

Early Years

PROJECT REPORT



Evidence-based Resilience Support for Families with Children Aged 2-7

The Exchange working in partnership with
Cwm Taf Morgannwg

Rhaglen
Trawsnewid
y Blynnyddoedd
Cynnar Cwm Taf



Cwm Taf
Morgannwg
Early Years
Transformation
Programme



Working in partnership with



GIG
CYMRU
NHS
WALES



BRIDGEND
County Borough Council



MERTHYR TYDFIL
County Borough Council
Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol
MERTHYR TYDFUL



RHONDDA CYNON TAF
County Borough Council

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About The Exchange

The Exchange is part of **The TCS Group** – a psychological wellbeing organisation with over 18 years' experience working with children, young people, families, and adults.

The Exchange specialises in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of children, young people and their families. We are currently delivering a range of services in 767 schools, colleges and communities, working in partnership with 10 local authorities. We are invested in all things **wellbeing** and our team of psychologists, counsellors, Thera-play specialists and practitioners provide evidence-based support and accredited training as part of a whole-system resilience focused approach to improving mental wellbeing.

Exchange Families is set up to support resilience development in early years, primary school children and parents/carers of all ages.

Exchange Youth provides psychological wellbeing support to young people aged 11-25 in schools and local communities.

Exchange Resource delivers accredited education, training and resources to school and support staff who support young people.

What does this look like?

- School and community based counselling
- Online counselling support
- D-EXY our digital wellbeing App
- Thera-play/counselling
- Group work
- Resilience programmes
- Resilience yoga
- Psychoeducation workshops
- NEET support
- Digital training suite
- In-person and virtual training
- Staff qualifications
- Tailored ALN training and resources

How is what we do, evidence-based?

The Resource-Based model of healthy psychological wellbeing development informs all activities, interventions and support delivered by **The Exchange**. This is a trauma-informed and strength-based approach which provides a framework for assessing mental health struggles and promoting healthy resilience development through targeted and measurable interventions.



Aims

The Exchange were commissioned to provide psychological wellbeing support to children aged 2-7 and their families in Merthyr, Bridgend and Rhondda Cynon Taf as part of the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Early Years Transformation Programme Oct 22 - Oct - 23. The contract was extended until March 2024.

The aim of the project was to improve child and family resilience through evidence-based programmes which targeted 3 mild to moderate mental health needs:

- 1. Anxiety struggles**
- 2. Managing behaviour and emotional regulation**
- 3. Social isolation**

Delivery Model

The Exchange delivered evidence-based interventions which targeted resilience resources linked to anxiety, emotional regulation, and social isolation. A flexible delivery approach was used to respond to the needs of the children and families. This involved a combination of sessions for the child, sessions for the parent and sessions where the child and parent were engaged together.

- The project included working collaboratively with partners across the Cwm Taf Morgannwg (CTM) to deliver a seamless service to families.
- Practitioners and parents made referrals via an online portal through **The Exchange** website
- Families took part in an initial assessment to identify a suitable programme
- Support was delivered in-person (Bridgend, Rhondda and Merthyr) and virtually
- Outcomes reported on 'symptoms of struggle' and 'building resilience protective factors' for both the parent and child
- Multi-agency action plans were created with the family which outlined the support and progress made, identified ongoing areas for support, and resource packs were provided to parents and practitioners
- Regular feedback was provided to partners via multi-agency and reporting meetings co-ordinated by the Early Years Transformation Programme Lead
- **The Exchange** attended the Early Years Transformation Board to present project outcomes

The Exchange Programmes

Families where the parents are struggling to cope with managing behaviour of a 2-7 year old (but for whom parenting support would not be effective).



The **Caterpillar to Butterfly** programme targets the 3 dimensions of resilience; I have: Belonginess (external resources), I am: Development of Self (internal resources), can: Interaction with Others (social resources). This is achieved best by working with the whole family through a 6 step process using a range of creative and imaginative activities.



Key to Me promotes the development of self-esteem and supports parents to support the emotional development needs of their child. Parents are engaged in resilience building activities which offer a therapeutic benefit to their identity and confidence in being a parent and learn how to use the activities at home to support their child.

Key to Me targets 5 key internal resilience resources

For mild to moderate mental health/anxiety issues The Exchange provides 2 programmes; Inside Out and Dragon Mountain.



Dragon Mountain is a mindfulness based programme which aims to support children and families to develop a healthy attitude towards dealing with challenges, grow confidence in their ability to manage difficult feelings and learn emotional regulation techniques that can be repeated at home.



Inside Outside aims to help children and families to learn healthy ways of managing stress, anxiety, and emotional pain. The programme includes a series of creative activities which target the development of self regulation, reflective-insight and emotional literacy.

Families (with children aged 2-7 years) which are considered to be isolated from either peer or family support.



I Matter aims to support families who are experiencing conflict, breakdown and/ isolation. The programme has 5 key targets:

- Promote Autonomy
- Restore Sense of Security
- Build Self-Confidence
- Develop Skills to Communicate
- Build Optimism



The Adventure supports children who are going through changes in circumstances. The programme targets the development of social competence, self confidence and optimism to help the child make sense of the world which is changing around them.

Structure & Pathways

At the beginning of the project, local 'Leads' were identified from Bridgend, Merthyr and Rhondda Cynon Taf to liaise with **The Exchange**

A referral pathway was set up for practitioners across the region to request support for families via exchange-counselling.com

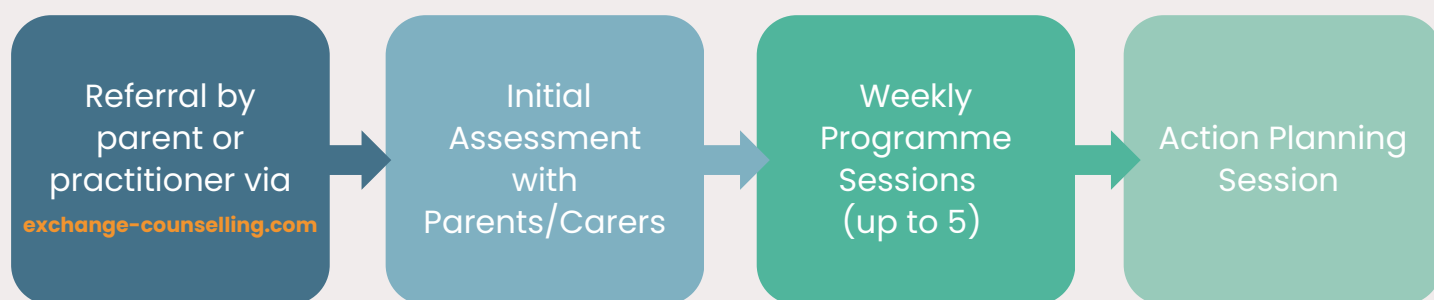
Referral Criteria:

- Families where early years practitioners feel that either the parents or the child/children have mild to moderate mental health/anxiety issues.
- Families (with children aged 2-7 years) which are considered to be isolated from either peer or family support.
- Families where the parents are struggling to cope with managing behaviour of a 2-7 year old (but for whom parenting support would not be effective).

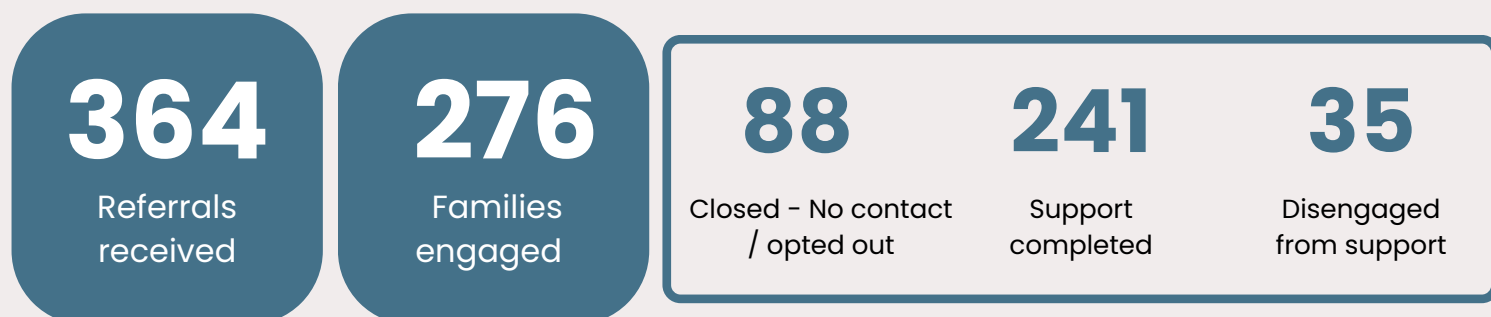
The project was commissioned to support up to **230** families. In total, **364** referrals were received.

Provision was accessed by a broad range of practitioners across the region.

Process



Overview of Activity Across the Region



Key Findings

Completed Overall figures

87%

of families who engaged in support across the region, completed the intervention

Number of Families Supported

241

Families completed interventions

The main reasons reported by families for disengagement was

'ability to travel to the venues'

Virtual support was made available but the contract did not permit **The Exchange** to use schools as a venue in Bridgend and RCT which caused a barrier to access.

Outcome Measures

Outcome 1 - Reduction in 'symptoms of struggle'

Reported by Parent/Carer

Measured using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)

SDQ

Outcome 2 - Improvement in 'resilience protective factors'

Reported by Children

Measured using the Build Assess Evaluate Resilience (BEAR)

BEAR
Assessment

Outcome 3 - Improvement in 'Parent self-efficacy'

Reported by Parent/Carer

Measured using Brief Parental Self Efficacy Scale (BPSES)

CORC
Child Outcomes
Research Consortium

Outcome Data

Outcome 1 **80%** of parents reported a reduction in symptoms

Outcome 2 **77%** of children reported an improvement in resilience

Outcome 3 **79%** of parents reported an improvement in self-efficacy:

- parent knowledge
- parent confidence
- parent skills & techniques
- family relationships

The SDQ was completed by parents at the start and at the end of the intervention.

The BEAR was completed with children aged 5-7. The BEAR is designed to engage children in a resilience assessment using picture cards but this is dependent on the age and stage of each child.


55% of children engaged in the project completed the BEAR assessment to provide outcome data from the perspective of the child.

Impact Explained


Outcome data indicated that parents recorded the most significant changes on the 'emotional symptoms' and 'conduct problem' scales of the SDQ. The majority of parents reported a healthier SDQ score at the end. Many of the families were accessing support for multiple needs and / waiting further assessment (e.g. neurodivergent pathways).

Children (aged 5-7) reported the most significant improvements in self-regulation, problem solving, consequential thinking, social competence and resolving conflict and self-esteem.

Average Clinical Start and End Scores

Performance Measure	Average Start Score	Average End Score	Average Improvement %
SDQ	23 <i>Very High difficulty</i>	17 <i>Slight Difficulty</i>	78%
	44 <i>Moderate Resilience</i>	55 <i>Moderate Resilience</i>	80%

Score Descriptors

Assessment	Range of Scores	Descriptor
SDQ	21 - 40 17 - 20 14 - 17 0 - 13	Very high difficulty High difficulty Slight Difficulty Normal
	0 - 15 16 - 40 41 - 60 61 - 75	V Low resilience Low resilience Moderate resilience High - V High resilience

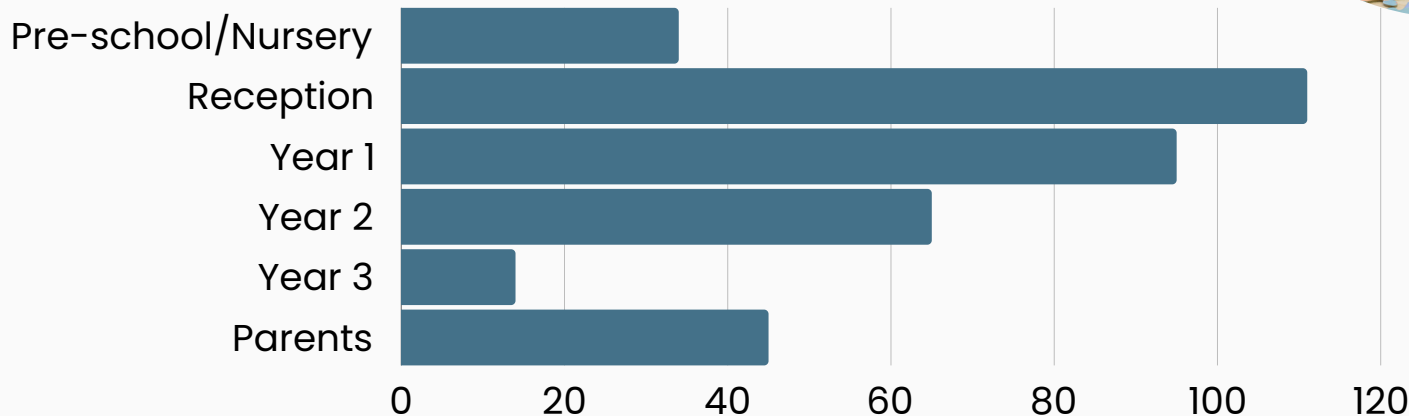
Demographics

Families referred

364



Referral Age



Referral Reasons



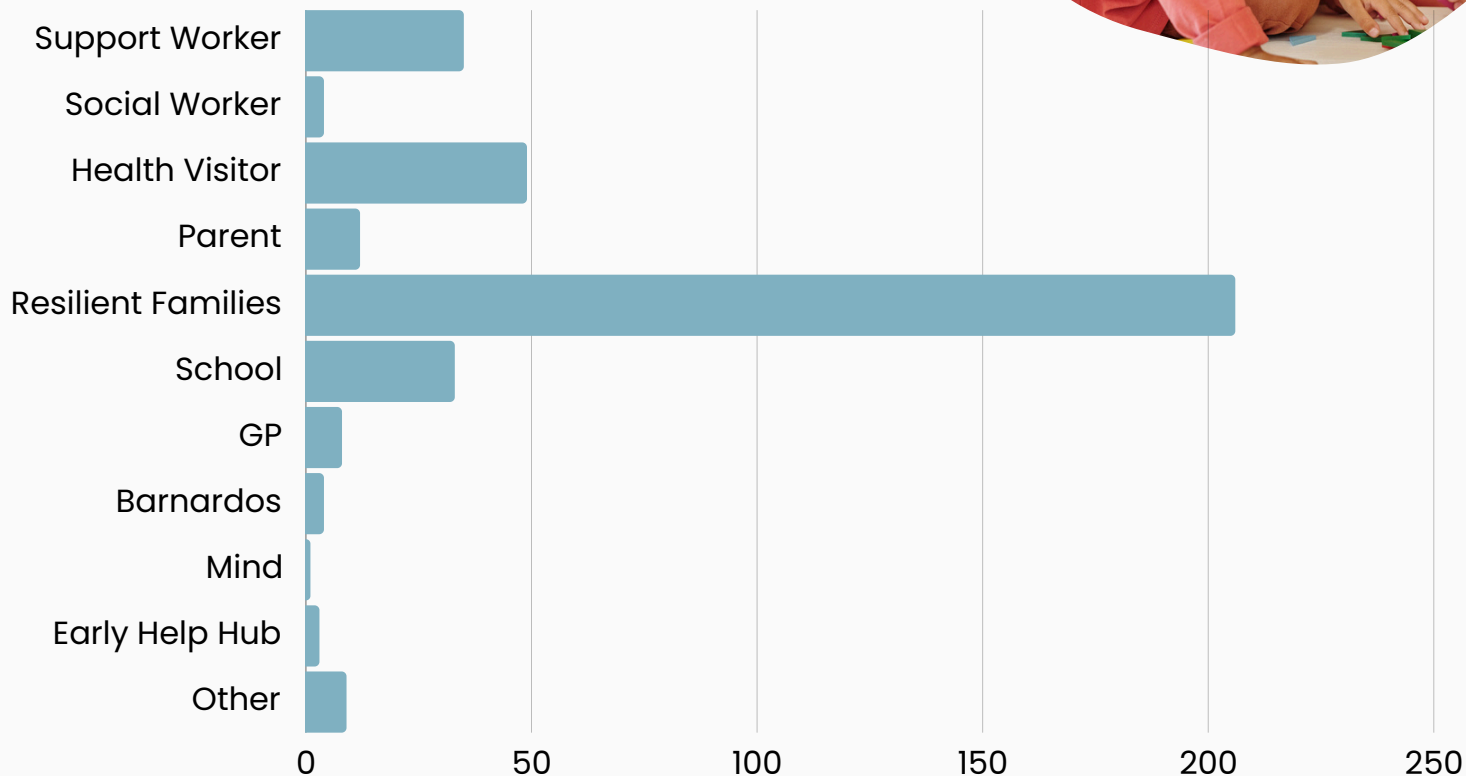
36%

of children registered additional learning needs

Demographics

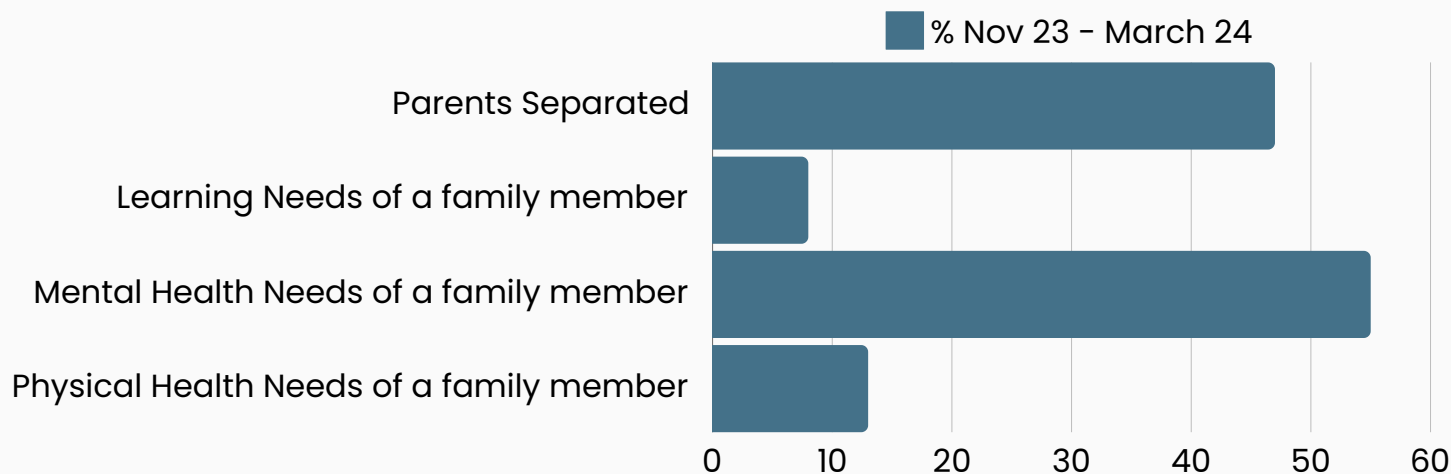


Referral Source



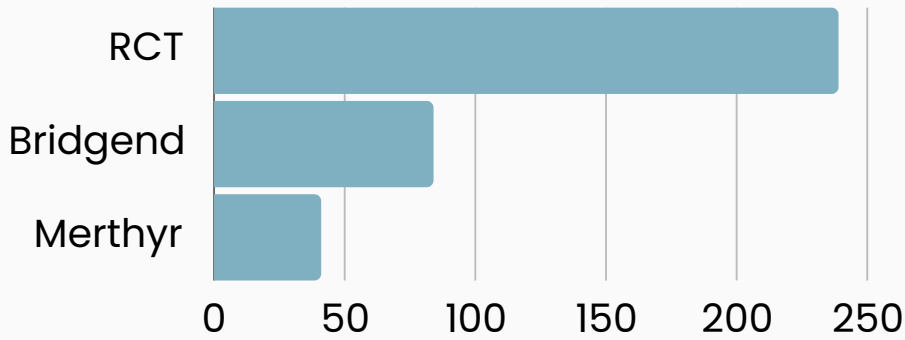
Additional Family Needs

When the contract was extended for a further 6 months, additional data was collected to understand more about the families accessing support.



Referrals Across the Region

Including Parents



Local Needs

Most popular referral reason

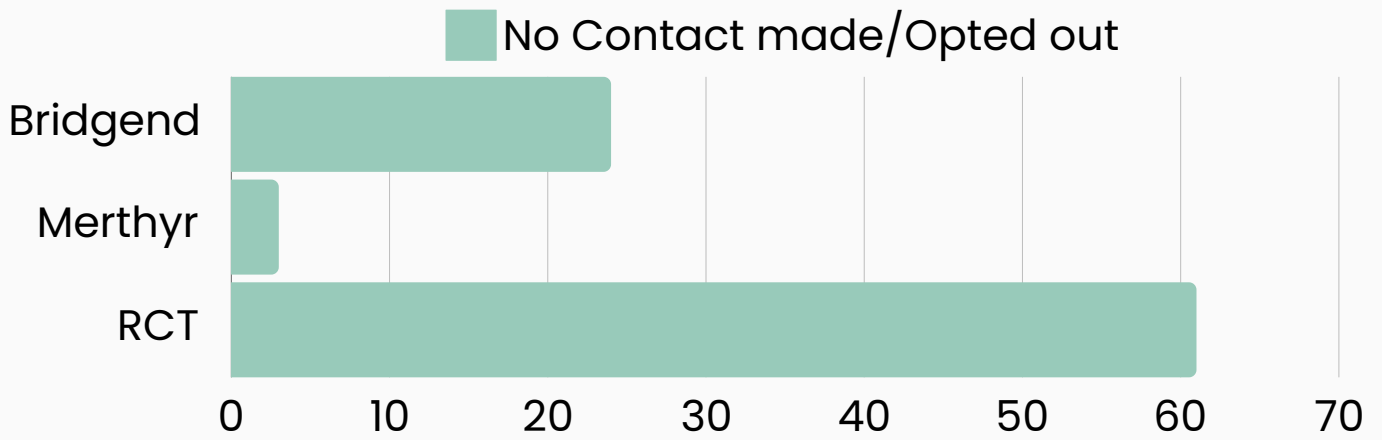
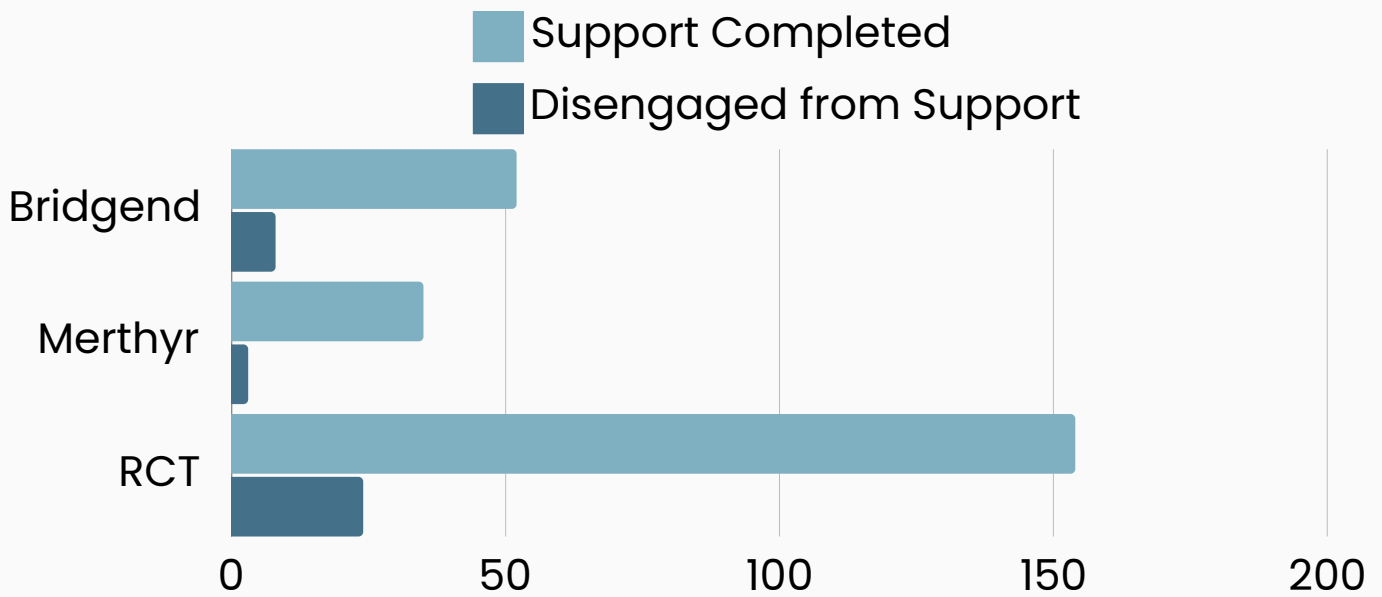
Merthyr	Anxiety
Bridgend	Behaviour
RCT	Emotional Regulation

Referral Source



Referral Source	Count	Bridgend	Merthyr	Rhondda Cynon Taf
Resilient Families	161			
Barnardos	4			
Early Help Hub	3			
GP	8			
Health Visitor	49			
MIND	1			
Parent	12			
School	33			
Social Worker	4			
Support Worker	35			

Engagement



Rhondda Cynon Taf Families Supported



239

Referrals received

178

Families engaged

154

Support completed

24

Disengaged from support

61

Closed - No contact / opted out

Parents/carers reported an improvement in their child

78%

Children who registered an improvement in resilience

77%

Completed by	Average Start Score	Average End Score	Performance Measure
Parents/Carers	*23 <i>Very High difficulty</i>	17 <i>Slight Difficulty</i>	SDQ
Children (aged 5-7)	44 <i>Moderate</i>	55 <i>Moderate/high</i>	BEAR Assessment

On average, parents reported a higher level of distress compared to parents across Wales and Scotland being supported by **The Exchange*

Bridgend Families Supported

84

Referrals received

60

Families engaged

52

Support completed

8

Disengaged from support

24

Closed - No contact / opted out

Parents/carers reported an improvement in their child

80%

Children who registered an improvement in resilience

78%

Completed by	Average Start Score	Average End Score	Performance Measure
Parents/Carers	*22 <i>Very High difficulty</i>	16 <i>Slight Difficulty</i>	SDQ
Children (aged 5-7)	44 <i>Moderate</i>	54 <i>Moderate/high</i>	BEAR Assessment

On average, parents reported a higher level of distress compared to parents across Wales and Scotland being supported by **The Exchange*



41

Referrals received

38

Families engaged

35

Support completed

3

Disengaged from support

3

Closed - No contact / opted out

Parents/carers reported an improvement in their child

80%

Children who registered an improvement in resilience

78%

Completed by	Average Start Score	Average End Score	Performance Measure
Parents/Carers	*23 <i>Very High difficulty</i>	17 <i>Slight Difficulty</i>	SDQ
Children (aged 5-7)	45 <i>Moderate</i>	55 <i>Moderate/high</i>	BEAR Assessment

On average, parents reported a higher level of distress compared to parents across Wales and Scotland being supported by **The Exchange*

Key Learnings & Adaptations

During the contract review a decision was made to extend the contract for a further 6 months due to the positive results. **The Exchange** highlighted opportunities for improvement to respond to the different levels of need presented by children and families. A tiered approach to support was created and implemented for the contract extension period of 6 months (October 23 - March 24).

Level 1 Virtual Workshops

A 4-week programme for parents who wanted to learn techniques and activities to support the emotional wellbeing of their child.

There were 4 themes: supporting anxiety, promoting self-esteem, social and emotional regulation, understanding resilience

Level 2 Structured Programmes

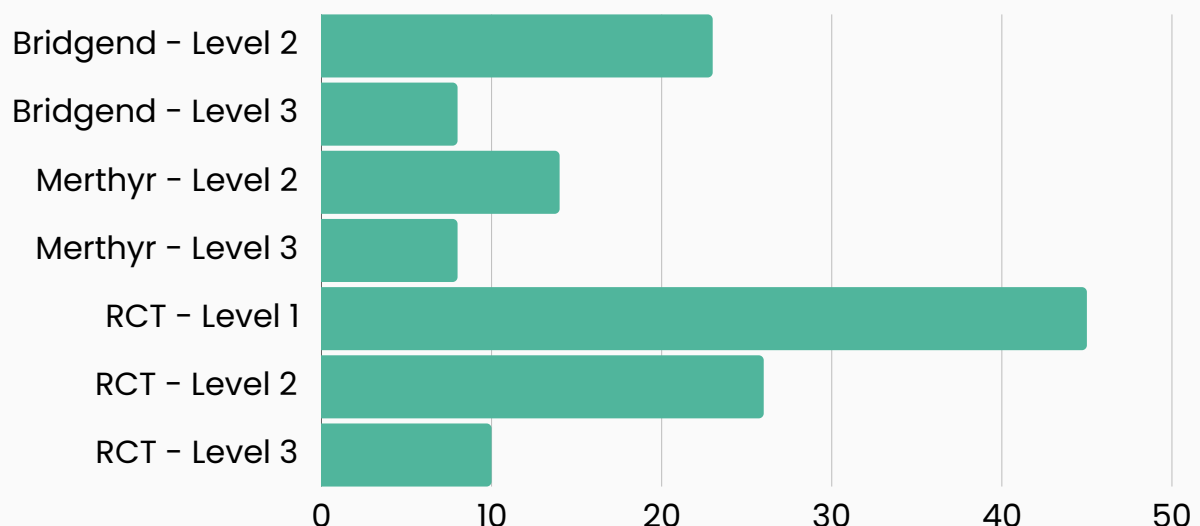
Resilience-based interventions targeting the 3 key issues outlined by Cwm Taf Morgannwg; anxiety, emotional regulation, social isolation

Level 3 Bespoke Intervention

Resource-based Thera-play targeting individual needs of the child and family.

Examples: complex needs, additional learning needs, engagement needs, trauma

Levels of Support Accessed Across the Region



Case Study 1

Virtual Group Programme: Social and Emotional Regulation

Number of group sessions: 4

Number of parents: 7

Area : RCT

Description of referral/reasons for struggle:

- Managing challenging behaviour
- Children having regular meltdowns
- Difficulties regulating emotions.
- Feeling lack of support from school.

Observations and Outcomes

- Many of the parents who attended had children with additional support needs , some of which were non verbal. The practitioner demonstrated different ways to adapt activities.
- Parents and carers utilised the group to share their own emotional reactions to challenging behaviour. They talked about what worked well and what didn't in different circumstances. Parents identified their own levels of anxiety when dealing with challenging behaviour and were supported to address this.
- Parents and carers reported positive feedback about the use of play doh in engaging the children in one of the activities. They explained that the sensory element and non directive approach was successful in facilitating the children to externalise their worries.
- The 'Five Minute Wonders' activity generated dialogue between the parents and carers. As a result, the activity evolved to suit the needs of each child
- Parents and carers were encouraged to complete each activity alongside their children. During follow up sessions the parents and carers reported a benefit to their own mental health and wellbeing.
- Parents and carers reported that practical coping strategies were valued and the opportunity to be shown the activities via the online group improved their understanding and confidence.
- The activities discussed during the workshops promoted the use of positive language which was adopted by the parents as the group progressed.

Case Study 2

Level 3 - Bespoke Programme

Age: 3

Gender: Male

Referred by: Health Visitor in Bridgend

Other support: Behaviour Support

Reason for referral:

Frequent outbursts of anger and distress which often involved the child banging his own head against things. Mum reported regulation struggles which were impacting the whole family (it can take up to two hours for child to return to calm)

Assessment: SDQ High Difficulty

The SDQ indicated 'emotional' and 'conduct' as areas of struggle. Due to the age of the child and the nature of their engagement, a be-spoke agenda was created to respond to the individual needs of the child and mum.

Resilience target areas: emotional literacy and self-regulation

Programme of Support

Character play was used to facilitate the child to recognise and understand different emotions. Drama therapy techniques supported the child to develop an emotional language and movement was used to test out different ways of releasing frustration in a healthy, fun and safe way. Mum participated in sessions and helped develop a strategy for externalising anger and frustration that could be used at home.

Outcome

SDQ Slight Difficulty

Areas of improvement:

Child Regulation and security

Parent Confidence and competence

Mum reported a significant improvement in some areas of regulation. The strategy was being used frequently at home and this had improved the length of time that the child was distressed. Mum shared that most episodes were managed within 20 minutes (instead of 2 hours). Some struggles remained.

Mum reported that the child remains easily frustrated but is mindful that this is aligned to their age and stage. Mum reported improved confidence and shared that she was engaging the child in activities which were focused on feelings and play.

Case Study 3

Level 2 Support – Structured Self-esteem Programme

Age: 8

Gender: Female

Referred by: Parent in Merthyr

Other support: ASD pathway

Reason for referral

Frequent outbursts of anger towards peers, low confidence, and self-esteem. Child was in the process of being assessed for ADHD. Mum was in the process of being assessed for ADHD.

Assessment: SDQ High Difficulty

The SDQ indicated 'emotional' and 'peers' as areas of struggle.

Resilience Assessment

External resources: Medium

Internal resources: Low

Social resources: Low

Resilience target areas: self-esteem, optimism, social competence and empathy, self-regulation

Child struggled to identify any positive attributes about herself and recalled friendship struggles which appeared to confuse and frustrate her. Child indicated a lack of ability to manage conflict.

Outcome

SDQ Slight Difficulty

External resources: Medium

Internal resources: Medium

Social resources: Medium

Areas of improvement: Child Self-esteem and self-confidence

Child reported a significant improvement in her self-esteem and confidence. Mum reported that she appeared to be less confrontational and able to notice when she had achieved something. Self-regulation was a work in progress. Child reported that she was able to use her strategies some of the time and that mum was trying to help her. Mum reported that there was an improvement with friendships with some episodes of overwhelm. Mum has shared her strategy with the school who were supporting her.

Case Study 4

Level 3 support - Be-spoke Programme

Age: 6

Gender: Female

Referred by: Resilient Families RCT

Other support: None

Reason for referral

Challenging behaviour at home and frequent outbursts of distress (tears/tantrums/screaming). Mum is finding it difficult to help child regulate her emotions and struggling to understand the triggers.

Assessment: SDQ High Difficulty

The SDQ indicated 'emotional' and 'conduct' as areas of struggle. Inside Outside was identified as a suitable programme to help the child (and mum) learn ways of externalising emotions and healthy anger management strategies

Resilience target areas: emotional literacy and self-regulation

Programme of support

Mum and child engaged in the programme together. First, they were introduced to creative tasks to promote the development of emotional literacy. Next they were introduced to resilience yoga and mindfulness techniques. At first the child struggled to engage in the activities. After two sessions mum reported that the child was using them herself at home (even though she didn't "like them"). The child was encouraged to modify the mindful activities with her own ideas and mum created a 'mindful plan' which was introduced to daily activity.

Outcome

SDQ Slight Difficulty

Areas of improvement: Child Regulation and emotional literacy

Parent Confidence and competence

Mum reported a significant improvement in regulation and shared that the child was independently taking herself to her calm space and completing her activities. Mum also reported that they had introduced a mindful 5 minutes at the end of each day which was helping her bedtime routine. Mum noted that child appeared to be triggered less and seemed more able to control her immediate reactions when things weren't going her way.

Service Satisfaction

98%

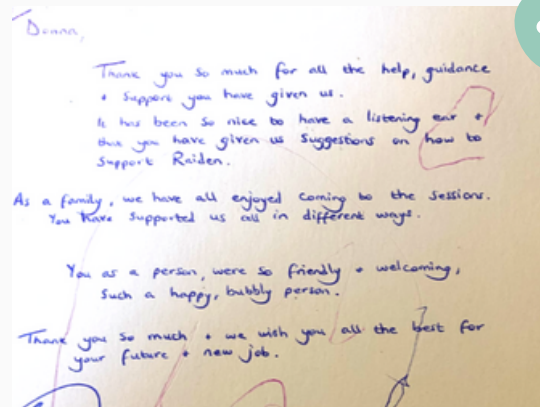
of families would recommend us

96%

rated the process as clear from start to finish

99%

of families had a positive experience of our practitioners



Feedback About One to One support

"I thought this service was amazing, we really needed this I have learnt so much and he is coping so much better "

"It was helpful to learn new strategies to help manage my child's emotions. We have the tools we need, I am so grateful "

"They are now able to manage their emotions and talk about how they feel "

"The sessions were helpful to learn different coping tools to help my child control her emotions"

"I have seen a difference in the way he manages his emotions. This has improved the school routine for him and all involved"

Feedback About Benefits Gained



"How I can interact with his emotions, How to get him to explain how he feels."

"Helped me understand my child more"

"I have more ideas on how to help my child"

"I have lots of different tools to add to my tool box to help my child"

"He is more reflective in talking and understands his emotions"

"They are now able to manage their emotions and talk about how they feel at home"

"Improved child's wellbeing. A massive improvement."

"Everything, his behaviour, his confidence, our bond"

"The client hits out less and can recognise how he is feeling and knows what he needs to help him."



Workshop Feedback



"The activities are really beneficial for me and my child"

"The activities are really helpful for mine and my child's mental health and wellbeing"

"The activities helped provide really practical coping strategies for my child's tool box."

"I was able to think about the language I use with my child and I can now have a positive and confidence building dialogue with my child"



Felt more confident to support their children



Found the session useful



Would recommend to others

Working in partnership with



Rhaglen
Trawsnewid
y Blynnyddoedd
Cynnar Cwm Taf



Cwm Taf
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Early Years
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Programme



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