



PLANT YNG NGHYMURU
CHILDREN IN WALES

Issue 92
Spring 2025

childreninwales.org.uk

Growing Minds: Shaping Education for Wales' Future

FEATURES

Ara Recovery for All
Amberleigh House
Therapeutic School
Epilepsy Action Cymru
Theatr Iolo

PLUS:

Child Friendly Cardiff
Tŷ Hafan
Children's Legal
Centre Wales



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Welcome from Chief Executive, Hugh Russell

Croeso cynnes, a warm welcome to the Spring edition of Children in Wales' magazine.

This Spring I've been proud to work with my colleagues to launch Children in Wales' **brand new five-year strategy**, which sets out our commitments to making a positive impact for our members, as well as for babies, children and young people directly. The work that went into developing that strategy involved hundreds of conversations with our many stakeholders – young people, members, politicians and others. Those conversations left me with a clear impression that our work is valued and necessary, but also that we have more to do to clarify our role, and to bring our membership offer up-to-date, to reflect the demands and aspirations of a wide-reaching member group ambitious for positive change for babies, children and young people.

Taking that learning onboard, I'm excited to announce that this year will see a **membership refresh** which will bring even more value, engagement and opportunities for our members. Our renewed membership offer will include exclusive access to a range of new features, including an **events calendar**, chock-full of opportunities to learn from and share brilliant practice and ideas, and designed to bring those working with children closer together, to help us to understand one another's work and support our colleagues in areas of shared interest.

More information on the new membership offer will follow, but in the meantime, if you have thoughts on what you'd like to see from Children in Wales, feel free to get in touch. My thanks to those who've contributed so far and to those of you who've recently renewed membership. Your support is very much appreciated.

In our magazine this quarter, we celebrate the progress we've made together to foster an environment where all babies, children and young people in Wales receive the best education possible, including through play-based learning

approaches (an area where Wales remains a leading voice). My thanks go to the Cabinet Secretary for Education for her contribution to this edition, which outlines many of Welsh Government's commitments in this area. While we remain ambitious for progress in this field, it is helpful to reflect on some of the many positive approaches taken by Welsh Government to improving educational outcomes for children, such as the free school meals offered to state primary pupils.

Elsewhere, highlights in this edition include learning about Barnardo's Cymru's *PATHS® Programme for Schools* and how a school in Pembrokeshire is very successfully putting the framework in place. It's also great to read about NYAS Cymru's unwavering dedication to amplifying the voices of care experienced young people; the Centre for Evidence Based Early Intervention at Bangor University making strides in addressing bullying in schools across Wales; and Ara Recovery for All, who are at the forefront of preventing gambling harms among young people in Wales.

Children in Wales is proud to stand alongside all our contributors as partners in this essential work. I hope you enjoy this edition.

Best wishes

Hugh





Working together we can deliver the best for our learners and shape a brighter, stronger future for them

**Lynne Neagle,
Welsh Government Cabinet
Member for Education**



As Cabinet Secretary for Education, I have the privilege to see the excellent work that is taking place in our settings, schools and colleges across the country by our dedicated education workforce. It is clear we all share the same priority, in always putting the interests of children and young people first in our decisions.

Despite a relentless focus on reforming our education system with a new curriculum and a new Additional Learning Needs (ALN) system, there is still more that we can do to improve education.

My focus is on raising standards and attainment, continuing to improve attendance and ensuring the wellbeing of all learners. This is why I am pleased that through our recent budgetary decisions we have increased funding to the education sector by £262.5m.

Our budget is committed to providing a brighter future for Wales, and education is at the heart of this goal. Providing funding to future-proof skills and provide opportunity for all.

Play and learning are not always mutually exclusive. The Curriculum for Wales makes learning more experience-based and gives schools the flexibility to teach in more creative ways that best suit their learners.

Our Early Childhood Play, Learning, and Care (ECPLC) vision places babies and young children's wellbeing, development, and play-based learning at the heart of our approach, ensuring they receive high-quality, nurturing care that builds strong foundations for lifelong learning. The [Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care Resources](#) on Hwb provide valuable guidance for practitioners to create high-quality, inclusive early learning environments for children aged 0-5. These resources help ensure that every baby and young child in Wales has the best start in life, regardless of background.

For all children but especially young children play is something they take very seriously and is a vital element in children's development, such experiences benefit a child's health, happiness, well-being and independence. As learners progress and develop, the way they learn also evolves, the focus remains on active learning and engaging experiences.

Literacy and numeracy are the foundations of learning and are key to improving the Welsh education system. We are working with local authorities and other partners to develop a package of national support for literacy and numeracy that will ensure that all practitioners have access to high-quality training to improve the quality of teaching in these areas.

It's important that we understand the progress that is being made here in Wales, this is why I recently announced our participation in international assessments for literacy, numeracy and science for year 5 learners. Taking part in PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) and TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) will provide us with further information on the progress of learners at younger ages.

High-quality learning is not possible without high-quality teaching. We must understand how children and young people develop and ensure the right approaches are used to meet their

developmental needs. To do these teachers need access to the best professional learning to meet the needs of their learners. From September this year a new national body for professional learning and leadership will be established to simplify and streamline support for schools

We are now into the final year of the initial implementation of the Additional Learning Needs system. The new system will strengthen children's and young people rights and will help ensure earlier identification. Supporting this new system is transforming learning spaces for ALN students. I recently announced £20m in funding to help improve ALN facilities. This is in addition to the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme which is investing £750m over the next nine years to improve existing facilities and create new specialist provision for ALN learners.

Wellbeing is central in successful education outcomes. We want children and young people to learn in welcoming environments, indoors and out, that offer a sense of belonging. Over the last ten years as part of our [Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme](#) we have built 159 new schools, with a further 49 still under construction or in planning stages.

We also know that other external factors can affect a learner's experience in school. This is why we have several schemes in place to support eligible families with the cost of school, such as the Get help with school costs | [GOVWALES](#) to help low-income families buy uniform and sports kits.

We are still the only nation in the UK to offer all state primary school children a free nutritious school meal. A healthy school meal can help with learner concentration and wellbeing enabling them to achieve their full potential. We are able to provide support during the school summer holidays via SHEP 'Food and Fun'. The programme is exactly what it says, providing fun activities and healthy meals to children during the summer holidays. I recently announced a further million pound to support this initiative.

I'm delighted to be working with Minister for Further and Higher Education, Vikki Howells, in supporting post-16 education in Wales. Increasing the visibility of options for post-16 learners,

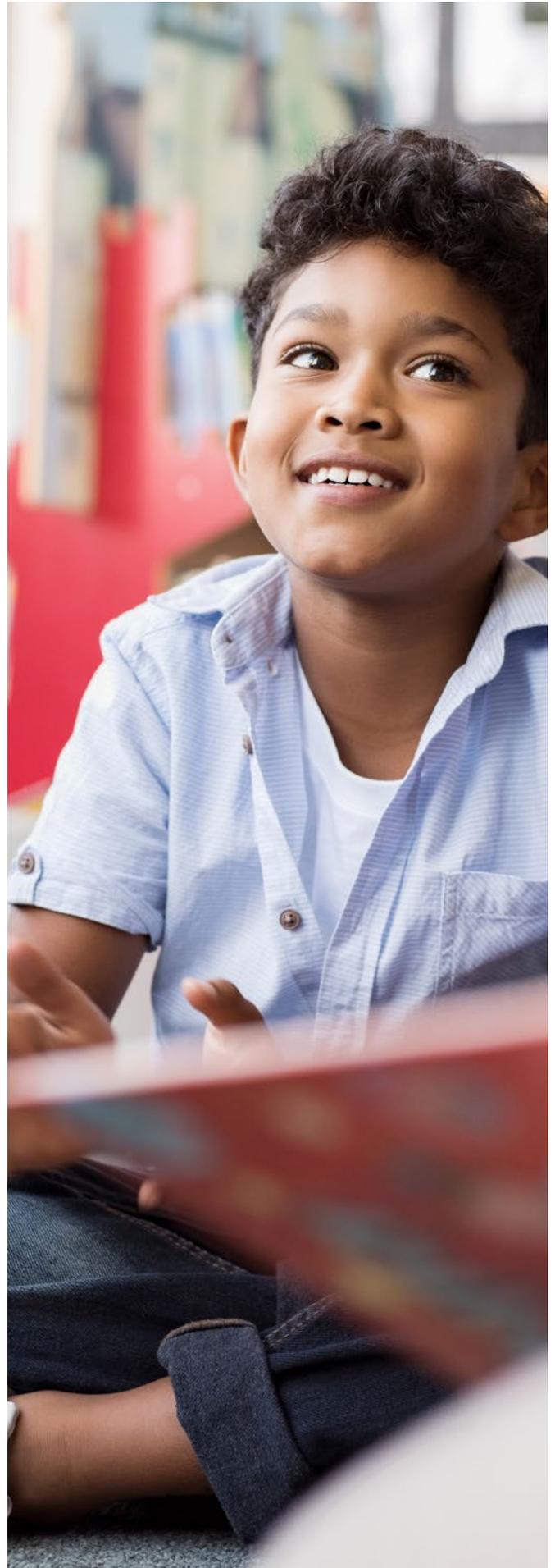
whether it be academic or vocational route is a key focus.

We recently announced that an estimated 3000 post-16 learners in colleges and sixth forms will be eligible for the [Education Maintenance Allowance \(EMA\)](#) following an uplift to the household income thresholds, resulting in more families being able to apply. EMA helps 16 to 18-year-olds from eligible households with further education costs, such as transport or meals.

Raising education standards is a collective responsibility. Working together with the sector we can deliver the very best for our learners and shape a brighter, stronger future for them.



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government





The right to play in schools

Marianne Mannello, Play Wales

Children say that playtimes are an important part of the school day.

98% of the children surveyed as part of the Wales Children's Omnibus Survey (2022) said they look forward to playtime at school. 82% said they especially like playtime as it allows them to spend time with their friends.

Between 2019 and 2022, the Welsh Government undertook an in-depth and collaborative review of its play policy work. A cross-professional steering group of play and playwork specialists and policy officials from across the Welsh Government was set up to support the review.

The steering group considered the range of national policy and delivery initiatives that support children in accessing their right to play across educational settings. The discussions highlighted the need to ensure that play is valued in these settings, not only for instrumental educational outcomes, but also for the immediate wellbeing benefits it brings to children of all ages.

The Welsh Government commissioned Children in Wales – through its Young Wales initiative – to consult with children across Wales about their experiences and thoughts on play. Through this work, children of all ages feel that schools and the education sector are responsible for ensuring that there are sufficient opportunities to play. They are clear that playing is not only important for children in primary school. Children aged between 12 and 18 feel that schools and education providers should allocate more time for play and more opportunities for children to meet up during the school day. They suggested that the review should consider playtime or break time for children aged 12 to 18 in school and colleges.

Teachers also note the benefits of playing, particularly playing outdoors:

- 97% of teachers say that outdoor play is critical for children to reach their full potential
- 88% of teachers say that children are happier after playing outdoors
- 86% of teachers say that playing outdoors gives children a better understanding of the environmentⁱ

Evidence suggests that school playtime initiatives aimed at enriching opportunities to play are linked to a range of improvements in:

- Academic skills
- Attitudes
- Attention
- Behaviour
- Social skills
- Social relations between different groups of children
- Enjoyment of and adjustment to school lifeⁱⁱ

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comment no. 17 emphasises that the playing is of positive benefit to children's educational development and should be facilitated during the course of every day throughout early childhood education, as well as in primary and secondary school. General Comment no. 17 notes that schools have a major role in the promotion of the right to play across the following areas:

- Curriculum demands
- Educational pedagogy
- Physical environment of settings
- Structure of the day

A child spends more than six hours a day and 28 weeks of the year at school, for at least 12 years of life, so children have considerable opportunities to play in educational settings.

Play Wales has a range of resources to help schools support play in school every day:

A play friendly school guidance provides information about policy and practice to help school communities take a whole school approach in supporting children's right to play.

A reading list for teachers – Supporting the right to play in school for those with an interest in improving children's opportunities for playing at school.

Focus on play – Supporting the right to play in schools is a briefing for head teachers, teachers and school governors about the crucial role of children’s play in promoting positive mental health.

Opening school grounds for play is a toolkit to support schools to offer opportunities for children to play at school outside of school hours.

Right to play workshop raises awareness about the right to play, supporting children and teenagers to make the case for better opportunities for to play and meet up with their friends.

[To read the various publications, visit the Resources library on the Play Wales website.](#)

Date for your diary: the International Day of Play will take place on 11 June 2025. It provides an opportunity to draw global awareness to children’s play and schools across Wales have a major role in promoting the right to play for children and teenagers.

ⁱ Prisk, C. and Cusworth, H. (2018) *From muddy hands and dirty faces... to higher grades and happy places Outdoor learning and play at schools around the world*, Learning through Landscapes.

ⁱⁱ Russell, W. (ed.), Ardelean, A. and Smith, K. (2021) *The Case for Play in Schools: A review of the literature*, Bristol, Outdoor Play and Learning. Bristol: OPAL.





What does 'education' look like from birth?

Anna Westall, Children in Wales

Everything is new for me; I need your help to understand and make sense of this big wide world around me.

Babies and young children have the **right** to grow up in a happy, healthy and safe environment where they can flourish and have the best start in life.

The early years is a rapid time of growth and development, babies are developing and learning from the moment they are born as they adapt and begin to understand the world around them.

To ensure that babies and young children have the best possible start in life and have access to their right to education we need to understand how they learn and develop.

Every baby and young child is unique, they are exploring, discovering and developing at different rates. They are impacted the most by their parents/carers and the adults around them, their environment and the experiences they have.

When it comes to **education for babies**, the focus is less about formal instruction and more about creating an environment that nurtures their natural curiosity and helps them develop and learn.

Babies learn largely through their senses their eyes, ears, nose, hands and mouth. As babies grow, they learn to use their bodies to make discoveries. They begin to reach and grasp which allow them to explore in new ways.

Babies and young children learn best by **actively engaging with their environment**. This includes:

- Observing things, watching faces and responding to voices
- Listening to sounds, making sounds and singing
- Exploring – for example, putting things in their mouth, shaking things and turning things around
- Asking questions – for example, 'But why?' and more...

You may have heard the term **'Parents are the first educators'**; parents play a huge role in providing a variety of learning opportunities. Simple interactions between a parent and child can be learning moments, such as talking, playing and reading together.

"When you talk with me, you light up my mind and help my brain to grow..."

The little things you do, will make a big difference, now and in the future.

Take a look at the [Talk with me | GOV.WALES; Parenting. Give it time. | GOV.WALES](#) and [Teulu Cymru | GOV.WALES](#) websites for more information, ideas and resources.

All those working with babies and young children in Wales have an important role to play in shaping early experiences that help babies and young children thrive. High quality play, learning and care in the early years are essential in supporting each child's development, and practitioners are key to creating nurturing, engaging environments that respond to individual needs.

In Wales we have Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care (ECPLC) vision ([Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care \(ECPLC\) | GOV.WALES](#)) and resources ([Early childhood play, learning and care in Wales - Hwb](#)) which place babies and young children's wellbeing and development at the heart of early years provision. The ECPLC Plan sets out Welsh Government's vision for high quality early childhood experiences, ensuring all babies and young children (0-5 years) receive nurturing, play-based learning and care. It emphasises **inclusion, child development, workforce support and collaboration** across services to improve outcomes and reduce inequalities.

The [Early childhood play, learning and care in Wales - Hwb](#) Resource, work together to support childcare, play and school practitioners provide high quality provision for babies and young children from 0-5 years of age. The resources focus on what is important for babies' and young children's development and how we can best support them to grow, learn and develop in ways that suit their stage of development.

We also have a specifically designed curriculum that has been co-constructed with practitioners to support children at the very beginning of the 3 to 16 learning continuum, to ensure they have the best possible start on their journey [Curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings - Hwb](#)

We need to work together if we are to support babies and young children to thrive and have the best start and provide an effective environment where they can learn about their rights and be supported by engaging experiences and supportive adults.

To find out more about the Rights of babies and young children visit: [Children in Wales | Early Years Resources](#).

Give plenty of time to listen to me and take a real interest in what I have to say/share. I find it easier to talk and play with an adult I know and trust.

I have my own individual and unique personality; I just need help to work this out. Watch me to see what I do; and get to know my family and who I am.



The Children's Rights in Early Years Network (CREYN) are holding an **Early Years in Practice: Research Informed Practice conference on 21 May 2025 in Cardiff.**

The Minister for Children and Social Care will open the conference and there will be a Keynote presentation from Professor Jane Williams entitled: *"Research - informed - practice: What does it mean when working with young children."*

A selection of workshops will also be on offer, including the Children's Commissioners Office; Early Years Settings; Save the Children and NEST Framework.

We will also be launching the Wales wide **Baby Voice Pledge**, which sets out what a baby needs from their grown-ups (parents, carers or guardians), what their grown-ups need and what society needs to do for babies and their grown-ups. To book a place visit:

[Children's Rights in Early Years Network \(CREYN\) Annual Conference: Tickets, Wed, May 21, 2025 at 10:30 AM | Eventbrite](#)



A close-up photograph of a young person's face and hands. They are holding a lit cigarette in their mouth and using a black lighter to light it. The background is blurred, showing green foliage and a string of small, glowing green lights. The overall tone is somewhat somber and cautionary.

A Smoke-Free Future for Cardiff and the Vale: Supporting Young People to Make Informed Choices

**Lauren Thomas,
Cardiff and Vale University Health Board**

Staying Smoke-Free: Protecting Our Health, Our Communities and Our Future

It is well known that staying smoke-free is one of the best things we can do for our health. Not only does it protect individuals, but it also benefits those around us and helps safeguard the environment. Cardiff and Vale University Health Board's Smoking and Tobacco Education and Prevention Service supports children and young people in making informed choices about smoking and vaping, equipping them with the knowledge and skills needed to lead healthier lives.

How we support young people

Our service works closely with schools, youth settings and professionals to create environments where young people can make positive choices. This includes:

- Supporting the development of whole-school approaches to staying smoke-free, including policies and education
- Delivering interactive sessions on smoking, vaping, peer pressure and accessing support services
- Training professionals to ensure they have accurate and up-to-date information on tobacco and vaping
- Developing and signposting resources to support educators and youth workers
- Running the Smoke-Free Gates scheme for primary schools and pre-schools in Cardiff and the Vale
- Promoting smoke-free messages at youth and community events

- Working with partners to reduce the harm caused by smoking and vaping
- Involving young people in shaping how tobacco education is delivered

The importance of prevention

Smoking remains the leading cause of preventable early death in the UK, increasing the risk of cancers, heart disease and stroke. Most people who smoke start before adulthood and those who begin at a young age often find it harder to quit. The Welsh Government aims to achieve a **Smoke-Free Wales by 2030**, meaning fewer than 5% of adults will smoke.

Currently, **2% of 11 to 16 year olds in Cardiff and the Vale smoke regularly**, and **13% of adults** are smokers. By continuing to focus on prevention and education, we aim to lower these figures even further.

Understanding vaping: what young people need to know

While vaping can be less harmful than smoking it is not risk-free, especially for young people. Many vapes contain nicotine, which is highly addictive and can lead to mood changes, irritability and dependency. Research shows that young people who vape are more likely to start smoking cigarettes.

In Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan, 17% of 11 to 16 year olds have tried vaping. Findings from Public Health Wales indicate that many young people who vape daily show signs of nicotine dependency.

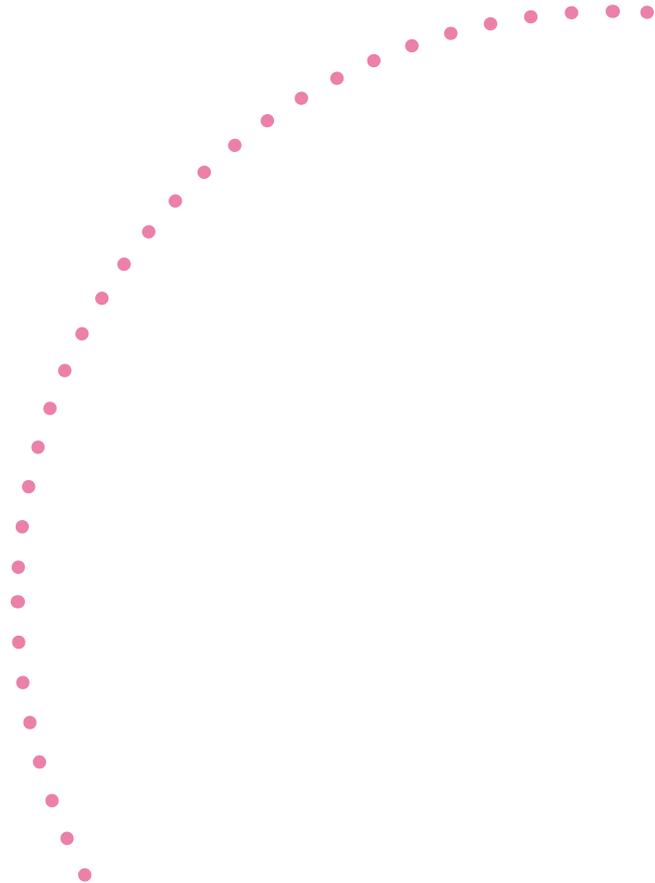
We tailor vaping education to the needs of each school or youth setting, providing sessions and resources that raise awareness and empower young people to make informed choices. Additionally, a [Padlet](#) is available to support professionals with guidance on smoking and vaping.

If you'd like to learn more about how we can work together, please contact: Lauren Thomas, Public Health Practitioner on 07976 070763.

By working together, we can help create a healthier, smoke-free future for young people in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan.

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2. National Survey for Wales. Available at: <https://stats.wales.gov.wales/catalogue/National-Survey-for-Wales/population-health/adult-lifestyles/adultlifestyles-by-year>
3. School Health Research Network (SHRN). Available at: <https://phw.nhs.wales/services-and-teams/observatory/data-and-analysis/shrn-data-dashboard/>





Going for Gold

Sioned Davies, Amberleigh House Therapeutic School

Many young people across the UK, around 28,000, start the Duke of Edinburgh Gold Award program every year. However, a very small percentage, less than 8% of those accessing the Award at any level have additional learning needs, and even fewer have learning needs while living in full-time residential children's care.

Amberleigh House Therapeutic School, Golfa Hall, is a long-established registered therapeutic community in Powys that bases its approach on empowering young learners to achieve as much as possible while in its care. Our highly successful school runs many ambitious initiatives, one of which is the Duke of Edinburgh Award. This year, the school has two learners working toward the highest level - the Gold Award - five working toward their Silver Award, and five participating in the Bronze Award program.

The additional needs of our learners mean that we have had to work closely with our Duke of Edinburgh Regional Team to make sure the awards are accessible to everyone at the school. For example, we have made a residential activity available to our learners during the half-term break. Staff teams have collaborated with the residential setting to ensure safety, engagement, and appropriate provision for our very special learners.

Over the past three years, learners at Golfa Hall have achieved 11 Bronze Awards and two Silver Awards. This has been hugely empowering for learners who often arrive with exceptionally low motivation and self-esteem. One learner said, "I am so proud of how far I have come. I didn't think I could do this, but with the support of the team - I am good enough!" The same learner won the This is Youth – Boundary Breaker of the Year Award for the Duke of Edinburgh Program in 2024.

February 2025 marked a real high point for our program, with two boys completing a residential experience in Shrewsbury and coming within a hair's breadth of completing their Gold Award. It will be amazing to see these two teenagers receive their Award - potentially at Buckingham Palace - showing that, with the right support, their journey can be just as successful as that of any learner in any school in Wales.

These incredible achievements would not be possible without our dedicated staff, strong partnerships and the support of the Welshpool community. Sarah Wilkinson, our nurture lead, was recognised as Life Changer of the Year (2024) by This is Youth for her work on the Duke of Edinburgh Program. Kathryn, the Duke of Edinburgh Operations Officer, has been instrumental in supporting our ambitions and achievements at Golfa Hall. The Welshpool community has been extraordinary too, allowing learners to gain experience at the Welshpool and Llanfair Light Railway, serve as beacons of support at the Hope House charity shop, and benefit from the generosity of Tesco.

Respect, responsibility, independence, participation and community are all values we uphold, and they align directly with those of the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme: Respect, Trust, Inclusion, and Discovery. This program has propelled our learners forward in their personal, social, and educational journeys, enabling them to see their "Care Experience" in a positive light, a beacon of hope and ambition.

For more information about the work of the school, please email:

Sioned.Davies@amberleighcare.co.uk



Amberleigh Care
Better | Together

Ahead of the Game: Preventing Gambling Harms Among Young People in Wales

Dave Hewer, Ara Recovery for All



GAMBLING HARM PREVENTION WORKSHOP FOR ADULTS SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE

We Provide Workshops For Adults Too!

- Are you a professional working with young people?
- Are you a parent unsure where to start?
- Are you a carer who wants to learn more?
- Do you understand the links between gaming and gambling?

We offer **FREE**, expert-led workshops to help adults understand, recognise, and respond to gambling harms in young people.



Why Book Our FREE Training?

- **Safeguarding Young People:** Equip yourself with the knowledge to protect young people from gambling-related harms.
- **Understand the Impact:** Discover how a young person's wellbeing can be affected by someone else's gambling.
- **Build Confidence:** Learn practical steps to identify and support young people experiencing gambling harms.
- **Tailored to Your Needs:** If you have specific concerns, we can adapt the content to address them.
- **Stay Ahead of the Trends:** We monitor the latest gambling trends and risks affecting young people.

Book Today!

✉ youth@recovery4all.co.uk
🌐 recovery4all.co.uk



GAMBLING HARM PREVENTION WORKSHOP FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Get Ahead of the Game!

Ahead of the Game offers **FREE** workshops, assemblies, and lessons for young people aged 11-24, led by our expert Education and Prevention team.

We partner with schools, organisations, and clubs that support young people.

What We Do

We help young people recognise gambling behaviours, understand gaming's link to gambling, and make safer choices.

Our workshops explore gambling harms, reduce stigma, and provide resources for seeking help or supporting others.

Where Are We?

We offer **FREE** training across Wales and the South West of England.

Are Young People Affected By Gambling?

- **85,000** young people (11-17) in the UK are experiencing gambling harms.
- **27%** of 11-17-year-olds gambled with their own money last year.
- **96%** of 11-24-year-olds recall seeing gambling ads.
- **1.6 million** young people are affected by someone else's gambling.

Book Today!

✉ youth@recovery4all.co.uk
🌐 recovery4all.co.uk



Addressing Gambling Harms in Wales

Gambling-related harm is a growing public health concern, particularly for young people. Research from the Gambling Commission (2024) shows that **52% of young people engage in gambling activity**, with an estimated **38,000 in Wales experiencing gambling-related harms**. These figures highlight the urgent need for **education, prevention and early intervention**.

To tackle this issue, **Ara** has launched **Ahead of the Game**, a **FREE** gambling harms prevention programme for **young people, parents, carers and professionals**. Through **interactive**

workshops, digital resources and direct interventions we provide the tools to **recognise risks, reduce stigma and seek support**.

Taking Action: Raising Awareness and Linking Locally

We are committed to a **locally tailored approach** in Wales. Our Welsh **Education and Prevention Leads, Helen and Hannah**, are embedded in their communities, ensuring that our work **meets regional needs**.

Our FREE programme includes:

- **Workshops for Young People (11-24)** – Delivered in **schools, youth centres and community settings**, raising awareness of gambling harms, gaming risks, and informed decision-making
- **Training for Youth-Facing Professionals** – Equipping **teachers, social workers, and youth workers** to **spot early warning signs and support young people**
- **Support for Parents & Carers** – Helping families **understand gambling risks, how their own behaviour may impact young people, and how to have supportive conversations**
- **Youth Portal (Launching April 2025!)** – An **online hub** reinforcing workshop learning, offering self-assessments and independent exploration of gambling harms
- **Events & Public Engagement** – We attend **Wellbeing Events, Freshers' Fairs and community activities**, providing accessible, **non-judgmental support**

Since 2020, Ara has provided gambling awareness workshops across Wales and the South West to over **30,000** young people and over **8,000** youth facing professionals.

If your **organisation or event** could benefit from our support, **get in touch!**

Making a Difference in Wales

Our programme is:

- **Engaging young people across Wales**, equipping them to **recognise gambling harms** and make informed choices
- **Providing direct support** to young people and families, ensuring those affected can **find age-appropriate services**
- **Increasing awareness among professionals**, enabling them to **identify risks and support young people**

- **Available in Welsh and English**, ensuring **equal access** to information and support

By embedding **education, prevention, and intervention** into **schools, communities, and professional training**, we are actively **reducing gambling harms in Wales**.

Let's Work Together to Safeguard Young People: Book a FREE Workshop!

- **Education is key** – Raising awareness **prevents gambling harms before they begin**
- **Early intervention saves lives** – Recognising signs of harm early **reduces long-term consequences**
- **Support is available** – If you or someone you know needs help, visit www.recovery4all.co.uk for **immediate local support and counselling**

Find out more & book a FREE workshop:

North Wales:

hannahgunn@recovery4all.co.uk

South Wales:

helenwebstermorgan@recovery4all.co.uk

General enquiries:

youth@recovery4all.co.uk

Let's work together to **protect young people and build a safer future for Wales**.

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/ararecoveryforall/>

<https://www.instagram.com/ararecoveryforall/>

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Tackling bullying in schools in Wales

**Professor Judy Hutchings,
Centre for Evidence Based Early Intervention,
Bangor University**

School-based bullying is a major international health concern requiring action at a policy level, in the wider community and in schools (World Health Organisation, 2020). In the UK, schools are required to have antibullying policies, although there is considerable variability in terms of their content and the ways in which schools implement them. For victims and perpetrators, and even for witnesses, bullying can have significant negative effects in childhood and adolescence and is linked to a range of difficulties into adulthood.

Bullying norms play a large role in rates of school bullying with positive school connectedness associated with lower levels of school bullying. Insufficient adult supervision, inadequate anti-bullying policies, and/or a permissive attitude toward bullying within schools represent increased risks for bullying rates. As many as 25% of teachers do not recognise some types of bullying and need help to both recognise and intervene effectively.

Bullying is increasingly recognised as a group process with the social architecture model. Salmivalli (in 1996) described a range of bystander roles that impact levels of bullying. Other children can reinforce bullying, by joining in, laughing or watching or reduce its occurrence by turning away or supporting victims.

Like UK schools, Finnish schools were required to have an anti-bullying policy, but over a 10-year period this had no impact on rates of bullying. So the Finnish government funded Salmivalli and colleagues to develop a programme for their schools. KiVa has all the tools needed to address bullying and achieved extremely good outcomes in terms of reduced reported bullying and victimization particularly among 7 – 11 year olds. Following the initial success, KiVa was taken up by 90% of Finnish schools and showed year-on-year reductions in bullying over a seven-year period.

The components of the KiVa programme

Universal components:

1. Materials for all school staff and parents
2. Hi-visibility KiVa vests worn on playgrounds
3. Posters throughout the school
4. Three sets of lessons that include videos, small and large group discussions, role play, written assignments, and other play activities and games. Pupils learn to define and recognise bullying and how to stand against it. The aim is to encourage students towards defending behaviors
5. Children report annually, online, whether they have experienced or perpetrated bullying

The indicated action components used when a confirmed bullying incident is identified:

A trained KiVa Team decides whether it is bullying. If so, there is a structured process for the Team to follow. This does not require blame, only that bullies commit to a documented solution that is reviewed after two weeks.



KiVa in the UK

UK schools must have an anti-bullying policy, but schools decide what it contains and how to implement it. However, although this was similar to the pre-KiVa Finnish situation, evidence of transportability was required. KiVa covers 50% of PSE/PSHE topics and in 2013, with Welsh Government support through a school improvement training grant, KiVa was introduced in Wales. The first 17 primary schools showed promising

reductions in bullying related behaviour and more schools were trained. The first 41 UK schools to trial the programme again reported significant reductions in bullying and victimisation.

In 2019, the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) funded a randomised controlled trial (RCT) to establish outcomes based on one year of KiVa, compared to usual practice in state primary schools. From four areas, North Wales, Oxfordshire, Devon and Birmingham, over 11,000 students were recruited. KiVa trainers were appointed for each site, met termly with schools and were available for consultation. Two staff from each school attended a two day training, to learn the roles of school co-ordinator and KiVa team lead.

Despite considerable disruption in 2021/22, with schools returning from the COVID-19 shutdown and with high levels of post-COVID-19 absenteeism of both pupils and teachers, meaning that it was not known how much of the programme individual pupils accessed results favoured KiVa. After one year of implementation the KiVa programme significantly reduced the odds of victimisation by 13%, compared with schools continuing with usual practice. KiVa pupils also demonstrated significantly greater empathy and fewer teachers reported peer-relationship problems. Nevertheless, the positive school and teacher feedback on the resources and evidence to date, from three reported trials, of significant reductions in reported bullying suggest that the results justify further roll-out of KiVa in both Wales and the rest of the UK and policy leadership is needed.

For more information on KiVa, how to access training and references to research papers see <https://ceit-cymru.org/kiva-school-based-anti-bullying-programme/>



- **Empowered Learners:** Pupils develop a deep understanding of their rights under the UNCRC, equipping them to advocate for themselves and others
- **Positive School Culture:** Rights-respecting schools create inclusive, respectful environments that enhance relationships between pupils, teachers and the wider community
- **Improved Wellbeing:** Research shows that RRSA schools experience better attendance, behaviour, and emotional wellbeing, fostering safer, happier schools
- **Alignment with the Welsh Curriculum:** The RRSA complements the new Welsh curriculum, which prioritises human rights education, ensuring children's rights are seamlessly integrated into everyday learning
- **Global Citizenship:** Understanding rights encourages children to engage with issues of justice, equality, and sustainability both locally and globally



Cardiff's Progress and Future Goals

Cardiff has 128 schools of which 103 are engaged with the award (as of January 2025) that's made up of:

- 41 Bronze Schools
- 36 Silver Schools
- 26 Gold Schools

To build on this momentum, Cardiff aims to:

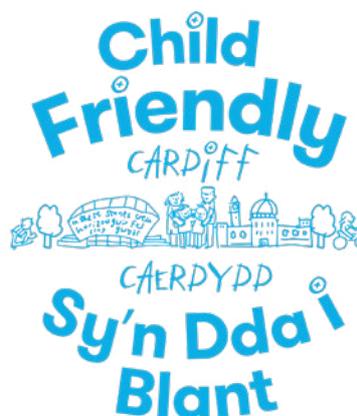
- Expand tailored support to ensure every school receives the guidance needed to progress through the RRSA journey
- Train Gold-level assessors to strengthen Cardiff's self-sustaining model
- Host more RRSA events and initiatives to showcase best practices, foster collaboration, and celebrate school achievements
- Develop new resources and training opportunities to support schools in embedding children's rights more effectively

A Model for Wales and Beyond

Cardiff's approach to the RRSA is helping to shape a more rights-respecting education system. By prioritising children's rights within learning, school culture, and policy, the city is fostering an environment where pupils feel heard and valued. As Cardiff continues to refine its approach, we hope that other local authorities across Wales and the UK can take inspiration from this work, ensuring that more children benefit from an education where their rights are recognised and upheld.

For more information please get in touch with:

Robin.Bonar-Law@cardiff.gov.uk





The Importance of Legal Education Resources in Schools

Rhian Howells,
Children's Legal Centre Wales

It is a fundamental requisite of the rule of law that the law should be made known. The individual must be able to know of his legal rights and obligations.

— Mr. Justice Burton: R (Salih and Rahamani) v Secretary of State for the Home Department [2003] EWHC 2273 (Admin)

Despite the fact that laws impact the lives of many children, young people and adults, there remains a significant gap in understanding about their legal rights and responsibilities. The Children's Legal Centre Wales aims to make legal education accessible to children and young people in Wales. This work is being carried out through the

Education and Engagement Project which aims to provide valuable resources and information on various legal topics to both young people and the adults who work with or care for them.

A Children's Rights Approach

Rhian Howells, our Education and Engagement Lead, launched a pilot project in 2024 in collaboration with three primary schools in Swansea. Using a Children's Rights Approach, the children explored specific Welsh laws designed to protect their rights. For example, the link between Universal Free School Meals in primary schools and *Article 24* of the UN Convention on the Rights

of the Child (UNCRC) - the right to healthy food. The children also studied the *Abolition of the Defence of Reasonable Punishment (Wales) Act 2020* and *Article 19* of the UNCRC, which protects children from harm and mistreatment.

The pilot project involved Blaenymaes Primary, Portmead Primary and Pennard Primary, where pupils used role play to explore UNCRC articles and to think about how their lives may be different if the UNCRC wasn't in place to support their rights.

In addition to learning, the children were challenged to share their knowledge with the wider school community. They worked together in groups to create engaging presentations, videos, and leaflets which they presented to classmates, parents and school governors.



Legal Education Resource Packs

As part of the project, we also identified pressing issues that impact young people today. After gathering input from the pupils, they ranked these issues in order of importance. Nine key topics were selected for the development of resource packs. In Spring and Summer 2025, we will focus on creating and trialing these educational materials.

Each pack will include:

- Lesson Plan
- Teacher Notes
- Class PowerPoint
- Infographic

We are looking forward to piloting these resource packs in three secondary schools in Swansea, Pentrehafod, Bishop Gore and Olchfa, where we will receive feedback from pupils and teachers. Finalised resources will be published on the Children's Legal Centre Wales website later in the year.

The Power of Infographics

In our efforts to make legal information more accessible, we have incorporated infographics as a powerful tool to engage young people. In collaboration with various Welsh Government departments, we recently published '*Different in Wales*,' a resource highlighting the areas of law that are unique to Wales compared to the rest of the UK.

Infographics are an excellent way to present complex information in a visually appealing and digestible format for young people. By distilling key information into engaging graphics, we can help students better understand important legal issues. Additionally, QR codes are included in the infographics, allowing young people to easily access further information.

We would like to encourage schools to participate in the dissemination of this resource by taking part in our Expressive Arts Competition and creating two minute videos that highlight the key points.

Please check out the [Children's Legal Centre](#) website for more information on the competition and great prizes for the winners.

By providing students with accessible legal resources and fostering an understanding of their rights, we hope to empower the next generation to navigate their legal landscape with confidence and advocate for themselves when necessary.

If you would like to get in touch and receive further information, please contact: childrenslegalcentre@swansea.ac.uk



Ongoing challenges in Wales for children and young people with epilepsy in accessing education and learning support

Jan Paterson, Epilepsy Action Cymru

Children and young people with complex epilepsy often face significant challenges in mainstream education, requiring tailored support to manage their medical, cognitive, and emotional needs. However, in Wales, there are several critical gaps in the provision of adequate support, leading to inconsistencies in care, learning accommodations and staff training. Addressing these gaps is essential to ensure that every child with epilepsy can access a safe, inclusive and supportive learning environment.

In the UK, it is estimated that around 40% of children with epilepsy have a learning disability. One in three children with epilepsy face insufficient support in schools. Young Epilepsy produced a survey, which gathered anonymous responses from over 1,000 families across the UK, which revealed concerning disparities in school policies and the support provided to young people living with epilepsy during the 2021/22 academic year. [School support report 2023 | Young Epilepsy](#)

Some of the key challenges schools face include:

1. Lack of Specialist Training for School Staff

- Many teachers and support staff lack sufficient training in understanding epilepsy, seizure management, and the broader impact on learning and well-being
- There is often inconsistency in how schools handle epilepsy, depending on individual staff knowledge rather than a clear national standard

2. Inconsistent Access to Individual Healthcare Plans (IHPs)

- Not all schools have clear and well-implemented Individual Healthcare Plans (IHPs) for children with epilepsy
- Some schools may not fully understand their responsibility to create and follow these plans, leaving children without structured support

3. Limited Awareness of the Cognitive & Emotional Impact

- Beyond seizures, epilepsy can affect memory, concentration, fatigue and mental health, which can be overlooked in mainstream education
- Children with epilepsy may struggle with anxiety, depression or social isolation, but **mental health support** within schools is often insufficient

4. Challenges with Medication & Emergency Response

- Some schools may not have enough staff trained to administer emergency medication like Buccal Midazolam
- There can be delays in responding to seizures or confusion over protocols, putting children at risk

5. Lack of Inclusive Educational Support

- Children with epilepsy may need adjustments like extra time for tasks, quiet spaces, or reduced workload, but these are not always provided

The existing gaps in supporting children with epilepsy in mainstream schools across Wales demonstrate the urgent need for a more consistent and comprehensive approach. The lack of specialised training for school staff, inconsistent implementation of Individual Healthcare Plans (IHPs), and the failure to fully recognize the cognitive and emotional challenges of epilepsy are leaving children at risk of inadequate care and support. Furthermore, issues surrounding medication administration and emergency response create safety concerns, while the lack of inclusive educational adjustments hinders academic potential.

To address these challenges, it is critical to establish clearer national standards and ensure mandatory epilepsy training for all school staff. Additionally, enforcing the implementation of IHPs and providing better support for the mental and cognitive impacts of epilepsy will significantly improve the learning experiences of

these children. Collaboration between schools, healthcare providers, and families is essential to build a supportive and inclusive environment where children with epilepsy can thrive.

Epilepsy Action UK helpline offers free, confidential advice to anyone affected by epilepsy, including education. [The Epilepsy Action helpline - Epilepsy Action](#). It's time to act, children with epilepsy deserve a fair and equal opportunity to succeed in their education.

If you would like more information about the work of Epilepsy Action Cymru, please email: jpaterson@epilepsy.org.uk





From Classrooms to Centre Stage: National Youth Arts Wales inspires performers throughout Wales

Evan Dawson,
National Youth Arts Wales



At a time when the Arts sector across Wales faces growing financial pressures and uncertainty, National Youth Arts Wales (NYAW) has been a vital lifeline for creative young people. Throughout February and March 2025, NYAW visited 15 secondary schools, colleges, and youth theatres, engaging over 550 students aged 14-18 in dynamic workshops designed to nurture the next generation of performers.

Delivered by a young team of National Youth Theatre Wales (NYTW) alumni - many of whom have since built careers in the arts - the NYAW Roadshow provided not just skills development, but a powerful message: opportunities in the arts should not be reserved for the few, especially as funding cuts threaten to narrow the path.

Megan Childs, Theatre Producer at National Youth Arts Wales said:

"Meeting students, teachers, and course leaders from every corner of Wales has been inspiring. Yet, beneath that enthusiasm lies a stark reality: many schools, especially in areas facing economic hardship, are working miracles to keep arts education alive despite dwindling resources. There's no shortage of talent or commitment among young people - what's lacking is the consistent investment to support them."

The Roadshow is part of NYAW's new Ambassador programme, offering paid training and facilitation opportunities for former NYTW ensemble members. These alumni not only led workshops

but also shared their own journeys, showing students how involvement in the arts can lead to professional careers and lifelong personal development.



Niamh Moulton, a 2017-2019 NYTW member and now working professionally in the arts, reflected:

“It was great getting to tell students interested in creative arts what National Youth Theatre Wales can offer them. They were at the perfect age to be able to apply and audition over several different years, which is something I wish I’d done. I’m also glad schools in Wales are as passionate and eager about the arts as NYAW is - a positive step in the best direction for the future of the industry.”

Dafydd Leonard, who has been part of NYTW since 2019, added:

“I found the eagerness to get involved from the students really inspiring. I wanted to be [an ambassador] because of how special my time with the National Youth Theatre Wales was. I wanted to enlighten the next generation of young creatives about how they could get involved and have an unforgettable experience, just like I did.”

One stop on the Roadshow, Afon Taf, Troed y Rhiw, illustrates the stakes. Drama teacher Miss Jones shared:

“The experience [of NYAW’s visit] was invaluable for our students, many of whom come from a generally deprived area where opportunities in the arts are limited. As the sole Drama teacher since qualifying, I have been working to build the drama department from the ground up, striving to provide creative opportunities in a time when Arts Education is increasingly underfunded and under resourced. Seeing the students engage so enthusiastically with the workshop and opportunities in front of them

reaffirmed just how vital the arts are in inspiring confidence, creativity, and self-expression.”

Participating in the performing arts offers young people proven benefits - boosting confidence, communication, academic performance, emotional wellbeing, and employability. Yet, these pathways are increasingly under threat.

Earlier this year, National Youth Arts Wales Chief Executive, Evan Dawson, issued a strong call to action in response to more proposed cuts to arts funding in Wales:

“We cannot afford to be the generation that watches from the sidelines as our cultural legacy and the potential of our youth are stifled by shortsighted budget cuts. Let’s champion a renaissance in Welsh arts - not just for culture’s sake, but for the holistic development of our society.” Read the statement [here](#).



As Wales faces difficult decisions about the future of arts funding, National Youth Arts Wales commitment to empowering young people in the arts sends a clear message: our young people’s creative voices deserve not only to be heard - but championed.

If you would like to learn more about this work, please email charlotte.moult@nyaw.org.uk

Photo credit: Kirsten McTernan

Twitter: [@KMTPhotographer](https://twitter.com/KMTPhotographer)

Instagram: [@kirstenmcternanphotography](https://www.instagram.com/kirstenmcternanphotography)





How Twiggle the turtle is proving the perfect teacher for toddlers

Margaret O'Reilly, Barnardo's Cymru

All eyes are on a plush turtle puppet called Twiggle, as a group of two year olds sit down quietly to turn rice cakes and bananas into smiling faces.

They've been listening to what it means to be happy. Each child waits patiently as their teacher, Jen Thomas, divides up tangerine slices for smiles and raisins for eyes. Despite their age they concentrate on their task without a problem.

Here at Fenton Flying Start in Haverfordwest the children have been learning how to recognise and manage their emotions with the help of Twiggle and his puppet friends, Henrietta Hedgehog, Daphne Duck and Duke the Dog.

For the children, the puppets have become familiar friends who join them for lessons and activities every day, but for their teachers they are much more than colourful toys. They are key to the *PATHS® Programme for Schools*, a social and emotional learning tool, originally created in the United States, and developed for use in UK schools and pre-school settings by Barnardo's. The

programme is having a powerful effect on children's behaviour and emotional development in schools and pre-schools across Wales.

It helps children recognise their own emotions and become more empathetic towards others. They learn how to express their feelings in simple words, and that means they are more likely to regulate their own emotions with growing independence. It also promotes positive behaviour.

Pembrokeshire County Council is rolling out the programme in many of its pre-school settings. It was introduced for two year olds at Fenton Flying Start four years ago, and has been so successful it has earned a social and emotional learning award, the SEL Worldwide award for model pre-school status. It has now been introduced in the reception classes at Fenton CP Primary School.

The school sees it as a way of building social skills and emotional literacy in children at an early age, to improve behaviour and prevent problems for the future.

Lisa Davies, the school's head of Foundation Phase, said:

"It was working very well in our Flying Start setting where the children had built resilience skills. We also shared the techniques with parents who were noticing the difference in their children and were becoming confident using some of the PATHS techniques at home. That's why we are using *PATHS* with all our early years children this year. Local providers of wrap around childcare are also using it, so the children have that consistency. They learn to follow a set of rules in the classroom and they learn how to be kind to each other. It's successful because the children really enjoy the puppets, activities and stories that come with the programme. They can relate to Twiggie going into his shell when they feel unhappy or worried."

The *PATHS*® Programme for Schools provides training not just for teachers but all staff, such as lunchtime supervisors, so the language used with children remains consistent throughout the day. There are regular opportunities for parents to learn how to follow on the work at home too. Barnardo's provides the coaches, who are not only there to train staff, but regularly support them.

Jen Thomas' enthusiasm for the programme is obvious as she uses puppets Twiggie and Henrietta the Hedgehog to act out the sharing of segments of a plastic cake in front of the children at Fenton Flying Start. The children also listen to a story about Twiggie sharing his birthday present with his friends. The messages are clear, it's good to share, it makes people happy and it's good to say thank you.

She said:

"We incorporate *PATHS*® holistically throughout the curriculum. We've even had the Pembrokeshire Hospital and Outdoor Schools come in and talk about real life hedgehogs. *PATHS*® just ticks so many boxes in developing social and emotional literacy. At a time where children are beginning to recognise their own and others' emotions, then can begin to learn strategies to cope when they get angry or frustrated."

One of those key strategies is to ask, 'What would Twiggie do?' and follow his example of "doing turtle", by stopping, taking a breath and saying how they feel. The message is that feelings are ok, it's what you do with them that matters.



Every child is encouraged to share how they are feeling at the start of each session. A child is chosen each day to wear the Twiggie helper jacket. Not only are they given responsibility to help with tasks, but also receive compliments from staff and their classmates, giving them a sense of positive worth.

"I've seen a massive difference in the children. They can concentrate and sit still for longer. The children are so kind and caring, they help each other and they share more. I love it," said Jen.

To learn more about how Barnardo's is supporting schools through *PATHS*® Programme for Schools email paths@barnardos.org.uk.

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Standing Side by Side with Care Leavers in Wales

Phoebe White, NYAS Cymru

‘Success’ in education looks different for everyone, but there is a strong correlation between education attainment and outcomes in adulthood, and lower educational attainment is associated with poorer outcomes. Similarly, experiences of care as a child are strongly linked to lower educational attainment and higher risks of poorer outcomes in later adulthood. Too often we hear that care-experienced young people across Wales face significant barriers to accessing education and employment opportunities. Whether this is during the fundamental years of their secondary education or considering their post-16 options, these young people are missing out on opportunities which are easily accessible to many of their peers.

Throughout the school year, many care-experienced students are often faced with repeated disruptions to their learning because

of changes to their school. According to Welsh Government, over 400 care-experienced students in Wales had one or more school changes during the 2022-2023 academic year. This instability impacts both a student’s academic and social experiences of school – with these often being a vital protective factors for promoting overall mental health and wellbeing. At post-16 level, care-experienced young people can continue to face challenges when trying to access college courses, apprenticeships, university and employment opportunities. These barriers are often felt alongside the other challenges care leavers face when they transition out of care. Care leavers have told this transition period significantly impacts their post-16 options, as often the transition out of care and finding stability can take priority over progressing onto further education or apprenticeship opportunities.

For care leavers, youth work can be an essential alternative to formal educational approaches. The foundations of youth work enable young people opportunities to learn away from a traditional educational setting through a young person led approach. This way of learning allows young people to participate in activities they may not experience in formal education, as well as developing new skill sets and meeting new people. This form of learning brings significantly positive impact on young people - particularly those who find formal education challenging. When NYAS Cymru has asked care leavers what youth work means for them, they have described it as 'fun, informative and an inclusive place to make friends, learn things and get a break from day-to-day life'. The power of youth work cannot be underestimated, and we hope that the work currently being undertaken by Welsh Government will continue to amplify, advance and strengthen the role of the sector in Wales.

Supporting care leavers to reach their best post-16 outcomes is vitally important, and we are so proud that our support services at NYAS Cymru can help achieve this. Our *SidebySide* programme in Neath Port Talbot supports care leavers by bridging the gap between leaving care and adulthood, by providing help when they need it and embarking on their journey 'side by side' with them. The programme matches young people with a mentor for a 12-month period, provides access to a broad range of support, and access to a £500 care leaver bursary. SidebySide provides invaluable support for young people to access their post-16 options such as helping to submit college or university applications, organising student finance, searching for jobs, practicing interview questions, CV writing, or sometimes, just having someone to talk to. Our Project Unity service for care-experienced mothers also provides similar support, with around 1 in 10 women we work with requesting support to access education and employment opportunities.

We want to see a transformation in the education and employment outcomes for care leavers across Wales, to make sure they can access the same opportunities as their peers. Professionals supporting care-experienced young people in these spaces must continually ask themselves

'would this be good enough for my child?' and if the answer is no, then something needs to change.

Written by Phoebe White, phoebe.white@nyas.net

For more information about NYAS Cymru's services in Wales, please visit our [website](#)





‘Chat with Me’ – A conversational adventure for Cas!

Jenna Davies & Delyth Dando,
Newport City Council

A children’s book called ‘Chat with me’ was launched in June 2023. The Flying Start team in Newport worked with parents to create the book which follows the exciting adventures of Cas across Newport. Aneurin Bevan University Health Board specialist speech and language therapists played an integral part of developing this book and it was a collaboration with Save the Children who funded the project.

The book offers the opportunity for learning and development to continue off the pages, encouraging children and parents to extend the conversation outdoors. The book features various landmarks within the city, to encourage the interactive learning experiences. The photographs and illustrations were designed to reflect the diversity of Newport and it allows children to see themselves, their families and friends and their local area represented in a positive way. The book features a QR code so families can access a website with further information about speech, language and

communication development as well as further ideas for exploring the book and Newport. Printed versions of the book have been provided to families across Newport at the 15 months-old Health Visitor appointment as well as in council run groups and fundays. ‘Chat with Me’ is also available in local libraries, playgroups and schools.

Lots of positive feedback has been received, with parents saying that it is exciting to see Newport in a book. A number of parents have also completed the feedback questionnaire. They report that the book has been read with children ranging from 11 months to 5 years.

71% of parents report that they found the website useful

100% of the parents reported enjoying the book

93% felt that their child enjoyed the book

73% of parents reported an increase in their

confidence in supporting their child’s speech, language and communication development

While 91% of parents reported Chat with Me encouraged them to spend more time reading with their child.

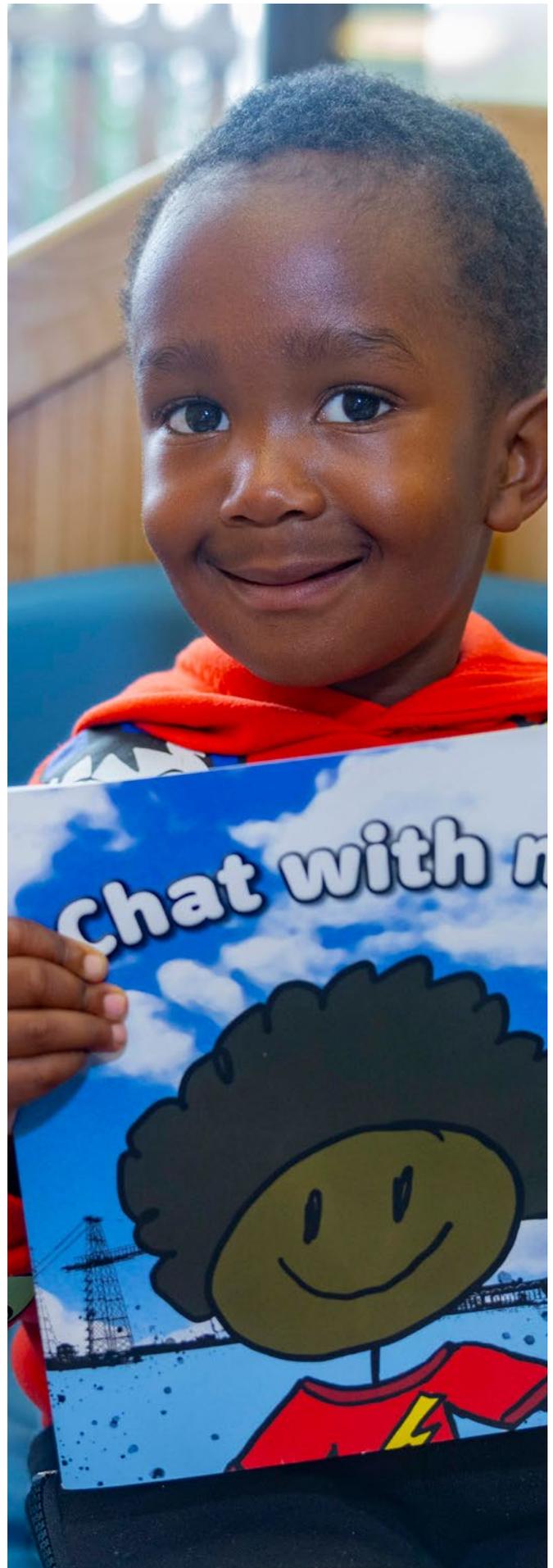
Councillor Deborah Davies recently saw the book and said:

“It’s a lovely book, really accessible and it achieves its objective whilst celebrating what our city has to offer with lots of QR codes explaining why the transporter bridge is so special.

I appreciate it was published last year but every health visitor now ensures that every child is provided with a copy and I was told that parents are enjoying using this.

This is a real success story.”

Further information about the book, and extra resources can be found at <https://www.newport.gov.uk/en/Care-Support/Children-and-families/Reading-with-children/Reading-with-children.aspx>





Empowering the Next Generation: How Reaching Wider is Opening Doors to Higher Education

Alice Davies, South West Wales Reaching Wider Partnership
Paula Griffiths, North and Mid Wales Reaching Wider Partnership
Chris Webb, South East Wales Reaching Wider Partnership

Reaching Wider is a partnership of universities, schools and colleges in Wales working together to improve social mobility by widening access to all forms of education. We are dedicated to making higher education accessible to all, ensuring that children and young people have the support, guidance, and opportunities they need to succeed. Through our outreach initiatives and mentoring programme, we empower learners to explore higher education pathways, their potential, break down barriers and make informed decisions about their futures.

Access and Equity: A Core Mission

We believe that every child and young person should have the opportunity to consider higher education, regardless of their background. Many learners, especially those from underrepresented communities, may feel that university is out of reach due to financial concerns, lack of family experience in higher education or limited exposure to the pathways available. Our work

focuses on addressing these challenges by providing clear guidance, hands-on experiences and tailored support to help children and young people see that university is a viable option for them.

Breaking Down Barriers to Success

We actively work with priority schools, youth organisations and community groups to ensure that students from all backgrounds, including young carers, care-experienced students, BAME learners, and those with disabilities are given the support they need to succeed.

Our targeted outreach supports learners aged 10 and above by:

- **Raising educational aspirations** – Empowering students to believe in their potential
- **Providing guidance and information** – Helping them explore all available pathways

- **Developing skills** – Strengthening both new and existing talents and abilities
- **Inspiring and motivating** – Encouraging learners to explore future careers and opportunities

Inspiring Children and Young People Through Hands-On Experiences

We offer a range of programmes designed to immerse students in the university experience:

- Campus visits & taster sessions – Allowing young people to experience university first-hand
- Information, Advice and Guidance sessions – Helping students make informed choices about their education and careers
- Creative and subject-specific workshops – Providing insight into different courses and career pathways. Encouraging exploration of a wide range of subjects

The Power of Mentoring

One of our impactful initiatives is the Reaching Wider Mentoring Programme, which pairs young people with university students who provide support, advice and encouragement. This mentoring relationship helps students:

- Build confidence in their academic abilities
- Gain insight into university life and study options
- Develop study skills, goal-setting techniques, and a clearer vision for their future
- Navigate the UCAS application process and explore student finance

By connecting students with relatable role models, we demystify higher education and help them feel more prepared to take the next step.

Looking Ahead: A Future of Opportunity

Reaching Wider is committed to making education truly inclusive. By continuing to develop our mentoring programme and expanding our outreach work, we aim to create a lasting impact on young people's lives, helping them unlock opportunities that may have once seemed beyond their reach.

Together we are involving, inspiring and empowering the next generation to achieve their goals and access the education they deserve.

Want to get involved or learn more about our programmes? Get in touch today:

www.reachingwider.ac.uk





Theatre for Babies

Sarah Argent, Theatr lolo

Theatr lolo is a children's theatre company based in Cardiff making work for young audiences between the ages of 0 and 16. In 2020, by working together with renowned theatre makers, Sarah Argent and Kevin Lewis created a new theatre show for babies aged 6 -18 months. In this article, Sarah tells us more about how her practice of making work for babies started almost 20 years ago and the science behind the development of shows for the very young.

“Back in 2007, I was the recipient of a prestigious Creative Wales Award from the Arts Council of Wales. Having previously made successful work for 3-5 year olds, I was interested in finding out about an even younger audience - how do you get their attention; how will they respond; how long should a performance be and what REALLY makes them laugh?!

The award allowed me to explore these questions and I spent five months observing babies, studying their development, meeting with and seeing work by experts in the then very new field of theatre for babies. I then received a grant from Small Size (the European Network for Theatre for 0-6 year olds), which supported the creation of my first theatre production for babies - *Out Of The Blue* - in association with Theatr lolo. This has been performed in Wales, England and Northern Ireland; formed the foundation stone of a project developing theatre for babies with three artists in India, and was the first piece of baby theatre ever to be performed at Sydney Opera House. It has also been adapted into a production about baby's first Christmas, *Scrunch*, which will this year be performed at the Unicorn Theatre in London for the fourth Christmas season.

In 2016, I was invited by Polka Theatre in London to be part of its Brain Waves Festival, bringing together artists and neuroscientists to create productions for a range of ages of children. Working with PhD students from Birkbeck University's Babylab, along with developmental psychologist Caspar Addyman who specialises in Baby Laughter, we created *Shake, Rattle and Roll*. This invited babies and their carers into a theatrical recreation of the Babylab, where lights and sounds and a beautiful physical performance explored concepts such as the vestibular system, object permanence and time intervals to explore why babies are so funny and what makes them laugh, their sense of timing and rhythm and what music they like to dance to and how they dance.

What was so exciting about this project was that while close and detailed observation of babies observing rehearsals or performances had always been part of my process, the level of scientific clarity with which our scientists could describe the babies' responses - the moments that make babies' giggle, that make them move spontaneously be that bouncing or waving their arms, that make their already-large eyes open even more widely - and analyse why the babies were responding in a particular way at their particular age took things to a deeper level and has influenced my work ever since.

In September 2020, at a time when babies and their parents had been so isolated - and when indoor gatherings were still banned - Kevin Lewis and I developed a piece of baby theatre with Theatr Iolo. We believe it was the first live performance since theatres had closed in March due to Covid restrictions. In the beautiful garden at the front of Chapter Arts Centre in Cardiff, *Baby, Bird and Bee* provided families with an opportunity to spend time engaged with their baby; sitting together on comfy mats, sharing smiles and giggles, joining the performer in making percussive sounds and engaging in a communal experience - something that was virtually non-existent at this time. There were many tears (of joy from parents!) at once again - or for the first time - being able to do this.

Baby, Bird and Bee is now touring Wales as an indoor performance in both English and Welsh - *Babi, Aderyn a'r Wenynen*. Still set in a garden, against a backdrop of beautiful illustrated plants and

flowers, it tells the tale of a slightly inept gardener who has brought their baby to work with them and whose playful nature regularly distracts them from the job in hand.



The performance makes use of the sensory, of the human voice singing, of playing with the delicious sounds of words which may be new to babies, including the names of flowers, slapstick and peekaboo. This format and story allows opportunities for sensory sequences playing with sound and rhythm, for direct interaction with the babies in the audience, for singing and music-making and, at the end, for parents and carers to dance with their little ones to a series of music tracks about babies, birds and bees at a baby disco complete with bubbles!

All this joy is the result of many years of careful research as part of a growing movement of artists making theatre for our youngest and most important audience.

Find out more about *Baby, Bird and Bee* | *Babi, Aderyn a'r Wenynen* theatriolo.com. To get a word out to someone at Theatr Iolo about their work for children, email hello@theatriolo.com





The unique, innovative role at Tŷ Hafan, where no child's education is ignored

Katie Simmons, Tŷ Hafan

In 2004, the Welsh Government formally adopted the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as the basis of policy making relating to children and young people in Wales. Article 28 of this policy states that “every child and young person have the right to education no matter who they are.”

Are we in Wales meeting this requirement for children receiving palliative care?

Through my unique role at Tŷ Hafan's Children's Hospice, I'm learning that this isn't always the case.

My passion for helping children started early. My mum was a registered childminder and ran a playgroup which meant my home and life mostly involved children. I loved engaging with them and supporting with their development.

I became a primary school teacher. A proud product of the Welsh medium education system, I qualified in 2002 and started teaching in Welsh medium mainstream primary education. I loved

my job and did it for more than 20 years, before trying something new - empowering young people supported by Tŷ Hafan whose lives are very different from most other children in Wales.

In my first year as Tŷ Hafan's Youth Social Action Practitioner I established our Youth Board and set up various projects. However my passion for teaching remained and questions posed about education for children receiving palliative care by the Children's Commissioner, Rocio Cifuentes lit a flame within me. Following discussions my role was developed to have more focus on supporting children and young people in an educational capacity due to the evidence of need. It's the first role of its kind in the UK. I felt so blessed!

As Tŷ Hafan's new Children's Rights and Education Practitioner I began to learn more about what education looks and feels like for children and young people with life-shortening conditions in Wales. It was, and continues to be, a massive challenge.

These are just few of the challenges I have recognised in the short period of fulfilling my role.

- A sense of negativity around why it's so important to deliver education to these children
- Palliative / hospice care is often misunderstood, and preconceptions are apparent
- An increasing number of children do not have any access to education during winter months as they are too vulnerable to attend school
- Children can spend long periods of time in bed not being stimulated or inspired to learn new skills and achieve
- There is a lack of qualified nurses based in special school settings to enable the child to attend and be safe
- There is a lack of provision / options for children to attend special school education, with many oversubscribed
- Teachers don't have the skills and knowledge needed of medical conditions that a child might suffer from, leading to barriers formed
- Post-16, opportunities to continue studying at a certain level decrease dramatically. It's a struggle to secure a place in a sixth form special school, as the demand is so high.

Since Covid-19 the way babies, children and young people think and learn generally has changed dramatically. They struggle to concentrate for periods of time, their social skills aren't as secure, they might be further behind in their studies and more children are being diagnosed with additional learning needs. All these factors are apparent and remain a challenge for teachers and teaching assistants across Wales.

The budgets that schools receive simply can't meet the demand for more bespoke learning, where the focus is child-led, and more skills/inquiry based. Although the new curriculum for Wales, which became statutory in September 2022 for children aged 3-16, aims to achieve this approach and focus on the six areas of learning and four core purposes the results of this change are yet to be measured.



Finally, I'd like to highlight how invaluable advancements in technology are to improving educational opportunities. For the children I support they are very often non-verbal and have limited mobility / strength. They may also be sensitive to lights, touch and sound. Technology plays a huge part in them having control of their decision making or learning and advances and access are pivotal for inclusivity for all types of learners.

No parent ever imagines that their precious child will have a short life. Sadly, this is the reality facing thousands of families in Wales. But just imagine a Wales where every child has access to the services they need and where families have a choice about the care and support they receive.

My colleagues and I at Tŷ Hafan can't stop seriously unwell children dying. But we can walk alongside every family who needs us.

For more information about Tŷ Hafan and the services we provide please visit www.tyhafan.org or email katie.simmons@tyhafan.org

1. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child 'UNCRC' July 1992.



Urdd Apprenticeships

Rachel Dwyer, Urdd Gobaith Cymru

Urdd Gobaith Cymru provide apprenticeships through workplace training across the whole of Wales across the Sports, Youth work, Childcare and Outdoor sectors. This training is provided free of charge if your member of staff works for more than 16 hours a week. The Welsh Government funds this provision and we are delighted to be able to provide this training either in Welsh or bilingually, as this can play a significant role in building confidence in the language.

Our wonderful Childcare provision works with nurseries across Wales to support staff in gaining their qualifications. Here's what Bethan Jones, a Level 3 Childcare apprentice said about her experience of training through the Urdd so far:

"My Assessor Sonia and my Cylch Meithrin Leader Ceris have been amazing and I am so grateful to them both. I would really like for them to be mentioned in recognition for all the help, support and encouragement they have given to me throughout my apprenticeship."

We are very fortunate to have our HWB team on hand to help with the teaching of essential skills qualifications (communication, numeracy and digital literacy) through the medium of Welsh, as this can help learners to have a complete package

of qualifications at the end of their learning journey with us. Some of the learners we work with may have finished school without the grades they needed, so completing their essential skills can help to rebuild a qualification portfolio for their future. We welcome learners with additional learning needs and adapt the teaching to suit the learner.

Our Youth Work provision continues to grow from strength to strength. The Education Workforce Council now requires Youth Worker registration across Wales, so we have seen an increase in people working towards their Level 3 qualification as a result. This, in turn, should go on to create a positive environment for the future. Seeing the great work that is being carried out across the sector throughout Wales is fantastic, with organisations such as GISDA and Area43, as well as local authorities such as Flintshire, working closely with young people on a daily basis to provide them with life skills, as well as a safe space to discuss any problems and discover further help.

We are developing new relationships across the Sport sector too, with new apprentices starting their learning journey with us from Mon Actif, where they will be pursuing a Leisure Operations & Management qualification, which is a level 3 qualification.

We have assessors based across Wales, who will guide our learners through their qualifications and learning. This happens both in person as well as virtually, and we also collect the learning evidence in many ways, either in writing, orally and through observation. This gives learners the opportunity to share their work in a way that is most effective for them.

We have delivered apprenticeships for over 10 years and have seen demand in our programmes and the work-based learning sector increase consistently. To provide opportunities for learners to gain experience along with suitable qualifications, as well as to increase their confidence, creates a platform for them to continue their careers and to prepare them for the future.

To see learners grow and thrive during their learning journey is a privilege and supporting a person to improve their skills and to prepare them for a new opportunity or the next step in their career is great. For more information about the Urdd's apprenticeships, visit www.urdd.org/prentisiaethau, or contact us to discuss further.

The apprenticeship section is a department within Urdd Gobaith Cymru, Wales' largest voluntary youth organization, that supports young people with the aim of providing opportunities and experiences through the medium of Welsh for all young people in Wales to develop into confident and fulfilling citizens.



Prentisiaethau





The importance of early years shared reading in supporting children's learning and progress in school

Sioned Jones, BookTrust Cymru

Drawing on hundreds of studies to support our research on 'The Benefits of Reading'¹, the evidence shows that reading and sharing stories is proven to bring children profound and wide-ranging benefits including supporting them to meet speech and language milestones and do better at school.

Children's brains experience the most growth in their first five years. So, in these early years, stimulation from books, and using books, stories and rhymes as a focus for playing, talking, and singing enhances the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional growth and development of children that extends far beyond childhood.

Reading for pleasure in the early years unlocks academic success across the curriculum, with a child who is read to at age 1–2 scoring higher in reading, spelling, grammar, and numeracy skills at age 8–11. In fact, reading for pleasure is four times more powerful an impact on a child's progress across the curriculum at age 16 than parental education or socioeconomic status.

From research² we undertook in 2022, parents and carers see reading with their children as important and whilst the majority are sharing stories with their

children in the first year of life, almost a quarter of families are not. Frequent shared reading reaches its peak when children are aged between two and four and then starts to drop significantly, continuing to decline throughout childhood. This means many children are missing out on regular shared reading opportunities and exposure to books and stories and, therefore, the chance to enjoy the profound and wide-ranging benefits that reading brings. A lack of time due to the pressures of work or family life and a lack of confidence in choosing books their children will enjoy are among the main barriers that prevent families from reading together. Furthermore, over a quarter of parents and carers do not find it easy to read with their young children. These are complex issues that require a behaviour change led approach to support families to read more with their children, and to continue shared reading throughout and beyond the early years. Making sharing stories with children easy and enjoyable for families is therefore key.

BookTrust has been working in Wales for over 25 years providing various bilingual programmes. These programmes spark family enjoyment through creating fun reading experiences for

both children and adults, and through building parental confidence. Working closely with our local delivery partners, we provide non-judgmental guidance and modelling, helping to reduce anxiety that might make sharing books stressful for some parents/carers. Each programme includes expertly selected high quality, diverse and inclusive books that inspire children and families to read, developmentally appropriate resources, messages and support to parents and carers and support for our network of dedicated and skilled partners.

Our work supports every child in Wales from their first year of life, with our Bookstart Baby programme, right through to the end of their Reception year in school with our Pori Drwy Stori Programme. It is essential that children from low income and vulnerable family backgrounds do not miss out on the transformative benefits of early shared reading. Evidence shows that children from disadvantaged backgrounds who achieve highly at the end of primary school are twice as likely to have been read to at home in their early years, compared to their peers. In the long-term, reading has the potential to transform children’s future life chances. A child growing up in poverty who is read to at age five has a significantly higher chance of economic success in their 30s than their peers who were not read to. That’s why, in addition to the universal offerings in our Early Years Reading Journey, we deliver a range of programmes,

including Bookstart Toddler, that are designed to ensure that children and families experiencing disadvantage are given more support to develop or maintain a positive reading habit and for the children to have greater opportunity to realise the amazing and transformative benefits of reading.

References

1. [The benefits of reading | BookTrust](#)
2. BookTrust conducted an online survey of 2,148 parents and carers of children aged 0–7 living in low-income households in England, Wales and Northern Ireland between April and June 2022. We use the term low-income families to indicate those living in relative poverty as defined by Department for Work and Pensions



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Lywodraeth Cymru
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The Power of Play: Building Foundations for Learning with Cardiff Parenting & Play

**Dr Sarah Fitzgibbon, Sara Wiggins
& Alexa Tudball, Cardiff Council**



Parents and carers are a child's first influence and their first educator. Each of us learn about who we are, how to interact with others, how to play and how we see the world from our interactions with our caregivers. Cardiff Parenting and Play Service work in partnership with parents and carers living in Cardiff from pregnancy and until children become adults. Our aim is to empower parents to help children grow and develop, build strong and meaningful parent-child relationships, help parents feel better able to understand their child's emotional and developmental needs, and to nurture wellbeing and resilience for parents and children. The Service does this by working with parents and caregivers in a variety of ways.

Communication is central to learning. Babies start to communicate in response to what they see and hear; being influenced by a caregiver's emotional

responses, use of touch, movement and language. Babies are born with the capacity to speak any language, and will start to understand and use the spoken sounds they hear most often. In a bilingual home, our little ones are able to use and master more than one language. Cardiff Parenting and Play offer opportunities for parents to attend English and Welsh stay and play groups, and we promote the use of all home languages and culture.

Cardiff Parenting and Play put relationships first and our work is underpinned by the important role of attachment and play for children's development. We offer early years groups where parents and little ones can delight in opportunities to share in play. Through play, children learn about themselves and about adults – whether adults are reliable and can be trusted. Children

broaden their knowledge and understanding of the world through the first-hand experiences on offer, exploring a variety of textures, concepts, sounds and movements. Children develop their problem solving and curiosity which are essential skills for learning. Through the praise and comments adults give, we are shaping children's pattern of motivation for learning. When we focus on celebrating our children's effort, we encourage children to try hard and persevere in the face of challenge. When we acknowledge that they must be feeling proud of themselves, we encourage them to notice and be motivated by their own feelings. The Service also offer opportunities for caregivers to come to together and reflect on the role of the adult in children's play.

Play is the way children explore the world and learn about themselves and others. Children value time, freedom and quality places to play. Cardiff Parenting and Play offer a continuum of play experiences for babies and children up to age 14. Our earliest sessions invite caregivers to enjoy the time together with their child and as children grow older we offer open access play sessions for children aged 5 to 14 to join independently. We also offer sessions tailored to children with a range of additional needs and disabilities.



Play is freely chosen and can happen anywhere! Children play where they feel safe to explore and be free; this can be at home, in the garden, in open spaces and parks. Cardiff Children's Play Service facilitate a wide range of activities, designed to encourage children and young people to create their own fun and manage risks. We aim to provide opportunities to play for all children and young

people in line with the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Article 31, that states: *Every child has the right to engage in play activities suitable for their age and stage of development.*

The Service works alongside parents and schools to invest in the play needs of children across Cardiff. Joining play sessions with peers allows children to be part of a play community, developing relationship and collaboration, which support a child's wellbeing and are also helpful for learning. Play and playfulness can form part of the school curriculum, and take place in the school grounds during and after school. Schools can feel like a safe base for children and are often located centrally in a community. Community-focussed schools can offer safe places for children to play, outside of the typical school hours.

Playing is an important aspects of children's lives. Children value time, freedom and space to play. Babies and children are better able to learn, flourish and grow, when adults allow them to fulfil this need to play!

To give children the foundations for learning, our responsibility as adults is to protect their time and space to play.

To learn more about this work, please email: Sarah.Fitzgibbon@cardiff.gov.uk



Battles, Triumphs and Joy

Betsan Gower-Gallagher, Oxfam Cymru

I have been blessed with two beautiful twin girls, Bowann and Brielle, who have been diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Global Developmental Delay (GDD). From the beginning of their speech stopping and their hands starting to flap and spin, it's been a constant fight.

When we started visiting mainstream schools, Autism wasn't evident. We had the warmest of welcomes and everybody wanted our beautiful twinnies. As soon as we started noticing signs of Autism, we requested a referral to the paediatrician, who then put us on the pathway to Autism. After this, the warm welcome from the schools changed. Those who initially wanted us made us feel like a burden.

I remember the awful, devastating feeling of my children being unwanted. Thank goodness one mainstream school accepted our beautiful girls. It was a tough decision to send them to mainstream, but they were only 4 at the time, and we hoped that they would develop, and it

was something we felt we had to try. At this stage they were statemented, with a 1 to 1 provision recommendation, more on which later

After the first year, we could see that mainstream may not be the best place for them, but we managed to get them a place in the local authority Autism Assessment Unit, which helped us identify the best way to support them. After a year at the assessment unit, we decided that a special needs school would be the best place for them.

Nobody dreams of sending their child/children to a special needs school, BUT it's the best thing we have done. The girls now attend Ysgol Maes Y Coed. Helen Glover is an exceptional headmistress and is a massive driving force in the school. Our children are valued, and all their achievements are celebrated, however big or small.

As parents, my husband and I were proactive from the off. We decided that even though we couldn't really afford to hire a private speech therapist,

we couldn't afford to ignore it either. So we hired a speech therapist, which was the best thing to do at the time as it helped us get the girls' statement early. After spending all our savings, we were then penalised as we didn't get speech support from the NHS, on the basis of 'you've already got one'.

Everything has been a battle. I can't explain how hard, demoralising and exhausting it's been. There's a saying which resonates so deeply with me - 'Autism broke my wings and then I grew claws'. I would change this to 'The fight for Autism broke my wings, and then I grew claws'. This is exactly how I feel. I have to be Dragon Mamma!

What has worked is being proactive. Getting the girls' statement was very positive. However, the local authority tried to give us 2-1 care for my girls who were, according to their statement, in need of 1 to 1 care. It felt like they were being discriminated against for being twins! Well, let's say I fought, and I won.

We managed to access Flying Start outreach, which helped us get early intensive intervention (intensive interaction play therapy) for the girls, which 100% helps children.

Ongoing difficulties are childcare! This is a massive issue for my husband and I as working parents. It is practically non-existent, we've had a quote for £350 for 1 day's care as both girls need the 1-1 element due to their high needs and issues. I have been told by charities, organisations and friends to give up work. However, I feel the need to work for my mental health and from a social aspect. We feel like I'm being punished for having disabled children!

We also don't have access to breakfast clubs, after-school clubs, or overnight respite.

One thing that we were not comfortable with in the early days was requesting a social worker, but without a social worker, you will struggle to get any family support. When we first asked for one, we were refused, another battle ensued, and in the end, we were allocated one. For anyone with disabled young children, I would highly recommend you get a social worker.

Getting an autism diagnosis hasn't been easy. It can feel like you're grieving, and every step toward getting the proper support is a fight. But our girls fill our lives with joy. Their cheeky, mischievous energy

brings so much laughter, and we wouldn't change them for the world.

Oxfam Cymru would like to thank Betsan Gower-Gallagher for sharing her personal experience of the challenges her family has faced in accessing childcare and support for the children.

Together with its partners Oxfam Cymru is making the case for better childcare provision as part of their campaigning to end poverty and inequality. The Expert Advisory Group on Childcare (EAGC) continues to demonstrate the link between childcare and poverty and why it is important to support parents with their childcare needs.

The Expert Advisory Group on Childcare in Wales has stressed that childcare settings are not accessible for significant numbers of children with disabilities and those with additional needs, and is calling for a clear plan from the Welsh Government in addressing these systemic issues.



Organisational links

[Children in Wales](#)

[NYAS](#)

[Barnardo's Cymru](#)

[Play Wales](#)

[Centre for Evidence Based Early Intervention, Bangor University](#)

[Epilepsy Action Cymru](#)

[Cardiff & Vale UHB](#)

[BookTrust](#)

[Ty Hafan](#)

[Child Friendly Cardiff](#)

[Newport City Council](#)

[Theatre Iolo](#)

[Reaching Wider Partnerships in Wales](#)

[Oxfam Cymru](#)

[Cardiff Council](#)

[Amberleigh House Therapeutic School](#)

[Children's Legal Centre Wales](#)

[Urdd Gobaith Cymru](#)

[National Youth Arts Wales](#)

[Ara Recovery 4 All](#)



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📷 [@youngwalesciw](https://www.instagram.com/youngwalesciw)

🌐 [Children in Wales](https://www.linkedin.com/company/children-in-wales)

[childreninwales.org.uk](https://www.childreninwales.org.uk)