Recommendations for bereavement and loss support for asylum seeking and refugee children

These recommendations are suggested as a way forward to give bereavement and loss support to the children and young people who are asylum seekers and refugees in Wales. They are based on the recommendations in the report proposed at the seminar hosted by the Child Bereavement Network [CBN] and the National Children’s Bureau [NCB] in October 2007, [Grief Matters for young asylum seekers and refugees]. The NCB hosts the CBN and works in partnership with Children in Wales. Valuable advice and suggestions for how these recommendations could be implemented have been given by a number of practitioners working with asylum seekers and refugees in Wales.

It is fully understood and recognised that such support is just one part of the whole package of needs for these young people that have to be addressed and that other more practical issues must take priority. However, most, if not all, of these children and young asylum seekers and refugees will have suffered bereavement and sometimes multiple bereavements, often in traumatic circumstances. All will have suffered significant losses. If the practitioners who work most closely with them are aware of what support is available and how helpful it could be for the children’s mental and physical health and development, then this surely must be included in the package.

It is also recognised that this support may not be identified as a need until the children and young people are more settled in their new environment and feel that they can trust those working most closely with them to tell their stories; these may be told over several months or even years. A number of the young people and children will be very resilient and not need support; others may only need minimal help. Those in families will find it easier to cope with if their parent/s is/are resilient. Assessing the support needed, which must include the needs of the parent/s or carers, and be culturally sensitive, and directing the young people to what is available would be the responsibility of the practitioner in the first instance. He/she will know that supporting the young person to build/increase their social networks and activities will contribute a lot to the level of resilience and coping abilities and constructive advice can be sought from the recommended bereavement organisations. Practitioners need to be aware that the need for such support may change as the children and young people grow and develop and that they may wish to receive additional or new support over time.

It is essential that all practitioners working with asylum seekers and young people have some basic understanding of the impact of bereavement and loss and the support that is available and this should be included in their basic training. Barriers such as language, mistrust of those in authority and the sheer overwhelming nature of the progress of individual cases can lead to families and individuals failing to engage with the very people that are desperate to assist and support help them. It would be most helpful therefore if a few of the practitioners who work most closely and over time with these children and young people could have relevant training so they could assess the needs of the young people themselves and support them as and when it is appropriate. These practitioners have already engaged and built up trust. It would also be most beneficial if volunteers from within the settled BME communities who are multilingual are encouraged to have training. [In Lambeth, in London, Cruse has attracted a higher proportion of volunteers from different ethnic backgrounds because of a proactive campaign.]

Type of support available and relevant contact numbers.
Only those organisations which have provided bereavement support for a number of years to children and young people, are well known and are signed up to the CBN’s guidelines for Best Practice are recommended. Most also provide support to adults as well. All offer support to children whatever their culture, religion or beliefs. The organisation which specifically offers support for loss also is **Seasons for Growth**, [www.seasonsforgrowth.co.uk](http://www.seasonsforgrowth.co.uk).

This is a well established loss and grief, peer group, education programme for children and young people aged 6 – 18 years; the core element is the promotion of social and emotional wellbeing for those who have experienced significant loss due to death or family breakdown. It aims to produce resilience, to understand the effects of change and to develop life skills. The programme originates in and has been widely used in Australia and a number of overseas countries since 1996. It is now operating in the majority of schools in Conwy and Denbighshire and is also in Monmouthshire and a number of counties in England.

**Cruse** is the only organisation operating throughout the Principality and the Cruse Cymru Office in Caerphilly provides support and direction to local services located within each of the new LHBs. The services available for children and young people which are all free include;

- A dedicated free phone helpline 0808 808 1677; as far as the helpline is concerned this service could be conducted through a translation service.
- On-line access to information and support at [www.rd4u.org.uk](http://www.rd4u.org.uk). This is a worldwide help site which received over 500,000 hits in 2007-2008. Recommendations have recently been made that this information is translated into different languages and that the fact sheets which are downloadable are also available in different languages.
- Free leaflets available through the helpline, from local branches/areas or from the Welsh Cymru office;
- Individual face to face support and/or counselling from a volunteer when appropriate and translators could be provided if requested by individual volunteers. All volunteers are CRB checked and have the appropriate training.
- Individual help by private e-mail. This service is provided by young volunteers who are specifically trained for this role.
- Support groups.

1. **Local support available in Wales** The following organisations provide telephone support and information, e-mail support and information, resources, family assessment, individual work with all family members and one off group events to all bereaved children in their locality. They may also offer support and training to professionals working with children but this may incur a cost. All their members of staff and volunteers are CRB checked and appropriately trained.
   - Conwy and Denbighshire Bereavement Service for children aged 0-18 years. Tel. 01492 879058 [9-5 daily]
   - Wrexham, Release at Nightingale House Hospice. For children up to the age of 19 years. Tel 01978 316800
   - Monmouthshire Youth Services – ‘Face 2 Face’ for young people aged 11 -25 years. Tel 01291 673400, website, [www.monyouth.net](http://www.monyouth.net)
   - [The Unicorn Project, St David’s Foundation Hospice, Newport 01633 270980; this is a new dedicated service for any bereaved children; the hospice has been supporting those children known through the hospice for many years and is now offering this to all children who are bereaved.]

2. **Organisations based in England which provide support to bereaved children and young people in Wales and training for professionals.** All offer a nationwide helpline, web support, publications including DVDs etc
Awareness raising for the practitioners

- Invite Alison Thomas, the Children’s Services Officer for Cruse Cymru [phone number 02920860339] to give education awareness training on the impact of bereavement supports to the practitioners, including those working with age assessment issues and advocacy, in each of the dispersal areas and the social workers, foster carers and other practitioners working with refugees in all Local Authorities. This should ideally happen sufficiently regularly to ensure that new practitioners working in the field are appropriately informed. Her role is currently funded by the Welsh Assembly Government, there would be no cost.

- Information on cultural interpretation of death and bereavement and how to manage cultural differences could be given to practitioners by inviting practitioners and/or volunteers from the asylum seekers and refugees from the different ethnic minority groups to share their knowledge and understanding of their own cultures and practices. Advice can also be sought from all the recommended major bereavement organisations which offer support to children and young people whatever their culture, beliefs and religion.

- Ensure that the school counsellors, those with responsibility for pastoral care in schools and the special support members of staff in the schools that these young people are attending are aware of their particular circumstances and needs as far as possible. At the very least they should know that they are asylum seekers or refugees. The school counsellors that are in post have had some bereavement support training and should know how to access more support if necessary. [One of the general recommendations to the Minister that is included in the interim report for this research project is that all schools should signpost bereavement support agencies in the same way that Childline is signposted now in every school. Another recommendation is that learning about death as a part of life should be on the PSE programme for all children from the start and throughout their school career.]

- The most effective way to raise awareness amongst the practitioners - and disseminate information about the various services - would be if Cardiff, Wrexham and Swansea established a multi agency forum for monitoring vulnerable asylum seeking children, their families and singles using the model of the Newport Health and Well Being Practitioners Group. Bereavement support could then be a regular item on the agenda. The effectiveness of the support could then also be monitored regularly.
Training for the practitioners

- The impact of bereavement support and knowledge about what is available should be an integral part of the course for those training in counselling or social work in Wales. Kate Tucker, the Refugee Children’s Advice and Information Worker at the WSMP is hoping to work with the course manager for social work training at Cardiff University to ensure that those training have a better understanding of the particular needs of asylum seekers and refugees; other universities in Wales which also offer training for social work and educational psychologists also need to be contacted to achieve the same outcome.

- One or two days training for the practitioners could be provided by Cruse Cymru, free of charge or by Winston’s Wish or Jigsaw4u at a cost. Other organisations which could be approached about training include Release in Wrexham and the Conwy and Denbighshire Bereavement Service.

- Volunteers from the asylum and refugee and practitioners could undergo the more comprehensive training to become bereavement counsellors provided by Cruse Cymru. This is organised by Alison Thomas at Cruse Cymru. The new pilot course to train counsellors to work with both children and adults is being funded by the Welsh Assembly Government.

Disseminating information on the available services

This could be done relatively easily and with very little cost through the agencies working with the asylum seekers when they come into Wales and then through a number of the practitioners who work most closely with the youngsters. It is essential that this is both systematic and sustainable and it needs to be signposted so that young people – and adults – who become computer literate and have a reasonable level of English can access resources, websites, helplines and e-mail advice independently and privately. The information that is published should be monitored and reviewed ideally every 2 or 3 years.

- One person in the WRC, could take the responsibility for publishing the information for their practitioners on their website [possibly the Senior Children’s Policy Officer] .

- Disseminating information to the drop in centres and other voluntary organisations who work with these young people such as the DPIA, Red Cross, BAWSO, refugee support groups and Refugee Community Organisations could be the responsibility of the WRC in each of the dispersal areas.

- The WSMP could alert all the social workers and through them the foster carers looking after unaccompanied refugee children either through their All Wales practitioners meetings, their website or through the UASC All Wales Child Protection Procedures which is in preparation.

- The multi-agency steering group of the Young Asylum Seekers Support Service, together with Shared Futures are facilitating the development of the welcome resource pack for young asylum seekers and refugees in Newport; those interested in the other 3 areas can contact Emmy Chater, the Migration Policy Officer for further details. Tel 01633 233461, e-mail emmy.chater@newport.gov.uk.

- Information could be given to the young people who are involved with Young People Speak Out and perhaps this could become a place for group support [and the Seasons for Growth programme] which is one of the recommendations made by the young asylum seekers and refugees who attended the CBN conference in 2007.
Jane Fitz  May 2010

Researching child bereavement services in Wales for the Palliative Care Implementation Group commissioned by the Minister for Health and Social Services at the Welsh Assembly Government.