

Experts by Experience: Report to the Expert Review Panel VAWDASV and Young People

February 2023

Freya Reynolds-Feeney (Experts by Experience Officer) and Katie Dalton (Director)

1. Background

The Welsh Government has committed to reforming homelessness legislation in Wales and has established the Expert Review Panel to provide advice and proposals to the Minister for Climate Change. Through a series of online and in-person events and surveys, Cymorth Cymru's Experts by Experience project will provide opportunities for people with experience of homelessness to share their experiences and views on what needs to change.

This paper has been prepared in advance of the panel meeting focused on young people and on survivors of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence. It should be noted that people's contributions often touched on issues that may not be addressed by legislation, but we felt it was important to provide an authentic representation of people's views and experiences.

Thank you to everyone who participated in the survey or spoke to us about their views and experiences, making valuable contributions to this paper and the Expert Review Panel's work.

2. Format of engagement

During this engagement period we conducted one-to-one interviews with experts by experience, as well as running two surveys – one for each client group. The interviews and online surveys focused on people's experiences of approaching the council for help, temporary accommodation, accessing social and private rented housing, and the role of other public services in preventing and responding to homelessness. The surveys were open between 20th and 27th February. The online interviews were held on the 23rd and 27th February 2023.

3. Participants

Opportunities to engage with this work were promoted through Cymorth Cymru's member organisations, mailing list and social media accounts.

We engaged with 31 people through two surveys and informal online interviews. One survey focussed on survivors of abuse, whilst the second focussed on young people.

In addition, we have included some quotes from people with lived experience that featured in End Youth Homelessness Cymru's report '[Don't Let Me Fall Through the Cracks](#)' (Sep 2020).

Survivors of Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence

The following views and experiences were shared by survivors of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

4. Approaching the council for help with homelessness or housing

4.1. Awareness of, and access to, advice and support

One of the themes that arose from several people's experiences was a lack of knowledge about where or how people could access help. Some survivors said that they had never been at risk of homelessness before and were unfamiliar with systems or processes, and had no idea where to seek help or what solutions might be available to them.

"I don't know what my rights are. We need more information about our rights."

"I remember when he threatened to kick me out of the house. I didn't know who to contact."

"I didn't know who to ask for help. There wasn't a clear pathway to get help."

"I had to sort it out myself."

"Services were involved, but no one told me about refuge or women's aid. I found the number on the back of a toilet door. I didn't know that refuge was an option or even a thing."

One survivor talked about receiving an eviction notice but did not understand what it was or the potential consequences. This added to the trauma she had experienced as an abuse survivor and she called for information to be more accessible and trauma-informed. She also commented on the shame she felt and the judgement or lack of compassion that some people experience when they are accessing help.

"I was then served a Section(?) notice, but didn't understand what it was. You feel like you're on the edge. When you're in an abusive relationship you feel like you can be thrown out at any time – I needed stability. It wasn't explained to me what this section was, which made me quite panicked. It definitely added to the pressure and panic. There's a lack of trauma informed information and a way of dealing with people. It made me feel so much empathy to people who experience homelessness, the general shaming that comes with it, even subconsciously. There's so much guilt and shame, the use of language which isn't thought through, which isn't needs led. People are treated like a lower class, like a burden. There are ways of speaking, processes that could be improved to make people feel like they're not a burden."

4.2. Timely and effective responses to prevent further abuse

One of the frustrations expressed by several of the survivors we spoke to was that the council had not been able to act more quickly or effectively when they first needed help. They described how the abuse at home had then escalated and resulted in people experiencing homelessness, when both could have been prevented if the local authority had been more responsive when they first asked for help.

"There needs to be more on the preventative side. Once someone recognises they're experiencing abuse, there needs to be a method to reach out and a safe space they can go to, before the abuse escalates."

“I went to homelessness but I was not a priority at all. You tell people what’s going on, they take notes, but offer no help.”

“It was poor as because I had my own property, I wasn’t classed as at risk or homeless, yet I had police markers against my house.”

“Once you’ve decided to leave, your behaviour changes, they’re tracking your computer usage, so the perpetrator picks up on this and the abuse escalates. I wish I could have picked up the phone said I don’t feel safe, and would have been provided with a home so I could have left my partner.”

“Having a person within the council housing department, who I could say I need to leave, do you have a space I the next few days where I can safely pack up myself when partner is at work, and I can get out safe.”

“I left without money, stayed with friends for two nights, but quickly realised that this wasn’t going to work. There was some victim blaming and I felt like I was being a burden, because people don’t want you to be there.”

4.3. Communication between local authorities

Some survivors told us that they needed to move out of their home local authority in order to escape the abuser and feel safe. However, sometimes the communication between the two local authorities was not as effective as it could be, resulting in housing and support taking longer than necessary.

“Drawn out and difficult as there were 2 council departments doing the same thing that bounced me between the other.”

“Services in [X] council weren’t great, might have sent a letter to [Y] council but it didn’t help very much.

4.4. Intentionality

One survivor described how they had been found intentionally homeless by their local council after leaving their home and not being able to take up refuge.

“The council wouldn’t help me. The school wouldn’t help me. No-one would help me because I had made myself homeless and had refused refuge space. So, I ended up on people’s floors, in my car.”

“I was judged to have been intentionally homeless because I had left my home (due to the abuse) and refused refuge (due to my son’s health issues). How can you say I’m intentionally homeless, when I got two buses to get here and I’ve waited for two hours? There was no empathy. I was so frustrated.”

4.5. Accessibility

One interviewee discussed barriers she had faced as a deaf person and the need for better accessibility when trying to access help for domestic abuse and housing. She had very little confidence in her ability to get in touch with the council, referring specifically to the pandemic leading to fewer in-person services and more reliance on telephone or internet services. She also had very little confidence in the council’s understanding of her needs as a deaf person, and their ability to help. One of the consequences of this was her needing to disclose very private information about her situation to her mother, who was having to make phone calls to the council and other services on her behalf.

"I didn't know where to go and because I'm deaf it's really difficult to get through to services. I knew they wouldn't help me.

"Deaf people have problems with the council understanding our needs.

"The biggest problem in all of this is that deaf people can't contact any of the services unless they physically go into the office and meet people face to face. There are no other ways of communication for deaf people. Services are not available for deaf people because it is too difficult for them to contact them. You get a line that's supposed to be for the deaf but 9 times out of 10 there's no one on the end of the line.

"Any services that they've had in the past for things like an interpreter, the funding for that seems to last for a few months and then disappear. I have to get my mum to ring – so she needs to know everything, which means there's no privacy for me.

"Since pandemic, it has got worse to access services. Everything is staying on the phone / internet. It was hard before, it's twice as hard now. How can I telephone?! I'm deaf!

"BSL needs to be given more priority – more staff need to learn it. There should be access to services via video calls, more in-person contact at council offices, and people in the council who understand issues affecting deaf people."

The same survivor also made a broader point about language and jargon, commenting that people's rights need to be explained in a way that is accessible and understandable for people who are not experts in housing law and rights. They made the point that jargon or complex language can make it more inaccessible for deaf people.

"Words that aren't used that often, are sometimes inaccessible for deaf people who don't understand the meaning. We need less jargon, more plain English."

"When you get a letter about pathway to housing – it's very long and complicated. Need to have a clear pathway that is clearer to people."

4.6. Importance of specialist VAWDASV support

One person told us that they did not go into refuge but instead received support from a more generic housing support service. While they appreciated the support worker's efforts, the survivor felt that the support worker did not have the specialist expertise and experience to support them through the trauma of leaving an abusive relationship and becoming homeless.

"Support worker was lovely, but didn't have specialist knowledge of domestic abuse, and didn't understand what it was like to be a survivor."

"I had a generic support worker. They looked traumatised themselves from what I told them. Having someone who had the skills to be able to hold that information and put practical solutions on the table is really important."

4.7. Financial assistance

A number of survivors talked to us about the importance of financial support from the council when they left their home and had to move into temporary or settled housing. This is particularly important for survivors, especially where there has been financial control and abuse, as the lack of funds could result in the person remaining in the abusive relationship. They may also have been isolated from friends and family during the period of abuse and feel that they have no-one to turn to for financial help.

“There’s no financial help available – after leaving there’s a huge period of 6-8 weeks where you’re trying to apply for jobs, you apply for UC, but you have to wait weeks for it to come through and they only give £150 up front.”

“I left with debt, I didn’t have money. If you haven’t planned the exit then you don’t have the money. For that 6-8 weeks you have nothing.”

“The council was able to provide me with a deposit, which I couldn’t afford myself. They provided a grant to put basic furniture in the house such as a couple of beds, white goods, pots and pans. It was great but could have been more – I still had to put stuff on the credit card.”

“There is nothing in place for women leaving the relationship, no consideration for how a woman is supposed to make ends meet, no extra financial support. I am constantly at risk of being homeless due to post-separation financial abuse. I think women who have suffered should have automatic kids uniform grants, extra discounts on council tax, free school meals, grants to start up when leaving, and a property to stay in, I couldn’t get emergency housing because I had my own home albeit we were in danger! Absolutely no help!”

4.8. Joint tenancies

One person described how having a joint tenancy with the perpetrator made it extremely difficult for her to stay safe and start to gain her independence. At the time, the local authority did not act to remove him from the tenancy and he continued to exert control and cause distress, sending threats and enabling his family and friends to access the house and change the locks.

“Before perpetrator went to prison, he decided to add me to the tenancy, which he had refused to do before. But he would have lost tenancy if his sentence was over 1 year, so he added me to the tenancy in order to keep the house. He was given 6 years in prison and I viewed this as my time to save money and move away from him due to the abuse sustained over many years.

“However, he got out on leave to re-integrate and he was accessing my house and getting people to check up on me. I didn’t feel safe. He tried to kill me because I was going to leave him.”

“His family had entered the house while I was away and changed the locks. So, I had to change locks again.

“I went back to council and said they need to take him off tenancy or do something to make me and my children safe. Council said he was on the tenancy first, so they couldn’t help me. I continued to live in fear. I had bullets through the door.

“The council refused to take him off tenancy. I showed them evidence of the abuse, including a report from the school about the abuse. But they refused unless he gave them written consent.”

4.9. Property ownership

A number of the people we engaged with had experience of owning a home with the perpetrator and found it extremely difficult to qualify for help and understand their rights. Some spoke about feeling trapped in the property because they were unable to access temporary accommodation or felt that the financial consequences of selling the property would put them at greater risk of homelessness.

“There wasn’t a clear pathway to get help. Because I had mortgage, I had no idea what to do.”

“He had 35% of the house – I can’t afford to move out or sell, but I can’t afford to buy him out. But I also couldn’t apply for temporary housing because I had a mortgage. We’re not happy in this home – it’s a reminder of the abuse.”

“I owned my own home and holiday letting business with my abuser. He moved into one of the holiday cottages which was right next to the main house where I continued to live. After nearly a year I obtained an Order to Sell but he did everything possible to obstruct the sell and continue to harass me, using gas lighting, stalking, controlling behaviour etc. It took 3 years to sell. What would have helped is if the police had helped me to remove him from the property so that it could be sold and the money divided. But I kept being told there was nothing they could do. My only option it seemed was to wait until completion, put what I could in storage and stay with a variety of friends for three months until I could find a new home. On the day I left he tried to stop me and so I had a removal van and 2 drivers, two IDVA and two police officers to escort me. I was terrified.”

4.10. Housing for perpetrators

One person described how the perpetrator becoming homeless had resulted in her letting him back into the family home. She questioned whether the council could and should have done more to provide accommodation for the perpetrator, and how that might have avoided him returning to the family home and continuing to abuse her.

“I had my mum on the phone crying because he [the perpetrator] was living in a tent. I felt pressured to take him back into the home. I had nowhere else to go with 3 kids. The council definitely could have done more – might not have wanted to go to the places they were offering him. He might have come back anyway. But always felt pressured.”

5. Experiences of temporary accommodation

A number of the issues raised by survivors were similar to those raised by other experts by experience in our previous engagement work. However, some were specific to, or exacerbated by the trauma and abuse that survivors had experienced.

Some told us that they hadn't been able to access or stay in temporary accommodation, instead resorting to sleeping in their car, on friends' sofas, or having to pay for hotels themselves.

“Didn't qualify (for temporary accommodation).”

“Never had the opportunity.”

“The only temporary accommodation I had was friends' sofas.”

“I had to stay with my mum sofa surfing. It was really hard. I had no money for 6 weeks when I fled. There was no further support.”

“I moved into a hotel, but had to put it on a credit card. It wasn't pleasant but it gave me a safe space.”

“I left without money, stayed with friends for two nights, but quickly realised that this wasn't going to work. There was some victim blaming and I felt like I was being a burden, because people don't want you to be there.”

“I packed a car and was then homeless for 6 weeks with two small children aged 6 and 4. No-one would help me because I had made myself homeless and had refused refuge space. So I ended up on people's floors, in my car.”

5.1. Quality, standards and appropriateness of temporary accommodation

Several of the survivors we spoke to had experience of staying in poor quality temporary accommodation that was ill-equipped to meet the needs of them and their children. The impact of this, coupled with the trauma from experiencing abuse and violence, meant that this was incredibly challenging for them and their children.

“There were no cooking facilities in TA, how was I going to feed the kids?”

“We shared one bedroom, four of us, youngest was only 9 months.”

“It was really traumatising for daughter (staying in pub) as she has already witnessed abuse. Then take someone where small, damp, no facilities to make breakfast, prepare food. And environment wise it wasn't good.”

“The council got me a room in back of pub, which wasn't ideal. The only other option was miles away which wasn't an option as I didn't want to pull the kids from school. The room was small and damp. It was one room and was supposed to sleep two people, but the sofa bed that wouldn't pull out because there wasn't enough room. Our next-door neighbour was an alcoholic but was placed in a room in a pub. That brought quite a lot of emotional turmoil, as the neighbour had lots of people coming back to her room. She was a nice lady but very emotionally unstable. It was not a great place to be for me and the children. We were there for about two weeks.”

However, when survivors were provided with appropriate temporary accommodation, it had a significant impact on their wellbeing and sense of safety and security.

“I got moved to two bed flat rental – it was a life saver for me.”

“When got to flat it was lovely, had all the facilities I needed.”

5.2. Impact on children

A few participants discussed the effect of bringing their children into temporary accommodation:

“The children couldn't have friends over or tell anyone the address. I would have to travel if I had to see other family because they couldn't come to see me at the refuge. My eldest was 7 and she had a birthday while we were in refuge. That was really hard for her. We couldn't have a party or have her friends round. I couldn't afford to [hire] a party place.”

“One child is autistic, so the change of scenery was really difficult. I would feel bad about disturbing other women in refuge.”

“It was really upsetting. My eldest child had to have counselling.”

5.3. Uncertainty and length of time in temporary accommodation

Others commented on the uncertainty of being in temporary accommodation and how they had no idea of how long they would need to stay there before being moved to another type of temporary accommodation or into a settled home.

“We had no idea how long we were going to be there. Difficult for me and for the kids. Couldn't give them a timeframe. We just bid (for housing) and wait.”

Other expressed frustration about how destabilising TA was for them and their children as well as costing the local authority more than it would cost them to be in settled housing.

5.4. Lack of refuge availability

Welsh Women's Aid regularly reports that the demand for refuge exceeds supply, and this was reinforced by some of the survivors we spoke to. One person told us that there was no space in refuge in the local authority area she wanted to be placed in, so had to move into a refuge in a different part of Wales.

Another survivor told us that their IDVA had advised them to leave their friend's property because it was known to the perpetrator, however there was no available refuge space for her to move into. As a result, she paid for a hotel on her credit card, putting her further in debt. She was then offered a space in refuge but was told that there was only room for one of her two children.

"It took a really long time to get information about refuge. I got a phone call saying there was space in refuge, but there was only space for one of my children, which I therefore couldn't take."

5.5. Preference for self-contained, dispersed accommodation

Several people recognised the benefits that refuge provide, in particular providing a safe space during a time of crisis, as well as the specialist VAWDASV support available within the accommodation. However, some people expressed their preference for self-contained accommodation where they and their children would have greater privacy and stability.

"The support is great in refuge, but it's extremely difficult to live with others, especially with children."

"It would have been better to have self-contained flat with support. Refuge is difficult, especially when sharing with lots of people. There are certain rules you have to follow in refuge."

One interviewee specifically talked about temporary accommodation being inaccessible for people who are deaf and people with other types of disabilities. Another said that her child's health issues made it impossible for her to be able to access refuge – and other forms of accommodation were unavailable.

"I couldn't go into refuge because it wouldn't be accessible for deaf people. For example – I wouldn't be able to hear the fire alarm. They won't provide the equipment to enable a deaf person to stay there, and the staff don't use BSL so I wouldn't be able to communicate with them. As a result, people would rather stay home with their perpetrator than move into refuge."

"I couldn't have gone into a shared temporary accommodation. I would need a self-contained flat that's equipped for deaf people."

"I couldn't go into refuge because of my son's health issue. We couldn't have shared a space or bathroom with other people, everything needed to be very clean and I didn't want him to be at risk. I would have taken anything; we just needed a separate bathroom due to my son's health issues. I didn't want to put him at risk."

5.6. Inspections of temporary accommodation

One interviewee told us that someone from the local authority would visit her every week to inspect the accommodation. She described how intrusive and unsettling this was, how she felt judged and micro-managed, and likened the experience to the abusive, controlling relationship she had recently escaped.

"In temporary accommodation I had weekly inspections by the council, which don't take into account how traumatising this is. The person from the council would stay 15/20 min, and it felt like an

abusive relationship, with so many rules and regulations, constantly being judged, checking whether you have cleaned enough.

“Every Monday the same woman comes around to check. You become hypervigilant in an abusive relationship, and that becomes really hard to unlearn. The micro management is one of the main tactics of coercive control. That’s what I felt when someone was coming around every week. It needs to be judged on a case-by-case basis; it needs to be proportionate. Even if you do a weekly check initially, but then relax it.

“It was the same for the woman next door - the level of control the council is enforcing on her with weekly, and she had come from an abusive relationship herself.

“There is lots of judgement heaped upon you when you’re trying to get support – you feel like you’re moving from one judgemental relationship to another.”

6. Finding a settled home in the social housing sector

6.1. Length of waiting list

The most common complaint from the survivors we engaged with was the length of time it took for them to secure social housing. As outlined above, lengthy stays in temporary accommodation can be incredibly stressful for survivors who are dealing with the impact of trauma or abuse.

“I was on the social housing waiting list in [X] for over a year. I was bidding on anything that was big enough. It was quite depressing. Having to wait so long for housing.”

“We were on the list for over a year, I had letters from the police, social services, health visitor, girls’ school. But I was still on silver band but not getting any higher. I was bidding on everything, not fussed about which area, but I wasn’t getting anywhere and I wasn’t getting any higher up on the banding.”

“It was difficult. Bidding was stressful.”

“Even when I was priority to be homeless, the wait was lengthy. I arrived in temporary accommodation in July 2021, but didn’t get a settled property until March 2022.”

“It’s quite hard to find somewhere where you feel safe to move on with your life.”

“Stability, security. That’s all I wanted.”

“I had been on the list for a housing association property for so long, on the highest band, but didn’t get help early enough.”

6.2. Allocations and prioritisation

A number of survivors felt that the prioritisation of survivors in the allocations process needed to be improved. Some commented that the local authority or social landlords did not view them as a priority because they were currently in a home, despite them reporting that they were experiencing domestic abuse, needed to flee the property and had no-where else to go.

“I should have been given higher priority for housing, given the circumstances.”

“When I was thinking about leaving, I’d made inquiries about a property I could move to, but because I had a home, I was right at the bottom of the list. I know how limited social housing is, but I

couldn't wait. I was already on the list, but I had my name on a tenancy agreement so didn't get prioritised."

"Once we left [home] and went to refuge in [local authority] – I was able to go to the council in person. I spoke to a homelessness officer, and because we were effectively homeless, we were then awarded the highest band (for housing). It was frustrating that I couldn't have had that priority before. [We weren't given priority] because we had somewhere to live, even though we weren't safe there. We shouldn't have had to make ourselves homeless in order to become priority."

"Why can't give priority to single mother who has good record of paying rent. I feel that couple with two jobs, two cars are getting priority for social housing, which should be for people who need it."

7. Finding a settled home in the private rented sector

7.1. Affordability

Affordability was a common theme when people discussed the private rented sector. The rental market is extremely challenging for most people, but several survivors of abuse told us they had no money due to fleeing the abusive relationship and some were in significant debt due to the financial abuse and coercive control they had experienced.

"Too expensive to consider when I left. I had more money coming out than going in due to the financial abuse from partner and no financial support from anywhere."

"That was a challenge. Affordable housing needs to be offered."

"Impossible. I had no money so couldn't offer a bond or months' rent up front. I also couldn't afford the rental fees."

"Moved into house but didn't have beds for children. Had to buy beds for the children, but I slept without a bed for a long time."

One survivor talked about feeling as though she was trapped by the benefits system. The housing benefit did not cover the cost of her rent, yet if she increased her working hours she would end up losing money due to the impact on her benefits and the requirement for her to pay council tax. She worried that this would trap people in abusive relationships because they couldn't afford to leave and would also risk people becoming homeless when they fell behind with rent and council tax.

"I feel very angry. I'm angry about the system, it's a trap, a circus, a failure. I was living in a 2-bedroom flat, a single mother with two children. You are trapped on housing benefit unless you have a very well paid job. The more you work, the more council tax you pay. It's a big trap. Because you chose the wrong man in your life. I don't know how I manage."

"It will push people to stay in an abusive relationship – it will be really tough on HB, to get housing."

7.2. Upfront rent, bond and references

As well as high rents being a huge challenge for many survivors, many found it impossible to provide many of the things that letting agencies and landlords require, such as advance rent, bonds and references.

"Horrific and as I didn't have a job had to get a loan on my car knowing I would never be able to pay it back but managed to get 6 months' rent together to begin."

“Had to get lots of money upfront for bond, advance rent.”

“I had to sell my car to afford to put 6 months' rent down in advance – the landlord wouldn't accept any less rent in advance. I wouldn't have been able to afford otherwise.”

“Hard work trying to get all the documents they needed. References for every home I'd ever rented. This included the home I had to flee which was left with furniture in etc which was obviously incredibly embarrassing. Having to explain to landlords and estate agents my situation and why I had to flee. Asking them to not give the details to my ex-partner of what area I was in if he came looking for me.”

“I tried to rent a property, but it was really hard to get references, a deposit etc. There's 2-3 months where you're effectively destitute, trying to get work, not in a good state emotionally. The abuse gets worse after you leave, you will be trying to get a job, with your children upset, it's impossible to manage emotionally. So you end up going back because financially it doesn't make sense.”

One person talked about private landlords refusing to rent to people on housing benefit. She told us that she had always paid her rent on time and had looked after the property, but found herself reliant on housing benefit due to fleeing abuse. She called for a system that would recognise survivors who had a positive record of being a good tenant to help, which would provide assurance to the landlord and encourage them to accept someone receiving housing benefit.

7.3. Lack of security

Some survivors commented on the lack of security they felt in the private rented sector, and how this exacerbated the trauma they had experienced when they were in an abusive relationship. While the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 provides greater security for tenants, the feeling of insecurity experienced by the survivors we spoke to was particularly acute given their experience of abuse.

“And private rented is so fragile, if landlord doesn't want you then he can evict.”

“You feel like you're on the edge. When you're in an abusive relationship you feel like you can be thrown out at any time – needed stability.”

“I was given 2 months' notice, I had to leave on 1st July. I asked why and they said they wanted to do Air BnB.”

“Landlord told Housing Benefit that I had left the flat and someone else had moved in.”

“Landlord increased the rent from £800 to £1,000 with only two months' notice. I was really upset, he didn't give me time to think. I asked for a slower increase but the landlord but the flat on the rental market and said there were 20 people who wanted it and would pay the rent. I felt very vulnerable. The house was my therapy. It had a real impact on my mental health. Where should I go? It is not my home anymore. It shows that any time he wants to increase the rent, he had the power. He could give notice. It destabilised me completely, I really feel trapped. It's a total disgrace.”

“Would want a warmer flat for children, for the landlord to put in insulation and do repairs. But I am stuck with landlord who is not going to repair and a risk of increasing rent if I ask for repairs.”

“The landlady made a threat of a bad reference.”

8. The role of other public services

8.1. Early intervention

One of the key points raised in relation to both housing and other public services was the missed opportunities to intervene earlier and prevent the abuse from escalating or avoid the survivor from becoming homeless. Many called for public services to be able to spot the signs and respond much more effectively.

“We need public services to ask the right questions, to spot the signs of domestic abuse early. To understand what I was going through before it got too late, before my kids witnessed the beatings. Every time I went to a professional, I thought they would ask me about the abuse. But they didn’t. They need to get you on your own, and ask. Don’t miss that opportunity.”

“I was there presenting, giving evidence, and leaving a trail of evidence, I feared for my life, but nothing was picked up. Instead, everything was blamed on me, mental health, being viewed as intentionally homeless.”

“Missed opportunities. Agencies blamed my mental health.”

“Listen to the Survivors they live the sheer horror day in day out! It’s awful to endure the lives we live. But the Abuse is 10 x harder to recover from when services enable him to carry on and leave you in fear of your life!”

“They all need to be taking active steps to support survivors in every aspect to save women and children’s lives, to give them that hope that they can manage on their own. they don’t need to stay in the relationship for financial reason. There is absolutely no help out there.”

8.2. Multi-agency working, communication and information sharing

Lots of the survivors we engaged with talked about different agencies not working together effectively, or failing to share information that could have prevented the abuse from escalating and them becoming homeless.

“Siloed work – each service acting separately. I would have wanted my notes shared with other agencies. There is a lack of joining up the dots.”

“I know lots of women who keep reporting, keep taking logs, but where does it get you?”

“I used to ask the services to share information, please share it. I’m still being ignored.”

“They all need to be taking active steps to support survivors in every aspect to save women and children’s lives, to give them that hope that they can manage on their own. they don’t need to stay in the relationship for financial reason. There is absolutely no help out there.”

“Collaborative working without needing people to be fully homeless before you get the help you need.”

“I was asking for help from my GP, police - it looks like everyone is taking notes, but they just say it is abuse, go to family court. They weren’t sharing this information about how he was threatening me, making my life terrible. He almost managed to put me in a homeless situation.”

8.3. Trauma informed services

A number of survivors called for more trauma informed services, greater understanding of how trauma can affect survivors and their children, as well as how to deliver services in a way that does not re-

traumatise people. Survivors also talked about victim blaming and feeling judged or not being believed by public services. They emphasised that it is a really big decision to leave an abusive relationship and services need to be trauma informed, non-judgemental and compassionate to enable the survivor to feel safe and not remain in the abusive relationship.

“Services need to have a much better understanding of trauma. Everyone’s triggers and trauma responses are different. Women who come across as loud, jokers, or irrational and are not taken seriously.”

“Tried to explain to education what the girls had been through but they didn’t understand the impact of trauma on the girls. Education don’t understand domestic abuse.”

“Services victim blaming, judging me, blaming my mental health. I thought ‘Maybe I am crazy’.

“You worry about being believed. You need someone who understands. It’s a big decision to leave. Anything anyone can do to make that process smoother.”

“Not making them have to explain and relive the trauma constantly. There should be a referral team for someone that has support workers who can liaise with housing and council to help while not making the person constantly relive it.”

“You worry about being believed. You need someone who understands. It’s a big decision to leave. Anything anyone can do to make that process smoother.”

“People never ever speak to you as the deaf person. They will look to the children to interpret what their mum is saying and to communicate back. But children shouldn’t have to interpret a conversation about domestic abuse.”

8.4. Criminal justice system

A number of survivors told us that the response from the police had put them at greater risk of further abuse and / or homelessness.

“The perpetrator started a campaign of sending the police to my house – sometimes in middle of the night, and on mother’s day. I was in total despair. I was worried about social pressure of people seeing police turn up. The landlord said the neighbours were getting worried about police turning up and complaining, which could have put my tenancy at risk. This must stop, if there is no valid reason, they should not be coming. The perpetrator is using police as tool to threaten me. I’m scared of the police – it was a violence to me to have the police knocking on the door, how it affects me, my surroundings, neighbours’ judgement. The police are a threat to homelessness.”

“The police were ok most of the time but sometimes I felt I was making a nuisance. I’d been told to log everything, write everything down. But I felt like a nuisance.”

“The police would come around and I would say he had threatened to kill me and the police said ‘really, would he?’. I don’t want to have to retell the whole thing - you should know what has happened. I shouldn’t have to go through it all again for you to take me seriously.”

“I didn’t have any panic alarms - ideally, I would have liked to have been safe in the area I’ve been in. I still get homesick.”

“Let me know my rights! Help me as I had two children. He threatened me and my kids’ lives and it wasn’t safe. But it didn’t matter to police or anyone as he had rights.”

“The abusers must be held account for their action. I had over 3 years of diaries and 2 years of CCTV which the police refused to even look at as it “wasn’t their job”. I was referred to MARAC

about 8 times but still nothing was done. I am still worried about him finding me so my current address is kept secret even from my family.”

Survivors also commented on how the court system, including family courts, and the CPS had an impact on them, their experiences of abuse and risk of homelessness.

“Family courts don’t understand domestic abuse. “You’ve moved three times, why have you done that?” Because he kept finding me and threatening me. This was viewed as a problem for the children. CAFCASS threatened to take my kids because I was homeless. I was fearful that homelessness could lead to my children being taken off me.”

“The CPS allowed him to plead guilty to ABH, rather than prosecuting for GBH. And as a result, he only got an 8-week sentence, when he could have got up to 16 years for GBH.”

“The criminal justice system could have helped me to enforce the Order the Sell. I tried to go back to court but the judge refused. The police refused to help me in any way despite phoning them regularly when he attacked me or made my life hell in all sort of ways.”

8.5. Health and social services

One survivor told us that their health visitor had spotted the signs of domestic abuse and had helped them to realise that they were experiencing abuse. As a result, the survivor spoke out and accessed help, escaping the abusive relationship.

“Health visitor told me it was abuse; this is not normal. She planted the seed. Made me realise in that moment. Her intervention made me speak out.”

Others talked about the role that social services played and how a temporary change in behaviour by the perpetrator, or attendance at an anger management course, resulted in services stepping away or closing the case, despite the risk of continued abuse.

“Had a social worker, two girls had been on at-risk register during abusive relationship. Once they closed everything off and he was doing everything they wanted him to do, he went back. Social workers could have done more to ensure dad didn’t continue being abusive.”

“The perpetrator went on an anger management course for ten weeks. He would always come home really angry. He was having to talk about things he didn’t want to talk about. But because he attended the course he was viewed as having changed his behaviour and social workers stepped away.”

Part Two: Young People

9. Approaching the council for help with homelessness or housing

Some of the young people we engaged with had found it difficult to access help from their local council.

“It’s quite difficult to get in touch with housing. There are different options to choose from and quite difficult to get to the housing department. I think housing should be an option when you phone up the council as it’ll make it easier to access contact details etc.”

Others said that local services helped them to navigate the system and get in touch with the council.

“I went by my local youth service and they put me in touch with the right people, after that i was moved into temporary accommodation pretty fast.”

“I accessed Info services in my local area and they directed me to the council.”

There were mixed views and experiences of the response young people got from the local council when they approached them for help:

“I contacted the council last year when I was homeless and they were quick to respond.”

“They provided temporary accommodation.”

“I feel like if you're a minor the council don't believe what you tell them and would want to speak with a parent.”

One person commented that their family needed help much earlier to prevent homelessness, rather than being provided once they had been evicted.

“Family breakdown led to us getting evicted - mum left with five children. Support for mum didn't come in until after a breakdown – needed it earlier to prevent homelessness.”

End Youth Homelessness Cymru heard from one young person who felt that different departments in the local authority were not willing to take responsibility for them due to their age and housing status.

“Obviously you have got the people who are homeless sleeping on sofas, you've got other young ones sleeping in B&B's, or the others who are in the middle of the system - 17 turning 18. You've got social services saying: 'they are not my (responsibility), I don't look after them anymore - they are 18, that's housing.' Then housing go 'well they are 17 they are not ours yet'. So you've got the battle (within) the council of who looks after (that young person).” - End Youth Homelessness Cymru, Don't Let Me Fall Through the Cracks (2020).

10. Experiences of temporary accommodation

Young people described very mixed experiences of temporary accommodation. Those who had been placed in specialist young people's temporary supported housing tended to speak very highly of their experiences there, with a particular focus on help to develop independent living skills, the quality of support and activities provided.

“My experience has been quite good to be honest, I've received help from the key workers and they have pushed me to my full potential.”

“This hostel is the best. There's 24-hour care and they're trying to give us things to do – activities, volunteering, art.”

“No-one will ever understand how beneficial this hostel was to me.”

However, other young people had been placed in unsuitable temporary accommodation. This was evidenced in one of our earlier Experts by Experience papers which included example of young people being placed in hostels with people using substances and becoming violent, or having to sleep in staff

rooms due to lack of appropriate temporary accommodation. This has been reinforced by research published by End Youth Homelessness Cymru, which features direct quotes from young people.

“There have been times when ambulances and police vans have been here, at my home.”

“Doesn’t feel safe. I don’t feel stable (like I can relax). Can be noisy or chaotic with other tenants.”

“I was actually 16 (when) they moved me into the night shelter and that’s too young to be in somewhere like the night shelter. I was in a pod. That is not a room that is floor space... I’ve been at the night shelter about six times now and I have been there twice between the time I was 16 and 18 and that’s the worst place I have been, to be honest. I have been to jail and the night shelter is worse than that. I would like to put in a complaint that people can’t stay in the night shelter when they are 16 years old” - End Youth Homelessness Cymru, Don’t Let Me Fall Through the Cracks (2020)

“Kids at the age of 17 or 16 are in the night shelter, it’s disgusting...they are making young people suffer... You get involved in that environment, a drug environment - taking or selling - it’s hard to get out of.” - End Youth Homelessness Cymru, Don’t Let Me Fall Through the Cracks (2020)

Others had mixed views on temporary accommodation or highlighted particular struggles with money or access to the internet.

“I have mixed views on the different temporary accommodation I have stayed in.”

“Temporary accommodation was hard for me as I struggled with money.”

“Wi-Fi has been a real problem.”

11. Finding a settled home

Young people told us that they were finding it incredibly difficult to find a settled home that they could afford. Some young people told us they had been waiting three years to find their own home, despite being ready to move out of temporary or supported accommodation.

“It’s really impossible. There is very little affordable housing and I have been waiting nearly 3 years for social housing.”

“It’s difficult as there are not many houses.”

“I think it is really hard, especially if you have a dog and looking for something with the council is hard as there are no properties.”

“This has been difficult as there are not a lot of 1-bedroom properties.”

“I’m ready to move into my own home but have been waiting for nearly 3 years. There is no housing available.”

“I have been waiting for move on for 3 years from my temporary accommodation.”

“More 1-bedroom flats or even more supported housing accommodation Everyone should be given a chance Everyone should be treated the same as EQUALITY is a must! Were all in the same boat.”

Another person said local connection was proving to be a barrier for them accessing housing in their preferred area. This issue came up with young people at one of our previous engagement events, who talked about needing to move away from particular areas where they didn’t feel safe, but worried that local connection would prevent them from being able to access temporary or settled accommodation.

“At the moment, I am finding it quite difficult as I come from Bangor and want to continue living in Caernarfon, I have to live in this place for 5 years before I have a local connection. This makes waiting time for a flat longer than what it would be if I was waiting for a flat in Bangor”

12. The role of other public services

Young people also shared their experiences with other public services, and their views on how they can play a more effective role in preventing and responding to homelessness.

12.1. Early intervention and access to advice and support

“Other services could have got involved sooner.”

“I think there should be more knowledge around homelessness.”

“There should be more support that young people know about, signposting.”

“An early access centre for people who think they may become homeless, services need promoting.”

“Make these services easily accessible Make the help known by advertising posters in the streets, including contact numbers email addresses, and any drop-in services that are available.”

12.2. Social services and family support

“In my situation, I feel like social services could have done more to prevent me from being homeless. They knew what problems I had going on at home and how much it all was affecting me I had to live between friends because I didn't want to go home due to what I was going through but social services forced me to go back home. If social services had done something sooner rather than later, I think I would be in a different position now.”

“I think if mediation was followed through this may help.”

“More support groups for people who experience abuse at home.”

“I think that parents and guardians should be more supportive with their kin because it effects the children's mental health later on in life.”

12.3. Mental health services

“I was also under CAMHS for many years but still struggle to get mental health support.”

12.4. Education and youth services

“I didn't receive any help from school or college to get me into supported housing. Social services referred me to [YP supported housing].”

“I think my youth service did a great job at helping me.”

“School and social services had chances to see the abuse I was telling them about at home, but did nothing. This led to be being kicked out of home.”

“I did not learn about housing in school or at college.”

“I did not go to the College as I didn't think they would do anything to help.”

“College and high school do more on budgeting and real-life independent skills.”