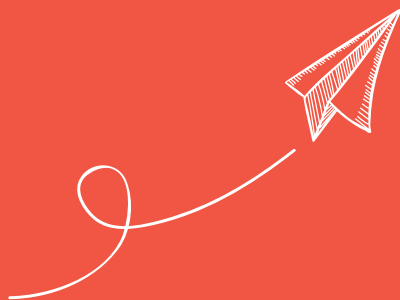


SHARING

STORIES

SHARING

STRENGTH



TOGETHER WE CAN BREAK THE SILENCE

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WELCOME

This booklet has been written by young women and men who have used the services of Amethyst SARC.

In their own words, they have told us about finding the courage to speak out, coming to the SARC, talking to the police, going through the court process, the support that they had and how they have coped.



Amethyst.

Canolfan Atgyfeirio Ymosodiadau Rhywiol
Sexual Assault Referral Centre

SUPPORT NETWORKS

Childline: 0800 1111 www.childline.org.uk



North Wales Police:
101 or in an emergency 999
www.north-wales.police.uk



HEDDLU GOGLEDD CYMRU
Gogledd Cymru diogelach
NORTH WALES POLICE
A safer North Wales

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



We would like to thank all the amazing young people who shared their stories and hope that this will enable others to break their silence and share your strength.

We would also like to thank PACT, CGI and the Soroptimists for all their support with this initiative and also everyone who donated their time, money and expertise.

This booklet is available in Welsh or English. Contact your CYPSVA or Amethyst SARC for your free copy.

CGI



Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol
Betsi Cadwaladr
University Health Board



crimebeat
north wales

GLOSSARY

CAMHS: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

Counsellor: A person trained to give guidance on personal or psychological problems

Counselling: Professional assistance in resolving personal or psychological problems

CPS: The Crown Prosecution Service

CYPSVA: Children and Young Peoples Sexual Violence Advisor

Disclosure: A fact, especially a secret, that is shared

PACT: North Wales Police and Community Trust

PC: Police Officer

Psychological Problems: The mental and emotional state of a person

SARC: Sexual Assault Referral Centre

STARTING THE JOURNEY

“Dear Friend,

It’s ‘A’ here and I’ve heard that you are going on a journey through a similar thing to me and I want to say don’t be scared. Just be strong, there are people to guide you and tell you that you’re a strong and independent person just like the rest of us. Be safe. Don’t worry because you have millions of supporters with you who are on your side. Love and look after yourself and never give up on your dreams.

From all of the people like you. You got this!”

“Welcome. Breathe. Just breathe. The hard part is over. You’re here now.

They believe you, unconditionally.

Just breathe - its all going to be okay.

Do it - you owe it to yourself.”

“By being here today you are **COPING!**”



“You’re no longer a victim. I’ve always hated that word. You’re now a survivor.”

DISCLOSURE

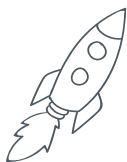


"I held my secret in until the age of 12, the first person I ever told was a high school teacher. Telling and explaining was extremely hard, I had built up so much fear in myself which made me lose my self confidence."

"As a child I'd gone through similar situations and felt like it kind of had a knock on effect of the person I am today and it had a knock on effect on my anxiety, everything and I just felt like no other girl should have to feel like that and if I were to not go to the police then he would have carried on doing it and I felt like... in a way... I had to stand up for the people who weren't willing to speak out who were just too scared to."

"If you feel like you can actually do it then definitely go for it. Do it cos in the short run it sucks, it really does suck, but in the long run like looking back on it now, I'm happy I did it now. I know it took a lot of strength and courage and bravery or whatever anybody wants to say. I'm just glad that it's over and done with and I don't have to endure it anymore."

"There are always going to be people who don't want to understand or believe in you but don't give up on finding the ones that do believe in you."



"After years of not being able to tell what really happened to me I felt a relief that I said the words. They knew and it wasn't me keeping his secret anymore."

“The advice I could give you is to be brave in whatever you decide to do.”



"When I first opened up to someone about what happened, I was in counselling with CAMHS and despite me not wanting anyone to know, my counsellor had to inform the police and social services as well as the people I was dreading: my mum and dad. This may be scary because you never know how your mum and dad will react. Will they be angry? Sad? Disappointed? Turns out they were all three, but luckily those feelings weren't towards me. They were extremely supportive and even though they felt so much hatred for this boy, they were so patient and understanding."

TALKING TO THE POLICE

"The day I spoke to the police I had never been more nervous, anxious, scared, the list could go on. Walking into the room my tummy went into knots and I thought my heart was going to beat out of my chest. A million and one thoughts were racing through my head "What if I can't speak" "What if I cry" "What if I'm not going to be believed" "What if I just can't do it" the room went quiet and then the police lady asked me to say my name. As soon as those first words left my mouth the words began to tumble out. It feels like a blur."

"The police asked me to meet with them and scheduled an interview. For me, I think this was the hardest step because I'd never spoke to anyone about what happened. The officer and social worker who were assigned to my case, were really patient, calm and good listeners. They made me feel like I was safe to talk about it."



“It's very scary, but like I said it was worth it in the long run, just stay calm.”

"She (the PC) was very straightforward, she didn't try and sugar-coat anything, she was gentle, she was kind, she didn't sit there and say "everything's going to be ok, it's not going to be bad" or anything like that, she just told me how it was and said she would support me and that there were other people who would support me all the way through, she didn't lie to me, she was great."

"The interview is very in detail, as in some of the questions may make you feel uncomfortable, embarrassed or even upset as you have to explain every detail of the events that happened to you. But don't worry; their intention is not to make you feel like this: only to make sense and get enough details to understand your case fully. I'm not going to lie to you and say every part of this process is amazing because the interview made me feel so many negative emotions. However, after I finished the interview, I felt a whole weight off my shoulders (and I mean it, it was like I could suddenly breathe clean air again)."

"After explaining to my teacher I had an interview with the police, although I was nervous, I tried to put on a brave face. After explaining what happened it got easier and easier each time. I wasn't holding it in any longer, I was ready to let it out and let go. I made my first ever video about the assault a few months after telling my teacher, I was nervous, I felt sick, I felt like no one would ever accept me."

"I was expecting to be put in a prison cell for some reason, I don't know why I had that stupid thought in my head, but I just felt like, you know, this was the place where all bad people go, not where you go for an interview. I remember sitting in the chair being asked a bunch of questions, trying to hold my stuff together and not cry because that would have made me worse, going into detail about everything that happened made me incredibly uncomfortable, like I'm over it now, but back then it was probably one of the most nerve wrecking things I've ever done but I would still recommend anyone to do it because it helps in the long run."



"Reporting doesn't validate what happened to you. You never have to do anything you don't feel ready for. If you feel you want to that's ok too. It seems impossible but you can, its not easy but you can."

"Reporting the abuse was something I felt I needed to do for myself. I had gotten to a point where I knew it wasn't my fault, a massive part in my recovery. However the next step for me was to take the actual action to prove it wasn't my fault. Him walking round without a care in the world whilst I had been suffering totally didn't sit right with me. And I can safely say that reporting it was one of the best decisions I ever made. And I totally get that it might not be right for everybody and that's ok!"

HAVING A MEDICAL OR SEXUAL HEALTH CHECK

"The SARC isn't a place anyone wants to go, but it is not as bad as what you think in your head. The SARC is a safe place. Everyone is kind and understanding, you will get the support you need even if at first it seems really scary, you're safe and you'll receive all the support and advice you need."

“I was expecting an entire, like lab facility and, it was kind of like that but a lot more welcoming.”



"I have never been so uncomfortable in my life! But I knew in the long run it was better to be safe than sorry!"

"Definitely go for it because if there is something there, better catch it early on."

WAITING FOR A CPS DECISION

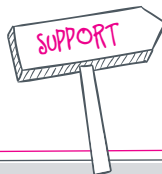


“Waiting for the CPS decision does take time. It can feel as if it is taking years like your happiness and life is on hold but eventually their decision will come through and their decision doesn't determine your life.”

GETTING SUPPORT

“My CYPSVA organised more counselling because I was still really low and suicidal. So she referred me to an agency who were specialised in sexual assault cases. This is where I felt things were getting better. Every week I went to see my counsellor and she helped me pick at all the anxieties and worries about what happened, my future relationships, my current friendships and how all these could (and surely were affected) by the events.”

“I feel like she's helped me come to terms with the fact that it's not my fault.”



“A CYPSVA is someone to talk to who understands, you can talk to anybody but nobody actually understands, but because it's their job and they speak to so many people about it they understand it more, it's just everyday for them, sort of thing. So, yeah, it's just better to speak to somebody who knows what they're talking about.”

“Remember you can talk to people and don't hold it in, it's better out than in.”

“I honestly have no idea what I would have done without my CYPSVA. She's been there every step of the way. I never knew that people like CYPSVAs even existed but I wouldn't be where I am without her. Words can't describe how helpful and how much of an impact she's had on my life.”

“Working with my CYPSVA helped me realise that it's not my fault, everything that happened, that you know, it just, there's nothing to be ashamed of because what happened, happened and you move on.”



PREPARING FOR COURT

"I'm glad I took the chance to view the court before my case because it allowed me to take in my surroundings and meet all of the staff beforehand."



"You get a realisation of the court itself because its hard to think of what it would be like and you get shown where you sit and where everything will be."

"It wasn't so scary on the actual court day, going into the court cos I knew what to expect, I think if I had gone into the court and thought it was something it wasn't I would have been a bit more overwhelmed and a bit more scared. I mean, I was scared but it was a bit more 'I know this'."

“Take it at your pace and be brave because it might not be ok now but it will be.”

"My worst fear was to come face to face with the man of my nightmares. The night before I couldn't sleep, sat up thinking of all the negatives."



“Keep heading straight because there's light at the end of the tunnel. Never stop, always go forward, never turn back.”



"I think my advice to someone who is waiting to go to court after being victim to a crime like I suffered would be to stay calm. Talk about your problems, don't hold them in or when you get to court it will be worse than it should be. Also, prepare yourself, its hard. But I think you shouldn't try to put on a brave face like I did, if you're upset be upset, if you're angry be angry (to a certain extent), but it will be the best decision you have made in your life to even come this far, because believe me, I know it's hard. And I hope you get the outcome you deserve."

GOING TO COURT

“COURT SURVIVAL GUIDE

HOW NOT TO STRESS TOO MUCH

Step 1: Think about all your loved ones and how proud they all are of you

Step 2: Make yourself comfortable (trust me, it helps)

Step 3: Think about 10 things that make you happy

Step 4: Make sure you tell the truth, nothing but the truth (it will come in your favour)

Step 5: Last but not least, relax. I know it's hard and I've been in your situation, twice, but it helps.”



“Throughout the days of my trial the staff were very helpful, making sure you have security with you to make you feel safe. My CYPSVA was extremely helpful during this as she not only offered advice and guidance, she gave me distractions and a shoulder to cry on.”

“I imagined the court would be 1000 x worse than it actually was. I was so scared going into the court room and so anxious, but I was reminded that I'm not the one on trial here, I'm just here to tell the jury what happened.”

“Taking a fidget toy into the court room really helps when you can't keep still.”

“Then we were waiting, it was ages, then they came to get me and I remember walking down with my CYPSVA and she was holding my hand and I remember standing just back on the wall and I was like “no, I can't do this” and the door was open and I was like “I'm out of here” and she was like “no you're not” and I was like “I can't do this” and she was like “no, everything's gonna be fine,” I said “I can't do this, I DON'T want to do this” and she said “it will be ok, everything's going to be fine” and she was reassuring me and everything was fine, she was right.”

“The judge... was really nice, he made it easier cos he wasn't a scary person, he was nice, and he was friendly so it was just easier.”

“It was to me personally awful but amazing. I overcame something I'd feared for months but also had to go through the hardest part of being put on the box and dealt with by the barrister. It's worth it in the end though.”

AFTER COURT



"We'd been waiting all day. My phone rings and it was My CYPsVA and I looked at my Mum and I was like "now is the time" so I answered it and she said, well done and she said are you ready to hear the verdict and I was like, NO! I was scared, I was worried, I was like, what is going to happen, have I done enough, but part of me was also like, I must have done enough."

“Once you're out of the court room you'll feel the relief and it'll be worth it. Keep fighting.”

"How I felt the day after court was awful, I felt weird, and I've spoken to other people about that, so the feeling after court is normal, like I had a bit of me missing, like I'd had everything held in then a bit taken out. I think cos I had to talk about everything and it was all sort of brought forward. I just felt like it was like anxiety times a million, all of the symptoms you could have times a million for a few days."



"Months after court I was stressed, anxious, constantly annoyed at everything and everyone. I kept telling myself every tiara will fall, you just got to pick it back up and keep moving forward towards the crown."

"To others who've been through similar I would say you're not alone. It feels like the weight of the world is crushing you, but with time and support it does get easier."

“Nurse your body, mind and spirit like a robin with a broken wing. Be gentle.”



"It felt like a weight was being lifted off my shoulders."

EWINGS



COPING

"I'm not going to sugar-coat it, I was suicidal and self-harming for a long while. It also felt hard as it felt like everyone was treading on ice around me. I just wanted to stop being a problem. But then a few months ago, I realised that I deserve to be here and I deserve to be heard, just like you deserve to be heard. You have a right to live, have fun, be free to do well and things that bring you joy despite what has happened to you. So the real advice I have to tell you, is to just talk to someone, let them know the situation and make it clear to whoever did this to you, that it's not okay and you are worth more than what they did to you."

“I've struggled and at many points I couldn't see a way out. It's been a huge rollercoaster...”

“As the process continued, I began feeling better bit by bit.”



“...But talking to someone and re-engaging in the things that make you happy. The storm doesn't last forever. It feels like it, but it won't.”



“To help me, I cooked, read, drew and for a while I did nothing. It did not help, I felt trapped, so don't you do that, you need to stay positive and not negative.”

“It's easy said than done, but it's going to be okay. Talk to your CYPSSA about the feeling and thoughts you are having, they are there for YOU! Be proud of you.”

“Boxing really helped a lot because it's bringing strengths out in different ways because you can be strong physically and mentally.”

MY STORY MY FEELINGS



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“ Your wings
are not broken.
Just resting.
Look after them and
they will fly you out.
You survived. ”