

# Support for children in domestic abuse housing related support services

## Report

October 2014



Compiled by Claire Cunliffe for the Domestic Abuse Housing  
Related Support Services Modernisation Group

Convened by the Local Authorities Homelessness and  
Supporting People Networks'

# Contact

## Welsh Local Government Association

The WLGA's primary purposes are to promote a better local government, its reputation and to support authorities in the development of policies and priorities which will improve public service and democracy.

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## Introduction

### Findings of the questionnaires investigating the services available to children and young people within Domestic Abuse Services

In November 2013, the Domestic Abuse Housing Support Services Modernisation Group was re-convened in order to take forward the recommendations outlined in its original implementation plan created in May 2012. Recommendation 7 within this implementation plan focussed on the needs of Children and Young People and stated that:

- a) The needs of children and young people who are in an environment / home where they experience Domestic Abuse / Sexual Abuse or who are in supported housing are considered with the same level of priority as the parent (link in to refuge specification)*
- b) Further mapping of services for children to be carried out to identify local and regional gaps in service; to identify remodelling opportunities and commissioning gaps*

In order to take this recommendation forward, it was agreed by the group that a questionnaire was to be developed to investigate the provisions for children and young people within Domestic Abuse (DA) services. This questionnaire was subsequently developed by the Homelessness and Supporting People Network and approved by the group. Two questionnaires were developed, one focussing on children's provision within refuge and the second on Children's workers within Domestic Abuse Services. These questionnaires were circulated to all DA providers and collected via the Regional Development Co-ordinators. The results have been analysed by the Network's Project Officer and this document outlines the key findings.

## Analysis

The document will begin by outlining the findings from the questionnaire which focussed on the provisions for children within refuge. There were a total of 20 respondents to this questionnaire. (Although there were 22 questionnaires returned in total, two of

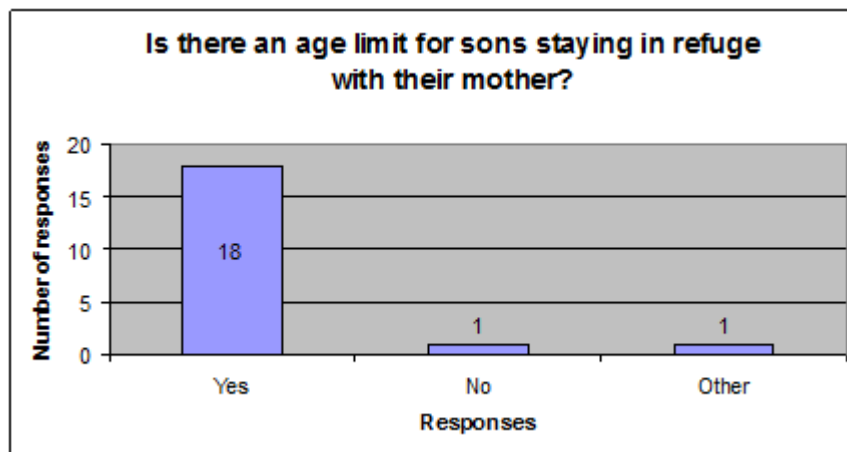
these services cut across Local Authority areas and therefore their response has been recorded once within the

questionnaire to avoid distorting the figures and counting the same service twice.)

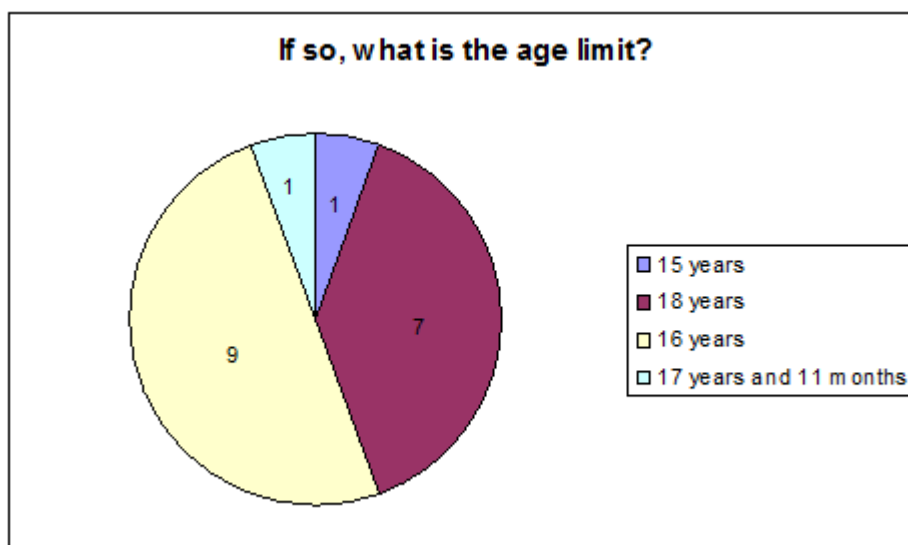
## Questions and Responses

### Q1 Is there an age limit for sons staying in refuge with their mother?

18 responded yes, 1 one responded no and 1 reported that the determined age limit of sons within refuge is dealt with on a case by case basis.

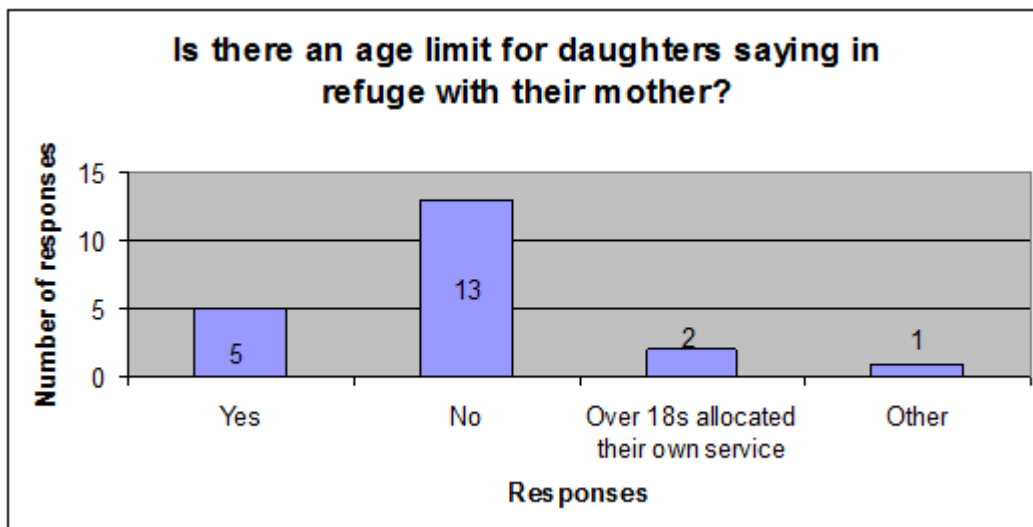


**1B** In response to the question 'if so, what is the age limit?' the responses were as follows:



## Q2 Is there an age limit for daughters staying in refuge with their mothers?

This question yielded a greater variety of responses than question 1. The majority of respondents answered No to this question. There were a couple of respondents who highlighted the fact that if a daughter was over 18 she would be allocated a service in her own right. One respondent reported that the age limit would be determined on a case by case basis.



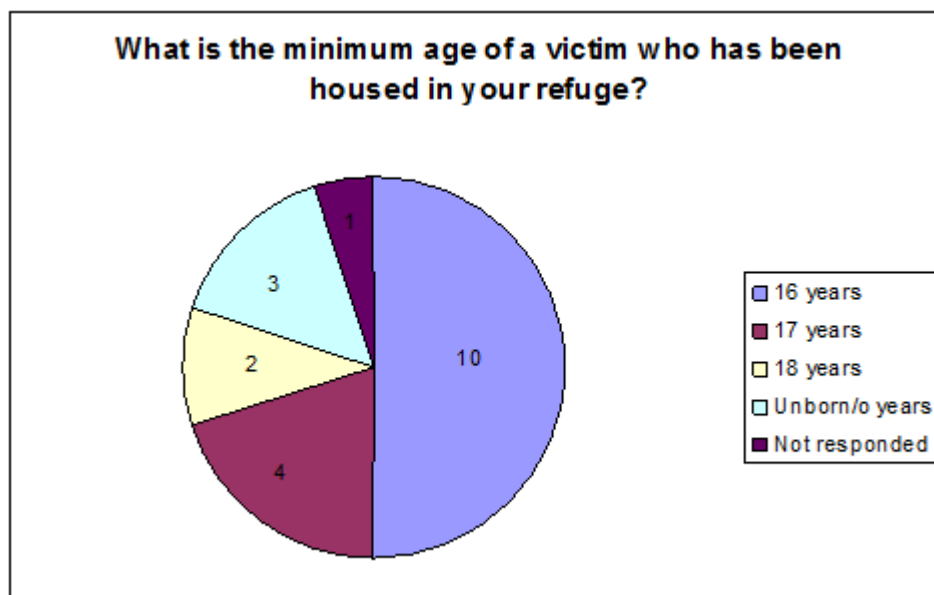
**2B** In response to the question 'if so what is the age limit?' the majority of respondents (5 in total) answered 18 years old. Only one respondent answered 19 years old if dependent.

## Q3 Is there provision for older sons whilst their mother is in refuge?

18 respondents answered no with only 2 respondents answering yes.

## Q4 What is the minimum age of a victim who has been housed in your refuge?'

As the chart below shows, the minimum age of victims in most services is 16 years old. In relation to the 'unborn/0 years' response, this applies to those victims who have accessed the refuge whilst pregnant.



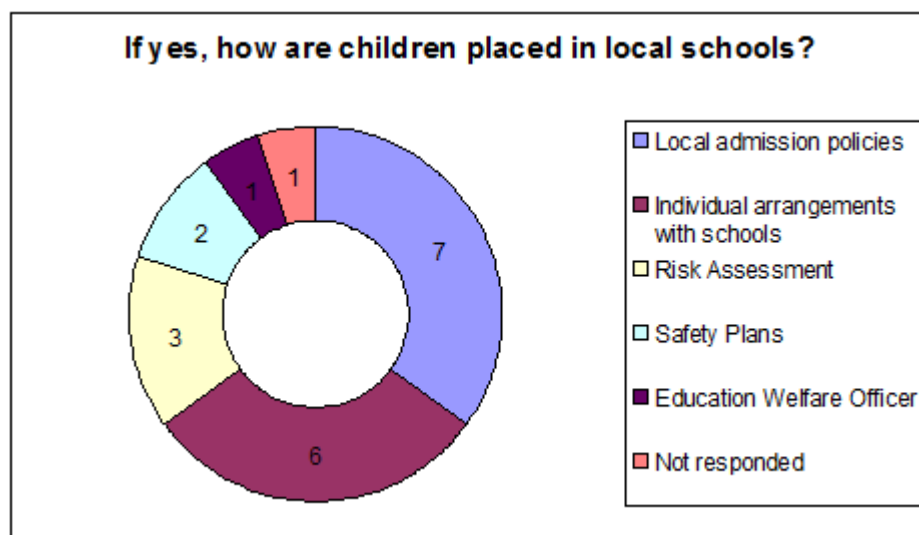
**Q5 Do you have links with local schools?**

19 respondents answered yes to this question, there was just one anomaly responding no.

**Q6 If yes, how are children placed in local schools? Is there a provision for safe drop off and collection of children?**

There was considerable variety in responses to this question:

- 7 services stated that they placed children in local school in accordance with local admission policies
- 6 services stated that they had very close relationships with schools and therefore had individual flexible relationships depending on the child and parents wishes. Such arrangements included: children looking around the school beforehand and a flexible approach by the school to start and finish times
- 3 services stated that the process of placing children in schools would be done through the completion of a risk assessment
- Similarly, 2 services stated that the placing of children in local schools would be undertaken through the completion of safety plans
- 1 service responded that the Education Welfare Officer would co-ordinate the placement of a child in local schools
- 1 service did not respond to this question

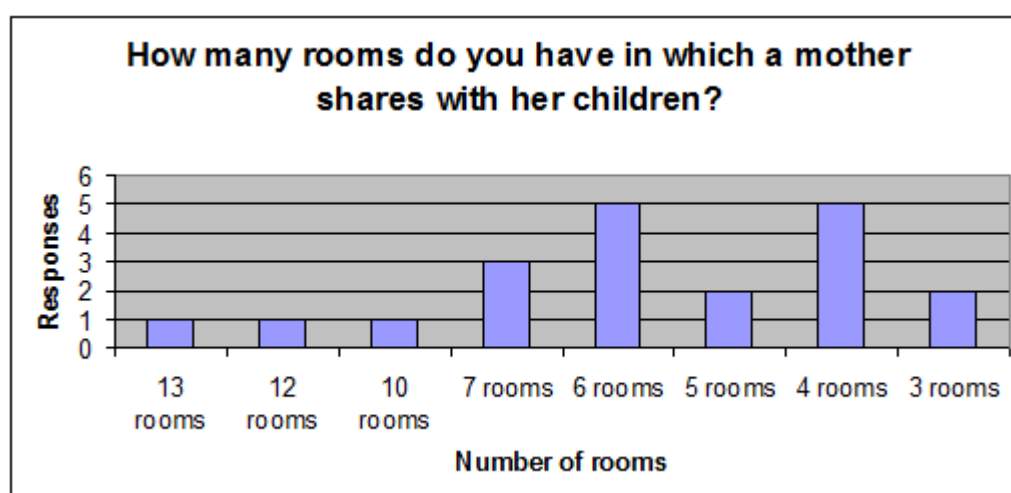


### **Q7 Does your refuge have family sized rooms?**

All respondents answered yes to this question.

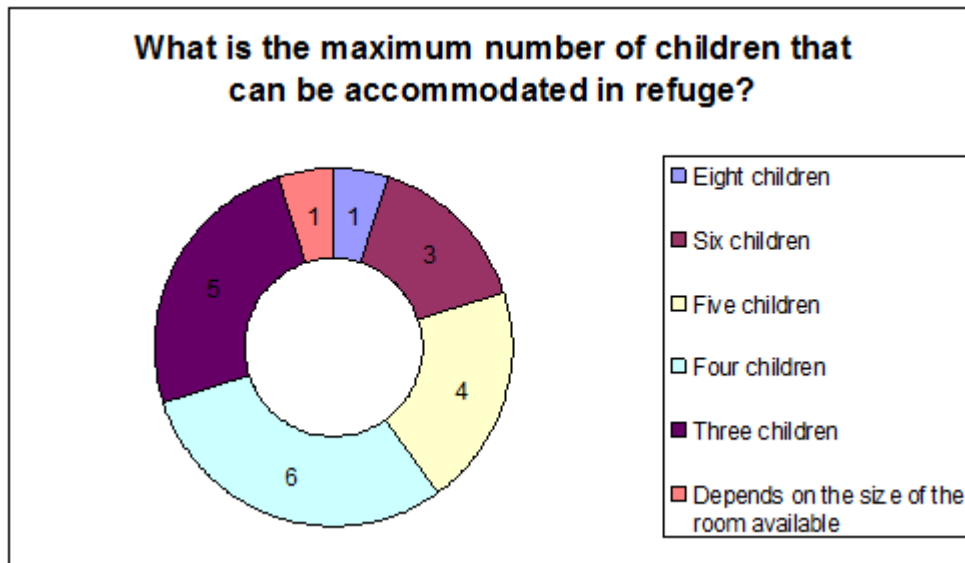
### **Q8 How many rooms do you have in which a mother shared with her children?**

There was considerable variation in the answers to this question. Responses ranged from 3 rooms to 13 rooms. The chart below shows the breakdown of responses with 5 and 4 rooms yielding the highest responses.



### **Q9 What is the maximum number of children in one family that can be accommodated in refuge?**

The majority of responses stated that four children were the maximum number that could be accommodated in refuge, with six services selecting this response. The graph below sets out the proportion of responses in further detail.



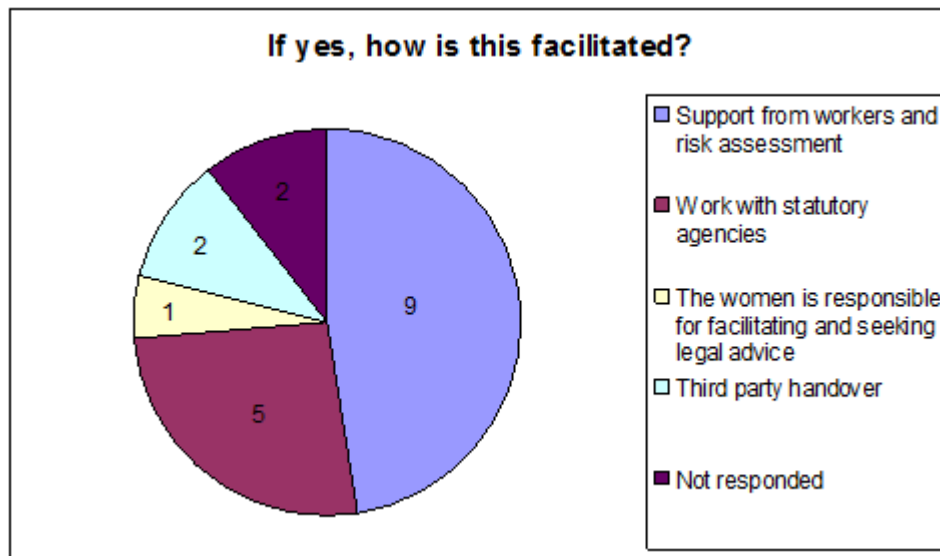
### **Q10 Does your refuge have a playroom?**

The majority of respondents (17 in total) responded yes with just three responding no.

### **Q11 Are there a range of facilities for children of all ages within refuge? E.g. playstation, toys, books etc**

All respondents answered yes to this question. Examples of facilities included Wii, video games, books, TV and age appropriate toys.

**Q12 Do children have access to their other parent whilst in refuge if requested?**



19 out of 20 respondents answered yes. However, it is worth noting that although one respondent answered no to this question, it was with the detail that *'although it is not usual for children to have access, in some cases it can be arranged through social services.'* It is also worth highlighting that one 'yes' response did come with the following caveat.

*'This is difficult because if women are in refuge then the DA is at crisis point. We support to women to get legal advice regarding this and don't advise they manage any contact themselves as it puts them at further risk. Contact with the other parent is possible but we would have to work closely with other services to identify any risks to the children in order for contact with the other parent. Contact with the other parent also has implications regarding them knowing the area in which the women and children are living and can compromise their safety further.'*

**12B** 'If yes, how is this facilitated?' The majority of respondents stated that in order for children to access their other parents, support was offered from case workers and a risk assessment was completed - 9 services responded in this way. Five services stated that they work with statutory agencies such as social services to facilitate this meeting.

**Q13 Do parents know who to contact if their child displays sign of stress?**

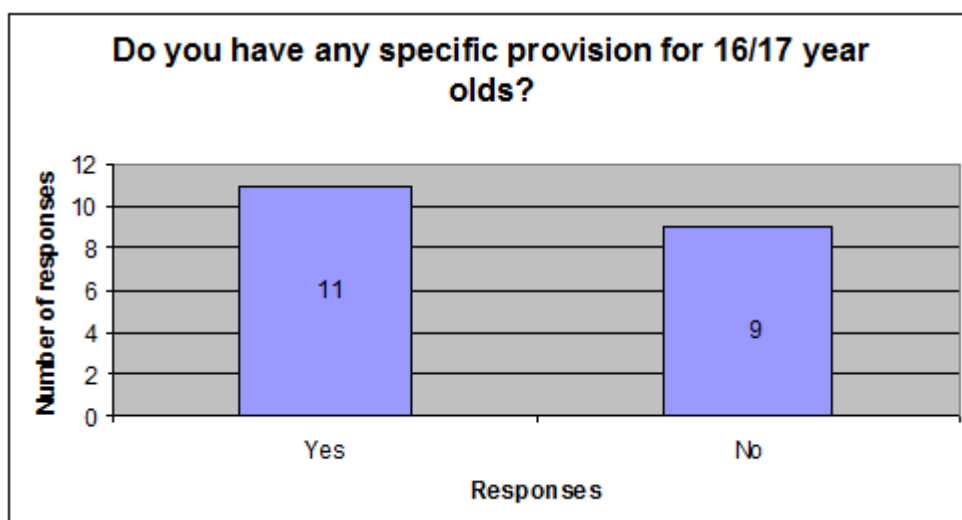
All respondents answered yes.

**Q14 Is floating support available for children of victims of domestic abuse who are not in refuge?**

18 responded yes and two responded no.

**Q15 Do you have any specific provision for 16/17 year olds?**

Of the 9 who responded 'no' to this question, a significant proportion did highlight the fact that outside their DA service, their organisation had generic support programmes available for young people to access.



**Q16 Have you ever identified any specific issues facing children of mothers with protected characteristics?**

Three services did not respond to this question. Of the seventeen that did, 10 responded no and 7 responded yes.

**16B** Below is a narrative of the responses to this question to illustrate in depth the type of issues and provision made available to children of mothers with protected characteristic

- *Religion: we have made provision for religious beliefs of young people e.g. prayer mat. We have supported children on families fleeing HBV using high risk multi agency support and liaising with national specialised organisations*
- *Translation services and the use of a quiet room have been made available to address religious issues*
- *Extra support and signposting to additional services*
- *BAWSO's services primarily specialise in supporting families who have different ethnicities and faiths. The Newport Refuge provides culturally and religiously sensitive facilities including the use of Prayer Room, dedicated cooking/eating/food storage facilities appropriate to each faith group and dietary requirement. A great importance is placed on this as it does significantly affect a mother's decision to flee a domestic abuse situation*
- *We also understand that Domestic Abuse increases during pregnancy and after childbirth and have supported mothers who have given birth while residing at the Newport Refuge. We worked closely with other charities to obtain appropriate donations (especially when mothers are not entitled to Welfare System) as well as working closely with Social Services, and health providers so that they are able to have peace of mind while admitted to hospital for childbirth. Support tend to intensify during this period, particularly while ensuring that health provision would understand and record issues relating to Female Genital Mutilation, Language Barriers, Religious Needs and ceremonies during childbirth*
- *We have encountered a minimum number of BME women with disabilities who sought BAWSO's help and support to flee domestic abuse. In those cases, we liaised with BAWSO's Refuge in Swansea as it provided dispersed and dedicated*

*disabled facilities, as well as liaising with other accommodation providers on a case by case basis*

- *Children of mothers with diagnosed mental health conditions have presented with their own mental health issues e.g. eating disorders, low mood, anxiety state, behaviour problems. Children whose mother does not have a diagnosed mental health condition but is suffering with stress/anxiety or depression have also presented with their own mental health problems. The support worker provides one to one sessions and group work sessions, the support worker may refer to other services such as CAMHS, counselling, play therapy, social services or others as appropriate*
- *Children of mothers with learning difficulties have frequently presented with behaviour problems and/or mental health problems. The support provides sessions and works one-to-one with the child and support the child through group work. The support worker may also refer to other appropriate services such as*

*CAMHS, social services, play therapy, counselling*

- *Children of mothers with religious and cultural beliefs. Issues have arisen where a child will not eat food from the fridge where others have stored their food, or from a saucepan which has previously been used by other people. We have accommodated for this with individuals on a practical level by providing a separate fridge/ new cooking utensils and pans where possible. The support worker organises celebration days such as Chinese New Year, to provide a multi-cultural focus for families and to encourage a non-judgemental approach. The support worker facilitates visits to religious centres e.g. mosques, church for families*
- *Children of same sex relationships have presented with behavioural issues that may relate to discrimination experienced at school. The support worker works with them individually on emotionally difficult topics and may also work with the mother/school on bullying issues.*

*Again, appropriate referrals may be made*

- *Group work with mothers is also offered through our service, this is a separate group but runs in parallel with the childrens group work. The mothers gain a better understanding of the issues their children may be facing or going through and this is also an important key to supporting the family*

## **Key findings**

- **All services have an age limit for sons staying in refuge, in most cases this is 16 years old. Few services have provision for older sons whilst their mother is in refuge**
- **The majority of services have strong links with local schools**
- **The majority of services have a playroom and all services have a range of facilities for children in the form of toys, books, playstation etc.**
- **The majority of services have some form of provision for facilitating access between the child and other parent whilst in refuge**
- **Religious and cultural issues were the main issues facing children of mothers with protected characteristics.**

**This section of the report will focus on the responses from the questionnaire on Children's Workers within Domestic Abuse Services. There were 25 responses to this questionnaire. It is unclear**

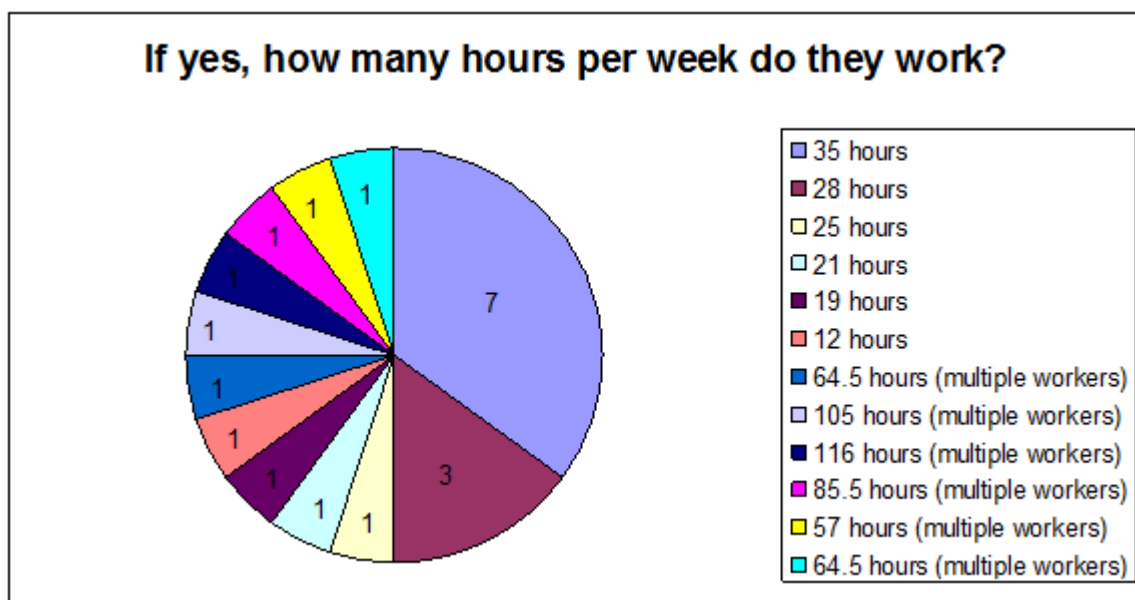
**why there were more responses to this questionnaire; it is possible not all organisations offer refuge provision and therefore did not think the first questionnaire would be applicable to their service.**

### **Q1 Do you have a dedicated Children's worker?**

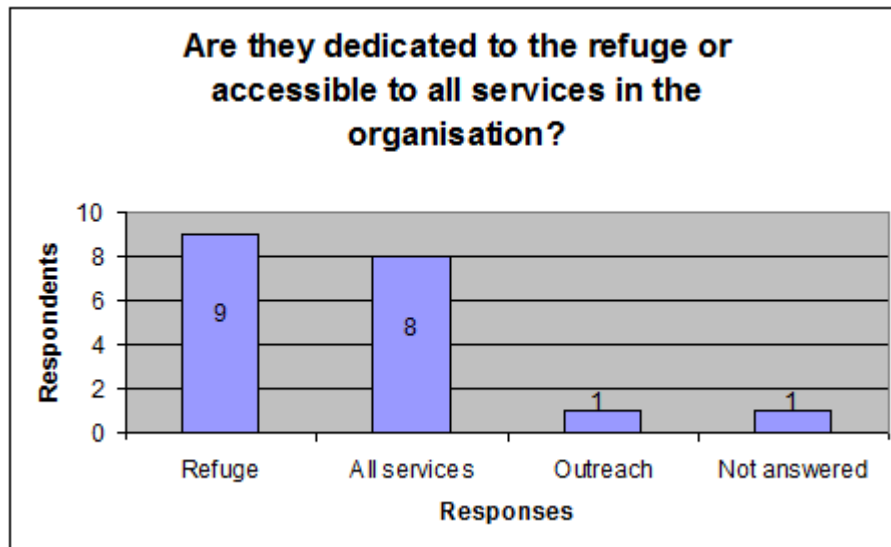
The majority of respondents answered yes (20) with only 5 responding no.

### **Q2 If yes, how many hours per week do they work?**

This question yielded a variety of responses from services. A few responses included the hours of multiple workers within their organisation. For example, 2 workers operating for 28hours per week and 2 workers working for 30 hours per week. The graph illustrates the responses below.



**2B Are they dedicated to the refuge or accessible to all services in the organisation?**



**Q3 Who funds any additional child support work you may provide?**

As with the previous question, responses varied to this question. It is worth highlighting however, that Supporting People, Families First and Welsh Women's Aid were referenced in some form in many responses.

Three respondents responded N/A as they had no additional child support work. For a breakdown of responses please see the table below:

N/A	3
Families First	4
Supporting People	2
Supporting People and Core Funding	1
Social Services	1
Gwynedd Council	1
Families First and Welsh Women's Aid	1
Social Services, Welsh Women's Aid and Children in Need	1
Families First, Welsh Women's Aid and Comic Relief	1

Families First and Social Services	2
SPPH, FCC, Core Funding and Betsi Cadwalder	1
Welsh Women's Aid and Children in Need	1

#### **Q4 How sustainable is the funding you receive? i.e. ongoing or year on year**

This question revealed that the majority (12) of services were funded year on year, however, quite a few responded with the caveat that this process was under review and they would be entering a tendering process under a new system.

#### **Q5 Do children have access to support out of schools and at the weekends?**

19 respondents answered yes, with just 9 respondents answering no.

**5B** Although 19 respondents answered yes to question 5, in response to the question 'If yes, who provides it?' there were 10 respondents who provided no answer. Of the remaining 8, the answers were as follows:

Children and Young People Worker	5
Support Worker	1
Local groups and clubs	1
Refuge worker, CAHA and Flintshire Children and Young People Worker	1

#### **Q6 Is there a counselling service available for children in your service?**

The majority of respondents (21 out of 25 in total) said they did not have a counselling service available for children. One service did not respond to this question.

## **6B If yes, who provides this counsellor?**

Of the three services who responded yes, one stated that this service was only available for children over the age of 10. One respondent stated this service was provided by a qualified counsellor and one respondent stated this service was provided by an in house counsellor.

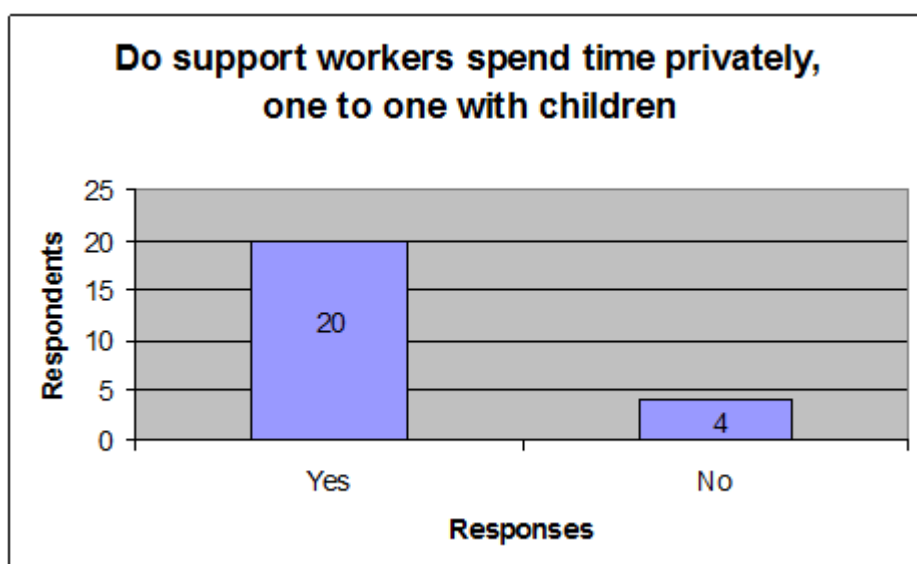
## **Q7 Do children ever express their concern to staff about moving into refuge?**

Not all responses fitted neatly into a yes or no category. In order to portray the variety of responses, below are extracts from the responses which expanded beyond yes or no.

- *'The majority express relief at being in refuge. A few older children resent moving home, school and friends'*
- *'Children are offered one to one support sessions where they are encouraged to express their feelings and thoughts. Women are usually admitted on an emergency basis into Refuge and there might not always be an opportunity to speak fully to the children about this under those circumstances'*
- *'Children are welcomed to the refuge with an age appropriate welcome pack and are reassured about any concerns that they have throughout their stay. Each child has their own support plan'*

## **Q8 Do support workers spend time privately, one to one with children?**

As the graph below shows, the majority of services provide one to one support to children with a support worker.



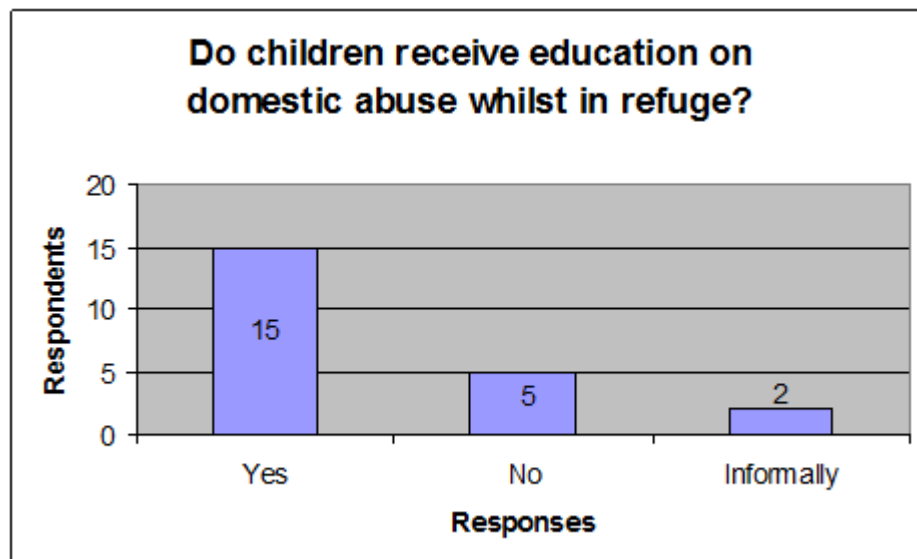
**8B** If so, what proportion of staff time is spent between group work and one to one?

The responses to this question varied dramatically. 4 respondents said the proportion of staff time depended on the number in refuge, 6 respondents stated the proportion of time varied depending on the needs of the child. One service did not respond to this question and the rest of the responses were all unique, some services gave the proportional split in percentages which ranged from 30-80% spent one to one, others responded in hours which ranged from 7-16 hours spent one to one. Individual responses to this question were as follows:

- Equal split
- 80% one to one and 20% group
- 85% one to one and 15% group
- 30% on one to one and 70% group work
- 16 hours one to one and 7 hours group work
- 7 hours one to one
- 2.5 days on one to one and 1 day on group work
- 10 hours one to one and 2.5 hours group
- Staff are available 3 days per week in our refuge and the remainder of the time is spent on development work

### Q9 Do children receive education on domestic abuse whilst in refuge?

Two services did not respond to this question which accounts for the reduced number of responses in the graph below.



### 9B If yes please specify if this is one to one and course title and content

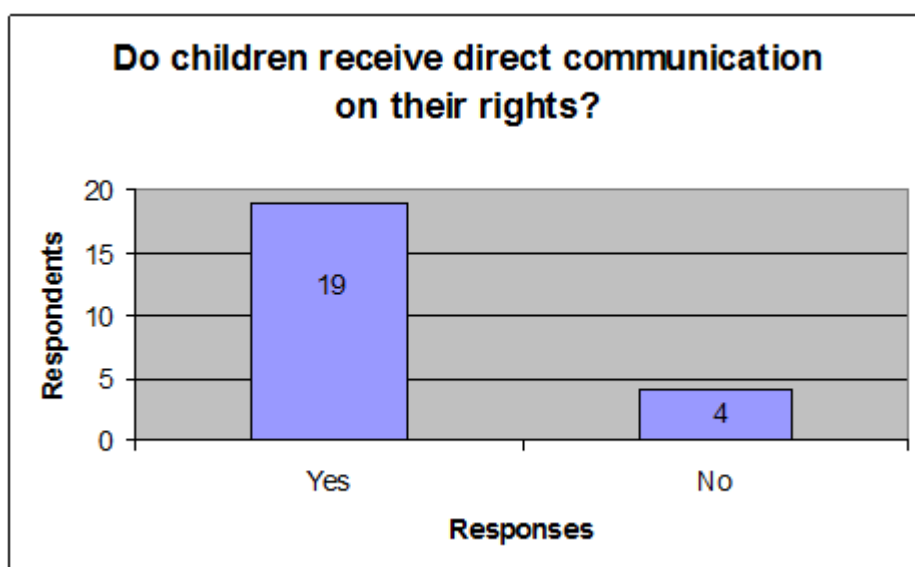
STAR appears to be the main course used one to one within services. 9 services solely use STAR, whilst 2 services use it in conjunction with other packages i.e. STAR & Seasons for Growth. One service stated they used the Children Matter course one to one with children. The two services which stated they provided education 'informally' gave the following responses:

- 'Support is tailored around managing behaviours associated with DA and *challenging beliefs around DA*'
- 'Try to build awareness of the issues, the impacts that it has had on them, and how they can move on, through both group and individual work, depending on the individual needs of the child'

### Q10 Are children provided with a support and safety plan?

Almost all respondents answered 'yes' to this question (23 in total) The one respondent who answered 'no' provided the following detail: 'No when we used to have a children's worker they did. Currently they are part of their mothers safety plan and we work with the parent regarding their safety and that of the children and support the parents to support the children.' One respondent did not provide an answer to this question.

### Q11 Do children receive direct communication on their rights?



There are two respondents that are not covered in the graph as their responses suggested although they did not consistently communicate with children on their rights, they did talk to them on an ad hoc, informal basis. To illustrate, their responses were as follows:

- We cover the UNCRC in the STAR programme but it is not always covered in one to one sessions as other issues may take priority
- Family support workers provide information on request

## **Q12 What is the ratio of children to support worker?**

Similarly, to many questions in this section, the responses varied greatly between services.

- 8 services responded N/A to this question
- 9 services answered that this ratio would vary depending on the activities, numbers and needs of children within the refuge
- Ratios ranged from 6:1 – 64:1. In order to capture all responses, the full range of answers are outlined in the table below:

<b>30:1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>8:1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>6:1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>15:1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>64:1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Incorporated within family support</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Five support workers are able to support children as required</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Depends on activities, numbers and needs of children</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>N/A</b>	<b>8</b>

## **Key findings**

- The majority of services have a dedicated Children's Worker in the refuge. However, it is important to highlight these posts are not secure and there is considerable concern from services that these essential skills and expertise are at risk of being lost due to the temporary nature of funding
- Social Services, Supporting People, Families First and Welsh Women's Aid are the main sources of funding for additional child support
- The majority of children within services have access to support out of school. However, 21 out of 25 services do not have a counselling service for children
- The majority of services reported that children expressed concern at moving into refuge
- The majority of time children spend with support workers is on a one to one basis
- 15 services deliver education to children on domestic abuse whilst in refuge. The majority of services utilise the STAR resource in this capacity
- The majority of services provide children with a support and safety plan and directly communicate with children on their rights

## Recommendations

The Domestic Abuse Housing Support Services Modernisation Group has put together the following recommendations in light of this report. They are as follows:

- **All children in refuge have a right to access a specialist DA children's support appropriate to their needs**
- **Refuges should take a family centred approach to support**
- **Funding for services for children in DA services should be more sustainable**

A multi-agency long term approach to funding is recommended. This may be achieved through liaising with RCCs and LSBs and developing joint SLAs.

## Acknowledgements

Thanks to the Domestic Abuse Housing Support Services Modernisation Group for their input into the questionnaire and for devising the recommendations.

Thanks also to the Regional Development Co-ordinators for their help in collating the responses.

*Produced by Claire Cunliffe, Local Authority Homelessness and Supporting People Network Project Officer. Claire has since left the Network to take up a new position with the Police and Crime Commissioner for South Wales*

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