

Highlight report: Children and Young People's Webchat service

“[it’s a] good [idea] because CYP don’t feel included when it comes to domestic abuse”

Produced by Helen Berry and Sarah Morton, Matter of Focus
July 2021

About Matter of Focus

Matter of Focus is a mission-led company and certified B Corp based in Edinburgh.

We work with organisations, projects and programmes to explore, map, analyse and assess the outcomes that matter to them, the people and populations they care about, and their funders. We provide tools and techniques to bring together evidence, data and evaluation to ensure that projects and programmes can meet their outcomes, are successful and adaptable, and can demonstrate that success to funders, service-users and other stakeholders.

We have created an innovative and easy to use software tool, OutNav, that enables public service organisations and funders to make effective use of their data and information to learn, improve and tell the story about the difference they make.

Matter of Focus is led by Dr Ailsa Cook and Dr Sarah Morton. Ailsa and Sarah are internationally renowned thinkers, both well known for their ability to develop practical tools backed by robust evidence-based approaches, with extensive experience of delivering solutions for public service organisations.

CONTENTS

Background	4
Setting the scene	4
Glossary	4
About the CYP Webchat pilot service	5
About domestic abuse	5
What the service hoped to achieve	5
The context for the CYP webchat	6
Our approach to supporting this evaluation	6
Awareness raising and promotion	7
📍 Highlight findings	7
Participation and consultation	10
📍 Highlight findings	10
Supporting children and young people using the service	13
📍 Highlight findings	13
Summarising the learning and outcomes	15
Appendix One: Pathways to impact for the Webchat pilot	16
Pathway 1: Awareness raising and promotion	16
Pathway 2: Participation and consultation	17
Pathway 3: Supporting children and young people using the service	18
Appendix Two: Data sources and evidence included in this report	19

BACKGROUND

Setting the scene

Scottish Women's Aid (SWA) is the lead organisation in Scotland working towards the prevention of domestic abuse. In 2020/21 Scottish Women's Aid piloted a webchat service providing direct support to children and young people experiencing domestic abuse.

Matter of Focus is the evaluation partner for this work. Matter of Focus is a mission led company that supports organisations to understand if and how their actions really do make a difference for the people and communities they care about.

This **Highlights Report** is written by Matter of Focus and draws together evaluative evidence gathered by Scottish Women's Aid between November 2020 and April 2021, highlighting key points of learning and impact.

This report is organised by three different processes or activities undertaken by the pilot project; awareness raising and promotion, consultation and participation (with CYP who have used support services for experience of domestic abuse), supporting children and young people using the service. Each section provides 'highlights' and further discussion of the evidence in support of outcomes at each step in the journey from action to impact. Relative to the third heading, supporting children and young people using the service, the discussion is brief reflecting the progress of this work within a short timeline.

Glossary

In this highlights report, we use the following terms and abbreviations:

"CYP"	Children and young people
"CYP Webchat"	The pilot webchat service for children and young people offered by Scottish Women's Aid from 1 December 2020 to 31 March 2021, which is the subject of this evaluation
"Domestic abuse"	Domestic abuse is a pattern of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and/or violent behaviour, including sexual violence, by a partner or ex-partner.
"Participation"	Creating safe and inclusive spaces whereby CYP can express their views and experiences, ensuring that there is a ready audience and that those views and experiences influence action where appropriate – participation implies shared decision-making.
"Consultation"	Giving space, time, support and information to CYP to enable them to express their views and experiences meaningfully on a set issue.
"Outcome map(s)"	To help make explicit or 'map' the steps between the activities that you undertake and the outcomes you hope to achieve, we use an interactive approach called outcome mapping. It separates out different types of outcomes at the level of reactions, knowledge, skills and capacities, changes in behaviour, policy or practice, and at the level of longer-term social change.
"Pathway(s)"	Having created and refined an outcome map that represents your work as whole, we then break down the outcome map by focusing on specific sets of stepping stones that link together to tell a story. We call these sets, pathways.

About the CYP Webchat pilot service

Many years' experience of participation work with children and young people has told Scottish Women's Aid that children and young people want a service that is just for them, not an extension of adult services. The choice of developing a webchat service in particular was guided by the [Improving Justice in Child Contact](#) project, a partnership project across five European countries and hosted by the University of Edinburgh, where the young expert group indicated that a webchat service felt safer for young people to use. Children and young people's input has also shaped Scottish Women's Aid's understanding that children and young people impacted by domestic abuse want to speak with someone who 'gets it', that is who is specifically informed by their understanding of domestic abuse.

The CYP Webchat pilot was an additional service added to the Scottish Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline (SDAFMH) from 1 December 2020 to 31 March 2021. It was one in a parcel of developments funded by the National Emergencies Trust as a Covid-19 emergency response and ran as a pilot project to explore this type of support and how it might be delivered.

About domestic abuse

Scottish Women's Aid offers the following definition of domestic abuse,

"Domestic abuse is a pattern of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and/or violent behaviour, including sexual violence, by a partner or ex-partner. Domestic abuse is overwhelmingly experienced by women and perpetrated by men. It doesn't matter how old someone is, what race or ethnicity they are, what class they are, whether or not they are disabled, or whether they have children – anyone can be a victim of abuse."

Although children and young people may not relate to the language of 'domestic abuse', they can be affected by harmful and abusive actions both in their family lives and in their own relationships. The Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 identifies children as potential victims of abuse and allows the judiciary to impose harsher sentences when children are involved. Local Women's Aid groups offer direct support to children and young people affected by domestic abuse. Nationally, the Scottish Women's Aid participation lead has created supportive spaces for enabling young people with experience of domestic abuse to inform policy and practice, for example with regard to child contact in situations of abuse and here, in designing the CYP Webchat service and how it would be promoted to children and young people more widely.

What the service hoped to achieve

The aims of this short-life CYP Webchat pilot project were to:

- pilot a webchat for children and young people who are experiencing domestic abuse
- consult with children and young people who have experienced domestic abuse and received support from Women's Aid on how best to shape the webchat service
- make sure that other services know that Women's Aid provide direct support services for children and young people
- gather resources and learning to then support local Women's Aid groups in developing webchat services to children

The focus of this evaluation is defined by three 'pathways' to impact (see Glossary):

- Awareness-raising and promotion
- Consultation and participation (with children and young people)
- Supporting children and young people using the service

These divide the outcomes sought by different processes or activities - and therefore different journeys to impact - and form the structure of this highlights report. It was felt to be especially important for this project, as a learning piece, to invest in evaluation to sit alongside of the work and to capture the learning as fully as possible.

The context for the CYP Webchat

The CYP Webchat service operated during the second wave of Covid-19 in Scotland which included school/service closures amongst a range of other restrictions. It had been anticipated that schools would be the main site for promotion of the webchat service to children and young people. This had serious consequences for the project being able to channel information resources to children and young people experiencing domestic abuse and seems very likely to have affected engagement with the service. While the consultation was able to draw in children and young people already receiving support from local Women's Aid groups, the project was unable to reach children and young people not in touch with provision, as is often the challenge in consultation and participation.

Scottish Women's Aid works with a network of 36 Women's Aid groups across Scotland, learning from their work with women and children affected by domestic abuse, to influence effective responses to domestic abuse in legislation and practice. The connection between domestic abuse and Covid-19 lockdowns has been widely recognised and reported as an issue of serious concern.

Our approach to supporting this evaluation

Matter of Focus is a mission-led company that supports organisations to understand if and how their actions really do make a difference for the people and communities they care about. For this evaluation we used an approach based on Contribution Analysis, which is well-suited to understanding and evaluating complex, people-based initiatives. It is a 'theory of change' approach, which makes explicit the 'theory' or thinking as to why desired changes are expected to happen.

This approach involves two main stages:

The **first stage** involves working collaboratively with key people involved to understand the unique context of their work and to set out or 'map' how the work contributes to the intended outcomes. We capture this as a series of steps on a pathway to impact, following the headings below, that keeps people at the centre through the different levels of change. The pathways were created with the Scottish Women's Aid Webchat team.



In the **second stage** the map is tested and refined through various forms of data collection with participants and other stakeholders, to create a nuanced and well-evidenced account of the impact of the

work – to make sure that we can make strong claims that the actions taken have led to the changes we see. Evidence-gathering is scaled appropriately to the complexity and scope of the work.

The final distinctive aspect of our approach is that we use a colour coding system where appropriate to provide a visual representation of the progress made for each stepping stone in the pathway and your confidence in the supporting evidence.

	Great Progress	Some Progress	No Progress
High Confidence			
Some Confidence			
Low Confidence			

The pathways to impact developed in support of this project are shown in Appendix One. These have been colour-coded by the project lead within Scottish Women's Aid to give a visual picture of her self-assessment of the project's progress (where the boxes are left white, the project lead felt unable at this stage to make judgments on these). The coding therefore offers a data source in itself, showing the project lead's experience and understanding. The data sources used to support the creation of this highlights report are listed in Appendix Two. The data provided by Scottish Women's Aid have been reviewed independently by Matter of Focus.

AWARENESS-RAISING AND PROMOTION



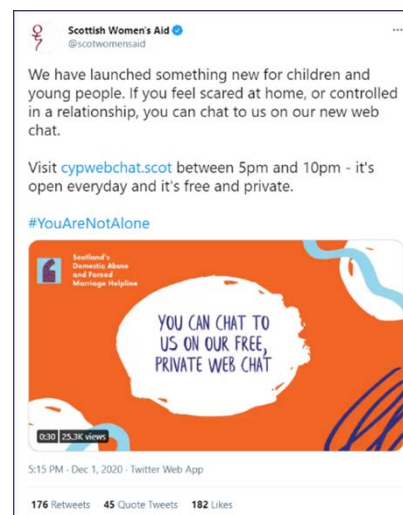
Highlight findings

- A targeted social media campaign took place, including promoted posts and Insta stories, with a combined reach of over 500 000 children and young people.
- The flow of publicity material and information to potential referrers and in turn to children and young people themselves was severely disrupted by Covid-19 lockdown and school/service closures.
- There was good engagement by local Women's Aid groups including support for the idea, and some engagement by external partners in promoting the service.
- The service drew positively on wider experiences/knowledge of operating webchat support.

What the project did and who with

In order to reach young people, the project promoted posts introducing the Webchat service into the timelines of 13 to 17 year-olds on social media platforms. Social media analytics were gathered from 20 November 2020 through to 12 February 2021 showing a combined reach on Facebook of over 100 000 young people, on Twitter over 400 000 and Instagram, 2500.

Publicity materials were created (with further information about this process provided under ‘participation and consultation’, below) and distributed – however the flow of this information to people who might refer, and thereby to children and young people themselves, was interrupted due to Covid-19.



Three groups within the local Women’s Aid network engaged in supporting the consultation with children and young people (described in more detail below). Materials and information about the webchat were sent to all groups to distribute to their local communities and use on their own social media channels. Some local groups gave feedback showing their support for the idea behind the service (“it provides similar support to what women – who have experience of domestic abuse – engage with”). Scottish Women’s Aid shared regular updates on the webchat across the network and the engagement of the local Women’s Aid groups was felt to be a key strength.

External partners such as Children in Scotland, Education Scotland, Young Scot and Youthlink were invited to share publicity about the service, with the contacts made creating conversation points. The project scoped out national services available for children and young people in Scotland. Email trails show the ways in which external partners (national organisations) were using their own networks and resources to publicise the service.

The project was felt to be successful in exploring good practice to inform service development. In particular, Childline was involved in giving training input specific to providing webchat support to staff directly delivering the CYP Webchat service.

How people felt and what they learned and gained

Through the connection made with Childline, the project team gained knowledge and skills directly relevant to delivering a webchat service, with the project lead, experienced in facilitating children’s participation, noting specific differences in providing support through this medium.

“

Working on the webchat was a totally new experience for me, as a children’s worker I found supporting children and young people over text a really different experience to face to face work. I am so glad I had the opportunity to take part in skills training before it launched, I found that really useful.”

Project lead Scottish Women's Aid

Having completed the training with Childline, webchat handlers cascaded this to additional, sessional workers.

It is hoped that external partners have an increased awareness of Women's Aid services to CYP. Email correspondence from partners shows warmth and enthusiasm for the webchat service. Of four responses to an online survey completed by youth workers, all were aware that young people can experience domestic abuse in their own relationships and three of four were either 'very likely' or 'somewhat likely' to refer a young person experiencing abuse to Women's Aid.



What people did differently

The project team reported network benefits of having worked on this project, for example a greater confidence in referring children and young people to Childline ('a place we can happily refer to'). In turn, Childline have included in their information for their call handlers, information about Women's Aid services for children and young people.

For the webchat service, existing helpline policies were adapted to suit children and young people's needs. The webchat pilot provided the impetus to refresh helpline and webchat policies for the SDAFMH also – in particular to make these more inclusive of support requirements for children and young people and to realign webchat and helpline to be more equal in status. One call handler commented that, "the learning we gained from the CYP Webchat has increased our ability on the SDAFMH to offer more direct signposting for children and young people who experience domestic abuse".



"the pilot has been a great opportunity and valuable to our processes within our existing service. We had an incredible amount of learning which we think will be of great support to groups in local areas"

Call handler, Scottish Women's Aid



What difference this made

At this stage, it has not been possible to gather sufficient evidence of whether children and young people experiencing domestic abuse were in general made aware of the webchat service. Low uptake means that the difference in support for children and young people is confined to the experience of a small number of individuals at this stage.

PARTICIPATION AND CONSULTATION



Highlight findings

- 28 children and young people with experiences of domestic abuse informed the development of the service and the design of publicity materials.
- The design of the service and of the publicity material clearly reflects the children's and young people's input. Avatars were developed for the website responding to children and young people's wishes for a welcoming look and feel.
- The consultation provided valuable insights into the perspectives of children and young people e.g. around the language to use when speaking about domestic abuse.



What the project did and who with

Key areas of activity here included: consulting 28 children and young people in three local areas (Angus, East Dunbartonshire and Borders – so covering rural and urban geography); co-design of publicity materials with children and young people; and a short survey of children and young people who took part in consultation.

All of the 28 children and young people consulted had experience of domestic abuse and of receiving support from a local Women's Aid group. Posters co-designed with the children and young people were sent out to partners and shared on social media. Children and young people who contributed to the consultation were also invited to complete an online survey to express their feelings and experiences around the consultation.

Children and young people's contributions confirmed the importance of having a dedicated service: "something for kids as it is hard for them to have the opportunity to express what they can't at home"; and that young people may be "more comfortable with typing, it's more anonymous, they are likely to say more".



"Children don't have control, THEY NEED TO TALK ABOUT IT BECAUSE THEY CAN'T MAKE THE DECISION TO GET OUT of the situation so they need support of how to get through"

Young person



How people felt and what they learned and gained

Through the consultation, Scottish Women's Aid gained valuable insights into the views of children and young people. These relate to the colour palette and design of the posters, what should and should not be asked of children and young people contacting the service, and the language that makes most sense to them.

Two young people who took part in the initial consultation completed an online survey about that experience. Both agreed that 'they felt heard and that their views were listened to' and that 'what they said was valued'.





What people did differently

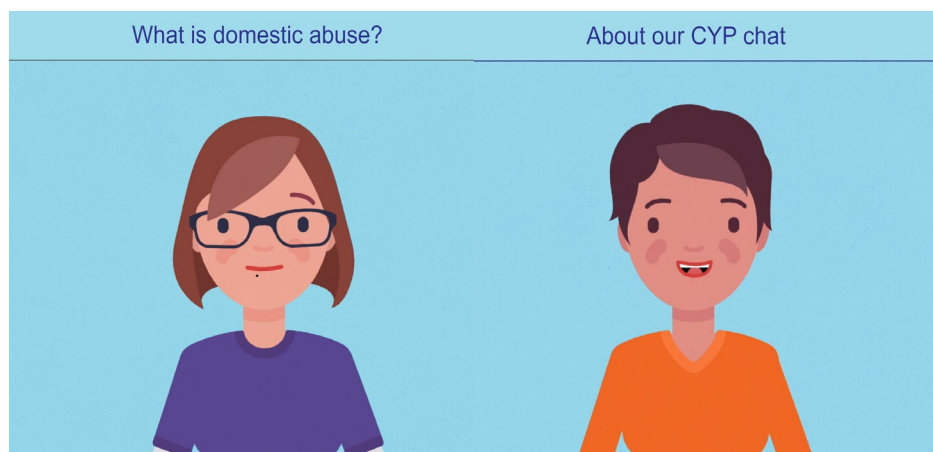
There are a number of specific examples of how the design of the Webchat service followed children and young people's views. Children and young people were asked their age on contacting the service, as those consulted felt this would be an important guide to how to speak to the child or young person. Children and young people were not asked for an email address to be contacted back, due to safety concerns, i.e. that the abuser may be monitoring their device. The timing of the Webchat, 5-10pm, was also decided by children and young people's views.



"If something is bothering me it gets to me at night or when it happens – like when my Dad does something to my Mum and that's more likely to be at night"

Young person

Children and young people wanted the website to look fun and inviting. This, in tandem with Scottish Women's Aid's experience that children and young people find it difficult to process too much written information when they are worried or fearful, led to the creation of two avatars for the website. These used the real voice of those working on the webchat to explain what domestic abuse means, and what they can expect from the webchat service. The aim of the avatars was to make children and young people feel more comfortable, as well as meeting the needs of those who find it difficult to read text on screen. Using subtitles and a sound control button, it was possible to watch silently if it felt unsafe to play the avatars. Some local Women's Aid groups added the avatars to their social media for promotion.



CYP webchat avatars



Children and young people offered comments on the draft design of publicity materials, and again these were adapted accordingly. They also provided the text for the speech bubbles on the posters.



Posters reflecting children and young people's language and preferred colours

A really important learning point from the consultation is the term 'domestic abuse' is not relatable for children and young people. It was found that younger children preferred to use feelings words to describe their experiences, such as feeling safe/unsafe, or scared. Older young people, who might be experiencing the abuse in their own relationships, related better to language such as 'toxic' or 'unhealthy' relationships. This is invaluable learning for reaching out to children and young people in future. Arriving at an agreed language for reaching children and young people remains an ongoing challenge.

Language offered for younger children who are experiencing domestic abuse from their parent	Language offered for older young people experiencing abuse in their own relationships
<p>Feeling scared to go home</p> <p>Are you scared to go home because of the fighting or shouting at home?</p> <p>Use words like scared at home</p> <p>Hurting at home inside and out</p> <p>Speak about</p> <p>aggression/shouting/control/rules</p> <p>Anxiety and shouting</p> <p>Arguing at home</p> <p>Hurting on the outside and inside at home</p> <p>Feelings and actions – sad, scared/ hurting, shouting</p> <p>Focus on feelings</p> <p>Being scared or worried because you have to go to dad's</p>	<p>Toxic relationship x2</p> <p>Unhealthy relationship x3</p> <p>Controlling relationship</p> <p>Describe relationship with – control/makes you sadder than happy/toxic relationship</p> <p>Controlling relationship with examples – checking through phone/ asks for passwords/makes you question yourself</p>

Sample feedback from children and young people during the consultation



What difference this made

That the service is child and young person-led is supported by the ways in which the service and publicity were adapted to meet the children and young people's hopes and expectations. Scottish Women's Aid provided both payment and feedback to the children and young people who contributed, to show that they were valued. To ensure that children and young people who took part in the consultation could see and understand what impact giving their views had had on the webchat service, Scottish Women's Aid produced an easy-to-read young person's feedback leaflet, shown below.



Young person-friendly feedback leaflet

The two young people who completed the online survey agreed that 'what they had said made a difference to how the webchat was designed', and that it 'made a difference' having young people involved in this way.

SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE USING THE SERVICE



Highlight findings

- An additional channel specifically for children and young people was added to the existing webchat platform for the duration of the project.
- While very few children and young people contacted the Webchat, the contacts that were made were described by handlers as 'full on' and included a case where a young person was linked into local support and another that was passed to the Police because the young person was felt to be in immediate danger.
- Engaging children and young people was the key challenge in relation to this pathway to impact.

Funding for this webchat service was part of a Covid emergency response, recognising that children and young people affected by domestic abuse were isolated and not able to seek face-to-face support or access support from their usual support networks during this time. The project lifespan coincided with the closure of schools and many other services due to the pandemic. As well as contributing to children and young people's isolation, this also makes it more difficult to promote information to them.



The particular timing of this work means it is very difficult to draw general insights around children and young people's likely engagement with a webchat service and their responses to the support provided. Post-chat feedback questions were not in the end answered, so it is not possible to provide the views of children and young people who used the service. The experience of Scottish Women's Aid on the SDAFMH is that post-chat feedback is generally low, given the emotions involved at the time of calling and how draining the calls can be. Further exploratory work would be needed to provide evidence relative to the pathway to impact here (see Appendix One) – in relation to reaching children and young people (especially those beyond existing supports), how they feel, what they learn and gain, do differently, and how this contributes to overall outcomes. Experience so far implies that social media campaigning alone did not generate uptake of the service – during this particular time at least. We could recommend that any local Women's Aid groups trialling webchat services continue to monitor patterns of use very carefully, so that these can be better understood.

SUMMARISING THE LEARNING AND OUTCOMES

The CYP Webchat pilot can be understood as a learning piece. While staff members experienced frustration with the low levels of contact with children and young people during the pilot period, this can be seen as first, exploratory phase of work, to be continued by local Women's Aid groups. We can summarise the learning points as follows:

- **Learning relative to the offer**, i.e. the timing, and what information the webchat handler should and should not ask of the child or young person.
- **Learning about language**, that the term 'domestic abuse' does not work for children and young people and that children and young people need wording that is differentiated by age.
- **Learning around the publicity materials** that are attractive to children and young people.
- **Practice learning** about how to run a webchat service well – call handlers also felt that this project has elevated recognition of the webchat element within the SDAFMH

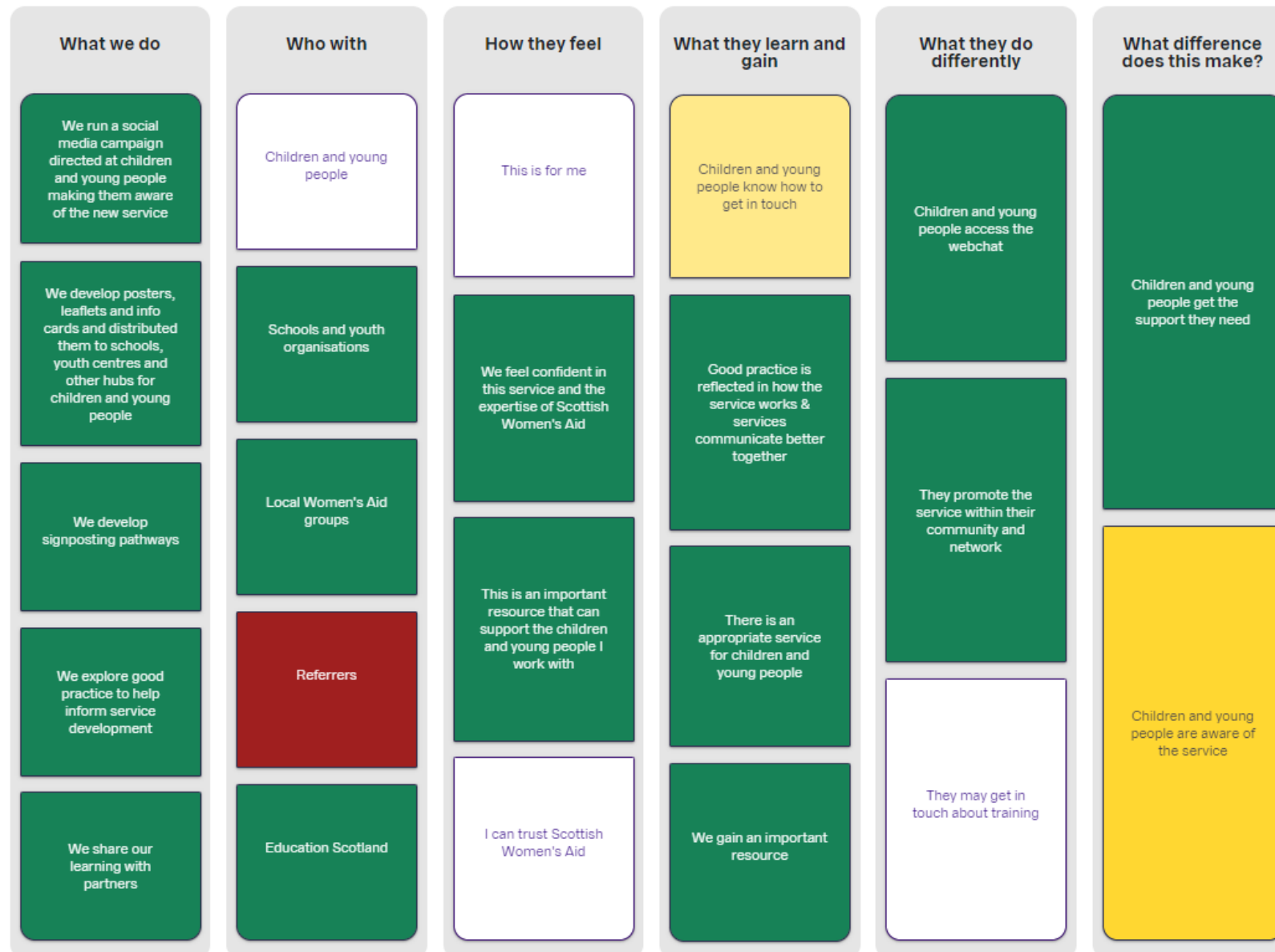
One of the impacts of this project is having developed a closer relationship between Childline and Scottish Women's Aid - including drawing on Childline's experience of operating a webchat service and ensuring that Childline has included Women's Aid services for children and young people in their information for call handlers. During practice reflection, the call handlers involved in the CYP Webchat reflected that the experience of this project has elevated the status of the webchat component of the SDAFMH, bringing it onto a par with the telephone helpline. The three call handlers that worked on the CYP Webchat, in addition to the project lead, also benefited from an increased focus on the specific needs of children and young people and can now contribute this to their ongoing role on the adult service. The SDAFMH has also refreshed its practice resources, policies and procedures - including being more alert to child and young person friendly language. The internal impact of the work, relative to Scottish Women's Aid and the connection between the national organisation and local groups, was perhaps less well anticipated within the pathways to impact initially created for this work.

A key strength of this project emerging from our analysis of the pathways to impact relates to 'participation and consultation'; that children and young people were meaningfully engaged in this process, gave a quality of feedback in their responses and that this feedback was demonstrably used to shape the final offer and publicity material.

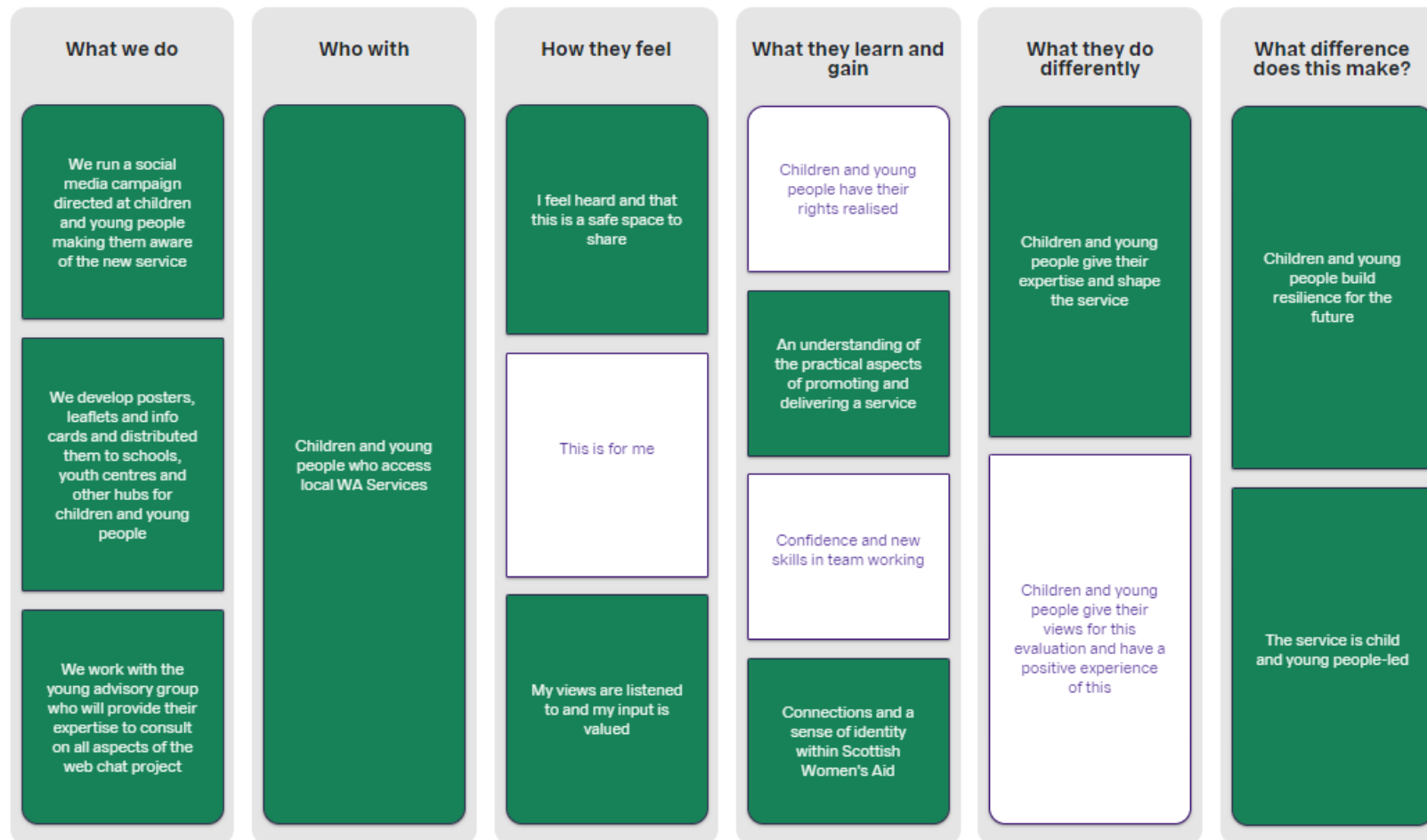
Finally, the project will lead to the bringing together of a resource pack for local Women's Aid groups that wish to further develop their services to children and young people by offering webchat support - covering the planning, consultation, learning and outcomes. Given the low levels of engagement with the pilot service during its short life, it has not been possible to gather sufficient evidence of impact in relation to the service itself, and we would recommend that further work by local Women's Aid groups to develop services to children and young people includes ongoing monitoring and evaluation of patterns of use including user feedback - for which the pathways to impact developed for this, national work, offer a useful framing and an important resource.

APPENDIX ONE: PATHWAYS TO IMPACT FOR THE CYP WEBCHAT PILOT

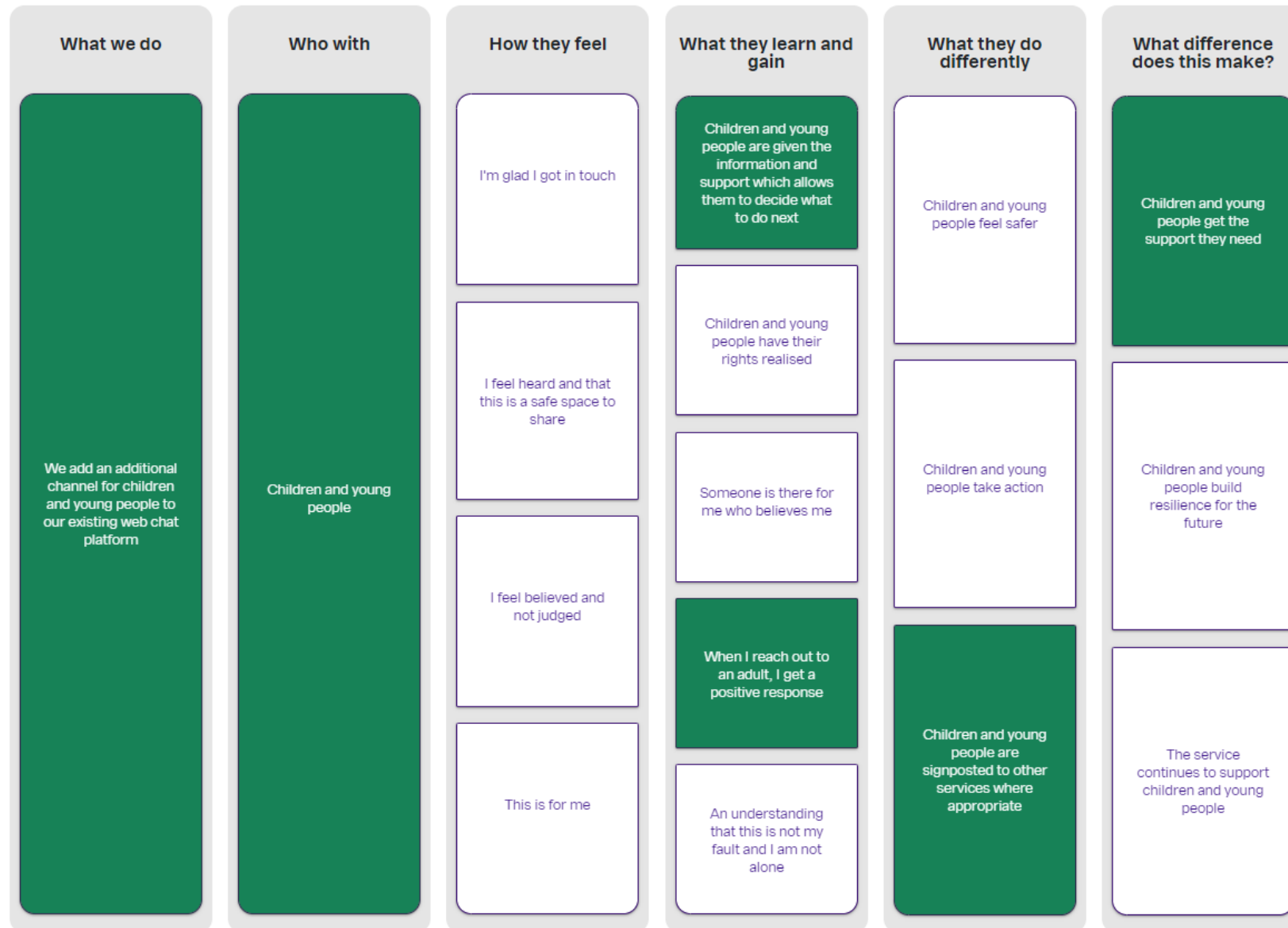
Pathway 1: Awareness raising and promotion



Pathway 2: Participation and consultation



Pathway 3: Supporting children and young people using the service



APPENDIX TWO: DATA SOURCES AND EVIDENCE INCLUDED IN THIS REPORT

Evidence reviewed and included

People included	4 members of the project team 28 CYP who took part in the consultation 2 CYP who provided feedback on their experience of the consultation
Processes	Reflective impact log completed by the team independently and then reviewed by Matter of Focus with the project lead Consultation with CYP in Angus, East Dunbartonshire and Borders aged 8-18 years and using Women's Aid local support (28) Informal feedback via email from partners collated Progress reporting
Data collection	Survey of CYP who participated in the consultation (2) Survey of partner organisations (4) Social media analytics

Data sources

Source	Date
Email correspondence/meeting notes with partners	
Social media analytics	To February 2021
Posters created for children and young people	
Consultation report (young person friendly)	
CYP consultation materials and responses	
Survey with CYP who consulted	
Survey with partner agencies	
Progress report	
Reflective impact log (tool for gathering practice reflections for evaluation, developed by Matter of Focus) completed by four call handlers of the CYP webchat project	April 2021