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Real Voices, Real Trauma

**Adverse Childhood Experiences
(ACEs), trauma and homelessness
in Welsh young people**

**Research commissioned by The Wallich and carried out by Nia Ffion Rees.
Summary written by Alex Osmond.**

October 2018

Introduction

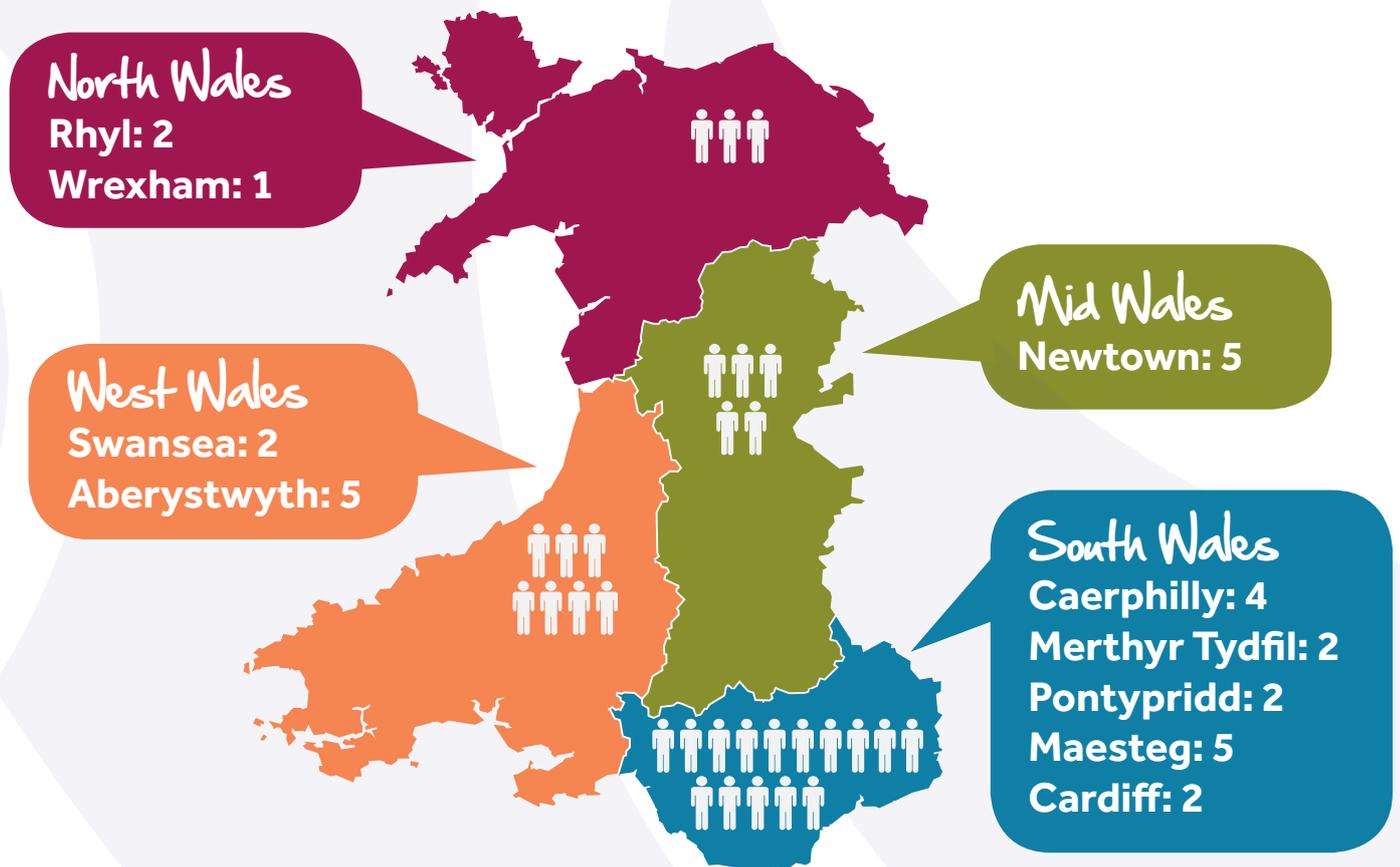
Following a piece of research commissioned by The Wallich and carried out by Nia Ffion Rees, who acted as a Research Consultant to the organisation, The Wallich has produced the following summary. City and County of Swansea Council also provided financial support to the project.

You can read the full report [here](#); it contains a literature review that examines homelessness legislation across the UK, in addition to the practical research outlined below.

The research

30 people, aged 16-25 years old, were interviewed about their experiences leading up to and including them being homeless.

The participants were located across Wales, in a range of different settings. We also spoke to 'key informants' from a range of charities, local authorities, Welsh Government, and the housing industry, to get their views on homelessness across Wales.



The findings

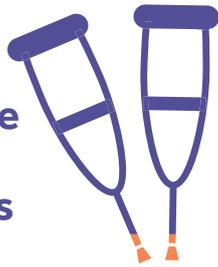
The group of 30 was evenly split in terms of gender, with



15 males and 15 females

13%

of the young people interviewed have physical disabilities



47%

highlighted conflict with parents or other family members as a key driver in them becoming homeless

Divorce and/or separation of parents was a recurring theme in these stories. In some cases, the young people highlighted the arguments with their parents that took place because of relationships the young people had formed.

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7% suggested that drug or alcohol use was a key element leading to homelessness

80% would mention that drug or alcohol use became a feature of their homelessness

This suggests that young people who have suffered trauma and become homeless are more likely to drink or take drugs.



50% of the young people interviewed have mental health issues (including issues diagnosed as anxiety, depression, borderline personality disorder, suicidal ideation, eating disorders, and PTSD)



23% spoke of experiencing violence, abuse or sexual assault within the childhood home

Two of these spoke specifically of violence and sexual abuse at the hands of their step-fathers, while another highlighted a sexual assault carried out by a family friend, after which the young person was treated with scepticism.

17% said that the death of a close family member was a key driver in their homelessness



In two cases, one of the parents died, and the young people interviewed highlighted how difficult the remaining parent found it to continue to take care of the family. All five young people who discussed the death of a loved one mentioned the challenges of a single-parent home, and how unstable the home environment became.



One of the young people interviewed raised the issue of **religious pressure** in the family contributing to her homelessness, referencing her struggle with 'the many rules' associated with her religion.

What young people said

We would like to highlight some direct quotes from the interviews. *

I want a place to call home. [A] safe and happy place, that's all.

Lacey, 22

I didn't have the best start to life and continue to struggle now. I hope once I am settled I can forget about my past.

Kelly, 24

[After one parent died] I went off the rails. Went into a secure unit and jail.

David, 24

[Our] baby was born and [my girlfriend] wanted me to move in. [My mother] kicked me out because we were arguing

Danny, 17

I was the black sheep of the family... I failed at school, I wasn't great at anything. There were a lot of expectations.

Mjega, 22

I was lost in the system. [The council] took a year to come back to me when I was on the streets.

Mark, 22

It's hard to get to where you want to be in life when living in a hostel, but I'd rather be [in a hostel] than on the streets

Aaron, 18

I've moved around a lot for only being 17, in different placements and with loads of different families and hostels. But I think this one is right for me, I like it here, they want to help and want you to do well. I'll be going back to school next year too

Nadia, 17

I don't want to be left behind any more. I am going to every training course I can and have stayed at this accommodation for the past 18 months. I just don't feel like enough is being done to help the ones who really want to get on, and live independently out of this situation

Liam, 18

***Names have been changed to protect identities.**

What this means

The results highlighted in this summary, as well as more evidence in the full report [\[link\]](#) suggest a clear link between Adverse Childhood Experiences, taking place in unstable, chaotic family environments, and homelessness – as well as other potential problems - years later.

Young people spoke articulately and thoughtfully about traumatic events and situations in their family homes. They highlighted what they saw as the links between ACEs during their younger lives, and their current situations, either experiencing or having experienced homelessness.

What next?

We would like to highlight a few of the report's policy and practice recommendations and explain The Wallich's current work in relation to them.



Staff, with whom young people experiencing homelessness are likely to engage, need to be trained in understanding ACEs, and how trauma can affect a person's needs in later life. At The Wallich, we ensure our staff are highly-trained professionals with in-depth understanding of ACEs.

We need to ensure that young people are involved in decisions about the services that they will engage with. Service users need to have a voice. This is something The Wallich has always prided itself on – our service users are always given the opportunity to give feedback about, and to be part of, what we do.



The Psychologically Informed Environment (PIE) model should be implemented when it comes to designing the spaces within which young people will engage with services. This is something we are doing at The Wallich, across our residential accommodation, and we are already seeing direct benefits.

Independent tenancy maintenance/living courses should be taught in emergency and hostel accommodation. This kind of support is a key part of how we work with our clients; our aim at The Wallich is to have a longer-term impact on the people we work with, rather than providing short-term fixes.



We are pleased to say that at The Wallich we are leading the way in doing these things across our projects - not just the ones for young people - across Wales. We will continue to do so, working in all the ways we can to ensure that the cycle of ACEs and homelessness is broken.

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