

# SAM'S STORY



## Addressing bullying cultures in schools through art, stories, drama, helping hands and a cwctch.

'Sam's Story' is the culmination of a large-scale consultation by the Children's Commissioner for Wales, with over 2,000 children and young people and nearly 300 professionals' views about contemporary experiences of bullying in Wales. An analysis of the material from children and young people and professionals produced key findings in a report with recommendations for the Welsh Government, schools and local authorities published in July 2017.

### 'Sam's Story: Listening to children and young people's experiences of bullying in Wales.'

This case study shares some of the process and provides practitioners with ideas of how to use 'Sam's Story' to explore gender-based and sexual bullying in the wider context of children's rights and equity.

When a child is bullied their rights, under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), are being violated. Key to preventing bullying is instilling a rights-based approach in schools. See the Children's Commissioner for Wales' report **'A Right Way, a children's rights approach for education in Wales'** for further information.

## Gathering experiences through stories

To explore children's perceptions of bullying, 'Sam's Story' engaged children and young people in projective exercises which allowed them to express their feelings and experiences through an imaginary character called 'Sam'. The Commissioner's team asked children to tell 'Sam's Story', specifying that Sam was their age, from their community and was experiencing bullying. Sam's gender was not specified. For primary-aged children a range of simple templates were provided to support them to create a picture, cartoon or written narrative. Alongside the templates, the Commissioner's team provided scaffolding questions which could be used to help children structure their responses to include possible solutions for change as well as Sam's experiences.



'Sam's Story' enabled the Commissioner's team to understand what identity-based bullying looks and feels like. **Identity-based bullying** refers to any form of bullying related to the characteristics considered part of a person's identity or perceived identity group (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2010). This can include their disability, gender, gender identity, race, religion or belief or sexual orientation. These are referred to as protected characteristics by the Equality Act 2010.

## An insight into Sam's experience: stories and drama workshops

Through the many visual images and written stories that were received about 'Sam', 'Sam' became the voice of the bullied, the bully and the bystander, and a complex social world of bullying cultures emerged. 'Sam' was often portrayed as being different to other children in some way and this was implicitly or explicitly linked to being the target of bullying cultures. Social pressures to conform to a range of norms included issues such as physical appearance, disability, poverty, ethnicity, religion, sexuality and not conforming to gender stereotypes. Some children talked about how difficult it was to break free of social norms, even if they wanted to.

As well as gathering written and visual material, the Commissioner's team engaged groups in freeze frame drama workshops. This enabled participants to place themselves within scenarios that might reflect Sam's experiences. Groups discussed the impacts of bullying and possible solutions for change. To try this out go to the DIY activity, **Freeze Framing Bullying**. All the written and visual material as well as notes recorded from the freeze frame workshops were analysed and presented as findings along with recommendations for Welsh Government, Schools, and Local Authorities in the report **'Sam's Story: Listening to children and young people's experiences of bullying in Wales.'**

## Example: Story written by a primary school pupil

Once upon a time, there was a little girl called Sam and she was new to her school. She was friends with all the popular girls, until suddenly, she saw a football outside.

She said, "Do you want to play footy?" to the popular girls

"Ewww, no. That's a boys game, you weirdo" the popular girls said "Why do you even like that?"

Sam began to feel sad and worried. She wanted to tell someone but she was worried it would make it worse. She kept feeling mixed emotions because they kept following her around and calling her mean names.

So then she classed it as bullying because they were doing it constantly. She wanted to tell someone, but she was afraid that if she did, it would change from verbal bullying to physical bullying.

Sam sat down at lunch, on her own, then another girl who was sat on her own came over.

She said "Hello, do you want to be friends?"

Sam said "Yes, but I'll warn you...I'm a bit of a tomboy"

"That's OK, me too"



A number of children's rights in the UNCRC are threatened or denied in the many descriptions of bullying that we received as part of 'Sam's Story'.

Particularly relevant are:

All children and young people have rights and no child or young person should be treated differently.

Article 2

You have the right to be protected from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and bad treatment.

Article 19

You have the right to an education.

Article 28

The right to survive and the right to develop.

Article 6

Children have the right to an identity.

Article 8



"Everyone needs educating on why people are different, awareness raising e.g. my friend has spasms and makes involuntary noises and people think she is stupid because she can't talk so they laugh at her – she understands all this and is very intelligent (community ambassador group)

"All students should do anti-bullying weeks where they think through the consequences of bullying and how it makes people feel and talk through solutions and how important it is to talk – we did this at my school and it helped" (community ambassador group)



### Locating 'Sam's Story' in a whole school approach to healthy relationships education

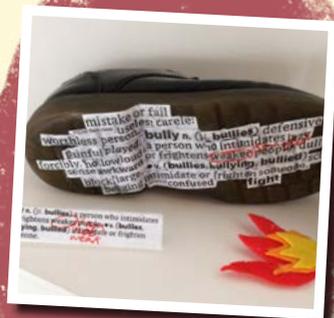
After listening to young people's experiences of bullying, one of the Commissioner's key recommendations from this work was that children and young people of all ages have time to reflect on and discuss their relationships. Children benefit from opportunities like circle time and other fora in which they can reflect and discuss peer relationships and behaviour.

'Sam's Story' activities created space for further discussion and reflection on the experiences that children shared through taking part in the activities. In November 2017, the Commissioner published resources for both Primary and Secondary Schools, these resources provide practical ideas and activities for teachers and pastoral support officers linked to the curriculum.

Penygawsi Primary School took a whole school approach to delivering the original 'Sam's Story' **special mission**, developing a series of differentiated lesson plans for each key stage and adapting existing resources. The Commissioner's team worked with a teacher at the school to co-produce an anti-bullying resource which showcased the whole school teaching approach Penygawsi took. Read it **here**.

## In our shoes: Taking Sam's Story messages to the National Assembly for Wales

In November 2017, the Commissioner exhibited a selection of images and words, created and authored by children and young people, gathered as part of the 'Sam's Story' consultation. This was an opportunity to highlight the real impact that being bullied is having on children's lives in Wales, bringing these messages directly to public visitors to the National Assembly for Wales and decision makers based there.



A group of young artists as part of the group, Criw Celf, contributed an artistic response to the material we originally gathered, exploring the idea of putting themselves in 'Sam's shoes'. The group of young artist were provided with a selection of the visual images, written stories and blogs we received for the group to reflect on and discuss. The group used an old pair of shoes as a starting point for their individual responses, adapting and adding new materials and objects to create their own contemporary three dimensional art.

## The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)

The Public Sector Equality Duty requires schools to take action to improve outcomes for pupils with different protected characteristics. It is a legal requirement, under the Equality Act 2010. The PSED can be used as a helpful mechanism to tackle identity-based bullying and implement a preventative whole school approach that teaches children good relationships and conflict resolution skills from an early age and ensure clear strategies for recognising and tackling identity-based bullying when it occurs.

## Addressing Bullying Cultures in School

### What is bullying?

Bullying is the abuse of social and cultural power relations that are persistently directed towards targeted people or groups of people over time. It can be covert or overt and expressed in verbal, physical, psychological, material, or technological ways.

### What can schools do?

Bullying behaviours frequently reinforce what is socially and culturally acceptable (e.g. what a 'boy' can wear or where a child should live). Individual or groups of children and young people who are perceived as 'different' from the 'norm' are frequent targets of bullying.

If bullying behaviours are understood as the micro-expression of wider persistent social inequalities, best practice for schools is to work towards interventions that address bullying cultures in the context of rights, equity and social justice.

Best practice includes developing whole-school policies and practices *with* children, parents/carers and the wider community to develop **proactive and affirmative** interventions that:

Advance awareness of **children's rights** to be safe and free from discrimination and harm

**Celebrate** (not tolerate) **difference and diversity**, and understand how bullying behaviours, related to protected characteristics, are interconnected.

Measure progress of successful activities that promote difference, diversity, rights and social justice more widely, as part of a

**whole-school equalities plan**

Situate anti-bullying work in the wider context of an **equity and social justice** approach to health and well-being.

Support and celebrate whole-school **child-led action campaigns** and research projects to evaluate progress

(NB. student ownership is paramount to successful interventions, and allows them to raise areas of change that matter to them)

## DIY

# IDENTITY CWTCH

Supporting children to explore different aspects of identity and belonging in the context of Article 8 (UNCRC) - children's rights to have an identity

- 1 Introduce the fictional character 'Sam'. Specify that Sam is their age and from their community, but do not specify any other details, such as gender or faith or disability.
- 2 Discuss the multiple meanings of CWTCH (i.e. a cupboard, a cuddle, a safe place).
- 3 Provide each child (or pair of children) with a box and a coloured pipe-cleaner. Let them know that they will be making a stick figure of Sam and a 'Cwtch' for Sam to live in.
- 4 Make a human figure from the pipe cleaner. This will be Sam. As they are making Sam, encourage children to reflect on what Sam's Story might be. Who is Sam? What does Sam look like? Where does Sam live and who with? What does Sam really enjoy doing? Is Sam scared of anything? What dreams might Sam have about the future?
- 5 Place the box on its side, so that the two opening flaps become the entrance doors. Decorate the outside of the box (but not the doors) with all the different things, people and places, that make up Sam's life.
- 6 On the outside of the doors write what someone might think or say to Sam if they saw Sam on the street. Choose to write two or more things.
- 7 On the inside of ONE of the doors, write two (or more) things someone could find out about Sam if they spoke with Sam for 5 minutes.

- 8 On the inside of the other door, write two (or more) things that an acquaintance (e.g. neighbour, classmate, family friend) could know about Sam.
- 9 Inside the cwtch write something that only someone who knows Sam really well would know, or that Sam himself might only know [if it is difficult to write inside, open up the box and tape back up again]
- 10 Using the shredded paper, place Sam (pipe-cleaner figure) somewhere inside or outside the Cwtch. If there are enough pipe cleaners and time, children could make other figures to be with Sam (e.g. friends, family, pets, bikes etc.)

### What you'll need:

- Plain cardboard box with one side that opens (e.g. like a cupboard door)
- Coloured pipe cleaners
- Coloured pens/pencils
- Shredded paper

### Close

Remind everyone that each person has a unique identity of which they can feel proud. Remind them that each person's individuality is important to the community and relate this to your group or school values. Ensure all children know who they can go to talk to for support or advice (see the **Safety and Support** section)

### Extension activities

Make a Cwtch Identity wall, or hanging mobile, from the boxes; display in a space for others to view (e.g. you could make the shape of a large shoe, and call it 'Walk in Sam's Shoes'). Accompany the display with inspirational quotes about children's right to an identity; and freedom from identity-based discrimination or abuse (Article 8 of the UNCRC).

Make a **poem, song** or **drama** from some of the stories that each describe a different protected characteristic.

### Reflections

Ask for volunteers to share their cwtch with the group. Explore differences and similarities. Discuss how they found the task:

**Did they think their version of Sam or their cwtch would be the same as anyone else's in the class? in the world?**

**What do people miss when they look at the outside only?**

**Why are identity rights important?**

**What do children need so that their identity rights are protected and realised?**

**How might we share what we have learned with others?**

Before you begin adapting this activity for the children and young people in your setting, read the section on **Safety and Support**.



# DIY FREEZE FRAMING BULLYING

## Addressing the social and cultural pressures that underpin bullying cultures through movement and drama.

- 1 Explain to the group that you are going to introduce an imaginary character called 'Sam'. Give them the following information about Sam: Sam is \*\* years old [choose the age relevant to the group] and is a child in your group or class at school. Sam is being bullied.
- 2 Divide the group into small groups of 4-5, to discuss the following questions:  
Who is Sam?  
What is happening to Sam?  
Where is this taking place?  
Why is this happening?
- 3 Ask each small group to create a freeze-frame showing a scenario that they are discussing. It could be the bullying itself, or a scene before or after. Set ground rules before they set the frame, e.g. no physical contact.
- 4 Groups show their freeze frames to each other. First one group shows and the rest of the class discusses what could be happening while the group stay frozen. Then they come out of role and explain what was happening.
- 5 Ask the groups to consider what advice they would give to 'Sam', if Sam was someone they knew. During discussion, identify and explore with children the underlying values of how and why being picked on/bullied/harassed happens. Why are certain differences targeted? What wider pressures might be at work here? (e.g. gender and sexual stereotypes, poverty).
- 6 **Vital here is to shift the discussion away from blaming or shaming the 'bullies' 'victims' or 'bystanders' and locate each scenario with the wider social, cultural and economic pressures that underpin all bullying cultures.**
- 7 Pair up the groups in the class. Invite one pair to return to their original freeze frame and invite the other pair to create a freeze frame that shows some of the external pressures acting upon the original scenario. Share and discuss as above. What can we do?
- 8 Distribute A4 paper and coloured pens to each child. Invite the group to consider how they can lend a hand to prevent bullying cultures in their peer groups. Ask each participant to draw around their hand on the paper. Invite them to write an action they can do or attitude they can have that will help prevent bullying on each finger. Some examples of statements are: 'Be proud of my identity'; 'Respect Equality'; 'Stand up for rights'; 'Report bullying if I see it', 'Celebrate difference' and 'Speak Up'.
- 9 Children can then decorate their hands and put their completed hand pictures on a table or on the floor. Invite the group to look at the different actions on the hands and consider: how can these actions change our community or school? Which ones can we action now?

Invite and create one large hand from all the little hands to represent how addressing bully cultures and standing up for our rights is never achieved alone and affects us all. We are more, together.

### What you'll need:

Pens and Paper

### Extension Activity

Visit another class in your school, or a neighbouring school. Share what you've been doing.

Make a silent statue from all the freeze frames (i.e. the bullying scenario freeze frame to communicate *what's happening*, and the external pressures freeze frame to communicate *why it's happening*).

Each group could place sticky-notes with how members of the frame are feeling or the pressures they are facing on their body for others to read and ask questions about.

Pass around the 'helping hands' to the audience. Say, 'will you give them a helping hand?'. As they give the hands to the frozen statues, it breaks the freeze.

Reflecting on the process, and using the helping hands, discuss the what, why and how of bullying cultures, and where children can access help and support if any of the issues that have been discussed in the session have concerned them.



Suite of **primary anti-bullying lesson plans and activities** to accompany 'Sam's Story' that provide practical ideas for teachers and pastoral support officers

**Live Fear Free / This is Me** is a Welsh Government campaign that challenges gender stereotypes in a positive way aiming to start conversations about gender and to encourage people to 'live fear free' from gender constraints and gender norms.

**Challenging gendered cultures in childhood to address school bullying**

**Why zero tolerance approaches for LGBTQ bullying can become part of the problem**

**How boys and girls are taught different things about violence**

**How to challenge racism in British schools**

**Bullying that relates to gender or sexuality is the most common form of violence that students encounter in schools, but often goes unchecked**

**Why telling kids homophobia is wrong won't stop bullying in schools**

**Getting Started: A toolkit for preventing and tackling homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying in primary schools**

**Celebrating Diversity Through Pupil Voice: A guide for primary schools**

**Primary Best Practice Guide: how primary schools are celebrating difference and tackling homophobia, biphobia and transphobia.**



Before you begin adapting this activity for the children and young people in your setting, read the section on **Safety and Support**.