



Comisiynydd Heddlu a Throsedd
Dyfed-Powys
Police and Crime Commissioner

Youth Engagement Forum:

Y Sgwrs: Young people's experiences of mental health, substance misuse and low-level offending in Dyfed-Powys

May 2023





Foreword

Some of the content within this report may be emotionally challenging and includes themes of mental health and substance misuse. The report includes some personal accounts of survey respondents and focus group participants, which may be triggering for those who feel particularly vulnerable. The report has been arranged so that a summary and recommendations are available before the detailed report so that readers can navigate the document without reading these personal accounts.

Summary

- The report focuses on the responses gathered from 'Y Sgwrs' (a Welsh title meaning 'The Conversation') survey, and focus groups, designed by the Youth Engagement Forum. The report also looks at information gathered from the Urdd National Eisteddfod in Carmarthenshire (2023) which featured a 'Y Sgwrs' engagement activity (which was based on the survey questions).
- The survey was shared widely with young people and people who work with children and young people. The focus groups were conducted by members of the Youth Engagement Forum which included their peers. 19 focus groups were held and aimed to have 6-8 people in attendance.
- 78 responses were collected as part of the engagement activity at the Urdd National Eisteddfod.
- There was a strong response to the Youth Engagement Forum's priority around mental health support for young victims. 61% survey responders selected this as the priority that meant the most to them.
- The Youth Engagement Forum found that communication of services available to children and young people in the Dyfed-Powys area could be improved, particularly in the more rural parts of the area, and especially relating to mental health (such as counselling).
- When discussing substance misuse in young people, many commented that good information was provided by Schools Police Officers, while others mentioned that there was some repetition in the inputs provided.
- Some commented that young people may be deterred from taking illicit substances by learning from previous substance users who may be able to give insight on the long-term negative effects.
- On discussing low level offences, many considered the root cause of offending in young people and questioned whether it stemmed from home life or adverse childhood experiences.
- Individuals responding to the survey and the focus groups all discussed the role of school and colleges and considered whether they could do more to provide better access to career and training opportunities. Those taking part commented that more could be done to cater to wider opportunities. Many also commented on improving access to learning more life skills and a wider choice of work experience and careers advice.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were created by the Youth Engagement Forum following a discussion to review feedback collated from both the survey and the focus groups.

Recommendation 1

Dyfed-Powys Police and the OPCC should increase social media posts to raise awareness of mental health and mental health support in the area. The police should share these items through social media and try to target a far-reaching audience.

Recommendation 2

Partners should raise awareness of their services and inform children and younger people of mental health services in the local area, how people can access support, and provide detailed information on the process of accessing the service.

Recommendation 3

Dyfed-Powys Police and its partners should work to improve its data sharing between agencies and organisations to ensure a child-centred approach.

Recommendation 4

Dyfed-Powys Police and its partners should aim to raise awareness of substance misuse services available for children and young people in the Force area.

Recommendation 5

Schools Police Officers should consider including information on, and visual aids of, long term effects of drug use when engaging with schools around substance misuse.

Recommendation 6

Schools Police Officers should consider working with the local health boards to create training for teaching staff within schools on substance misuse and the support available.

Recommendation 7

Dyfed-Powys Police should increase a positive relationship with children and young people by, for example, creating engagement events or open days, inviting children and young people to get to know the service. The Force should also consider sharing positive work in engaging with children and young people via social media for a wider reach.

Recommendation 8

Dyfed-Powys Police to raise awareness of the likely outcomes of low-level offences in children and young people so that they understand the consequences.

Recommendation 9

In response to this report and its recommendations, the Police and Crime Commissioner should support youth organisations and charities with funding requests. The Police & Crime Commissioner can offer funding directly in support of the delivery of Police and Crime Plan priorities.

Introduction

The Youth Engagement Forum, along with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Dyfed-Powys (OPCC), launched a survey to hear from 14 to 24-year-olds living in each of the Force's counties: Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire, and Powys.

'Y Sgwrs' (a Welsh title meaning 'The Conversation') launched in January and invited young people and professionals working with young people, to share their experiences of issues such as mental health, youth offending and substance misuse. The survey closed on the 21st April 2023.

The online survey asked teenagers and young adults to explain what is working, what doesn't and how things might be improved.

The Youth Ambassadors (members of the Youth Engagement Forum) also held focus groups to ensure a wide reach, and to get views from children and young people in their areas. The focus groups discussed each of the Youth Engagement Forum's priorities and the same questions that were asked in the survey, to ensure an extensive reach.

Dyfed-Powys Police and the OPCC were present at the Eisteddfod. The Urdd National Eisteddfod is one of Europe's largest youth touring festivals that attracts around 90,000 visitors each year. While many attendees were from the Dyfed-Powys area, the event attracts attendees from Wales and beyond. The stand had many interactive aspects, including an engagement activity based on the 'Y Sgwrs' survey. The activity asked attendees of the tent to give their top idea on the following:

- How the police and other agencies should provide mental health support to young victims of crime
- Support that can/should be provided to help prevent young people becoming involved in substance misuse
- Support/projects/programmes that can be provided to young people who are committing low level offences

While the Youth Ambassadors were keen to gain insight from children and young people in the Dyfed-Powys area, they felt it was important to consider the voices of children and young people attending the Eisteddfod, regardless of where they lived.

This report collates the findings from 'Y Sgwrs', the Youth Engagement Forum's findings through their focus groups, and the responses collected at the Eisteddfod, collating recommendations to improve the service. The report will be shared with the Chief Constable and decision-makers from local authorities and youth organisations at the Youth Engagement Forum's Conference.



Background

In October 2022, the Police and Crime Commissioner welcomed young people from across the Force area to Police Headquarters in Carmarthen, who were appointed as new members of the Dyfed-Powys Youth Engagement Forum.

A total of 15 young people were appointed, ranging in age from 15 to 19 years old. They received an induction session and training to support and prepare them in representing young people from Powys, Ceredigion, Carmarthenshire, and Pembrokeshire.

PCC Dafydd Llywelyn first established the Youth Engagement Forum in 2018 so that Dyfed-Powys has a Forum of Youth Ambassadors who would influence and challenge decision-making, and to ensure that the communities of the Dyfed-Powys area have a Police Force that successfully safeguards children and young people and promotes their wellbeing.

Last year, as part of the recruitment campaign for the Youth Engagement Forum (to recruit Youth Ambassadors), the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner launched a youth survey asking young people for their views and perception of policing in their area. The survey findings identified three priority areas for the Youth Engagement Forum to focus on for 2022/23:

- Mental Health support for young victims
- Substance misuse prevention activities for young people
- Support for young adults who are committing low level offences, to build their confidence and access training and employment



Methodology

This report looks at responses received from the 'Y Sgwrs' survey as well as the information collated through the focus groups and engagement activities conducted by the Youth Ambassadors. The report also captures the discussion from the Youth Engagement Forum's meeting on the 3rd of May 2023, where they discussed the findings.

'Y Sgwrs' was shared widely. The survey was shared through social media (such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn) and by the Youth Ambassadors to their peers. The survey was also shared with Schools and Colleges through Heddlu Dyfed-Powys Police's School Police Officers, the Police Cadets, as well as relevant partners of the OPCC. The survey received 135 responses in total. 100 were received in English and 35 were received in Welsh. 73% of respondents were children or young people under the age of 24, with the remainder being professionals working with children and young people.

County	Percentage of responders
Carmarthenshire	64%
Ceredigion	12%
Pembrokeshire	20%
Powys	4%

Figure 1: A table showing the answers received when asked the optional question to state the local authority in which the survey respondents lived; Y Sgwrs survey.

Respondents were asked to select the Youth Engagement Forum priority that meant the most to them, with an overwhelming number of respondents (61%) opting for priority 1: mental health support for young victims. When asked about where they lived, only 95 people responded, and the majority stated that they lived in Carmarthenshire. 40 people skipped the question.

Youth Ambassadors also conducted focus groups with their peers, where the questions that were outlined in the survey were discussed. The sessions lasted 40-60 minutes and Ambassadors aimed to have 6-8 peers within their groups. Each focus group focused on one priority and discussed the questions that related to this priority. 19 focus groups were conducted by Youth Engagement Forum members. Some were held face-to-face, and some were held virtually.

The Youth Ambassadors also met on the evening of the 3rd of May 2023 to discuss the findings of both the focus groups and the survey, generated interesting discussion on the three priorities, commenting on findings they had made.

The Youth Ambassadors also reviewed the responses that were collated at the Eisteddfod at the end of each day that they attended. All responses were reviewed and considered – the responses collated echoed what was collected through the survey and focus groups.





Priority 1

Mental Health Support for Young Victims

Mental Health in Wales

The number of children and young people experiencing mental health issues is growing¹ in the UK, and this isn't a new issue.

In Wales, the mental health of young people has been on the agenda for some time. Actions aimed at at-risk children and young people were part of a cross-government suicide prevention strategy², launched in 2015. A 2014 investigation³ by the Senedd's Children, Young People and Education Committee showed unmet needs for individuals wanting less intensive mental health treatment as well as insufficient capacity in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) for young people needing expert mental health services. As a result, the NHS established the Together for Children and Young People programme to enhance a variety of services. This includes better expert care (e.g., target waiting times and quicker access to CAMHS) and better prevention (e.g., an emphasis on wellness).

A later review by the Senedd's Children, Young People and Education Committee⁴ pushed for more rapid change since they recognised that while education had seen advances, local government and health care still need significant work.

The Together for Mental Health Delivery Plan⁵ (2019–2022) by Welsh Government noted that improvements had been made to CAMHS crisis response teams and waiting times but that there was more work to be done.

1 https://reader.health.org.uk/improving_CYPMHS

2 <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-06/talk-to-me-2-suicide-and-self-harm-prevention-action-plan-for-wales-2015-2020.pdf>

3 <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/id/eprint/23954/1/Report%20November%202014.pdf>

4 <https://senedd.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld13568/cr-ld13568-e.pdf>

5 https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-10/review-of-the-together-for-mental-health-delivery-plan-20192022-in-response-to-covid-19_0.pdf

Information collated by the Youth Engagement Forum

31 individuals provided a comment to the survey question that asked respondents to share their thoughts and/or experience of mental health. Many shared personal accounts or experiences of knowing someone experiencing mental health problems:

“ I suffer a lot with bad mental health due to the stress of schoolwork and day to day life so I think it should be prioritised ”

“ My best friend tried to commit suicide ”

“ I suffer with quite bad mental health, and I think that in 2023 it is being ignored way too much. School and family, they all seem to be missing the signs a lot more lately. People are getting better at hiding it and worse at expressing their thoughts and emotions ”

“ Personally, I have suffered ill mental health and that led to me doing things I may not otherwise have done as a young person - I do believe if we tackle the mental health struggle then we tackle the behaviours a bit ”

“ I believe that young people's mental health issues are not supported enough in rural communities ”

“ Waiting times too long, services not known to young people - they don't know who to go to, assessment is too formal, young victims can feel like they are being interrogated or not believed support workers are often best placed to offer mental health support as they have the relationship and investment to professionally train and qualify support workers is needed, this would also reduce timescales in Mental Health services the narrative that 'something is wrong with me' needs to change to 'what has happened to me' we need to have more text messaging / online chat based services rather than in person and 24 hour access ”

“ A lot of the behaviours we find unacceptable in society are caused by poor mental health or past trauma that is/has not been treated or identified. The children I see in my job are hitting out, searching for attachments, confused, and hurting and most don't know it comes from trauma ”

This reflects what was collated through the focus groups, with many sharing that they felt that they had suffered more anxiety, stress and depression. Many also noted that the effects were more prevalent after the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, and with the pressures of exams and schoolwork:

“ Suffered more anxiety, stress, and depression since COVID lockdowns and with the pressures of exams and schoolwork ”

“ School is a positive place.... able to socialise and share feelings ”

“ In secondary school I went through a lot of traumatic experiences and ended up seeking help from the school councillor who although we had a good relationship, always blamed my problems on anxiety which was not accurate. I am currently in college and have been seeing the councillor there who has been a lot more helpful than my past one however I still don't feel that this is enough to get me into a better place ”

“ My experience has been overthinking and worrying about things. Have felt sad and upset. Sometimes the stress of school/college work has gotten to me. I get worried and anxious when in strange /new situations - speaking to strangers ”

Survey responders were then asked if they had ever seen information about mental health support for young people on social media."

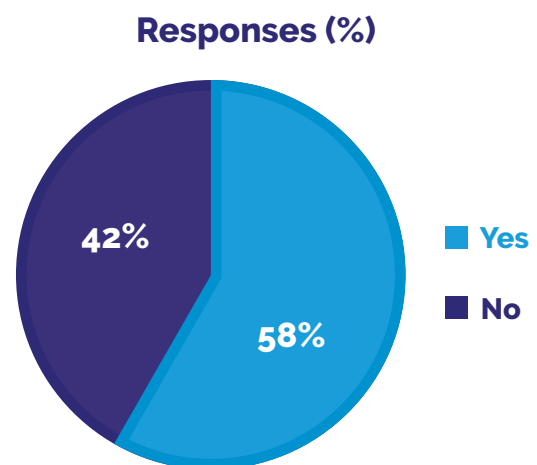


Figure 2: A pie chart showing the result for whether respondents had seen information about mental health support for young people on social media; Y Sgwrs survey.

The majority stated yes (58%) and some made additional comments to inform where they had seen the information:

- School/College
- Social Media posts that provided information on services or ways to self-support
- National charities, such as Mind and Papyrus UK

- Local youth centres/charities, such as Area 43, Point youth centre, Choices (Barod)
- Online positive newsletters, such as 'theknowmedia' and the 'happy news'.

Through the focus groups, some shared that if they were searching for help and support, that they would look for information on social media, or websites for charities that focus on mental health. Many commented that charities, local services, and schools/colleges could publish more information on social media or via posters/videos on helpful websites/helplines/support services.

On answering if the police and other agencies should be providing more content on their social media accounts about how young people can access mental health support, 31 survey respondents gave their feedback:

“ Police can post more to help young people with mental health, but it would be more effective if it came from a known source such as school or at home ”

“ To make it normal. There is too much of a negative stigma around mental health with young people ”

“ Knowledge is power, and if mental health issues can be covered in how young people can access support, it can only be better for the young people ”

“ I think it would be helpful for the Police to provide more content on social media of how young people can access mental support, however, this information/content needs to be made more widely available through social media ads (that come up regardless of who you follow), as many young people would not be following the Police's social media account ”

“ We need to vastly increase advertising of mental health services as young people do not know where to go and think there isn't any help for them ”

“ To inform parents of resources they can access, I doubt many teens follow police on social media. But maybe just knowing the police are aware of the mental health difficulties will help teens and young adults see the police differently ”

“ I have never seen anything advertised by The Police in regard to mental health help available for young people ”

This is not surprising. The discussion between the Youth Ambassadors and their focus groups echoed the information captured in the survey. They identified that Dyfed-Powys Police and its partners could strive to share information about services available widely. Some suggested looking further than social media and suggests that the police and other agencies should consider item such as TV adverts, posters, and newspapers:

“ Give talks on how young people can access help, make better links and connections with the community ”

“ There should be talks, like assemblies, to younger children about what the police do and how they are willing to support individuals with mental health issues ”

“ Community police officers be visible in schools, and young people to be able to access a friendly trusted person in school/college to talk to after an incident or when a victim of a crime ”

Many also highlighted the importance of school and colleges, and their role in providing better access to support, counselling, relevant work experience, and community or voluntary work to help build confidence, strengthen routines and to attain a sense of achievement.

They also identified that mental health services could better outline how individuals can access their services, as well as give a detailed account of what the service may entail.

During the discussion, and by looking at the information gathered through the survey and focus groups, the Youth Ambassadors noticed a trend of organisations working in isolation and that better communication between agencies would be beneficial, especially where a service user transitions to an adult service.

The next question within the survey and focus groups for this priority asked participants to provide an idea of how organisations (such as the police and other agencies) should provide mental health support to young victims of crime.

Give support to victims and witnesses or anyone effected with help booklets or therapy

Offer counselling sessions, Weekly/ Monthly check-ups

Education in schools and community settings

Make people aware that they offer the support. Follow up counselling and welfare checks to victims and young offenders in the months following an incident

Show us that you understand a relate, using social media such as reels and TikToks talking about it and giving support. Being fun and not too serious

Signposting to other agencies

The focus groups echoed similar suggestions for the same question:

Create a better image in the community, one of support. Offer more visual support online on social media sites seen by young adults

More talks in school, more advertisement, more one to one support with individuals, support groups, train specific mental health issues

Set up organisations such as CHAT in a wider range of schools (Students of older years are trained to support students and help them through hard times)

Specifically trained mental health police officers that either have a separate uniform, or wear no uniform at all

I think that once young people have been involved with a crime in some way and the police have been notified, they should either be referred to or given options for counselling sessions. Even if the young person does not pursue counselling even being given the option for it is a step in the right direction

At the Eisteddfod, those who engaged in the 'Y Sgwrs' activity made very similar remarks:

“ More information to be made available about local services ”

“ More support in school ”

“ Referring young victims of crime to mental health teams/charities, or for those choosing not to need mental health support to receive a follow-up call at a later point ”

“ Signpost to an agency that promotes outdoor wellbeing ”

“ More support services for young people with learning difficulties and mental health issues would be beneficial ”

The final question that was asked as part of the survey asked whether young people are more likely to develop mental health problems if they have been a victim or witness of crime. Of the 31 who responded, 71% stated that they agreed, while the remaining 29% neither agreed nor disagreed.

The Youth Ambassadors identified the following recommendations for Dyfed-Powys Police and its partners:

■ Recommendation 1

Dyfed-Powys Police and the OPCC should increase social media posts to raise awareness of mental health and mental health support in the area. The police should share these items through social media and try to target a far-reaching audience.

■ Recommendation 2

Partners should raise awareness of their services and inform children and younger people of mental health services in the local area, how people can access support, and provide detailed information on the process of accessing the service.

■ Recommendation 3

Dyfed-Powys Police and its partners should work to improve its data sharing between agencies and organisations to ensure a child-centred approach.





Priority 2

Substance Misuse Prevention Activities for Young People

Welsh Government's Substance Misuse Delivery Plan and the wider picture

The Welsh Government's Substance Misuse Delivery Plan⁶ (2019-2022) acknowledges the importance of the prevention interventions. The key themes for 2020-21 were to promote substance misuse education and awareness across Wales. Within the reporting period (2020-21) there were 921 clients under 20 across Wales that were assessed due to their problematic drug use, according to their Substance Misuse Annual Report, Treatment Data, and Forward Look (2021)⁷.

By the end of March 2021⁸, there were 5,155 children receiving care and support due to parental substance misuse. The number of children receiving care and support whose own substance misuse was identified as a problem was 630, representing 3.8 per cent of all children receiving care and support.

The number of school exclusions in 2021-22 as a result of alcohol or drugs amongst school aged children was 396, a decrease of 21% from 2020-21.

For alcohol-specific conditions, there were 621 admissions involving young people aged under 25 in 2021-22 (9.6% decrease from 2020-21). Admissions for illicit drugs decreased by 5.9% in this age group in 2021-22.

Information collated by the Youth Engagement Forum

The survey asked respondents for their thoughts and/or experience of substance misuse. 10 individuals provided a comment to the survey question that asked respondents to share their thoughts and/or experience. Some of these responses are included in this report:



⁶ <https://www.gov.wales/substance-misuse-delivery-plan-2019-2022-0>

⁷ The data only includes instances of heroin, cannabis & cocaine for males only https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2022-05/working-together-to-reduce-harm-substance-misuse-annual-report-treatment-data-and-forward-look-2021_0.pdf

⁸ <https://phw.nhs.wales/publications/publications1/data-mining-wales-the-annual-profile-for-substance-misuse-2021-22/>

“...our School Liaison [Police] Officer has had plenty of lessons on the danger and effects of the misuse of drugs and alcohol. Furthermore, inputs within Police Cadets. I have been offered drugs and seen people who vape and take drugs”

“I have seen many of my friends and a close family member, lives crawl away before my eyes due to lack of quality support and intervention. The services available do more damage than good. Lives are being lost because of it”

“Widespread use of cannabis in increasingly younger age groups. It is clearly easy to obtain. We sometimes have groups of about a dozen young people at a time arriving under the influence”

“Working with many young people it seems the common theme is that they have most of them come from being in care or divorced or domestic abuse homes where there is a lack of consistent role models with unconditional positive regard”

“I think that the main reason people turn to these substances is because they use them as a coping mechanism to the problems they're facing, because of this these people should have more support to stop them from using these substances and for them to have the right help they need”

“As a pharmacist I see it as a significant problem and people are not being educated on the dangers of party drugs”

“Through recent years I have seen first-hand the increased use of substances in towns, and villages across Dyfed-Powys. It has been glamorised to take drugs and drink every weekend. I have felt like an outsider when I refused to take some cocaine and was looked down upon, when those taking the drugs were seemed as the 'cool' kids. I have seen first-hand the consequences of substance misuse and the mental health effects. Unfortunately, we have lost a few young individuals in our town due to mental health and I believe they we're strongly linked to substance misuse. It seems that the availability and demand for class A and B drugs are on the rise”

The focus groups conducted by the youth ambassadors asked the same question. Participants shared similar responses to the survey:

“Many said they knew of their peers smoking cannabis, some spoke of some taking cocaine. Many were aware of others in their communities that relied on alcohol and drugs on a regular basis, often turning to crime to feed their habits”

“I have known people who have had issues with substances and have become addicted or have overdosed from them. I think that they're, majority of the time, used as a coping mechanism for people in serious need of help or for people who feel like they don't have anyone to talk to about their issues people who have addiction running in the family majority of vulnerable people turn to it”

“ My parents have both had a history with substance misuse from before I was born. My father misused drugs like heroin and developed schizophrenia, which he has since recovered from almost entirely and my mother is a recovered alcoholic from around age 14. They have also both smoked tobacco from a young age and while my mother had to quit due to her health, my father switched to vaping. My dad has been smoking around me since I was a child, which has given me an intense fear of passive smoking. While my parents no longer misuse substances their past actions have influenced me to develop fears of drugs and alcohol ”

Survey responders were then asked to share an idea that could/should be provided to help prevent young people involving themselves in drugs and alcohol misuse. Some ideas that were provided include:

“ Lessons on peer pressure and how to avoid that situation ”

“ I'm satisfied with the education and resources that are being provided relatively consistently by the School Liaison [Police] Officer and through cadets ”

“ Early intervention to vulnerable young adults. An option to make informed decisions via training programmes, therapy, community support. All these people need love ”

“ Campaign to highlight the long-term negative effects of misuse, with real examples, especially on social media ”

“ Tell more young people the effects of the substances and the long term impacts it can have on both your physical and mental health ”

“ Get involved earlier in families e.g., lots more support for struggling single parents with good positive role models e.g., take children to sport and other activities ”

“ Explaining the risks from a young age e.g., year 7 of substance misuse and long-term consequences ”

“ More things for young people to do in communities. We need better awareness and better prevention. I believe education is needed when kids are still in school and college. Relationships with the police need to be better and better promotion of services available to support those in need ”

The focus groups also responded to the same question. Many focus group participants suggested the involvement of individuals who have previously misused substances - to give personal insight and to discuss the consequence of substance misuse:

“ Prevention, pupils should be spoken to by ex addicts about the short- and long-term effects of drugs and alcohol and the dangers that starting these habits can lead to. They did not think that visits by the police, showing drugs and giving warnings were effective. They emphasised the need for people that have been affected by alcohol and drug misuse should speak ”

“ I feel that a strong sense of community could help to divert people onto a better path. For example, if there are more social clubs and opportunities available, it will encourage people to make better use of their time. The consistent social interactions that go along with this may also help to keep people from going down a bad path ”

“ Talks/advice from previous substance misusers; hearing the consequences of substance misuse from previous offenders will convey the message better than those who have no experience with substances ”

“ Make young people aware of the risks; many members agreed that if they/people they knew were aware of the side effects involved with substances, they would not have taken those in the first place ”

“ Advice/rehabilitation for young people- counselling to kick habits, or even combat addiction to substances ”

At the Eisteddfod, those who engaged in the 'Y Sgwrs' activity echoed the survey and focus groups:

“ Hearing stories from substance misuse survivors; hear about how they recovered ”

“ More awareness of the true effects on the body ”

“ Young people don't listen to the police ”

“ Restrict shops from serving underage children ”

“ More activities/youth clubs ”

Survey responders were asked to suggest what age schools should start talking to children and/or young people about substance misuse. Half of responders suggested that this should begin in year 6 (ages 10-11). 30% suggested that the discussions should begin in year 7 (ages 11-12). 10% suggested that the discussions should begin in year 8 (ages 12-13). 10% suggested that the discussions should begin in year 10 (ages 14-15). All other years had 0% of responders.

Responses (%)

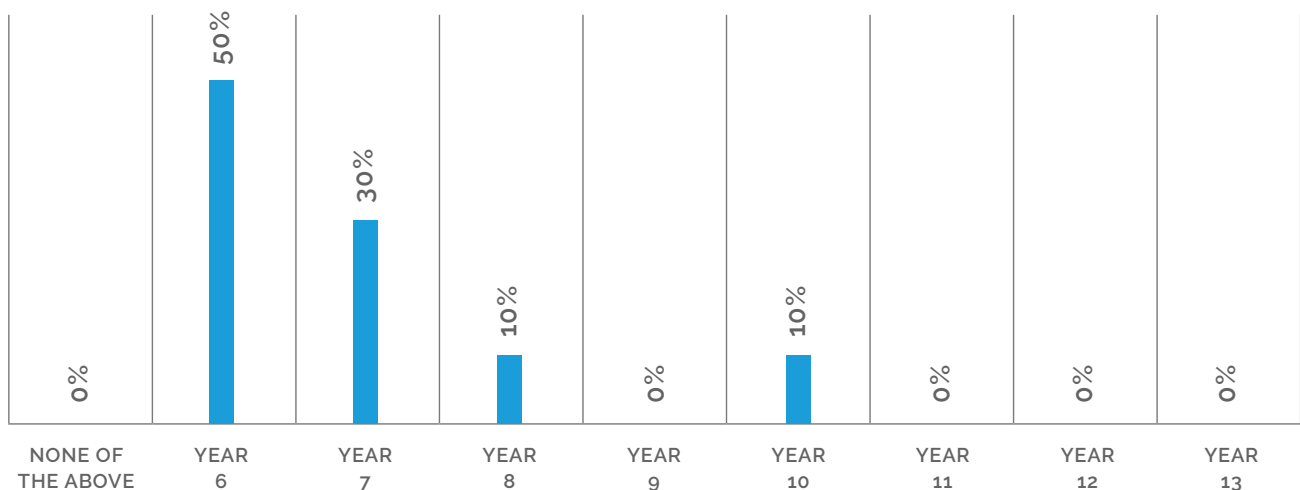


Figure 3: A clustered column chart showing the suggested age for beginning to talk about substance misuse in schools; Y Sgwrs survey.

The focus groups were asked the same question and they discussed their thoughts in more depth, with some groups considering as young as year 4 (ages 8-9), and the majority suggesting year 6 (ages 10-11) and 7 (ages 11-12). Some stated as old as year 9 (ages 13-14), but most participants highlighted that it should be discussed more than once, perhaps annually while in school or college. Some reflected on the age that they received information themselves and made comment on whether it was the appropriate age to learn about substance misuse or not.

Survey responders were asked to suggest how schools or colleges should approach talking to children/young people about substance misuse. Some of the responders stated:

“ In secondary school there is more than enough information provided by the school officer. The school liaison [police] officer is invaluable to the school ”

“ Presentation and a visual of the things that happens to your bodies when you use bad drugs ”

“ Rather than only doing lessons on the consequences and dangers of drugs- which is so very important. Offer an anonymous service, for young people to reach out to with no shame or judgement so they can at least begin to reach for a better quality of life before it's too late ”

“ They should share information with and learn from local youth organisations who know these young people well, to make joint plans to protect and rehabilitate them into education and improve their chances in life ”

“ Have recovering addicts come in to discuss the impact on their life ”

For the same questions, the focus group participants included their input:

“ Definitely case studies and stories by ex-substance users and families affected by this, where substance misuse has led to crime or even death. Posters of the effects, videos, and posters to offer warnings but also support and where to access it ”

“ I think that inviting past substance abusers into schools to tell their story would cause the greatest impact as children would not only be educated on the dangers of drugs but would also receive first-hand knowledge from someone who suffered with it, helping them to empathise and understand why people turn to substances and how hard it can be to quit them and get help ”

“ Visual description of how substance misuse can impact the body, can be a hard-hitting message for young people ”

“ Advice for young people who are already involved within substance misuse (support, counselling, rehabilitation programmes) ”

“ Numbers and hotlines to access after taking substances for instant support ”

The survey then asked responders if they were aware of any substance misuse support services available. Half were aware, and the other half were not. Many chose to include some of the services that they were aware of, listing DAN 24/7, DDAS (Dyfed Drug and Alcohol Service) and Choices.

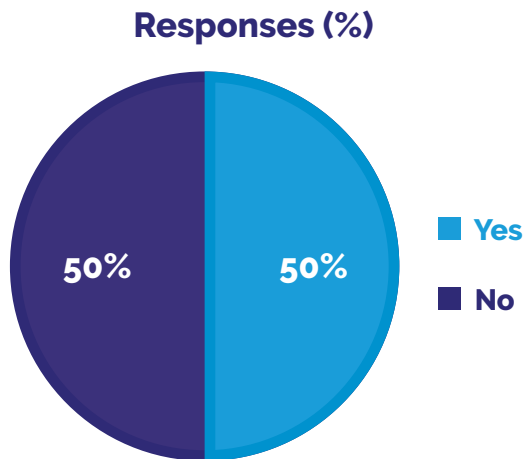


Figure 4: A pie chart showing the survey responders' awareness of substance misuse support services; Y Sgwrs survey.

The focus groups held discussions for this question. In many of the focus groups, many were unaware of any support services available to them or their families. Some stated that they would go to their youth clubs to ask for information. One group discussed whether schools provide information on available support and concluded that schools do not provide clear enough information on support for substance misuse.

The Youth Ambassadors identified the following recommendations for Dyfed-Powys Police:

■ Recommendation 4

Dyfed-Powys Police and its partners should aim to raise awareness of substance misuse services available for children and young people in the Force area.

■ Recommendation 5

Schools Police Officers should consider including information on, and visual aids of, long term effects of drug use when engaging with schools around drugs misuse.

■ Recommendation 6

Schools Police Officers should consider working with the local health boards to create training for teaching staff within schools on substance misuse and the support available.





Priority 3

Support for young adults who are committing low level offences, to build their confidence and access training and employment

Children and Young People's Plan

The Children and Young People's Plan⁹ was launched by Welsh Government in March 2022, setting out an ambition for Wales to be a wonderful place to grow up, live and to work, now and in the future. The plan places the child at the notional centre of the learning process in which they are active participants, which is referred to as a 'child-centred approach'.

The Welsh Government and the Ministry of Justice have developed a Youth Justice Blueprint for Wales, as part of the Welsh Government's wider work through their Children and Young People's Plan. The blueprint sets out a vision for youth justice that takes a child-centred approach, as well as a trauma-informed approach throughout, focusing on prevention and early intervention, through to resettlement from custody.

In England and Wales, the age of criminal responsibility is 10. Children between the ages of 10 and 17 can be arrested and taken to court if they commit a crime. The police have a range of options to deal with any offence committed by a child. They can receive 'no further action', they can be given out of court disposals (such as community resolutions, youth cautions and youth conditional cautions) and can be charged.



In Wales, where a young person has committed a low-level offence, and the police decide that they are eligible for Bureau, they will be referred to a youth offending team. Youth Offending Teams look at young people from a balanced perspective and will involve the victim too to ensure that their voice is heard.

It's worth noting that young people are more likely than older age groups to be stop searched. In Wales¹⁰, 3,697 stop and searches were conducted on 10–17-year-olds, and 4,984 stop and searches were conducted on 18–24-year-olds in 2021-22. This means that almost half (46%) of all stop searches in Wales were conducted on children and young people. This is consistent with the position in the Dyfed-Powys area, where 454 stop searches were conducted on 10–17-year-olds and 849 on 18–24-year-olds during the same period. 49% of all stop searches in Dyfed-Powys were conducted on children and young people.

⁹ <https://www.gov.wales/children-and-young-peoples-plan.html>

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/police-powers-and-procedures-stop-and-search-and-arrests-england-and-wales-year-ending-31-march-2022/police-powers-and-procedures-stop-and-search-and-arrests-england-and-wales-year-ending-31-march-2022>

Information collated by the Youth Engagement Forum

Survey respondents were asked to identify which of the listed low-level offences they had heard about. 14 provided a response to this question:

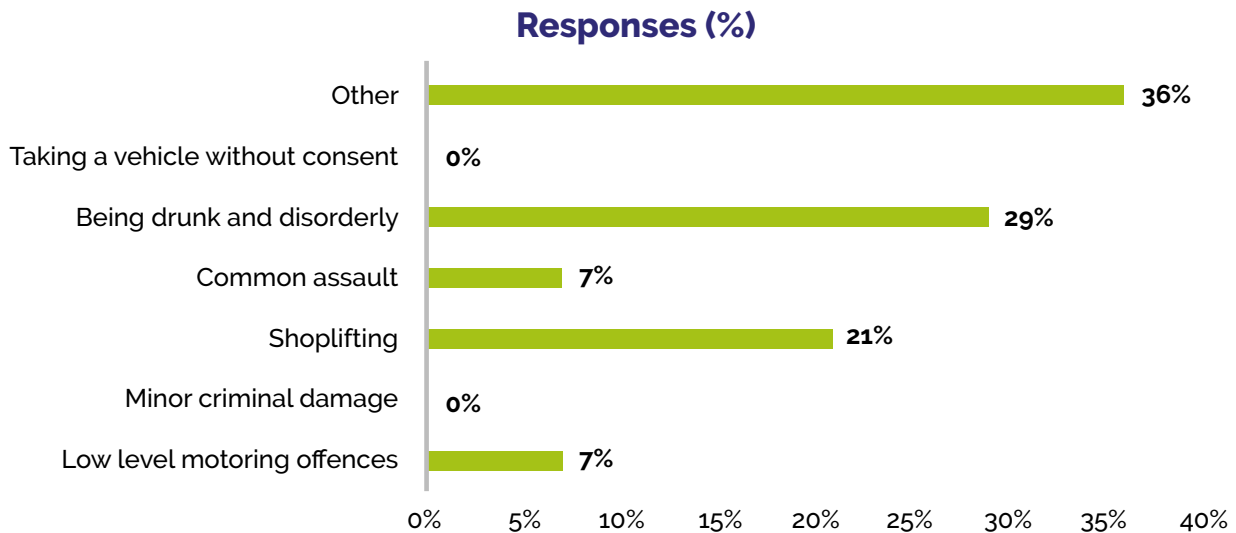


Figure 5: A clustered bar chart showing the survey responders' awareness of low-level offences; Y Sgwrs survey.

All individuals who selected 'other' stated that they had heard of all of the listed low-level offences that had been listed.

The survey asked respondents for their thoughts and/or experience of young people committing low level offences. 14 individuals provided a comment to the survey question that asked respondents to share their thoughts and/or experience:

“ Some not all are from a poorer background, not had the investment by the state ”

“ There's usually a reason behind it and it can be down to issues at home/ lack of money or a need to be heard in some capacity ”

“ Degenerate, lack of proper parenting, on the highway to larger crimes and general disruption ”

“ Young people need access to youth service provision at least 3 times per week. By providing young people with a place where they can have fun, interact with their peers, take part in positive connecting activities in a place that is safe with strong boundaries which they do not always get at home is really important in deprived areas when young people are making the transition from childhood into early adulthood. Encouraging respectful relationships with role models and always having an open and honest atmosphere, youth service provisions educate young people to make healthy decisions for themselves and focus on preventing them taking part in crime, reducing the numbers of youth offending in the area – by giving young people the belief in their self-worth, a place to go where they belong and a sense of pride in themselves as part of their community ”

“ The importance of getting to the root cause - self-fulfilling prophecy, employment or training opportunities, appropriate role models ”

“ That there are multi-faceted issues usually involved in that young person’s life and there needs to be a multi-agency approach to support them ”

“ Not enough youth projects or facilities in rural areas ”

The focus groups also discussed this question, and like the survey responders, many made a correlation between offending and considering the root cause. Additionally, the focus groups (like the survey responders) also considered ways to reduce low level offences. Many believed that poverty was a contributing factor and that a bigger focus on prevention and support was required:

“ They have nothing to do, skate park in our area gone there’s minimal things they have to do in the town, people just trying to entertain themselves ”

“ Antisocial behaviour ”

“ Instead of solely focusing on capturing and arresting, we should focus more prevention and treating the root causes ”

“ Peer pressure ”

“ Underage drinking. Drugs. Stealing. Arson ”

“ If we give people the opportunity to make money legitimately, they won’t have to resort to low level offences like having more access to career training and apprenticeships ”

The survey sought to know if responders know what happens if they commit a low-level offence.

Responses (%)

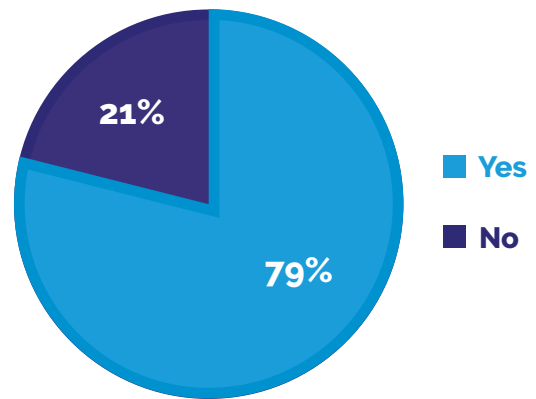


Figure 6: A pie chart showing the survey responders’ awareness of the consequences of committing low-level offences; Y Sgwrs survey.

There were 14 respondents in total, with the majority stating ‘yes’.

The following question was asked in both the survey and the focus groups:

Have you got suggestions and ideas for support/ projects/programmes that can be provided to young people who are committing low level offences, to build their confidence and access training and employment? For example: If you had committed a low-level offence, what do you think should happen next? What might help you?

Survey respondents provided some of their ideas:

“ Young offenders should be given a councillor who has shared similar experiences ”

“ Craft working art café. Covers creativity, which is good for mental health and wellbeing, Good for workshop courses, can cover building skills and CV’s as well as life skills. Communicating, confidence building. Also, opportunity to give back to the community. Cafe - being part of the community. working on relationships with peers and likeminded people ”

“ A non-threatening conversation with a support worker or youth worker to understand why the offence was committed and what steps the young person thinks they can achieve in order to stop them from offending again and things progressing negatively ”

“ One stop shop youth drop in provision for all young people 11-25 with access to youth clubs, wellbeing support, employability support and life skills ”

“ Volunteering opportunities, work experience, apprenticeships with additional support. Bespoke programmes tailored to the behaviour ”

“ More support in prevention work within schools through behaviour programmes such as role models, etc ”

The focus groups delved deeply on this question and provided a plethora of suggestions, with themes of easier access to support and counselling, increasing activities, clubs and sporting initiatives and increasing opportunities to learn life skills and access education:

“ Give opportunities to sign up for clubs to keep them off the streets ”

“ The police should hold open days and teach young people what happens when they commit an offence ”

“ Young people committing offences are often stereotyped and criminalised, when instead should be offered support ”

“ The group felt that they often find that young people who are in trouble with the police are often dealt with differently. Someone in the group gave an example of two children who caused damage at a park. One was spoken to by police with parents and the other needed to go to a youth offending team. The group felt the police should be doing more to make sure they deal with all young people the same way across the country ”

“ Lessons and support programmes for young offenders ”

“ Youth clubs (Area 43). Be provided with mentors, role models and counsellors ”

“ Receive support with mental health problems, family issues, accommodation ”

“ Be given support pathways to access training and apprenticeships ”

“ Get youth charities to work with police. Easier access to counselling ”

“ More activities and clubs for people to participate and socialise in, community projects with strong mentors. Compulsory sport lessons for sixth forms ”

“ Rehabilitation programmes: support to quit smoking/vaping, creative outlets for people to explore rather than vandalism, etc ”

“ Easy to access careers advice; how to work around a criminal record, what opportunities are still available? ”

Eisteddfod attendees who engaged in the 'Y Sgwrs' activity provided the following ideas:

“ School trip to a prison ”

“ Videos to educate them ”

“ Community-led youth clubs to give young people somewhere to socialise safely ”

“ Having a role-model (for example, a teacher that everyone likes) to discuss the young person's choices ”

“ Counselling – young people may be causing offences due to no attention/bad home life ”

“ More police officers on the streets ”

Responders of the survey were asked if schools and colleges provided young people with enough support to access career and training opportunities. Half of responders believed that they did, and the other half believed that they did not. Responders were able to add a comment and all who chose to provide a comment stated that they believed that schools could be doing more, from increasing opportunities to learn life skills, providing more opportunities to go on work experience and working closer with support that is available to young people in the community:

“ Money handling, basic life skills e.g., removing a tyre off a wheel. For children who are unable to follow normal school introducing them to primary jobs experiences e.g., farming ”

“ More work experience ”

“ More accessible links between schools, colleges, and services ”

“ Many of these young people are hard to reach - there is a lot of support within schools and colleges, but what about the young people who have low attendance; are un-motivated; are young carers or have other health and mental health needs? There is a big emphasis on school-based support currently, but not much community-based support and co-working where arguably it is needed more ”

Within the focus groups, some mentioned that they were aware of some support that the schools/colleges could give around career and training opportunities, however they were not well-advertised or accessible throughout the school day/week. Others commented that career advice was available for those who knew what to pursue, but that there was less support for those who were unsure or still considering options:

“ Due to Covid, pupils have missed out on important and necessary support and experience (Example- missed out on in-person work experience days in Parc Scarlets) ”

“ Maybe they weren't much help for me, just wanted me to do a levels and university ”

“ There is need more staff employed specifically for this ”

“ Careers in school don't offer alternatives such as college and apprentice opportunities to year 12 and 13 after GCSEs. Big focus on UCAS. When they do offer colleges, they only mention cardigan college not others outside of Ceredigion. There is a careers advisor, but no input on training opportunities and apprentices, no links made with local companies or national companies. University talks are provided ”

“ Some careers fairs are provided in the lower years in partnership with Aberystwyth University ”



The Youth Ambassadors identified the following recommendations for Dyfed-Powys Police:

■ Recommendation 7

Dyfed-Powys Police should increase a positive relationship with children and young people by, for example, creating engagement events or open days, inviting children and young people to get to know the service. The Force should also consider sharing positive work in engaging with children and young people via social media for a wider reach.

■ Recommendation 8

Dyfed-Powys Police to raise awareness of the likely outcomes of low-level offences in children and young people so that they understand the consequences.

■ Recommendation 9

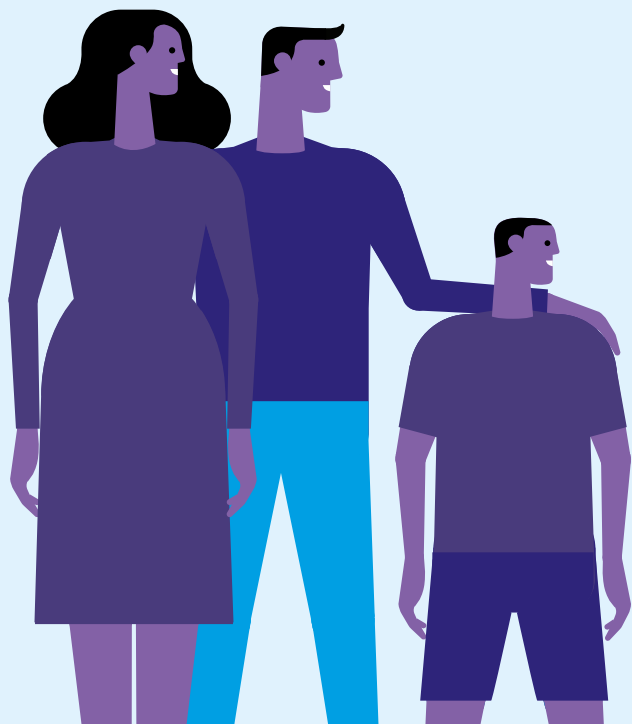
In response to this report and its recommendations, the Police & Crime Commissioner should support youth organisations and charities with funding requests. The Police & Crime Commissioner can offer funding directly in support of the delivery of the Police and Crime Plan priorities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, young people, and those who work with them, that contributed through the survey and focus groups described many factors that showed the local vulnerabilities in mental health, substance misuse and low-level offending.

Many described that early targeting in schools/college and the community could be the key to reducing mental health problems, substance misuse and low-level offending. They wanted better working relationships between the police, support services and schools/colleges. They also highlighted that it would be advantageous to have better access to support services and a youth service provision, to allow them to have a stable space to interact with their peers, take part in positive connecting activities in a place that is safe with strong boundaries.

Some commented on how fractured family relationships and domestic abuse in the family home can become root causes of offending and antisocial behaviour, and that sometimes the perpetrator can be the victim of their circumstances, which may in turn, contribute to the reason they are more likely to offend.



Some described that the availability of services varied across the Dyfed-Powys area and some being harder to access than others, due to living in a rural area and perhaps unable to access transport to reach services further away. Some commented on the lack of opportunities available for young people to get involved in and to feel a sense of purpose.

The Youth Engagement Forum held a meeting with staff from the PCCs Office in May 2023 to discuss their findings and they believed it was important to share the findings from their work. As a result, the Youth Engagement Forum plan to work with the PCC to hold a conference in July to share their findings with the Police and partner agencies.



Comisiynydd Heddlu a Throseddu
Dyfed-Powys
Police and Crime Commissioner