



To: Directors of Social Services
Heads of Children Services
Heads of Adult Services

c.c Local Health Boards
WLGA
Care Council for Wales

Eich cyf * Your ref
Ein cyf * Our ref A XXC16-04-712426/1
27 May 2010

Parents with Learning Disabilities in Wales

Dear Colleague

Children in the care system whose parents have learning difficulties are overrepresented, our policy *Stronger Families* committed to implement legislation to strengthen support to vulnerable children and their families with complex needs; including parents with learning difficulties.

This letter is to bring to your attention to research undertaken by Learning Disability Wales to inform the body of evidence to assist developments in policy and practice for children and parents with learning difficulties. It also sets out the WAG policy direction for parents with learning difficulties.

Background

The Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 delivers on the Welsh Assembly Government *One Wales* commitment to children and vulnerable families, and will for example require a change the way service are organised and delivered to support better and earlier vulnerable children and families including parents with learning difficulties . The changes will be effected through the establishment of Integrated Family Support Teams (IFST) in each area. We are starting the implementation through pioneer areas initially in the area of parental substance misuse. Building on our experience of the pioneers the long-term aim is to extend access to IFST to parents with learning difficulties whose children may be in need or at risk.

Research

Attached are copies of the research *Being a Family: Parents with Learning Disabilities in Wales* which we commissioned from Learning Disability Wales. The reports sets out and maps the issues confronting parents and professionals in this area and provides strategies for positive practice in providing parents with learning difficulties and their children with the right support to stay together as a family.

The key research messages are;

- The number of parents with learning difficulties needing support is higher than previous research estimates
- Support needs to be sustained over longer periods
- There continues to be a lack of understanding between professionals and a lack of support given to parents with learning difficulties –with a potential for discriminatory practices
- Service needs to be to the family as a unit rather than adult or child centred.

The Welsh Assembly Government's policy document 'Statement on Policy and Practice for adults with a learning disability', 2007, states that 'All people with a learning disability are full citizens, equal in status and value to other citizens of the same age.' It is recognised in the document that people with learning disabilities may become parents and will need support from various agencies to fulfill this role.

Effective support involves a wide range of issues including early identification of parents with learning disabilities; support during pregnancy; assessment of support needs; skills training; help at home; parenting groups; flexible support to meet families' individual and changing needs; helping parents to engage with children and family services and multi agency working. The parents in this study identified 'attitude' as a major barrier in receiving the appropriate support, this included negative and stereotypical attitudes about parents with learning difficulties on the part of staff in some services.

Local authorities and their partners will wish to consider the research and how your service best supports parents with learning difficulties so that they can remain together safely as a family unit. To promote improvements in this area, shortly we will issue further statutory guidance with examples of good practice on integrated working across child and adult services that are delivered in a positive and supportive way.

In addition, later this year Learning Disability Wales (in partnership with the Welsh Assembly Government) will be undertaking a series of workshops to disseminate their research findings and the new statutory guidance on working with parents with learning difficulties.

I should be grateful for your cooperation in wider dissemination of this letter and research within your organisation and your partner agencies so that professionals working with parents with learning difficulties are fully informed of its finding and the policy direction.

Copies of the research are accessible on the WAG website at
<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/childrenyoungpeople/publications/?lang=en>

For further information on the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 and IFST see
<http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-legislation/bus-leg-measures/business-legislation-measures-cf.htm>

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'R L P' followed by a stylized flourish.

Director for Social Services Wales