



Cymorth i Ferched Cymru  
Welsh Women's Aid

# "I trust them"

Children and Young People in Wales:  
Sources of resilience in the  
community

Results of Welsh Women's Aid's Survey



PROFIADAU NIWEIDIOL MEWN PLENTYNDOD  
ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

## Who we are

Welsh Women’s Aid is the umbrella organisation in Wales that supports and provides national representation for independent third sector violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (VAWDASV) specialist services in Wales (comprising our membership of specialist services and members of the regional VAWDASV Specialist Services Providers Forums). These services deliver life-saving and life-changing support and preventative work in response to violence against women, including domestic abuse and sexual violence, as part of a network of UK provision.

As an umbrella organisation, our primary purpose is to prevent domestic abuse, sexual violence and all forms of violence against women and ensure high quality services for survivors that are needs-led, gender responsive and holistic. We collaborate nationally to integrate and improve community responses and practice in Wales; we provide advice, consultancy, support and training to deliver policy and service improvements across government, public, private and third sector services and in communities, for the benefit of survivors.

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## Acknowledgements

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# Introduction

This report presents the findings from an online survey designed to contribute to an evidence base of children and young people's sources of 'resilience' in communities. As Wales prepares for the implementation of mandatory Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in 2022, it is imperative that we understand where children and young people access support in their communities, as well as any barriers they experience in accessing it. Ensuring that children and young people get the right support at the earliest and at every opportunity plays a crucial part in preventing violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, and is central to implementing a "whole school approach" in relation to VAWDASV<sup>i</sup> prevention and RSE.<sup>ii</sup>

Whole community responses have long been recognised as an effective way of embedding preventative and early intervention approaches. This is because communities are often the first to know about VAWDASV but report that they do not have the skills, knowledge or confidence to reach out or to offer help. Upskilling communities and giving them the knowledge about VAWDASV and support services therefore increases the likelihood of earlier intervention with both perpetrator and survivor. However, these whole community responses are predominantly designed and delivered from an adult perspective. In this document, we outline the responses from children and young people themselves, sharing their views on where and what would be effective entry points and delivery within a whole community response for them.

## Background

In recent years, there has been increasing emphasis on the notion of 'resilience' in studies of childhood abuse. Research demonstrating correlations between childhood abuse and poorer health and well-being in adulthood<sup>iii</sup> has been challenged by 'resilience studies', which have shown that some individuals who experience childhood abuse retain healthy functioning or develop positive adaptation and are essentially able to 'overcome' the experiences, thus avoiding any measurable long-term negative outcomes.<sup>iv</sup> This has led to the investigation and promotion of "protective" factors: i.e. the things that promote resilience and positive outcomes.

Clearly, the ultimate aim of any strategic response to abuse must be to prevent it before it happens. Preventative interventions which address the root causes of violence against women and children must therefore be a priority.<sup>v</sup> However, it is also imperative that children who are experiencing abuse are given the best chance to recover and thrive. Resilience literature<sup>1</sup> shows a broad consensus that resilience is not some innate quality based on individual characteristics, but rather a process that

1 The literature review which was undertaken to inform this survey is available on request.

is impacted by a person's interaction with their environment. Several examples are given of social processes – or “protective factors” – which are commonly found to facilitate resilience, including: experiences that bolster self-esteem; interventions that reduce exposure to harm; new opportunities for positive development; and accessing developmental assets like a positive peer group or attachments to an adult mentor.<sup>vi</sup>

This suggests that, given the right support and opportunities, children and young people's likelihood of thriving despite exposure to trauma and/or atypical levels of stress increases. It is therefore essential for us to understand what kind of support/opportunities promotes children's resilience, and where / from whom they would seek such support. However, as with prevention interventions, the context of children and young people's environment should not be understated: specifically, the socio-cultural context in which abuse is perpetrated and tolerated (even encouraged), and the way in which intersecting forms of structural discrimination and inequality impede one's access to 'protective factors'.

By identifying the community spaces and support which children find beneficial and important to their well-being and resilience, as well as any barriers they experience in accessing these, the findings of this survey will help to inform the development of a Children and Young People model of Change That Lasts, whose principles ought to be employed throughout communities, especially schools. Change That Lasts takes a 'whole system approach' to addressing VAWDASV, prioritising prevention and early intervention. It promotes a 'whole community' response, including statutory and non-statutory services as well as individual community members, to ensure that wherever and whenever a survivor reaches out, they receive a response that is right for them: a response that is strengths based, needs-led, and trauma informed.

# Summary of Key Findings



**80%** of respondents selected the **internet** as a **source of support**, second only to friends.



**Black and minoritized** young people were nearly **half as likely** as their White British counterparts to identify the **Police** as a **potential source of support**.

For those who reflected on their own experiences, **fear of judgement** and a perception of abuse as normal were the two most common **barriers** to seeking **support**.

**Employers** are generally **not** perceived by young people to be **sources of support**. This perception is even stronger among Black and minoritized young people.



**No one** stated that they, personally, would seek support from the **Police**.

Across both age groups and all ethnicities, **friends and family members** were the **primary sources** of potential support identified by the respondents.



**50%** of those who reflected on their experiences stated that **education professionals** had been **unhelpful**.



Supportive qualities most valued by young people were getting **advice, trust, feeling safe,** and **not being judged**.



Young people who reflected on their own experiences were more likely to report being **helped to cope** with their experiences by **someone outside their family** and educational setting.



# Summary of Key Findings

The survey's key findings are summarised below.

## 1. The importance of the internet, helplines, and online sources of support

The results revealed that young people consider the internet to be a key source of support. Nearly 80% of respondents selected the internet as a source of support, second only to friends. Those aged 18-25 cited helplines as a potential source of support at more than twice the rate of the 13-17-year-olds, while online gaming / chatrooms were identified by the younger age category at twice the rate of the older ones. Other than friends and family, young people aged 18-25 were most likely to seek support online. This highlights the importance of ensuring that specialist support and advice services strengthen their understanding of the online communities and spaces used by young people so that they can promote factual information and helpful advice in places young people are likely to access.

## 2. Police, Education, and the Workplace

The survey highlighted that there remains much work to be done in these three sectors to improve their accessibility and response to young people seeking support. While the Police were identified as a potential source of support by 14 out of 73 respondents, no one stated that they, personally, would seek support from the Police, and 63% of respondents aged 18-25 stated that they would be least likely to seek support from the Police. This may be explained by the individuals' personal experiences of abuse and seeking support: none of the respondents aged 18-25 who chose to reflect on their personal experiences stated that the Police had been helpful. Moreover, when analysing for differences according to ethnicity, the results showed that Black and minoritized young people were nearly half as likely as their White British counterparts to identify the Police as a potential source of support (17% and 32%, respectively).

Black and minoritized respondents were also three times less likely to identify 'employer' as a potential source of support compared to their White British counterparts (7% and 21%, respectively). The workplace performed poorly overall in terms of where respondents (all ethnicities) reported that they, personally, would seek support: only one respondent out of 73 selected this. It is possible, of course, that only one of the respondents was working; however, the generally low rate at which employers were identified as a potential source of support (regardless of personal preferences or experiences), combined with the clear ethnic disparity, suggests that the workplace and employers are generally not perceived by young people to be sources of support, and that this perception is even stronger among Black and minoritized young people.

Overall, approximately 75% of respondents identified 'education' (teachers, support staff, tutors, lecturers, other staff) as a potential source of support for young people. Yet again there was a disparity here between Black and minoritized young people and their White British counterparts, with 66% of the former and 86% of the latter selecting 'education'. Overall rates for selecting education were lower when respondents were asked where, personally, they would be most and least likely to turn to for support: approximately half of the young people aged 13-17 identified 'education' as a source of support they were likely to turn to, while the other half stated they were unlikely to turn to education. For the 18-25s, only 29% stated that they were likely turn to education for support. The reason for these lower rates are perhaps linked to individuals' experiences of abuse and seeking support: 50% of those who reflected on their experiences stated that education professionals had been unhelpful. Despite this, education institutions appeared to be useful at signposting young people to other places/people whom the young people did find helpful.

### **3. Support from family and friends and in community spaces**

Across both age groups and all ethnicities, friends and family members were the primary sources of potential support identified by the respondents. However, when considering the different family members, there was a stark difference by ethnicity in relation to identifying parents as a potential source of support: Black and minoritized young people were nearly half as likely to also identify parents as a source of support compared with their White British counterparts (24% and 46%, respectively). They were, however, slightly more likely than White British young people to turn to friends for support. Moreover, Black and minoritized young people were almost three times as likely to identify religious groups as a potential source of support (38% compared to 14%), which is important to consider when thinking about providing support in accessible spaces.

Despite the fact that family and friends were the two most commonly identified potential sources of support across the entire cohort of respondents, the young people who reflected on their own experiences (n=46) were more likely to report being helped to cope with their experiences by someone outside their family (and educational) setting – for example youth groups/workers, counsellors, doctor, online support.

### **4. Enablers and barriers to accessing support**

The supportive qualities most valued by young people were getting advice, trust, feeling safe, and not being judged. The general perception (part 1 of the survey) was that the main deterrent for seeking support was a lack of trust that their conversation would remain confidential – a particular concern was raised about

professionals informing parents. For those who reflected on their own experiences, fear of judgement and a perception of abuse as normal were the two most common barriers to seeking support. This highlights the importance of educating communities, including schools, about the nature of abuse, how to get support, and challenging and changing victim-blaming cultures and attitudes. Lack of financial means and travelling distance were also identified as barriers to accessing supportive places, as well as feeling unwelcome and lacking in confidence.

# The Survey

## Aims and Overview

The aim of the survey was to explore what community resources which support young people's resilience are available and accessible to them. After discussions, it was decided that the term 'resilience' was not a helpful concept for young people and would therefore not be used in the survey. Instead, questions were asked about the people, places, and activities that helped them to 'cope' or 'get through' difficult times. These questions were informed by a rapid review of the literature on children and young people's resilience in which people, places, and activities were identified as the three overarching categories of resilience-supporting resources.

There were no criteria for taking part other than being aged between 13-25 years and living in Wales. Two versions of the survey were written to account for the wide age range: one version for ages 13-17 and one for ages 18-25. The same questions were asked in both versions but worded differently. Having two versions also enabled us to signpost to relevant helplines and support services for those age groups throughout the survey. The survey was available in both Welsh and English.<sup>2</sup>

The survey was in two parts. The first part of the survey was designed to get answers from a broad range of young people about potential sources of resilience. This did not require that they had experienced any form of abuse or an otherwise difficult time. Here we wanted to gauge what places, people, and activities they identified as being potentially supportive and accessible to young people, and what they thought was helpful about these. We also asked them to identify where, who, and what they, individually, were most and least likely to turn to for support and why.

The second part of the survey was designed to shed light on the experiences of young people coping with some form of abuse or an otherwise difficult time. Here they were asked to reflect on:

<sup>2</sup> It is possible that some young people may not have found the survey accessible, given that no version was developed with symbols for assisting reading and interpretation, or audio for assisting individuals who are visually impaired. This is a limitation of the survey will be duly considered in any future work.

- the age at which this was going on;
- what activities they helped them through their experience(s);
- whether there were any people they found helpful, and if so, who they were and what was helpful about them;
- whether there was anything else that helped them to cope with the experience(s).

They were then asked whether they turned to anybody who was not helpful and what they could have done differently to help. This was followed by a question about places or people they would have liked to go to for support but felt that they couldn't, and if so, what prevented them from seeking support. Finally, they were asked what strengths they found in themselves which helped them cope, and to identify the three most important things that helped them through their experience.

It should be noted that we did not ask respondents to state explicitly whether they had experienced abuse. This decision was made to ensure that responding to the survey was a safe and supportive process for the young people to engage with. It is possible, therefore, that some of the respondents reflected on 'difficult times' which do not constitute abuse. However, the nature of the comments made by many respondents suggests that a significant proportion had experienced, and reflected on, abuse.

### **Response Rate and Demographics of Respondents**

In total, 73 responses were received between the 10th November 2020 and 4th January 2021. 67 young people responded in English and 6 in Welsh. Of the total number of respondents,

- 29 were aged 13-17 years
- 44 were aged 18-25 years

Of the respondents who stated what their sex is (n=57), 88 per cent were female and 12 per cent were male. One respondent identified as transgender.

Of those who shared their sexuality (n=53), 58 per cent identified as heterosexual; 11 per cent as a gay woman or lesbian; and 9 per cent as bisexual. One respondent identified as queer; and two identified as pansexual. No one identified as a gay man.

Of those who shared their ethnicity (n=58), 50 per cent identified as White British; 14 per cent as Asian / Asian British; 12 per cent as Mixed / Multiple Ethnic background; 9 per cent as Black British / Black African; 7 per cent as Any other White background; and 3 per cent as Arab. 5 per cent stated "Other" but did not provide any more detail about their ethnicity.

# Findings

## Survey Part 1 (respondents = 73)

### 1. Sources of support available in young people's communities

#### Key Finding 1:

The internet is widely considered a source of support for children and young people. This was selected by approximately 80% of respondents, second only to 'friends'.

#### Key Finding 2:

18-25 year olds cited helplines as a potential source of support at more than twice the rate of the 13-17 year olds, while online gaming / chatrooms were identified by the younger age category at twice the rate of the older ones.

#### Key Finding 3:

There were some clear differences between the sources of potential support identified by Black and minoritized young people and their White British counterparts. In particular: Black and minoritized respondents were nearly half as likely to identify the Police as a source of support compared to their White British counterparts (17% and 32%, respectively). A similar pattern emerged in relation to 'parents', with 24% and 46%, respectively. Black and minoritized respondents were also three times less likely to identify 'employer' as a source of support (7% and 21%, respectively), and were less likely to identify anybody from within the education sector as a potential source of support (66% compared to 86%).

#### Key Finding 4:

Conversely, religious groups were identified as a potential source of support by Black and minoritized young people at almost three times higher rate than by White British young people (38% and 14%, respectively).

Respondents were asked to consider where / from whom young people in general<sup>3</sup> could access support when going through a difficult time. They were instructed to tick as many boxes as they felt relevant, and there was also an "other" option where they could specify additional sources of support.

<sup>3</sup> i.e. this question did not ask where they, personally, would seek support. This was asked later and showed some interesting discrepancies (see section 2).

Across both age groups, the two most common sources of support identified were friends, and information on the internet. Approximately 80% of respondents identified the internet as a source of support for young people. Approximately 75% of respondents identified 'education' (teachers, support staff, tutors, lecturers, other staff) as a potential source of support for young people, but there was a disparity here between Black and minoritized young people and their White British counterparts, with 66% of the former and 86% of the latter selecting 'education'.

While a similar proportion of both age groups identified **youth groups** as a source of support (39 per cent and 40 per cent), there were some significant differences in the other forms of support. Particularly, while the 18-25 year olds cited helplines as a source of support at more than twice the rate of the 13-17 year olds, online gaming / chatrooms were identified by the younger age category at more than twice the rate of the older ones.

While **siblings** were selected with a similar frequency by both age groups (35 per cent and 42 per cent), 13-17 year olds were far less likely to identify **parents** or **other family members** as sources of support compared to 18-25 year olds, as were Black and minoritized respondents compared with White British respondents (24% and 46%, respectively).

Other differences between both age groups related to **support workers**, the **police**, **religious groups**, **social workers**, and **employers** – all of which were identified as a source of support by the older group at a higher rate than the younger group. The biggest differences in terms of ethnicity related to the Police, employers, and religious groups: Black and minoritized respondents were approximately half as likely to select Police; three times less likely to select employers; but approximately three times more likely than their White British counterparts to select religious groups.

Three 'other' sources of support were identified by three respondents: social media, online friends, and doctors. One young person, aged 18-25, commented:

"They should be able to get help from all of these but from my experience it's easier to go online or ring a helpline"

(Translated from Welsh)



## 2. Places / people respondents were most and least likely turn to for support, and why.

### Key Finding 5:

Other than friends and family, young people aged 18-25 were most likely to seek support online.

### Key Finding 6:

No one stated that they would seek support from the Police, and 63% of respondents aged 18-25 stated that they would be least likely to seek support from the Police.

### Key Finding 7:

Only one respondent (aged 18-25) stated that they would seek support from the workplace.

### Key Finding 8:

Young people aged 13-17 were less likely to seek support from 'education' (teachers, support staff, tutors) and helplines than those aged 18-25.

### Key Finding 9:

The supportive qualities most valued by young people were getting advice, trust, feeling safe, and not being judged.

### Key Finding 10:

The main deterrent for seeking support was a lack of trust that their conversation would remain confidential.

Respondents were asked in separate questions to identify the top three places or people they would be most, and least, likely to turn to for support if they were going through a difficult time, and why.

Respondents aged 13-17 were **most likely** to seek support from 'Friends', with 96% of respondents stating this as a place where they would seek support. The second most common source for support was 'Family Members' (52%). The third most common was 'Education', which includes teachers, tutors, schools and universities. Education accounted for 48% of participants' responses. Family members were also identified as one of the **least likely** sources of support for 95% of the respondents. This apparent contradiction was accounted for by the fact that the 'family members' category included a wider range of people, from siblings and parents to extended

family members. It was evident that some young people felt that they could seek support from some family members but not others, but there was no discernible pattern (e.g. preferring immediate or extended family, siblings or parents). The other two people/places they were least likely to turn to were 'Education' (50%) and the Police (30%).

In the 18-25 age group, similarly to the younger age group, respondents were **most likely** to see support from 'Friends' (75%), followed by 'Family Members' (50%). Unlike the younger group, the third most common source of support for the 18-25s was 'Online Support' (39%). They were **least likely** to seek support from the 'Police', with 63% of respondents stating this as a source where they would not wish to seek support. This was followed by 'Family Member' (48%) and 'Education' (41%).

Places /people most likely to seek support from: 13-17 years olds	%
Friends	96
Family member	52
Education	48
Online support	22
Professional support	13
Specific CYP support	13
Helpline	9
Partner	9
Other	4
Religious or community support	4
Health service	0
Police	0
Strangers	0
Workplace support	0

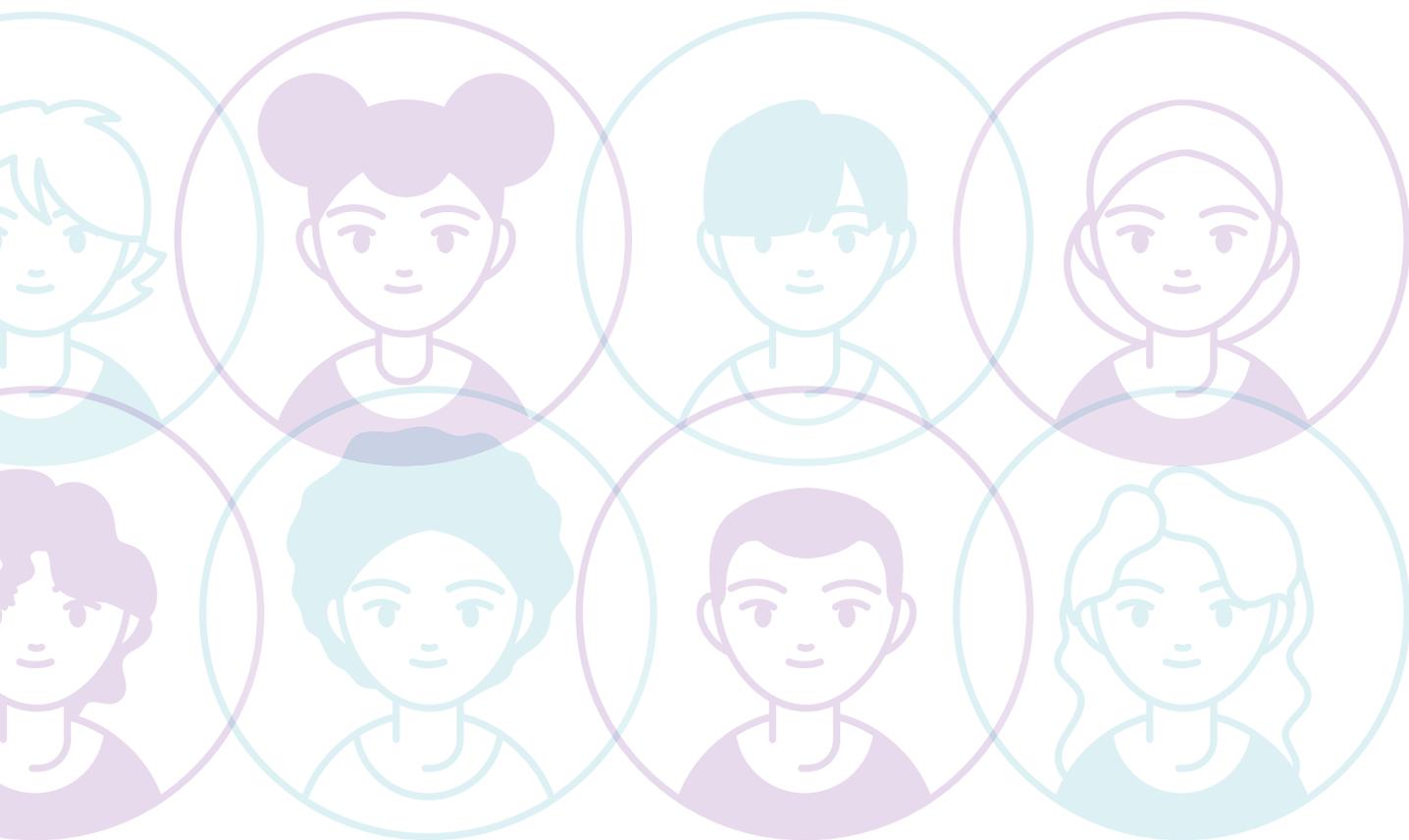
Places /people most likely to seek support from: 18-25 years olds	%
Friends	75
Family member	50
Education	39
Online support	29
Professional support	29
Specific CYP support	21
Helpline	11
Partner	7
Other	7
Religious or community support	4
Health service	4
Police	0
Strangers	0
Workplace support	0

Religious or other 'community support' were not frequently cited by either group, despite being cited by almost 40% of young Black and ethnic minoritized young people as a potential source of support. The reasons for this are unclear, as the young people's reflections on their own experiences of seeking support did not identify religious groups as unhelpful. In keeping with the responses to the previous question about the sources of support generally available to young people, the younger group were less than one third as likely to use helplines than the older group (9 per cent compared to 29 per cent).

## Reasons for seeking / not seeking support from these sources

47 responses were recorded on why they would be likely to seek support from these people / places. Thematic analysis of these comments showed trends in the responses given and showed what qualities children and young people most valued in accessing support. A summary of this information is included in the table below:

Key themes	%
Getting advice about what to do	85
Feeling safe	58
Not being judged	49
Trust	48
Being listened to	48
Having fun	21
Meeting new people	18
Problem-free time	18
Learning new skills	16



For some young people, familiarity was key to feeling comfortable disclosing information, while for others, they preferred to seek help anonymously. A few key quotes from participants in response to why they would seek support from these sources:

"They know me well, we have a good relationship."

"Because we're close and care for each other. Helplines can be good if your family don't understand."

"Good relationship with them, they know about my life, they [are] like family."

"They know how to support me and know my background."

"Achos dwi'n trystio nhw."  
["because I trust them"]

"Understanding and supportive without judgement, ability to control anonymity lessens risks involved."

"Friends get me and know my family. You can find lots of helplines and chats on the internet."

"I gael gwybodaeth da a aros yn ddiennw."  
["to get information and stay anonymous"]

"They make me feel safe and I know I can trust them with the information."



"Expertise and talking through issues with someone you trust but who doesn't know you is good."

40 responses were recorded on why they would not seek support from these people / places. Of these the most common answers were a lack of trust and confidence that conversations will be kept confidential; fear that it would make things worse; bad previous experiences; and fear of judgement.

Key themes	%
Confidentiality and trust	36
They won't help and would make it worse	19
Bad previous experience	17
Judgement	17
They won't understand	14
Fear, safety and wellbeing	14
Other	6

Some key quotes from the young people's responses to this question are listed below:

"They judge and make it worse."

"Because I don't think I'd be as honest."

"I don't think they'll help."

"Dwi'm yn trystio nhw."  
["I don't trust them"]

"Don't want to make family worry and teachers always tell parents everything."

"They all work together to make things hard if you have Kids."



"I'd be scared they'd yell or judge me."

"Already tried and they made things worse."

"I feel like they won't understand."

"Bad experiences before. They start off not believing you and make you question yourself."

# Survey Part 2

(respondents = 46)

Respondents were asked to reflect on a time where they experienced a 'difficult time' and then answer a series of questions. Only 46 young people answered questions in this section; 21 were aged 13-17, with 25 aged 18-25.

## Key Finding 11:

Young people were more likely to have been helped to cope with their experiences by someone outside their family and educational setting.

## Key Finding 12:

None of the respondents aged 18-25 who chose to reflect on their personal experiences stated that the police or social workers had been helpful, while 50% stated that education professionals had been unhelpful.

## Key Finding 13:

Although education professionals were overwhelmingly viewed as unhelpful, education establishments were useful at signposting to other places/people whom young people found helpful.

## Key Finding 14:

Fear of judgement and a perception of abuse as normal were the two most common barriers to seeking support.

## Key Finding 15:

When asked to reflect on any places they would have liked to go to for help but couldn't, inaccessibility due to finance and travelling distance were identified as barriers, as well as feeling unwelcome and lacking in confidence.

## Key Finding 16:

Friends, hobbies, and online support were the three most common things that young people who shared some of their personal experiences found to help them cope with their experiences.

## Key Finding 17:

Respondents characterised their own strengths most often as the ability to 'get on with things', or 'carry on' despite adversities.

The most common time during which the young people experienced abuse or otherwise difficult times was secondary school age (11-16). 80 per cent of young people selected this age group; 43% selected over 16 years; and 26% selected primary school age (3-11). Many young people selected more than one category, showing that often their experiences were long-term and/or happened at several different stages in their lives.

## Helpful and Unhelpful People

When asked about any people that helped them to cope, friends were most frequently cited (by 71% of young people in both age groups). For those aged 13-17, "other" was the next most frequently cited (35%), which primarily referred to youth workers, as well as single references to counsellors/therapist, doctor, coach, Childline, and online support. Teachers and other school staff did not score well (12%), and even fewer citing parents and helpline workers. Not one mentioned the police or religious leaders.

18-25 year olds were more likely to report being helped by family (33%), helpline workers (38%) and support workers (24%). Counsellors/therapists were also identified under "other" (38%), along with doctor, work, partner, and church group. None identified the Police as having been helpful.

Their answers to the question "what was helpful about these people?" broadly correlated with the answers in Part 1 of the survey: the most common qualities were "getting advice", "having someone to talk to and listen", being non-judgemental, and trust. However, safety was less frequently cited (50% of young people). The theme of normalisation of abuse and fear of reporting was evident here too, as exemplified by the following quotations from two young people:



"[They helped me to] see I'm right and my parents are wrong."



"They helped me to work through issues and encouragement to report."

Overwhelmingly, the people whom respondents identified as unhelpful having sought support from them were teachers. Overall, 43% (13 respondents) said that they had not been helped when they approached teachers for support. This is concerning, especially in relation to the implementation of a Whole Education Approach to VAWDASV prevention, and the increasing emphasis in recent years on the role that schools have in safeguarding and referring to specialist services (e.g. via Operation Encompass).

People who did not help	%
Teacher	43
Brother or sister	17
Parents	17
Other	17
Police	13
Other family members	10
Friends	10
Support worker	10
Youth worker	7
Employer	3
Social worker	3

Young people were asked what these people could have done differently to be helpful. A total of 20 answers were noted. Of these 6 young people said that the person or place they went to for support should have 'listened' to them (30%). 20% said that they wanted the support source to be 'understanding' and another 20% said they wanted support representatives not to 'blame' the young person for the difficult circumstances they were experiencing (4 respondents in each case). 10% said that they wanted to be 'taken seriously'; and another 10% wanted to be 'believed' by the person they were asking for help from. Together this suggests a strong theme of the young people feeling that their experiences were not being validated.

Also, 10% said they wanted the support source to 'help' and a further 10% wanted the source of support to 'do something', which indicates that they felt that the person or place took no action at all to assist them.

A further 10% said they didn't want 'police involvement', which may link to the previous data received on the mistrust of the police.

Young people provided a number of enlightening quotes on the treatment they received. They stated that the person/people should have:

## "Not blamed me."

"AsKed if I was oK."

"Taken me seriously and stopped things before they got worse."

"Tried to understand."

"Cymryd fy nghwyn o ddifri."  
(taken my complaint seriously)

"Believed me and not treat me like a liar or a suspect."

"Been non-judgemental and dismissive."

"Not passed information on that I told them in confidence."

"Taken me seriously and fired the guy who was harassing me."

"Not called the police and listened to me."

"They could have done anything to actually help."

These quotes illustrate that young people are heavily impacted by a culture of victim-blaming, as well as safeguarding practices where individuals fail to listen and provide support, and instead pass the information on (to meet statutory obligations) and place the onus on the young person (and/or their family) to protect themselves and to find support.

Unsurprisingly, experiences such as these deterred young people from seeking help again. Although fear of judgement, as well as the normalisation of abuse, were the two most common barriers to seeking support, previous bad experiences were also cited, along with lack of knowledge about where to go to get support, and self-blame. The following quotations provide an invaluable insight into some of the barriers facing young people:

The problem involved my family members so i didn't know who to go to.

I didn't think anybody would help.

Don't want the attention.

Athrawon ddim yn gneud  
dim i stopio bwlio.

(teachers don't do anything to stop  
bullying)

Scared things would  
get worse if my  
parents found out.

Thought it was normal for  
parents to fight until I was way  
older.

I didn't know there was support  
I thought I was the only one.

"I didn't think it was  
important enough."



"Bad experiences  
before, better to just  
deal with it quietly."



Dwi'm isio i bobl wybod.  
(don't want people to know)

Wasn't sure what to do.

Feeling embarrassed.

Thinking there was something wrong with me.

Didn't think people will believe me they'll  
just say that's life so get on with it.

Doeddwn i ddim yn sylweddoli am amser hir bod help ar gael.  
(didn't realise for a long time that help was available)

The threats from  
my boyfriend or  
what would  
happen if I told.

I needed time off work but didn't feel I  
could ask my employer or I might lose job.

Didn't know for ages that I'd been  
abused, I thought it was normal.

Fear of being judged, stigma against sexual assault survivors,  
perceived potential judgement from others.

## Helpful activities

Aside from spending time with friends, young people identified several activities which helped them to cope with their experiences. There was a wide range of activities, including: sports/exercise, work/college/volunteering, youth clubs, playing games, online chat, drinking/smoking, shopping, and church group.

Despite the broad range of activities, the vast majority were things outside the family / home and outside of school. A high proportion indicated that either them or another family member moving out was a key action which helped them to cope. Out of the 19 comments provided on this topic, four stated 'moving (away)' as a positive action. A further two respondents mentioned that staying out of the home also helped.

Young people said:

"I just distracted myself all the time and finally told my parents so we could work it out."

"Working hard at school focusing on the future."

"Being out of the house a lot."

"Moving out."



"I didn't have support for about 10 months as I was on a waiting list for therapy. That meant I developed unhealthy coping mechanisms that have persisted into addiction since. Even though the therapist helped me with the traumatic experience, they weren't able to support me to beat the addiction."

"Practising dancing and figuring out what I want to do with my life and owning it."

"Mynd i ty ffrindiau i aros mas o adra."  
(going to friend's house to stay out of home)

These comments show the individuality of young people and underline how important it is to centre their voices in all responses. It is clear that some young people, despite their experiences and difficulty accessing (the right) support, were able to cope with the support of friends and/or hobbies or other positive distractions, and by having the ability and taking the initiative to move out of an abusive situation. For others, the inaccessibility of support services had led to self-medication with harmful substances and compounded the issues and the level of intervention needed when, eventually, they accessed therapy.

## **Finding out about support other than family/friends**

Young people who had accessed support outside of their family and friend group were asked how they found these resources.

Several places were identified as being able to signpost or refer young people to external support services or help. This included 'school' which was the most frequent place where young people could find information (10 respondents). This suggests that although schools were not particularly useful in providing support, they were helpful in signposting to other supportive people/places. That said, the internet and community groups closely followed schools in terms of signposting to support (9 respondents each).

The 'other' category included two young people who had received information via their church, and another two respondents mentioning receiving information about support through their college. A further two participants found information via their GP. Other places included a salon and youth club.

## **Barriers to reaching / accessing supportive places**

In addition to the barriers already experienced by young people, respondents were asked whether there was anything that prevented them from reaching services / places which they would have liked to go to for support. Trust was identified as a key factor, suggesting that even if young people thought a place could be supportive, they had to be certain they could trust the people before attending. Given the accounts of the negative experiences when seeking support, it is perhaps unsurprising that trust cropped up again here.

In terms of other significant barriers, inaccessibility due to finance and travelling distance were identified, as well as feeling unwelcome and lacking in confidence.

## **Young people's sense of their own strengths**

A majority of respondents identified the ability to 'just get on with things' or focusing on the future as their key strength. Other examples included 'becoming more focused', 'standing up for myself', feeling emotions, and self-belief. Some more negative examples were 'not relying on others for happiness', and caring less about the situation.

Finally, young people were asked to identify the three most important things that helped them to cope with their experiences. Friends was identified most frequently (41%), followed by 'hobbies' (33%) and support 'online or social media' (19%).

# Conclusion

The results from this survey have highlighted the need to address the way in which children and young people who are experiencing abuse are responded to when they seek support, as well as improving education and awareness-raising around what constitutes abuse. The findings suggest that normalisation / lack of understanding of abuse, combined with a culture of victim-blaming, remain prevalent factors affecting young people's likelihood of seeking support. It is also clear that key institutions, especially the police and education (and possibly workplaces), are not considered accessible, desirable, or trustworthy places to seek support by many young people, and that this is partly due to previous bad experiences and/or lack of means to attend. This is more pronounced for young people from Black and minoritized backgrounds.

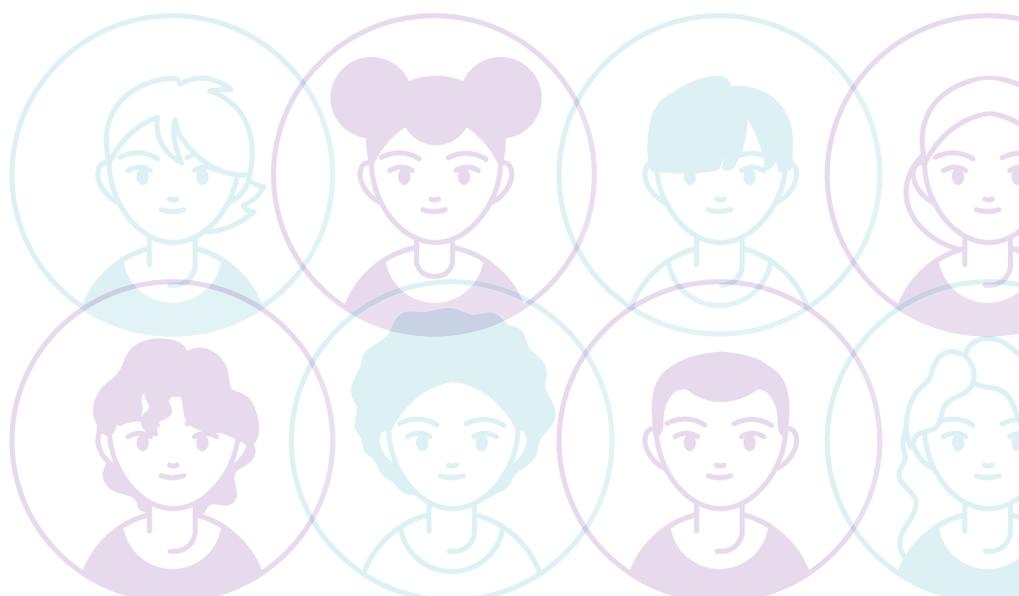
The findings suggest that young people use the internet and search online for support or advice. This is in keeping with other studies, which suggests that young people increasingly engage with online communities, and often find it easier to communicate via text or chat than face-to-face. This suggests that utilising / developing online spaces need to be a key consideration when developing a children and young people's model of Change That Lasts.

What was notably missing in the responses were references to specialist VAWDASV support workers / services. Notwithstanding the caveat that there is no way of knowing whether the difficult times young people reflected on constituted VAWDASV, the comments and responses concerning the education sector and the Police, in particular, suggests that young people are not accessing specialist support services. This may be due to lack of signposting or referrals, but is likely also impacted by the gaps in provision and lack of sustainable funding for specialist services in general.<sup>vii</sup> The findings also suggest that some young people feel that they are not believed when they do disclose, and/or have their trust undermined when (perhaps under safeguarding duties) the information they have disclosed in confidence is passed on to others. Although not cited by many, it is also important to highlight that some young people faced long waiting lists when referred to support services, and that this can have a significant impact on their ability to recover from the abuse.<sup>viii</sup>

The importance of having friends, hobbies, and online support should not be underestimated as factors which help young people to cope with their experiences. It highlights the importance of ensuring that young people can access such facilities that enable them to pursue hobbies, or safe spaces to talk with friends, as well as accessing specialist support where required or needed. Overall, the picture painted in the responses to this survey was one of young people who, despite the adversities, 'got on' with life. These strengths need to be drawn upon in all interactions with young people and in plans to improve the response to them.

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- vii See e.g. Welsh Women's Aid (2019) Children Matter: Children and young people experience violence and abuse too. Available online: <https://www.welshomensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Children-and-Young-People-participation-report-FINAL.pdf>
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