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### Submitted by ProMo-Cymru in respect of Meic

#### 1. About Meic:

##### Meic is unique –

- Universal, low threshold and easily accessible central point for information, advice and advocacy support service for children and young people (CYP) in Wales up to the age of 25 in Wales
- Commissioned by Welsh Government through tendering, designed, delivered and managed by ProMo-Cymru since inception in 2008 to the present
- Access to Helpline Adviser Advocate (HAA) from 8am – midnight everyday 365 days per year through instant message, text, phone, email
- Participation and engagement by whole Meic community facilitated via Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and Website
- Meic offers children and young people the chance to have a voice and be heard, listened to and helped, without criteria, without judgment
- Value base embedded in UNCRC and SSWB Act: information, rights, advocacy, safeguarding, early intervention, prevention

#### 2. Meic's experience and expertise is steeped in knowing and understanding:

- Knowing something, and acting on this to make a change, is hard
- Adjusting to change imposed on you is hard
- Both are influenced by a complex interplay of control, influence, power, and motivation – all of which are often hard or out of reach for many children and young people
- Adolescence for many is a difficult transition; the journey that takes place over several years from dependent childhood to independent adulthood is fraught and influenced by many internal and external drivers – some toxic and inhibiting, and others nurturing and empowering
- A rights based approach is essential in giving young people a voice

#### 3. Covid-19 has introduced disruption and uncertainty into all aspects of children and young people's day to day lives: education, family life, relationships. Extrapolated from this is an implied question: the extent to which CYP rights (and outcomes) are being disproportionately compromised for the sake of wider protection concerns. The immediate impact is clear:

- The key feelings being expressed are: alone and overlooked, fearful and scared, worried and anxious
- The key issues being presented are: Covid-19+ mental health and well-being, relationships, education, family life, living arrangements

- The proportion of Covid-19 related contacts to HAAs is approximately 30% of all contacts; this is likely to be an underestimate.
  - Less clear are the longer term impacts, as we emerge from lockdown in the short term, adjust to life with the pandemic in the medium term, and return to a new normal in the longer term.
- 4. Successes and difference made: Helpline Adviser Advocates have been able to intervene across a range of situations and issues to provide information, signposting, support self efficacy, facilitate access to services, protect life – a very few examples include:**
- supporting care experienced young person to establish contact with advocate – having lost contact during transition from face to face to alternative provision,
  - support young person resolve family conflict after being forced to return home to Wales from university in England during lockdown,
  - supporting grandmother concerned about grandson whose mother is frontline NHS worker to explore options around communication about living and care arrangements,
  - supporting the father of 17, soon to be 18 year old, concerned about son's discharge from psychiatric unit into community in context of Covid-19 and transition to adult services, and signposting to advocacy service for YP,
  - supporting young carer of alcohol dependent mother, to access alternative help and support following closure of service she was using due to Covid-19,
  - supporting young person to access school counseling via different route and pathway following changeover to online platform,
  - clarifying lockdown regulations in respect of young person wishing to be with their partner,
  - supporting young person with strategies to relax and help reach calm when anxious and stressed,
  - supporting young person with communication strategies for resolving / avoiding / minimizing arguments with family in household
- 5. Information:**
- following the arrival of Covid-19 ProMo-Cymru significantly scaled up Meic's Covid-19 specific and related communication and engagement strategy in order to mitigate the need and gap resulting from CYPs' reduced face to face contact with education settings, youth services, social care services, community / voluntary sector support services;
  - this has resulted in exponential increases in segmented audience reach and engagement during April and May compared with previous months;
  - the focus has been on 4 key young person friendly and accessible messages and messaging: i) Covid-19 – what is it, what are the regulations, ii) how to stay safe, iii) reclaiming control, iv) Meic is still here

- **Website:**
  - i) accessed by the broad Meic community including CYP and adults (parents, carers, relatives, social care and health professionals, support workers, practitioners, teachers...),
  - ii) device breakdown and YouTube video views suggests demographic is mostly YP – estimated breakdown: 65% CYP / 35% other
  - iii) all-Wales coverage mostly aligned to population spread
  - iv) doubling of number of visitors from 12,000+ to 25,000+ and sessions from 16,000+ to 35,000+ pre / post Covid,
  - v) most popular pages: homepage and get help, most popular articles: Worried About Coronavirus, Activities during lockdown, Tips to Keep Calm, Covid-19 Tag Archive, Getting Parents to let you go out with Friends
  - vi) much of this has been picked up and included in the new mental health toolkit developed by WG and going live 1 June
- **Instagram:**
  - i) accessed mainly by CYP 13 – 34 year age range, two thirds female
  - ii) 4-fold increase in output - including new designs and graphics, stories, and playlist - increase in impressions from 1,000+ to 100,000+, increase engagement, from less than 100 to more than 1000
  - iii) creation of linktree linking Instagram to key links on Meic website
- **Twitter and Facebook (FB):**
  - i) FB demographic: half aged under 25, one third 35+, mostly female, Twitter mostly adult – professional,
  - ii) output (posts) doubled, impressions increased from 32,000+ to just over 400,000, engagement increased from 400+ to 9,000+
- **Most popular post across social media platforms:**



## 6. What children and young people are telling us:

### 6.1 Feelings:

- *i don't know what's wrong with me and don't know who to talk to*
- *I just feel sad, and empty. Like my whole body just feels out of energy and sad, I'm eating well, exercising, getting good sleep but I feel unmotivated*
- *I think it's just a combination of feeling stressed about school work and feeling lonely from not seeing friends. Even though I'm stressed I also just can't seem to care, I just don't know what I'm doing*
- *I'm having panic attacks*
- *i have had these voices for a while now, but being in lockdown has only made them worse*
- *I struggled previously with depression. And with this lockdown. I feel like I'm struggling with it again I feel like I'm going down hill and i don't know how to stop it*

### 6.2 What they are coming to the helpline for:

- *because im already struggling enough with lockdown i dont need relationship problems aswell*
- *are we now officially in lockdown? what does this mean? i live in a household filled with hatred towards me and also work in a food shop. will i still be working, and can i decide where i go into lockdown? im very confused*
- *am i able to go to my mums or boyfriends and continue to stay there for the lockdown*
- *I need advice on how to deal with things better I guess? Like when my parents argue,*
- *Maybe some encouragement and motivation to get my college work done to go to uni?*
- *I think it would be helpful if you had any idea on how to lift ones mood when they are in a bad place*
- *i need someone to talk to about another coping mechanism which may work better for me*
- *I'm 30 and my younger sister is 13. All is not well in her house with my mum and her stepdad. I think it would be best for them to have a break from one another, but I'm not sure what to do in light of coronavirus. Is it reasonable to have her come stay with me for a while? She is also under CAMHS*
- *I had a mentor in school. A counsellor. But they are stopping my session because of lockdown. I have been to camhs previously struggle to talk to her. Only because she didnt talk to be as I was in school. She was hardly there and when we arranged a chat. She always had to cancel*

### **6.3 Why to Meic helpline:**

- *I'm not the type to talk to people, I understand that it could help but It wouldn't make a difference or make things any easier. When I say not the type to talk about people, I mean about problems and struggles.*
- *i don't want to give the impression that I'm weak or can't deal with it.*
- *I thought i was doing okay without any support but it's not getting any better*
- *I never really reach out as I don't really know what could help*
- *i'm not receiving any kinds of support like that because nobody really knows about it.*
- *i don't really want to talk to my parents about it because i have talked to them about things like this before but they just didn't really understand. i have a sister but she is younger than me so that's not very helpful and i don't really have way of getting in contact with people like my GP. i have tried to hint slight things to one of my friends but they just don't really take it seriously because they don't really know how to respond.*
- *I dont find that I talk to people that much about it, I dont want to be a hassle. I very rarely will tell 2 of my friends when they ask how im doing but i dont go into details. The only family I have is my father but I dont have a particularly good relationship with him. But he suffers from depression and I havent told him of my mental health stuggles because i dont want him to get worse worrying*
- *I've come to meic before and I found that it helped*
- *i can vent*
- *She told me that I wasn't trying enough to get better. It made me feel like I wasn't good enough*
- *My mam works in the nhs so is in work all the time. And I don't want to add more stress on her I just feel like I'm struggling but don't want to talk to my family*

### **7. Road map out of lockdown and beyond:**

- While there is some clarity, there remains a lot of uncertainty about the details and impact of what will happen to children and young people's day to day lives, and the longer term consequences on their development, outcomes and opportunities.
- The immediate crisis has generated considerable solidarity, agility, flexibility, and creativity across a spectrum of life (not least the NHS), while at the same time exposing weaknesses and gaps.
- Some of these gaps and weaknesses include (this is not an exhaustive list): i) on-going issues with information: access to it, its accuracy and accessibility, navigating round it to ascertain pathways and processes, ii) inequalities as evidenced with (lack of) access to tech / online / digital alternatives, iii) perpetuating traditional barriers between statutory services and CYP eg: insistence on using Microsoft Office or Skype, when CYP more likely to use What's App, Zoom
- In moving forward to mitigate and reduce the adverse impact of the pandemic specifically on children and young people as they navigate a

fraught journey into independent adulthood, now is certainly the time to seize the day and review traditional models of face to face CYP focused service delivery and awareness raising, and ensure transformational change and alternatives fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**END**