# Contents

1. Intro ........................................... p.1

**Young experts working together**

2. Young experts working together - how we did this project .................................. p.2

3. Peer education sessions – the activities we ran and what the young experts thought of working with VAV ........................................ p.3

4. VAV’s views on the peer education sessions ...................................................... p.7

**Changing the world with our voice!**

5. Young experts’ views on things that help children and young people going through domestic abuse ........................................ p.8

6. The young experts’ questions for the Big Bang panel ........................................ p.10

7. The Big Bang Event and what the young experts thought of being there .............. p.11

8. Question Time and what the young experts thought of talking to the people in power ......................................................... p.12

9. What Tam, Nicola and Harry said…and what the young experts thought of their answers ........................................ p.13

**Handy hints for adults in power**

10. Young experts’ advice on things adults in power can do to make talking to them a safe and happy experience ........................................ p.17
1. Intro...

Voice Against Violence (VAV) is a group of 8 young people with first-hand experience of domestic abuse and different services. We have been going strong since November 2009 as the ‘critical friends’ of adults in power – Scottish Ministers, CoSLA¹ and heads of services. We use our experience, our research and our fact-finding to help them understand what changes need to happen so that other children and young people have a smoother journey.

We are a voice for children going through domestic abuse in Scotland but we know we can’t speak on behalf of all children and young people, especially if they want to speak for themselves, so we decided to create a chance for other ‘young experts’ on the subject to make their voices heard by the people in power!

To do this, we invited young people to take part in a Question Time debate which took place on the 29th November 2011 at VAV’s Big Bang Event in the Omni Vue cinema, Edinburgh. The debate was chaired by VAV’s Co-Chair, Karen, and the panel members were Nicola Sturgeon, Deputy First Minister of Scotland; Tam Baillie, Scotland’s Commissioner for Children & Young People and Councillor Harry McGuigan, CoSLA Spokesperson on Community Wellbeing & Safety... pretty intimidating professionals if you don’t know them, but also people who have a huge amount of power to make the changes that young people say are needed.

Eight amazing young people, aged 10-16, who are also experts on domestic abuse, took part in our project. They came from three different organisations – Edinburgh Women’s Aid, Clydebank Women’s Aid and ASSIST, which is the Support and Advocacy Project linked to the Glasgow Domestic Abuse Court.

This Report covers how we did the project (our peer education and participative methodology) and what the young people thought of working with VAV. It also covers the fantastic questions they put to the Big Bang panel, the answers they got and what they thought of speaking to the people in power. Whether you are a young person or an adult professional, we hope you enjoy reading it. Use the learning in your own participation projects. Make sure that politicians, decision-makers and heads of services know what matters to children going through domestic abuse. Help continue the direct approach between young people and adults in power that VAV have pioneered. Together we can make a difference!

Dec, VAV Young Expert & Lead on Participation Project

¹ CoSLA is the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. It represents local Councils.
2. Young experts working together – how we did this project

This project was a ‘peer education’ participation project. We are calling it that because the young people we worked with were our peers in the sense that they were close to us in age. They were also experts like us on domestic abuse and what helps if you are going through it. In fact, they had more expertise than us on some services because their experience of domestic abuse was much more recent than ours.

The ‘education’ bit was therefore two-way. We wanted to find out their views about improving services and they wanted to learn from our experience of talking to adults in power. They wanted a bit of help to make adults sit up and listen to young people so they could put VAV’s Big Bang Question Time panel on the hot seat.

The amazing young experts we worked with...

Logistically, we knew we could not work with many young people from all over Scotland, so we approached just 3 organisations. We chose them because Support Workers from these organisations had contacted us to ask how the young people they work with can become involved in VAV-type work. They had already identified young people who were interested and we felt that this was a great chance to get them involved!

In the end, six young experts from Clydebank Women’s Aid, two from ASSIST and one from Edinburgh Women’s Aid chose to take part in the peer education sessions.

All eight of them were girls and their ages were 10-16. All of them came to the Big Bang in November 2011 and seven of them put their views and questions to the Question Time panel. We met with four of them again in February 2012 for a fun activity session, to find out what they thought of working with us and speaking to the people in power.
3. Peer education sessions – the activities we ran and what the young experts thought of working with VAV

Jack and I designed the activity sessions. We’d been involved in delivering sessions to VAV members before, but this was different. We knew we were travelling to see the young people in their own spaces and we had to fit with their times. Also, we had never met them before and we were complete strangers!

It was important to us that we started on an equal footing – we are all experts on domestic abuse, we can learn a great deal from each other, and we all have the right for our voices to be heard by adults in power. It was also important to make sure their involvement was a safe and happy experience.

In VAV, we have standards which are a set of basic rules and regulations that help make sure our participation is happy and safe. Even though we are a positive group, we all come from backgrounds of domestic abuse so there are always going to be issues of safety for us. The standards are criteria for good participation and we found them very useful to help us think about working with other children or young people who have experience of domestic abuse.

You can find the VAV participation standards here: http://voiceagainstviolence.org.uk/category/resources/

Things like protecting confidentiality, not asking personal questions and creating fun activities that use different methodologies and have a real focus, were all important to us. It was also very important that all young experts, VAV included, had a worker that they trust with them throughout the sessions. The role of the worker was to be there as a support in case anyone needed to talk about things that activities brought up for them. Also, workers were great at giving useful prompts to help participants remember things, but of course, did not speak on their behalf!

Our first session: Working with young experts from Clydebank Women’s Aid (CWA)

The purpose of this session was for us to get to know the CWA young experts and for them to get to know us. It was about feeling comfortable with each other to share our areas of expertise. By the end of the session, we hoped they would be up for coming to our residential in Edinburgh, meeting the rest of VAV and preparing for the Big Bang Question Time.

Jack and I started off with a thank you to the four CWA young experts for inviting VAV. We did a couple of fun ice-breakers (workers included), one of which was to draw yourself as a superhero – what powers would you have and why – and we all discovered we had pretty good artistic skills in common!

“I liked it when we had to draw those mad people, the superhero things!”

CWA Young Expert

We had film-making expertise in common too. The next activity, exchanging our films, was a good way of getting to know each other and an equaliser-‘we’re all young experts.’ We had a group discussion about how we created them and what we enjoyed about the process. The CWA film was a fantastic evaluation of the children’s service which they sent to the Big Lottery.

We did not have much time to do the last activity, which was noting down on flipcharts our views of what helps/doesn’t help if you are going through domestic abuse, but that’s because we had to focus on the important business of eating snacks 😊

Before the session, the CWA young experts said they were half excited and half worried: “I was worried about meeting VAV but GLAD I did”. By the end, we were all up for meeting again!
Our second session: Working with young experts from CWA, this time in Edinburgh!

The aims of this session were:

- To learn from the CWA young experts’ areas of expertise – what helps children going through domestic abuse and what changes need to happen in Scotland so children have a smoother journey.
- To help CWA young experts feel prepared for taking part in the Big Bang Question Time and come up with their own questions for the panel (not influenced by VAV).

By the end of the session, we wanted everyone to feel happy and comfortable working together, that we’d all had fun and learned new things. We also wanted the CWA young experts to feel fully informed about the Big Bang Question Time and make sure they knew who the panel members would be and what kind of powers they have. Most importantly, we wanted them to feel confident about putting their questions to the panel.

Four CWA young experts came to Edinburgh, three of whom we had met before in Clydebank. This was a much longer session and we covered a wider range of issues using different methods such as worksheets, role-plays and flip-cams. As facilitator, I felt more ‘in control’ this time, because they were visiting us and I knew what to expect in terms of the room layout and when we would break for food. My big worries were keeping to time and making sure the activities were interesting and people got things out of them.

Getting started, sharing ideas about things that help children going through domestic abuse

After the icebreakers, each CWA young expert buddied up with a VAV young expert to fill in a worksheet about ‘Things that really help if you’re going through domestic abuse’. VAV buddies used the worksheet headings (housing, schools, police etc.) as prompts and the idea was to exchange views based on personal experiences and journeys. What ended up on the sheet though, had to come from the CWA young experts.

The buddy system seemed to work really well. Everyone was comfortable and confident speaking about incredibly sensitive topics. We got very detailed responses because of the 1-to-1 attention:

Teachers keeping information secret, not telling other people in class. Teachers should not gossip about you.

In refuges, more room so you don’t need to share a bathroom and stuff, being able to invite your friends and to decorate your own room.

I feel unsafe and uncomfortable around police – during the interview they had a bat and spray on them. Hard to connect. You have to say stuff – there is no support.

Getting support from people who know us and understand professionally and have a background.

Read all their views on page 8!

Focusing on the most important priorities for change

The next activity was about focussing on what the young experts though were vital priorities for change. All the young experts, VAV included, chose from the worksheets ‘one thing I would change to make things better for children affected by domestic abuse’ and created posters...
Practicing speaking out!

This activity was a bit of fun but had a really important point. If you can voice your personal opinions once in front of others, you get more confident about doing it again in front of different people. 😊

CWA young experts and VAV buddies paired up and used flip-cams to film each other saying out loud the ‘one thing they would change’. They could do it any which way they like – it did not have to be serious – and everyone spontaneously decided to do their film shoots outside in the garden. When we all got together to watch each other’s clips, it was brilliant; both hilarious but also very powerful.

Introducing the ‘adults in power’

After the flip-cam activity, it was time to introduce the Question Time panel – Nicola Sturgeon, Tam Baillie and Cllr Harry McGuigan – all of who have different powers to help make the changes that young people think are important. VAV created ‘trading cards’ as a fun way of explaining what each panel member does and what specific powers they have.

We also did a quiz on the panel members. Test your own knowledge if you like:

**Before Harry became a local Councillor, what kind of teacher was he?**
A. An English teacher
B. A Physics teacher
C. A Sports teacher

(Answer = B)

Preparing and practicing questions

The last activity involved VAV buddies working with CWA young experts to transform the ‘one thing I would change’ into a powerful question for the panel...‘How will YOU make sure X changes...’ Three VAV members pretended to be Tam, Nicola and Harry and we did a role-play of Question Time. The CWA young experts put them on the hot seat with their fantastic questions and the ‘panel members’ responded with enthusiasm and a little of their familiar ‘political speak’. 😊

Feedback on the session

All the CWA young experts said they enjoyed the session and meeting VAV. Overall impressions were:

In terms of location, they thought it was fun to come to Edinburgh, but one CWA young expert did say she preferred it when VAV came to Clydebank: “I liked it more when you came to see us. It felt more relaxed.”

Even though some of the activities explored really sensitive subjects, the fact that we were all had a background of domestic abuse in common, made it easier and more comfortable to talk about things. One of the CWA young experts also said it made them feel more confident to speak to the panel: “Telling people who have been through it too gave me confidence to speak to them [the panel at the Big Bang].”

Everyone from VAV thought it was the best session they had ever done at a residential and someone said that “it reminded me why I am part of VAV” which I totally agree with. Hearing the CWA young experts’ views was inspirational and as one VAV member put it: “I was totally star struck by meeting new talented young people!”

‘People in power’ trading cards:

Collect them all now!!

Download materials we used in this session!
http://voiceagainstviolence.org.uk/put-your-questions-to-your-big-bang-panel/

Before Harry became a local Councillor, what kind of teacher was he?
A. An English teacher
B. A Physics teacher
C. A Sports teacher

(Answer = B)
Our third and fourth sessions: Working with young experts from ASSIST and Edinburgh Women’s Aid (EWA)

Jack and I travelled to Glasgow to meet two young experts from ASSIST, the Support & Advocacy Project linked to the Domestic Abuse Court. Lola, another VAV member, met with a young expert from EWA in Edinburgh. The idea was to have the same number of VAV ‘buddies’ as young experts at each session.

For our meetings, we adapted some of our residential activities to fit into a smaller amount of time. The purpose of the sessions was the same as before: to learn from the young experts’ areas of expertise and help them feel prepared for the Big Bang Question Time.

There were different challenges though. Having less time meant we could not do things like the flip-cam activity which can help lighten the atmosphere after quite heavy discussions. We were worried that working with just one or two young experts would be a very intense experience, for them and for us. There was also the issue of location. Jack and I went to ASSIST. We were confident that it was a familiar and safe space for the young experts, but the EWA young expert met Lola at VAV’s HQ in the University of Edinburgh. Though it is ‘home away from home’ for VAV members, it can be a bit intimidating for other people.

Lola and I agreed with Jack when he said: “I was nervous at first and did not know what to expect but totally relaxed once I met the young experts. They made it easy for us!”

Lola also said that it really helped when the EWA and VAV workers left the room and it was just the two young experts together. The EWA young expert was incredibly confident and had done public speaking before. She already had a great deal of expertise talking about domestic abuse to adults in power which was really impressive!

With ASSIST, the location definitely helped and also the fact that we got the chance to meet the young experts’ mums and sisters before starting the session. We began with our ‘superhero icebreaker’ then Jack and I buddied up with the young experts to fill in the worksheet. We learned a huge amount from them about what helps children going through domestic abuse:

Moving home is kinda good and bad. Good is: new happy memories, dad can’t find us. Bad is: I lived in my old home a long time so there was lots to pack! My family used to visit – memories of my grandparents.

My Guidance Teacher had a session in PSE. It helped teach about domestic abuse, taught that no-one is different no matter what they’ve been through.

I’ve been in court. It was a closed court with a lawyer. I didn’t like it – would have been better if Dad didn’t make you go. If nobody supported you, wouldn’t know what to do. ASSIST helped out.

Not been to court yet but I had a chance to visit which really helped. I got to see where the witnesses stand. I’m not sure if it will be an open court where anyone can walk in. Nervous about everyone knowing my business – closing the court from the public would be more relaxed.

It took very little time for them to decide their questions. One of the ASSIST young experts told us that they were surprised how comfortable they felt speaking about everything with us, which was a massive boost! They also said that a good thing about the session was that they got to meet another young person from ASSIST.

The feedback from the ASSIST worker was also really positive: ‘the young people both engaged really well and felt talking to people they had never met before about domestic abuse. This was powerful and healing in itself!’
4. VAV’s views on the peer education sessions

At first, when I took on the project as Lead, I did not realise how much I would love doing this work. I don’t think any of the VAV members realised how much they would enjoy the working with the young experts either.

The moment I realised I loved designing and delivering the peer education sessions was when I saw how different things were to normal VAV residentials. Because of the nature of our work, VAV spends a lot of time talking about things – we look for solutions to problems based on our expertise and our fact-finding, we debate with adults who are so careful about what they say always. Working with other young people, well…that was about participation and I felt like we were properly doing participation…like ‘Yeah! We’re pushing this forward, we’re making this happen’ and some of the things you hear from other young experts are amazing and everything is inspirational.

VAV members learned a great deal from working with the young experts. It is better to get the views of young people who are closer to the storm, whose experience of domestic abuse is more recent than ours and to see their reality because for them, they are not as concerned about the WHY things are not working, they just want it to STOP and their passion is infectious. Our one big hope was that they had also learned things from us about making their voices heard by the adults in power. The Big Bang was going to be a tremendously exciting event!!!

Our learning from doing peer education sessions…

Working as ‘peers’ really works: Even though we are not experts on doing sessions with young people, we had an immediate connection with the young experts based on our shared experiences and our shared language. Both the young experts and VAV members said that they felt comfortable opening up about very sensitive topics. As peers, our relationship was equal. We could learn from one another and we could help each other understand new things without it feeling like a ‘lesson’.

Safety and Comfort: The location was very important and meeting young experts in their own spaces. This did not happen with the EWA young expert but with the CWA group, we met them first in Clydebank before they came to our Edinburgh residential. Having standards about confidentiality and respect was also important in terms of helping us feel safe and happy with our involvement. Our workers were brilliant – they were there to offer support or prompt if needed, but took a back seat and did not speak on our behalf. In terms of comfort, having lots of nice snacks and drinks available really powered us through the sessions 😊

Fun and different methodologies: When we were designing the sessions, we put a lot of effort into making sure that the activities were fun and they used different methods – worksheets, quizzes, drawing, filming, role-play etc. It is amazing how much preparation you need to do in terms of planning and creating resources but it is worthwhile because it keeps people motivated and interested! The thing that worked best in making people feel comfortable to speak out was having a buddy. The 1-to-1 attention helped build trust and it meant that activities could be really flexible and move at the pace of each young expert and VAV member.

Meeting other young people who have been through similar experiences: This was something unexpected - the fact that sharing our journeys and stories with each other was much more than just a learning process. It was a confidence boost because you are talking about very personal things with people who, in a way are total strangers but at the same time, they really understand. The ASSIST young expert said that one of the good things about the session was that she got to meet another young person from ASSIST and this is something we all found good – meeting other young people who have been through similar things.

New skills: Coming away with new skills was truly rewarding. For VAV, it was participation skills and for the young experts, it was skills to make adults in power sit up and listen!

Thanking young experts for participating: We felt it was important to thank the young experts for giving up their time to work with us, so we got them vouchers and we were really pleased when they said they appreciated them 😊
5. Young experts’ views on what helps children going through domestic abuse

The following quotes are what the young experts wrote on their worksheets ‘Things that really help if you’re going through domestic abuse’.

Getting help and support

- Whole family support helps... a support worker for 1-2-1 with children and mum has another support worker.
- Getting support from people who know us and understand professionally and have a background.
- NOT BEING AFRAID to phone in – it’s okay to just call or come to office.
- Better advice from social workers...trust.
- More support workers.
- CEDAR Group programmes! Mums also supported to help build relationship again.
- Knowing you are not alone but together against a bigger problem.
- Best thing was support – help by talking = confidence.

Housing

- A safe environment, location where we feel safe.
- Going to a new place = scared. Having someone to talk to is important.
- We’re staying close to dad – support worker and social worker are trying to help us move. Bad experience with dad’s friend. Dad has own home but comes back when drunk.
- Age restriction needs to change so that boys older than 16 can also go to refuge and be with their family.
- Moving home is kinda good and bad. Good is: new happy memories, dad can’t find us. Bad is: I lived in my old home a long time so there was lots to pack! My family used to visit – memories of my grandparents.
- Need good place to stay fast!! No waiting lists!

School

- Some teachers help and listen to you.
- Being punished when you don’t do anything – teachers not understanding that domestic abuse can lead to anger problems – there’s more to the problem than just assuming you are unruly.
- For schools to provide info about places which can help if you don’t want to talk to teachers.
- Being supported through schools to contact women’s aid.
- Teachers keeping information secret, not telling other people in class. Teachers should not gossip about you.
- Support assistants really nice – they talk to me about different stuff, nice stuff.
- My Guidance Teacher had a session in PSE. It helped teach about domestic abuse, taught that no-one is different no matter what they’ve been through.
- No questions asked when leaving class to seek support.
- Teachers should make more time for you.
- Teacher training to raise awareness and spot the signs.
- Taught about domestic abuse more.
The police

- Some are okay, some aggressive, bang in, shout if you are in the room ‘get out!’ Not patient, been searched. ...judged before you talk, don’t listen to full story. Perpetrator lies, victims get arrested. Police think victim is perpetrator.
- Should be more friendly and not accusing.
- POLICE Don’t UNDERSTAND domestic abuse – if there’s an incident, they don’t talk to everyone. Skip young people.
- I feel unsafe and uncomfortable around police – during the interview they had a bat and spray on them. Hard to connect. You have to say stuff - there is no support.
- Do not stigmatise young people so take our word seriously.
- Children hear and see a lot more than they think so take us seriously.
- Schools policeman is good. He talks and asks if everything is ok.
- Faster response to incidents.

Courts

- Not supposed to talk about court with mum before case. I will see her in court only so couldn’t get support from mum. Had to be in room with perpetrator, wouldn’t let me leave.
- Not been to court yet but I had a chance to visit which really helped. I got to see where the witnesses stand. I’m not sure if it will be an open court where anyone can walk in. Nervous about everyone knowing my business – closing the court from the public would be more relaxed.
- Judge not lenient on the criminal.
- Stronger punishments, police to lock up domestic abusers for at least 10 years.
- Courts to listen to what young people have to say about it, and take them seriously.
- Doesn’t work in a court room. No privacy, exposed. Awkward with your family, uncomfortable, support workers do help.
- I’ve been in court. It was a closed court with a lawyer. I didn’t like it – would have been better if Dad didn’t make you go. If nobody supported you, wouldn’t know what to do. ASSIST helped out.
6. The young experts’ questions for the Big Bang panel

From personal experience, I know that reports of domestic abuse are often dismissed or dealt with poorly, for example, discussing them when the abuser is present. What will you do with regard to social work, the NHS staff and school teachers to improve this situation? EWA Young Expert

What would you do to make sure that every child in Scotland has a support worker or someone they can go to to get their feelings out? ASSIST Young Expert

I had to give evidence at court against my dad, I felt really scared and nervous. I liked having a worker there from ASSIST to support me, because it helped me to feel less scared. How can you make sure that all children have got support workers that know about domestic abuse to help them at court? ASSIST Young Expert

My PSE teacher was really good at helping me through everything and teaching my whole class about domestic abuse, how could you make sure that every PSE teacher in Scotland was as helpful as this? ASSIST Young Expert

Are you going to make sure that there is funding for support for every young person who experienced domestic abuse? CWA Young Expert

How would you make sure that police understand and respect young people who have been through a domestic abuse? CWA Young Experts (two chose to ask the same question)

How can you make sure that people in power listen to children and young people who have been through domestic abuse? CWA Young Expert
7. The Big Bang Event and what the young experts thought of being there

For VAV members, the Big Bang was a chance to showcase our achievements since we started up as a group. The whole event, from beginning to end, was organised by us and we felt it was the culmination of all our talents. We welcomed around 200 young people and adult professionals to the Vue cinema in Edinburgh on the 29th November 2011. The day started at 11:00am with a hotdog & pop-corn reception in the main foyer of the cinema. Everyone came DRESSED TO IMPRESS and mingled under VAV’s massive balloon arch!

After the reception, we invited guests into cinema Screen 2, where we launched two amazing resources: the VAV Legacy Film, *One Voice at a Time* and our *Shaping the Future* Survey Manifesto - a new set of priorities for tackling domestic abuse chosen by hundreds of young people from across the country.

The second part of the ‘screening’ was our Question Time, giving young people in the audience the chance to have their voices directly influence the people who run this country. As a group, VAV was coming to an end, and the Big Bang was a way for us to ‘pass the flame’ to new inspiring young experts!

Once Question Time was over, everyone returned to the foyer for more mingling and some well-earned ice-cream!

The four young experts who came to our Evaluation Session in February 2012 all said they were really excited about being at the Big Bang. What they were looking forward to most was the Question Time: “I wanted to come to the Big Bang because I wanted to meet these people [the panel]. I wanted to know how they could help like people who have been through domestic abuse and stuff—how they would help us.” CWA Young Expert

Big Bang got a mix of reviews. Good things were travelling to Edinburgh, the VAV movie, the venue and the food! Also, the fact that there were other children in the audience who had been through domestic abuse: “There were many other children like us there which made it good.” CWA Young Expert

Not so good was the fact that the main event in Screen 2 was almost two hours long. Some of the presentations, as well as some answers the panel members gave, were not so easy to understand. As one CWA young expert summed it up, it was “a teeny bit boring but still fun”. She had advice for VAV on making the experience better: “Next time you should let us take the pop-corn into the cinema!”

Being amongst a massive audience and knowing that you have a question to ask was a bit nerve-wracking. As the ASSIST young expert said: ‘It felt weird in the big cinema room cause of all the people there.’ Due to Nicola Sturgeon’s availability, we had to move Question Time to a later point in the event, which meant the young experts had a long wait before they could relax. If we did it all again, this is one thing we would definitely try to do differently.
8. Question Time and what the young experts thought of talking to the people in power

The young people in the audience sat with their workers in the front rows of the cinema, up close to the panel. Unaccompanied adults were at the back 😌. Question Time began with Karen, VAV’s Co-Chair, opening the proceedings in style:

*I am glad to announce the start of today’s Question Time. This isn’t any Tom, Dick or Harry you know… I’d like to welcome….. Tam, Nic (ola) and Harry! We hope you don’t mind the poetic license Nicola! We want you all to enjoy it and we know there are some nervous people out there….VAV have had the pleasure of meeting all three of our panellists and insist they won’t bite! We’re delighted to have people with such power and responsibility here…*

Of course, the real stars of Question Time were the young experts themselves!

All the young experts said that the panel members were a bit intimidating:

“*They just look like old people, like my mum and dad. It would help if they seemed friendlier when listening – you would talk to them with more confidence.*” CWA Young Expert

“*Freaky. They stare at u.*” CWA Young Expert

One CWA young expert thought that Tam, Nicola and Harry would also have felt intimidated: “*They would have been more scared than we were cause there were more people looking at them, then at us.*” CWA Young Expert

The young experts who had invited a VAV member or their worker to ask their question for them, were equally nervous about how the panel would respond: “*I was worried about the reaction [from panel members].*” CWA Young Expert

Things that were personally nerve-wracking, like being the youngest or the first to ask a question, became real sources of pride: “*I was dead nervous because I was the first to ask my question but once I started, I was fine!*” ASSIST Young Expert

“I was the youngest person to ask!!!” CWA Young Expert

All the VAV members were blown away by the young experts’ confidence! It was great to hear that they felt good about putting the people in power in the hot seat: “*It felt a bit weird like, talking to them like, you know, I would talk to yous, but once I got into it, I liked it!*” ASSIST Young Expert

“I felt more relaxed after asking my question. Well, not relaxed but kinda confident.” CWA Young Expert
9. What Tam, Nicola and Harry said…and what the young experts thought of their answers

The four young experts who took part in the February 2012 Evaluation Session had very mixed views of the panel members’ answers. One the one hand, they felt it was good that adults in power took time to answer young people’s questions: “At Big Bang they listened and answered properly without just giving a yes or no answer.” CWA Young Expert

On the other hand, they all agreed that there were massive barriers to communication between young and old, due to the panel members’ use of jargon and ‘political speak’. The young experts felt strongly that “they could have made a better effort to talk to us like, so we can tell what they are saying” CWA Young Expert

This applied equally to all three panel members: “They should give clearer answers. I didn’t understand the way they talked…none of them.” ASSIST Young Expert

The young experts described all the experience of listening to the panel members as ‘confusing’ and ‘boring’ – “they talk and talk and talk and talk…and talk.” CWA Young Expert

Even after 2 years of working with adults in power, we also get confused by their language and political speak! At the Evaluation Session, we thought it was important to help the young experts understand the impact they made with their questions.

We created pictorial representations of the panel’s answers to help them cut through the political speak and see the results they got. Some of these have been used to illustrate the next section of the Report in which we summarise the main points from the panel members’ answers.

The first two questions about Support were asked together:

1. What would you do to make sure that every child in Scotland has a support worker or someone they can go to get their feelings out? (ASSIST Young Expert)

2. Are you going to make sure that there is funding for support for every young person who experienced domestic abuse? (CWA Young Expert)

Deputy First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, announced then and there that the Scottish Government would continue the Fund for specialist children’s support workers for 2012-15:

“…we are going to continue funding for support workers because we recognise just how important it is to provide that support for young people who find themselves in the domestic abuse situation.”

She also spoke of training to ensure “…that any professionals that a young person comes into contact with in their day to day life, whether that’s their teacher at school or their GP … they have the knowledge and the awareness and the skills to make sure they are listening and responding as appropriate.” Both Tam and Harry agreed with Nicola about making sure all professionals get better at listening to children and young people. Tam said he was “hopeful” that in future years this will become a reality.

3. How will you make sure that the police understand and respect young people who have been through domestic abuse? (shared question from two CWA Young Experts)

Tam Baillie, Scotland’s Commissioner for Children and Young People, agreed that there were “strong messages” coming from young people about how the police should respond to domestic abuse, including that they should listen to the child’s side of the story at incidents.
He said that he did not want to “speak on behalf of the police” but he felt that the police forces would welcome young people’s views:

“...the way that they [the police] have responded quite differently to the issue of domestic abuse, over the last five, six, seven years, I think gives you hope that your message can be heard.”

Nicola and Harry agreed that the police would be very open to young people’s views but felt there is a need for appropriate training for police officers to help them listen to children at incidents of domestic abuse. For Nicola, this was not just an issue for the police, but “more generally about changing culture” with respect to how adults view young people and the opinions that they express.

Harry spoke about the role of “single outcome agreements” and “community planning partners” in making sure that training for the police improves and becomes consistent across Scotland.

Nicola mentioned that, in her experience, young victims of domestic abuse:

“...often feel that, having been the victim of a crime, the justice system makes them a victim all over again, because of the processes that they have to go through, the giving statements, reliving horrific experiences that they have had to endure, and then the process of giving evidence in court.”

She said there is “…an absolute obligation on politicians, on the court service, to make sure that when a young person has to do that [give evidence in court], then they have all the support they need.”

Her view was that it’s not just about support workers, but also about making the whole court system easier for young people to have a say without feeling as if “they’ve been dragged through the mill again.”

Harry’s view was that “we must learn from the two examples” of the Glasgow Domestic Abuse Court and the Children’s Hearing System to make sure children feel comfortable and confident to speak about their experiences. Tam made the point that “it is right in the middle of my agenda” to look at the justice system. He explained that he was in the process of listening to children’s and young people’s views on how it could be improved.

5. My PSE teacher was really good at helping me through everything and teaching my whole class about domestic abuse, how could you make sure that every PSE teacher in Scotland was as helpful as this? (ASSIST Young Expert)

Before Cllr Harry McGuigan became a local authority politician and CoSLA Spokesperson for Community Wellbeing & Safety, he was a physics teacher in a secondary school. He said himself he was very familiar with the “shortcomings and strengths” in the education system:

“Some teachers do not feel they are confident or well enough trained to know how to go about moving into that kind of territory [domestic abuse]....I don’t like ‘mandatory’ anything, but there is recognition, or there has to be recognition, that better training arrangements need to be put in place for teachers.”
Harry also suggested that schools should try to work closely with other agencies more expert on domestic abuse, to understand the issues better and support children going through it. He made it very clear that it was not for national government to try to do this. Local authorities and community planning partners should be committed to doing everything they can to help children and young people get the most from their school experience, no matter what their needs are.

Nicola agreed with Harry’s views on training for teachers and better links between schools and expert agencies. Tam said he was confident that teachers and other professionals in education have the motivation to do more through the curriculum:

“I think we are sitting in a place right now where there is an appetite for doing much more through the curriculum, for doing much more in our everyday engagement with children and young people that will take account of the need for support in domestic abuse, but that relates back to your rights.”

6. From personal experience, I know that reports of domestic abuse are often dismissed or dealt with poorly, for example, discussing them when the abuser is present. What will you do with regard to social work, the NHS staff and school teachers to improve this situation? (EWA Young Expert)

All three panel members talked about the need for better training of professionals as a way of changing ‘practice’ i.e. the way agencies deal with domestic abuse. Nicola Sturgeon pointed out:

“...in this day and age it’s not really acceptable that that happens, that the victim of abuse is spoken to or interviewed while their abuser is present.”

She said that everyone is aware that abuse is “absolutely and fundamentally wrong”, and all of us need to send out the message “that not dealing or responding to domestic abuse properly and sensitively and appropriately is also wrong.”

7. How can you make sure that people in power listen to children and young people who have been through domestic abuse? (CWA Young Expert)

Nicola’s answer focused on what she herself could do as well as the Scottish Government:

“Well I can start by taking responsibility for it myself ... and that’s why I’m here today...and I want to give you an assurance that I’m listening, the government is listening, and we’re not just listening, we’re taking very seriously what we’re hearing and we’re going to do our very best with the others here to make sure we make improvements where you have identified them. “

Harry spoke about what local authorities should be doing in terms of listening to children and young people. He said there was lots of good work at national level, like VAV and the Big Bang, but there should be more local work:

“...the local authorities, they have got a responsibility to lead and to make sure that they make contact with young people in their own areas, to explore how they can best ensure that they mirror some of the activities and some of the efforts and some of the success that has happened here nationally. So that’s already started, but it has got still quite a way to go.”

Tam made it clear that this was one of his biggest priorities!

“That’s one of the key areas where I will be working. It’s absolutely crucial and I think, I am hopeful that we’ll get better at listening to the views of children and young people, and if I have anything to do with it, it will just become part and parcel of the way that we engage with children and young people.”
The young experts’ final verdict on the answers they got

The young experts’ comments we already highlighted in the Report were ‘first impressions’. After we explained the panel members’ answers to their questions, did anything change?

There was no shift in terms of opinions about the ‘political speak’. In fact, the young experts read out loud bits of the Question Time transcript and said they were even more confused. Once we did our fun activity with the pictorial representations (we asked the young experts to guess what they meant and then used notes, similar to those in the Report, to fill them in on all the replies), feelings were still slightly mixed:

All the young experts were pleased to get the chance to go over the answers. This activity was by far the most important part of the Evaluation Session. They were rightfully very proud to have spoken to the adults in power and happy that they had got ‘results’ - promises and commitments from the panel members which would help other children going through domestic abuse.

Something they felt was less good was the fact that certain answers didn’t relate to their questions. This was the case, for example, when panel members talked about ‘things that should happen’ rather than ‘how they will make it happen’. There was also the worry about whether Tam, Nicola and Harry’s words would actually become a reality: “Those things they said to us, will they actually do them?” CWA Young Expert

For VAV members, the whole experience of Question Time was a defining moment. Even before Big Bang, working with the young experts made us re-connect with why VAV existed in the first place. They were amazing and strong and inspirational. It made us realise that VAV is the first but we will not be the last. There are thousands of young people out there who can do what we do.

Okay, at the Question Time we knew the panel would go on into their ‘political speak’ and it would be hard for anyone to follow but the impact was there. When the young experts asked their questions about specialist support workers and Nicola just went...‘yes, we are continuing the fund’...she just announced it then and there! Or when Harry who, as he pointed out, doesn’t like ‘mandatory anything’, came out and said that there should be training for teachers....and then Tam, and Nicola and Harry made a public commitment to make sure children and young people going through domestic abuse have their voices heard by decision-makers at all levels of government! The young experts got results like VAV does!

It is up to us young people and all our adult allies to keep reminding the people in power of their promises and make sure, as the CWA Young Expert said, that they actually do all the things they said they would 😊
10. Young experts’ advice on things adults can do to make talking to them a safe and happy experience

The young experts spent a huge amount of their own time to prepare and practice for meeting with the Question Time panel members. Their commitment and their enthusiasm were truly inspirational and they overcame many worries in order to get results for other children and young people going through domestic abuse.

After taking part in Question Time, they had lots of advice for adults in power on what they can do to make talking to them a safe and happy experience. If involving children and young people in policy and service development becomes ‘part and parcel’ as Tam Baillie said, of how we do things in Scotland (and we believe it must do!), then this advice is relevant to everyone.

Why must adults in power listen to young people?

If adults in power listened more to children and young people, Scotland will be a better place...

“IT will give us more rights!”

“We can help people in power make a better community.”

“We will enjoy what we do, enjoy being involved and participating! It makes a difference to young people when being involved with decisions, because you feel like you are making your own decisions and adults aren’t telling you what you can and can’t do. You feel free!!!”

“There would be more education on domestic abuse. I only got two lessons.”

“It would encourage young people to open up and talk about their problems.”

“There would be more refuges for people who need them.”

“It would end domestic abuse!”

“Adults will feel proud that they helped us have our rights and made us happy.”

Things that would make our communication fly!

1. Relaxed Environment: Adults should meet us where we feel relaxed, in our own spaces with people we know around us:

“If they came to our school and spoke to all of us.”

“Be available to us in our own times and spaces.”

“Strangers there – big crowds- can put you off,”

Things that are relaxed are “sitting at a table together” and “having snacks and stuff.”
2. Take the time: It takes time for us to open up, to trust you and to feel confident about talking to you. We want you to take the time to tell us about yourself and to find out about us too:

"Take time to get to know me."

"Adults are always being busy – need to make time to talk."

3. Talk to us like we talk to you: For it to be an equal dialogue, there needs to be respect both ways. Listen to us, take us seriously and use our language. We find it difficult to understand your ‘political speak.’

"Interpret adult speak to kids."

"Actually listen to us and respond."

"Give clearer answers."

"Believe what we are saying to you."

4. Be fun and be friendly: Domestic abuse is a very serious subject but that doesn’t mean we can’t feel happy talking about how to improve things for other children and young people. It helps if adults are funny and understanding and if they try creative ways of involving us:

"Adults to make it fun for us to talk to them."

"If adults said something silly/weird, something."

"Play some games, like board games, use drawings."

"Be friendly and kind."

5. Have the knowledge to help us: Learn about domestic abuse:

"They should know about domestic abuse. If they don’t, they can’t help."

6. Keep things confidential: Because of our domestic abuse background, we are always going to have issues about safety. We need to trust that you will not use the information you get from us in a way that reveals our identity and puts us and our families at risk:

"Keep things confidential, whatever we say."

7. Take action: We are giving you information and our advice because you have the power to help change things for the better. We expect you to help the best you can and be honest. If you make a promise, you need to keep it.

"Give us your opinion."

"Take action. Find some way of helping."

"If they say they will do something, they should do it."

www.voiceagainstviolence.org.uk