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NSPCC Northern Ireland consultation workshop on the young people's version of the Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Strategy

April 2015

EVERY CHILDHOOD IS WORTH FIGHTING FOR

Overview

1. This report on the draft young people's version of the Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Strategy has been informed by feedback provided during a consultation workshop with the Brownlow Young People's Forum for Social Action in Craigavon held on 2nd March 2015 which was hosted by NSPCC. The workshop consisted of 20 participants, ranging from 14 -16 years. We asked for the children and young people's feedback and circulated questionnaires based on the young people's (CYP) version of the draft Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Strategy. The feedback from the discussion was collated and forms the content of this paper.
2. It is useful to note the importance of a young person's version of the named Strategy considering the prevalence of abuse affecting this group. This was confirmed in NSPCC's How Safe Are Our Children? Report which indicates that nearly one in five young people aged 11 to 17 has experienced high levels of abuse and neglect, and nearly one in 20 in the UK has experienced contact sexual abuse.¹ More than one in three children (34%) who experienced contact sexual abuse by an adult did not tell anyone else about it and four out of five children (82.7%) who experienced contact sexual abuse from a peer did not tell anyone else about it.²
3. As referenced, a questionnaire (see annex) was shared with the group to capture additional commentary. A total of 18 anonymous questionnaires were returned; and where relevant this information has been incorporated into the following content.

Strategic plan

4. The consultation workshop included a brief overview of the key objectives of the Strategy noted on page 3 of the draft document. The CYP unanimously agreed that the stated strategic plan is important and that it would be useful if it can be achieved. Further information on each of the strategic aims is detailed below.

¹ Jütte, S., Bentley, H., Miller, P. and Jetha, N. (2014) *How safe are our children?* (London: NSPCC). Available at: www.nspcc.org.uk/howsafe

² Radford, L. et al (2011). Child abuse and neglect in the UK today. London: NSPCC. Available at: www.nspcc.org.uk/childstudy

Improve everyone's understanding of domestic and sexual abuse

5. It was felt that the document was too vague, needs more detail and that further information about related facts would be useful to improve the CYP understanding. *“(It) didn’t really tell me anything I haven’t learnt in school already”* and *“I have already heard of all the things in the booklet,”* also *“not enough information (in the Strategy) on what domestic and sexual abuse it.”*
 6. The CYP felt that the language and format used was aimed at younger children, i.e. primary school age, *“it is too dumbed down”* and *“very covered up and made for 8 year olds”* also *“(it is) too vague and childish information, which degrades the importance of this issue.”* They described the document as patronising, especially the language used. When asked if they felt it was appropriate for young people under the age of 18. The CYP stated they did not agree, one CYP stated that whilst *“it was aiming for the entire age group but it’s unsuitable for any”*.
 7. The group suggested that a leaflet aimed at post-primary young people, with more advanced language that a teenager could relate to, *“(it) needs to be less vague and be more blunt + to the point using words like rape etc”* and *“not enough (information) for the older age group”* also *“not enough detail, it does not specify age of consent.”*
 8. CYP discussed the content on page 5 which states, “some people, because of their age or level of understanding, legally cannot agree to have sex.” It was suggested by the group that it would be useful to include the age of consent and case studies/examples to illustrate this point.
 9. The CYP suggested that clearer formatting and more concise information i.e. the use of bullet points would be useful. In addition, the CYP felt the myth buster page was unnecessary and the available space could have been utilised in other ways, for e.g. many felt that a case study or real life examples would be more suitable for young people.
 10. The CYP noted that they would prefer more pictures that are relevant and easily identifiable in relation to domestic or sexual violence/abuse.
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Stop it happening in the first place

11. Some of the group felt that the Strategy would not stop abuse happening in the first place, *“most of the abuse will have happened before people get the chance to read it”* and *“this just informs us about it rather than preventing it”* also *“it isn’t presented to the abuser so how would it stop it.”*
 12. However, other member of the group described that quite often the people causing abuse might not realise what they are doing as abusive; and that the Strategy might raise awareness of the issue and inform young people of what abuse is and what is appropriate/not appropriate. By way of example, the group mentioned that although people know what physical abuse is, they might not know about all the different kinds of sexual abuse and emotional abuse. The group also discussed that - *“sometimes kids watch things on YouTube or TV, or even if their parents fight with each other they might think it’s normal and not wrong.”*
 13. Some of the CYP stated that they believed education about physical, sexual and emotional abuse should be provided from a younger age i.e. Year 7/ Year 8 as most children and young people are aware of sexual issues/behaviours much earlier than when schools/youth groups/education are addressing the issues. It was suggested that many young girls may not realise they are being exploited if an older person is interested in them.
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Help people come forward to report it when it does

14. The whole group agreed that a young people’s version of the Strategy was important and relevant for their age group. Some CYP described how many of the peers don’t realise what abuse is when they are a victim of it, *“it will show people that abuse happens quite often and it’s not just you,”* and *“it had some good information to inform people who had no idea what abuse is and might help them come forward.”*
 15. When asked where the young people would go to for support/help the CYP mentioned friends, youth workers and teachers. They indicated there was a fear of referring to the police in case they would not be believed. *“There is a difference between who you could go to and who you would go to.”*
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Support and help victims of domestic and sexual violence and abuse

16. The group agreed that it was useful to include helpline information in the document, but they felt additional information and more helplines (for e.g. the Samaritans and Lifeline) would be helpful - *“it has a few support lines at the front, but needs work”* and *“it gives a little bit of support information in the booklet but not enough.”*
17. Additional websites and text services were also suggested as a means of seeking support. Many people felt this was the most beneficial means of communication for young people.
18. We welcome the reference to NSPCC's ChildLine service, by way of information we have provided some suggested text:

ChildLine ensures that every child and young person up to the age of 19 has someone to talk to, and someone that will listen to them 24 hours a day/365days a year. Whether you're feeling stressed, anxious, lonely or down - ChildLine is here for you. Call free on 0800 1111 (calls are **confidential and won't appear on your home phone bill) have a 1-2-1 chat online at www.childline.org.uk or send an email.**



Help people change how they act when they are violence or abusive

19. The discussion was broadly similar to s12 noted above, in that some of the CYP felt that the Strategy could not change violent or abusive behaviour, *“if someone is violent they probably won't change.”* However, most of the group agreed that the Strategy will raise greater awareness among young people, *“some people who didn't realise they were being abusive might read this and see that it's wrong and stop it,”* and significantly *“I didn't know that all that stuff on facebook was emotional abuse.”*

Hold people responsible for their actions if they have been violent or abusive

20. Most of the young people did not understand the wording of this strategic aim; after a brief explanation, one young person suggested that it should instead be called: **'Hold abusers responsible for violence and abuse and help them change to stop doing it again.'**
21. The group discussed this aim and described it as *“a good thing that people won't get away with it.”* One young person thought it might be useful if the Strategy noted how the abusers will have to take responsibility for their actions *“it doesn't detail what will happen to them, maybe if it did it would stop them from doing it.”*

22. Another young person did not feel that the Strategy document would make people take responsibility for their actions “it doesn’t hit hard enough for people to change, there’s no statistics about legislation and what will happen to them.”

23. The CYP also raised the issue regarding services available in England should also be available in Northern Ireland. One CYP has children and felt she should be able to enquire about the criminal history of any potential partners to ensure the safety of her child.

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ANNEX

Consultation questionnaire on the children's version of the Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse

Please circle either Yes (Y) or No (N) and provide comments where possible

1) Does this plan improve your understanding of domestic and sexual violence and abuse? (Y / N)

2) Do you think it will stop domestic and sexual abuse happening in the first place? (Y / N)

3) Will it help people come forward to report it when it does? (Y / N)

4) Does the Strategy support and help victims of domestic and sexual violence and abuse? (Y / N)

5) Will the Strategy help people change how they act when they are violent or abusive? (Y / N)

6) Will the Strategy make people take responsibility for their actions if they have been violent or abusive? (Y / N)

Thank you for your comments