



Calderdale Young Advisors

Safeguarding, Sofa Surfing and Homelessness Survey

2023



Calderdale
**Safeguarding
Children**
Partnership

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Brief Summary

A survey about homelessness and sofa surfing was sent to all high schools and the education and inclusion service (who supports elective home educated young people and young people not in education) in Calderdale. It results in a total of 619 responses from 3 different schools as well as some young people who are either educated at home or not currently in education.

Some key findings were:

- Not all students knew what safeguarding was. Some had heard of the word but didn't know the meaning of it.
- Not all students are confident with reporting safeguarding concerns, including reporting concerns about sofa surfing or homelessness.
- The term 'sofa surfing' doesn't make it clear that it includes all temporary sleeping arrangements e.g., sleeping on a makeshift bed.
- Only 25% of students had heard about sofa surfing
- Most young people who had heard about sofa surfing had heard about it through assemblies or skills sessions but that these were too brief and didn't cover the reason why people sofa surf, the signs of, or the risks involved.
- The majority of young people didn't know anyone or hadn't experienced Sofa Surfing themselves, but it is still important that they know the signs and risks involved.

[Watch this video](#) produced by the Young Advisors which outlines some key findings and recommendations.

Introduction

The Young Advisors group chose Sofa Surfing as a project to focus on because Sofa Surfing is a topic which is hard to identify someone who is at risk of, until a disclosure is made.

The definition of Sofa Surfing is 'the practice of moving from a friends or relatives house to another, and sleeping in any spare spaces available, e.g., a sofa or floor. They generally stay for a few days before moving onto a different house.'

Sofa surfing is a form of homelessness.

Context

The Government statistics show that between October to December 2022, 72,550 households were initially assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness, up 4.7% from the previous year. Furthermore, on 31st December 2022, 101,300 households were in temporary accommodation, which is an increase of 5.2% from 31st December 2021. Households with children increased by 6.6% to 62,410".

The charity Shelter have conducted research on [the impact of homelessness on children's education](#). It identified that 'children who are homeless or living in bad housing tend to have lower academic attainment. This is particularly the case for homeless children.³⁷ Homeless children suffer psychological, physical and emotional damage because of the challenges to living that homelessness presents to a child, these issues impact on children's health, development and education.'

Methodology

Following a meeting with the Calderdale Council's Young Persons Housing Team to learn more about Homelessness and Sofa Surfing, the young advisors created a survey to collect responses from Calderdale school aged young people about what they knew about Safeguarding, Homelessness and sofa surfing. The survey was distributed to all Calderdale School Designated Safeguarding Leads, as well as the Education and Inclusion Service to target home educated young people, as well as young people not in education. A further reminder was sent to the DSL network.

Findings

The Young Advisors survey received 619 responses. This is the most responses the group have ever received before.

Although, it received a lot of responses, these were only from 3 schools including: Ryburn Valley high school, Trinity Academy Halifax and Greetland Academy, and some from home educated young people, and young people not in education.

The young advisors provided analysis on the data collected, either in group sessions, or on their own.

Question 1 - Do you know what is the meaning of safeguarding for children?

Safeguarding children is defined in Working Together to Safeguard Children as: *protecting children from maltreatment; preventing impairment of children's health or development; ensuring that children are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care.*

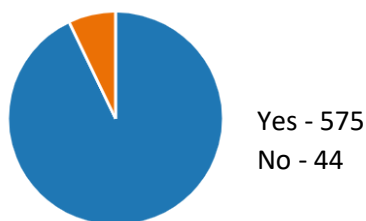


Yes – 501
No -118

The majority of responses were yes, I understand the meaning of Safeguarding. However, the Young Advisors felt like a lot of young people are familiar with the word Safeguarding, but not the meaning. They

wondered if including the definition on the question may have skewed the results. It is concerning that 19% of respondents did not know what safeguarding was.

Question 2 – Do you currently live in Calderdale?



The majority of young people who responded live in Calderdale. Some of the schools who responded sit on the border of Bradford and Kirklees so some students will live outside of Calderdale.

Question 3 - How are you currently being educated?

- Secondary School/Grammar School – 607
- College/Sixth Form - 1
- Home-School - 2
- Pupil-Referral Unit (PRU) - 0
- I am not currently in education - 2
- Unsure - 4
- Other – 3

The vast majority are being educated in secondary school/ grammar school. However, when investigated further, there were no responses from any Grammar Schools in Calderdale.

There were 2 responses from electively home educated young people, and 2 who were not in any education. However, when comparing this to the responses to question 5, it is concerning that 2 students at school age, are not accessing any education at present.

4 responses were unsure, so we are not aware of their current education status.

3 responses were other, which could include the response received from Greetland Academy.

Question 4 - What school do you currently attend?

We were only able to identify 3 schools: Ryburn Valley High, Trinity Academy Halifax and Greetland Academy.

Next time we do a survey, we will use dropdown lists to ensure that we don't get any silly responses as we missed the opportunity to capture where these young people were being educated.

Question 5 – Which age bracket do you fit into?

- Below 11: 3
- 11-12: 167
- 13-14: 273
- 15-16: 170
- 17-18: 0
- Over 18: 0
- Prefer not to say: 6



The majority of young people who answered the survey were aged 13-14, followed by aged 15-16 and aged 11-12. The YA's had predicted that more results would be received from secondary schools, and that year 7 and year 8's would be more likely to respond, as older and college age students simply ignore requests and GCSE students are under pressure already. However, these responses contradict their predictions to some extent.

The survey was not intended for Primary children, but some responses were received from Greetland Academy who have connections with secondary schools, so it was likely it was sent to them via the high school.

Question 6 - We'd love to know, what does Safeguarding mean to you?

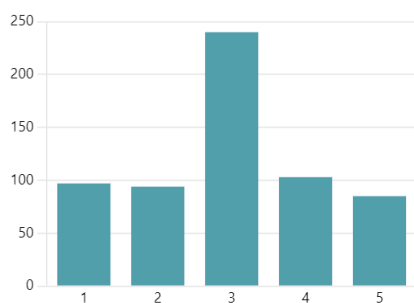
463 of the 619 responses replied with what they thought safeguarding was. The results show 249 of the responses said safeguarding is *the safety and protection of people*, while a further 148 say it's *the protection of under 18s*. Furthermore, there are 45 responses saying safeguarding is only one or two of the following: *safety online, protection in school or protection at home*. 21 responses said that *safeguarding is looking after someone*.

However, 103 responses replied with they don't know what safeguarding is. The group were surprised that so many people didn't know what it was. 29 responses didn't answer the question or didn't give a suitable response i.e., a joke response. 19 responses said safeguarding doesn't mean a whole lot to them. The final 5 responses simply copied the definition given to them in question 1.

Although lots of people said they understood the meaning of safeguarding in question 1, when asked to give their own answer of what safeguarding meant, they weren't clear and may not have answered honestly to question 1.

Question 7 - On a scale of 1 to 5, How confident do you feel that you could raise a safeguarding concern?

(1 representing least confident and 5 representing most confident).



8The majority of responses rated their confidence as a 3, with the rest evenly selecting the other options. The Young Advisors estimated that the responses wouldn't be very high, probably a 2 or 3, because Young People are embarrassed to answer this question honestly. They know who to go to for support, but don't want others to know this. Schools need to make pupils feel more confident in answering honestly.

The least responses were for level 5 indicating that a lot of young people are not fully confident in raising a safeguarding concern.

The Young Advisors said that most schools will be asking students to complete the survey in lessons/form time, so everyone knows what everyone else has put so this impacts on how they will answer. The young advisors felt there is a need for teachers and senior leaders to allow young people to complete these questionnaires in safe, private spaces to get more honest responses.

Question 8 - Who would you typically discuss a safeguarding concern with and why?

The majority of young people that answered question 8 would confide in parents, teachers and friends however a large amount feel they have nobody.

The data shows that 216 of the respondents would go to their parents for reasons such as having close bonds with their parents and therefore trusting them with information. It would benefit young people if parents knew more about safeguarding in order to educate and help their children. Three people also mentioned within their parents' answers that they would go to the social services with their parents to report the issue.

The second biggest category for responses was nobody/I don't know which had 122 responses. Through this we can see that 122 people don't feel they have the support around them to talk about safeguarding issues or didn't have the knowledge to know what the best next step would be in this situation. To better this there could be an increased safeguarding presence in school so that people always feel they have a member of staff to go to if they don't have that close bond with their parents. Further education for schools could also be put in place.

The third biggest category of responses was teachers with 110, this is positive because it shows how teachers are seen as trustworthy by a lot of students. One response said that they would go to their teachers as it's within their duty of care.

Safeguarding staff had 61 responses. Reasons given included that they are trained in dealing with this type of problem so they will be better prepared to help. This shows that some students do trust safeguarding staff, but not as much as they do with their lesson teachers. The group were surprised that Safeguarding Leads/ support was so low as some schools have whole teams of safeguarding officers to support, however they are not very well known by students. Students may not always know what they look like, or they are teachers that students do not feel are friendly and easy to talk to. Teachers need to make themselves known to students, i.e., go into class and introduce themselves to form a positive relationship.

The second to lowest category was friends which had 28 responses, when asked why people said that it's because their friends are trustworthy, however the young advisors felt that friends aren't always the most reliable when it comes to getting help so it's good that this category is low.

The lowest category mentioned was online with 4 responses; they said that they would go to websites such as ChildLine to get professional but anonymous help.

It was evident from responses that reactions would be dependent on the situation such as where it's happening and who it involves. Also, many teenagers would only go to people who they already have a good connection with instead of an unknown professional first.

Some joke answers were provided that couldn't contribute to the data analysis.

Question 9: Have you ever heard of Sofa-Surfing?

This is the practice of moving from one friend or relative's house to another, sleeping in whatever spare space is available, floor or couch, and generally staying a few days before moving on to the next house. People sometimes refer to it as couch-surf when travelling and or sometimes because they are homeless. (Wikipedia)

The Young Advisors predicted that most young people would not know what sofa surfing is, and if they did, they would only have a brief understanding it, and not fully understand it. They thought that most students would not know the risks associated with this. A lot of them had not heard of sofa surfing before joining the young advisors. Most have not been taught about it in school, and different schools have different levels of teaching about sofa surfing.

The group think it happens very little but it's still very important that we identify who is at risk and offer support. They feel it is becoming more common amongst teenagers, with more austerity, and less support from social services.

The findings support their prediction and shows that the majority of respondents hadn't heard of sofa surfing. Only 25% said they had heard about it or said they have heard about it but don't understand it fully. This indicates that some schools aren't teaching students about it.

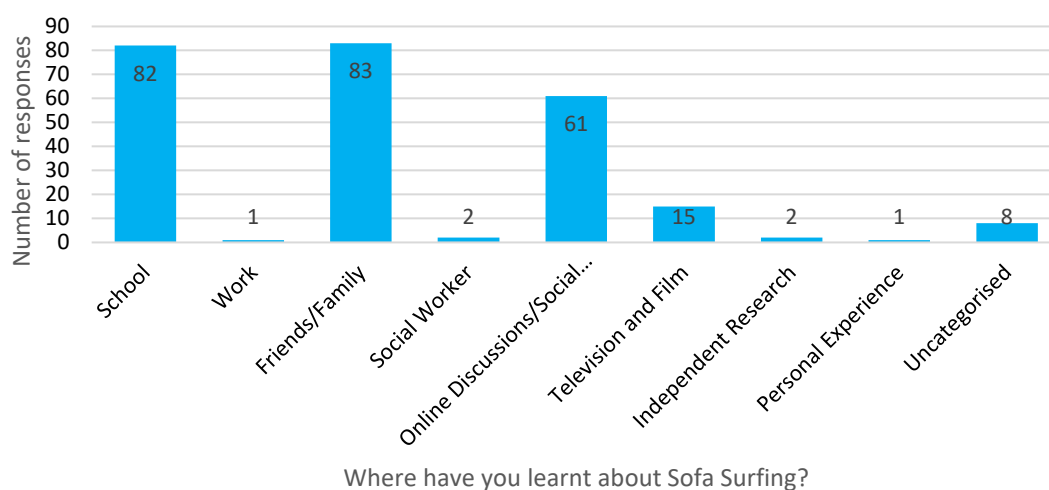
The group agreed that they should not have included the definition straight away as young people may have answered more honestly and given us a truer picture.

Question 10: Is the definition above helpful in explaining Sofa-Surfing?

The Young Advisors felt that the definition explains Sofa Surfing well and is understandable and is Young Person friendly which was supported by the responses in the survey as people said the definition had helped them understand it a bit more, but there were some people saying they didn't understand what the definition was telling them.

Question 11: If so, where have you previously learnt about it?

This question will only be responded by the people who answered yes to Q10.

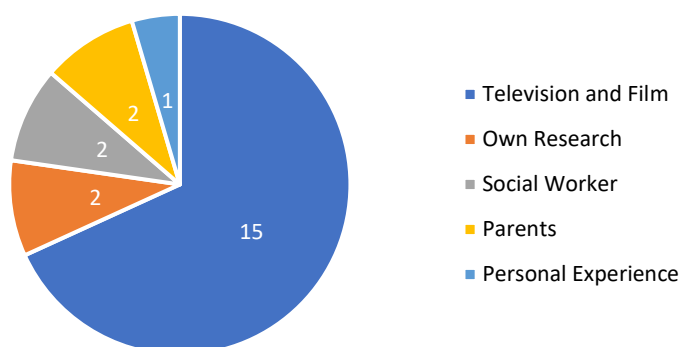


The most common answers from the survey were online, school or family/friends which tells us some schools are sharing it and that some people are hearing about it from reliable sources.

Other responses included a large proportion informed from Television and Film which was not an option the Young Advisors had thought of. Other factors that were not considered by the young advisors were young person conducting their own independent research, being informed of the issues by somebody outside of the role of Family/Friends, such as a social worker, and a person's own experience with sofa-surfing. It is important that young people experiencing homelessness of sofa surfing understanding their difficulty fully and know where they could find help for their situation.

Parents has also been listed separately for two responses which can be integrated into Family/Friends.

'Other' responses to Question 11.



Social media posts and in school are where some of the Young Advisors had heard of sofa surfing.

One group member had heard about it via a poster on an Instagram post. Another member said they had a brief teaching of it through school, 'Learning for life' on an extended form time, but didn't feel they received enough information about it, and that the topic was brushed over too quickly whilst discussing homelessness in general.

Question 12: How was this Sofa-Surfing information delivered?

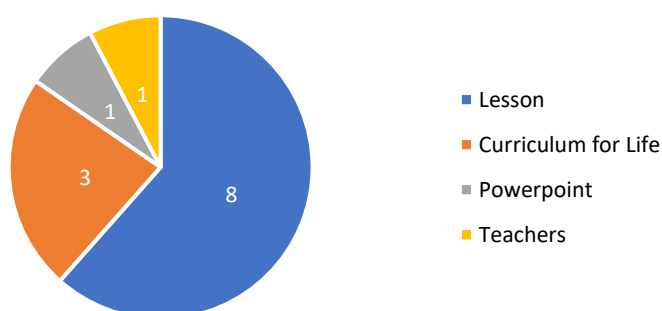
Only people that answered 'school' for Q11 were asked to respond to this question.

- Assembly - 34
- Workshop - 4
- External Talk – 9 (someone external coming into schools e.g., a charity comes to talk about it)
- Question & Answer - 10
- Skills Session - 10
- Other – 15

The Young Advisors thought that skills session, or assembly would be the most popular answer for Q12, and this prediction was supported by the results as the main answer was 'assembly'.

The group felt that a session with more interaction and engagement e.g., a workshop, would stick in students minds better than just a talk in assembly. A Question & Answer session could also have more of an impact if it's from a perspective of someone who has lived experience of sofa surfing or homelessness.

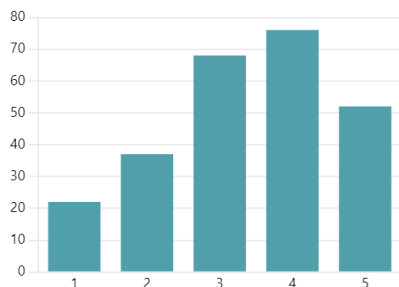
'Other' responses to Question 12.



'Other' ways students had been informed about sofa-surfing in a lesson, rather than in a formal session specifically covering sofa-surfing. This could be combined with the 'other' response of being taught about sofa-surfing by teachers. One young person also said that they were informed of sofa-surfing by using a PowerPoint, which while vague, would likely apply to an assembly or lesson.

Moreover, it seems that Trinity Academy Halifax runs sessions which they call 'Curriculum for Life', which seem to reflect the definition for a skills session, and as such, those 3 responses should likely also be paired with that category.

Question 13: On a scale of 1 to 5, How effectively was Sofa-Surfing explained as an issue?



Most people selected 3, 4 or 5 which is quite positive. However, some selected 1 or 2 indicating that further, and better education is needed on the topic.

Question 14: Do you have any criticisms over how Sofa-Surfing was explained?

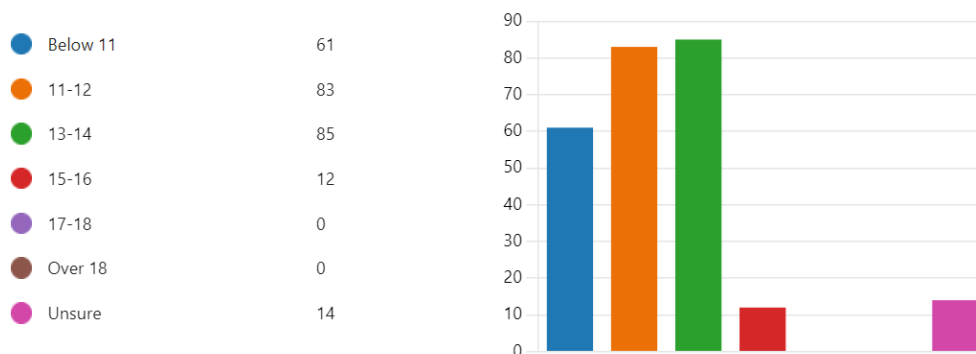
Most people put 'no' even if they scored low on the previous question. Other responses included:

- Need more detail
- Didn't explain the reason why people sofa surf.
- Didn't explain the dangers or consequences of sofa-surfing
- Didn't explain the impact on people who sofa surf

Others felt their explanations of sofa surfing were good:

- It was explained well
- It was a good explanation as my friend who experienced it explained it and how he and others may feel about it.

Question 15: At what age did you learn about Sofa-Surfing?



The group predicted that the highest response would be 14 year olds which was supported by the findings. The young advisors were surprised at the number of people who were 11 and under (61) as they felt that the topic was more appropriate to teach to students in high school, as high school aged students would be more at risk of it than primary aged students, and younger children don't always understand the topic. No responses were received from 17-18 or 18+ because no 6th forms or colleges responded to the survey.

Question 16: Does the definition given at the start of this section match your current understanding of Sofa-Surfing?

Only respondents who responded yes to question 9 were asked this question.

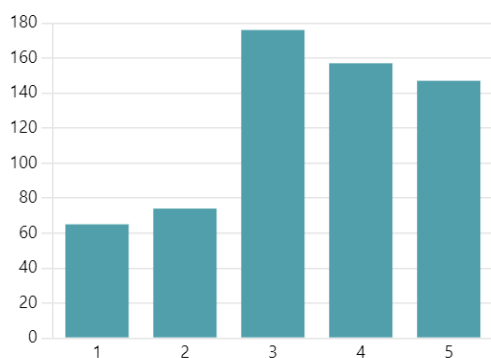
The vast majority of people said yes (230) meaning the definition on the survey matched peoples understanding. 25 were unsure or felt it didn't not match their understanding. The group thought that their own understanding, and other Young Peoples understanding of sofa surfing would be much more simplistic than the definition from Wikipedia, which was quite professional, but it is a helpful definition.

Question 17: If not, what was your personal definition for Sofa-Surfing?

Although many people said the definition didn't match their understanding, their responses indicated that they did in fact understand it to an extent.

The group discussed that the term 'sofa surfing' doesn't make it clear that it can also include staying in a bedroom or makeshift/ unorganised space or arrangement, many may assume that the term sofa surfing just means moving and sleeping from sofa to sofa. Furthermore, research from Crisis found that the definition does little to capture the complex realities or provide any insight into the damaging consequences of sofa surfing.

Question 18: On a scale of 1 to 5, How confident do you feel in your current understanding of Sofa-Surfing?



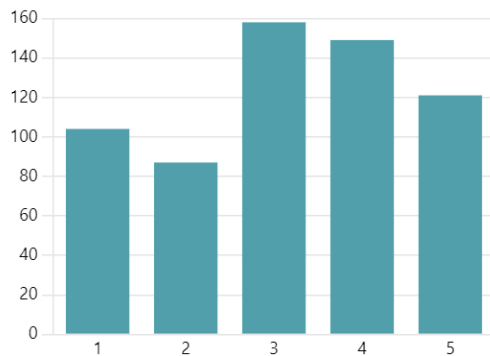
Most people selected 3, 4 or 5 which suggests they are somewhat confident with the understanding. However, there were still a number of young people who selected 1 or 2 indicating that they still have a lot to learn about sofa surfing.

The group thought that the majority of responses would have been from people who had been taught about sofa surfing rather than have experienced it. They said that most will have just been given a basic outline of what sofa surfing was if they had been taught about it, and not necessarily what the risks or impact are. If more people had experienced it, a higher proportion would have selected 4 or 5.

The group said they would want more people to have selected higher confidence levels as it's important that young people know the risks and impact of sofa surfing. There is an opportunity for awareness raising; professionals or people with lived experience could go into schools and talk about it. The group felt that it would be better to do it in assembly rather than lessons as it hits more people but to make it stick in peoples mind more, it should include a question and answer session.

We asked each of the Young Advisors to rate their own knowledge of sofa surfing. All young advisors said they could explain what sofa surfing means with confidence (4 or 5 out of 5 on the scale) but that was mainly because they had covered the topic in depth for the purposes of this survey.

Question 19: On a scale of 1 to 5, How aware are you of the risks and impacts of Sofa-Surfing for young people?



Although the results indicate that a lot of people are aware of the risks, the group felt that not many people would actually know the risks involved. Sofa Surfing is a soft name for it and doesn't sound that bad. Unless you have experienced it, you are not going to know what toll it will take on someone or the risks and impact that come with it. The lessons they have received only discussed the mental health risks, not the physical risks. Young People need to know more about the risks.

We asked the group if they knew any of the risk involved, they said:

- Risk of not having access to hygiene facilities.
- Insomnia / affect sleep pattern– difficult to sleep in different places all the time.
- Higher blood pressure with the anxiety/stress involved.

Question 20: Do you feel you would be able to recognise the signs that somebody is Sofa-Surfing?

| | |
|--------|-----|
| Yes | 242 |
| No | 135 |
| Unsure | 242 |



The group thought that the main response would be No or Unsure, that a lot of people don't know or are unsure about the signs of sofa surfing. However, 39% said they could recognise the signs of sofa surfing. We did not ask for follow up question to confirm these figures, it would have been good to know what young people think are the signs of sofa surfing. Furthermore, we did not ask if young people had been taught the signs as part of any education that they had received, which would have been good to know.

The Young Advisors thought that having someone with lived experience talking to students would be a more engaging story, and they would be able to teach the signs of sofa surfing. There may be an opportunity for the Young Advisors group to link in Calderdale Council's Young Persons Housing Team who are working with people who have lived experience.

Question 21: If yourself, or somebody close to you was in this situation, who would you feel comfortable reaching out to, and why?

Approximately 52% of those who participated in this questionnaire mentioned that they would reach out to Parents, trusted adults, teacher, safeguarding team, family, friends or the police because they trust them.

Approximately 9% of people answered I don't know, or no, showing that they wouldn't be comfortable reaching out for help or that they weren't sure on what they would do in this kind of situation.

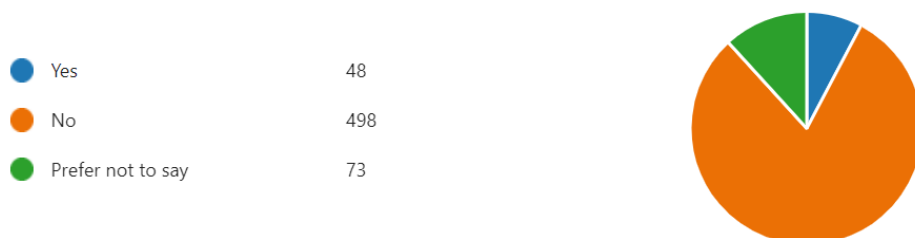
The remaining answers tended to just be a case of 'yes', they would reach out. Some included reasons as to why they would reach out, such as it being unsafe, and some even mentioned that they would offer to let them sleep at their house (depending on who it is). A couple of individuals suggested talking to or using ChildLine, homeless shelter or other websites.

There were also the odd couple of joke answers. There also seemed to be some answers which appeared to be just to get through the questions faster, this could suggest that a shorter questionnaire is needed in the future.

The group discussed who they would feel most comfortable telling if they were at risk/experiencing it. Many would tell a trusted friend as they think the repercussions of telling an adult could be intimidating. Some would tell/ involve a friend and get them to support them to tell an adult. Many schools and colleges have safeguarding leaders/ child prefects that you can talk to, and many feel more comfortable talking to them.

Some people may be worried about the stigma about sofa surfing so might not tell anyone. We need to make it clearer to Young People that they should not be embarrassed if it is happening to them, and that help, and support is available.

Question 22: Have you, or somebody close to you experienced or been affected by Sofa-Surfing



The majority of responses were no which was expected by the young advisors group. Many won't know anyone close that has been affected by sofa surfing, or they may want to keep it private. People are cautious and don't want to tell people about it or they may prefer not to say as it gives too much away, so most will say no even if they have.

Question 23: If you are comfortable, please share your journey, how you overcame the challenges, what support you received? How life is now? What advice would you give to those experiencing similar situations?

This was an optional question, so people had the opportunity to skip - only 34 responses were given to Question 23.

13 of the 34 responses given were young people who expressed they didn't have anything they wanted to share or didn't know what to provide as their answer. 3 more of the responses were nonsense answers which do not provide any wealth of detail to a young person's experience. An additional 3 answers were 'yes' which could be interpreted to mean that these young people did overcome the challenges of sofa-surfing but did not wish to share their experiences, however due to the lack of depth to these answers – it should be noted that is interpretation only.

15 of the 34 answers can be used to provide insight in experiences of sofa-surfing, although this is a low number compared to the collective number of young people who answered the survey overall there are still common themes across the answers.

6 of the answers are based on a young person's friend or family members lived experience of sofa-surfing – 4 of these answers were young people's fathers who had to sofa-surf, one young person explained 'this affected me because I couldn't see him as much as I wanted' and another young person shared 'we wasn't able to help him due to him stealing and his intakes'. These answers show that young people in Calderdale are also impacted by sofa-surfing from the lives of those close to them even if they are not experiencing sofa-surfing first hand.

1 answer explained how they helped someone who was sofa-surfing to get a house.

7 of the answers were from young people who had experience of sofa-surfing themselves – 4 of the 7 answers explained that the young people had overcome the challenges of sofa-surfing and their lives were currently going well. The 3 remaining answers were from young people who shared their first-hand experiences but not the outcomes, these were the answers Young Advisors found most impactful:

- One young person explained how they sofa-surfed around family houses ‘because my dad couldn’t pay for his house fully so we couldn’t move in and the owner of the house we were living in kicked us out’. This example shows how young people can be affected by sofa-surfing due to financial issues of parents/carers and contrary to popular belief it is not always because of their own behaviour or their own decision to leave home.
- Another young person shared ‘I sofa surfed for 2 months, and received no support or help’ – this young person doesn’t explain why they received no support or help but it could be due to peers or teachers not understanding the signs of sofa-surfing for a young person that they were unaware this young person’s situation or due to the fact the young person didn’t feel comfortable reaching out for support or know how to access support at the time.
- In addition, another young person shared their story of their mum and family, ‘we moved around from place to place on a general basis. we did settle in one house when she got the money, but it got very messy, and we had to go. we kept moving and on our last trip...we got put into a foster system. I was separated from my brothers... things have been like this for 6 years’. Although this young person has intervention from social care after their experience of sofa-surfing this case shows the lasting impacts sofa-surfing can have for young people and their families without preventative and early intervention.

One stand out piece of advice received from a young people with lived experience of sofa-surfing who overcame the experience was ‘tell someone about it and don’t be afraid of speaking for yourself’.

Question 24 - We would really appreciate any feedback that you feel is necessary, and if there are any issues we may have not covered above.

The vast majority did not have any feedback.

The survey did receive some good feedback including:

- It was a great survey
- I have learned a lot
- It is helpful to know what to do if you are in these situations

Others provided constructive feedback which are themed below:

- Use less tick boxes and more open answered questions
- Make questions easier, and more interactive.
- Make the survey shorter
- Explain why we are collecting the data and what we are using it for.
- Some of the branching questions did not work

Some Young People said they wanted to know more about the reasons for Sofa Surfing and the risks involved.

There were also some silly responses to this question.

Recommendations / Action Plan

The Young Advisors group will produce a 'reel'/ video to share the key findings and following recommendations to both professionals and young people:

Recommendation 1: A Myth Busting Poster should be created to educate Young People on Homelessness and Sofa Surfing. This poster should include the definition of Sofa Surfing and raise awareness of the signs and risks of sofa surfing. Schools and other organisations need to share this poster with young people in Calderdale.

Definition: Sofa surfing is staying for short periods with different friends or family because you have nowhere to live. Even though you may have a temporary roof over your head when you sofa surf, you are still classed as homeless.

You might be staying with friends, family or even people you don't know very well. Perhaps you are sleeping on people's sofas or floors, moving around from house to house or staying with someone who is taking advantage of you.

You have rights to help you find somewhere to live long term. You do not have to wait until you are on the streets to get help.

Recommendation 2: Young People's Housing Service to consider delivering more in-depth question and answer sessions to students in schools and youth settings on homelessness and sofa surfing. These sessions need to cover the definition, the risks and signs, and myths of homelessness and sofa surfing. Consider delivering these sessions with people who have lived experience of it.

Recommendation 3: Young Peoples Housing Services to offer support to schools to develop 'Homelessness Ambassadors'. These ambassadors will be young people who other students can go to for help, advice and signposting. The Young Advisors can support with writing the job description/role.

Recommendation 4: Young Peoples Housing Service should capture the stories/lived experience of young people who are going through homelessness or sofa surfing, and share these stories with Calderdale Safeguarding Children Partnership.

Recommendation 5: Services in Calderdale to be encouraged to use social media to distribute information on sofa surfing and homelessness as this is the best platform to engage with young people.

Recommendation 6: Calderdale Safeguarding Children Partnership to raise awareness of what Safeguarding is with Children & Young People.

Recommendation 7: Schools need to ensure that Safeguarding Staff are more visible and well known by students, so they know who to go to if they have any safeguarding issues.