Welsh Government consultation on 'More than just words'....follow-on Strategic Framework for Welsh Language Services in Health, Social Services and Social Care. The strategy hopes to increase the use of Welsh in health and social care settings.

The Welsh Government wants to help children and young people who want to speak in Welsh when using health and social services. Staff who work in these organisations will get help to understand why it so important for many young people to be able to speak in Welsh.

The Welsh Government will ask people in health and social services to:

- Recognise that you want to speak in Welsh when speaking about your health, wellbeing and care;
- Make sure that you feel you can speak Welsh, if you wish to do so;
- Respect your wish to speak Welsh.

This will be done by:

- Asking health and social services organisations to plan differently so there are more Welsh language services;
- Asking health and social services organisations to make sure that services in Welsh are easily available and that staff can speak with you in your own language;
- Asking health and social services organisations to make sure that the organisation makes it easy for you to speak in Welsh;
- Asking health and social service organisations to make sure that staff respect you.

Introduction

This report contains an overview of the approaches adopted around the delivery of several consultation sessions with Young People, details how many young people were involved and the local authority areas they represented. The report further outlines the consultation questions that were asked, along with the key messages from the responses captured. To avoid tokenism, and to ensure that Young People were presented with the opportunity to contribute to a meaningful consultative exercise, young people were provided with the opportunity to feedback on a selection of current Welsh Government Consultation topics around the areas of education, health, social services, housing and transport. Young People were also provided with the opportunity to complete an online questionnaire (this online consultation exercise fundamentally focused on the 'More the just words' agenda and officially closed on the 28th February 2016).

As a result, the Young People were asked the following consultative questions (their replies, coupled by online responses) are collectively captured in Section 2):
Questions:

1. Do you think that it is important for people to be able to speak about their health, wellbeing and social services in Welsh?

2. Do you agree with our plans?

3. We would like to hear your suggestions on anything else we could do to make sure that children and young people have Welsh language services in health, social services and social care.

Methodology

Children in Wales / Cymru Ifanc Young Wales consulted with 108 Young People. The consultation covered a wide geographic region with Young People representing several local authorities, i.e. Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, RCT (Treorchy & Aberdare), Carmarthenshire, Caerphilly, Newport, Torfaen, and Monmouthshire. The Young People who participated within this exercise were aged 11 to 25 years old. Due to the short timescales, and to maximise the reach of the consultation, an online version of the questionnaire was also posted on the Children in Wales / Cymru Ifanc Young Wales website using Survey Monkey.

The discussions, with Young People, took place in groups that ranged in size according to attendance on the evening. It was felt that the consultations should be delivered as a group discussion not a formal interview or focus group, due to the complexities around some of the subject areas. In-effect, this helped the young people feel more relaxed and at ease and more forthcoming. Due to the informal approach, many of the Young People covered more than one issue/question within their responses.

The consultation sessions were delivered around the key-questions (as identified above). The group consultations lasted for approximately 2 hours. During each session the Young People where asked for their views on a number of current Welsh Government Consultation exercises, for ease of clarity, the workshops were developed to address individual consultation areas and from the perspective of ‘More than just words’ young people were also asked to share their current experiences of health and social services organisations (they also reflected on the availability of these services bilingually).

Young People where given the option to fill out a short questionnaire developed by Children in Wales, or to participate in interactive group work sessions (Young People preferred the option of working together as a group, as-opposed to populating a questionnaire and this informed a detailed, informative and insightful dialogue with constructive feedback around the areas covered).

Section 2: The Views of Young People:

The following section endeavours to collectively capture the salient feedback of those Young People who participated in the interactive group work consultation sessions. (A synopsis of the overall comments made by Young People are also included). In general the comments given were positive. However a balance between positive and negative comments has been
presented, giving a rounded view on the consultation questions. The consultation facilitator appraised the participants on the current situation, and updated Young People on the ‘More than just words’ strategy and rationale (in-effect, Young People were fully briefed on the proposals / questions to be discussed).

Capturing the views of Young People – Cymru Ifanc Young Wales – ‘Be involved, it’s our Wales!

Question 1: Do you think that it is important for people to be able to speak about their health, wellbeing and social services in Welsh?

Overall, Young People felt that it is important that they have the opportunity of Welsh Language services in health, social services and social care. However, they commented that this is not a ‘quick fix’, and that Welsh Government would still need to address the health inequalities agenda (and also recognise that in some circumstances follow on care may not be available in Welsh due to costs and lack of language skills).

“Yes: People may feel it will help them talk about their needs better”.

“If this is your first language you should be allowed to communicate in Welsh”

“Welsh language is one of the 21 devolved areas of Welsh Government – so this should ensure that services are available in Welsh”.

“Will access to the services in Welsh mean better quality and experience of those services received by individuals – surely, what is important is the quality of the services you receive and not the language they are delivered in”.

“I feel it is important to be able to speak in first language, i.e. Polish etc”.

Question 2: Do you agree with our plans?

Overall, Young People felt that ‘it is good that Welsh Government is taking cultural issues and respecting the wishes of those young people who speak and think in Welsh quite often – especially the more rural and isolated communities’. Young People made the observations that ‘Health’ and access to ‘Social Care’ is everyone’s responsibility, and that everyone needs support and up to date (current) information to make ‘informed choices – preferably, in the language of their choice. They also collectively suggested that they would like to attend follow-up workshops with Welsh Government, to help understand and shape this ‘cultural’ agenda in the future.

“Yes, however currently not all services are resourced effectively with staff supported to learn Welsh”

“It is good that WG is taking cultural issues and respecting the wishes of those young people who speak and think in Welsh”

“Young People should be involved in this because they are the future – WG need to keep asking us our views on these issues”

“All services in Wales should be bilingual, and people should be able to choose what language they prefer to use, especially when they are talking about important things like the care they receive”
“living in my area, there is only a small percentage of people who speak Welsh/would choose it as their preferred language. My main hesitation with the plans are that it may be costly to implement at a time when there are cuts being made left, right and centre and though it is important that people are able to speak in the language of their choice... what’s more important is that they receive good quality care”

“Need to identify Welsh speaking staff first and perhaps they could act as an advocate/translator for these in need of services – not sure about costs here in developing the framework”

“People who are able to talk in Welsh should have the Welsh orange badge on so that people know who they can speak to”

“Literature including posters should all be bilingual”

“More Young People need to be involved to make things easier to understand”

“I think we need to improve the services for Welsh language but the emphasis should be on who the person is best to suit the needs of that patient not what language they speak. As a Welsh speaker I would prefer to have a doctor that can service my health needs first then language second”

Question 3: We would like to hear your suggestions on anything else we could do to make sure that children and young people have Welsh language services in health, social services and social care.

Overall Young People felt that information should be available in many accessible formats with the aim of getting the key messages across in the ‘right way’ - they also commented that the quality and accessibility of services should remain a key priority. Young People also agreed that there should be more visible professionals in communities promoting bi-lingual services. However, consideration needs to be given to the current workforce requirements and some young people felt it was unclear how the strategy will be funded, implemented and monitored in the future. Accordingly, future education services should develop, in partnership with health and social services professionals a scheme of work that is interesting, realistic and encourages more practitioners to actually ‘learn Welsh’.

Overall Young People felt that it extremely important that Young People are kept updated on the developments of this strategic framework and receive appropriate information in an acceptable and self-explanatory format. Better use of social media and twitter campaigns supporting health and social services organisations was considered to be more impactful with greater reach. Young People also thought it would be useful to look at the introduction of a ‘Healthy Lifestyle Ambassadors / Young People’s Champion’ programme - this would see Young People being recruited and trained to develop and deliver key-messages with their peers (but most importantly be available in youth forums/youth councils, youth groups & school and would seek to promote better use of Welsh Language services). All the Young People involved in the consultative workshops commented that they would welcome an early dialogue with Welsh Government around the future developments all relevant initiatives such as the ‘More than just words’ strategic framework with the aim of increasing the use of Welsh in health and social care settings.

“Speak to young people involved and ensure the workforce is equipped to deal with new plans”

“Better use of social media and recruitment drives etc. that promote the Welsh Language”

“Ensure that Welsh Language learning for staff is supported by all managers in all services”

“Ensure that Welsh speaking staff are employed across a range of health and social care services”
“Young people need to speak for themselves – especially at times of crisis when they may revert back to their first language because for example, we attend a Welsh school and actually ‘think’ in Welsh – so naturally our first language is going to be through the medium of Welsh”

“Young People need be involved and receive information they can understand from the right people, at the right time and at the right places”

“I think services should be available to those who feel comfortable speaking Welsh, but there needs to be balance of having everything bilingual and not just in Welsh – so that everyone understands what is going on”

“Encourage more bilingual opportunities for young people, particularly those who are not first language Welsh to access services and provisions that creates a more normalised process to the language. This removes the stigma”

“Make information Young People Friendly from the beginning and look to introduce Young People Champions”

Conclusion:

Children in Wales would like to offer our thanks to Welsh Government for approaching the Cymru Ifanc Young Wales Initiative and ensuring that Young People from across Wales are given the opportunity to have their voices heard on the More than just words’ consultation exercise. We feel that it is vitally important that the views of Young People are taken on board when Welsh Government develops this framework in the future. What is further encouraging is that Young People are being consulted on issues that are intended to help us ‘all’ work together to address the many health and social care challenges we face in Wales today. It was also commented that we must support and enable people to make healthy lifestyle choices for themselves and their families in their preferred language. Furthermore, we need to ensure that we give the Children and Young People of Wales fair opportunities to grow up healthy, happy and free from poverty.

“This is important – it’s about us and it affects us… we feel like we’ve learned something [tonight].”