



**Engagement Report
August 2016**

Aloud Views and voices from Babies, Children and Young People about help and support in Domestic Abuse situations

Commissioned by: Sarah Carter, Domestic Abuse Strategic Lead, for Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children's Board Audit

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Date: August 2016

The Engagement Team provides consultation and engagement support to colleagues in Social and Community Services, Children, Education and Families, and Corporate Services. Our aim is to hear the voices of people and their families who use services.

Aloud

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[] indicate author's addition to clarify meaning.

Italics indicate verbatim quotes.

Names, places and other identifiers have been changed.

Not all participants answered all of the questions and therefore the quantitative data doesn't always add up to 20.

Summary

Introduction

Aloud was commissioned on behalf of the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board as part of the Domestic Abuse audit (July 2016). The focus of this work was to find out the views and voices of babies¹, children and young people's experiences of help and support in Domestic Abuse situations. The findings will also inform the Strategic Review of Domestic Abuse in Oxfordshire due to complete in September 2016.

Timescale Structured interviews happened in June and July 2016.

Methodology and Participants

Twenty one voices are represented within the findings.

- 12 children and young people and 8 mothers (one mother spoke for her two children)
- 6 from the OSCB audit plus a one line response
- 12 from Refuge and 2 further young adults
- 13 female 8 male
- Special needs and disability are represented
- Living in different parts of Oxfordshire
- Various methods took place; mainly one to one interviews, one group of 4 mothers speaking for their under 3's and one children's group
- A total of 21 hours of listening took place

The participants were selected from a sample of children and young people who had experienced Domestic Abuse. Three of the young people were also a perpetrator of Domestic Abuse. The audit cases were selected for the audit using a method which, using Children's Social Care data recording system, identified all cases fitting the described criteria for the Domestic Abuse Safeguarding Audit², then a random selection was made from these to make sure there was a mix of ages, of boys and girls and children from different ethnic backgrounds and children who have used different services. However, one young person was interviewed as a substitute for another young person.

All those from the audit whose social worker concluded it was appropriate to approach with an invitation took part, gave their views (although for one person it was just a one line response). In one of the audit cases the mother spoke on behalf of her two children. As the audit was a small sample it was decided to ask the

¹ Mothers spoke on the behalf of their babies.

² Cases for this audit were identified from the following categories with 2 – 4 cases being selected in each category: Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference victims with children on Child Protection Plans , Domestic Abuse victims with Children In Need living with them and young person victims and or perpetrator

Refuge services in Oxfordshire to be involved in order to broaden and deepen the range. One of the Refuges wanted to provide the opportunity for residents to take part. Following the author introducing the idea at a Refuge house meeting all of the mothers and children took part; two more children who had recently moved on from the Refuge also wanted to join. In addition, two young adults who knew the Engagement Team heard about the work and asked to participate.

One member of staff from a housing project interviewed one of the audit young adults and a group children's session was jointly facilitated with the children's worker from the Refuge. One of the interviews took place over the phone; all others were face to face, either at home, at the Refuge or at a local authority building. Each interview took between thirty minutes to one hour and a half.

Zoe Elford from the Engagement Team interviewed with no prior knowledge of their circumstances or cases to be open and non-judgmental and invite honest responses. Therefore the participant's responses should be read in that context. All of the mothers on behalf of the babies, children and young people were happy to give their views; with some spontaneously commenting on how positive it felt to be asked, or how pleased they were to help.

A structured interview took place covering seventeen question areas:

- Who helped?
- What was good about professionals help and support?
- What made a difference and what was the best bit of help?
- Can you think of anything to change?
- Were there any missed chances to help you?
- Did you have to repeat information to different professionals?
- Did professionals work together?
- Open question to capture anything else important to say

Key messages and conclusions

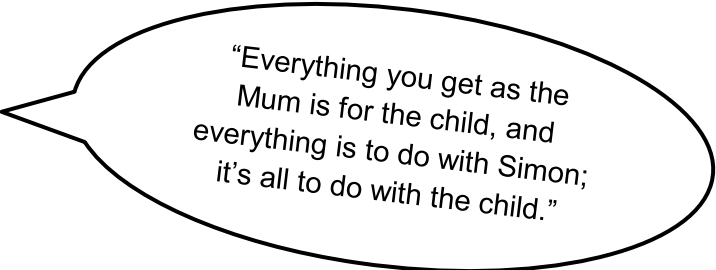
There was strong take up indicating that people wanted to give feedback and have their voices heard. Central messages that are already known were re-iterated - how hard it is to come forward; not knowing what help is on offer and mistrust of social services. The non-British women face a dilemma as services, in their experience, weren't designed to keep mother and child together. The mother child bond means, in some cases, women go back to abusive relationships because, in their view, that is less harmful to the baby / child. For others it is the arrival of the baby that drives them to seek help. For all, whether single or being part of a family, moving forward positively is the measure of the quality of support and help.

Co-ordination of services was reported positively. However, a common theme was the tenuous link to help, often marked by chance and good fortune. Another common theme was the repetition of information to different services which was very widespread and an area to improve on. The importance of communication came

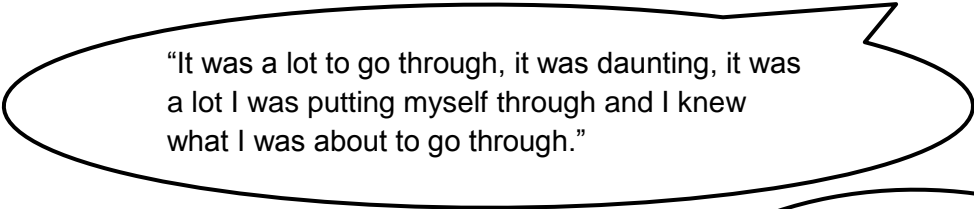
through very strongly with specific practical pointers mentioned. The participants reported a variation in quality of help and support across areas and services; many positive experiences were fed back as well as participants reporting negative experiences which light the path for improvement and change.

Themes: Babies and under 3's and their mothers

- Intertwine between mother and baby
- It's really hard to talk about domestic abuse and to seek help
- The difficulty of seeking help is exacerbated by not knowing who to ask or that support is available – especially if you have not grown up in Britain

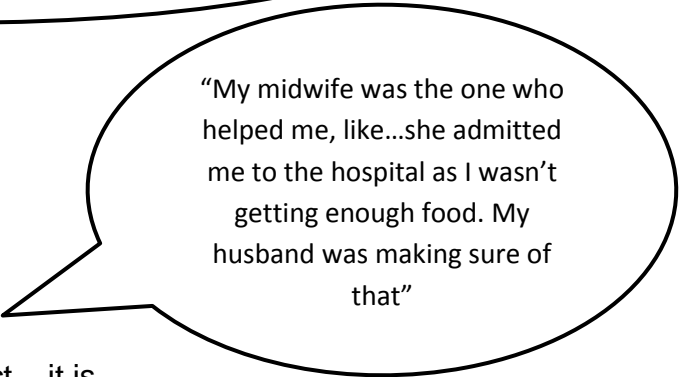


"Everything you get as the Mum is for the child, and everything is to do with Simon; it's all to do with the child."

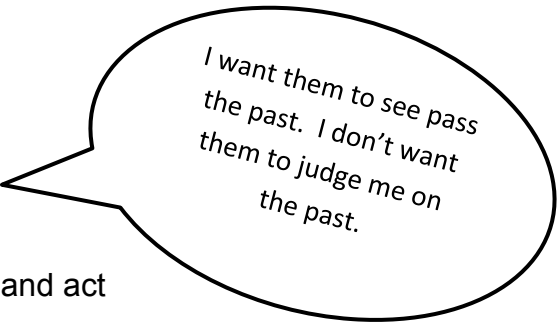


"It was a lot to go through, it was daunting, it was a lot I was putting myself through and I knew what I was about to go through."

- Fear and mistrust of social services
- Practical help matters
- Refuge is good, supportive, change happens
- Self-determination is important - working, earning money
- Professionals don't be blunt or direct – it is wrong approach
- Feeling like there are options and choices
- Appreciation of help and support



"My midwife was the one who helped me, like...she admitted me to the hospital as I wasn't getting enough food. My husband was making sure of that"



I want them to see pass the past. I don't want them to judge me on the past.

Themes: Children and Young People

Common themes are:

- Get the communication sorted – check out and act on communication needs
- Listen. Hear me
- Help and support through fun and play
- Many positive and effective examples were provided of help at children's centre / nursery / school / Early Intervention Hubs
- Connect and click with staff is ESSENTIAL
- Changing / evolving relationship with their Dad
- Importance of pets

- Help and support needs to keep mother and child / children together

The area of communication came up 10 times. The conclusion to draw is that professionals need to ask 'How does this mother / child, young person communicate?' and 'What do I need to do to help them communicate well?'

The issue of communication needs and styles were reflected in this piece of work, for example, an interpreter was needed for one young person, another wasn't comfortable talking to someone they didn't know so their interview was with someone they did know, another had a hearing loss and communicated with words, with actions and with drawings. For other children they wanted to read the questions and write their answers at their own pace and for others playing football was interspersed with the questions and giving their views.

Full Findings

Did you feel that there was someone you could ask for help?

To this question 10 participants reported that they didn't have a professional they could ask for help and a quarter (n.5) reported that they did have a professional. 3 participants reported that they didn't have either a professional or friend or family.

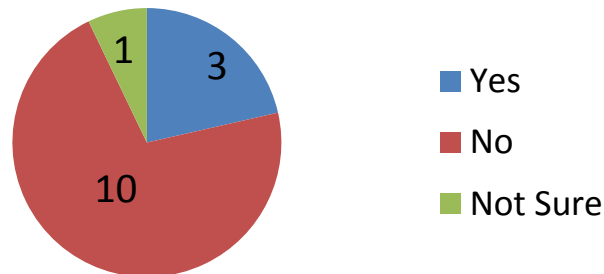
A tenuous line to help and missed chances

There were 6 participants (4 mothers and 2 young people) who reported that it was by chance that they managed to get help. And in 3 out of the 6 of those participants the health visitor was the only line of help to the mother and baby.

- One mother reported her health visitor spotted signs of Domestic Abuse and was ingenious about getting the mother on her own without her husband to build a relationship and support the mother and baby. The same health visitor advised the mother to go to the civilian police rather than the military police as she herself had had a negative experience of the military police.
- For one woman it was her health visitor who took action to admit her to hospital as a consequence of her husband's abuse.
- For one of the mothers, she happened to meet a social worker who knew about a specific group and gave the contact information to her.
- For one young person it was by chance that a school office worker spoke the same language and struck up a rapport with his mother and that led on to them being able to flee.
- For one young adult it was her friend who helped her "if she hadn't come and picked me up I would still be with him now."

Connected to this issue of the tenuous link to help and support, is the issue of missed chances. Participants were asked: Were there any chances to help that were missed?

Were there any chances to help that were missed?



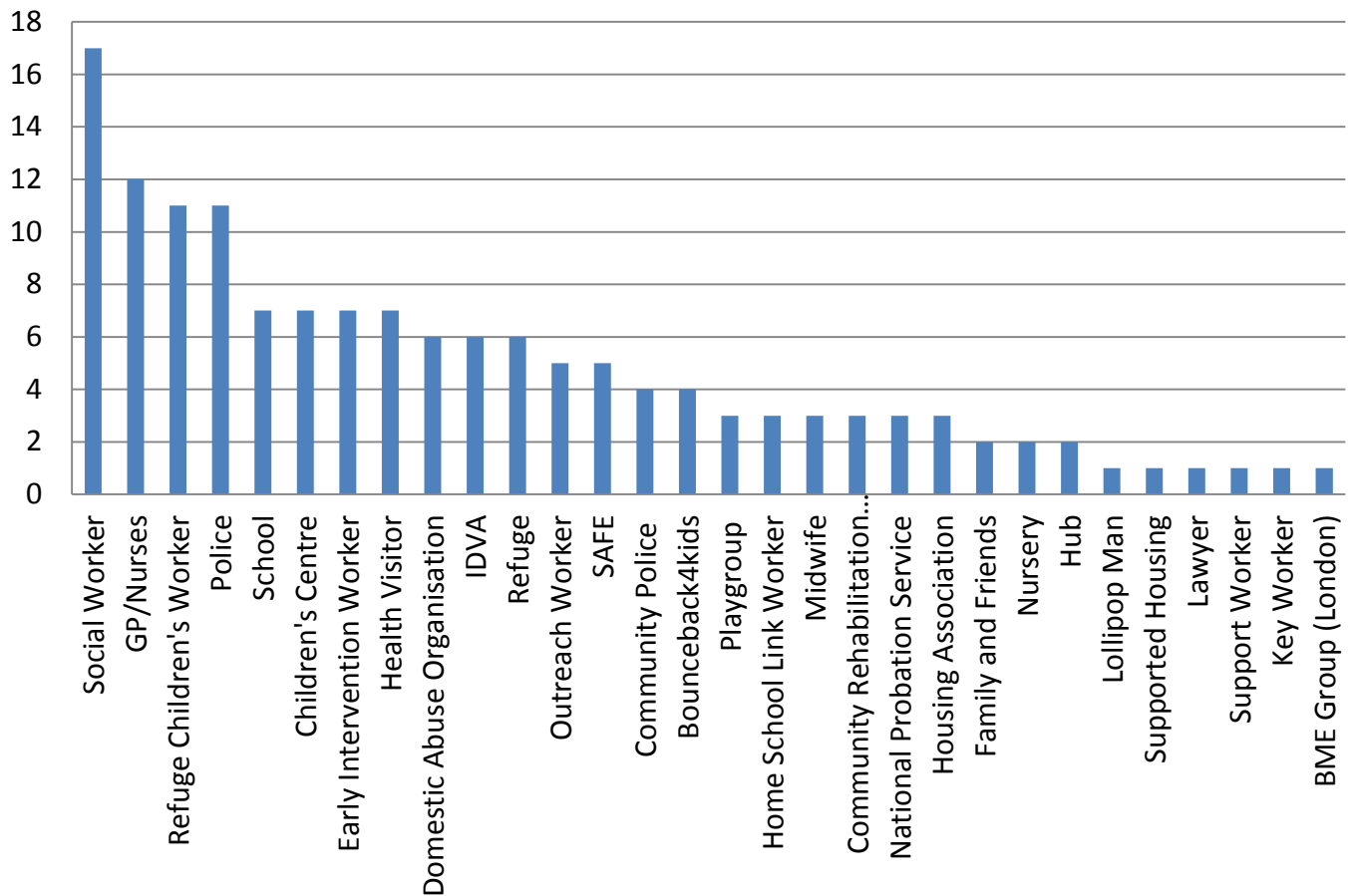
3 answered yes to this question. 13 answered 'no' to this question but during their answers to other questions, spoke of examples which could be construed as missing opportunities to help, for example:

Girl "Police should have come and they didn't". One of the mothers, 7 months pregnant at the time: "Police came and said 'in this country women can go to work and earn your own money.' I was expecting help from them which I couldn't get from them". And a young adult reported "social services should have helped me earlier in my life – when I was about 13 or 14 years old". And another young adult said "The Personal Advisor wasn't going to find out – I only met her at the office and she never came round to the flat – she would have had questions because there were holes in the walls, she should have tried and pushed her way and check your living environment".

Professionals involved

The majority of participants lived in other places before moving to Oxfordshire. They spoke about the help and support they had experienced from those areas as well as recent experiences of Oxfordshire. Unsurprisingly social workers were the most often mentioned. Worthy of note was the finding that GP's and nurses were the second most mentioned which highlights the need for health care professionals to be well trained, well aware and well informed.

Professionals Involved



"I feel about the health visitor that I am not just a number."

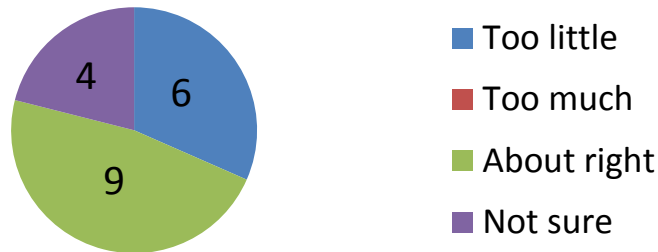
"I am not going to come and shout for help, I'd rather stay and suffer with what is happening to me"

"When I was facing domestic violence I needed police and they gave it to me. There was no other one who could help me. There was the police innit. At that time I didn't have family, friend [to ask for help]."

Help and support from professionals

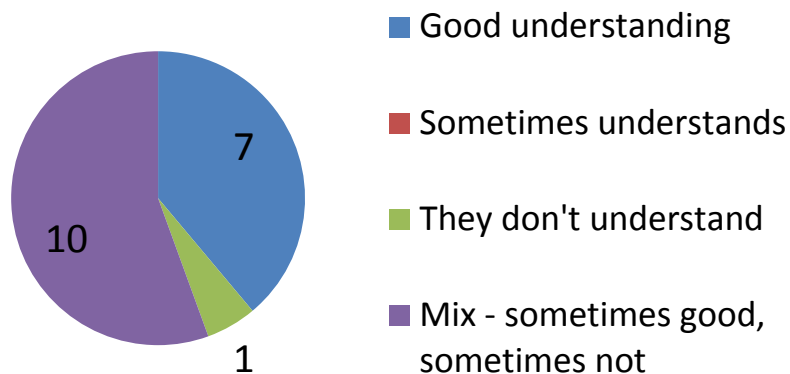
Half of the participants reported that the help they received was "about right," six said it was "too little" and four people were "not sure". However the four 'not sure' participants made reference to a lack of support and help in their answers to other questions; so in total half the participants had too little support (at specific points in their journey). A conclusion to note was that the mothers especially, were grateful for what they did receive and didn't want to come across as ungrateful.

Thinking about the help and support you got or get, was it, or is it ...



How well do you feel professionals understand you and your needs?

How well do you feel professionals understand you and your needs?



Half of the participants had a mix of experiences across all of the main services; social, police, refuge and health. Ten participants summarized their experiences as a mix - sometimes good and sometimes not.

The most commonly expressed message was that the women felt that services weren't designed to keep the mother and children together, particularly in the case of non-British nationals.

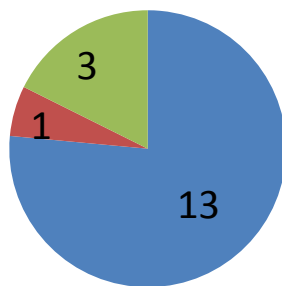
"I was warned they would only take my child away from me. But now things have changed for me. I know people I could ask for

Have you often had to tell the same information to lots of different people?

One child replied “no”, all others said “yes” or “sometimes”. There were lots of immediate “yes” replies to this question with lots of emphasis and facial expression to express how “annoying” and exhausting it is. For those with English as an additional language they were helped by having an interpreter or being talked to slowly and clearly. Another clear finding for all participants was how important it was to have a connection with “your professional”. “They listen to me: They make me feel good about myself. They play with me to get my mind off everything”. “The doctor, she listens, you feel she doesn’t judge you and she cares.”

Frustrating. Waste of time. A waste of everyone's time.

Have you often had to tell the same information to lots of different people?



- Yes
- No
- Sometimes
- Not sure

“it’s always hard, very hard.”

“How can you speak when you are scared?”

“Painful, I wanted to forget but I had to repeat.”

“It’s easier to tell people when they don’t try and get it out of me. Therefore it’s easier to talk to family and sometimes professionals when I’m just playing.”

Did you feel like your parents/carers and the professionals worked well together?

Out of the 12 who answered this question 11 reported that they often worked well or sometimes worked well together.

What 3 differences have professionals made?

4 participants couldn't pinpoint any differences. For the others there were some common threads throughout the answers and it is possible to group the answers into themes:

- Current Refuge and the support from Refuge staff was very positive
- Being helped with school work is important and valued
- Being supported and understood and helped through playing and fun
- Help and support with emotions makes a difference
- Practical help – i.e. carer for Mum, baby milk formula, supplementary vitamins when breast feeding, learning English, courses, interpreter
- Feeling safer – non-molestation order, alarms for house, unannounced police visits
- Being recognised as needing support and progressing

Is there anything especially important for professionals or people that help to know about you and your situation?

6 participants reported it was important for services to know the history of domestic abuse. All the other answers are individual and showed a wide variation of what it is important for professionals to know and can be read in the graph below. The wide ranging responses highlight the need for effective help and support to pay attention to the individual and to involve the individual. "It's a good question. It's a good question to ask someone because it makes you think well....what might be important, what could I mention?"



What Happens Next?

The findings of the feedback were presented to the Domestic Abuse Safeguarding Audit peer review meeting on 18th July 2016. The learning from the Aloud findings was shared prior to the commencement of the Audit to enable the voice of the children and young people affected to be heard by the agencies involved. The Aloud findings formed part of the picture as to how well agencies are working to safeguard families affected by domestic abuse. Recommendations from the Audit including this element will be reported to the OSCB's Performance and Quality Assurance Group.

Also, the findings from Aloud will be used to develop key messages around children and young people's voice, forming part of the current strategic review of domestic abuse in Oxfordshire. In practice learning from this work will be drawn on to inform training, commissioning and service development work in organisations working with families experiencing domestic abuse in Oxfordshire.

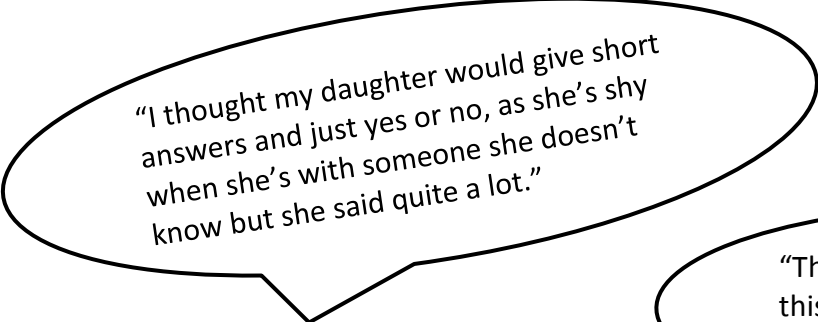
The Aloud report will be presented and or sent to:-

- Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children's Board
- Performance and Quality Assurance Group
- Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Advisory Group
- Oxfordshire Children's Trust
- Mending Broken Mirrors: Service users and professionals task and finish group
- All who took part in the Aloud project

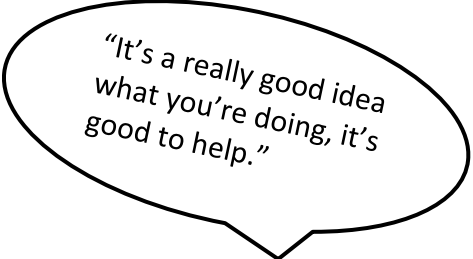
Thank you

A massive thank-you to the mothers, babies, children, young people and young adults, for giving their time and allowing us to hear their views. Thank you to colleagues and staff who helped with contacts to set up the interviews. An extra big thank you to the Refuge staff for their support, time and work, and to staff at the supported housing service for supporting young adults to take part.

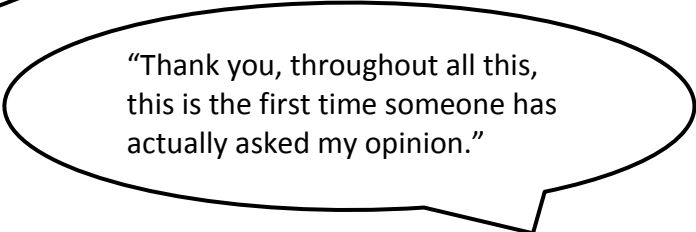
Spontaneous feedback on taking part:



"I thought my daughter would give short answers and just yes or no, as she's shy when she's with someone she doesn't know but she said quite a lot."



"It's a really good idea what you're doing, it's good to help."



"Thank you, throughout all this, this is the first time someone has actually asked my opinion."

For further information

Sarah Carter, Domestic Abuse Strategic Lead

Email: sarah.carter@[@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:sarah.carter@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

Phone: 07795 061438

Appendices

Appendix One: Invite Letter



Zoe Elford,
Engagement Officer,
Engagement Team,
Joint Commissioning,
Oxfordshire County Council,
County Hall,
New Road,
Oxford
OX1 1ND

Zoe.elford@oxfordshire.gov.uk
Tel: 07825 105 457

Asking permission for your child to take give their view on getting support

Dear

Why we are writing to you

The Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board makes sure everybody works together to keep children and young people safe. The board is made up of managers in organisations like the police, health, social care and schools.

The board is checking (auditing) that professionals are working well and helping people when there's domestic violence going on. We are looking for some children and young people to give their views about the help they've had.

What is it about?

The board want to find out:

- How well everybody is working together to keep children and young people safe?
- Are teachers, doctors, school nurses, the police, social workers and family support workers listening to children and young people?
- What is important for adults to know about child or young person's situation?
- What is good about the help that children and young people get and what is not good?
- Is there anything that we could improve in the way that we work to keep young people safe?

How you can help (if you want to)

We would really like to listen to your child's views and hear first-hand about how well they think professionals are working or have worked to keep them safe.

Zoe Elford from the Engagement Team has been asked to talk to the children and young people, and would very much like to meet your child. A parent or carer or another adult your child trusts can be with them if they wish. It would only take an hour and we can meet where they want.



Keeping your information private

Only people who are allowed to see your information can. Zoe does not see your private information. Zoe will write down what you say and make a report of everyone's views but your name will not be used.

There's nothing to worry about and it's totally up to you if you want to give your permission.

What next?

If you would like to find out more or have a question please ring Zoe on 07825 105 457.

Thank you very much for your help with this. It is important we find out children's views and we look forward to meeting you.

Zoe Elford
Engagement Team

Appendix Two: Children's Letter



Zoe Elford
Engagement Officer
Oxfordshire County Council
County Hall
New Road
Oxford
OX1 1ND

Zoe.Elford@oxfordshire.gov.uk
Tel: 07825 105457

Your views and feedback please

Dear

Why we are writing to you?



The Oxfordshire Safeguarding Board makes sure everybody works together to keep children and young people safe.



Managers in organisations like the police, health, social care and schools are a part of the board.



The board is checking that professionals have

What is it about?

The board wants to find out:



- How well everybody is working together to keep children and young people safe.



- Are teachers, doctors, school nurses, the police, social workers and family support workers listening to children and young people?



- What is important for adults to know about child or young person's situation?
- What is good about the help that children and young people get and what is not good?

How you can help (if you want to)



We would really like to hear your views and feedback



Zoe Elford has been asked to find out the views and feedback from children.



You would be able to have a parent or carer or another adult you trust with you if you wish.



It will take about an hour and we can meet where you want. Zoe will bring snacks and a drink for you.

Keeping your information private



Only people who are allowed to see your information can see it.

Page 3 of 4



Zoe does not see your private information. Zoe will write down what you say and make a report of everyone's views but your name will not be used.

There's nothing to worry about and it's totally up to you if you want to do it.

What next?



If you would like to find out more or have a question please ring Zoe on 07825 105457.

Thank you very much. It is important we find out your views and I look forward to meeting you.



Zoe Elford

Zoe Elford
Engagement Team

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Appendix Three: Questionnaire Sample

Children and Young People Finding out your views about help and support



Professionals

Did you feel there was someone you could ask for help?

Who helps you / your child the most?

What do they do to help you / your child?

What else could they do to help your child?

Are there any professionals that you don't think help your child?

Why not?

What could they do to help you / your child?

Thinking about the help and support your child got / gets, was it or is it: About Right / Too much / Too little

How well do you feel professionals understand the help your child needs?

Have you often had to tell the same information to lots of different people? Yes / No / Not Sure

If yes, how does this feel?

Is it easier to tell some people than others? Yes / No / Not Sure

Did you feel like your parents/carers and the professionals worked well together? (tick one) Yes / sometimes / No / Not sure

What three things have services and professionals done which made the most difference for you and your family?

Why did these make a difference for you?

Were there any chances to help that were missed?

Is there anything especially important for professionals or people that want to help to know about you and your situation?

What help has made the biggest difference?

What was the best bit of help you / your child got?

Did you go online to get help and support? / If yes where did you look online?

Would you have wanted to have help and support online?

Are there any specific types of Social media that could be helpful?

Anything you would change?

Is there anything else you would like to say?