CAFCASS Cymru
Annual Report 2015-2016
Dear C

All The Very Best

Without you I wouldn't know where I would stand today. So thank you for helping me get what I've always wished for. We may meet again but let's hope it's not in a court room hahaha.

Thanks to the rest of the CAFCAAS crew

All the best,

N

A young person
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This has been a challenging year for CAFCASS Cymru, as we delivered the final stages of our change programme against a background of another rise in the number of section 31 (care) applications referred to us. Despite this, these cases were completed in Wales in 24.9 weeks compared to an England and Wales performance at 27.9 weeks – a significant achievement, bringing earlier certainty to many children and young people regarding their future.

This was not achieved in isolation but is the result of the hard work and commitment of both our staff and colleagues in partner organisations, in particular local authorities and Her Majesty’s Courts and Tribunal Service who have all remained determined to ensure that cases involving the most vulnerable children in Wales are dealt with in a timely way.

In private law we have again focussed on trying to help families resolve their issues as early as possible, where it is safe to do so.

**Highlights during the year have included:**

- Being the best performing area across England and Wales in achieving the 26 weeks target in public law cases;
- The *Your Voice* children and young people participation events held in October which led to the launch of our participation plan in February 2016;
- The successful implementation of our new electronic case management system – the Integrated Recording Information System (IRIS) – which contains our analytical model of case planning and recording;
- The development of a suite of expectation statements to clarify and explain our role in private law for service users;
- The publication of our strategic plan for 2016-19.

The constructive challenge and support provided by the CAFCASS Cymru Advisory Committee, chaired by Catriona Williams, the Chief Executive of Children in Wales, provides ongoing helpful external scrutiny and advice.

It is a great privilege to be the Chief Executive of an organisation which cares so passionately for the children and families for whom we provide a service. There will undoubtedly be further challenges in the year ahead, but I remain confident we will continue to improve our quality of service and ensure the voice and wellbeing of the child remains pivotal to all we do.
Our achievements and developments during the year

Service improvements

Key service improvements during 2015-16 have included:

Public law target

The average waiting time for public law cases in 2015-16 was 24.9 weeks in Wales, with 73.8% of cases resolved within 26 weeks. This maintains the performance position for 2014-15 which was an average of 24.9 weeks with 76.7% resolved within target time.

Service Clarity

We developed a set of expectation statements which describe in a concise way the services our Family Court Advisors and Family Court Social Workers (FCAs/FCSWs) provide. The expectation statements are aimed at service users, key stakeholders such as the Judiciary, HM Courts & Tribunals Service and CAFCASS Cymru staff. The statements cover all key areas of private law work: Family Assistance Orders, Contact Monitoring Orders, Section 7 work, Wishes and Feelings, Rule 16.4 appointments and Dispute Resolution. Following discussion with Mr Justice Moor, the Family Division Liaison Judge for Wales, they became operational and were published on our website in December 2015.

IRIS

In July 2015 we implemented our new case management system, IRIS (Integrated Recording Information System), as part of our IT modernisation programme. IRIS provides a single consolidated electronic system with improved access for staff and the ability to manage all case-related information in one place. This new integrated approach has helped streamline processes and enabled the organisation to operate more efficiently and effectively. The next stage will be to implement software to create standard report and letter templates which will be rolled out on a phased approach.

“Today was so much better than I expected and hoped for. And it’s largely down to the fantastic work u have done in the case.

I can’t thank u enough, and fully intend to build on this chance. At A .....’s pace and not ever letting her down again. But thanks in believing in me enough to let have the chance to be the dad that she wants and more importantly deserves”.

A Father
CAFCASS Cymru Child and Adolescent Welfare Assessment Checklist (CC-CAWAC)

The CAFCASS Cymru Child and Adolescent Welfare Assessment Checklist (CC-CAWAC) has been developed by Professor Harold, Professor of Psychology, in collaboration with CAFCASS Cymru to assist FCAs/FCSWs in assessing psychological risk to children who are/or have been exposed to inter-parental conflict and/or domestic abuse.

The continued embedding into practice of CC-CAWAC remained an organisational priority in 2015-16. At the end of March 2016 accreditation of eligible FCAs/FCSWs increased to 86% from 68% in 2015.

In January 2015 we commissioned Professor Harold to refresh and update the CC-CAWAC materials: the improvements identified are on-going and will be completed in 2016-17.

Children’s Champions (Team Advisors) – working with disabled children

We are committed to honouring our obligations to children under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Listening to children and young people to ensure that their views are heard is an essential part of the FCA/FCSW role. This applies to all children, with an understanding that some may have additional barriers to overcome if they are to have the same opportunities as their peers. Our Team Advisors provide a central point of information in respect of disabled children. They offer advice and guidance to staff in working with children and young people who have additional needs.

We updated our resources on working with disabled children, with particular reference to sibling relationships.

Contact Services

Child contact centres offer safe and neutral places where separated families can see their child so that relationships can be (re)started and/or assessed. We make a referral to a child contact centre when ordered by the court, or where it is seen as necessary as part of our work with the family. In any other circumstance it is the responsibility of the parents/parties or legal representatives to make their own referral to a contact centre.

In April 2015 we introduced a centralised system for managing contact service referrals. This helps to provide a consistent service to families across Wales and also ensures robust data is available. There was a small increase from 109 to 110 in supervised contact referrals and a 9% increase to 136 supported contact referrals in 2015-16 compared to 125 in 2014-15.
Assessment tools

To support practice which is both analytical and evidence based, we continue to embed and promote the use of assessment tools within our organisation. On 1st March 2016 we launched our library of resources for direct work with children and young people. These resources help support us to meet the objectives set out in our 2016 – 2019 Strategic Plan.

As part of Strategic Goal 2 in our Strategic Plan we commit to:

- Provide the opportunity for children and young people to have direct communication, by letter or drawing, with the Judge or Magistrate in their case.
- Develop a suite of direct work tools to engage with children and young people to evidence their wishes and feelings.

It is essential that decisions made in the family court take into account the detailed needs, wishes and feelings of the child. These tools will be used to evidence the wishes and feelings of children involved in proceedings.

To strengthen our practice further, we developed an analytical model of case planning and recording which has been integrated into our IRIS case management system. The model was formally implemented into practice on new cases allocated from 1 March 2016. The model captures key information from point of contact to conclusion of a case (interviews/ meetings/ communications) and enables consideration of assessment resources and research with an analytical approach.

DNA Testing

The Welsh Government agreed CAFCASS Cymru would facilitate DNA testing (linked to Child Arrangements applications) on behalf of the Ministry of Justice for a period of 12 months. Prior to implementation in December 2015, we worked closely with Cafcass England and DNA Legal (preferred provider to analyse the DNA samples) in developing an information leaflet for service users subject to DNA testing. We also developed a factsheet for courts in Wales to clarify the process for DNA testing.

By the end of March 2016 we had received five court orders for DNA testing.
The number of children we worked with

During 2015-16 we worked with 7,500 children and young people which was a 1% increase compared to 7,430 in 2014-15. Most of the children we worked with (84%) were aged ten years and under.

Our work is mainly split into two areas: public law and private law. The demand placed on each area of work varies significantly and the following information provides an overview of the level of demand for these services.

Public law

The number of referrals increased by 6% over the past year from 1,429 in 2014-15 to 1,513 in 2015-16. Public law referrals accounted for 26.2% of all referrals received in 2015-16.

Figure 1: Public law referrals over the last three years by month
Care and Supervision Orders – Section 31

Section 31 (Care and Supervision) applications are made to the court by a local authority when it has significant concerns about the safety or welfare of a child. They will apply to take the child into care or to have responsibility for supervising the child’s care. We received 833 applications during the year which was a 9% increase compared to 767 in 2014-15.

Figure 2: Comparison of Section 31 referrals by month over last 3 years

“What has been good about it means that I have an overwhelming feeling of relief, this cannot be put into words.

I would like very much for M.... to know that I send a sincere “thank you” to him”.

A Mother
Adoption Applications

The role of CAFCASS Cymru in adoption proceedings is to safeguard the welfare of the child. Dependent on the circumstances that result in an adoption application being made, a Guardian or Reporting Officer will be appointed to ensure the best interests of the child are represented in the court. The Guardian/Reporting Officer will consider the welfare checklist as defined in the Children and Adoption Act 2002 and in particular, the lifelong implications of adoption for the child and both their birth and adoptive families.

In 2015-16, 85 referrals were received, which is an increase of 5% compared to 81 referrals in 2014-15.

Private law

Private law cases arise when there is a dispute regarding contact/residence of a child that adults are unable to resolve without intervention. At the first hearing we meet with the parties to help them to agree an arrangement for the child that is safe and in the child’s best interests. Where an agreement cannot be reached due to dispute or safeguarding matters, the court can ask us to undertake an assessment and write a report to assist the court to make decisions.

The private law workload referred to in Figure 3 includes the Work to First Hearing (WTFH) Schedule 2 Letter – Safeguarding Enquiries Reports.

“In October 2014 K… became involved to help us as parents and to support our children. From the outset, despite this being a distressing and awful situation, K….’s input was not only fair, considered, professional and always in my girls best interests, but, moreover, completely reassuring.

…Her focus was always on our children’s wellbeing, however, without bias she also supported me. I will always speak highly of CAFCASS following my experience with K……. Thank you” x….

A Mother
Work to First Hearing (WTFH)

In private law, when a party has applied for a Child Arrangement Order CAFCASS Cymru will prepare a Safeguarding Enquiries Report (SER) for the court before the First Hearing Dispute Resolution appointment (FHDRA). Information for the report is obtained from the police and social services and from telephone interviews with the parties. The purpose of the report is to detail any risk for the court to consider when making decisions about a child at the FHDRA.

2,894 WTFH applications were received in 2015-16, which is a 20.4% increase compared to 2,403 in 2014-15. Figure 3 provides a monthly overview of private law workload received during the last three year period up to March 2016. We responded to a total of 4,273 referrals in 2015-16, compared to 3,808 in 2014-15 and 5,156 in 2013-14. The increase in private law referrals over the last year equates to 12%. Private law referrals accounted for 73.8% of all referrals received in 2015-16.

Figure 3: Private law referrals by year
(including WTFH cases)
Rule 16.4 Orders and Family Assistance Orders

A Rule 16.4 case is considered if a child is involved in a complex private law case. The court has the power to make the child a party to the proceedings by appointing a Guardian for the child, who then also benefits from legal representation by a solicitor. This is a provision made under Rule 16.4 of the Family Procedure Rules 2010.

Rule 16.4 cases increased by 4% from 140 in 2014-15 to 146 in 2015-16 and an 80% increase compared to 81 received in 2013-14.

A Family Assistance Order (FAO) is an order of the court to assist, advise and support families experiencing difficulties in family court proceedings. We received 89 FAOs in 2015-16, an 18% reduction on the 108 received during the previous year.

Figure 4: Rule 16.4 Orders and Family Assistance Orders (FAO)
How we have performed

Key Performance Indicators

There are two Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that measure and assess how well we are performing:

**KPI 1:** Average working days to allocate Section 31 cases – Target = less than 3 working days

**KPI 2:** Proportion of open private law workload allocated – Target = greater than or equal to 95%.

Figure 5 shows our performance against KPI 1. We achieved this target with an average KPI of 0.8 working days for 2015-16, despite the pressures facing the organisation in meeting the increased Section 31 demand. This was an increase of 9% compared to the previous financial year.

Figure 5: KPI 1 Average working days to allocate Section 31 cases
Target = less than 3 working days
Figure 6 shows our performance against KPI 2. Our performance has been just below the target throughout the year, with an average KPI achievement of 92%.

Figure 6: KPI 2 Proportion of open private law workload allocated
Target = greater than or equal to 95%

“A heart breaking situation that my family and myself have lived for the past (almost) 4 years was finally understood and I am so grateful for the support I received from ‘M’. What has been good about it means that I have an overwhelming feeling of relief, this cannot be put into words”.

A Grandparent
Complaints

We received 88 complaints from service users during the period 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016. This is an increase of 12.5% compared to 2014-15.

Of the 88 complaints that were fully investigated, 14 investigations either had elements of the complaint upheld or were fully upheld.

In February 2015 we launched our new website, some of the new features for service users included online feedback and complaint forms. During 2015-16 the new complaint form accounted for almost 10% of the complaints we received. In January 2016 we also updated our internal procedure and external guide to complaints.

We endeavour to continuously improve the service we provide service users and are grateful for learning opportunities that come from complaint investigations.

Should a service user wish to make a complaint, they can get in touch with us in a number of ways. Figure 7 breaks down how service users chose to contact us in 2015-16.

Figure 7: Breakdown of how we received complaints in 2015-16
Compliments

Our Family Court Advisors become involved with families during very stressful and emotional periods in their lives, often making recommendations to the court which all parties may not agree with. During the period 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016 we received 64 compliments.

All positive feedback and compliments are appreciated and used to improve the service that we provide.


We received 10 requests for information during 2015-16 and determined that:

- 6 were processed under the Data Protection Act (DPA) 1998
- 4 were processed under the Freedom of Information Act (FOI) 2000.

All requests were responded to within the statutory timescales.

“I’d like to thank you very much for everything you have done.

It’s a pleasure to know there is at least one person who has the children’s best interests at heart. It has been a genuine pleasure meeting you”.

Thanks again.

A Mother
Our budget

Our budget for 2015-16 was £10,362,000, of which £9,254,637 was spent on running costs (e.g. salaries) and £331,911 on programme funded costs (e.g. funding for contact services and contact activity provision). We spent £775,452 on implementing IRIS, of which £210,000 was Invest to Save funding we secured in 2014-15.

The chart below highlights how the total spend for the year was broken down:

- Pay: 84%
- IRIS: 8%
- Programme: 3%
- Non Pay: 5%

“I would like to pass on my sincere appreciation as to how your Cafcass officer handled our case quickly and effectively within the 1st court hearing. With his skill quickly noticing that there was a valuable opportunity for both parties to communicate he helped us resolve everything on the day bringing it all to a satisfactory end, therefore saving everyone concerned stress and time with the ultimate goal to enable my daughter and her family the much loved contact together again. A big huge thank you to ‘I’ and your very professional organisation”.

A Father
How we continue to develop and improve

Improving the skills and knowledge of staff

Learning and development for staff remains a key priority and we continue to invest in our workforce with a focus on specific training to develop the skills of our staff.

In the annual Welsh Government People Survey, of the CAFCASS Cymru staff who responded:

- 99% said they had the skills they need to do their job.
- 52% said they were able to access the right learning and development opportunities when they need to.
- 53% said learning and development activities they had completed in the past 12 months had helped to improve their performance.

All staff have access to a Learning and Research Portal which provides a variety of learning opportunities.

- A two day induction programme was held in January 2016 for all new staff;
- A number of business support staff completed the Stepping up to Leadership Programme;
- Practice Development workshops were held covering a variety of topics which included understanding complaints, special guardianship orders and analysis and decision making;
- All staff have access to the Welsh Language Awareness e-learning and are expected to complete the training;
- Our Senior Management Team completed a masterclass in unconscious bias in January 2016. All staff involved with recruitment must complete the unconscious bias e-learning.

“Thank you for your time and effort in making the court process a success”.

A Father
Strengthening stakeholder links

We continued to develop and improve relationships with partners and stakeholders during 2015-16 at a national, regional and local level. These include:

- Quarterly meetings with the Family Division Liaison Judge for Wales
- Meetings between Heads of Children’s Services, HMCTS and CAFCASS Cymru
- Active participation in the three Local Family Justice Boards.

Participation Programme

Our aim is to achieve the best outcomes for the children and young people we work with. The *Your Voice* Participation Plan will help by implementing sustainable and achievable improvements to the services we provide to ensure the voice of the child is heard in the family court system.

We published youth friendly and adult versions of the *Your Voice* Participation Plan: a three year plan of interrelated projects aimed at improving the quality of service we provide. We established a Participation Board to co-ordinate and oversee the delivery of our ambitious plan.

The projects include:

- Redevelopment of our website
- Development of informational videos
- Child led reviews of our offices
- Redeveloping our children’s information packs.

The Participation Board held two *Your Voice* events in South and North Wales with over 40 children from 10 different young people’s groups coming together to share their views and make suggestions to shape the *Your Voice* projects.

We responded to the suggestions made by the children and young people by:

- Developing and implementing a welcome letter specifically for children when we become involved with them
- Publishing the youth friendly version of the *Your Voice* Participation Plan.
The Board consulted with young people to develop a letter and picture template which offers children and young people the opportunity to communicate with the Judge or Magistrate in their case.

We established links with the Family Justice Young People’s Board (FJYPB), which has been joined by 3 people from Wales. We ran a joint participation session with the FJYPB at the 2016 Family Justice Network event in Cardiff.

The Board delivered a roadshow of workshops and presentations to stakeholders and staff to promote the *Your Voice* Participation Plan and to update on progress of the Board.

**Advisory Committee**

The CAFCASS Cymru Advisory Committee supports our Senior Management Team in the development of the organisation and advises us on relevant stakeholder issues.

The purpose of the committee includes:

- Representing stakeholders’ interests and providing suggestions to us on a range of practice issues
- Acting as an external consultative reference point in relation to the development of policies
- Considering the impact of new legislation and developments in the Family Justice System in relation to the development of the service in Wales.

The Committee met three times during 2015-16 and is chaired by the Chief Executive of Children in Wales, Catriona Williams.