



Ethnic Minorities
& Youth Support
Team Wales

Tîm Cymorth
Lleiafrifoedd Ethnig
& Ieuenctid Cymru

All Wales BAME Engagement Programme
Online Forum: Impact of Covid on Young People, Aged 16-25
24 June 2020

Participants: Thirty people attended this forum, a mix of young women and men, ages ranging from 16-23. A couple people just over the age of 25 also attended. There were young people from Cardiff, Newport and Swansea represented and a few outlying towns. There was a mix of university students, GCSE and A level pupils, and people waiting to get into the next educational step. A few were volunteers and advocates active in their communities. There were also some youth and community workers from Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham speaking on behalf of young people with whom they have been in contact in recent weeks.

Aim of this forum: Rocio Cifuentes explains the aim of this forum. We are here to see how Covid has impacted on young people. Perhaps it has impacted on health, mental health, relationships with family, employment, or employment prospects. This forum is open for people attending to talk about topics they feel are having the most impact or are most important. EYST will feed information and viewpoints from this forum into an inquiry being conducted by the Senedd Children, Young Persons and Education Committee. The CYPE Committee is doing that inquiry to scrutinise Welsh Government and ask if Welsh Government is doing enough to mitigate the impact of Covid 19 on children and young people and make suggestions for what services WG must provide for children and young people in light of these times. So the aim here is to influence the Senedd and the Welsh Government to take your views into account and create solutions and services. The aim of this forum is to find out how pandemic has impacted you, the young people present. This has probably been the biggest change in your life. What has hit you hardest? What has been biggest sacrifice you have had to make? Maybe you feel like you have gained or maybe you feel it's worse.

Covid as an opportunity to slow down

- One young person notes this situation has come as a surprise to every person and thinks most everyone has both gained and lost from this experience. He has lost more materially but gained spiritually and notes this situation has brought him closer to faith, family, and himself and given him time to reflect.

- Another young person agrees that though many young people have lost materialistically, they now have closer-knit families. As young people are not able to do other things like go out to play sports, that has been good for connecting with loved ones.
- A couple of others agree that during Covid, they have been “able to slow down and not have 100 mile per hour lifestyle.”
- One young person notes that some people will use this time, and some will abuse it. “It’s about how you use this time to advance yourself.”

Lost opportunities to invest in young people’s development during Covid

- Young people need more options to be available for them to fill time in a positive and constructive way. There was strong consensus and a real sense of frustration amongst participants that there has not been enough service provision to guide young people in this period.
- Welsh Government and other public bodies haven’t provided sufficient opportunities for young people to use the free time generated by the lockdown in order engage in constructive activities or self-development.
- “Looking at how services are set up, there’s not been enough set up to help young people use this time well. Organisations should try and use the same social media and apps that young people are using to channel their energy to something more positive. That is lacking now. They [young people] are just on Fortnite.”
- Not enough has been done online to facilitate learning, motivation and enrichment for school children – not least schoolwork but also extracurricular and social options. Most children are just on social media when they could be using this time to be innovative.
- This time period presents an opportunity to motivate children and young people outside of the classroom/school environment, particularly for those children and young people who have not performed well or struggle in school. School is a “one size fits all” construct which does not suit all children and young people. As such, lockdown represents an opportunity as well as a challenge to provide unique services and development opportunities.
- What is needed? Virtual workshops and virtual benefits for children/pupils and young people/students, such as competitions, or learning projects such as history projects. The group had no shortage of ideas for such sessions:
 - Competitions
 - Learning projects such as history projects

- Virtual book clubs for children of all ages, where children read books independently, then meet online to discuss it.
- Learn entrepreneurial skills and plan building a business.
- Facilitation of career guidance and career pathways, particularly for non-academic youngsters.
- Hearing from role models that resonate young people's various identities, that have ties in their communities.
- Youth and third sector organisations can play a big part in setting up or facilitating such sessions.

Representation and role models

- One twenty-four-year-old youth worker noted the foundational issue continues to be representation of BAME people in media and in power.
- “The need for role models and better representation is ongoing. It was a need before Covid and will be after.”
- Negative role models can fill the void when positive role models are lacking in media and civil society and also when real opportunities are lacking. Two young people noted that “hungry” young adults who have struggled in school may see drug dealers as role models. “When you see someone like you – who has the same image, the same mindset – if you see them succeeding, you want to follow that ... because he relates to me.”
- “We need more role models, representation and awareness of those role models.” Before lockdown, this Newport youth worker's organisation connected youth with speakers who have thrived in industry rather than academics and showed alternative routes to careers other than academics routes.
- That representation must happen at all levels including broader society – politics, media, civil society, and school curriculums.
- A few young people present expressed interest in playing the role of advocate and acting as role models for younger children and can connect with the appropriate EYST worker for that.

(Self) Employment & Income

- One young person in his early 20s has been a barber for 6 years and started his own business two years ago. As young businessperson, he lost out on the opportunity to get

a £10,000 grant from the government, because lockdown set in 10 days before he was supposed to sign a lease on a new premises. Thus, while setting up a new premises, he has had to pay his own rent and bills, whilst moving house at the same time. Everything hit at once and it has caused stress and anxiety. "It can be a tough time."

- One person recounts a close young family member's experience during Covid. This family member was a contractor who had made plans to take a break and go travelling before returning to Cardiff to work. Because of lockdown, he was not able to travel and now is unemployed.
- In South Asian families, many men work as taxi drivers or in the restaurant trade, both sectors which have lost much trade in lockdown. Currently, a lot of fathers not able to work and are losing income. In South Asian families, the father is usually the biggest breadwinner, and they may succumb to more pressure as they are not getting same income as pre-Covid.
- One teacher who is from Cardiff, but currently living in Dubai, was planning to come back to the UK. When asked how confident he is about post Covid job prospects in UK, he replied that he is worried about getting a role in a suitable organisation. Previously in Cardiff, he had been overqualified for the roles he was offered. "That would be my main worry if I did come back."

Education – Continuity of learning and digital access

- There is strong consensus and frustration that not enough is being done to support pupils and parents with continuity of learning.
- Lack of access to laptops and Wifi continues to be a serious intractable problem, despite the funding given by Welsh Government to local authorities to resolve this issue. EYST staff continue to hear from families every week who have not been provided laptops or have no access to Wifi for home learning or only have one laptop for many children. Other organisations report the same. EYST knows of several families who still had not been provided with digital access in early July. In one instance a family was loaned a laptop in June, only to be asked to give it back when schools reopened. In other instances, even third sector advocates have found it difficult to liaise with schools to resolve digital access for families. And those are the families who are somewhat engaged or have networks that have resulted in referrals to EYST or other third sector organisations. Refugee and asylum-seeking families face the greatest challenges in the digital divide. But they are not the only families facing this.
- A youth worker from Swansea mentions that some young children feel parents have not had support to help young people with schooling. Other people in the forum agree,

particularly issues with online homework and parents who lack computer or English proficiency.

- The Swansea youth worker recounts what young people have told him. A lot of them don't feel supported. Being young people, they might not make effort to engage in home learning unless someone reminds them, prompts them and is there to help. If parents don't know how to do that, there is no support.
- Another young participant says, "Most families of Butetown have not been supported at all. They've just had a few crayons and a few books."
- One 16-year-old girl notes her younger brother was enrolled in education when they arrived in the UK and Swansea in January, but now because of Covid is at home and is not doing much. She doesn't know if he has any homework. He is just on phone. "I try to teach him by myself, but I don't know if that is going to work." The family does not have a laptop and her brother has not been given one by the school or local authority.
- That same girl hasn't been in school since just arriving to UK and Swansea in January. She was told to wait for September to enrol in school. Her younger brother was placed in a school when they arrived, only to have his education disrupted again due to Covid.
- A youth worker notes that there is a lack of opportunities for 16-year olds, including volunteering opportunities.
- Single parent families face many challenges, as the parent must be carers as well as study and work part time.
- Some young people mention poverty. If a family is well off, they can hire tutors. But if a family is poor, the children will not have the same experiences as other people who have resources. "So, inequalities are a big deal."

Education – Pupil's anxiety over Summer 2020 assessment arrangements

- A youth worker knows many 16-year olds who are worried about GCSE grades. They are concerned about impact on grade if the teacher dislikes them or if they have fallen out with the teacher, it will affect your grades. "There is not one youth who doesn't feel that."
- Another school pupil notes the uncertainty about this current grading system and the nervousness that brings for pupils, especially those who are waiting to see if they are able to get into the courses they strive for at 6th form or college. "You want high grades and if you don't get them, you will fall down. And some kids won't have power to

complain or to challenge the school if they get grades they don't like." This pupil also feels predicted grades will be unfair to some young people.

Education – University Students

- Experiences of university students have been affected by the abrupt transition to online coursework and exams.
- One student notes that a large part of her medical course is already self-directed learning which requires students to motivate themselves.
- There is some evidence that different departments may have inconsistent methods and approaches for dealing with completion and assessment of remaining coursework given the abrupt closing of classrooms, labs and libraries. One person's sister who is in university has been told that her department will use predictive grades for any missed or unfinished labs. A student in a different department at the same university missed a lab when classes shut, but the department facilitated his group to be able to complete the assignment in alternate fashion.
- Students with pre-existing responsibilities such as work or care responsibilities or pre-existing physical or mental health problems may be more affected by the impact of campus closures and abrupt university shutdown. Those students may lose out more when departments draw upon previous assessments to predict grades in lieu of summer exams.
- Numerous international students are in dire straits. One lost his part time retail job when the flood hit Pontypridd a few weeks before the Covid lockdown. After that, it was hard to continue paying university fees. He has loans in his origin country related to his education in UK. He is not in furlough because he has been out of work since the flood. There is no help from Government and the university is not helping. He asks, "Is there anyone I can get help from? I am struggling and it is affecting my mental health." There at least 20 students in this situation in his area, many of whom are down to their last few pounds. The EYST team has been following up with this gentleman.

Health & Mental Health

- Rocio notes that the Covid 19 situation impacts on everyone's mental health, so although this is a difficult subject, she invites people to share their own experiences or those of people they know.

- Males in particular feel pressure to conform to a stereotype of being strong and the man of house. In public they show a “brave face” and then get home to face feelings that they wonder where they came from. These gendered expectations can feel heightened in this pandemic. “Especially in lockdown. You’re stuck in the room and can’t see friends. A lot of people out there are struggling.” A youth worker also notes that he struggles to get young men to talk about mental wellbeing. When asked, they refer to boredom, but he senses there is more than that underneath.
- There is a risk that people mask depression with phone addiction or with drugs. “We aren’t educated in these things.” One solution posed is for people in early 20s to be in place to have frank talks with younger kids. “We need to have people who resonate with different communities and cultures.”
- Social media is a very dangerous place. Schools and government should have more presence on social media, so that if kids are on their phone, they are learning.
- Children and young people need encouragement and options to engage in alternatives to social media such as reading. “When you are reading a book, it resonates with you and you have a conversation with yourself.”
- Physical exercise is very important to mental health. One former EYST youth volunteer (now a uni student) has created a webpage to encourage women and girls to take up physical activity. She noted that as, as a Muslim female, the weightlifting scene is dominated by men. She aims to raise awareness that being female has nothing to do with a person’s ability and that attending to your physical wellbeing has massive impact on mental health. She wants to continue to find further ways to encourage people who want to get into fitness and health but do not have confidence.
- EYST has an Instagram live session every Friday at 5pm. It is open to anyone to join, and the purpose is to inspire and motivate. The host or speaker can be a community member or represent an organisation. The former volunteer showcased above recently hosted one session, following which quite a few young people have asked how they can get into fitness and training.
- One Children and Youth Advocate, stresses that we need to account for young parents and families, who have unique emotional and financial pressures. New moms in their 20s face lack of childcare, especially with children not going to school. This is affecting young women’s mental health, especially if they have a partner who is working, and all care falls on them. And for new parents, health visitors are not visiting as often as usual.
- Another charity worker noted the stress on young people with additional needs, especially anyone on the autistic spectrum for whom routines are important. This situation has left some people further isolated. At the beginning of the most restrictive

lockdown phase, the Government could have made an earlier decision to allow unlimited exercise for families whose children needed it. But even now that families are allowed outside more, for people on the spectrum for whom routines are important, families can't take them to their favourite restaurant or their favourite activities.

Community cohesion and racism

- Some young people feel racism and exposure to racist incidents are currently an issue whether verbal or online. Some felt a need to have more police on the road to make it safer, but others have fraught relations with police. One youth worker is supporting young people to report racist incidents.
- One person in her late 20s has witnessed rising tension between younger and older people in her community. The tension has always been there but has been more pronounced since Covid 19 and lockdown. There is a high percent of retired folk where she lives. With lockdown, the younger people feel they are being judged as older people criticise, "Why are young people in the streets?" That seems to have caused kids to do things they may not have otherwise and that escalated tension. "It was a problem before, but now everyone is angry. It may be done subconsciously by the older people, but there is increased criticism of young people when it's not really their fault. It has ostracised young people."
- The forum chair has witnessed the same. "People are being very judgemental, almost vigilante, and it can have currents of racism."
- One young person refers to bad relations between young people and the police in Butetown, Cardiff. "Most of us get stop and searched for no reason. It is part soft their job, so we have to respect that. But if police approach boys in aggressive way, they won't like it and there is a lot of tension there as well."
- He notes the distinctness and individuality of the Butetown, a close-knit community, where there are a lot of flats and normally, people socialising outside of flats. "You see a lot running a [sporting] club with 200 boys." The Covid situation is really hard on the boys who have nothing to do. There is nothing for them. And the Black Lives Matter movement and associated media coverage has really affected them. There has been racism for many years. These boys have always had that racism. There needs to be a change or things will get worse. We've been through cycles. Young boys don't have job opportunities because of where they come from."
- The chair asks, "What can be done?"

- Give people opportunities, especially docks boys. “Were’ not as bad as people make us out to be.” Give them the opportunity to go do something. Empower the youth. For any Cardiff boys or boys from ethnic background, it makes a big difference.
- A young business owner suggests teaching young people how to set up businesses and empowering them to be entrepreneurs.
- Another young person from Butetown agrees, “That would be self-esteem and make a big difference. Most boys don’t have confidence in themselves because they’ve experienced that negativeness from other organisations.” He notes other organisations have come into Butetown for selfish reasons, jumping aboard, and then retreating, so there is mistrust.

Black Lives Matter Movement

- Young people are very aware of the Black Lives Matter movement, the death of George Floyd and events emerging from that. It is having an effect on them.
- A youth worker was told by one young person, that because of recent global events, he feels institutional racism has been highlighted.
- As noted in section above, young people in Butetown who have been through cycles of racism and lack of opportunity are very aware of BLM movement, attuned to the media and their position in relation to this movement and the profound need for change.
- A university student notes there are two paths for institutions and organisations that are jumping on the back of campaigns now: 1) action and commitment or 2) lip service and superficiality. She notes that the groundswell of reaction from mainstream organisations is subsiding now. “So you can see who was just doing it for show.” For example, regarding her university, she feels one statement is not enough: “They are hiding now. It’s about action now, not words.”
- The Chair asks, “What actions do you want to see prioritised?”
- Answer: Long term plans going forward with concrete, measurable and SMART actions that can be implemented gradually. Not just something that is spur of the moment, like a photo opportunity or a one-off statement or a superficial show of commitment.

Rocio thanks all for attending and notes that we will compile this information and provide it to Welsh Government and the Senedd with the aim to influence for positive change and the implementation of ideas presented here.