

Evaluation of Blaenau Gwent Community Connections Project Progress Report

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Believe in
children**



Barnardo's
Cymru

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Introduction: Evaluation Rationale and Methodology

Evaluation rationale

The aim of this evaluation is to:

1. Assess the extent to which the Blaenau Gwent Community Connections service has met the four outcomes and ten indicators described within its funding bid to the Big Lottery in 2013.
2. Provide additional analytical comment regarding the effectiveness of the service, unexpected outcomes and recommendations for the coming year.
3. Provide analytical explanations based upon qualitative data regarding the possible reasons behind outcomes and indicators that have been exceeded or not met.
4. Produce a clear report for circulation to funders, project partners and other interested parties where appropriate.

Evaluation methodology

The evaluators have used a combination of methods to analyse the extent to which indicators and outcomes have been met. In addition to the Blaenau Gwent Community Connections service supplying quantitative information regarding targets, evaluators have also undertaken qualitative work in order to assess the context and personal impact of the successes of the project.

In terms of methods, the evaluators have undertaken the following:

- Requested summaries of the personal action plans for the year for each young person the project has worked with. Evaluators received 17 individual action plans in total. The action plans detail the personal outcomes that the young people wanted to work on and their own assessment of the distance travelled towards their personal outcome.
- Monitoring data and feedback collected by the Blaenau Gwent Community Connections service, including action plan details for another 13 young people.
- Participatory focus group with seven young people who have completed at least one of the group courses that aims to build personal skills. Some of these young people had undertaken more than one course and some of them were also receiving one to one support. The courses are listed in the box overleaf.

Envirobeats. This was a three day course that involved playing with instruments, recording voices and taking photos using an ipad and creating a rap and film. Three people in the group evaluation had attended the Envirobeats course. More young people had attended the course but were unable to attend the evaluation session.

Come dine with us. This was a six week course which taught participants food hygiene and how to cook six different main courses and desserts. Five of the evaluation participants attended this course, but more young people attended the course who were not able to attend the evaluation session.

Independent living. After an introductory session the young people chose what they wanted to learn during the course from a list of options. Young people chose learning about money, hygiene body and health, household chores, anxiety and stress and dealing with bullying. Five young people from the group evaluation session attended this course. More young people attended this course but were unable to attend the evaluation session.

Physical activity. All of the participants of the evaluation session attended this one day course that involved archery and canoeing.

- Service fun day evaluation. This involved ten parents, six siblings and nine project participants. Evaluators designed two evaluation workshops using creative methods for participants and their families enabling them to discuss the four outcomes of the project.
- Evaluation forms of the training offered to young leaders and youth workers. These forms were designed so that questions directly corresponded with the outcome objectives.

This evaluation is based upon the data collected from all of these methods, and rather than report on the findings from each method, the data is organised into the indicators that were agreed for each outcome. In this way, funders and partners can clearly identify the successes of the project, targets that have been exceeded or not met and reasons behind that, as well as the project direction and evaluator recommendations for the next year.

Assessing Outcome 1: Young people will have improved social networks, reduced isolation and have more choice and control over their lives

This outcome is divided into three different indicators and the target numbers for each of the indicators was 30-50 young people. The analysis and commentary below draw upon different data sets - 30 actions plans, material gathered in the group evaluation of four courses facilitated by Blaenau Gwent Community Connections, and data gathered during the participation and evaluation day. The numbers for each indicator were compiled through adding up the monitoring data from action plans, outcome assessments, project worker observations and parent feedback. Indicators 1 and 3 are very similar and involve the same research information and they are therefore reported upon together.

Indicator 1: Number of young people who report an increased participation in social, leisure and/or work related activities AND

Indicator 3: The number of young people who report positive changes through accessing new community venues, resources and support services

There are two separate evaluation comments to make with regards to indicators 1 and 3. Firstly, there is comment to make regarding the project delivery activities that in themselves have enabled increased participation in social, leisure or work related activities and, secondly, there is community connecting work beyond the group work of the project which has led to an increase in social leisure and work related activities outside of the service.

Project delivery activities

Data from 30 action plans confirms that 27 of the young people report an increase in participation in social, leisure and/or work related activities and positive changes through having accessed new community venues, resources and support services.

The project has undertaken a number of group work activities, enabling young people to socialise together, undertake a variety of leisure activities and access new resources and community venues. Group work activities have been diverse, but have included outdoor pursuits, independent living skills, music projects, a job club and outings to community activities.

To enable young people to access community resources, the project has taken 22 young people to community resources including Big Pit, supermarkets, the cinema and local parks. The service has also facilitated group sessions for these 22 young people in community resource centres, such as the Ebbw Vale

Institute, job centre and Winchestown Community Centre. The aim behind this is twofold: firstly, to facilitate a group session that will build confidence and skills but, secondly, to enable young people to become aware of what is available for them and acquaint them with the staff and the building. This is an effective way of working since it encourages participation in social activities through familiarity without taking up vital group session time. All 22 of the young people, who have been involved in these different group activities, report that they have benefited and seen positive changes in terms of understanding more about community spaces, having more confidence and more knowledge of what is available to them.

Community connecting work

Beyond the direct project activities, data from action plans and monitoring regarding joining community groups shows that 13 young people have increased participation in social, leisure and work related activities in mainstream community settings, beyond the group activities, and they all report positive changes through accessing new community venues, resources and support services. With preparation support in individual and group settings from the project, young people have gained the skills and confidence to join local groups and activities. Some of these young people had initial support to attend the mainstream activities, some had ongoing support and some accessed community activities independent from the project.

The exact social, leisure or work related activities young people have undertaken are as follows:

- 6 young people have joined one club or activity: a trampoline club, youth club, choir, horse riding and guitar lessons.
- 3 young people took supported employment placements - one at a café, one at Terrance Gardens and one at a cinema. The cinema has continued to retain the young person on a volunteer basis to enable them to have work experience.
- 2 young people joined a community education course: pottery and cake decorating.
- 1 young person joined 2 clubs - street dance and tennis.
- 1 young person volunteers in community services: radio station.

The qualitative data reveals the huge distance travelled that these 13 young people have achieved. Five of these young people had not travelled alone before but, with support from the service, they are now attending mainstream courses and activities unsupported and travelling independently. This is highly significant in terms of social inclusion and increased confidence.

We do not have the data to know how many young people have accessed the community venues and resources independently since they are informal meeting places; but through acquainting young people with the community around them, the service is taking the necessary steps to enable young people to participate in social activities, although this would not be reflected within the target figures.

At the evaluation day, it was clear that a minority of parents and young people felt that they had accessed existing community groups (50% and 75% respectively) felt they had not, as shown in table 1 below. Therefore, whilst the project has made great strides to enable community connecting, it has only occurred for 43% of the young people the project has worked with.

Table 1: Have young people joined existing youth and community groups?

From evaluation day

Score	No. of young people	No. of parents
1 (yes lots of new groups)	3	3
2	0	0
3 (a few)	0	1
4	1	1
5 (not at all)	5	1

Conclusions to assessing indicators 1 and 3

Indicator 1 and indicator 3 have both partially been met, in terms of activities within project delivery and activities as a result of project delivery. Within project delivery, the indicators were met by a score of 27 out of a target of 30 (90% met) and in community connecting a score of 13 out of a target of 30 (43% met). However, the quality of the work undertaken and the distance travelled for the young people who have experienced community connecting is outstanding. Quality assessment is expanded upon in the overall conclusion to the whole of outcome 1 below.

Indicator 2: Young people demonstrate improved independence skills following input from individual sessions or groups

Twenty nine out of the 30 action plans had increasing independence as a goal. Of the 27 young people who have reviewed their outcomes, 25 young people reported improved independence skills. Sixteen young people's outcome scores increased by 1 scale point, 8 increased by 2 scale points and 1 increased by 3 scale points. Numerically, this target is 83% achieved.

However, the qualitative data shows that this indicator is not just achieved through numbers alone. From the face to face evaluation workshops with 16 young people and 10 parents, there was clearly a marked difference in independent skills after group or individual support had been received from the project. Young people reported that all of the courses had made a difference to them, particularly in learning new skills which raised their confidence and their ability to be independent. It was also apparent that young people who had attended multiple group sessions had greatly increased their independence skills and confidence. They reported that, having attended the courses, they felt able to try out new activities, help with household chores at home, go to new places and meet new people and confidence and independence was listed as two of the most important skills they had learnt.

Parents also spoke very highly of the level of independence they felt the project had given their young people and felt that independence should be a priority of the work Barnardo's Cymru Community Connections project undertakes. Parents described how having had the option to try new things, learn more life skills and be encouraged to think about their future, young people had been given the skills to gain independence and to undertake age appropriate tasks at home.

Eleven young people went on a two day residential and, for some of them, it was their first time having a night away from home. Parents were particularly moved to see their child have this experience and hear about the independence that the young people had achieved. The young people themselves described how good it felt being able to put into practice the skills they had learnt - they contributed to household tasks through laying the table, washing dishes and tidying up; they maintained their personal hygiene and did the shopping using healthy living knowledge, making choices and using money.

It is clear from the data regarding accessing new community activities and resources (outcome 1, indicator 1) that some young people are beginning to access mainstream community resources independent of their families or other support. Whilst this is happening in a minority of cases, the achievement for these young people should not be underestimated. Some young people have gained the skills to go to choirs, pottery classes and cake decorating courses with no support and never having previously been to any mainstream activities unsupported, which demonstrates a very high level of independent skills, learnt in a short space of time. The evaluators anticipate that more young people may

be achieving similar outcomes, but that it cannot be measured because these activities are occurring outside of any Barnardo's support.

Summary of outcome 1

Outcome 1 has three elements: improved social networks, reduced isolation and more choice and control over their lives. It is clear that the project activities themselves have led to improved social networks and reduced isolation. Parents highlighted that the project had enabled young people to have somewhere to go and had given them an opportunity to socialise. Parents pointed out that many of their children had no social networks and relied upon school and family for all social opportunities. In this context, the project activities offer huge socialising opportunities for the young people it reaches and the isolation it reduces is highly significant. For example, some parents said that the group work gave their child a reason to get up in the morning, and another mother said that her son had proper friends for the first time. The group work is imperative for building personal skills, social skills, independence and confidence, as evidenced within this outcome and outcome 3 below, but it also provides important socialising opportunities and reduces isolation.

However, one of the main aims of the project is to create community connecting opportunities to improved social networks, reduced isolation and offer more choice and control outside of the group work of the project. The data shows that this is beginning to occur for some young people but the numbers are less than half the target goal. In group evaluations with young people, we asked them to rank the four outcomes in terms of which ones they felt the project had achieved the most. The least achieving outcome was 'I think I can go to more places and do more things in the area where I live'. Additionally, when asked who was on board with the project i.e. who was helping them to achieve in the project, they cited teachers, young people and Barnardo's workers. These pieces of data combined suggest that most of the young people are yet to become more involved in socialising opportunities and mainstream activities outside of the group work but the data is clear that young people plan to undertake community based activities. Assessing the level of community connecting is quite complex and is, therefore, addressed within the conclusion and recommendations section of this report with reference to all of the data from all four outcomes and 10 indicators.

The three indicators for this outcome do not enable due consideration to 'Choice and control over life'. Both the individual and group work have led to greater choice and control in day-to-day life that can be overlooked or taken for granted. In group evaluations, the outcomes 'I have more choices about my future' and 'I feel I have been listened to and have control over what I do' were ranked joint first in terms of the most achieved outcome. Young people explained that they feel more able to talk to adults in their lives generally and, therefore, have more confidence to say what they think and give opinions. Young people said this was more important to them than undertaking new activities. This is crucial in terms of having control and making choices but is not captured in the target numbers. The quote below exemplifies how choice and control can impact upon existing life:

“I always went to cadets but since being with Barnardo’s I am doing really well there. I talk more, join in, and feel able to do more. It’s great, we do camping. Flying. Flying gliders and I am now part of it.”

To conclude, outcome 1 has been achieved in terms of the quality of the work, although the numerical indicators are very slightly below target. Young people report that choice and control is the most important thing they have learnt, although this is not captured within the indicator data. The group work provides highly significant life experiences and skills to the participants. Community connections have only occurred for a sizeable minority of participants, but the impact upon those individuals’ life experience, confidence and aspirations is profound.

Assessing Outcome 2: Community groups will be more inclusive and welcoming to a wider group of disabled young people

This outcome relates to the capacity building with community groups that the Blaenau Gwent Community Connections service has undertaken. There are three different indicators to this outcome:

1. one which discusses the community connecting that the project has undertaken with young people, (building on the data within outcome 1 indicators 1 and 3)
2. one which discusses the capacity building the project has undertaken with community groups, venues and resources
3. one which analyses the success and effectiveness of training provided by the Community Connections project.

The data used to assess this outcome is a mix of primary data collected by the evaluators and monitoring and feedback data collected by the service and compiled and analysed by the evaluator. It includes data within the personal action plans for young people who have joined mainstream groups, evaluation forms from training courses, evaluation forms from community groups, and staff observation.

Indicator 1: The number of community groups which report increased number of young disabled people attending their activity (15-20 groups)

This indicator can only be discussed in terms of young people's reported increase in attending mainstream community activities as the data is not available from community groups themselves. The following 13 community venues have disabled young people attending their activities:

- 3 community venues for informal groups: Brynmawr Cinema, Terrance Gardens and a café and cake shop
- 1 community resource - community radio station
- 1 integrated youth club
- 2 music groups - choir and guitar lessons
- 4 sports clubs - street dance, tennis, trampoline club, horse riding
- 2 community education courses - cake decorating and pottery.

Whilst this information is available in relation to outcome 1, it will now be assessed according to whether community groups are more inclusive and welcoming to a wider group of disabled young people. The target for this indicator is 15-20 groups and therefore, according to young people's reports, the project is below target numbers by two community groups and 87% achieved. However, the young people who are attending these groups or go to these

venues are regular members and some of them no longer need support to attend the groups. Barnardo's Community Connections has worked with some of these groups and venues in order to build their capacity in welcoming disabled young people, but not all of them. It is also of note that the mainstream community groups young people are attending are diverse, reflecting individual interests rather than a group approach. This is evidence that the project is implementing a person centred approach rather than a formulaic approach.

Indicator 2: Community groups identify that they feel more able to welcome disabled young people into their venues following input from the project (20 groups)

The Community Connections project has worked directly with a variety of venues and staff groups to increase their skills in welcoming disabled young people. This breaks down as follows:

- 12 community resource places (Winchestown Family Centre, Integrated Children's Centre, Ebbw Vale Institute, Bryn Bach Parc, Festival Park, Big Pit, Fire station, Millennium Stadium, the cinema, job centre, radio station and local supermarket)
- 3 mainstream community based venues (cake shop and cafe, Terrence gardens, cinema),
- 9 sports clubs (trampoline, street dance, tennis, horse riding and 5 from young leaders programme)
- 2 music clubs (choir and guitar lessons)
- 2 community education courses (pottery and cake decorating),
- 7 youth clubs (the youth forum, an integrated youth club and 5 clubs represented by the young leaders programme).

The indicator target number was to build capacity with 20 groups or venues and therefore this indicator has been exceeded by 15, with the total number of community groups reporting that feel more able to welcome to disabled young people being 35.

Whilst the targets specify 'community groups' the project has used the rationale of inclusion to ensure that general places in the community where people congregate to socialise are accessible to disabled young people. An inclusive life means being able to use drop in community resources that non-disabled people take for granted. This is particularly pertinent to the life choices of young people, where socialising may take place in informal settings such as parks, street corners or cafes. To this end the project has facilitated visits for disabled young people to community resource centres in order to build the young people's confidence in being in inclusive environments but also to enable the centres to welcome the young people and be aware of any specific needs and interests they may have. These have included Winchestown Family Centre, Integrated Children's Centre, Ebbw Vale Institute, Bryn Bach Parc, Festival Park, Big Pit, Fire Station, Millenium Stadium, the cinema, job centre, radio station and local supermarket.

In terms of community groups, courses and youth groups, a range of activities have begun to become inclusive and include disabled young people such as a trampoline club, a youth club and a cake decorating course. The project has employed three methods for enabling community groups to welcome disabled young people:

1. Individual young people have been supported to attend a group of their choice. Support workers have enabled the young people to learn how to travel without needing support, support the group or venue to understand any specific needs of the young person and built confidence with the young person and the venue or group so that they can continue to attend without support.
2. Supply training in disability awareness and skills for inclusion to staff groups and young volunteers.
3. Support young people to find out about a group of their choice and actively encourage and support them to try out something new.

Communication from the groups and venues that the project has worked confirms that they feel more able to welcome disabled young people and this is demonstrated by the evidence of disabled young people joining those groups and visiting the venues. This indicator has been exceeded by 75% and the project has exhibited numerous creative mechanisms for building capacity of staff in mainstream settings.

Indicator 3: Numbers of people who identify improved disability awareness following training sessions provided by the project (100)

Within the first year, Blaenau Gwent Community Connections has provided formal and informal training to organisations, volunteers and paid staff in disability awareness. The service has run nine training courses this year, reaching 49 young people and 17 professional youth workers, making a total of 66 people trained. Additionally, it has provided progressive, informal training to 36 staff members working at the 13 mainstream community groups that young people have joined. Therefore, the total number of people who have received disability equality training is 102.

Data and analysis regarding the informal training

It is commonly known that one of the difficulties with formal training is that the learning can be hard to implement into everyday work practice. Therefore, to enable supported employment and inclusive spaces, it can be more effective to provide job specific, task related training that relates to an individual's specific support needs. The data shows that this was the focus of the training provided for community groups. The numbers of individual staff trained at each venue are as follows:

- Terrance Gardens – 4
- Café and cake shop – 3
- Cinema – 4
- Adult Education staff – 8
- Community Tutors – 14
- Community Venues – 3

Each individual reported that they had more awareness of disability as a result of the training input from the project.

Data and analysis regarding the formal training

The 49 young people who received training are referred to as ‘young rep’s’ and are volunteers for numerous sports and youth clubs within the Blaenau Gwent county. Forty four of them felt that their awareness of disability and inclusion issues had increased and the table below summarises how useful the young rep’s found the training they received.

Table: Outcomes of young person’s training, total of 49 respondents

Question about the training	yes	no	no answer
Will the training be useful in your volunteer roles?	46	2	1
Has the training increased your awareness of disability and inclusion issues?	44	2	3
Do you feel more able to welcome young people with disabilities into activities and groups?	39	1	9
Did the course provide you with the skills needed to facilitate inclusion in your activities/ group?	35	4	10

Seventeen of the young people received a recognised accreditation for their participation in ‘Respect: Disability Awareness’ from Agored Cymru.

Data and analysis regarding training to professional youth workers

With regards to the training for 17 youth workers, they unanimously felt that the course had provided them with practical tools to implement inclusion and 14 felt they had more awareness of disability and inclusion. Respondents reported that the training enabled them to offer positive support and be more confident in their existing skills. A minority of the youth workers did not have any prior knowledge of disability issues and had not worked with disabled people (colleagues or young people) before.

Concluding observations regarding indicator 3

Informal and formal training was provided to 102 people and 94 of them reported higher awareness in disability and inclusion as a result of the training. Numerically, this indicator has not been met, although it is only under target by 8%.

The informal training may have had more impact in terms of sustaining inclusion, but it is also more time consuming and needs to be person centred so cannot, therefore, just be “rolled out”. There is, therefore, a pragmatic need to provide the two different types of training. Evaluation forms from the formal training courses clearly evidence the quality of the courses, with both sets of training receiving descriptions such as ‘thought provoking’, ‘interesting’, ‘relevant’, ‘informative’ and ‘practical’. It should also be noted that the project provided additional value by arranging Agored Cymru accreditation to the course the young people received.

Analysis regarding outcome 2

Data for all of the indicators show that the project has undertaken a lot of work to support the goal of enabling community groups to be more inclusive and welcoming to a wider range of disabled young people. It is clear that individualised groundwork has been undertaken with staff within mainstream community spaces, and disability awareness raising has occurred for professionals and young people. A large number of different venues, community resources and activities report feeling more able to welcome disabled young people.

Assessing Outcome 3: Young Disabled People Will Have Increased Self Confidence and Improved Social Skills

To an extent, an increase in self confidence and improved social skills is inherently linked to learning independence skills which is outlined in outcome 1 indicator 2. This section may appear to slightly repeat data, but this is only in order to expand upon how the learnt independence skills have aided increased confidence and social skills. The data for this section includes data from focus group evaluations with participants, focus groups with sibling and parents at the evaluation day, compilation and analysis of personal action plans, project monitoring and staff observation.

Indicator 1: The number of young people who report increased confidence

The target number for young people who report increased confidence was 30-50. Out of 30 action plans, all of the young people identified increased confidence as an outcome they wanted to work on. Of the 27 young people who have reviewed their outcomes, all of them reported improved independence skills. Eighteen young people's outcome scores increased by 1 scale point and 9 increased by 2 scale points. This indicator was 90% achieved.

From the group evaluation and evaluation day, there was unanimous consensus that young people gained increased confidence through the different types of group work and individual support. During the evaluation day, all parents (10) and young people (9) identified confidence as one of the key outcomes of the project. The table below shows a breakdown of self assessed scores regarding confidence gained from the group work:

Table: 'Has the project 'Community Connections' raised confidence?'

From end of year evaluation day

Score	No. of young people	No. of parents
1 (loads of confidence)	5	3
2	2	2
3 (a little)	2	1
4	0	0
5 (not at all)	0	0

In addition to the group work undertaken, the project has also facilitated a specific confidence building course which resulted in one young person achieving an Agored Cymru accreditation. This is an example of how the project

has attempted to provide activities that are tailor-made to individual young people's needs, rather than providing just one generic group course.

In workshops during the evaluation day, siblings also commented upon the level of confidence that their brothers or sisters had gained. They spoke about the things they regularly say their siblings do which they had not done before, such as help with cooking and cleaning, being more talkative etc.

The qualitative data provides some important learning regarding how young people have gained confidence. Young people reported gaining confidence through learning in three distinct areas:

1. From being more aware of themselves through self exploration and reflective understanding on topics such as personal hygiene, healthy living or learning to listen.
2. From undertaking group activities and trying new skills that involved physical risk or effort.
3. Through creative activity that produced a concrete outcome (cooking and Envirobeats).

It is also clear from the data that an increase in confidence has life changing effects. The data shows that the young people have gained a deep level of confidence and report not being scared to, for example, meet new people, try new things, visit new places or be independent. This is borne out by the 11 young people who attended the two day residential. They had the confidence to stay away from home but also participate in activities they had not done before, such as body-boarding and high ropes. Many of the indicators within this report crucially rely upon this one indicator of increasing confidence. This is summarised in the statement from one young person who said she was always scared when she restarted the academic year but that this year:

"I'm not scared moving classes."

It can be concluded that the service needs to continue its commendable work in the three spheres of risk and physical activities, personal awareness and creative skills in order to exceed the targets for this indicator. Numerically, the indicator was 10% under target but the impact upon the young people's lives, which is detailed further in the section below, entitled 'Unexpected Outcomes', highlights the quality of the work undertaken to raise confidence, as well as the sustainability of new confidence within the individual participants.

Indicator 2: Young people demonstrate improved social skills

The target number of young people who demonstrated improved social skills was 30-50. From 30 action plans, 26 young people identified wanting to improve their social networks, peer relationships or social skills and, of these 26, 25 of

them reported improved independence skills. Thirteen young people's outcome scores increased by 1 scale point, 11 increased by 2 scale points and 1 increased by 3 scale points.

At the evaluation day, 11 parents and young people specifically mentioned that they had made new friends since attending the project. When questioned, friends were made within the project and also at school. Some of the young people who attend the community groups also said they were beginning to make new friends in these new settings. In both evaluation focus groups with participants, it was clear that, for most of the group, making new friends was a personal goal for the coming academic year:

“Making new friends- I didn’t really have many before.”

“I’m going to make more friends.”

Parents felt that the project enabled their children to make new friends and learn social skills more generally, and both of these were seen as a priority.

Table: ‘Has ‘Community Connections’ helped young people gain friends/be more socially active?’

From the end of year evaluation day

Score	No. of young people	No. of parents
1 (many more friends)	4	3
2	2	1
3 (a little)	1	0
4	1	2
5 (not at all)	1	0

In the group evaluation and during the evaluation day, it was clear that young people felt they had improved social skills, regardless of whether they had actually made new friends. The ability and confidence to be sociable was highly valued and young people who had not made friends were not concerned about it because they felt better able to be sociable more generally. Social skills specifically cited included dealing with nerves, team work, communication, how to make friends and listening. Similar to other outcomes, although the target number for this indicator was just missed, standing at 83% met, the quality of the work and the impact upon young people's lives is highly significant.

Analysis regarding outcome 3

Both indicators for assessing outcome 3 are just under their numerical target. However, it is very apparent that the vast majority of the project participants have increased confidence and demonstrated increased social skills. It is of note that the young people value the skills to be sociable rather than just joining activities. By learning social skills, the young people feel more equipped to make decisions in their lives and sustain friendships that they may make. This suggests that the work being undertaken by the project is sustainable, making a

Assessing Outcome 4: Learning from the project will inform statutory and voluntary sector service provision and help to develop better models for supporting young disabled people as they move into adulthood

Indicator 1: The completion and circulation of an annual evaluation report

Barnardo's Cymru's Policy and Research Unit has supported the service to gather monitoring data and supplied this evaluation report. This report will be circulated to partner organisations of Blaenau Gwent Community Links, to other regional and national partner organisations which will have an interest in the work and be available to download in both Welsh and English from the Barnardo's Cymru website. The report's author, Vikki Butler, also gave a presentation and question and answer session regarding the evaluation and project progress, on 10th September 2014, to the project steering group. The next report is scheduled for completion by 4th September 2015. The targets for this indicator are, therefore, exceeded.

Indicator 2: Interventions made by the service to remove barriers to young people's participation and inclusion in community activities and improve support services (30-50 interventions)

The Blaenau Gwent Community Connections project has supported 30 young people, all of whom have had individual action plans. Referrals were received for a further five young people who chose not to engage with the project after receiving information and initial home visits. The project provides choice and decision making to participants to ensure needs are met effectively and to build the skills of the young people. To this end, young people have been consulted with regards to the development of group activities and access to community activities. Young people were also meaningfully involved in recent recruitment.

The project has also worked with 102 community members including young people, staff at community venues and professional youth workers. It maintains regular dialogue with local service provision through its project steering group. The steering group consists of representatives from social services, youth service, health, Careers Wales, advocacy services, families first and voluntary sector, who attend bi-monthly meetings. This approach has supported the development of the project and enabled positive partnership working and relationships to be developed.

With regards to this indicator, the numerical target has been met and the project has developed positive working relationships with other local services as well as having reached out to community services in mainstream settings. It can be concluded that this indicator has been exceeded.

Analysis Assessing Outcome 4

Both indicators from outcome 4 have been exceeded. Although only at the end of year one, the project is achieving noticeable good and innovative practice that is of quality and interest to service providers and other sectors at a national level.

Unexpected Outcomes

Whilst the project has specified outcomes to work to, there are a number of unexpected outcomes that are important in terms of shared learning and good practice. This section highlights some of the emerging unexpected outcomes that the Community Connections project is achieving.

Applicability of work across the voluntary sector and education

The sessions used in disability equality training with young people were disseminated at a national anti bullying seminar hosted by Children in Wales. The focus was about the role of equality education in preventing bullying behaviours and how this needs to happen in community groups as well as in schools. The disability equality training being delivered to non disabled young people is highly relevant to the education sector and advancement of equalities in the light of the Welsh Government document 'Tackling Hate Crimes and Incidents: A Framework for Action' (2014) and Estyn's recent thematic report 'Action on Bullying: a review of the effectiveness of action taken by schools to address bullying on the grounds of pupils' protected characteristics' (2014).

Applicability across age groups

The project focus is to work with young disabled people in transition to adulthood. However, from training form evaluations and feedback from community venues, the work is equally applicable to primary aged children and there is a need for community connecting across all age ranges.

Use of creativity and different mediums to build confidence and social skills

Through evaluating the work via separate indicators and outcomes, the holistic nature of the project becomes fractured, detracting from the multifaceted learning. The group courses are more than face value. A well designed group programme is more than learning skills: it has socialising skills, team building and independent skills built into it. For example, a young man explained that the best day for him was a trip to the Millennium Stadium. However, this was far more than a trip out to have fun or expand horizons. The young man explained it was amazing because he bought his own train ticket for the first time and with no support. He explained that it was a surprise to him that it was not difficult to do. Many of the young people were excited by trips out, not just because of the activities but because they would make their own sandwiches. The combination of skills taught through the group courses cannot be underestimated and were highly valued by the participants.

Innovation in community connecting

Most community connecting projects support individuals to access activities of their choice. The project is innovative through taking groups of young people to 'informal meeting places' i.e. community venues where people commonly congregate. Many inclusion practices find it hard to enable disabled people to be included in informal groups in community spaces. Through taking young people to community venues, the project is making first steps to addressing this common problem. Depending upon strategy capacity and safeguarding issues, it could be possible for the project to identify informal community groups within these venues to enable community connecting outside of structured groups.

Level of skill implementation

The analysis of the indicators and outcomes omit a focus upon the level of skill implementation being undertaken by the young people. During the participation day evaluation and group evaluations, young people stressed that one of the most enjoyable things from undertaking the group work was being able to do new things without help. One young woman explained how much fun it is being able to Hoover and bake at home. All the young people stated that they had learnt new things that they were going to keep doing. These ranged from making short films on a daily basis to following up music courses and options at the local college. The impact of the project upon the young people's lives is clearly transformative as shown in the comments below in response to the question 'What do you plan on doing from September and over the next year?':

"Clean the house and keep the hygiene knowledge I have learnt"

"I'm going to go shopping and learn more money skills. I will do cooking and more PE to be healthy."

"I like going bowling. I like going to the cinema. I like going to the museum. I hope to go with a friend one day and not be taken."

"I make films a lot. I am going to do more art and music. I have joined a tennis club and now do street dance too. I'm going to do all of this in the next year."

Offers life outside the family

Many of the young people and their parents reported that they had nothing to do outside of family and school before the Community Connecting project started. The majority of parents stated that it was the first time that their child had been able to choose what to do in their spare time and gone out without family support; they explained it was their first real social experience. This had led the project to be highly valued by both young people and parents, but runs the risk of the project being perceived as a lifeline service rather than a community

connecting service. It also highlights how much capacity building is needed within community settings.

Quality of work from Barnardo's Cymru staff

Unanimously, young people, siblings and parents gave high praise for the work of Barnardo's Cymru staff. Comments were collected through an anonymous comments box to enable people to speak honestly. Most commonly, parents were very positive about the quality of the service, how it had enabled young disabled people to have a social life and the level of confidence it had helped young people achieve. Example comments are listed below. These are cited to show consensus opinions.

"We have had excellent service for X. Staff are FAB and always helpful - they put her needs first. Top class, thank you!"

"Barnardo's have given my 2 children a boost of confidence and shown them things that have helped them both. Thank you, you're fab."

"The summer programme was so well organised and positive for the children! Our family has really benefited from your service. Thanks for looking after our children so well!"

"Absolutely fantastic! Great friendly staff and amazing work."

"This is the best thing that could happen for Blaenau Gwent."

"She now talks to me about things that aren't just family or school."

Mix of focus

The focus of the Community Connections project is threefold. Firstly, the project focuses on the individual young person's learning and development; secondly, on community resources to build capacity and, lastly, upon the young person's family. Most projects focus on one of these three but rarely all three. This holistic focus is necessary to enable sustainable community connecting to occur. Parents felt that including the family was a priority and particularly welcomed the visit made to the family home prior to joining groups, the fact there were family fun days and good communication so that they knew what was happening. Parents also enjoyed being able to spend time with other families who had a disabled member, gaining a sense of solidarity and thereby reducing family isolation.


Families Let Loose

In Chessington. (mad families on the rampage)

A Fab day was had by all, families were let loose to get to know one another.

Children running riot to enjoy themselves.

Well done Barnardos for supporting families



Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions regarding indicators and target numbers

A summary regarding indicators and percentage of achievement is given in the table below.

Outcome and indicator	Target	Actual number	% achieved
1. Young people will have improved social networks, reduced isolation and more choice and control over their lives			
1: Number of young people who report an increased participation in social, leisure and/or work related activities AND 3: The number of young people who report positive changes through accessing new community venues, resources and support services	30 young people	27 - via project activities 13 - via joining integrated groups	90% 43%
2: Young people demonstrate improved independence skills following input from individual sessions or groups	30 young people	25	83%
2. Community groups will be more inclusive and welcoming to a wider group of disabled young people			
1: The number of community groups which report increased number of young disabled people attending their activity	15 groups	13	87%
2: Community groups identify that they feel more able to welcome disabled young people into their venues following input from the project	20 groups	35	175%
3: Numbers of people who identify improved disability awareness following training sessions provided by the project	100 people	94	92%
3. Young people will have increased self confidence and improved social skills			
1: The number of young people who report increased confidence	30	27	90%
2: Young people demonstrate improved social skills	30	25	83%

4. Learning from the project will inform better provision and help develop models that best support transition to adulthood			
1: The completion and circulation of an annual evaluation report	1 report	1 report, present	100% +
2: Interventions made by the service to remove barriers to young people's participation and inclusion in community activities and improve support services	30 - 50 interventions	30 project participants 102 people trained 13 main stream groups	100% +

None of the indicators have been met by less than 83% and some have been exceeded. This does depend upon the interpretation of outcome 1 indicators 1 and 3. If the indicators were to be met through joining mainstream community groups and activities alone, the target would fall to 43%. However, evaluators do not believe that this interpretation would present the whole picture and have, therefore, presented two different figures for these indicators as a guideline to the project and funders regarding the direction of travel for the coming year. When the quality and sustainability of the work is taken into account and the numbers of unexpected good practice outcomes are considered, it can be concluded that the project is meeting its overall outcomes and objectives.

Quality of the work being undertaken

The quality of the work being undertaken should be highlighted in this evaluation report. Service users' evidence is that the project is undertaking outstanding work and it is clear that there is an impact on young people's lives and sustainability. The work regarding confidence is highly commendable, but also remains crucial to the success of the other outcomes and indicators.

Impact beyond local area and communities

Some of the work being undertaken by the Community Connections project has been used by Barnardo's Cymru colleagues in other forums in Wales and relates to young people's inclusion and wellbeing in education as well as communities. Although the project is only at the end of year one, it is already having an unexpected impact outside of its locality and remit, and has informed some of the Barnardo's Cymru policy work.

Complexities regarding community connecting

There are some tensions within the project with regards to community connecting and they span outcome 1 indicators 1 and 3, and outcome 2. The

evidence is clear that work has been undertaken with community groups, venues and people in mainstream settings. The indicator regarding input to community groups has been greatly exceeded but yet indicators regarding community connecting are under target, with too few groups showing an increase in disabled young people's attendance. The evaluator would suggest that in year two there will be an increase in the number of groups and community places that welcome disabled young people because all necessary work has been undertaken.

It is possible that the targets are too ambitious but before suggesting altering the targets, the following issues need to be considered:

1. The Community Connections project has had to build confidence and community capacity before being able to undertake individual community connecting. Some of the youth workers in training commented that they had never worked with disabled young people before and parents report that young people have never had socialising opportunities. It has, therefore, been imperative for the project to undertake a large amount of work before community connections can be a realistic, sustainable possibility. It is possible that the very low inclusion starting point was underestimated during project planning.
2. Given the low inclusion starting point and the delay in the start of the project, there has not been enough time to enable community connections to take place. The project started in January 2014 so seven months may be too tight a timescale to meet the target indicator numbers.
3. The project has focused upon group work and raising individual aspirations and confidence. As evidenced, this is crucial and has been undertaken to a very high standard. Some young people have started to join community groups for themselves, which is evidence of implementing a good empowerment model. However, it may be that, in year two, more individual work will need to be undertaken to enable more supported community connecting to occur.
4. The majority of parents cited one benefit of the project was that 'it is not mixed in with other groups currently running' and that 'regular youth groups are not accessible for our children'. Whilst all parents are very positive towards the project, the majority did not appear to be supportive of one of the main outcomes. The minority of parents whose children have joined mainstream groups were noticeably different in their opinions regarding inclusion from those parents who had not seen the benefits of community connections and cited three youth groups that were accessible.

The barriers to inclusion identified by parents and disabled young people are summarised in the table below.

Barrier to inclusion	Numbers (19)
There are no barriers	5
Fear of the unknown (new people and places)	7
Fear of the size of groups	2
Fear (some based on real experiences) of discrimination	5
Practical restrictions (travel, distance, time)	3
Lack of knowledge about support needs	6

If parents are not in favour of inclusive settings for their children, it is likely that it will be harder to achieve community connecting.

Young people may be staying in the project rather than moving through it

The evaluator does not have enough evidence to categorically claim that young people are staying in the project rather than moving through it. This sub section is therefore included as a possible caution. Twelve young people have completed their individual action plans and they will either move on from the project or be supported to create a new action plan to further improve their confidence, independence and social skills. There is a possibility that the project itself may become the primary mechanism for inclusion whereas, to meet the outcomes, the project should aim to be the vehicle for creating inclusion. This caution is raised owing to the fact that many young people are widening social networks and activities through involvement with the project rather than through community connecting and some young people describe making friends in terms of friends within the project rather than friends within community settings.

Specific recommendations for the project's next year

- Utilise existing staff expertise to expand plans to connect participants to mainstream groups and places.
- Explore the possibility of offering mentoring placements to colleagues in mainstream services (e.g. youth workers) to build their inclusion and support skills.
- In areas where existing community groups are low in numbers, undertake micro community profiles and outreach to informal groups as well as structured groups.
- Continue existing group and individual support practice in order to consolidate and continue to excel in raising confidence and independence.

- Consider training mainstream staff in the techniques the project uses.
- Ensure that young people flow through the project rather than use a service, acknowledging that this has to be balanced with individual needs.
- Maintain the family focus and undertake further work with parents to allay fears regarding mainstream youth groups. It is possible that facilitating parent peer support may function to reduce fears.

