



# THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

## Edinburgh Research Explorer

### **The support needs of children and young people who have to move home because of domestic abuse (Full report)**

**Citation for published version:**

Stafford, A, Stead, J & Grimes, M 2008, The support needs of children and young people who have to move home because of domestic abuse (Full report). Scottish Women's Aid.

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Publisher final version (usually the publisher pdf)

**Publisher Rights Statement:**

Licensed under Open Government License

**General rights**

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

**Take down policy**

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact [openaccess@ed.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@ed.ac.uk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.





**THE SUPPORT NEEDS**  
**OF**  
**CHILDREN AND**  
**YOUNG PEOPLE**  
**WHO HAVE TO MOVE**  
**HOME** **BECAUSE OF**  
**DOMESTIC ABUSE**

## Summary Report

The University of Edinburgh/NSPCC Centre for UK-wide Learning in Child Protection (CLiCP)

Anne Stafford • Joan Stead • Marian Grimes

Scottish  
**Women's**  
Aid

for women, children & young people

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research team is grateful to the many people who contributed to the making of this report.

We are indebted to staff in Scottish Women's Aid and the other organisations who participated in the research. In particular, we are grateful to children's support workers, who, in addition to providing practical help, were an important source of knowledge and advice about young people and their experiences. We would like to thank the Scottish Executive for providing funding for the research.

Where interviews took place in young people's home we would like to thank mothers of the young people for trusting us enough to agree to young people speaking to us.

We are grateful to everyone on the advisory group for their time and invaluable advice: Cheryl Sutherland Stewart and Fiona Morrison from (SWA); Tam Baillie from Barnardos; Kate Bilton from the Scottish Government and Julie Henley from Angus Women's Aid. Particular thanks to the younger members, Jass and Michael. Their carefully considered advice and input at every stage added so much to the research process and the final report.

Most of all, we want to express our thanks to the young people who participated in this research, for taking time to talk to us and share their experiences, hopes and ideas.

# CONTENTS

<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2 Policy Background</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>3 Brief Learning from the Literature</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>4 Research Practice: Ethics, Confidentiality, Consent</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>5 Research Design: Access to the Sample and Methodology</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>FINDINGS</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>EXPERIENCES OF HAVING TO MOVE HOUSE FOLLOWING DOMESTIC ABUSE</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>6 Number and Types of House Moves</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>7 The 'First Move'</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>8 Subsequent Moves</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>9 Experience of School Following the Move</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>SUPPORT NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE TO MOVE HOME BECAUSE OF DOMESTIC ABUSE</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>10 The Importance of Talking; the Difficulties of Finding Someone to Talk to</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>11 Friends as a Source of Support</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>12 Family as a Source of Support</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>13 Support in Refuge and from Women's Aid</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>14 Support from other Organisations</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>15 Support in School</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>16 Bolt-holes and Escape Routes</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>17 Other Support that Might Have Helped</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>18 Recommendations</b>	<b>23</b>

## 1 INTRODUCTION

This is the summary report of findings from research funded by the Scottish Executive and commissioned by Women's Aid. The research explores the views, experiences and support needs of children and young people who have to move home as a result of domestic abuse. It builds on earlier research commissioned by Women's Aid (Edgar et al 2003) which graphically highlighted the often traumatic process involved for women of leaving violent homes and the convoluted routes to finding (or not finding) sustainable housing (Edgar et al 2003).

This new study examines the parallel (but separate and different) experiences of children and young people caught up in the same set of circumstances. It examines their views and experiences of: leaving home following domestic abuse; the journey they made to being re-housed; the services and support they received along the way; their views of the services and support they received; and additional support they would have liked.

Its aim is to make a contribution to improving existing services aimed at supporting children and young people who have to leave homes where there is domestic abuse and to inform the process of building new services.

## 2 POLICY BACKGROUND

This study was conducted at a time where increasing information is becoming available to policy and decision makers about the experiences of young people living with and moving from situations of domestic abuse; and in a context where government policy at central and local level is recognising the problem and working to address the needs of children in this situation. Policy and decision makers in central and local government and across the voluntary sector have received encouragement in a number of policy documents to review and develop services to support this vulnerable group. Funding has been made available to support service development. There are a range of policies and policy areas relevant to children and young people experiencing domestic abuse in Scotland.

Findings from the study will be of use to planners and practitioners involved in delivering services to young people leaving home in these circumstances; and to policy makers shaping and influencing decisions about how best to support them. Its aim is to make a contribution to improving existing services aimed at supporting children and young people who have to leave homes where there is domestic abuse and to inform the process of building new services.

## 3 BRIEF LEARNING FROM THE LITERATURE

Information from prior studies suggests that children experiencing domestic abuse are likely to know about it and be affected by it; have sophisticated understandings and information about it; and to have mixed views about refuge life. Earlier studies also suggest that given the complexities of their lives, it can be difficult for organisations to find effective ways to support them.

## 4 RESEARCH PRACTICE: ETHICS, CONFIDENTIALITY AND CONSENT

**Ethical Considerations:** The research was designed to be highly participative in line with the belief of funders (Scottish Women's Aid), of the importance of involving children and young people in every aspect of their work. Young people participate fully in the research; as members of the Advisory Group and as respondents. They had all experienced leaving home in these difficult circumstances - experts in their own lives (Mayall 2002) - and in a unique position to tell us what works best.

Young people's motivation for participating in the research was often a desire to share their complex experiences with other young people in the same situation, in the hope that this might contribute to improving the situation for them. The challenge for the research team was to listen to the experiences of these young people but in a way that would not involve them in further harm.

Very careful consideration was given to how best to report and share the results of the research with young participants. Following consultation with the advisory group, rather than write separate reports for adults and young people, we have produced one main report and one summary report for everyone; for adult policy and decision makers and for young people. We tried to write both in a form accessible to all.

**Confidentiality:** This was a priority consideration for this group; there was detailed discussion about the limits to confidentiality, the extent of anonymity. Drawings made in the course of interview were scrutinised at the end to ensure they and their stories were not identifiable. A 'Private Thought Box' was made available at the majority of interview sessions with children and young people, providing a way of sharing information confidentially (Punch 2002).

**Consent:** Full and informed consent was checked out with young people at every stage; strong messages given that the decision to participate belonged to the young person. Information about available support routes was available in the event that interviews brought up painful memories. Information about the research was also given to main adult care givers.

## 5 RESEARCH DESIGN: ACCESS TO THE SAMPLE AND METHODOLOGY

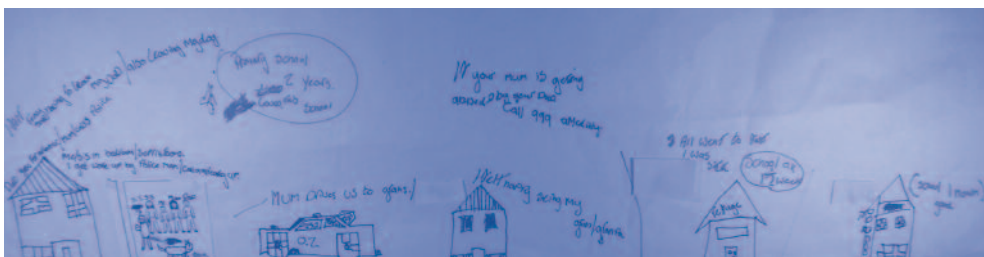
**Access to the Sample:** 30 young people were interviewed. Most were contacted through Scottish Women's Aid and Women's Aid Groups; 26 had had some contact with a refuge; others (4) were accessed through different organisations and had not had contact with Women's Aid. It involved in a mix of individual and group interviews.

**Interviews:** The research took the form of an interview-based study of young people age 10 – 16. Interviews took the form of group and individual interviews in locations throughout Scotland. The sample included young people from across Scotland living in a mix of urban and rural settings. A flexible approach was taken to interviewing, enabling us to respond to: the wishes of young people; the practicalities of time and space; and relationships between young people (with consideration given how best to manage sibling groups and friendship groups).

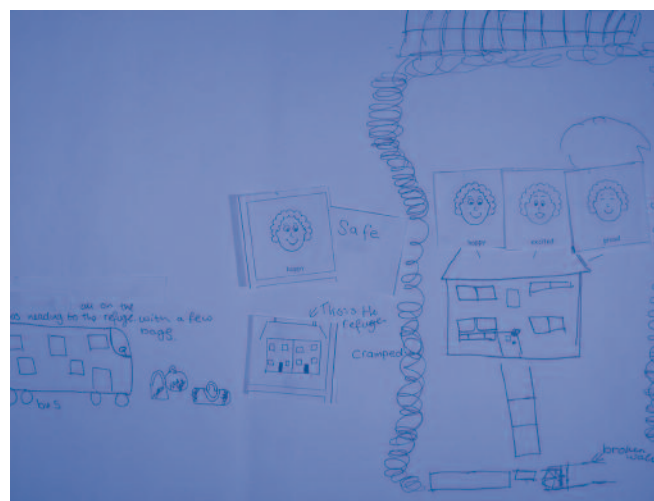
When interviewing children in their own home, we were struck by the trust shown to the researchers by mothers. They made space for young people to speak to researchers on their own. This seemed the result partly of trust already built with workers who made the first contact about interview. On a number of occasions, mothers expressed that they felt it was important that the young people were given the opportunity to tell researchers about their experiences.

**Interviews as a Journey:** We tried to conduct interviews as ‘constructing an account with a child’ (Wescott and Littleton 2005). Interviewing around the novel concept of a ‘journey’ was successful on several levels; both as the vehicle around which they could share their experiences as a journey. It was also a practical task, meaning that space and time to reflect, think and decide what to say was built into the interview process; it enabled them to talk to us about difficult things in their own time and own way. These visual journeys were set out on a large sheet of paper, with young people drawing and linking journeys from their old house to the new and all points in between. Dialogue continued throughout the

journey. Individual ‘journeys’ were photographed and these remain an important record of each interview (Examples below).



**FIGURE 1: MUM DRIVES US TO GRAN'S**



**FIGURE 2: HEADING TO REFUGE WITH A FEW BAGS**

# FINDINGS

## EXPERIENCE OF MOVING HOUSE FOLLOWING DOMESTIC ABUSE<sup>1</sup>

### 6 NUMBER AND TYPES OF HOUSE MOVE

Most of this particular group of 30 young people had made multiple moves. They had moved mainly from the house where domestic abuse had occurred via a stay with relatives, to the refuge. 17 of the group had stayed in a refuge at some point. At the time of interview, most were still in accommodation they saw as temporary, waiting to move again. A few knew that moving to avoid the perpetrator would be an ongoing part of life. Sometimes young people had moved substantial distances. For one young person this meant moving to the UK from abroad; others from England to Scotland; for others towns and cities in Scotland. Only one young person was able to remain in the family home or return to the family home without the perpetrator.

**TABLE 2: NUMBER AND TYPE OF HOUSE MOVE**

Male/Female	Age	Journeys	Number of moves
Female	12	Home - new home	1
Female	14	Home - new home	1
Female	10	Home - new home	1
Male	10	Home - refuge - new home	2
Female	14	Home - refuge - new home	2
Female	13	Home - friend - refuge - waiting for new home	2
Male	10	Home - friend - refuge - waiting for new home	2
Female	?	Home - relative - return home (without perpetrator)	2

<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this study, we refer to the 'family home' as the home they left because of domestic abuse. We refer to the 'new house' as the house where they currently stay. We refer to the 'first move' as the first time a house move was made because of domestic abuse.



**TABLE 2: NUMBER AND TYPE OF HOUSE MOVE CONT.**

Male/Female	Age	Journeys	Number of moves
Male	15	Home - refuge - new home	2
Female	10	Home - refuge - new home	2
Male	12	Home - relative - new home	2
Female	10	Home - relative - refuge - waiting for new home	3
Female	11	Home - new house - refuge - new home	3
Male	11	Home - refuge - house - bigger house	3
Female	8	Home - relative - refuge - new flat	3
Female	10	Home - relative - refuge - new flat	3
Female	11	Home - relative - refuge - new house	3
Male	10	Home - relative - refuge - another refuge - waiting for new house	3
Female	12	Home - relative - refuge - another refuge - waiting for new house	3
Female	14	Home - relative - refuge - new home	3
Female	14	Home - relative - refuge - council flat - new home	4
Female	10	Flat - relative - refuge - new house	4
Male	10	Home - relative - back home - relative - new home	4
Male	14	Home - poor quality house - better quality house - back home - refuge - new flat	5
Female	13	Home - new house - homeless flat - new house - relative - new flat	5
Female	10	Approx 8 houses/flats over past 2 years	8
Female	13	Approx 8 houses/flats over past 2 years	8
Female	14	Many moves - including different countries	Many
Female	12	Many moves	Many
Male	10	Several moves - some outwith Scotland	Several

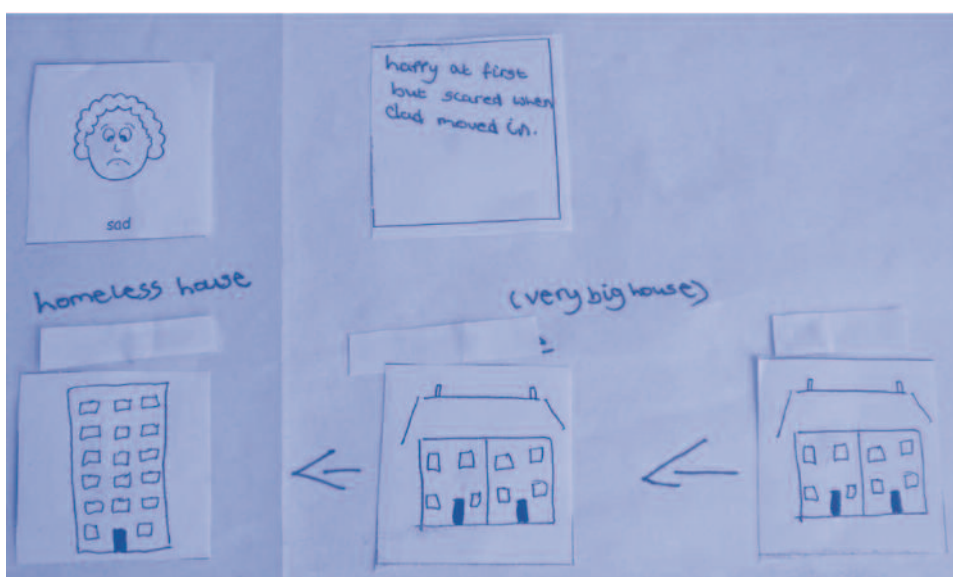
## 7 THE 'FIRST MOVE'

**'The Incident':** The 'first move' made by young people because of domestic abuse evoked the strongest feelings. The majority were aware that the 'first move' was about domestic abuse. For most it was triggered by 'an incident' requiring them to leave home suddenly and in difficult circumstances. Young people described hiding outside the house in terror while their mother was being abused inside, or feeling trapped inside the house. One girl discovered that her mum had fled, with her dad after her, leaving her and her brother alone in the house at night, not knowing if her mum was alive or dead. Another described seeing the assault on their mother. Sometimes the incident was serious and traumatic enough to have evoked great fear and for one the admission of flashbacks.

*Basically, you've turned over a new leaf by trying forget it, but it's just one of they things that stick in your mind...Cos, sometimes you get flashbacks at times... just when I just think about it. I try not to. (Boy 10)*

**Living with Fear:** Young people in the sample seemed to live with high levels of anxiety and fear, both before and at the time of the move; carrying concerns about their own personal safety and for their mothers. They might not share these concerns with their mother because they did not want to put any additional pressure on her. One young person remembered sustained feelings of being afraid of her father's behaviour towards her. She was unable to share this with her mother who she felt she had enough to cope with. One girl described being scared and not able to talk to mum. Two said that despite being settled and happy in their present accommodation, they still lived in fear of the perpetrator returning and being violent again.

**FIGURE 3: HAPPY AT FIRST**



**Awareness of Domestic Abuse:** All but one of the young people seemed aware of domestic abuse in general and understood it as the reason for having to leave home. Most had detailed information about and sophisticated understandings of the complex situations they were in; often displaying mature understandings of their parents' difficulties and problems; this from young people as young as 10.

*I don't know, I was scared - and my mum phoned to say "It's alright, it's alright". But you could tell it wasn't alright, because my dad was shouting and bawling in the background (Boy 10)*

Some young people seemed to be in caring roles, or carrying watching briefs in relation to their mother and other siblings. They had mature insights about the manipulative way the perpetrator could be treating their mother. Sometimes they had clear views about what their mother should be doing in the situation and carried disappointment if it did not happen. They had well worked out criteria about when and when not to involve third parties.

*We always used to phone the police when there was arguments, cos there was, like, an argument nearly every week. We always used to phone the police and it would just make him worse'. Mum used to lie and tell police that it was just a misunderstanding, so they didnae ken anything about it. I felt quite angry 'cos they didn't dae anything about it because they didnae ken what was really gannin on.(Girl 14)*

**Information About the First Move:** Because most of the young people reported leaving home following 'an incident', the first move was experienced as sudden and confusing and information given to them about the process of moving was often incomplete. Mothers fleeing in these circumstances might not be in a position to provide children with full information about what was happening and why. If the move was unplanned, mothers needed to make decisions quickly about what and how to tell children. Many did not share wholly accurate information about why they were leaving, where they were going, how long they would be away. This could leave young people feeling confused and sometimes resentful. At the time of interview some young people continued to carry strong feelings about this; some remained unclear about details.

*No, I didn't know we were moving, because my mum told my dad we were going to the chippy for his dinner and I was sitting in the living room and my mum came in and said we should go and I didn't want to go... because it was pointless [going to the chippy] and eventually she coaxed me out of the house because that was when she was trying to get away from my dad : ... and my mum laughs at it and says that'll be the chippy he's waited longest for (Girl 14)*

One child drew happy and excited faces next to a taxi with the words 'Thought holiday' beside. Another drew an airport, planes and sad faces. As they drew, they mentioned that they were upset because their mum had misled them. Particularly younger ones remembered feeling confused and unaware of what was happening and reasons for it.

*I was just wee and confused ... I remember being confused and moving an' all because I was only wee and we were from house to house and town to town, and I was like where am I going? and what's happening? ... my mum said we were moving house, and stuff like that, but I still didn't get it, ..... (Girl 10)*

Two referred to their struggle to make sense of the extreme contrast between their feelings about the horror of their recent experience, and the way that the perpetrator could switch behaviour to 'normal'.

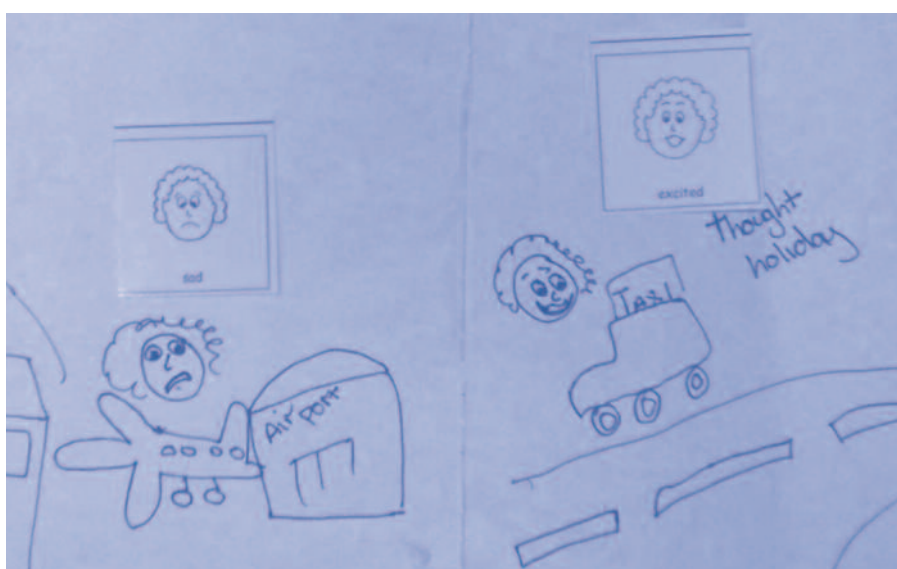
*He used to have the us in our bed for 5 o'clock or something...but he'd act during the day as if nothing happened that night! (Boy 10)*

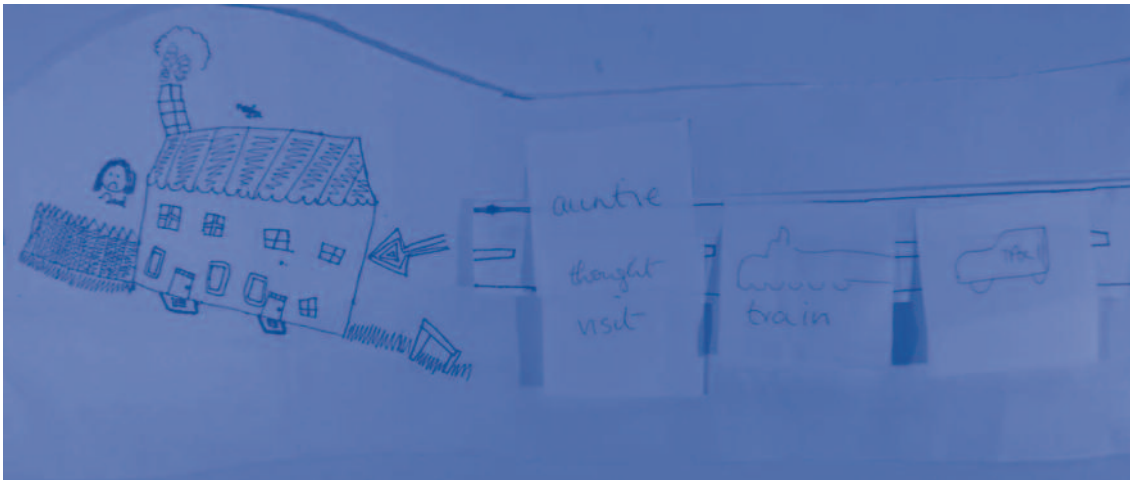
One described in almost surreal terms the scenario of returning to the family home after 'the incident' had precipitated a traumatic move. He vividly described his sense of discord between the rawness of the trauma he felt with the normality of the way everything looked, 'everybody was acting quite normal'. He described his father mundanely painting the shed 'as if nothing had happened.'

There were some, not many, examples where their mother had given honest, difficult information.

*We thought we were going away forever and couldn't come back (Girl 11)*

#### FIGURE 4: THOUGHT HOLIDAY



**FIGURE 5: THOUGHT VISIT**

**Leaving People, Pets and Possessions:** Leaving home in an emergency following ‘the incident’ also meant there was no time for young people to plan and pack. They were forced to leave behind everything that was precious and familiar. Some young people left unable to take personal and treasured possessions with them.

*It was really confusing. Everything totally changing. Not having a car or a house. A proper house of my own. Having to stay in the refuge and not having all the ... I don't know how to explain it. All like nice things that you would have in your own house. Just having to leave all your stuff in the old house (Girl 14)*

*I didn't actually like, take anything. My mum had taken us to a charity shop and bought us new clothes from there because we didn't have anything (Girl 14)*

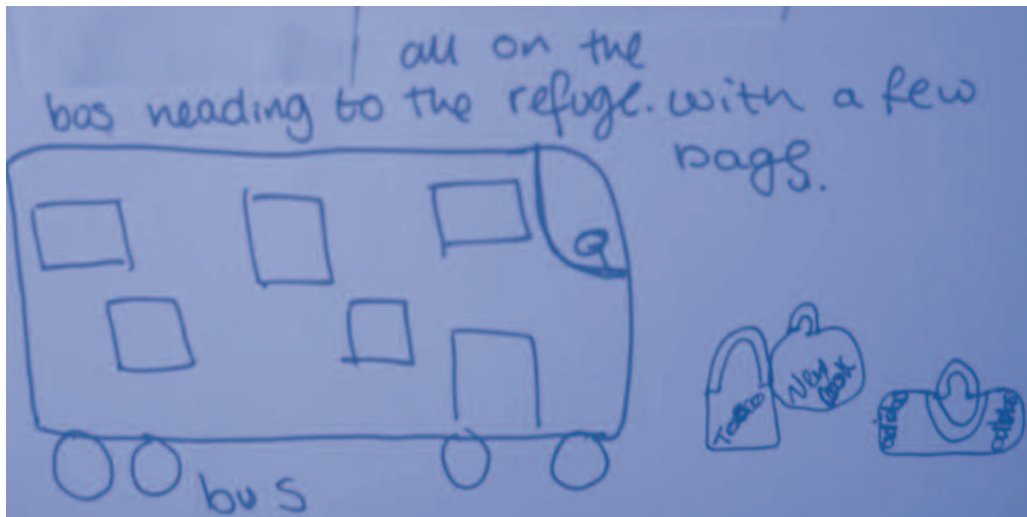
A few young people mentioned the difficulties of leaving behind loved pets

*RES: Well there's some stories behind, behind my pets, eh, so, so I'm kind of sad. I kind of miss them [laughs].*

*INT: What happened to them when you were moving?*

*RES: Well we had to give up two dogs through moving. My cat went away 'cause my mum was pregnant. My other cat got knocked down. And then we had to give the rabbit up as well (Girl 13).*

**Positive Things about the First Move: A Move to Safety:** While experiencing the move as difficult, confusing and traumatic, at the same time all of them seemed able to accept the necessity of moving and understand it as a move to safety.

**FIGURE 6: WITH A FEW BAGS**

**Contributing Factors to Feeling Positive about the First Move:** There were a number of factors that could make moving in these circumstances less stressful. These included: where the move could be more planned; where they had information about where they were going and about why they were moving; where there was time to pack; where the accommodation moved to was judged to be as good quality as the old; and where there was least disruption to friendships.

**FIGURE 7: SAFE AND BETTER**

## 8 SUBSEQUENT MOVES

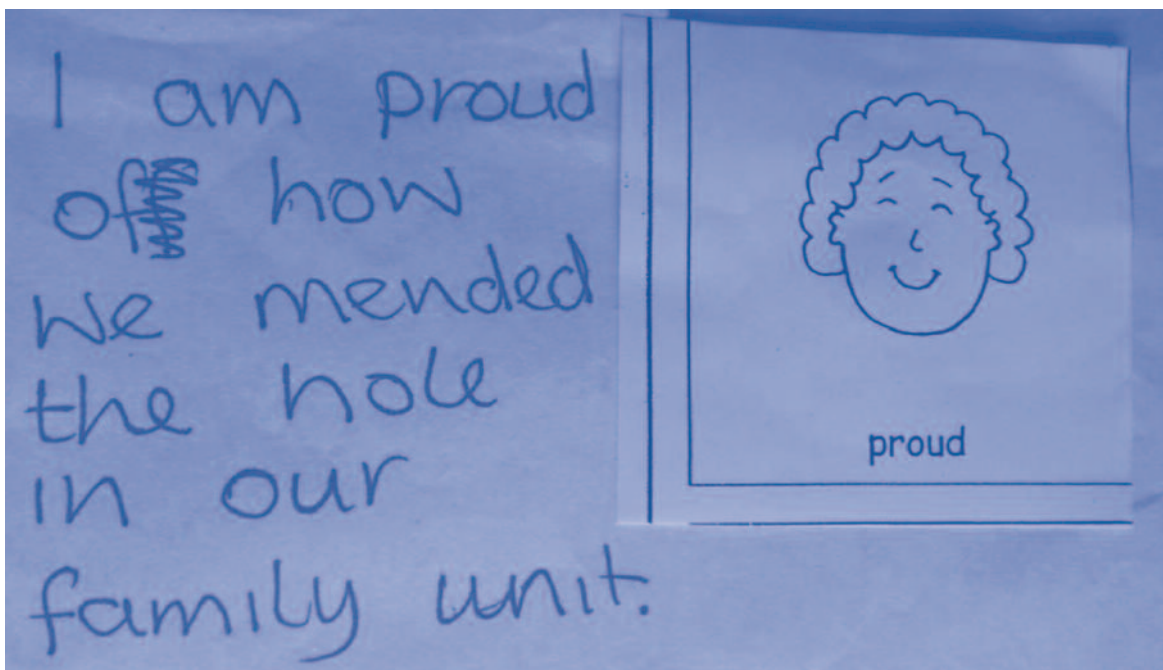
Subsequent moves were described less negatively and with less emotion. These moves were generally planned. Most of the young people in the sample had moved several times, were not yet settled, and were waiting to move again. Interim moves were not described in ways that seemed particularly noteworthy, generally seen as positive and leading to an improvement in the living situation. Young people described that they were waiting to move from the refuge to own home, from cramped to more spacious accommodation, and even to buy their own home. A minority of young people spoke of the need to make further moves to avoid contact with the perpetrator.

*Well we moved in England before we actually got to this house. He kept finding us. And finally we just left (Girl 14)*

At some stage in their 'journeys' several young people wrote the word 'Proud' on their drawings. They spoke of their mothers having survived the difficulties and trauma of moving and of how proud they were of what they had done, now feeling happy and safe where they were.

*'I was proud of my mum for getting away from him.'* (Girl, 13)

**FIGURE 8: PROUD**



## 9 EXPERIENCE OF SCHOOL FOLLOWING THE MOVE

Moving school or returning to school following having to move house because of domestic abuse was a major source of anxiety; this seemed to be focussed on anxieties about implications for relationships with friends and friendships.

Fifteen young people spoke of having to move school. The rest were able to stay at the same school. Some talked of the difficulties of being able to do school work following the move. Some referred to the difficulties of doing homework while staying with relatives.

*Well, when I was at my [relative], it was just doing my homework...I'm not saying it affected me, but there wasn't much space to do my homework ... But now I'm here and I've got my space in my room, but at my [relative] there was only, like, one room I could do it in the living room. But my [relative] was usually in there, or somebody else, so (unclear), so there's more space to do your homework in here.  
(Boy 12)*

*It distracts you from everything (Boy 10)*

The disruption and trauma of moving often meant many young people having at least short periods away from school. One young person described missing considerable amounts of schooling during upheavals and how she was afraid to go to school. She explained why she did not go to school. She had not started High School and indeed, had missed the whole of first year, and half of second year. She was now struggling to get back to school.

*'Because I was scared in case, like, he battered her and she went away and then I went home and she wasn't there and it was just me left and him. Ye ken what I mean? So I was scared.'* (Girl age unknown)

A minority of young people spoke of the experience of moving school as positive and the chance to create a new start. One young person spoke about trying to create a new identity each time he moved to a new school; some welcomed the change and challenge of a new school.



# SUPPORT NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE MOVING HOUSE BECAUSE OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

## 10 THE IMPORTANCE OF TALKING; THE DIFFICULTIES OF FINDING SOMEONE TO TALK TO

One theme emerging strongly from the interviews was the value young people placed on having someone they could completely trust to talk to about their experiences. However, finding someone appropriate to fulfil this role could be difficult.

## 11 FRIENDS AS A SOURCE OF SUPPORT

Friendships were extremely important to these young people. The extent to which old friendships were maintained, disrupted or severed as a result of having to move house, was a major preoccupation. However, the complexities of their lives made it very difficult for them to confide in and to share information with peers. Friendships remained very important to them despite this.

Some described the difficulties involved in maintaining important friendships; the impossibility of this, despite strenuous efforts. One young person described going to see friends who lived where she used to live. She described having to hide to prevent the perpetrator seeing her. It was too dangerous to maintain the friendship.

Maintaining friendships could be difficult for other reasons. Living such complex lives in such difficult circumstances meant that it was a problem for young people to know what information to share with friends. A number of reasons were provided to explain why it was difficult to talk to friends: for some it was fear of repercussions if the perpetrator found out; a small number expressed concern that it would increase the risk of them being taken into care; others, who had fled in secrecy, had been told not to tell anyone, in case their whereabouts got back to the perpetrator. There also seemed an element of embarrassment about what had happened that prevented them sharing information with friends.

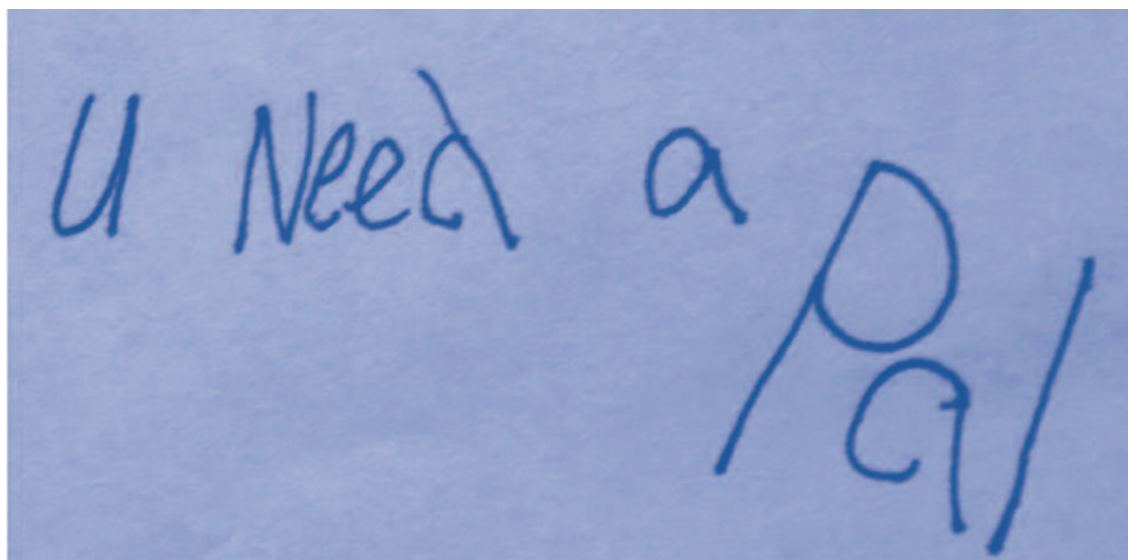
*'I just get, like, embarrassed...in case they judge me' (Girl 13)*

One mentioned that telling a pal is not straightforward because sometimes you feel ashamed of what is happening at home. She also said that what happens if you let things build up is that you can end up telling the wrong person, who might not keep the secret.

However, even where young people were not able to share feelings and experiences, they reported that friendships were still important.

*INT: Do they [school friends] know your circumstances?*

*RES: Only a couple of them, cos I'm trying to keep it, like, low, d'you know what I mean? (Girl 14)*

**FIGURE 9: A PAL**

## 12 FAMILY AS A SOURCE OF SUPPORT

The importance of support from their mother was mentioned by almost everyone. They also recognised that it was not always possible in the circumstances for their mother to provide all the support they needed. Sometimes they kept worries and concerns, even significant fears about their safety, from their mother; mothers had enough to cope with and they did not want to add to her pressure. Support from wider family was valued where it existed. This was often described as practical support; with moving, with transport. This kind of support was less available to young people who moved straight from home to refuge.

## 13 SUPPORT IN REFUGE AND FROM WOMEN'S AID

While most of the young people in this study found some aspects of refuge life limiting, this seemed more than offset by the benefits.

**Limitations:** These seemed almost wholly concerned with experience of old style refuges; problems with sharing space and not being able to have friends around.

*It's also right (unclear), like, you can't invite your friends in, d'you know what I mean. I mean, I understand why and that, but it's just right annoying when your friends are... My friends have this thing where, one Saturday night we all stop at, say, XXX's house, and then next Saturday we'll stop at somebody else's. And then when it comes to my turn, I've got to make up an excuse, like my mum's ill or my bedroom's a tip. So... (Girl 14)*

Some young people with negative expectations of what the refuge would be like, were pleasantly surprised by the reality.

*No, I guess it's a lot better than what I did expect, because, when my mum told me we were moving to a refuge, I honestly – I know this is going to sound really mean – but I expected to like walk up to the door and for it to look ...like a crack house, d'you know what I mean? Just like mice and sharing beds with people you don't know, you know what I mean, that's what I expected... (Girl 14)*

**Benefits:** These included:

- That they and their mum were safe
- The support of new friends made in refuge; and not having to pretend about domestic abuse
- Vital support afforded them by Children's Support Workers; as a trusted adult to begin to open up to and talk to; as an escape from problems in the form of activities and outings

**Support of New Friends in Refuge:** Friendships and the support of other young people in the refuge was an important and much appreciated factor. Many reported new and quickly formed bonds with other young people of the same age with similar experiences. They reported friendships made in the refuge as very important. Some of the complexities of maintaining old friendships and making new ones outside of refuge did not apply; here everyone knew that domestic abuse was a factor.

*I was more closer to the ones here because they knew more about me. There were things we [unclear] with each other. Like what has happened. So like a lot more closer to them than friends at school. (Girl 14)*

**Refuge: A Safe Environment, Trusted Adults, Children's Support Workers:**

One significant finding from the research was the extent to which these young people valued having their own dedicated Children's Support Worker. In a context where they could find it difficult to confide in and receive all of the support they needed from their mother, and where sharing information with friends was also difficult, their worker at Women's Aid played a vital role. The Children's Support Worker was a trusted adult to open up to and talk to, an escape from problems in the form of activities and outings. One child mentioned this as having been a matter of life or death. They were vital for practical support, and for the emotional support needed to help them understand their situations and talk about issues of concern.

Many young people were able to explicitly describe how important this relationship was to them:

... you could say anything to them and you know that they wouldnae go and tell your mum if you're feeling a bit down, ye ken, but they'd gae ye advice instead of just rushing off and sayin, ken, : "I must tell her mum" sortae thing. Because I sometimes dinnae have a very good relationship with my mum. (Girl 14)

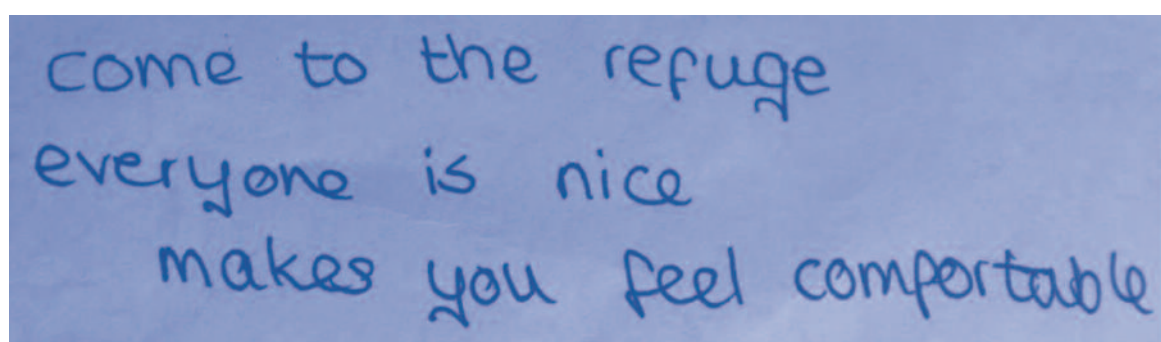
They make you happier when you are down (Girl 14)

XX [Children's Worker] is part of the family – I can tell her anything – she's like an aunt or something. (Girl 13)

### FIGURE 10: SAFE AND HAPPY IN THE REFUGE



### FIGURE 11: EVERYONE IS NICE IN THE REFUGE



## 14 SUPPORT FROM OTHER ORGANISATIONS

For a minority of young people, the suddenness of the move meant they were made homeless. Initial contact with sources of support was therefore with police and/or housing to help find accommodation. When these agencies had been involved this had been viewed by young people as helpful. These organisations tended to have provided support in a practical way; putting the family in touch with Women's Aid, providing transport for a move or finding emergency accommodation. Where agencies had designated Children's Workers these workers were an important source of support, enabling young people to talk about their experiences, often for the very first time:

*INT: And how did that feel, if that was the first time you'd talked about the reasons?*

*RES: Well, it felt quite...it was quite upsetting but it was quite good to talk about it.*

*INT: What difference does it make do you think?*

*RES: I don't know, it's just, like, being able to talk to somebody (Boy 10)*

## 15 SUPPORT IN SCHOOL

There were mixed views about the ability of schools to provide young people with the kind of support they would have valued. Few young people related difficulties at school as being concerned with educational attainment; almost all expressed difficulties in terms of worries about friendships and peer relationships. Some young people did receive support at school.

*The best help I got was from there – from the school (Boy age unknown)*

However, this seemed to be the result of a positive relationship with an individual teacher, rather than through formal procedures or structures such as pastoral or guidance support. The striking thing about young people's accounts is not that young people received negative treatment from teachers and school but the extent to which young people lacked confidence in school as place that could provide them with the kind of support they wanted. Young people did not tend to share information with schools/teachers, or only limited information.

*INT: Could you tell teachers?*

*RES: No, I just kept it to myself and didn't tell anybody (Girl 11)*

One young person felt that informing teachers would have dire consequences:

*It's like, if social workers get involved, and then me, my brothers, would get taken off my mum and she'd be all on her 'ain, so you cannae speak to, like teachers about it. (Girl 13)*

## 16 BOLT-HOLES AND ESCAPE ROUTES

Many young people spoke of the need for an escape route or a bolt hole; somewhere to go to get away from problems. Sometimes this meant going to visit or stay with other relatives, for one it was a room at gran's house, or a friend's house, sometimes it was somewhere outside, for example, in the woods.

*Whenever they started arguing or fighting or that, we would just go up to her house (aunt). When we moved away, if they were arguing...we could just run up the stair and into the room, cos it was, like, far away cos it was so big. It was good.*

## 17 OTHER SUPPORT THAT MIGHT HAVE HELPED

What young people would have liked in terms of support emerged through responses to questions about the advice and messages they wanted to share with other young people. These messages were primarily around three broad themes:

- Finding someone you can trust to talk to about problems; and not bottling things up
- Getting out of violent situations (and persuading mum to go)
- No matter how bad it is at the time, there is help out there, it can get better

**Finding Someone You Can Trust to Talk to About Problems; and not Bottling Things up:** One key message young people were keen to pass on to other young people was; that while it could be difficult because of all the complexities to find someone to talk to, it is important to find someone you completely trust to talk to who will not spread information about you:

*Talk to somebody about it...like, not be embarrassed, cos it's not you they're going to judge, it's the person who's doing it. Just, like, you have to talk to someone about it. Because, like, keeping it inside is just going to make you feel worse...But when you do tell somebody, it feels good; you feel better because somebody else knows what you've gone through. Just like trying to tell somebody you think you can trust – who willnae go spreading it. Talk to them. (Girl 13)*

*Yeah, cause, like, if you are strong enough you will get through it, eh. And just keep remembering that there are people out there that are like going to help you. And you are not going to, like, do it alone. Cause there are, like, people out there that are like going to like help you get over things and that. And it's good to, like, talk to somebody about it. That's what I've learned. (Girls 13)*

*U need a pal (Boy 11)*

Best to talk to adult or own age group (Unknown)

If it's somebody your own age, you can't, like, they understand you and that, like. But if it's an adult, sometimes you think 'why am I telling you because you're probably not even listening'. But, like, some adults are really...like, concentrating and that, and, like, understand what you're saying. Sometimes it's better if you talk to someone your own age, but it's also better if you talk to an adult as well (Girl 13)

It's important to talk about what happened; even if it is hard; it's better than bottling it up (Age unknown)

You could at least try and tell somebody (Boy 10)

Talk to somebody about it ... like, not to be embarrassed, cos it's not you they're going to judge, it's the person who's doing it. (Girl 13)

Try to tell someone you trust (Boy 10)

Tell people how you are feeling (Girl 13)

Talk about it. Don't keep it inside (Girl 10)

Talk about it sometimes (Girl 10)

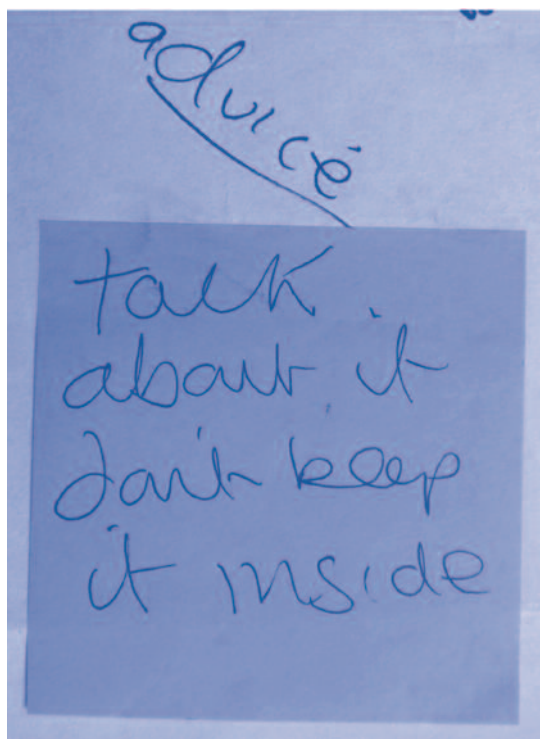
Always find someone to talk to and that will keep a secret (Boy 10)

Talk to someone about how your feeling (Boy 12)

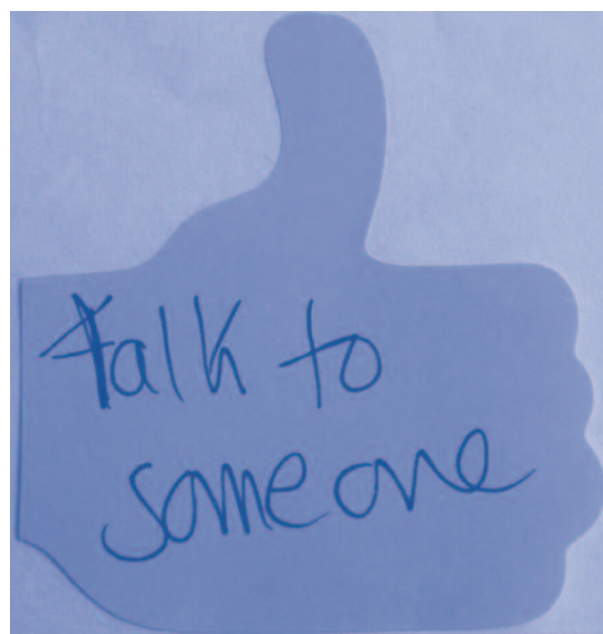
Support each other (Girl 12)

## FIGURE 16: TALK TO SOMEONE WHO CAN KEEP A SECRET

always find someone  
to talk to and that will keep  
a secret



**FIGURE 18: TALK, DON'T KEEP IT A SECRET**



**FIGURE 17: TALK TO SOMEONE**

**Getting out of violent situations (and persuading your mum to go):** The second most important message that young people wanted to share with other young people was the importance of getting away from the violence. As a secondary message, that if your mother is undecided, make sure she knows what you want, and understands the effect of the violence on you - and get her to move.

*It's horrible in the house, but, whoever's getting hit, or whatever, has to move house. Dae it; it's a horrible thing, but you have to dae it to get away from it. You have to stand by your guns (Girl 13)*

*If they're still with the abuser I would tell them to get away quick as possible ... get to the refuge and get the help that they want - that would help them (Girl 11)*

*If your mum is getting abused by your dad call 999 immediately (Boy 10)*

*Just go for it. If something turns up bad, well, you just run away. Run to a far place where your family would know but he wouldn't know (Girl 10)*



The following 'advice' was put in the private box:

*'If your mum does not want to move or is to scared, speak to her and let her know how your feeling and how affected you are by the violence' [anonymous]*

**No matter how bad it is at the time, there is help out there, it can get better:** The remarkable resilience of young people in the sample was reflected in the third message they want to pass onto others.

*It is hard at the time; but it will get better; help is out there (Unknown)*

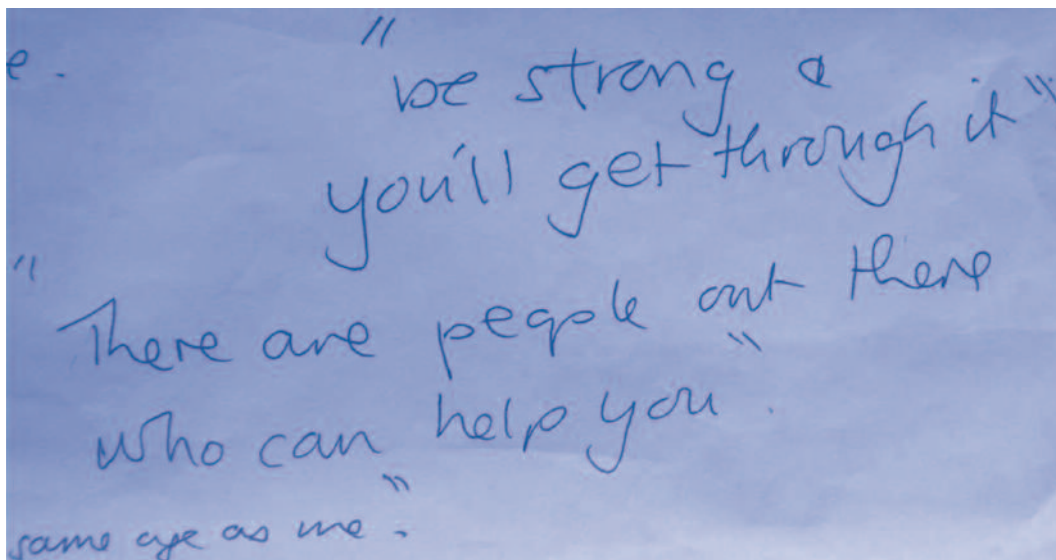
*No matter how bad things are 'it will be ok' (Girl 14)*

*No matter how bad it gets it should get better (Boy 14)*

*You'll get more help [from Women's Aid] with family problems and stuff (Boy 10)*

*Be strong and you'll get through it... There are people out there who can help you (Girl 13)*

### FIGURE 15: YOU WILL GET THROUGH IT



# RECOMMENDATIONS

## 18 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research findings and conclusions, a number of key recommendations have emerged. They may be of relevance to those with responsibility for policy development, service planning and delivery; in Women's Aid, the voluntary sector, local authorities, central government, schools, and providers of children's mental health services. We make 18 recommendations, structured around the 2 broad themes of the report:

- Young people's experiences of moving house following domestic abuse
- Support needs of young people leaving home because of domestic abuse

Within these 2 sections, recommendations are largely reported in the order of young people's journeys - from 'first move', to where they were now, and points in between.

### **EXPERIENCE OF MOVING HOUSE FOLLOWING DOMESTIC ABUSE:**

1. Be aware of young people in this situation as active decision makers in their own lives – they may have highly sophisticated understandings of their own situation, well worked out strategies for coping, views and opinions about what should happen next and want to be as involved as possible in decisions affecting them
2. Ensure support provided by organisations is pulling in the same direction as the mechanisms and strategies for coping young people may already have in place
3. These young people did not tend to return to live in their original home: only 1 in the sample returned home to live, without the perpetrator. Many retained strong feelings about this. Agencies should explore ways of helping young people address this
4. Recognise the extent to which young people appreciate clarity and honesty about what is happening, even where moves are not able to be planned. Where this has not happened, acknowledge young people may feel misled and have strong feelings about it. Attention should be given to helping young people find ways to address this later. Acknowledge that young people may well know more about the circumstances than adults are aware
5. Help where possible with the practicalities of moving
6. Cash help directly to young people to help them replace precious things they have not been able to take with them.

**SUPPORT NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE MOVING HOUSE BECAUSE OF DOMESTIC ABUSE:**

7. Recognise the importance of the support of friends and friendship networks to young people in these situations. Support agencies should prioritise helping them maintain old friendships and networks; helping them build new ones where this is not possible
8. Recognise that young people may already have important mechanisms in place for support and to keep themselves safe: eg. private escape routes and boltholes to go to when life is difficult. Support agencies should find ways to respect and facilitate these
9. Recognise the value young people in this situation place on being able to talk about their experiences to someone they completely trust who will keep their information private; recognise how difficult it is for them to find support at this time from friends and relatives
10. Appreciate the value young people place on having their own dedicated Children's Support Workers; as someone trusted to talk to, to open up to; and as an escape from their difficulties in the form of activities and outings
11. Continue to build on developments already underway in Women's Aid to strengthen the role of Children's Support Workers. Ensure easier access for young people to Children's Support Workers at every stage of the process; from when they first move home, to when they become settled in their new home. Recognise that having their own dedicated worker is as important to young people as the support worker is likely to be to their mother
12. Consider a publicity campaign targeted at young people, challenging negative images of Women's Aid refuges; and promoting them as a welcoming place for children
13. There is a need for schools to review ways to support young people living with and leaving these complex and difficult situations
14. Schools should acknowledge the difficulties young people have when returning to or moving school in this situation; appreciate this is a very difficult transition; make planned and appropriate provision
15. Schools should take seriously the concerns and anxieties young people have about peer relationships when returning to school or moving school in this situation; find ways to acknowledge this; make planned and appropriate provision
16. Recognise that most young people experiencing domestic abuse will be living at home in the community. They will not have had contact with a Women's Aid Refuge. Local authorities children's services planners should take account of the findings of this report when allocating budgets and planning services

17. Local authorities should take account of this report when reviewing progress in relation to service development to young people experiencing domestic abuse who are living in the community. They should work alongside Women's Aid to accelerate mechanisms to identify and support these young people in a way that recognises the complexities of their lives and their own priorities
18. There should be more opportunities and access to counselling and therapeutic services at an early stage and at the point of need
19. Attention should be paid to the optimism young people in this situation express that there is help out there; that it can get better. Consider a publicity campaign focussing on the message from these young people to other young people that it's important to leave the violence.

Further copies of this report can be obtained from:

Scottish Women's Aid  
2nd Floor, 132 Rose Street  
Edinburgh, EH2 3JD

Tel: 0131 226 6606

[www.scottishwomensaid.org.uk](http://www.scottishwomensaid.org.uk)

Scottish  
**Women's**  
Aid

for women, children & young people

**Scottish Women's Aid**  
**2nd Floor**

**132 Rose Street**  
**Edinburgh, EH2 3JD**

**Tel: 0131 226 5492**

**[www.scottishwomensaid.org.uk](http://www.scottishwomensaid.org.uk)**

IS N 978187354902-5



9 781873 549025 >

**Scottish Women's Aid Charity No SC001099**

**Recognised as a charitable organisation by the Inland Revenue in Scotland**