

# **Scrutiny of Covid-19 and its impact on children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds**

## Summary Note 1

June 2020

The Children, Young People and Education Committee is exploring how the outbreak of Covid-19 is affecting all aspects of life for children and young people in Wales. The Committee is keen to hear from everyone involved in supporting children and young people across sectors, including – but not limited to - education, health, social care, and youth work. In April 2020, the Committee launched an open consultation to seek views on, and experiences of, the impact of the pandemic. A child friendly version of this call for views is also available.

With this in mind, it was of importance to the Children, Young People and Education Committee to ensure the voices of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are at the forefront of scrutiny. To support this, the citizen engagement team have focused on how to engage

specific audiences who could be considered as from disadvantaged backgrounds. This summary note includes the key findings to date.

The engagement approach includes working closely with partner organisations who communicate with young people regularly. By offering guidance and encouragement to these organisations, they have enabled the citizen engagement team to collate valuable experiences directly from young people and to bring these to the Committee's attention.

In addition, by adjusting the questioning used for the main Call for Views, a paper worksheet has been created for young people who may require a non-digital route to engage with the consultation. This has been distributed with the support of partner organisations and findings will be included in subsequent summary notes.

This will be the first of several summary notes that will be presented periodically throughout the consultation. Each summary note will be divided into 2 parts:

- Part 1 - Themes arising of relevance to the Committee's selected meeting topic in the coming week
- Part 2 – General themes emerging from children and young peoples' views outside of the next meeting topic

The themes and quotes have been selected on the basis that they are occurring themes and poignant to the current situation. Where it's possible and appropriate general information has been linked to the quotes to add context within this summary note.



## Part 1 - Themes on Physical and Mental Health

**Restricted outdoor spaces and overcrowded housing** – Many young people have reported a limited amount of outdoor space available to them and therefore they lack the opportunities to do exercise and maintain a good physical health during this time. They also reported concerns about not being able to play with their friends, although they appeared to understand why.

"I always get up early. I like going for big walks with my mum and my sister. Or if I'm at my Dad's I'll go on my bike. I always want to be outside. We can't stay outside for too long now though. My garden isn't big so there's not much space there." - Young person

"The last time I went outside was when I came back from school 5 weeks ago. I don't have a garden so we go and clap on the doorstep every Thursday for the doctors." - Child asylum seeker

"My sister and her baby moved in with us and now the house is overcrowded." - Young person

"I miss seeing my friends and being able to play team sports the most." - Young person

"I miss my friends, teachers and being able to go outside to play." - Young person

**Access to food** – We received a comments about free school meals and shopping during the lockdown and school closures.

"The free school meals help but they don't go far enough. My mum gets the voucher but it doesn't last the week. It's really hard to access food right now and we can't go to a large shop because they are too far away and we can't all go inside." - Child asylum seeker

"Going to the shops is difficult, being pregnant and now that I have split up with my partner. I could not get a taxi until recently due to the lockdown. I struggle with not being able to see much of people." - 22 year old woman, living in independent accommodation

"Some young people are also not able to access their banking information due to branches being closed and them not having access online. This is causing stress and worry as they are unsure if payments have gone in, bills have been paid and if they have enough money to go shopping." - Professional working with young people

**Concerns about mental health** – A range of comments were made from young people suggesting theirs or other young people's mental health could be affected by the lockdown and school closures.

"I suffer with my mental health and this has really affected it. I feel as if I've lost my freedom. I've felt low and know my mental health has gone downhill. I'm not sure why I feel like this, I think I'm being excluded from things and often feel alone. I have apps on my phone that I was told about by CAMHS. I use these a lot to help." - Young person

"People need to keep in touch, they need internet access, laptops, top-ups for their phone, so they can contact friend's family or others. Otherwise it would be bad for my mental health." - Young person

"We need people to engage with teachers, youth workers and to be able to use digital platforms, we need screens for face interaction. Lack of access could add to or bring back demons, sitting in the same walls can be so detrimental to your mental health." - Young person

"I'm staying in my bedroom all day, I don't have a routine to keep me afloat. I feel like I've lost myself. I don't sleep or eat; I have no friends to talk to. In education I was able to see some friends but it's not the same." - 16 year old in foster care

**Possible discrimination towards these groups** – One young person felt that as a care experienced young person they were discriminated against in view of the restrictions and this was having an impact on their mental and physical health.

"If you have mental health problems, the fresh air means you feel better and so you need more of it. We are less likely to have a garden and so need to leave the house more than others. Why can't there be more understanding that we need to be away from home for longer? Care experienced young people are often more known by local police and some are targeted, not understanding we may be out for mental health reasons and not just physical health." - Care experienced young person

"Why is it so hard for vulnerable and social care children to get access to mental health help?" - Care experienced young person

## Part 2 - Additional Key Findings

### **Lack of digital provision or confidence online (particularly with regards to education)**

- the following comments highlight some of the thoughts and experiences of young people and professionals or parents around this theme.

"I do my work sometimes. I don't like doing it at home. We've only got one iPad at my mums and I have to wait for my sister." - Young person

"What is needed are mobile phones and internet. If I could not speak to people with Zoom, I would feel lonely and isolated and that I could not take part in anything. I need to see people's faces, it is more personal" - Young person

"I have Zoom meetings with teachers. I don't really like this as I prefer to talk on the phone. I don't really enjoy talking like that as I feel embarrassed but I know it's a good way. I like the face to face when I'm actually with people. I have missed a few lessons as I felt stressed." - Young person

"The school offered us a chrome book but I didn't want to explain to them that we don't have broadband. We receive such a small amount of money a week as asylum seekers that we have to make a choice between either a meal or broadband. I'm very grateful for what we do receive but it's very difficult." – Parent asylum seeker

"A family had no tech at home so, despite living on benefits too they took out a £500 loan for an iPad so the 10 year old could do the same work as classmates." - Professional working with young people

**Long term effects of the lockdown** – Many young people were concerned about the future and what this would look like. They also had concerns around potential attachment issues that may occur from not seeing friends, family, or having to communicate with them in an entirely new way.

"I am concerned about how lockdown is really affecting young children. They are being told not to socially/physically interact, that can't be good." - Young person

"I miss seeing people especially when they can help me by taking me to things and places [for education and employment opportunities]. I was supposed to be having 1 to 1 help looking for jobs but a text doesn't really help. I could have gone on a retail course but that's stopped now." - Young person

"I was supposed to complete year 11 this summer and sit by GCSE's. I'm very anxious now as this doesn't look possible. There has been lots of different things said about this but I still don't really understand the process and because of illness I took a lot of time off last year, my predicted grades are low and there's nothing I can do about it. The school said we might be able to sit our GCSE's next year while we do our A Levels but I think that would be too stressful." - Young person