



# **ENHANCING MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING FOR BABIES, CHILDREN, AND YOUNG PEOPLE**





# Welcome

**G**ood mental health and emotional wellbeing of babies, children, and young people is crucial for their development, happiness, and success in life. Early intervention, nurturing relationships, and support systems play a vital role in fostering resilience and providing children with the foundation for healthy mental wellbeing. By investing in mental health from the start, we lay the groundwork for a brighter, healthier future for our children and young people. Together, we can create a society where mental health and wellbeing is prioritised for every generation.

This e-bulletin includes a range of projects and initiatives focused on enhancing mental health and wellbeing support for younger generations across Wales.

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## Building Strong Foundations: Enhancing Mental Health and Wellbeing for Babies, Children and Young People

### Public Health Network Cymru

At the request of our members, Public Health Network Cymru organised two in-person conferences held in February and March. Both events focused on the mental health and wellbeing of babies, children and young people, with one held in South Wales on 20<sup>th</sup> February 2025 and the other held in North Wales on the 26<sup>th</sup> March 2025.

The conference aligned with the PHNC objectives of sharing knowledge, facilitating the developments of solutions and approaches and connecting members and building a community. The day followed a structure of policy, research and practice and included an ‘open space’ element which enables conversations with peers to discuss the challenges you face

and allows you to share your experiences and encourage cross sector collaboration to find solutions.

Evaluation of both events will be shared in the coming weeks however we have included some initial feedback here.

*“A great atmosphere was created, very welcoming and collaborative” (South Wales delegate)*

*“I liked the network opportunity, discussions, breadth of topics” (South Wales delegate)*

*“Really interesting. Very informative speakers and enjoyed the open conversation workshops. Face to face opportunities like today are extremely valuable” (North*

*Wales delegate)*

*“Such good learning opportunities as well as networking with other mental health professionals” (North Wales delegate)*

*“Good engaging speakers” (South Wales delegate)*

*“A great event with some really inspiring speakers that are clearly passionate about their work” (North Wales delegate)*

The recordings and presentations from both events can be found on our [website](#).





## Practice

# The best start in life; Combining baby's mental health and well being with language development

**Marion Mayhead,**

Lead Officer Welsh for Children, West  
Wales Welsh for Children

How can new parents ensure they give their babies the best start in life? Many focus on finances, but what use is wealth without stable mental health, the ability to create and maintain lasting relationships, resilience and confidence to see us through life's challenges?

These go hand in hand with language development. It's essential children can express themselves, communicate and interact with others, as well as learn and develop themselves and their relationship with others and the world around them. The



free Baby Massage and Yoga groups provided by Cymraeg i Blant, offer the perfect support for new families in starting baby on the right path. There's a warm welcome to non-Welsh Families and fluent Welsh speakers alike.

Cymraeg i Blant is a project run by the Mudiad Meithrin – the Welsh medium early year's specialist – and part of the Welsh Government's 2050 'Million Welsh Speakers Strategy'. We are passionate about ensuring every child has the chance to play, learn and grow through the medium of Welsh. It's well documented

that a sense of belonging is vitally important to the mental health of children and young people. The ability to participate fully in local social, sport and cultural events as well as school life, is ensured when children can chat, make friends and have fun through the medium of Welsh. What better way to start this process enjoying simple songs in fun relaxed baby groups?

During a 5 week course of baby massage, parents and babies are able to build on the all-important 1-1 bonding process. Cymraeg i Blant officers encourage constant

parent-baby eye contact whilst demonstrating massage moves and singing simple, Welsh songs which both lull baby and introduce language patterns. Massage is known to release oxytocin, further helping to relax both parent and baby and strengthen the attachment.

Families are encouraged to progress from massage to baby yoga which reinforces the bonding process as well as offering the chance to learn new songs and expressions that can be used with little one at home.

Some moves involve triggering the 'moro' or 'startle' reflex followed by reassuring cuddles and loving expressions that from the very start help baby learn about emotional strength, resilience and help them gain confidence. 'Things can go wrong but it's alright'.

Other moves trigger the calming reflex which, combined with hearing mum or dad sing simple rhymes, help baby relax and associate song and language with positive feelings.

Allowing time in the sessions to focus on oneself and on one another provides a simple introduction to both mindfulness and relationship building. We are giving babies a 'toolkit' to help ensure positive mental health in the

future and at the core of this is language and song.

Post-natal depression, which can affect both mums and dads, can have lasting effects on all family members. Regular feedback from questionnaires and case studies have shown that our sessions have wide ranging benefits for families in terms of mental health as well as language learning and development and offer a vital opportunity for new parents to make friends.

For more information about Cymraeg i Blant services and examples of case studies use:  
Cymraeg i Blant : Cymraeg for kids  
[www.llyw.cymru/](http://www.llyw.cymru/)  
CymraegiBlant  
[www.meithrin.cymru/cymraegiblant](http://www.meithrin.cymru/cymraegiblant)



# PLANT YNG NGHYMURU CHILDREN IN WALES

## Policy & Commentary

### Working in partnership to ensure Young Voices are heard: Advancing Children’s Rights and Access to Mental Health Services

Rachel Beddoe,

Research & Policy Information Officer,  
Children in Wales

Children’s rights are set out to protect the wellbeing of babies, children, and young people and as such are interconnected to mental health. The UNCRC outlines various rights that ensure children’s mental health and emotional development is supported and protected. Every child has the right to be protected from harm, to access health services, protection in crisis situations and the right to participate and express their views on matters that affect them. Mental health challenges in childhood can affect a child’s emotional wellbeing, as well as their social relationships and academic performance. Addressing mental health as a key component of children’s

rights enables children to thrive emotional and socially, setting a foundation for a healthier future. By integrating mental health considerations into children’s rights frameworks, we can build communities that serve to protect children from harm and empower them to lead healthy, fulfilling lives. In Wales, poor mental health is affecting a growing number of children and young people, with the latest report from the School Health Research Network (SHRN) showing 24% of young people have experienced high levels of mental health symptoms<sup>1</sup>. As mental health challenges for babies, children and young people continue to rise, the

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need for a comprehensive, proactive and accessible strategy is more urgent than ever. The Welsh Government’s draft Mental Health Strategy marks a pivotal moment in how Wales approaches mental health care, especially for the youngest and more vulnerable citizens. Embedding children’s rights into the strategic approach to addressing mental health can work towards building an inclusive, supportive, and effective system that caters to the diverse needs of all babies, children and young people in Wales. Children and young people have a right to express their views on issues that are important to them. Giving them a voice in decisions that



may impact their emotional and psychological wellbeing is important. Through our work, children and young people tell us that prevention, early intervention and interventions at different stages is important to them. Therefore, a focus on prevention and a holistic approach is crucial to supporting their needs. Integrating mental health support into every aspect of a child's life can offer a comprehensive approach to addressing mental health challenges. Actively involving babies, children and young people in shaping the development of services can ensure their rights are upheld and services meet their unique and evolving needs. Services should be easily accessible

and culturally competent, appropriate, and fully inclusive to meet the needs of a diverse young population in Wales. Creating a supportive environment where babies, children, and young people can thrive emotionally and mentally begins by upholding children's rights. With the onset of the Welsh Government's Mental Health Strategy, Children in Wales alongside colleagues in the Third Sector have been exploring the potential of establishing a network which aims to promote the rights of babies, children and young people across Wales. The network will provide a forum to amplify their concerns and ensure their voice is at the heart of decisions on service

provision for mental health support. If you would like more information about the children and young people's mental health network, please contact Rachel Beddoe, Research and Policy Information Officer, [rachel.beddoe@childreninwales.org.uk](mailto:rachel.beddoe@childreninwales.org.uk). [Nearly a quarter of young people in Wales are reporting very high levels of mental health symptoms following the pandemic - News - Cardiff University](#) (cited 08.01.25)



## Practice

# Babi Actif for Happier Carers and Babies

**Jeanette Wooden,**

Babi Actif Project Coordinator,  
Snowdonia-Active

The Babi Actif project helps parents/carers to be active outdoors with their babies during baby's first 1000 days (conception to age 2). What happens during this time lays the foundation for future development, offering a unique window of opportunity to build healthier, happier children and to improve their life chances. Babies' growing brains are shaped by their experiences, particularly interactions they have with parents and other caregivers. By encouraging participation in outdoor activities, Babi Actif aims to increase habitual physical activity for both adults and babies, to aid babies' development and ensure long term wellbeing

benefits for the whole family.

Babi Actif has been running since 2019, initially funded through Welsh Government. Its success in the first 4 years of delivery has led to the latest funding award of £300k from The National Lottery, enabling delivery for 3 counties (Gwynedd, Anglesey and Conwy) over the next 3 years; but total funding to date of £1.3 million has enabled provision across all 6 counties of North Wales, reaching over 5,000 participants, and delivering 1200 sessions with over 16,000 attendances.

The project has an evidence-based approach; evaluation carried out during the project's

pilot by Bangor University, shows that attending sessions improves parents' wellbeing, increasing the effectiveness of their parenting, ultimately benefiting the baby. This 'Mother / Baby Benefits Model' further suggests that enhanced health and mental wellbeing of mothers positively influences babies' health and wellbeing, through the direct and indirect pathways of carers' wellbeing, and babies' sensory stimulation and sleep. Participant surveys have revealed 83% of respondents believe their babies health and wellbeing has improved because of Babi Actif sessions.

Parents have reported that

attendance results in sustained healthy behaviour change. They have told us:

*“After [a session] I am more motivated throughout the rest of the week to get out and exercise. I find my baby sleeps so much better when I have been and this impacts the rest of the day, his naps, his eating and bedtime. Having a reason to get up and out on a Monday morning has often changed how I’ve been feeling. We give off endorphins to our babies and they are able to feel we are more relaxed after a walk in the fresh air.”*

*“It’s wonderful watching all our children develop an interest in their surroundings through these sessions, and notice how they are changing week by week.”*

Babi Actif’s intervention is unique, not only in outdoor delivery, but also in that carer and baby benefits are interlinked. The variety of sessions offered; pre and post-natal exercise, buggy walks, nature exploration, forest and sensory play, enables adults to improve physical and mental wellbeing, whilst also impacting positively on babies’ development. For babies, being outdoors can be an exciting sensory experience, leading to cognitive and motor

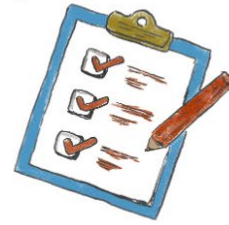
skills development. We aim not only to increase outdoor activity in the short term, but to develop sustainable habits for a lifetime of improved physical and mental health and wellbeing, not only for parents, but for their children.

For further information please contact [babiactif@snowdonia-active.com](mailto:babiactif@snowdonia-active.com)





# Welcome to EASE Group



## Research

### Adverse Childhood Experiences: A role for Welsh schools in breaking the intergenerational cycle

Flo Avery,

PhD Researcher, National Centre for Population Health and Wellbeing Research (NCPHWR), Swansea University

Sinead Brophy,

Professor in Health Data Research, National Centre for Population Health and Wellbeing Research (NCPHWR), Swansea University

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) occurring before the age of 18, such as witnessing domestic abuse or experiencing neglect, are common in Wales, and can have a negative effect on long-term health outcomes. Providing timely support to young people affected by potentially traumatic ACEs could mitigate against the impact of ACEs and protect the health and wellbeing of future generations.

A national survey of 16-18 year olds in Wales found that the majority of young people affected by ACEs do not receive enough help and many do not disclose their experiences to anyone (1).

There is a stigma around experiencing family problems and young people are aware of this, which affects their ability to disclose their problems and can also contribute to loneliness. There is a need for empathic, non-judgemental help which can support the whole family rather than contributing to stigma by blaming parents and caregivers. Survey responses indicated that young people would rather be spoken to about ACEs and 'kept in the loop' than have them treated as a taboo or sensitive subject. Schools and colleges were found to be acceptable sites of support. Support for young people on the school site is appropriate for those who

regularly attend school and experience school as safe.

Access to skilled support such as counsellors or psychologists is limited, with young people often facing long waiting lists and complex referral routes. However, a recent review has found an emerging evidence base for interventions delivered by non-clinicians for young people affected by trauma (2). One such intervention highlighted by the review is the [Emerging Adolescent Skills for Emotions \(EASE\) programme](#), authored by the World Health Organisation (WHO). This intervention is a group intervention for young people and their caregivers living

in adversity. EASE has been modified and optimized for a Welsh audience through a process of public involvement with Welsh youth. A feasibility pilot trial is currently underway with two Welsh primary schools in preparation for a national trial.

This project is important because it has made a crucial contribution to the evidence base for how best to support those affected by ACEs. This evidence is rooted in the Welsh context and champions the perspectives of young people in Wales with lived experience of ACEs. This project is also important for education policy in supporting schools and other educational professionals to effectively safeguard and promote the wellbeing of young people in their care.

Providing effective, non-stigmatising and empathic care to young people affected by ACEs can significantly reduce health problems in the long term. Schools and school staff have an important role to play in providing this and securing a happier, healthier future for children and young people.

To read more about our work, please follow the links to the articles below. We would welcome contact from young people and educational and policy professionals who are

interested in this project and future collaborations.

(1) Avery F, Kennedy N, James M, Jones H, Amos R, Bellis M, Hughes K, Brophy S. “Support for my dad would have benefited me because I was the one looking after him”: A qualitative analysis of the support needs of young people exposed to Adverse Childhood Experiences. PLoS One. 2025 Awaiting publication (Formally accepted)

(2) Avery F, James M, Cowley L, Griffiths L, Bellis M, Hughes K, Brophy S. A systematic review of non-clinician trauma-based interventions for school-age youth. PLoS One. 2024;19: e0293248. doi:10.1371/JOURNAL.PONE.0293248 <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240082755>

# THE GAME CHANGE PROJECT

## Practice

### Resilience is key

**Sian Roberts,**

Director, The Game Change Project

The Game Change Project supports young people who struggle in mainstream settings to reengage in education, employment, and community life.

The project offers three innovative programmes in animal care, mechanics, and land-based skills, each designed to build participants' self-esteem, social skills, and motivation. Through hands-on learning, mentorship, and community involvement, the project creates pathways for young people to thrive, reconnect with education, and explore career options.

At the heart of the organisation's success is a passionate team who believes in each young person's potential. Staff members' compassion and dedication provide crucial support,

transforming lives and leaving a lasting impact on the community they serve. 95% of participants report increased confidence following the programme, 94% have improved social skills and 92% are more motivated.

This is a sample of feedback from both a parent and a teacher's perspectives.

"We would like to thank The Game Change Project for all the time they have invested with our son, he has only been there a short time so far and the improvement we see with his moods and general attitude at home is phenomenal. School absolutely destroyed our son, constant bullying and picking at him by fellow pupils at high school pushed him to rock bottom where he wouldn't communicate with us, his parents, and we were very

concerned about his mental wellbeing. Since attending The Game Change Project, he is becoming more like his old self and communicating with us a lot more".

This is a comment from a teacher at Newtown High School.

"It has certainly helped attendance, motivation, and enthusiasm. Every one of our pupils attending find it really rewarding and they are full of energy and enthusiasm when they come back. The courses give them a sense of achievement and purpose, especially those who are academically challenged - the curriculum is difficult for them, and school is not always a positive place."

We have identified the following key aspects of our programmes which, when



practiced consistently, are transformative in terms of developing resilience in young people.

To instil confidence (a positive sense of self)

To improve social skills (feeling connected)

To provide motivation (a sense of purpose and achievement)

How we do this –

Group activities (6 people) which engage, spark interest, are fun, encourage teamwork and cooperation, give freedom to explore (within clear boundaries) No mobile phones.

Challenging activities with an element of perceived risk (stepping out of comfort zone, in a safe environment)

Impact –  
increased self-awareness, improved self-esteem, self-acceptance, self-belief, self-control, routine, improved physical and mental wellbeing, improved sleep, positive identity, social acceptance, looking forward and making plans for future, improved motivation/goal setting/school attendance/ career planning/ emotional resilience.

Resilience (the ability to cope with life's challenges) is fundamental to good mental health into adulthood. Projects which provide an anti-dote to the current culture of safetyism and encourage real life, quality social connections are crucial for our future generations.

For case studies and more information, please visit our website [www.thegamechangeproject.co.uk](http://www.thegamechangeproject.co.uk)



## Research & Practice

# Supporting Young People to Shape Mental Health Support in Gwent

**Halyna Soltys,**

Content and Communications Officer,  
ProMo Cymru

Imagine a world where young people are not just recipients of mental health services, but active architects of their own support systems. In Gwent, this vision is becoming a reality through the Mind Our Future (MoFG) project.

Developed thanks to National Lottery Community Fund funding and delivered by ProMo Cymru and Newport Mind, the project adopts a service design methodology. This began with researching the needs of young people (Discover), defining the key problems (Define), developing potential solutions (Develop), and implementing and testing these solutions (Deliver).

Employing 11 young people

from across Gwent as Peer Service Designers (PSDs), this youth-led approach ensures that the project's direction and outcomes are reflective of the needs and priorities of young people in the region.

The Discovery phase involved research with over 200 young people across Gwent. The analysis of this data was shared in the MoFG Discovery Report. This generated seven key insights, providing a comprehensive understanding of the existing support landscape and identifying critical gaps. This allows us to consider the root causes of the problems and develop solutions based on evidence. The PSDs defined key problems and co-created three

core solutions:

**Campaigning and Social Media:** MoFG is developing a dedicated Instagram account to raise awareness of support services available in Gwent. Reaching young people in the places they are and providing easy access to information and resources on the support landscape within Gwent, as well as reduce stigma surrounding accessing support.

**Training:** MoFG is developing training programs for professionals and young people, delivered by the PSDs. The professional training aims to support adults working with young people to be adept and confident when communicating with them about their mental health,

so they feel supported and listened to. The peer training equips young people with essential skills like active listening and signposting, enabling them to provide appropriate support to their peers.

**Engagement:** MoFG engages with stakeholders to improve existing systems, using service design principles. One example is working with the SPACE panel to improve the referral pathway. This collaboration ensures that young people's voices are heard within existing structures and that services are responsive to their needs. The PSDs' engagement with members of the Senedd further highlights the project's impact and reach.

MoFG is not just a project; it's a movement towards a more youth-centred and responsive mental health support system. By empowering young people to co-create solutions, MoFG is paving the way for a brighter future where every young person in Gwent has access to the support they need to thrive.

Beyond developing skills in research, evaluation, advocacy, and campaigning, the project provides unique opportunities for personal and professional growth. PSDs are actively involved in the service design process, gaining valuable experience in teamwork and project leadership. Residential opportunities have provided a

dedicated space for in-depth learning, connection, and peer support, fostering a strong sense of community. These experiences have significantly increased their confidence and helped to clarify their future aspirations, with many now in higher education and employment.



# AHEAD OF THE GAME

AN *Ara* PROJECT

## Practice

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

Dave Hewer,

Education and Prevention Team Lead, Ara Recovery for All.

#### Addressing Gambling Harms in Wales

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

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

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

#### Taking Action: Raising Awareness and Linking Locally

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

#### Our FREE programme includes:

**Workshops for Young People (11-24)** – Delivered in **schools, youth centres, and community settings**, raising awareness of gambling

harms, gaming risks, and informed decision-making. **Training for Youth-Facing Professionals** – Equipping **teachers, social workers, and youth workers** to **spot early warning signs and support young people**. **Support for Parents & Carers** – Helping families **understand gambling risks, how their own behaviour may impact young people, and how to have supportive conversations**. **Youth Portal (Launching April 2025!)** – An **online hub** reinforcing workshop learning, offering self-assessments and independent exploration of gambling harms.

**Events & Public Engagement – We attend Wellbeing Events, Freshers’ Fairs, and community activities, providing accessible, non-judgmental support.**

Since 2020, Ara has provided gambling awareness workshops across Wales and the South West to over **30000** young people and over **8000** youth facing professionals. If your **organisation or event** could benefit from our support, **get in touch!**

### **Making a Difference in Wales**

Our programme is:

**Engaging young people across Wales**, equipping them to **recognise gambling harms** and make informed choices.

**Providing direct support** to young people and families, ensuring those affected can **find age-appropriate services**.

**Increasing awareness among professionals**, enabling them to **identify risks and support young people**.

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

By embedding **education, prevention, and intervention** into **schools, communities, and**

**professional training**, we are actively **reducing gambling harms in Wales**.

**Let’s Work Together to Safeguard Young People: Book a FREE Workshop! Education is key – Raising awareness prevents gambling harms before they begin.**

**Early intervention saves lives – Recognising signs of harm early reduces long-term consequences.**

**Support is available – If you or someone you know needs help, visit [www.recovery4all.co.uk](http://www.recovery4all.co.uk) for immediate local support and counselling.**

**Find out more & book a FREE workshop:**

**North Wales:** hannahgunn@recovery4all.co.uk

**South Wales:** helenwebstermorgan@recovery4all.co.uk

**General enquiries:** youth@recovery4all.co.uk

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



## Practice

# How the Baby Friendly Initiative enhances babies' mental health

**Rachel Evans,**

Lead Midwife for Breastfeeding, Public Health Wales

What do you think of when you see “Baby Friendly Initiative”? If you are familiar with it, you might think “breastfeeding”, and this is certainly a key element. But did you know about the contribution Baby Friendly (BFI) can make to mental health and wellbeing of babies and children?

Nurturing, responsive relationships are the foundation of infant wellbeing and good mental health, and responsive feeding plays a significant part in the early weeks of life. Babies seek comfort and nurturing from breastfeeding along with nutrition and BFI has long supported this. The standards incorporate guidance on

responsive feeding for all babies, however they are fed, to support early relationships and optimal nutrition.

As well as the responsive elements of feeding, BFI has incorporated dedicated standards on close and loving relationship since 2012. Staff learn about the impact of responsive relationships on a baby's brain development, and the negative effect of stress and separation. Parents are educated to combat common myths, informing them that it is not possible to spoil their baby and advising what they can do to nurture their baby's growing brain.

The BFI standards impact the very start of a baby's life,

even before birth. Midwives discuss brain development with pregnant women and encourage them to connect with their growing bump, giving practical examples such as talking and singing to the baby and involving siblings too. This complements advice about noticing baby's movements to promote safety.

In the very first minutes and hours of life, the BFI standards promote skin to skin contact between baby and mother until after the first feed, allowing the baby to go through their natural transition to life outside the womb. Baby's instinctive cues to feed are observed and the responsive feeding relationship can begin. For babies and parents who

are unavoidably separated because of medical need, the neonatal standards recognise the importance of promoting loving relationships for this vulnerable group.

Promotion of close and loving relationships also runs through the community standards. Staff support parents to understand the emotional and social development of their baby and promote practical ways to support this. The needs of parents are recognised, with support for them to access local family services.

What about mothers' mental health and the effect this can have on the parent-baby relationship? Research shows that if a mother wants to breastfeed, meeting her feeding goals is protective of mental health, and where mental health is a challenge, breastfeeding is protective of the mother/ baby relationship. The BFI team have developed specific training for perinatal mental health teams to support optimum care in this area.

All maternity, neonatal and health visiting services in Wales are expected to progress towards BFI accreditation, with services currently at different stages along the journey. Infant feeding leads deliver regular staff training and updates. If you are

working to improve mental health and wellbeing for the very youngest and most vulnerable in your service, contact your infant feeding lead- they just might be able to help.





**Policy & Practice**

# Escaping Never Land: A whole system approach to help children grow up well

**Dr Helena Tallon,**

(Principal Clinical Psychologist) Central CAMHS Early Intervention, Prevention and Promotion Service (EIPPS) Besti Cadwaladr University Health Board

School Readiness is a hot topic and increasingly becoming a focus priority not just within education settings, but across all services with evidence showing a worldwide reduction in the number of children reaching required developmental competencies in the areas of social, emotional, cognitive and physical health, by the time they start school. Skills that are required to enable them to access education ready to learn and benefit from the early learning experience.

Within Denbighshire, part of the Central Area of Betsi Cadwaladr University Hospital, North Wales, the concerns in childhood

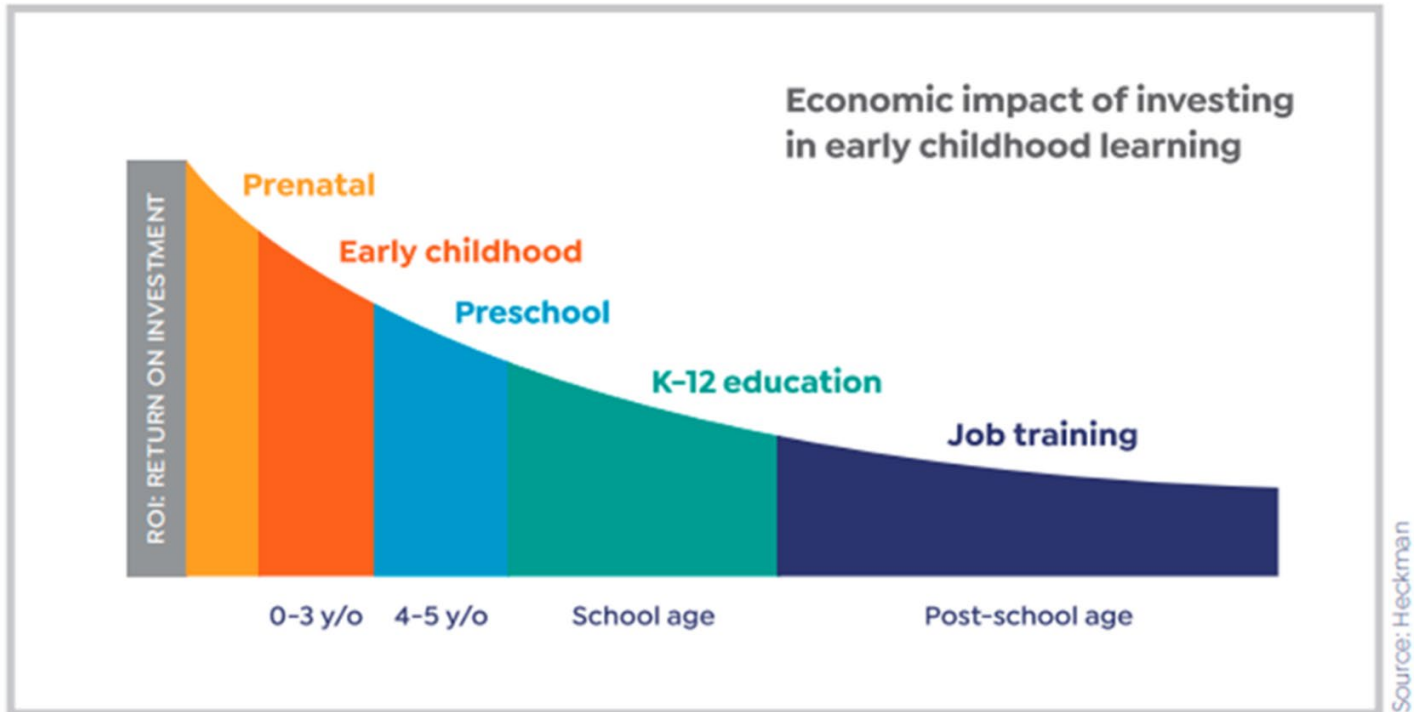
development echo those of other areas. Concerns include:

-

High levels of children presenting with anxiety, excessive worry, and other signs of emotional distress including separation anxiety and attendance issues.  
30% of children starting school unable to use the toilet independently.  
Children unable to complete tasks of daily living including dressing.  
Delayed language skills.  
Poor social communication and reciprocity skills, including an inability to make requests and seek interaction with others.  
Poorly developed play skills.

Problems with listening and concentration.  
Higher incidents of children presenting earlier with physical health difficulties including poor dental hygiene and hearing difficulties.

Children who start school 'ready' are more likely to achieve academic and lifelong success. Failure to intervene early to promote development will result in more costly and resource heavy interventions later as shown by Heckman Curve below.



Given the cross-service impact of Denbighshire’s ‘Never Land’ children, it was recognised that agencies needed to come together to find ways of intervening early with families, babies, infants and young children to allow them to grow up well, in the real world.

In order to address this, with a focus on the infant and early years (0-3 years), the Denbighshire Multi-Agency ‘School Readiness’ project was established. With cross agency membership from mental health, paediatrics, health visiting, education and nursery settings, as well as the local authority, flying start and early help services, the project aims to design a framework to describe what a ‘school ready’ child looks like. Priority

areas will be established and, alongside mapping of current services available, whole system pathways and interventions will be designed to pool resources to meet the shared aims of services, families and children. The project will collaborate with parent/carer reference panels, along with other stakeholders to ensure the framework, priorities, pathways and interventions are developed by the people of Denbighshire, for the people of Denbighshire.

The project has five drivers: -  
 Identification of need  
 Development of the 0-3 years, School Ready framework  
 Co-production  
 Measure impact  
 Stakeholder involvement

It is projected that the framework will be in its final version within the next few months and that baseline data assessing the school readiness of children, aged 3 years, starting school in September 2025, will be collected. Over the academic years the priority area pathways and interventions will come online. Impact data will be used to build on what works and learning will be shared with other areas.

For further information please contact: [helena.tallon@wales.nhs.uk](mailto:helena.tallon@wales.nhs.uk)



## Practice

# Now we can see a light ahead

Margaret O'Reilly,

Barnardo's Cymru

Where can parents turn when anxiety, bereavement, conflict or another mental health problem affects the family?

Barnardo's Cardiff Family Wellbeing Service is providing whole family support to help them cope, recover and thrive.

Mum Nora started noticing a change in her daughter Chloe when she returned to work after seven years at home raising her and her younger siblings. Chloe's attitude to school worsened and she was angry a lot of the time.

Things escalated when Chloe started pulling out her eyebrows and eyelashes. Nora said: "We were desperate, I had an eight-year-old daughter who was self-harming. I had no idea why and nowhere to

turn."

Then she saw a leaflet about Barnardo's, rang the number and got a call back straight away. "They recognised that I needed help too and suggested counselling with Cardiff Family Wellbeing.

The family work included an attachment-based intervention with both parents and their daughter that provided creative and enjoyable sessions aimed at strengthening relationships and nurturing connections between parents and child.

Nora said: "Those sessions made me realise the importance of dedicating time to spend with her. She had been used to a stay-at-home mum, now I was back in work

and with two younger children to care for too. I can look back now and see I was close to a breakdown.

"With Barnardo's support I've learnt to be a better parent. I shared what I learnt with my husband each week, and we've attended parenting sessions together, learning techniques to help us be more patient and more conscious of our words and actions. Now we can see a light ahead."

**'We are often the first people who ask parents what they need'**

When a child is referred to Barnardo's for mental health support in Cardiff it's not only the child who gets offered help, but their parents/carers and siblings too.

The charity which runs the Cardiff Family Wellbeing Service on behalf of Cardiff City Council recognises that if a child is struggling with life, it's often a reflection of challenges facing the whole family.

Liz Baker, Barnardo's Assistant Director, explained. "We look at the individual needs of each family member including parents and the family relationships and dynamics. That may involve us working with children and parents together or individually, but a systemic approach helps make sustainable change for the child."

"Parental mental health impacts on children, many parents are trying to do their best but finding it difficult because of their own needs. We are often the first people who say to them, 'But what about you, what do you need?'," said Liz.

Both parents and children are helped to develop skills so they can improve their emotional wellbeing. Each intervention is individually tailored and may include counselling, creative therapies or specific groups such as bereavement support.

The service also works jointly with Cardiff Parenting so that a family only has a single

assessment and doesn't have the trauma of repeating their story multiple times.

The service also follows the 'no wrong door' approach so that children get the right help at the right time, and those who need a different sort of help are supported to access it.

[cardifffamilywellbeing@barnardos.org.uk](mailto:cardifffamilywellbeing@barnardos.org.uk), telephone 02920 577074





**Practice**

## Working with families across Denbighshire to improve mental health and emotional wellbeing

**Rhian Jones,**

Team Manager, Barnardo's Denbighshire

To support families struggling with the impact of their mental health and emotional wellbeing struggles in Denbighshire. Barnardo's in partnership with Families First, was commissioned to work with children, young people and parents and carers to build their resilience around their mental health and emotional wellbeing across Denbighshire County. There are three separate services where children, young people and parents and carers are provided a package bespoke to their needs but also feeds into the wider family dynamic.

### **What support is available for children aged 5-10 years old?**

The Mental Health and

Wellbeing Child Service, named the Rainbow Loving Hands service by the children accessing the service, supports children to emotionally regulate, help with the feelings children have from parental separation, building confidence and self-esteem, help with feelings around living in poverty, resilience building into the future, neuro diversity and the feelings behind the challenging behaviour and feelings that come with being isolated and more...

### **What support is available for young people aged 11-25 years old?**

The Mental Health and Wellbeing Young Person Service, named the Resilient

Mind service by the young people accessing the service, supports young people to build confidence and self-esteem, improve feelings of anxiety, issues around school refusal/avoidance, negative impact of social media, relationship issues, transitions in life, resilience building, bullying, poverty and the impact on the young person, friendship issues, lack of opportunities associated with isolation, risks around criminality – knife crime and substance issues, neurodiversity and more...

### **What support is available for parents and carers aged 18 years and over?**

The Mental Health and Wellbeing Adult Service, named the Warm Mind

service by parents and carers accessing the service, support parents and carers with anxiety issues, build self-esteem and confidence, support around deprivation and finance issues, family relationships, isolation issues, domestic abuse and the impact and feelings, separating families, impact on mental health when using substances and supporting with the challenges of children with neurodiversity and more...

**How to access the services?**

We are part of Families First Services whereby a referral can be made online, via email or over the phone.

Online- [Families First: our support | Denbighshire County Council](#)

Email- [cfsgateway@denbighshire.gov.uk](mailto:cfsgateway@denbighshire.gov.uk)

Phone- 01824 712200

If you are open to Team Around the Family, please speak to your Coordinator who can refer directly to the service.



## Practice

# Bringing the KiVa school based antibullying programme to the UK

**Professor Judy Hutchings,**

Professor in Psychology, Bangor University

A recent paper, Bowes et al (2024), reports on a randomised controlled trial of the KiVa school based antibullying programme, delivered across four sites in the UK – Devon, Oxfordshire, Birmingham and North Wales. The trial included 11000 children aged 7 – 11 in 118 state primary schools. It found significant benefits for KiVa versus control schools after one year of implementation in terms of reduced victimisation, benefits to child empathy and reduced peer problems. The trial included schools with a wide range of levels of social disadvantage but analysis found no significant difference in intervention effect across this gradient. The implications of this finding are that the programme worked equally well in schools with higher levels of social disadvantage. A subsequent paper, (Hutchings

et al 2025), explored the mechanism of change and reported significant reductions in both bullying and support for bullying among the KiVa pupils. This trial takes on more significance following the publication of a paper (Hughes et al 2025) showing how levels of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) impact levels of bullying. The Hughes et al (2025) paper, based on national cross-sectional household survey in Wales of 1,868 adults aged 18+ the Hughes (2025) paper highlights the impact of ACEs on rates of bullying. The proportion reporting both having been bullied and lower school belonging increased with the ACEs count (0 ACEs 6%, 4+ ACEs 51%).

### **What is KiVa**

KiVa was developed, evaluated and broadly rolled out

across Finland with Finnish government funding. The government was concerned to improve children's mental well-being and over a ten-year period found no reductions in reported levels of bullying. Professor Salmivalli at Turku University had been researching bullying for some years and had developed what has come to be known as the "social architecture" model of bullying. This is based on the notion that all children play a part in either supporting or reducing bullying. The pupil roles identified in this model are the bully, children to join in with the bully but do not initiate, children who provide an audience for the bully but do not join in, pupils to behave as if it's not happening (silent approvers), pupils who defend victims and victims. Salmivalli's research showed that the rates of either

supporting or standing against bullying impact the levels of bullying within schools.

When the Finnish government decided to do something about school-based bullying they commissioned Turku university to develop a programme. This was developed for the Finnish comprehensive schools, pupils aged 7 to 15. It has universal components that include lessons, material for parents, posters and tabards to be worn at break times. The lessons which runs throughout the school year and teach children ways of making that classroom a happy and supportive place, how to identify emotions and how to recognise and stand against bullying. The international definition of bullying is taught to pupils and school staff. There are three components, the behavior is i) deliberate, ii) repeated, and iii) undertaken by a higher status or more powerful individual or individuals.

Alongside the universal approach for the whole school there is a scripted strategy for dealing with confirmed incidence of bullying that stopped bullying incidents completely in 75% of cases and significantly reduce it in a further 20% of cases.

Based on the results finish government funded a roll out to the whole of Finland and this was followed up for seven years and showed year on year reductions in rates of bullying.

KiVa was introduced in Wales in 2013 with a small trial of schools funded through a Welsh Government training grant for evidence-based programmes. Seventeen schools were trained and reported a significant reduction in bullying after one year based on pupil reports on the anonymous Olweus bullying survey undertaken by pupils every July.

Following this initial introduction more schools were trained and results from the first 41 schools again showed significant reductions in bullying after one year. These positive results enabled a successful grant application to the National Institute for Health Research that showed the significant results reported above.

Given the significant long-term impacts of bullying on pupils subsequent well being and the fact that trial showed beneficial effects regardless of school levels of disadvantage this programme appears to benefit children in school. Schools can offer support to vulnerable children including safety, friendship, trusted adult support, life skills and access to specialist services.

As the Hughes (2025) paper points out “schools are opportune settings for children who lack safety and support at home to recover from stress, develop resilience and access support”.

The implications of both the Bowes (2024) and Hutchings

(2025) papers are that there is a need to address school based bullying and that we must particularly ensure that schools with high proportions of socially disadvantaged pupils need the resources to support this work.

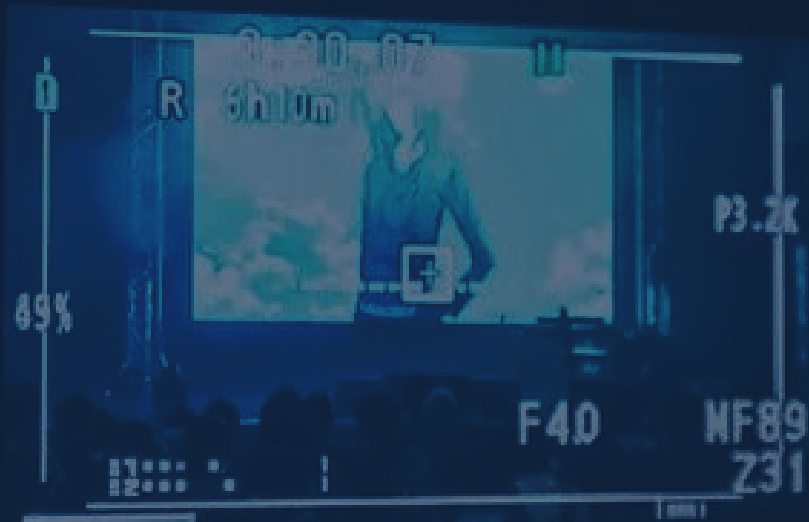
For more information about KiVa in the UK see [www.kivauk.org](http://www.kivauk.org)

## References

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- Hughes, K., Bellis, M.A., Ford, K. *et al.* Adverse childhood and school experiences: a retrospective cross-sectional study examining their associations with health-related behaviours and mental health. *BMC Public Health* 25, 672 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-025-21788-3>



# Videos



BARS

EVF DTL ZEBRA

LCD WFM

COUNTER-RESET/TC SE

FUNCTION SHTR/F



## Supporting postnatal weight management

We explore the need to develop the evidence base, discuss a behavioural science perspective and consider next steps for developing policy and practice to support postnatal health and wellbeing.

[Watch](#)



## Public Health Wales' International Public Health Forum

The International Health Forum promoted the experiences of colleagues across Public Health Wales, shared their learnings from engaging in international health activities and research and provided time to discuss opportunities for the future to engage in international partnerships working and networks.

[Watch](#)



## WHIASU@20

The landscape of Health Impact Assessment (HIA) has changed massively over the last 20 years, and the Wales Health Impact Assessment Support Unit (WHIASU) have been right at the heart of it since its founding in 2004.

[Watch](#)

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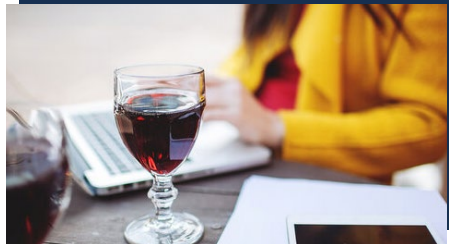
# News & Resources





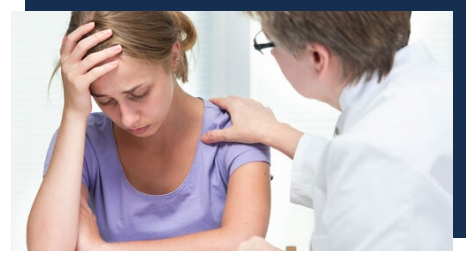
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18-03-2025



[Record high alcohol related deaths in Wales highlight urgent public health concerns](#)

12-03-2025



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11-03-2025

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## [Tackling the Inverse Care Law: Reducing health inequalities in Wales through General Practice and place-based partnerships](#)

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## Next Issue

# HEALTH PROMOTING SCHOOLS



A health promoting school is one that constantly strengthens its capacity as a healthy setting for living, learning and working (WHO).

The 'Healthy School' is one which takes responsibility for maintaining and promoting the health of all who 'learn, work, play and live' within it not only by formally teaching pupils about how to lead healthy lives but by enabling pupils and staff to take control over aspects of the school environment which influence their health.

It actively promotes, protects and embeds the physical, mental and social health and well-being of its community through positive action. This can be achieved by policy, strategic planning and staff development about its curriculum, ethos, physical environment and community relations.

For our upcoming e-bulletin we are inviting contributions from projects and initiatives focused on enhancing the health and wellbeing of children and young people within the school environment across Wales. These can be national, regional or local initiatives, policies or programmes.

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 17<sup>th</sup> April 2025.

**Contribute**