

APPENDIX 1

Overview of Bridgend Specialist Participation Service

Bridgend Youth Voice (BYV) Forum

2024 – 2025



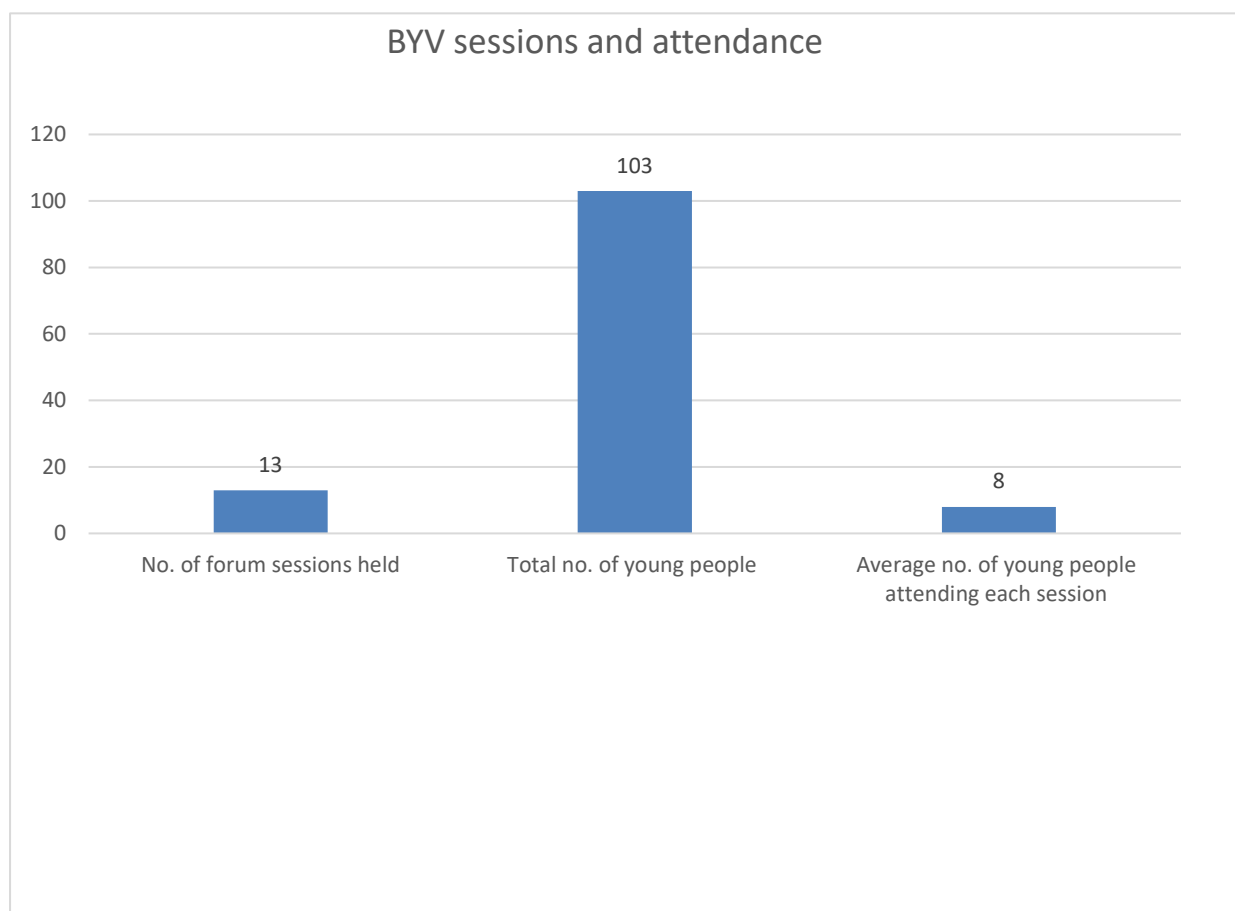
Scope

TGP Cymru is commissioned by Bridgend County Borough Council Children Services to deliver specialist participation support to gain the views of care experienced young people and care leavers on a range of themes identified by Bridgend Corporate Parenting Board and Bridgend County Borough Council Children Services, Bridgend's independent advocacy provider and the forum members themselves. This three - pronged approach is supported by regular attendance to the forum by advocacy staff, including the advocacy team manager, and by Bridgend County Borough Council via Steve Berry, *Corporate Parenting & Participation Officer*. We have also experienced positive engagement from LA staff and personal advisors who have assisted in some sessions.

Activity Overview

Between April 2024 and March 2025 13 participation sessions have been held with Bridgend care experienced young people.

The sessions have been attended by 103 young people overall. A total of 16 unique young people in attendance, ten male, five female, one young person identifying as transgender. One young person diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder has also attended forum sessions regularly.



Achievements and Activities Summary

Q&A session with Bridgend Complaints Officer Sarah Tripp

The Bridgend Complaints Officer shared copies of Bridgend Complaints policy with the Bridgend Youth Voice Forum members and explained the complaints procedure and answered questions put forward by forum members.

Independent Professional Advocate (IPA) Recruitment

Forum members were invited to be involved in the recruitment of a new Independent Professional Advocate into the Cwm Taff Morgannwg Regional Advocacy Service. One member sat on the interview panel, asked questions along with TGP Cymru staff and was involved in discussion and scoring following the interview. Their insights were invaluable and resulted in wider planning and discussions about how young people can be involved in advocacy recruitment in the future.

Questionnaire from Corporate Director of Social Services Claire Marchant

Claire Marchant attended Bridgend Youth Voice Forum to consult with forum members in relation to their experiences with social services over the previous year.

Award for previous 'These are our Voices' work.

Bridgend Youth Voice Forum were informed of their success in winning two awards for a previous piece of work 'These Are Our Voices' in which forum members were supported to spend a day with young people's poet Laureate Connor Allen, along with the Foster Wales and We are Cowshed and created a unique poem reflecting their feelings about being care experienced. Their work is now displayed publicly in Bridgend town.

The awards were the Low Budget Campaign Award at the PRCA DARE Awards Cymru, honouring outstanding PR and communications. The same week at the CIPR Excellence Awards in London (a UK-wide PR awards ceremony), the campaign won gold in the low-budget campaign category! 'These Are Our Voices' was up against the likes of Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water, Weetabix, Paddy Power, Brewdog and Virgin Media O2.

Reflecting on the campaign, judges said they were:

"Impressed by how this campaign was grounded in the real experiences of young people in care which led to an emotional insight the campaign was built around, based on a shared experience of this group".

Collaboration with Childrens Commissioners for Wales Office

Forum members were consulted and asked to contribute to an interactive and immersive exhibition being held at the Senedd in November 2024. Jordan Doherty, Childrens Commissioner for Wales Officer, gathered views, thoughts and ideas from the group and invited them to a session taking place early November.

Bridgend LA consultation 'What makes a Good Home'

Forum members were consulted in relation to LA run community homes. As a result of opinions shared by members during the consultation, it was agreed that the new home would be equipped with double beds rather than single beds. Forum members shared

they felt this was important to allow for “spreading out and having a large space to chill with friends”.

Children in Wales consultation on Padlet.

Forum members were consulted on an online memo board designed by Children In Wales. They shared views on content and the visual aspects of the design. Changes were made to the online resource following feedback from forum members and Padlet launched in Bridgend.

Bridgend Achievement Awards

Forum members assisted the Corporate Parenting and Participation Officer in designing these awards in previous forum sessions and their views were gathered on several occasions regarding venue, logo, categories, fundraising, activities for the day etc.



TGP promoted their Advocacy and Independent Visitor Services at the award ceremony as well as the Bridgend Youth Voice Forum. We were also pleased to be able to fund a DJ workshop at the event and the creation of the helping hand poster which was for children and young people to nominate an adult that was important to them or had helped them or listened to them.

Children’s Commissioner for Wales office visit in Neath Port Talbot.

Forum members met with British Transport Police before travelling with them on a train to Port Talbot. They shared information on train and track safety and how to report concerns. This was also a great opportunity for forum members to view the police in a positive light.



Forum members along with other young people from Swansea and Neath Port Talbot assisted the Childrens Commission for Wales Office with the visual display and created voice clips. TGP Cymru staff attended as well as Steve Berry.

During this session we also met with Senior Policy Manager Welsh Government Lucy Akhtar who consulted with young people on PEP's (Personal Education Plans).

Lucy Akhtar said:

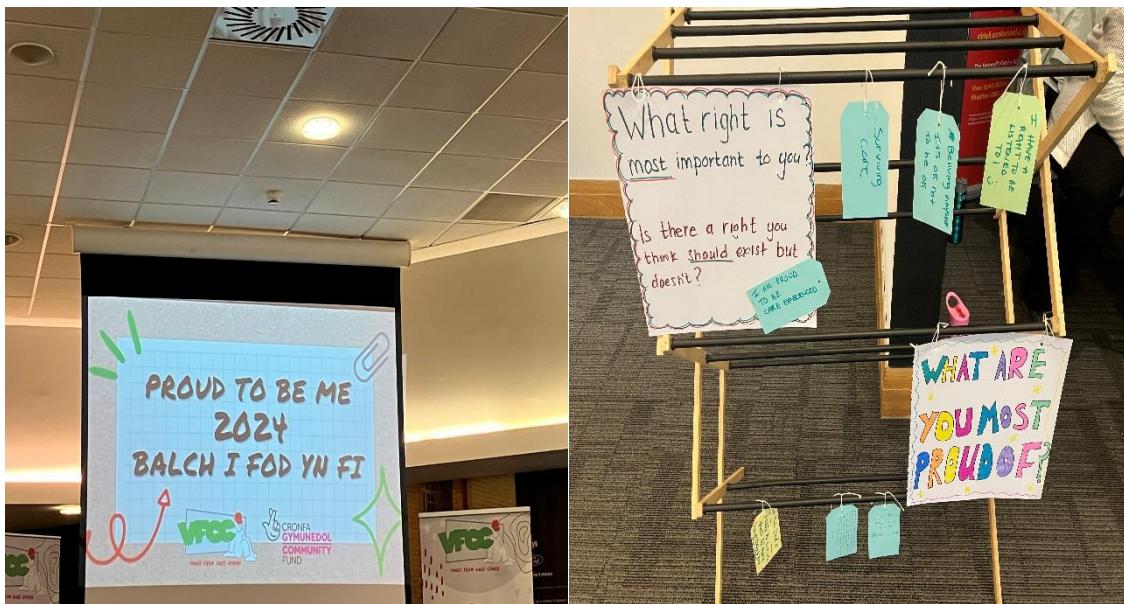
"It was a real pleasure and also an honour to meet the young people at the event at the Children's Commissioner for Wales's office on 30 October. I was very grateful that they spared the time to share their thoughts and ideas so openly and with such dignity.... Through all this activity it has been really valuable for me to hear what the young people had to say and to reflect on that in terms of future policy development at Welsh Government in relation to the education of care experienced young people."

Lwc/Luck Event

Three forum members attended the Senedd and their contributions to the Children Commissioner for Wales exhibition were on show and attended by over 100 people which described their experiences of placement moves and unfamiliar surroundings.

Voices from Care Proud to Me event.

Four forum members attended the event held in Swansea along with TGP Cymru staff. All forum members were recognised at the event for their contributions to forum over the previous year. During the event, members were able to meet with other care experienced young people from across Wales and took part in activities and workshops throughout the day.



Christmas Party

A Christmas party session was held for Forum members, at their request. Forum members have formed supportive relationships over the previous year and wanted to spend time together having fun with no agenda.

Corporate Parent Online Training

Forum members were invited to record voice clips to assist with Corporate Parenting online training and to remind those attending training that our children and young people are at the forefront of all that they do.

Consultation with Bridgend Fostering Team Managers

Bridgend Fostering Team Managers attended the February forum meeting to consult with forum members on a new project happening in the fostering service called “Remodelling Fostering”. The project is aimed at ensuring that children and young people who live in foster care are getting the best care and opportunities. Forum members were asked to answer a list of questions honestly, based on their own experiences of being care experienced.

Consultation with the Bridgend Corporate Parenting and Participation Officer

Forum members were asked how they felt their views, wishes and feelings were considered by adults that they know.

Consultation on ‘Eliminate Agenda’

Discussions with forum members regarding engagement with Voices From Care Cymru regarding Eliminate agenda and progress on radical reform. Plan for members to attend engagement events in April 2025.

What has worked well?

Bridgend Youth Voice Forum now has a permanent home in Evergreen Hall. This has allowed the forum facilitator to book sessions for the whole year in advance. Forum members have been very positive about this change, highlighting the range of activities on available, kitchen facilities and comfortable break out rooms.

Following a period of consistent forum attendance, we have noted positive and supportive relationships developing between members of the forum. One young person said:

“It’s a great place for community in terms of people who are and who were in foster care. It’s a way for us to connect with each other and share our views on the people around us e.g., foster carers, social worker and advocates...we actually get to discuss and deal with issues we deal with and have to go through on a daily basis and it’s a great place to vent off frustrations safely....things in the community like our mural to raise awareness and educate others on how a foster child lives and how things are different. It’s also a great place to meet various important people who we might need to speak to if we have issues so we know where we’re going”

Other forum members said:

“Forum gives me a place where I feel accepted, and my voice is listened to”

“I can be myself and discuss my mental health openly”

“I feel accepted even though I have autism, and I feel I can influence important decisions”

“I feel like I have a place to make changes for young people in care”

We have also received positive feedback from carers. One foster carer said:

“This is so important for these young people to have...these forums have definitely enhanced our boys’ confidence. This is very important and makes a huge difference to young people!”

Increased engagement with other organisations and LA staff. As highlighted above, this year, BYV forum have collaborated and consulted with various external organisations and staff from within Bridgend County Borough Council.

Zoe Morgan, the facilitator of the BYV forum TGP Cymru, has a positive and supportive relationship with Bridgend County Borough Council Corporate Parenting and Participation Officer Steve Berry. They meet regularly to discuss the progress of the forum.

Information about the advocacy service is always available to young people in the group, and several have used or are currently using the service. Young people are updated on a quarterly basis on advocacy themes and any views and ideas gathered to address these themes. This year, the forum has been promoted in several Bridgend Social Work team meetings by the Advocacy Team Manager, Forum Facilitator and Steve Berry.

The Forum Facilitator also provides the Independent Visiting Advocacy (IVA) for two LA community homes. Part of Zoe's role is to share information about Bridgend Youth Voice Forum with the young people in residence. Some young people living in LA community homes have attended forum, sharing a wider perspective of being care experienced in Bridgend.

All staff have enhanced DBS checks and have been able to respond appropriately when they have concerns. During this period, two safeguarding referrals were made by the forum facilitator. One referral resulted in the facilitator attending a strategy meeting. Concerns are discussed fully with social workers and carers, with knowledge of the young person. Forum sessions are often supported by wider staff within the statutory advocacy team.

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

We are also pleased to note 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 group attendance has improved over this period, we have not been able to hold two separate sessions for a younger and older group as planned. This is mainly due to the average age of forum members being 14 years or above. Splitting the group would result in low attendance in the younger age category. We hope to be able to recruit young care experienced young people over the next year with the support of social workers and Personal Advisors.
- **Unknown young people turning up on the day of forum.**
It's important that potential new group members are known to the forum facilitator before they attend to ensure we can support young people to attend Bridgend Youth Voice Forum safely. Forum members are aware they must speak to the facilitator before inviting new young people to forum sessions.
- **Age range of forum members.**
As highlighted earlier, sessions are often attended young people aged 13 years to over 18 years. Although there are many positive aspects to a mixed age group of this nature, we are aware that on occasion this can be difficult to manage when older forum member wish to discuss topics of a more adult nature. We aim to resolve this by revisiting behaviour expectations with forum members and supporting forum members with more facilitators during sessions. The new venue has several areas which can be used to split forum sessions if necessary.
- **Evaluating the impact of consultation with Bridgend Youth Voice Forum**
Forum members have enjoyed engaging with a wide variety of services and organisations but we a yet to understand the wider impact of this.

Future objectives

- More guest speakers to attend forum (chosen by forum members). We have recently contacted South Wales Police and plan to invite a representative to a future forum session.
- Attendance at Fostering / Kinship Teams' ICE events and coffee mornings by TGP Cymru
- Clear expectations to be revisited by forum in relation to behaviour and consequences.
- Explore making links with staff responsible for Care Experienced young people in local schools.
- Redesign of membership form to include any safeguarding concerns.
- Explore ways to allow older and young members of the forum to share experiences separately.
- Design an exit/signposting strategy for older forum members who may want explore opportunities with other organisations/bodies when they feel they want to move on for Bridgend Youth Voice Forum.
- Explore opportunities for forum members to support with promoting Bridgend Youth Voice Forum to other Care Experienced young people.

Conclusion and looking forward.

We are pleased to have established a consistent membership of the forum despite some challenges. Forum members describe Bridgend Youth Voice Forum as very important to them and they are invested in sharing it with other Care Experienced young people in Bridgend over the next year.

Consultation and collaboration with so many different groups and organisations throughout the year has meant the impact of Bridgend Youth Voice Forum has been wide-reaching and forum members are hopeful this will make a positive difference to the lives of all Care Experienced children and young people in Bridgend, as well as those who attend forum sessions.

Over the next year, we aim to better understand the wider impact of Bridgend Youth Voice Forum by inviting some of those who have engaged with us to share how consulting with forum members has influenced their work with Care Experienced children and young people in Bridgend and across Wales.