

Bridgend Young Person's Project Research

Staff and clients were asked a series of questions, which are summarised in the text below. This internal research was carried out alongside the 'Real Voices, Real Trauma' work conducted by Nia Rees. The results of that research are available [here](#).

Client responses

First, clients were asked how common they thought mental health issues were, among young people who have experienced, or are experiencing, homelessness. They were also asked whether they had experienced, or were experiencing, a mental health issue.

All the clients at Bridgend YPP called it common for young people to have mental health issues – one pointed out that everyone he'd met at the project was probably dealing with an issue. All respondents also claimed that they were suffering from a diagnosed mental health issue. One comment explained that while mental health issues are common, it's up to the individual receiving support whether they're going to dwell on things or 'help themselves'.

One person added that they were taking medication to help with their mental health, while another said that they 'used [their situation] to achieve things they're passionate about'.

The next question briefly explained the fact that current research suggests that Adverse Childhood Experiences (traumatic events earlier in life) are important factors that can influence a person's experiences later in life. Clients were then asked whether emotional or traumatic events from when they were younger have had a substantial impact on more recent experiences.

Responses were mixed: three out of five said that they thought experiences earlier in life had an effect on later life, while someone else said 'yes-ish' and someone else said 'not recently'. That leaves one flat 'no'.

That said, all the clients then said that these events could affect a person's mental health issues, which could suggest that, although there is not so much affinity with the terminology of ACEs, young people agree with the basic idea behind the theory.

The last-but-one question asked about the importance of learning to manage a tenancy.

All respondents except one said it was very important to learn to do this. One person expanded on this, saying it should be taught in schools, while another person explained that it is important to learn to live independently and have the confidence to manage a tenancy. Another explained the importance of learning to budget and pay bills on time. A final comment called managing a tenancy independently a 'sign of accomplishment'.

Finally, clients at Bridgend YPP were asked whether they wanted to say anything else about what it's like to be a young person experiencing homelessness.

One client said they were 'angry' and 'sad' and then finally 'relieved' when they were given accommodation. Another person called being homeless a 'lot of stress', adding 'you don't know when you're going to eat next, where you're going to sleep, or if it will get better. I'd rather not [be] here than go through this.'

Another response called living like this a person's 'lowest point', but acknowledged that there are people who can help, if a client 'wants it'. They elaborated on this, explaining that 'you don't have to be at your lowest and not talk to anyone because there is always someone [who can help]'.

Someone else called this a 'hard' and 'intimidating' life. All this was reinforced by a final comment; a client summed up homelessness simply by saying 'it's shit'.

Staff responses

Staff were asked about mental health issues among the young people with whom they deal, and all staff describe such issues as common or very common; one also commented that many young people with these issues are not receiving the help they need. Another makes clear that these young people have complex support needs.

When asked, staff affirmed the fact that substance and alcohol use is common among young people experiencing homelessness, while one support worker suggested that such behaviour is common among young people more generally. One respondent called the behaviour a form of 'self-medicating' because of the aforementioned mental health issues.

When it comes to Adverse Childhood Events affecting later mental health issues among young clients, all staff agreed that ACEs had a far-reaching influence. Two responses provided additional information: one member of staff pointed out that ACEs led to young people using substances and alcohol to 'help them cope', while another described ACEs as 'associated with multiple adverse outcomes' and 'generational issues'.

A fourth question dealt with The Wallich's implementation of Psychologically Informed Environments, and how staff view the potential effects PIE could have on our clients. One response said that PIE is 'very important', even 'essential' in some support projects. The clients have a better understanding that the support they're receiving is 'balanced'.

Another member of staff described PIE as 'building a relationship with the young people, understanding that [they] sometimes have trouble building healthy relationships due to past events' (again, an affirmation of ACEs and the influence they can have in later life). According to this member of staff, PIE is a way of working with service users to help them form healthy relationships.

The idea that PIE is more suited to some clients or projects than others was raised again by another respondent, who pointed out that 'not all [approaches are] useful', and that this depended on context.

However, another member of staff was more positive, explaining that 'incorporating PIE into everyday practice ensures young people are comfortable and enables [members of staff] to fulfil [their] roles as Support Workers'.

Finally, a member of staff pointed out that they'd be attending PIE training.

The fifth question staff were asked was about clients learning to maintain tenancies. All responses described this learning as very important or even vital. The first member of staff explained that this was because clients would be required to maintain tenancies after leaving support, an idea echoed

by others; one member of staff used the phrase 'sustainable independent living' as an ultimate goal for clients.

The last question asked for any other thoughts on young people experiencing homelessness. One member of staff said that everyone has different needs, and support is 'essential'. Another respondent said that working with young people is 'rewarding'; they described seeing their reaction when they've achieved something as 'fab'. Another response highlighted the incoming Universal Credit regime as adding to clients' financial struggles. One last response to this question was, simply, 'don't give up!'.