



William Powell AM

Chair - Petitions Committee

National Assembly for Wales

Cardiff, CF99 1NA

22nd June 2015

Dear Mr.Powell

Petition for Children & Fathers – P04/588

Thank you for sharing with me the Minister's letter of 14th June.

I'm pleased to confirm that I had a very positive meeting with the Minister and the Chief Executive of CAF/CASS Cymru earlier this year in which we discussed a number of issues.

CAWAC ASSESSMENT TOOL – We understand the concerns expressed by Welsh Government about children being 'coached' if information about the assessment methodology is made public. However we note that Cafcass in England are able to share details about all of their assessment tools openly on their website here: <https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/leaflets-resources/policies-and-templates-for-secs/forms,-templates-and-tools.aspx>

It is fair to say that our service users have very little confidence in the outcomes from the use of the CAWAC assessment – partly because it cannot be properly and completely explained or opened to scrutiny. It is also clear that the Welsh Government is not going to change their position on this matter, nor abandon the use of this assessment tool despite it not having been peer reviewed or scrutinised by members of the Assembly.

MALE ENGAGEMENT – I am a little confused by the response from the Minister. We appreciate that Welsh Government itself does not directly engage with service users (except in relation to Cafcass Cymru). We were asking that he consider requiring the Local Authority services he has responsibility for to alter their current practice.

We have previously identified a lack of engagement with fathers across a wide variety of Welsh Government services. In relation to services overseen by the Minister for Health & Social Services we note that Children's Services departments appear to have a culture of 'institutionalised sexism'

towards fathers. I wrote to the Minister on 16th June to highlight this matter and ask him to launch an inquiry into the treatment of fathers and other male carers by Local Authority Children's Services departments.

We base our view about 'institutionalised sexism' on a couple of pieces of evidence. Firstly, we have just published our first annual Welsh Dads survey which captured information from fathers across the whole of Wales about their experience of engaging with a variety of public services. The data shows that 60% of fathers who had contact with them had a negative experience of engagement with Children's Services. The data – with many comments from individual fathers can be accessed here https://www.fnf-bpm.org.uk/image/upload/branch/cymru/WELSH_DADS_SURVEY_report_v2.pdf

A very significant piece of evidence is represented by the work of the Fatherhood Institute with Children's Services in Conwy and Newport. Under an EU funded project they undertook a programme of work to map levels of engagement with fathers in child protection cases. The levels were disappointingly low, but in the case of Conwy the department asked to re-assess engagement after a few months during which they asked front line social workers to ask about dads and actively seek to improve engagement levels. The results haven't yet been published officially but a report was included in the industry journal Children & Young People Now (document attached) – which shows the dramatic improvement made by Conwy just by asking social workers to improve their practice.

We believe that requiring LA Children's services departments to record data around the engagement of fathers (using the Fatherhood Institute template) would be a very low cost option that would significantly improve engagement. We also believe that, given the evidence now available in Wales about a lack of engagement, the Welsh Government is currently failing in its duty of 'due regard' under the Rights of Children & Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 in respect of Article 18 of the UNCRC.

I would be happy to discuss any of the above with the Committee if that would be helpful.

Regards



Paul Apreda

NATIONAL MANAGER

FNF BOTH PARENTS MATTER CYMRU

