

Championing advice and counselling



Our Call To Action

Young People's Voices and Demands on Improving Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Support in Wales

February 2021

Introduction

There have been increasing concerns about young people's emotional wellbeing and mental health and louder calls to improve how we are being helped and supported. We want to see action taken right now.

No matter who we are or what we are going through, we need to be seen and respected as individuals with human rights. This means there can't be a one-size-fits-all approach to looking after our emotional wellbeing and mental health.

Our Call To Action document explains what changes we demand. Our Call To Action speaks to everyone because everyone has a part to play in making a difference for our emotional wellbeing and mental health.

As professionals and decision-makers, we want you to support and endorse our Call To Action as a way of bringing about positive changes in your practice, decisions and influence that you have on others.

As young people, we want our Call To Action to make our peers feel better informed and more confident in getting involved and having our voices heard.

We want this Call To Action to also speak to the adults, because there is so much you can do to help even if you are not an "expert" and because you care. We know that many of us go to our parents, family, friends and trusted adults (teachers, support workers, carers etc) for information, support and guidance when things are not going so well.

We want to take this opportunity to thank Our Minds Our Future (Wales) partners, ProMo-Cymru and Hafal, for helping us with this. We are also grateful to the other organisations and projects who enabled us to be involved and contribute: CWVYS, Diverse Cymru, EYST, Llamau, Meic, Newport Mind, Platform, Hafal's Early Intervention Psychosis Teams and Cyfle Cymru.



About Us

We are the voices of more than 100 young people aged 12–25 from across Wales with different experiences of emotional wellbeing and mental health.

We are aligned to the Our Minds Our Future (Wales) partnership, with whom we have shared our views, wishes and feelings about what we want good quality emotional wellbeing and mental health support to look and feel like.

We have used different channels to get our voices heard. We spoke to our support staff about some of our difficult experiences when receiving care for our mental health issues and our recovery process. At online and offline workshops that we participated in, we looked at how services should be delivered to make us feel truly supported.

And when we reached out to seek help from the Meic helpline, many of our first-hand stories were collated (funded by the Welsh Government, Meic is the helpline service for children and young people up to the age of 25 in Wales).



Our Minds Our Future (Wales)

Our Minds Our Future (Wales) is the Welsh voice of a UK-wide 4 nations partnership aiming at putting our voices at the centre of mental health service design.

Funded by the National Lottery for 5 years, this project has established a coalition of 10 youth and mental health organisations, to shape and design emotional wellbeing and mental health support services and systems that better meet our needs.

We want to actively work with professionals, influencers, and decision-makers to develop a meaningful rights-based approach for our emotional wellbeing and mental health support.

We started off by reviewing existing research on emotional wellbeing and mental health support in Wales. We support many of the key recommendations in the following documents:

- Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure (2011)
- Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014: all ages - Part 2: Section 15 - signposting people to preventative wellbeing services, and Section 17 - co-productive approach and provision of information, advice and assistance (IAA) to promote early intervention and prevention (2014)
- 'Making Sense' Report In (2016)
- Mind Over Matter (2018)
- Everybody's Business (2018)
- Hafal Young People & Mental Health (2019)
- No Wrong Door (2020)
- Let's Talk about Mental Health: Wales Youth Parliament report (2020)
- Together for Mental Health Delivery Plan 2019-2022: Review of response to Covid-19 (2019)
- Hafal winter edition Mental Health Wales – Young People Talk Mental Health (2020)
- Wales Civil Society Report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child to inform their List of Issues Prior to Reporting (LOIPR) – including theme on mental health (2020)
- The work of the Interim Youth Work Board: interim report (2021)

A snapshot of our challenges

Because we all live different lives, we respond differently to challenges and difficulties that are thrown at us. Some of us will be more affected by events than others. How we are able to deal with things often depends on what else is going on in our lives or how well supported we feel.

To better illustrate the struggles that we face, we have shared a snapshot of our thoughts, feelings and experiences below:

“I don't know what's wrong with me but I just feel like, excuse my language, but sh*t.”

“It's gotten to the point where when I get so anxious or stressed I unconsciously dug my nails into my skin.”

“I'm being a burden to everyone. My depression is bad and I feel like crying. I don't deserve help for it because there are so many other people who need help right now and im being a waste of space. I just feel alone and useless to everyone.”

“I have been pulling my hair when I'm stressed and anxious for about 8 years but didn't pull as often the past few years. Unfortunately it has gone so much worse the past few months and I have bald patches on my scalp and I even pull my eyelashes and eyebrows but normally it's from my scalp. I know this sounds disgusting but I also put the hair into my mouth, I don't normally eat it but I'm so scared it someone will see me putting hair in my mouth as I don't even notice that I do this sometimes. I'm so embarrassed as I'm 18 and I still pull my hair, I've tried so hard to stop but I really can't. It really affects my confidence. I've also gained to much weight recently as I don't stop eating just food.”

“I have my parents but they only shout at me and tell me I'm pathetic and a waste of space if I mention stuff like this.”

“For many months I’ve been unhappy about my weight to the point where I’ve been restricting my food intake and exercising. I have lost weight. I’m considered healthy but I hate my body.”

“When I’m in situation where I’m anxious or stressed, I pinch myself and it’s now gone to the stage where my arms and thighs looks so bad but it’s my way of coping. I’ve also have self harm scars from years ago but only a few close people knows about this. I constantly wear long sleeves and jeans and cannot wear things that I would like to because I would never want anyone to see them I’ve hid them for so long but I just feel like everything is getting too much now.”

“Mentally I’ve been struggling with how my body image for years. I haven’t told anyone properly about the way I feel because they get worried and start shouting at me. It just makes me feel worse.”

“I’m under psychiatric care ...I’ve been told nothing. All they’ve said is I need to see the neurologist about going on anti-convulsive medication for seizures because he can’t give me medication for sleep, ADHD and low mood because they trigger epileptic events. Im awaiting an epilepsy diagnosis too so I’ve had to lose my license. I’ve been waiting to see a neurologist for 8 weeks and the guidelines were 2 weeks....Im just waiting in a limbo.”

“I suffer with OCD and have done all my life. I’m 21 now and struggle to lead a ‘normal life’ with it. I see a private therapist who is fab and helps me a lot and I am learning the skills I need to live happily with OCD, that being said, I still struggle a lot and over the last few months I have noticed that my mood is very low all the time. I don’t have many friends, and am normally alone most of the day as both my parents work. I feel that my mood is low because I don’t have a routine and I don’t really have a purpose atm, so I have been looking for a course or a class I could attend that is purely for enjoyment and not an educational one. I’m really struggling to find one though.”

“My mum ran away on me, like no one else mum does that. My mum n dad split up n I’m sad n stuf. Havin a really bad night. My mum just left on Thursday like she just went I duno wer n shes na answerin my calls r txts n I really need her. See like yesterday I got my period started like first time n its actuly so sore today n really tonight n I duno I really want my mum n I duno y is she not talking to me I thought like she wudnt do this to me n I really want her here n I duno y shes ignorin me.”

“I’m on my first year of university and live in university accommodation. I just feel so lonely. I have friends from my course but they all commute from home therefore apart from lectures I don’t go out with them. I spend my weekends on my own in my room doing nothing and it really is getting me down as I don’t have friends in halls and wasn’t not at all as I expected uni life to be. I really hate it here. No one from my flat does anything with each other and they all prefer to stay in even on weekends. The mess in the kitchen is awful too and even if I wanted to bring someone over for pre drinks I couldn’t because there’s dirty dishes everywhere. This is annoying me so much and I’ve told them many times but no one listens we’ve had warnings about the mess but no one seems to care. It’s too late to join clubs and societies now so I’m constantly bored and just thinking of dropping out of university and all of this has had a massive effect on my mental health.”



The need for a rights-based approach

We want our Call To Action to be centred around a rights-based approach.

A rights-based approach promotes creating more awareness of our rights and putting in place more support in helping us claim our rights. It also calls on those in positions of power to do what they can to ensure our rights are met.

We have grown up being taught about 54 articles in The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) from a very early age, and have learnt that as children up to the age of 18, we have rights.

‘Everyone has value, and should be treated right’

‘People should be able to express themselves’

‘Rights are important for everyone’

‘There needs to be more education and awareness on what rights we have as young people, from an early age’

‘People should listen to what we want and need more’

The UNCRC articles most relevant to Our Minds, Our Future (Wales) are:

- ***Article 12 (respect for the views of the child)***
Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously.



- **Article 13 (freedom of expression)**
Every child must be free to express their thoughts and opinions and to access all kinds of information, as long as it is within the law.
- **Article 14 (freedom of thought, belief and religion)**
Every child has the right to think and believe what they choose and also to practise their religion, as long as they are not stopping other people from enjoying their rights.
- **Article 23 (children with a disability)**
A child with a disability has the right to live a full and decent life with dignity.
- **Article 24 (health and health services)**
Every child has the right to the best possible health.
- **Article 28: right to education**
All children and young people have the right to education no matter who they are.
- **Article 42 (knowledge of rights)**
Governments must actively work to make sure children and adults know about the Convention.

But just knowing about our rights is not enough.

We also want to feel empowered and be actively involved in decisions that affect our lives, instead of passively waiting for help and support. We want to work with decision-makers to make this happen.

We are proud that in Wales, we have gone even further than many other countries by having a Welsh law making it a duty for Government to “pay due regard” to the UNCRC when making decisions.

We now want to see emotional wellbeing and mental health support services in Wales adopt a rights-based approach because we want services to prioritise our rights when they are helping us.

We believe our rights and our voices must be included in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of such services for us.

Our Children's Commissioner has developed a framework to help decision-making bodies put this into practice. The principles of this framework and approach are: Embedding, Equality and Non-discrimination, Empowering, Participation, and Accountability. There is also a Children's Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) to help put this into practice and hold decision-makers accountable.

- **Embedding** - Children's rights should be at the core of planning and service delivery.
- **Equality and non-discrimination** - Equality is about ensuring that every child has an equal opportunity to make the most of their lives and that no child has to endure poor life chances because of discrimination.
- **Empowering** - Empowerment means enhancing children's capabilities as individuals so they are better able to take advantage of rights.
- **Participation** - Participation means listening to children and taking their views meaningfully into account.
- **Accountability** - Authorities should be accountable to children for decisions and actions which affect their lives



Our demands – Act Now!

There is an urgent need to act now to improve emotional wellbeing and mental health support for young people in Wales. We are demanding immediate change.

1. We want a centralised way for 16–25 year-olds to find and access support

We would like a centralised approach to support as many of our needs as possible, and to help us access appropriate referral pathways.

When we turn 18 and transition from children to adult services, many of us slip through the net and can get lost. There should be more support for us during transitions between all services.

We would like to easily find and access a full range of information and services to enable us to help ourselves and each other. This needs to be provided in the face-to-face and online settings we currently use and feel comfortable with.



2. We want to see services working well together to help us using a holistic approach

We would like to see professionals and decision-makers working with each other for our benefit, and not competing against each other or working in isolation. Instead of being passed from pillar to post, we would like the flexibility to be able to enter, exit and move between different services quickly and easily, and have simplified referral pathways, threshold criteria, assessments, care and treatment plans. Crucially, we would like to see an easy process created to fit our needs and preferences rather than us having to adapt to what services can offer.

We would like services to see us as a whole person and consider our needs holistically. Mental health is built on much broader foundations and linked to all aspects of life. Sometimes the biggest step to recovery may be finding a place to live, getting a job, establishing a good relationship with their family etc.

“Accessing a face-to-face service can be difficult for some young people, options should be available, and promoted widely for telephone and online services as some young people may not be able to access physical services due to the opening times.”

“CAMHS services should not stop at 18, as when transitioning to adult services people slip through the net and can get lost. There should be more support during transitions between all services.”

“When transitioning to adult services, the support received was not as good as CAMHS, I was left to manage myself, and found it really difficult as there was no consistency of support I had.”



3. We want to access face-to-face and online settings that are safe, welcoming, and respectful

When we are seeking support and guidance for our emotional wellbeing and mental health, whether we do so face-to-face or online, we want to feel safe, welcomed and respected.

We access many services in person. However, we are brought up in a digital age and many of us, at times, prefer to access support online. Show us that you understand our online world and you are not afraid to engage with us in that space.

When working with us, we would like you to be:

- **Reliable and consistent**
- **Kind and authentic**
- **Open and trustworthy**
- **Responsive and communicative**
- **Curious and interested**

It can upset us when you:

- **Are too prying**
- **Are dismissive or fail to acknowledge our feelings**
- **Are judgmental or hurtful**
- **Pretend or make promises to give us false hope**



“The support I had wasn’t good. Nothing was explained, I did not know who was who as I had lots of different people I saw.”

“Lower-level support options should be in place, to prevent the need for young people having to refer back in to CAMHS.”

“When I was discharged from CAMHS, there was no support, and no one that checked I was doing okay.”

“More support and information are needed before the discharge process, to explain exactly how discharge works, and what it means for you.”

4. We want influencers and decision-makers to listen to us, hear our voice and be accountable to us

We can't always express ourselves in the same way that an adult can and some of us have additional challenges and barriers for different reasons, but it's still important that you hear what we have to say.

When we find it difficult to do this ourselves, we would like someone on our side to be our voice, so you can hear about our experiences (whether they are positive or negative), and understand what might make it better for us.

We would like you to listen to us and support us to get involved in decision-making about:

- our care, support, treatment and recovery
- the design, commissioning, delivery and accountability of the services that we use
- the allocation of funding and budgets
- the recruitment and development of staff and others with an interest in / concern for children and young people

“She (counsellor) told me that I wasn't trying enough to get better. It made me feel like I wasn't good enough.”

“I don't really want to talk to my parents about it because I have talked to them about things like this before but they just didn't really understand. I don't really have way of getting in contact with people like my GP. I have tried to hint slight things to one of my friends but they just don't really take it seriously because they don't really know how to respond.”

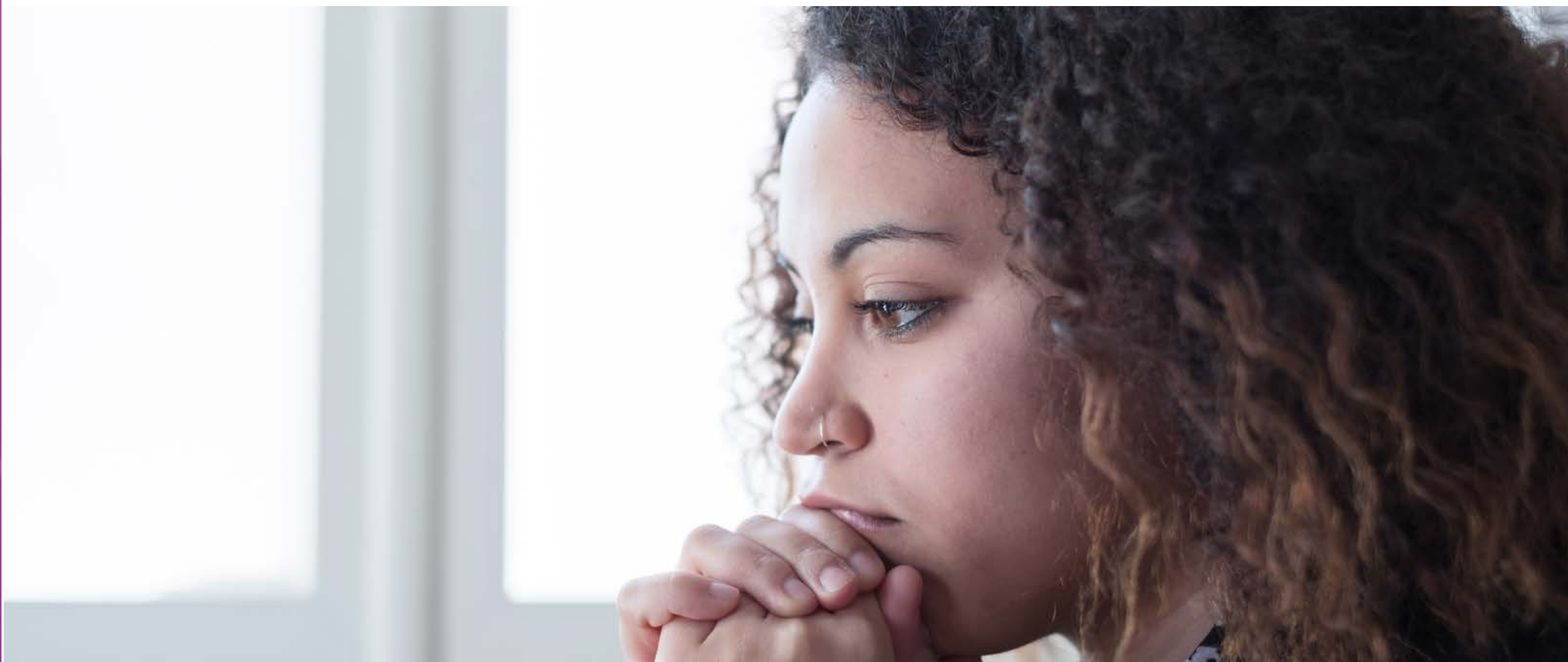


5. We want to see a minister with a portfolio for children and young people up to the age of 25

Finally, to ensure our demands are being taken seriously, we need a high-level champion committed to bringing about long-term changes across all policy and government departments so young people of the future experience better journeys than many of us do now.

We need a champion with the power to improve our day-to-day lives through legislation, policy, finance, and good service design. We would like to see proper investment to enable our active participation in decision-making and awareness-raising.

We need a champion to make a real difference to us by giving us good quality information, knowledge, skills, advice, treatment, advocacy in the right way, at the right place, and at the right time.



Our next steps

We are looking forward to the implementation of recommendations from previous research (Mind Over Matter and Everybody's Business) and also the review of youth work in Wales.

More importantly, we are determined to share our voices loud and clear and publicise our demands far and wide. We would especially like to enter meaningful dialogues with key influencers and decision-makers, to make our Call To Action a reality.

We all have a part to play in making positive change.

If you are a:

- ***Young person*** – Know that you have the right to good holistic mental health and wellbeing support. Share our Call To Action with your peers, and find out how you can get involved in our campaign.
- ***Parent, family member or carer*** – Actively seek information on what is good mental health and how you can help children and young people develop this. Get to know what services are available to help and support your child. Share our Call To Action with other parents and carers in your circle to create awareness of this important piece of work.
- ***Professional*** – Work with the young person as a whole instead of fixing the hole in the young person. Work together with colleagues to equip children and young people with the means to develop and maintain good mental health and emotional wellbeing. Help them to ease their transitions. Share our Call To Action with your colleagues and professional networks and start implementing our demands.
- ***Key influencer or decision-maker*** – Put our Call To Action in action today! Be our champion. Listen to and work with young people and ensure their active involvement and participation in decisions that affect them. Work with us to co-produce solutions and quality services that are available, acceptable, and accessible.

Appendix – List of useful resources

Here is a list of some key resources and helplines to support children and young people.

Meic

Meic is the information, advice and advocacy helpline for children and young people up to the age of 25 in Wales.

<https://www.meiccymru.org/>

080880 23456

Text: 84001

Childline

Childline is private and confidential service to help anyone under 19 in the UK with any issue they're going through.

<https://www.childline.org.uk/>

0800111

Young Minds

Young Minds is a charity for children and young people's mental health.

<https://youngminds.org.uk/>

Text: SHOUT: 85258

Papyrus

Papyrus is the UK Charity for the prevention of young suicide (under 35).

<https://www.papyrus-uk.org/>

Hopeline: 0800 068 4141

C.A.L.L.

CALL offers emotional support and information/literature on mental health and related matters to the people of Wales.

<https://www.callhelpline.org.uk/>

0800 132737

81066