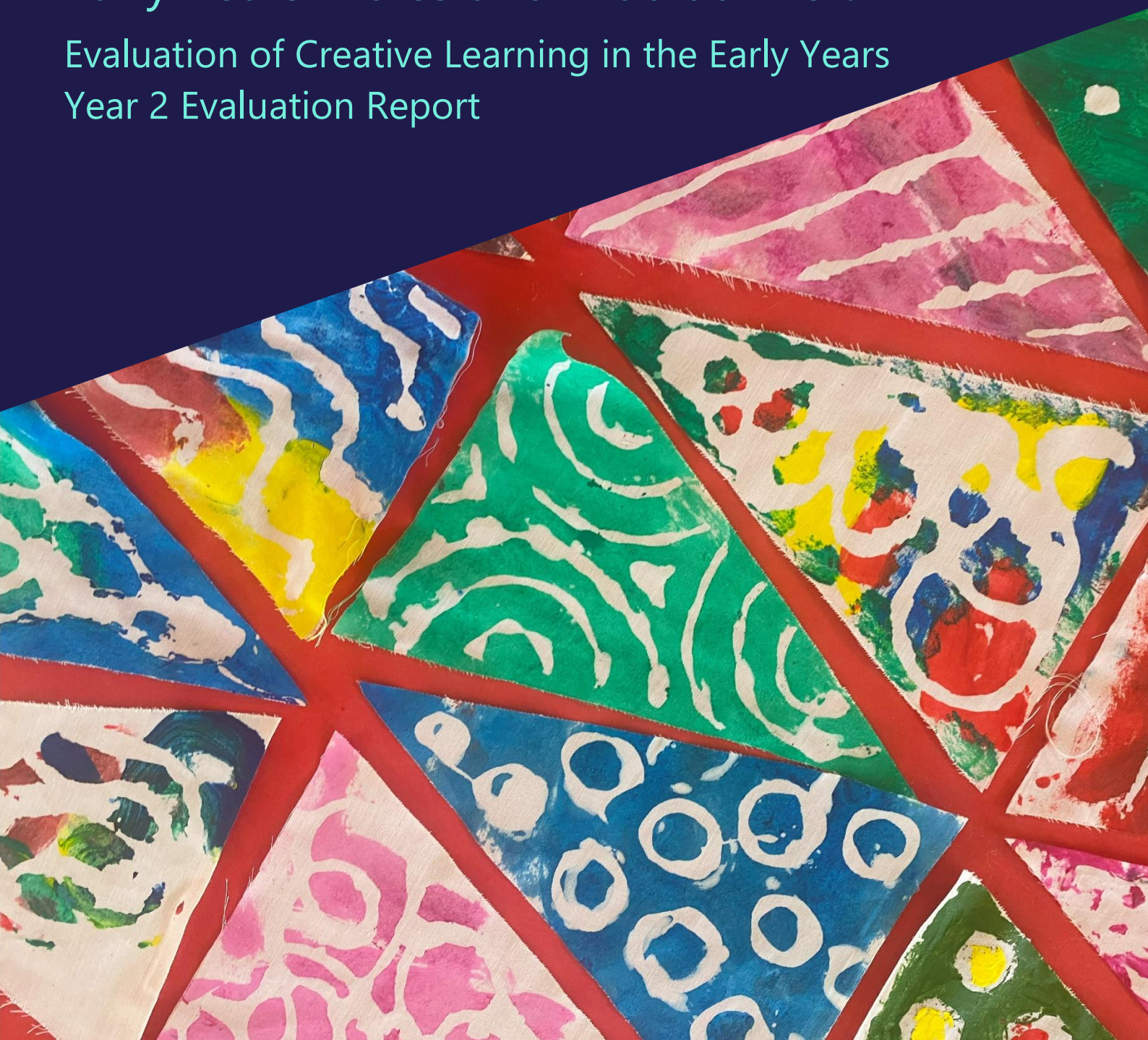


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For economic and
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Arts Council of Wales,
Early Years Wales and Mudiad Meithrin

Evaluation of Creative Learning in the Early Years
Year 2 Evaluation Report



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1. Overview and Aims

Creative Learning in the Early Years is a joint initiative between the Arts Council of Wales, Mudiad Meithrin, Early Years Wales and the Welsh Government supported by Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

At the heart of Creative Learning in the Early Years is the principle that the early years phase is a critical time in a child's life and development. This core principle aligns with the Curriculum for Non-Maintained Nursery Settings;

"We know that high-quality early education provision is essential to children's development. The experiences, knowledge and skills needed for lifelong learning, active citizenship and future employment begin in the early years."¹

This year, Creative Learning in the Early Years welcomed Mudiad Meithrin as a partner in the initiative. Mudiad Meithrin bring with them a wealth of experience and a wide network of Welsh-medium nurseries and Cylchoedd.

The purpose of Creative Learning in the Early Years is to, "explore what effect bringing creative learning into Early Years settings has on the learning and development of 3 – 5 year olds."²

The stated aims are:

1. To **understand** the central role of creativity and play in a child's development
2. To combine the principles of the **Curriculum for non-maintained childcare settings** with the **Creative Habits of Mind pedagogy** and learning from the **Lead Creative Schools Scheme**
3. To develop **confidence** in both early years practitioners and creative practitioners to trial new ways of working

¹ [A curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales/curriculum-for-funded-non-maintained-nursery-settings)

² Original Invitation to Tender – Evaluation of Creative Learning in the Early Years

2. Roles and Responsibilities

2.1 The Partnership

The Creative Learning in the Early Years delivery partnership is comprised of the Arts Council of Wales, Early Years Wales, Mudiad Meithrin and Cwmpas.

Arts Council of Wales are the official body that funds and develops the arts in Wales. Through Creative Learning Cymru they are the lead organisation, responsible for the administration, management and overall delivery of Creative Learning in the Early Years;

"Creative Learning Cymru supports teachers to explore and develop new approaches to curriculum design through a creative learning pedagogy that places the arts and creativity at the heart of education."³

Early Years Wales is the largest umbrella organisation supporting a range of comprehensive membership services to the Early Years sector in Wales. Their role in the partnership is to provide advice, guidance and support to engage their wider network in the Creative Learning initiative and to share the resulting learning across their network;

"We believe that in order to give children in Wales the best start in life, we need to provide services which promote child development and support families...Our main activity is to enhance the development and education of pre-school children in Wales by encouraging parents to understand and provide for their needs through high quality pre-school provision and childcare."⁴

Mudiad Meithrin has been influencing and working practically to ensure that the young children of Wales are able to become confident Welsh speakers. Their role in the partnership is to provide advice, guidance and support to engage their wider network in the Creative Learning initiative and to share the resulting learning across their network.

"The aim of Mudiad Meithrin, and that of its subsidiary companies, is to facilitate and promote Welsh medium education, care and development for children under the age of five. This is done through Cylchoedd Meithrin, Cylchoedd Ti a Fi and other provisions. Our aim is to give every young child in Wales the opportunity to benefit from early years care and education experiences through the medium of Welsh."⁵

Cwmpas is a development agency working for positive change, in Wales and across the UK.

"We are a co-operative, and our focus is on building a fairer, greener economy and a more equal society, where people and planet come first."⁶

Cwmpas are working collaboratively with the partnership to provide formative evaluation across the three year timeframe of Creative Learning in the Early Years.

³ <https://creativelearning.arts.wales/creative-learning>

⁴ <https://www.earlyyears.wales/en/about-us>

⁵ https://meithrin.cymru/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/adroddiad_blynyddol_saesneg_20-21.pdf

⁶ <https://cwmpas.coop/about-us/>

2.2 Key Roles

There are three key roles involved in the delivery of Creative Learning in the Early Years.

Early Years Practitioners are professionals working in the Cylchoedd, nurseries, playgroups and preschools. They are the experts in what their staff and children need, and they work with the creatives to decide how to bring creativity to their setting.

Creative Practitioners are artists and creatives skilled in a wide range of creative practices. They are recruited to bring the required creative skills and experience into the settings. They work collaboratively with the Early Years Practitioners and Creative Agents to design and then to deliver the creative sessions in the setting.

Creative Agents are also artists and creatives. They take on the role of supporting and managing the process. They support the Early Years Practitioners with the recruitment of Creative Practitioners, designing and shaping the creative sessions, supporting relationships and communication, administration and paperwork.

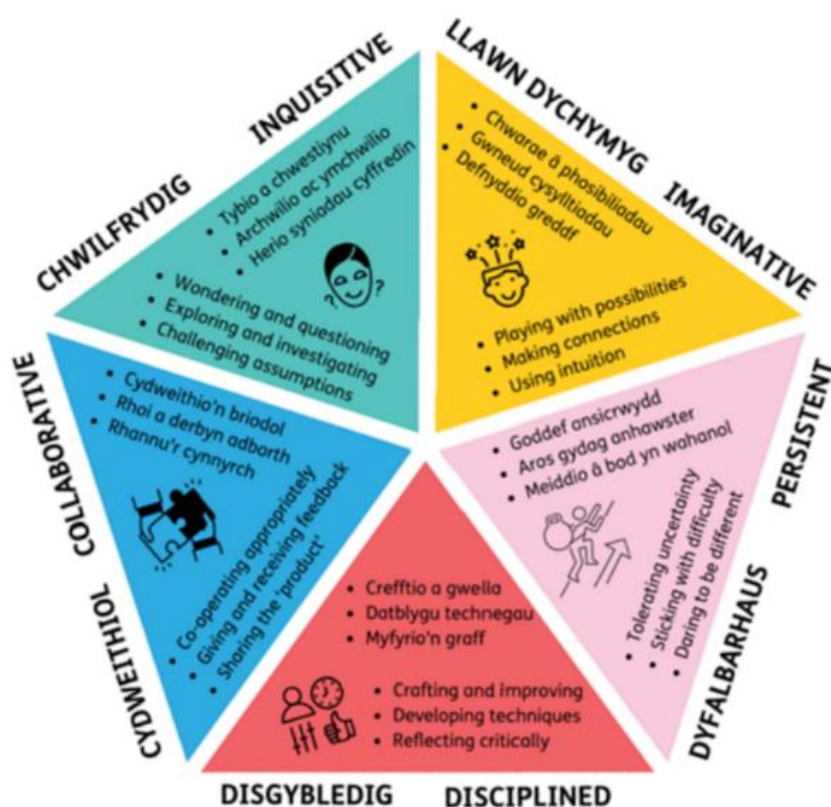
We will use the term “settings” throughout this report to refer to the cylchoedd, nurseries and playgroups involved in the Creative Learning initiative. We will also use the term ‘Early Years Practitioner’ interchangeably with ‘setting staff’ to refer to the professionals working in the nurseries, Cylchoedd and playgroups.

3. Methodologies

Creative Learning in the Early Years uses two primary methodologies to measure impact and to test progress against the initiative's aims – The Creative Habits of Mind and the Areas of Focus outlined in the Curriculum for Non-Maintained Nursery Settings.

Creative Habits of Mind pedagogy is based on research conducted by Bill Lucas, Guy Claxton and Ellen Spencer.⁷ The issue that their research tries to address is the lack of consensus on what creativity is which means that there is therefore no defined way to assess or track progress of creativity. The research presents a “five dimensional definition of creativity”⁸ which can be used to provide support to enable teachers to develop their learners creativity and to help learners to have a broad, shared idea of what it means to be creative.

The Arts Council employ the Creative Habits of Mind (see below). The 5-dimensional model is designed to help both learners and teachers visualise and reflect on where their abilities lie in each aspect of creativity, to develop a shared language or ways to talk about creativity and to actively seek opportunities to become more creative and develop their creative abilities.



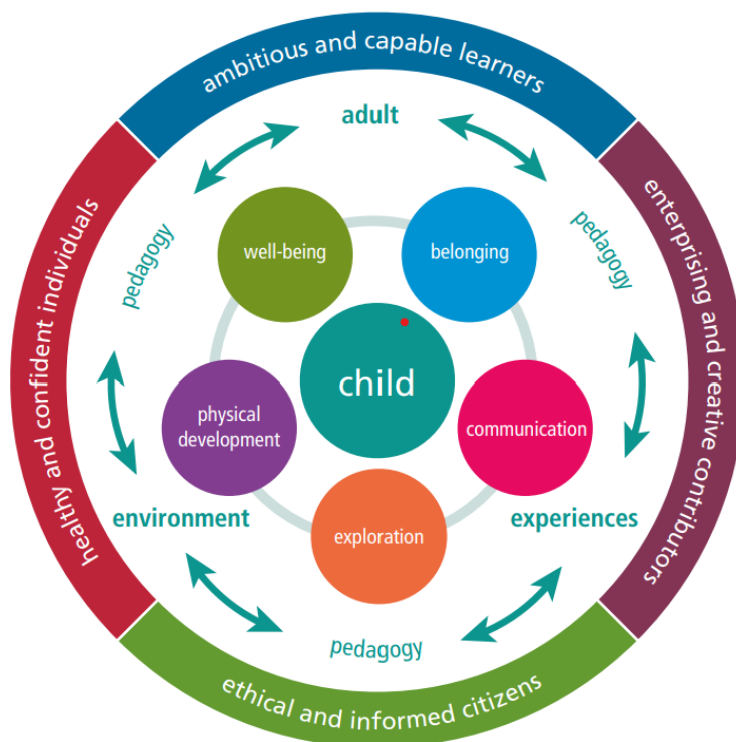
All participants engaged in the Creative Learning initiative are given training on the purpose of the Creative Habits of Mind. They are asked to reflect using the Creative Habits of Mind methodology on their own creative development and the development of the children engaged in the creative learning journey.

⁷ <https://www.oecd.org/education/ceri/5k4dp59msdwk.pdf>

⁸ [A curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings \(gov.wales\)](#)

Creative Learning in the Early Years also uses six 'areas of focus' which are directly linked to the Curriculum for Non-Maintained Nursery Settings. These areas of focus are centred around the five developmental pathways of Belonging, Communication, Exploration, Physical Development and Well-being (see diagram below).

The sixth area of focus is "Observing and Noticing Children in Creative Activities", based on the key principle within the Curriculum of, "enabling adults", which are defined in the Curriculum as, "...skilful, observant and interested adults, who provide authentic and engaging experiences in effective, exciting environments."⁹



Using the six areas of focus as a methodology enables Creative Learning in the Early Years to explore how the initiative is specifically supporting the development of children and Early Years Practitioners in areas that are, "...fundamental to the learning and development of all young children."¹⁰ It also supports a central aim of the initiative, which is to support Early Years Practitioners as 'enabling adults', giving them the skills and confidence to trial new ways of working and, "supporting the staff in settings in being leaders in the field of creative practice,"¹¹

This evaluation is framed around the Creative Habits of Mind pedagogy, and the six areas of focus from the Curriculum for Non-Maintained Nursery Settings.

⁹ [A curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales/a-curriculum-for-funded-non-maintained-nursery-settings)

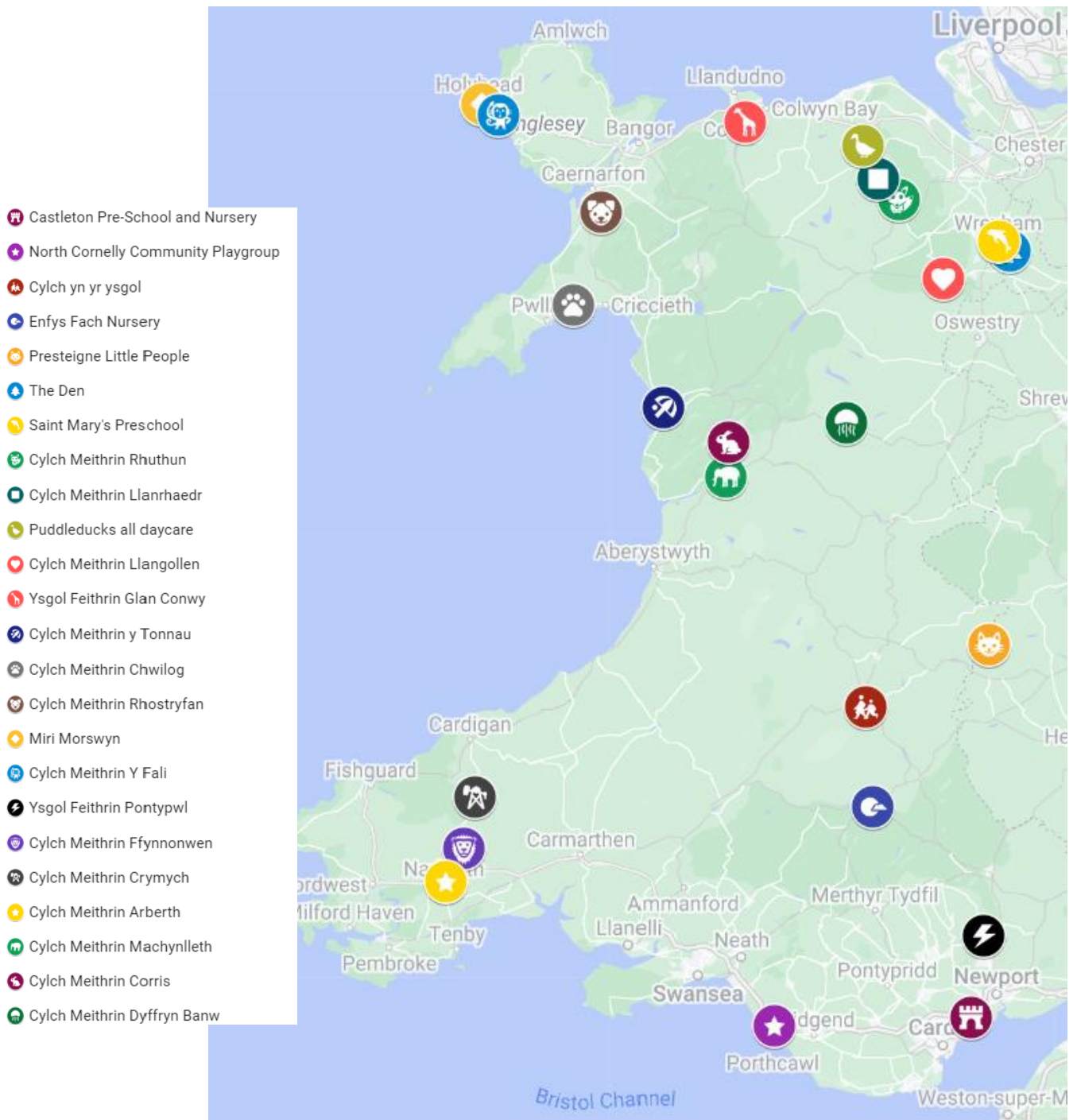
¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹ Original Paul Hamlyn Foundation Application

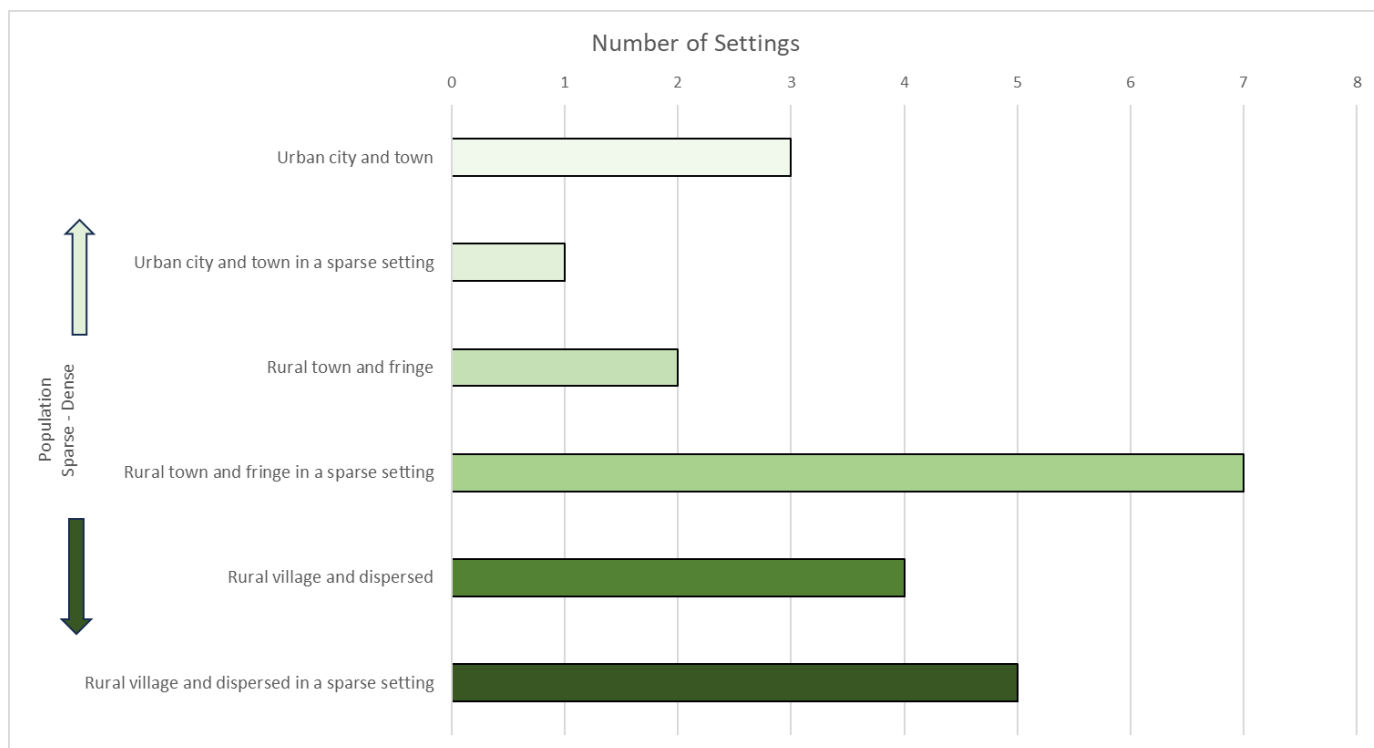
4. The Settings

There were 24 settings engaged year two. Two of these setting were unable to fully complete their learning journeys and will be discussed in more detail in section 5.4 of this report.

The settings were from a well dispersed geographical area across Wales as can be seen in the map below, or by following this [link](#).



The settings are located in a mixture of rural and urban settings. The graph below categorises the settings according to the rural-urban classification system.¹²



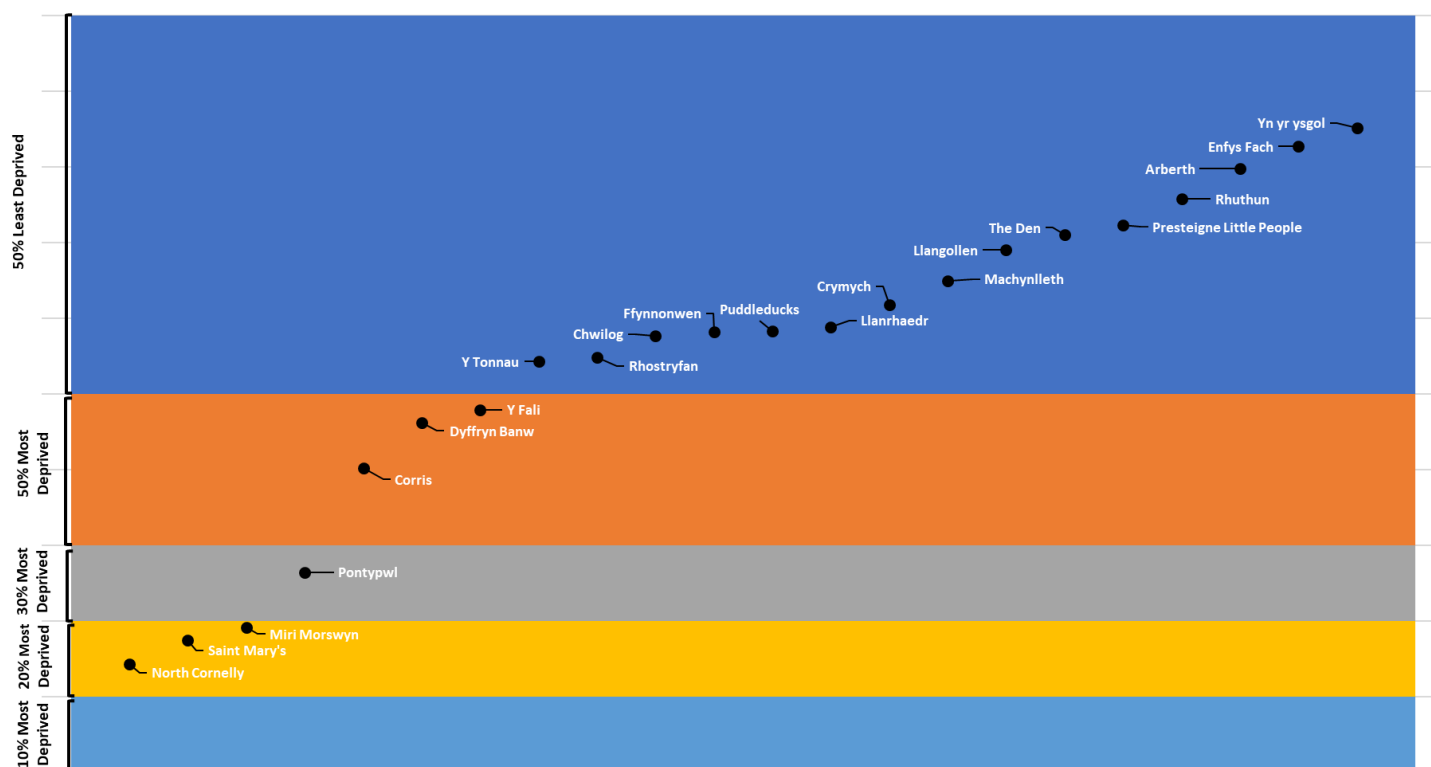
Of the 22 settings that completed their learning journey this year, three were classified as being in an urban location and one in a larger town. Nine of the settings fell into the “rural town” category. There were nine settings based in areas classified as rural, five of which fell into the most sparsely populated category. In 2023, 50% of the settings that took part in the Creative Learning initiative were located in urban or town settings, and it is positive that more settings in rural locations have been able to take part in the initiative.

This year, 67% of the settings involved were Welsh-medium settings. This positive engagement was achieved through expanding the partnership to welcome Mudiad Meithrin, enabling the partnership to capitalise on Mudiad’s wide network of Welsh-medium cylchoedd.

The chart below uses the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation¹³. The Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation Welsh Government’s official measure of relative deprivation for small areas in Wales and use eight different measures to assess each area; income, employment, health, education, access to services, housing, community safety and physical environment. Each setting is plotted against this index, based on the lower super output area in which it is based and the ranking that it has been given against the eight different deprivation indices.

¹² https://datamap.gov.wales/layers/geonode:rural_urban_classification_of Isoa

¹³ https://datamap.gov.wales/layers/inspire-wg:wimd2019_overall



This year, 17 settings (which equates to 70.8%) of the settings engaged in the initiative are located in areas classified as within the 50% least deprived in Wales. The remaining seven settings were located in areas with some degree of deprivation, as defined by the WIMD. During the first year of the initiative, 50% of the settings engaged were located in areas where there was some degree of deprivation.

During the evaluation we gathered an wealth of evidence unique to each of the settings. We felt it was important to devote a specific section of this report to each setting to explore both the granular evidence and to tell the individual stories that we heard when speaking with each setting. Each setting was generous with their time and their feedback, sharing their thoughts and reflections as well as the stories about the impact of the project on both the Early Years Practitioners and on the children.

4.1 Cylch Meithrin Arberth

[Cylch Meithrin Arberth](#) is located in Narberth in Pembrokeshire. The Cylch is a Welsh-medium setting and is categorised as being in the 50% least deprived areas, according to the Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation. It is located in an area described as a, 'Rural town and fringe in a sparse setting' by the Rural Urban Classification system.

The setting wanted to explore how to improve their use of outdoor space, supporting the staff in the setting to develop new skills, techniques and activities that could be continued after their time with the creatives comes to an end. There were two Creative Practitioners engaged with the setting.



We visited the setting and were able to observe a session taking place outdoors. The session was primarily conducted in English, with some Welsh spoken. The Creative Practitioner first brought the children and setting staff together to sing a welcome song and play some role-playing games. The children were able to choose what animal they wanted to be and to chase each other in character. The children were encouraged to see the game as their own, and began to invent new rules, becoming new animals and mythical creatures.

The Creative Practitioner had brought some willow sticks and showed the children how to use their bodies to warm up the willow so it would bend but not break. The children then curved the willow and tied it into frames. They arranged their leaves and flowers in between layers of the tissue paper, making beautiful hanging suncatchers.

The children were encouraged to explore the setting's large outdoor space throughout the session, coming and going as they wanted. They had previously planted some seeds which were growing, and many of them went to check on their progress and give them some water, proudly telling each other how much the plants had grown since they were last in. Other children wanted to search for bugs and went off together and explored under stones, leaves and old pieces of wood to find minibeasts. The session, whilst focused around a particular task, was relaxed and child-centred. The Creative Practitioner asked the children questions, asked for suggestions, asked them to name objects, processes, colours and textures. We observed the children using both fine and gross motor skills, bending the willow, carefully arranging the flowers and leaves, using scissors to cut the paper, twine to tie the willow.

The setting staff were initially less comfortable using the outdoor space, concerned about children running off, the weather, potential for injury etc. The setting staff had also initially focused on trying to keep the children engaged in the main creative activity. However as the sessions progressed, the staff became more relaxed about the children being outdoors, and began to be led by their interests and curiosities, rather than being focused on producing a finished creative product. The setting reflected that being involved in the Creative Learning initiative had "The main change has been confidence and help for the staff to be adventurous in the setting".

The children had particularly loved building a fire, something that the setting staff were initially less comfortable with, but had really enjoyed. They had toasted some bread on the fire, and the children had been really thrilled by this. The staff reflected that the children were, "really loving it".

The staff were also very positive about the impact of the sessions. They felt they had learnt a lot from the sessions and were more confident in leading activities outdoors. They told us, "It's gone really well, the children have loved it." Another member of staff said, "I wish it could have gone on longer."

Key Impacts – Children

INQUISITIVE

The children's natural inquisitiveness and love of minibeasts and bugs was encouraged and supported during the sessions, becoming a regular activity within the setting.

PERSISTENT

The children had to warm the willow before they could bend or it would snap. We observed children trying again after snapping their willow on their first attempt, and succeeding to bend the willow.

COLLABORATIVE

The children worked together to cover large sheets of tissue paper with glue, helping each other to spot areas that needed gluing and helping each other to carefully cover the willow frames in paper.

IMAGINATIVE

The children were able to become animals at first, then they decided to become dragons and unicorns in their play. They started a game with the rules given to them by the Creative Practitioner, then began to make up and collectively agree new rules, creating an imaginative new game.

DISCIPLINED

The children had to be careful with the wet tissue paper as it was fragile, and to hold the willow before tying it as it was springy. They learnt how to manipulate the materials they were using in different ways to produce the desired results.

Key Impacts - Early Years Practitioners

INQUISITIVE

The setting staff were open to new ideas, eager to learn and to explore how the children could benefit from new ideas and activities.

PERSISTENT

The setting staff developed confidence in using the outdoor space, working to overcome their concerns about risk and keeping everyone focused on the same task. They now feel more confident to use their outdoor space to its full potential.

COLLABORATIVE

The setting staff worked together as a team to make sure that children that needed snacks or the toilet were able to do this safely, whilst enabling the other children to continue to be outside.

IMAGINATIVE

The staff now feel they have become more "adventurous" in the setting, able to use a range of creative practices to engage children, being imaginative with the outdoor space they have and the resources at their disposal.

DISCIPLINED

The sessions have enabled the Early Years Practitioners to experiment with a range of different outdoor creative processes and activities, developing their creative skills and confidence.

4.2 Cylch Meithrin Chwilog

[Cylch Meithrin Chwilog](#) is located in Gwynedd, on the Llŷn Peninsula. The Cylch is a Welsh-medium setting and is categorised as being in the 50% least deprived areas, according to the Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation. It is located in one of the least populous areas in Wales, described as a, 'Rural village and dispersed in a sparse setting' by the Rural Urban Classification system.

The plan for the setting centred around the Cylch becoming part of the community through "...drwy daith greadigol fydd yn pontio cenedlaethau" (...through a creative journey that will span generations). The Cylch wanted to bring older and younger generations together to do activities together, to improve understanding and respect.

The setting recruited two Creative Practitioners who worked with both the children and older adults together in each session. The sessions involved a huge range of different creative approaches including movement, dance, imaginative role play, painting, singing and yoga. Each session, the Creative Practitioners created a relaxed and supportive environment to encourage the young children and the older adults to play together, "Daeth dwy genhedlaeth ynghyd i ddawnsio, symud, canu, chwerthin ac i chware."¹⁴ (Two generations came together to dance, move, sing, laugh and play.)



¹⁴ Cylch Meithrin Chwilog Evaluation Form

The children and adults were able to use their imaginations, creating a rocket and a train out of empty cardboard boxes, becoming plants growing in the sunshine and dancing like a butterfly around the hall. The sessions ended with a celebration, with the children and older adults putting on a show for the parents and carers. The parents reflected that the children had become more confident, "Roedd un rhiant wedi rhyfeddu at ba mor hyderus oedd ei merch fach swil i siarad o flaen pawb yn y sesiwn rhannu."¹⁵ (One parent was amazed at how confident her shy little girl was to speak in front of everyone in the sharing session.)

The sessions were very successful, with the Cylch reflecting in their evaluation form that they had seen that the children had made progress in all of the areas of focus and all of the creative habits of mind. The Cylch reflected that the sessions have enabled the children to develop their self-confidence and self-esteem. Through being free to use their imaginations, they have become more creative and more confident in their own creative abilities. Their physical confidence has improved, as have their gross motor skills and the children are better able to communicate as a result of their interactions with the older adults.

The Cylch also reflected that the sessions have helped the children to feel more connected to their community, and supported their sense of cynefin. This concept is a significant aspect of the Curriculum for Non-Maintained Nursery Settings in Wales and the wider Curriculum for Wales and will be discussed in more detail later in the report. The parents reflected that they felt more part of their village as they had got to know the older adults involved in the sessions, who would stop in the street and say hello to them. In summing up the sessions, the Creative Agent reflected that, "Taith greadigol arbennig ar fydd yn aros yn y cof am amser hir."¹⁶ (A special creative journey that will remain in the memory for a long time.)

Key Impacts – Children

INQUISITIVE

The children were excited to see each new activity, and able to use their natural inquisitiveness to explore the new items and activities in each session. They were able to play with the older adults, getting to know them and forming friendships, singing and dancing with them. This helped the children and their families to create bonds with the older people, feel a stronger sense of community and to challenge any negative assumptions about what people are capable of at any age.

PERSISTENT

The children were presented with new activities, items and ideas each session and encouraged to let their imaginations lead their actions. The children were also unfamiliar with the older adults that joined them in their play. The children all overcome these uncertainties, becoming friends with the older people and embracing each activity in their own unique ways.

COLLABORATIVE

The children worked together with each other and with the older adults in each session to create imaginative worlds where they were able to express themselves through movement, song, dance and play. The children worked together to create paintings and create mynydd yr Wyddfa out of boxes. They developed their ability to communicate with each other and with the older adults to achieve their shared creative goals.

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ bid

IMAGINATIVE

Each session provided the children with the opportunity to use their imaginations to become animals, sea creatures, plants and insects. They developed empathy with the older adults in the sessions, seeing them as friends and as people to share with, to play with and to talk to.

DISCIPLINED

The children were able to practice their physical movement and communication skills in every session, gaining confidence in both areas. They were also able to share their skills people, and learn new skills with the older people involved in the sessions.

Key Impacts - Early Years Practitioners

INQUISITIVE

The sessions inspired the setting staff to overcome the assumption that creativity should be rigorously planned and that each step should be carefully thought out. The staff have relaxed into the idea that children are naturally creative and can make any idea into something exiting.

PERSISTENT

A significant impact was described by the setting as, "...y staff llawer hapusach ac yn teimlo yn fwy egniol wrth gynnal sessiynau creadigol."¹⁷ (...the staff much happier and feel more energised when holding creative sessions.) The activity modelled by the Creative Practitioners in the sessions has enabled the setting staff to feel more confidence in using physical movement with the children and to see it as something that is beneficial for both them and for the children.

COLLABORATIVE

The setting staff reflected that they feel that they are a more important part of their community as a result of the sessions. They feel there is a stronger connection between them, the children, the older adults and the wider community as a result of the intergenerational sessions. The sessions have brought staff, children and the community together to share ideas and to learn from each other.

IMAGINATIVE

The sessions helped the Early Years Practitioners to see that creativity can come from the simplest of things. The sessions have inspired them to see how they could use other simple, cheap materials to inspire creativity in the children.

DISCIPLINED

The staff have been able to develop and expand their creative practices, gaining new ideas and techniques to use with the children after the session end. The staff reflected that they can see new possibilities to continue to work with their local community, and plan to continue to build on the relationships that they have created.

¹⁷ ibid

4.3 Cylch Meithrin Corris

[Cylch Meithrin Corris](#) is located in the village of Corris, 5 miles north of Machynlleth in Gwynedd in north Wales. The Cylch is a Welsh-medium setting and is categorised as being in the 50% most deprived areas, according to the Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation. It is located in one of the least populous areas in Wales, described as a, 'Rural village and dispersed in a sparse setting' by the Rural Urban Classification system. The cylch is very much part of the community.

The setting planned to use the creative sessions inspire confidence in going outdoors in all weathers. They also wanted some inspiration around using natural resources in their creative activities.

The sessions centred around going outside and using natural materials in a variety of creative processes. The children were not presented with highly structured activities, but instead given items and activities and supported to engage with these creatively as they wished. They had previously been going for walks, but the sessions encouraged them to stop and explore their environment, play in the mud by the river and to experience and learn from their natural environment. The children were able to help build a fire, and use it to cook food. They created patterns in cloth by hitting leaves and flowers with a hammer. The sessions were also used to talk about nature and the natural environment, learn the right words and terms for things and understand how things grow and change through the seasons. The Early Years Practitioners reflected, "I really enjoyed the times when the children found interesting natural materials themselves".



The evaluation form for the setting reflected that they had made progress in all of the areas of focus and all of the creative habits of mind. The children particularly enjoyed the chance to touch and feel things outdoors, getting dirty and playing without being concerned about their clothes getting dirty. The setting staff were able to feel more confident in using natural objects and found items in creativity with the children. The project has planted seeds of creativity which will grow into new ideas with both the staff and the children.

Key Impacts – Children

INQUISITIVE

The children were more confident in engaging with nature and the natural environment after the sessions. They felt more confident playing in mud, getting dirty, touching natural objects and exploring things they encountered when exploring outside.

PERSISTENT

The children were happy to keep trying difficult tasks or new creative processes and returned to things they hadn't been able to complete.

COLLABORATIVE

The Creative Practitioner was able to work with the children to build a fire, work together to make food to share and to help each other learn new skills. The setting Leader reflected, "One session I enjoyed was when we made boats out of wood. When we were sailing the boats we lost one of them. The other children started sharing their boats with the little girl that had lost hers; it was a strong learning experience."

IMAGINATIVE

The children were able to use their imaginations in role play, inventing new games to play in the outdoors, developing their physical movement and their gross motor skills.

DISCIPLINED

The children were able to practice a range of creative processes, each of which required the development of different techniques such as using a rolling pin, mixing in a big bowl, moulding clay into shapes. They were able to reflect on what wasn't working, and help each other to get the desired results.

Key Impacts - Early Years Practitioners

INQUISITIVE

The setting staff reflected that they felt more confident to explore outdoors with the children, and felt better equipped to engage in different ways to engage the children.

PERSISTENT

Developing confidence in more adventurous use of the outdoor space was something that took time for the Early Years Practitioners to develop. The sessions helped the staff to feel more comfortable with building fires and getting muddy.

COLLABORATIVE

The setting staff worked collaboratively together to support the Creative Practitioner to explore outside with the children. They were able to work with the Creative Practitioner to expand their own creative practices and skills, and to pass these skills on to other colleagues in the setting.

IMAGINATIVE

The Creative Practitioner supported the setting staff to see the full potential of the natural environments around the Cylch. The sessions enabled the staff to see how anything could be used to inspire creativity in the children and they will continue to allow their imagination to lead activities in future.

DISCIPLINED

The Creative Practitioners supported the Early Years Practitioners to develop a range of skills and techniques that they could use to engage the children. The staff were able to reflect on what would work for their setting, focusing on shaping their learning to best meet their needs and the needs of the children that come to the Cylch.

4.4 Cylch Meithrin Crymych

[Cylch Meithrin Crymych](#) is located in the village of Crymych in northeast Pembrokeshire in West Wales. The Cylch is a Welsh-medium setting and is categorised as being in the 50% least deprived areas, according to the Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation. It is located in one of the least populous areas in Wales, described as a, 'Rural village and dispersed in a sparse setting' by the Rural Urban Classification system.

The setting wanted to use the sessions to increase the confidence of the setting staff, enabling them to be more creative with the children and to expand their creative education. They also wanted to make better use of their outside area and be, " ...yn dilyn llais y plant."¹⁸ (...led by the voice of the children).

The setting engaged two Creative Practitioners, who used a range of activities, skills and techniques to engage the children. We visited the setting and were able to take part in a session that centred around stones and the history, myths and legends of the area. The importance of stone to the history and culture of the setting was used creatively to spark the imaginations of the children. They learnt about the importance of the local quarry and about the blue stones that were mined for Stonehenge. They pretended to ride the Cardi Bach, the train that carried the stone from the quarry. The children were fascinated the tales of the giants who threw the giant boulders that can now be seen on the hills. The children made cromlech, mirroring Pentre Ifan, out of just about everything. They even began making cromlech out of their snacks.



¹⁸ Cylch Meithrin Crymych Planning Form

The sessions involved the use of natural, recycled or found objects which enabled the setting staff to gain an insight into how almost anything could be used creatively with the children. They used the outside space and leaves and debris from nearby trees to create pictures on the playground floor. During the session we observed, we watched the children draw in a container of ash from a fire, practicing mark making, enjoying the tactile feel of the ash, drawing letters and naming them aloud. The children also took turns in pretending to be giants, throwing a boulder. They sang their new song, 'Edeiladu Cromlech' which they had learnt during the sessions.

The staff reflected that one child had shown a huge improvement in their confidence, and was able to focus their attention far better since taking part in the sessions. The staff also reflected that the children's vocabulary had widened and that they were using many new words from the sessions in their everyday play.

The sessions immersed the children in myths, legends and history all centred around their local area, enabling them to understand and have a stronger connection to nature and the local area. The sessions were clearly enabling the children to develop a sense of cynefin, and to see themselves as part of a rich history, culture and landscape.

The staff felt far more confident in using many different processes, objects and techniques after taking part. They reflected that, "The wealth of imagination [the creatives] have brought is outstanding – such inspiration." The setting staff also told us that they felt empowered by the way the creatives had used such simple materials and turned them into amazing creative activities for the children, "What's she's made out of nothing! It's Amazing!"

Key Impacts – Children

INQUISITIVE

The children were inspired to learn more about their local history and culture, to develop a sense of wonder about the natural world and the wild landscapes around them. They wanted to visit the local areas they had learnt about, and continued to be curious about their local area.

PERSISTENT

One activity involved the children using leaves, pine cones, needles and other fallen materials from trees to create a huge picture of a cromlech in the garden. The task required the children to work together to create the outline first, and then fill it with materials gathered from all over the play area. The picture took time and effort, requiring the children to keep working until they could see the finished picture.

COLLABORATIVE

The children worked together to build a tower and a cromlech from foam rocks, helping each other to select the best shaped rock for the next level, communicating their intentions and offering each other suggestions until they had reached their goals.

IMAGINATIVE

Throughout the session we observed, the children used their imaginations to become giants, birds, horses, trains, kings and knights. The children led the sessions with their incredible imaginative suggestions, turning slates into witches hats and imagining the lives of local people from the past by listening to the sound made by a clog walking on stone.

DISCIPLINED

The children improved their ability to focus and engage in activities with less support from staff. The children were now more confident in taking on a range of new creative processes and were more willing to try new things after taking part in the sessions.

Key Impacts - Early Years Practitioners

INQUISITIVE

The Early Years Practitioners felt more confident to try new things with the children, be more adventurous and allow the children to experiment. The sessions helped them to see that creativity doesn't necessarily require expensive resources or equipment, but can come from anything they have to hand.

PERSISTENT

The way that the Creative Practitioners approached the sessions had a lasting impact on the setting staff. They found the open, enthusiastic, imaginative and affirming approach that they took with the children helped them to feel less constrained in future. They saw how much the children were capable of, given the chance to try new things and focused less on trying to structure activities, and more on enjoying the creative process.

COLLABORATIVE

The setting staff told us that they felt the sessions had, "extended our knowledge and skills." They explained that it was easy to "get in a rut" and the sessions had brought the team together and enthused them to continue the creative activities.

IMAGINATIVE

The setting staff spoke enthusiastically to us about their future plans. They want to take the children to visit some of the historical sites that they learnt about, to use local quarry stone to build a rockery and cromlech in the garden with the children. The staff have discussed a range of imaginative ideas that they plan to bring to the setting in future.

DISCIPLINED

The sessions helped the staff to develop new creative skills and to develop existing skills. They were able to reflect on things that worked well for their setting, and things that could be improved or revised to meet the needs of their children.

4.5 Cylch Meithrin Dyffryn Banw

[Cylch Meithrin Dyffryn Banw](#) is located near the village of Llangadfan in Powys. The Cylch is a Welsh-medium setting and is categorised as being in the 50% most deprived areas, according to the Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation. It is located in one of the least populous areas in Wales, described as a, 'Rural village and dispersed in a sparse setting' by the Rural Urban Classification system.

The Cylch had not long moved to their new site within a school, and wanted to use the sessions to focus on transition as a theme. Transition between home and the Cylch, Cylch and the school, transitions in nature. The setting wanted to enable the children to grow, develop closer connections, and support them to recognise and express their feelings to support their wellbeing. It was important to the setting to support the children to feel safe and to develop their sense of cynefin through the sessions.

The Cylch has a large outdoor space which is very important to them, with a shared history and links to the community. The setting worked with two Creative Practitioners, one who was a gardener and experience forest school leader, the other who specialised in exploring the natural world. They brought older children from the school into the sessions to help them create links between the children in the Cylch and the school. The setting wanted to make more use of the outdoors area and understand how they could engage the children with nature in new ways.



The sessions focused on allowing the children to explore nature, use tools, plant plants and seeds to grow food, connect with wildlife and express themselves through movement, painting and creating. The sessions were collaborative, bringing the children, Early Years Practitioners and creatives together to explore and experience nature. The setting reflected that, "It has reiterated the importance of early years education being so important and how creative it is."¹⁹ The Creative Practitioners felt that it was a fantastic opportunity, describing the small children as, "the most creative people in the world".²⁰

Key Impacts – Children

INQUISITIVE

The sessions centred around enabling the children to feel free to explore and wonder at nature. The sessions allowed the children to follow their natural inquisitiveness, using tools, digging and exploring the outdoor space as they wanted.

PERSISTENT

Some of the tasks required fine motor skills, such as the mark making or painting. The children showed persistence when things were hard, and continued to practice until they mastered the techniques.

COLLABORATIVE

The older and younger children worked together to learn new skills. The older children modelled behaviour and techniques for the younger children, helping them to learn. The older children became better at showing and explaining to the younger children.

IMAGINATIVE

The children made masks and costumes to explore the ideas of transition of the self and how we change and grow as people. The children were able to imagine themselves as someone else, or think about how they might change as they grew, making connections between their own experiences and those of others.

DISCIPLINED

The creative activities used a range of techniques and the children in the Cylch were able to practice and become adept at using scissors to cut shapes.

Key Impacts - Early Years Practitioners

INQUISITIVE

The sessions helped the Early Years Practitioners to feel more confident to explore new possibilities of using the outdoors with the children. They were able to see new uses for everyday items, and to recycle materials for use in creativity any play.

¹⁹ Dyffryn Banw Evaluation Form

²⁰ ibid

PERSISTENT

The setting staff have been able to see the benefits of taking time to explore the outside and nature. They have become more confident in letting the children lead, rather than arranging structured activities with a predefined focus.

COLLABORATIVE

The setting staff were by nature collaborative and worked as a team, but the sessions helped them to reflect on how to manage the challenges of being outdoors with small children. The requirements of staying in ratio, children needing the toilet or a snack mean that outside adventures require a collaborative effort, but are worth the benefits for both staff and children.

IMAGINATIVE

The sessions helped the Early Years Practitioners to see the potential of utilising the outdoor area in a wide range of new and exiting ways. The sessions supported the children to be active and to express their emotions through play, which helped the setting staff to see how they could continue these activities in the future.

DISCIPLINED

The sessions supported the Early Years Practitioners to further develop their creative skills and to reflect on how they can carry the learning from the sessions forward to the future.

4.6 Cylch Meithrin Ffynnonwen

[Cylch Meithrin Ffynnonwen](#) is located near the small hamlet of Login, in Carmarthenshire. The Cylch is a Welsh-medium setting and is categorised as being in the 50% least deprived areas, according to the Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation. It is located in one of the least populous areas in Wales, described as a, 'Rural village and dispersed in a sparse setting' by the Rural Urban Classification system.

The setting wanted to develop the confidence of the Early Years Practitioners in taking on new activities and developing new skills. The setting also wanted to focus on supporting the children to become more independent, to engage more freely and to communicate more confidently.

The setting worked with two Creative Practitioners to explore how they could use the outdoor space more effectively and in ways that engaged the children's creativity. The Creative Practitioners brought a huge range of different activities and creative processes to the Cylch, and spent time engaging the children in smaller groups to ensure they could all have a turn in trying out the activity. The setting has children ranging from 18 months to 4 years, so the Creative Practitioners had to be very flexible and adaptable to ensure that all the children could engage with each activity.

We saw the results of the children's experiments with cyanotype printing (see pictures below).



The children had loved this activity, and the magical way that the images appeared on the paper when exposed to sunlight. The Early Years Practitioners reflected that they had found it interesting to see how the artists had used simple but effective processes with the children.

Key Impacts – Children

INQUISITIVE

The youngest child involved in the sessions was only 18 months but was able to take an active part in every one of the activities. The Creative Practitioners were led by the children, quickly modifying and supporting the children to engage where needed. The Early Years Practitioners and Creative Practitioners were all amazed by how capable even the smallest children were of trying and mastering a range of creative processes.

PERSISTENT

The children had to practice using the tools, in order to use them effectively, particularly in the activity where they were hammering the leaves and flowers to make patterns in fabric. This required them to be persistent and keen on trying until they achieved the results that they wanted.

COLLABORATIVE

The children worked together to build totem poles out of old cardboard boxes, not only working together to find the right sized box to stack effectively, but helping to design, draw, paint and collage the finished results. The children were proud of their creations and had been able to communicate with each other effectively.

IMAGINATIVE

The Creative Practitioners reflected that the children in the Cylch were “so imaginative” and open to try any new experience. The less confident children had started to join in and speak up during the activities as the sessions progressed. The Creative Practitioners observed that all of the children in the Cylch were more engaged, ready to share their ideas and more communicative by the end of their time with the Cylch.

DISCIPLINED

The Creative Practitioners reflected that they had to adjust their initial plans, allowing the children to return to the same activities rather than moving on each session. The children wanted to practice and improve their techniques – particularly in using the tools.

Key Impacts - Early Years Practitioners

INQUISITIVE

The Early Years Practitioners were inspired by the Creative Practitioners to see the creative potential in a range of materials. As a team they were inspired to continue to “arbrofi”²¹ (experiment) and develop more ways to engage the children’s creativity and explore how they can use the outdoor space.

²¹ Cylch Meithrin Ffynnonwen Evaluation Form

PERSISTENT

The setting has begun to use the outdoor area more, now that they have found ways of making it more engaging and exciting for the children. The staff have found being outside beneficial and that it has had, "...effaith bositif ar y staff a'r planta."²²(positive effect on the staff and children)

COLLABORATIVE

The Early Years Practitioners worked together to enable as many children as possible to engage in the activities – particularly those outdoors. The staff collaborated to work with the children in small groups so that they could engage in the activities with the Creative Practitioners.

IMAGINATIVE

The Creative Practitioners used a huge range of materials in the sessions, all of which were salvaged, recycled or repurposed. The staff in the setting reflected that this had helped them to see the creative potential in so many things they would not have otherwise have used.

DISCIPLINED

The sessions involved using tools and the Creative Practitioners had helped the Early Years Practitioners feel comfortable managing the risks associated with the children using hammers and saws.

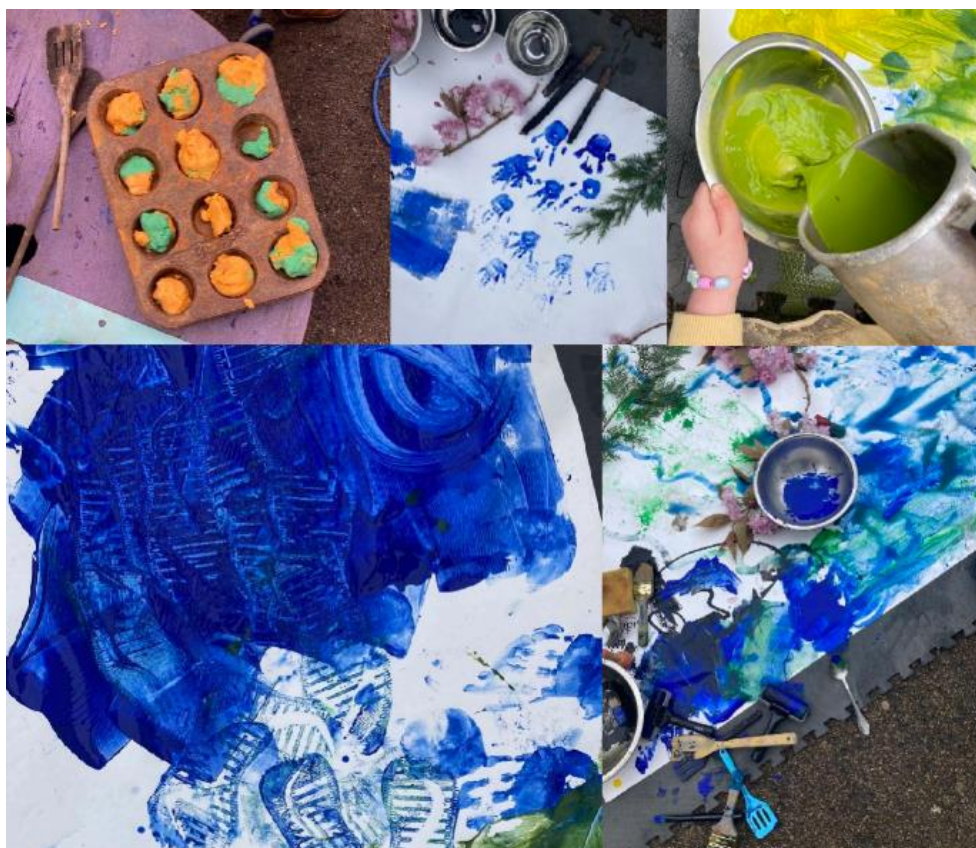
²² ibid

4.7 Cylch Meithrin Llangollen

[Cylch Meithrin Llangollen](#) is located in the town of Llangollen in Denbighshire. The Cylch is a Welsh-medium setting and is categorised as being in the 50% least deprived areas, according to the Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation. It is located in an area described as a, 'Rural town and fringe' by the Rural Urban Classification system.

The setting is located in a Chapel, which is also used for worship and community activities. This means there are some restrictions on how the space can be used – particularly the outdoor area which is small and difficult to access. The setting wanted to focus on ways to enable the children to access the outdoors, engage with nature, connect with their surroundings and develop a sense of belonging. The setting worked with two Creative Practitioners to help them achieve these goals.

The Creative Practitioners collaborated with a Care Home located next door to the setting, allowing the children access to the care home's extensive grounds. The Creative Practitioners led the children in visits to the gardens then engaged them in a wide range of activities such as felt making, painting with their feet, mark making and printing using ink and rollers, using tools, strings and pulleys. The Creative Practitioners supported the staff and children to use natural and found materials in their creativity to promote sustainability and help "foster a deeper connection with nature."²³



²³ Cylch Meithrin Llangollen Evaluation Form

The children were able to develop a sense of belonging in the garden of the care home. They particularly enjoyed meeting some of the residents and the owners sausage dog.

Key Impacts – Children

INQUISITIVE

Since taking part in the sessions the children have been observed by parents and setting staff collecting sticks and other found natural objects to use as paint brushes and building materials. They are more excited to explore their natural environment and follow their curiosity wherever it leads them.

PERSISTENT

The Creative Practitioners reflected that at the start of the sessions, some of the children were uncomfortable with mess and getting their hands dirty. As the sessions progressed, the children became more comfortable and willing to engage in sensory activities and in getting a bit messy as a part of playing.

COLLABORATIVE

The children were able to meet and build connections with the older residents in the care home. They were able to share their creative experiences with the residents, showing them the things they had found and explaining how they would use them. This helped them to feel more a part of their community, and helped them to develop a sense of cynefin.

IMAGINATIVE

The children were able to lead the creative activities and follow their imaginations. The sessions enabled them to create their own imagined worlds, “they created a castle and a kingdom, which lived a friendly crocodile who was...their early years practitioner who then became a jelly fish. The scene also included a pirate ship, they created boat out of a red box and used the spare planks of wood as their paddles to row with.”²⁴

DISCIPLINED

The children were shown how to use tools such as a mallet and pegs, and were able to practice using the mallet effectively. They were supported by the Creative Practitioners to engage in their own problem solving, thinking about how to achieve the outcomes that they wanted with the materials at hand.

Key Impacts - Early Years Practitioners

INQUISITIVE

The sessions used natural and found resources in the creative activities, enabling the setting staff to feel more confident that creativity does not necessarily require expensive tools and materials.

PERSISTENT

The Creative Practitioners reflected that the setting staff were really open to trying new things, managing risk and tolerating not knowing how something would go. They reflected, “it is wonderful to see a team where they are all completely on board with the same way of thinking - and so open to new experiences and taking a lead from the children and following their curiosity.”

²⁴ ibid

COLLABORATIVE

The setting staff worked collaboratively with the Creative Practitioners and learnt from each other, sharing their own specialist knowledge and skills to the benefit of everyone involved. The setting staff modelled the behaviour of Enabling Adults and the Creative Practitioners helped the setting staff to appreciate, "...the value of taking a step back and allowing the children to navigate their own play and curiosity."²⁵

IMAGINATIVE

The Creative Practitioners observed the setting staff as the sessions progressed becoming more comfortable with letting the children lead and being able to join them in their imagined worlds.

DISCIPLINED

The Early Years Practitioners have been able to develop a range of new techniques and creative processes which they plan to continue into the future. They have seen the value in stepping back to observe the children at play, to use these observations to reflect on how to best support and enable the children to play.

²⁵ Ibid

4.8 Cylch Meithrin Llanrhaedr

[Cylch Meithrin Llanrhaedr](#) is located in the village of Llanrhaedr, just south of Denbigh in Denbighshire. The Cylch is a Welsh-medium setting and is categorised as being in the 50% least deprived areas, according to the Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation. It is located in an area described as a, 'Rural village and dispersed' by the Rural Urban Classification system.

The setting is located in half of a school hall, which requires them to pack everything away after each session. However, they do have access to outdoor space and nearby parks and woodlands. The setting planned to use the sessions to help them make better use of their outdoor space and to support the children to become more confident in creative movement.

The Setting worked with two Creative Practitioners who were skilled in outdoor play and dance. The sessions focused on building the confidence in Early Years Practitioners and the children to move and dance with spontaneity and joy. The Creative Practitioner that specialised in dance and movement used themes such as 'under the sea' and brought movement and dance to their trips outdoors.

We were able to visit the setting and observe a dance session in action. One Creative Practitioner first worked with the children to create a dance to the story of the Three Little Pigs. The children then went outside with the second Creative Practitioner to build dens made of wooden bricks, and to dress up if they wished, following the theme of the Three Little Pigs. The session was well planned, with collaboration from both the Creative Practitioners and the setting staff. The children were presented with the invitation to play, and then able to engage with the materials and resources however they wished, dipping in and out of the activity and taking their games in imaginative new directions.



The Early Years Practitioners reflected that they had become more confident to do more outdoors, particularly activities that they had seen before the sessions as too risky. They had seen how movement and dance activities did not have to be highly structured or planned, but could be spontaneous and happen anywhere. The staff reflected, "We feel more confident as staff to be able to deliver dance and movement sessions. This confidence will help us to encourage children to grow in confidence where needed as well."²⁶

One parent commented "I live for those videos on a Monday!" another said "Aren't they good, it's amazing what they put together in a short time."²⁷

Key Impacts – Children

INQUISITIVE

The children were able to use their imaginations freely during the sessions and were presented with numerous invitations to play by the Creative Practitioners. By stepping back, the adults enabled the children to use their imaginations and the freedom to play creatively.

PERSISTENT

The children were able to challenge their own capabilities during the outdoor sessions, climbing, jumping and expanding their physical confidence. Through repeating activities and taking on new challenges, the children were able to develop new skills and believe in their own capabilities.

COLLABORATIVE

The children worked together to act out the story from the Three Little Pigs. In the outdoor activity that we observed the children collaborated well, working together to build dens to then hide in from the wolf.

IMAGINATIVE

The children were presented with boxes of "junk" and invited to play with them however they wanted. They used their imaginations to create their own games,

DISCIPLINED

The children wanted to repeat movements such as marching, as this helped them develop and improve their confidence in physical movement. The Creative Practitioners saw the children's confidence and enjoyment in movement increase as the sessions progressed.

Key Impacts - Early Years Practitioners

INQUISITIVE

The Early Years Practitioners reflected that the sessions have helped them to see new possibilities and ways to use their skills to support the children's creativity in future, "We have also begun to think about what resources we can provide for the children to allow them the freedom to express themselves creatively."

²⁶ Cylch Meithrin Llanrhaedr Evaluation Form.

²⁷ Reflection document shared by the setting.

PERSISTENT

The sessions helped the staff to feel more confident engaging the children in more adventurous activities, such as climbing and building fires. Some of the setting staff were particularly concerned about risk, but the sessions helped them to feel better able to assess and manage risks, "In particular...support one member of staff really shifted her fears around risky play and was able to see the positive benefits it brought the children and the setting."²⁸

COLLABORATIVE

The setting staff collectively reflected on where they needed support and identified areas in which they wanted to develop. They worked together as a team with the Creative Practitioners to fully engage in the sessions, giving and receiving feedback.

IMAGINATIVE

The Early Years Practitioners now feel more confident to use different resources and creative techniques to facilitate the children's creativity. They have taken ideas from the Creative Practitioners and are planning how to use them in new and imaginative ways to continue their creative journey with the children.

DISCIPLINED

The setting staff have developed their own confidence with outdoor play and dance through actively engaging in the activities with the children. They also involved parents and carers, gathering their reflections and observations of the impact on the individual children to help them build on what is working for their setting.

²⁸ Cylch Meithrin Llanrhaedr Evaluation Form.

4.9 Cylch Meithrin Machynlleth

[Cylch Meithrin Machynlleth](#) is located in the town of Machynlleth in Powys. The Cylch is a Welsh-medium setting and is categorised as being in the 50% least deprived areas, according to the Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation. It is located in one of the least populous areas in Wales, described as a, 'Rural village and dispersed in a sparse setting' by the Rural Urban Classification system.

The setting planned to use the sessions to enable the children to learn more about the natural world, develop woodworking and outdoor skills. They also wanted to involve movement, song and dance. The setting worked with two Creative Practitioners who focused on developing outdoor play, using tools, movement and dance. The Creative Practitioners led sessions outdoors, playing hide and seek, going on bug hunts, singing songs and dancing. The sessions took place in a variety of weather, building the confidence of the setting staff to engage the children outdoors at any time of year. The sessions also enabled the staff to develop new ways of using their existing resources and to feel more confident supporting the children to use tools. The sessions utilised a wooded outdoor area, into which the setting had not previously ventured.

The Creative Practitioners took the children to a community Garden, where they took part in a session with community volunteers. It is hoped that this relationship with the garden will continue, enabling the children and the setting staff to share in growing and eating their own food. The movement sessions gave the children, "...an opportunity to develop an awareness of their bodies in terms of their coordination, core strength and balance, gross and fine motor skills."²⁹

The end of the sessions was celebrated in the Cylch by holding an event for families to attend and to share in the learning journey with their children. The Creative Practitioners reflected that it was, "... so lovely to see the children taking the lead and showing/ directing the parents/family during this session."³⁰ The setting reflected that having two Creative Practitioners meant that the sessions were shorter than they would have liked. One of the Creative Practitioners was less confident in speaking Welsh, which meant that some English was used. The Creative Agent reflected that "...there appears to be a lack of confident Welsh language creative Practitioners"³¹ and that this is something to be considered for the future.

Key Impacts – Children

INQUISITIVE

The outdoor sessions enabled the children to be led by their natural curiosity and to explore their environment.

PERSISTENT

The children were all able to try new activities and practice things that they found hard during the sessions. The Creative Agent reflected that, "There was one child who was not really engaged when making the bird feeder and had wanted to give up with the potato peeler after 3 attempts of trying to strip the wood. Through support and encouragement, he did continue and was able to achieve a completed item at the end."³²

²⁹ Cylch Meithrin Machynlleth Evaluation Form.

³⁰ *ibid*

³¹ *ibid*

³² *ibid*

COLLABORATIVE

The children worked together – particularly in the outdoor activities which required them to collaborate to achieve their goals. The Creative Agent reflected, “There was a small group of children who attended the Forest school session and the change in their presentation by the end of the project was noticeable. They were more willing to join in within this small, protected group, confidence had grown and by the end, felt comfortable and built a relationship with the creative practitioner, chatting away to him about things going on in their lives.”³³

IMAGINATIVE

The children were encouraged to ask questions, make new connections and to use their imaginations, “Children were happy exploring, asking and answering questions. They were comfortable in adapting new songs, trying out rhythmic work.”³⁴

DISCIPLINED

The children were able to develop their skills, particularly in using tools and in physical movement, by being given the opportunity to repeat and practice activities during the sessions.

Key Impacts - Early Years Practitioners

INQUISITIVE

The setting staff were able to challenge their own assumptions about risk and what the children were capable of through observing the Creative Practitioners.

PERSISTENT

The Early Years Practitioners were able to feel more confident in enabling the children to use tools, and to feel more comfortable managing risk. They reflected, “Staff feel a bit braver with a variety of tools and using them.”³⁵

COLLABORATIVE

The setting staff worked with the Creative Practitioners to engage and excite the children in the sessions. They plan to continue many of the activities and to take their learning forward into the future.

IMAGINATIVE

The Early Years Practitioners were able to see how their existing resources, natural objects and other found items could be used in creative ways. The Creative Agent reflected that the Creative Practitioners had, “...come with an energy that inspired the children, the setting and staff and made the Antis feel motivated.”

DISCIPLINED

The sessions had enabled the setting staff to reflect on how they can use their outdoor space creatively in future and helped them to practice a range of different creative practices to engage the children.

³³ ibid

³⁴ ibid

³⁵ ibid

4.10 Cylch Meithrin Rhostryfan

[Cylch Meithrin Rhostryfan](#) is located in the village of Rhostryfan, south of Caernarfon in Gwynedd. The Cylch is a Welsh-medium setting and is categorised as being in the 50% least deprived areas, according to the Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation. It is located an area described as a, 'Rural village and dispersed' by the Rural Urban Classification system.

The setting is located in a school hall, and has to pack up at the end of each session. This posed challenges for the Cylch in terms of the range of activities that could be undertaken with the children. The outdoor space in the setting was also shared with the school, and their access to it was sometimes limited by the school's activities. The setting did not complete a planning form, but the setting engaged two Creative Practitioners who were experienced in movement, dance and outdoor play.

During the sessions the children were able to undertake a wide range of indoor and outdoor activities, including imaginative role play, dance, making mud pies, using fabric to create hammocks and dens. They were able to explore their outside area, looking for bugs and exploring the natural objects that they found. They also had a final session with a musician, and were given clogs so that they could dance and sing together.



Key Impacts – Children

INQUISITIVE

The children were given the freedom to explore outside during the sessions, looking for bugs, poking under tree stumps and in logs to see what they could find. The freedom that the Creative Practitioners allowed them enabled them to follow their curiosity, learning words for the insects and objects they found. The Creative Practitioners reflected that, "...gwelwyd rhai plant yn blodeuo wrth bod yn yr awyr agored."³⁶ (some children were seen to blossom when being outdoors.)

PERSISTENT

Creative Practitioners reflected, that, "Profodd y bythefnos cyntaf yn eithaf heriol i'r ymarferwyr creadigol ond daeth newid amlwg wrth i'r plant ddechrau mwynhau yr ymweliadau a'r gweithgareddau yr oedd yr YC yn eu cyflwyno."³⁷ (The first two weeks proved to be quite challenging for the Creative Practitioners but a clear change came as the children began to enjoy the visits and activities that the CP presented.) The children stuck with the new and challenging activities that they were being presented with until they started to find enjoyment in them.

COLLABORATIVE

The children were invited to play with a large number of empty boxes, out of which they created ships and oars to paddle them. They worked together to realise this shared vision and helped each other to take part with some rowing and others steering.

IMAGINATIVE

Throughout the sessions, the children were inspired to use their imaginations, and to explore their environments freely. The children embraced the invitations to play presented to them during the sessions and became more confident to express themselves through imaginative play.

DISCIPLINED

The children were more confident and comfortable with movement and dance by the end of the sessions. By regularly engaging the children in dance, they became more confident in expressing themselves through movement.

Key Impacts - Early Years Practitioners

INQUISITIVE

The Creative Agent reflected that the setting staff were incredibly willing to take part in the activities and to give things a go. They felt that the staff had grown in their own confidence as well as their confidence in what the children were capable of. The Creative Agent observed that the setting staff had begun to feel confident enough to bring their own ideas into the sessions, to explore what other activities they could bring to engage the children creatively.

PERSISTENT

The challenges presented by the space that the Cylch is located meant that the sessions were harder and more complicated to plan. However, the setting staff worked with the Creative Practitioners to try new ways of organising the space, finding what worked best.

³⁶ Cylch Meithrin Rhostryfan

³⁷ ibid

COLLABORATIVE

The need to pack up the space each session and lack of access to the outside space required the Early Years Practitioners to work collaboratively with each other and with the Creative Practitioners. The initial sessions were difficult

IMAGINATIVE

The Creative Practitioners reflected that "...holl staff sicrhau darpariaeth sydd yn sicrhau cyfleoedd gynhwysfawr i'r plant ddefnyddio eu dychymug ac offer yn eu amgylchedd i ffurfio eu dymuniadau. Gall y staff ymuno yn eu chwarae yn berthnasol a chyfoethogi eu profiadau wrth ychwaengu at eu profiadau heb gyfyngu eu syniadau."³⁸ (all the staff ensure provision that ensures comprehensive opportunities for the children to use their imagination and tools in their environment to form their wishes. The staff can join in their play and enrich their experiences by adding to their experiences without limiting their ideas.)

DISCIPLINED

The initial challenges of the first few sessions were overcome by the collaboration and team work of the setting staff and the Creative Practitioners. The Early Years Practitioners had to reflect on what was working for their setting, and help the Creative Practitioners to craft the sessions to work for their Cylch. They were able to develop their skills and abilities through engaging in the sessions.

³⁸ ibid

4.11 Cylch Meithrin Rhuthun

[Cylch Meithrin Rhuthun](#) is located in the town of Ruthin in Denbighshire. The Cylch is a Welsh-medium setting and is categorised as being in the 50% least deprived areas, according to the Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation. It is located in an area described as a, 'Rural town and fringe' by the Rural Urban Classification system.

The setting plan focused developing all six areas of focus from the Curriculum for Non-Maintained Nursery Settings in Wales. The plan also stated that they were focusing on developing all of the Creative Habits of Mind. The setting wanted to use the sessions to encourage communication, confidence in moving and using their voices.

The setting engaged a Creative Practitioner who is a musician and movement artist. They worked with the setting to bring musical instruments to the sessions, helping the children to learn about rhythm, to create their own musical instruments from natural objects and to experiment with the sounds they can make with their voices and their bodies. A lot of the sessions took place outside, providing new ways to use the settings outdoor space and giving the children opportunities and the confidence to express themselves freely.

The children used a variety of natural and recycled materials to make their own instruments such as shaking maize in old bottles. The children were able to practice using different tools and trying different processes throughout the sessions. The Early Years Practitioners reflected that the sessions had come at a time when the Cylch were developing their outdoor area, and that the timing was perfect. They described the activities and instruments that the Creative Practitioner brought to the sessions as, "hynod effeithiol" (highly effective).

Key Impacts – Children

INQUISITIVE

The children were given the opportunity to interact and experiment with a range of instruments, exploring and experimenting with creating different sounds, rhythms and tones.

PERSISTENT

The children were able to make their own musical instruments from different natural and recycled objects, without knowing what sounds their instruments would make. They needed to apply different forces, use different movements and actions to create louder or softer sounds, trying different ways to achieve the sound that they wanted.

COLLABORATIVE

The children worked together to create songs or to create the sounds made by different objects. They had to work collaboratively to make the sound of a train, making slower or faster noises as the train changed speed.

IMAGINATIVE

The children used their imaginations throughout the sessions, creating new words for songs, new sounds with their bodies and with musical instruments.

DISCIPLINED

The children were able to use tools to practice making different musical instruments from natural materials. This enabled them to develop different techniques and to refine their skills with the tools.

Key Impacts - Early Years Practitioners

INQUISITIVE

The Early Years Practitioners were able to expand their understanding of how music could be used in the Cylch. The sessions helped them to see music as more than singing nursery rhymes during circle time, and began to use music in different ways throughout the day.

PERSISTENT

The Creative Practitioner introduced complex musical concepts to the children, showing the Early Years Practitioners that it was worth trying things, even if you didn't know how the children would react. In trying out more complex ideas and concepts with the children the Creative Agent reflected that the setting staff are more willing to try new things with the children since being involved in the sessions.

COLLABORATIVE

The setting staff all worked with the Creative Practitioner to engage all of the children in the sessions. They also worked together as a team to manage the challenges presented by some building work being done in the outdoor area, problem solving with the builders to create an area that was as effective for the children as possible.

IMAGINATIVE

The sessions helped the setting staff to see that musical instruments could be created from almost anything, and did not need to be expensive. "A toes dim rhaid i sesiynau cerddoriaeth fod yn ffurfiol, a toes dim angan prynu offerynnau drud."³⁹ (And music sessions don't have to be formal, and there's no need to buy expensive instruments.)

DISCIPLINED

The setting staff felt that the sessions had given them a range of new ideas and ways to bring music into the activities with the children, "...roedd y ffordd roedd o'n symleiddio syniadau cerddorol mawr i'r plant ifanc yn rhywbeth y byddwn ni yn parhau i'w gwneud yma."⁴⁰ (the way he simplified big musical ideas for the young children was something we will continue to do here.)

³⁹ Cylch Meithrin Rhuthun Evaluation Form.

⁴⁰ ibid

4.12 Cylch Meithrin Y Fali

[Cylch Meithrin Y Fali](#) is located on the west coast of the Isle of Anglesey . The Cylch is a Welsh-medium setting and is categorised as being in the 50% most deprived areas, according to the Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation. It is located in an area described as a, 'Rural town and fringe in a sparse setting' by the Rural Urban Classification system.

The setting wanted to develop the children's ability to focus as well as their physical literacy. They felt that bringing multi-sensory experiences to the children would help them to maintain persistence in tasks. The setting also identified yoga as a way of supporting the children's confidence in movement.

The setting worked with two Creative Practitioners specialising in movement, yoga and physical expression, sensory and outdoor play. During each session there was time for stretching and yoga, where the children would move and sing, and focus on moving their bodies. The sessions then moved to invitations to play, exploring sensory experiences through engaging with different materials, textiles, feelings and colours. The children were able to use their imaginations and play freely, becoming whoever or whatever they wanted to be.

The Early Years Practitioners reflected that the children seemed more able to focus and persist with their engagement in activities when they were outside, away from the many boxes of toys and games that they had within the setting. They found the children less able to focus their attention when presented with toys that had a pre-defined use (cars, kitchens etc) and were amazed by how the children were inspired to be imaginative with simple things such as empty boxes.

Key Impacts – Children

INQUISITIVE

The setting staff felt that they sessions had stimulated the children's natural curiosity and that the Creative Practitioners had let the children lead with their curiosity.

PERSISTENT

As the Early Years Practitioners reflected, "...y plant wedi dod yn amlwg wrth weithio gyda'r ymarferwyr a fod y staff wedi sylwi effaith wrth iddynt gyd chwarae gyda'r plant. Roedd yr amser roeddynt wedi'i rhoi i "ddangos diddordeb mawr" yn y plant wedi cael effaith are eu gallu i gadw at dasg a dyfalbarhau ar dasg."⁴¹ (...the children's curiosity had become evident when working with the practitioners and that the staff had noticed an effect as they all played with the children. The time they had given to "show great interest" in the children had an effect on their ability to stick to a task and persevere on a task.)

COLLABORATIVE

The setting staff noticed that the children worked better together, there were less disagreements and the children were more likely to stick with a task when outdoors or away from lots of distracting toys.

⁴¹ Cylch Meithrin Y Fali Evaluation Form

IMAGINATIVE

The activities that the Creative Practitioners brought into the setting were engaging, and were directed and guided by the imagination and interest of the children. This helped to keep the children engaged for longer periods, "...syniad mor syml ond y plant wedi gallu defnyddio eu dychymyg ac wedi ymrwymo am gyfnod sylweddol."⁴² (such a simple idea but the children were able to use their imagination and were committed for a considerable period.)

DISCIPLINED

The children were developing new skills and creative techniques throughout the activities because they were able to focus on what engaged them. The Creative Practitioners observed that one child who had initially been quiet in the sessions had begun to dance and play with the other children.

Key Impacts - Early Years Practitioners

INQUISITIVE

The sessions have provided the Early Years Practitioners with opportunities to see how new creative ideas positively impact the children's energy and confidence.

PERSISTENT

The Early Years Practitioners were able to trust in the approaches brought by the Creative Practitioners, even if they seemed at first to be counter intuitive. They were inspired by the simplicity of the sessions and amazed by how engaged the children were by simple items and how long their interest could be sustained in this way.

COLLABORATIVE

The Early Years Practitioners were able to let the children lead the creative sessions, joining in with the children. The Creative Agent reflected that the setting staff had modelled teamwork and curiosity for the children in the way they engaged with the creative activities.

IMAGINATIVE

The setting staff reflected that they had enjoyed observing how the Creative Practitioners had engaged the children, allowing them to have freedom and following their imaginative leads. They felt this way of engaging the children was something that they would continue in the future.

DISCIPLINED

The sessions provided ideas and techniques that were simple, effective and inexpensive. The Early Years Practitioners reflected that, "Roedd cyd weithio gyda'r ymarferwyr creadigol wedi bod yn agoriad llygaid."⁴³ (Working together with the creative practitioners had been an eye opener.)

⁴² ibid

⁴³ ibid

4.13 Cylch Meithrin Y Tonnau

[Cylch Meithrin Y Tonnau](#) is located on the coast in Barmouth, Gwynedd. The Cylch is a Welsh-medium setting and is categorised as being in the 50% least deprived areas, according to the Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation. It is located in an area as a 'Rural town and fringe in a sparse setting' by the Rural Urban Classification system.

The setting plan focused developing all six areas of focus from the Curriculum for Non-Maintained Nursery Settings in Wales. The plan also stated that they were focusing on developing two of the Creative Habits of Mind. The setting is located right on the sea front in Barmouth, and the planning form described using the sessions to support the Cylch to make better use of the beach and seaside with the children. They wanted to focus on developing the children's physical skills, confidence, perseverance and problem solving skills.

The setting engaged two Creative Practitioners, experienced in outdoor play and exploration. The sessions involved lots of trips to the huge beach, looking at the creatures they found, learning about the beach, the plants and creatures that live there. Making music and creating tunnels to make an obstacle course for little balls to roll through. The children also explored some woodland areas, meeting butterflies, climbing, exploring the river, catching minibeasts, splashing and playing. They also used tools such as drills and hammers to craft with wood and they created a fire to cook on, to sit around and enjoy.



The Creative Practitioners reflected that the children developed their understanding and knowledge of their local environment, gaining an appreciation for nature and biodiversity, which helped them to feel a sense of cynefin and a strong connection to their environment. The Early Years Practitioners became more relaxed and able to enjoy being outdoors with the children, able to let go of hands, let children explore and follow their imaginations. One of the Creative Practitioners reflected that " I saw more confidence in the staff each week and it was nice to see the staff embrace being outdoors and dressed appropriately, the reason the children had so much fun and engagement was because the staff were brilliant and having fun too."⁴⁴

Key Impacts – Children

INQUISITIVE

The children were able to explore their natural environment, following their curiosity about the world around them. They found all sorts of creatures in each of the outdoor environments that they visited and were able to learn about them, their habitats and their importance to the local ecosystems.

PERSISTENT

The children were able to develop their outdoor skills and confidence in keeping themselves safe, particularly around the fire they built.

COLLABORATIVE

The children learnt how to work together to achieve a goal, such as building a fire. They learnt about being patient and waiting for your turn and the importance of waiting in keeping everyone safe.

IMAGINATIVE

The children used their imaginations to lead each session, inventing their own obstacle course by digging tunnels in the sand for pipes, using pipes as slides and rolling balls along the course.

DISCIPLINED

The children were able to develop new words in Welsh in each of the outdoor settings they visited, improving their confidence and communication skills.

Key Impacts - Early Years Practitioners

INQUISITIVE

The sessions enabled the Early Years Practitioners to engage in exploring outdoors and enjoying nature in a curious and creative way. The focus seemed to shift during the sessions, from managing risk, counting heads and safeguarding, to enjoying exploring, sharing the children's wonder and excitement in what they discovered.

PERSISTENT

The Early Years Practitioners experienced the benefits of taking the children outside and enjoying different environments. They were able to see how they could manage risk, keep everyone together and safe whilst still offering engaging, adventurous and exciting experiences for the children.

COLLABORATIVE

⁴⁴ Cylch Meithrin Y Tonnau Evaluation Form

The setting staff all worked together to enable the children to have the enriching outdoor experiences during the sessions. They were able to collaborate to ensure the children were all safe, but also able to fully engage in the exploration and adventure of the sessions.

IMAGINATIVE

The Creative Practitioners observed that the setting staff became more confident in using their imaginations to come up with ideas and new activities as the sessions progressed.

DISCIPLINED

The Creative Practitioners reflected that the setting staff became more relaxed as the sessions progressed and were able to reflect on their perceptions of risk "...bod y plant yn ddiogel i weithio'n eithaf annibynnol gyda morthwyl a hoelion."⁴⁵(...that the children are safe to work quite independently with hammer and nails.)

⁴⁵ ibid

4.14 Cylch yn yr Ysgol

[Cylch yn yr Ysgol](#) is located in Builth Wells, Powys. The Cylch is a Welsh-medium setting and is categorised as being in the 50% least deprived areas, according to the Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation. It is located in an area described as a, 'Rural town and fringe in a sparse setting' by the Rural Urban Classification system.

The setting plan focused developing all six areas of focus from the Curriculum for Non-Maintained Nursery Settings in Wales. The plan also stated that they were focusing on developing all of the five Creative Habits of Mind. The setting plan focused on enabling the Early Years Practitioners to feel more comfortable in engaging the children in 'risky play'. They wanted to develop outdoor skills, building fires and using tools.

The setting worked with two Creative Practitioners who were skilled at supporting outdoor and adventurous play. The sessions involved a range of outdoor activities, with an element of risk. The children were able to make their own fishing rods, build a firepit and cook different foods together, explore and develop cyanotype pictures. The sessions provided the staff and children with a range of experiences to develop their confidence in managing risk and exploring the benefits of adventurous outdoor play.

The setting were recently [inspected by Estyn](#) who rated the setting as 'excellent' across the board and made specific reference to the setting's supporting the children to engage in risky play, "A notable example of this is the way they have identified the need to develop opportunities for children to take risks when playing in the outdoor areas. As a result of training and visits to other settings, they have adapted their approach to develop children's confidence to become more skilled at making their own decisions and managing their own risks."⁴⁶

The Creative Practitioners reflected of both the children and the setting staff, "They believe they can do a number of different things that they didn't think they could do before."

Key Impacts – Children

INQUISITIVE

The children were inspired by the process of making cyanotype pictures, which sparked their inquisitiveness and imaginations. They particularly enjoyed seeing the cause and effect in the process that creates the pictures, and experimenting how small changes could lead to different results.

PERSISTENT

The Creative Practitioners provided a great example of the children becoming more able to stick with a task when it became difficult, "...when the children were working with the sawhorse to create wands/fishing rods out of branches, some of the children found it difficult to begin with but with persistence and determination they saw the activity through with focus and concentration."⁴⁷

⁴⁶ https://www.estyn.gov.wales/system/files/2024-07/Inspection%20report%20-%20Cylch%20yn%20yr%20Ysgol%202024_0.pdf

⁴⁷ ibid

COLLABORATIVE

The Creative Practitioners reflected that, "Working together to build things meant that [the children] were being asked to work collaboratively and to stick with difficulty and problem solve together."⁴⁸

IMAGINATIVE

The children particularly enjoyed the invitations to play that enabled them to use their imaginations and follow new ideas.

DISCIPLINED

The children were able to practice and refine their skills using tools as the sessions returned to these activities a number of times. By the end of the sessions the children felt confident to use tools effectively and independently.

Key Impacts - Early Years Practitioners

INQUISITIVE

The Early Years Practitioners reflected that the sessions had given them, "...some great new ideas for cooking and using the fire, mixing ingredients and making things from wood and clay."⁴⁹ The staff felt more confident to explore the possibilities opened up to them by the Creative Practitioners.

PERSISTENT

The setting staff worked with the Creative Practitioners to develop risk assessments for activities that they perceived as risky. Although they reflected that they had been concerned at first, the sessions had helped them to overcome these fears and embrace the benefits of allowing the children to engage in experiences such as using tools and toasting marshmallows.

COLLABORATIVE

Being involved in the Creative Learning journey enabled the setting staff to feel stronger as a team, and to realise, "...we are a great setting, and we don't big ourselves up enough."⁵⁰

IMAGINATIVE

The sessions, "helped the staff in the setting to let go of the reins a little bit and feel more able to 'step back' and allow the children to take the lead on their learning a little more."⁵¹ This enabled the setting staff to feel more confident to share their ideas, use their imaginations and create new ways to engage the children.

DISCIPLINED

The Early Years Practitioners reflected that they had become more confident in using the tools that they already had in their setting, and that through learning from how the Creative Practitioners supported the children to use the tools, they felt more confident to allow the children to use them safely.

⁴⁸ Cylch yn yr Ysgol Evaluation Form

⁴⁹ ibid

⁵⁰ ibid

⁵¹ ibid

4.15 Enfys Fach Nursery

[Enfys Fach Nursery](#) is located in Brecon, Powys. The nursery is an English-medium setting and is categorised as being in the 50% least deprived areas, according to the Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation. It is located in an area described as a, 'Rural town and fringe in a sparse setting' by the Rural Urban Classification system.

The setting wanted to use the sessions to develop their outdoor learning environment, particularly developing carpentry and woodworking skills. They worked with a Creative Practitioner who specialised in carpentry and they brought a range of professional power tools to the setting for the children to make their own woodwork creations. The children were supported to use drills, saws and tenon cutters to make their own wooden stools as well as a dragon shaped bench.



The children engaged in a wide range of activities that supported their learning, from measuring and counting, problems solving, estimating, using different degrees of force for different tools, understanding how to keep themselves safe, and communication. The children enjoyed playing on the benches, stools and ladders that they made with the Creative Practitioner, practicing their balance and physical movement.

The setting staff saw some very significant changes in some of the children with additional learning needs that come to the setting. One child who the setting described as “non-verbal” and often didn’t engage with people was able to sit and listen with the Creative Practitioner. Another child who often had difficulty in engaging in activities was able to listen to instructions, put on safety goggles and use the tools. One child the setting described as having poor speech and language, who did not play with other children began to interact with the Creative Practitioner as the sessions progressed. The child was able to communicate with the Creative Practitioner and “blossomed in his speech”⁵².

The setting created and shared a video, giving an insight into a day in the life of the setting during their Creative Learning journey which can be viewed [here](#).

Key Impacts – Children

INQUISITIVE

The children were presented with new materials and given the space to investigate and interact with them in their own ways.

PERSISTENT

The children initially found the tools hard to manipulate and some were scared by the noise that they made. However, the children were able to work with the Creative Practitioner to develop confidence in using tools.

COLLABORATIVE

The children had to work collaboratively together to ensure that everyone was safe when using the tools. They were able to see the importance of patience and taking turns. They were then able to share in the finished products that they had all made together.

IMAGINATIVE

The ladders, stools and dragon benches were used during and after the sessions by the children to play and invent new games. “They have turned stools into thrones for tea parties, used the ladder as an outdoor library and flown their wooden dragon bench through the skies.”⁵³

DISCIPLINED

The children were able to develop a range of woodworking techniques, thinking about how each piece of their creation needed to fit together, and how the tool achieved the shape they needed. They learnt new words and terms for the processes and tools they were using, and were able to describe their experiences for their parents and carers.

Key Impacts - Early Years Practitioners

INQUISITIVE

The Early Years Practitioners have been inspired by the sessions to explore new ways of using their woodworking skills to enhance the setting and the activities for the children. Instead of buying new planters and bug hotels, the setting staff now feel confident that they can make these with the children, using recycled materials.

⁵² Enfys Fach Evaluation Form

⁵³ Enfys Fach Evaluation Form

PERSISTENT

The Room Leader in the setting said of herself, "I cannot usually be trusted with a hammer at home"⁵⁴. Through building confidence working with the Creative Practitioner she now feels able to use a range of tools with the children and at home.

COLLABORATIVE

The staff directly involved in the sessions have shared their knowledge and enthusiasm with the other team members in the nursery. This has meant that the experience, "has rippled out into other areas of our setting"⁵⁵, inspiring other members of the team to create bridges and bookshelves in other areas of the setting.

IMAGINATIVE

The experiences that the Creative Practitioner brought to the setting inspired the Early Years Practitioners to expand their ideas of what is possible, and to think of new ways to bring creativity into the setting.

DISCIPLINED

The Early Years Practitioners were concerned initially about risk around the children using power tools. However, as the Creative Practitioner was able to show how this could be done safely, the setting staff felt more confident and were able to reflect on how beneficial engaging the children in the woodwork was, and how any risks could be safely managed.

⁵⁴ ibid

⁵⁵ ibid

4.16 Miri Morswyn

[Miri Morswyn](#) is located near Holyhead, on the Isle of Anglesey. The Cylch is a Welsh-medium setting and is categorised as being in the 20% most deprived areas, according to the Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation. It is located in an area described as a, 'Urban city and town in a sparse setting' by the Rural Urban Classification system.

The Cylch wanted to use the sessions to develop communication for both staff and children. They wanted to support the use of Welsh in the setting, expanding the vocabulary and confidence of the children through physical movement, dance, outdoor play. They also wanted to explore how they could foster a sense of teamwork and support collaboration amongst the children.

The setting worked with two Creative Practitioners, who specialised in dance, movement, visual and sensory play. The Creative Practitioners first focused on supporting the development and confidence in using the Welsh language. They created a short animation and an accompanying creative pack which went home with children. This encouraged parents and children to learn Welsh together through fun games and challenges. This was well received by parents and the setting found that the process had improved communication with parents and carers.



The Creative Practitioners also explored creative movement with the children, using dance alongside Welsh words and vocabulary to help the children to connect more deeply with the language. They also sang nursery rhymes in Welsh, exploring the meanings of the words and connecting them to the children's own lives and experiences through sensory play. The children were presented with materials, such as baskets of fabric strips, leaves, feathers, or coloured paper and could use their imaginations to explore them and express themselves creatively.

Key Impacts – Children

INQUISITIVE

The Creative Practitioners reflected that some of the children were very shy and lacking in confidence at first. However as the sessions progressed, " Even the shyest children have come out of their shell and participated and now wanting to be more involved in activities and voice their opinions as a result."⁵⁶

PERSISTENT

The sessions enabled the children to develop their Welsh language skills through tactile exploration, props and games, making it fun and more effective.

COLLABORATIVE

The children were presented with a huge sheet of paper on the floor. They worked together to use their feet, wellies, their hands and toys to create one huge colourful painting. They explored how different movements created different patterns and shapes, moving and dancing together.

IMAGINATIVE

The children were able to engage with a range of activities and materials through imaginative role play. The less structured and curated sessions provided by the Creative Practitioners provided the children with the opportunity to play and engage with materials and objects in new ways.

DISCIPLINED

The setting reflected that the Creative Practitioners approach had enabled the children to develop more confidence in physical movement and in expressing themselves in Welsh. They had also seen an improvement in behaviour with more willingness to share and to work together.

Key Impacts - Early Years Practitioners

INQUISITIVE

The setting staff found the approaches used by the Creative Practitioners have inspired them think of how they can continue to give the children engaging experiences within the limitations of staff numbers, resources and time. The benefits experienced by both the staff and children have inspired the Early Years Practitioners to want to continue the approaches introduced during the sessions.

⁵⁶ Miri Morswyn Evaluation Form

PERSISTENT

Some of the painting activities resulted in parents expressing concerns about children being stained with paint. However, the setting staff worked with the Creative Practitioners to explore how the children could become part of the cleanup process, and found that they enjoyed taking on this role.

COLLABORATIVE

The setting staff have a lot of responsibilities which mean that providing the children with exciting and engaging activities, such as the big collaborative painting, required the team to work collaboratively together to ensure that there was time to make lunch and clean up.

IMAGINATIVE

The approach modelled by the Creative Practitioners has enabled the setting staff to feel more confident in presenting the children with less structured activities, and to allow the children to explore and be inquisitive.

DISCIPLINED

The sessions enabled the Early Years Practitioners to take a step back and observe the children playing and engaging in the activities. They were able to reflect on how important it is to allow children the space to play and engage in their own ways.

4.17 North Cornelly Community Playgroup

[North Cornelly Community Playgroup](#) is located in the village of North Cornelly in Bridgend. The Playgroup is an English-medium setting and is categorised as being in the 20% most deprived areas, according to the Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation. It is located in an area described as an, 'Urban city and town' by the Rural Urban Classification system. This setting is in an area which has the highest levels of deprivation of any of the settings involved in year two of Creative Learning in the Early Years. The setting has very little indoor space, which made the sessions incredibly challenging for the staff and Creative Practitioner. They were able to use a shared area for the movement sessions, but most of the other activities had to take place in a large room with lots of noise, children having snacks and other distractions. The setting enjoys access to a large shared outdoor space, but they are frequently the target of vandalism and theft, and during the sessions some of their resources were stolen overnight, which was very frustrating and upsetting for the setting staff.

The setting wanted to use the Creative Learning sessions to enhance their storytelling skills using music, puppets, and movement. They also wanted to explore how they could use their outdoor areas in a more enriching and inspiring way. The setting worked with a Creative Practitioner who is a musician, performer and artist. The Creative Practitioner worked with the setting, bringing a puppet called Jai in to become part of the playgroup. The Creative Practitioner had also created a beautiful new pink bird puppet with the children that would stay with the setting after the Creative Learning sessions ended. The children had helped to design the puppet and had named her Prinny, and the Creative Practitioner had supported one of the setting staff to operate Prinny and give her a voice.



We were able to observe a session and the children were welcomed into the activities through singing songs, moving and dancing to the music with the Creative Practitioner playing their guitar. The children ranged in ages from 18 months to 4 years old, and had very different ways of engaging with the music but the session was very inclusive and engaging for all the children. The Creative Practitioner used new and familiar songs, giving the children the chance to lead the rest of the group, choosing a movement for the others to follow. The Early Years Practitioners joined in with the movement and dance, which the children clearly enjoyed. The Creative Practitioner introduced her puppet Jai, a big blue bird, that the children were familiar with and whom they had formed a close bond. The group then all sang a song to wake up Prinny, and went to find her in her nest. The children took such care waking Prinny, uncovering her from her nest, smoothing her feathers and taking turns to say hello. The group then all went outside and visited the forested area in the back of the grounds. The children listened and joined in with the story of the Very Hungry Caterpillar and were able to interact creatively to tell the story through movement, props and sounds. Throughout the children were talking directly to Jai and Prinny, passing them items and helping them to act out the story.

The children then went back to the setting and were able to use drills and other tools to make their own bird, choosing colours and decorations once they had drilled holes for the legs and wings. The children could be seen helping each other to keep safe, passing the safety goggles and reminding each other to stand back when one was using the drill. Whilst the children were taking turns to use the tools, other children were playing with Prinny, helping her go down the slide, chatting away to her about their game and the things they were imagining. At the end of every session, the children would come together with the puppets to sing and say goodbye, taking care to put Prinny away safely to sleep in her nest.



The Early Years Practitioner and Creative Practitioner had initially had some miscommunications and misunderstandings about what was expected, and the boundaries around the role of the Creative Practitioner. Despite these early difficulties, the setting, Creative Agent and the Creative Practitioner worked hard to talk through the difficulties, and get the learning journey back on track. From this point on, all parties began to work in harmony and the sessions flourished.

The Early Years Practitioners reflected that the sessions had had a notable positive impact on the children's vocabulary and on their communication skills. The children were using more Welsh words and were showing improved social skills and willingness to collaborate with each other. A significant impact that the Early Years Practitioners observed was the impact of the sessions on the children's improved ability to sit for longer periods and to focus. They reflected, "We've found the whole experience brilliant."

The setting produced a video about their learning journey which you can see [here](#).

Key Impacts – Children

INQUISITIVE

The Creative Agent reflected that, "Activities such as mini-beast hunting, exploring and looking for 'Jai' our big blue bird, exploring in the forest and reading stories together naturally invited Inquisitiveness."

PERSISTENT

The sessions each engaged the children in activities which fostered persistence. They worked with the Creative Practitioner to develop the confidence and capability to use tools. They were asked to listen and be patient, even when this was hard, and the Creative Practitioner reflected that they children kept trying with things they found challenging, until they were able to achieve their goals.

COLLABORATIVE

The children took such care of Prinny and Jai, modelling caring, loving behaviour towards them which helped them to bond with each other. The Early Years Practitioners observed that, "The children clearly demonstrated that 'belonging' is just as much acceptance of others as it is of feeling it for oneself."⁵⁷

IMAGINATIVE

The children saw Jai and Prinny as friends and equals, and their obvious comfort in interacting with them enabled them to use their imaginations to lead games with the puppets.

DISCIPLINED

The sessions gave children time outdoors and in the forest area, enabling them to run, jump, crawl, balance, hide and practice moving their bodies. The musical games, particularly musical statues, encouraged the children to develop their listening, movement and balance skills, practicing each session to develop and expand these skills.

⁵⁷ North Cornelly Community Playgroup Evaluation Form

Key Impacts - Early Years Practitioners

INQUISITIVE

The Creative Learning journey enabled the setting staff to feel more confident in taking creative risks with the children, and in being more experimental in their approaches and in using different tools and materials. The Early Years Practitioners feel more confident, "We are looking forward to how we will use all of these skills in the future."⁵⁸

PERSISTENT

Initially, some of the setting staff felt uncomfortable with movement and singing. As the sessions progressed, they developed more confidence to join in, to sing and move freely with the children and to not worry about "looking silly".

COLLABORATIVE

The challenges presented by the space within the setting means that the setting staff have to work very collaboratively to meet the needs of the children. The staff worked collaboratively with the Creative Practitioner to overcome these challenges and to work together to provide the children with engaging and exciting experiences.

IMAGINATIVE

The setting staff felt inspired by the Creative Practitioner and full of new ideas and enthusiasm after the sessions. The setting staff plan to continue to use imaginative ways to engage the children.

DISCIPLINED

The setting staff particularly enjoyed how the Creative Practitioner brought music into the activities, and saw how positively the children responded to her playing her guitar in the sessions. The staff all developed their singing and movement skills, and one member of staff has been inspired to learn to play the guitar, so that they can continue to play for the children.

⁵⁸ ibid

4.18 Presteigne Little People

[Presteigne Little People](#) is located in the town of Presteigne, in Powys. The nursery is an English-medium setting and is categorised as being in the 50% least deprived areas, according to the Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation. It is located in an area in Wales, described as, 'Rural town and fringe in a sparse setting' by the Rural Urban Classification system.

The setting is located very near the English border and many of the staff and children at the setting did not feel confident in using Welsh on a daily basis. The setting wanted to use the sessions to focus on developing their confidence in using the Welsh language through songs, stories and creativity. They wanted to inspire everyone in the setting to learn more about Wales, the history and culture and to feel a stronger sense of belonging or cynefin.

The setting worked with two Creative Practitioners. The first is a Welsh speaker, artist and musician who would explore Welsh folktales, legends and stories through music and movement. The second Creative Practitioner is an artist and carpenter who would support the setting to bring elements of these songs and stories to life through woodwork and other creative processes.

The Creative Practitioners centred the sessions around telling the children in English the legends of Blodeuwedd and Y Ddraig Goch and then bringing in Welsh words and songs connected to these stories. This approach enabled the children to understand the context of the songs and words they were learning in Welsh and develop a stronger connection with them. The children were able to visit Presteigne's own red dragon, a statue of a red sleeping dragon that serves as a memorial to the 35,000 Welsh soldiers who died in the First World War. This inspired the children to learn more about their town, and to want to build their own dragon. They worked the Creative Practitioner to build y Drdaig Goch out of wood, using a range of tools to craft him. The photos below show the children using tools and Y Ddraig Gogh himself.



For the Early Years Practitioners, the activities had fostered, "...a sense of belonging to our community and the country we call home."⁵⁹

The setting reflected that the children engaged in the sessions had gained confidence as the sessions progressed. One child who would not normally participate in carpet time or group singing activities, took an active role in each session, showing lots of enthusiasm to join in. The setting described the impact on another child, "[the child] who is non verbal has begun speaking more throughout this initiative and as a result, has been able to build stronger bonds with others."⁶⁰

The children and staff now sing every day in Welsh, using the collection of ten songs created by the Creative Practitioner. The songs were put on to a CD to enable them to continue to be used after the sessions finished. The setting also held an Art Exhibition for parents and carers to see everything that the children has been working on during the sessions and share their children's sense of pride in everything that they had learnt and achieved. The Creative Practitioner reflected, "It astonished me – how effortlessly they learnt Welsh."

Key Impacts – Children

INQUISITIVE

The children were inspired to learn more about their heritage and culture, to be curious and ask questions about the past. They now use Welsh in the setting and are being supported to learn more every day. "The children absolutely loved it. There was a constant look of awe of wonder on their faces."

PERSISTENT

One of the Creative Practitioners reflected that some of the children were less confident in using the tools, and one child was frightened of them. Through being persistent and brave, the child was able to overcome their fears and was soon "unstoppable".

COLLABORATIVE

The setting has introduced a chalkboard with 'Welsh Words of the Week' which is displayed for parents and carers to see when they pick up or drop off their children. They are collaborating with the parents and children to support them on their continued journey to learn and use Welsh.

IMAGINATIVE

The children loved hearing the stories and legends, and they used these stories to role play, and invent new stories of their own.

DISCIPLINED

The children all had the opportunity to develop skills in using various tools. They learnt how to apply different pressures to the tools, push harder or softer to achieve different results. They all learnt about how to keep themselves and other safe and grew in their confidence as a result.

⁵⁹ Presteigne Little People Evaluation Form

⁶⁰ ibid

Key Impacts - Early Years Practitioners

INQUISITIVE

The Early Years Practitioners were inspired to develop and expand ideas that were introduced during the sessions. The setting plans to create a fairy garden using offcuts from the woodworking to make mushrooms. They plan to introduce stories involving 'Tylwyth Teg' to continue the children's exploration of the Welsh language and Welsh storytelling.

PERSISTENT

The setting staff did not speak Welsh and lacked confidence in speaking in Welsh with the children, the explained, "Before this initiative, speaking Welsh was a daunting task"⁶¹. The sessions enabled them to develop their knowledge of the Welsh language as well as gaining confidence in singing and speaking with the children. "Using Welsh has become part of our everyday routine here at Presteigne and we are eager to continue learning so that we can pass on this knowledge to the children."⁶²

COLLABORATIVE

The Creative Practitioners reflected that the setting staff had been very collaborative and "totally on board" with everything that they wanted to introduce. The staff had joined in enthusiastically with activities, supporting each other with their own Welsh language learning. The Creative Practitioners could see from the way the children had continued to learn, that the setting staff had ensured that the children sang and spoke in Welsh every day and not just in the creative sessions.

IMAGINATIVE

The many different creative techniques and activities that the Creative Practitioners brought to the setting made the setting staff feel inspired with new ideas and possibilities, "It has given our practitioners lots of wonderful ideas of how they can enhance provisions within our setting and has left us fizzing with new ideas."⁶³

DISCIPLINED

The setting staff now feel more confident to use tools with the children, learning from the Creative Practitioners how to adapt approaches to make them work for little hands.

⁶¹ ibid

⁶² ibid

⁶³ ibid

4.19 Puddleducks Daycare

[Puddleducks Daycare](#) is located in the village of Trefnant in Denbighshire. The setting is an English-medium setting and is categorised as being in the 50% least deprived areas, according to the Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation. It is located in an area described as, 'Rural village and dispersed' by the Rural Urban Classification system.

The setting has limited access to both outdoor and indoor space. The setting shared space with a school and only had access to it for 30 minute periods. The setting wanted to focus the sessions on finding better ways to use the limited outdoor space available to them and to encourage the children to be more adventurous. They also described feeling 'stuck in a rut' as Early Years practitioners and wanted to explore how to support the staff to feel more confident to provide new and engaging activities for the children. The setting engaged two Creative Practitioners who were experienced in developing engaging creative outdoor experiences for children.

The Creative Practitioners engaged the children in a wide range of creative activities including making potions with wild flowers, planting sunflowers, playing with water, drawing with chalk, fabric painting, bubble blowing, wheelbarrow rides, and willow weaving. The children enjoyed experimenting with filling different sized containers with water and pouring it out, practicing using the tap. Rather than structuring activities, the Creative Practitioners provided the children with materials, objects and random items to engage their creativity and imaginations.

Initially the Early Years Practitioners found it challenging to manage the children's excitement within the small space. It took some time for the staff to feel comfortable and relaxed in allowing the children to lead the sessions. However as the sessions progressed, and the staff grew in confidence, they began to value the benefits that allowing the children to "be free" brought to their learning experiences. They reflected that, "Over the project we have all become so much more confident in allowing the children more free rein in letting them choose what they want to do. Adding things they suggest like fairy liquid to make bubbles or powder paint to change the colour."⁶⁴

The setting staff feel confident that they will continue to build upon the learning from the sessions. Since the sessions ended they have used some old tarpaulin to create a sunshade in the garden area. They are also being bolder about using their outdoor space, pushing back against their 30 minute limitation and giving the children the chance to be outdoors more during the day.

Key Impacts – Children

INQUISITIVE

The children engaged far better when provided with unstructured invitations to play which engaged their curiosity and inquisitiveness. They loved being able to follow an idea, experiment and try things out.

PERSISTENT

Some of the children and setting staff were worried or uncomfortable with getting wet or dirty. The Creative Practitioners supported the children to challenge themselves to overcome this reluctance, to fully embrace the activities. Both the children and the staff were less concerned and more able to throw themselves into wet or messy activities at the end of the sessions.

⁶⁴ Puddleducks Daycare Sharing Event PDF

COLLABORATIVE

The children were better able to play together and to cooperate during the sessions, as they were not fighting over particular toys, but able to freely engage in a range of activities.

IMAGINATIVE

The sessions were centred around the children's interests and followed where the children led them. The Creative Practitioners provided engaging experiences that the children were then able to shape and guide by following their imaginations.

DISCIPLINED

The children were able to take part in a range of activities which involved learning new techniques and developing and refining new skills. The Creative Agent observed that the children were engaged in experiences that were developing, "...body control, coordination, core strength, balance, gross and fine motor skills."⁶⁵

Key Impacts - Early Years Practitioners

INQUISITIVE

The setting staff began to voice their own ideas, make suggestions and build confidence in their own creative abilities as the sessions progressed. The staff felt more in control and relaxed as a result, and that they could continue their learning journeys after the sessions ended.

PERSISTENT

The setting leader observed that the staff were now more confident to try new things, and not to be dissuaded if things didn't go to plan, "Also I think the practitioners are now better at tolerating uncertainty in terms of trying out an activity and if it doesn't go to plan or doesn't work out how the expected then it doesn't matter they have given it a go and the children are doing what they want to do."⁶⁶

COLLABORATIVE

The staff began to work together more effectively as they learnt from the Creative Practitioners. They were able to observe and support the children, providing additional help and input if needed, working together to allow the children to lead the sessions.

IMAGINATIVE

The setting observed that the staff had become more comfortable in following their own instincts and imaginations, and had developed more confidence in themselves, "Practitioners [have been] using their own intuition...to step out of our comfort zone and feel comfortable trying new things out."⁶⁷

DISCIPLINED

At the start of the sessions, the setting became very busy with the children, Creative Practitioners, staff and all the equipment. The staff reflected on this and decided to split the children into two groups to manage the activities more effectively whilst staying in ratio. This worked much better and enabled everyone to get more out of the sessions.

⁶⁵ Puddleducks Daycare Evaluation Form

⁶⁶ ibid

⁶⁷ ibid

4.20 St Mary's Preschool

[St Mary's Preschool](#) is located in the city of Wrexham. The Preschool is an English-medium setting and is categorised as being in the 20% most deprived areas, according to the Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation. It is located in one of the least populous areas in Wales, described as, 'Urban city and town' by the Rural Urban Classification system.

The setting recently moved into new premises and wanted to focus on using the sessions to explore how they could use their outdoor space. They wanted to focus on utilising '[loose parts](#)' in play and exploring the possibility of using some wilder outdoor space for more risky and adventurous play. The setting worked with two Creative Practitioners who were both experienced in outdoor play, loose parts and in creating engaging experiences for young children.

The sessions involved the Creative Practitioners bringing lots of different objects such as old phones, keyboards, hats and other random items in to the setting and allowing the children to engage with it as they wanted, using their imaginations to create their own games and activities. The Creative Practitioners also engaged the children in creating a woodland area, where they built a swing, a campfire, explored nature and got dirty.

The Early Years Practitioners felt that this had been "amazing" and had helped all of the setting staff to feel more confident in enabling the children to explore and adventure outside. They felt that the Creative Practitioners had done "a fantastic job and had such amazing ideas." They were going to continue with the loose parts play and had sourced their own boxes of (what they described as) "random tat" to create an engaging, unstructured play environments for the children.

Key Impacts – Children

INQUISITIVE

The Early Years Practitioners reflected that many of the children that come to the setting live in flats and have no regular access to outdoor space. This made it more important for the children to have access to the outdoors in the Preschool, and that they were able to freely interact with nature and natural space. The sessions gave the children the chance to explore, be inquisitive and to engage with nature.

PERSISTENT

Some of the children were initially less confident in the outdoor settings, being less familiar with mud and interacting with minibeasts. The children all became more confident in outdoor and adventurous play through the sessions, and are now excited to play outside.

COLLABORATIVE

The Early Years Practitioners observed that, "The children have learnt how to share and take turns and have developed confidence in taking risks and challenges within our new outdoor area."

IMAGINATIVE

The loose parts play invited the children to use their imaginations. The setting staff reflected that the children, "really got into it", creating their own games, role playing and working together.

DISCIPLINED

The Early Years Practitioners reflected that they children had formed, "...a closer network and more language was noticed whilst using the swing in our new outdoor area."⁶⁸

Key Impacts - Early Years Practitioners

INQUISITIVE

The setting staff were all willing to try a very new approach to play introduced by the Creative Practitioners. They were open to exploring how this new approach would work in their setting and benefit the children.

PERSISTENT

The Early Years Practitioners were able to rise to the challenge presented in allowing the children more freedom and to take risks in their outdoor play. The Creative Practitioners observed that the staff were less fearful and more relaxed after seeing how risk could be managed during the sessions.

COLLABORATIVE

The Early Years Practitioners collaborated closely with the Creative Practitioners, and "...embraced this challenge, not afraid to take on risk and more importantly, allowed children to take risks too, without an overbearing sense of fear or 'what if ...'"⁶⁹

IMAGINATIVE

The setting now uses the loose parts approach to play as they have seen how much the children benefit from playing in such an engaging and effective environment. The staff reflected that they were inspired to go and source lots of new objects for the children to engage with now that the sessions have ended.

DISCIPLINED

The Early Years Practitioners reflected that they became more comfortable with the children engaging in riskier activities. They were able to reflect critically on the benefits for the children of this way of engaging with nature and the outdoors.

⁶⁸ St Mary's Preschool Evaluation Form

⁶⁹ ibid

4.21 The Den

[The Den](#) is located in the village of Marchweil just outside of Wrexham. It is an English-medium setting and is categorised as being in the 50% least deprived areas, according to the Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation. It is located in an area described as, 'Rural village and dispersed' by the Rural Urban Classification system.

The setting wanted work with Creative Practitioners to explore improving the children's communication, physical development, confidence in using tools, managing risks and trying new creative experiences. The setting engaged two Creative Practitioners who would provide sessions for the children in a range of creative practices including woodworking.

The setting had a change of staff between the time that the sessions had been planned and the start of the sessions. There were some initial minor challenges with managing risk which led to a loss of confidence in the process and some difficulties in communication between one of the Creative Practitioners and the setting. However, the sessions continued but were modified to involve less exposure to any possible risks.

We were able to visit the setting and observe the children engaged in activities with one of the Creative Practitioners. To manage risk, the setting had decided to bring the children into activities in small groups. This made it more difficult for the Creative Practitioner to develop the sessions in a more unstructured and free-flowing way, and acted as a source of frustration for them. However, the Creative Practitioner was able to introduce some large blocks, which the children enjoyed rolling and pushing over. This inspired the Creative Practitioner to work with the children to create a large scale dominoes game which allowed the children to both build and enjoy knocking over.

We were also told by the setting team about the work they had done with their other Creative Practitioner who had engaged with the children around the theme of 'The Very Hungry Caterpillar' book. The Creative Practitioner supported the children to make the caterpillar using decoupage, and to use different objects such as strawberries and leaves to print on paper, representing the food that the caterpillar had eaten on his journey. The children made butterflies and flowers, which were all combined to create a huge banner that, "...is proudly displayed in our outdoor area and cloakroom walls."

Key Impacts – Children

INQUISITIVE

The Early Years Practitioners reflected that the sessions had enabled the children to be more open to exploration and following their inquisitiveness. They were more confident to ask questions and were more open minded to try new activities.

IMAGINATIVE

The Early Years Staff reflected that the children were more able to explore different art materials and creative processes as a result of being involved in the sessions. They enjoyed being able to use their imaginations to explore the story of The Very Hungry Caterpillar through looking at minibeasts and exploring the shapes, tastes and colours of the food the caterpillar ate.

DISCIPLINED

The children were able to develop a range of creative skills during the sessions, refining their techniques in using wooden mallets and other simple tools.

4.22 Ysgol Feithrin Pontypŵl

[Ysgol Feithrin Pontypŵl](#) is located in the town of Pontypool in Torfaen. It is a Welsh-medium setting and is categorised as being in the 30% most deprived areas, according to the Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation. It is located in an area described as, 'Urban city and town' by the Rural Urban Classification system.

The setting wanted to focus on bringing a wider range of creative activities and experiences to the children. They wanted to develop the children's confidence, perseverance and enthusiasm for creativity. They also wanted to give the Early Years Practitioners confidence and creative skills which they could continue to use with the children after the sessions ended.

The setting worked with a Creative Practitioner who was a multi-media artist and skilled in a range of creative practices. They worked with the children, helping them to do screen printing (using recycled materials), pressing flowers and leaves into clay, supporting the children to use a sewing machine, hand sewing, making bunting, bending wire to make sculptures. Some of these activities can be seen in the photos below.



We were able to visit the setting and observe the children making dye from natural materials. The children were supported to mash berries, mix spice powders, crush petals and leaves and to use sieves and old fabric to extract the dyes from the different materials. The children were very engaged in the activities, remaining patient and taking their turn but constantly asking questions and using new vocabulary to describe the colours, smells and textures of the dyes. Once the dyes had been extracted the children went outside where big sheets of paper had been laid on the garden floor and the children were able to all paint on the paper using the different dyes. The children enjoyed seeing how the different colours looked and remembering how they had made each colour. They enjoyed tipping the pots of dye over and watching the colours run down the paper, mixing together to create new colours (see photo below).



The sessions provided the setting with a new “toolbox” of activities and the setting Manager described the skills that all of the staff had gained through the sessions as “enormous”. In between sessions the Early Years Practitioner had been inspired to take each creative skill and adapt it, improve it and make it their own. The strength of the relationship between the Creative Practitioner and the Early Years Practitioners was an important part of the success of this Creative Learning journey. This relationship was built through strong, clear communication and time at the start of the journey for planning and developing a shared understanding. The setting Manager described the Creative Practitioner as “part of the family”.

Key Impacts – Children

INQUISITIVE

The children were able to follow their curiosity and try new ways of interacting with materials. The session creating different dyes allowed them to experiment, finding out how different substances created different colours, and finding out how the dyes looked when used as paint.

PERSISTENT

The children initially found threading needles and using the sewing machine difficult. However, as they persevered they became more skilled, as the Early Years Practitioners reflected, “Mae’r plant wedi dysgu creu patrymau, arbrofi gyda phob math o ddeunyddiau, gwnio gyda pheiriant a chotwm ac edau sydd yn arwain at ddatblygu sgiliau motor manwl trwy profiadau go iawn.”⁷⁰ (The children have learnt to create patterns, experiment with all kinds of materials, sew with a machine and cotton and thread which leads to the development of fine motor skills through real experiences.)

COLLABORATIVE

The children worked together to create a beautiful painting out of natural dyes that they all made themselves. They were able to work together to create a shared piece of art, of which they were justifiably proud.

IMAGINATIVE

The children were able to engage with different textures, materials and creative processes. They became comfortable with trying new things and understanding how different actions achieved different outcomes.

DISCIPLINED

The children were able to practice a wide range of creative skills during the sessions, and showed a huge improvement in their abilities to thread needles, make marks, and follow clear steps.

Key Impacts - Early Years Practitioners

INQUISITIVE

The Early Years Practitioners were able to observe the sessions with the Creative Practitioner and then put into practice what they had learnt throughout the week with the children. This enabled them to explore how they and the children could adapt and expand the creative activities, making them their own.

PERSISTENT

The setting staff found it challenging to enable all of the children to take part in each creative activity in the timeframe, and some of the activities needed a bit of adaptation to work for the children. The Early Years Practitioners became more comfortable with trying things out and with the uncertainty that this brings.

⁷⁰ Ysgol Feithrin Pontypŵl Evaluation Form

COLLABORATIVE

The Creative Practitioner and Early Years Practitioners collaborated throughout the initiative, working together to discuss what would work in the setting, how to adapt a creative activity to make it accessible to the children, how to manage the session and keep everyone engaged. The team developed a close and effective working relationship through good communication and trust.

IMAGINATIVE

The Early Years Practitioners all felt inspired by the Creative Practitioner to bring new creative activities to the setting. They all described feeling more confident and that, "mae'r staff wedi dysgu edrych tu allan i'r bocs"⁷¹ (the staff have learnt to look outside the box)

DISCIPLINED

The Early Years Practitioners all developed their creative skills alongside the children, expanding their knowledge and skill in a wide range of creative practices. The setting Manager told us, "We couldn't believe there were so many ways we could do art and creativity with the children."

⁷¹ Ysgol Feithrin Pontypŵl Evaluation form

5 Impact

5.1 Impact on the Early Years Practitioners

There is clear evidence that all of the settings that completed their learning journeys met or exceeded their expectations in terms of the development of the Creative Habits of Mind. In the first year of the initiative, it was identified in the evaluation that some of the settings that took part were less familiar with the Creative Habits of Mind as a methodology for evaluating and supporting creativity. This year, the evaluation identified that the Creative Habits of Mind was still not yet fully embedded in the practice of Early Years Practitioners that took part. However there is clear evidence that Creative Agents worked with settings to increase their understanding of the methodology, and that it may take more time for Early Years Practitioners to fully embrace this methodology. We interviewed one of the Early Years Practitioners who took part in year one of the initiative, who reflected that it had taken them some time to really, “get to grips” with the Creative Habits of Mind. For them, it wasn’t something that they had been able to fully grasp within the timeframe of their involvement in year one, but they were now felt more confidence in using the methodology in their setting.

When we examined the narratives contained in the evaluation forms, our interviews and evidence gathered at the sharing events, twelve of the settings had developed additional Creative Habits beyond those identified in their Evaluation Form.

The evaluation forms for the settings included a scaled question asking the Early Years Practitioners to rate the impact of the initiative on their confidence, “Has taking part in this initiative improved your confidence in using your creative approaches in your settings?” The scores for the question, can be seen in the graph below.



The levels of confidence in using creative approaches in all of the settings was high, with an average score of 9 out of 10.

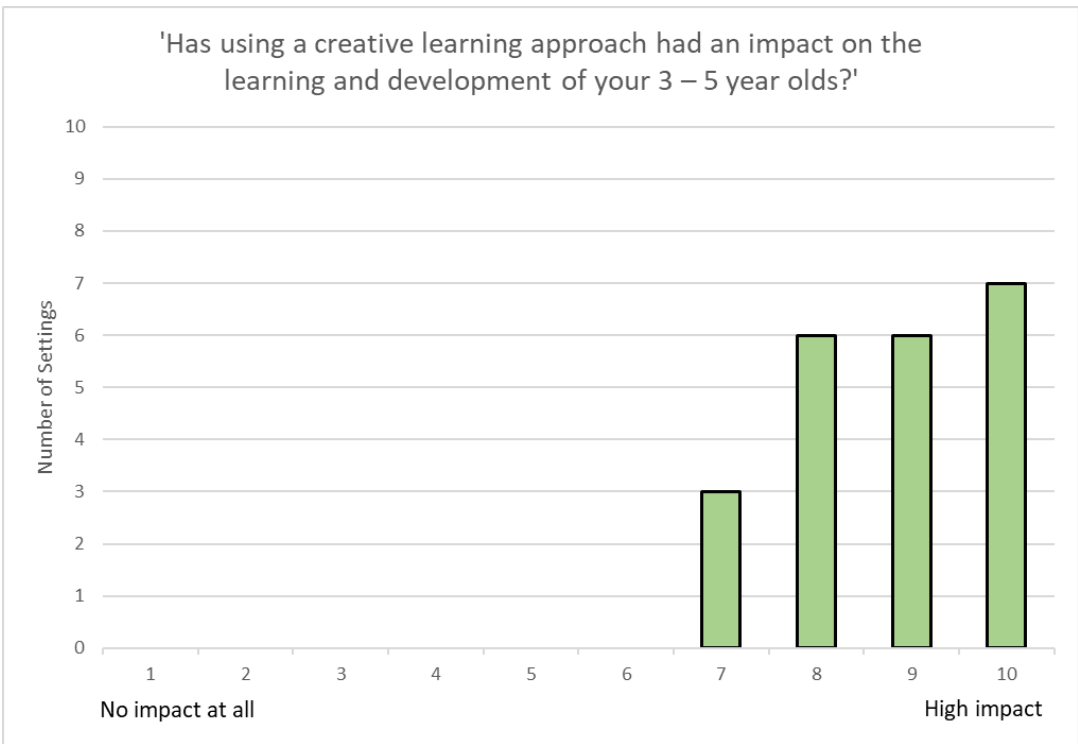
As in year one, the most significant impact of the initiative has been in inspiring confidence in the Early Years Practitioners. This is a vital outcome, given that it is one of the three key aims, “To develop confidence in both early years practitioners and creative practitioners to trial new ways of working.”⁷² In every setting, the Early Years Practitioners reflected that they felt more confident in using creativity in their setting. All of them planned to continue to use the creative ideas and skills with the children.

Many of the Creative Practitioners also developed confidence in working with early years children and some reflected that they had developed their own practice as a result of being involved in the sessions. In settings that had two Creative Practitioners, many welcomed the collaboration and confidence in their own work that this brought.

There remained some confusion, for both Creatives and Early Years Practitioners, around whether the Creative Habits of Mind were to be developed for the children, the Early Years Practitioners or both. We have captured evidence throughout the evaluation for both, but for the final year it could be beneficial to be clearer in both the training and the evaluation forms as to which group is the central focus and more specific instructions in the evaluation forms around what evidence is needed to demonstrate impact.

5.2 Impact on Children

The evaluation form also asked settings to evaluate the impact of the sessions on the children. The scores for the question, “Has using a creative learning approach had an impact on the learning and development of your 3 – 5 year olds?” were also positive, as can be seen in the graph below.



The Early Years settings involved in the learning journeys this year felt that the creative approaches had a positive impact on the children, with an average score of 8.7 out of 10.

⁷² Original Invitation to Tender, Arts Council of Wales

The evaluation forms also provided evidence of the numbers of children that had taken part this year. The original planning forms estimated that 436 children would be engaged. The evaluation forms show that 493 children across Wales were part of these creative experiences. In two years, Creative Learning in the Early Years has engaged **736** children across Wales, and a total of **34** Early Years settings.

This year, there was a stronger emphasis, both in the training and the evaluation process, on the Curriculum for Non-Maintained Nursery Settings in Wales⁷³. The Curriculum establishes developmental pathways which support settings to realise the mandatory elements within the Curriculum and to "support authentic and purposeful learning, and the realisation of progression for all children."⁷⁴ The five pathways relate to the four purposes of the broader Curriculum for Wales (ambitious capable learners, enterprising and creative contributors, ethical and informed citizens and healthy and confident individuals).

The training for Creative Practitioners, Creative Agents and Early Years Practitioners explored the six areas of focus which were based on the Curriculum. These areas of focus were centred around the five developmental pathways with the addition of "Observing and Noticing Children in Creative Activities", based on the key principle within the Curriculum of, "...skilful, observant and interested adults, who provide authentic and engaging experiences in effective, exciting environments."⁷⁵

We have used each developmental pathway's 'I am learning to...' statements to explore how Creative Learning in the Early Years has contributed to supporting these areas of development. The 'I am learning to ...' statements are expressed from the child's viewpoint, "to ensure that provision focuses on the needs, interests and curiosity of three- and four-year-olds"⁷⁶.

5.2.1 Belonging

There were numerous examples throughout the evaluation where the creative sessions had provided children with opportunities to participate in the life of the setting. Children were able to help make new areas for play and create benches, planters, bug hotels, swings, write songs and make puppets that were all part of the lasting legacy of the sessions.

A number of settings explored how to support the children to take on risk, and both the Early Years Practitioners and children learnt together how to keep everyone safe during wood work, outdoor exploration and cooking on open fires.

Many of the settings this year wanted to focus on developing their use of outdoor space. This provided many children with opportunities to engage with nature, insects and wildlife, developing a curiosity and respect for living things. Many of the creative sessions used recycled and repurposed materials, helping the children to learning how to take care of their natural environment through reusing and recycling.

⁷³ [A curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings \(gov.wales\)](#)

⁷⁴ <https://ndna.org.uk/ndna-cymru/curriculum-for-wales/the-five-developmental-pathways/>

⁷⁵ [A curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings \(gov.wales\)](#)

⁷⁶ *ibid*

Throughout this year of the Creative Learning initiative, there were interesting discussions around how children have been supported to develop their sense of 'cynefin'. Cynefin has no direct translation into English, but is defined in the Curriculum for Wales in the following way;

"This is the place where we feel we belong, ...cynefin is not just a place in a physical or geographical sense: it is the historic, cultural and social place which has shaped and continues to shape the community which inhabits it"⁷⁷

Children were supported to develop and value the Welsh language, and to learn about Welsh history and culture through stories, songs, music, dance, role play, and physical exploration. The creative sessions helped the children to develop stronger connections with their communities through intergenerational activities and through learning about their home, their neighbours and how they are part of a shared history and culture. The children were also supported to work together, respect each other's needs and differences, and have empathy. They learnt, "...belonging' is just as much acceptance of others as it is of feeling it for oneself."⁷⁸

5.2.2 Communication

Many of the settings reflected that children had become better at communicating, both with each other and with adults after taking part in the creative sessions. They were more confident, able to speak up and share their ideas and suggestions. The invitations to play and 'loose parts' approaches in particular enabled children to collaborate more effectively, resulting in less disagreements and requiring less intervention from setting staff.

In every creative session, there was an element of roleplay, and the children were able to express themselves through a wide variety of different media. The sessions often involved the use of a familiar song or story, which the children were able to act out or retell in their own way. Many of the children were able to develop their communication in the Welsh language. Some settings were able to achieve huge progress in developing their confidence in Welsh, forging deep connections between the words and their meanings through play, song and storytelling.

Children practiced mark-making using fingers, sticks, brushes and a range of different objects. There were numerous examples of children developing fine motor skills through using tools, learning to sew and thread needles and arrange small objects, all of which are crucial in supporting the development of handwriting⁷⁹.

5.2.3 Exploration

Many of the creative sessions were child-led, allowing the children to take activities wherever their interests and curiosities led them. They were given opportunities to try new things, make mistakes and practice until they were able to achieve their goals.

Many of the sessions used new and exciting materials which the children could experiment with, such as cyanotype photography, creating dyes from natural materials and adding paint to bubbles. The children were able to explore how their actions resulted in different outcomes.

⁷⁷ <https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/humanities/designing-your-curriculum>

⁷⁸ North Cornelly Community Playgroup Evaluation Form

⁷⁹ https://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/jpts/30/2/30_jpts-2017-450/_article

The children were able to practice measuring and estimating, learning about numbers and quantities in their wood working sessions. These sessions often required great resilience and perseverance from the children as using tools was often difficult, noise and frustrating at first, but became easier as the children were able to practice.

5.2.4 Physical Development

The sessions gave the children many opportunities to move, run, crawl, jump and dance. Movement was a particularly strong theme in this year of the initiative with many settings involving movement both indoors and outdoors in their plans. Children were enabled to engage with a range of different environments and supported to develop their confidence to express themselves through movement.

5.2.5 Well-being

There were a number of references to children developing their ability to be patient and take turns. Many of the children learnt how important it was to wait and give others space when doing more risky activities. The children were able to understand the instructions and express them to others, reminding their peers when they forgot to follow the rules.

Some of the settings reflected that the sessions had enabled some children, particularly those with ALN, to improve their focus and become calmer and more engaged.

5.2.6 Observing and Noticing Children in Creative Activities

The Curriculum describes 'enabling adults', who are, "...integral to the progress of all children and is particularly significant in this period of early learning."⁸⁰ Throughout this evaluation there were countless examples of the Early Years Practitioners, Creative Practitioners and Creative Agents all modelling a curious and joyful approach to learning. There were numerous reflections from Early Years Practitioners around how the sessions had helped them to reflect on the way they engage children in activities. Early Years Practitioners were able to observe the children's play and reflect on what interests and engages them, rather than pre-defining the structure and direction of activities. This approach of 'stepping back', allowing the children to lead and to use their imaginations and fascinations resulted in the children being more engaged and for longer periods.

⁸⁰ [A curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales/curriculum-for-funded-non-maintained-nursery-settings)

6 Delivery and Management

The Arts Council of Wales, Early Years Wales, Mudiad Meithrin and Cwmpas all share a commitment to the importance of Early Years education and a respect for all of the creative and early years professionals involved in the initiative. Communication between the partner organisations and evaluation team has been very positive and productive.

Throughout the delivery phase of year two of the initiative, the delivery team has actively invited feedback from Creative Agents, Creative Practitioners and Early Years Practitioners through open dialogue and online surveys. There have been some challenges this year, and the delivery team and the partner organisations have worked collaboratively to understand any problems, listen to those involved and devise solutions to prevent the problems arising in year three.

6.1 Recruitment of Creative Practitioners

There were some challenges around recruiting Creative Practitioners this year. Some of these challenges were around recruiting confident Welsh speaking Creatives to work in Welsh-medium settings. Delivering creative learning for children of such a young age is still a specialised skill set and there are perhaps not yet enough creatives who feel confident to take up the challenge of getting involved in the initiative – particularly those who speak Welsh. It would be useful for the Arts Council to work with the partner organisations to devise ways to broaden the pool of potential creative practitioners that could be engaged in year three.

6.2 Timings

A number of settings suggested that the timing of the initiative to occur during the last term of the year was not ideal, as they described this term as often busiest and most stressful. However, other settings reflected that the timing worked for them, particularly around planning outdoor activities which they felt worked better in the spring and summer months.

6.3 Application Process

A number of settings faced challenges in registering with the Arts Council's online portal, which is an issue that was raised in year one. The Arts Council, Early Years Wales and Mudiad Meithrin worked hard with settings to resolve the issues, but many were caused by administrative technicalities (such as different names being on bank accounts to governing documents), which were very hard to resolve. We received feedback from a number of settings that had experienced issues with the portal this year and there were many who expended valuable and limited staff time on trying to gain access. One setting was not able to resolve their issues with the portal and could not take part in the learning journey this year, however, they plan to join in year three.

Our understanding is that this issue is recognised by the Arts Council as a serious barrier to the engagement of Early Years Settings in this initiative, and that steps are being taken to remove the need to register with the portal from the initiative next year. Removing access to the portal as a precondition will significantly support the engagement of Early Years Settings in year three and potentially assist the partnership to engage a more diverse range of settings in the final year of the initiative.

6.4 The Importance of Relationships

As in the first year, a key success factor for year two has been the positive relationships that have been forged between Creative Agents, Early Years Practitioners and Creative Practitioners. There was a great deal of positive feedback from settings about how important it had been to build strong relationships with the creatives that were based on trust, mutual respect, communication and shared goals. Many of the settings described the relationship that they had built with the Creative Practitioners as being like one of the team or part of the family, "They have become part of us – part of our family."⁸¹

Creative Agents in particular have been vital elements of the success of the initiative. They have prevented some creative learning journeys from becoming untenable and had provided a huge amount of support to settings with administration, form filling and general ongoing support.

There were three instances where relationships between the setting and Creative Practitioners became strained. In one instance, the Creative Agent was able to bring the parties together to communicate clearly and resolve the issues successfully. Another setting had a breakdown in communication with a Creative Practitioner than could not be resolved. This resulted in sessions being limited and restricted in a way that had less impact for both the children and the Early Years Practitioners.

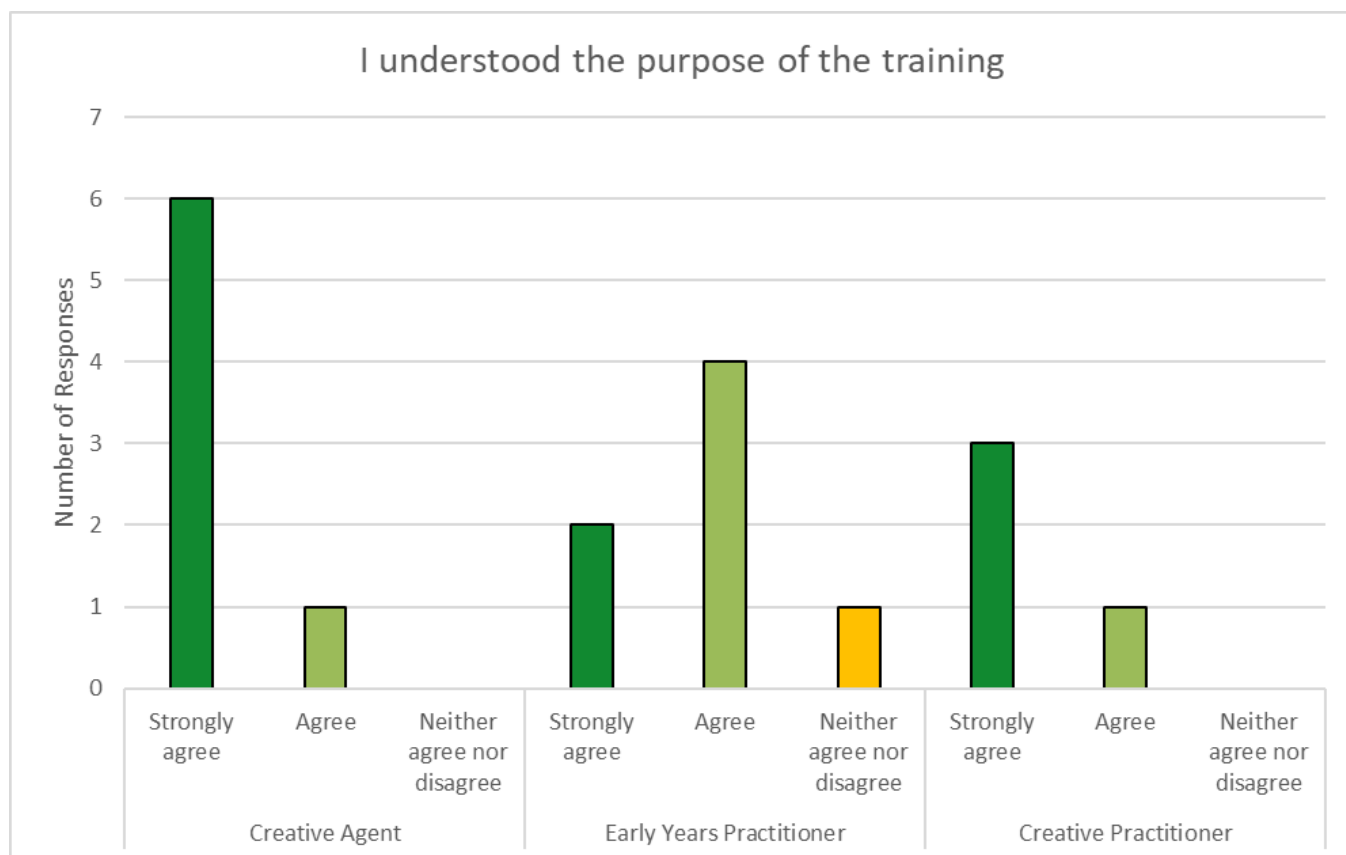
A third setting did not complete their learning journey as relationships between the Early Years Practitioners and Creative Practitioners broke down to the extent that the activities could not continue. The setting wanted to use the Creative Learning sessions to renovate their outdoor area, conducting extensive groundworks which they had agreed to match fund. As the funding for the Creative Learning initiative is not intended for this purpose, and is usually primarily used to fund the Creative Practitioners time in the setting, this was a significant misunderstanding. The setting became dissatisfied with progress towards the goals they had established, trust was eroded and communication between the setting and the creatives became less effective. Eventually, the Creative Practitioners were asked to stop attending the setting and the learning journey came to a halt. This experience has resulted in disappointment and upset for all parties and sadly the intended impacts for the Early Years Practitioners and children could not be realised.

We were not able to speak directly with the Creative Practitioners or Creative Agent involved with this setting, but we did speak with the Early Years Practitioners. It was identified that the member of staff that applied to take part in the initiative left the setting around the time that the sessions began. This meant that the Early Years Practitioners that continued with the sessions did not have the same understanding of the purpose and aims of the Creative Learning journey. It is also possible, given the Creative Practitioners were new to the Creative Learning initiative, that they did not fully understand the wider purpose of the initiative or their role in delivering it. This may be due a change in the way that the training was delivered for year two and this will be explored further in section 5.6 of this report.

⁸¹ Cylch Meithrin Crymych Interview

6.5 Training

This year, the training for Creative Practitioners, Creative Agents and Early Years Practitioners was combined in to a one-day session which was held in both north and south Wales to minimise travel for participants. We conducted an online survey gathering feedback about the training and explore some of the main findings below.



As the graph above illustrates, most of the participants understood the purpose of the training, and there were some positive comments from participants about the benefit of bringing everyone together to, "...share ideas and get to know everyone."

After the training, the Creative Practitioners and Creative Agents had a clearer understanding of the Creative Habits of Mind compared to the Early Years Practitioners. Unsurprisingly, the Early Years Practitioners had a stronger grasp of the 6 Areas of Focus from the Curriculum than the creatives. When asked about whether participants understood the next steps in their learning journeys, there was less confidence amongst Early Years Practitioners, but comments suggested they had planned meeting with Creative Agents and Practitioners in settings to explore this in more detail.

There was feedback from some of the Early Years Practitioners that they had travelled a very long way to attend the training, and that only the cost of covering their missed hours in the setting were covered, but not additional time that they spent at the training or travelling to a from the venue. One reflected that they felt some frustration about this as they felt the training was, "nice but not essential." This issue was discussed with the partnership and both Mudiad Meithrin and Early Years Wales have agreed to work with the settings in year three so that staff who attend the training and sharing days are not out of pocket.

The evaluation revealed that some of the settings where things didn't go to plan involved Creative Practitioners who had not been involved in year one. The decision to hold a combined training may have meant that creatives new to the initiative did not fully understand the aims and purpose of Creative Learning in the Early Years. For year three, it may be necessary to provide specific training to new Creative Agents and Creative Practitioners to ensure that there is a shared understanding of roles, responsibilities, boundaries and the wider purpose of the Creative Learning initiative.

Overall comments suggested that participants would have liked more time in the session to plan what came next. This was reflected in comments and feedback from the evaluation forms and interviews, which suggested that a lack of time to plan and to create a shared understanding of what would take place in the setting led to some miscommunication and some relationships to become strained. The time allocated to deliver the creative sessions is very precious and Creative Practitioners and settings want to ensure that as much of this time as possible is in active delivery with children. However, it is clear from the evidence that where time was taken to allow the Creative Practitioners to visit the setting, observe, build relationships with the staff, this led to more successful outcomes. In year three, it may be beneficial to focus on allowing more time for setting teams to plan together during the training days, or to use some of the training budget to allow an additional planning session in each of the settings.

6.6 Funding

One issue that was raised by Creative Practitioners and Creative Agents in both interviews and the feedback survey was that they were spending more time in the settings, additional time travelling, planning and organising than was reflected in their contracted hours. We received feedback from creatives which suggested travel should be paid separately from the work delivering in settings;

"I felt some of my settings lost out because they paid me for my travel in lieu of a day in the setting. I really think the travel of the creative practitioners should be paid, all my settings were at least 1.5 hrs drive away and it felt uncomfortable negotiating payment for this. when i have worked with the Arts Council on lead creative schools projects mileage is paid a 45p per mile, this seems fairer to me."

This issue of the cost of travelling long distances may be exacerbated by the lack of Welsh speaking creatives, meaning that suitable creatives are not available within an area local to a setting. Increasing the pool of Welsh speaking creatives may help to reduce the issue of costly travel for the creatives.

We also received survey feedback from creatives who had invested additional time in their settings. This additional time wasn't paid, as it exceeded the Creative Learning budget for that setting. We received feedback from five Creative Agents who all contributed extra time ranging from two extra days to nine and a half extra days of unpaid work. This was mainly around planning, recruitment and paperwork. Four Creative Practitioners also responded to the survey, and each indicated that they had given extra time to the setting which ranged between 5 and 12 extra unpaid hours. Whilst all the comments from these creatives were positive about their experience and their pride in being part of the initiative, they believed that the outcomes that they had achieved were only possible through their working more than their allocated hours.

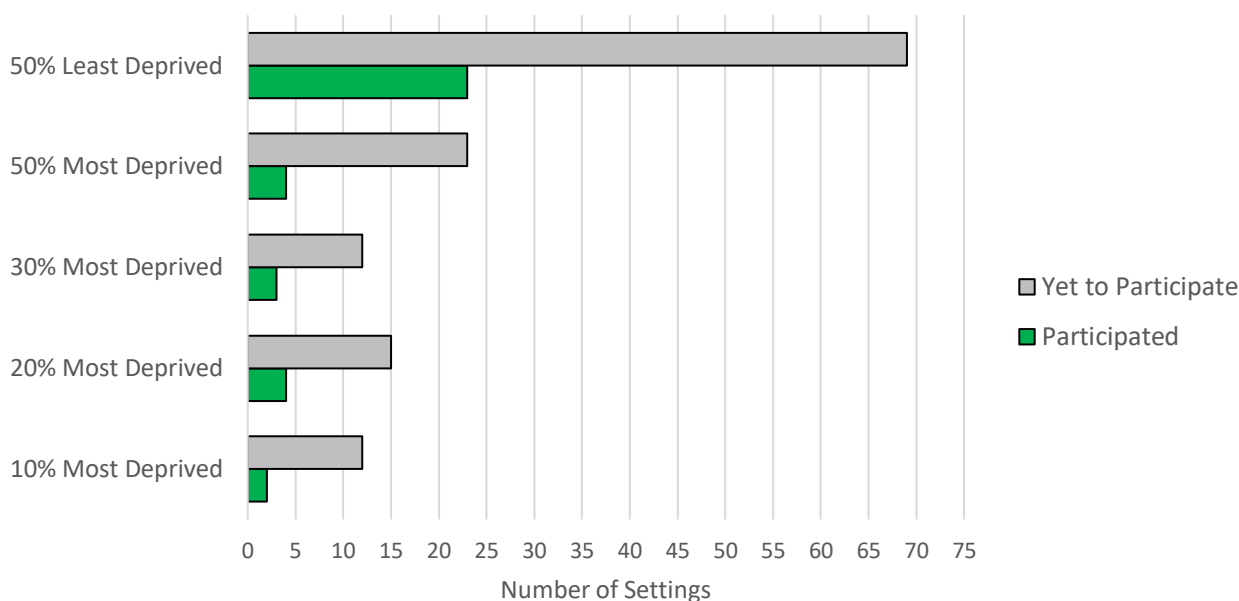
It is important as Creative Learning in the Early Years approaches its final year and begins to consider exploring a continuation of this valuable work, that consideration is given to ensuring that any future initiative is fully funded and sustainable.

7 The Future

7.1 Recruiting for Year Three

As explored in section 3 of this report, 71% of settings involved in year two were located in areas defined by the Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation as amongst the 50% least deprived.

As part of this evaluation, we used data provided by Mudiad Meithrin and Early Years Wales to establish that there are 167 settings in Wales that meet the eligibility criteria for the initiative. We then established the WIMD categorisation for each of these settings, and compared this data with the settings that have already taken part. The graph below illustrates these findings.



As can be seen from the graph above, there are a significant number of eligible settings that are located in areas of deprivation who have not yet taken part in the initiative. Our data also suggests that there have been proportionately more settings involved in the first two years that are located in areas that are amongst the 50% least deprived.

In years one and two, the partnership opted to use an “open callout” for settings to take part, which has been successful in engaging settings. However for year three a more targeted recruitment strategy may be more appropriate to enable Creative Learning in the Early Years to achieve one of its fundamental aims;

“The programme will accelerate the Covid-recovery for young children, bringing communication, well-being, and belonging to the fore; and allow our organisations to focus on the 28% of families with children aged under 4 in income deprivation in Wales. It will enhance contributions to the Race Equality work in Wales and support bilingualism and Welsh heritage.”⁸²

The removal of the need to access the portal will also remove a significant barrier to engaging new settings, particularly those with less resources and staff time.

⁸² ibid

7.2 Legacy

We reflected in the evaluation report for year one that it would be a positive outcome to develop resources that could be shared with the wider sector. These resources could be simple 'recipe cards' outlining a particularly creative activity and detailing key information about how to bring it to your setting and the impact that it might have. We are aware that some of the Creative Practitioners involved this year have created similar resources to leave with the settings after their sessions ended, to enable the setting to have easy to follow guides for staff. Settings also suggested that having access to resources such as template risk assessments for the riskier activities outdoors or using tools would be beneficial, and could support other Early Years settings to be inspired by and to share in the abundance of learning and creativity that has been generated.

The recipes could include:

- **About us** – where, how many children, relevant facts
- **What we wanted** – our plan, why we needed it
- **What we did** – overview of activities
- **How it helped us** – key facts about any impacts on Early Years Practitioners and on children
- **Top tips** – what made it work (or not) in the setting, any issues they overcame, potential pitfalls, best advice."

We also attempted to follow up with some of the settings involved in the first year of the initiative to explore the longer term impact of the Creative Learning initiative. We were able to speak with one Early Years Practitioner who had been involved in year one, who had since gone on to become a Creative Agent in setting in year two. They had also taken part in the Arts Council of Wales Creative Leadership Programme, as the first member from an Early Years setting. The Early Years Practitioner reflected that taking part in year one, "had real benefits" for their setting, and had led to transformational change to how the setting approached play and their attitude to risk. The Early Years Practitioner felt inspired and spoke passionately about the importance of Creative Learning in the Early Years for the sector and how they hoped it would not only expand creativity and bring confidence to settings but change the wider perception of the value of early years education. The Early Years Practitioner explained that their creative learning journey had enabled them to have a clearer understanding of the benefits of creativity for children. They also reflected how clearly both the Creative Learning initiative and the Creative Habits of Mind are aligned to and supportive of the Curriculum for Non-Maintained Nursery Settings.

For the evaluation in year three, we will continue to explore the longer term impacts of the Creative Learning initiative through further interviews with settings involved in years one and two. This will build the evidence base supporting the longer-term impacts of Creative Learning in the Early Years.

8 Conclusions

The evidence gathered throughout the second year of Creative Learning in the Early Years has supported and enhanced our understanding of the benefits of supporting the development of creativity in early years settings. As established in the evaluation of year one, the most significant impact for the Early Years Practitioners has been in developing their confidence to develop new approaches and expanding their conceptions of creativity. They were supported to take more managed risks and to 'step back', observe and provide engaging experiences and effective environments for the children in their settings. All of the Early Years Practitioners that completed their learning journey reflected that they had developed in at least three of the Creative Habits of Mind. Many of the setting staff demonstrated that they had developed their confidence and skills in every Creative Habit of Mind, even if they were not yet fully confident to use the methodology as a reflective tool.

There is also strong evidence that children that have been part of the learning journeys have also experienced positive benefits. Children were able to be curious, inquisitive, and adventurous outdoors, learning about the natural world. They were given invitations to play and able to follow their own imaginations and interests in new ways. They developed both fine and gross motor skills, feeling pride in their new found abilities to use tools and machines, create objects, and experiment with different materials. There were also interesting developments in the children's sense of cynefin, and they were supported to develop a deeper connection to and understanding of their home and their community. The evidence shows that most of the children developed in every Creative Habit of Mind, as well as showing clear development against the areas of focus outlined in the Curriculum for Non-Maintained Nursery Settings. One Creative Practitioner reflected that, "It was wonderful to see the awe in the children's faces".

The challenges that have been experienced by some settings this year have reinforced the importance of the appropriate training and the need for time to plan and establish clear plans and shared goals before beginning the process of delivering in settings. The most frequently raised feedback was to ensure that there was planning time in the setup phase, rather than taking this time out of the creative sessions in the settings. It may also be beneficial to provide additional training, separate from the collaborative training day, for new or inexperienced Creative Practitioners and Creative Agents to ensure that they fully grasp their role and its boundaries, and the wider aims of the Creative Learning initiative.

As identified in year one, Creative Learning in the Early Years has a strong alignment with the Well-being of Future Generations Act and the work of the Future Generations Commissioner. The impacts described in this report have clear links to the seven Future Generations Well-being Goals and the importance of "Harnessing the power of creativity"⁸³ to create a "bright and optimistic future" for Wales⁸⁴. The children taking part in the learning journey are being equipped with the knowledge, skills and confidence that will help them reach their potential as future citizens of Wales.

⁸³ <https://www.futuregenerations.wales/work/culture-and-welsh-language/>

⁸⁴ <https://www.futuregenerations.wales/work/cymru-can/>

The work of the Creative Learning initiative has been referenced in a report by the Senedd Equality and Social Justice Committee in July 2024. The report references a visit to observe the Creative Learning sessions at Enfys Fach nursery being highlighted as identified as an example of good practice;

"Jenny Rathbone MS saw a strong emphasis on child-centred learning at Enfys Fach Nursery in Brecon, with seamless indoor and outdoor provision. This included working with a sculptor to make wooden stools designed by each child."⁸⁵

The report unfortunately does not state that the session is part of the Creative Learning in the Early Years initiative, and this is being addressed by the partners, but it is significant that the value of the Creative Learning approach is being recognised by the Senedd.

The Early Years sector remains an undervalued profession, with many settings under resourced and experiencing a high turnover of staff. Some of the Early Years Practitioners involved in the initiative reflected that at times they felt tired, overwhelmed and uninspired. After taking part in the learning journey many Early Years Practitioners felt inspired, revitalised, more enthusiastic and more appreciative of the importance of their profession, "What an incredible project and incredible process to be part of."

It is worth reiterating that Creative Learning in the Early Years is as much about highlighting the professionalism and the importance of the role that the Early Years Practitioners play in our society, as it is about helping them to gain creative skills and confidence. This initiative enables Early Years settings and the professionals that work in them to give children in Wales the best possible care and to help them to have the best possible start in life. The Early Years Practitioners we spoke with during the evaluation embody the Curriculum for Non-Maintained Nursery Settings in Wales's framing of 'enabling adults'. They are skilled professionals who provide emotionally safe environments for the children, supporting children to learn and thrive. The project supports the Early Years Practitioners to "model a joyful approach to learning, and encourage and support children's natural curiosity..."⁸⁶ Many of Creative Practitioners and Creative Agents reflected that they had learnt as much, if not more from the Early Years Practitioners;

"The people that work in settings are amazing – fantastic."

"The skills sharing went both ways."

"It was an honour and a privilege to be involved. "

"We shared this creative journey together"

⁸⁵ <https://senedd.wales/media/iboexr4y/cr-ld16609-e.pdf>

⁸⁶ [A curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings \(gov.wales\)](#)

9 Recommendations

Following the evaluation Cwmpas proposes the following recommendations:

1. Work with partner organisations to explore how more Welsh speaking Creatives can be supported, developed and recruited to join the Creative Learning initiative in year three.
2. Review the training programme for all participants with more focusing on providing additional training for new Creative Practitioners and Creative Agents to ensure a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities.
3. Review the allocation of time and resources during the setup phase to ensure that there is adequate time (preferably in the setting) for Creative Practitioners, Creative Agents and Early Years Practitioners to come together to co-produce a plan before the sessions begin.
4. Introduce a more targeted approach to the recruitment of settings for year three, to encourage participation from more settings located in areas of higher deprivation.
5. Develop 'recipes' or case studies from year one to provide examples of the impact of the project through the voices of the settings that took part. This should help showcase the impact of the project, encourage other settings to get involved and enable the learning from years one and two to be shared with the wider sector. It will also support the creation of a lasting legacy of resources and learning from Creative Learning in the Early Years.
6. Examine whether in a future funding bid, additional resource is required to support Creative Practitioners and Creative Agents to manage the requirements of their roles.

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