

LET'S TALK ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH.

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Authors:

**Welsh Youth Parliament Emotional and
Mental Health Support Committee**

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BACKGROUND

THE WELSH YOUTH PARLIAMENT (WYP) WAS ESTABLISHED IN 2018 TO PROVIDE YOUNG PEOPLE IN WALES WITH A NATIONAL PLATFORM TO RAISE AND DEBATE ISSUES THAT ARE IMPORTANT TO THEM.

In February 2019, all 60 young people elected to become the first ever set of Welsh Youth Parliament Members (WYPMs) met in the Senedd to decide which issues the Welsh Youth Parliament (WYP) would prioritise for the next two years. Almost 2,000 young people took part in a survey which asked them for their views on what the WYP should prioritise. The second most popular theme selected by young people in that survey was chosen by the WYP as one of its three priority issues, which is the subject of this report, Emotional and Mental Health Support.

WYPMs decided to organise into committees, to speak with other young people, adults, and professionals in order to investigate the issues prioritised. We, the Welsh Youth Parliament's Emotional and Mental Health Support Committee have met regularly since then to design a consultation, considering work previously done in this area, especially that of the Senedd's Children, Young People and Education Committee, which has been a big influence in guiding our work.

As WYPMs, and Members of the Welsh Youth Parliament's Emotional and Mental Health Support Committee, we know from personal experience, and from talking to other young people that there are issues with the provision of emotional and mental health support. It is estimated that three children in an average size classroom will have a mental health problem, and that by the age of 14, half of all the mental health problems they will experience would have begun.

“Mental health can affect anyone and it is absolutely critical that those who need the support and guidance are given the proper resources and means to do so”.

(Emily Kaye, Member of the Emotional and Mental Health Support Committee, Siamb February 2019)

We decided to focus our efforts on gathering a real life picture of the current state of emotional and mental health support for children and young people in Wales, good, bad and indifferent. To get a full picture we also engaged with parents, carers, education and healthcare professionals to get their views on the current information and support provision in Wales.

Over 1,600 people responded to our surveys, one of which was aimed at children and young people aged between 11-25, the other was aimed at adults including parents, carers, education, and health professionals. We held online consultation sessions as part of Welsh Youth Parliament Week in July 2020, where we spoke with young people from across Wales, and individually we have had regular discussions with other young people in our areas to understand their views and experiences. A huge thank you to all of those who took the time to engage with us during this consultation.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a big impact on the way in which we as young people in Wales live our lives, the way we learn, socialise, and work. We felt it was important that we use our status as WYPMs to support young people during this period where we could, which has seen us:

- Produce vlogs to share information and activities to help young people to be able to keep a positive mental state during this period;
- Signpost support services and resources;
- Discuss our experiences of living with the pandemic with the First Minister of Wales; and
- Support the Children's Commissioner for Wales' 'Coronavirus and Me' consultation, which saw over 23,000 young people respond.

We are passionate about ensuring that better support is available for children and young people in Wales and hope that this report, informed and written by young people for young people, will help deliver the improvements that are so greatly needed.





CONSULTATION FINDINGS

MUCH OF WHAT WE FOUND IN OUR CONSULTATION EMPHASISED THE NEED FOR URGENT ACTION.

61% of young people surveyed experience difficult emotions, or suffer with their mental health (such as low mood, worry, anger, stress, sadness, fear, jealousy, feeling anxious) at least once a week, whereas only 8% reported never having such feelings. These figures are all the more significant given that over half of those young people who responded to our survey said they had never received support.

Our report focuses on two broad areas: information and awareness; and barriers to and quality of support. The rest of the report will explain our main findings under these themes, followed by our Committee's conclusions and recommendations.

INFORMATION AND AWARENESS

WE WANTED TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE INFORMATION BEING PROVIDED, AND HOW GOOD IT IS IN EDUCATING PEOPLE ABOUT DIFFICULT EMOTIONS AND MENTAL HEALTH. DOES IT EFFECTIVELY SUPPORT PEOPLE TO RECOGNISE BEHAVIOURS, GET HELP, AND KNOW HOW TO HELP PEOPLE WHO ARE EXPERIENCING DIFFICULTIES?

Both young people and adults told us that more needed to be done to make people aware of where and how to access support. Only half of parents and guardians who responded to our survey told us that they were confident that they know where to signpost a child or young person. Over half of adults surveyed also told us that they didn't know if places of learning in their local area provided information or support. Many young people told us that more effective promotion, and better quality information was needed.

“Information is available on our intranet - although it can be hard to find (A 21 year old female University Student from Denbighshire that responded to our survey)

“When I travelled around my constituency there were many things that shocked me. One of the things is how many people need mental health support, the second is the lack of support for us, and third, the number of people who do not know that there is support available if we are struggling”. (Ifan Price, Member of the Emotional and Mental Health Support Committee, Siamb February 2019)

We asked young people where they would most likely access support for difficult emotions and mental health. We also asked adults to tell us where they thought young people were most likely to access support.

Adults' responses to our survey seemed to suggest that they thought young people would access support from lots of different places, whereas the majority of young people told us they would mostly seek support from family (63%), and friends (62%), with school/college/university staff a distant third (34%). These responses are very different from some of the adults' responses where only 30%, and 39% of adults, thought that young people would access support from family and friends respectively.

“It depends on the service/people they have in their lives...young people will open up to people they feel comfortable with and trust to do so.” (Youth Worker from Wrexham who responded to our survey)

Our findings show how important family and friends can be in helping young people with their emotions and mental health. Some adults told us that they would welcome a parent/carers programme, to raise awareness on how to deal with emotional and mental health issues that affect children and young people.

***“More awareness for parents on how to deal with emotional and mental health issues that affect their child/young person, such as parenting programmes.”
(Charity worker from Anglesey that responded to our survey)***

We were also told that children and young people wanted to receive wellbeing and mental health education at a younger age, and it should be talked about more in places such as schools. It was felt that this would provide young people with the skills to be able to deal with their emotions better, and would encourage young people to get help before they got to crisis point.

Less than half of young people said that their current or previous place of learning regularly discussed emotional and mental health support, and almost half of young people surveyed said they hadn't, or didn't know if they had received training or information at their place of learning which explains what difficult emotions and mental health means. Our survey also showed that only 43% of young people felt that the quality of emotional and mental health support at their current, or previous place of learning is/was very good.

“Having someone else show concern before you raise it yourself can be a huge motivating factor in seeking help. It may be useful to develop a way to make people aware of the signs of struggle so this is possible.” (A 17 year old female from Anglesey who responded to our survey)

We received several comments that showed that awareness and understanding of the support available for children and young people who do not meet the threshold for CAMHS was very low. Several young people who engaged with us called for the creation of an early intervention support service.

“I think we need to give ALL children information on where to get help whatever the situation. The problem is with the majority of the services that give help and support don't give it until you've reached breaking point, this needs to change!”(A 16 year old non-binary young person from Caerphilly who responded to our survey)





CONCLUSIONS

IT'S CLEAR TO US THAT SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENTS ARE NEEDED TO RAISE AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING, ESPECIALLY AMONGST YOUNG PEOPLE, PARENTS AND CARERS. INFORMATION AND AWARENESS NEEDS TO BE MAINSTREAMED.

We want to see information which is regularly updated, clear and to the point, accessible and engaging for young people. To do this we think it's important that young people advise on the information materials that are created. We are also calling for the creation of a wellbeing pack specifically aimed at friends and families, disseminated widely, so that they know how to deal with mental health issues and know where to go to get information and support.

The amount of advertising and publicity of the information and support available should increase significantly. To make information easier to find, we think that a recognised 'one stop shop' should be created so that everyone knows where to go to access the support they need.

As a Committee we feel strongly that children and young people should be taught about emotional wellbeing and mental health from an earlier age, and that places like schools should more frequently discuss emotional wellbeing and mental health with young people. The new curriculum provides an opportunity to incorporate mental health into young people's learning on a more consistent basis across Wales. Linked to this, we believe that schools should increase the amount of time that counsellors are available to support young people.

BARRIERS TO, AND QUALITY OF SUPPORT

AS PART OF OUR CONSULTATION WE WANTED TO FIND OUT WHAT WAS STOPPING YOUNG PEOPLE FROM ACCESSING HELP, AND WHAT PEOPLE FELT ABOUT THE QUALITY OF SUPPORT.

According to the young people we engaged with, by far the biggest thing that could be done to encourage young people to seek support before reaching crisis point, was to eliminate the stigma associated with mental health. Young people need to feel that they are able to talk openly about their emotions.

The majority of young people who said they do not feel comfortable in speaking to others or asking for help, told us that this was because they found it difficult to express themselves for fear of judgment.

“NORMALISE MENTAL HEALTH!!!! even the smallest things are HUGE.” (A 16 year old young person from Powys who responded to our survey)

Adults told us that safer environments were needed where young people are encouraged and feel comfortable speaking out. They felt that consistent encouragement, and regular conversations in schools, colleges, youth groups, and with their peers would help reduce stigma, and raise awareness of support available. Adults called on a campaign on the importance of asking for help early.

Another barrier to support that was raised consistently with us was the length of time young people had to wait to access support. Young people's expectations of how long they should have to wait to access support does not match up with the waiting times people reported in our surveys. It was clear from our survey that young people and adults alike felt that they should be able to access support within a month, even in more moderate cases that doesn't meet the CAMHS threshold. 51% of adults who had referred a child/young person for support said that the child/young person referred had to wait between a month to a year for that support. 37% of young people reported having to wait between a month to a year for support.

“The problem is accessing support services as the waiting lists are so long.” (A youth worker from Wrexham who responded to our survey)

Parents and guardians raised concerns about the frequency of support and care, with only 20% of those responding thinking it was appropriate. Many adults spoke

about the need to increase CAMHS capacity, and only 30% stated that they were happy with the quality of mental health support. Both adults and young people felt that young people needed longer term care from CAMHS, which they felt wasn't possible because the demand is so high. A number of comments were made calling to increase funding and capacity within CAMHS.

“CAMHS - needs more funding. Needs to get rid of waiting lists.” (A youth worker from Caerphilly who responded to our survey)





CONCLUSIONS

STEPS TO IMPROVE YOUNG PEOPLE'S CONFIDENCE TO ACCESS INFORMATION AND SUPPORT NEED TO BE TAKEN.

As mentioned earlier in this report, more frequent discussions at school can play a significant role in raising awareness and understanding. We agree with those who responded to our survey who called for more conversations at schools, colleges, youth groups and with peers to help reduce stigma.

We also want to see more information and support services available online so that people can access anonymously for those who currently aren't willing to seek support in person.

Many people we engaged with made passionate points about CAMHS. We are calling for urgent action to reduce waiting times and to ensure the support young people get is adequate. We think that better promotion of alternative services for those who haven't yet reached crisis point, would enable young people to use coping techniques that could in turn reduce the demand on CAMHS, and therefore reduce waiting times. We want Welsh Government to revise this situation as a matter of priority, so that young people are able to access the support they need.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- Improve the quality of information materials, ensuring they are clear, accessible and engaging to young people
- The creation of a wellbeing pack for families and friends, to better equip them to identify signs, signpost information, and provide support to young people who are experiencing difficult emotions and mental health
- Ensure that young people are involved in advising on all aspects of information provision and support
- Establish a recognised central 'one stop shop' for information, resources, and support
- Significantly increase the amount of advertising and publicity to raise awareness of where information and support can be accessed. Messaging should express the importance of seeking help early
- Ensure that emotional wellbeing and mental health gets taught consistently across Wales from an earlier age, and with greater frequency
- Enhance, and regularly update the mental health training which education, health and social care workers receive
- Schools should increase the amount of time that counsellors are available to support young people
- Offer more services where young people can remain anonymous in order to help them feel more comfortable with the process of reaching out for help
- Review CAMHS as a matter of urgency, in order to reduce waiting times, and ensure that funding and capacity is sufficient to provide the necessary support



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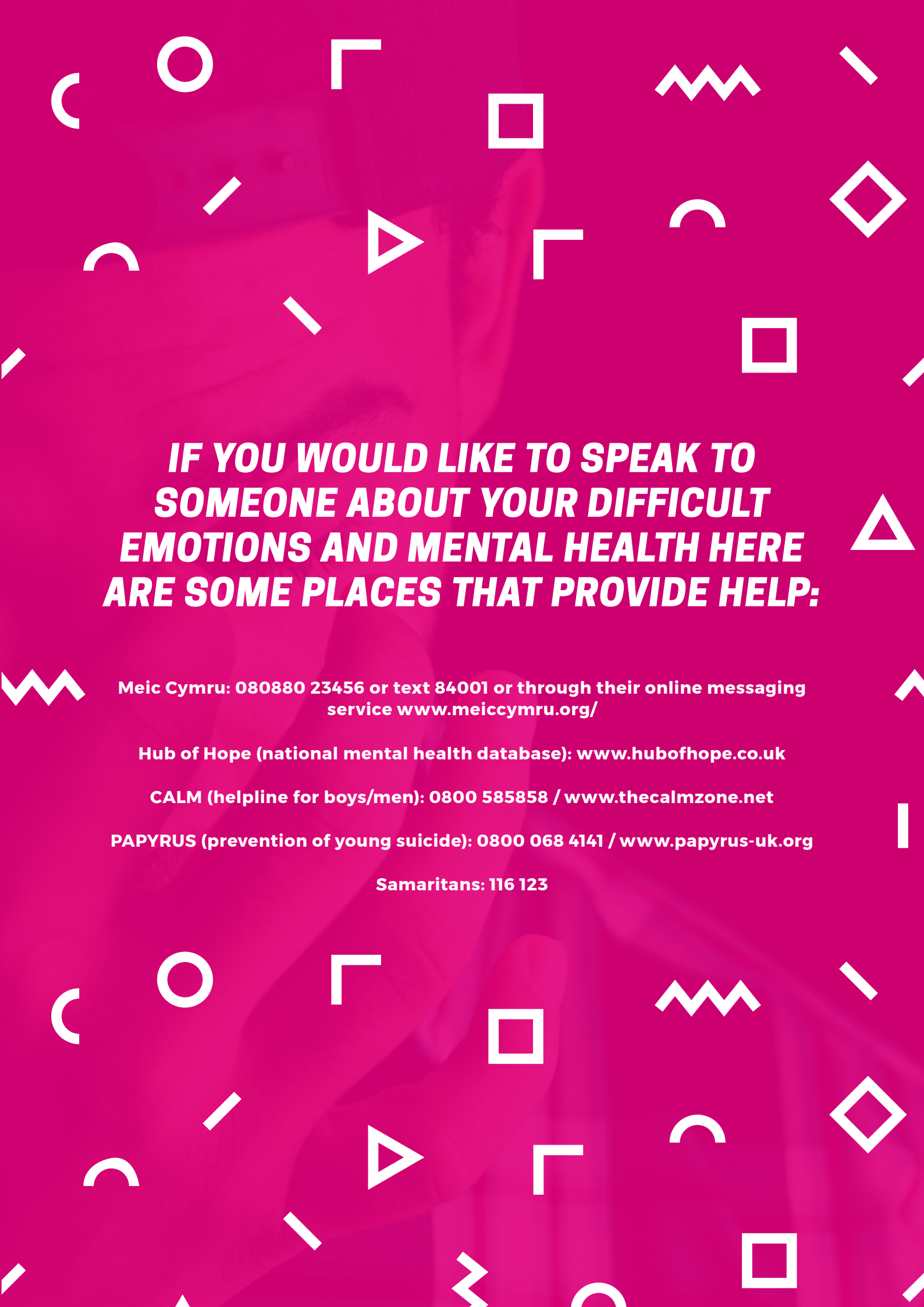
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***IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO SPEAK TO
SOMEONE ABOUT YOUR DIFFICULT
EMOTIONS AND MENTAL HEALTH HERE
ARE SOME PLACES THAT PROVIDE HELP:***

Meic Cymru: 080880 23456 or text 84001 or through their online messaging service www.meiccymru.org/

Hub of Hope (national mental health database): www.hubofhope.co.uk

CALM (helpline for boys/men): 0800 585858 / www.thecalmzone.net

PAPYRUS (prevention of young suicide): 0800 068 4141 / www.papyrus-uk.org

Samaritans: 116 123

