

Senedd Cymru
Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg

Ymchwiliad i effaith argyfwng Covid-19 ar
blant a phobl ifanc yng Nghymru

COV 127
Ymateb gan: 4thecommunity

Welsh Parliament
Children, Young People and Education Committee

Inquiry into the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak on
children and young people in Wales

COV 127
Response from: 4thecommunity

4thecommunity is a community based small organisation working in a severely disadvantaged area. We work together very closely with St Marys church, the Catholic Church for Rhyl. We are based in West Rhyl, which was for nearly 20 years the most disadvantaged ward in Wales as per Welsh Government deprivation statistics. West Rhyl is an area within Rhyl, a seaside town and resort itself very disadvantaged.

We are expressing views and information from three sources.

- 1) Experience of issues young people face in a disadvantaged area making the experience of covid especially difficult.
- 2) Views of some young people we have face to face contact with.
- 3) Anecdotal comments heard from associates and through networks.

Locally, there is substantial social and financial inequality in comparison to other areas. This includes many local community members facing some of the following: entrenched poverty, child poverty, social exclusion, social isolation, poor housing, overcrowded housing, unemployment, low paid work, bad work conditions, financial exclusion, low self-esteem, low confidence, prejudice, very limited education & basic skills, high levels of crime, anti-social behaviour and drug misuse. Health poverty, with many local residents facing poor mental and physical health.

Covid-19 has worsened already ingrained inequalities, severe hardship, insecure work and the feeling that people have been set adrift, left to sink or swim on their own.

Many families are already in a very fragile state, with children facing a lack of structure, uncertainty and anxiety. Covid-19 has tipped them further into very difficult crisis situations they were already facing.

Food poverty affects many children. We work closely with one food project in particular that has seen a three-fold increase in the numbers of people,

especially families, needing food. This project is one of four food projects in Rhyl. Lost access to school meals has affected many children. While Welsh Government have invested in providing alternatives, the impact of this has been inconsistent. Food poverty is affecting many children.

Some people are on low incomes and live from what they make each day. There is great pressure to go out to work each day to earn money to buy food. To pay the bills. There is great pressure to minimize risk of catching the virus and infecting the family. This creates very high levels of pressure and stress felt by children.

Low incomes mean a lack of resources for children. Children lack digital access. They lack IT equipment, broadband, and basic resources such as art + craft, eg paper and crayons.

Overcrowded housing and poor housing conditions affects children's health and risk of catching the virus. There are families of five with one bedroom. Multiple generations sharing one home. Greater risk of infection. Locally there are many Houses of Multiple Occupation providing low quality crowded accommodation with shared facilities. There are families living in bed and breakfast accommodation intended as emergency temporary for weeks that extends to many months. This creates huge pressures and stress for children, affects their physical and mental health, makes social distancing very difficult, and increases risk of catching the virus.

Living in such conditions also involves children not having a garden for play. Play is hugely important for children's health, well-being, and development.

"As a teacher I knew of families with children who were going hungry. Their parents were simply unable to feed the children. Along with several colleagues we organised food collections from our own neighbours and did food bag drop offs to certain families."

"As a social worker working in fostering, some of the children I work with have experienced increased anxiety. Its been hard getting medication reviewed for children with ADHD and ASD Due to lockdown restrictions. We have been unable to get support referrals for victims who have been assaulted. Children that do have a contact plan in place have been unable to have direct contact with family members which has been distressing for them."

There is strong impact on children's mental health. This comes from social isolation, loneliness, not seeing friends, not accessing support networks, fear of getting the virus, stress from not being able to access lessons and resources on line, struggling teaching themselves, lacking support, lacking the structure, connection and sense of belonging that school provides,

divided households with families living apart because of the virus, and uncertainty about exam grades and their futures.

Some comments from young people aged 13+ follow.

“I feel so alone.”

“Our family are split up because of covid-19.”

“I feel very lonely and isolated from friends.”

“With children being off school on our estate they’re badly behaved due to hot weather and lockdown. There are lots of rude nasty people wandering about the estate as not going to school”.

“It’s hard coping with the level of work expected from school, especially when not getting taught by a teacher. We’re having to teach ourselves.”

“School said there’d be School Council meetings but there haven’t been.”

“I’m scared that I’m getting behind with my school work”

“I’m never going back to school”

“Friends have discussed feelings of panic, anger, frustration and no one to talk to regarding those feelings.”

“School had stated zoom meetings and lessons with teachers would occur but none have.” “I’m finding on line classes very difficult.”

“We don’t get support”.

“Lots of tensions in the family and house.”

“Always the worry of catching the virus, constantly washing our hands.”

“I don’t know when I can see my mum again and I’m worried she will die”.

“At home we only have one slow computer between three of us at school in the house.”

Parents comments:

“My child is so anxious they can barely eat.”

“My child will only go to the shop with me when its quiet.”

“My children have coped well but I have to work from home and it’s been very hard trying to homeschool too. I feel guilty that my eldest daughter has had to support with this a lot, schooling her younger siblings and the pressure from school was hard to deal with at times.” “My children don’t have the latest technology/iPads and can’t get online to see the work they have been given.”

“Several parents I know with kids who access CAHMS have complained they have had no help. At a time of high anxiety to have the safety net pulled away is awful.”

“My son has not left the house since the day schools closed.”

“My child barely leaves the house, they are too scared to.”

Returning to school places children at risk of catching the virus. It is an issue that has caused parents great stress and anxieties about their children’s safety and health.

“In my opinion it's impossible to make an informed decision.”

“I need to feel secure he will be able to cope.”

“Impossible to physically break up a fight or comfort an upset young child.”

“Government decisions and science guidance are different.”

“Until things are under control a wider re-opening of schools risks increasing the spread of the virus and killing more people.

“Lots of people are not sending their children back.”

“Is it safe? Is it really safe?”

Board of Directors, 4thecommunity, Rhyl