SHAPING THE FUTURE: ONE VOICE AT A TIME

Tackling domestic abuse through the voice of the young
This Survey would not have been possible without the help of many amazing people. We would like to give special thanks to our adult allies:

Colin, a guidance teacher in the school that helped VAV test the survey questions

Fiona and Katherine, researchers from the Scottish Government, who helped us shape the Survey questions. Katherine also gave us expert advice on how to analyse the findings

Claire, a really talented artist, with whom we had lots of fun creating the images for this Report

Cat, Neal & Martin from Young Scot who helped us set up the online survey using Young Scot’s Says Who? website

All the adults working with young people who helped promote the Survey - there are too many to name but you know who you are!

BUT MOST OF ALL, WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK ALL THE YOUNG PEOPLE ACROSS SCOTLAND WHO TOOK THE TIME TO SHARE THEIR VIEWS AND HELP US SHAPE THE FUTURE!
1. Our Survey Journey ........................................ 4
2. Overview .......................................................... 6
3. Findings and Recommendations
   What do young people know about domestic abuse? .................. 9
   Where would young people go for help and support? ................. 12
   The housing journey of young people experiencing domestic abuse ................................ 16
   Young people’s priorities:
   what changes do young people want to see? ......................... 18
     How this bit of the report works ........................................ 18
     Young people’s top priorities for Help & Support .................. 19
     Young people’s top priorities for improving the Justice System & Courts .... 23
     Young people’s top priorities for Schools ............................... 27
     Young people’s top priorities for improving the Housing Journey .......... 30
4. Summary and Call to Action .................................... 32
Our Survey Journey

It all started with Lola’s ‘light-bulb moment’

- something the Minister said about VAV being a ‘voice’ for other children and young people made her think of ways to hear their opinions about domestic abuse. We started small with a test pilot in one local school. The success was amazing and Government gave us full support to reach out to all young people across the universe of Scotland. With the help of our wonderful allies in Government and Young Scot, we designed an online survey that spread like fire! Hundreds of young people participated. They told us what they think about domestic abuse and what changes they want to see to make things better. Our voice is stronger now and we want people to really listen and help shape a brighter future!

DEFINITION:

Domestic abuse is when one person bullies and hurts another person on purpose. It happens in a relationship like between people who are going out with each other, living with each other, married or in a civil partnership. It can be physical, mental, financial or sexual. If there is domestic abuse going on at home it can be really scary and traumatic for a child. If you can’t see it then you can hear it. Sometimes you might be hurt directly by the person who is abusive. Young people may also experience domestic abuse in their own relationships with a boyfriend or girlfriend.

If you are going through domestic abuse, talking to someone can really help - talk to an adult you trust or phone ChildLine 0800 111 1111 or webchat at www.childline.org.uk.

Check out www.safehubScotland.org for sources of support including local children’s support workers (mainly from www.scottishwomensaid.org.uk)
WE NEED YOUR HELP TO GET IT RIGHT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AFFECTED BY DOMESTIC ABUSE.

No one believes me.

It was the worst feeling in the world.

We got sent to a refuge.

THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT WILL SUPPORT VAV TO REACH AS MANY CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE AS POSSIBLE.

VAV’S MESSAGE SPREAD LIKE FIRE...

I think that children suffering domestic abuse should always have someone to talk to and not keep it to themselves.

TACKLING DOMESTIC ABUSE THROUGH THE VOICE OF THE YOUNG.

What do you think about domestic abuse?

Let’s find out more from young people...

I nearly told my pal once but I didn’t as I was too scared.
We are Voice Against Violence (VAV) - 8 young people who all have personal experience of domestic abuse and different services. We are the ‘critical friends’ of people in power like the Government, local authorities and heads of agencies. Our job is to make sure that the voices of children and young people shape their plans around domestic abuse.

We know that with the right kind of support there can be light at the end of the tunnel for those going through it. We also believe that with the right kind of education there can be a future Scotland without domestic abuse. We want this survey to help shape that future.

The idea for this survey came from VAV’s first meeting with Ministers and CoSLA (CoSLA is an agency that represents local politicians). A passing remark made by the Minister for Housing & Communities about VAV’s role as a voice for other children caused one of us (Lola) to have a ‘light-bulb moment’.

She thought of ways to hear from other children, and the survey idea popped into her head. Excited at this idea, she created a pilot survey with paper questionnaires which she then tried out with pupils at her local school (a ‘pilot’ is like a test to see if a project will work).

The pilot was really successful and got great feedback from pupils and teachers at the school. Based on its success, VAV decided to do something BIGGER. We wanted to reach out to all young people no matter where they are in the universe of Scotland. We wanted to give all of them a voice and combine it with VAV’s voice to make sure that people in power hear our views - what we know and think about domestic abuse, and what changes we want to see to build a brighter future.

Domestic abuse affects everybody, it doesn’t matter if you’ve been through it or not, so we wanted the views of all young people, regardless if they had experienced it or not. We took our plans to Ministers and CoSLA in September 2010 and they gave us their full backing!

We decided the best way to hear the voice of all young people in Scotland was to do an ONLINE SURVEY. Things started rolling quickly with the help of our allies: the brilliant Neal and Cat from Young Scot agreed to let us use their ‘Says Who?’ website for the survey and helped us with the technical side of creating a funky design. You can check out the survey ‘homepage’ at:

http://www.youngscotsayswho.org/consultation/Voice-Against-Violence

The amazing Fiona and Katherine (researchers from the Scottish Government) gave us advice on how to shape the survey questions. Some of these were based on the 2004 BBC national survey of adults’ knowledge of domestic abuse, but changed to suit the age group that we wanted to target (11-26 year olds which fits with the age group of Young Scot).
Our questions asked about attitudes to domestic abuse, getting taught about domestic abuse in school, getting help and support, personal experiences of domestic abuse and what young people thought were the most important things to change to make things better. Some of our questions asked young people to pick their answer from a number of options so that we could see how many people chose each answer - this is where we got our ‘facts and figures’ from. Other questions asked people to write what they thought in their own words.

The survey was launched on 1st February 2011. Over the next few months our message spread like fire! We promoted the survey through many different networks - schools, Young Scot, Scottish Women’s Aid and more. It closed on the 22nd May 2011.

- 786 young people started the survey and 610 completed the whole survey.
- 58% were female and 42% were male

13% (79) of participants had experience of domestic abuse.
44% of participants aged 18-21 and 35% aged 22-26 had experienced domestic abuse, compared to 8% of participants aged 13-15.
11% of males and 15% of females had experienced domestic abuse.
We are really happy that so many young people took the time to participate but we had hoped to get the views of more young people who have experienced domestic abuse. The survey is a good start as we know they are a very hard-to-reach group - but we think there is still work to be done to make sure they have more opportunities to have their voices heard.

**Recommendations**

1. We would like to see more opportunities for children and young people affected by domestic abuse to have their voices heard through research and participation projects.

Once we had all the results, we looked at the numbers to see how many young people had particular opinions and experiences.

We chose the most interesting and useful of these ‘facts & figures’ and explained them in the first part of the report. We also looked at all the things that young people had written in their own words. We grouped these into themes and we have written about these themes (using young people’s own words) in the second part of the report.

Our big job now is to spread the findings as widely as possible so they actually help change things! We need you to help us spread the word. We also need you to take the findings and use them wherever you have influence. You can help make things better for children and young people and create a Scotland with no domestic abuse.
What do young people know about domestic abuse?

We wanted to find out what other young people know about domestic abuse. This graph shows the percentage of young people who agreed that different things are domestic abuse:

- Physically hurting a partner or ex-partner (93%)
- Forcing a partner or ex-partner to have sex (89%)
- Threatening to harm a partner or ex-partner (86%)
- Stopping a partner from having the money that they need (74%)
- Stopping a partner or ex-partner from seeing their family & friends (66%)
- Threatening to harm family, friends or pets (59%)
- Deliberately making a partner or ex-partner feel worthless (57%)

Nearly all young people thought that physically hurting a partner was domestic abuse (93%) and fewest young people thought withholding money was domestic abuse (62%). 11-12 year olds were least likely to recognise that all these things are forms of domestic abuse.

We also asked what young people would do if they experienced different types of abuse in their own relationships or between their parents (or parent’s partner). We were shocked to find that over a quarter (28%) of young people said they would accept one-off violence by a boyfriend/girlfriend if it happened to them or a friend. 11% said they would accept it if their boyfriend/girlfriend forced them to have sex or told them they would break up with them if they didn’t have sex. Around one in six (17%) said they would accept one-off violence if it happened between their parents. Lots of young people said they did not know what they would do if one of their parents was experiencing domestic abuse.
**Do young people learn about domestic abuse at school?**

We found that just under half of young people had been taught about domestic abuse (47%). Just under half of these young people had a one-off lesson or information (e.g. a leaflet) about domestic abuse, the rest had more than one lesson or more than one type of information about domestic abuse. Most (79%) were taught about it by a teacher. 70% of young people thought the lesson or information was useful.

Around half the young people thought their school did not give enough information about domestic abuse (48%). Young people who had experienced domestic abuse were even less likely to think their school gave enough information, with over two-thirds saying it was not enough (69%). Young people seemed to think it was better to get more than one lesson or type of information - those who got this were almost twice as likely to think their school gave enough information compared to those who had just one lesson/type of information.

We found that it did not seem to make a big difference to what young people knew or thought about domestic abuse if they had been taught about it at school. What we also found though was that young people who thought the lesson or information was useful were more likely to say they would talk to someone at school if they were going through domestic abuse.

---

**VAV comments**

We can see from the findings that lots of young people do know what domestic abuse is but they are still less likely to recognise types of abuse like financial abuse. Our research shows that many young people don’t get the chance to learn about domestic abuse in school but there are schools that do offer information. We can see that young people really appreciate information on domestic abuse when they get it but many think that the information they get is not enough, especially those who have experienced domestic abuse.

We found it really interesting that whether or not young people got information about domestic abuse at school it did not seem to make a big difference to what they knew about the subject. We think this is because if you only get one or two lessons in your whole time at school this is not enough to really understand it. Also, we think this shows that young people who are not getting lessons at school must be getting some information from other places but this too is not enough. What is really positive though is the fact that good lessons or information given to young people seems to make them more confident about asking someone at school for help.
Recommendations:

2 All schools should teach about domestic abuse and not just a one-off lesson. Young people should get the opportunity to learn about it throughout primary and secondary school in different ways that suit the age-groups.

3 Lessons should cover what is a healthy or unhealthy relationship (all the different types of abuse) and what children and young people can do if they experience abuse.

4 We would like to see children who have gone through domestic abuse be more involved in creating lessons or information so that it is more likely to be useful for them.
Where would young people go for help and support?

Young people were most likely to look to family or friends for support rather than services. This graph shows who young people would be most likely to go to if there was domestic abuse in their own relationship or their parents' relationship:

1. Other
2. No-one
3. Domestic Abuse Helpline (for over 18's)
4. A website for children & young people*
5. Domestic abuse support worker, e.g. Women's Aid
6. ChildLine
7. Someone at School, e.g. Teacher
8. Other Family
9. FRIENDS
10. Sisters or Brothers
11. The Parent who is not being abusive
12. Dad
13. Mum

★ e.g. Therelime, The Hideout

1 In the question about young people's own relationships we asked about Mum or Dad separately, whereas we just asked about the non-abusive parent for their parents’ relationships. We also added in an extra option of the Domestic Abuse helpline for young people's own relationships.
Boys were less likely than girls to say they would talk to friends. Young people who had experienced domestic abuse (in their own or parent’s relationships) were less likely than other young people to talk to family, including their parents. Where the abuse was in their parents’ relationship they were more likely to say they would talk to friends.

We can see that young people were less likely to want to go to formal services for support than to family and friends. But these services are still important. Of all the services available, young people were most likely to say they would go to a domestic abuse support worker, talk to someone at school or talk to ChildLine.

We asked young people if there was anyone else they would go to and it was interesting to find that quite a few young people would go to the police for help and support.

We asked young people who had experienced domestic abuse about their experiences of getting help. Only 67 young people answered this question. Nearly half of them had spoken to their friends and 40% had spoken to a parent.

**Telling no-one**

While a lot of young people would go to someone for help, nearly one in ten young people said they would not talk to anyone about domestic abuse. Young people who had experience of domestic abuse were even more likely to say they would talk to no-one about the abuse, with nearly one in five saying they would talk to no-one. One person said that they had ‘been too worried to tell’.

Another said:

“I nearly told my pal once but was too scared to but have a support card with a mobile number and woman said they won’t like come and look for me if I call so I might call them but never have much credit.”
Talking to someone at school

Our campaign\(^2\) to get young people to talk to someone about domestic abuse said young people should talk to ChildLine or someone at school. We wanted to find out more about whether young people would talk to someone at school.

![Bar chart showing percentage of young people who would talk to different staff members at school.]

Three quarters of young people (76\%) who had been taught about domestic abuse thought they would speak to a guidance teacher if they needed help because of domestic abuse. Young people were least likely to say they would talk to a head teacher (28\%), although boys were more likely to think they might than girls. As we said before, it seems that young people who thought their lesson about domestic abuse was useful were more likely to say they would go to someone at school for help.

When young people who had experience of domestic abuse were asked if they had gone to anyone for help, nearly one fifth (18\%) said they had asked someone at school for help.

\(^2\) [Video link](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sf5yjaq7ubU)
**VAV Comments**

Our survey found that young people would prefer to speak to a family member or a friend if they were experiencing domestic abuse. This shows that it is really important that everyone understands domestic abuse and knows how to be there for someone who is going through it.

What is really worrying is that lots of young people say they would not tell anyone about the abuse. This could mean that they don’t know who they could turn to for help. It could also mean that they are worried about the consequences of telling someone or they fear the stigma of being labelled as experiencing domestic abuse.

School though can be a place of safety for many children and young people. We know from the survey that nearly a fifth of young people who had experience of domestic abuse did talk to someone at school so it is really important that teachers know how to respond. This is particularly true for guidance teachers as young people said that they are most likely to talk to them but we know from the survey and our fact-finding that not all young people will want to speak to their guidance teacher - they might prefer another professional in the school.

**Recommendations:**

5 There should be more publicity about domestic abuse directed at everyone - family and friends should know how to support children affected by domestic abuse. For example, lessons in schools should cover how friends can support each other.

6 There should be more publicity directed particularly at children going through domestic abuse like, for example, the campaign VAV helped develop. The publicity should have as messages things like: ‘it is not your fault’, ‘you are not alone’, ‘talking to a trusted adult really helps’ and ‘there can be light at the end of the tunnel’. Also, the publicity should spread information about the support ChildLine, Children’s Support Workers and other professionals like teachers can provide.

7 There should be mandatory training for professionals in schools around domestic abuse which is consistent throughout their careers, not just a one-off. The training should be given to as many teachers as possible, not just guidance teachers or the child protection person as children need a choice as to who they can speak to. All teachers should be aware of the DARTSS (Domestic Abuse Resources and Training for Schools in Scotland) website\(^3\) and use it to increase their learning about domestic abuse.

\(^3\) [http://www.dartsscotland.org/](http://www.dartsscotland.org/)
The housing journey of young people experiencing domestic abuse

In the survey we asked young people who had experienced domestic abuse some questions about housing. There were not many young people who replied to these questions (64) but of those who did, 37 said they had to leave home because of the abuse. Out of those 37, more than half went to stay with friends and family. The others went to a refuge, council accommodation or somewhere else - “we slept in the car once but just till the morning”.

We gave the young people an opportunity to write their own thoughts about their housing journey. Even though the number of young people was small, their words show that the housing journey is not smooth. Some of the problems they wrote about were in relation to:

---

**Lack of understanding from housing services:**

“I would have preferred to of had help from housing services to move me to another town but they didn’t understand or help which was scary as I was a 16 year old pregnant girl.”

“the housing officer was arrogant and spoke to me as if I was worthless”

“I didn’t feel I could access support because I was in a lesbian relationship and I didn’t want either of us to face homophobia.”

---

**Difficulties with moving into new accommodation:**

“We had to move from our house because of abuse to homeless centre. We had half our stuff in homeless place + half our stuff in our old house. Hard for us to keep going back home for things.”

---

**Lack of access to a suitable and safe place to stay:**

“council houses are a lot worse cause they are so small so when the abuser comes to visit I dinny have anywhere to hide”

“in Edinburgh women who have fled abuse only get given silver priority so they are in refuge for anything up to 9 months.”

“housing associations don’t give priority at all to people who went through domestic abuse.”
Families being split up because of housing services:

"we got sent to a refuge instead of staying with my granny because they told us we would get a house quicker. I am not sure if this was the case, but my big brother was not allowed to come to refuge because he was over 16 therefore we had to leave him at home. We should have been able to live with my granny allowing us all to go including my big brother, and still have the same access to being re-housed"

VAV Comments

It is clear from our survey that the housing journey is not smooth for children and young people affected by domestic abuse and this needs to change. Young people have pointed out lots of problems e.g. lack of understanding from housing services, lack of a suitable and safe place to stay, families breaking up and possessions being left behind. Children’s experience of homelessness due to domestic abuse can be less traumatic through improving communication between agencies and the council housing services; ensuring housing officers have an understanding of domestic abuse and how to respond appropriately as well as improving access to decent housing quickly.

The last quote also shows the problems for some older boys getting help. We know from our fact-finding that some Women’s Aid organisations do not offer refuge services or even outreach support services to boys once they are 16 so there is a big gap in services for this group.

Recommendations:

8 All housing officers should be trained to have an understanding of domestic abuse and how to respond and there should be better communication between housing services and different agencies.

9 Local authorities and agencies like Women’s Aid should look at gaps in services to make sure young people receive the right kind of housing support.
We wanted to know what other young people’s priorities are in tackling domestic abuse. We asked them to choose one of four areas (Help & Support, Housing, Schools and Justice Systems & Courts) that they would most like to campaign for change. 581 young people answered this question. This graph shows which area they felt was most important to them:

Under each area we asked them to prioritise a list of changes/improvements we suggested. Under Help & Support for example, young people were given the opportunity to prioritise between: more support workers; more groupwork; a helpline; more publicity (a campaign) or a website. The rest of this report is about presenting young people’s top two priorities out of every area.

We were also interested to hear young people’s views in their own words so we asked them to tell us in writing: if one thing could be changed to make things better for children and young people experiencing domestic abuse in Scotland what would that be? For this question we got 258 responses, out of which only a handful were not serious. We themed the responses and included as many as possible under each area below.

Most of our recommendations in this part of the report are based on young people’s top two priorities. In cases where young people’s own words said something different from the top two priorities we have added a recommendation, but only if lots of young people wrote about the same theme.

Recommendation

10 This survey proves further that young people know what needs to change. We would like to see more local and national decision-makers involving children and young people in setting their priorities for action and checking whether their domestic abuse policies and services work.
Young people's top priorities for Help & Support

Out of our priorities Help and Support was the most important area for young people by a huge way: it was chosen twice as often as any of the other areas. Under Help & Support young people were given the opportunity to prioritise between: more support workers; more groupwork; a helpline; more publicity (a campaign) or a website.

1. Young people voted for their top priority that children should have a support worker to talk to who knows all about domestic abuse:

   "More accessible support and experts to talk to."

   One young person explained why they thought this was most important:

   "I would make sure that there is more people to talk to personally. Some children can’t call childline or other hotlines because their parents would find out, therefore abusing them more. Some people don’t like doing groupwork because they are afraid to speak out."

2. Young people chose as their second priority to make sure that there is ‘Groupwork’ which allows children to get together with other children and young people who’ve been through it and work through stuff:

   "I think you should have a club that people can go to and tell you their problems."

   "Find ways in which you can try to make young people become more open because most teenagers don’t like talking about their personal life so maybe if you get a program where young people can socialise and make new friends and develop their friendship then they maybe able to become more open."
One young person specifically mentioned CEDAR⁴ which is a groupwork programme that was piloted in three areas of Scotland (Edinburgh, Fife and Forth Valley):

"CEDAR (Children Experiencing Domestic Abuse Recovery programme) Should be expanded and implemented across Scotland."

What was really important to many young people was to make sure that help is easily accessible. One young person wrote that if they could change one thing, it would be:

"more support workers in schools and in our area so it easier to speak to a person who knows how you feelin".

Another asked for "more help closer to home" and yet another wrote that they would "have more people to be able to tell and get help from."

It was also important for young people to know who to talk to. Some young people suggested things like "more advertising for helplines and domestic abuse help centres etc. so that people know where to go" or setting up more/better helplines and websites to give information: "Some better helplines so young people can talk to people who are going through the same thing and not someone who thinks they know."

Another young person asked that there is "better information for LGBT people."

Make it easier for young people to ask for help

Some young people wrote about how hard it was to tell someone about what was going on, especially because of being afraid that something will happen that they don’t want, e.g. they will get taken away:

"I think it is important that someone makes a promise that children won’t get taken into care if they tell because I would of maybe told my teachers before but worried about that so I think that promise might help other people like me."

⁴ http://cedanetwork.org.uk/
T prov

 _ I would get some people to talk to a person you trust and can help you with the domestic abuse._

 _more help and support provided for the children so they don’t feel so alone whilst getting abused. Anyone who is aware of domestic abuse should be able to tell someone in complete confidence and confidentiality._

Young people seem to know it can be difficult for those going through domestic abuse to speak out. Many suggested getting more awareness out there that it is okay to talk, for example:

_“Getting awareness out there and let children know there are many people in the same situation.”_

_“Making sure people know that it is not their fault.”_

_“To make sure that they know that it is nothing to be ashamed of and even if it happens once it needs to be reported as it can start to happen frequently.”_

People who are there to help (family, friends, professionals) should all listen to children...

Another big message for services and people that try to help children is that they should listen to children, believe them and respect their opinions and views. One young person wrote that if they could change one thing it would be that:

_“if a child is experiencing or witnessing abusive behavior then they are listened to”._

Others wrote:

_“if a child complains about domestic abuse, listen to him/her rather than ignoring them thinking that they are lying”_

_“I would let the children and young people decide what they want to do after they’ve experienced domestic abuse, and not have trained adults decide for them.”_
**VAV comments**

We think specialist support workers are essential. Without access to a support worker - someone to talk to or open up to - it leaves you battling through life on your own with devastating consequences. If a child does not get the right help straight away (early intervention) then the costs to the child, society and government in the long term will be huge, especially, in our experience, in relation to mental health services, homelessness services and the criminal justice system. We have been challenged about whether mainstream services (e.g. schools, mental health services or social work) can provide this kind of support. Whilst we agree those services can improve hugely, in our view they cannot provide the time, skills and child-led support that a specialist worker can.

Our survey has shown how important it is for young people to have support that is accessible but in our fact-finding we have seen many examples of gaps e.g. waiting lists (especially for outreach support), for rural communities, LGBT and BME children, boys over 16 and disabled children. Agencies are getting better at identifying children affected by domestic abuse which is good but this means that there is a rising demand for support. The biggest gap is simply that there are not enough specialist workers in Scotland to meet this demand.

We also strongly support groupwork programmes to be rolled out. Two VAV members have been through CEDAR® (Children Experiencing Domestic Abuse Recovery) which is the groupwork programme piloted in Edinburgh, Fife and Forth Valley. To us CEDAR worked - its staff, programme, methods and comfort - we learned so much, it saves money and gives free training to professionals like teachers and social workers who become co-facilitators for the group-work. Lots of young people have managed to turn their lives around because of CEDAR and for some it saved their lives.

Many young people wrote about raising awareness of support that is out there and making sure that there are different kinds of help such as websites or helplines. We agree with their opinions that there should be more publicity of things like ChildLine and the Safe Hub website so that all young people know where to go for help.

People listening to children was a big theme for young people who answered our survey. This is also a big theme for all VAV members especially with regards to adult professionals who children chose to confide in. It is a big privilege to be a child’s trusted adult and it is important that professionals believe children and know how to include the child in any decisions they make about how to help. It is, after all, our lives and our future and we know best what we need.

**Recommendations:**

11 Local specialist domestic abuse services need to be built on and sustained into the long term both by local authorities and the Government - gaps in services should be addressed.

12 The highly evaluated CEDAR (Children Experiencing Domestic Abuse Recovery) groupwork programme should be rolled out across Scotland.

13 All professionals should have training on how to listen to children and involve them in any decisions about their lives.

5 http://cedarnetwork.org.uk/
6 http://www.safehubscotland.org/
Young people’s top priorities for improving the Justice System & Courts

"I have phoned the police on more than one occasion due to domestic violence. The first time they never believed me and it was the worst feeling in the world."

Young people’s top priorities for improving the Justice System & Courts

After Help & Support, young people were most likely to want to campaign for change in the Justice System and Courts. Under Justice & Courts young people were given the opportunity to prioritise from: making sure the police listen to children; more programmes for abusers to help them change their behaviour; providing support to women and children when they give evidence against the abuser in court; more specialist courts or making sure the police tell other agencies as soon as there is an incident so children get support straight away.
Their most important priority in the Justice Area was to make sure that the police listen to children when they respond to a domestic abuse incident: “the police to listen to the child’s side of the story”.

One young person wrote that if they could change one thing it would be that: “when police respond to a domestic abuse call that they interview everyone alone from the family.”

Another wrote that “a full investigation should be taken out listening to every member of the household’s statement.”

Their second most important priority in the Justice Area was for the police to let other agencies know as soon as there is an incident so that the child or children get support/help straight away.

Police to take domestic abuse seriously

Many young people also thought that the police should take domestic abuse more seriously and take more action:

“do something about it as quick as possible”

“police acting in every case of domestic abuse”

“[If I could change one thing to make things better for children affected by domestic abuse it would be] telling the children that are getting the abuse to tell the police and hope that they deal with it that day and not get pushed to the bottom of their pile.”
Consequences in court for abusers

As well as improving the police response, many young people had strong views about other parts of the Justice System. Quite a few wrote about “consequences in court should be very serious” and if they could change one thing it would be “longer sentences”, “more convictions”, “harsher punishments for abusers”. One young person wrote:

"Tougher sentences. I’ve heard about people walking away with a £100 fine - what does that teach them? Nothing!"

Some young people thought that programmes to help abusers change their behaviour are important:

"Provide help for people who are liable to abuse others so that they can change their attitude"

The law

A small number of young people wrote that if they could change one thing, it would be to make domestic abuse “illegal” and that we need “a bigger, more effective law to prevent those abusers from doing it again or even doing it in the first place.” One young person said that we need:

"a separate crime called domestic violence. That way it’s not treated like common assault and the abuser will have domestic abuse on their record if convicted."
VAV comments

It appears that young people see the Justice System and the Police as a way of solving the problem of domestic abuse. It is also an area where they have strong opinions about what can be done better: if the police response is good and quick and if sentences are harsher then this could help stop the abuse from re-occurring or happening in the first place (early intervention).

We found it really interesting that young people chose as their top priority making sure that children are listened to by the police. Some adults have suggested that police talking to a child at an incident of domestic abuse will cause distress, but our findings show that young people want the police to listen to their “side of the story” and act upon it.

Young people’s second priority was that the police should tell other agencies about the domestic abuse so they can help/support children from the moment they know an incident has happened. From our fact-finding, we know of good approaches that help agencies get better at communicating and working with each other to help children affected by domestic abuse in a way that respects their right to confidentiality (e.g. the Getting it right for every child Pathfinder approach and the MARAC approach).

Many young people also had strong views about the need for harsher sentences for abusers. We agree that sentences should give a clear message that domestic abuse is taken seriously by the justice system and that abusers will be brought to justice. If the abuser is sentenced to prison or to take part in a behaviour-change programme, this can prevent the abuse and give victims a ‘breather’ - a chance to begin re-building their lives.

We know, though, that good support for the adult victim and children is essential, both for their confidence to give evidence in court but also to re-build their lives. It is also really important that courts understand domestic abuse and there is a way of fast-tracking cases through court. In our fact-finding, we have been really impressed with the Specialist Domestic Abuse Court in Glasgow which works together with a specialist prosecution service and a police Task Force. It also works together with ASSIST which provides specialist support for adult victims and children. This is an excellent approach which helps agencies work together to support victims of domestic abuse and make sure abusers are brought to justice.

Recommendations

14 The most important thing for young people was to make sure the police listen to children at incidents of domestic abuse. We would like to see all police officers getting training on how to listen to children and young people so they are confident about doing this.

15 Approaches like the Getting it right Pathfinder approach and MARAC that help agencies communicate and work together to help children and families affected by domestic abuse should be adopted across all of Scotland.

16 We would like to see sentences for abusers reviewed to make sure that they give a clear message that domestic abuse is taken seriously by the justice system and that they act as a deterrent for abuse and a ‘breathing space’ for victims.

17 Areas outwith Glasgow need to adopt the good practice of the Domestic Abuse Court and ASSIST, the Police Task Force and multi-agency risk assessment and planning (we realise there will be adaptations of the model to suit local areas).
Young people’s priorities: Schools

Young people’s top priorities for Schools

Under Schools young people were given the opportunity to prioritise between: training teachers about domestic abuse; teaching pupils about domestic abuse so they know where to get help; teaching pupils about healthy relationships or improving communication between schools and other agencies.

1

In the Schools area young people’s top priority was to teach pupils about domestic abuse so they know where to get help if they are affected by it:

"well, I think it’s really important to teach children/teenagers about it in school so that we know what to do and where to go to get help"

"Have schools definitely do a course on domestic abuse so that a child can spot the abuse and maybe that will give them the confidence to tell someone about it resolving the problem much quicker than it normally would helping their lives get back to normal."

"I think it needs to be talked about more in schools, as this reduces embarrassment and helps people suffering from domestic violence realise that it is ok to talk, and that they need to tell someone. If the subject continues to be ignored in schools, this sends the message that it is the sufferers fault and it is something they should keep to themselves."

Some young people had specific advice about how these lessons should be:

"getting taught about it in maybe like s1. because primary might be a little young."

"more lessons in school by other agencies and not teachers"

"I think that maybe it would be good for someone who has experienced domestic abuse before should come into schools and talk to classes about it, then be available to talk to for someone who is going through domestic abuse."

Quite a few young people also thought that lessons can help young people with their own relationships so there is no domestic abuse in the future:

"More lessons on healthy relationships...how to communicate and say how you feel without feeling threatened."
For young people, training teachers about domestic abuse was their second highest priority in the Schools area (after lessons for pupils on domestic abuse):

"Train teachers to understand"
"Looking out for signs of abuse more in schools."

One young person explained why it was so important that teachers understand but also that schools work together with other organisations like Women’s Aid and Rape Crisis:

"Would mibe talk to the woman that talked to my class but not like in front of everybody but she doesn’t work in the school but she gets it I know she does she totally gets it and that’s why I couldn’t talk to a teacher not sure they understand."
VAV Comments

School is a place where you learn right from wrong e.g. it’s wrong to think man is better than woman; domestic abuse is wrong and it’s right to work together as a whole to achieve equality. From our fact-finding we know that there are lots of excellent resources out there in Scotland that can help children and young people of all ages learn about domestic abuse and healthy relationships. These are all listed on the DARTSS® (Domestic Abuse Resources and Training for Schools in Scotland) website and we would like to see more schools using them to help create a brighter future for everyone. We would also like to see more schools linking up with local agencies like Women’s Aid so that pupils get to know them and the support they can provide.

School can be your one place of safety if you are going through domestic abuse. It is the law in Scotland for the teacher to make sure that the child gets Additional Support for Learning if there looks like there is a problem. Many children are not getting the support they need to continue education because teachers don’t recognise domestic abuse and don’t understand the stress about matters at home.

We know that the Curriculum for Excellence and the Additional Support for Learning Law are meant to enable pupils to be successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens but without training for teachers on domestic abuse this will not happen for a huge group of children.

Recommendations:

What young people have told us supports three recommendations we have already made:

2 All schools should teach about domestic abuse and not just a one-off lesson. Young people should get the opportunity to learn about it throughout primary and secondary school in different ways that suit the age-groups.

3 Lessons should cover what is a healthy or unhealthy relationship (all the different types of abuse) and what children and young people can do if they experience abuse.

7 There should be mandatory training for professionals in schools around domestic abuse which is consistent throughout their careers, not just a one-off. The training should be given to as many teachers as possible, not just guidance teachers or the child protection person as children need a choice as to who they can speak to. All teachers should be aware of the Dartss (Domestic Abuse Resources and Training for Schools in Scotland) website and use it to increase their learning about domestic abuse.

Young people's top priorities for improving the housing journey

We’ve seen how difficult the housing journey can be for young people experiencing domestic abuse. From all the young people who answered our survey (including those with no experience of domestic abuse), many said they would campaign to improve the Housing area.

Under Housing, young people were given the opportunity to prioritise between: more refuges; improving the standard of existing refuges so that families have their own kitchen and bathroom but there are also communal areas; providing more security so families can stay in their own home and the abuser can’t come back or providing training for housing officers so they understand domestic abuse.

Their top priority in the Housing area was providing more security so women and children can stay in their own homes and prevent the abuser coming back:

“better security for families when the domestic abuser has left but is still threatening them”

“More protection in the home stopping the parent/partner coming back to cause trouble.”

Their second most important priority was building more refuges (safe houses at secret places where women and children can get support):

“more refuge centers and police notice”

Some young people had specific requests about making it easier for families to access a suitable and safe place to live if they need to move home:

“maybe preserve council houses for people that have experienced these problems and are trying to get away from it.”

“put families experiencing Domestic Abuse at the top of housing lists.”
VAV Comments

We know from our own fact-finding that there has been little progress in ensuring that women and children affected by domestic abuse have somewhere safe and happy to stay. We agree with Ministers who said that in the 21st Century women and children should have their own non-shared accommodation or be able to stay in their own home safely. These options can help reduce the additional trauma for women, children and young people.

We are sceptical about staying in your own home safely as it would not have been possible for any VAV members even with the abuser gone. Our survey shows that there is a mix of views about whether it is best to have more security and stay in your own home or move house. One young woman wrote: "...there is no way even if my partner was removed from the house and security increased, that I would return to my home and that is true of most of the women I met in refuge...a lot of women I knew, like myself, lived in constant fear even after moving into refuge."

We know there are real world complications so we are suggesting looking into this some more and also focusing on improving the way housing works with other agencies like the police and Women’s Aid. We totally agree with the young people who recommended that there should be more refuge centres and that local authorities and housing associations should put families experiencing domestic abuse at the top of housing lists.

Recommendations

18 We would like to see more research involving children and young people that looks into their experiences of staying at home with the abuser gone. We need to know if this makes them be safe and feel safe and how multi-agency working can better protect and support them.

19 Women and children should get easy access to high standard housing if they need to move home because of domestic abuse – they should get higher priority and be re-housed in a decent and safe home quickly.

20 All refuges should be up to 21st Century standards (currently only 50% are). Families should have their own bathrooms and kitchens but there should also be communal spaces such as a room for children, a room for young people and a room for women.
Call to Action

“get the government and childline to help children experiencing domestic abuse”

“It should be for the Police and Government to listen to young people.”

“More accessible support and experts to talk to.”

“Train teachers to understand.”

As children and young people, we have the right to life, to be healthy and to be listened to and taken seriously. We have the right to privacy and to be protected from being hurt or badly treated by our parents or other people who care for us. We have the right to a good standard of living, to an education and to have fun and relax.

Domestic abuse can take away all those rights - there are thousands of children in Scotland who do not succeed, who live their lives in fear and in constant danger, who may experience homelessness and bullying at school, who may be hurt by the person who is abusive and who don’t have a way to speak out or get help.
Our big message to adult professionals is:

Take these recommendations and use them wherever you have influence. Make them a reality for children and young people but always involve us in decisions you make about our lives. It is our future and we have the right to be involved. At the end of the day who knows what we need but us?

Our big message to people in power - nationally and locally - is:

Listen to what children and young people have said and take action. Make sure these recommendations are implemented across Scotland and you’ll make a real difference to children’s lives. Involve young people in setting your priorities - we can improve Scotland’s future together.

Our big message to other children and young people is:

Keep making your voices heard! We can change the world with our voice and our actions. If you are going through domestic abuse there can be light at the end of the tunnel, believe us. No matter what, it is not your fault and you should not feel ashamed. The best thing is to tell someone about it.

VAV calls children, adult professionals and people in power to take action!

Children should be allowed to
Live, Laugh, Love
so they need to
Be Healthy, happy, Suse!!
Recommendations

Through the Voice Against Violence online survey, over 600 young people have shared with us their views and opinions about domestic abuse and what can be done to make things better. All the recommendations below come from what they told us. Our first two recommendations reflect the need for participation. The rest are themed to match the areas of the survey: Help & Support, Justice & Courts, Schools and Housing.

- We would like to see more opportunities for children and young people affected by domestic abuse to have their voices heard through research and participation projects.
- This survey proves further that young people know what needs to change. We would like to see more local and national decision-makers involving children and young people in setting their priorities for action and checking whether their domestic abuse policies and services work.

Help and Support

- There should be more publicity about domestic abuse directed at everyone - family and friends should know how to support children affected by domestic abuse. For example, lessons in schools should cover how friends can support each other.
- There should be more publicity directed particularly at children going through domestic abuse like, for example, the campaign VAV helped develop. The publicity should have as messages things like: ‘it is not your fault’, ‘you are not alone’, ‘talking to a trusted adult really helps’ and ‘there can be light at the end of the tunnel’. Also, the publicity should spread information about the support ChildLine, Children’s Support Workers and other professionals like teachers can provide.
- Local specialist domestic abuse services need to be built on and sustained into the long term both by local authorities and the Government - gaps in services should be addressed.
- The highly evaluated CEDAR (Children Experiencing Domestic Abuse Recovery) should be rolled out across Scotland.
- All professionals should have training on how to listen to children and involve them in any decisions about their lives.

Justice and Courts

- The most important thing for young people was to make sure the police listen to children at incidents of domestic abuse. We would like to see all police officers getting training on how to listen to children and young people so they are confident about doing this.
- Approaches like the Getting it right Pathfinder approach and MARAC® that help agencies communicate and work together to help children and families affected by domestic abuse should be adopted across all of Scotland.
- We would like to see sentences for abusers reviewed to make sure that they give a clear message that domestic abuse is taken seriously by the justice system and that they act as a deterrent for abuse and a ‘breathing space’ for victims.
- Areas outwith Glasgow need to adopt the good practice of the Domestic Abuse Court and ASSIST, the Police Task Force and multi-agency risk assessment and planning (we realise there will be adaptations of the model to suit local areas).
Schools

- All schools should teach about domestic abuse and not just a one-off lesson. Young people should get the opportunity to learn about it throughout primary and secondary school in different ways that suit the age-groups.
- Lessons should cover what is a healthy or unhealthy relationship (all the different types of abuse) and what children and young people can do if they experience abuse.
- We would like to see children who have gone through domestic abuse be more involved in creating lessons or information so that it is more likely to be useful for them.
- There should be mandatory training for professionals in schools around domestic abuse which is consistent throughout their careers, not just a one-off. The training should be given to as many teachers as possible, not just guidance teachers or the child protection person as children need a choice as to who they can speak to. All teachers should be aware of the Dartss (Domestic Abuse Resources and Training for Schools in Scotland) website[^10] and use it to increase their learning about domestic abuse.

Housing

- All housing officers should be trained to have an understanding of domestic abuse and how to respond and there should be better communication between housing services and different agencies.
- Local authorities and agencies like Women’s Aid should look at gaps in services to make sure young people receive the right kind of housing support.
- We would like to see more research involving children and young people that looks into their experiences of staying at home with the abuser gone. We need to know if this makes them be safe and feel safe and how multi-agency working can better protect and support them.
- Women and children should get easy access to high standard housing if they need to move home because of domestic abuse – they should get higher priority and be re-housed in a decent and safe home quickly.
- All refuges should be up to 21st Century standards (currently only 50% are). Families should have their own bathrooms and kitchens but there should also be communal spaces such as a room for children, a room for young people and a room for women.

You can download Shaping the Future plus the full findings and an accessible version of the Report from the following websites:

www.voiceagainstviolence.org.uk
www.dartsscotland.org
www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Equality/violence-women
www.safehubscotland.org

info@voiceagainstviolence.org.uk
www.voiceagainstviolence.org.uk

VAV is funded by the Scottish Government