

Senedd Cymru  
Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg

Welsh Parliament  
Children, Young People and Education Committee

Ymchwiliad i effaith argyfwng Covid-19  
ar blant a phobl ifanc yng Nghymru

Inquiry into the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak on  
children and young people in Wales

COV - 01  
Ymateb gan: Amberleigh Care

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Response from: Amberleigh Care

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We were given your details as members of the Welsh Independent Schools Council and we understand that you wanted some feedback on the impact of the virus and its management on our service and pupils.

We are a specialist residential care and education provider working with looked after young people from England and Wales in two services (20 miles either side of the border) and we work specifically with boys, 11-18 who have displayed harmful sexual behaviour. This is always underpinned by a wide range of early life trauma and other needs..... so we work with young people who have had disrupted education as well as those with identified learning difficulties and/or on the autistic spectrum

Notably our services work as formal Therapeutic Communities (TCs) which are highly structured and deliberate group living and learning environments. There is a clear evidence base and theoretical underpinning for this model of delivery in supporting vulnerable individuals through the purposeful use of relationships. Our Welsh service is the only fully accredited (by the Royal College of Psychiatrists) TC in Wales and one of only a handful in the UK.

Our sites comprise a large 12 placement childrens home, a separately registered independent school (that only educates our boys) and on site clinical team - so it's a campus type set up.

We kept our schools fully open throughout this situation, closing for the Easter 2 weeks holiday as normal - this has maintained a positive structure and routine for the boys and all the adults - whether they be carers or teachers.

We made swift and early changes to practical issues - reducing and then quickly stopping visitors, reducing footfall internally with any use of working from home (limited), extra hygiene, overnight deep cleans, temperature testing for all staff each morning..... we also spent a lot of energy researching the guidance (patchy as it was at the start) and developing our own internal communications to staff - we were able to have everything in place and a well organised approach within the first few days - certainly ahead of more specific guidance from central government or our host (or placing) local authorities

Part of the working approaches of TCs are a very open and structured approach to communication, real empowerment of the children, transparency, flattened hierarchy and decision making....all of this was employed in discussions with staff and boys about what was happening, why, any questions, concerns etc....

The other linked priority for TCs is that all behaviour is communication, and that defensive or acting out behaviours are usually rooted in anxiety.... so a very clear structure and a positive focus on boundaries, routines, clarity all provide containment of anxiety and therefore keeping people feeling OK

This has meant that our boys and staff have been doing great - we have had no infection on site whatsoever and we have had less than 10% of staff needing to self isolate - these were virtually all about suspected symptoms in their homes and this happened in the early 2-3 weeks with nothing since.

We put time into getting our PPE in place ourselves (as there was nothing really from central and local governments for the first 2-3 weeks) ordering bots and pieces from a range of suppliers in the UK and overseas.... Our need is clearly not as great as other contexts.

Overall - the shape and structure of our service (physically) and the theoretical focus on containing anxiety and managing all the work through really deliberate use of relationships, has proved that Therapeutic Communities have been ideal environments for children (and staff) to be well managed and sustained in a unprecedented situation like that which we experience currently.

Once we had got our heads around what the restrictions actually meant in practice and had all of this understood by staff and boys so that this became the new normal (1st week) we have really had a very uneventful and straightforward time of it. Staff and boys have responded remarkably (as they almost always do)

Its worth noting that a campus setting with outside space mixed with some fortunate weather has also been a practical help in keeping a dozen lively teenagers supported

I hope this is helpful.... it's a good news story 😊