

PLANT YNG NGHYMURU
CHILDREN IN WALES

Issue 94
Autumn 2025

childreninwales.org.uk

Changing the story: working together to end child poverty in Wales

FEATURES

Blaenau Gwent
County Borough Council

Fairer Future

Welsh Refugee Council

Lisa Turner
(Trails, Bales and Snails)

Money Ready

PLUS

Play Wales
Welsh Local
Government Association
ScoutsCymru
Credu

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Welcome from Chief Executive, Hugh Russell

Croeso cynnes, a warm welcome to the Autumn 2025 edition of Children in Wales' magazine.



This edition focuses on the grim picture of child poverty in Wales. It cannot be overstated how far this wicked problem has become embedded in Wales, lying at the root of so many of the other challenges we collectively face here.

A Joseph Rowntree Foundation report at the beginning of the year¹ set out some of the effects of poverty on children in Wales. To give one example, educationally, the impact of poverty sets children back against their peers from an early point to the extent that Year 6 students who experience poverty are over two years behind their peers in numeracy and reading.

Our own work shows similar, life-course-altering influences of poverty. Each year, Children in Wales, in partnership with the End Child Poverty Network Cymru (ECPN), conduct the Child & Family Poverty Surveys, giving us the opportunity to amplify the voices of children, parents and practitioners who are dealing with the very real consequences of child poverty. The most recent report on these surveys², released in February, depicted an increasingly bleak scene, with the cumulative impact of years of grinding poverty and stretched services cutting away at people's sense of optimism. One practitioner stated in their response, *"People are losing hope and being pushed further and further into poverty."*

At Children in Wales, addressing child poverty is a motif that runs through much of what we do, as it undermines children's access to so many of their rights. Our Policy Director, Sean O'Neill, has written in this edition about our recent trip to Westminster where he and I, along with member organisations, raised the issue to the recently re-formed All Party Parliamentary Group on Children in Wales. It is clear that action is necessary at a UK Government level to fundamentally shift the situation. Within the magazine, you'll read Fairer Future's perspective on how we should be focussing our messaging on this to achieve policy change.

We also need to see the next Welsh Government deliver wholesale, measurable change, placing children at the heart of their programme for government. In this edition you'll read pieces by partners including Barnardo's Cymru, who have written about both the work that they are doing to immediately support those in poverty, and what needs to change at a systemic level in Wales, so that such reliance on frontline, short-term fixes, can be diminished.

We know that poverty is an intersectional challenge – some groups of people are more likely to suffer from poverty, or it is liable to compound situations experienced by some demographic groups that others do not experience. Powerful pieces within this edition touch on the experience of young carers (Credud), sanctuary-seeking children (Welsh Refugee Council) and neurodivergent children (Family Pathway) as examples of these situations.

We can take heart from the varied and impressive efforts undertaken across the sector to alleviate the day-to-day impact of poverty for families, and there are some superb examples provided within of local authorities and third sector agencies doing excellent work to ensure that there is food made available to people (Welsh Local Government Association), that their voices are heard in local decision making (Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council), that education is not impacted for lack of resources (Buttle UK), amongst an array of approaches being taken to address families' immediate challenges.

Finally, I was particularly moved to read about the work being done to enable children to continue to access their right to play, in the face of the

pressure of poverty. I am especially grateful to both Play Wales and to Lisa Turner for their writing on these points.

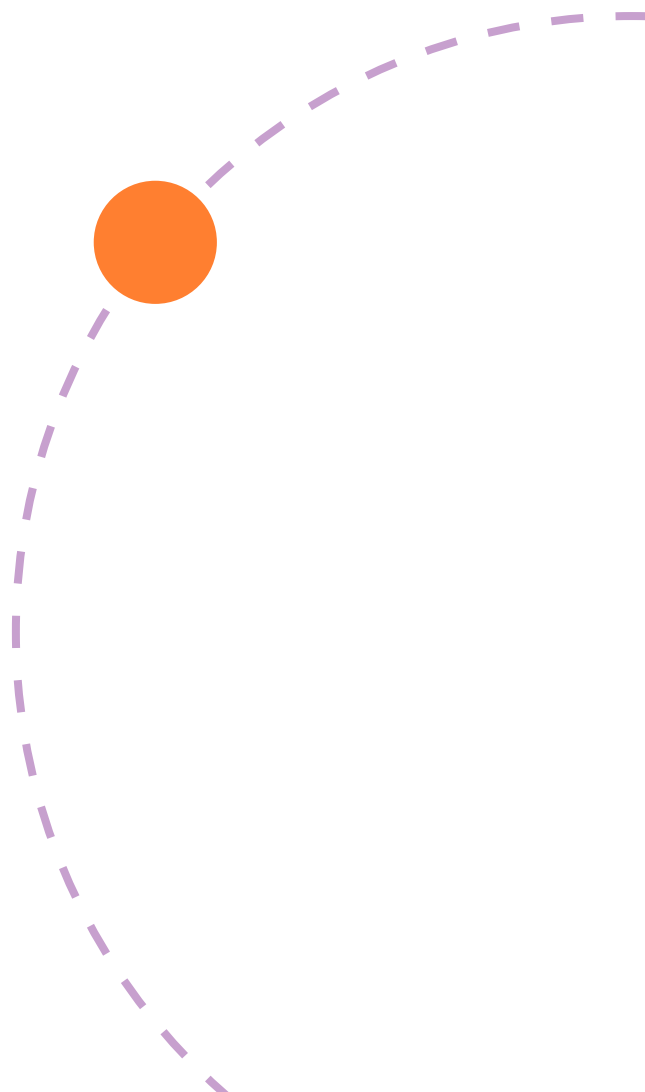
To everyone who has contributed to this edition of the magazine, thank you. Together, these articles form an overwhelming record of some of the inspiring approaches which are being taken to address the effects of a catastrophic problem that we cannot allow to continue.

Diolch o galon!

Hugh

References

1. <https://www.jrf.org.uk/poverty-in-wales-2025>
2. <https://www.childreninwales.org.uk/news/children-wales-launches-its-8th-annual-child-family-poverty-survey-findings-report/>



Training course calendar

November 2025 – March 2026

Here are some of the training courses available to help keep you informed and up-to-date. Members receive discounts off all our courses. Courses are either delivered online or face-to-face.



November 2025

Anxiety in Young People: Supporting Young People's Wellbeing

Thursday, 20 November 2025
09:30 – 16:00

Online event

Members: £126, Non-members: £140

Gain essential knowledge and practical tools to understand and support young people struggling with anxiety in this insightful one-day course on mental health and resilience

December 2025

Group B: Safeguarding Children, Young People and Adults at Risk

Wednesday, 3 December 2025
09:30 – 16:00

Online event

Members: £126, Non-members: £140

This essential course provides the knowledge and confidence to recognise, respond to, and report safeguarding concerns involving children, young people, and adults at risk.

Through Their Eyes: Understanding the Impact of Child Poverty

Thursday, 4 December 2025
10:00 – 13:00

Living Room, 96-98 Neville St, Cardiff

Members: £72, Non-members: £80

This half-day training explores the impact of child poverty across Wales and the UK, equipping professionals with the insight and practical strategies to challenge inequality and better support children and families.

Group C: Safeguarding for the Designated Person and Senior Practitioners

**Monday, 8 &
Tuesday, 9 December 2025**
09:30 – 16:00

Online event

Members: £252 Non-members: £280

Designed for Designated Safeguarding Leads and senior practitioners, this course strengthens your expertise in managing safeguarding responsibilities, making informed decisions, and leading effective safeguarding practice.

January 2026

Recognise, Respond, Support: Addressing Self-harm & Suicide in Young People

Thursday, 22 January 2026
09:30 – 16:00

Online event

Members: £126, Non-members: £140

This training provides the knowledge and practical strategies to understand, identify, and support individuals at risk of self-harm and suicide, helping you respond with confidence and compassion.

PACE & Trauma Informed Recovery: Using PACE to Support Children and Young People

Thursday, 29 January 2026
09:30 – 16:00

Online event

Members: £126, Non-members: £140

This course offers key insights into how trauma affects children and young people, and shows how PACE principles help build safe, trusting relationships that support recovery and resilience.

February 2026

Grief, Loss and Resilience: Tools for Supporting Looked After Children

Wednesday, 4 February 2026
09:30 – 16:00

Online event

Members: £126, Non-members: £140

This compassionate and practical training helps professionals understand and respond to grief and loss in children, offering tools to support emotional healing and resilience

Building Resilience: Understanding adverse childhood experiences

Wednesday, 11 February 2026
10:00 – 13:00

Online event

Members: £72, Non-members: £80

This half-day course deepens your understanding of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), trauma, and resilience, empowering you to better support children, young people, and adults affected by early life adversity.

Group C: Safeguarding for the Designated Person & Senior Practitioners

**Tuesday, 24 &
Wednesday, 25 February 2026**
09:30 – 16:00

Cardiff Central Library

Members: £252, Non-members: £280

Designed for Designated Safeguarding Leads and senior practitioners, this course strengthens your expertise in managing safeguarding responsibilities, making informed decisions, and leading effective safeguarding practice.

March 2026

Group C: Safeguarding for the Designated Person & Senior Practitioners

**Wednesday, 18 &
Thursday, 19 March 2026**
09:30 – 16:00

Adferiad, 36 Princes Drive, Colwyn Bay

Members: £252, Non-members: £280

Designed for Designated Safeguarding Leads and senior practitioners, this course strengthens your expertise in managing safeguarding responsibilities, making informed decisions, and leading effective safeguarding practice.

Events



Young Wales Summit 2025 Celebrating Youth Voice and Children's Rights

Saturday, 15 November 2025, 10am – 4pm
SPARK, Maindy Road, Cardiff, CF24 4HQ

Join us for a day celebrating the power of youth voice in Wales. You are warmly encouraged to bring along the young people you work with to take part in this exciting and inspiring event.

This year's Summit follows the Big Conversation: a national programme of creative sessions where young people shared how their rights are being realised and what change they want to see.

This event is free to attend and designed to be inclusive and welcoming to everyone. Spaces are limited, so please register your interest now - confirmations will be sent by the end of September. Interpreters and access support will be provided.

For more information, contact Emma Butler, Events Officer.

emma.butler@childreninwales.org.uk



Champions for Children: A Manifesto for babies, children, and young people in advance of Senedd elections 2026

Tuesday, 9 December 2025, 10.30am - 3pm
Y Neuadd, Senedd, Cardiff Bay

Join our call for every political party and candidate to make children a top priority during the election campaign and throughout the next Senedd term.

Panel discussions, marketplace and networking opportunities. Full agenda to follow. Refreshments provided. Sponsored by Julie Morgan MS

Book via [Eventbrite](https://www.eventbrite.co.uk)

Download and read the Manifesto [here](#)



Children in Wales Annual Conference 2026 Youth Voice in Action - Putting Participation at the Heart of Change

Wednesday, 25 March 2026, time to be confirmed
sbarclspark, Maindy Rd, Cardiff, CF24 4HQ

Keynote Speaker: Professor Laura Lundy
Leading expert on children's rights and participation

Interested in participating? Contact our Events Officer at

emma.butler@childreninwales.org.uk

Earlybird tickets will go on sale in December



Supporting brighter futures for young people in Wales

Kerrie Gemmell, ScoutsCymru



ScoutsCymru is the largest youth membership organisation in Wales, with approximately 18,000 members. We support thousands of young people across the country, including in some of the most deprived urban and rural communities.

Helping children thrive, not just survive

Child poverty isn't only about a lack of income. It also means missing out on the networks, spaces and experiences that help young people grow and thrive. Scouting helps close those gaps by offering safe, supportive environments, access to the outdoors, and opportunities that many children wouldn't otherwise have.

At a time when school absence is rising, 1 in 6 young people in Wales have a diagnosable mental health condition, and young people in Wales are more likely to be NEET than elsewhere in the UK, ScoutsCymru offers consistent, community-based support that helps young people stay engaged, build confidence and take positive steps toward their future.

ScoutsCymru contributes to ensuring every child in Wales has the best possible start in life and the opportunity to realise their potential, no matter their background.

Through low-cost weekly activities, outdoor adventures and volunteering, we give young people the chance to:

- **Belong** – building friendships in a supportive environment
- **Grow** – developing skills for life including leadership, resilience and teamwork
- **Take part** – experiencing things that families facing hardship often can't afford, from camping to kayaking, hikes to high ropes
- **Connect with nature** – known to boost wellbeing, reduce stress and improve mental health
- **Have a voice** – gaining confidence to express themselves, share their views and shape the decisions that affect them.

Strong reach across rural and urban Wales

We know from research that child poverty in rural Wales is often hidden, but just as severe as in an urban setting, linked to transport costs, housing and isolation. Scouting is uniquely placed to support all communities:

- Present in every local authority in Wales
- Delivered by trained volunteers embedded in their communities
- Flexible, place-based, and tailored to local needs

We also reach young people who may be struggling with regular school attendance, social anxiety or disconnection, encouraging participation and consistency in a safe and supportive environment.

Demonstrable impact

Scouting gives young people a better start in life – with long-term benefits for families, communities and public services.

We know that:

- **94% of scouts in Wales** aged 5–18 say they've developed skills useful in later life
- **88%** say have tried activities they've never done before and feel more confident, more connected, and better prepared to lead
- **8 out of 10 parents** believe Scouts helps develop skills
- **53%** of Scouts felt ready starting their first job, compared to just 37% of non-participants
- **More than half** of Scouts say teamwork and leadership skills gained through Scouting helped their careers

These outcomes also help tackle the root causes of young people becoming a NEET statistic, by building confidence, transferable skills and a sense of purpose.

Exceptional value for money

Scouting delivers measurable personal, social and community outcomes – **at a fraction of the cost** of many formal interventions.

- A volunteer-led model means investment stretches further
- Many groups offer subsidies, uniform banks and hardship funds
- Our support helps reduce future public costs by improving health, skills and employment prospects

For less than half the price of an Original Glazed™ Krispy Kreme doughnut each week, Scouting offers life-changing experiences.

In Wales, the average annual membership fee is just £62.39 – that's around £1.20 per week. For this, young people gain access to outdoor adventure, practical skills, leadership opportunities and a sense of belonging that lasts a lifetime.

For every £1 invested in Scouting, the social return is significant – from improved mental health and physical activity to reduced loneliness and stronger communities.

Working together for impact

As Wales renews its approach to tackling child poverty, ScoutsCymru stands ready to play our part, locally, nationally and across sectors. We are already:

- Supporting families under pressure with free or low-cost activities
- Partnering with schools, local authorities and community groups
- Reaching young people often missed by other services

Our work sits at the intersection of the Curriculum for Wales, the Play Policy and the Well-being of Future Generations Act helping to turn national ambition into real-world impact for young people and families across Wales.

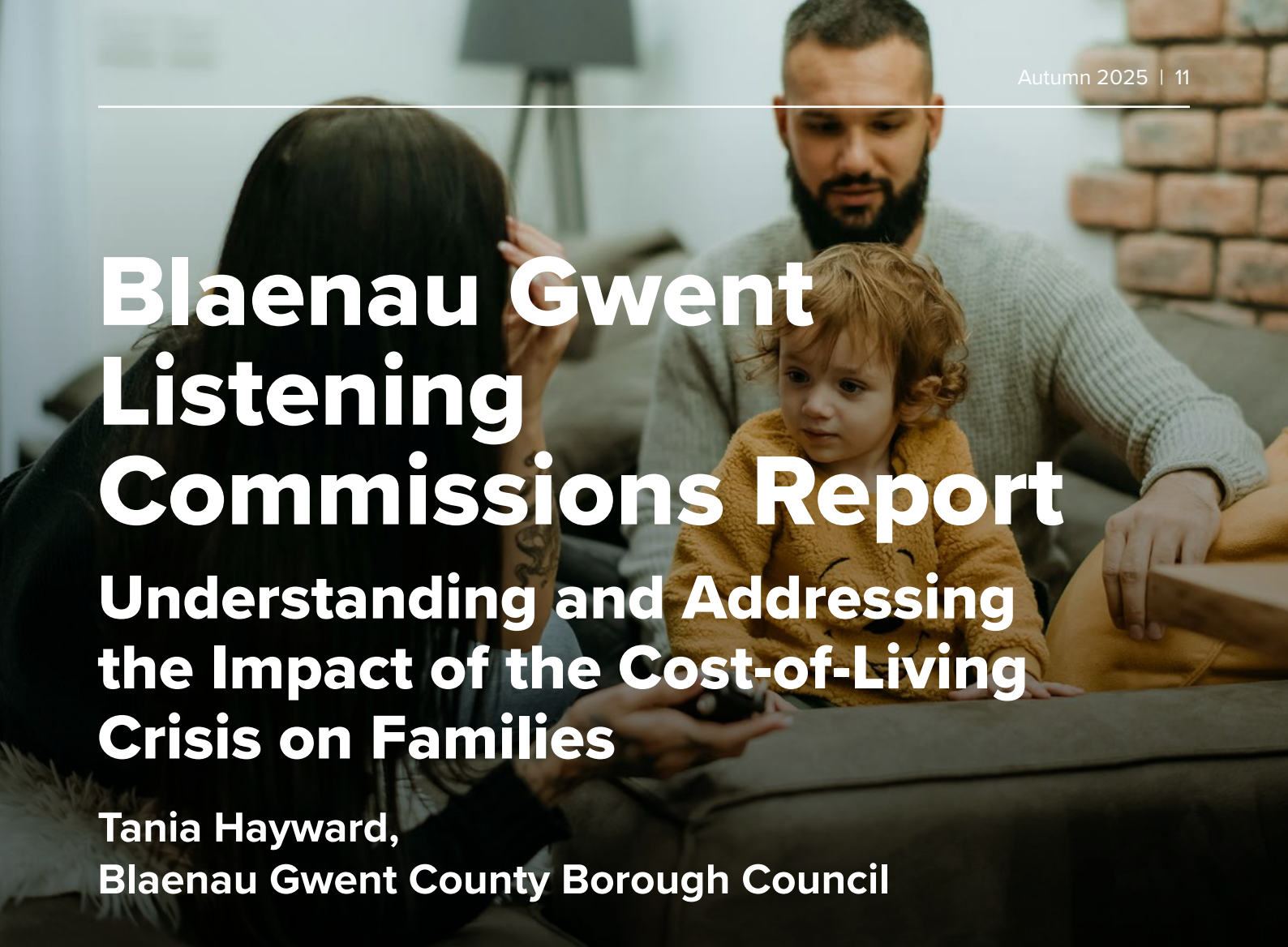
We are also aligned with the ambitions of the 2024 Child Poverty Strategy and play a complementary role alongside programmes such as Flying Start, Free School Meals and the Young Person's Guarantee, extending their reach by providing opportunities beyond the classroom, in evenings, weekends and school holidays, where support often drops away.

Today's Scouts are tomorrow's role models, workers, leaders and parents.

If you would like to learn more about our work, please email: lisa.newberry@scoutscymru.org.uk



Scouts 
Cymru



Blaenau Gwent Listening Commissions Report

Understanding and Addressing the Impact of the Cost-of-Living Crisis on Families

Tania Hayward,
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

Blaenau Gwent recently presented a report on the findings from a comprehensive series of listening commissions undertaken with parents and carers across the county. The primary objective was to gain an in-depth understanding of how the ongoing cost of living crisis is affecting families within the community, and to evaluate the effectiveness of local authority initiatives implemented in response to the challenges identified by residents.

In collaboration with the Cost-of-Living Strategic Group, a series of targeted listening sessions were facilitated with over 50 parents and carers experiencing poverty and socio-economic hardship in Blaenau Gwent. These sessions provided a platform for individuals to voice their lived experiences, enabling the local authority to better appreciate the nuanced realities facing families. The voices and perspectives gathered are at the heart of this report, underscoring the belief that those most directly impacted by adversity possess invaluable insights into the policies and services that shape their lives.

Key themes identified

Through detailed consultations, six predominant themes emerged:

- **Housing:** Parents expressed concerns about the affordability, quality and security of housing. Issues such as rising rent costs, inadequate heating, overcrowding and insufficient social housing were commonly raised
- **Educational Pressures:** The cost of school-related expenses, including uniforms, trips and supplies, placed additional strain on family budgets. Some parents noted that these costs threaten children's full participation in educational opportunities
- **Food and Nutrition:** Many families reported increasing difficulties in maintaining a nutritious diet due to the escalating cost of food. The use of food banks and community pantries has risen, and some parents described skipping meals to ensure their children are fed

- **Benefits and Debt:** The complexity and inadequacy of the welfare system, along with mounting debt, were significant sources of stress. Delays in payments, insufficient benefit levels and challenges in accessing support were routinely cited
- **Mental Health:** The cumulative pressures of financial insecurity, housing instability and food scarcity have contributed to deteriorating mental health among parents and children alike. Anxiety, depression, and feelings of isolation were prevalent themes
- **Employment:** While employment is seen as a pathway out of poverty, many parents highlighted the barriers they face, such as a lack of flexible work opportunities, inadequate childcare and low wages that fail to meet the rising cost of living

Local Authority actions and initiatives

In response to the concerns raised, Blaenau Gwent local authority has implemented and expanded a range of projects and support services. These include targeted grants for school uniforms, the development of a Family Support Hub to improve service coordination, increased access to financial and debt advice, enhanced food support initiatives and the rollout of additional cost-of-living events to provide direct assistance to those in need. Investment has also been made in antenatal support and mental health services with the aim of addressing both immediate and long-term challenges.

Future plans and recommendations

Building on the feedback from the listening commissions, the local authority is committed to further improving service accessibility and delivery. Key actions moving forward include:

- Expanding the Family Support Hub model to reach more families in need
- Developing new partnerships with local organisations and charities to strengthen the safety net for vulnerable households

- Enhancing communication and outreach to ensure families are informed about available support
- Continuing to regularly consult with parents and carers, ensuring that their voices drive the ongoing development of policy and practice

This report reaffirms the importance of placing families and individuals with lived experience at the centre of policymaking. By listening to those directly affected by poverty and the cost-of-living crisis, Blaenau Gwent aims to enact meaningful change and progress towards a more equitable community. The findings and recommendations contained herein are intended to support the development of responsive, compassionate and effective strategies that reduce inequality and enhance opportunities for all children and families living in low-income circumstances.

If you would like more information please contact:

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THE LISTENING COMMISSION REPORT FOR PARENTS

The report presents findings from listening sessions with 50 parents in Blaenau Gwent, aimed at understanding the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on families.

Seven key themes emerged: **housing, school costs, food and nutrition, benefits and debt, mental health, fuel** and **employment**. For each issue, the local authority responded with targeted actions, including new support services, grants, and policy changes.

The initiative, driven by the Cost of Living strategic group, emphasized the importance of hearing directly from those affected by poverty to guide meaningful change. The report also outlines future plans to improve service access, including a Family Support Hub, antenatal support, and expanded cost-of-living events.



The approach fosters empathy, trust, and collaboration between families and commissioners, with more listening sessions planned throughout the year. After consulting 50 parents to date on the themes below we have found out **'what you said'** and **'what we did'**.

HOUSING



You said: Homes were unsafe, damp, and repairs were delayed.

We did: Created a QR code for reporting issues, brought housing officers to sessions, and contacted landlords

SCHOOL COSTS



You said: Uniforms and school extras were too expensive.

We did: Asked schools to reduce costs, set up recycling schemes, and supported free childcare expansion.

FOOD & NUTRITION



You said: Healthy food was unaffordable, and some families skipped meals.

We did: Delivered food parcels, cooking sessions, and promoted Healthy Start vouchers.

BENEFIT & DEBT ISSUES



You said: Debt and benefit delays were leaving families without essentials.

We did: Opened support hubs, ran financial advice events, and tackled illegal money lending.

IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH



You said: Stress and anxiety were rising.

We did: Offered support through Flying Start, GP visits, and shared mental health resources.

FUEL



You said: Heating was unaffordable.

We did: Distributed fuel vouchers and opened 18 Warm Hubs across the area.

EMPLOYMENT



You said: Zero-hour contracts and childcare costs made work unviable.

We did: Encouraged better employment practices and offered financial advice and training support.

WHATS NEXT



Family Support Hub: One front door for all support services.

Antenatal Support: Cost-saving advice for expectant parents.

More Listening: We'll be speaking with older community members next.

Rural Outreach: Events in more areas to reach every family.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Family Information Service

fis@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk Tel: 01495 369610



Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol
Aneurin Bevan
University Health Board



Making money make sense

Liam O'Sullivan, Money Ready

Money Ready (formerly MyBnk) is a leading financial education charity that has been active in Wales since May 2024. Why is this important? Everyone needs to be able to manage their money, yet almost two-thirds of young adults do not recall receiving any financial education at all, and 53% are worried that they will never be financially secure.

Poor financial literacy is central to many problems people face today, such as rising mental health issues, homelessness and unemployment, which can potentially perpetuate poverty. A family facing financial stress may not have the time, confidence or knowledge to pass on money management skills, and until financial education is given a higher priority on national curriculums, it won't be systematically and effectively taught in all schools.

That's where Money Ready can help. We believe that financial education can be used as a tool to break the cycle, by helping young people to develop skills around budgeting, banking, understanding credit and building a savings habit. With the result of empowering young people to make informed financial decisions and choices.

Money Ready aims to bridge this gap by working with over 50,000 individuals across the UK every year, delivering expert-led, high-impact financial education programmes on topics such as saving, debt and student finance.

The need

48% of 7–11 year olds say they didn't receive key elements of financial education at school or at home.

70% of 18–24 year olds spend money on something they have second thoughts about.

41% of parents are concerned about pressure on children to make purchases.

Our approach

Our free and fully funded money lessons are fun, engaging and memorable, using games, videos and real-life scenarios and challenges. We tailor sessions for all children and young people from the age of four, helping participants become confident savers, spenders and consumers. Many 16+ programmes also offer a Level 1 Money Management qualification.

Our impact

87% of learners said they felt confident with managing their money after our programme.

70% of children stick to their money saving plans a year later.

78% of pupils understand what they do with their money today can make a difference to their future.

We are keen to especially work with underrepresented and hard to reach groups, such as care leavers, refugee and asylum-seeking children, sensory impaired and additional learning needs. Typical group size, depending on the programme being delivered, can be anywhere from five or six up to a class of 30 for school sessions. Many of our sessions are delivered in-person and we also have the option to deliver virtually.

Our work in Wales is only just getting started and we are keen to find out how we can collaborate and support the children and young people you work with. Money Ready's mission is to bring the language of finance to life so that everyone can navigate their money with confidence, no matter where they start.

If you would like further information or to arrange a call to find out more, please get in touch visiting our website: <https://moneyready.org/> or emailing: cymru@moneyready.org

You can also find us on social media.





How child poverty impacts education: Insight and impact from Buttle UK

Kate Zaczek, Dr Naomi Harflett & Tom Rowe
Buttle UK

Buttle UK is a national charity dedicated to supporting children and young people in the UK living in poverty and crisis. Our mission is to improve emotional, educational and social outcomes through our Chances for Children grants; bespoke packages of support of up to £2,400, tailored to the needs of each child. Many of the children and young people we work with have lived through crises including domestic abuse, homelessness, neglect, bereavement or estrangement.

Barriers to education for children in poverty

Recent figures show that 31% of children in Wales are currently living in poverty¹. We know that poverty and education are intrinsically linked. A recent Joseph Rowntree Foundation report highlights the huge attainment gaps for children in Wales based on their household income - just 41% of children receiving free school meals attain GCSE grades A*-C, compared to 71% of those not receiving free school meals².

Earlier this year Buttle UK conducted research to explore the relationship between financial hardship and education³. Survey responses from 825 parents and carers in the UK, who had experienced financial hardship, highlighted the devastating impact that poverty has on their children's engagement in education. Six out of 10 parents and carers told us that their children's capacity to engage in learning was diminished due to hunger or tiredness. Parents and carers reported an average school attendance rating for their children of 78% - this is significantly lower than the 91% attendance rating for children in Wales⁴. Parents and carers were asked which key educational resources were unaffordable for their household:

- 82% of parents and carers reported that they could not afford a laptop or tablet
- 69% could not afford school trips
- 61% could not afford extracurricular activities

Supporting engagement in education in Wales

Our Chances for Children grants are bespoke packages of support tailored to the individual needs of each child, providing items and activities to support children's engagement in education, promote social and emotional wellbeing and improve the home environment. In the last 5 years applications in Wales have increased by 12%. In 2024-25 we awarded almost £300,000, funding 178 grants and supporting 374 children and young people across Wales. Of this, £105,022 was awarded specifically for support with education. This included laptops or tablets to support school work, new school uniform to enable children to go to school, toys, books and games to enhance learning opportunities, and access to afterschool activities to explore something they enjoy and make friends.

Siblings Anna, aged 6 and Luke aged 12⁵, had to leave their toys, clothes and belongings when they and their mother fled their home because of domestic violence. They were housed in temporary accommodation away from their old school and friends and had to start again in a new area and new school. They were feeling very isolated and their school work was affected. A Chances for Children grant was able to support them with items they needed in their new school and to replace some items they had lost. Their mother describes how the grant was able to help them:

"I would have been lost without this grant. Me and my children escaped DV and left with what we could carry. The children had to change schools so I was able to buy them new uniform with the grant and was able to replace their bikes. My eldest also had a Chromebook to help him with his school work." Parent, Wales

We routinely collect feedback from parents and carers who receive our grants. In 2024-25, 88% of parents and carers in Wales reported an improvement in their child or young person's engagement in education, as a result of the grant they received.

Looking forward

With over three in 10 children in Wales living in poverty, at Buttle UK we are only too aware that there is more to do to support children in poverty to

engage in education. We encourage organisations across Wales, supporting children and young people in financial hardship who have experienced crisis, to explore our Chances for Children grant eligibility criteria www.buttleuk.org/apply-for-a-grant/chances-for-children-grants/.

Moving forward, as part of our new 2025-30 strategy⁶, we are aiming to have an even greater impact on children in poverty through developing longer-term programmes of support for communities facing the toughest challenges, and through building our influencing work to change the systems that are holding children and young people back.

If you would like to learn more about our work, please send an email to Kate Zaczek, Grants Development Officer: katez@buttleuk.org

References

1. End Child Poverty (2025), www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/child-poverty-2025/
2. Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2025), UK Poverty 2025
3. The full report, 'Growing Up in Poverty: Exploring the Education Gap' is due to be published later this year
4. Welsh Government (2025), Attendance of pupils in maintained schools: 2 September 2024 to 25 July 2025 www.gov.wales/attendance-pupils-maintained-schools-2-september-2024-25-july-2025.html
5. Names have been changed
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Beyond the classroom: How poverty and homelessness limit young people's access to the full experience of education

Mark Wilmore, Llamau

When we think about education, it's easy to picture classrooms, lessons and exams. But education is much more than that. It's about friendships built through after-school clubs, confidence gained on sports teams, and creativity sparked by music or drama. It's also about having the tools to keep up with homework and research in a world where digital access is essential.

For young people experiencing poverty or homelessness, these vital parts of education are often out of reach.

The digital divide in education

For most pupils, homework, revision and even lessons rely on technology. But many young people supported by Llamau don't have reliable access to laptops, tablets or Wi-Fi at home. Without the right equipment, keeping up with schoolwork becomes almost impossible, leaving them

excluded from the exact opportunities that help their peers thrive.

Llamau works to bridge this gap by providing digital devices, safe learning spaces and tailored educational support. This support gives young people the chance not only to complete their studies, but also to gain essential digital skills for the future.

Lost opportunities in extracurricular activities

When families are struggling financially, extracurricular activities such as school trips, sports clubs and music lessons are often the first things to go. For those without a stable home, these experiences may not be an option at all.

Yet these activities are far from 'extras'. They help young people to build confidence, resilience and social connections. They are where many discover

talents and interests that shape their future. Missing out on these experiences means losing access to vital building blocks for adulthood.

At Llamau, we create opportunities for young people to explore their interests, make friends and grow in confidence: from creative projects to group learning experiences that spark curiosity and connection.

Learning beyond borders: young people lead Taith-funded trip to Poland

One inspiring example is Llamau's youth-led learning exchange to Poland, funded by Taith - Wales' international programme for global education and cultural exchange.

This October, a group of young people supported by Llamau travelled to Poland on a trip focused on learning, leadership and connection, with young people shaping the journey from the very beginning.

The idea came from Llamau's My Way Home leadership group, a weekly space where young people meet to share experiences and shape change. Having already worked with the Senedd on LGBTQ+ issues and co-produced resources with Welsh Women's Aid, the group wanted to design a meaningful international experience rooted in their values.

After thoughtful discussions they chose Poland, a country with a complex history of oppression and resilience, to deepen their understanding of LGBTQ+ issues, human rights and cultural identity.

The trip balanced education, cultural immersion and time to reflect. The itinerary included exploring Jewish history at the Galicja Museum, visiting Auschwitz with trauma-informed support, and connecting with Polish young people through cultural exchange. Some participants documented their experiences through blogs and videos, sharing their reflections in their own words.

The group included trans young people, a person that uses a wheelchair and others who are neurodivergent or have faced economic disadvantage. For some, traditional education has been disrupted or inaccessible, so this

journey offers a new way to learn: through lived experience, empathy and leadership.

This is the first time Llamau has supported a youth-led international learning exchange of this kind, showing what's possible when young people are not just consulted but truly empowered to lead.

The wider impact

Education should be about more than passing exams. It should help young people build the confidence and skills to thrive as adults. But when poverty and homelessness strip away access to digital learning and extracurricular activities, young people face disadvantage on multiple levels: academically, socially and emotionally.

That's why Llamau is committed to breaking down barriers. With the right support, every young person can not only access the classroom but also experience the wider opportunities that help them flourish.

Our belief

At Llamau, we believe every young person deserves more than just a seat in the classroom: they deserve the chance to thrive. That means providing digital access, creating inclusive spaces to learn and grow, and ensuring no young person is excluded from the opportunities that can change their life.

Accompanying photo: Our young people meeting their Polish counterparts and sharing culture and traditions (through facts, quizzes and food!)

Llamau

Imagine a World Without Homelessness



Child Poverty - a bespoke approach

Sarah Edwards,
Action for Children

In Flintshire, North East Wales, poverty is no longer a distant concept - it's a daily reality affecting the physical and emotional wellbeing of children, young people and their families. At Action for Children's Flintshire Family Project, we see this firsthand. Our therapeutic work is rooted in relationships, built on trust and shaped by the unique needs of each child. But increasingly, we are supporting families whose ability to thrive is being eroded by poverty.

Our vision at Action for Children is simple: every child and young person should have a safe and happy childhood and the foundations they need to thrive. Yet in Flintshire, we're seeing the opposite.

Families face food insecurity, inadequate housing, and rising energy costs.

Children go without heating, space, or proper nutrition. These physical hardships are visible, but the emotional toll is often hidden.

Parents and carers tell us their children are struggling with anxiety, sleep issues, screen dependency and challenging behaviours. These are not isolated incidents. They're symptoms of a wider crisis. When families are focused on survival - paying bills, securing food, keeping the lights on - emotional presence becomes a luxury. Routines

collapse, boundaries blur, and stress becomes overwhelming. One more setback - a broken-down car or a complicated form can tip the balance. Dysregulated adults feed into cycles of emotional distress, and children respond in kind. Every behaviour is a message: a need to be seen, heard, and understood.

At Flintshire Family Project, we never judge but listen and offer bespoke one-to-one emotional support for children and young people, working closely with schools, partners, and agencies to build resilience. We also provide practical help through our support hub and access to family funds and grants. Importantly, these grants are not cash handouts. They're targeted purchases that meet specific needs. Families often request food, but our practitioners have found that other items — tailored to the child's emotional world — can be even more transformative. We've provided school uniforms for growing children, trampolines to support emotional regulation, and lids for trampolines to create safe retreat spaces. Roller skates and metal detectors have helped siblings find individual focus. A chest of drawers gave a teenager a sense of order and ownership. A cadet uniform allowed a young person to participate in an activity that gave them a sense of belonging. Taxi fares helped families attend vital appointments. A gym pass gave a teenager an outlet. A SIM card enabled a parent to complete a universal credit form.

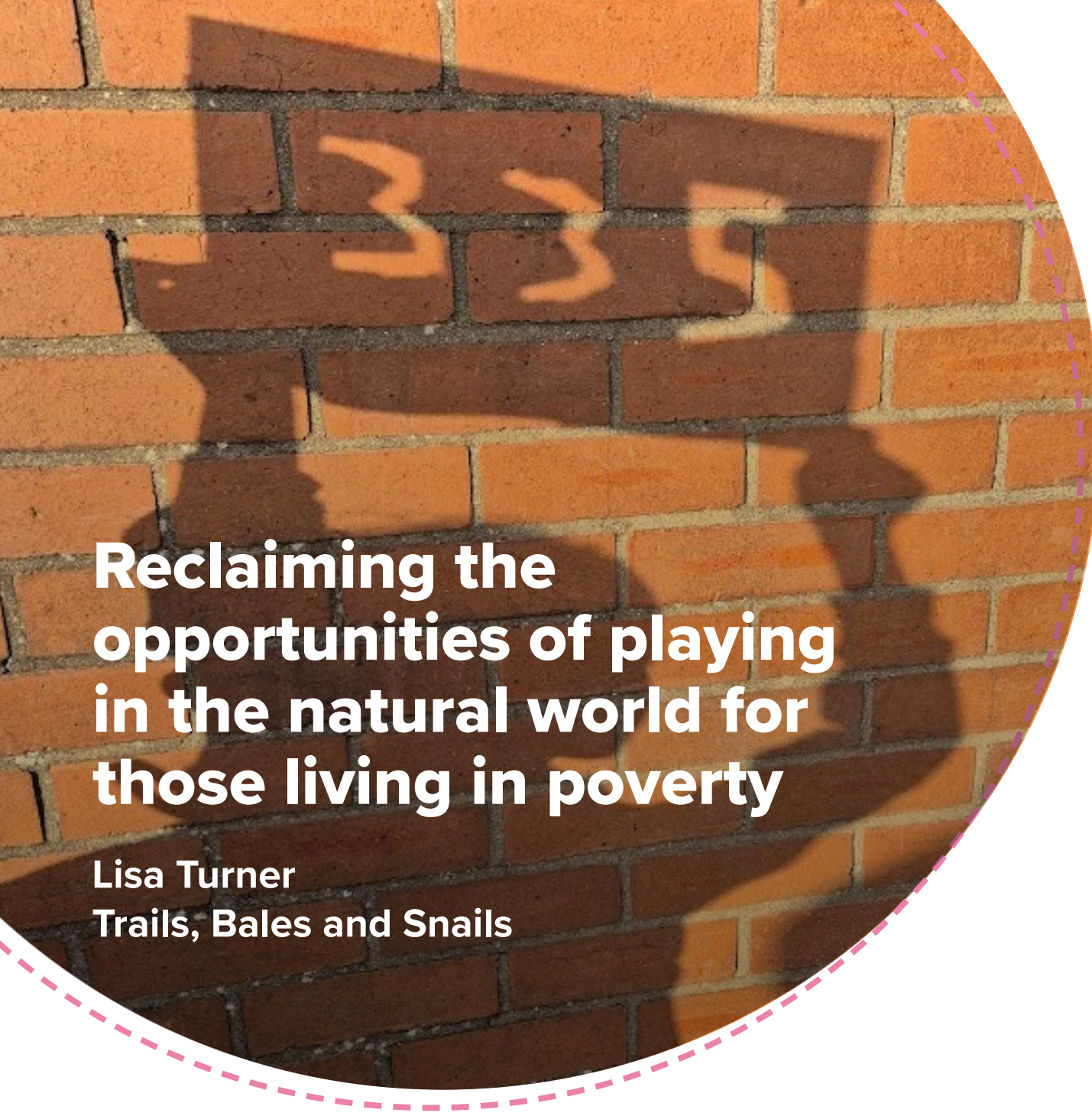
These items may seem small, even indulgent, when food and rent are pressing concerns. But they are powerful. They relieve stress, restore dignity, and create emotional space. They allow children to feel included, organised, and safe. They help parents breathe, regroup, and re-engage. And most importantly, they ensure that children and young people are seen — not just as dependents, but as individuals with voices, needs, and dreams.

Bespoke financial support is just one part of our work. But it can be pivotal. It builds trust, fosters resilience and engagement, and lays the groundwork for deeper connections. It turns crisis into movement. And it brings our vision of safe, happy, thriving childhoods within reach.

If you would like to learn more about this work in Flintshire, please contact:

Sarah.Edwards@actionforchildren.org.uk





Reclaiming the opportunities of playing in the natural world for those living in poverty

Lisa Turner
Trails, Bales and Snails

For the last year my daughter 'B' (aged 10) and I have been doing the **365 Day Nature Play Challenge**. Every day we go outside and find something fun to do in the natural world. What we have found has made me rethink my presumptions about what is most important for this sort of play, and how valuable it is as an easy to access resource for those children living in poverty in Wales today.

The foundations for the challenge came from the Covid crisis. As a single parent, my daughter and myself were suddenly homebound and alone for weeks on end. I resolved that we'd get outside where we could and explore the natural world, but I had no ideas and I found surprisingly little online help. I was lacking the encyclopaedia of options in

my head that was helpfully provided everywhere when it comes to buying toys or finding online entertainment.

Slowly we worked on things to do. We'd go and loiter in the local park and find ourselves swinging on trees and playing the three little pigs. I'd set up treasure and scavenger hunts for her and we'd make potions and perfumes. I still found that the repertoire of ideas was too small and, frequently, we stayed in because we couldn't think of anything to go out for.

So, the challenge came about, before she got too old to play with me, to make us find things we could do all through the year. We started on 1 January with no ideas and found ourselves playing

with sticks by a tree on a housing estate. We made a little den. It wasn't particularly impressive, but it was a lot of fun and we did it even though it was cold and wet. The next day we found a rainbow inside and tried reflecting it and putting things in it. The day after, we broke up the ice on a little pond and played with the pieces. Slowly, the 'having to do it' was finding ideas for us.



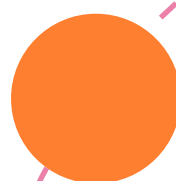
I've had some incredulity from older relatives and friends who don't understand why it's worth mentioning ("kids just do this stuff"). I wonder if they actually do now? It's ironic that often, even in poorer areas with lots of natural resources, kids stay in these days, hooked on electronic items which are addictive, costly and can damage their mental health. Kids are kept inside 'so they're safe' (as one dad explained to me at the school gates), but parental perception and reality are often far apart. The risks are greater inside than out. My daughter needed a push to get outside and once there, permission to explore. I, as a parent, needed help learning how to encourage her to do what, for my parent's generation, would have been automatic through necessity.

I've chronicled our adventures along the way on Instagram and Facebook (Trails, bales and snails) and have also been writing a blog with the aim of creating some accessible resources to help other families, especially those that come from disadvantaged areas and who may not have the resources to pay for expensive days out. The benefits of outdoor play are well documented and promoted by many agencies and governments, but can easily get crowded out by the volume of other information parents in financial difficulty have to negotiate.

Over 270 challenges have now been completed, and the vast majority have cost us nothing and have been easy to access in our local area. We've climbed trees, chased butterflies, made daisy chains, tried grass whistling, raced snails, been nature detectives, learnt wayfinding and got lost a lot, among many other things. We've started conversations and learnt from family and friends, and it's felt like a great big healthy adventure.

Our biggest discovery - that the best resources are the lanes and unclaimed land around where we live, and where so many people in Wales live, which no one cares too much about and don't cost to visit. There you can pick stuff and break stuff and find weird bugs and hang out with friends and climb trees and build dens and discover to your heart's content. A brilliant free resource for any child heading out to explore the world.

It's my aim to create more online parental resources around this topic and I am keen to collaborate in the spread of this conversation. More information can be found at <https://trailsbalesandsnails.co.uk/> or by emailing lisawellsturner@gmail.com





Food and Fun: A decade of difference in Wales

How a summer holiday programme is shaping brighter futures for children in Wales

**Alexandra Gdula,
Welsh Local Government Association**

When the summer sun rose over Wales in 2025, it shone upon a remarkable milestone: the 10th anniversary of Food and Fun, a transformative initiative that has quietly revolutionised school holidays for thousands of children. What began as a modest pilot project in Cardiff in 2015 has blossomed into a national movement, with all 22 Welsh Councils now on board and over 833,500 places provided since inception. Following the summer of 2019 the programme has been fully funded by Welsh Government.

This education-based programme runs in eligible maintained schools for at least 12 days spread over a three week period, where children are immersed in an environment filled with variety and excitement. Along with a nutritious breakfast and lunch, children are provided with a rich tapestry of activities and hands-on opportunities, ensuring that summer is not a pause in learning but a chance for informal enrichment and inspiration.

There are economic benefits to the programme as well, with a host of employment opportunities for staff and wider support networks, in addition to the provision of volunteering opportunities.

The secret ingredient behind Food and Fun's success is partnership. Multi-agency collaboration brings together educators, local authorities, health professionals, local and national partners and community groups, each contributing their unique expertise and resources. This collaborative approach supports schools in creating schemes where informal learning flourishes aiming for every child to feel welcomed and uplifted.

Focused on schools in socio-economically disadvantaged areas, the programme seeks to lessen the effects of poverty for participating children and families. Five key outcome areas were developed focusing on issues that

disproportionately affect those most in need. These are improved mental health and wellbeing, school engagement and educational attainment, improved aspirations, improved physical activity, and improved dietary behaviour all empowering children to make positive and lasting changes in their lives.

A core element is the nutrition education provided to children using the Nutrition Skills for Life framework. Parents often share that children bring their newfound knowledge home, enthusiastically explaining, for instance, how much sugar is in everyday foods.

The impact of Food and Fun extends well beyond the school gates. Schools consistently report positive impacts such as helping pupils to return to school in September ready to learn and motivated. In addition, other benefits include a reduction in boredom and isolation, improved connectedness with peers and the school community and maintaining a structure and routine.

One Headteacher wrote:

'By keeping children engaged in structured activities, the programme also helps prevent the summer learning slide, ensuring that pupils return to school in September prepared and motivated.'

One parent said:

'This has been three weeks of non-stop fun. My son enjoyed every minute and looks forward to going! There have been a variety of activities from sports, first aid, to meeting animals. Even educational learning without them realising, which shows how brilliant this is! He comes home telling us about his day, what new foods he has tried, which ones he likes, which ones he doesn't. Food and Fun is exactly what it says! I hope it continues to run.'

Families are invited in each week for a meal/activity with their children, and one child wrote:

'I like it that you can bring your family to school.'

At the heart of Food and Fun are the children, who are encouraged to share their thoughts on graffiti walls in pictures or words, providing genuine insight into what matters most. Common themes include new friendships, exciting activities, tasting

unfamiliar foods, and making summer memories to cherish.



One child wrote:

"I love enjoying this. It is special to me because it is the best school ever in my heart. I will love this a lot of times. It will always be in my memory forever and ever."

Another wrote:

"I am enjoying Food and Fun because people are kind to me and respect me."

Now entering its second decade, Food and Fun continues to align with key policies such as: The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Child Poverty Strategy for Wales ensuring that every child, whatever their circumstances, has the chance to thrive.

As one summer draws to a close and another begins, Food and Fun's impact endures in healthier children, stronger communities, and brighter tomorrows across Wales.

If you would like more information, please email: alexandra.gdula@wlga.gov.uk



Step Up – The impact of widening access programmes in combating intergenerational poverty

Rebecca Kirkby, Dr Poppy Hodgkinson and Dr Anna Váradi
Widening Participation Team, Cardiff University

Step Up is Cardiff University's flagship Widening Participation (WP) programme. Every year, the programme gives 300 Year 12 learners, from disadvantaged backgrounds, an insight into university life through six weeks of academic masterclasses or a residential summer school.

Higher Education has the potential to break cycles of intergenerational poverty; recent analysis of government data showed that graduates earn around 30% more than non-graduates who could have gone to university.¹ Step Up supports Year 12 pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and those affected by poverty, to build confidence in applying to university and develop the skills needed to thrive there. 41% of the programme's 2025 cohort were entitled to free school meals, a reliable indicator of childhood poverty,² and 72% were from postcodes in the lowest quintiles of the Welsh Index of Multiple deprivation (WIMD). Programmes like Step Up are necessary to support learners from these demographics. Recent UCAS entry data shows that just 18.5% of 18-year-olds in the lowest WIMD quintile were accepted to university, compared to 44.9% of their peers in the highest quintile.³

In 2025, Step Up delivered a six-week academic masterclass programme. Young people from South Wales joined us on Cardiff University campus to get a feel for the learning environment and build academic confidence in their chosen subject. Learners could choose from eight different subject areas, such as Medicine, Dentistry, Law and Politics, Science and Technology, and Humanities. Masterclasses were led by Cardiff University PhD tutors and facilitated by student ambassadors, allowing participants to interact with current university students. After the programme, learners reported increased feelings of academic and

social belonging at university and there was also an increase in learners' knowledge of what they can expect from a university degree.

Following their engagement with the masterclasses, participants receive tangible support to navigate the application process and transition to university. All learners who complete the programme receive [contextual admissions](#)⁴ at Cardiff University. This includes an adjusted grade offer, or a guaranteed interview for subjects like Medicine, Dentistry and Healthcare Sciences. Those hoping to enter these competitive fields can also attend interview preparation sessions.

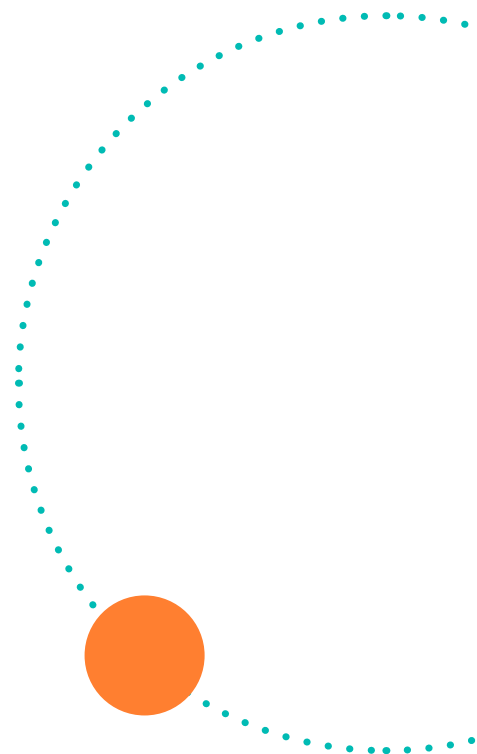
Step Up supports programme alumni and their parents or guardians through information and guidance webinars, which are specifically tailored for WP groups, covering themes such as student finance and university accommodation. This support is particularly important as 74% of the 2025 Step Up cohort were of the first generation in their family to attend university, and may otherwise navigate these processes with less access to advice than their peers.

Recognising the role of geography in young people's opportunities and aspirations, Step Up recently recruited participants from as far as Flintshire and Denbighshire to its residential summer school, and committed to covering the prohibitive cost of their travel to and from Cardiff University. In doing so, Step Up supported access to Wales's only Russell Group university for those who may have otherwise been unable to visit in advance of making university decisions. During the summer school, learners stayed in university accommodation, took part in a variety of taster lectures, and met peers with similar experiences and aspirations for Higher Education.



“Step Up had a big impact on me as it gave me more confidence to apply to university. The support I received helped me make my UCAS application and write my personal statement, and it made me feel more assured that I was capable of getting into higher education. The summer school was a highlight for me as I was able to talk to someone who was already studying my chosen course, to learn more about it. Her insight was very helpful”

2023 Step Up participant
Current Cardiff University student



Between 2020 and 2024, 76% of Step Up alumni applied to Cardiff University, three quarters of whom were made an offer to study.

As child poverty in the UK continues to increase, it is clear that there is still work to be done across all sectors to address this.⁵ Ensuring that universities are a place where everyone feels they can thrive and belong is a crucial part of this work. Step Up masterclasses will return in February 2026 and we look forward to welcoming a new cohort of learners to explore the options available to them at Cardiff University.

If you would like to learn more about our work or know any young people who may be interested in applying for the 2026 Step Up masterclasses, you can [subscribe](#) to our mailing list or email outreach@cardiff.ac.uk. You can also follow our work on [LinkedIn](#).

References

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Invisible in the Numbers: The hidden poverty of sanctuary-seeking children in Wales

Sabiha Azad, Welsh Refugee Council

“Please don’t move me to another school again.”

A seven-year-old girl in Wales has already changed schools three times in eight months, each move forced by housing instability. Every time she loses friends, she loses a piece of security.

This is the hidden face of child poverty in Wales. For sanctuary-seeking children - those navigating the asylum system - poverty is not just widespread, it is invisible. Barred from work, cut off from public funds and living in limbo while waiting over a year for a Home Office decision, these families are among the poorest in the country. Yet sanctuary-seeking children are entirely excluded from the Welsh Government’s child poverty statistics.

The hidden crisis

When children are not counted, they are not seen. And when they are not seen, they are not supported.

Sanctuary-seeking families endure some of the harshest living conditions in Wales. Immigration policies such as **No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)** mean many are trapped in poverty, many

survive on just £49.18 per week while waiting, often for over a year, for a Home Office decision. This places them among the lowest-income households in the country.

This exclusion has serious consequences. Without official recognition, funders often turn away, citing a lack of data. The result is a deepening cycle of poverty and isolation for families already pushed to the margins.

But poverty is not just about income - it is the denial of basic rights. Safe housing, nutritious food, healthcare, education and the ability to participate in society should belong to every child. For sanctuary-seeking families, these rights are out of reach and children often pay the highest price. They experience hunger, instability and exclusion. In Wales today, some sanctuary-seeking children live in households where hope is rationed as tightly as food.

This isn’t just a statistic, it’s a daily reality

Behind the statistics are stories of sacrifice and survival. Our Play Project offers a small sanctuary

for children, giving them space to simply be children. One mother described how instability took a toll on her daughter:

“Every time I get to know someone, they leave me,” the seven-year-old said, after being forced to change schools three times in less than a year. Each move meant new uniforms the family could not afford, further straining their limited income.

Another mother told us: *“Sometimes I don’t eat. I just eat my children’s leftovers. They are my priority.”*

These stories are not isolated - they reflect a broader, systemic failure to support sanctuary-seeking families. If we are serious about tackling child poverty in Wales, we must start by acknowledging all children, including those seeking sanctuary. Their lives, their futures and their voices matter. And until they are counted, they will continue to be left behind.

What are we doing about it?

Thanks to funding from the Welsh Government’s Child Poverty Innovation and Supporting Communities Grant, the Welsh Refugee Council is leading a powerful new initiative with Swansea Asylum Seeker Support (SASS), Mums and Toddlers Foundation (MTF) and Displaced People in Action (DPIA). Together, we’re spotlighting the

lived experiences of sanctuary-seeking families, especially those affected by No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF), a policy that denies access to essential services and leaves children particularly vulnerable.

How are we driving change?

- **Listening:** through interviews and focus groups, we’re capturing real stories of hardship, resilience, and exclusion
- **Mapping needs:** we’re identifying where families are, what challenges they face and gaps in support
- **Creating tools:** co-designing a digital toolkit with families and frontline workers to share vital information on rights and services
- **Training staff:** equipping Local Authority teams in Cardiff and Swansea to respond to NRPF with empathy and understanding
- **Advocating for change:** sharing insights with funders and policymakers to push for inclusive, child-focused support strategies

Wales has set bold ambitions to tackle child poverty and that ambition cannot be realised while some of the poorest children remain invisible in the data. Counting sanctuary-seeking children is not only the right thing to do, it is the smart thing to do. Because when every child is supported, Wales as a whole is stronger.

If you would like more information about this work, please email Sabiha Azad, Sanctuary Coalition Cymru Lead: sabiha@wrc.wales





Meithrin Natur - truly life-changing access to nature

Dr Simone Lowthe Thomas
The National Lottery Community Fund

Kids need nature – it's crucial for their wellbeing, health and happiness in their early years. That's why The National Lottery Community Fund has launched [Meithrin Natur](#) - a new £10 million programme to build meaningful connections with the natural environment for babies and young children in Wales. [Dr Simone Lowthe Thomas, Chair of the Fund's Wales Committee](#), shares why this funding matters and how it aims to create lasting impact.

At The National Lottery Community Fund, we believe that helping children build a strong connection with their natural environment, at the earliest stages of their lives, is vital to allowing them to reach their full potential.

We've launched Meithrin Natur in response to a growing body of evidence – including this research from [The Wildlife Trusts](#) – that shows that spending time in natural environments increases children's personal wellbeing and health over time. However, barriers such as accessibility and location can make it difficult for young children and their parents to access natural spaces. We know that a child's start in life can affect their access to nature greatly, with those experiencing poverty, disadvantage and discrimination facing more complex and deep-rooted challenges than others.

Our new programme supports partnership projects that bring early years activities into green spaces - parks, wetlands, gardens, playgrounds and more. These partnerships will bring early years organisations together with environmental experts, and crucially, involve children and families in shaping the projects to reflect local needs.

Who we're funding

We're committing £10 million of life-changing funding over seven years through Meithrin Natur. We are seeking partnership proposals from organisations and projects who could work together on community initiatives that open-up the outdoors for children. We want to fund innovative projects that will co-produce their work alongside children and families every step of the way.

The funding programme is open to a wide range of partnership projects, including those that provide early years activities within parks, wetlands, rivers,

public gardens, playgrounds, allotments and nature reserves, as well as those that serve communities in areas of particular deprivation.

We define partnership projects as combining early years organisations with those that have experience and knowledge of the environment. Input from local children and their families will also need to be factored in, to ensure that plans are inclusive and meet the needs of the local community.

Case study: *Babi Actif*

We have supported a number of environmental projects in Wales over recent years through [People and Places](#). We recently awarded over £300,000 to Eryri-Bywiol, for its [Babi Actif](#) project in North West Wales.

The grant has enabled them to host activities immersing carers and babies in the outdoors, to improve their physical and mental health. This includes buggy fitness, baby forest play, outdoor movement, and sling and buggy walks. They provide 15 activities a week throughout the year, giving an invaluable opportunity for families to access nature with their babies.

*Projects like these showcase the importance of giving young children access to their natural environment, work that we hope **Meithrin Natur** will build on in new and interesting ways.*

Apply today

If you have an idea for a partnership project that brings together expertise in babies and young children, with the benefits of spending more time outdoors, please visit the [Meithrin Natur programme page](#) to get in touch and apply for funding.





Shifting money, services and power to children, families and communities to end child poverty in Wales

Melanie Simmonds, Save the Children Cymru

It is an outrage that one in three children live in poverty in Wales. This means nearly 200,000 children are being failed with figures set to increase over the coming years. These are not just stark statistics; they represent real children growing up without food, heating, toys or even a bed.

Behind every number is a story of hardship and of families forced to make impossible choices. The guilt and stress that parents feel when their children miss out on parties or playdates, the dread of Christmas without presents or even enough food, is heartbreaking.

Taking action on child poverty is an investment in a brighter future for Wales. The decisions we make today will shape the opportunities and wellbeing of the next generation. Every child in Wales deserves a decent start in life and the chance to thrive, regardless of where they live or how much money their family has.

Our new strategy for the next five years, **Ymlaen** (Onwards), is about shifting money, services and power to children, families and communities to enable us to meet our aim of ending child poverty in Wales.

We are committed to:

- Ensuring families can access all the financial support they are entitled to. This includes calling on the UK Government to scrap the unfair two-child limit and introducing a child-lock on social security to protect children from further suffering
- Enabling practitioners to work together so that children and families get the services they need, when they need it. Better coordination at both local and national levels is essential
- Making sure that decisions must be driven by the voices and experiences of those who live with poverty every day. Children and families must be genuinely engaged in shaping the policies that affect them

This is not just about policy - it's about practice. Across Wales, we've seen how shifting power to communities can lead to real change. From Bettws in Newport to Ely and Caerau in Cardiff, we've learned that giving communities seed funding with no strings attached, and supporting them with backbone coordination, can be transformative. The *Dan y Coed* community garden spaces in Ely and Caerau is a true example of how supporting local champions to take ownership and build solutions that work for their context, truly helps children to grow, blossom and flourish.

In our new strategy, we'll also deepen our focus on participation, working with young people to co-design research and shape ours and their futures. Our participatory *Power of Voice* research project revealed the aspirations and potential of children living in poverty. Children and young people from across Wales spoke of the pressure poverty places on relationships, opportunities and mental health. But they also spoke of the power of community and of role models, support networks and the importance of being heard, as articulated by one of the young researchers:

"I've learnt that not everyone feels like they fit in, they can't make friends, and they miss out on things because of where they live or that their parents don't have enough money. It's important that politicians and people who can make things better for children living in poverty listen to our opinions."

As we move forward and take bold steps 'ymlaen', we remain committed to learning, adapting and being honest about what works and what doesn't.

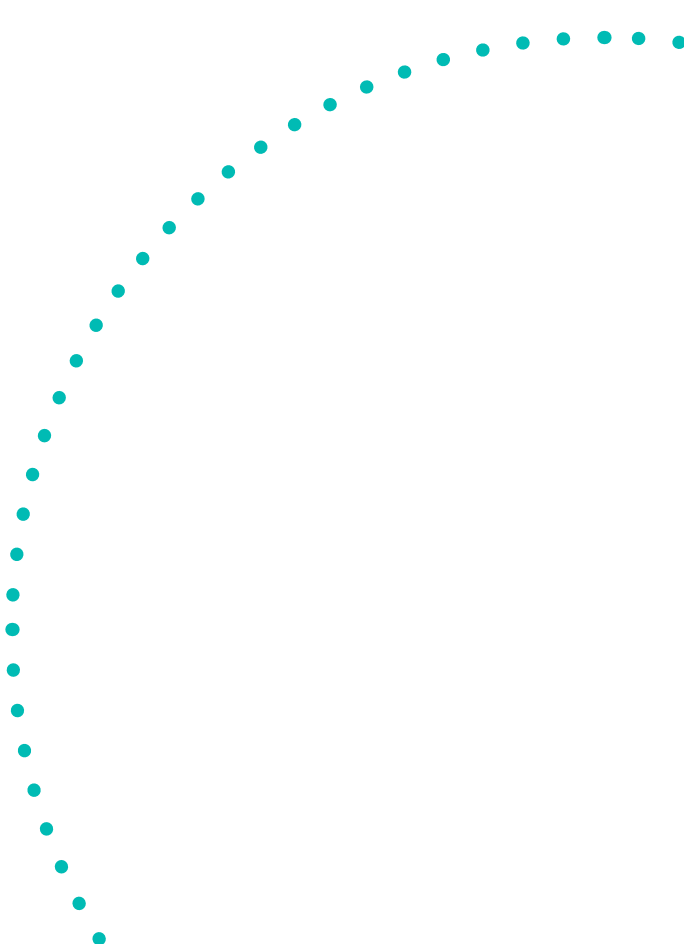
Eglantyne Jebb, our founder, once said: *"Save the Children is often told that its aims are impossible.... It's impossible only if we make it so. It's impossible if we refuse to attempt it."*

Ending child poverty in Wales is not easy. But it is possible. And together, we can make it happen.

If you would like to learn more about our strategy, please contact: walesinfo@savethechildren.org.uk



**Save the
Children**
Achub y Plant





The ‘poverty of experience’ is harming our children’s development

Matt Lewis, Action for Children

Financial poverty is undoubtedly linked to poorer outcomes and life opportunities for children, but for us working in Action for Children’s Fostering service here in Wales, of equal weight, is the impoverished nature of children’s experiences and their lack of exposure to nurture, which leaves children in deeply distressing developmental states.

The referrals for children needing foster families coming daily into the fostering service are for children whose development is arguably more compromised now than ever before. Certainly, since the hugely impactful Covid pandemic, there has been a marked deterioration in children’s lived experiences within the communities and families they come from, such is the enduring legacy of that extraordinary period.

Far too many children have little or no experience of primary nurture and safe adult relationships. Many show symptoms of complex PTSD and have experienced multiple ACEs and, as a result,

are hyper-vigilant and hyper-anxious. Many have suffered with hunger, don’t know how to play, or how to interact successfully with peers. The list goes on and on. All this adds up to too many children in Wales who have missed out on the very foundations of the developmental essentials of a healthy childhood, which can lead to embedding long-term vulnerability into adulthood, bringing profound challenges in forming healthy relationships across all aspects of society including raising families.

This is a cycle of ‘developmental poverty’ which leads to ever increasing needs across the generations and could account for the increasing number of children in Wales that need to be removed from birth families. According to the Welsh Government, as of March 2024, there were 7,918 children ‘looked after’ by Local Authorities, which is a 28.4% increase to the decade prior. This is a bleak outlook for children in Wales, because as we all know to be the case ‘prevention is better than cure’.

However, once already 'looked after' this is another chance to get it right, by living in a foster family: Our foster parents are often busy introducing children - perhaps for the first time - to a childhood most of us take for granted: playful, loving, consistent adult care. We are amazed at their commitment to the children. The fostering service has learned over the years that for a child to re-experience a happy and safe childhood is essential for developmental growth. We have invested in our own Arts Space, offering a safe and creative space to further reduce the impact of trauma and help children thrive”.

For Wales, investment in early intervention and prevention in our communities is critical to supporting children to remain with their birth families and to thrive throughout childhood into adulthood. Nurturing the parents as well as the children is essential through long-term, accessible support that provides a basis for relational safety and developmental growth for the whole family system.

If that's not possible then children require specialist support to counter the impact of trauma, assist developmental growth and be enabled to have long term healthy loving relationships where secure attachments can form - as ultimately, it's this experience that breaks the cycle of 'developmental poverty'.

To discover more about this work, please email Matt Lewis, Action for Children's Fostering Wales Service: Matthew.Lewis@actionforchildren.org.uk





Child poverty in Wales - a view from the frontline

Laura Tomsa, Barnardo's Cymru

"I've never seen things this bad. Parents are often reluctant to speak about how bad things are because they are ashamed, they cannot feed or clothe their children or keep them warm. Only when we visit the home do we understand just how much they are struggling."

Barnardo's Cymru practitioner

Child poverty continues to cast a long shadow over Wales. Despite countless efforts and the publication of the Welsh Government's Child Poverty Strategy in 2024, 31% of children in Wales are still living in poverty, a figure that has remained unacceptably high for over a decade.

Geography makes a difference to how poverty is experienced, but it's a serious issue in every part of Wales. In 94% of Welsh constituencies, at least one in four children are affected.

At Barnardo's Cymru our services work directly with the families hit hardest by these

inequalities. We support those who are living with the daily, grinding impact of poverty: increased physical health needs, declining mental health and wellbeing, and impossible choices between essentials like heating the home or feeding the family. Poverty has profound and wide-ranging impacts on children, affecting nearly every aspect of their lives - physical health, mental development, education and future opportunities. Its effects are both immediate and long-lasting, limiting a child's potential and reinforcing cycles of social inequality that can persist for generations.

Through our frontline work, we help families access grants and ensure children's basic needs are met - food, clothing, warmth, safety. But the growing demand for crisis support shows just how deep this issue runs.

In November 2024, Barnardo's launched a Child Poverty Fund to respond to urgent needs. The support provided focused on the essentials:

- 41% went towards feeding families
- 29.6% covered clothing, including warm winter coats
- The remaining funds helped families access working appliances, essential furniture, warm spaces, and in some cases, support with education and training

This kind of help can relieve short-term pressure, but it's not enough. Families in Wales should not have to rely on emergency funding to meet their basic human needs.

What needs to change

If we are serious about ending child poverty in Wales, the next Welsh Government must commit to a set of bold, practical changes that tackle its root causes, not just its symptoms.

First, we must address the biggest policy drivers of poverty: the two-child limit and the benefit cap. These UK-wide welfare policies limit the financial support available to families with more than two children, regardless of need. They hit the poorest families the hardest and disproportionately affect larger households. Scrapping these measures could lift up to half a million children out of poverty across the UK, and would make a tangible difference for thousands of children in Wales.

Secondly, we must recognise that where a child lives matters. In rural areas, the cost of living is often higher, access to services is limited, and public transport options are scarce. That's why Barnardo's Cymru supports universal free public transport for children and young people. Too many young people tell us they are cut off from education, training and opportunities simply because they can't afford the journey.

We also need to expand universal free school meals to include all secondary school pupils. Hunger doesn't end in primary school, and no child should have to learn on an empty stomach.

And while we welcome schemes like the Bwndel Babi, which gives new parents essential baby items, it must be made universally available to ensure no family is left behind due to postcode or income.

Above all, we need ambitious, measurable targets to end child poverty - targets that are transparent, tracked and reported on regularly. Without them, progress is difficult to monitor, and families continue to fall through the cracks.

We've seen the resilience of families, the dedication of frontline workers and the impact of targeted support. But we cannot continue to rely on short-term solutions or crisis response. What's needed now is bold, long-term action, led by government, supported by communities, and informed by the experiences of those living through it. With the right investment, leadership, and accountability, we can build a Wales where no child grows up in poverty, and every child has the chance to thrive.

If you would like to find out more about Barnardo's Cymru's work, please email: Laura.Tomsa@barnardos.org.uk



Newid Plentyndod.
Newid Bywydau.
Changing childhoods.
Changing lives.



Working with and engaging children and young people from low socio-economic backgrounds

**Sian Bibey, Training Officer
Children in Wales**



As a children's rights organisation, Children in Wales is committed to making sure every child and young person has the chance to take part, no matter their background. We believe that opportunities to participate should be accessible to all, and that includes those from low socio-economic backgrounds.

One of the training courses developed and delivered by Children in Wales, as part of this commitment, focuses on supporting professionals who work with children and young people from low-income families, specifically around how to engage them in arts and culture.

Research shows that children and young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds often feel that arts and culture activities are “not for people like them” (Hull, 2013; Atkinson and Mason, 2014; Northern Ireland Assembly, 2016; McAndrew and Widdop, 2021). Feelings of being out of place or worrying about not fitting in can discourage participation (O'Brien and Oakley, 2015). These

internal barriers are often reinforced by external ones, such as the cost of activities, travel or the location of venues.

Studies have also found that where a child lives can influence their engagement. Children growing up in more affluent areas are twice as likely to take part in arts activities outside school, compared with those in more deprived areas (Mak and Fancourt, 2021). Similarly, children living in rural or less affluent areas are less likely to visit museums and galleries because of location, funding inequalities and the social environments that surround these spaces (O'Brien and Oakley, 2015).

With this in mind, our training explores what practitioners and services can do to encourage engagement and make arts and cultural activities more accessible to all. The course focuses on practical strategies and examples that help remove barriers and create meaningful opportunities for participation.

1. Co-creation

Engaging communities in participation and co-production can transform how arts and culture are experienced. It helps increase engagement, improve quality and representation and gives communities a sense of ownership.

Examples include:

- Involving community members in management boards and community panels to help commission activities and programmes
- Holding consultations to ensure arts and culture initiatives reflect local interests and identities

2. Participation

Active participation in arts and culture appears to be less influenced by social class or status (Reeves, 2015). Providing opportunities for people to get involved at every stage – from development to delivery – can attract more diverse audiences and offer enriching experiences that spark lasting interest.

Examples include:

- Inviting community members to help shape or deliver activities
- Encouraging hands-on involvement to strengthen connections and confidence

3. Community settings

Accessibility is about more than physical access. Distance, cost and availability can all affect whether children and young people take part. Bringing arts and culture activities into local community spaces can help reduce barriers and increase feelings of familiarity and belonging.

4. Opportunities to socialise

The chance to socialise is a key motivator for many children and young people from low socio-economic backgrounds (Parkinson et al., 2015). Building in social opportunities can make arts and culture more appealing and inclusive.

Examples include:

- Attending live performances or community screenings of films and television shows
- Hosting arts and culture events in familiar local venues where people feel comfortable

5. Communication and outreach

Understanding what communities want and value helps create a more positive connection with arts and culture. Communication should be clear, local and built on trust.

Examples include:

- Using word-of-mouth, community ambassadors and local partnerships to promote activities
- Building connections through community spaces to gather feedback and understand interests
- Creating events around universal themes, such as climate change, that resonate across backgrounds

At Children in Wales, we believe that engaging children and young people from low socio-economic backgrounds in arts and culture is not only possible, but essential. Through our training, we help practitioners and organisations develop the knowledge and confidence to break down barriers, build trust, and create opportunities that feel genuinely inclusive.

Arts and culture should be for everyone – and with the right support, they can be.

Learn more about this training, and all our other courses, here: [Training and Events | Children in Wales](#)





Contact Cymru's Claiming with Confidence project

Katherine Wyke, Contact Cymru

Thanks to funding from the Welsh Government, and in partnership with the All Wales Forum, charity Contact Cymru is now offering parent carers in Conwy and Gwynedd free, confidential 1-1 appointments with an expert adviser for practical, tailored help with benefits and financial support.

Contact's recent research shows that 86% of families with disabled children in Wales find claiming benefits difficult. Alarming, 39% said they couldn't keep their homes warm enough for their child's needs, and 88% reported that the extra costs of care cause stress, worry, or financial strain.

Families often face disproportionately high living costs – from utility bills and transport to specialist equipment – while also dealing with reduced income due to caring responsibilities.

Finding a way through the benefits maze

Despite this, many struggle to access the support they're entitled to. Parents often describe the benefits system as complex, overwhelming, and even adversarial. For example, applying for Disability Living Allowance (DLA) - the main benefit for disabled children - can feel traumatic, requiring families to relive painful experiences and justify their child's needs.

One parent in North Wales shared how they spent four and a half months trying to renew their child's DLA, risking a loss of vital financial support, until they contacted us and received the help they needed. Sadly, this experience is far too common.

Through *Claiming with Confidence*, Contact Cymru and the All Wales Forum are working together to change that. The new service offers parent carers in Conwy and Gwynedd the opportunity to:

- Receive a free, confidential benefits check to ensure they're claiming all they're entitled to
- Get answers to any benefits and money-related questions
- Access direct support with completing DLA and Personal Independence Payment (PIP) forms

Families can also access online and offline resources developed by the All Wales Forum like their [Rights in Action padlet](#), alongside online and in-person advice and support workshops, giving families the chance to hear from other local parents who have been through the system themselves.

Contact Cymru offers more than just information

Our expert parent advisers provide more than just information. They offer empathy, understanding, and practical guidance from people who truly get what families are going through.

Parent carers in Conwy or Gwynedd struggling with benefits can book a free confidential appointment here: <https://contact.org.uk/cymru/claiming-with-confidence>.

About Contact Cymru

Contact's team in Wales offers support, advice and information to families with disabled children, no matter what their condition or disability. We support families through workshops and sports events, and by providing local information and resources. To find out more about Contact Cymru and the support we can offer visit: <https://contact.org.uk/cymru/>

About the All Wales Forum

The All Wales Forum brings a national voice and recognition to parents and carers of children and adults living with Learning Disabilities in Wales. They work through an alliance network of local, regional and national support networks from across Wales. Find out more by visiting: <https://www.allwalesforum.org.uk/>.

contact
For families with disabled children
I deuluoedd gyda phlant anabl

CLAIMING WITH CONFIDENCE

A new service for parent carers
living in Gwynedd and Conwy.

Free, confidential 1-1 support from
Contact's expert advisers.

Tailored help with benefits and
financial support.

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Ariennir gan
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All Wales Forum
Fforydd Cymru Gyfan

The relationship between caring and poverty in Young Carers

Sally Duckers, Becky Evans and Leanne Jeffreys
Credu

Credu supports young carers across five counties in Wales, from rural Powys to the city of Wrexham and the coastal areas in Conwy, Denbighshire and Ceredigion. Each of these counties has areas of deprivation, areas of rurality and the lack of service this brings, and areas of excellent support and strong communities.

Children's financial status is very reliant on the adults in their life; they often have very little or no control over this. Young carers are unable to claim Carers Allowance under 16 years or if they are in full-time education, so where they are the main carers there is no financial support from the state.

Young carers have been the focus of multiple recent studies focusing on the emotional impact of caring and the effect caring has on their education.

Research by MYTIME Young Carers in 2023 found that:

70% of the young carers they looked at across 5 secondary schools received Pupil premium compared with 26% of non-young carers.

A second research paper in 2025 found that:

44% of young carers received free school meals and 53% were eligible for pupil premium across 7 primary schools.

Anecdotally, we see this pattern through our own work with young carers, but we do not currently have the data to show this as young carers are not consistently identified on school management systems in Wales.

A Carers Trust report in 2024 from England found that:

Young carers are missing on average 23 days of school every year – that's more than a month in total.

This report highlights the extent of the impact of caring and its disadvantages for young carers, with implications for their educational outcomes, attendance and overall wellbeing.



A case study from Wrexham shows the real-life impact on young carers from low-income households:

'I was in a conversation with a 14-year-old, and he was saying how hungry he is in the day because his free school meal allowance (£2.65 a day) doesn't fill him. That is all he eats ALL day, and he isn't an exception. It's the same with uniform and school bits and bobs; the uniform grant only pays in year 7, so it's tough if you have a growth spurt or wreck your uniform. It's heart breaking.' Leanne (Outreach Worker)

Marcus Rashford: "Childhood poverty is not just about hunger. It's about the lack of opportunity, the lack of hope."

How is Credu responding - holistic Family Support & Outreach

Credu's approach is deeply relational and family-centred. Outreach workers build trust with young carers and tailor support to individual and family outcomes. This model ensures that young carers receive help for as long as they need it. The support includes:

- **Exploring personal circumstances**
- **Co-creating solutions**
- **Connecting families to community resources**

This approach has proven transformative for families facing complex challenges, especially those in poverty or low-income households.

Credu has developed a **Young Carers School Programme** that is co-produced with carers, educators and youth specialists. The programme:

- Raises awareness of young carers' experiences
- Promotes inclusion and empathy
- Offers flexible lesson plans for different age groups

It is searchable on hwb.cymru or follow this link:

<https://padlet.com/creduteam/rhaglen-gofalwyr-ifanc-young-carers-programme-phm9cnrvjiqyk5lq>

Credu organises **residential, trips and creative workshops** to give young carers a break from their responsibilities. Notable examples from 2025 include:

- **Young Carers Festival:** Over 300 carers from across Wales attended a two-night camp, packed with indoor and outdoor activities
- **Amser funded trips:** These trips are focussed on creating memorable family days out and trips & events specific to young carers
- **Bangor University Taster residential:** Credu supported a trip for young carers to experience University life and have the space to reflect on the barriers they are facing

These events are provided free of charge, giving equitable opportunity.

Credu has been able to offer cost of living-type financial assistance too. Last year we supported over 300 families with direct support.

'It's going to help so much. It's hard to explain as the words don't explain how overwhelmed and grateful I am. How much less anxiety I'm feeling for me and my children...My children are happy to see their mum smiling and not worrying for once... Huge thanks for the help and kindness xx.'
Parent of young carers

"This has brought tears to my eyes. Thank you so much for this kindness and support, I am very grateful. It's like I've been sent an angel to support us, now I know why T was so excited you were coming." Parent of young carer

If you would like more information about our work, please visit <https://www.carers.cymru/> or email: info@credu.cymru



A Network Partner of
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Why We Should Stop Talking about the “Two Child Benefit Cap”

Mary Sherwood, Fairer Future

The Benefit Cap was introduced in 2013 to assuage grumbling voices who felt it was unfair that some people who did not work in paid employment might end up with more income than some people who did.

Leaving aside the immense, confusing technicalities of the benefits system, and leaving aside more intelligent ways to respond to such grumbles, let's just look at what the Benefit Cap does.

It says that if your earnings (from work) are below a certain level, then the total you may receive in benefits will be restricted, or capped. For a couple, or a single parent whose children live with them, outside London, the cap currently ensures the household will receive no more than £22k per year.

Once your family circumstances have been considered, and all the elements of support you are entitled to have been added up, anything over £22k is knocked off the total you'll get - without any discussion about how on earth you're supposed to manage.

The cap doesn't apply to everyone; in some circumstances a household is exempt (earn over £846 per month and the cap doesn't apply at all). It is never applied to **pensioners**, hurting only people of working age, and children. It is mostly larger families, headed by someone who cannot undertake any paid employment, who are hurt the most.

So that's the **Benefit Cap**.

A bit later, the same government brought in another policy: anyone claiming benefits for their children may only get them for the first two children. Called the **Two Child Limit**, this applies to Universal Credit. A family's UC calculation adds an element for each member of the household – each adult and each child. If the Benefit Cap applies, then the elements for 3rd and later children are removed. As if they don't exist.

Talking about the *Two Child Benefit Cap* creates confusion. Many people think that **Child Benefit** is capped at two children. This is problematic for several reasons.



Child Benefit was one of the last universal benefits (applicable to everyone) before the government decided higher earners have to repay it via their tax, in a complicated self-assessment process. But a family can in fact receive Child Benefit for any number of children - it is not part of the **two-child limit**. Happy days? Not really. Child Benefit is only £17.25 per week per child (for 2nd and subsequent children): a helpful but fairly low amount. Universal Credit is much higher, and being denied it represents a far more hurtful loss.

So, there is no cap on Child Benefit - if you don't claim other benefits, you can receive it for three, four or more children. However – remember the Benefit Cap? Child Benefit is one of the many benefits counted in the household's total benefit income. The fact that in theory you are entitled to receive it for all your children doesn't help when your total income is then slashed because of the Benefit Cap.

The Benefit Cap and the Two Child Limit are two separate policies which do damage to families - particularly families with three or more children. The Limit says the government doesn't care how many kids you have, you will only get UC for the first two (but you can still get Child Benefit for all of them) while the Cap says it doesn't matter why your benefit calculation adds up to what it does, they're going to remove anything over £22k per year and only give you what's left. These separate

policies rely on separate legislation – they need to be regarded and discussed as separate problems. Child poverty analysts are clear that both need to be scrapped, because child poverty was bad enough before they were introduced and is even worse now.

Being fuzzy about the policies creating hardship in our country allows manipulation and misinformation to flourish. For example, some political parties are promising to scrap the Two Child Limit, and some people drowning in hardship are excited about that, because they haven't understood that the Benefit Cap will still apply.

Talking about the “two child benefit cap” conceals the extent of hardship caused by these two distinct policies, and dark forces are able to take advantage of the gaps in people's understanding. As activists, let's be vocal and clear about the difference. Both have been repeatedly criticised by the United Nations as blatant breaches of Human Rights, and both need to go.

Fairer Future is a Social Enterprise sharing knowledge to tackle inequality and poverty. We provide facilitation, training & consultancy so you can do your best work. www.fairerfuture.org.uk


 The logo for Fairer Future, featuring a stylized leaf icon to the left of the text "FAIRER FUTURE" in a bold, sans-serif font.



The cost of caring: One family's story at the heart of a national crisis

Davina Carey-Evans, Family Fund

In Barry, South Wales, the weight of caregiving never lets up. Julia, a mother of three, begins every day before dawn, not by choice, but by necessity. With no car and her daughter Carys, 16, who has drug-resistant epilepsy and additional needs, Julia juggles full-time work at a special school with a relentless caring role at home. Sleepless nights, broken appliances, skipped meals, she is constantly in survival mode.

Her story, heartbreakingly familiar, features in disability charity [Family Fund's Cost of Caring 2025 report](#), based on 2,300 families raising disabled or seriously ill children on low incomes across the UK. It reveals a stark reality: nearly half of the families that the charity supports cannot afford basic living costs, despite receiving disability benefits. Over 87% have no savings at all, unable to replace essentials like beds or washing machines.

Caring is not just demanding, it is all-consuming. Parents provide constant supervision, medical care, and emotional support, amounting to an unpaid full-time job. Just 7% of carers can work as much as they'd like to. Julia's experience is typical: *"I work all day exhausted."* Carys doesn't sleep between midnight and five and Julia has to catch a train to work at dawn.



[Julia lives in Barry, South Wales, with daughter Carys (16) and her son Iestyn (12). Julia's eldest daughter, Seren, is 23. Carys has drug resistant epilepsy, learning disabilities and is undiagnosed autistic. Julia works full time in a special school.]

The financial strain takes a serious toll: 51% of families skip or shrink meals, nearly half cannot afford dental care; 17% struggle to pay for basic medicines and 11% cannot even buy toiletries. Behind these numbers are faces like Julia's - desperate, stretched, determined.

Mental health suffers too: 28% of parent carers report signs of clinical depression. Two-thirds of children are affected emotionally and educationally by financial stress. Families' whole lives bend under the strain: *"We can't celebrate birthdays. There's no money. We live on pennies"* Julia says.

Support gaps widen when children outgrow the limited services available: *"Carys is too old for a childminder,"* Julia explains, *"We need someone seizure-trained, but once you mention complex needs, most providers say no."*

Amid the pressure of day-to-day life, Family Fund provides relief. Julia received vouchers for a short family holiday: *"It was a godsend. We could just breathe. Sleep. Relax. Someone cared enough to help, someone we'll never meet."*

Last year, Family Fund provided over 200,000 grants and instances of support to families raising disabled or seriously ill children. But what families tell us goes far beyond financial need. They describe a system that fails to recognise their rights to the same opportunities and quality of life that others take for granted. That's why Family Fund is calling for urgent policy changes, to ensure families can thrive, not merely survive. We recommend recognising the full cost of disability, rethinking work expectations for carers, ensuring tailored childcare, and prioritising carer well-being, before a national crisis deepens.

Julia sums it up: *"I call our life 'the plot twist'. Things can change just like that."* For thousands of families like hers, change isn't just needed, it's overdue.

Wider family quotes

"I am mentally depressed and tired physically from caring for my two disabled children. I can't concentrate or do any work. I have enough work to do regarding their appointments and forms to do and referrals and medication."

"The Household Support Fund isn't open yet to apply for any support. I keep desperately checking. Arthur"

has lots of medical equipment and struggles regulating his temperature - this time of year is the worst for us. He has a feed tube that needs charging daily, a through-floor lift hoists, bed and bath seat all electric."

"[We] need childcare that supports and caters to children with SEN. Childminders usually don't want to take on any children with additional needs."

"I have 4 disabled children and 2 of them need help with every single thing daily. I have no sleep and no chance of working."

"I would not leave my son with childcare companies as he is non-verbal and vulnerable."

"My son chews his clothes and ruins them quickly, so we are constantly replacing everything from pyjamas to tops to coats."

"[My] disabled child has pica so is destroying skirting boards and flooring."

"They are all incontinent so I'm replacing all the duvets, bedding and actual beds regularly. Between that and keeping them well fed and clothed (they chew their clothes daily) so I am constantly replacing these. My washers and dryers are always breaking down as I literally do 3/4 loads of washing every day."

"My son is home schooled due to his needs and anxiety. It's such a financial burden to have him home 24 hours a day with all essential bills."

If you need any further information about the work of the Family Fund, please email Davina Carey-Evans, Partner Engagement (Wales) on davina.carey-evans@familyfund.org.uk





People PWR: Powering up financial confidence for families in Pembrokeshire

Gemma Baker, Pembrokeshire County Council

In a time when the cost of living continues to rise and financial pressures weigh heavily on families, a pioneering project in Pembrokeshire is making a real difference. **People PWR** - short for *Pembrokeshire Welfare Rights* - is a bold and compassionate initiative, commissioned by Pembrokeshire County Council and delivered by Citizens Advice Pembrokeshire (CAP), designed to support families with school-age children ensuring that they are claiming all financial assistance they are entitled to. This is having a hugely positive impact, especially for families who are affected by or at risk of poverty by helping to create more stable and positive financial futures for many.

Launched in 2023 as a pilot project, People PWR takes a holistic, person-centred approach

to tackling financial hardship. Inspired by the experience of the *Maximise!* programme in Scotland, the project aims to create greater financial stability for households, address inequalities, and improve financial capability across the county.

Financial assistance with a human touch

At the heart of People PWR is a simple but powerful idea: that every family deserves to understand and access all of the support they're entitled to. Once referred, most often through schools though self-referrals are also welcome, families receive what the team informally refers to as a **"financial MOT."** This involves a thorough review of the household's financial

situation, focusing on **welfare rights and income maximisation**. Advisors work closely with families to ensure they are claiming all eligible benefits and entitlements, while also helping them identify and address the underlying issues contributing to financial challenges.

But this isn't just about numbers on a page. The People PWR team is trained to deliver advice with **dignity, empathy and respect**. Meetings are held in familiar, private settings - often within schools or community spaces - to reduce barriers to engagement and ensure families feel safe and supported.

Real results, real impact

In the first five months of 2025 alone, People PWR supported **130 families** across Pembrokeshire. The awards generated were significant: over **£261,000** in unclaimed benefits was identified and accessed, with an average gain of **£8,428 per household**. These are life-changing sums for many households, helping to ease the burden of everyday essentials like food, heating and school costs.

Yet the impact goes far beyond the financial. Families report increased confidence, a better understanding of their rights, and a renewed sense of control over their circumstances. For many, the project has been a turning point.

As **James White**, Head of Engagement and Communities at Pembrokeshire County Council, put it:

“For some clients, this service has been life changing. Thanks to PWR, in excess of half a million pounds has been put into the pockets of Pembrokeshire residents - most of which will be spent locally. I look forward to seeing the project continue to grow and expand its reach.”

Collaboration at its core

One of the key strengths of People PWR is its **close partnership with the Local Authority, in particular school settings**. Headteachers and family engagement officers have praised the project for its positive impact on both parents and pupils. By working together, Citizens Advice Pembrokeshire and schools are building a joined-up approach to supporting families - one that

recognises the link between financial wellbeing and educational outcomes.

Looking ahead

As the pilot phase continues, the People PWR team is focused on expanding its reach and deepening its impact. With growing demand and positive feedback from families and professionals alike, there is strong momentum behind the project's future.

People PWR is more than a welfare rights service - it's a movement for **empowerment, equity and dignity**. In a world where navigating the benefits system can feel overwhelming, this project offers a lifeline and a reminder that with the right support at the right time, families can thrive.

Geraldine Murphy, CEO of Citizens Advice Pembrokeshire, highlighted the dedication of the team:

“Our team of advisers has gone from strength to strength, forging strong links with schools and community organisations. Most importantly, they care deeply about helping families ensure they have the tools, knowledge and confidence to take back control of their finances.”

Need support or want more information on PWR?

You can contact the team directly at PWR@pembscab.org or visit www.pembscab.org for more details.





Play for children in temporary accommodation project

Marianne Mannello, Play Wales

There is a well-established body of solid evidence¹ that shows the contribution that play, particularly self-organised play, can make to children's immediate and long-term wellbeing, to their physical health and to their mental health and resilience. When they play, children contribute to their own wellbeing and development.

Opportunities to play are particularly beneficial during times of uncertainty. Being homeless and living in temporary accommodation or poor housing conditions can cause adversity and uncertainty. The 2018 International Play Association's Access to Play for Children in Situations of Crisis toolkit notes that, 'In situations of crisis, stress, weakened physical and emotional development, feelings of lack of control and loss of trust steadily multiply if children lack everyday opportunities for play.'²

During and immediately following times of uncertainty, playing:

- Helps to give children a feeling of normality and joy during an experience of loss, isolation and trauma
- Helps children to overcome emotional pain and regain control over their lives
- Helps children make meaning of what is happening to them, and enables them to experience fun and enjoyment
- Offers children an opportunity to explore their own creativity

Concerned with the growing numbers of children living in temporary accommodation, such as bed and breakfasts and hotels, Play Wales developed

a project to identify the opportunities and challenges of providing opportunities to play in these places.

We worked with our network of play officers in four local authorities to understand the limitations and opportunities in temporary accommodation. We sourced and supplied play packages which included no-cost and simple ideas for families to support play in limited living. We also provided small equipment and ideas to support physical activity in small spaces, and supplied boxes of art and craft material to encourage creative play.

These small and simple items were intended to enable play teams to engage with parents to hear more about their lived experience of supporting children's play in temporary accommodation. The project also enabled us to learn of the challenges for housing officers and providers of temporary accommodation.

Although this was a small-scale project, we hope that the learning will enable us to work with trusted practitioners and families to co-create a practitioner-facing tool grounded in lived experience. The aim is to improve how services support play in low-income and displacement-affected contexts.

Our project has highlighted that children living in temporary accommodation often face unsafe or unsuitable environments for play. Children may find themselves with limited space and may be expected to be indoors for long periods of time. Our research identified that these children have limited opportunities to play both in the living environment and in community-based provision.

Our engagement with parents and families indicates that children have little access to safe, clean or culturally appropriate spaces for play, and are often isolated from community-based provision:

'I'm worried about allowing my child to play. I don't know the other people living here.'

'I feel like I am always telling my children to quiet down. Sometimes when they are playing they are loud, and I don't want to be told off for allowing the children to be noisy or messy.'

'I don't know where to take my children to play. There are busy roads and I don't have the money to take them to clubs or places to play.'

'Our living space is small – there is no room to play. The community area – if you can call it that – feel dirty and uncared for. It doesn't feel like a good place for my children to play.'

'I just wish there was somewhere to play outside. It is so hard for my son to let off steam and few chances for him to play with other children.'

There is an urgent need to improve the lived experiences of children in Wales who, due to emergency or crisis situations, are living in temporary accommodation. These environments – hotels, B&Bs or repurposed communal housing – are not designed with children in mind and offer few, if any, opportunities for play. When children are facing homelessness, provision for play must be considered as part of this assessment to support children's immediate and long-term wellbeing.

Play is not a luxury. It is a right under Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and is essential for recovery, learning and social connection. For children who have experienced displacement, poverty or trauma, having opportunities to play becomes even more crucial and yet, it is routinely overlooked in temporary housing settings.

If you would like to learn more about this work, please email: Marianne@play.wales

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Scrap the two-child limit, Welsh MP told

Sean O'Neill

Deputy CEO/Policy Director, Children in Wales

Child poverty rates in Wales remain stubbornly high and are increasing. Now is the time for the UK Government to urgently act to shift the dial before yet another generation of children are negatively affected.

This was one of many messages which emerged from the first meeting of the newly reformed All-Party Parliamentary Group on Children in Wales in Westminster (APPG), which met before the summer recess. The APPG, now chaired by newly elected MP Gill German (Clwyd North), and managed by Children in Wales (secretariat), provides an opportunity for Welsh MPs, Peers and their officers to meet on a termly basis to discuss the priority issues impacting on babies, children and young people in Wales which are principally within the control of the Westminster Government.

The APPG meeting on child poverty included presentations from national third sector organisations in Wales, who had previously met with representatives of the UK Government's Child Poverty Taskforce in Cardiff, including Ellie Reeves MP. End Child Poverty Network Cymru members Barnardo's Cymru, Children in Wales, Citizens Advice Cymru and Save the Children Wales discussed the impact of social security changes

and the effects of the downturn in the economy on children and families, and the key priorities the forthcoming UK Child Poverty Strategy and November Budget must address.

Amongst the changes called for was the ending of the two-child limit and benefit cap, the uprating of the Local Housing Allowance and a rethinking of disability benefit reforms. The potential to create a Welsh Child Payment, similar to that rolled out in Scotland for eligible children was also advocated for. Members were able to draw from their organisations' experience of direct engagement with children and families in Wales, through their services, advicelines and recent research.

APPG members were briefed on the negative impact of the two-child limit on children and families in Wales, alongside many of the other challenges facing more and more families impacted by benefit changes and ongoing cost of living pressures in Wales. Members heard how the two-child limit punishes children and families by restricting the amount of welfare benefits a household can receive, regardless of need. As a violation of children's human rights, calls for the policy to be scrapped have been made on numerous occasions by the United Nations and the Welsh Government,

echoing similar calls from the Children's Commissioner for Wales, the End Child Poverty Network Cymru, leading UK-based charities and coalitions as well as education unions.

According to UK Government statistics, there are 1.6m children in the UK affected by the policy with 59% of families impacted having at least one adult in work. At least 350,000 children would be lifted out of poverty if the two-child limit were scrapped. Further, if the benefit cap were to be abolished too, at least 500,000 children could be lifted out of poverty by the end of the current parliamentary term.

With the upcoming November budget and the publication of the much-anticipated UK Child Poverty Strategy, the UK Government has a clear opportunity to show ambition and deliver fairness by easing financial struggles of many households in Wales by scrapping this discriminatory policy. With senior figures in the UK Cabinet now publicly recognising that lifting the cap is the most effective way of alleviating child poverty, now is the time to act before more children in Wales are negatively impacted. We hope to secure the continued support of Welsh MPs and Peers with our endeavours.

If you are interested in learning more about the work of the APPG, please email:

sean.oneill@childreninwales.org.uk



Youth work, young people and poverty: What they are telling us

Emma Chivers,
Youth Work Leadership Lab



I first came to youth work as a young person myself - someone who found support, belonging and fun through the relationships it offered. Thirty years later, as Director of the Youth Work Leadership Lab and Chair of Youth Cymru, I still see every day how youth work transforms lives and helps young people navigate barriers.

That's why I've been speaking with children, young people and youth workers across Wales - listening to their experiences of poverty and how youth work helps them cope. These conversations, part of a project funded through the Welsh Government's Child Poverty Strategy Grant, will inform the next progress report in December 2025, ensuring that the lived experiences of young people and families affected by poverty are represented.

Poverty isn't just about benefits and work doesn't always end it. Youth workers told me many young people live in households where parents work long hours or multiple jobs, yet still struggle to meet

basic needs. Rising housing, energy and food costs mean wages no longer stretch far enough. For families reliant on benefits, the support available rarely matches the real cost of living. Whether in work or not, parents face immense pressure and young people feel the strain on their wellbeing, opportunities and sense of security.

The Welsh Government's Child Poverty Strategy for Wales recognises the need to reduce costs and maximise income, but listening to these frontline stories shows that tackling poverty requires looking beyond categories like "in work" or "on benefits" and asking a simpler question: do families have enough to live well? Youth workers see the impact daily, and young people live it, reminding us that policy must connect with practice.

Across Wales, youth workers do far more than provide safe spaces - they hold the line for young people's wellbeing. Poverty doesn't just restrict choices; it shapes how young people see

themselves and their futures. Many feel anxious or guilty watching parents struggle. One young person told me, “If my parents’ mental health is good, mine is too.”

Young people spoke about how free school meals and uniform grants reduce daily stress and help them feel included. “Less stress on parent, less stress on you,” said one. These insights say more than statistics ever could. Free school meals bring stability, but gaps remain during holidays, and the need for essentials like food, clothing and travel continues. Youth work steps into this space. It provides trusted adults and safe environments where young people can talk openly, build confidence and find hope. Through youth cafés, creative projects and holiday programmes, youth workers are not just offering activities, they’re offering stability and belonging. One young person stated that during school holidays, “One meal a day isn’t enough,” and Conway’s Youth Engagement and Belonging Service shared how they worked with schools during the summer holidays to deliver ‘Food and Fun sessions’ to help young people overcome this.

Social and Cultural capital (Putnam (2000) and Beck (2003) describe social and cultural capital, the networks and relationships that help young people build aspirations and access opportunity, which are usually out of reach for young people living in poverty. Youth workers bridge that gap,

removing barriers and providing opportunities that others take for granted. Ensuring experiences are accessible: covering transport, meals and equipment so no one feels excluded. Youth workers aren’t just supporting, they’re broadening horizons, challenging stigma, and helping young people have a positive future.

Youth work in Wales is grounded in a strong framework for equality, inclusion and young people’s rights (YWiWRG, 2022), with many services putting these principles into practice through free activities, meal provision and subsidised transport. Aligning with the Child Poverty Strategy for Wales (2024) and reinforcing youth work’s role in reducing inequality and promoting belonging. Youth workers are responding with compassion and creativity - working with schools, local services, and community partners to poverty-proof their practice. Some local businesses are even sponsoring breakfast clubs or transport, ensuring no young person starts the day hungry or excluded.

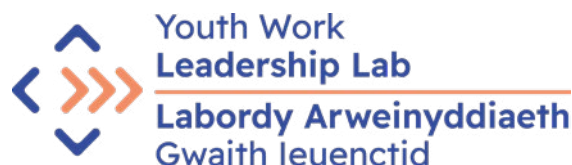
But poverty is about more than material hardship. It’s about dignity, belonging and fairness. Listening to young people is the first step; the real challenge is turning their stories into action. Together, we can build a Wales where no young person’s potential is limited by poverty or postcode.

Thank you to the staff and young people of Torfaen Youth Service, Rhondda Cynon Taf Youth Engagement and Participation Service (YEPS) and [Conwy’s Youth Engagement and Belonging Service](#) who have helped to shape this article.

If you would like more information about this work, please contact Emma Chivers on emma@ywleadershiplab.co.uk or visit <https://ywleadershiplab.co.uk>



Staff and volunteer from Food and Fun Sessions (Summer 2025)





Poverty, exclusion and unmet need: Why neurodivergent learners are falling through the gaps in Wales

Elsa Torres, Family Pathway

Poverty in Wales: the bigger picture

Wales continues to have one of the highest child poverty rates in the UK. Around 31% of children are growing up in relative poverty (StatsWales, 2025), which equates to over 200,000 learners. Nearly half of children in poverty across the UK live in households with a disabled family member (Social Metrics Commission, 2024).

Not all neurodivergent children live in poverty, but where poverty and neurodivergence overlap, the challenges multiply. Many parents of children with complex Additional Learning Needs (ALN) reduce or give up work to provide full-time care when systems fall short. Carers UK (2023) found almost half of parent carers experience reduced employment, while extra costs like transport, heating and equipment deepen financial strain.

QUICK FACTS

- **31% OF CHILDREN IN WALES LIVE IN POVERTY (OVER 200,000 LEARNERS).**
- **NEARLY 50% OF UK CHILDREN IN POVERTY LIVE IN HOUSEHOLDS WITH DISABILITY.**
- **90.5% – AVERAGE SCHOOL ATTENDANCE IN WALES (2023/24).**
- **84.8% – ATTENDANCE FOR PUPILS ON FREE SCHOOL MEALS.**
- **45.2% – YEAR 11 PUPILS PERSISTENTLY ABSENT IN 2023/24.**
- **65 PER 1,000 – FIXED-TERM EXCLUSIONS OVERALL IN 2022/23 (UP FROM 41 PRE-PANDEMIC).**
- **524 PER 1,000 – EXCLUSION RATE FOR PUPILS WITH ADHD.**
- **459 PER 1,000 – EXCLUSION RATE FOR PUPILS WITH BESD.**
- **2,597 LEARNERS WERE IN EOTAS IN 2023/24 – THE HIGHEST ON RECORD.**

When poverty meets unmet need

Families tell us the same story: poverty and unmet need are inseparable. If your child is autistic or has ADHD and you also live in poverty, every barrier is bigger.

In 2023/24, average school attendance in Wales was 90.5%, but for pupils eligible for free school meals it fell to 84.8%. Nearly half of Year 11 learners (45.2%) were persistently absent (Welsh Government, Attendance & Absence 2023/24).

Provision, skills and knowledge: the real drivers behind exclusion

Exclusion is rarely about behaviour alone. It reflects whether provision is in place, whether staff have the skills to respond, and whether knowledge is used to interpret behaviour correctly.

In **2022/23**, schools issued **65 fixed-term exclusions per 1,000 pupils**, up from **41 per 1,000 pre-pandemic**. Rates were far higher for children with identified needs: **524 per 1,000** for ADHD, **459 per 1,000** for BESD, and **189 per 1,000** for all SEN/ALN compared with **45 per 1,000** for those without (Welsh Government, *Exclusions 2022/23*).

One parent told us:

“My son was excluded for lashing out – but the school knew he couldn’t cope with the noise and nothing had been put in place.”

By the time exclusion happens, families have usually been raising concerns for months. Exclusion is the system’s release valve, not a solution.

The hidden world of EOTAS

In 2023/24, 2,597 learners were in Education Other Than at School (EOTAS) – the highest on record. While some thrive, research shows these learners face significantly higher risks of mental health difficulties and self-harm than peers in school (Rouquette et al., *BJPsych Open*, 2025). Families often describe EOTAS as a cul-de-sac: “We were told it was temporary. But months later, there’s no plan to get her back into school.”

Why “universal provision” doesn’t feel universal

The ALNET Act 2018 and ALN Code 2021 promised equal rights to Individual Development Plans. In practice, implementation has been patchy, with families reporting inconsistent IDPs and a lack of accountability (Senedd Research, 2024). “Universal provision” risks being a slogan unless clear standards and monitoring are built in.

What helps: learning from practice

Here’s what is working in pockets and where Wales must scale. From evidence and experience, Wales must:

1. Define universal provision – set a clear, minimum package schools must evidence
2. Require proof before exclusion – adjustments must be shown before a child can be excluded
3. Tackle poverty-linked absence – fund basics like transport and food, and publish FSM vs non-FSM attendance gaps
4. Reform EOTAS – make it a bridge back to education, with joint reviews every six months
5. Fix accountability – enforce duties with timelines and escalation routes

The cost of delay

When unmet need is left unchecked, the cost simply shifts downstream. Excluded learners are more likely to become NEET and enter the criminal justice system; more than 80% of young people in custody have been excluded from school at some point (Youth Justice Board, 2023). Early investment prevents exclusion, reduces long-term costs, and changes lives.

Moving forward

Poverty is not an aside - it shapes everything. Combined with unmet need and systemic failure, it sidelines neurodivergent learners. But this narrative can change. With clear rights, co-production, integrated supports, and shared accountability, learners can stay in school, families retain dignity, and Wales can break the pipeline of exclusion.

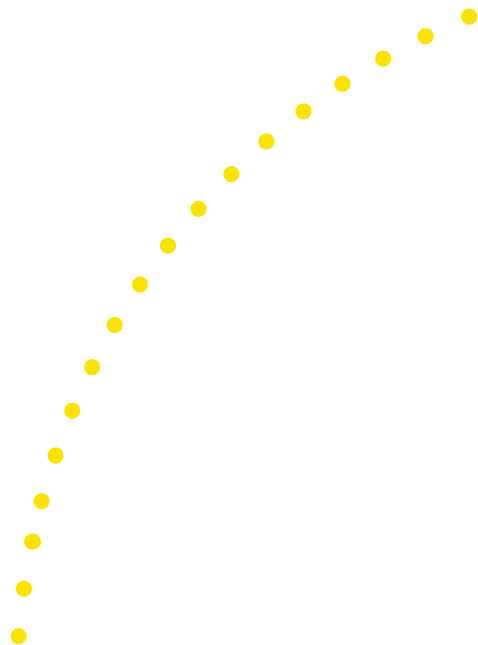
Family Pathway is committed to this transformation - working with families, schools and services to build the environments every child deserves.

About Family Pathway

Family Pathway is a Welsh social enterprise on a mission to close the gap for children with ALN. We partner with schools, services and families to turn policy into practice - co-designing person-centred solutions that rebuild confidence, restore trust, and make inclusion real.

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Why Out of School Childcare matters

Clare Dare, Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Clubs

As an organisation, Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Clubs have spent many years supporting Out of School Childcare Clubs across Wales to provide a safe environment for children to access play and childcare, and enable their carers to work, train or even take respite – thus elevating families out of poverty. We have seen that play opportunities have a profound and lasting impact on children's wellbeing and that access to play in a safe, welcoming environment is of paramount importance upholding a necessary right for the child (UNCRC Article 31).

Out of School Childcare Clubs provide a social opportunity for children to play, connect and interact within their home community, as well as with their wider community. **'It takes a village to raise a child'** is a powerful proverb that highlights the essential role of community in a child's upbringing. Reflecting upon the community around the child as a support mechanism for modern families and the work involved within today's society. Out of School Childcare Clubs inevitably become the wider community for

working families, supporting the child, and therefore the family out of poverty. Without this wider community network, more children will be exposed to harsh poverty lines in a continuation cycle of deprivation for future generations.

They also provide a place to meet new people from within their local area and share knowledge and experiences from a wider range of individual family cultures and values. These interactions empower children to understand and develop skills from outside their inner family dynamic, supporting an avenue of escape from an entrenched cycle of deprivation. Many families have experienced generational outcomes of negative opportunities. Out of School Childcare Clubs help to build upon a child's experiences, through positive engagements and opportunities to thrive. Children develop life skills and grow in confidence through play and within their local club they are provided with opportunities that foster feelings of belonging and care for their own community, values that they will retain and develop through their lives.

Urban sociologist Ray Oldenburg identified three key places that support personal and social wellbeing – it is important to understand and reflect upon this from a child’s perspective. The First Place is a child’s home environment, their private, domestic space with their families and carers who hopefully provide a safe space of belonging. The Second Place is their school, where they engage in tasks and learning within a designated space. The Third Place is their community where they connect socially in informal ways.

Out of School Childcare Clubs are more than just “childcare,” they are a vital ‘Third Place’ where children are provided with the opportunities to make friends outside of school, build confidence and become sociable. They also help children feel part of a community as well as supporting their right to access play in a safe, welcoming environment. They are neutral, familiar, playful spaces where children can be themselves, relax and grow. They are the glue that holds a community together.

How many adults can remember their own play experiences? When asked, many adults talk of being outside, exploring nature, feeling free within their community as if there are no time or limits to their play. Many have said they have grown up in a generation of having to go home when the streetlights turn on for the evening. The reality of then is very different to now. In a time and space where children are living in an online social world, it is important for us to recognise that even though times are different, children still need to play, explore and feel that they are free without limits to play.

Within today’s fast-paced and individualised society, Third Places are becoming harder to access (for both adults and children) even more for those families who are affected by poverty. More time is spent online and less in physical community settings, fewer informal play areas are available due to urban development and safety concerns, as well as busy working lives and financial pressures that limit community engagement. As a result of this way of life, many children no longer have regular access to safe, social, unstructured environments where they can play freely together, build friendships, and

develop a sense of belonging. Third Places support and strengthen family life, build healthier more confident children and can restore a sense of community. A Third Place needs nurturing through human connections that can support a cycle of deprivation from influences within the child’s family and wider community. When they disappear, children risk becoming disconnected from their peers, from their communities, and even from their own sense of identity.

Inspired by Ray Oldenburg’s “The Great Good Place” [Ray Oldenburg & Karen Christensen on third places.](#)



Call for contributions for the Winter 2025 magazine

Topic: Arts & Culture - Celebrating a Child's Right to Create, Experience and Share

Our Winter magazine theme is **Arts and Culture**, and we'd love to hear from you!

Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) recognises every child's right to **rest, leisure, play and to participate fully in cultural and artistic life**, which supports their well-being, development and overall happiness. In this edition, we want to explore how this right is being supported, championed and celebrated – and we invite you to contribute.

We welcome articles, case studies or reflections on topics such as:

- **Projects or initiatives that support children and young people's access to arts and culture** – in schools, youth settings, community spaces or health and care services
- **The impact of creative experiences** – how participating in arts, music, performance, storytelling or cultural activities has supported wellbeing, voice, confidence and inclusion
- **Examples of co-produced or child-led creative work** – where children and young people have shaped the direction, content or outcomes
- **Barriers and enablers** – what helps or hinders children and young people's participation in cultural life? What needs to change?
- **Voices from practice** – your reflections on why arts and culture matter in your work, and how you incorporate them into your setting

This is a fantastic opportunity to shine a light on the rich and creative ways children and young people engage with arts and culture and how you, as professionals, can protect and promote this vital right.

Submission guidelines:

- Articles should be between 500 and 750 words and include a title, the author's name and organisation
- Please include a high quality JPEG image if you wish or your organisation's logo
- Please provide your submission in both English and Welsh
- Deadline for submissions **Thursday, 4 December 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.**

Organisational links

[Children in Wales](#)

[Youth Work Leadership Lab](#)

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[Barnardo's Cymru](#)

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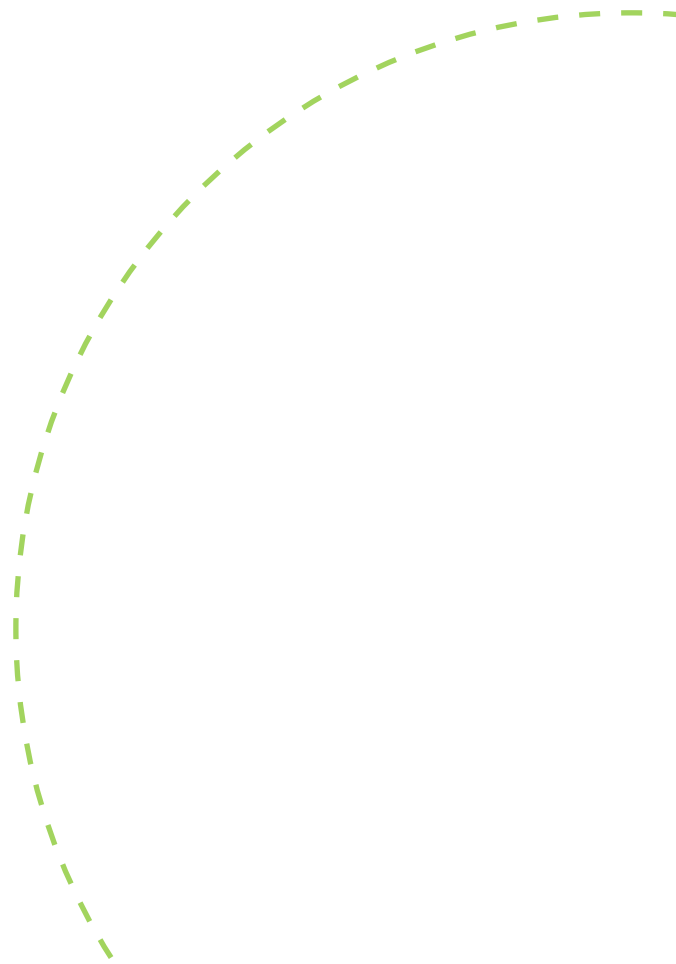
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Wednesday, 25 March 2026
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Leading expert on children's rights and participation

Interested in participating? Contact emma.butler@childreninwales.org.uk
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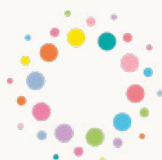
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