



APPLICATIONS OF PROSOCIAL PRINCIPLES IN WELSH SOCIETY

ENGAGING PARENTS, EDUCATION, AND PEER GROUPS THROUGH A NURTURING WELLBEING PROGRAMME

Darren J. Edwards¹, & Dion Curry²

Department of Public Health, Policy, and Social Sciences, Swansea University, UK¹

Department of Political and Cultural Studies, Swansea University, UK²

Key points:

- A prosocial intervention programme helps to build early resilience skills, thus improving early academic success and lowering the chances of later delinquency, which ultimately helps to reduce health, educational and prospects inequality.
- Building early mental health resilience and psychological flexibility has short-term benefits in reducing burdens on the NHS and supporting strong childhood and youth development, as well as longer-term benefits that align with the goals of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, such as a prosperous, healthy and more equal Wales.
- Wales must work with universities, schools, parental support groups and other key actors to explore the use and implications of prosocial intervention programs that support local needs.
- An advisory group on prosocial behaviour and education should coordinate with related advisory and support groups to ensure local educational support needs are met.

POLICY ISSUE

Wales has a high degree of delinquency, drug abuse and poor health in some of its poorest communities. Wales has seen a 78% rise in deaths cause by drug abuse and has the second highest number of drug misuse deaths after the North-East of England¹. The substance misuse programme² mainly focuses on reactive measures such as the naloxone (THN) programme that helps with reducing the risk of opioid poisoning, but focuses less on underlying causes and proactive approaches to mitigating harm.

In line with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, which emphasises a sustainable and more equal society, several policy implementations have been suggested such as the Welsh Government's 'Together for mental health delivery plan 2019-2022³', a 10 year cross-Government strategy to improve mental health in terms of quality and accessibility. Cross-government work includes education, employment, and housing, which can make a significant contribution to improving mental health and wellbeing outcomes in a way that is sustainable for the future.

However, despite these policy initiatives inequality has been growing according to a recent report by the Equality of Human Rights Commission⁴. One problem is that the focus of the mental health delivery plan is on diagnostic care, whereas there needs to be increased emphasis on preventative care to bring this in line with other Welsh health initiatives. Though these are important immediate measures, in the longer term more focus needs to be placed on the preventable aspects of society, such as building early psychological resilience rather than the management of existing mental health problems. This requires a move away from individually-focused treatments, which may actually serve to increase inequality, treatment lags, gaps, and mental health issues, to treatments that recognize community values and connections with others in society⁵.

Recent progressive policies move towards this focus on underlying causes. 'A healthier Wales: Our Plan for Health and Social Care⁶', has a focus on prevention and integrated, person-centred care delivery that is informed by stakeholders such as service users and carers. These integrated services could be expanded further by improving mental health and building resilience at the core roots of social development (i.e., child learning) through Prosocial. Such innovation, with greater mental health resilience, will lead to better programmatic success and ultimately a rise in Welsh GDP and greater prosperity⁷.

PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

Prosocial is a practical process that utilises contextual behaviourism and multi-level selection evolutionary principles to build more collaborative relations between and within groups. Concrete examples of prosocial in application are **parenting skills programmes** to nurture children's prosocial development like the 'Incredible Years'⁸ that help parents to become more skilled in nurturing their children and developing mutually reinforcing interactions. Another concrete example of prosocial in action is 'The good behaviour game' in schools to promote cooperation and self-regulation, which builds emotional stability in the longer term and has been used in Birmingham.⁹ The institute of medicine also provide several other evidence-based programmes for parents.¹⁰ Various programmes such as the Family-check-up programme¹¹ encourage parents to communicate with their children about what they have done and where and who they are interacting with. Other programmes such as the promoting alternative thinking strategies (PATHS)¹² are designed to teach children about each emotion and how to appropriately express it, building emotional regulation and communication skills that then help them to go on and develop more positive peer groups.

PROSOCIAL APPLICATIONS IN WALES

Prosocial builds on some of the progress for integrated services, but goes further by focusing on some of society's underlying causes that promote mental health problems. Recent developments in applied behavioural analysis (ABA) for the management of children's behaviour¹³ have expanded into a full programme for societal change focusing on promoting group collaboration, called Prosocial¹⁴. An effective wellbeing system should become a connected and integrated movement driven by public stakeholders (schools, parent groups etc.) as well as standing advisory groups who can rapidly collate information from active parties. Such movements have worked well in the context of other wellbeing initiatives and need to be explored in proactively and holistically reducing mental health issues from a young age⁷.

POTENTIAL PROSOCIAL APPLICATIONS IN WALES

'Communities that care' (CTC)⁷, a community-change intervention for reducing youth problem behavior such as drug use, low academic achievement, sexual risk-taking, and violence

The recent development of **'Connect'¹⁵, an Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) curriculum**, designed to build psychological flexibility and resilience in children.

'Positive behaviour interventions and supports'⁷, (PBIS) which seeks to improve school safety and promote positive behavior in children.

'The good behaviour game'⁹, (GBG) which seeks to reward collaborative, prosocial behaviour thus reducing problematic behaviour.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- ❑ A two-pronged public education campaign will raise public and institutional awareness of the benefit of Prosocial and a Prosocial intervention programme.
- ❑ Develop an advisory group on prosocial behaviour to explore the benefits of prosocial in a Welsh context and how it can be integrated and embedded in relevant educational and social programmes in a safe and ethical way.
- ❑ Based on the advice of the advisory group, a Prosocial intervention programme should be developed that helps build early resilience skills, thus lowering the chances of later delinquency and improving early academic success, ultimately helping to reduce health, educational, and prospect inequality.
- ❑ Parents, schools and peer groups should be provided educational support in developing complementary prosocial programmes that are flexible and fit for purpose.
- ❑ This work can link with existing Government and Welsh Parliament work and committees like the Whole-School Approach to Mental Health and Well-being Youth Stakeholder Group, the Improving Outcomes for Children Advisory Group and the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales.
- ❑ The new Curriculum for Wales rightly foregrounds health and wellbeing, including mental health. This allows for integration of Prosocial responses to support this vision.
- ❑ Joined up, integrated and ethical practice will ensure that there is efficient and transparent communication between schools, and parental support groups.

-
- ¹ Public health Wales (2019a). Drug deaths at their highest ever levels in Wales <https://phw.nhs.wales/news/drug-deaths-at-their-highest-ever-levels-in-wales/>
- ² Public health Wales (2019b). Harm Reduction Database Wales: Drug related mortality Annual Report 2018-19 <https://phw.nhs.wales/news/drug-deaths-at-their-highest-ever-levels-in-wales/harm-reduction-database-wales-drug-related-mortality-annual-report-2018-19/>
- ³ Welsh Government (2020). Together for mental health delivery plan 2019-2022 <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-01/together-for-mental-health-delivery-plan-2019-to-2022.pdf>
- ⁴ Equality and human rights commission (2018). Is Wales fairer? The state of equality and human rights 2018. <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/is-britain-fairer-2018-is-wales-fairer.pdf>
- ⁵ Fankhauser, S., & Tol, R. S. (2005). On climate change and economic growth. *Resource and Energy Economics*, 27(1), 1-17
- ⁶ Welsh Government (2020). A healthier Wales: Our Plan for Health and Social Care' <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-10/a-healthier-wales-action-plan.pdf>
- ⁷ Biglan, A. (2015). *The nurture effect: How the science of human behavior can improve our lives and our world*. New Harbinger Publications.
- ⁸ *The incredible years*. (2020). Available from: <http://www.incredibleyears.com/>
- ⁹ Little, M., Berry, V. L., Morpeth, L., Blower, S., Axford, N., Taylor, R., ... & Tobin, K. (2012). The impact of three evidence-based programmes delivered in public systems in Birmingham, UK. *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, 6(2), 260-272.
- ¹⁰ O'Connell, M. E., Boat, T., & Warner, K. E. (2009). *Preventing mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders among young people: Progress and possibilities* (Vol. 7). Washington, DC: National Academies Press.
- ¹¹ *The family check-up*. (2020). Available from: <https://reachinstitute.asu.edu/family-check-up#:~:text=The%20Family%20Check%20Up%20is,evidence%20demonstrating%20strong%20intervention%20effects>. For a UK example see <https://guidebook.eif.org.uk/files/pdfs/programmes-family-check-up.pdf>
- ¹² <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/promoting-alternative-thinking-strategies/>; Little, M., Berry, V. L., Morpeth, L., Blower, S., Axford, N., Taylor, R., ... & Tobin, K. (2012). The impact of three evidence-based programmes delivered in public systems in Birmingham, UK. *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, 6(2), 260-272.
- ¹³ Autism Speaks (2020). <https://www.autismspeaks.org/applied-behavior-analysis-aba-0>
- ¹⁴ Atkins, P. W., Wilson, D. S., & Hayes, S. C. (2019). *Prosocial: using evolutionary science to build productive, equitable, and collaborative groups*. New Harbinger Publications.
- ¹⁵ Connect (2020). <https://www.connect-pshe.org/>