

## **Pilot Study – Virtual Welsh Youth Club**



### **NEATH PORT TALBOT YOUTH SERVICE JUNE 2021 – DECEMBER 2021**

A priority for Neath Port Talbot is to support children and young people's wellbeing, especially following the Covid pandemic and the Council's Covid-19 Recovery strategy and in line with the Council's Corporate Plan 2019-2022 Well-being Objective 1 - To improve the well-being of children and young people, improvement priority

In May 2020 the Children's Commissioner for Wales in partnership with the Welsh Government, Welsh Youth Parliament and Children in Wales undertook a significant engagement to understand the impact of COVID-19 on children and young people. Over 23,000 children took part in the survey which reported that:

72% of those surveyed said the biggest impact of COVID-19 was not being able to see friends, 59% said not being able to visit family members and 42% school or college closures.

This pilot aimed to assist on the road to COVID recovery by reducing the social isolation of young people wanting to engage using their preferred language.

The project aimed to benefit Young People who attend the youth club with a range of group work activities that will look to address communication, confidence, problem solving and team building skills to aid and develop a range of skills in a fun and engaging way. Sessions would be developed to encourage and empower young people whilst expanding a range of new skills that will help to reduce and remove barriers, decreasing the risk of disengagement with current educational activities and when progressing onto further education, training or employment, decreasing the Number of NEET individuals in rural communities.

Short term the project will allow support to be provided for Young People whose needs are not being addressed currently, by providing a service that fills an identified gap and is equal to the provision that is available in English.

#### **PLAN**

- Pilot a Virtual Youth Club through the medium of Welsh.
- Online delivery for 21 weeks supported by a Worker in Charge and 2 activity workers.
- Providing opportunities to use and develop their Welsh language skills.
- Exploring local issues like rural deprivation and environmental concerns.
- Participating in team building and fun challenges to improve self-confidence, whilst also encouraging development of problem solving, working together and social skills.
- Supporting and improving mental health.
- Increasing knowledge of local and Wales's wide culture, traditions and celebrating Welsh heritage.
- Optional qualifications

## TIMELINE/MILESTONES

April 2021 - Application submitted

May 2021 - Presentation to LAG

June 2021 - Project commenced

July 2021 – Taster sessions and school visits

August 2021 - Planned residential

September 2021 - School transition

October 2021 - Back up date for planned for residential, if COVID rules allow

November 2021 - Shortlisted as finalists for Youth Work Excellence Awards in category - Welsh Language Youth Work

December 2021 - Planned verification of Qualifications – not possible – awarding body moderation is March

December 2021 - Youth Work Excellence Award winners announced – NPT Youth Service announced as runners up

December 2021 - End of programme trip and completion of funding

## PROPOSED KEY OUTCOMES

- Increased knowledge of Welsh culture, tradition and heritage
- Provision mainstreamed into Youth Service delivery
- Increased skills and qualifications
- Better mental health & well-being
- Reduction in social isolation



## **POSITIVES**

The project achieved the key objectives that were set out in the project proposal.

### **Increased knowledge of Welsh culture, tradition and heritage**

Young people gained an increased knowledge and appreciation of Welsh culture, tradition and heritage in a fun and creative way. An end of programme trip to Cardiff castle was arranged which also included ice skating and an ice walk around the castle grounds. For some of the young people this is the first time they had ever visited the Capital and were given a bus tour to see the prominent sights of Cardiff. Young people also learnt how to cook Cawl and traditional Welsh cakes, providing many an opportunity not only to learn new skills but also to taste and try new foods, expanding their tastes.

Through arts and crafts activities young people learnt about the significance of the Welsh Dragon as the national emblem and designed their own dragon by painting money boxes shaped as a dragon. They learnt about the symbols and history of the Welsh love spoon, creating their own love spoons out of pretzel bread and baked them.

### **Increased skills and qualifications**

Young people who participated in the programme achieved a food hygiene and an allergy awareness level one certificate. Initially these were not planned qualifications but during a consultation with the young people on activities, they all expressed an interest in undertaking cooking activities. It was felt that having a basic knowledge and understanding of food hygiene and basic food preparation techniques would benefit the group. Some of the group also commenced an Agored cookery qualification. This course is currently on going and will be completed in March 2022.

Alongside gaining qualifications the group also improved their IT and communication skills which helped to increase their confidence.

Staff also gained a wealth of new skills, adjusting not only to working and delivering sessions online but also adapting the way they worked with and supported young people. Staff learnt how to use a variety of different computer software and feel that their IT skills have vastly expanded.

### **Reduction in social isolation**

The Virtual Youth Club allowed young people from across the whole of the Neath Port Talbot borough to attend. It removed the barrier of transport and provided an opportunity to meet new young people and create friendships, this aided a smooth transition for young people that were commencing Year 7, as they had met young people from other schools in the youth club that were also transitioning. They also had made friends with young people that were moving up into Year 8. One parent said that her daughter was really anxious about her first day in comprehensive but when her daughter returned home from school she was extremely happy as she had seen members of the Welsh youth club who had welcomed her and helped her settle in.

The Virtual Youth Club also linked up with a small local charity that provided back to school bags and provisions. Youth Workers were able to identify young people that would benefit from this support and provided new school bags, stationary and water bottles. This would not have been possible without the creation of the virtual youth club.

The young people also participated in the NPTCBC 'Let's Talk Campaign'. This gave the young people the opportunity to think about what matters to them in their community and suggest ways to improve the Neath Port Talbot area and help to recover, reset and renew after the Covid pandemic.

Guest speakers from NPTCBC Youth Council attended a session and spoke to the youth club members about the opportunity to join the Youth Council and represent Welsh Speaking young people throughout Neath Port Talbot.

During the periods when schools were closed and social mixing was limited the activity packs were dropped to the homes of the young people. Parents stated that the activity packs were a lifeline for the young people and they really looked forward a Monday as they knew their packs were coming. During the drop offs the Youth Worker would check in with the young people to see how their week was going and how they were

feeling which helped them feel less isolated. Parents also commented on how impressed they were with the project and how much their young person was benefiting from it.

### **Better mental health & well-being**

The virtual Welsh Youth Club provided young people support and open access to a Youth Worker. The young people made new friends, practised speaking and writing in Welsh in a fun, supportive, safe and engaging setting which has helped to build their confidence, which in turn has supported and improved their mental health. The virtual Youth Club provided new experiences and skills to the young people, which without the youth club they would not have had the exposure too. This all assisted to improve and enhance the young people's well-being and mental health resilience.

The youth club received funding from the Youth Service to attend a trip to Oakwood Park during half term which provided a boost to the young people and allowed them to meet for the first time as a group in person. This trip allowed for friendships to be strengthened.

Evaluations completed by the young people all stated that through the youth club they had all made new friends, had new experiences and felt more positive about themselves.

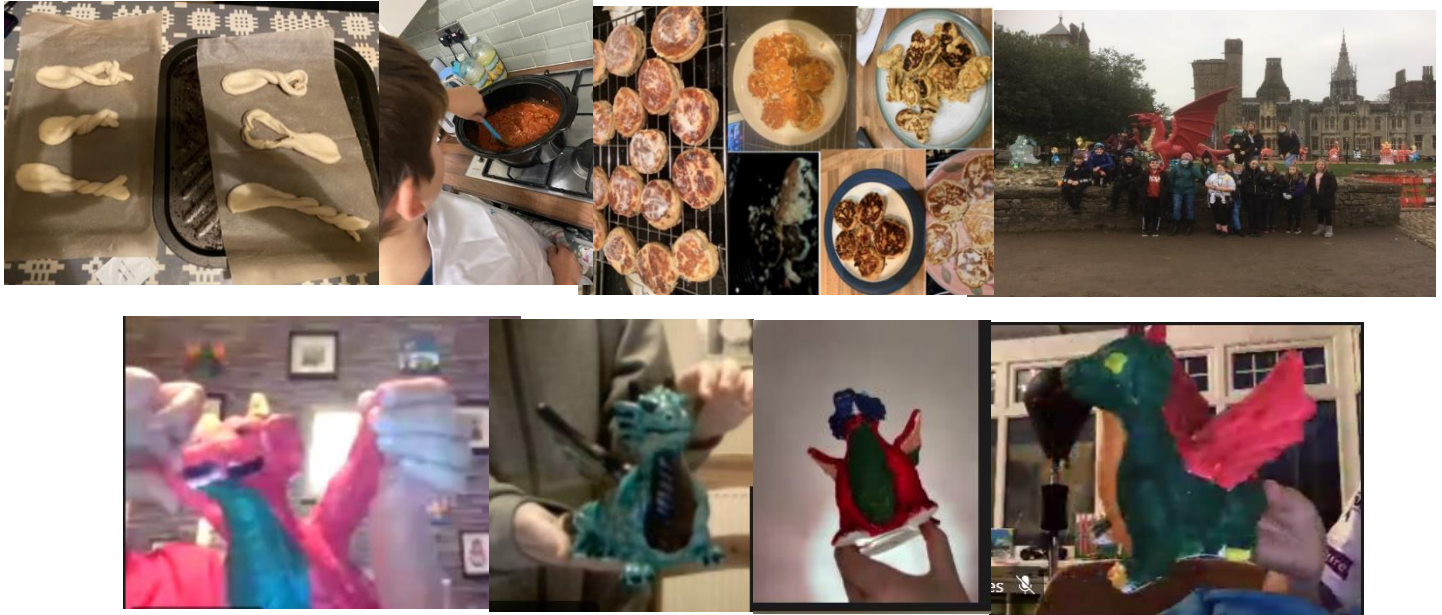
### **Provision mainstreamed into Youth Service delivery**

Both young people and their parents were informed that this was a pilot project, with funding in place until December 2021. As the project progressed a couple of parents asked what they could do to help secure additional funding and one parent offered to set up a fundraising group to raise money so the provision could continue.

Funding has been secured to continue the Virtual Welsh Youth Club until the end of the financial year 2022 and further funding is being sought to mainstream the Virtual Youth Club into the Youth Service programme of delivery for 2022/23 financial year.

### **Other unexpected positives**

- Provided an opportunity for trained Youth Workers to undertake safeguarding and well-being checks during lockdown. This allowed Youth Workers to provide early intervention by working closely with the school to establish and deliver support needs.
- Provided small opportunities and new experiences, like visiting the capital of Wales, tasting new foods, ice skating, providing craft materials and making new friends from across the Neath Port Talbot borough, that would not have occurred had the Virtual Youth Club not have been created.
- Shortlisted as finalists for Youth Work Excellence Awards in category - Welsh Language Youth Work. The Youth Club was nominated and shortlisted as finalists for the creation of the virtual Welsh language Youth Club. The judging panel commended the project for the ability to see the challenge of the pandemic as an opportunity for change and development, highlighting their approach to working with the schools as an excellent basis for developing Welsh language youth work.
- Allowed 2 trained, skilled, enthusiastic Youth Workers to retain their roles and continue using their Welsh language skills whilst embarking on their higher educational journey in English Universities.
- Strengthened working relationships and partnerships with Welsh medium schools throughout Neath Port Talbot.
- Increased traffic to our social media sites which provided us with a larger audience to promote the service to.
- Assisted the Local Authorities Welsh Language Promotion Strategy.
- Parents comments "Thank you so much for everything you've provided this year, loved it! Diolch" "Thank you for providing some fantastic opportunities and great fun. My son enjoyed being involved." "They were delicious. Fabulous experiences and new ideas every week for the students with the club. Diolch o gallon" "Diolch yn fawr plant wedi joio! Thank you so much they really enjoyed"



## CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNT

- Staffing**  
 A month into the project the Worker in Charge handed in his notice. Recruitment is a lengthy process and appointing a suitable replacement was difficult as the post required a fluent, confident Welsh speaker who also held or was committed to achieving a Level 3 Youth Work Qualification.
- Labour intensive**  
 The amount of time required to source resources and ingredients, purchasing what was needed and compiling the activity packs and then delivering the activity packs/resources throughout the Neath Port Talbot County borough to the young people was underestimated. Delivering activity packs to the school once they reopened did assist to decrease the amount of time spent on delivering resources.
- Engaging activities**  
 Creating engaging, participative online activities that catered for varied interests was challenging. Staff were very keen to ensure that activities were fun, engaging and educational without being repetitive. A bank of resources, games and activities have now been created that can be modified and adapted incorporating relevant Welsh themes, traditions and customs alongside other traditional celebrated calendar events. It was also challenging getting the young people to participate in exploring local issues like rural deprivation and environment concerns as they saw the club as somewhere fun to make and build friendship and do fun activities.
- Technical support**  
 Staff had to learn and adapt quickly to delivering session online. Due to increased pressure on the IT department due to Covid there was a delay in getting some IT equipment to staff so they could run the sessions virtually. Initially there were also some technical difficulties surrounding Council, Microsoft Teams and HWB licences and privileges. However these were overcome and a secure, safe team was created, providing peace of mind and security to parents, young people and staff that only authorised individual were able to access the sessions.
- OCN Qualifications**  
 Motivating the young people to complete their files to achieve their qualification was challenging. Due to the funding only being available until December 2021 some qualifications could not be counted as achieved, due to the moderation window being March 2022 and being out of the reporting timeframe. However these qualifications will be moderated and paid for by the Youth Service so all young people who have successfully completed their OCN's and achieved satisfactory moderation will achieve their qualifications.



## LEGACY

The creation of the virtual Welsh Youth Club has fostered a stronger partnership working relationship with the local Welsh medium schools allowing Youth work and Funding secured to continue the project until March 2022, further funding is being sought in order to continue the project beyond this date for the virtual youth club to become part of the Youth Service core provision. Continuing the project will assist with Welsh Governments pledge to have 1 million people speaking Welsh in Wales by 2050. The Virtual Welsh Youth Club will help promote and encourage the use of Welsh among the younger generation and highlight the importance and benefits of speaking Welsh, encouraging them to continue using the language in a fun and engaging way.

The project also is supported by research carried out by Wavehill on behalf of the Welsh Government stated that “Welsh medium youth work is essential not only because youth work can contribute to national strategies such as 'Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers', but also because engaging with young people through their language of preference is essential to the youth work methodology.”

