

**First Year Overview of Specialist Participation Service
2023 – 2024**



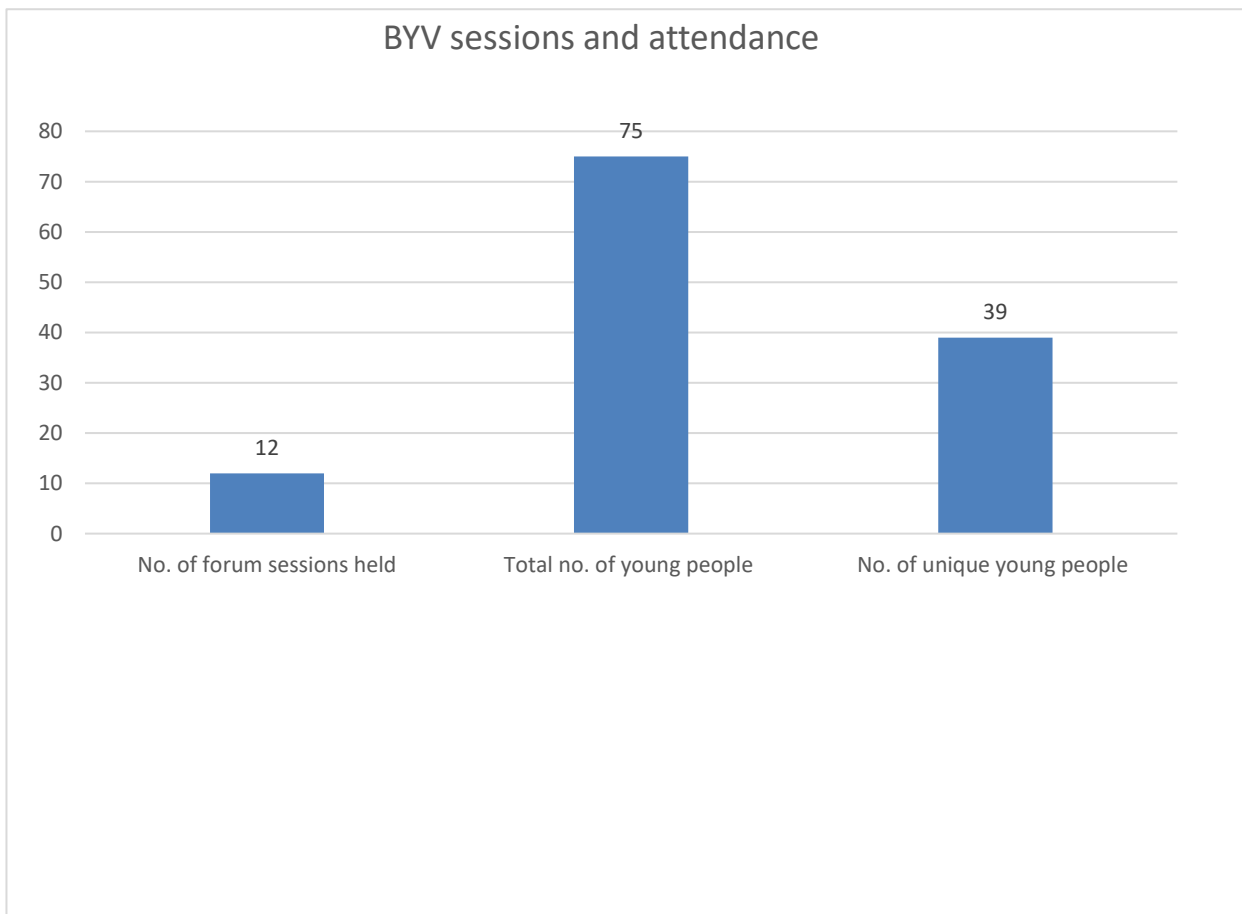
Scope

TGP Cymru is commissioned by Bridgend to deliver specialist participation support to gain the views of care experienced young people and care leavers on a range of themes identified by the Corporate Parenting Operational Group, Children’s Social Care, Bridgend’s independent advocacy provider and the forum members themselves.

Activity Overview

Between December 2022, and October 2023 12 participation sessions have been held with Bridgend care experienced young people. There are two more sessions scheduled before the end of the year.

The sessions have been attended by 75 young people overall. A total of 32 unique young people in attendance, 17 male, and 15 female.



Objectives/Achievements

The aim of the service is to establish a way to collectively gain the voice and experiences of our children and young people to inform how all children and young people could have a better experience from the care that is provided to them in the future.

Young people in sessions discussed a wide range of topics and subjects including: Education, Independent professional Advocacy (IPA), letterbox contact, letterbox parcel scheme, communication with social workers, rights and entitlements, fostering recruitment, CLA reviews, IRO's, accessible information, leaving care, housing, life story work, subject access requests, mental health support, corporate parenting, residential care, independent visitors, compliments and complaints, life skills checklist, contact/family time, appropriate language for those in and leaving care, behaviour, stereotypes, safeguarding, family, what makes a good worker, assumptions, placement moves, lack of information and importance of friends.

So far, achievements of the forum include:

The Naming of the Bridgend Youth Forum (Bridgend Youth Voice BYV)

The group worked with together to pick a name for their forum.

Bridgend Corporate Parenting Board logo

BYV met with another care experienced young person who is currently studying design to come up with a new logo design for the newly launched Bridgend Corporate Parenting Board.

Naming of new community home (Meadows View)

BYV used part of one session to pick the name for the new community home, recently opened in Bridgend.

Consultation on birthday cards instigated by Cllr Gebbie.

Young people were asked their views on birthday cards being sent to all care experienced young people and to give their opinions on the design of cards being sent. Young people also shared YPA's should ask individuals if they want to continue receiving cards post 18.

Consultation on complaints

Forum members were asked to share their opinions on current complaint and consultation literature. This was then shared with Dan B

Corporate Parenting Strategy Development

Forum members shared their views on what they felt should be incorporated in the CPB strategy.

Launch and Promise Event

Forum members led and facilitated the Launch event held in the Heronston Hotel in April and they were also consulted, and their words were shared before professionals made their promises at the promise event in March.

BYV forum members said the following about the promises:

"The promises were all good and are real and can be done"

“All achievable so no excuses”

“let’s see if the promises are kept and if not, we know we can challenge this and will happily raise in forum with Zoe”

Voice recording work For Childrens Rights animation

We are hoping to support the forum to develop a animation to be used by Bridgend on their CPB page.

Q & A with Claire Marchant

The forum had the opportunity to ask Claire Marchant questions about her role and any ideas they had on improving services.

Consultation on feedback forms for children and young people in foster placement

PO Bridgend Placements Team, consulted with them about feedback forms and what will be needed on new ones.

Fostering Campaign for Teenagers

BYV were supported to spend a day with young people’s poet Laureate Connor Allen, along with the Fostering Network and We are Cowshed where they took part in a workshop and came up with a unique poem reflecting their feelings about being care experienced. The plan is for the poem to be displayed publicly in Bridgend.

Supported Housing consultation

Some BYV forum regular members along with other young people known to the PA service took part in a session to explore what is needed in supported housing etc.

Consultation re; Achievement Awards

Forum members have been fed into plans for a celebration event for those in care and leaving care and ideas shared with CPO Steve.

What makes a good parent voice work

Forum members recorded what they felt makes a good parent as they felt professionals and carers had their say and they wanted to share their views also.

Young Person Interview Panel

Forum members have taken part in interview panels for various Social Care roles in BCBC.

What has worked well?

Despite some challenges in relation to engagement at the beginning of the period, we now have an established group of young people attending the forum, helped hugely by having HALO Bridgend as a permanent venue.

Group facilitators and relationship with BCBC

Zoe Morgan, the facilitator of the BYV for TGP Cymru, has an excellent and supportive relationship with Steve Berry, and they meet regularly to discuss the progress of the forum. It was decided that discussion topics would be chosen using a three-pronged approach. Topics are chosen by young people themselves, are chosen from themes arising from the independent advocacy service contract, also held by TGP Cymru and from BCBC themselves. This approach is supported by regular attendance to the forum by advocacy staff, including the advocacy team manager, and by BCBC via Steve Berry. We have also experienced positive engagement from some social work staff and personal advisors who have also assisted in some sessions.

This is what some BYV forum members said about their involvement in the forum:

“We are the experts and the ones in care or leaving care so should be fully involved.”

“I feel we are taken seriously and not just a tick box.... Zoe wouldn't let that happen anyway!!!”

“Other young people coming into care will be happy and reassured I think that children and young people have been fully involved and not just the adults sorting this stuff out”.

Information about the advocacy service is always available to young people in the group, and several have used or are currently using the service.

Zoe has recently taken on the role of independent visiting advocate for the two local authority community homes. Part of Zoe's role will be to share information about BYV with the young people in residence, and we are hopeful this will encourage more attendance in the forum and offer an even wider perspective of being care experienced in Bridgend.

Forum sessions and attendance

BYV forum members have commented they are happy with both the venue and the times of the sessions, and this is evidenced by improved attendance in recent months. The young people in attendance have also commented on feeling ownership of the group and a sense of identity as BYV forum. This has resulted in the establishment of trusting relationships between the young people and the forum facilitator who is also care experienced, and created a space in which they can have open, honest, and sometimes difficult conversations. All staff have enhanced DBS checks and have been able to respond appropriately when they have concerns. One child protection referral was made by following a disclosure by a forum member. Concerns are discussed fully with social workers and carers, with knowledge of the young person.

Attendance is also supported by BCBC by taxi transport etc.

Young people have responded well to incentives to be involved in some events, and we are pleased to be able to offer this, but we are also pleased that the group is well attended by established members without any monetary incentive to attend.

We are also pleased by the consistent membership of some young people who have had difficulty in engaging and remaining engaged with professionals and groups in the past.

Challenges

- **Getting a fully representative group of children and young people and ensuring any work that is completed is based on a wider collective voice.**
Although recent group attendance has improved, we have not been able to hold two separate sessions, for two different age groups as planned. We are hopeful recruitment of young people and promotion of the group will be supported by social services staff moving forward as despite information and future dates of forums via myself and the Corporate Parenting Officer we get very few new enquiries about new young people attending.
- **Unknown young people turning up on the day of forum.**
It's important that potential new group members are known the forum facilitator before they attend to ensure any issues, including safeguarding are known.
- **Large age range of forum members.**
There are occasions when having a mixed age group works well, however there are occasions when the range of ages within the group are difficult to manage because of the topics discussed etc. We have been unable to split the forum into a younger and older group because of low numbers and the expression of some young people that they do not want to attend if there is not more than one or two other young people also in attendance.

Future objectives

- Longer term funding and ensuring this forum is seen as an expert group.
- Guest speakers have been identified to attend forum because of consultations with young people and so far, the following have been agreed in the next few months- IRO Team, Police, Education and Adoption Team
- Regular attendance at ICE events and coffee mornings by TGP Cymru
- 2024 dates to be set and booked in with Halo.
- Team Meeting attendances to raise awareness.
- Develop Children's Rights Animation in partnership with BCBC.
- Young people are keen to be involved in Foster Carer training so to explore how this can become a reality.
- TGP Cymru to make use of their social media regarding BYV Forum whilst respecting young people's identity and confidentiality.
- Clear expectations to be agreed by group re, behaviour and consequences.
- Regular flyers with dates sent to all teams and in format to send to young people.
- Liaise with Designated teachers in all comprehensives.

- Development of information sheet about young people to ensure forum facilitator is aware of any safety issues relating to new forum members.
- If numbers allow, to split the forum into a younger and older group as planned.
- Develop a more detailed system to record group membership.

Conclusion and looking forward.

As stated above, we are pleased to have established a consistent membership of the group despite some challenges. With the support of BCBC and the independent advocacy service, we aim to increase membership in the coming months and develop partnerships with more children's services teams.

Below are some quotes from a BYV forum members:

"I love group and the people in it, they all know how hard in can be being in care and leaving care"?

"I feel my voice can make a difference".

"I always look forward and having this group has saved me from deep depression".

*"I can be a right pain in the a** and have some behaviour problems but that is never been an issue in group and that's because I am listened too and taken seriously".*

"I can just be myself".