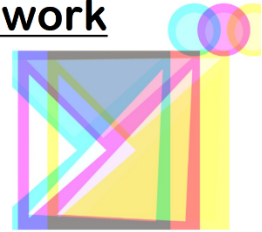




## **CWVYS report on the impact of Covid-19 on the voluntary youth work sector in Wales**



**CWVYS is the representative body for the voluntary youth sector in Wales. It is an independent charitable body that promotes quality youth work and represents the interests of its Membership and the wider sector.**

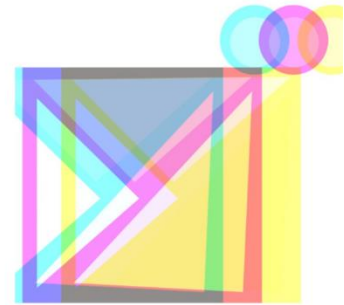
As a response to the Coronavirus crisis and the nationwide lockdown in March 2020 we surveyed our Members in May 2020 and released a report in June of that year, to assess and report on the impact of the pandemic on the voluntary youth work sector in Wales.

That report was shared widely and together with our Members we engaged with the Welsh Government in providing specific Coronavirus guidelines for operating youth services safely in August 2020. As summer became Autumn and Winter and Wales entered and came out of another brief lockdown in November 2020, we decided to survey our Membership again, to gauge the mood and ongoing impact of the pandemic on the voluntary youth sector in Wales. This document presents the results of our latest survey, which was open from November 2020 to January 2021.

**Helen Jones  
Communications Officer  
February 2021**



# Contents



<b>How is everybody?</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Impact on the organisation and staff</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Impact on volunteers, young people and the community</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Financial impact</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Concerns; present and future</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Recent updates</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>30</b>

## How is everybody?

Given the difficult times many of us have faced during the Coronavirus pandemic, we were keen to gauge the mood and morale in the voluntary youth sector.

In the first question of our survey we conveyed the following to our Members; **“We are interested to know how you are feeling at this time. So, in your own words, please tell us...How are you?”** It is worth sharing some of the responses in full here:

*Mixed - frustrated on how long things have gone on for - perhaps feel we're not able to do as much as we'd like to be doing - and wondering when we will feel we have some sort of normality again ... or if things will never be the same.*

*Tired; feels like I have never been so busy or working so much. However, I have felt so proud of the youth work sector in Wales; continuing to find creative ways to provide vital services to young people.*

*Feeling very fed up and overwhelmed with the pandemic. It is hard enough dealing with it ourselves let alone supporting young people and how they are feeling about things. I'm exhausted.*

*We remain hopeful, continue to work fulltime to support our communities, and have come together as a team to ensure we support one another. In terms of planning for the future, it is a huge challenge, so we feel some uncertainty and anxiety about this, however, we live in the knowledge that we are all operating in similar circumstances so we need to support one another and carry on.*

Words that seemed to crop up frequently in the responses were “frustrated”, “confused”, “afraid” and “lethargic”, maybe related as one mentioned to a perceived “uncertainty in the sector”. Perhaps unsurprisingly due to the diversity of our Members, some seemed more annoyed, while others were “emotionally and physically drained”. Still others were a little more “encouraged by vaccine developments” and some remained optimistic but cautious of the changeable nature of the situation, were still “keen to get back to some kind of normal”.

Some seemed even more upbeat, noting sentiments such as “I'm doing well, very lucky to have worked throughout the pandemic” or “I am feeling really positive and energised.” Though another respondent remarked that they were “feeling positive” the reason given was that their office had “reopened”, which, in light of the subsequent lockdown announced shortly after most of these responses were given, is a little sobering. The respondents who offered that they were feeling “a

*bit down - isolated and demotivated*” or *“tired - looking forward to a break”* might better capture the feeling in the last month or so.

In all, it was a privilege to be given an insight into the thoughts and feelings of staff at our Member organisations, whether the sentiments expressed were positive or negative, very detailed or rather brief, whether people felt *“very, very busy in work”*, *“very tired”*, *“stressed”*, *“weary”*, *“OK”*, *“Continually challenged”*, *“hopeful”* or indeed *“splendid”*.

## Impact on the organisation

We asked our Members how the ongoing pandemic was impacting their organisation, particularly in terms of staff mental health, organisational capacity, changes to opening times and so on.

One respondent reported a very positive picture;

*Our organisational mental health is good. We invest across the organisation to provide support, free access to counselling for all staff, regular reflective practice group and one to one. The Board take great interest in this area of work. We ensure that there is a good work life balance, and encourage breaks away from the workplace. We try to create a welcoming and supportive work environment, physical and among colleagues with mental health champions. We provide financial support for investment in creating a good homeworking environment for those working remotely and regular one to one support. this doesn't mean that we get it right all of the time, but we try our utmost to do the best that we can to support people as they need support. We are always willing to do more and learn from others. We run mindfulness, exercise classes and free gym sessions.*

The majority of respondents mentioned their premises were closed and that staff were working from home, one shared that they *“miss the incidental conversations in the office which are not the same if you have to schedule in a time to talk.”* Some talked of *“issues with staff mental health, long term sickness and staff relationships”*. Many also reported that staff hours had reduced, one was able to calculate *“collectively hours have been reduced from 80 hours a week to 28.5 hours a week”*. In addition to this, some other organisations described increased workload; *“we now work more in the evening. Our services is more 9-9 now. Staff mental health has decreased. We have been awarded additional funds which means part time staff are now full time and we have taken on more staff for our of hours projects”*. Despite the diversity of responses, there were hints of a resilient sector, some cheerfully noted that *“More staff working from home, may be better for work/life balance”* or *“all fine though some were impacted by being placed on furlough.”* *“Despite obvious stresses the organisation has responded quickly and flexibly. The organisation has learned a great deal about itself as a result of the pandemic. Staff have been innovative and creative.”*

However, many reported *“fatigue”* or that *“staff now getting tired generally”* and there is a worry that morale will only decrease as the period of lockdown continues with no end in sight; *“very challenging for staff - feeling tired and over worked, especially those with caring responsibly and who are shielding themselves.”* *“Staff are confused, afraid for the community and struggling to cope with the situation.”* *“It's definitely more difficult for staff to switch off and take time away*

*from work.” “Staff are weary of the constantly changing guidelines.” And of concern “3 staff left due to stress and low income”, “everyone is exhausted”.*

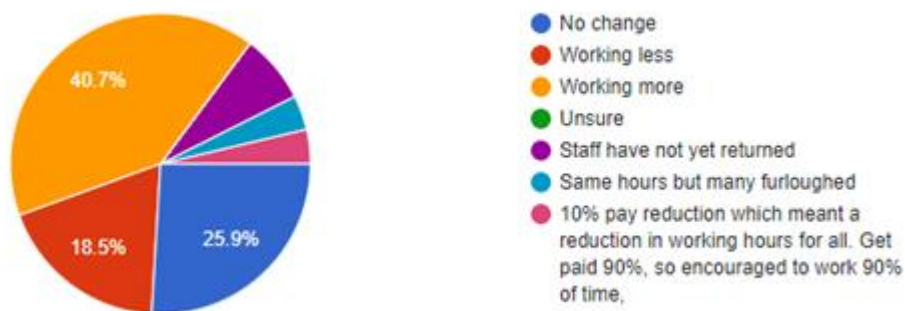
## Impact on working hours

In two questions we sought to assess the impact on staff by measuring staffing numbers at our Member organisations as of 09/11/20 compared to 01/04/20.

Unfortunately, not all responders answered both questions, so it is difficult to definitively measure whether more organisations experienced staff losses, how many were unaffected or the percentage of organisations that recruited new staff.

However, some of our members experienced staff losses of almost half, one in particular saw 163 losses, going from 328 to 165 members of staff between April 2020 and November 2020. Some smaller organisations saw losses of 1 or 2 members of staff, which can be a dramatic decrease in capacity for organisations of 4 or 5 team members. Encouragingly, a number of responders saw no staff losses, and a few actually took on more members of staff to meet increased demand for their organisational services.

However, staffing numbers does not offer a full picture of impact, changes to the hours staff are working or whether or not they are on 'furlough' can have a large impact on the operational capacity of an organisation. We asked our Members **"has there been a change in the number of hours staff are working?"** in order to capture this.



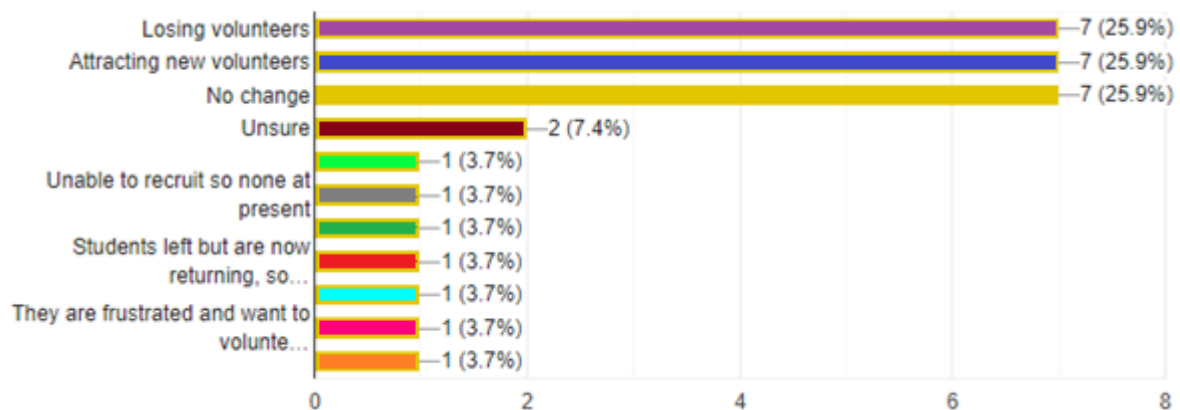
As the chart shows, almost 26% saw no changes to staff working hours, and the largest percentage of respondents reported that they were working more. This could appear positive on the face of it but could also reflect an increased need for services that our Member organisations provide but not necessarily reflect that staff are being remunerated for this increased workload, or whether or not organisations are comfortably able to meet increased demand.

Of concern perhaps is that a very small number reported that they had not yet been able to return to work, between April and November 2020, some 7 months of not being able to work or offer services to young people. The smallest percentage of respondents reported no change in hours but that some staff were still furloughed, perhaps indicating that work for the remaining staff has increased or that services offered would be reduced as a result, or that a reduction in pay equalled an identical reduction in working hours (paid 90% of usual pay, so encouraged to reduce hours by 10%).

A statistically significant number of respondents, some 18.5%, reported that they were working less hours as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic.



## Impact on volunteers



Volunteers make an invaluable contribution to the youth work sector, so we asked our Members **“How are your volunteers?”** and also about the current level of engagement.

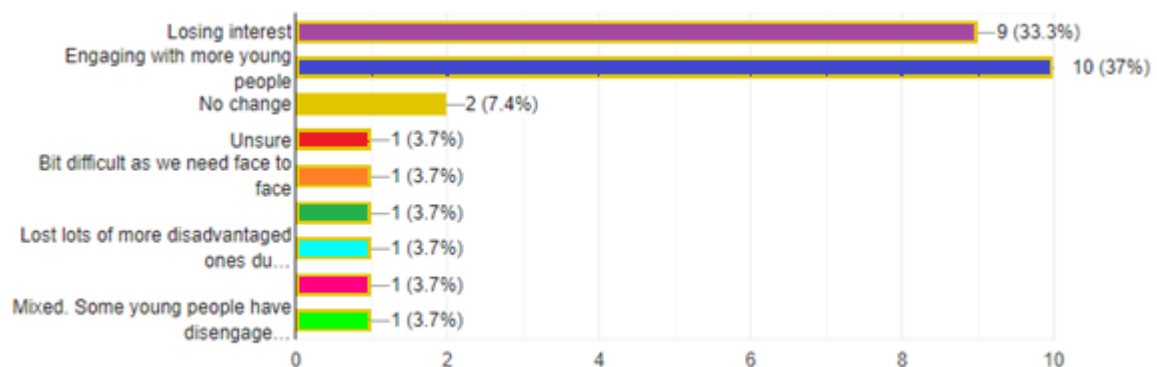
Out of 27 responses, 7 indicated that they were attracting new volunteers, and 7 reported no change. The remaining responders noted that they were *“unsure”*. A further 7 sadly reported that they were losing volunteers. One of our Members mentioned *“more enquiries, fewer opportunities”* with another adding of volunteers that *“they are frustrated and want to volunteer”*.

A small number responded that their volunteers were engaging very well online, in stark contrast to others who mentioned *“volunteers are having trouble using social media”*. Sadly, one respondent wrote that *“one volunteer is fearful of coming out of the house”* while others were reported to be *“desperate to get back to volunteering. They feel as isolated as the young people”*. As with the mood of the organisations and staff members generally, the volunteer experiences described were mixed; *“we have new volunteers who are engaging well”* or *“decrease in numbers but those who are isolated are very active”* compared with *“no engagement at all”*. One Member answered optimistically that volunteers were *“not currently engaged - we're unsure if they will return, though we are confident there may even be an increase.”*

The care and concern for volunteers displayed in some of the responses was heart-warming and reflected positively on the voluntary youth work sector: *“We have had to ensure we are adequately supporting our volunteers wellbeing, doubling our efforts with support, communication, virtual and face to face.”* As a result of this *“more people are now coming forward who wish to volunteer as a result of COVID and wanting to give back.”*

## Impact on young people

A similar picture was painted in the responses to our question regarding young people. We asked “**how is your level of engagement with young people?**” Some of the briefer responses are tallied in the bar graph below. Out of those surveyed, 9 respondents flatly stating that young people were “*losing interest*”. In contrast 10 stated that they were “*engaging with more young people*”. A couple stated there had been “*no change*” in the level of engagement, and one simply “*unsure*”.



This lack of certainty was reflected in the remaining responses however, where despite not mentioning directly that they were “*unsure*”, one respondent said the situation was “*mixed*” explaining that “*Some young people have disengaged, or have never engaged online. Others have engaged more, or in different ways*”. Another commented that young people had been “*harder to reach*” but added that they were “*still engaging and actively looking for opportunities.*”

One Member shared that they had “*had a lot less engagement*” than they had “*envisaged during the past 8 months*” and explained this as “*young people preferring face to face contact and the actual activities*” that used to be on offer. Another remarked similarly “*Bit difficult as we need face to face*”.

## **As well as engagement levels we asked more generally what the impact of Coronavirus was on young people.**

As with previous responses, it is worth mentioning these were gathered shortly after the brief Autumn 2020 lockdown in Wales and before the Winter lockdown which began shortly after Christmas 2020. Children and young people were in school at that point, and depending on their local lockdown level, many organisations were open and operating but with social distancing measures in place. Unsurprisingly then, some responses mentioned schools directly, one noting that:

*“Many schools have struggled with maintaining learning and are not able to get 'extra-curricular' activities re started because of bubbling and altered time tabling. Young People are missing out - those who do not have access to activities outside of school, because their parents cannot afford the time or funding to access clubs etc, are missing out most. Opportunities provided by schools for young people to experience learning outside of the classroom are severely restricted and many LAs have stopped all trips and visits even though these are permissible under current rules. Residential opportunities remain 'banned' and so our outdoor centres are underused and under threat.”*

Given the current nationwide lockdown is still in effect as of writing (February 2021) it is not outlandish to suggest the situation has likely deteriorated further. One respondent said of young people that *“they are now fed up with the restrictions. They cannot cope with social distancing. They feel frustrated that we can't let them have free rein as before. Only years 7 and 8 are attending school here and most of our young people are failing to engage with online education/school.”* It is difficult to see how the situation may have improved since that response was submitted as schools have been closed for over a month and operating virtually, putting increased strain on young peoples' time with demanding virtual learning schedules.

To our previous survey a Member remarked on the irony of youth workers having to encourage students to engage online when they were accustomed to encouraging young people away from screens and towards social engagement face to face to promote positive mental health and improved social skills. At the moment it seems youth workers having to operate in a virtual capacity alone are torn between wanting to check in with young people and maintain engagement on the one hand, and giving them a virtual break on the other. Some have sought to work around this by providing physical activity packs and post challenges, but this can be difficult to fund and support also.

Backing this up, one respondent mentioned that young people “have less time and intimate contact with youth workers. The subtle *“sideways conversations and listening”* that would

*normally take place around the fire or sat in the youth club has diminished - for some young people, it's inaccessible. Therefore they are not getting that support or sounding board from peers and professionals."*

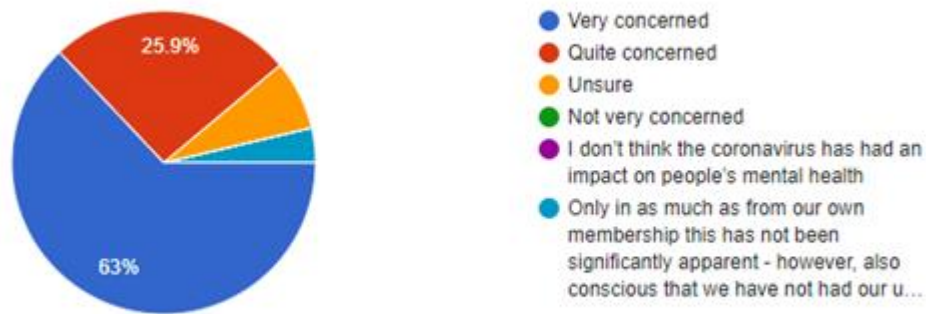
One of our Members remarked favourably of young people that *"they are resilient and should be applauded"* but went on to add that unfortunately *"the negative impact has been growth in anxiety, poor health, lack of access to services, connectivity."* Unacceptably some have "seen a rise in emergency cases of homelessness and chaotic lifestyles with young people desperate for emergency support. A huge rise in poor mental health and anxiety. Young people anxious about education, their exams. Youth employment and losing their jobs."

Another member commented on the "resilience of young people", but cautioned of the people falling through cracks. Echoing this one noted that young people *"are frustrated, many have been isolated, lack of IT, lack of any social opportunities. Increase in low level mental health issues reported by club leaders."* Several responses mentioned "anxiety" and "worse mental health" specifically and one added that they had witnessed *"a complicated change in our relationship with Young People and their Families"*. Many other respondents corroborated, adding *"we think it's been huge .. the insecurity of school , the virus and not being able to meet up as before, and not able to mix our groups younger members are missing out on the role modelling."*

Another stand-out remark outlined *"more isolation, less physical activity, reduced contact with positive role models, loss of routine, impact on wellbeing generally, more sedentary lifestyles"*.

## Mental Health Crisis

In response to our previous survey wherein some respondents noted their worries of an impending crisis of mental health facing young people, we wanted to capture in our latest survey whether respondents were concerned or not.



As the chart shows, well over half of respondents, 63% were “*very concerned*” with a further 25.9% “*quite concerned*”. The remaining respondents were “*unsure*” with one adding that it was not immediately apparent within their own networks, but they conceded that they had not had their “usual” engagement with young people which could be a factor.

## Impact on the community

Related to these concerns of a mental health crisis, and the impact on staff and volunteers, we were keen to know what our Members felt the community impact might be.

As with the previous questions, answers to this one were mixed, portraying an uncertain picture of life in the communities our Members are part of. Some talked of how they were supporting the community; “*We are working closely with GPs clusters to provide contracts of support to children, young people and families in the community and schools.*” Describing a “*significant growth in poor mental health. Bigger waiting lists for services. Huge need for preventative services.*”

The impact that school opening and closing has had on communities was noted; “*It's been huge, deaf people are impacted by isolation, not being able to meet, the wearing of masks, the school situations of being there one day sent home the next.*”

*“Many children and young people are not going to school. School is suffering staff shortages and turning year groups away, and some parents have chosen to continue with ‘home schooling’.*

Others described negative community views of young people; *“The community looks upon the congregation of young people as negative – in terms of ASB but now emboldened/justified by the risk of transmission of COVID-19. On a positive, more members of the community are engaging with us as a children’s centre.”*

Perhaps explaining some of that negativity, another respondent noted there was *“possibly more young people out on the streets, some minor youth annoyance, litter etc”*. Or conveying that *“many people are ignoring the ‘rules’ and going about daily life as before. E.g. Families allowing children to mix and having sleepovers”* despite lockdowns.

On the whole, despite the mixed responses, several mentioned *“community cohesion”* and told of the *“community pulling together”*, despite *“isolation”* being noted and *“everyone feeling it”*.

## Financial impact

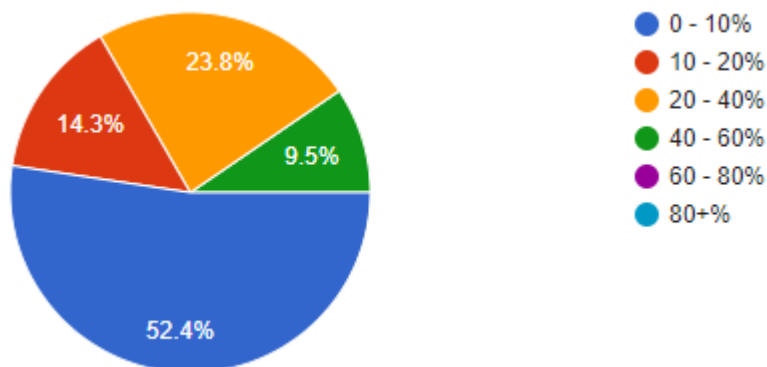
### What is the ongoing financial impact?

Some respondents to our survey gave detailed accounts of the financial impact on their organisations, and we are very grateful for that insight:

*“Devastating impact on income generation and cashflow, losing £11,500 per month due to lost business on gym, tenants, room hire. An emergency fundraising strategy was put in place to re-coup this and meet the new identified needs of the community. Secured funds to stabilise and move forward. Please note, if we had not had emergency funds we would not have survived as our usual unrestricted income sources and sales have dried up. We secured the organisation then focused on delivery of new and additional services to support the exasperated needs of our community due to COVID. Raised more funds than first projected for the year. All short-term. Short term planning only as funders have changed their processes to prioritise - can't plan with certainty so having to create a number of scenarios for consideration. Investment in emergency services has been good, now looking towards recovery and sustainability for post 2022.”*

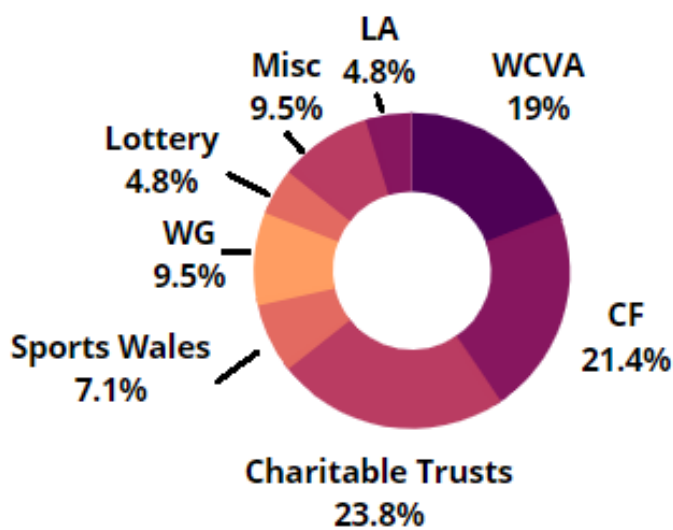
Predictably the situation on the whole was mixed, some were *“fortunate to receive some funding from several sources to cover immediate core costs (e.g. salaries, rent, mooring fees)”* or doing *“reasonably well with funding as our overheads are small”*. Some found it was *“difficult to quantify”* and *“impossible to plan activities and services as there is no definitive rules and much seems to be left to the discretion of the provider”*. Others echoed that *“It is increasingly hard to justify applications for funding while numbers of sessions and numbers of young people attending are intentionally reduced.”*

Seeking clarity we asked our Members **“Has there been any fall in income?”** and offered responses in the following percentage ranges;



The chart shows that just over half of the organisations surveyed reported losses up to 10%, encouragingly the smallest percentage, 9.5% of respondents, reported financial losses of up to and over half their income. It seems none of the respondents reported more than 60% loss of income, but many (23.8%) reported up to 40% losses.

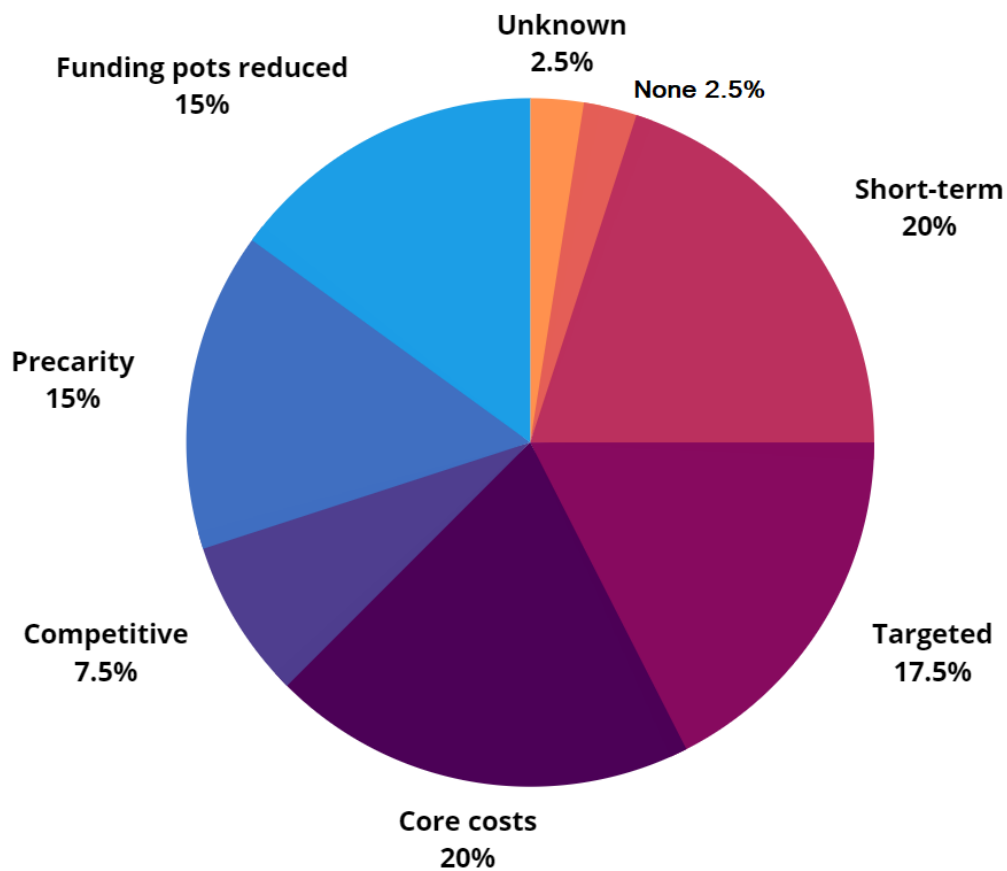
**What additional funding opportunities have you accessed?**



The above chart shows the percentages of respondents who accessed funding from certain organisations or bodies, this list below gives exact figures from respondents regarding how many listed each; WCVA funds 8, Community Foundation (CF) in Wales 9, Charitable Trusts 10, Lottery 2, Local Authority (LA) Youth Support Grant 2, Sports Wales 3, Welsh Government (WG) Economic Resilience Fund 4, Miscellaneous (including corporate investment and partnership work) 4.



## What concerns are there over future funding streams?



**20%** were concerned that funding is too **short term**; *“all the funding secured so-far is short term for one year only due to the uncertainty because of the on-going effects of COVID-19 restrictions”*

**17.5%** were concerned that funders were only funding very **targeted** work; *“funding has often been for front line covid organisations and the outdoor residential sector seems to be forgotten.”*

**20%** of respondents were worried that **core costs** are not covered; *“more funding for core costs would help a great deal”* and *“core costs and traditional delivery will disappear replaced with COVID recovery specific funds.”*

**7.5%** of our Members were concerned that applications for grants will become more **competitive**; *“we are concerned that funding will get more competitive (which we have seen when you look at the number of grants we are applying for vs the success of them).”*

**15%** were worried about the effect that their financial **precurity** would hamper efforts to secure more funding; *“fear that as we chase income for next year it will have a negative impact on our support work”* or *“lack of staff to complete and manage bids”*

15% were also concerned that funders might have **reduced** funds; *“funding pots from grants will get smaller and what is the long term going to look at.”*

A small percentage of respondents, **2.5%** said their concerns **were Unknown** or that they had **None**.

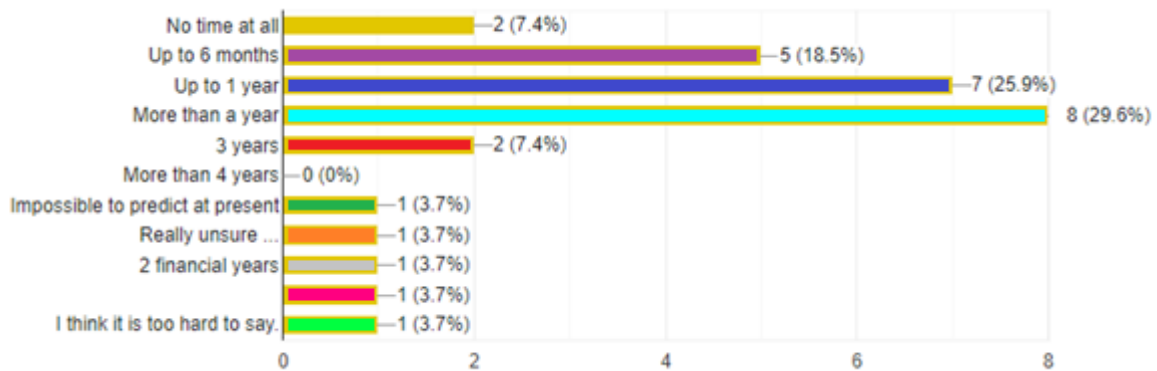
## **Plans for next year**

Following on from this, we asked Members, **“as an organisation are you looking ahead to the next financial year? If yes, what plans do you have in place?”**

We asked our Members about their plans for the next financial year, in order to gauge the outlook, mood, potential health of the organisation in terms of capacity. Some of the responses were indicative of a positive outlook, with many planning to build on their strong work responding to the pandemic and even expand on this. One reported they would continue the *“development of Service Design work with the youth sector in Wales especially around Youth Information. Continuing to expand our work across the UK and Europe.”*

Many did not have concrete plans yet in place but were *“looking for on-going financial support to offer the services we can offer”* or said *“we are continuing to plan and have a new fundraising strategy in place”*. Unfortunately given the developments since our survey closed and Wales entered a nationwide lockdown, some noted they were *“currently business planning and budgeting. Aiming for resume to face-to-face in January pending local conditions. Hopefully more of a stable condition by Spring but many contingency plans being discussed.”* It would seem likely that much of these plans mentioned in the survey responses through November and December will have had to have been amended and some of those emergency / contingency plans adopted. Encouragingly, a couple of respondents mentioned they *“have funding for worker’s wages, however activity, training etc will have to wait until we are more aware of how this looks to pan out.”* Others were similarly cautious, noting that they were *“currently setting budget with several contingencies in place. We are not planning for growth but to sustain activity and retain what we have.”* It seems that the bulk of our respondents were awaiting the outcomes of funding bids before being able to confidently state their outlook as positive or negative.

## We asked our Members “How long will it take to recover?”



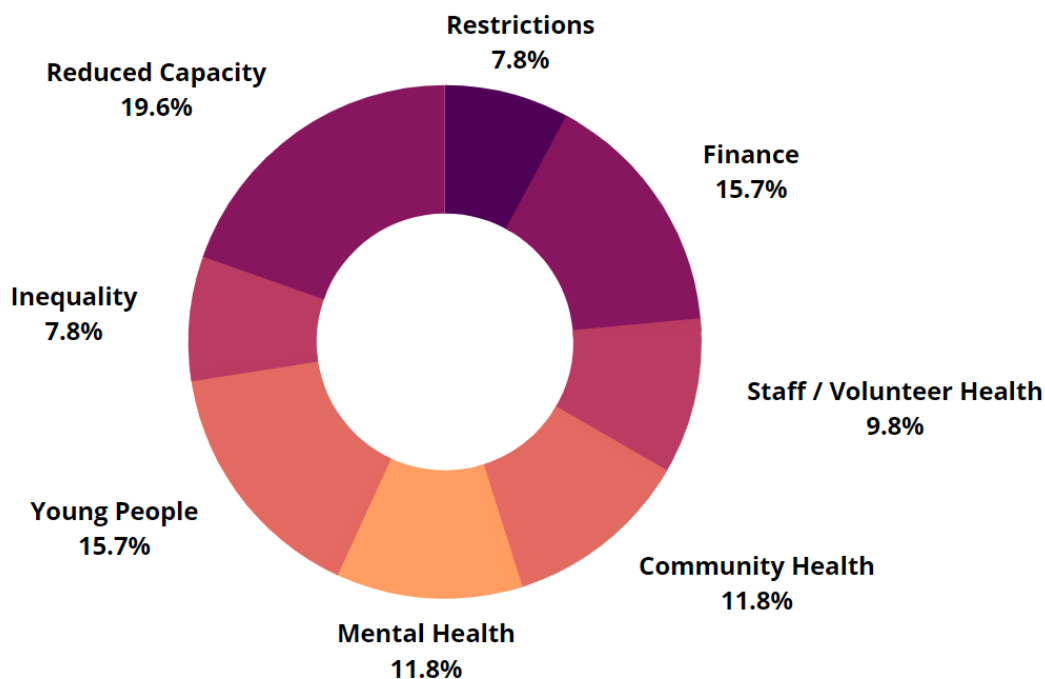
As the above chart indicates, the greatest percentage of respondents (29.6%) said they predicted recovery would take more than a year (but less than two). The second largest percentage of respondents (25.9%) were more optimistic and thought recovery would take up to a year. 18.5% of those surveyed thought recovery would be manageable within 6 months, and a not insignificant percent, 7.4%, were very positive that recovery would take “no time at all”. This optimism may be as a result of voluntary sector organisations being accustomed to having to manage on very little and a great deal of experience with short-term funding. It may also be related to our survey being responded to shortly after Wales exited a brief period of lockdown, pre-Christmas positivity may be a contributing factor too.

An identical 7.4% said it would take 3 years to recover. Since our survey closed, those who responded that the situation was “impossible to predict”, that it was “too hard to say” or that things were “really unsure” seem to have been prescient.

## Concerns; present and future

### What are your concerns?

Members responses were grouped into the following categories; **Restrictions, Finance, Staff/Volunteer health, Community impact, Mental Health, Young People, Inequality** and **Reduced Capacity**. The chart below shows the percentage of respondents who were concerned about each thing, and some selected quotations elucidating some of those concerns in a little more detail.



*We are concerned about young people and how they recover from the pandemic, whilst we are concerned about the financial impact on families as well as the impact on funding and fundraising*

*long term funding. increased inactivity gap of young people in the poorest communities. disengagement of young people and them being 'lost' to the local support. mental health crisis amongst young people, but also 'on the ground' workers*

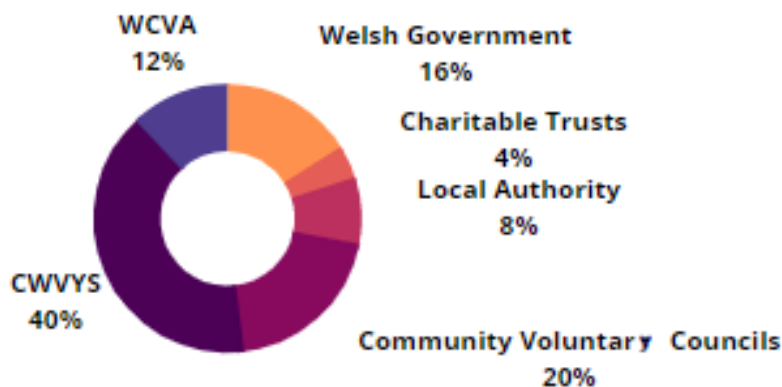
*Concern for staff exposure to the virus. We will have to reduce sessions further if staff go off sick. The knock-on effect that this has on being able to raise money to keep going. i.e. Fewer activities = less evidence of impact.*

*We are experiencing a growth in demand for our work - concerns for the young people can we continue support - lack of signposting to face to face services*

## Who have you contacted for advice, support and information?

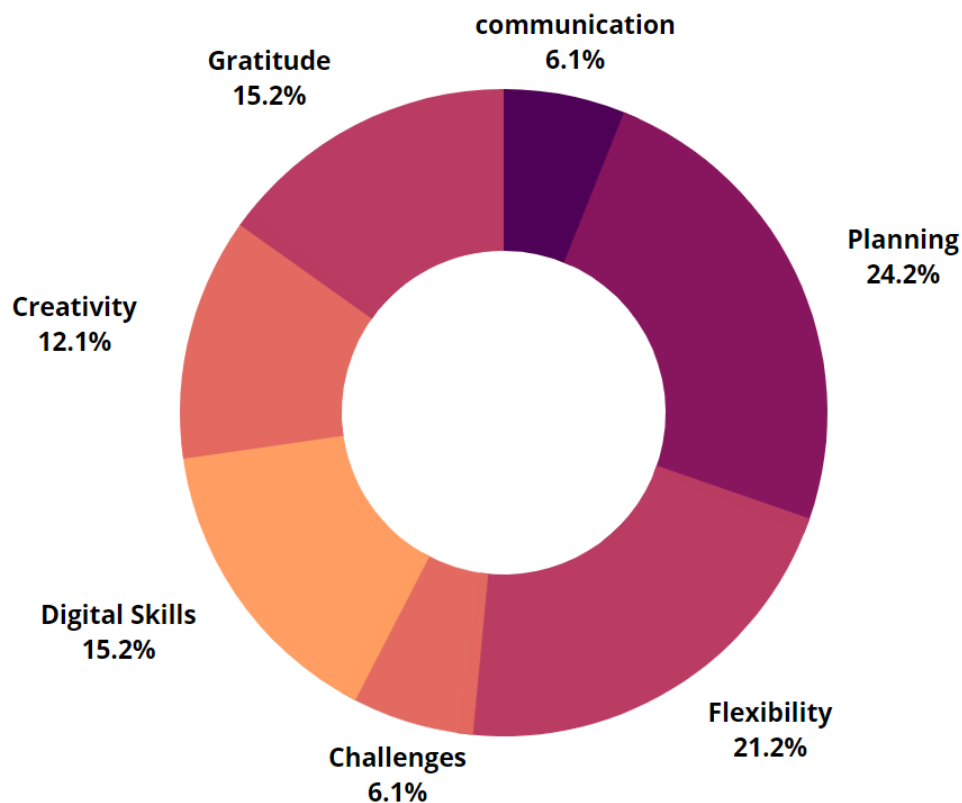
10 (or a third of respondents) mentioned CWVYS directly and others mentioned “*network partners*”, one Member specifically mentioned that attending CWVYS Regional Meetings had been a crucial way of keeping abreast with developments. This is not unsurprising in a survey of CWVYS Members, but receiving trusted information explicitly aimed at voluntary youth organisations has been useful to respondents, it may be that the wider youth work sector in Wales could benefit from an organisation which is all about youth work in Wales, which maintains expertise and insight of the voluntary youth sector as well as information tailored to the local authority (LA) services too. Despite all of our members working in at least one Local Authority in Wales, only two respondents mentioned seeking or receiving information from their LA.

4 respondents mentioned the Welsh Government directly, and 3 named the Wales Council for Voluntary Action. However, County Voluntary Councils (CVCs) came up twice and by name specifically, such as “GAVO” and “BAVO” in three responses. Only a couple of responses mentioned the organisation’s own board of Trustees or the expertise of their own volunteers and staff (“We have a volunteer who has experience of fund raising” and “our business support group”). This may well be as a result of the way the question was posed; it is possible that “who have you *contacted*” indicated that answers should pertain to organisations *outside* of those surveyed. By no means does this indicate a lack of inter-organisational expertise, as many of our Members offered advice and support to their fellow Members at numerous CWVYS Regional Meetings, demonstrating a wealth of knowledge in the voluntary youth work sector.



## We asked Members “What have you learned from the last 7/8 months?”

Based on the responses our Members gave us, we grouped them into the following categories; **Communication** (such as; “always talk to people”); **Planning** (such as; “have at least 3 plans”); **Flexibility** (such as; “how resilient people can be”); **Challenges** (such as; “we cannot solve everything”); **Digital skills** (such as “virtual working”); **Creativity** (such as; “learning new ways of reaching out, being creative”) and: **Gratitude** (such as; “how much I value our time together”).



Most of our Members (24.2%) reported they had learned the value of **planning**. “Planning ahead is hard but isn't pointless so long as you are prepared to adapt” and “With a small proactive board of trustees we can make decisions quickly, we can be reactive and proactive which are in the interests of the charity.” The second largest percentage of respondents (21.2%) talked of the importance of being **flexible**, adaptable and resilient; “We are adaptable and we have a good team. Also, that we cannot solve everything and I have learned to say no sometimes!” and “resilient leadership - always talk to people, be flexible and responsive, have at least 3 plans. Reach out for support.” Tied at 15.% were the number of people who responded that they had learned **digital skills** and that they had valued being **grateful**, but how they were valued in return, for example; “How much I value our time together just being with the young people /families is

*always rewarding,” and “how much the young people and their families need and value our support (you don’t know what you have until it isn’t there)”. It was really heartening to read; “people generally work better/more effectively when they have the option to come together.”*

## **What positives have arisen as a result of the Coronavirus?**

Most responses mirrored those of a previous question asking what Members had learned in the past 7 months, including increased digital skills, better communication and collaboration among staff and volunteers, being more proactive and adaptable;

*Online training has been a revelation and has proven to be very effective at engaging with more volunteers. Collaborative team working across the charity has improved - as part of a wider UK charity it has become so much easier to engage with colleagues and whilst we've been looking in, the centre has also been looking out. There is a much greater awareness of devolution and what it actually means for us in Wales , the various different country Covid restrictions have finally highlighted that we can and do, do things differently. Specifically for our programme we have been able to shift the emphasis away from expeditions and focus on the other sections and the benefits these bring. We have been more proactive than previously and change has been swiftly implemented, more people have been willing to compromise and things that were barriers in the past have been easier to remove as everyone has genuinely been working towards achieving the best outcomes for young people.*

*Some talked of; “wonderful partnerships and joint working, young people planning and getting involved in taking the lead in designing programmes” and also touched on the importance of planning “reconsidering business models and sustainability with support for social entrepreneurs, investors and trusts.” Again as the previous question on learning showed, respondents reported increased gratitude for “better communication and connection by all”, and added “young people tell us that they have felt part of decision making processes. Some young people have also told us that they feel services are more inclusion from an online digital perspective. Young people have seen kindness amongst their communities.”*

Similarly positive, a respondent noted;

*Less travel expenses for the charity as a whole - huge savings as a national organisation. Remote working is hard, but at times it has meant more of us can get together virtually that we would have afforded if face to face. better communication between our team.*

This point on reduced travel cropped up in several responses, one particularly was discussing an uncertainty over any positives, saying:

*“Unsure ...(other than now being very familiar with a range of on-line meeting platforms - eg: Zoom/Teams etc) - for external meetings, staff/team meetings/board meetings - whilst not a perfect medium - does reduce travel time, help with everyone's capacity.”*

As stated, this came up in a number of responses, and some were especially grateful of these virtual technologies enabling the reach of a *“wider audience, particular those is rural areas.”*

Increased staff connectivity cropped up in many responses; *“we have developed a unique team spirit and now work as 'one Wales team' rather than three regions.”* With another Member reporting; *“our links with the LA have increased dramatically”*.

## **Going forward, how has this changed the way you operate and provide youth provision?**

*We have adapted our programme and resources but thankfully the activities that young people do to achieve their awards can still carry on. We have increased our level of support to our volunteers and where they have capacity issues we have been providing additional direct support at a cost to ourselves, this may have an impact in the future on the way in which we provide support to our partners.*

*When we first went online we started a digital support programme to provide one to one support for our members. This was so successful that we have kept going with that throughout the summer and since reopening (and closing again).*

*Carry on with the digital work for those who do not necessarily want to come to the centre. We do rely heavily on Facebook though so if young people don't have it then it is difficult to engage them effectively.*

*We have had to change our support from face to face physically close support to more remote services and loose some of the closeness of our emotional support*

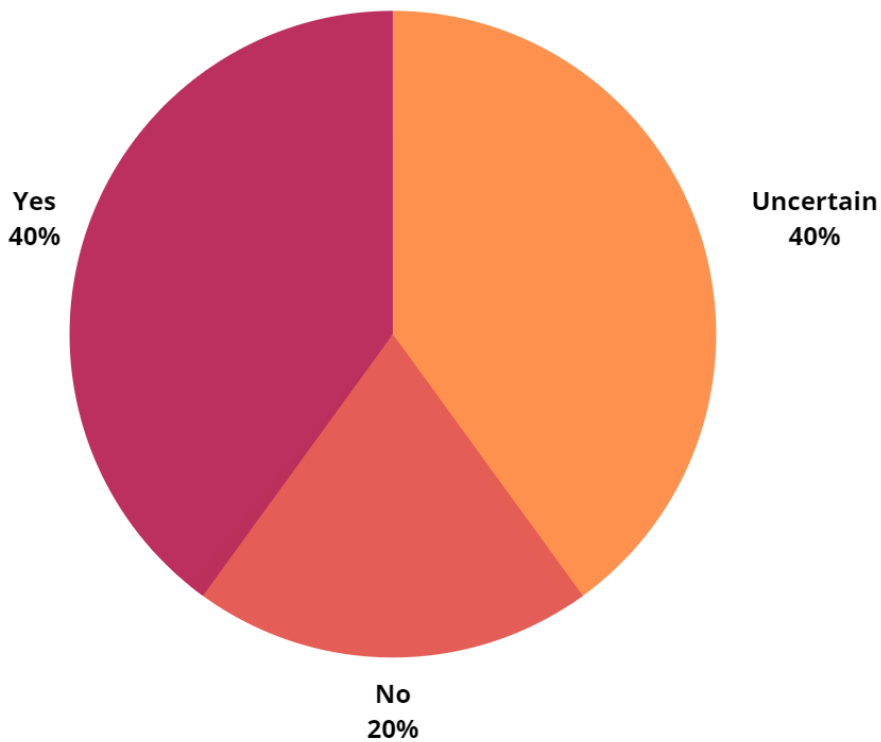
*Youth voice and children's rights need to be at the heart of everything we do. There is also a need to network with other youth orgs via CWYVS and EWC.*

*We will likely decentralise operations and have a blended working approach with staff working from the office and from home.*

*Ensure that we put plenty of time into developing training packages so they are effective whether face to face or digitally.*



## Will you be able to continue as before?



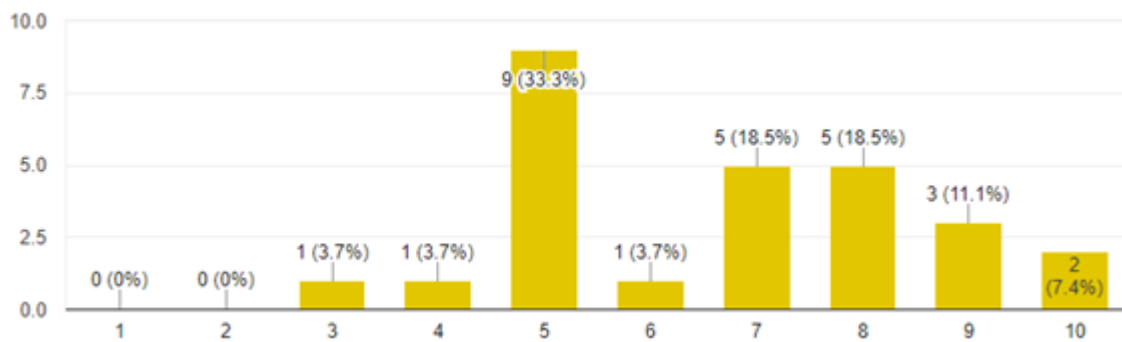
**40%** of respondents answered that continuation was **Uncertain**; *"Depends on COVID"*

**20%** said **No**, but confidently, one said *"no, we will be better."*

**40%** said **Yes** they would be able to continue as before but one respondent said *"Yes but better"*

*Others said; "yes but maybe using different venues" or "If things return to "Normal" or if "everyone is vaccinated"*

How confident are you about the future on a scale of 1-10 (1 = not at all confident, 10 = extremely confident)?

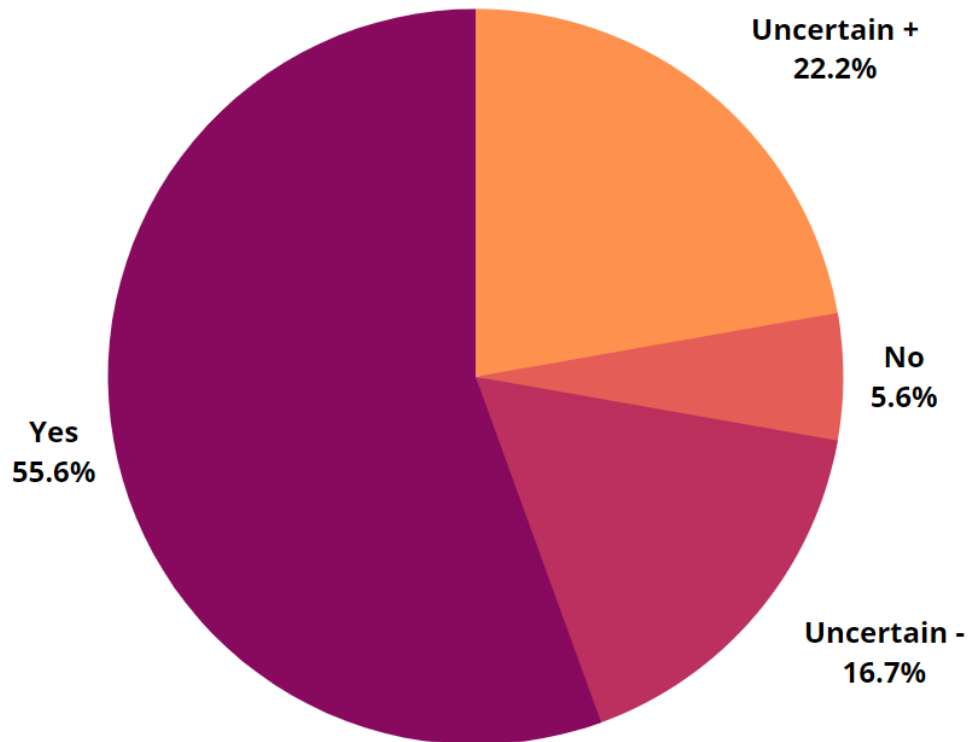


It seems the greatest percentage of respondents fell right in the centre of the scale, simply confident. A higher percentage reported being very confident or extremely confident, which is encouraging to see.

## Are there opportunities (benefits)?

We asked if there were any benefits or opportunities as a result of this unique situation, and as with previous questions on positives and learning, the picture emerging was mixed.

To avoid repetition we will break responses down into the categories Yes, No, Unsure but optimistic (+) and Unsure but pessimistic (-).



A small percentage (5.6%) of respondents reported no opportunities, or were “not really” any.

22.2% of people thought that there may be some uncertain positives and benefits arising, with one remarking that they would; *“continue with established links which will hopefully gain new opportunities.”*

16.7 % of our Members surveyed were less certain of any benefits, simply stating that they are as yet *“unknown”*.

The greatest percentage, 55.6% of respondents replied that yes, there are opportunities and benefits coming out of this situation, elaborating that there are; *“more efficient ways of working have been identified and implemented”* and *“Yes, we feel that our activities are suited post covid as they are evidenced to improve young people's mental health”*.

Others remarked; *“our staff meeting is now online accommodating flexible working,”* or *“yes, more digital work with our new digital youth worker.”* One Member was cheerful that *“our young people and volunteers have shown resilience and an interest in improving our provision.”*

## Recent updates

In our most recent CWVYS Regional Meetings, which took place in mid-February, we asked our members what the general mood was and how they were managing as this latest lockdown draws on, one respondent simply said *“it’s been non-stop”*.

We took note of their remarks, and they seem to describe a tired workforce, fatigue among young people, and worryingly for some of our larger Member organisations, a loss of members; *“coming up to annual subscriptions now, and we’re seeing a huge drop off”* and *“very sharp decrease in membership this year.”*

A couple described the effect of virtual working on staff in a positive light; *“we’re talking as a team more than before lockdown, we have dedicated time every week to catch up”*. For some however, the picture was not as rosy, one person said of staff who are *“providing most support online”*; *“I’m death by screen at the moment”*.

Others described the rise in their workload, and a change in the intensity and complexity of the work and young people being engaged with, saying; *“it’s a lot of intensive needs, the mental health needs are so much”* or *“we’ve been extremely busy, non-stop, delivering loads of wellbeing care packages over Christmas, our young adult carers really struggling with this second lockdown”*. This was mirrored by many of our Members present at the meetings; *“we’ve gotten busier and busier during lockdown.”* *“At the beginning we weren’t that busy, but as the situation has continued young people have become more used to interacting over video call”*, *“we haven’t been able to do any outdoor activities or group support”*, *“we’ve never worked with so few but so busy, people working in the evenings, weekends, overtime, it’s a lot”*.

Unfortunately there did seem to be a theme emerging, that of young people struggling more during this latest lockdown as compared with the first;

*“I think this lockdown is taking its toll, more so than the one we had last March”*.

*“It’s a much smaller cohort we’re dealing with at the moment, but some of the issues seem more intense”*.

*“This lockdown has been harder than the first, young people, like everyone else, are just fed up”*.

## **In conclusion**

As ever, we are very grateful to CWVYS Members for taking the time to take part in another survey. We're acutely aware that taking that precious time out to respond to a list of questions has been done in addition to carrying out an ever-growing list of responsibilities.

However, we and our Members know that evidence such as has been provided is critical in developing a greater understanding of the issues being faced, day in day out, throughout the voluntary youth work sector in Wales. It's important because we need to accurately reflect, as best we can, the challenges faced, opportunities considered and solutions presented at the frontline of delivery.

Please note that this is not merely a data-gathering exercise – CWVYS, as the representative body for the voluntary youth work sector in Wales, will ensure that such vital evidence is used in our work in support of the sector and also with key partners such as Welsh Government and the Interim Youth Work Board, amongst others.

So, as ever, thank you to everyone who has participated in this survey and please know that CWVYS is here to support the voluntary youth work sector in its absolutely essential work with young people.

**Paul Glaze**  
**Chief Executive**  
**CWVYS**  
**February 2021**