

# Evaluation of Reflect in Gwent

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### Key messages for policy and practice

- Reflect is a service that aims to support women and their partners who have experienced the compulsory and permanent removal of a child from their care. The primary aim of the service is to prevent repeat pregnancy in the short-term, when there has been little time for positive change and successive child removal remains the most likely outcome.
- A two-phase evaluation was undertaken (funded by Public Health Wales and Barnardo's) to explore the views and experiences of key stakeholders, as well as to examine outcomes for parents engaged with the service.
- The findings of this evaluation are positive and suggest that not only is Reflect meeting a key gap in support provision for a highly vulnerable group, but that it is also having positive impact despite the high level, varied and multi-faceted needs of parents.
- Evidence of progress and change was noted in areas including health, housing, finances, relationships and subjective well-being.
- Further research is required to substantiate the findings with larger samples, to understand the trajectories of parents beyond their engagement with Reflect and to determine the impact of the service on the numbers of women subject to repeat care proceedings.



## Background

It is estimated that 1 in 4 women involved in care proceedings will become 'repeat clients' of the family court within 7 years (Broadhurst et al. 2017). Recurrent proceedings most often involve a child born during or recently after previous proceedings. This quick succession of pregnancy and court proceedings, gives mothers little time to make or evidence positive change (Broadhurst et al. 2015).

Women who experience recurrent care proceedings typically have troubled histories and complex needs (Broadhurst et al. 2017; Memarnia et al. 2015). In the aftermath of having a child removed, on-going issues from the past remain, but these can be intensified and accompanied by additional problems (Neil 2006, Broadhurst and Mason 2017, McCracken et al. 2017, Hinton 2018). Until recently, women who had experienced the permanent and compulsory removal of a child from their care were offered 'little or no routine follow-up' (Cox 2012: 543, Sellick 2007).

The development of Reflect by Newport Children's Services, Aneurin Bevan Health Board and Barnardo's was driven by a need to 'do something' (Lewis-Brooke et al. 2017: 6) to address a clear gap in service provision for parents following the removal of a child. Reflect aims to provide practical and emotional support to women and their partners who have experienced the compulsory and permanent removal of a child from their care. The service is available for up to two years. The primary aim is to prevent repeat pregnancy in the short-term and encourage '*women and their partners to understand their past, their present and achieve their future goals*' (Barnardo's 2017).

## The research study

A two-phase evaluation was undertaken with the aim of capturing longitudinal data. In the first phase of data collection, 30 case files were analysed, made up of 15 open and 15 closed cases. Qualitative interviews were undertaken with Reflect staff (n=4) and parents (12 women and 4 men). The Manchester Short Assessment of Quality of Life (MANSA), a standardised and validated measure that assesses objective and subjective quality of life, was completed by 16 parents.

In phase two, the 15 open case files were reanalysed. Follow-up interviews were conducted with 8 women and 2 men and a follow-up focus group was conducted with Reflect workers (n=4). Nine respondents participated in a survey of Gwent professionals and the MANSA was recompleted by 9 parents.

## Key findings

There was evidence of positive service impact from each of the research methods. The key findings of the evaluation are summarised below with illustrative quotations from parents:



### **Reflect meets an important gap in support provision**

Findings from the case file analysis suggest that Reflect workers are effective in encouraging women to access contraception. The importance of long-term, flexible and tailored support through Reflect was recognised by professionals who responded to the survey, as well as in interviews with workers and parents.

*I don't know what I'd do without the support really because I haven't got anyone else ... a lot of my issues have been taken off my shoulders since being involved with Reflect.*

### **Engagement is both challenging and time-consuming**

Case file analysis and interviews revealed workers needed to be persistent, flexible and adaptive in their approaches with parents; offering both intensive and remote support as required.

*I just didn't know how they worked like I thought they were social workers at first ... I just thought it was going to be terrible.*

### **Sensitive and respectful support is key**

During interviews, parents often characterised their relationships with workers as different to their previous experiences with professionals. Parents typically reported Reflect workers to be caring, non-judgemental, responsive and 'on their side'.

*I thought it would be different to what it is, I thought it would be more giving you shit about what you've done and what you shouldn't have done and that it's your fault and now you've got to deal with it ... but it's not, it's more like, stop feeling like you're a bad one, it's not all you, you're not very well ... you've had your difficulties and they help you understand them difficulties and move forward. (parent)*

### **Both practical and emotional support is valued**

Findings from the MANSA showed improvements in subjective well-being across seven of the eight domains. Interviews with parents and Reflect workers highlighted the importance of emotional support to help parents manage feelings of loss and grief, as well as practical support to address immediate and often escalating needs such as debt and housing issues.

*She's helped me budget ... she's helping me on the neglect side of things [understanding what this means]... she helped me write letters for, the children ... she has helped us through birthdays,*



*Christmases, she's done me a survival guide [to cope with domestic violence as well managing very low mood]. (parent)*

### **Progress and change should be considered on an individual basis**

Findings from the case file analysis, MANSAs, interviews and focus group identified progress in regards to health, housing, finances, education, employment and relationships. Improvements in confidence and self-esteem were recurrent themes within interviews. In some instances, such improvements were shown by parents taking more time over appearance or being better able to communicate, while for others, such improvements prompted transformational change and enabled parents to address addictions and / or pursue employment and education aspirations.

*It has helped me if I'm honest, I didn't think I could, well I've started to smile again, that sort of thing ... when I lost my kids I never thought I'd smile again'. (parent)*



## Further Details

For a full copy of the report, please contact Louise Roberts: [RobertsL18@cf.ac.uk](mailto:RobertsL18@cf.ac.uk).

A film summarising the findings from interviews with parents is available via the CASCADE website.

## References

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