



# EDUCATION IN WALES





# Welcome

**A** good education is a building block for health and well-being and can increase our chances of living a long and healthy life. In turn, our health and well-being can affect our ability to learn. Education provides the skills, attributes and knowledge needed to secure good jobs and participate in society.

In this e-buletin we have a range of articles which cover national regional and local initiatives, policies and programmes aimed at improving or enhancing education in Wales.

Let us know what you think of our e-bulletin by answering two questions. Click [here](#) for the survey.

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### Survey shows strong support for schools' role in children and young people's health and wellbeing

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Liz Green, Consultant in Public Health, Policy and International Health and Programme Director for Health Impact Assessment, Wales Health Impact Assessment Support Unit (WHIASU) Public Health Wales

A new survey conducted by Public Health Wales has shown that most people in Wales support schools and nurseries having a role in health and wellbeing outcomes for under 18s.



GIG  
CYMRU  
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Iechyd Cyhoeddus  
Cymru  
Public Health  
Wales

The [latest results](#) from Public Health Wales' Time to Talk Public Health panel survey show that support for the role of educational settings (e.g. schools and nurseries) was high across all nine child health and wellbeing areas asked about. When asked to what extent they support or oppose education settings having a role in health and wellbeing, in the general population, the proportion responding "strongly support" was greatest for supporting online safety (77 percent), preventing smoking and vaping (76 percent), accessing support for mental health difficulties (74 percent), and preventing alcohol and drug misuse (74 percent).

Even greater support was found among parents with children aged under 18 years, where the proportions responding "strongly support" were highest for online safety (84 percent), developing positive coping

mechanisms (80 percent), accessing support for mental health difficulties (80 percent), developing positive relationship (78 percent), and preventing smoking and vaping (78 percent). Schools play a small but important role in promoting health and wellbeing among young people, and parental support has been identified in the wider literature as one of the key levers enabling settings to embed whole school approaches to health and wellbeing.

Public Health Wales takes a leading role in promoting and implementing a whole-school and systems approaches to health and wellbeing. Three complementary programmes delivered by Public Health Wales, on behalf of the Welsh Government are the Welsh Network of Health and Well-being Promoting Schools (WNHWPS), the Whole

School Approach to Emotional and Mental Well-being (WSAEMWB) and the Healthy and Sustainable Pre-school Scheme (HSPSS).

Our teams provide local support to schools and early years settings, guided by national tools, guidance, and resources, to help identify their health and wellbeing priorities, develop action plans, and access additional support such as training, to meet the needs of their school community.

Alexa Gainsbury, Consultant in Public Health at Public Health Wales, said: “While it’s important to be realistic about what schools can achieve, and to remember the importance of parental support, it is great to see such support for the positive role of education settings for the health and wellbeing of young people. Children and young people thrive in environments that nurture their health and wellbeing, be that in school or at home. “In Wales, our schools and early years education settings already understand the unique position they hold in influencing the health and wellbeing of children and young people. Their commitment to improving outcomes for all in their care is clear and so much has been achieved through partnership working already.

“Our programmes also play a vital role in supporting settings promote the health and wellbeing of children and young people. Through locally embedded teams and national tools and guidance, the programmes support settings to take evidence-based action to embed health and wellbeing into the fabric of the school or nursery, supporting lifelong physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing.

“While schools and early years settings have a key function in supporting the health and well-being of children and young people, they are just one part of a far larger system that needs to work collaboratively to secure the best outcomes for children and young people and provide support to children, young people and their families when they need it.”

[Time to Talk Public Health – February 2024 Panel Survey Findings](#)

**Commentary**

# Fostering Future generational resilience within our ‘planetary boundaries’ – a commentary on the need for future educational policy directive and framework to encompass a ‘harmonious’ approach

Rebecca Gardner. Macmillan Rural Cancer Experience Researcher. Rural Health and Care Wales (NHS)

This is an extract from an assignment submission made towards an MSc in Global Public Health from Queen Mary University London. For further information please contact [Rebecca.gardner2@wales.nhs.uk](mailto:Rebecca.gardner2@wales.nhs.uk)

From recipients of the adverse health effects resultant from exceeded planetary boundaries (1) our children and their health entwine with that of the planet. I wish to argue that the predominant current educational format is negating a primary step in positively influencing this process and in doing so misses one of the greatest opportunities in cementing the science, concept and experience that constitutes planetary health into our future generations. Within this stance I cite the planetary boundary’s concept (2) as a referenced framework to guide pedagogical processes. I will example through using existing national policy (3), proposed learning directives (4), an existing vessel for dissemination (5), and mobilise existing strategy that connects children to their environment through the ‘Harmony Project’ (6). This commentary provides a hypothesised assimilation aimed to address potential perceived shortfalls in the integration of planetary health into the mainstream education of our children through providing working examples of different methodologies.

In 2015, Wales became the first country in the world to harness the notion of ‘explicit duty’ through legislation regarding the well-being of our future generations with an act that falls on public bodies, denoting a duty in law, to safeguard the well-being of future generations (7). In 2019 a subsequent education ‘white paper’ in Wales makes bold propositions for educational reform. The paper calls for a more explicit relationship with the Future Generations Act, and amongst recommendations such as GCSE’s no longer being fit for purpose, it recognises that disciplines are inadequate when teaching about the climate emergency, which needs to cover the interplay of geography, anthropology, history, economics and sociology (recommendation no.15); and in order to go further schools need to recognise new skills and

job roles for the future, such as those of caregiver, place-maker and eco-warrior – as given examples.

Schools challenging the system and adopting different ways of learning can access education models such as those professed by the Harmony Project - sustainable, transformative principles, prioritising interconnectedness and taking inspiration from the principles of Harmony in the book by HRH King Charles (8). Models such as The Harmony Project, encapsulate learning across disciplines, recognising that merely studying a single ‘school subject’ will not provide the full holistic perspective to understand the true complexities of our global environment and ultimately the challenges we will face existing within it if current patterns of human behaviour continue (9).



But curriculum-based teaching and learning, historically formulated from the schools borne of the industrial revolution impose their own set of limitations. Extending upon this assessment culture, schools traditionally promote and reward academic success and individualistic endeavour. Understanding the climate catastrophe, and more importantly, fostering the social change and movement to do it, needs to be embraced through enriched pedagogy inclusive of reformative action. As an example, *The Work That Reconnects* (5) provides a relevant vessel for instigating these changes. A programme such as this encourages a re-telling of the story. It provides powerful narrative that can incite positive action. More importantly, it promotes social interconnectedness. Pupils go from being individuals 'pitted' against each other for the best grades, to being key societal members, with equal and important opinions and contributions.

To promote behavioural change that results in movement away from an exploitative linear economy towards a sustainable circular one (9,10), that embraces the core concepts of the U.N sustainable development goals (11) and prioritises the health of our planet, we need a true 'bottom up' approach. Education is paramount at all stages.

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### Further Reading:

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RURAL HEALTH AND CARE WALES



## Practice

# Making mental health support accessible for children and young people in schools

Jana Meier, Head of Service Development, Acacium Group

## Tackling emotional-based school avoidance with integrated mental health support in schools

Nearly a third of UK secondary pupils avoid school due to anxiety, according to a survey conducted for the charity stem4, with emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA) impacting 1-5% of the school population.

The increase in mental wellbeing issues among children in primary and secondary education is a pressing concern, with its roots in the repercussions of recent global and domestic challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted children's routines and social interactions, leading to heightened anxiety and stress. The rising cost of living has also placed undue strain on families, which can act as a catalyst to substance abuse and unstable home environments and, in severe cases, domestic abuse—each a risk factor for children's mental health. Schools can play a pivotal role by integrating mental health support and educational programmes into the curriculum. Improving access to mental health care, regardless of socio-economic status, along with early intervention strategies, can help mitigate the potential long-term effects of poor mental health in children and young adults.

## Making mental health support accessible for children and young People

Co-developed by clinicians and young people, Acacium Group's



CYP IAPTUS service is a digital solution for children and young people's mental health. The service targets issues such as low mood and depression, anxiety disorders, difficulties with emotion regulation, and behavioural challenges.

Children, young people, or their families can access the service using a smartphone, laptop, or tablet with an internet connection, enabling early intervention and with service users able to seek assistance in a familiar and comfortable environment.

The service addresses the adverse effects of common experiences affecting children and young people, including bullying, the impact of social media, challenging school transitions, and the stress associated with sleep issues and academic exams. The service also extends its support to include children and young people diagnosed with ADHD or autism spectrum disorders, tailoring its interventions to meet the specific needs that accompany these conditions.

Therapeutic interventions are tiered to match the severity and nature of the issues the service users face. It offers a spectrum of therapies, beginning with low-intensity and parent-led

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), escalating to traditional counselling, higher intensity CBT for more complex cases, and even Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) for trauma-related issues.

## Making mental health and wellbeing a priority in Welsh schools

Collaboration across educational, healthcare, social, and policy sectors is key to fostering resilience and promoting the mental wellbeing of future generations. The CYP IAPTUS programme provides a fully inclusive, clinically safe and accessible service that enables schools and local authorities to help their students in getting the mental health support they need to thrive.

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## Practice

# The Cornerstone of Well-being: The Critical Link Between Education and Health for Children and Young People with a Learning Disability

Rebecca Curtis, Senior Improvement Manager, Children and young people with a learning disability, NHS Executive

Education plays a fundamental role in shaping the lives of children and young people, particularly those with a learning disability. Looking beyond academic achievement, access to education is not only a vehicle for empowerment, but it also equips children and young people with the knowledge and skills needed to navigate the complexities of life.

Numerous studies have demonstrated the correlation between access to education and better health outcomes. A growing body of literature helps us to explore the positive relationship between health literacy and improved health outcomes [1]. Suggesting that individuals with higher levels of education can better understand and utilise the health information they receive resulting in fewer chronic illnesses [2].

The importance of accessible education is recognised in both the Curriculum for Wales (2022) [3] and the ALN Code of Practice (2021) [4] with an



emphasis on person-centred practice and inclusive learning. However, inequalities in access to inclusive education for children and young people with learning disability often prevail. [The Learning Disability Strategic Disability Action Plan \(2022-2025\)](#) [5] in Wales aims to target and improve the inclusion of children and young people with a learning disability in all aspects of society. It is hoped that by addressing systemic barriers and promoting inclusive, multi-disciplinary practices, policymakers and educators can create environments where all children and young people, regardless of ability, can thrive academically and holistically. As part of the action plan, the [Learning Disability team](#), based in the NHS Executive with funding from Welsh Government, is overseeing several innovative improvement projects across Wales. One of these projects aims to promote communication outcomes for young people with a learning disability in a school environment with the use of a high-tech digital applications. This collaboration between health and education will support pupils with complex communication needs to communicate their choices and ideas, helping to improve their learning outcomes.

A second, hospital-based education project run by a charity is aimed towards preschool-aged

children. This project offers early intervention through tailored and inclusive learning environments so children and their families can develop confidence, resilience, and a sense of agency over their health and well-being. This project also welcomed a visit from the previous deputy minister for social services to meet with children and chat with families about the impact of accessing such a provision. The improvement projects are currently ongoing and will look to conclude at the end of 2024 where all the learning will be shared across networks and communities. By prioritising inclusive education policies in Wales, we can continue initiatives to improve services for children and young people with a learning disability, creating a society where every child has the opportunity to flourish and be the best that they can be. For more information about the learning disability improvement projects or the learning disability communities of practice, please contact [improvement-cymru\\_ld@wales.nhs.uk](mailto:improvement-cymru_ld@wales.nhs.uk) or [Rebecca.curtis7@wales.nhs.uk](mailto:Rebecca.curtis7@wales.nhs.uk)

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## Policy

# School playtime is under threat in Wales: why it is a public health issue

Marianne Mannello, Assistant Director: Policy, Support and Advocacy, Play Wales

For several years, there have been significant policy changes to schools and education in Wales. As well as changes to the curriculum there are a multitude of programmes focusing on increasing the levels of physical activity amongst children and on better school meals.

Over this same period there have also been growing concerns about the physical and mental health of children and young people. As concerns grow about the ‘epidemic’ of child anxiety and unhappiness, there seems to be an almost acceptance of the contemporary barriers that prevent and discourage children’s play. As the Ministerial Review of Play highlights, these barriers include:

- changes in neighbourhoods including increased car use, increased traffic, changing work patterns
- parental restrictions due to perceptions of neighbourhood safety
- an increase in participation in structured activities and educational demands
- increasing intolerance towards children and young people playing and meeting up.

Against this backdrop, a constant in children’s lives, and at school, is play and break time – those bits of the school day when children of all ages meet friends to play and socialise, eat, and relax.

As pointed out in the Ministerial Review of Play Background Paper, a child spends more than six hours a day and 28 weeks of

the year at school, so children have considerable opportunities to play in this setting. International empirical evidence suggests that school playtime initiatives aimed at enriching play opportunities are linked to a range of improvements in academic skills, attitudes, attention and behaviour, and to improved social skills, improved social relations between different groups of children, and better enjoyment of and adjustment to school life (1)

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

98% of the children surveyed as part of the Wales Children’s Omnibus Survey (2022) said they look forward to playtime at school

82% said they especially like playtime as it allows them to spend time with their friends.

In the Wales Children’s Omnibus Survey (2022), 61% of children say they have missed playtime. The most frequent reasons for this are to catch up with work or because a teacher feels they had misbehaved. This practice flies in the face of the Welsh Government Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental well-being, which places a strong emphasis on the importance of play. In particular, the Framework notes that the removal of playtime as a punishment denies children their right to play and can cause stigmatisation and anxiety, too. From a physical activity point of view, the Active Healthy Kids Wales 2021 Expert Group

recommends that providing sufficient breaks for play would contribute to overall physical activity for children. In a 2019 inquiry into children’s physical activity, Senedd Cymru’s Health, Social Care and Sport Committee expressed disappointment to hear that reductions in lunch breaks and playtimes are common in schools.

Creating the conditions for good playtimes in schools is about both the physical space and the culture of the school: both operate in tandem to produce an environment where children can play. Public health policy and practitioners can help by advocating:

- for well-designed playable space that adequate time is given for both lunch and playtime
- that playtime is protected and not withdrawn.

For further information please contact: [marianne@playwales.org.uk](mailto:marianne@playwales.org.uk)

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## Practice

## Come and Cook with your Child

Andrea Basu, Service Lead for Public Health Dietetics, Claire Dutton, Dietetic Assistant Practitioner (Central area), Rachel Roberts Dietetic Assistant (East area) Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board

A Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board Award winning programme engaging foundation phase children and their parents in confidently developing food and nutrition skills for life. [Come and Cook with your Child – Nutrition Skills for Life®](#)

**C**ome and Cook with Your Child is a 5-6 week award winning programme designed for foundation phase pupils (4-6yrs) and parents, grandparents or carers. Developed by the BCUHB Public Health Dietetics team, it creates a unique opportunity for adults interested in learning to create healthier meals for their family, to build knowledge and skills whilst also engaging their child in the preparation of meals, trying new foods, and making healthy food choices (1,2).

Children and parents partici-

gramme, and are professionally supported by Registered Dietitians.

81% of families complete the programme

75% families are from population quintiles 1 and 2

>90% of children report enjoying their parent/ carer being in school and cooking alongside them.

97% of participating parents learn something new, including how to make healthy and affordable meals from scratch, whilst being more conscious of food labels.

97% report feeling either ‘much



100% of parents would recommend the programme to others

Facilitators Claire and Rachel share their reflections below:

Parents have stated at the start of the course that their children are fussy eaters and will not try new things; however, we have seen first-hand children trying new foods with their peers, especially fruit and vegetables, and then trying new foods at home. Both parents and children have enjoyed cooking together in school and loved the one-on-one time-shared. They then spent more time cooking together at home in between sessions with the use of the recipe books. The classroom assistants have liked the story-time and the variety of activities and felt the children have learnt new skills through counting numbers, sorting and imagination.



pate in their school enabling a familiar, supportive and relaxed learning environment. For 2-3 hours each week, they engage in a mix of practical cookery and fun learning activities focused on food and nutrition. Dietetic assistants facilitate the pro-

more’ or ‘more’ confident preparing healthy meals  
91% make changes to what their family eat including reducing sugary and sweet foods (91%), reducing fatty or fried foods (85%), increasing fruit (79%) and vegetable (76%) intake.

Claire, Course Facilitator Conwy & Denbighshire

Throughout the course we get to see the confidence growth of both children and parents during food preparation. Children become more accepting of touching new foods and getting stuck in whilst the parents confidently allow the children to get stuck in. Our courses allow cross generation learning with a mixture of grandparents, parents and carers attending, the groups are positive, encouraging and enthusiastic throughout and keen to gain further education around nutrition and cooking with their children. Rachel, Course Facilitator (Wrexham and Flintshire)

Programme development has evolved through a partnership approach with teachers, parents and children all actively contributing to shaping the programme and its resources. We draw upon the collective assets of our school community and support teaching assistants by offering accredited food and nutrition skills training to extend programme messages into the classroom. Our aim is to gather longer-term impact for families participating, and extend reach across North Wales.

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## Practice

# Mental health support for young people: Enhancing wellbeing across Newport school communities

Alexandra Konovalova, Whole School Approach Project Coordinator, Newport Mind



Young people in the UK have higher mental health need than ever (1), and secondary schools in particular are struggling to meet the needs of young people with mental health problems (2).

Whole School Approach (WSA) Project at Newport Mind provides wellbeing and mental health support to educational communities across Newport. Our work ranges from 1-2-1 therapeutic sessions with children and young people, assemblies and workshops for school and college students, training and upskilling school and college staff to running workshops and peer support groups for parents and caregivers.

Now in its 7<sup>th</sup> year, the WSA project has had many iterations, starting off as a pilot funded by National Mind to explore existing in-school mental health support and work with school leaders on developing action plans to improve provision for all stakeholders of the school communities. With time, the project's work focused primarily on providing direct mental health support to young people through targeted interventions.

The project accepts referrals for an extensive range of difficulties, from managing friendships to coping with suicidal thoughts,

and supports young people by exploring tools and coping strategies to help them manage their mental health and enhance wellbeing.

The impact of the project's work has been recognised by Newport schools that have been funding us directly to commission mental health practitioners to serve the needs of their communities. Over the last few years, project workers have been based in 6 out of 11 Newport high schools, including the local alternative education provision, as well as in all 4 of the local college's sites.

The project has been constantly evolving in response to the feedback from young people and families, as well as schools. The approach we have strived to employ is to be genuinely open and listening to the voices of our local communities.

One of the significant outcomes of this approach to developing the service was the Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSA) project that supported families where children and young people struggled with attending school regularly due to mental health challenges. The project was the first of its kind in Newport and contributed to the issue of EBSA becoming more understood across local school communities.

Over the years, we have had many heart-warming and encouraging comments through our anonymous surveys, where young people have told us that "it is life changing, especially

if you struggle in life to see a reason to be happy, it clears the air and teaches you lots of new strategies and techniques to deal with your problems" and that "it has helped to realise that you are not alone".

Our work has highlighted the need for more preventative work to stop young people's mental health challenges from developing or worsening.

The demand for accessible and effective mental health support services for young people is ever increasing, and there is no "one size fits all" solution when it comes to tackling this, and therefore more needs to be done to allow local services to grow and develop to meet the demand in their communities.

References: [Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2020: Wave 1 follow up to the 2017 survey - NHS England Digital not-making-the-grade.pdf \(mind.org.uk\)](#)

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## Practice

# How GISDA's Academi Cyfleon and ICAN Projects Empower Young People in Gwynedd

Catrin Stokes, Marketing Coordinator, GISDA



A strong foundation in education is vital, but many young people in Wales face challenges that hinder their academic success and future prospects. This is where GISDA's Academi Cyfleon (Opportunity Academy) steps in to offer vital support, helping them gain the skills, confidence, and qualifications needed to progress to further education, employment, and independent living.

Academi Cyfleon operates through drop-in centres in Caernarfon, Blaenau Ffestiniog, and Pwllheli, welcoming young people aged 16-25 who need advice, support or simply have questions. The team works closely with each participant to create a personalised plan that addresses their specific needs and challenges.

The project offers employment support, confidence-building activities, and essential employment skills like crafting CVs, interview techniques, and workplace behaviour. Additionally, Academi Cyfleon focuses on developing independent living skills, such as time management, budgeting, and using public transportation, all in a safe and supportive environment.

The project also arranges work

experience and volunteering opportunities, offering valuable exposure to the working world. This, alongside gaining training and accreditations, greatly enhances young people's employability prospects. Upon successfully transitioning into the working world, the Academi Cyfleon team is still on hand to provide support and help smooth out any wrinkles.

Since April 2023, Academi Cyfleon has supported 138 young people. A significant portion of them, around 44%, also benefit from the services of ICAN – a project that provides support for young people in Gwynedd struggling with mild to moderate mental illness. Within welcoming hubs in Caernarfon, Pwllheli and Bangor, individuals can easily access early therapeutic interventions and support.

Here's what young people who benefited from ICAN's support had to say:

*"You're a lifesaver, you've turned my life around".*

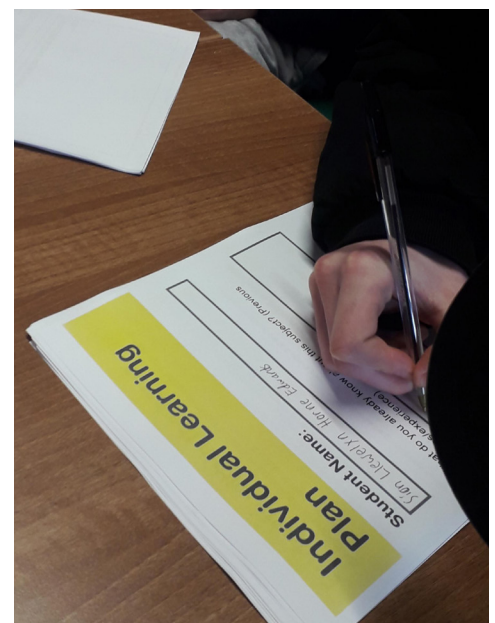
*"I wish I could make you into a little doll and keep you in my pocket so that you're with me when I have meltdowns and negative thoughts"*

The project complements NHS services, bridging the gap to ensure the right support at the right time. It addresses mental well-being on multiple levels, from practical skills to therapeutic activities and counselling, enabling individuals to access support on their terms, whether through drop-in sessions, phone

calls, or appointments. In complex cases requiring more comprehensive support, the ICAN team can help young people navigate the wider network of services and connect them with the most appropriate care.

The combined impact of Academi Cyfleon and ICAN projects is making a real difference in the lives of Gwynedd's youth. By providing a comprehensive support system that addresses both educational and personal needs, GISDA empowers young people in Gwynedd to overcome challenges and secure a brighter future.

If you are interested in learning more about GISDA's work, please visit our website – [www.gisda.org](http://www.gisda.org)



## Research + Practice

# Well-becoming - How schools can help children learn to be healthy and well

Dr Amy Hulson-Jones, Research Officer, Catherine Spurdle, Trainee teacher, CIEREI, Bangor University;

Dr Richard Watkins, Research Officer, CIEREI, Bangor University & Research Improvement Officer, GwE, North Wales Regional School Improvement Service;

Dr Corinna Grindle, Research Officer, CIDD, Warwick University;

Dr Duncan Gillard, Educational psychologist, Bristol City Council;

Dr Gemma Griffith, Research Officer, Centre for Mindfulness Research and Practice, School of Human and Behavioural Sciences, Bangor University

Dr Nic Hooper, Lecturer in Psychology, Cardiff University;

Professor Carl Hughes, Head of School, School of Education, Bangor University.



## Connect

In this article we describe research that involved mapping and translating a health and well-being programme called Connect to the Curriculum for Wales. We also explored teachers' perspectives and experiences of delivery. Connect is an evidence-informed health and well-being programme that has been developed for UK primary schools, based on the 6 ways to well-being (Baskerod, 2019) and is designed to increase the psychological flexibility and resilience of young learners through incorporating Acceptance and Commitment Therapy theory and research into practical teacher guides and professional learning for supporting teachers.

Schools are challenged with rising mental health problems in children and young people. It is estimated that one in eight 0 to 25-year-olds will struggle with mental illness at some point in their lives with the most prevalent conditions being anxiety

and depression (March, et al., 2022). Schools in Wales are also being tasked with providing robust evidence-informed mental health and well-being curriculum within a whole-school approach (Welsh Government, 2021), and are simultaneously designing the health and well-being area of learning and experience (AoLE) as they implement the Curriculum for Wales (CfW). Research suggests school leaders and teachers are concerned about delivering effective well-being education when they have gaps in their knowledge and expertise concerning mental health and mental health education (Long, et al, 2023).

Despite these challenges, schools are uniquely positioned to have a significant impact on and provide support for pupils' mental health and well-being through delivery of evidenced-based approaches. This paper describes our early work to adapt and map an evidence-informed programme called Connect that is designed to support teachers in delivering

evidence-informed approaches to help children develop knowledge and practical skills to keep them well. Connect is based on the DNA-V model derived from Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (Hayes et al, 2006; Gillard et al.,2024; Hayes & Ciarrochi, 2015).

We first mapped the Connect learning objectives onto the Welsh curriculum's Health and Well-being AoLE descriptions of learning. We then translated a section of the curriculum into Welsh which we trialled with teachers working in Welsh medium schools. Finally, we explored teachers' perspective and opinions (n=7) after 12-week period of trialling the Connect with their pupils.



We found that the Connect Early learning goals and Curriculum Objectives for reception year through to year 6 were successfully mapped to almost all the health and well-being descriptions of learning in the AoLE (96%). We are continuing to translate the Connect curriculum into Welsh having completed one third of the content. A thematic content analysis of teachers' perceptions revealed several main themes relating to teacher's initial perceptions, the most significant of which were the useful nature of the Connect resources, the easy to use Connect website and lesson plans, the enjoyable and engaging nature of the program, the benefits of the mindfulness sessions, the benefits of the Advisor component of the DNA-V model, the strengthening of the teacher-pupil bond, and the challenges surrounding difficult content and complex language.

There is a serious need in Wales for evidence-informed bilingual approaches to teaching children health and well-being knowledge, and how to integrate this into practical action in their own lives. Prevention is a key approach to supporting societal health in the long term, and schools will play a pivotal role in this. It is therefore crucial that schools are supported to integrate the latest evidence-in-

formed knowledge into the design and development of the Health & Well-being AoLE. Connect seems to be a 'promising bet' to help us achieve this.

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# The Grapevine

## Practice

## Working together to enable healthier places and spaces

Cheryl Williams, Principal Public Health Practitioner, Cardiff and Vale University Health Board



Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol  
Caerdydd a'r Fro  
Cardiff and Vale  
University Health Board

Urban planning has its origins in public health, and in recent years there has been an increased focus on the crucial importance of the built and natural environment on protecting and improving population health and well-being.

The places we live, work and play have a major impact on our health, both physically and mentally. If we create healthy spaces, healthy buildings and healthy travel opportunities, we can build places that can lead to increased physical activity, better air quality, good quality and well located homes, access to fresh and healthy food options, active travel, the ability to easily access services and amenities, and a reduction in health inequalities.

In Wales, the 'plan-led' system means that policies in local development plans provide the starting point for planning decisions. National planning policy in Wales has a strong focus on the role that planning plays in improving health and it guides local authorities to reflect this in their local plans.

Cardiff and Vale University Health Board work with planners in Cardiff and Vale local

authorities, liaising with planners over the development of health focused policy and development, and on the provision of healthcare services.

Planning and health joint work includes:

Providing consultation responses to the various stages of the replacement Local Development Plan (LDP) process, ensuring a health 'lens' is put into the vision, aims and objectives of LDPs, and the policies have both a health focus and enable opportunity for consideration of healthcare service provision. Providing the evidence base for local population health needs. Regular liaison over draft policies at stages of the LDP process, checking that health related policy and legislation is referenced, such as the Well-being of Future Generations Act, and the impact on health and well-being is woven throughout relevant policies, such as transport, housing and green spaces. Supporting the delivery of Health Impact Assessment stakeholder reviews of the draft LDP preferred strategy and deposit plans.

Responding to planning applications for major housing developments or developments considered to have a public

health impact. Applications are considered in relation to their potential impact on health and also the impact on healthcare services of an increased population. This process can offer an opportunity for negotiation over developer contributions towards services.

Some key messages:

If there is an opportunity to get engaged in the LDP process, it is worth doing because the impact could be great for health and well-being. Planning policy is the starting point for creating healthy places to live, and engagement with the planning process can benefit healthcare services.

This work takes time. LDPs are long term, and replacing them takes years!

Partnerships and relationship building is crucial. Planners and health professionals can speak different languages, so they need to learn from each other. Regular communication, regular meetings, training and sharing of information all help.

For further Information please contact [cheryl.williams9@wales.nhs.uk](mailto:cheryl.williams9@wales.nhs.uk)

## Policy

# Built Environments And Child Health in Wales and AuStralia (BEACHES)

Gareth Stratton: Professor. ASTEM Research Centre. Swansea University. UK

Lucy Griffiths, Richard Fry: Professor Swansea University Medical School, Swansea, UK

Harriet Barker BSc ASTEM Research Centre. Swansea University. UK

Dora Poulidou PhD, Amy Mizen PhD, Joanne Davies PhD Swansea University Medical School, Swansea, UK

Hayley Christian: Associate Professor Telethon Kids Institute. University of Western Australia.

Alan Watkins: Professor, Rowena Bailey PhD, Rebecca Pedrick- Case PhD, Ronan Lyons: Professor Swansea University Medical School, Swansea, UK

Overweight and obesity remain a global issue for public health. In Wales, 25% of 4-5year olds are overweight and 13% obese with an upward trends in unhealthy weight since 2014/15 as well as a increasing deprivation gradient. Data from the Swanlinx and HAPPEN projects (n=3327; Tyler, 2019)) demonstrate that over a third of 9-11 year old children are overweight with significant differences evident between the upper and mid and lower WIMD quintiles. The built environment is key to healthy weight promotion, yet little is known about environments that foster healthy weight in children.

In response to this challenge, we have teamed up with academics in the Telethon Kids Institute in Western Australia to seek insight into built environment fac-

tors that foster healthy weight during childhood. The MRC (UK), and NHMRC (Australia) funded BEACHES project aims to provide high quality evidence of aspects of the built environment which can be modified to reduce the negative impact on children's physical activity, eating behaviours and weight status.

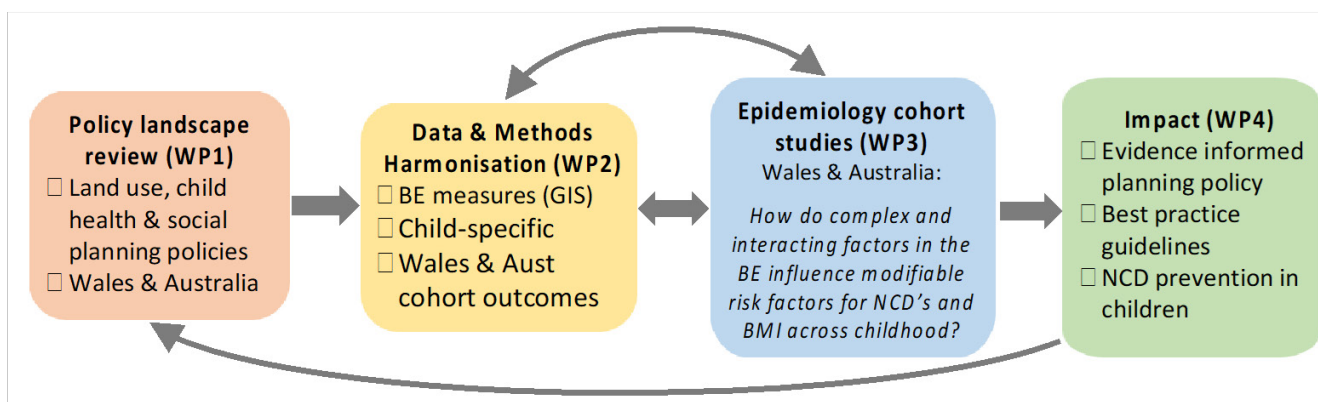
Both Wales and Western Australia have extensive routine data and these are being used to integrate built environment and children's weight measures over a 10 year period. The BEACHES project has 5 main objectives that will be addressed in 4 packages of work (fig 1) (Pedrick-Case et al. 2022).

### Objectives:

To develop a comprehensive Geographic Information

Systems (GIS) model of the child-specific built environment (BE) using standardised methods for the United Kingdom and Australia.

To link the standardised GIS models of the BE to e-cohort and standard cohort data for children in Wales and Australia. To determine the direct and indirect (mediating) relationships between the BE and a) modifiable risk factors for non-communicable diseases (NCDs) (physical activity, sedentary time, diet) and b) obesity To identify how relationships between the BE and these NCD risk factors vary by socio-economic position and geographical location (Wales and Australia) 5. To produce evidence which policy makers can use to modify the BE to reduce childhood obesity and NCDs.



**Figure 1: BEACHES Work Packages**

## Exemplar Research Activity

**WP1:** We have assessed the walkability of the built environment using the active living environments (ALE) index for 2017-2018 and found that scores were higher in urban compared to rural areas (Pouliou et al 2023). We have also engaged adult stakeholders and children in an integrated workshop using appreciative inquiry approaches to generate a “perfect policy” for a built environment that fosters children’s healthy weight, noting that current policy in Wales focus is on adults.

**WP2:** Data methods and harmonisation between the Wales and Australia studies have been developed. These are based on the following hypothesis: Certain modifiable elements of the built environment will promote physical activity and healthy diet. Whereas elements of measures of the built environment, ambient greenness, vegetation indices have been developed in previous work (Geary et al, 2023). We will quantify the following as important measures of the BE for children: garden size, viewable greenspace from household location, proportion of greenspace in LSOA, Distance to nearest park, walkability of home neighbourhood, count of greenspaces within 800m of home location, distance to nearest facility where physical activity can happen,

outdoor playpark within 5 minute walk of household location, footpath density in a space, other facilities.

**WP3:** We have also accessed de-identified children’s GP-BMI data between 2011 to 2019 (n=246,817) CMP-BMI measures for 222,772 in the SAIL databank. Our intention was to produce a second measurement point for children to add to the CMP data at school entry. We found the the GP measured data was biased and not representative and strongly recommended that Wales invests in a second measurement if systematic insight is to be derived on secular and longitudinal changes in childrens weight status.

Further work on Residential mobility amongst children and young people in Wales:

**Future work:** A longitudinal study using linked administrative records will be completed after bringing together metrics from work package 2 and 3 to further understand the interaction between the BE and children’s weight status over time.

Further information: [Data Insight: Exploring the complex relationship between legislation, policies and research: Built Environments And Child Health in WalEs and AuStralia \(BEACHES\) - ADR UK](#)

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## Research

# A Healthy Connection to Nature

Karen Clarke, Lead Specialist Adviser Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills, Natural Resources Wales

According to [Professor Miles Richardson](#), we are all born already perfectly connected to nature, the home of our evolution and our existence.

Extensive research into the biophilia hypothesis, highlights human affinity with the natural world. However, across the globe, we have created societies that insidiously reduce that innate connection during a lifetime. To ensure a healthy future, it is understood that we must correct our declining relationship with nature. Children and young people are feeling increasingly overwhelmed as they face a future of global warming and biodiversity loss, leading to a mental health crisis. With 'climate change' chosen as the Children's Word of 2023 by Oxford University Press, our children are in dire need of hope that their future will see nature thriving. Inspiring current and future generations to be optimistic and confident that nature and people can thrive together, forging a strong and positive connection to nature is achievable.

Supporting our children to spend time in nature with repeated engagement, are key elements in establishing and sustaining their connection to nature. So, what is connection to nature and how do we support it?

Connection with nature is the extent to which individuals include nature as part of their identity.

There are three recognised components to the nature connect-

edness construct: The **emotional component** is established through first-hand experiences of being in nature. The **cognitive component** sees us develop an understanding of the natural world and its multiple benefits, understanding our own impact, and developing a personal position on managing our natural resources. The **behavioural component** is an individual's commitment to protect the natural environment.

As Welsh Government's principle advisor on managing the natural environment, Natural Resources Wales (NRW) strives to influence people's willingness to develop pro-environmental, pro-climate, pro-health behaviours to support adapting to the climate and nature emergencies. We recognise that there is a gap between values and actions, which can be reduced through a deeper connection to nature. Insights from research such as [Otto & Picini 2017](#), indicate the importance of individual's connection to nature as a motivating force in behaviour change.

Evidence on the importance and multiple benefits of connecting to nature for people's health, well-being, education, lifestyle, community, and economy, is building. Low levels of connection to nature leave us with little attachment, and consequently we may not notice biodiversity loss. Deepening our connection to nature induces greater engagement and motivation to act to address the climate and nature emergencies directly or indirectly at a local, national or

global level.

NRW has developed a [Natural Progression](#) model that seeks to help everyone in Wales to develop a sustained connection to nature. Find out more on our [What's your connection to nature like](#) webpage.

We support the education and health sectors with a comprehensive training programme and range of resources to encourage educators to embrace outdoor, climate and nature pedagogy and take their learners outside for hands on memorable learning experiences, and to encourage health professionals to prescribe nature. People and nature *can* thrive together.

**Learning in, learning about, and learning for the natural environment.**

Please contact: [education@naturalresourceswales.gov.uk](mailto:education@naturalresourceswales.gov.uk) or go to <https://natural-resources.wales/learning>

## Practice

# Healthy minds, healthy lives, healthy relationships

Sian Richards, Spectrum Project Team Leader, Stori



Stori is a social housing association that provides support to people in crisis including survivors of domestic abuse, those experiencing mental health issues, and homelessness through housing support, training, and the Spectrum Project.

The Spectrum Project is one of Welsh Government's projects in tackling Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse, and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) by raising awareness on domestic violence and associated issues in primary and secondary schools across Wales. The project delivers lessons to pupils, teachers, governors, and/or parents on the importance of safe, equal, and healthy relationships which empowers them to make positive personal choices.

These sessions aim to prevent the prevalence of VAWDASV by providing children, young people, and adults with information, advice, guidance, and tools in identifying, understanding, and avoiding unhealthy and destructive relationships. The project uses the whole school approach, aiming to support children and young people's mental and physical health.

The content and resources are written and delivered by qualified and experienced teachers. The lessons are age appropriate, using teaching methods apt for sensitive topics relevant for pupils aged 3-16 years old.

They are cross curricular, bilingual, and designed to be thought provoking and promote discussion not disclosures. Every session concludes with information on where and how to access help.

Utilising a whole school approach, the Project also delivers training for all school staff and governors on:

- Raising awareness of domestic abuse

- Understanding the effects of domestic abuse on a child

- Supporting a child who has witnessed domestic abuse.

- Similarly, we provide parent information sessions on the importance of the project, information on lessons taught, and impact of lessons to pupils.

The project is evaluated annually by the University of Wales, Trinity St David, who conducts a Social Impact Evaluation by reviewing the reach of the project, interviewing a selection of staff that have been present during sessions and running focus group discussions with children and young people who have taken part in the sessions.

Recent evaluation shows that the Spectrum Project continues to provide a valuable service across Wales to schools and teachers. The project can demonstrate outputs, positive outcomes and potential impacts on the broader community / society thus positively supporting the outcomes of the Welsh Government's VAWDASV (WG, 2015) National Strategy and drive to tackle VAWDASV.

"Thank you for your dedication

and commitment to providing an outstanding RSE lesson. We value the partnership we have with educators like you, and we are excited about the prospect of working together again in the future." -- Teacher

The Spectrum project ensures that all children and young people in Wales recognise abuse and know where to get help by supporting schools deliver elements of the Health and Well-being curriculum, and assist with safeguarding. In the context of relationship education, the project helps pupils to build confidence, resilience and to become mentally healthy, which in turn will increase academic performance.

The project works alongside other school partners and initiatives, such as the healthy school scheme, the rights of the child and the school beat programme.

## Practice

## MMR/measles resources

Vaccine Preventable Disease Programme (VPDP), Public Health Wales

There are cases of measles in Wales. We are asking for everyone to be aware of the signs and symptoms of measles and to know how to respond if measles is suspected. Measles is highly contagious and can be serious. Two doses of the MMR vaccine are over 95% effective at preventing measles.

We have developed posters, leaflets and other resources to support healthcare professionals and the public. Key messages and a summary of resources can be found in our [MMR toolkit for primary care](#)

See our public website here: [phw.nhs.wales/MMRvaccine](http://phw.nhs.wales/MMRvaccine) and our website for healthcare professionals here: [phw.nhs.wales/mmr](http://phw.nhs.wales/mmr)

Free resources can be ordered here: [phw.nhs.wales/health-information-resources](http://phw.nhs.wales/health-information-resources)

### MMR and measles facts

Cases of measles have increased across the UK and uptake of the MMR vaccine is declining.

- Uptake of the MMR vaccine is declining in Wales. Coverage of 2 doses of MMR in children reaching 5 years of age is 89.3%. Achieving 95% uptake or greater is recommended for countries aiming at measles elimination.
- Unprotected staff who are exposed to measles without PPE may require a 21-day work exclusion.

### MMR Vaccination

- **NHS Routine Childhood Immunisation Programme**

Two doses of the MMR vaccine are offered free to all children before they start school at:

- **12-13 months, and**
- **3 years and 4 months.**

The MMR vaccine should not be given to people who are immunosuppressed or who are pregnant.

This is even more reason to ensure that everyone who is eligible has received both MMR doses, to protect those who cannot have the MMR vaccine.

More information about the MMR vaccine and eligibility is available at [phw.nhs.wales/MMRvaccine](http://phw.nhs.wales/MMRvaccine)

A schedule showing which vaccinations are routinely offered in Wales is available from [phw.nhs.wales/CompleteSchedule](http://phw.nhs.wales/CompleteSchedule)



- Measles is a highly infectious illness. It is contagious before symptoms start. Close to 100% of people not vaccinated against measles will catch measles if exposed to the measles virus.
- It can cause serious illness including pneumonia, encephalitis and even death.

## Practice

## Public Health Wales investigates ways to reduce Carbon Emissions from Microbiology Labs

Tracy Evans, Senior Sustainable Development Officer, Health and Sustainability Hub, Public Health Wales

Public Health Wales (PHW), in conjunction with Revolution-ZERO, has today published a report which highlights the potential to reduce carbon emissions from microbiology laboratories by investigating ways to reduce single-use plastics.

[This report](#) not only demonstrates PHW's commitment to environmental sustainability but also highlights the pivotal role that small-scale actions can play in mitigating our collective impact on climate change. The endeavour comes in response to a concerning trend over the past decade, where microbiology labs have increasingly relied on single-use plastic items due to evolving work practices, material availability, and stringent health and safety standards. In 2014 alone, research laboratories worldwide generated a staggering 5.5 million tonnes of plastic waste, much of which goes unrecycled due to contamination risks.

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 also exacerbated this issue, leading to a significant surge in single-use plastics and personal protective equipment, thereby increasing emissions and waste within laboratory settings.

Securing funding from the Welsh Government's Health and Social Care Climate Emergency Fund, PHW joined forces with external partners, including Revolution-ZERO, the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP), and Eunosia, to examine this pressing challenge. While the project primarily focused on PHW labora-

tories, its findings and solutions hold promise for replication across the broader healthcare and science sectors.

Kelly Ward, Interim Deputy Head of Operations at Public Health Wales, remarked, "A number of actions have been identified as a result of the project where changes have and could be made to reduce carbon emissions."

Ben Davies, Business Support Manager of the Microbiology Division, echoed this sentiment, emphasising the importance of sustainable practices in laboratory operations, "Key initiatives highlighted in the project include the establishment of a sustainable lab group, adoption of biodegradable alternatives such as cocktail sticks, and engagement with potential suppliers of sustainable products and services. Additionally, Life Cycle Assessments conducted as part of the project identified potential significant emission savings from various scenarios, including reducing sample bags/packaging and recycling pipette tip boxes.

The report identifies the top 16 single-use plastic materials and the highest carbon impact items used in the microbiology labs. The recommendations, endorsed by PHW's Climate Change Programme Board, include establishing a specific procurement task group, reducing paper usage, and focusing on the highest carbon impact single-use plastic items. Notably, several recommendations have already been implemented, including small trials for recycling plastic pipette tip boxes and utilising sustainable

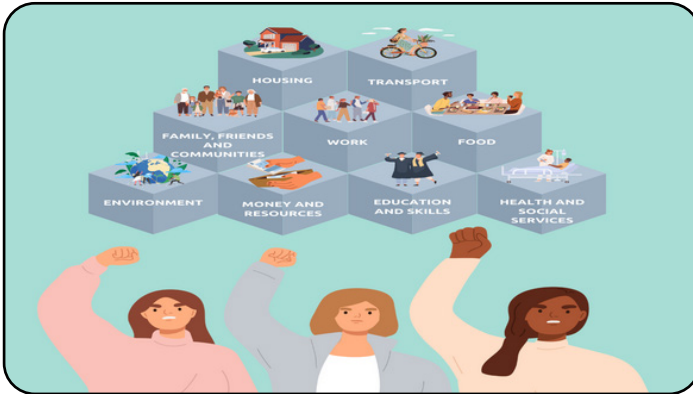
spreading sticks.

Nevertheless, the transition away from single-use plastics presents significant challenges, including navigating existing procurement frameworks and ensuring seamless service delivery. However, the enthusiasm and commitment demonstrated by microbiology staff emphasises the collective determination to champion sustainability within laboratory settings.

This collaboration between Public Health Wales and Revolution-ZERO marks a significant step forward in addressing the challenges of single-use plastics in microbiology labs. By harnessing innovation and fostering collaboration, this project is an excellent example of a proactive approach to reducing environmental impact and advancing sustainable practices in healthcare settings.



# Videos



## Building blocks for gender equity: Strategies for a prosperous future for women in Wales

This webinar explored the links between gender and the wider determinants of health and discussed the role of gender-inclusive policies in shaping equitable economies and health systems. It was an opportunity to look at the prevailing gender inequalities which impact health beyond health services.

[Watch](#)



## A participatory systems mapping approach to exploring education achievement in Wales – a reflection on theory and practice

This webinar gave an overview of the Wider Determinants of Health Unit's work in relation to education as a determinant of health

[Watch](#)



## Spatial planning, public health and health service policies: opportunities for improving health and addressing inequalities

This event focused on changes in the planning policy agenda, public health and healthcare services' involvement in influencing the use of Section 106 monies, policies facilitating healthy food environments and an update of the Welsh Government Health Impact Assessment (HIA) Regulations. Relevant projects and case studies were presented.

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# News & Resources



[Public Health Wales Launches Dedicated Workstream to Maximise Impact of School Food on Child Health](#)

25-04-2024



[Measles, Mumps and Rubella \(MMR\) – Information for health professionals](#)

24-04-2024



[Tackle dependency, visibility, and availability to address rapid rise in youth vaping, say public health experts](#)

18-04-2024

[All News](#)

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[Vaping amongst Children and Young People in Wales: Incident Response Group Incident Report](#)

Public Health Wales

[WHO global report on trends in prevalence of tobacco use 2000–2030](#)

World Health Organization

[All Resources](#)

# Next Issue

## EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES - PLACE-BASED APPROACHES TO IMPROVE HEALTH AND REDUCE INEQUALITIES



Taking a place-based approach to improving health and reducing inequalities can give us a better understanding of how to coordinate actions and investments to improve the quality of life for communities.

Health inequalities arise because of the conditions in which we are born, grow, live, work and age. These conditions influence our opportunities for good health, and how we think, feel and act, and this shapes our mental health, physical health and wellbeing.

By taking a joined up, place-based approach we can improve the conditions of communities which will support people to live healthier lives in a community that encourages them to flourish.

For our next e-bulletin we would welcome articles which cover national, regional or local initiatives, policies or programmes using a place-based approach in Wales.

Our article submission form will provide you with further information on word count, layout of your article and guidance for images.

Please send articles to [publichealth.network@wales.nhs.uk](mailto:publichealth.network@wales.nhs.uk) by 16 May 2024.

[Contribute](#)