



## FAMILY ENGAGEMENT PROJECT

# BRIDGEND

## INTRODUCTION

StreetGames' Family Engagement Project (FEP) aims to engage with families who are inactive, isolated or who have challenging circumstances which may impact on their health and wellbeing. Funded by the Healthy and Active Fund (HAF), the FEP operates in 7 Local Authorities in South Wales.

In Bridgend, the project is focussing on vulnerable children, working with three different strands. These include children looked after, those who are differently-able and those who are young carers themselves. The target group has been chosen to complement the wider work of the social service and wellbeing directorate. These are children whose family lives can be challenging and have likely experienced high levels of trauma in their lives.

The project is led by staff from within the prevention and wellbeing service and involves a joined-up response, working with colleagues in social services, children's services and residential unit settings. It provides a wraparound service for the families of children who need support – including the alternative family unit for residential settings, where members of staff become a temporary family support system.



## PROJECT ACTIVITIES: ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES

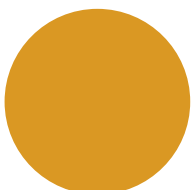
### YOUNG CARERS

During its response to the pandemic, Bridgend focussed much of its FEP time on Looked After Children (LAC). The project used a variety of sport, creative, recreational and physical activities, offering respite and support, often needing high staff to participant ratios due to the needs of families and children.

Since September 2021, the project team have put more resources into making progress on their planned work with young carers and young people who are differently able. Between September and December, the team undertook a scoping exercise, getting out and talking to young carers. The team is working with a group of 188 young carers across 9 secondary schools. ***"It's understanding what it's like to be a young carer, how we can help them, how can we impact on their physical and mental wellbeing"***.

**Access to opportunities:** One of the barriers for young carers is having the time and space to look after their own wellbeing and attend any activities. Looking after family members is the priority and there are many individual different issues that the young people have to overcome before they can access health and wellbeing provision. Young carers spoke about how sometimes teachers didn't understand or weren't aware of their circumstances and might get into trouble for being late or leaving early, forgetting PE kit and so on when the reality is that they are facing the challenge of having to get siblings ready for school and/or helping parents. The team will provide information to schools so they have an understanding and awareness of some of the difficulties that pupils might be facing.

One of the solutions has been establishing that the main chance for young carers to meet and participate during school hours when they haven't got caring responsibilities. The team is exploring the provision of activity sessions at Margam Park: ***'You are valued'*** days and providing windows of opportunity where young carers can come out of school.



**Hidden groups:** There can also be 'hidden' groups of young carers where parents don't want to officially recognise that their children are young carers over concerns about Local Authority personnel coming to their house and asking invasive questions. However, this can mean that families miss out on the statutory support that is available to them. The consultation has gathered feedback on how the young carers would choose to be active. This could be as a group, or being active with buddies, or active with their family and finding out about what different activities would appeal to the group. Working via third sector organisations, the team is also in contact with 26 young carers at primary schools.

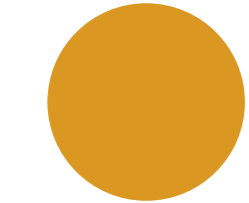


*"Between now and March we will be rolling out an activity menu that they've chosen to do, so I feel we're getting somewhere with young carers... we do feel it's important to make sure we provide opportunities for these young carers, but also make sure it is sustainable in the community and how we can, you know, not walk away, but set up a platform for their voice so they can lead whatever they want to do, and we will be able to support them doing it."*

#### LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN: FAMILY ENGAGEMENT REFERRAL

The majority of looked after children in the Local Authority have free access to leisure through Halo membership cards. Children looked after consist of a wide group, of those whose birth-parents have shared parental rights with the LA, as reunified families; those under Child Protection (CP) measures and Care and Support Plans (CASP); and those currently going through the court system, (PLO) to remove them from their birth family due to safeguarding. Foster families have HALO access along with care experience children and care leavers. With these groups being catered for by existing services, the FEP team have approached third sector organisations that work with children who are differently able or who are young adult carers and young carers, including large families where there are 6 to 8 in a household. The premise is for third sector partners to refer families either at the point of crisis or at the point where they feel that FEP could have a positive impact on family wellbeing through physical activity or just going to relax in the swimming pool. The team aims to organise Halo membership for the referrals.

To date, 18 families have been referred and the expectation is for around 23 in total to be on board by March 2022. The project team have identified an opportunity for families to connect together in their venues – something that hasn't been an area of focus for the service before.



*"One of the real big highlights to come forward is the need for informal sibling contact. Looked after children can be placed with different families or quite often we've got one child that will be within a residential setting and then the brother, sister is placed in different foster arrangements, sometimes within the county and sometimes outside of it as well. Whilst they have regular contact, that's very formalised. It's with a social worker in the room sat and monitoring what is being done. So we're looking at creating a space where they can come together and do activities and have that quality time as a family - a kick about with the football or using our hard courts where some are interested in basketball. Ultimately providing spaces for children, siblings to be able to come together and just have that kind of shared enjoyment - quality time without social workers sitting and assessing them in the corner of the room. That's one of the ways we're looking at taking it forward"*



#### YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE DIFFERENTLY ABLE

The third project strand that is being developed is a 16 plus youth club. While there are third sector organisations focussing on this group, the team have identified a gap in social opportunities for differently able young people aged 16 plus. "Sometimes, you know at 16 you don't want to be around your family, you may want to be around friends. So we have done a lot of work in relation to working with our local leisure centre provider to find the space... identifying the times, identifying the coaches and making sure we got a social room where maybe every month we could look at a dance or disco, exactly what you would do if you went to a youth club."

The aim is for the Prevention & Wellbeing Team to start the activities before transitioning and embedding them into a third sector organisation in order to create a sustainable model. The team are aware of students at Bridgend College who may want to attend and are linking with Weston House students and the college Active Wellbeing Officer to shape what older students want to do. The immediate challenge is gaining more of an understanding of how the group can be supported in a community setting, beyond their participation through education and their residential unit, along with the logistics of organising Welsh translation, coaches with appropriate qualifications and managing Covid-19 risks. "It's only very small, it's very new. But it's something that we're really passionate about and it is something that isn't available in Bridgend. It will finish off what we said we would do with FEP and providing respite and the residential unit as the family".



#### ENABLERS

**Partnership working:** The team take care to ensure they are not duplicating existing service provision and are complementing the work of other staff members rather than 'stepping on toes' with a clear focus on their role being to provide wellbeing and physical activity opportunities. The team feel they are in "a luxury position" in Bridgend as they sit in social services where supporting the intended FEP target groups is work that is already embedded in this directorate. The team work closely with a Young Carer Coordinator who does referrals and with partners like Bridgend Carers Centre, Action for Children, and by learning from and sharing good practice ideas with other local authorities including the Vale of Glamorgan, Ceredigion and Flintshire. The FEP work can afford to be very targeted and work with very vulnerable groups. **"One of the reasons we didn't go down the universal theme was because we have a team driving that element forward. The AYP (Active Young People) team operate activity bags/resources for households to do activities. We've got the youth clubs third sector Bridgend Matters network, so we were in a really luxury position where we've been able to fully concentrate on these themes, and really make a difference and bring the third sector organisations with us."**

**The right people: capabilities and skills:** Team members have had to navigate and understand how fostering services (placement and providers services), care experience team and residential settings are currently working in the organisation. This groundwork has given them the ability to participate in conversations around care packages or what a child needs and how the FEP can support them. This networking and advocacy role has taken some years to develop and requires some key skills and experience beyond sports development. Staff members have been headhunted to add new capacity and skills to the team in areas such as fostering, occupational therapy and working with differently able people. They can then be supported through sports development training to have an all-round skill set. This approach is therefore not something that can be replicated quickly in other local authorities without assessing the different range of skills required, and how the opportunities can be linked to existing services to create a holistic offer. **"The type of work we do going forward is less 'sports development' and a bit more social working."**

**Learning, insight and accountability:** The FEP project is included in internal reporting processes and progress updates are presented to Cabinet via Prevention and Wellbeing reviews. The team have presented information about the project to their Director to raise awareness and understanding of the work. The team are keen to use robust monitoring and evaluation to assess their progress and share impact: quality evidence will help get buy-in from senior leaders and demonstrate the value of the service, increasing the likelihood of it being funded long-term. The team will use the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMBS) with families at different points in the intervention. This will help show the evidence of distance travelled and the project's impact on the family or individual. **"Sport and physical activity will be used as a therapeutic provision and research will help us understand the difference that that is making. Anecdotally, we've seen that change in our own observations and see those differences in the children, but actually linking with a behaviour psychologist, being able to evaluate that and put something real down on paper shows the difference made."**



## SUSTAINABILITY AND NEXT STEPS

Some of the remaining budget will be used for training to address gaps and recruitment challenges that have emerged during the pandemic. Coaches and volunteers will be invested in over the next 6 months and the team will link with Duke of Edinburgh provision and Bridgend College to connect with students who are doing the social care qualifications as well as the 'normal' route of those on sports courses. This will add value to the kinds of work that the team can take forward.

Finding the right people and connecting with the right service areas and partners can take time and the team advise that resilience is required to keep chipping away to find the right advocates and champions. Bridgend's FEP provision has become a valued addition to the overall service and is targeting some new groups of vulnerable children and families in the Local Authority. This has meant that StreetGames funding from the HAF programme will not be needed beyond March 2022 and the provision will become embedded or 'mainstreamed' in the ongoing work of the organisation. Core funding for a key staff member has also been secured.

***"We're quite confident that it is embedded enough in the organisation and it's got enough weight behind it to take it forward...we're happy with the three years of funding that we've had, it has given us the head start we needed. We're passionate about driving it forward and will keep driving it forward long-term."***

