

PLANT YNG NGHYMURU
CHILDREN IN WALES

Issue 93
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Where Every Child Belongs: Diversity and Inclusion in Practice

FEATURES

Widening Participation,
Cardiff University

PIWS

Cwm Taf Morgannwg
Regional Partnership

Boys' & Girls' Clubs for Wales

PLUS:

Youth Work
Leadership Lab
TACT Fostering
Barnardo's Cymru
University of Wales
Trinity St David

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Welcome from Chief Executive, Hugh Russell

Croeso cynnes, a warm welcome to you. I'm delighted to share the Summer edition of Children in Wales' magazine in which we explore the theme of Diversity and Inclusion in the lives of babies, children and young people in Wales.



I want to start with an acknowledgment that many young people, and those who work with them, continue to face significant challenges because of who they are, who they love or what they believe.¹ Religious hate crime has spiked across the UK in the last year. Hate crimes committed against trans people have risen at an alarming rate over the last decade,² and child poverty in Wales remains at an unbearably high level and is more likely to affect those from certain ethnic backgrounds (or who are in a household where someone is disabled) than others.³

Set against that, we have seen progress in Wales, with the LGBTQ+ Action Plan and the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan amongst some of the significant steps forward led by Welsh Government, and with the support and involvement of many of Children in Wales' members. At Children in Wales our values provide a framework to work by, in which we specifically note that we will ensure that our work is inclusive, that those whose voices are not heard as often as others have a place at our table, and that all can have a say.⁴ In our vision

for the Wales we want to build we are clear that **all** babies, children and young people have all of their rights fulfilled.

It is with this vision in mind that I am pleased to introduce a magazine in which our members have reflected on putting their own inclusive values into practice to help to overcome some of those challenges - whether through **anti-racist youth work**, ensuring **equity in access to free school meals**, supporting **autistic learners** or embedding **equality and diversity in early years settings**. These contributions demonstrate that while there is still much to do, there is also a strong and growing commitment to change.

I am particularly pleased to feature a contribution from the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Jane Hutt at Welsh Government. I would like to warmly thank her for taking the time to share her insights with us. I'd like to also take this moment to note my appreciation of Jane's unfailing commitment to inclusivity and to challenging discrimination throughout her long and impressive career. As she retires from politics next year, I hope that she can do so confident in the knowledge that her work has helped to foster a spirit of active inclusion among many of us in Wales, raising the voices of people who otherwise would go unheard and creating a culture in which those of us who fight for the rights of others feel emboldened to continue to push for positive change.

Meaningful inclusion cannot be achieved through policy alone though, it relies on consistent, reflective practice and listening to children and young people. We're grateful to our many long-standing members in this issue who share how they are working to create services that are not only inclusive in principle, but in day-to-day reality. We would also like to welcome our brand new members too, including:

- Youth Work Leadership Lab
- Widening Participation, Cardiff University
- PIWS
- Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Partnership
- Boys' & Girls' Clubs for Wales
- ESports Wales

We very much look forward to working with you in 2025 and beyond.

I hope you find this issue inspiring, thought-provoking and hopeful.

Cofion

Hugh

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Building a Wales where every child belongs

**Cabinet Secretary for
Social Justice, Jane Hutt**



Growing up in Wales means belonging to a nation that treasures every child for who they are – a Wales for all children.

Along with Ministers from across the Welsh Government, I'm proud to be part of the first UK nation to incorporate the UNCRC into our law. The Convention is the basis for all our policy for and affecting children. It is central to our ambition to give every child the best start in life and improve their outcomes.

Equality of opportunity is a core principle of the UNCRC and of this Government. Every child in Wales deserves to thrive, regardless of their

background or circumstances. It's not just about policies on paper – it's about creating a Wales where diversity is celebrated, barriers are dismantled, and every young person can reach their full potential.

For children from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, it means walking through the world without facing racism, seeing themselves represented in our leadership, and having their cultural contributions celebrated as integral to Welsh identity. Through our Anti-racist Wales Action Plan, we're tackling discrimination head-on, working directly with young people who have experienced racism to create meaningful change.

The Welsh Government wants everyone living in Wales to be valued, accepted and respected. We have published a draft Disabled People's Rights Plan; this is for disabled children and adults. We think that the way the world is designed sometimes stops disabled children from taking part in all the activities they would like to. We want to make sure every child can do the things they enjoy, learn at school, and feel safe and included.

For LGBTQ+ young people, it means growing up in communities where they can express their authentic selves without fear. It means inclusive relationships education that acknowledges their identities and comprehensive support that understands their unique challenges. Our LGBTQ+ Action Plan isn't just policy – it's about creating the conditions where every young person can flourish as themselves.

For children living with financial hardship, being valued means never having to feel shame about their circumstances. Our Child Poverty Strategy – developed with over 1,400 young people themselves – and our Basic Income for Care Leavers in Wales pilot demonstrate our commitment to ensuring economic circumstances never limit a child's potential. Every child deserves a secure home, nutritious food, and the same opportunities as their peers.

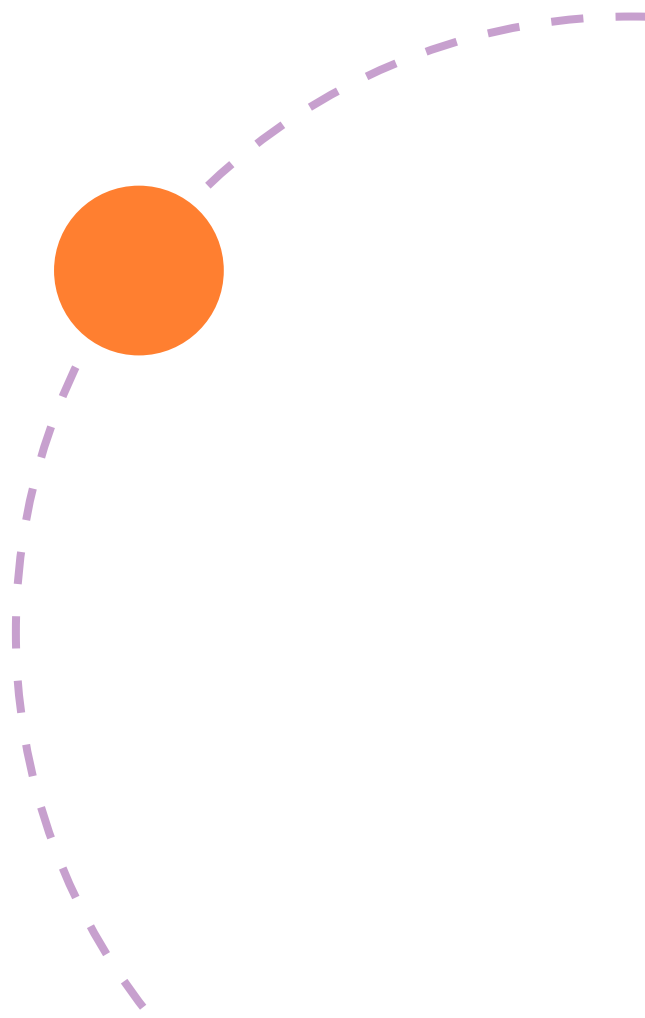
Having spaces to play, create, and connect is central to our Children and Young People's Plan. Through our 'Talk with Me' campaign and community initiatives, we're fostering environments where children develop their voices and confidence. Play isn't a luxury – it's how children make sense of the world and build the resilience they need for life's challenges.

Real inclusion means children and young people having genuine participation in decisions affecting them. Through Young Wales and other platforms, young people aren't just consulted – they're active partners in shaping policies sharing their lived experiences from diverse backgrounds.

Grounded in the Rights of Children and Young Persons Measure and the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, we're working to build a Wales which values every child's rights and needs – not just their education or health needs in isolation, but their entire wellbeing as valued citizens.

This isn't work we can do alone. From local authorities to community groups, from schools to families themselves – creating a Wales that truly values every child requires all of us. Together, we're building a nation where every child grows up knowing they are seen, heard, and deeply valued.

The journey continues, but our direction is resolute: a Wales where every child belongs and a Wales for all children.





Working together to create an equitable future

**Stephanie Garbutt, Children in Wales &
Michael Flynn, Diverse Cymru**

Equality, diversity and inclusion are the foundations of our values at Children in Wales. We are committed to ensuring that we are inclusive, and that those whose voices are less heard, have a place at our table and that all can have a say.

In order to ensure that we are living up to these values, and as part of our five-year Strategy, we have committed to *“Working hard to ensuring that our values are always visibly demonstrated in our actions”* and *“We will be a sustainable, inclusive organisation working compassionately and with integrity to achieve our mission.”*

We know that in order to deliver on these commitments, we need to work in partnership with others who have the knowledge and lived experience to support us. One of these partners is Diverse Cymru, who have taken us on board within their Cultural Competency Scheme.

Here’s what Michael Flynn from Diverse Cymru, our incredibly supportive partner on this journey, has to say about how together we are moving forward towards our equality vision:

‘Don’t forget to take your shoes off’

This is where it all starts, respecting each other’s environment and values.

Our Cultural Competency Scheme is a workplace development tool that is helping Children in Wales reach and cater to the unique needs of its staff and volunteers, and to ensure that their services are accessible to all within the immediate and culturally diverse environment.

What makes our Scheme work, and lead to real and sustainable outcomes, is the relationship that we have with the organisations that we support.

It is a relationship built on trust and honesty. For an organisation to make real change, it has to want to do so and not just because it has to. This means having honest discussions about where it is and where it wants to be.

The process involves looking at all areas of the organisation, from its management commitment to Equality Diversity & Inclusion (EDI), through its ability to communicate, consult and involve a broad range of voices in its delivery, to looking at the ways in which it ensures its policies and procedures help its staff include and service all within its community in a sustainable way.

We are there to provide the simple cultural tools and advice that supports inclusion, and this is what we call 'getting your house in order before you entertain.' Often an organisation will concentrate solely on 'Diversity' and with good intentions, but concentrating all of your effort solely on increasing immediate diverse representation may have some good short term gains, but the sustainable outcomes are not achieved, as the environment is not yet ready to cater to the cultural needs of some individuals, and thus they leave or drop out of the service.

Rather, we need to understand that Diversity is the ultimate result of real Inclusion, and that is how we are working with Children in Wales, providing it with the nuts and bolts to make real progress towards their Equality vision.

Our first task has been to help them and their staff understand why this commitment is needed, and this involves a series of awareness sessions and conversations that lay out the current inequality situation across all sectors of public life. Then to look at how we as individuals can overcome, or at least acknowledge, our own biases and make small practical adjustments to help address big issues. This is an important step, as this 'Whole Equality thing' can often seem too big for people to deal with, thinking that there simply is too much to be done. We say that we cannot turn the whole tanker around, but by taking small incremental steps we can influence day to day practice, and start a real relationship with communities that have never engaged before.

The next step of the process involves looking at how Children in Wales carries out its day to day work, and to identify the current level of cultural awareness, to see what additional support is needed to allow all to have the cultural knowledge and ammunition to engage a broader section of society. Each organisation is usually surprised by what they are already doing, but often this good practice is not shared, so this is an important part of the process. We then help to take this good practice, together with increasingly better communications and consultation activities, and put this into policy and practice.

We will continue to work with Children in Wales over the next year, with the aim of developing its cultural knowledge base, and solidifying and communicating the lessons learned to ensure that the services they offer are accessible to all. This will, down the line, ensure that its workforce and customer base represents the true diversity of Wales.

For further information about the Cultural Competency Scheme, please contact:
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Discovery at Cardiff University: helping autistic young people build confidence, develop skills and discover university

Dr Elisabeth Jones, Cardiff University

Cardiff University's Widening Participation and Outreach team believes that education should be for all.¹ One of our programmes is **Discovery**, which gives autistic young people (aged 14+) an insight into higher education (HE) through weekly workshops, residential Summer Schools, and visit and experience days. Discovery aims to increase participants' confidence in social situations and academic spaces, building skills needed to thrive at university and beyond in an inclusive, neuro-affirming environment.

Discovery addresses some of the additional barriers and challenges - both academic and social - that autistic individuals face when thinking about, applying for and studying at university. Though autistic young people may be less likely to apply for

university, the number of UK students declaring a 'social, behavioural, or communication difference' (such as autism spectrum conditions) more than tripled in the last decade.² This increase, coupled with the fact that retention and attainment amongst autistic students still fall behind their neurotypical peers, highlights the necessity of programmes like Discovery.³

During the weekly Discovery project, PhD tutors run interactive workshops on topics like budgeting, socialising and managing energy. Parent/supporter information and guidance sessions run concurrently, fostering a community of support and collaboration. We also include a social break with pizza and snacks! At the end of the 2025 project, 89% of the cohort said they

were considering university as a realistic option. Our post-intervention survey revealed large increases in positive responses to questions about participants' sense of belonging at, and knowledge of, university. There were more moderate increases in affirmative answers to questions about academic self-efficacy, reflecting our understanding that autistic learners often struggle more with social confidence, executive functioning skills, and new situations, than with academic confidence and ability.



Every July, we run a three-day Summer School. Participants aged 16+ stay in student halls with flatmates and participate in a range of fun, informative activities: they manage a budget, cook their own meal, visit a university library, and work in groups to create and pitch a university society. 72% believed they would get a place at university at the end of the 2024 residential, while confidence about in fitting in socially and living independently also increased.

In December 2024, we ran a 'Quiet Visit Day' for neurodivergent young people and anyone who might find a traditional Open Day environment overwhelming. The day included a campus tour and quiz, information talks and library treasure hunt. To mark World Autism Acceptance week in April 2025, we introduced the Discovery Academic Taster Day. Participants tried academic subjects like coding, creative writing and finding and using reputable sources. By expanding our programme, we hope to offer more autistic young people chance to explore university in multiple ways.

The Discovery programme builds links with local charities and organisations, regularly inviting them to showcase their work (eg, during our Summer School 'Graduate Fayre' and parent/supporter sessions). We also work with colleagues in the university's Student

Disability Team to share information on navigating application processes, accessing Disabled Students' Allowance and transition.

Being able to picture themselves at university is incredibly valuable for these young people, and so we are proud to actively recruit neurodivergent and autistic students to our ambassador scheme. One participant told us the best part of Discovery was 'speaking to the ambassadors who have experience and getting advice from people who know what they're talking about for *people like me*'.

The true successes of Discovery are always in inspirational individual stories, of which we are privileged to be part. It feels apt to conclude with one such story: a former participant's parent recently got in touch to say 'Discovery is brilliant. For anyone thinking about signing up, definitely do. My daughter did it [...] and now she's applying for university... She's just received her first offer for September!'

If you would like to learn more about our work, please email outreach@cardiff.ac.uk

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Platform4YP - The role we play on mental health in Wales!

Lucy Thomas & Bex Roots, Platform

Platform is a mental health and social change charity in Wales that works with people experiencing challenges with their mental health, and communities who want to create a greater sense of connection, ownership and wellbeing in the places they live. Within that sits Platform4YP meaning Platforms for Young People.

Mental health isn't always at the forefront of people's minds when we think of diversity and inclusion, yet mental health doesn't discriminate and Platform4YP are here to make sure that no matter the background, identity or needs are, young people and children are getting the mental health support that they need.

Platform4YP Making a Difference

Platform4YP has projects within various communities throughout Wales. They are designed

to fit the needs of the people within those communities to make sure that we are supporting the actual individual. We know that people are different, so we believe it is important to be an individual-led charity.

We want to make sure that we work alongside young people to make sure that the changes that are made are things that actually affect them, and not what we think needs to be changed. We want to put the decision making at the hands of young people, the ones that are affected the most by the decisions made at the top.

The Hangouts that we have in Cardiff and Barry are a great example of the mental health support where young people, from diverse backgrounds, can drop in for wellbeing support, for a social space, events, groups and volunteering opportunities for people aged between 11-18 years old.

Platfform wants to highlight that different communities aren't the same and will have different reasons that will affect the mental health and wellbeing of those communities. For example, living in poverty will have different effects on what being a part of the LGBTQ+ community has on mental health.

The Power Up is a great example of one of our projects where young people aged 10-25, living in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan, can get involved in making a difference around mental health, regardless of the background they come from. It's what we do with that information that will help make that change on how we support communities throughout Wales. We believe that support should be built on the foundation of identifying what the root cause is, and understanding how lives are shaped by these experiences by including young people in these conversations.

Areas for improvement

There is still a long way to go when we talk about mental health. During our research stage for the Power Up project, young people had concerns about body image, war, intolerance and discrimination. For mental health support, young people wanted more accessibility, autonomy, acceptance and action over the support they are offered and receive.

What does this mean?

Accessibility – young people said that they would like support to be accessible, timely and appropriate. It's ensuring that young people don't have to wait long for their support and that it matches their needs. As well as being supported by someone who they can relate to and trust.

Autonomy - it means young people having the opportunity to make decisions about their own support. From the research, young people said that they want autonomy over their support, and the ability to make decisions on their support independently.

Acceptance – it's about validating the young person's feelings and experiences. It's making sure that what young people are going through is normalised, that they are not alone in what they

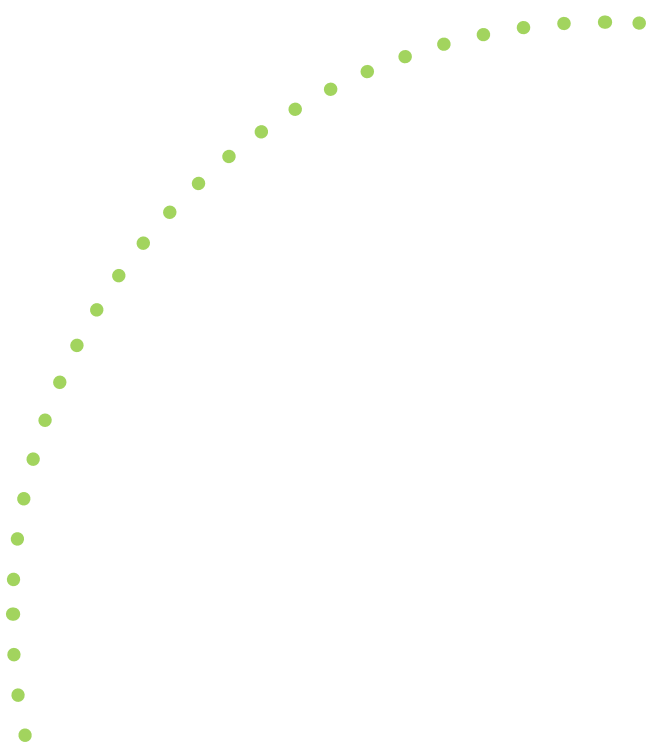
are feeling and that there is someone around them who cares about them feeling 'okay.'

Action – this means taking meaningful action to support young people achieving their goals, and what professionals can do to help. It's about advocating for change that improves young people's future and long-term health outcomes positively.

In the end, all we want to do is to make a positive change, to improve the support systems for young people and reduce the stigma around mental health. We want to make sure the voices of young people are heard, and that they are included in the change making, as they are the ones affected the most in the care they receive.

If you would like to learn more about our work at Platfform, please email:

LucyThomas@Platfform.org





Young people calling for an end to school food inequality

Ellie Harwood,
Child Poverty Action Group

Everyone wants children to have happy and healthy childhoods. In Wales, legislation like the Socio-economic Duty and the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 mean every child should have an equal chance to develop to their full potential. Welsh Ministers and public bodies are responsible for identifying and removing inequalities that get in the way of this happening.

Feeling included at school is an important part of ensuring mental and emotional wellbeing for all children. Surveys of children and young people in Wales show many learners do feel that school is a place where they belong. However, children from

families experiencing socio-economic inequality are more likely to say that they feel like they don't belong, especially once they start secondary school ([School Health Research Network, 2025](#)).

At Child Poverty Action Group, we work with young people and their schools to understand how policy and practice around poverty can affect children's experience of education. We use a peer-researcher model that enables young people to communicate their views, and we work together with groups of young people, known as Youth Voice Champions, to help share their insights with decision-makers. This helps adults have a better

understanding of what it is like to experience child poverty at school and in contemporary society.

Our Youth Voice Champions tell us that socio-economic inequality can create significant barriers to inclusion at school. This can range from being unable to afford to go on trips and residential, to missing out on fun and charity days, to having your subject options limited by costs. Having no money on your school meal account can mean going without food all day or having to ask your friends for help so you have enough food to eat. Being unable to afford the bus fare to school can mean missing out on education altogether.

We recently asked a nationally representative group of young people, aged 11-18 from across the UK, about the impact of socio-economic inequality at school, including over 200 young people in Wales. More than half of young people in Wales (52%) said the amount of money your family has can affect whether you feel happy and included at school. A similar proportion (51%) said your family's financial circumstances can affect your wellbeing and mental health, with 42% saying it can have an impact on your friendships too.

Our Youth Voice Champions feel incredibly passionate about the injustice around free school meals in secondary schools. They know about the welcome progress Wales has made, providing free breakfasts and universal lunches for younger learners, and feel disappointed that politicians haven't taken steps to ensure equality for older children too.

The current means-test for free school meals in secondary school hasn't been raised since it was set in 2019. Families with a net earned income of more than £7400 a year still have to pay for all the meals, snacks and drinks that their children require during the school day. Access to the School Essentials Grant is also attached to means-tested free school meals eligibility, so many families miss out on this too. [Analysis by Child Poverty Action Group](#) has shown that 20,000 young people living in poverty in Wales don't qualify for free school meals because they are in year 7 or above. Even though their family lives below the poverty line, they earn just over the threshold to qualify for free school meals.

For those young people who do get free school meals, the allowance is usually only enough to get a basic meal at lunchtime. It often does not cover food at break.

"Some people don't have breakfast, and if they have free school meals, they can't get food at break" (Secondary learner, Wales)

Food insecurity affects both the young people themselves and their friends and classmates. Our research found that 70% of young people in Wales say they give money or food to friends when they cannot afford to buy breakfast or breaktime snacks, with a third (34%) saying they do this at least once a week. Three quarters (74%) say they sometimes give food to friends who can't afford to buy lunch.

Young people are clear – they want school meals inequality to end now. The Welsh Government must ensure that free school meals are available to every child that needs them, regardless of their age. There should be no means testing in school canteens, and everyone should have equal access to food, so they can concentrate on enjoying their time at school.

If you would like to get in touch and discuss this work in more detail, please contact Simon Page, Education Project Manager on spage@cpag.org.uk





Training as a Tool for Change: The Role of Training in Equity, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Claire Sharp,
Children in Wales

In today's increasingly diverse society, creating inclusive environments for babies, children and young people is not a nice-to-have, it is essential. Understanding equity, equality, diversity and inclusion (EEDI) helps ensure we are working effectively with all communities in Wales. For professionals supporting children, ongoing learning through high-quality training is a vital step in building confidence, developing inclusive practice and delivering services where every child feels seen and heard.

Children in Wales is proud to offer expert-led training that brings together practitioners from a wide range of services and backgrounds. Whether you work in health, education, housing, youth work, childcare or the voluntary sector, our sessions offer space to share ideas, reflect on your practice and gain practical tools to support children and families.

Our training supports professionals to challenge discrimination, understand children's rights

and meet the needs of those who are often marginalised. Whether it's understanding the experiences of LGBTQIA+ young people, supporting neurodivergent children, or making sure Deaf participants can fully engage in learning, we work hard to ensure our courses are inclusive and delivered with care, respect and expertise.

As a child rights organisation, we are guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Our training is designed to reflect these rights, ensuring all children in Wales have the support they need to grow up safe, respected and valued.

Training that makes a difference

We are excited to share highlights from some of our courses, each tailored to support practitioners in meeting the diverse needs of children and young people in Wales:

- **Pride and Prejudice: Supporting Young LGBTQIA+ People**

This session explores identity, inclusion and safeguarding when working with LGBTQIA+ children and young people. Participants learn how to offer meaningful support through a rights-based approach, tackling issues such as bullying, self-harm and child sexual exploitation. An attendee from a previous session shared, *“The course felt like a safe space to explore issues and has really helped me in how I will approach young people in my work.”*

- **Transitions: Supporting Young Trans People**

This course looks at how to support young people navigating their gender identity, recognising the challenges they may face in schools, within their families and wider society. It offers guidance on building trans-friendly environments where young people feel safe to express themselves. As one previous participant said, *“It was so helpful to go into depth about gender identity and the terminology around this. Fantastic course delivered so sensitively.”*

- **Understanding Neurodiversity in Children and Young People**

Designed for frontline workers, this course introduces the broad range of neurodiverse experiences, from ADHD, dyspraxia, autism and more. It encourages practitioners to see the whole child, not just a diagnosis, and to use positive language when discussing behaviour. One previous participant told us, *“Thank you for a very informative training session. The resources are excellent, and I found the positive language examples for describing behaviours in report writing really useful.”*

- **Equality, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EEDI)**

This training helps practitioners understand how discrimination impacts the people they work with and how to create inclusive services. It also looks at unconscious bias, representation, and how to meet legal responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty. One attendee said, *“It gave practical advice on how to approach situations where someone is experiencing prejudice – really useful and thought-provoking.”*

Making our training accessible

We are committed to ensuring our training delivery is inclusive. In May 2025, we ran a safeguarding course for Deaf participants, funded by the Welsh Government Social Services Grant. We worked closely with the British Deaf Association and used British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters throughout. The training was held at Bridgend Deaf Club, a familiar and welcoming space for many attendees.

Delivering this course was a learning journey for our team. Our trainers adapted materials to be more visual, allowed for more breaks, and made space for emotional reflection, especially given the sensitive nature of safeguarding. One important theme that emerged was the need for Deaf children to have access to a language they can fully understand and use to communicate feelings, particularly around safety and wellbeing.

Looking ahead

Our training continues to grow and evolve, responding to current challenges and emerging needs. If you're new to Children in Wales, our training is open to all professionals who want to strengthen their inclusive practice and champion the rights of children and young people.

You can view and book [upcoming courses](#) on our website, or commission a bespoke session tailored to your team. We are here to support you in making your service more inclusive, informed and effective.

Visit our [training page](#) today and discover how you can be part of building a more equitable Wales for every child.





Empowering Young Voices: The Democracy Ambassadors Programme in Cardiff

Selma Abdalla, Cardiff Council

Did you know that in Wales, young people aged 16 and over can vote in Senedd and local council elections? In Cardiff, we're helping the next generation understand this important right through the Democracy Ambassadors Programme (DAP), a unique initiative designed for primary and secondary schools.

The aim of the programme is to support teachers to implement practicable yet authentic democratic learning experiences in line with the new curriculum for Wales's Purpose 3: *ensuring learners become ethical, informed citizens who understand and exercise their human and democratic responsibilities and rights and are ready to be citizens of Wales and the world.*

Each participating school nominates 'Democracy Ambassadors,' one or more teachers or pupils (year 9 and above) who take on the exciting role of promoting democratic rights and encouraging pupils to engage with politics in meaningful ways. These ambassadors help spread the message that young voices matter, especially when it comes to decisions that affect their lives.

Through DAP, students take part in real-world learning experiences that bring democracy to life. These include:

- [Visits to County Hall](#): where they explore how government works at different levels; get the chance to walk through a mock polling station and even cast a vote. Pupils also get to sit in the Council Chamber, role-playing as councillors in a meeting chaired by the Lord Mayor, who they also get to meet and interview
- In school workshops led by Youth Workers and Community Cohesion officers, supported by local elected members. These workshops aim to help pupils explore what power looks like in their local area
- Visits to the Senedd: where pupils get to tour the Senedd, learn about the powers held by the Senedd as well as take part in a mock debate
- Cardiff-specific learning resources, developed with the Cardiff Curriculum Team and the Electoral Commission. These resources are created in line with the Curriculum for Wales

The Democracy Ambassadors Programme is more than a project, it's a movement to help young people understand their rights, their power, and their place in our democratic society. We're proud to support schools in raising a generation of informed, engaged citizens.

Here is some feedback received from those who have taken part in DAP:

'Extremely worthwhile for our pupils. They have discovered that they have a strong voice to make a difference to the future of our society. They now believe that their views are heard and acted upon. Some pupils would like to have a role in the Senedd when they are older.' – **Democracy Ambassador at St Alban's Catholic Primary School**

'The visit offered our pupils a unique and engaging opportunity to step into the heart of local democracy and gain a deeper understanding of how political systems operate in Cardiff, Wales, and the wider UK.' – **Headteacher at St John Lloyd Primary School**

'I liked the interactive activities like icebreaker and for my opinion and voice to be heard.' – **School Senedd Pupil at Cantonian High School**

'I absolutely enjoyed the experience because I learned things that I never knew, things that will help me feel more confident in voting.' – **School Senedd Pupil at St John Lloyd Primary School**

Do you work with young people?

If you are an educator, youth worker or simply passionate about empowering young voices, we'd love to hear from you. Join us in shaping the next generation of voters and leaders. For more information, resources, or to see our programme in action, please send an email to **Selma Abdalla, Electoral Services Officer – Public Awareness, Cardiff Council**: Selma.Abdalla@cardiff.gov.uk





Building Brighter Futures: empowering young voices across Gwynedd and Ynys Môn

Llinos Evans,
Barnardo's Cymru, Mind our Future

Mind Our Future is a five-year project funded by The National Lottery Community Fund and rooted in the communities of Gwynedd and Ynys Môn in North Wales. The project aims to empower young people in these areas to create and implement a vision for a more resilient and mentally healthy future for young people in their community.

The Gwynedd and Ynys Môn Mind our Future partnership includes Barnardo's Cymru (lead agency), GISDA, Gwynedd Youth Services, Môn Youth Services, The Outdoor Partnership and Betsi Cadwalader University Health Board Child and Adolescence Mental Health Service.

Central to the work of Mind our Future is a team of Young Leaders - individuals aged 11 to 25 who live in the regions and who bring lived experience, passion and diverse perspectives to the project's development and delivery. These young leaders play a vital role in representing the diverse voices of young people in their communities, as well as supporting with project

design and delivery and filtering out the project's findings and learning of the project in their communities.

Within the governance structures of the project an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Group has been created. This group, led and comprised of young people, plays an important role in ensuring representation from all areas of Gwynedd and Ynys Môn, regardless of identity, background or location. The purpose of the Advisory Group is to provide advice and guidance in the co-design, development and co-production of the project in respect of youth voice, accessibility, representation and barriers to participation and inclusion.

Guided by the Lundy Model of Participation, Mind our Future ensures that young people are not only invited to speak, but are actively heard, understood and empowered to influence. The model's four pillars - space, voice, audience and influence - are embedded throughout the work of the project. Young people are given safe and

inclusive spaces to contribute. They are supported in expressing their views in ways that suit them, are heard by decision-makers, and are shown how their input has made a tangible difference.

In co-developing quality standards with young people themselves, the project demonstrates its accountability to young people. These standards, such as “Include me,” “Support me,” and “Make a difference to me,” are daily commitments that guide how the project engages with young people and ensures fairness, respect, relevance and transparency.



During the development and delivery phase, the project has reached out to diverse and often underrepresented groups of young people, for example, links were made with local providers of support for LGBTQ+ and black and minoritised ethnic communities, those experiencing homelessness and the impact of trauma, young carers, Youth Justice, supported housing, young people not in employment, education or training and young carers. This broad engagement has contributed to the inclusion of a wide range of voices.

Despite the progress achieved, the project is clear about the ongoing nature of its diversity and inclusion commitments, which require continual reflection, honest dialogue and adaptability. The EDI Advisory Group plays a pivotal role during project delivery, using their insights and lived experiences to help refine practices, identify and address blind spots and respond to emerging needs.

One identified area for growth involves deepening engagement with young people in the Penllyn area of Gwynedd, where geographical isolation presents additional participation challenges.


There is also recognition of the need to continue building lasting relationships with young people who may lack confidence, or have not yet been offered the opportunity to express their views.

As Mind our Future progresses, Barnardo's Cymru and the partnership remain proud of the journey so far and excited about what's to come. Through close collaboration with young people and listening to their voices, the project is contributing to the development of stronger, more supportive communities. With the continued support of partners and the commitment of Young Leaders, the project is making steps towards a more resilient and mentally healthy future for all young people across Gwynedd and Ynys Môn.

For more information about the Mind our Future project please email

meddwlymlaen@barnardos.org.uk





Creating a Wales where everyone belongs: Celebrating Wales' only LGBTQ+ Supported Accommodation Project

Yvonne Connolly, Llamau

Imagine growing up where how you identify puts you at risk of being rejected and ultimately made homeless. For many LGBTQ+ young people in Wales this is a reality. But what if we reimagined Wales, one where everyone, regardless of background or identity, feels truly safe and supported?

At Llamau we believe that every young person deserves that sense of safety and belonging. That's why we opened Tŷ Pride, Wales' first and only dedicated 24-hour support and accommodation project for LGBTQ+ young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Tŷ Pride was born out of urgent need. The 2019 End Youth Homelessness Cymru (EYHC) report *Out on the Streets: LGBTQ+ youth homelessness in Wales* revealed that LGBTQ+ young people are four times more likely to experience homelessness,

often as a result of family rejection. The report also highlighted that many existing services don't understand the specific needs of LGBTQ+ youth, leaving them further isolated and vulnerable.

Tŷ Pride set out to change that, and it has.

Delivered in partnership with Denbighshire County Council and Viva LGBT, Tŷ Pride is a 24-hour staffed project that supports LGBTQ+ young people with safe accommodation and wraparound support tailored to their needs. Initially funded by Welsh Government's Innovation Fund, it's a pioneering model, recognised internationally by organisations like FEANTSA (European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless) and True Colors United, as leading the way in LGBTQ+ homelessness support. The model offers a progressive and inclusive approach to supported housing, providing the young people

with access to psychotherapy and their own budgets to access personal and gender-affirming items. Tŷ Pride also delivers specially-designed LGBTQ+ training to other professionals to educate and raise awareness.

The demand for Tŷ Pride is huge. Since its launch it has received over 70 referrals from across Wales. That level of need cannot be met by one project alone. If we are serious about building a Wales that values and includes every child, then we must commit to creating more bespoke support for homeless LGBTQ+ young people in the form of more Tŷ Prides.

Because when it works, it *really* works.

Take TJ's story. TJ joined the Tŷ Pride project at 17, after sofa surfing due to being removed from his mother's care following periods of neglect. When he arrived, he was clear about needing support in many areas: building friendships, cooking, managing money, confidence and gender transition. At Tŷ Pride, TJ received holistic support in all of these areas, and more.

TJ began attending college and building a network in the local community. He took part in the psychotherapy available at Tŷ Pride and gradually he flourished. Now 22, TJ has moved into his own home. He continues to receive transitional support, and although formal support will eventually end, the Tŷ Pride team has made it clear: the door is never closed.

In fact, one of the most remarkable outcomes of Tŷ Pride is that none of the young people who have lived there have presented back to the homelessness team. That's not something many housing projects can say. And it speaks volumes about the importance of creating services that are not just inclusive in name, but in structure, staffing and ethos.

At Pride Cymru in June 2025, Llamau colleagues and many young people we support marched through the streets of Cardiff, celebrating love, acceptance and inclusion. It was joyful, but it was also a powerful reminder of how far we still have to go.

In Wales today, a young LGBTQ+ person's safety and future too often depends on where they

live and whether a service like Tŷ Pride exists nearby. That's not good enough. As a nation, we must do more. We must listen to young LGBTQ+ people. We must build services in partnership with them. And we must fund those services in every region, not just in pilot form, but as long-term, sustainable models of care.

Tŷ Pride has given dozens of young people a chance to rebuild their lives on their own terms, but this should be the *starting point*.

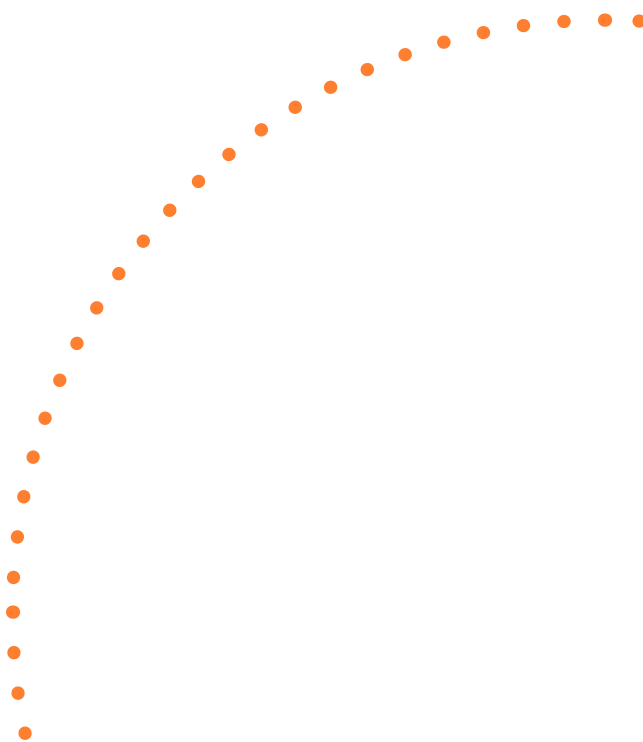
If we truly want a Wales that values and includes every child, we need to ensure every LGBTQ+ young person can access the same support and safety as those lucky enough to reach the doors of Tŷ Pride.

Let's not wait for another report to tell us what young people already know: being part of the LGBTQ+ community should never be a reason for homelessness. It should be a reason to be celebrated, supported and included.

To learn more about this work, you can reach out to sallytelford@llamau.org.uk

Llamau

Imagine a World Without
Homelessness





Calm classrooms, creative children: Fostering wellbeing and focus through visual journalling

Daisy Wilson, MA, PGCE,
University of Wales Trinity St David

In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, my attention was drawn to the impact on pupil wellbeing within mainstream classrooms. As a secondary school teacher of eighteen years, I observed first-hand a disruption to learning environments and a concerning decline in pupil readiness to learn. There was a marked increase in anxious tendencies across age groups, with many learners presenting as less mentally and emotionally prepared to fully engage with the curriculum. I felt failing to address these concerns would undermine any other educational efforts. Increasingly I became interested in the benefits of simple, creative activities to support children to self-regulate and prepare them for learning. These became a regular feature at the beginning of each of my lessons. This formed the basis for my research into how accessible, classroom-based strategies could foster emotional regulation, focus, and calm in a Year 4 classroom of diverse learners, in Wales. This article aims to share practical insights gleaned from this research.

In Wales, as across the UK, the need to support children's emotional wellbeing within the classroom is increasingly evident. Teachers are faced with unprecedented demands, balancing their roles as educators with the need to provide emotional support. The ongoing Additional Learning Needs (ALN) reform in Wales further emphasises the necessity for inclusive, accessible strategies that can effectively support all learners. It is imperative that educators consider how they can cultivate environments where every child feels safe, regulated, and primed for learning.

The study was conducted in a mainstream classroom characterised by a high level of need, including pupils with diagnosed and undiagnosed ALN (ASD, ADHD, microdeletion syndrome), Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), and social, emotional, and behavioural (SEBD) support needs. Many children struggled to emotionally self-regulate, impacting their learning and overall classroom dynamics. Traditional approaches were not always effective, highlighting the need for new, accessible interventions.

Transitions, particularly following the lunchtime break, presented significant challenges for this class. To address this, an intervention was implemented involving a daily visual journaling

task directly after lunch. Key elements of this intervention included a dedicated twenty-minute period for creative expression using personalised art books with tailored prompts. Individual books were prioritised to provide a sense of personal space and privacy for the students. The prompts were designed to offer structure and choice, catering to a range of learning preferences and abilities. The intervention was specifically designed using UDL (Universal Design for Learning) principles to ensure accessibility and engagement for all learners, regardless of their individual needs, focusing on multiple means of representation, action and expression, and engagement. Furthermore, the intervention was designed to be low-cost and easy to implement, requiring minimal resources and teacher training. The focus was on creating a sustainable approach that could be integrated into existing classroom routines.

The findings of this small-scale study provide encouraging outcomes:

- Improved emotional state; a tangible reduction in negative emotions and a corresponding increase in positive emotions were observed post-activity
- Enhanced focus and calm; teacher observations and survey data indicated significantly increased focus and a calmer, more productive classroom atmosphere
- Positive impact on wellbeing; positive impacts on the wellbeing of both pupils and teaching staff were reported

This small-scale study suggests that the integration of simple, creative activities can significantly improve emotional wellbeing and enhance focus within the classroom environment. Could a greater emphasis on daily creativity be a key element in fostering calmer, more positive learning spaces across Wales?

If you would like further information, please email d.wilson@uwtsd.ac.uk or visit daisywilson.art

TGP Cymru's North Wales Communication Passport Service

Julie Lloyd, TGP Cymru

tgp CYMRU
PLANT A THEULUOEDD
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Give EVERY child a VOICE!

GIVE EVERY CHILD A VOICE! Including those with communication needs.

Article 12 of the UNCRC says we should give EVERY child the confidence to express their feelings, views & opinions. Article 23 says that children with disabilities should enjoy a full and decent life which promotes self-reliance and facilitates active participation in the community.

1 in 10 children have communication needs. Please help fund Communication passports for children who need them, go to Make a donation to TGP Cymru.

Get your Communication Passport from TGP Cymru. A book all about you to help improve communication with others.

www.tgpcymru.org.uk



TGP Cymru have been providing communication passports to children and young people with communication needs in North Wales for over 10 years. In 2024, we were successful in our bid for three year funding from the National Lottery and this year we have secured further funding from the North Wales Freemasons (two years funding) to expand our service to all six local authorities including Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Gwynedd, Wrexham and Ynys Mon. We will now be able to provide 60 new communication passports and update 20 existing communication passports for the next two years, in both printed and digital format.

Our communication passports are created by specialised practitioners who work with the

child/young person, their families and other professionals to create a bespoke book all about that child and are intended to help improve communication with others. The communication passport aims to present complex information about the child, which includes photographs and pictures, in a clear, concise and fun manner, written in the child's voice. Information is included about what the child likes, what they don't like, what can trigger distress, and how to help them when they are distressed, what foods they like to eat, what special interests they have and what fun things the child enjoys to do.

Presenting this information in this format is designed to support the child so that new people they meet, such as teachers or medical staff, can

quickly get to know them. The child feels listened to, and more confident because their voice and their perspective has been heard and considered when providing services to them, which in turn can improve their confidence and well-being.

A child who was transitioning to high school said their communication passport felt like a comfort blanket for them, because they knew that any teachers and teaching assistants they met at their new school would have a deeper understanding of how they were feeling and the difficulties they might be experiencing, after reading their book. Both the child and their parent no longer feel under pressure to try and remember or explain everything to new teachers or medical staff as they have the communication passport to rely on.

Around 94% of parents and carers have said that sharing their child's communication passport has helped others to understand their child's needs quicker and more effectively. This means professionals such as teachers, teaching assistants and medical staff who are under time pressures are able to support the child/ young person more effectively as they have the most important information about them at their fingertips. This means that having and sharing a communication passport can have a positive effect for everyone involved.

The new funding will also help to fund TGP Cymru's "**Give EVERY Child a Voice**" campaign which aims to raise awareness of the difficulties faced by children and young people with communication needs. Article 12 of the UNCRC says we should give EVERY child the confidence to express their feelings, views and opinions. Article 23 says that children with disabilities should enjoy a full and decent life which promotes self-reliance and facilitates active participation in the community.

It is estimated that around 10% of the population have long term speech, language, and communication (SLC) needs with conditions such as hearing loss, delayed language development, autism and even injuries. SLC issues create barriers with others and can significantly impact on a person's ability to learn, socialise and participate in daily life and can have long-term consequences on educational attainment, employment and social

mobility. In North Wales around 13,000 children/ young people are estimated to have SLC needs and around 62,000 children/young people across the whole of Wales.

TGP Cymru believes that a communication passport should be something **ALL** children and young people in Wales who have SLC needs should be offered.

If you would like to learn more about this work, please email passport@tgpcymru.org.uk



Listening to Children and Young People with Disabilities and Additional Learning Needs: A Rights-Based Approach to Participation

Chloe Gallagher,
Children's Commissioner for Wales

Children and young people have the right to be heard and their voices are essential in shaping the world around them. However, for children with disabilities and additional learning needs (ALN), the challenge lies not just in being heard but in being listened to in a meaningful way, which resonates with them.

A rights-based approach, grounded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), ensures that children's rights are respected, protected and fulfilled. Yet, despite increasing awareness of the challenges faced by children with disabilities in Wales, their voices are still often overlooked.

The question of how we can ensure children with disabilities and ALN are genuinely listened to was the focus of our recent event in St Asaph, Denbighshire. The event brought together professionals to explore effective practices for participation and to highlight the importance of listening to children with disabilities and ALN.

Valuing diverse forms of communication

A children's rights approach is not just about gathering views, but about creating an environment where every child feels respected and empowered to share their thoughts. For children with disabilities and ALN, this means listening in ways that meet their individual needs, whether through verbal communication, art or other creative methods.

Ahead of the event, we worked with a group of young people from St Christopher's School in Wrexham. The group consisted of eight young people aged 13-18, each with a disability or ALN, and their individual needs were carefully considered throughout the delivery of the project. Together, we explored why "voice" matters to them, with support from Wrexham University's Civic Mission team to deliver Public Narrative training, which focuses on how to tell personal stories that inspire action and connect to larger social issues. Over a period of six weeks,

participation workers supported the group to prepare a presentation for the event using the “Heart, Head and Hands” framework:

Heart: Why does this issue matter? The group reflected on their personal experiences

Head: What are the facts? The group created a survey to gauge their peers’ views

Hands: What action do they want to see? The group discussed what changes they hoped their presentation would inspire. This approach allowed the young people to engage with the topic on a deeper, more personal level



One of the most striking outcomes of this project was the variety of ways the young people chose to express themselves. While some spoke directly, others used different forms of expression: one young person presented their thoughts through a fantasy fiction story, while others used visual art to share their ideas. These diverse methods of communication highlight the different ways children process and express their thoughts. It reinforced the point that the method of communication is just as important as the message itself. During the event, practitioners acknowledged the value of offering a variety of communication options. Feedback included comments like, *“Inclusivity and having different ways for children to share their views is essential,”* and *“simple changes can make a massive difference in participation.”*

Impact on the young people

The project had a significant impact on the young people involved. It provided them with the freedom to express themselves in ways that suited them, boosting their confidence and giving them a sense of ownership over the process. One young

person reflected, *“It was fun and challenging. I did enjoy it, even though I was worried at first. It helped me build my confidence.”*

Another said, *“They took their time to listen to what we said.”* The group felt that their message was important: *“A lot of people say children need to be listened to more, but they don’t talk about how. I think our message helps with this.”*

One particularly memorable moment was when a young person, who usually preferred writing, chose to speak during the event. Creating an environment where they felt comfortable and supported allowed them to step out of their comfort zone, demonstrating the power of providing a safe space for self-expression. This moment reinforced the importance of fostering an atmosphere where young people feel both supported and confident enough to express themselves in their own way.

This project has reinforced this approach to engagement, and we are committed to continuing to offer creative methods for young people to share their voices. By adopting a rights-based approach, we can ensure that all children, regardless of ability or need, have the opportunity to shape the world around them.

Please contact

Chloe.Gallagher@childcomwales.org.uk
if you would like further information.



**Comisiynydd
Plant Cymru**
Children's
Commissioner
for Wales



Celebrating Assemble: A Creative Journey of Joy and Inclusion

Charlotte Moulton,
National Youth Arts Wales

Led by **National Youth Arts Wales (NYAW)**, in partnership with the **National Youth Theatre of Great Britain**, “Assemble” started in Autumn 2023. It is a joyful, two-year creative project all about imagination and inclusion, with young people taking the spotlight.

NYAW has worked with three incredible non-mainstream schools across South Wales (Ysgol y Deri, Greenfield School and Ysgol Crug Glas), delivering creative workshops every fortnight, organising cultural visits and helping young disabled people explore their ideas, identities and talents through the arts. On Thursday, 10 April, at the Wales Millennium Centre in Cardiff, it was finally time to celebrate all they’ve achieved!

Our brilliant Participation and Learning team - **Hope Dowsett and Bruna Garcia** - opened the day with warmth and energy, welcoming families, teachers, supporters and young people to a day of performance sharing, celebration, and of course... cake.

“This has been a vibrant, energetic and occasionally bubble-filled adventure”
Bruna Garcia, Participation & Learning Officer.

Our Wales-based work ran alongside parallel programmes in London and Manchester, with each strand designed to reflect local voices and priorities. Here in Wales, we’ve been proud to lead with care, creativity and community.

From classroom-based workshops to unforgettable theatre trips (yes, the penguins in *Madagascar* were a definite highlight!), Assemble has been about creating safe and exciting spaces for young people to explore who they are, connect with others and build their confidence through creativity.

“What’s made this project so significant is the community it’s created,” Hope said. “Young people and volunteers have come together over a shared love of creativity, building friendships, developing teamwork, and becoming advocates for change.”

Over the past two years, there have been sessions every two weeks - filled with laughter, play, thoughtful conversations and more than a few cups of tea. But what really stood out on the day was the sheer joy in the room.

“Assemble has shown us what’s possible when we truly listen to young people, especially those whose voices too often go unheard. The team at NYAW is incredibly proud of every young person who took part. We will continue to champion the vital importance of the arts and creative collaboration for every single young person in Wales, including those in non-mainstream schools.” Evan Dawson, CEO, NYAW.

This project has been a big team effort together with our brilliant partners from **National Youth Theatre of Great Britain**, the creative minds at **Hijinx**, **Craidd** and **Grand Ambition**, to the researchers at **London Metropolitan University**, the Creative Learning Team at **Wales Millennium Centre**, and the wonderful teachers who let us turn their classrooms into stages, oceans and dance floors.

A huge thank you goes to our funders, the **National Lottery Community Fund** and the **Paul Hamlyn Foundation**, for making projects like this possible and for backing the kind of arts that genuinely change lives.

Of course, the biggest thank you of all goes to the young people who’ve been part of Assemble. They’ve shown what’s possible when creativity is for everyone.

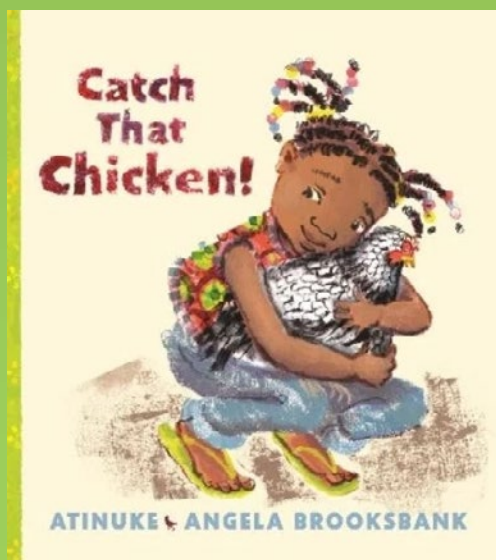
NYAW wants this to be just the *beginning* for the young people involved in Assemble. This journey doesn’t end here - let’s keep creating, connecting and celebrating the young people across Wales.

If you would like to get in touch with our Participation and Learning team about the Assemble project, please contact:

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Practicing equality and diversity in early years practices

Yasmin Husain,
Montessori Early Years Educator
and Children's Rights Lawyer

I write about children's rights and am currently looking at setting up a community-based provision for ethnic minority families in Grangetown, Cardiff.

Inclusion and diversity need to be grown from the outset. One of the key questions then for any early years practice is this:

"Can families from a variety of backgrounds and identities such as ethnic minorities, socio-economic, and families whose children have specific needs, access our provision?"

The danger is that without providing equality of access either intentionally or non-intentionally, barriers remain in place thereby excluding families from early years provisions.

A prepared environment for children in the early years is key to ensuring that both equality and diversity are being met. There are wonderful leaders who recognise and celebrate the differences of the children attending their settings and prepare their environment to reflect this. This includes having a variety of books around the setting to be picked up by children and to be read aloud by educators. These books include stories

about African and Asian families which highlight their culture, language, food and community, books about child refugees and children who have grown up with only one parent are just some examples of the diverse books on offer in early years settings. Children feel seen and heard when they see books, photos and images of themselves around their classroom and or nursery and reinforces positive representation, a key part of an inclusive setting.

Some settings include a diverse dressing up area for their children including ethnic and eastern European dresses, hats and jewellery which children can try on freely and express themselves, as well as role playing different characters with their friends.

One example of inclusive practice included choosing to place an Indian cookbook in the children's kitchen area. The result being that many children tried to read the book or asked for it be read aloud to them, and they asked many questions about the Indian dishes and recipes. The children were found making these dishes in the kitchen using role play.

Part of the Montessori prepared environment is an area called "*knowledge and understanding of the world.*" This part of the curriculum is underpinned by a philosophy that we are diverse, but there is unity in common needs that we all share as people.

In conjunction with learning about and promoting peace comes the need for and understanding of social justice. Montessori teachers begin planting the seeds for this understanding early on through the curriculum and building layers as the child grows into different stages of schooling.

Some Montessori settings will include literacy trays (moveable alphabet and sandpaper letters) in other languages such as Arabic, Urdu and Somali. These literacy trays provide a key benefit to children who speak English as a second language or those children who have a connection to second or third language through their family or community. These children have an opportunity to strengthen their home language, feel a sense of belonging and be positive about their identity and backgrounds.

The celebration of cultural festivals and special days is a beautiful inclusive practice which celebrates diversity. Some early years settings celebrate many festivals such as Eid, Diwali, Christmas, the Iranian new year, Japanese festivals as well as seasonal celebrations which aim to bring all families together. For children who experience these festivals for the first time, they are full of curiosity and wonder, from tasting different foods to trying on a cultural dress and asking curious questions. Children who celebrate these festivals at home, gain a sense of belonging, pride and solidarity as they are given a space to celebrate and share their culture and traditions with their nursery community.

Inclusive language creates a more equitable environment which respects diversity. This can be implemented through educators and parents using language which is respectful of each child, acknowledging their identities, backgrounds, needs and experiences. Using language which is accurate is important to avoid stereotypes in the environment by being truthful. Using relevant language is also important to ensure that everyone feels included and represented in the conversations you have with children. Educators can create a safe space for children to be curious and have respectful discussions through their role modelling with the children and inviting them to ask questions, share stories and have open conversations.

By creating respectful, inclusive classrooms, celebrating diversity in all its forms, crossing cultural boundaries and modelling engaged citizenry, parents and educators will nurture children who value equality and diversity. Sowing these seeds in the early years, will contribute towards a more equal society where diversity is celebrated.

If you would like to get in touch to discuss this work further, please reach out via LinkedIn www.linkedin.com/in/yasmin-husain-36283922a or email yasminweb@gmail.com



Empowering Young Females: Addressing Gender Inequality in Wales and Nuevo León, Mexico

Catrin Martinole & Kayleigh Cowdery,
Boys' and Girls' Clubs of Wales

As of 2025, gender inequality continues to influence the aspirations, opportunities, and overall well-being of young people across Wales and Nuevo León, Mexico. While notable progress has been made in some areas, young females still encounter systemic barriers that hinder their leadership potential, professional growth, and access to key opportunities.

Deep-rooted stereotypes, underrepresentation in leadership roles and limited pathways in critical sectors persist, impacting development and societal participation.

- Women occupy only 25% of leadership positions in local government and community organisations
- Female participation in sports remains low, constituting just 15% of registered athletes in Wales and 12% in Nuevo León
- In STEM fields, women represent only 28% of students in Wales and 22% in Nuevo León
- Women hold approximately 18% of elected positions in regional assemblies

- Violence against women remains a critical issue: Wales has seen a 40% increase in gender-based crimes since 2018. Nuevo León reported 175 murders of women in 2024 and 26 killings in the first quarter of 2025

Cross-country collaboration

The *Boys' and Girls' Clubs of Wales* and *Club de Niños y Niñas de Nuevo León, A.B.P.* have partnered through the *British Council Youth Connect*-supported project *Empowering Young Females for Gender Equality*. Rooted in the principles of Youth Work in Wales and guided by the UNCRC and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015), the project champions young people's rights, voices and wellbeing. It aims to create inclusive, young person-led spaces where girls are empowered to lead, question and thrive. Aligning with UN Sustainable Development Goal 5: Gender Equality, the initiative uses education, participation and cross-cultural exchanges to challenge gender inequality and inspire a new generation of changemakers.



Breaking down barriers

In February 2025, the first phase of the project involved an in-person leadership exchange and a virtual young person exchange between Wales and Mexico. The leadership exchange provided an invaluable opportunity to meet each other face to face, build relationships, share best practices and strengthen our collaboration through training, workshops and visiting local youth clubs.

The virtual exchange workshop brought together girls from Wales and Mexico to share their stories, ask questions and explore what it means to be a girl in today's world, with the goal of enhanced understanding and identification of gender stereotypes. Through creative expression, the girls designed posters exploring key themes like violence in adolescence, gender roles, community challenges and discrimination. Together, they shared their visions for a more equitable future.

Future agents of change

The project is developing young females' global awareness, empathy and ability to work effectively with peers from different backgrounds. This cross-cultural experience will not only enhance their skills, but also broaden their understanding of global issues, preparing them for a more interconnected world.

When young individuals are given the tools, confidence and opportunities to lead, they become catalysts for change, challenging societal barriers, uplifting communities and shaping a future where everyone has the chance to succeed. By fostering leadership, education, and

advocacy we can ensure that young people can drive progress, inspire innovation and create a world where equality and inclusivity are not just ideals, but realities.

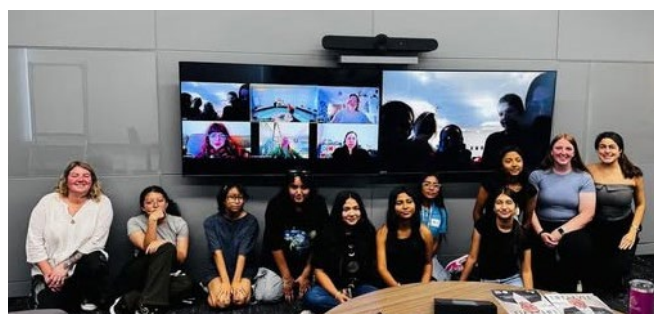
Looking ahead

The second phase of the project will unite Welsh participants at a residential, bringing together all of the key themes so far to develop a global, action-focused social media campaign designed to raise awareness of women's equality, rights, wellbeing and equal opportunities.

Date for your diary: a celebration **Showcase event**, hosted by the **Boys' and Girls' Clubs of Wales**, will take place on **Sunday, 13 July 2025 at Cardiff City Stadium**. Our dedicated young **Female Leaders** are ready to take the spotlight and launch their campaign for **Gender Equality**, a movement fuelled by purpose, passion and **international collaboration**. From an umbrella initiative to deeply personal individual campaigns, this event will shine a light on the critical role of **Female Leaders in Sports, STEM**, and the creation of **safe, empowering spaces for women and girls**.

Join us to celebrate the voices that will shape the future. Spaces are limited, so don't miss out! [Reserve your place now on Eventbrite.](#)

If you would like more information about this project or the work of Boys' and Girls' Clubs of Wales please email office@bgc.wales



Boys and Girls Clubs of Wales
Clybiau Bechgyn a Merched Cymru



Breaking barriers: Making children's rights accessible for all

Fatiha Ali, Children in Wales

Articles 3, 5 and 18 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) remind us that parents and carers play a crucial role in protecting and promoting their children's rights. That's why [Parents Connect Wales](#), a project based at **Children in Wales**, is working to ensure that every parent feels informed, empowered and included regardless of their background or life experience. The project has been working hard to engage with families in a way that is inclusive and recognises the diversity of communities across Wales.

No one is 'hard to reach'

The term '**hard to reach**' is a commonly used term when talking about marginalised communities.

However, this label must be challenged and we must ask why certain communities are not being reached. What are the barriers to access, engagement and taking part? What is not being offered? What are they not receiving from service providers?

The onus must be on service providers to ask these questions and make changes to reach those communities, rather than placing the responsibility on the communities themselves.

Involving Dads

One group that has often been overlooked is **dads and male care providers**. A recent project taking a more inclusive approach is the [For Dads](#).

[By Dads](#) project in Torfaen. They have created a welcoming space where fathers feel confident to talk, listen and support their children.

Jacob Guy, who runs the project, says:

‘There is.... a lot of support out there for parents or mothers, but not a lot aimed solely at dads.... We have wanted to create a safe space where all dads feel happy..... It’s amazing that these men are.... investing in their babies and families but also in themselves for a better future.’

A new partnership between the project, **the University of South Wales (USW)** and **Children in Wales** is now researching how to better involve dads in promoting children’s rights. The findings will give an important insight into what dads need to make them feel involved and included throughout their children’s lives.

Making information easy to access

For **parents from ethnic minority backgrounds**, understanding children’s rights shouldn’t depend on the language they speak. Parents Connect Wales has created inclusive training sessions to help parents learn about the UNCRC, no matter where they’re from. Working also with [Kidcare4U](#) in Newport, who have supported Bangla and Arabic-speaking parents, with the help of translators, and listened to requests for resources in home languages.

Many parents found some of the concepts in the UNCRC poster resource hard to understand. So they asked:

“Can we have this in our own language?”

In response, the poster was translated into [Arabic, Bangla, Urdu, Polish, and Romanian](#) — making children’s rights accessible for families from these communities.

Sharing information in creative ways

Making information accessible is vital, especially in light of evidence that the average reading age in the UK is just 9 years old (Haider and Wallace, 2024). Parents Connect Wales works to ensure resources are presented in a clear format, often using visuals and videos. A parent-friendly

[infographic](#) version of all our research and reports is always offered.

This approach doesn’t just support parents/carers with lower literacy, but also helps those who have English as a second language or who have additional learning needs.

Our [consultation](#) approach involves using creative methods such as **photo competitions** and **art workshops**. Instead of relying solely on surveys or questionnaires, we use creative methods to give parents alternative ways to express their views and experiences. These are all displayed in an [online gallery format](#).

By removing barriers, listening to lived experiences and working in partnership with communities, **Parents Connect Wales** is working to make children’s rights accessible to all parent/carers across Wales.

If you would like to learn more about this work, please email fatiha.ali@childreninwales.org.uk

References

Haider S, Wallace L. M. 2024. How Readable Is the Information the United Kingdom’s Statutory Health and Social Care Professional Regulators Provide for the Public to Engage With Fitness to Practise Processes? Health Expectations. Oct;27(5):e70067. doi: 10.1111/hex.70067. PMID: 39411841; PMCID

Available at: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11480634/#:~:text=The%20average%20reading%20level%20in,10%2C%2011%2C%2012%5D>

[Accessed on 25 June 2025]





Using Animal Assisted Intervention to Support Young People in Foster Care

Scott Ruddock, TACT Fostering

TACT Fostering is the UK's largest dedicated fostering charity, with a dedicated area team based in Wales.

Since 2023, we've been proudly collaborating with [The Baxter Project](#), a therapeutic, animal-assisted early intervention that promotes positive change through positive engagement. The Baxter Project has provided invaluable support to our young people, making a profound impact on their lives.

What is The Baxter Project?

The Baxter Project is a specialist service dedicated to supporting young people facing a wide range of challenges. The foundation of their approach is the Trauma Recovery Model (TRM), which prioritises relational development as a key element of healing and growth. The PACE Framework (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy) is also crucial

and aid in the building of positive relationships and a sense of safety. It encourages the building of an emotional connection before engaging the problem-solving area of the brain.

They have a plethora of techniques and strategies to maximise engagement, but central to the projects' success is the creation of trusting, supportive relationships with young people. By fostering positive engagement, the project empowers vulnerable individuals, with the help of wellbeing dogs. These specially trained dogs facilitate communication between young people and The Baxter Project's skilled practitioners, helping to break down barriers and support emotional wellbeing. They also have the added side effect of putting smiles on the faces of everyone they encounter!

How has The Baxter Project helped us?

The Baxter Project offers an innovative approach to supporting young people in foster care who find it difficult to engage with traditional clinical services, such as CAMHS. The one-to-one sessions have been invaluable for many of our young people, creating a safe space where they can open-up and discuss their feelings and struggles.

Through its unique methods, The Baxter Project has demonstrated that, when support is delivered in the right way, it can successfully engage and motivate young people, offering them the opportunity to overcome challenges and make positive changes in their lives.

Paul and Aly, who have been TACT foster carers since 2014, said:

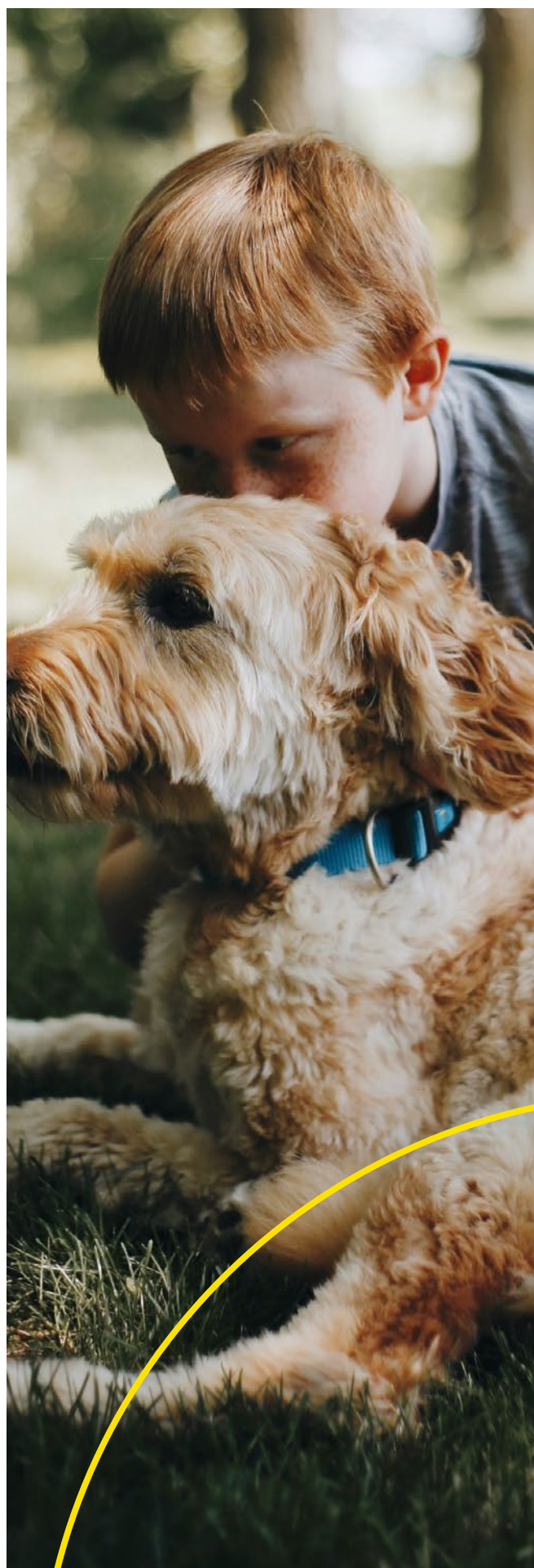
“The Baxter Project was introduced to us when S was in high school and was struggling very much with the work and school life generally. She really loved walking Baxter and enjoyed spending time with the Support Worker, Jess. She looked forward to the days she knew she would be walking Baxter. When she stopped attending school, she asked if she could keep walking Baxter. Through the Local Authority and TACT, we were able to continue. S has always enjoyed these times – but the most important aspect is the relationship she has built with Jess. She loves to spend time with her and she trusts her, opening up about her feelings and struggles. Jess has been able to talk things through with her and help her. We can only speak really highly of the Baxter Project, the help that it has given to S and the support and relationship that she now has with Jess has been great.”

Find out more about TACT Fostering:

www.tactfostering.org.uk/fostering-in-wales

Find out more about The Baxter Project:

www.thebaxterproject.co.uk





Showcasing Welsh youth work in Strasbourg

Cindy Chen, ProMo Cymru

ProMo Cymru was proud to represent Wales at the Council of Europe Youth Partnership's [Seminar on Youth Mental Health and Well-being](#) in Strasbourg in March 2025. The event brought together young people, youth workers and policymakers from across Europe to explore solutions to the growing mental health challenges faced by young people.

Cindy Chen, Head of Communications and Engagement at ProMo Cymru, led a session showcasing how we amplify youth voices to influence systemic change. Cindy used [Mind Our Future Gwent](#) (MoFG) as a case study - a five-year, Lottery-funded project co-designed with young people to prevent the escalation of mental health challenges in Gwent, Wales.

At the heart of MoFG is a meaningful co-production approach. Eleven young Peer Service Designers work alongside professionals using a Service Design model to create lasting, youth-led solutions. As Cindy explained,

“Young people aren’t just recipients of support - they’re architects of it.”

Now in its third year, MoFG is focused on three key priorities:

- Growing a digital presence to combat stigma and promote support services
- Equipping Peer Service Designers with the skills to deliver free mental health learning to professionals and peers
- Building relationships with stakeholders to influence strategy and policy

Cindy closed by encouraging colleagues to embed co-production in their own work, highlighting the importance of engaging young people in shaping their futures.

Visit [ProMo Cymru’s website](#) to find out more about our work.

Photo captions:

Image 1 - Cindy Chen of ProMo Cymru delivering a session on the Mind Our Future Gwent project.

Image 2 - Masa Cvar (Slovenia), Laura Cossu (Italy) and Cindy Chen (Wales) at the Seminar on Youth Mental Health & Well-being in Strasbourg

Image 3 - The young people and staff who work on the Mind Our Future Gwent project

Website: www.promo.cymru

Social media channels

LinkedIn: @promo-cymru

Facebook: @promo.cymru

X: @PromoCymru

swInstagram: @promocymru





Belonging: Mudiad Meithrin's Anti-Racist Approach

Llinos Anwyl, Mudiad Meithrin

For Mudiad Meithrin, anti-racism is neither a marginal project nor a statement of intent. It is a daily act, embedded in every aspect of what we do. As the leading provider of early years education and care in Welsh we acknowledge our responsibility to ensure that every child from every background feels that the Welsh language belongs to them; that every child feels seen, appreciated and represented. Being anti-racist means something more than creating policies or sharing promises – it means prioritising inclusion by taking time to reflect on and question every aspect of what we do. For example, re-designing the spaces, learning experiences and resources that surround children at the start of their learning journey by ensuring that they are intersectional and challenge white normativity.

In March 2025, we came together to reflect on this during our conference, Perthyn. This was an important event for collective reflection and sharing practice. Poet, Connor Allen, opened the day as keynote speaker, sharing his lived

experience and emphasising the importance of a sense of belonging, especially when growing up.

The day saw several deep discussions about identity and justice, but in Mudiad Meithrin, anti-racism is not something we talk about – it is something in every layer of our work.

Our approach is shaped by four strategic pillars: representation, inclusive provision, empowering the workforce and leading the sector. These lead our commitment across the organisation to ensure and sustain an anti-racist, positive and inclusive environment. Not only in responding to injustice, but in preventing it through learning and decolonising ourselves as individuals.

In our Everybody Belongs strategy, we support our early care and education settings to reflect the rich diversity of Wales. Our inclusive resources, such as Come and Celebrate, introduce children to various religions and beliefs, as well as supporting and empowering staff to

ensure that they are confident discussing cultures that are perhaps different to their own. Another resource we are very proud of is Nature Notes, a collection of nursery rhymes sung in the languages spoken in Wales: Arabic, Bangla, Polish, Urdu, Kurdish – to name but a few! To accompany the songs, performers Siân James, Gwyneth Glyn and Bragod created beautiful arrangements. These resources honour and celebrate multiculturalism in Wales and respond to the emphasis the Curriculum for Wales places on cynefin.

Research shows that the type of representation seen by children shapes the way they see themselves and others. Therefore, we have also invested in visual resources, activity packs and books that reflect a variety of identities and family structures, to normalise and celebrate differences. We developed Cymru Ni, a learning resource that centres Black voices and experiences within Welsh history. In addition, we established [AwDUra](#), a mentorship project supporting the publication of work by Black authors, to address the lack of Welsh-language resources reflecting the diversity of Wales. Through these projects we've placed marginalised voices front and centre, ensuring that our settings and staff have the resources to shape what is considered as the national Welsh narrative.

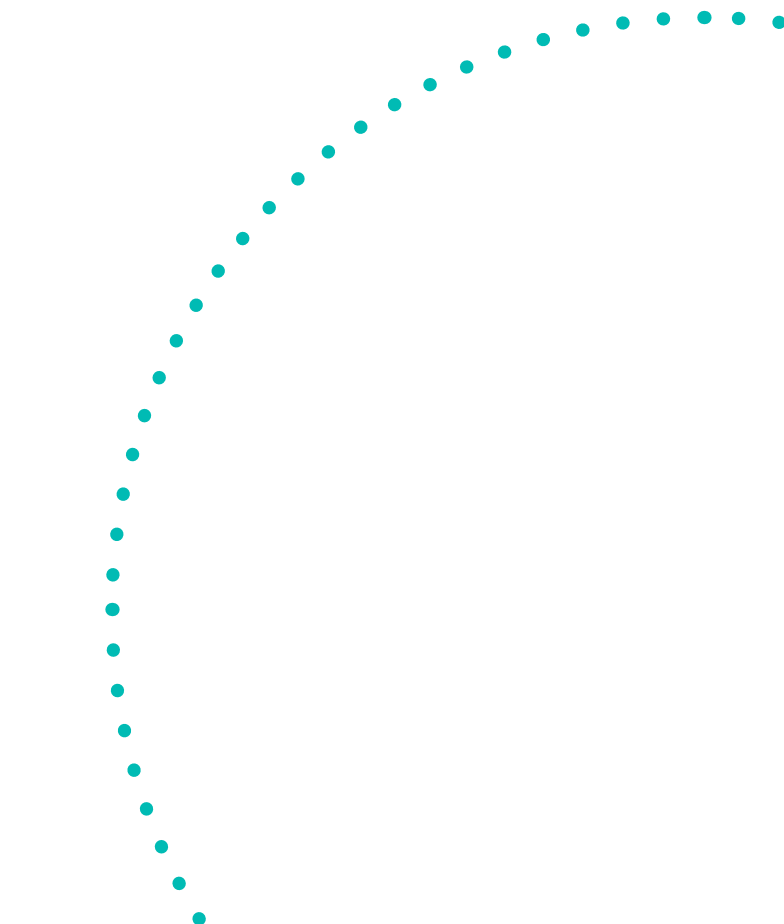
We understand that implementing anti-racism means that continuous learning is a necessity. Every member of Mudiad Meithrin's staff receives training on inclusion and anti-racism. This is not a box-ticking exercise. The training prompts reflection, challenges implicit bias, and presents the workforce with practical changes and examples of good practice to establish inclusive settings. By embracing the idea that this work is without end, we acknowledge that considered change requires time, care and confidence. We are wholly committed to this, as realising this change is the responsibility of us all.

A belief in holistic education is at the root of everything we do. A belief that every young child is a unique individual and a reflection of their experiences, identities and environments. Education must go hand and hand with teaching empathy, confidence and respect.

Equality and inclusion are not optional extras in education, rather they are its foundation.

Ensuring that children feel that they belong does create better nurseries, but it also builds a more inclusive Wales. Mudiad Meithrin is very proud of creating and preserving spaces where every story and every child belongs.

If you would like to learn more about our work, please email: llinos.anwyl@meithrin.cymru the organisation's Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Lead Officer



Anti-Racist Practice in Children's Services

Hannah Parkes, Action for Children



In Action for Children, we believe that diversity, inclusion and equity are at the heart of all our work. Our commitment to becoming an anti-racist organisation is more than just a statement - it is about ensuring that anti-racist principles shape our everyday interactions with children, young people and families. But what does this look like in practice? How can we embed anti-racism into our children's services in meaningful ways?

One example comes from a therapeutic parenting group for foster carers. This group not only offered foster parents essential support, but also revealed an important gap in cultural understanding, as demonstrated in the following example.

Supporting Culturally Responsive Foster Care

During the sessions, we met a White foster carer who was looking after a Black baby. She was honest about her lack of experience in caring for a Black child, admitting that she had little exposure to cultures different from her own and wasn't sure how to meet the baby's specific needs. Her openness created a meaningful opportunity for learning.

Recognising the importance of cultural awareness in foster care, we secured a grant through Action for Children's Family Fund to provide the foster

carer with a box of essential resources tailored to the baby's identity and heritage. The box we created contained Black hair and skin care products, a comb designed for afro-textured hair, and a selection of toys, dolls, and books featuring Black characters.

Take a look inside the box!





When the foster carer received the box, she was deeply moved. She shared how much the resources helped her understand the importance of representation for the baby in her care:

"Seeing all this together has made me realise how very important this is for her. Thank you so much for taking the time to put this together. I didn't have a clue!"

The Power of Representation

Representation matters, especially in childhood. A child's environment plays a crucial role in shaping their identity, self-esteem and sense of belonging. For Black children, seeing dolls, books and toys that reflect their own features, ethnicity and cultural heritage builds a positive self-image that can help counteract negative stereotypes and promote healthy identity development.

Similarly, ensuring White children have exposure to diverse representations can support the development of empathy and inclusivity. When children grow up in environments that embrace multicultural perspectives, they are more likely to establish respectful relationships and challenge biases.

Providing culturally responsive foster care is not just about physical resources, it is about ensuring that Black children in care grow up in environments that affirm their identity and celebrate their heritage. By embedding anti-racist principles in our practices, we create stronger, more inclusive support systems for children and families across Wales.

Our Race Equality Staff Network

At Action for Children, our commitment to anti-racism is strengthened by Breakthrough, our race equality staff network. Breakthrough collaborates with senior leaders to shape race equality strategies, policies and guidance across Children's Services and central functions.

The network amplifies the voices of Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff, advocating for career equity and identifying barriers whilst also offering solutions. It provides a safe space for conversations on race and ethnicity, engaging all staff in learning, allyship, and accountability for change.


Through monthly meetings, staff development initiatives, cultural events, and ongoing dialogue with leadership, Breakthrough ensures that Action for Children's Anti-Racism Action Plan remains visible, actionable, and effective.

Looking Ahead

Action for Children is committed to creating spaces where every child feels seen and valued. We encourage all practitioners and carers to reflect on their own approaches and consider ways to champion anti-racist practice. How do you bring anti-racism to life in your everyday work?

We'd love to hear from you, please share your experiences and ideas by reaching out to us at: walesadmin@actionforchildren.org.uk





From consultation to co-creation: weaving a culture of inclusive engagement

Stacy Chamberlain,
Cwm Taf Morgannwg
Regional Partnership



The Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Partnership is working to embed meaningful participation into the design and delivery of mental health and wellbeing support for children and young people. Introducing The Golden Thread - a strategic engagement programme designed to strengthen co-production and place lived experience at the centre of system change across the region.

When we train professionals, we often share a quote by American psychiatrist and neuroscientist Dr Bruce Perry, whose work explores the impact of trauma on children and the importance of relationships and trust. In *The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog: And Other Stories From a Child Psychiatrist's Notebook*, Perry writes:

"Relationships matter: the currency for systemic change was trust, and trust comes through forming healthy working relationships. People, not programmes, change people."

This quote reminds us that meaningful change doesn't come from structures alone, it comes from the people within them and the relationships they build. As a regional partnership uniting health, social care, the third sector, education, housing, the private sector and people with lived experience, we're committed to ensuring that babies, children, young people and families don't just participate in conversations, they help shape them. Their voices must be central to how we design, deliver and improve the systems that affect their lives.

A key priority for us is strengthening the whole-system approach to mental health support for children and young people across Cwm Taf Morgannwg (CTM). Aligned with the Welsh Government's Nurturing, Empowering, Safe and Trusted (NEST) framework, this approach recognises that improving mental wellbeing requires collective action. Education, health, social care and community partners must collaborate to drive sustainable, long-term change.

Wellbeing in education is central to this ethos. All educational settings, from early years to post-16, play a vital role in supporting mental health. The Welsh Government's Framework on *Embedding a Whole-School Approach to Emotional and Mental Wellbeing* reinforces this, calling for a shared vision, integration of wellbeing into daily practice, strong partnerships with families and services, and continuous evaluation shaped by lived experience.

With many partners already committed to this ambition, it's essential to identify who holds the power to influence change and how we nurture those relationships to turn shared vision into lasting impact. As a partnership that connects diverse voices, we must find ways to work meaningfully alongside children, families and professionals to make decisions together.

From creative hackathons to poetry open mic nights, we've tested innovative, accessible formats to create inclusive spaces for dialogue. At the heart of this transformation is the development of *The Golden Thread*, our new strategic engagement programme designed to embed meaningful participation across our partnership. The Golden Thread recognises and celebrates the unique role each person plays in driving change - showing how, by weaving together our experiences, skills and ideas, we can create a strong, sustainable network that shapes a better present and future for our communities.

Through this project, we're piloting different approaches to involvement. To begin, we have co-designed four workshops with partners from our workstreams - that sit within our partnership - to reflect on current practice and shape a new approach. This will help us ensure meaningful representation from babies, children, young people and their families in strategic decision-making.

These workshops explore challenges and barriers to meaningful representation. While children and families are often consulted, consultation alone isn't enough. To move toward a truly co-productive system, we must go beyond asking for opinions, we need to involve people directly in shaping ideas, developing solutions and evaluating their impact.

We know that meaningful engagement takes time and we must be willing to move at the speed of trust. Building relationships, fostering peer support and embracing creativity are essential to creating inclusive spaces where people feel safe to contribute. It's not just about listening, we must also observe carefully, recognising that not all voices are expressed in the same way. For instance, with babies and young children, physical behaviour can offer powerful insights.

We're also mindful of engagement fatigue. To maintain momentum, it's important to acknowledge and celebrate successes. While changing culture at scale is complex, especially across a multi-agency partnerships, we're starting with small, practical pilot projects that model new ways of working.

We continue to seek out and support those who naturally understand and practise co-production—our allies in driving meaningful, lasting change. So far, we've trained over 90 professionals in co-production and launched a Co-Production Incentive Grant, supporting 18 projects to trial new ways of working with children and families. All insights from this work will feed into our new regional Children's Strategy, launching this autumn.

By taking time to understand how we approach participation, we're not just listening, we're learning together. It is essential we work together to create a future where every child and young person is empowered to shape the services they deserve.

For more information, please contact Stacy Chamberlain on stacey.chamberlain@rctcbc.gov.uk or visit our website: <https://ctmregionalpartnershipboard.co.uk/children-and-young-people/>





Supporting Neurodiversity at the Football Association of Wales (FAW)

Caitlin McMillan, FAW National Youth Council

As more and more people look to attend live sport matches, diversity and inclusion is becoming a wider area of focus to ensure everyone is able to access both venues and sport in the same way, equally. With this, neurodiversity support is increasing across sport, creating safer and more comfortable spaces, whilst also making sure sport can be admired, attended and participated in by everyone.

The UK National Health System (NHS) recognises the term 'neurodiversity' to describe the population as a whole, and recognises the natural diversity across people and the way their brains understand the world around them. Neurodivergence is typically seen as when someone processes, learns and/or behaves in a different way from what may be considered the 'societal norm.' To name but a few, some neurodivergent conditions include dyslexia, dyscalculia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and autism spectrum condition (ASC). Those with neurodiversities may understand various elements of football differently to others with different interpretations of rules and processes, to finding crowds of people overwhelming or being overstimulated by a range of noises at a football game.

The FAW report that 1 in 7 people in the UK are considered neurodiverse, totaling more than

15%. With this, it would be fair to say a large majority of people who interact with football in one way or another, may be neurodiverse. However, it is important to note that not everyone will have a diagnosis, and some may self-identify as neurodivergent and choose not to seek a formal diagnosis. Therefore, to ensure everyone is welcomed and able to access the game in the same way, the FAW have launched a number of processes to champion and recognise neurodiversity across their organisation, as well as at club level and games.

Working alongside Neurodivergence Wales under the PAWB Strategy, guidance has been delivered to clubs on how to make sure it is understood and that best practices are put in place. Clubs are encouraged to consider and ask the person or their carer/parent what is best for them and what best would support their own neurodiversity needs to ensure they're comfortable. Alongside this, guidance is given to clubs to ensure everything from communication, clothing, changing rooms and break times are considered to create a more welcoming environment for those with neurodiversities.

Across senior Cymru Men's, Women's and U21s home fixtures, as well as domestic league cup finals, sensory rooms are available for children and young adults who may benefit from using

the space. These spaces are quiet, calming areas and contain sensory activities to ensure those who attend matches are offered an inclusive experience.

It is a key area of the PAWB strategy to champion and improve accessibility for underrepresented and priority groups, as well as provide opportunities in playing, coaching, officiating and leadership positions. Wider society's understanding of neurodiversity is constantly developing and, with this, the FAW are always reviewing their offering and guidance to clubs on how best to support those with neurodiversity to make sure that regardless of how our brains work, everyone is able to access football equally, and in the best way that works for them.

If you would like to know more about Children in Wales' work with the FAW, please contact Lisa Sanger, Development Officer Youth Engagement FAW on lisa.sanger@childreninwales.org.uk



PLANT YNG NGHYMRU
CHILDREN IN WALES



Embedding Anti-Racist Practice in Youth Work Leadership

Emma Chivers,
National Academy for Educational Leadership
and Youth Work Leadership Lab

Youth Work in Wales is rooted in the principles of equity, participation, and the holistic development of young people. It plays a vital role in enabling young people to understand themselves, others, and the wider world—and is well placed to lead conversations on race, identity, and justice¹.

While anti-racism is a clear commitment across education policy, Youth Work has not yet benefited from the same level of infrastructure or professional learning as formal education. However, a new collaborative initiative is beginning to change that.

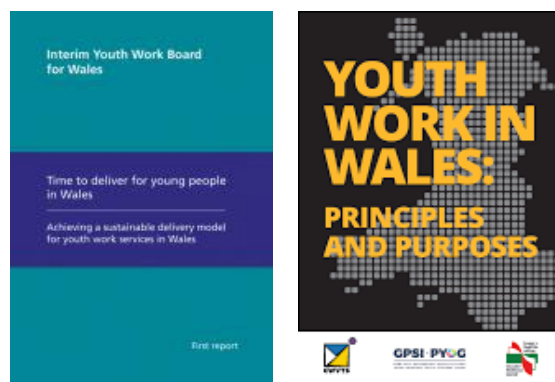
The Role of Youth Work in Anti-Racist Wales

The *Youth Work National Occupational Standards*² call on practitioners to challenge oppression and inequality and promote access for all, regardless of background or identity. In practice, this means

creating spaces where young people can express their identity, critically reflect on the world around them, and take part in shaping more inclusive communities.

Estyn highlights that youth work leaders have a vital role in helping young people explore identity, language, and diversity, while also supporting them to become respectful, responsible citizens who value both their own and others' cultures and experiences. This priority was reinforced in the Interim Youth Work Board for Wales Report, '*Time to deliver for young people in Wales: Achieving a sustainable delivery model for youth work services in Wales*³', which calls on Welsh Government and the youth work sector to collaborate in addressing inequalities and develop practice to promote inclusion and address diversity issues. The report emphasises youth work's ability to actively challenge discriminatory attitudes and

behaviours and to broaden access to provision across Wales. To ensure effective implementation across Wales, youth work leaders must have access to high-quality professional learning and support. The Workforce Development Plan for the Youth Work Sector in Wales⁴ reinforces this by affirming a continued commitment to enhancing leadership development opportunities.



A Collaborative Response: Youth Work and DARPL

To address this gap, a new set of professional learning resources for the Youth Work sector has been co-produced by **Diversity and Anti-Racism Professional Learning (DARPL)** and Youth Work leaders with lived experience from across Wales. Funded through the **National Academy for Educational Leadership's Innovation Strand**, supported by Welsh Government, the initiative draws on the principles of co-construction, equity, community of practice and collaboration.

This initiative builds on the significant reach of DARPL, which has already provided professional learning for *many senior leaders*, teachers, *practitioners*, teaching assistants and governors across education, *childcare and playwork*. However, Youth Work has, until now, been outside DARPL's remit—creating a clear policy and practice gap. The recent announcement by Lynne Neagle MS, Cabinet Secretary for Education on the establishment of a national body and statutory framework for Youth Work will help to reduce future policy gaps.

The newly co-developed *introductory* materials aim to support Youth Work leaders, practitioners, volunteers, and trustees to *contextualise and* embed anti-racist values *and leadership* into their work and reflect the diversity of the communities

they serve. Contributors to this work include practitioners with lived experiences such as Karen Brooke ([Oshun Education](#)), Chris Porter ([Urban Circle](#)) and youth work academics [Cez James](#) (Cardiff Metropolitan University) Kate Haywood (Urban Circle).

What Does the Programme Involve?

The Youth Work Leaders series is an introductory two-part professional learning programme:

- **Part One** explores the importance of anti-racism in Youth Work settings, unpacking the constructs of race and racism and supporting participants to engage in critical self-reflection.
- **Part Two** examines how Youth Work contributes to an anti-racist Wales and reflects on the sector's role in delivering the *Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan (2022–2026)*.

This flexible seed-series is designed for leaders to apply within their own settings and cascade to teams. It complements the *DARPL Toolkit: Eradicate Racism in Learning Organisations* and encourages the development of listening organisations that centre equity, belonging, and systemic change.

Both parts of the series launched on **16 April 2025** and are freely available on the **DARPL website** and **YouTube**.

Why This Matters Now

Youth and community work has a proud history of anti-racist practice, activism, and education. Yet, systemic inequalities persist—and Youth Work must be fully resourced to meet the demands of today's policy landscape. Inclusion in DARPL's national framework, and remit is essential for the youth work sector to work collaboratively with other professionals to achieve the objectives of the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan 2024 [Updated].

There is momentum in the sector. In June 2024, a DARPL Leadership Conference saw unprecedented engagement from Youth Work leaders, calling for dedicated support and resources. This new programme responds directly to that call.

By investing in the professional learning of Youth Work leaders, Wales is taking a meaningful step

towards embedding racial equity across all spaces where young people learn, grow, and lead.

Access the professional learning resources below:

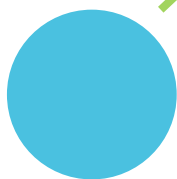
DARPL Campus – Youth Work Leaders:

[Youth Work Leaders Working Towards the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan – DARPL](#)

To find out more, visit www.darpl.org or contact Emma Chivers at: emma@ywleadershiplab.co.uk

References

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Gracie's voice: opening doors for disabled young people in Wales

Gethin Ap Dafydd, PIWS



At PIWS we believe that disabled young people should be able to enjoy Wales with confidence - whether that's a day at the beach, a coffee with friends, a night out or exploring somewhere new. That's why we created the Access Ambassadors programme: to break down barriers, promote inclusive spaces and celebrate what's working.

One of our inspiring ambassadors is Gracie Mellalieu, an 18-year-old singer-songwriter from Mold. Gracie lives with Morquio syndrome, a rare condition that affects her mobility and overall health. Like many disabled young people, she's faced frustrating access challenges - from heavy doors and awkward layouts to assumptions and stares. Now, Gracie is using her lived experience to make change happen.

As a paid Access Ambassador, she visits venues of her choice, shares honest feedback and helps both families and businesses understand how to improve accessibility.

"I'm really proud to be an Access Ambassador," says Gracie. "I can finally put my intelligence and lived experience to good use. I feel like I'm making a difference!"

This summer, Gracie is also helping launch the now bilingual Access Card, developed by Nimbus Disability. The card uses simple symbols to communicate a person's access needs - like needing more time, avoiding queues or requiring a companion. It's designed to reduce the burden on disabled people constantly explaining their needs, while supporting venues to meet their legal responsibilities under the Equality Act.

"It's a brilliantly simple and effective solution," Gracie says. "It breaks down communication and helps both the person and the venue make adjustments that matter."

The Access Card is already gaining attention, with organisations across Wales exploring how it can support more inclusive services.

At its core, PIWS is about making sure disabled children, young people and their families are seen, heard and valued - not as an afterthought, but as full members of their communities.

We're now looking for new Access Ambassadors from across Wales. You don't need qualifications, just lived experience of disability (or caring for someone who does) and a time to share your experiences. Ambassadors can be any age and choose when and where to visit. Full support and guidance are provided.

Together, we're building a bilingual, user-led platform for accessible tourism and leisure in Wales.

Join us and help create a Wales where disabled people don't just get by - they lead the way.

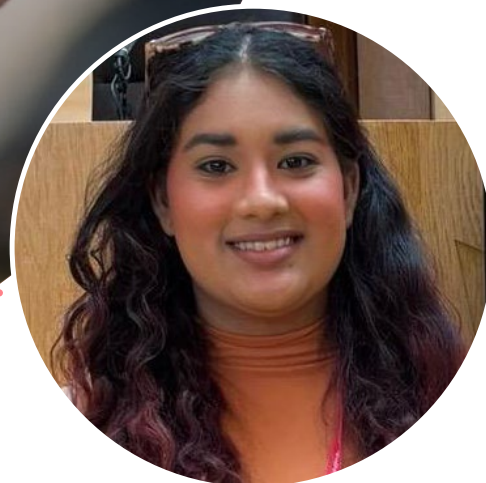
Contact Gethin Ap Dafydd at Gethin.ap@piws.co.uk or visit www.piws.co.uk for further information.





Transracial Foster Placements

Rayya, Member of
NYAS Cymru's Young Person's
Advisory Group in Wales



Trigger warning: This article contains content relating to racism, discrimination, references to racial slurs and accounts of racism which readers may find distressing.

Transracial foster placements are a regular topic of conversation between NYAS Cymru's Young Persons Advisory Group (YPAG) - a group of care experienced changemakers working with NYAS to ensure our services and projects across Wales meet the needs of care-experienced young people. In February, YPAG members accompanied NYAS to London to attend The Black Care-Experience Conference, which explored how racism and discrimination directly impact the lives of black and global ethnic majority children and young people in care. Rayya, (21) who attended, was born in Mauritius and described feeling that her experiences were validated when she heard the life stories of the conference speakers, their journey through care, and the racism and other hurdles they had

overcome. Race was very complex for Rayya who, due to misinformation, has described herself as being "Caribbean," despite being born in Mauritius – an island off the southeast coast of Africa. Rayya is keen to raise awareness of the reality of being in foster placements with families from different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds.

Rayya's Story

I arrived in the UK from Mauritius with my family when I was six months old and my siblings and I got taken into care when I was four. We were initially separated but later reunited in the second of three homes I lived in. Despite us all being together, this house was a bad experience for me. We were treated differently from the white children, and often they got away with lots of things that we would not.

All my foster carers were white and the fact that my skin was a different colour did not occur to me until I was with my first foster family and at

primary school. I was told that I looked like “poo.” It made me feel very sad, I was crying and felt disgusting and wondered “why I do look like poo?” For a long time I claimed it, I thought poo was disgusting and so am I.

The teachers did not understand how I felt, instead told me to ignore it and that the child who said it did not mean it. I was told to dry my tears and go back and play. The second time I experienced similar language the pupil was made to apologise, but I did not get any support. As I experienced more of these incidents, I did not have my parents to go to nor any support from my foster carers. I did not know what to say and I felt embarrassed. The conversations about race were always historical, it was Nelson Mandela, Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King. It was not taught in a way that explained that racism is very much still an issue. There were no separate water fountains or toilets, but racism was very real to me.

We talked about Islam in school, and this is how I learnt about my parents’ religion. It was all very theoretical, rather than being taught like it is a part of my identity. “*Muslims are terrorists*” was the message I was given from others - I knew my parents were not like that, but it hurt that people could view people who they don’t know so negatively.

My carers said things they should not have said, and I should not have heard. Being forced into a competition by carers of “*let’s see who can get darker in the sun*” hurt and was insensitive. Social Services did try and support me to learn Arabic, but it was still challenging. We were given a choice whether to celebrate Christmas “OR” Eid. I was not supported to be proud of my hair and skin colour or signposted to hairdressers to advise me. It was easier just to have straight hair.

It would have made a huge difference if I had had a foster carer from my own or a similar background. I am fully behind campaigns to increase the numbers of diverse foster carers. There should be more training, but carers should also be interested and want to do the research.

The conference made me realise how important it is to have positive role models who are like you. I have now learnt about my culture from my

parents and travelled to Mauritius with them. My past had made me want to be white at times, but I am now proud of my colour.

NYAS Cymru supports the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan and our work in this area is to advance the rights of ethnically diverse young people in care. If you would like to find out more, please contact: samantha.anderson@nyas.net.

If you are a care-experienced child or young people and would like support regarding any of themes in this article, our helpline can be contacted on 0808 808 1001.





Diversity and Inclusion in the lives of children and young people in Wales

Cath Smith, Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Clubs

Growing up in Wales today means being part of a culture that increasingly strives to recognise, support and celebrate every child and young person, no matter their background, identity or needs. Diversity and inclusion are not just ideals; they are integral to Wales' vision for the future. Whether tackling socioeconomic inequalities or ensuring children and young people who have additional needs, are neurodiverse or identify as LGBTQIA+, it is paramount to ensure they feel safe and valued. The goal is simple: every child should feel seen, appreciated and empowered to thrive.

It's crucial for children and young people who have additional or diverse needs to be seen, accepted and included like their counterparts, for their self-confidence, well-being and ability to thrive. Out of School Childcare Clubs have the child at the heart of everything they do, promoting an inclusive and diverse approach to remove barriers to participation. Many have adopted the social model of disability to meet the needs of the child in collaboration with the child and parents, ensuring equity, inclusion and interaction with their peers and that they have a positive play experience.

For LGBTQIA+ children and young people, visibility and acceptance make a world of difference. Feeling safe, respected and understood is crucial to their confidence and well-being. Across Wales, efforts are growing to create more inclusive play environments and communities, ensuring that

LGBTQIA+ identities are recognised and affirmed. While challenges such as bullying, isolation and underrepresentation still persist, many Welsh play environments are taking proactive steps - introducing inclusive policies, organising awareness days and training staff to better support gender and sexuality inclusion. Play environments, and youth groups play a vital role in providing safe spaces and support networks, helping LGBTQIA+ young people and their families feel connected, accepted and empowered.

Promoting anti-racism

Negative stereotypes about Black people and those from the Global Majority can develop from a young age, but children and young people can build friendships and develop respect for one another through play within an inclusive ethos that embraces difference.

Anti-racism moves beyond the promotion of equality and diversity and 'not being racist' to actively opposing racism and being an advocate for individual, institutional and systemic change. Welsh Government's vision is to create a Wales which is anti-racist by 2030, where everyone can thrive and feel valued. [CREATING AN ANTI-RACIST CULTURE IN SETTINGS](#) is a practical toolkit for those working in childcare, early years and play in Wales that can be used alongside learning opportunities to support an anti-racist culture.

Addressing socioeconomic inequality and improving access

Socioeconomic disadvantage remains one of the biggest barriers to inclusion in Wales. Children from low-income families often face barriers to accessing quality play opportunities and after-school provision, due to the:

- Cost of after-school clubs or extracurricular activities
- Lack of transportation, especially in rural areas, and limited provision in disadvantaged communities
- Cultural or language barriers, particularly for ethnic minority families

These disparities can affect children's physical health, emotional well-being and social skills. To address this, the Welsh Government has rolled out initiatives such as: The Play Sufficiency Duty (Wales, 2010) under the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010, making Wales the first country in the world to legislate for play. It requires local authorities to assess and secure sufficient play opportunities for children. The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 mandates public bodies to improve social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being, including ensuring equal access to opportunities for children. The Childcare Offer for Wales provides up to 30 hours a week of funded early education and childcare for eligible working parents of 3- and 4-year-olds, helping families balance work and child development. Wales is leading the way through its rights-based approach to play and childcare. While socioeconomic inequalities still impact access, significant efforts have been made to remove financial, geographic, and cultural barriers. However, inclusion goes beyond offering equal opportunities - it means recognising that different children require different kinds of support, and ensuring they receive what they need to flourish.

The importance of play, creativity and community

Play and creativity are far from trivial - they are fundamental to the healthy development and well-being of children and young people. Wales has been at the forefront of promoting this through its Play Sufficiency Duty, which ensures local

authorities provide adequate play opportunities for children. Whether it's local parks, youth centres or community art projects, these spaces foster confidence, resilience and meaningful social connections. Creative activities also provide a vital outlet for self-expression, particularly for those who feel marginalised in other aspects of life. When communities are engaged and equipped to support young people, inclusion moves beyond discussion and becomes a tangible reality.

A truly inclusive approach also means listening to children and young people, ensuring they have a voice in decisions that affect their lives. School councils, youth parliaments and local consultation projects provide important platforms for them to share their perspectives and influence the world around them. When young people are actively involved, they develop confidence, agency and a stronger sense of belonging.

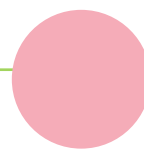
A vision for the future

A Wales that truly embraces inclusion is one that views diversity as a strength rather than a challenge. It is about fostering systems that are adaptable, compassionate and responsive to the varied needs of children and young people. It is about identifying and dismantling the barriers - both seen and unseen - that prevent full participation.

Progress has certainly been made, but there is still more to do. Continued investment in education, community resources and social initiatives is essential. Equally important is a cultural shift - one that ensures every child, regardless of their background, is treated with kindness, respect and fairness.

Inclusion is more than a policy, it is a commitment to equity, justice and the belief that every child deserves the chance not just to exist, but to thrive. Wales is laying the foundations for a future where all children grow up knowing that they belong.





Call for contributions for the Autumn 2025 magazine

Topic: Child poverty in Wales – what are we seeing, what needs to change?

We are now inviting contributions for the Autumn edition of our magazine, which will focus on one of the most urgent challenges facing Wales today: **child poverty**.

This issue will explore how poverty is impacting the lives of babies, children and young people across Wales, and how those working across health, education, social care, childcare, youth services and the third sector are responding to the growing pressures.

We want to hear from you. As a valued member of our network you have vital insights to share from your lived experience, frontline practice, policy work or research. How is child poverty impacting the children and young people you support? What is your organisation doing to address the challenges? Are there examples of innovation or collaboration making a difference in your community? What changes are needed at local or national level to ensure every child in Wales can thrive?

We particularly welcome articles that explore one or more of the following areas:

- The role of the Welsh benefits system in supporting (or failing) families
- The case for free public transport for all children and young people
- Childcare provision for marginalised groups
- The impact of poverty on children's physical and mental health, including food insecurity and access to health services
- Housing, homelessness and the right to safe and secure accommodation
- How poverty affects education - attendance, digital access, learning outcomes and participation in extracurricular activities
- How geography and location shape the experience of poverty, including access to services, transport and employment opportunities

Let's use this space to share learning, amplify good practice, and highlight for meaningful change in order to reduce poverty and support the rights and wellbeing of children in Wales.

Submission guidelines:

- Articles should be 500 and 750 words
- Please provide your submission in both English and Welsh
- Include a title, your name and organisation
- You are welcome to include high quality JPEG images (optional)
- Deadline for submissions **Thursday, 9 October 2025**

To express interest or reserve space in this issue, please email: membership@childreninwales.org.uk as soon as possible.

Please note: the magazine is shared publicly on our social media accounts, giving **your contribution the opportunity to reach a wider audience beyond our membership**.

We look forward to hearing from you and sharing your voice in this important conversation.



Organisational links

[Children in Wales](#)

[Diverse Cymru](#)

[Youth Work Leadership Lab](#)

[Child Poverty Action Group](#)

[NYAS](#)

[Mudiad Meithrin](#)

[Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Clubs](#)

[Widening Participation, Cardiff University](#)

[TGP Cymru](#)

[Democracy Ambassadors' Programme, Cardiff Council](#)

[TACT Fostering](#)

[PIWS](#)

[Action for Children](#)

[ProMo Cymru](#)

[University of Wales Trinity St David](#)

[National Youth Arts Wales](#)

[Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Partnership](#)

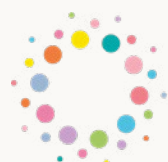
[Children's Commissioner for Wales](#)

[Boys' & Girls' Clubs for Wales](#)

[Barnardo's Cymru](#)

[Platfform](#)

[Llamau](#)



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