

"Just over three years ago, I applied to join the Children's Commissioner for Wales Adult Advisory Panel. At the time, I was intrigued by the opportunity to contribute to an organisation dedicated to protecting and promoting children's rights, but I could never have imagined just how rewarding and inspiring the experience would prove to be.

The Adult Advisory Panel brought together people from a wide range of backgrounds, professions and life experiences. What united us was a shared commitment to supporting the work of the Children's Commissioner for Wales and ensuring that children's rights remained at the heart of decision-making. Our role was to act as a "critical friend" to the Commissioner – offering support, perspectives, ideas and constructive challenge where appropriate.

Over the three years, we met every few months, either face-to-face or online, to discuss the Commissioner's work, priorities and future plans having received some reading in advance of the meeting. These conversations provided a unique insight into the diversity of issues and challenges affecting children and young people across Wales. Meetings often involved hearing about ongoing projects, strategies and areas of concern, about which we would share our thoughts, asking questions and challenging where required. The discussions were always open, thoughtful and respectful, creating an environment where different viewpoints were welcomed and valued.

When I first joined the panel, I have to admit that I felt a little overwhelmed. Surrounded by talented and knowledgeable individuals, I initially experienced a sense of imposter syndrome and concern about what I could bring to the group. However, those feelings quickly faded. Every member of the panel was welcoming, encouraging and genuinely interested in hearing the views of others. It soon became clear that the value of the panel came from the diversity of perspectives around the table, rather than any one individual's expertise.

One of the most rewarding aspects of the experience was the opportunity to learn from fellow panel members. Each meeting brought new insights, different lived experiences and fresh ways of thinking about challenges facing children and families. Through collaborative discussion, we were able to support each other while helping to strengthen the Commissioner's work which she undertakes tirelessly and with enthusiasm.

Before joining the panel, I was very familiar with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), but over the last three years I developed a much deeper appreciation of its relevance to everyday life. I came to understand that children's rights are not simply matters for policy-makers, educators or professionals working directly with children; they are principles that all of us can champion in our daily interactions.

Perhaps the most important lesson I will take away is that every one of us has a role to play in ensuring children's rights are respected, promoted and upheld. Whether through

our professional responsibilities or personal actions, we can all contribute to creating environments where children and young people are listened to, valued and given the opportunities they deserve.

As my term on the Adult Advisory Panel comes to an end, I have a genuine sense of gratitude. It has been a privilege to serve alongside such a dedicated group of people and to contribute, in a small way, to the important work of the Children's Commissioner for Wales. While I will be sad to see this chapter close, I am excited for those who will join the panel for the next three-year tenure - I have no doubt that they will find it every bit as worthwhile."