



BRIDGEND CORPORATE PARENTING ANNUAL REPORT 2023 - 2024

2023 - 2024





Introduction – the Corporate Parenting Board

In Bridgend County Borough, we are the champions from different departments and organisations who are the corporate parents for care experienced children and young people and care leavers (our children and young people). We meet regularly, in a Corporate Parenting Board to discuss how we can work together to provide our children and young people with all the things they need to live happy and healthy lives.

We, the Corporate Parenting Board, have agreed to focus our work on a list of the most important topics, known as priorities, that were decided by our children and young people in their Corporate Parenting Strategy launched in 2023:

Our Priorities

1. Having a voice.
2. Good health and well-being.
3. A comfortable, safe, stable home whilst in care and afterwards.
4. Educational achievement, training, and employment.
5. Getting ready for independent living.
6. Celebrating our children and young people’s important achievements and events.

The Work of the Board

The Corporate Parenting Board met 6 times from April 2023 – March 2024.

Attendance of Board members

[Table key: **Y** – attended **N** – no attendance **Rep** – represented by a colleague of their organisation]

Board member	5 th May	22 nd June	14 th September	16 th November	18 th January	7 th March
Corporate Director, Social Services & Well Being Directorate, Bridgend CBC (chair)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Corporate Parenting Officer, Bridgend CBC (board support)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Deputy Head Children Social Care, Bridgend CBC	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Rep
Head of Education, Early Years and Young People Directorate, Bridgend CBC	N	Rep	Rep	Y	Rep	N



Group Manager - Education Early Years and Young People Directorate, Bridgend CBC	Y	-	-	-	-	-
Group Manager - Prevention and Wellbeing, Bridgend CBC	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Head of Partnership Services, Bridgend CBC	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Group Manager, Learning Disability, Mental Health and Substance Misuse, Bridgend CBC	N	N	N	N	N	N
Employability Programme Leader, Bridgend CBC	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
Head of Safeguarding and Looked After Children, Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board	Rep	Rep	Rep	N	Rep	Rep
Detective Chief Inspector, South Wales Police	Y	Rep	Y	Y	Y	Rep
Vice Principal Learner Journey, Systems and Inclusive Practice, Bridgend College	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Station Commander, South Wales Fire & Rescue Service	Y	Rep	Y	N	Y	Y
Chief Executive, Awen Cultural Trust	N	Rep	N	N	Y	Y
Team Manager, Tros Gynnal Plant	N	Y	N	N	N	N
Partnership Manager, Halo Leisure	N	Y	Y	N	N	N

It must be noted that each of the above meetings had additional non Board members invited to present or to attend for their expertise on a topic being discussed.

During this time the Board has discussed a wide range of issues, received a variety of presentations and information relating to achieving the following 4 milestones:

- Launch of the [Bridgend Corporate Parenting Strategy](#) – the event was facilitated by our care experienced youth forum with Rocio Cifuentes, Childrens Commissioner for Wales, and Julie Morgan, Deputy Minister for Social Services as guest speakers in the presence of other dignitaries.
- Action planning event – this event provided a platform for staff, managers and leader from a range of organisations to explore the opportunities for our children and young people through collaborative working categorised by our 6 priorities.
- Celebration Awards for achievement in education, training and employment – this prestigious event recognised the achievements of 30 young people in the presence of Board members, Welsh Government Ministers and local politicians.
- The Board member agencies declared their commitment to their children and young people through the signing up to the [Corporate Parenting Charter – A Promise from Wales “A SHARED PARENTING PLEDGE”](#).

Bridgend Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting

Whilst the Corporate Parenting Board is not a statutory body, it is closely aligned with Bridgend Council’s governance through its relationship with the Cabinet Corporate Parenting Committee that



receives reports that provide oversight and accountability to the Councils' statutory functions in regarding care experienced children, young people and care leavers.

Children and Family Services and other Council departments report to the Cabinet Corporate Parenting Committee on a quarterly basis and reports that are taken to the Cabinet Committee are either shared either directly with the Corporate Parenting Board, given as a presentation or produced by the Board prior to Cabinet, these include:

- Corporate Parenting quarterly update
- Employability Service update • Basic Income Pilot
- Youth Justice Service update
- Children & Families 3-year Plan
- Independent Reviewing service Annual Plan
- Annual Report of Inspections
- Regional Advocacy Service Annual Report
- Regional Adoption Service Annual Report
- Inspection updates
- Foster Wales Bridgend Annual report
- Policy and strategy updates
- Annual report of Inspections on BCBC registered homes
- Housing Pathways for Care Experienced Children children's homes and Young People

Listening to the views of our children and young people

The Board has ensured that its work is underpinned by and where possible is co-produced with care experienced children, young people and care leavers they are responsible for. All of the work with children and young people has been co-ordinated by the Corporate Parenting and Participation Officer with much of the activities facilitated through by TGP Cymru Specialist Youth Participation Service who host a youth forum for care-experienced children, young people and care leavers.

Whilst the youth forum undertakes topic specific work relating to issues raised by its members, consultation activity for outside agencies such as Foster Wales, Voices from Care, Bridgend Children and Family Services and Welsh Government, the forums activity has been closely aligned to informing and influencing the Corporate Parenting Board through:

- Designing the Bridgend Corporate Parenting Board logo along with the forum logos with another care experienced young person who at the time studying design.
- Identifying the priorities of what is important to children and young people when they are in care.
- Providing feedback following on from the Board Promise Event:
 - *"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".*



- Sharing their views on what they felt should be incorporated in the Board strategy.
- Facilitating the Launch of the Bridgend Corporate Parenting Board Strategy by providing presentations and introducing all guest speakers and presenters which was held in the Heronston Hotel in April.
- Identifying the award categories for the Corporate Parenting Achievement Awards.

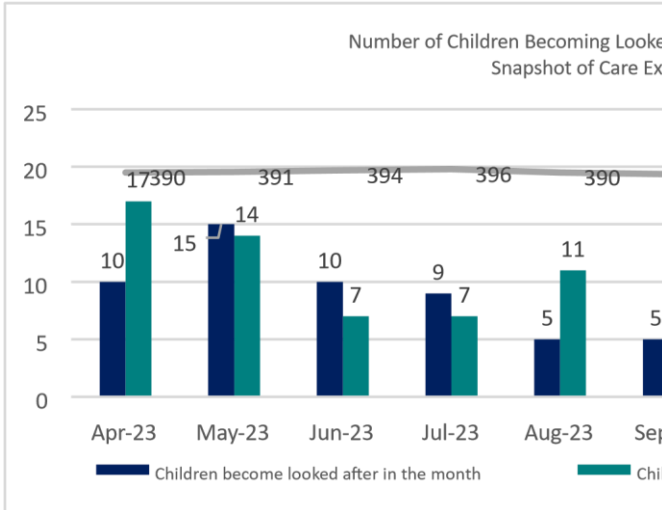
The forum is very passionate about their work and have stated the following in relation to the forum:

- *"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".*
- *"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".*

Board Member support for our children and young people

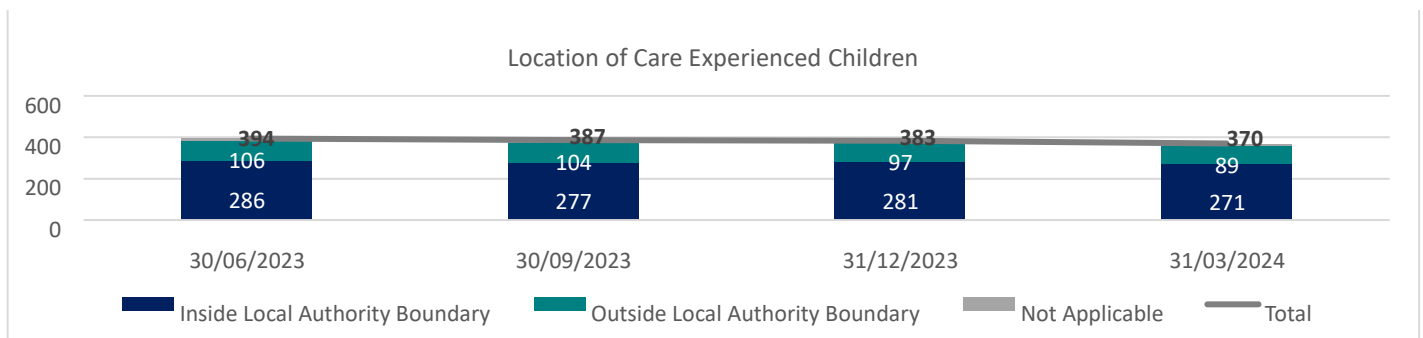
Children and Family Services

The local authority has statutory responsibilities towards all care-experienced children. Careexperienced children under 18 have allocated social workers and care leavers have allocated personal advisors. The allocated worker is responsible for developing, and overseeing the care plans to ensure that all children and young people are working towards their identified outcomes and having their needs met. There were 370 care experienced children and 226 care leavers supported to the local authority on 31 March 2024.

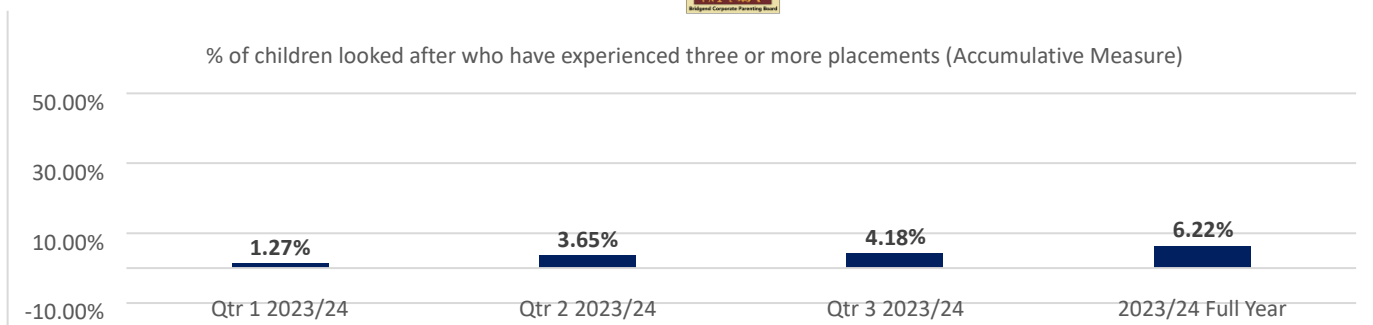


The number of care experienced children has steadily decreased over the course of the year. At its highest in March 2023, the number stood at 402, in March 2024, the number of care experienced children was 370. The two primary factors contributing to this decrease was work to prevent children and young people being care experienced and children ceasing to be care experienced through the timely progression of care plans and discharge of orders where safe and appropriate to do so.

The implementation of the Signs of Safety model of practice is changing how Children and Family services work with families and supporting them to find solutions within their own resources. This is resulting in children and young people remaining in the care of their families and not becoming care experienced. Increased staff stability is resulting in higher quality social work with timely progression of care plans. There is a systemic and co-ordinated approach to the process of discharging care orders which provides clear expectations for social workers when undertaking this activity. There is joint working between the Care Experienced Children’s Team, Kinship and Permanence Team and Independent Reviewing Services which supports working together to ensure high quality care planning and timely progression of care plans. The safe reduction of care experienced children strategy is in the process of being finalised and is expecting to be operational by the end of 2024. This will further drive the safe reduction of the numbers of care experienced children, supporting more to live with their families where safe to do so.



Of those children and young people living outside of Bridgend 44% live with family members, 73% of children and young people live in Bridgend with 21% living out of county but within Wales. 3% live outside of Wales. There has been neither a significant increase or decrease in any of these figures since the previous year where figures at the end of 2023 were 72%, 22% and 4% respectively.



There has been a 47% reduction in children experiencing 3 or more placements over the course of this year compared with the previous year which is a significant improvement. This has provided children with stability within their home network. The majority of children who have experienced 3 or more placement moves are those aged between 13 and 15 years of age.

Within the 16+ Team in Children and Family Services, all young people are allocated a Personal Advisor (PA) up until the age of 25. Legislation dictates that pathway plans only have to be reviewed up until this age unless a young person is being supported through a programme of education (largely university). The PA service is now fully staffed with an additional post added to the team over the past year. This has resulted in caseloads being more manageable and PA's being able to effectively review pathway plans and ensure that young people have a pathway in relation to education, training and employment. The 16+ team within have been implementing the Basic Income Pilot for Care Leavers. All our care leavers who were eligible for the scheme signed up. Benefits have been seen for our young people in this scheme and plans are in place to ensure there is no ongoing impact when the pilot ends. In addition, there is a Multiply worker based within 16+ solely to support care leavers to develop numeracy skills and received a recognised accreditation for this. Young people aged 16-25 have access to the St David's Day fund which is used to support with access to opportunities to assist with their development and successfully transition into adulthood. This is often used for course fees and study materials, equipment, transport etc.

BCBC (and all UK local authorities) is part of the Home Office National Transfer Scheme (NTS) for unaccompanied (asylum seeking children and young people. The NTS is a United Kingdom (UK) government scheme which enables the planned transfer of an unaccompanied seeking child from one LA to another. All LAs in the UK are subject to a mandatory duty to comply with the scheme. The purpose of the NTS is to ensure a fairer and equitable distribution of care to unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people. In Bridgend, 19 of our care experienced population are unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people.

There is ongoing recruitment activity to increase the number of high-quality foster carers for children and young people. Foster cares have access to their own supervising social worker and training packages and events to ensure they are supported and have opportunities for development. There are opportunities for planning for placements within out monthly placements planning meetings and out of authority panels. Children services are in the process of recruiting a When I'm Ready and Supported Lodgings Social Worker dedicated to recruiting and supporting providers of this service to enable stable and secure placements as the young person makes the transition into adulthood.

Education



The Education Engagement Team works with school clusters to develop a clear and coherent plan to support our care experienced children and young people via their Pupil Deprivation Grant. Examples of some of the support provided by the team can include:

- Supporting the Person Education Plan process including training.
- Delivering training packages to schools and governors on role and responsibilities, PEPs and safeguarding.
- Attending Care-Experienced Children Team (CECT) meetings.
- Oversight out-of-county placements.
- Attend Out-Of-County Panel and Out-Of-County Finance.
- Attending the Additional Learning Needs Panel.
- Providing a single point of contact for all agencies including schools, Children's Social Care and other services for information, training and guidance for vulnerable learners including careexperienced children.
- Manage Pupil Deprivation Grant (DPG) Funding.
- Attend reviews of care experienced children where required.
- Pre-admissions meetings/transition meetings and or planning.
- The Education Engagement Team works with school clusters to develop a clear and coherent plan to support care experienced children via their PDG and this can include:
 - the appointment of a school-based counsellor to acknowledge the impact becoming looked after can have on learning.
 - learning support officers delivering 'Thrive' training to promote educational attainment and mental health; and o trauma training for staff to consider how behaviour can present itself for children who have entered the care system.

As of 31 March 2024, there were 234 care experienced statutory school age learners, the team also support children placed in Bridgend by other local authorities. Each school has a designated coordinator as a point of contact.

Bridgend Youth Justice Service

The Bridgend Youth Justice Service (BYJS) is dedicated to addressing the unique needs and strengths of every child it encounters. Notably, children with care-experience are disproportionately likely to engage in offending or harmful behaviours. These children often present with more complex needs, prompting the BYJS to enhance its interventions to effectively manage risks and provide comprehensive care and support. To better serve all children, especially those with complex needs, the BYJS has implemented the following developments:

- Individualised Trauma Support and Planning: Tailored assistance to help children process and recover from traumatic experiences.
- Enhanced Speech and Language Support: Improved services to address communication difficulties.



- Education, Training, and Employment Support: Programmes to ensure children have access to educational opportunities and job training.
- Mental Health and Substance Use Support: Specialised care to address psychological wellbeing and substance use issues.
- Resettlement and Transition Planning: Comprehensive planning to support children transitioning back into the community.
- Exploitation Planning, Safeguarding Support, and Planning: Measures to protect children from exploitation and ensure their safety.
- Referrals to External Partners: Coordinated efforts to connect children with specific support services when needed.
- Every child undergoes a thorough assessment to create a personalised plan and intervention strategy tailored to their unique needs. Central to this process is incorporating the voices of the children and, when appropriate, their carers. This ensures that the interventions are not only effective but also resonate with the children's personal experiences and perspectives.

Bridgend Youth Justice Service (BYJS) worked with 92 children as of 1 April 2024. Among these, 12 (13%) were care experienced children

Bridgend Council Housing Department

The housing department oversees the Council's statutory responsibility for homelessness, rehousing and housing support. Applications for the above services are received directly from care-experienced children, young people and care leavers. The department, in conjunction with colleagues in Children and Family Services complete a quarterly return with regards to care leavers who have presented throughout the year.

In 2023/24, 27 care leavers presented as homeless, and of these 16 were assessed to be either homeless or threatened with homelessness. 16 homelessness duties have been accepted and appropriate support provided. In 2023/24, Cabinet Approved a Housing Support Programme Strategy. In developing this Strategy a comprehensive Statement of Need was undertaken, which included looking at data relating to homelessness applications by Care Leavers.

Health

Cwm Taff Morgannwg University (CTMUHB) health board provides all universal and secondary health services to care experienced children within its footprint and is responsible for any health referrals to regional centres of care. The health board are also responsible for completing the health assessments required under the Social Services and Wellbeing act. CTMUHB currently collects information on the number of health assessments completed, along with the number of care experienced children who attend our emergency departments. This will include the number of children registered with the General Practitioners and Dental services.

347 Health assessments were completed, of the 369 children looked after in Bridgend, 361 were registered with a doctor at the time of their health assessment.



TGP Cymru is the statutory independent advocacy service commissioned for care-experienced children and young people in Bridgend. Within this role 25 care-experienced young people were referred for the 'Active Offer' of advocacy and 65 care experienced young people were referred for issue-based advocacy. TGP Cymru also facilitate the care experienced youth forum (Bridgend Youth Voice) and ensuring children and young people are reminded of their rights and entitlements at regular intervals and referring into advocacy service or other support services as and when required. Bridgend Youth Voice (BYV) Forum has a regular cohort of children and young people aged between 12 and 22yrs old who meet on a monthly basis and school holidays. There have been 115 attendances over the last year. Young people also developed the words for the [mural to break the stereotypes](#) of young people in care with the poet laureate.

TGP Cymru actively promotes rights around education, training and employment via independent advocacy provision. Our care experienced children and young people presented with six education issues for advocacy support last year. BYV Forum regularly explore this area and TGP Cymru offer support to any issues raised in meetings and signpost to relevant agencies along with an offer of advocacy support. BYV Forum facilitated the Corporate Parenting Strategy Launch and were supported develop skills relating to the day. They have also signposted some young people to the Multiply service.

South Wales Fire and Rescue

South Wales Fire & Rescue provides a number of prevention programmes such as REFLECT (*engagement of 1874 children and young people, April 2023- March 2024*), Phoenix project (*engagement with 216 children and young people, April 2023- March 2024*) and Fire Cadets, which are tailored to reduce various risks involving children and young people and work with young people to reduce deliberately set fires and anti-social behaviour. Targeting those who have offended or are known to be at risk of offending, the programmes are customised to build up individual resilience, self-worth and confidence and raise awareness through workshops, Fire Fighter for a Day, Street Fire Fighter and Doorstep Sports activities. It must be noted that South Wales Fire & Rescue does not currently target or record numbers of care experienced children and young people, nevertheless their services are available to them.

South Wales Fire & Rescue offer the following educational opportunities through their youth intervention projects and programmes and these:

- Enhancing key citizenship skills and build confidence.
- Developing transferable, practical skills for future training or employment.
- Gaining a nationally recognised BTEC qualification.
- Playing supportive roles in their local community and develop positive peer relationships. • Attending a local fire station one evening a week, work alongside SWFRS
- Representing SWFRS at prestigious events.



Bridgend College

Bridgend College take on a pivotal role in supporting our care-experienced children, young people, and care leavers, ensuring that they receive consistent and professional support throughout their educational journey. Along with curriculum-based support, their responsibilities include regular liaisons with their social workers, support teams, and foster carers. This collaboration helps in maintaining a unified approach to each student's welfare. Each care-experienced student is assigned a safeguarding lead, and has a safeguarding lead care experienced champion, enhancing the personalised care by establishing a reliable point of contact for students to approach when in need. These leads play a crucial role in managing the students' reviews and fostering a supportive environment where students can develop trust and rapport.

Over the past year, from April 2023 to March 2024, Bridgend College have actively engaged in providing essential services like advocacy and housing support and have directed students to necessary external agencies for further assistance, such as ARC and Barod. This comprehensive support structure not only addresses immediate educational needs but also ensures a broader spectrum of welfare and guidance, reinforcing our commitment to the well-being and success of our care-experienced students. The College were aware of 43 students who were in care (note: 2023-24 academic year, not financial year), with three learners withdrawing from their programme during the first 56 days (this is the Welsh Government measure in education for retention), but with all other learners (93%) being retained on their programme after the first 56 days of the programme start date. Attendance for students who are in care was 89.4%, which is just above the overall College attendance, typically with the first part of the week seeing greater attendance (90%+).

Below is a case study example provided by Bridgend College highlighting the educational, pastoral and multiagency support that is has been made available to our care experienced young people.

S1 is an 18-year-old transitioning from foster placement to supported living. S1 struggled with substance abuse and was at risk of being withdrawn from their course. The Wellbeing Team collaborated with the curriculum staff to develop a balanced approach to the situation while managing the risks. The staff recognised considerable potential in this young learner.

Substance misuse led to a breakdown in S1's placement. The college worked alongside the social worker to devise a plan that would allow S1 to remain in college while ensuring safety, readiness, and respectfulness. It was evident that S1 did not recognise the issue with their substance misuse and was not ready for change. It would have been easier for us as a college to withdraw the student; however, we believe in the potential of all our students and strive for them to achieve their full potential.

The college and social worker conducted sessions on choices and consequences, which included S1's exclusion from college trips due to their substance use. When S1 faced difficulties or received negative responses, they would become aggressive. Over time, with the support provided, S1 became more aware of their actions and increasingly respectful, feeling "at last being heard."

The Wellbeing Team continued to advocate for S1, addressing the growing concerns from the curriculum area about their substance misuse. S1 felt "supported and was ready to improve their own chances," S1 is now enrolled in a drug program and is on track to complete their course and obtain their GCSEs and has been supported with independent living skills.

This case example demonstrates effective collaboration among services, clear communication, and the importance of acknowledging the continuum of need based on S1's perspective—even when not aligned with their best interest. It emphasises that placing the student at the centre of their own plan and controlling it is vital. The case exemplifies how students come from diverse backgrounds with varying life chances, making it essential in any situation to tailor an individualised plan that balances risks and strengths, enabling students to reach their full potential.



AWEN Cultural Trust

Awen Cultural Trust works with partners to ensure that care-experienced children can access, feel safe and enjoy cultural opportunities that will support social development and career pathways. Over the past year, Awen has supported the Corporate Parenting Board to further its celebration of the achievements of care-experienced young people, while at the same time developing its own policies and activities that fosters better opportunities for young people, carers and families.

The Santa Appeal promoted and managed by Awen was one of the most successful to date. 300 gifts and over £4000 in donations. In addition, Awen supports the Corporate Parenting Board and its initiatives through social media channels and the physical network of services throughout Bridgend. Awen used Carers Rights Day (23 November 2023) to spotlight the partnership with Bridgend Carers Centre, Inclusability and Special Families e.g. an exclusive Alice in Wonderland Trail at Bryngarw Country Park, relaxed cinema screenings, free tickets for carers for specific shows. Awen is an official Fostering Friendly employer, this demonstrates their commitment to supporting colleagues who are considering fostering, or have existing foster care responsibilities, with extra leave and flexible working arrangements.

Awen became a Fostering Friendly Organisation this year, having the policy in place means that they:

- offer flexible working for foster carers and those going through the approval process.
- can allow up to 5 days of paid leave. This could be for foster carer training, meetings with social workers or settling a child into their new home for instance.
- will promote Foster Care Fortnight™, The Fostering Network's annual campaign, which raises the profile of fostering.

Western Bay Adoption Service

Western Bay Adoption Service provides the adoption service for Bridgend. The service recruits and assesses any potential adopters from Bridgend, twin tracks and family finds for children in Bridgend who have a plan of adoption being considered or agreed by the court and provides an adoption support service to adoptive family and birth parents who reside in Bridgend.

From April 2023 to March 2024, the service worked with 42 twin tracking (potential adoption) referrals, 15 Bridgend children were made subject of a placement order, ie had an agreed plan of adoption and the service placed 15 children. The service recruited and approved 8 adoptive families. The service has a wide variety of support services available to adopted children and their families, including Virtual Hub consultations, birth parent support groups which are held monthly, access to a youth club specifically for adopted young people, support with life-journey work and identity, play group for adoptive families, and numerous support events in which adoptive families can come together. They also offer support to adopted adults to access their adoption information.



Barnardo's

Barnardo's are commissioned to provide two services via the Families First Grant in Bridgend. These include Atebion, a Disability Family Support Service and Practical Home Management (PHM). Whilst the primary focus of these services is not to support care-experienced children, young people and care leavers, we recognise that some of the individuals supported may be. As an organisation, Barnardo's ensures that all colleagues and volunteers complete Trauma training as part of the mandatory induction as this provides an insight into trauma as a whole, and in relation to care experienced individuals and care leavers. The Bridgend team work closely with Barnardo's Swansea, who offer a range of support services to care experienced children, young people and care leavers so their resources, expertise and support can be accessed when needed.

Celebrating our children and young people's important achievement and events

Bridgend Children services hosted an Education, Training and Employment Celebration Event for our care experienced young people. The event celebrated over 30 young people for their achievements in education, training or employment and was supported by the Leader and Deputy Leader of Bridgend Council, the Deputy Minister for Social Services and a range of Welsh Government Officials.



Next steps for our priorities, the coming year

In the coming year, Board member agencies will continue to share how they are working to support our children and young people through presentations at meetings with view to improving collaborative working and identifying opportunities to benefit our children and young people.

It is hoped that the Board will be able to produce a performance framework that can reflect how board member agencies are meeting the rights and needs of our children and evidence this in an outcome focused way.

The main ambition for the Board for 2024 – 2025 is to work together to improve outcomes for care experienced children and young people. It is anticipated that continuing to listen to, and act on, the priorities that our children and young people advise us of, use of better data and information, will mean that the benefits of multi-agency working will make us even better parents to our care experienced children in Bridgend in future years.