

Annual Report 2023 - 2024



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Chairperson's Report



As I'm sure you will agree, we seem to be living in increasingly uncertain times but helping children achieve their potential is a fantastic investment in a collective and positive future. Providing effective support to children in their earliest years is critical to their development which is fundamentally why Early Years Wales exists - to support those who are supporting children to help them fulfil their potential. And as a membership organisation we're getting stronger - with over 1,750 members across Wales - an increase of over 1,000 since 2020!

This report provides details about all of the things that Early Years Wales has been doing over the past year to help our members and the children and families that they in turn support. Whether it's funding, professional training, child development, business advice, quality assurance or the work we do to advocate for the sector, everything we do is focused on the needs of our members.

And because we want to keep growing and become even more responsive, we're focused on making Early Years Wales a better organisation. Over the past year we've recruited a number of new Trustees to strengthen our Board and I'm particularly pleased to have more diversity and more practitioners represented.

We've also had to respond to changes in the way that local authorities are working. This means fewer locally-based Early Years Wales staff, but we're increasing the range

of specialist support to all of our members across Wales – not just those in areas where local councils fund us.

We're also really aware of the tough times that many families have been having over recent years and the difficult situation that tight budgets have created for many early childhood services. This is why we're spending more of our time advocating for our members with Government and other public bodies to make sure that early years services are given the status and funding they deserve.

In the coming year we want to carry on increasing our membership and become an even better organisation in the service of our members and of children and their families so that we can help deliver the high quality learning, play and care services that children in Wales deserve.

David Dallimore
Chair of Trustees



Early Years Wales' Strategic Pillars

Our work is operationally delivered through five interdependent pillars of activity. Each pillar aspires to support, value, and enhance the early years sector in Wales and each pillar is of equal value.

With over 60-years of sector experience and extensive staff knowledge, Early Years Wales is a trusted organisation for working with the sector and for providing research based and evidence-led policy and practice support.

Early Years Wales aims to provide confidence to our members and our funders by being an organisation that is long-established, robustly governed, and provides a high-quality, supportive environment for our staff. We are focused on delivering value for money.



Sustainable, quality childcare businesses, charities, and parent-led groups



A qualified, valued, and skilled workforce at all levels (including volunteers and volunteer managers)



Support for parents of children in the early years; support for parent-led groups (e.g., Parent and Toddler groups)



Promoting a positive start for all children through their early years (0-5)



Advocacy for the providers and users of early childhood education and care



Sustainable, quality childcare businesses, charities, and parent-led groups

What we did

We distributed £36.76k grant funding to the childcare and early years sector.

This funding, supported by Moondance Foundation, allowed **83** settings to receive financial support to sustain, expand, or enhance their services. These sustainability grants have protected settings from closure and helped settings with essential funds needed to maintain or enhance their services during challenging financial periods.

We provided 12 monthly bulletins and worked with 1,720 unique childcare members across the full range of the childcare and early years sector.

Our officers have made **411** visits, **15,896** phone/email contacts, and attended **180** LA meetings in support of the partnership working we undertake.

We have supported 423 charity providers of childcare in Wales. During 2023/24 we helped establish **13** new Charitable Incorporated Organisations (CIOs) and provided support to **194** CIOs to help them meet their duties and compliances with the Charity Commission. In line with CIO constitutions, we have supported **52** Trustee Boards with training.

Sadly, some charities closed their services in 2023/24 we helped **11** Trustee Boards to close their charities in line with the Charity Commission's regulations and procedures. We have redistributed £2500 charity funds to similar charities following a charity dissolution process.

We have embarked on a project to review our QfA scheme and as of October 2023 our new ‘online’ QfA Assessment Tool became available to purchase for our members. During 2023/24, we sold **45** Initial Assessment Tools, of which **7** providers successfully achieved their QfA status. The new QfA process is about more than the assessment; our QfA is a reflection and improvement process that includes a professional dialogue to help recognise the providers’ successes and prioritise areas of development. You can hear more about this quality scheme by [clicking here](#), including the comments made by providers about how the scheme helps them in their work.

In support of the expansion of Flying Start in Wales, our team has helped 18 settings gain accreditation with their local authority to deliver Flying Start funded childcare for 2-year-olds. The process of tendering can be daunting for all, but for small childcare providers, or those that have not been familiar with the processes to date, it can feel even more challenging. Early Years Wales has helped **18** providers with the information and support they needed to successfully become Flying Start providers of funded childcare.



Moondance and Early Years Wales; working in partnership to support childcare providers in Wales


In 2023/24 Moondance provided Early Years Wales with **£30000** of grant funding to support the childcare sector. This funding was ring-fenced in our budget and 100% of the funding went directly to members. Early Years Wales took the decision in 2021 to not charge any service charges or staff time to administering grants from our partnership with Moondance.

In 2023/24 the grant funding supported **31** providers of childcare across **12** local authority areas.

How the grants helped

The applications for grants covered a wide range of needs. This included the additional benefit of free membership to Early Years Wales, which enabled every recipient of a grant to receive the full range of member benefits available through our membership offer. As a result of the partnership with Moondance we registered **61** additional members with Early Years Wales. The applicants for support requested help with short-term sustainability issues caused by inflation, utility cost rises, or unexpected rent increases. As we know, the market volatility in 2023 and 2024 was unprecedented and many small organisations found this a challenge due to operating on very small margins.

Other applicants benefited from set-up costs which helped them establish new or extended services for children in their area. Some examples include, new outdoor forest play area, sensory playroom, set-up community toddler groups, new wraparound, marketing and family events.

A photograph of a man and a young child playing together. The man, wearing a dark blue and grey striped sweater, is leaning over the child. The child, wearing a red and grey striped sweater, is focused on a colorful stacking toy with a red rod and green, blue, and red rings. The background is a colorful, abstract pattern.

In support of partnership working, some of the grant funding allowed childcare providers to purchase insurances, memberships or resources from partner organisations like NDNA Cymru and PACEY Cymru. We enabled this link because the provider was able to demonstrate how the grant would help them and there was no need for us as a facilitator of the grant funding to be protective or restrictive towards wider partnership working.

Who the grants helped

Over the course of 2023/2024 the grants we facilitated helped:





Case study

Creative Childminders on Conwy beach; Environmental Artist workshop

The May 2023 issue of *smalltalk* magazine featured an article from a group of childminders in Conwy, who had been awarded funding through the small grant scheme to run an art session on the beach with local artist, Tim Pugh.

Read the article in full [here](#)



What did the recipients say?

"This is fantastic news thank you very much!!! We all really appreciate the support from the panel and can assure you that the money goes to such a wonderful setting and superb staff."

"That is great news thank you so much for supporting our playgroup. The award of £1,000 will make such a big difference to the playgroup."

"This has more than helped (and sort of saved me). I get paid weekly with the Teaching Agency and would not have been able to make payments without your help. Huge thanks to you for everything. I honestly mean that from the bottom of my heart."

"Thank you so much, that's going to be such a benefit to the children's safety."



A qualified, valued, and skilled workforce at all levels (including volunteers and volunteer managers)

What we did

We provided 32 training opportunities, plus 7 Lunch and Learn sessions across 3 terms during 2023/24. Our training planners outline the availability of training across the diversity of our member interests and are updated each quarter. The offers we provide include helping with leadership and management, practice and pedagogy, and updating policies and procedures.

Through our **Foundation Learning** grant funding additional training was provided including 'Getting to know your children' observation training, an introduction to 'Through the eyes of a child' and 'Nature Notes' resources led by an external consultant, Nia Beynon. Additionally, a recorded webinar on supporting the 'Quiet, Shy and Anxious child' was commissioned in partnership with Dr Susan Davis and Dr Rhiannon Packer from Cardiff Metropolitan University.

The Foundation Learning Excellence Programme grant has allowed the developments of two excellent resources; 'Nature Notes' resource and 'Through the eyes of a child' supporting practitioners to introduce a combination of rhymes/songs with children and a guide for practitioners' professional development.

Two case studies captured childcare providers' approaches to their anti-racism journey. These will be published on Hwb when approved by the Welsh Government alongside our previous case studies. We also hosted two in-person events focused on helping practitioners with the three-enablers in the Curriculum for the funded non-maintained nursery settings in Wales attended by over **80** practitioners across Wales.





During 2023/24 we recruited into our Welsh language team and successfully achieved the Welsh Language commissioner's Cynnig Cymraeg recognition for our contributions to the Welsh language. We are one of 100 organisations in Wales with this accreditation.

145 of our members have been supported to embark on **Camau**, proving opportunities for **327** practitioners to access Welsh language learning opportunities. This work allows the staff to learn the Welsh language from beginner to fluency delivered as an asynchronous learning journey. **42** of our members have embarked on the **Welsh Promise**. This scheme underpins the practitioners' own language development with support to develop the language offer in the setting.

“The children have loved the sessions, after the first one, we noticed them singing more songs in Welsh and using phrases around the classroom and in their play, particularly role play. After the last session the children have been more engaged with the books and soft toys creating their own stories and using Welsh words that they are familiar with.” - St Paul's Flying Start

The **Cydweith Cymraeg** has completed its pilot year, which saw **12** settings engage in the project across Wales. The piloting stage was a great success, with settings embracing the opportunities to embed the Welsh language through music and play. Read about the project in full [here](#)



We hosted a number of events highlighting Welsh language practice and development. **Cymraeg in the Curriculum** was delivered to **18** members and facilitated conversations regarding the implementation of the Welsh language in the Curriculum for Wales. We have also hosted four **'Loving the Language'** sessions that look at spoken languages that are not English, and how all settings work with home-languages in promotion of bilingualism and celebrated the Welsh language and culture with **36** childcare providers during our **Gwyl Fach** event in St Fagans in South Wales, where we focused on the use of Welsh language, rhymes, stories, and culture to enhance practice.





“What started with my journey on developing my professional career, has embarked on a journey for the whole team. The work we are doing is not in addition to what we need to do, it is now embedded into our everyday practice.” - St Padarn’s Playgroup on their commitment to the Welsh Promise. Click [here](#) to read [more](#).



What is the threshold for safeguarding?

Early Years Wales



Deliver safeguarding courses is, somewhere?

What is the threshold for safeguarding?

What are the most common questions I get asked when I deliver safeguarding courses is, are the thresholds for safeguarding? Is there a list somewhere?

I wish! Wouldn't that make things easier? But in we use a child-centred approach to safeguarding, means there can never be a 'one size fits all' or 'set' approach to decisions around protecting a child abuse, neglect or harm. Instead, we need to look at child individually and determine what is in their best interests – prevention or protection?

Needs are things that, if addressed, will solve the problem or minimise the likelihood of risk

Ask yourself, is there anything missing, absent or required in the child's life that would enable their well-being? Would specific advice, assistance or support make life easier for the family and achieve the desired outcome?

Needs can be met by services or support such as counselling, respite, access to food, clothing or furniture banks, adaptations with equipment or technology, support groups, or needs assessments for social care.

Risks, on the other hand, are things that mean the child is, or is likely to experience abuse, neglect, or harm. Ask yourself, what are my concerns if we don't provide intervention now? What am I worried will happen?

As the Wales Safeguarding Procedures¹ state, "the most effective strategy is to prevent children from experiencing abuse, neglect and harm." Safeguarding itself is much more than protection - it also includes prevention and early intervention. But how do we know what to use?

One way to determine whether prevention or protection is appropriate is to first consider whether you are dealing with a need or a risk.

Are you worried about the risk of abuse (physical, sexual, emotional, financial, domestic), neglect (physical, emotional, nutritional, medical, educational, supervisory, identity) or harm (impairment of their physical or mental health, or their physical, intellectual, emotional, social or behavioural development)? Identifying any risks requires us to act swiftly to ensure the child is protected and formal critical interventions are provided to keep them safe.



- Are there any barriers to engagement with the situation?

In general, needs can be met such as early help, signposting, increase protective factors, problems and reduce While protective action protect the child.

And so, we come to the question: where's the line?

Look critically at the situation.

Have you identified and neglected the child?

- Could be and into
- Could be extra
- Could be or on
- Could be care

To help our members with policy updates we have held webinars and meetings to outline new or planned changes to practice. During 2023 we were joined by Welsh Government and our incoming Chair, David Dallimore to outline to members the importance of the recent Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care policies in Wales. We held member meetings to discuss changes to safeguarding requirements and have provided safeguarding training to **130** practitioners. Our staff also provided updated information to members on the National Minimum Standards (NMS) for childcare providers, the proposed Professional Register of the workforce, and how the settings can work with children to increase the opportunities for child-centred decision making during the day.

As part of our social-funded partnership, Cwlwm, we presented to the Senedd Scrutiny panel for Social Justice on the accessibility and availability of ALN support in childcare. Our work to help members with ALN access, provision and support focuses on two distinct approaches. Through our communications and forums, we help members with the implementation of the policies and their practice along with bespoke requests responding to member enquiries.

We also provided support through funded-service level agreements in four local authority areas. This work either directly provided the brokerage and application processes on behalf of the local authorities or worked directly with settings in support of practice enhancement where an identified need was made by the local authority. Through the brokerage/ application processes we managed and facilitated funding for **38** children were identified, assessed with partnership working with the local authority and other agencies, and placed in **34** settings around Wales with the associated staff support (1:1 or as required through the planned support).

The difference we made



The following case study highlights the impact of Play, Move, Thrive delivered in partnership with Sport RCT. Rebecca, from Cwmclydach Primary School's individual feedback is captured within this [powerful video](#).



 @sportrct

www.chwarsenrct.co.uk | www.sportrct.co.uk

SportRCT

Case Study

Getting children more active – Play Move Thrive at Cwmclydach Primary School

Early Years Wales approached us with an idea to offer Play Move Thrive training to school teachers in RCT. Play Move Thrive aims to provide the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to support children to be ‘fully physical’ in the curriculum for Wales. Early Years Wales explained that the training would help our schools to embed movement throughout the whole school day, using areas and resources that they already had. We loved how PMT used movement to enhance learning and engage children, so we organised the training, and invited Nursery and Reception teachers to attend. A lot of our schools were asking for help getting children active in the early years, specifically during wetter months, and we believed that PMT could really help them.

We held three courses and 43 teachers/teaching staff attended from 33 different primary schools. The training gave teachers an understanding of why movement is important, but also a wealth of ideas to implement in the classroom.

Rebecca from Cwmclydach Primary School completed the training, and found it informative, beneficial and fun. The training improved her understanding and increased her confidence. Since the training she has introduced subtle changes in the classroom, all with the aim of providing learners with an environment in which they can actively develop their physical skills. She has altered the layout of her classroom to allow learners to move freely throughout the day. Rebecca has evaluated the school resources

and used them to develop physical skills in the classroom. The school hasn’t needed to purchase any extra equipment. They have used areas, equipment and resources that were already available to them, but in a new, insightful way. The activities have impacted massively on the engagement of learners. They want to participate in the activities and often ask for them. By introducing multi-sensory, physical activities in class, Rebecca has seen changes in learners’ behaviour as they are engaged in activities that are interesting to them and, most importantly, are fun.

“This training has deepened my understanding of the importance of physical activity on young children’s physical, emotional and sensory development.”

“I found the physical activities I participated in impactful and have since started ‘good morning sun’ and a sensory walk. This has been impactful on my ALN students.”

“We developed a bank of ideas that we could run with as soon as we got back to the classroom. I love that we don’t need to spend any money to create the movement activities suggested.”



43
teachers trained



100%
enjoyed the training



100%
feel more confident



33
schools engaged



100%
feel they learnt new ideas and information



Download the case study to read in [full here](#)

20

Anti-racism coaching programme in partnership with the Black Nursery Manager, Apex Educate, and Representation Matters

In 2023 we worked with Liz Pemberton, Rachel Clarke and Aisha Thomas to facilitate the delivery of a highly successful coaching programme for early years practitioners. This course focused on childcare provider leaders and aimed to go beyond one-off training and take a longer and more sustained approach to racial literacy and early years practice. The outline of the course is shared below (note in present tense as advertised at the time).

What we promise in this course

This exciting coaching course runs across most of the academic year. Our course is aimed at Early Years practitioners and Primary school participants, who want to learn about anti-racist practice and how to plan and teach with an antiracist lens. It will involve exploring values and beliefs held, as well as opportunities to reflect on current practice. Gap tasks will be set between sessions to support the development of anti-racist knowledge and reflection.

The course is led by three anti-racist consultants, who have worked across educational sectors and beyond. All are passionate people who believe in the necessity for a more anti-racist comprehensive program for educators. This course will:

- Facilitate conversation and reflection
- Prompt thought
- Nudge beliefs and thinking
- Outline anti-racist actions that can be taken

The course will run every month for 10 months.

A bespoke 10 session coaching course to develop anti-racist practice and learning for Early Years and primary educators

ANTI-RACISM COACHING PROGRAMME

LIZ PEMBERTON, RACHEL
CLARKE & AISHA
THOMAS

What happened

We worked with **ten** providers of childcare across Wales. We selected the participants through an expression of interest application process. We asked each applicant to demonstrate that they would commit to the programme, work between the sessions on tasks, reading and deeper learning, and had the support from the staff/management structures in their setting. Over the course of the programme our participants substantially raised their understanding of anti-racist practice. The impact of this was reflected through their personal journeys.

Our three consultants were outstanding, individually and collectively. Their coaching was personal, focused, sensitive and supporting when needed, and challenging and direct when required. All participants would agree that for everyone engaged in the process, including our three staff colleagues, honesty, deep reflection, and learning took place. Misconceptions and biases were challenged with research-backed information, integrity, and personal living experiences from the consultants. This openness helped build trust and greater understanding for the participants.

As a direct result of the coaching one setting enrolled all their practitioners on entry level training and made anti-racist practice a feature of their staff development conversations in every meeting. A second multi-chain setting used their staff development meeting with over **100** childcare practitioners to share their learning and reflect on how they needed to make changes to their practice and their parental welcome policies across all **seven** settings.

Every provider that embarked on the training took the time to engage in meaningful conversations with their wider staff team and purposeful reflections about their practice. A third setting discussed how the superficial representation they had included in their setting had been replaced by meaningful and child age-appropriate activities. One great example originated from the children's interest in what the practitioners were drinking during their breaks from their safety cups. This resulted in a practitioner finding a book called 'Teatime around the world' and exploring the



Liz Pemberton
www.theblacknurserymanager.com



Rachel Clarke
www.apex-educate.co.uk



Aisha Thomas
www.repmatters.co.uk



potential of tea [the drink]. The activities spiralling from this included sampling different teas, finding where tea is grown on maps and pictures, undertaking art activities with tea leaves and tea, and a family asking to visit to share their Sri-Lankan heritage and tea making. The children made nettle tea and herbal tea from their garden and wildlife areas and understood more about the drink, the cultures, and choices people make.

Individually, course participants reported their own development. Practitioners were sharing how they had taken this work into their everyday life. One practitioner discussed how they witnessed something racially motivated in their supermarket and ‘could not walk past’, but felt they had to speak up and support the target of the racialised language. This participant also shared how they had started re-framing labelling language people in her village used when discussing fellow residents who were not racialised as white. A second practitioner discussed how normalised language in her community was being reflected by the children in her setting and that prior to the training it was addressed but only upon hearing the words spoken. As a result of the training, the staff planned to and addressed the issues directly, working with the community, the owners of a retail shop and the children. Staff re-directed the racialised language by giving the retail owner a name, a value, and demonstrating the positive relationship the shop has with the people in the community. The business owner visited the setting, and the children visited the shop building positive relationships.

These brief vignettes are a few of the many that could showcase how significant and powerful the coaching course was.

Of course, none of this was possible without the coaching provided by Liz Pemberton, Rachel Clarke and Aisha Thomas. They deserve all the credit and plaudits for this programme of learning and our delegates and Early Years Wales is grateful to all three consultants for the excellent programme of learning.



Support for parents of children in the early years; support for parent-led groups (e.g., Parent and Toddler groups)

What we did

As so much of the policy landscape has changed in Wales in recent years, our policy pack for the Parent and Toddler groups was updated in 2023/24. This important pack aims to provide the organisers of parent and toddler groups with the knowledge and information to help them run their settings effectively. The pack has been made available to current members of Early Years Wales as a free downloadable resource.

During 2023/24 we continued to provide our training offer Active Baby and You and Active Baby at Home courses. This training supports parents and professionals with key information about the child development pathway that babies are on. The focus is to improve the opportunities for movement with the children through the use of freely available resources that the professionals and parents can access at home. This movement promoting training aims to help everyone with the knowledge about the whole-child benefits of movement and facilitates practical invitations to move with children and to connect with the baby in their formative years.

We launched a new, Play, Move, Thrive area on our [website](#). This area includes videos, resources and guides for parents and practitioners. The resources allow a freely accessible basic package of support, alongside more in-depth learning materials that are available following practitioner or parental attendance at one of the courses named above. We think all parents should be informed of some of the key information about a child's first **1,000 days** and have made this available to all.





The difference we made

Supporting parents and young children to have highly positive experiences through *smalltalk* magazine. During 2023/24 Early Years Wales *smalltalk* magazine tackled several important issues that affect families away from the setting.

Some of those articles can be read by clicking on the images below.



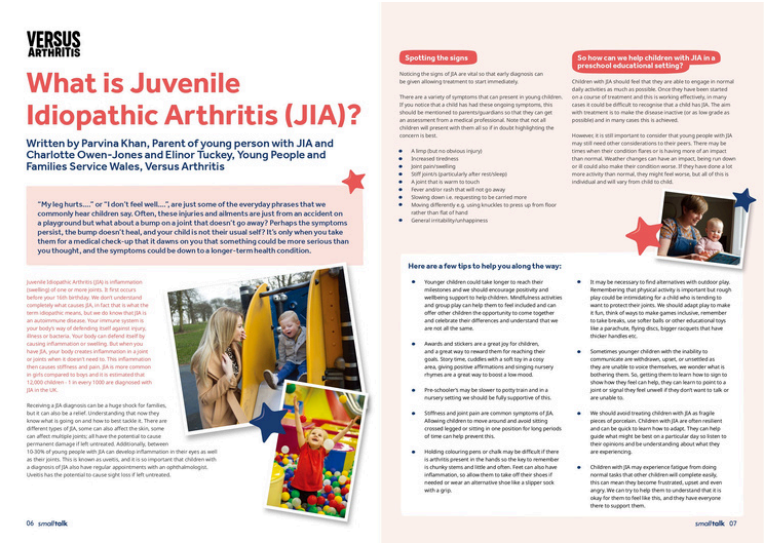
Brush-up on Dental Health (May 2023)



Everyone deserves a well-furnished home (October 2023)



The Importance of Sound (May 2023)



What is Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis (February 2024)



Promoting a positive start for all children through their early years (0-5)

Promoting wide-spread understanding of the importance of the first 1,000 days of childhood. Through all our communication channels and programmes in 2023/24 we have shared the latest research in child development and neuroscience with our members, stakeholders and elected representatives. We were delighted to read from the incoming First Minister, Vaughan Gethin about his focus on the first 1,000 days for children. We established a partnership with Alberta Family Wellness Centre and have translated their asset pack on the Brain Journey they authored and promoted in partnership with Oxford University into Welsh.

During 2023/24 we worked with the Open University to co-author a child-development module of learning, 'Incredible Years'. This Open University hosted learning module aims to help anyone with a professional interest in working with children to understand the developmental journey they undertake and how children need play, experiences, language and communication and movement to develop holistically. The online module will become part of the Open Universities module of learning for continuous professional development in early years pedagogy.

All staff in Early Years Wales have undertaken basic training in neurological development of children and the brain journey concepts. We have begun to share and disseminate the brain journey information to our stakeholders through presentations and made connections to policies and practices that have robust evidence-based impact on children in early years. Our plans for 2024/2025 include rolling-out this information more widely; both to practitioners and parents.

Working in partnership with Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB), we have undertaken a pilot project to support the community practitioners to understand how movement, language and opportunities daily help young children's development. This project aimed to help ABUHB with some of the challenges around infant obesity. Our approach connects the movement children undertake to their development. It includes reference to children's progressions from primitive reflexes to postural control and how these developments help children with learning, communication, self and co-regulation, and executive function.

What we did

Following our event Movement Matters: Holistic child development through the lens of physical development we were approached by Public Health Gwent to deliver our umbrella physical literacy training to **five** local authorities across Gwent. The programme consisted of our Active Baby (0 -18 months), Active Toddler (18 months – 3 years), and Active Child (3 - 5 years) training courses.

Working with early years stakeholders and community sports development officers we were required to provide a post-delivery evaluation of training to assess the impact of the training and how it has been embedded into their practice. We were supported by the Healthy and Sustainable Pre-School Scheme Officers who will support the implementation across each area.

In total, we ran **5** Active Baby, **5** Active Toddler, and **4** Active Child sessions with **146** attendees across all programmes.

For more information on the courses, click [here](#)



What the participants said

"Thank you very much for a lovely course straight forward and easy to understand"

"A really interesting course that was delivered tonight. Very knowledgeable deliverers and lots of interaction with the team overall"

"I really enjoyed the training, it was very informative, I was excited to tell the rest of my colleagues all about what I had learnt and couldn't wait to put some of it into practise in my setting"

"The girls were lovely and conducted the training well , they made it fun to learn"

"Thank you. Very informative and interesting training. Made to feel at ease and easy to participate"

"Jane was brilliant at delivering the course, she kept it fun and entertaining and I really learnt a lot from it!"



Creative Learning in the Early Years. Our jointly funded project working in partnership with Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Arts Council of Wales, and externally evaluated by Cwmpas has continued to develop excitingly. During 2023/24 **12** settings completed the initial pilot with some incredible journeys noted in the report. Also during this period we facilitated the engagement of Mudiad Meithrin into the project, and recruited an additional twenty settings to work with us during year 2. The training provided has supported **12** creative professionals to work in the early years sector.

Click the cover image to read the report in full

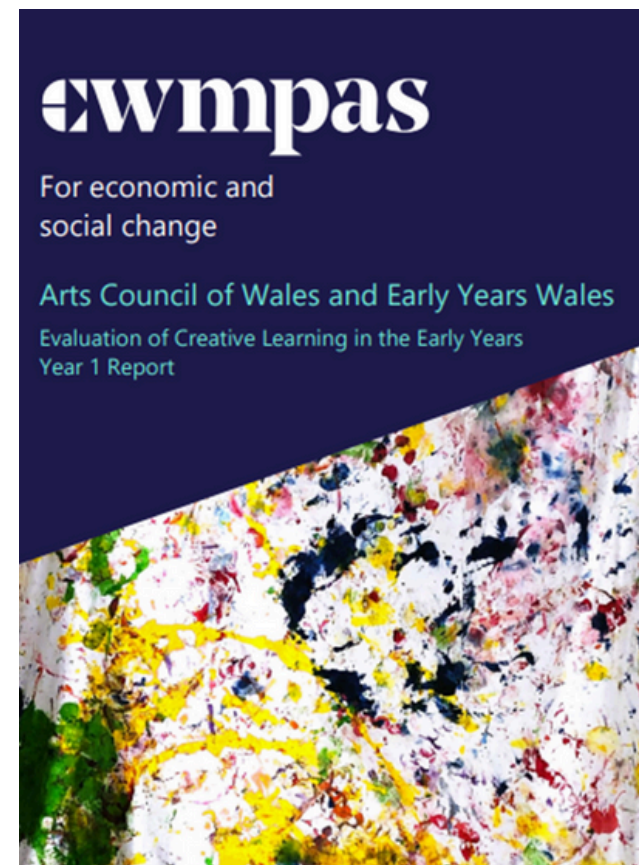


Photo credit: Overton Playcentre, Cwmpas Evaluation of Creative Learning in the Early Years, pg 37

"Opportunities to move creatively and be physically expressive are vital to the development of early years children. As a dance artist, I am fortunate to spend time playing with young children to support their physical development and communication. It is often difficult to tell who is having more fun wriggling like a worm, jumping like a frog or flying like a butterfly! The smiles are infectious, passing from one child to another around the group, and the giggling always adds another beautiful layer to music I use to help support and stimulate movement that sparks children's imaginations." - Angharad Harrop, Dance Artist

Click [here](#) to read the article in full



Bird Watching



about where we
look to find the birds.



found some great
team work!



We worked very hard to
search the forest.



We were very proud of
ourselves after we found them
all.

Bird Nest Making



We discussed what
materials the birds may like
to use to build their nests.



We explored the forest
for materials.



'Through real life experiences, children learn about the interrelationship of all living things. This helps them to think about the bigger questions of the environment, sustainability and climate change.' (Froebel Trust: 2022)

Camau Cyntaf Rhydyfelin took part in the Creative Learning in the Early Years programme. Their area of focus was on engaging with nature and outdoor learning. The impact this project had on one child in particular was extraordinary. Click [here](#) to read the article in full



Advocacy for the providers and users of early childhood education and care

Challenging funding levels for the childcare sector. During autumn 2023 we recognised the challenges childcare providers would face in meeting the uplifts to the Living Wage from April 2024. We surveyed our membership and reported their concerns to the Welsh Government in January 2024. Our report highlighted the concern about financial viability and sustainability in the current economic climate. The report summary is provided [here](#).

We have worked closely with policy makers to raise awareness of the financial challenges that the sector faces from April 2024. We continue to advocate for further investment into the early years sector in Wales.

During 2023/24 we worked with the Welsh Government cross-party groups on poverty, and children and families, and represented the childcare sector in response to reports about the impact of childcare costs on family budgets and poverty. We attended two report launch events at the Senedd and one hosted in a family centre in RCT led by Oxfam Cymru. Working with the cross-party group on poverty, and the Welsh Government cross-party group for children and families, Early Years Wales has attended four meetings during 2023/24 to provide the perspective of the childcare and early years sector.

In June 2023, we hosted our awards and conference event. The awards, supported by prizes and contributions from Community Playthings for all category winners recognised the positive and innovative work that the providers of childcare undertake in Wales. (See case study below for information). The conference keynote speakers were:

- Laura Henry-Allain MBE - how stories and narrative support an anti-racist approach in early years
- Alice Sharpe - the power of imagination
- Paul Isaacs - 'Live as a fruit salad', reflecting on the many presentations of autism and behaviours that people with autism use.

Our summary [playreel](#) highlights the enthusiasm, joy, and networking that the event brought with it. For all our winners, the value they place on the recognition for the work they do with children is clear.



Positive difference...

We believe that the early years and childcare sector makes a significant and lasting positive difference to children and our awards aim to recognise excellence, promote the impact of the work that practitioners do, and raise the profile of the sector. Read all about our 2023 winners [here](#)





Our future plans

As an organisation we are continually reflecting on the value of our services and the opportunities that we want to offer for our members. The following outlines some of our plans for 2024 and 2025.

- **Free membership offer** – our Trustee Board voted to extend our free membership offer in 2024-2025. The majority of this is funded from our invested reserves. We are grateful to the Moondance Foundation for their sponsorship of the free membership offer for home-based childcare providers and charity childcare providers. This funding substantially supports our offer and extends our reach.
- **Asynchronous learning** – our learning portfolio continues to develop. This year our focus shifts towards more asynchronous learning content as we recognise that the opportunity to attend scheduled sessions in the day and evening remains challenging for our members. Our Play, Move, Thrive offer, and our related member content in our Shop area begins our population of some consistently available asynchronous learning material.
- **Supporting the transmission of the Welsh language** – our plans to support greater parental engagement in their children's use of Welsh include more interaction with Parent and Toddler groups and more support to help parents develop the confidence to use Welsh with their children.
- **Staffing changes** – we have undertaken a staffing structure review and significantly altered our management structure to reflect our key priorities and budget resources.
- **Updated membership offers and benefits** – we are reframing our membership offers and updating the range of products and services we provide for each member category.

- **Partnership working with DARPL** - we continue to demonstrate leadership in the sector with our contribution to DARPL, and the work taking place at strategic and operational levels to embed anti-racist practice into early years in Wales. Our journey to date is summarised in our CEO's case study hosted on the [DARPL website](#). This work is supported by our bespoke training and learning offer focused on the early years of childhood and the work practitioners can do in their settings and with the families they support. We are working with DARPL on updated practitioner training.
- **Website updates** – we are updating our [website](#). This work will help us improve our public projection and share a better user journey to our products and services.
- **Office footprint** - we have rationalised our office footprint to allow staff to work more agilely. This reduction in liability from our estates frees up capacity for greater investment into people and services.





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