Childrens Conference

Summary of Key Findings
November 2023

> TALK SO KIDS WILL LISTEN
> AND
> LISTEN SO KIDS CAN TALK

Introduction

Staffordshire Safeguarding Children Board in conjunction with The Voice Project, The Staffordshire PSHE Education Service hosted by, Staffordshire Council of Voluntary Youth Services (SCYVS), and Education Safeguarding Leads at the Local Authority developed and delivered a bespoke conference, 'Talk so kids will listen, and listen so kids can talk' attended by children and young people. The purpose of the conference was to seek their views, wishes and feelings to enable decision makers to hear the voice of the child and use those voices to influence system and practice change.

Seventy-two children and young people from years six to eleven (10-16 years old) from eight schools across the county including two special schools, attended the conference on Wednesday 15, November 2023 at Stafford Rugby Club.

The conference was developed based on recent and on-going local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews. Children and young people involved in the reviews told us how support for them could be improved, in particularly how practitioners listen, understand, and communicate with them along with what makes a trusted adult and how that adult can enable how and when you can talk to them. Activities with the children and young people brought about opportunities to seek their views on how they would share their own worries and concerns and to establish who they viewed as trusted adults and why and how those adults need to respond appropriately to their needs.

The report is cognisant that the selected schools both mainstream and special educational needs represent a small demographic as outlined in the lessons learnt section. Further consideration to the development of a more diverse delegation will be needed for future events.

Working together to keep children safe

The event was also supported by skilled facilitators from across Staffordshire partnership including the NSPCC, Youth Offending Service, SCVYS' Youth Engagement Team and Staffordshire Police

During the day, children and young people were seated in groups with peers from their own setting, along with school staff and a facilitator who stayed with them throughout the day to guide them through the various activities.

The intended outcomes of the conference were to:

- Identify key relationships between children/young people and adults
- Produce a child-led definition for the term "Trusted Adult"
- Recognise enabling/disabling opportunities for children and young people to disclose safeguarding concerns to help form training plans and practice guidance
- Clarify preferred communication methods for children and young people to support future practice
- Explain how children and young people perceive friendships and challenge misconceptions about not telling on a friend (especially where there is a safeguarding concern)

Key Findings

Trusted Adults

Children were asked to identify who and why different adults were considered 'trusted' through a number of activities. Trusted adults were those who children saw as being **'safe and trustworthy'** figures in their lives (for example, family, carers, teachers, coaches and emergency services).

In the eyes of children and young people who attended the conference, those adults will have time to listen, be respectful and understand without judgment.

Trusted adults need to be
Calm
Caring
Comforting
Kind
Loving
Supporting
Honest
Genuine
Reliable
Protective
Enthusiastic
Wise
Experienced, and 'Make you feel safe' and 'solve problems'

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Trusted Team

The children and young people were asked to create a trusted adults' hand graphic.

The feedback on specific trusted adults was different for everyone as it depends on who they had in their lives, how comfortable they felt with them and their personal lived experience.

The **most common** people they expected to be able to trust and talk to if they were worried or concerned were:

- Mum and/or dad
- Teacher (or other staff who worked in schools such as teaching assistant or the school councillor - often these were named)
- Siblings

Other family members also featured **frequently**, especially as it meant they wouldnt get into trouble with their parents such as:

- Aunts/uncles/cousins
- Grandparents

A **number** of children also mentioned:

- social workers
- health professionals, e.g. doctor/nurse/therapist/psychologist
- friends
- family friends
- friend's parents
- neighbours
- coaches or youth workers
- emergency services, e.g. firefighters/paramedics/police officers
- national agencies, e.g. Childline/NSPCC.

Some participants said if they found it difficult to talk to a trusted adult, they may consider writing it down as that was easier.**

Recommendations

- Practitioners working with children should make time to listen with respect and adopt a non-judgmental manner.
- Practitioners working with children find innovative ways to hear the child's voice which takes into consideration how different backgrounds and experiences may affect how children engage .
- Safeguarding partners and leaders create a culture which supports and enables practitioners to listen to the child's voice and understand their lived experience.

Communication

Participants were asked to identify barriers of why sometimes they may find it tricky to tell an adult if they are worried, scared or have a problem. This was achieved by giving them paper bricks to build a brick wall with. This was a great success with over 300 bricks used which culminating in extensive data. The barriers they discussed that children and young people may face can be themed into five general areas:

- **Child/young person's own feelings** - feeling embarrassed and ashamed were some of the main barriers to why children may not share their worries or concerns with adults. Children said they may not feel safe, be scared, anxious and uncomfortable about sharing their worries. Some children may be shy; didn't know how to explain their concerns; be able to open up or describe them verbally; didn't want to be known as a 'snitch' or had 'been told to keep it a secret'. Some children said they may have trust issues especially if they had been let down in the past or couldn't connect with adults.

- **Perceptions of how adults would react** - children expressed concerns about how adults may react if they shared their worries and concerns. This included fear of not being listened to; being misunderstood; not being believed; not being taken seriously; being belittled or made fun of; being judged and getting themselves or others in trouble. Some children said adults may over-react; they may tell others (including parents) their secrets and get more people involved, not take their side; make it worse and put you in more danger. Their secret may also make the adult sad and upset (which they wouldn't want).

- **Characteristics of the adult** -these were mainly opposite to the attributes that children looked for in trusted adults, such as those perceived as having no empathy; lacking patience; being or looking angry or bad-tempered, unhelpful; poor listeners not trustworthy; uncaring; non-supportive and inexperienced.

- **Environment** - children and young people discussed the importance of having a location where they had privacy and would not be overheard and having a safe place to talk.

- **Timing** - children discussed how the timing had to be right for both them and the trusted adult. They also mentioned that their trusted adult might be too busy and wouldn't have time for them.

Recommendations

- Practitioners build positive, supportive and trusted relationships with children they are working with by understanding the feelings of the child
- Practitioners create opportunities in suitable and safe locations to enable the child to talk, and to actively listen

Common sources for support and information

The children and young people chose a range of different sources of support and information that they can access. Children were asked to vote for their top five sources of information. The top five common sources were: parents and carers; Childline, friends. specialist websites and PSHE lessons. Social media apps were less common as trusted sources for support and information.
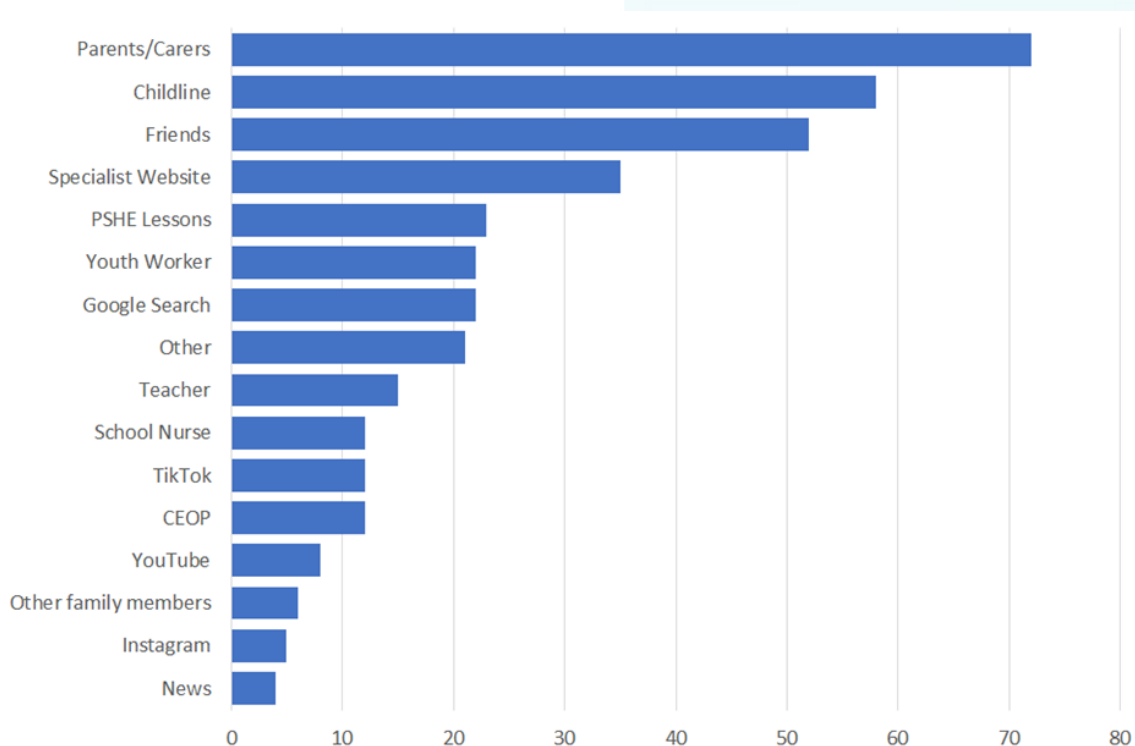
Children and young people also had an opportunity on the day to discuss with their peers about what they would do in different scenarios including who and where they would go to for support.

This was well facilitated, and discussions were forthcoming on all tables.

Scenario1. I'm really scared about puberty. I don't want to have spots or other things happen to my body.

→ **Answers.** talk to doctor, school nurse, therapist and/or parents. Might not go to doctor as feel embarrassed. Google, never trust Alexa, specialist on the subject. Snapchat

Scenario 2. A girl on Snapchat has a naked picture of me and is threatening to show all my friends and family if I don't send them money. I don't know what to do as it's on her phone and I don't have the money

→ **Answers**: call the police, talk to someone in school and/or parents, Talk to someone with similar experience to them.

Scenario 3 On my way home from school when a car pulled up beside me. The driver offered me a lift. I didn't know the driver, so I said no, they drove off. I keep seeing the car when I walk home from school

→ **Answers:** Text parents – tell them, get a lift or find someone, teacher, Police(kidnap), Mum and Dad, go to friends. They would feel helpless, scared and harassed.

Friendships

Children were asked to identify qualities of a good friend. Common qualities identified fun, loving and made them happy - and mostly were good for their wellbeing. Friends were kind, caring, helpful and supportive. They listened to you. Friends were loyal, respectful, honest and trustworthy - qualities of 'healthy' friendships.

Discussion took place through scenarios about when they would need to speak to someone (trusted adult) if they were beginning to have concerns about a friend. There was a lot of discussion about the importance of telling adults early.

The session also illustrated the importance of sharing worries and concerns with friends and trusted adults and exploring the different scenarios.

Telling Tales

Children and young people were given scenarios that they may be concerned about and asked if they would tell a friend or a trusted adult.

'*Sam is dating someone who is three years younger*'
> **Answer**, *Everyone said they wouldn't tell anyone*

'*Sam's partner takes Sam to lots of parties with alcohol*'
> **Answer,** *Everyone said they would tell someone, tell parents, tell the police*

'*Blake wants to get maximum points so adds everyone who sends a friend request*'
> **Answer**, *Mixed comments but wouldn't tell trusted adult*

'*Prab says they have a knife in their bag to protect themselves.*'
> **Answer**, *Everyone would talk, county lines. Speak out to Police, parent's, neighbourhood watch, ring transport Police.*

'*Blake says they have been getting extra points on their game for sending a friend photos*'.
> **Answer,** *Everyone would tell an adult, they shouldn't share photo's, or talk to anyone*
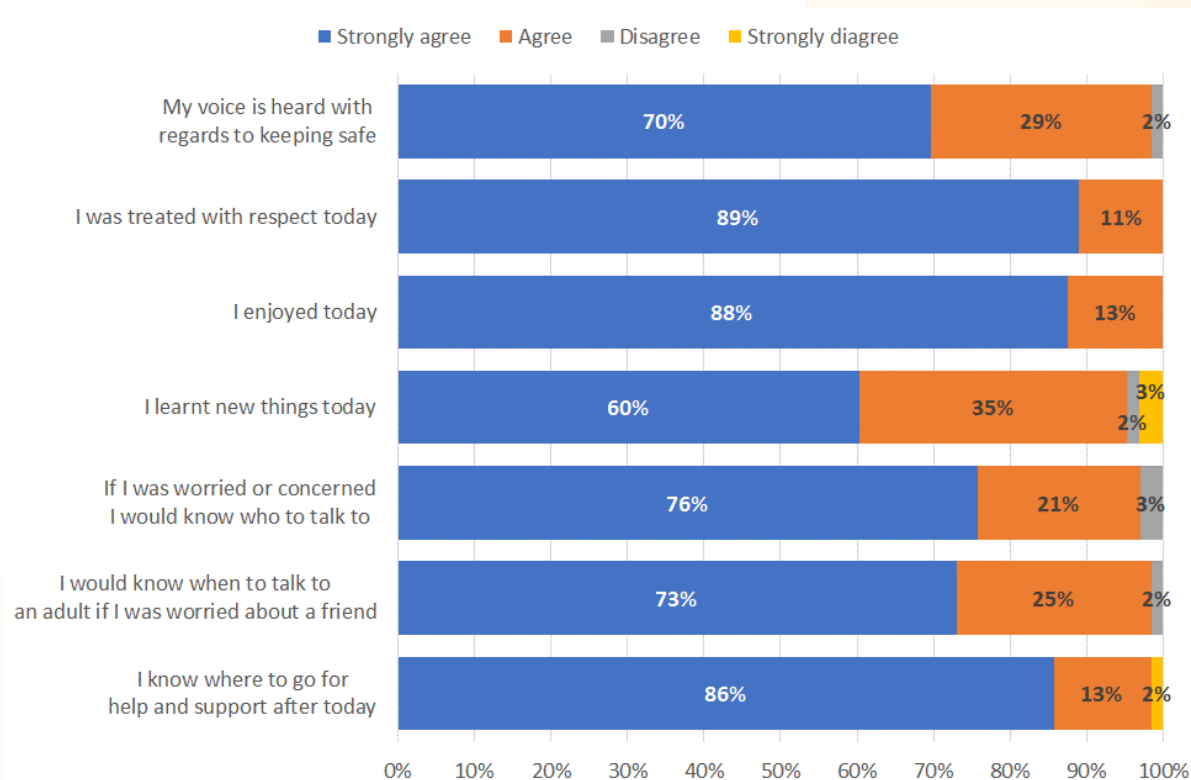
Recommendations

- Practitioners will demonstrate an understanding of peer pressure on a child who needs to share a concern, with empathy and guidance.

Evaluation of the day – children and young people

Participants were asked to complete an evaluation form at the end of the day. Most children agreed that their voice was heard, they were treated with respect and enjoyed the day. In terms of learning outcomes, most of the children said they knew who and when to talk to an adult if they had worries or concerns about themselves or a friend.

They recognised some of the common barriers about why children may not always tell an adult when they are worried or concerned about something or someone - with the most common ones identified as: being embarrassed, scared or fearful of the adult's reaction or outcome. They also said that some children may find it difficult to communicate their concerns. Following the event, the children's evaluations showed that they knew where to go for help and support.

Children and Young People's views on the day and learning outcomes

Legend: ■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly diagree

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly diagree
My voice is heard with regards to keeping safe	70%	29%	2%	
I was treated with respect today	89%	11%		
I enjoyed today	88%	13%		
I learnt new things today	60%	35%	3%	2%
If I was worried or concerned I would know who to talk to	76%	21%	3%	
I would know when to talk to an adult if I was worried about a friend	73%	25%	2%	
I know where to go for help and support after today	86%	13%	2%	

Around 95% of children and young people agreed that they learnt new things at the event. They talked about learning about safety and what to do in certain situations; who, how and when to talk to someone about their worries and concerns; trusted adults and friendships.

"How to be safe"
"Who to tell when things happen in life"
"There are a lot of trusted adults"
"Trust, friendship, how adults can help"
"Safety, boundaries and how to speak up"

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Tree of thoughts – All the children and young people were encouraged to write anything they wanted on the tree of thoughts.

- This activity made me think outside the box
- Enjoy talking to new people
- Not everyone can help but the trust team can!
- It was amazing
- It's hard to talk to people
- Not everyone knows who you are
- This has made me think from another perspective
- It was fun doing these activities
- It was fun because we got to talk about some of our personal stuff
- Enjoyable
- Excitement *
- I enjoyed everything I did today
- CALM
- It's not always easy to talk to people.
- Making sure we have the best time during the day
- I love the friendship activity
- Fun but hard
- Sometimes I feel too shy to even smile
- Enjoyable, fun, interactive
- A safe place for me is my secret spot in my room
- Bring the Police lady again please
- Nice environment to be in

Evaluation from school staff

Feedback from school staff and the facilitators was positive. Most thought that the venue and pre-event communications were excellent (average scores of 4.7 and 4.8 respectively where one is poor and five is excellent). Staff and facilitators thought that the event was well-planned, with fun and engaging activities for children allowing for information to be shared and their voices to be heard.

"It was made inclusive to support our pupils"
"I felt the ethos was fantastic. The children were prioritised, and this led to more information being shared"
"Very well-planned event, variety of engaging and interesting activities for the young people which enabled them to share views"
"Having the opportunity to hear from young people about important issues. I loved the discussions between the young people and feel that by listening to each other at times they came to their own positive conclusions about safeguarding issues"

Celebrating success

The participation and commitment of all partner organisations and individuals in both the development and delivery of the event was exceptional. The Voice Project used the voice of the child to assist in the development of the outline plan at the very beginning and schools embraced the opportunity to be part of the planning process as well as the event.

Having individuals from different organisations as facilitators gave a wealth of local experience that the children benefitted from, whilst busting the myths that some professionals are unapproachable.

Lessons learnt

This event hosted six mainstream schools and two special schools from across Staffordshire.

As part of the planning phase of the event, discussions were held with the Education Safeguarding Leads to identify schools from a range of demographics across the County. Further discussions were held with the individual schools about ensuring they bring a diverse range of students across learning abilities, family circumstances and demographics. It became evident at the event that this was not fully delivered as most of the students were high in both achievements and attitude. Further work needs to be achieved before the next conference to ensuring a more diverse range of children. Despite this one facilitator mentioned they had a diverse range of voices at their table (including Ukrainian refugee, non-binary, transgender students and a range of family circumstances).

Going forward to achieve a truly diverse range of children and young people, to inclusively capture all voices, work has commenced in conjunction with the Education Safeguarding Advice and Support Service to establish a new selection of schools including mainstream, special and potentially Pupil Referral units in preparation for the 2024 event in November. This may lead to a more varied and trauma informed format approach to meet the needs of the children.

The event at a glance
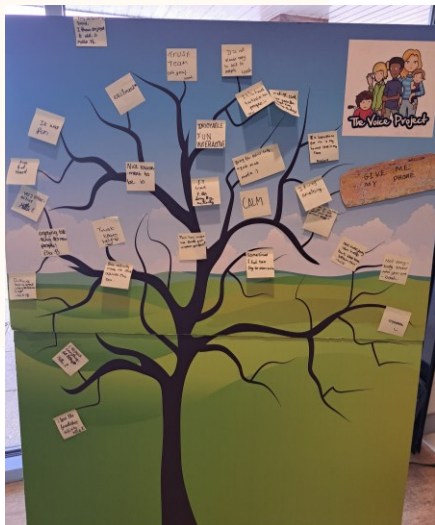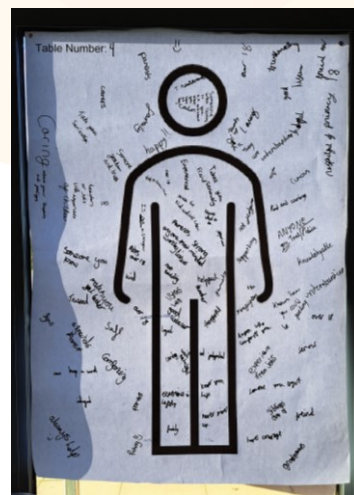
Next Childrens Conference Wednesday 20th, November 2024 – to be confirmed