positive impact that these can have.

Several of the recommendations of this document, which are repeated in the [annex](#), are aligned with work which is already happening in Wales. This is because we want the next step on from this document to be a co-ordinated, cross-sector effort to utilise the resources available to us.

That is why we are calling for a **Child Poverty Delivery Plan** which will lead to practical changes that can make a difference in the short to medium-term, based on the recommendations within this report. This will need to involve Welsh Government, local authorities, schools, and the many cross-sector agencies upon which the most vulnerable families rely. As well as those specific policies highlighted in this report, we want the Welsh Government to give consideration to child poverty whenever they are reviewing existing policies and when they are creating new policies.

We also want local authorities and schools to take action. With the resources we have produced for schools and community settings, we hope to have provided a platform for taking stock of current provision, and a reassessment of what would improve the lives of children and young people living in poverty in Wales. Importantly, we want children and young people to play an active part in making changes in their school and local community.

This year, 2019, is the perfect opportunity for the Welsh Government to take the lead on tackling the inequalities experienced by children living in poverty, as it's due to publish a progress report on its child poverty strategy, as required under the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010. The Welsh Government should consider producing a revised strategy which takes account of the significantly different landscape since the last time a revised strategy was published in 2015. This changed landscape includes changes in UK Government policy and the dropping of the child poverty eradication target set in the strategy itself, for example. A Child Poverty Delivery Plan, based upon the recommendations within this report, would form short to medium-term actions towards achieving the longer-term ambitions of such a revised strategy.

“I never get to go on any school trips as mum can’t afford it”.



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Annex — Our Charter for Change Recommendations

What we want Welsh Government to do

Key Recommendation

1. Publish a Child Poverty Delivery Plan based around the recommendations within this report.

This Plan should set out short to medium-term actions which make a tangible difference to the lives of children and young people living in poverty, by addressing the issues raised in this report.

This Delivery Plan should lead to the setting up of a multi-agency, cross-policy task force which as part of its work looks to consider and to implement the recommendations of this report.

Future reviews of existing policies, and consideration of new policies, should reflect the objectives of the Delivery Plan.

This Plan could support a revised Child Poverty Strategy.

Meeting Basic Needs

2. Welsh Government should review the eligibility criteria for Free School Meals, with a view to extending the threshold to include more families.
3. Welsh Government should continue to provide for holiday hunger and extend its reach as far as possible across Wales. Welsh Government should continue to evaluate their Food and Fun programme and other initiatives to ensure the best value for money and as wide a reach as possible for places on the scheme.
4. Welsh Government must take a strategic, long-term approach, in the context of other actions within their Delivery Plan, to the provision of sanitary products for girls and young women in Wales. The government should monitor how local period poverty schemes are being rolled-out, and how they can continue to fund them at a sustainable level.
5. Welsh Government should regularly monitor the effectiveness of investments made in youth homelessness programmes to ensure that the target of ending youth homelessness by 2027 will be achieved.
6. Welsh Government should take note of this report's findings on the effect that living in poverty has on social participation and access to community facilities, and ensure that their upcoming Loneliness and Isolation strategy takes specific actions to mitigate this.

The School Experience

7. Welsh Government should extend the eligibility criteria of the PDG Access grant, such as making this grant available to more key stages.
8. Welsh Government must ensure that school uniform policies across schools in Wales are fair, flexible, and limit costs for families.
9. Welsh Government should take the lead on tackling the costs of the school day, and the 'calendar of costs' over the school year. This should start by urging schools to use our resource through the Hwb website. Going forward, the Welsh Government should consider working with Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG), taking into account the resources they have created in Scotland, which could be replicated here in Wales.

Inclusion and Opportunity in the Community

10. Further investment from Welsh Government should be made in youth services and play opportunities in Wales, to ensure that these services are available to as many children and young people as possible.

What we Want Local Authorities to Do

Meeting Basic Needs

1. Local authorities should review the current provision of free breakfasts at primary schools to ensure that the scheme is available to all families that need it.
2. The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) should take a lead in monitoring local authorities' spend on Discretionary Housing Payments and, where DHP is underspent, working with those individual authorities to improve the advertisement of the availability of this payment, as well as other payments which may assist families living on a low income.

The School Experience

3. Local authorities where uniform recycling schemes are not already in place should work with schools in their area using our 'Revolve' resource to explore the creation of uniform recycling schemes using council-run buildings and resources in their area, drawing on the experiences of successful schemes such as in Denbighshire.

Inclusion and Opportunity in the Community

4. Local authorities should use our 'Community Activists' resource to involve children and young people in their planning processes when this involves space and facilities that they will use frequently as recommended in our Article 31 Spotlight Report³¹.

³¹ Children's Commissioner for Wales (2018) *Spotlight Report – Article 31: the right to have rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities and to participate in cultural life and the arts*. Available at: <https://www.childcomwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Play-FINAL.pdf>

What we Want Welsh Government and Local Authorities to Do Together

Meeting Basic Needs

1. Welsh Government and Local authorities should work together to assess local Free School Meal allocation to ensure each child or young person has sufficient funds for a nutritious, balanced meal.
2. Welsh Government and local authorities should work together to find a way to establish automatic enrolment of eligible families for both Free School Meals entitlement and the new PDG Access grant.

The School Experience

3. Welsh Government should coordinate a Practice Network for local authorities to share their approaches to tackling the costs of the school day, and the 'calendar of costs' over the school year. This Network should feed into an online Practice Hub, showcasing approaches from across Wales.
4. Welsh Government should work with local authorities to establish how the new proposed statutory guidance on school uniform and appearance is to be monitored, to ensure governing bodies are adhering to it.
5. Welsh Government and Local Authorities should work with Credit Unions to widen the network of School Savings schemes, particularly amongst secondary schools.

Inclusion and Opportunity in the Community

6. Welsh Government and local authorities should extend their investment in free or affordable and accessible transport schemes for children and young people, and look to make these more regular, covering both rural and more metropolitan settings.

What we want Schools to Do

Throughout this report, we have highlighted examples of where children and young people living in poverty miss out.

We have created two separate resources for schools, each of which have version suitable for both key stage 2 and key stages 3/4.

Using our 'Cofia Ceri' / 'Check with Ceri' resource, we want schools to:

1. Encourage children and young people in their school to 'put themselves in Ceri's shoes' and think about all of the costs and stigma around the school day and over the school year for those living in poverty.
2. Create a 'Ceri's Champion' role within their school. This could be someone within the school's governing body, or within the school staff body, who takes a lead on analysing the costs of the school day and over the school year to populate a 'calendar of costs', and create an action plan to reduce the financial burden on families.

This work should include taking account of the issues highlighted in this report, such as:

- Stigma of living in poverty and social pressures
- Food at school - considering schemes like breakfast clubs, and actions to improve the take-up of free school meals by eligible children and young people in school.
- Sanitary, hygiene and health products
- School uniform and clothing
- Equipment required for school
- Access to technology
- School trips
- Special events
- Fundraising
- Budgeting, life skills and school savings schemes

Using our 'Revolve' resource, we want schools to:

3. Encourage children and young people in their school to think about the environmental impact of the production of clothing.
4. Support children and young people to create and deliver an action plan to create a school uniform recycling project in their school, or in the community.