

Chance to Stay



rhwydwaith maethu
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action for
children
gweithredu
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In their own words

“Sometimes, when things are really hard, I feel like doing something stupid you know? I feel like doing a little crime, nothing major, just something big enough to get me into prison. At least in prison you know you’d always have company, people around you and someone to give you a meal. Sometimes I think that’d be better than this”.

C, 16, now lives in supported accommodation and was formerly in foster care.

“I worry about it now. I’m no good on my own; I need people I can trust around me. Kids in care worry about this stuff all the time, from when you’re really young you know it’s coming and it’s really scary. There’s no way I’ll be able to do it”.

A, 14, lives with a foster family.

All the quotes and stories in this report are from young people in foster care, people who have left foster care and foster carers in Wales.



“As you become older you have to start thinking about moving out when you’re 16. It’s a big thing for some people, you have so much stress on your shoulders when you shouldn’t. You’re 16, still a child. Your Personal Assistant, Next Step workers, Social Workers are on your back all the time about moving out and going into supported living. We get rushed out of care when we’re 16. It’s not fair! Being in foster care is supposed to be like a family”.

C, 15, lives with a foster family.

“I would gladly remain in my placement until I was ready to leave. Without having the option to stay until I am 21 brings stress and anxiety [...] Where will my food come from? How can I afford to buy a winter coat? These are issues I feel a young person should NOT have to worry about. I feel that I have been expected to accept the fact that I’ve had to grow up and mature an extreme amount since the age of 15. It is hard not to compare yourself to your friends who have a loving family and support whenever they need it”.

E, 19, lives with a foster family and is preparing to live independently.



01 Summary

“Care leavers are too often forced into independence too early.”

Young people leave foster care in Wales between the ages of 16 and 18. The average age for leaving home in the UK is 24.

Children and young people enter the care system for many reasons, but most will have experienced great distress and upheaval in their childhood. For these reasons young people in care will be less equipped to deal with independence than their peers.

“Emotionally though, I wasn’t ready to leave and live on my own. I was self-harming, withdrawn and wouldn’t talk much to people”. K, 36

Care leavers are too often forced into independence too early. They are more likely to have a mental illness, be homeless, misuse substances, be unemployed or in prison than their peers. They are 4 times more likely to commit suicide in adulthood.

If these young people had more time with their foster carers to develop the skills they need to live independently, they would have a much greater chance of success. Young people tell us that having a stable person you can trust and rely on makes all the difference.

“I know I’m lucky ... I wouldn’t be in college or anything because I wouldn’t have anyone behind me.” D, 20

Research says that young people do much better in adulthood when they are able to stay with their foster carers longer. They are more likely to get qualifications; less likely to abuse alcohol

or other substances; less likely to use mental health services; and less likely to be arrested or in prison.

Supporting these young people to remain with their foster carers longer saves money in the longer term. If we support young people by giving them the opportunities and tools that they need to succeed, they are more likely to be happy, active adults in good health and employment.

The estimated cost of a scheme to allow foster care to continue after 18 in Wales is £1.1 million per year.

Action for Children – Gweithredu dros Blant and the Fostering Network Wales are calling on the Welsh Government to change the law, and give these young people a fair shot at life.

If you would like to find out more about the campaign or help persuade the Welsh Government to change the law please visit:

www.actionforchildren.org.uk/chancetostay

or www.fostering.net/wales/chancetostay

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The estimated cost of a scheme to allow foster care to continue after 18



02 Introduction

The average age for leaving home in the UK is 24¹, yet vulnerable young people in care are often expected to live independently and leave care at 16, 17 or 18.

Many young people in care do not reach the same level of development as their peers by the same age. The trauma which so often characterises their lives before they enter care can have a devastating impact on their development. This means they are often not ready or able to make a successful move to independence at such a young age. However this is what we expect of them. They are being set up to fail.

Many foster carers have told us that they would like the chance to support young people for longer, and help them flourish rather than watch them flounder.

This transition is often described as the “cliff-edge”, when familiar, stable emotional and practical support is lost and young people face the world largely alone. This can mean losing the feeling of being with part of a family, of having someone to talk through a problem or other types of support we all need. Young people need stable relationships with people they can trust, and this is what has to change.



“It was just awful. He turned 18 and we were told he had to leave. It was like throwing a 13 year old boy out to fend for himself. We wouldn’t allow that to happen would we? But that’s what it’s like for these young people, and somehow that is seen as OK”.
Steve, foster carer, Newport

Urgent action is needed

It is well evidenced that care leavers in Wales often struggle to reach their potential.

We knowⁱⁱ nearly half of 19 year old care leavers in Wales are not in education, training or employment or in touch with their local authority.

Sadly, we also know that young people who leave care are:

▶ **more likely to experience mental illness including: substance misuse, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and aggressionⁱⁱⁱ.**

▶ **at far greater risk of homelessness, underemployment and unemployment^{iv}.**

▶ **over represented in the prison population, 23% of adult prisoners in the UK have care histories^v.**

▶ **Four times more likely to commit suicide in adulthood^{vi}.**

Action for Children – Gweithredu dros Blant and the Fostering Network Wales understand that in tough economic times we have to make smart decisions about spending limited money.

As well as the compelling social and human case for change, there is a clear economic case for investing in care leavers to prevent escalating and unnecessary costs borne by future generations.

“Young people shouldn’t have to fight for the basic things in life. It’s wrong that they have to act like adults when they are still children”

“I went into care when I was 12 years old. I had to go into care because it wasn’t safe for me to stay at home with my family.

Between the ages of 12 and 16 I had 11 different homes, some foster homes and some children’s homes. I would have loved to stay with my last foster family, but I wasn’t able to. I was withdrawn and self-harming, they found that difficult to manage though they fought to get me the help I needed. We built a connection, and I did stay in touch with them after I left their home. I would go and visit the family every so often.

I was 17 coming up to my 18th birthday when I got my own place. Loneliness is what I remember most. It was in a basement flat in the middle of town. I remember the first night vividly; I was so cold, lonely and petrified of what the night would bring. I locked all the doors and windows, and I even put a chair in front of the doors just to make me feel secure. I lay under the duvet all night shaking and crying thinking someone was going to come and hurt me. I felt totally alone in life.

When I was 17 I was good at cooking and cleaning and the practical stuff. Emotionally

though, I wasn't ready to leave and live on my own. I was self-harming, withdrawn and wouldn't talk much to people. I don't think it's right to force young people in my position to go into independent living before they are ready; they end up getting even more hurt than they already are. Young people shouldn't have to fight for the basic things in life. It's wrong that they have to act like adults when they are still children.

Back then I was really vulnerable, and easy to take advantage of. There was one occasion during this time when someone who had hurt me when I was younger hurt me again. I felt helpless as I wasn't able to protect myself.

I had a couple of friends who left care at the same time as me, we were all still messed up. We were all lonely and dealt with life in different ways. A couple of friends joined the army as a way of escaping, and I suppose to be looked after. Another who I was really close to got into drugs, alcohol and prostitution - it was her way of coping. She died 5 years ago.

I've spent the last 10 years doing what I can to help children in care, so they don't have to go through what I did.

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I helped run a support group for children in care and I have been a mentor for a young person who was in the care system.

I strongly believe that children in care do need that extra time to be ready to live independently, so they can be safe and make the right choices in the future.”



03 The time is now

“We all have a responsibility to ensure looked after children and care leavers have the best possible start in life”

In Wales, we have a new opportunity to improve the lives of young people leaving care.

Some local authorities in Wales are already taking advantage of their existing legal powers to provide young people leaving care with the opportunity to stay with their foster carers for longer if they need it. We’ve heard some positive stories from young people like D (p12) who have been able to stay with their foster carers longer.

But some local authorities in Wales don’t. We’ve heard a lot more stories from young people in different areas of Wales that haven’t had this chance.

The Welsh Government and Local Government in Wales are currently trialling a scheme called When I am Ready. The scheme gives young people in foster care the option to remain with their foster carers beyond 18, if that’s what they both want.

This is a positive step forward. It is already making a big difference to the small number of young people benefiting from the trial. We want to make sure this good work spreads and the scheme is implemented across Wales.

Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Bill

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Bill will change the law affecting social services, including how the care system works. Gwenda Thomas AM, Deputy Minister for Social Services, has explained^{vii}:

“The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Bill provides the background to our stated intention to do more for looked after children in Wales. As corporate parents, we all have a responsibility to ensure looked after children and care leavers have the best possible start in life”.

We want this law to say clearly care leavers should have the best possible start in life, and that young people reaching 18 have the option to remain with their foster carers until they are at least 21 years old.

In England there is a similar scheme in place^{viii}, but local authorities are able to choose if and how they implement it. Recent figures^{ix} show that this scheme has made no difference to the percentage of young people able to stay with their former foster carers beyond 18.

We believe this should be a consistent entitlement young people are able to access irrespective of where in Wales they live. This is why a mandatory obligation on local authorities is so important.

Clarity for young people

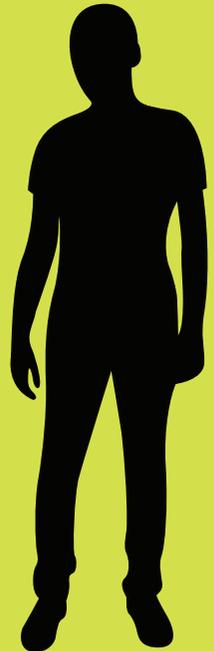
Young people frequently tell us leaving foster care is a confusing, lonely time in

which they struggle to obtain information about their rights to support and understand them. It's important young people in care understand precisely what the law provides for them. We believe a legal duty will give much needed clarity for everyone.

This entitlement will give young people leaving care the time they need to make positive choices about their future and develop the practical skills and emotional resilience to make a successful move to independence. It also gives them a chance to increase their responsibilities over time and develop the skills they need at a pace that is right for them.

Foster carers do a vital job providing supportive home environments in which young people feel safe and supported. By providing the option to remain with familiar foster carers we can provide a nurturing space for young people to flourish.

“It’s not really about how old I am, but whether I’ll be alright on my own”



“I came into foster care when I was 13. I’ve been with my foster carers since then, I’ve only ever been in the one placement. I know I’m lucky, I’m the only one out of me and my sisters that has stayed with the same foster parents.

I’ve known that I wanted to stay here beyond 18 for years. I did some stupid stuff when I first came into care, and got in trouble with the police. My foster carers stuck with me, and said they still wanted to foster me. They knew things would only get worse if I had to move. I knew then that I had to change and stop doing stupid stuff. If I didn’t, I would have ended up back where I came from and getting into worse trouble.

My foster carers have been really supportive when I was in school and now I’m in college. They help me with different things, and I can ask them for advice about the things I want to do and what my options are. I pay them some of my money towards rent and food. I budget what I’ve got left for the things I need and want to do. I’ve started college this year and am doing a vehicle body repair course. After this I want to do a mechanics course and do everything properly. I want to get

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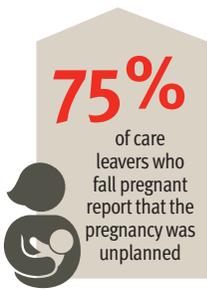
a good job in a car dealership, and I’ll get the qualifications to do it.

I didn’t really like school, I was glad to leave. Since I’ve left I’ve got more qualifications and done a few different courses to help me build up my skills. I even got an award during my work experience at a local garage.

When I’m settled in a good job and I know what I’m doing with myself, I’ll move on to my own place. It’s not really about how old I am, but whether I’ll be alright on my own.

Young people in foster care need time to get qualifications and an idea of what they want to do. They need to be able to manage their money and support themselves. If they’d put me in my own place, I wouldn’t have coped. I’d be on the dole I think. I wouldn’t be in college or anything because I wouldn’t have anyone behind me. As it is, I’m just concentrating on my course at the moment to try and get the job that I want.”

04 A critical time



The process of brain development in adolescence is crucial for all young people. It is particularly critical for the most vulnerable who do not have stable, familiar support. A recent report by Swansea University and Cardiff University^x, commissioned by Action for Children-Gweithredu dros Blant, outlines the clear evidence that young people approaching adulthood need opportunities to “exercise” their developing brains, and understand the world around them in “safe and supportive environments”.

Allowing those young people in foster care who have positive, stable relationships with their foster families to remain there and make the transition to early adulthood will allow them to undergo this development positively and with the very best chances.

The human cost

Sadly, we know most young people leaving foster care go on to experience chronic problems and on-going disadvantage.

UK statistics and sampling based studies have found:

▶ **29% of care leavers had no qualification, and only 9% had 5 A to C grade GCSEs^{xi}.**

▶ **young care leavers experience high levels of unemployment, poverty and homelessness^{xii}.**

▶ **almost half of young care leavers have a long-term mental illness^{xiii}.**

▶ **75% of care leavers who fall pregnant report that the pregnancy was unplanned^{xiv}.**

▶ **38% of young prisoners and 23% of adult prisoners in the UK have care histories^{xv}.**

▶ in one study of UK care leavers who exited care at 18 or younger, 37% had experienced housing instability, 35% had experienced homelessness and the majority were living on limited financial resources a year after leaving care^{xvi}.

How a Chance to Stay will make a difference

For many years, academics and those who work with young people in care have argued we should allow these young people to stay in care longer so they have the chance to benefit from the prolonged emotional, financial and practical support young people who live with their birth families have.

There is a strong body of evidence which shows that giving young people in foster care more time can have significant benefits. Increasing the age at which young people leave foster care:

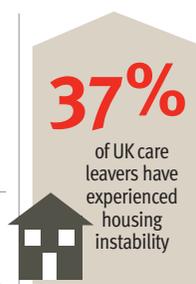
▶ has a positive, significant effect on secondary educational attainment and completion and entry into post-secondary education^{xvii}.

▶ reduces the likelihood of subsequent alcohol and substance abuse among care leavers. It also reduces the subsequent use of mental health services^{xviii}.

▶ reduces the frequency and number of multiple teenage pregnancies^{xix}.

▶ reduces the frequency of delinquent outcomes, including being arrested and being in prison^{xx}.

We must be ambitious for these young people. We must be committed to giving them the right tools to reach their full potential. Giving young people in foster care the opportunity to remain in a safe family environment will give them the time and support they need to succeed.



The economic cost

Giving young people in foster care the opportunity to stay until they are at least 21 is a positive investment in their futures. It is a progressive and responsible use of public money. It will reduce the likelihood of the serious adverse outcomes we know care leavers experience now and the cost of response by public services such as health and social care.

Action for Children-Gweithredu dros Blant commissioned economists from Landman Economics and Virtual Worlds Research to model the cost of a scheme for young people in foster care in Wales^{xxi}.

To make sense of future costs, we also have to understand the current costs. Landman Economics and Virtual Worlds Research mapped two young people's journeys from foster care to independence. These journeys are devised from what research tells us often happens to these young people and are moderate examples.

The following diagram compares the cost of support across different budgets for Megan and Rhys from 16 until they are 46. It also compares the contributions they make.

Although Megan spends longer in care, her costs

are lower. Megan is able to contribute as a tax payer through her paid employment and has less need for support from public services such as the health service.

Rhys spends less time in care, however his costs are higher. Rhys's lack of qualifications has resulted in his being underemployed and in jobs which pay low wages. He also has periods of unemployment, and is unable to contribute as much tax. Rhys has recurring depression and he requires support from mental health services.

These figures illustrate that we can provide better support for young people that is also cost-effective.

Rhys's journey over the same period of time costs £131,212 more than Megan. We can give young people the chance to stay and succeed, and it will save us money in the longer term.

Comparison: total costs to state by budget, and total contribution to state by budget



Megan Rhys

Megan stays with her former foster carers beyond her 18th birthday. At 19, Megan is enrolled on a degree course and continues to live with her former foster family. Megan graduates at age 21, and then moves out to her own accommodation and starts a job. Megan works steadily throughout her career.



Rhys is unable to stay with his former foster carers. He leaves his former foster home at 18, and doesn't gain additional qualifications. Rhys experiences low wages, spells of unemployment and recurring depression throughout his life.

Rhys's journey over the same period of time costs £131,212 more than Megan

The total cost for Wales

Based on the numbers of young people in foster care in Wales, Landman Economics and Virtual Worlds Research estimate that a scheme will cost £1.6 million annually. This figure is representative of the number of young people projected to take part in a scheme and the amount of time they would remain in the former foster placement^{xxii}.

Of the £1.6 million, £500,000 of this cost can be met by young people claiming their entitlement to support with the cost of housing and making a reasonable contribution from their own income.

This means that the cost of the scheme from Welsh Government budgets is £1.1 million.

This equates to 0.86% of the Welsh Government's budget in 2013/2014 which was allocated to supporting Children, Young People and Families^{xxiii}.

There is a strong social and economic case for investing in care leavers now. We know the Welsh Government is committed to preventative spending^{xxiv}:

“We have prioritised activity that improves outcomes, reduces the impact of negative outcomes on the people and communities of Wales and also considered how we can reduce the demand on public services in the future. This preventative approach underpins all of our spending plan” (Welsh Government, October 2013)

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Bill gives us a specific occasion to address the negative spending cycle and make a specific, discrete investment in young people now, which will have significant positive outcomes for them and substantial savings for public service budgets in Wales.

05 Our proposal

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Bill will change the law affecting social services in Wales, including how the care system works. We want this law to say clearly that young people reaching 18 have the option to remain with their former foster carer until they are at least 21 years old, where both parties agree.

Action for Children-Gweithredu dros Blant and the Fostering Network Wales call on all members of the National Assembly for Wales to support the following amendment to the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Bill:

Suggested amendment to Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Bill

At Section 93, add new subsection 2(a)

93(2)(a) The support given under subsection 1 shall include the continuation of accommodation with the former local authority foster parent, unless:

- (a) the category 3 young person states that he or she does not wish to continue residing in such accommodation, or
- (b) the former local authority foster parent does not wish to continue to provide accommodation, or
- (c) it is not reasonably practicable to arrange such accommodation.

(2) 'Former local authority foster parent' means a local authority foster parent within the meaning of section 65 (6) (a) or (b) with whom the former relevant child, as a looked after child, was placed under section 65 (6)(a) or (b).

If you would like to find out more about the campaign or help persuade the Welsh Government to change the law please visit:

www.actionforchildren.org.uk/chancetostay

or www.fostering.net/wales/chancetostay



About Action for Children – Gweithredu dros Blant

Action for Children-Gweithredu dros Blant is a charity that supports and speaks out on behalf of the most vulnerable and neglected children and young people in the heart of communities throughout Wales. With more than 100 services in Wales we are where you live and work.

We help thousands of children and young people to transform their lives each year and we've been doing so for over 100 years. The children and young people we support face the most difficult problems in life.

By supporting Action for Children- Gweithredu dros Blant you inspire hope in the thousands of vulnerable children and young people we help.

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Action for Children - Gweithredu dros Blant is committed to helping the most vulnerable and neglected children and young people in the UK break through injustice, deprivation and inequality, so they can achieve their full potential.

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About the Fostering Network Wales

The Fostering Network is the UK's leading charity for all those involved in foster care, and exists to make life better for fostered children and the families that look after them.

As a membership organisation and the voice of foster care in the UK, we represent over 5,000 foster carers and more than 40 fostering services in Wales.

We work with our members to campaign and lobby to influence national and local policy, and we provide a range of services and support so that foster carers and fostering services can provide fostered children with the best possible care.

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End notes

ⁱEurostat (2009) Youth In Europe: A Statistical Portrait.

EU data from 2007 places the average age of leaving the parental home for young people in the UK at around 24, with women leaving on average slightly earlier than men.

ⁱⁱWelsh Government (2013) Adoptions, outcomes and Placements for Children Looked After by Local Authorities, Wales, 2012-13.

ⁱⁱⁱRees, P., Holland, S. & Forbes, N. (2013) Outcomes for Young People Leaving Foster Care: A literature and data review on the effects of age of exit – Interim Report.

^{iv}Ibid

^vOgden J. (1992). Set up to fail.

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^{vi}The Centre for Social Justice (2013) ‘I never left care, Care left me’: ensuring good corporate parenting into adulthood.

^{vii}Gwenda Thomas (2013) Written Statement - Update on proposed scheme to allow young people to remain with Foster Carers beyond age 18. Available online: <http://wales.gov.uk/about/cabinet/cabinetstatements/2013/foster-carers/?lang=en> [Accessed 14 November 2013]

^{viii}HM Government (2013) ‘Staying Put’ arrangements for Care leavers aged 18 and above to stay on with their former foster carers. DfE, DWP and HMRC Guidance.

^{ix}Department for Education (2013) Children looked after in England, including adoption, Available online: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption> [Accessed 15 November 2013]

^xRees, P., Holland, S. & Forbes, N. (2013) Outcomes for Young People Leaving Foster Care: A literature and data review on the effects of age of exit – Interim Report.

^{xi}Statistics for Wales SDR 163/2013

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^{xii}Cheung, S. Y., & Heath, A. (1994). After care: The education and occupation of adults who have been in care.

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^{xiii}Saunders, L. & Broad, B. (1997) The Health Needs of Young People Leaving Care.

^{xiv}Chase, E., Maxwell, C., Knight, A., & Aggleton, P. (2006). Pregnancy and Parenthood among Young People In and Leaving Care: What Are the Influencing Factors, and What

Makes a Difference in Providing Support?

(Cited in Rees, P., Holland, S. & Forbes, N. (2013) Outcomes for

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^{xv}Ogden J. (1992). Set up to fail.

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^{xvi}Dixon, J. (2008). Young people leaving care: health, well-being and outcomes.

(Cited in Rees, P., Holland, S. & Forbes, N. (2013) Outcomes for Young People Leaving Foster Care: A literature and data review on the effects of age of exit – Interim Report.)

^{xvii}Courtney, M. E., & Dworsky, A. (2006). Early outcomes for young adults transitioning from out-of-home care in the USA. Courtney, M. E., Dworsky, A., & Pollack, H. (2007). When should the state cease parenting? Evidence from the Midwest Study. Courtney, M. E., Dworsky, A., Lee, J. S., & Raap, M. (2010). Midwest evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth: Outcomes at age 23 & 24.

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^{xviii}Courtney, M. E., & Dworsky, A. (2006). Early outcomes for young adults transitioning from out-of-home care in the USA. (Cited in Rees, P., Holland, S. & Forbes, N. (2013) Outcomes for Young People Leaving Foster Care: A literature and data review on the effects of age of exit – Interim Report.)

^{xix}Courtney, M. E., & Dworsky, A. (2006). Early outcomes for young adults transitioning from out-of-home care in the USA. Dworsky, A., & Courtney, M. E. (2009). Homelessness and the transition from foster care to adulthood. *Child Welfare*, 88 (4), 23.

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^{xxi}Landman Economics and Virtual Worlds Research (2013) Costing the When I am Ready scheme.

^{xxii}Ibid

^{xxiii}Welsh Government (2013) Draft Budget 2014-15. Available online: <http://wales.gov.uk/funding/budget/draftbudgetat1415/?lang=en> [Accessed 14 November 2013]

Under the social Services budget the Children’s Services allocation for 2013/14 was £10,317,000. Under the Communities and Tackling Poverty budget the Children, young People and Families allocation was £117,538,000 in 2013/14. The combined total is £127,855,000.

^{xxiv}Welsh Government (2013) Welsh Government Draft Budget 2015-15 Priorities for Wales. Available online <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/caecd/publications/131008draftbudgetnarrative1415.pdf> [Accessed 14 November 2013]