



# APPLICATIONS OF PROSOCIAL PRINCIPALS IN WELSH SOCIETY

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

Darren J. Edwards<sup>1</sup>, & Dion Curry<sup>2</sup>

Department of Public Health, Policy, and Social Sciences, Swansea University, UK<sup>1</sup>

Department of Political and Cultural Studies, Swansea University, UK<sup>2</sup>

### Key points:

- Creating a standing expert group and coordinating with related advisory and support groups to ensure local educational support needs are met.
- A prosocial intervention programme can help build early resilience skills, thus lower chances of later delinquency, improve early academic success, ultimately helping to reduce health, educational, and prospects inequality.
- Building early mental health resilience, and psychological flexibility, may facilitate a thriving Welsh society, with lower crime, drug, and alcohol abuse, and more economic prosperity to the region.
- Wales must work with universities, schools, parental support groups to explore the implications of prosocial intervention programs support local needs.
- Joined up, integrated and ethical regulation will ensure that there is efficient and transparent communication between schools, and parental support groups.

### POLICY ISSUE

Wales has a high degree of delinquency, drug abuse, poor health in some of its the poorest communities. For example, Wales has seen a 78% rise in deaths cause by drug posing, and has the second highest drug misuse deaths after north East of England<sup>1</sup>. The substance misuse program<sup>2</sup> focuses on practical measures such as the take home naloxone (THN) helps with reducing the risk of opioid poisoning, but does not focus on the underlying causes.

In line with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, which emphasises a sustainable and more equal future society, several policy implementations have been suggested such as the Welsh Government’s ‘Together for mental health delivery plan 2019-2022’<sup>3</sup>, which is a 10 year across Government strategy to improve mental health in terms of quality and accessibility. Cross-government working includes education, employment and housing that can make a significant contribution to improving mental health and wellbeing outcomes in a way that is sustainable for the future.

#### POTENTIAL PROSOCIAL APPLICATIONS IN WALES

Parental support	Health, diet, well-being support
Educational system	Probation, prison services
Peer groups	Mental health support groups
Social workers	Industry (ethical practice)

However, despite these policy initiatives inequality has been growing according to recent report by the Equality of Human Rights Commission<sup>4</sup>. One problem of the growing inequality is that the mental health delivery plan focus is on ‘fixing’ the problem in the traditional mental health service delivery. Though these are important immediate measures, more focus, in the longer term, may need to be made on the preventable aspects of society, such as building early psychological resilience early on, rather than the management of existing mental health problems. Some evidence suggests that our neo-liberal capitalist values, though beneficial for technological and many other innovations, actually serve to increase inequality, treatment lags, gaps, and mental health issues as these values often promote the ‘self’ over community values and connection with others in society<sup>5</sup>.

Another progressive policy, which focuses on underlying causes, called: 'A healthier Wales: Our Plan for Health and Social Care'<sup>6</sup> has a focus on prevention, integrated, person centred care delivery which is informed by stakeholders such as service users and carers. These integrated services could however be expanded further. Improving mental health and building resilience at the core roots (called Prosocial) of social development (i.e., child learning). Such innovation, with greater mental health resilience, will lead to better academic success and ultimately a rise in Welsh GDP and greater prosperity in Wales through a reduction in crime, and suffering to individuals and victims<sup>7</sup>.

## PROSOCIAL APPLICATIONS IN WALES

Prosocial builds on some of the progress for integrated services, but go further by focusing on some of societies underlying causes, which promote mental health problems. Recent developments in the Behavioural and evolutionary principles literature, have expanded the already successfully applied behavioral analysis (ABA) for the management of children's behaviour<sup>8</sup>, into a full programme for societal change focusing on promoting group collaboration, called Prosocial, which is an application of evolutionary principles to the evolution of behaviour, rather than organisms<sup>9</sup>.

Some examples of positive change programs, which are applicable to Prosocial's objectives, and which have proven successful include: (1) 'Communities that care' (CTC)<sup>10</sup>, which is a community-change intervention for reducing youth problem behavior such as drug use, low academic achievement, sexual risk-taking, and violence; (2) 'The good behaviour game'<sup>11</sup> (GBG) which seeks to reward collaborative, prosocial behaviour thus reducing problematic behaviour; (3) 'Positive behaviour interventions and supports'<sup>12</sup> (PBIS) which seeks to improve school safety and promote positive behavior in children and (4) the recent development of 'Connect'<sup>13</sup>, and Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) curriculum, designed to build psychological flexibility and resilience in children.

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 the 'Tobacco control movement' in the US, and perhaps reducing mental health problems needs a similarly strong movement with all of these moving parts<sup>7</sup>.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- ❑ A two-pronged public education campaign should: a) raise public body awareness of the benefit of Prosocial; and b) educate the public, and institutional bodies on the benefits of a Prosocial intervention programme.
- ❑ Develop a rapid and responsive governance, and standing group which can work with parents, schools etc., and oversee and advise how process changes occur in order to safe, ethical way.
- ❑ Develop a prosocial intervention programme, based on the advice of the advisory group, which can help build early resilience skills, thus lower chances of later delinquency, improve early academic success, ultimately helping to reduce health, educational, and prospect inequality.
- ❑ Support parents, schools, and peer groups. Reward prosocial collaboration. Monitor and minimise punishment.
- ❑ Develop a Wellbeing curriculum.
- ❑ Prison service reform, build resilience and psychological flexibility for convicts, through peer support ACT intervention.
- ❑ Joined up, integrated and ethical regulation will ensure that there is efficient and transparent communication between schools, and parental support groups.

<sup>1</sup> 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/>

<sup>2</sup> 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/>

---

<sup>3</sup>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>

<sup>4</sup> 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>

<sup>5</sup> Fankhauser, S., & Tol, R. S. (2005). On climate change and economic growth. *Resource and Energy Economics*, 27(1), 1-17

<sup>6</sup> 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>

<sup>7</sup> Biglan, A. (2015). *The nurture effect: How the science of human behavior can improve our lives and our world*. New Harbinger Publications.

<sup>8</sup> Autism Speaks (2020). <https://www.autismspeaks.org/applied-behavior-analysis-aba-0>

<sup>9</sup> Atkins, P. W., Wilson, D. S., & Hayes, S. C. (2019). *Prosocial: using evolutionary science to build productive, equitable, and collaborative groups*. New Harbinger Publications.

<sup>10</sup> Communities that care (2020).

[https://www.communitiesthatcare.org.au/#:~:text=Communities%20That%20Care%20\(CTC\)%20is,risk%2Dtaking%2C%20and%20violence.](https://www.communitiesthatcare.org.au/#:~:text=Communities%20That%20Care%20(CTC)%20is,risk%2Dtaking%2C%20and%20violence.)

<sup>11</sup> The good behaviour game (2020). <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/the-good-behaviour-game/>

<sup>12</sup> Understood (2020). <https://www.understood.org/en/learning-thinking-differences/treatments-approaches/educational-strategies/pbis-how-schools-support-positive-behavior>

<sup>13</sup> Connect (2020). Wellbeing from the word go. <https://www.connect-pshe.org/>