

# Home-Start Cymru

## Trauma-informed Communities

A spotlight series



# Home-Start Cymru

## Trauma-informed Communities – A spotlight series.

**Authors:** Huw Williams, Dr Joanne C. Hopkins, Dr Samia Addis

### Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Home-Start Cymru staff, volunteers and trustee who gave their time to contribute to this study.



### Funding

The report was produced by the ACE Hub Wales, with funding from the Welsh Government. ACE Hub Wales was founded in 2017 and was set up to support Welsh Society to help create an ACE Aware Wales and make Wales a leader in tackling, preventing and mitigating ACEs. We promote the sharing of ideas and learning, and to challenge and change ways of working, so together we can break the cycle of ACEs. ACE Hub Wales is funded by Welsh Government and is hosted by Public Health Wales and is part of the World Health Organisation (WHO) Collaborating Centre on Investment in Health and Wellbeing.



**Hyb ACE Cymru**  
**ACE Hub Wales**

ACE Hub Wales  
Policy and International Health,  
WHO Collaborating Centre on  
Investment for Health & Well-being,  
Public Health Wales,  
2 Capital Quarter,  
Tyndall Street,  
Cardiff, CF10 4BZ

[www.acehubwales.com](http://www.acehubwales.com)

[ace@wales.nhs.uk](mailto:ace@wales.nhs.uk)

ISBN: 978-1-83766-406-1

© 2024 Public Health Wales NHS Trust.

Material contained in this document may be reproduced under the terms of the Open Government Licence (OGL) [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/) provided it is done so accurately and is not used in a misleading context.

Acknowledgement to Public Health Wales NHS Trust to be stated. Unless stated otherwise, copyright in the typographical arrangement, design and layout belongs to Public Health Wales NHS Trust

## Contents

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>Background</b>                                       | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>Impact of HSC Services</b>                           | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>NYTH/NEST Framework</b>                              | <b>8</b>  |
| <b>Trauma-informed work supporting families</b>         | <b>10</b> |
| <b>The experience of families, staff and volunteers</b> | <b>13</b> |
| <b>Success and Challenges</b>                           | <b>16</b> |
| <b>References</b>                                       | <b>17</b> |

## Background

In 2022, ACE Hub Wales, hosted by Public Health Wales published 'Trauma-informed Communities; a Comparative Study of Welsh Models of Practice' (Addis, 2022), a comparative study of three approaches across Wales that were contributing to the development of a trauma-informed nation. ACE Hub Wales also co-leads the implementation of the Trauma-Informed Wales Framework (ACE Hub Wales and Traumatic Stress Wales, 2022) which provides an all-society approach to support a coherent, consistent approach to developing and implementing trauma-informed practice across Wales.

This 'spotlight' report forms part of a series of case studies, building on the comparative study which aim to showcase wider initiatives at the community level across Wales which are already contributing to the vision for Wales to become a trauma-informed nation. This spotlight highlights how Home-Start Cymru (HSC) are taking forward a trauma-informed approach at community level using the NYTH/NEST framework. The NYTH/NEST framework offers organisations the tools to create a 'whole system approach' to mental health and wellbeing with organisations working together to ensure babies, children, young people and their families get the right support, at the right time, in the right ways.

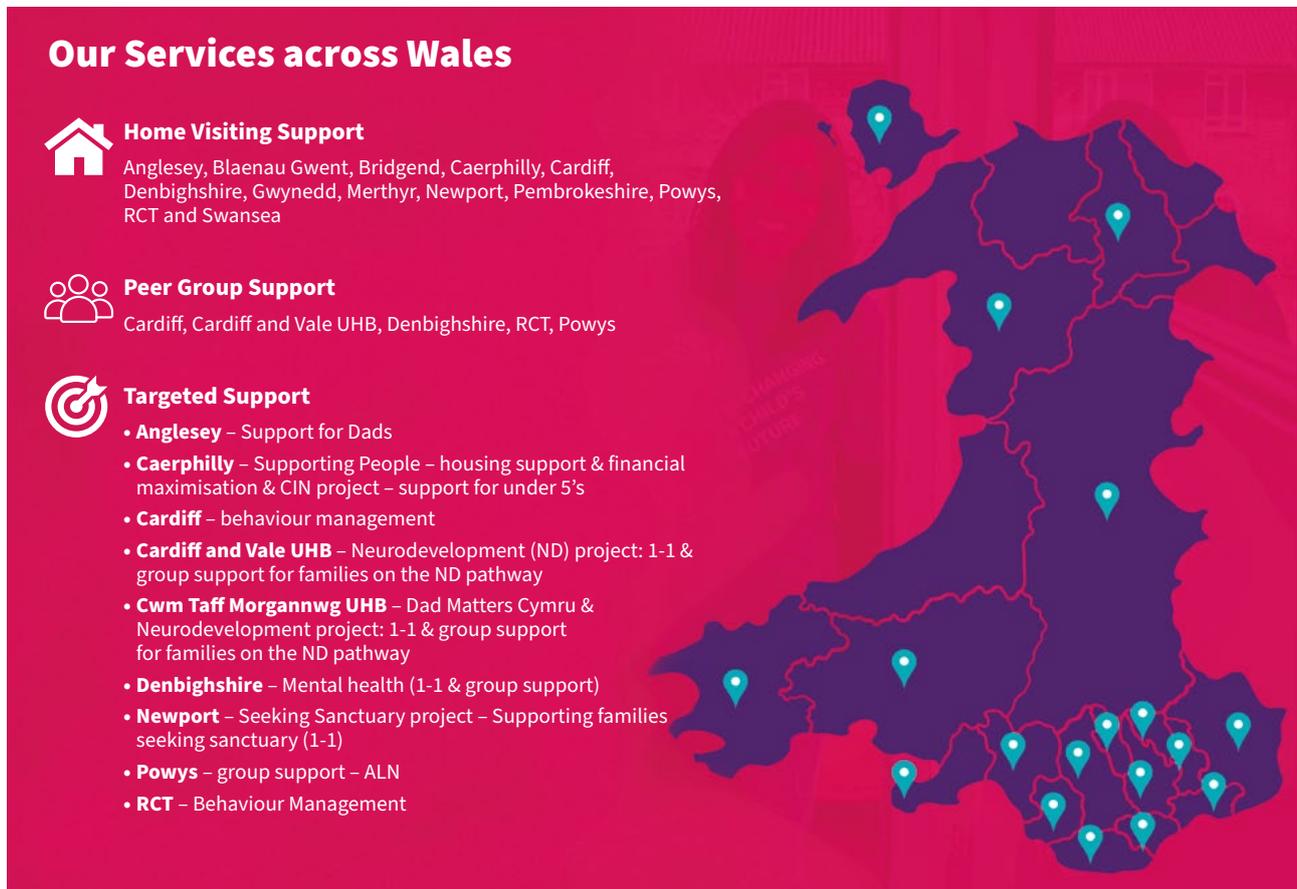
## Home Start Cymru (HSC)

Home Start Cymru's mission is to: 'Offer life changing support to families with young children to make sure that every child has the opportunity of the best start in life' (HSC). Families are referred to HSC either by self-referral, referrals from family members or from organisations such as health and education. Once families have been referred, staff and trained volunteers work alongside families to give personalised non-judgmental and compassionate support. They offer emotional support with empathic listening, in addition to practical assistance to access other services. This support acts as a bridge, providing information and guidance, and connecting families with support networks such as health services, schools, and local community projects. HSC understand that every family is different and have individual needs. As a result, staff and volunteers tailor the support they provide to parents by using a person centred and strengths-focused approach to enable parents to rebuild their confidence and empower parents to be the best parent they want to be.



HSC became a national organisation in 2019, when smaller independent Home-Starts in Wales merged to become a centralised organisation, operating throughout Wales. HSC's core mission is; 'being there for parents when they need us most, because childhood can't wait.' By retaining their locally based services and using community networks they have ensured they continue to work to their core mission.

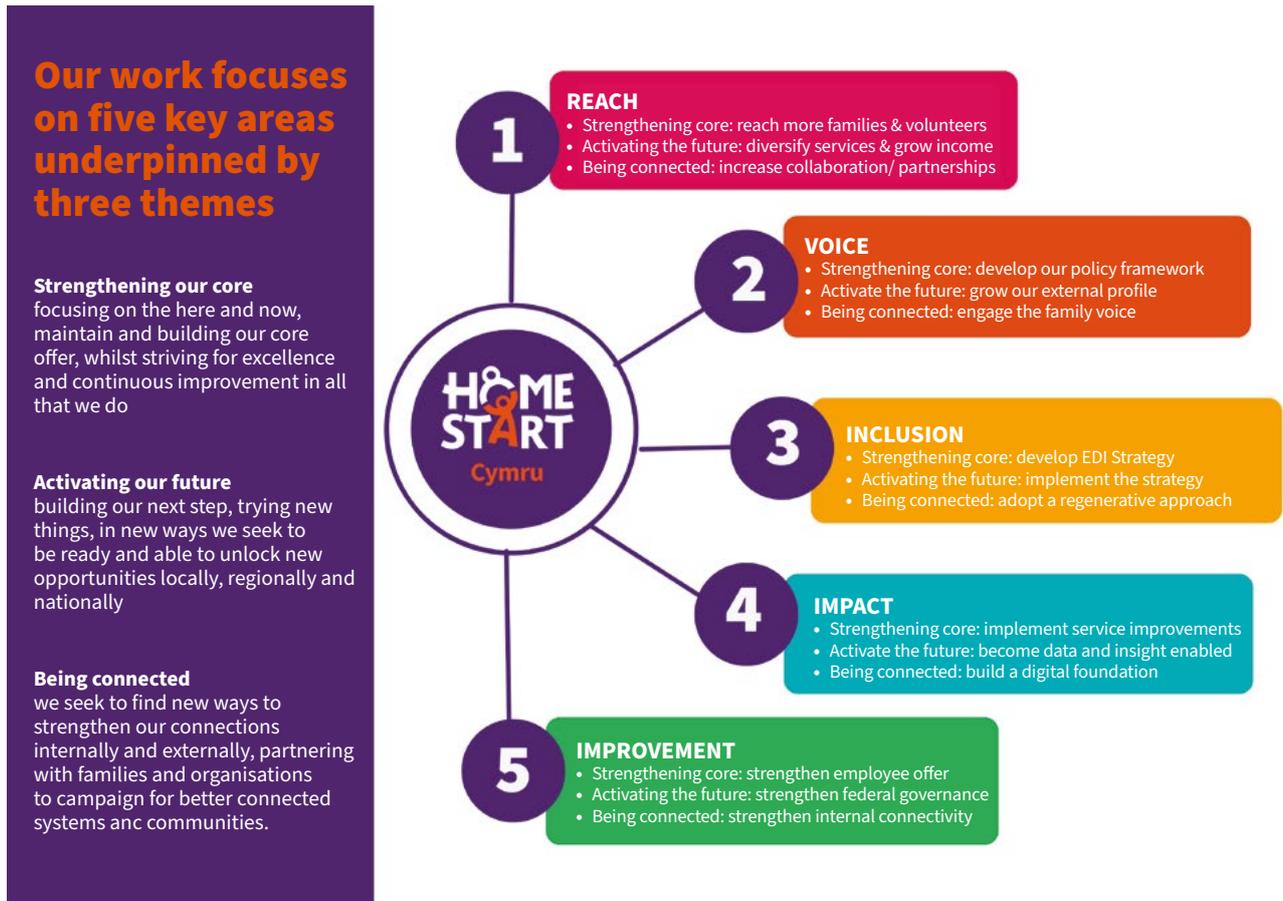
Figure 1: HSC services in Wales



HSC Impact Report (2023).

We are particularly concerned about addressing variations in care and inequalities in health. So therefore, part of our culture, our ethos is about addressing inequalities. Reaching out to marginalised groups, reaching out to vulnerable groups... reaching out to the people who perhaps are neglected, or who struggle to access other services.' (Chair of the Board of Trustees).

Figure 2: HSC priorities

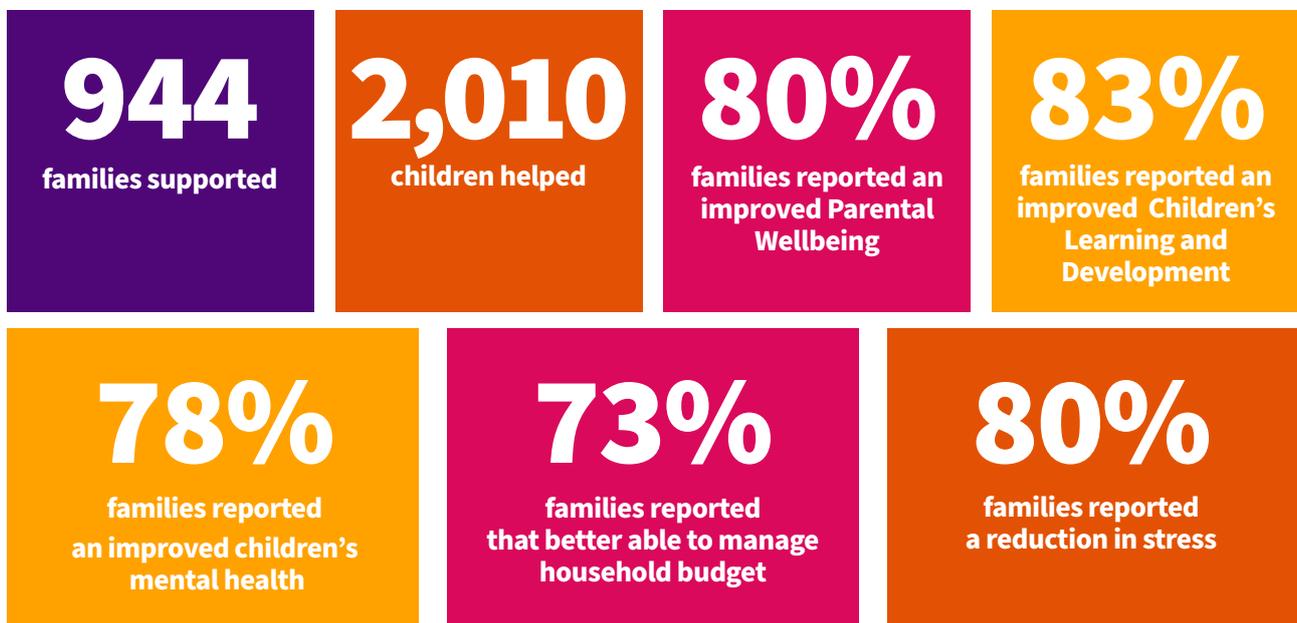


HSC Impact Report (2023).

## Impact of HSC Services

The impact of HSC's work is highlighted in the 2022/23 impact assessment (Home-Start Cymru, 2023). HSC are committed to monitoring and evaluating the work they do with families. The process includes an assessment form completed by families on first referral which identifies their need which is then used to monitor families' development and if their needs are being met. This process, and speaking to families who have reached the end of their support, means the vast majority of families supported by HSC report impactful and positive changes relating to their own and their children's wellbeing. HSC's impact assessment indicated that:

Figure 3: Impact on children and families



HSC Impact Report (2023).

HSC are committed to further development of their impact assessment and are keen to co-produce success indicators with families to continually improve the support they provide for families.

At the heart of HSC's work is home visiting volunteer support. Volunteers work alongside parents, in their own homes, to help them cope with the stresses and strains of life and to make sure they have the skills, confidence and strength they need to nurture their children. Volunteers and expert staff offer non-judgemental, compassionate, confidential support which enables parents to undertake a sustained journey of change that increases their own and their family's wellbeing. Additionally, HSC work holistically with other community support partners including health practitioners, offering a range of services aimed at building stronger families and communities and creating a safer environment for children through in-home or group programmes.

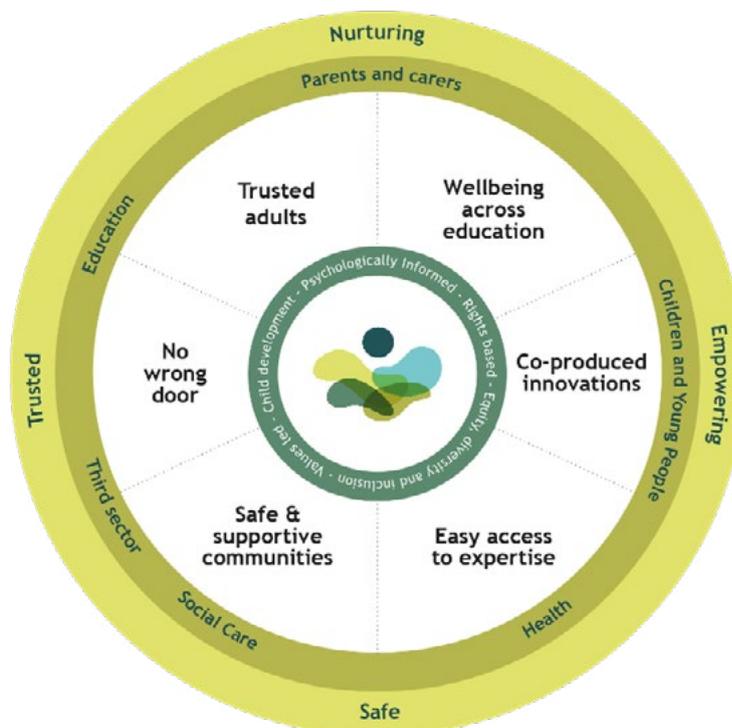
## Home-Start Cymru. Trauma-informed Communities – A spotlight series

A number of groups have been set up by HSC to address a specific need within the community; these groups are intended to build resilience by addressing specific challenges that families may face. An example is the Powys Parent Group, set up by HSC for local families who have children with autism. HSC created this group following feedback from families in the area that they lacked support from people who understood the challenges they faced. The group aims to encourage parents to provide peer support to each other, whilst also providing a safe space for their children to play. The relationship-focused service promotes safe, supportive and empathic relationships with other parents in the group, building parents' resilience and normalising feelings surrounding their children's needs. Meeting with local families increases their confidence through connection with their community and other parents of neurodiverse children, preventing isolation through providing a place to socialise and giving practical support including signposting local support services and community groups.

## NYTH/NEST Framework

The work HSC do with families is based upon a non-judgmental, compassionate and strengths-based approach which is built on trust. This is underpinned by the NYTH/NEST Framework (Figure 4), a strengths and children's rights-based planning tool to ensure that services prioritise a whole system's approach to mental health and wellbeing for children and families (Welsh Government, 2023).

Figure 4: NYTH/NEST Framework



Welsh Government (2023).

This Framework was co-produced with a number of stakeholders including children and young people, and parents and carers. Its purpose is to be a planning tool for Welsh government, Regional Partnership Boards, Local Authorities, Health Boards and voluntary organisations to ensure a whole system approach for developing mental health, wellbeing and support services for babies, children, young people, parents carers and wider families. The NYTH/NEST Framework was launched before the Trauma-Informed Wales Framework, but there is strong alignment between the themes and principles of both. The Trauma-Informed Wales Framework is an all of society approach, recognising that anyone can experience trauma in their lives that may affect their physical or mental health and wellbeing. The NYTH/NEST Framework is a tool that supports this approach with a particular focus on babies, children and young people and the people that support them.

HSC piloted the self-assessment tool for the NYTH/NEST Framework with a top down and bottom-up approach; HSC senior leadership in each of the Regional Partnership Board areas attend meetings to review the NYTH/NEST Framework and its implementation. HSC have also run their own NYTH/NEST workshops including operational staff, trustees and volunteers to reflect on their current practice in relation to the key principles of the assessment. Using the NEST self-assessment tool enabled HSC to identify some key examples of trauma-informed practice and to action plan to further embed the key principles of NYTH/NEST and trauma-informed practice.

*'That's, kind of a massive part, isn't it, that signposting element as well, is that collaborative work, because recently we had our own NEST workshops and a NEST Framework everywhere, kind of reflecting on where we are now and the actions that we need to set to embed that NEST Framework into our ways of working. And one of those topics was easy access to expertise. And a lot of what we were talking about was how we work with health visitors and align ourselves with already existing services to wrap around the family and create that whole system approach... That's kind of underpinned to a lot of what we do, we can't really work in isolation in that way, you have to acknowledge what a family needs in many different pockets' (HSC staff member)*

## Trauma-informed work supporting families

Examples of how HSC are reflecting the principles and practice levels of the Trauma-Informed Wales Framework can be found when speaking to staff, volunteers and families they support. The first assessment with a family places the person at the centre, volunteers empathically listen and acknowledge the trauma and adversity they may have experienced. This person-centred approach understands that every family's needs are different, and as a result, each family receives tailored support. Support is also co-produced between volunteers and families to ensure that the family has a choice in decisions about the type of support they receive. The aim is to empower parents to overcome barriers by providing them with the emotional and practical support they need, without imposing interventions. Staff and volunteers understand what support they are able to provide families and when to signpost to other organisations. They do not attempt to provide specialist interventions or intensive support but instead signpost to organisations that are equipped to deliver these interventions.

*“It’s also about the family action plan. So, the best way of saying is, co-design that plan with the family. If what they want are four different things, and we say okay, we can do these, but we may need to bring someone else in to help us with the fourth element...we might not be the right people for everything, but we will help you find the right people. And that’s empowering in itself, because you don’t have to take them on the full journey you just have to say these are the people you need to now talk to” (HSC staff member)*

Specific examples can be found from the conversations that took place for this spotlight that demonstrate how HSCs approach aligns with the five practice principles of the Trauma-Informed Wales Framework:

# THE 5 PRACTICE PRINCIPLES

## Relationship-focused:

'Well, you listen to them first of all, you have to listen to what they have to say to understand where they're coming from. You have to be sensitive, don't interject, you let them talk. You have to gain their trust and you have to let them know that what they're saying is important to you, you are listening... You are taking notice and you are interested. You have to be sensitive... they might not always tell you everything straightaway, again, because they don't know you, and they haven't built that trust with you yet.' INT 2



## A universal approach that does no harm

'Trauma-informed kind of embeds everything that we do because, naturally, we are trauma-informed, we're flexible to the family, we are mindful of their triggers. So, there is no kind of dedicated project that is labelled as trauma-informed because it underpins everything that we do' (Int 2)



## Resilience and strengths-focused:

'I think it's quite life changing for some families... they've now got the tools to change the outcome. So, instead of making things escalate [with] threats and bribes and everyone feeling worse, it's more therapeutic and they feel that they've got the toolbox to handle any situation because the strategies I give them... Everyone generally feels better about themselves and feels better about being in that family.' (HSC staff member).



## Person centred

'When I first met Home-Start, I didn't feel judged... the difference is with Home-Start, they feel like your friends. There's nothing they didn't know about me and I didn't think they're going to judge me on that.' (Previously supported parent and current volunteer).



**Inclusive:** 'We've also got to be mindful of our own trauma as well, and you work with families, and it can be so hard to then just switch off at the end of the day, sometimes we take it home with us... So you need to check in regular with volunteers, definitely. I was just saying that I do feel that Home-Start really does provide that, provide that support to volunteers... we have training, as well, lots of as training. They also put on events and days for volunteers, so coffee mornings, meet and greets. It's just about making the volunteer feel that they can reach out if they want to and that everybody is looking out for each other. It's that community feel' (HSC staff member)



## Home-Start Cymru. Trauma-informed Communities – A spotlight series

Other trauma-informed projects provided by HSC include:

- **Neurodivergent support** – this project provides 1:1 support for families that have at least one child on a neurodivergent pathway and are awaiting a diagnosis for neurodivergence. The support given covers a wide range of topics such as how to manage a child's behaviour, guidance to understanding a diagnosis, emotional support, as well as signposting to existing services for more specialised support.
- **Dad Matters** – this project aims to help dads have positive parent experiences during pregnancy and early years. It focuses on supporting dads with anxiety, stress and mental health issues whilst fostering a solid parent/infant relationship. This service prioritises dad's wellbeing and considers the importance of this relationship to child development.
- **Seeking Sanctuary** – this project offers support to families who are seeking refuge or asylum. Families are supported to identify support networks in their communities, build wider and healthy relationships and support their children to transition into education. Being culturally aware and trauma-informed is central to this project, as volunteers acknowledge that this group are at particular risk of experiencing trauma and adverse experiences.

## The experience of families, staff and volunteers

The tools provided include parenting strategies which help to strengthen the relationships between parents and their children. These strategies include how to regulate their own and their child's emotions, using positive language to avoid criticism and communication breakdown, and ensuring that parents are consistent in their routine and in their response to their children's behaviour. Parents more confidently support their children through increased emotional intelligence, looking beyond behaviour at the underlying causes, and providing children time and space to express their emotions, leading to improved mental health outcomes for themselves and their family.

### Case Study

We had one little girl, she was 10, she was suspended from school from threatening to harm another child, but she had been through a lot of traumas. I worked with mum, and it was just completely changing the family dynamics, so spending more time together. She wasn't eating breakfast before she went to school so I worked with mum to make a little café in the morning, so mum would have a notebook and say, okay, what would you like today, and she went to school with food. And we talked about spending time together, so, sit down, talk about your child, you know, be interested in them and what they're doing. And then she walked her to school, they held hands. So, it was just increasing moments of connection. Mum couldn't believe it, the fact that she (daughter) was really excited to get up, get dressed and then she had her breakfast and mum walked her to school...her home life changed quite dramatically.

Also, at home, between mum and the child we increased positive language, we talked about, try and stop the negative talk, just try and focus on the positive and be specific. And, then for discipline, what we do is we say, there's no naughty children, they just have accumulated feelings and unmet needs. So, trying to teach mum to stay in what we call the green zone, so when feelings get a bit heated, to stay in the green zone and not follow your child into the red zone. We'd talk about regulating emotions, and when mum stays regulated then she can help her child stay regulated and come back down to base, so we worked on that. I also explained that when her child has these challenging behaviours, that you can't question her or try and fix things at the moment, you have to give them space to let their feelings come out. That's one of the trauma-informed parts, where you let the feelings come out and give them space to do that and remain calm, so they can. So, all these changes and a regular bedtime, etc. made a massive difference. And, yes, after a few weeks she got star of the week. So, that was one of the ones we were most proud of, because it was a really big difference.

## Home-Start Cymru. Trauma-informed Communities – A spotlight series

Many volunteers have previously been supported by HSC which gives lived experience insight into the communities they support and empathy with the families. Staff and volunteers work with local organisations to tap into local provision:

*“So, it’s always linking in to making sure that you know the assets of the community. So, you need to be aware of what services are available in that specific community...also the way, statutory services, for example, may do things in the Local Authority area” (HSC staff member)*

This is supported by the fact that HSC staff and volunteers live in the communities in which they work:

*“With Home Start, where we are from is where we usually work in the community. So I live in Caerphilly, my line manager lives in Caerphilly and we all work in Caerphilly...We are aware of places that we can signpost, we know what is going on in the community” (HSC staff member)*

All volunteers are supported by their coordinator who regularly contact them to discuss cases and to support their mental health and wellbeing. Staff and volunteers acknowledge the impact of vicarious trauma and the potential of re-traumatisation of volunteers and the importance of the positive workplace culture:

*“We’ve also got to be mindful of our own trauma as well, and you work with families, and it can be so hard to then just switch off at the end of the day, sometimes we take it home with us... So you need to check in regular with volunteers, definitely. I was just saying that I do feel that Home-Start really does provide that, provide that support to volunteers... we have training, as well, lots of as training. They also put on events and days for volunteers, so coffee mornings, meet and greets. It’s just about making the volunteer feel that they can reach out if they want to and that everybody is looking out for each other. It’s that community feel (HSC staff member)*

The previous experience of the volunteers, and the relationships they are able to build as a result also shows how important trust is in the work that HSC does:

*‘And it kind of emphasises and evidences these really powerful bonds that we create with people and families in general, to trust you, that they want to keep working with us. So, I think that’s something that we’re really proud of.’ (HSC Staff member)*

One previously supported family member has found that volunteering had helped them to further reflect on their own experiences:

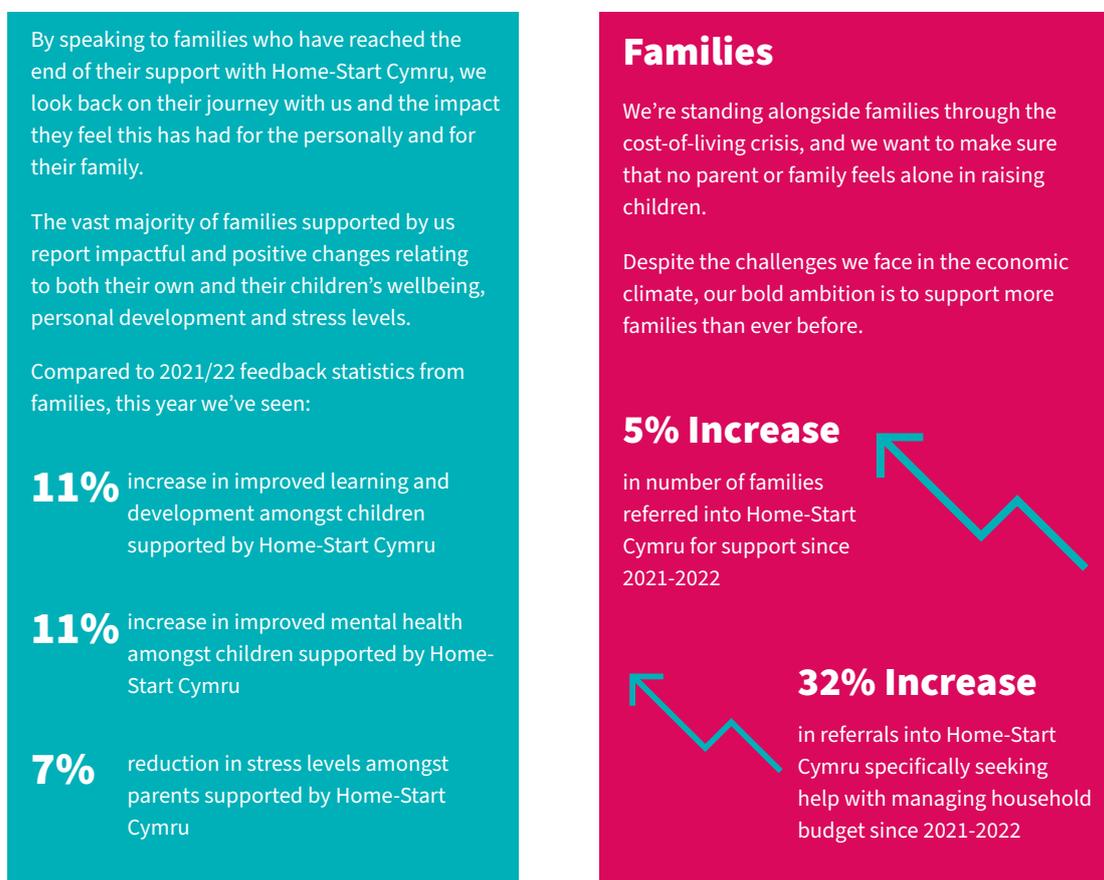
*'I've seen what I was missing in my relationships, and where the things were going wrong in mine. So much you do learn from being a volunteer. I think I'm on a journey of myself and I'm finding my puzzle pieces and they're connecting... it's helping me as a person as well as I'm helping them.'* (Previously supported parent and current volunteer.)

The training volunteers receive upon their induction an eight-module course created by HSC which includes topics surrounding mental health awareness, safeguarding, domestic violence, families with additional needs, and the underlying causes of these needs (such as trauma, discrimination, poverty etc.). This training is not designed to enable to volunteers to provide intensive interventions to those who have experienced trauma, but instead helps volunteers to recognise the signs of trauma and how best to respond.

## Success and Challenges

As a result of the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the challenges posed by the cost-of-living crisis, HSC have continued to see an increase in demand for services along with more complexity and challenges for the individual and families. HSC has worked hard to diversify its funding and predominantly receives funding from Local Authorities, Health Boards and Trusts and Foundations. One of the challenges currently faced is the reduction of funding for preventative services due to budget constraints across the whole sector. The pandemic and Cost of Living crisis has also affected volunteering across Wales and caused a decline in numbers. Recruiting volunteers is something that HSC are developing through a new three-year volunteering strategy and by introducing a ‘Volunteer in Wales’ award to help improve recruitment, reward and retention processes. By doing this, HSC hope to expand their reach and continue to support families in need. HSC are also keen to improve their impact assessment, they are passionate about putting the lived experience of families at the centre of what they do, and as a result are encouraging further activity to co-produce outcomes with families. Providing a high quality service, coproduced, developed and centred around families’ needs, is key to HSC’s strategy, along with continuous improvement and by capturing families’ insights, they hope to improve the monitoring of their work to ensure they are providing the best support for families.

Figure 5: HSC Impact Report



HSC Impact Report (2023).

## References

ACE Hub Wales and Traumatic Stress Wales. 2022. Trauma-Informed Wales: A Societal Approach to Understanding, Preventing and Supporting the Impacts of Trauma and Adversity. <https://traumaframeworkcymru.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Trauma-Informed-Wales-Framework.pdf>

Addis, S. Hopkins, J, C. Lyddon, C. Sheeran, E. 2022. Trauma-Informed Communities. A Comparative Study of Welsh Models of Practice. <https://acehubwales.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Trauma-Informed-Communities-report-E-7.pdf>

Home-Start Cymru, 2023. 'Impact Report 2022/23' [homestartcymru.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Impact-Report-29.7-x-21cm-2.pdf](http://homestartcymru.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Impact-Report-29.7-x-21cm-2.pdf)

Welsh Government, 2023. 'NEST framework (mental health and wellbeing): introduction' [NEST framework \(mental health and wellbeing\): introduction | GOV.WALES](https://gov.wales/nest-framework-mental-health-wellbeing-introduction)



Hyb ACE Cymru  
ACE Hub Wales

ACE Hub Wales  
Floor 5,  
2 Capital Quarter,  
Tyndall Street,  
Cardiff  
CF10 4BZ

[www.acehubwales.com](http://www.acehubwales.com)

 [/acehubwales](https://twitter.com/acehubwales)

 [/acehubwales](https://www.facebook.com/acehubwales)