

# **Helping Working Families: Programme Review**

**Written by Rowan Campbell and Rania Vamvaka, 2022**

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## 1. Executive summary

Helping Working Families is a £6 million programme developed in Wales to help tackle and alleviate in-work poverty. Projects were co-produced and strengths-based, and they were expected to develop solutions that were enduring and resilient.

Funding was committed in 2018, with most projects planning for a year of development and three years of operation.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused some to request extensions, and at the time of writing (December 2022), two projects have completed while the rest are wrapping up.

The issue of in-work poverty has worsened and expanded due to 2022's ongoing cost-of-living crisis, and the learning from Helping Working Families can feed into responses to the crisis.

### Data and methodology

This report uses data from the projects' evaluation and monitoring reports submitted following their third year of operation and in one case, their final project report; case studies; online and face-to-face interviews and focus groups with project workers as well as co-production participants.

Quantitative data was extracted from reports where available, and the qualitative data was analysed using a grounded theory approach and thematic analysis.

A full overview of the research methodology can be found in Annex A.

### Co-production

As might be expected, co-production underpinned every theme that emerged of the interviews and focus groups.

The three main themes that interlinked with co-production were intersectionality, COVID-19, and time. According to the findings, the projects were severely impacted by COVID-19, as the pandemic hit at the start of the funding period. This had a domino effect of how the beneficiaries engaged in co-production. All projects reported that the length of the funding period had positive outcomes on the beneficiary's commitment to co-production, as well as staff motivation.

### Impact

A large variety of activities and services were co-produced and delivered.

Over 100 activities were reported, which we have grouped into the 12 categories below:

- Training and skills
- Activities
- Clothes/toys/uniform banks
- Peer support/wellbeing groups
- Advice and advocacy (incl. online info)
- Activity packs

- Food-related
- Campaigning/community organising
- Community events
- Lending libraries and repair cafes
- 1-2-1 support
- Miscellaneous

It is not possible to calculate the total number of people engaged due to the range of activities and differences in reporting, the fact that some activities were one-off, and some were recurring, and that the same people might be benefitting from more than one project strand. However, a conservative approach to adding up reported numbers suggested that over 10,000+ people were directly reached.

The ‘quantitative’ impact of the programme included savings made by using services such as community pantries, ‘libraries of things,’ uniform exchanges, repair cafes and a loyalty discount app.

However, the ‘savings’ from activities such as drama classes, zoo trips, training, baking sessions etc. cannot be quantified in this way: the families would not have been able to do these had they not been funded. As such, these are examined in terms of the impact on quality of life. The non-material impacts of the programme included:

- More quality time spent together as a family
- Improved mental health and wellbeing
- Reduced isolation and loneliness
- Increased access to services and support
- Access to training and certification, leading to new opportunities or better-paid jobs
- Increased confidence, self-esteem, and empowerment of those involved with co-production

The qualitative impact was conceptualised at three ‘levels’:

- Immediate impact on the beneficiaries,
- The impact on participants who were more deeply involved in co-production,
- The impact at the level above the individual, such as communities and organisations.

This revealed a ‘ripple effect’ whereby the support and empowerment of individuals involved in Helping Working Families rippled out into positive effects on their families and communities, into organisations and even up to policy level.

## 2. About the Helping Working Families Programme Review

This Impact Review provides a detailed overview of the Helping Working Families programme. At the time of writing (October-December 2022) one project had finished while the 12 others were wrapping up or in their final phase of operation. As such, this is necessarily an interim report, but the current cost of living crisis facing individuals and communities in 2022 means that learning from the programme is even more pertinent. As many of the organisations funded by Helping Working Families have noted, they have been witnessing the forerunner to the cost-of-living crisis for years, dealing as they are with families experiencing in-work poverty who often ‘fall through the cracks’ of eligibility for support.

This review outlines the background and context to the programme, and the activities and outcomes reported by the projects in 2022. The most recent reports were chosen to capture projects as they started to come out of the period of COVID restrictions that impacted their activities for two years from March 2020. The report then presents the results of a thematic analysis of interview and focus group data. The fourth section draws on these and the project evaluation and monitoring reports to highlight the qualitative impact of the programme. A full overview of the research methodology can be found in Annex A.

### Programme context, activities, and outcomes

Helping Working Families was developed to tackle in-work poverty after the research and stakeholders told us that there was an increasing number of families affected by poverty despite having at least one person in the household who worked. From 2018, £6.2 million was awarded to 13 projects across Wales. Some key criteria of the programme were that:

- Projects should be co-produced, that is, beneficiaries should be involved in developing their own solutions to in-work poverty
- The projects should build on strengths already present within families and communities
- Solutions should be enduring and resilient.

Funding decisions were made by a panel that included sector experts and people with lived experience of in-work poverty. Funding was divided into three flexible phases - development, engagement, and support - and it was understood that projects would define their own outcomes based on their co-produced approaches.

### What do we mean by in-work poverty?

We mean when a household’s ‘resources are not enough to meet their basic needs, including the need for social participation’ even though someone in the household is in employment. Two-thirds of people affected by ‘in-work poverty’ were in families containing children.

### Why invest in this area?

Traditionally, people who were affected by poverty were out of work and government policy was focused at supporting and encouraging people into the workplace. However, the nature of poverty has changed, and we know that having a job is not necessarily enough anymore. The number of people who are ‘in-work’ and in poverty has grown, as well as the number of affected families.

Wales was (and still is) the country in the UK that had the highest proportion of people in poverty at 23%, with child poverty at 29%. The proportion of children in poverty living in a working family rose from 54% in 2009/10 to 63% by 2013/14 across the UK.<sup>1</sup>

The Welsh Government’s tackling poverty external advisory group<sup>2</sup> found that households experiencing ‘in-work poverty’ are not a homogenous group and different households will have unique needs and varied reasons for being ‘in work poverty.’ As such, co-production, holistic and wrap-around support were identified as being important for this target group, along with flexibility. The programme wanted to go beyond ‘just’ providing support by empowering and enabling people to improve their lives.

The aim of the programme was to support and empower working families experiencing in-work poverty.

- By family we mean one or two (or more) people bringing up a child under 18 years old. A family may be a single parent or two parents/guardians from the LGBTQ+ community, for example.
- By working families, we mean a household where there is at least one person with a full or part time paid job or who is self-employed. The jobs market can be precarious so we accept that we need to be flexible because people may move in and out of work.

Funding was committed in 2018 with most projects planning for 4 years and due to finish around December 2022, however some have requested extensions due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Funding per project ranged from £210,773 to £500,000 and the average funded amount was £456,745.85.

We funded 13 projects, with activities in 19 of the 22 local authority areas in Wales. The types of organisations delivering Helping Working Families projects were:

- community housing associations
- charities working with families, young children, and adult carers
- social justice, sustainability and community organising charities
- family centres and community development centres

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/7880>

<sup>2</sup> <http://gov.wales/docs/dsjlg/publications/150507-tpeag-in-work-recommendations-en.pdf>

- a social entrepreneurship CIC (Community Interest Company)

A full list of the organisations involved in project delivery is included as Annex B.

### 3. Activities and services

Given the diversity of organisations, and the co-produced nature of the projects, activities and services varied considerably.

Activities were often things that the families would not otherwise have been able to afford such as trips to the zoo or summer activities, or activity packs during lockdowns that helped relieve some of the tension of being stuck at home.

The Llandrindod Wells Together for Wellbeing project's co-production participants identified a lack of summer activities as a major issue. HAF 2021 was a hugely successful initiative attracting approximately 1,600 family visits to over 65 events. This included a celebration of National Play Day on August 4<sup>th</sup> when events were focussed around Llandrindod Wells Lake. Highlights of the day included the opening of a Giant Sandpit (the nearest beach is about 100 miles round trip from Llandrindod Wells), dramas and dance workshops as well as loads of art and other activities. A video from this day can be viewed on [YouTube](#).

Many services included ways for families to save money in areas that were identified by participants as being particularly costly: school uniforms, children's toys, laptops, tools, etc. Uniform Exchanges, Clothes and Toy Banks, 'Libraries of Things' and Repair Cafés were popular services. Similarly, some projects set up community pantries and community kitchens or cafés or delivered food parcels during lockdowns.

The table below shows the number of people benefiting from these types of service supported by Action in Caerau and Ely's (ACE) Working Well project for the fiscal year April 2021- March 2022.

Pantry and community kitchen (2 sessions / week)	201
Benthyg 'library of things' (2 sessions / week)	67
Repair cafe (1 session / month)	112
School Uniform exchange	48

Other activities were based around training, qualifications, and upskilling participants. Felinfoel Family Centre's Working Together project provided cleaning training and self-employment guidance for two participants, and plan to continue supporting them to start their own cleaning business. Another project, We Can

Work It Out, referred people to interpretation training courses in a partner organisation, helped 6 Black, Asian and minority ethnic community members gain construction skills certifications, and held training in Information Technology for Employment. They also held English language cafés for adults and a sports-based employment course for young people, and organised student placements.

#### **Swansea Carer's Centre - Swansea Working Family Carer Project**

“In partnership with Gower College and Ysgol Pen y Bryn we are supporting 8 parent carers to undertake their Level 2 in Supported Teaching and Learning. The teaching is delivered at Ysgol Pen y Bryn and the participants also do their placements there. On completion they will be qualified to apply for Teaching Assistants posts at any school.”

A few projects provided 1-2-1 support and mentoring or advocacy services. Information, advice, toolkits and ‘hubs’ for resources were also developed and provided by some projects. In some cases, participants identified that what they needed were peer support groups. Due to the holistic approach taken by many of the projects, it is likely that more mentoring and 1-2-1 support took place than has been explicitly noted in the project monitoring reports. Examples of these will be seen in quotes and case studies throughout sections 4 and 5.

#### **Dad's Group Case Study - HomeStart Cymru**

“Whilst working with mainly mothers in the HWF groups it became apparent that we needed a separate space for dads. I set up a weekly group just for dads which began in June [2021]. We have had a very good response and there are now 9 fathers from across Wales attending regularly. The dads really open up during the sessions are able to discuss things they felt that they couldn't speak to their friends and family about. They support each other, sympathise and brainstorm ideas when one of them has a problem. The dads who are the main carers for their children find it especially isolating and benefit hugely from these sessions.

Many of the dads struggle with the changes that come when they have children, mothers are supported by their midwives and health visitors but fathers seem forgotten about, yet it affects them in much the same way. Dads are expected to stay strong so find it hard to talk to each other about their problems in everyday life. Providing a safe, non-judgemental space makes all the difference. When the dads open up about their problems it is quite often the first time they have talked about it. One dad said, “I had no-one to talk to, I just needed to say it out loud to someone, I feel so much better now”. When dad is supported, it helps to support the rest of the family.

The dads discuss a vast range of topics from potty training to emotional breakdowns. These discussions help them to make positive changes in their and their children's lives, help them realise they are doing their best



and they are not alone. The dads have started reaching out to each other outside of the group, meeting up for walks with their children and one is helping another with maths tuition to help with his engineering degree.”

There was also a strong strand of community and enterprise apparent in the programme, with some groups organising community events and activities for local families and businesses. Butetown Community Market was one such event that took place in the old docklands area of Cardiff and focused on opportunities for local economic growth. The market stalls were run by female vendors who all sold out on the first day, and the event was attended by 500 people.

In North Wales, Creating Enterprise CIC developed a loyalty scheme discount app used by 272 families and 60 local businesses.

#### **A Living Wage for Social Care**

Citizens Cymru took a community organising approach and supported their caseworker participants to persuade their employer to accredit his care home as a Living Wage employer, lifting 30 people out of poverty pay. Caseworkers developed this campaign into a manifesto and following a Social Care Summit attended by First Minister Mark Drakeford in which caseworkers spoke persuasively about the issues they face, the Welsh Government pledged to commit to the Living Wage in Social Care, for implementation in April 2022.

The table below categorises the activities and services funded, as reported from 11 evaluation reports submitted at the end of projects’ third year of delivery or end of their project in one case. Not every report went into detail about all their activities or services, so it is likely that there are more that are not captured here.

<b>Category</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Training and skills	20	Employment support including CV writing; community organising and leadership; minibus training; safeguarding; child development and teaching qualifications; grant writing
Activities	18	Summer playschemes; after school clubs; family outings; baby/toddler groups
Clothes/toys/uniform banks	15	School uniform exchanges; 'Working Wardrobe' clothes lending for interviews
Peer support/wellbeing groups	12	Mostly online, some in person - Father's support; parent's wellbeing groups; women's wellbeing; older women's group

Advice and advocacy (incl. online info)	9	Advocacy services; Online Advice and Support Hubs, information and toolkits, signposting
Activity packs	8	Home delivery of kits for craft, cooking, sports activities etc. Sometimes video tutorials included
Food-related	7	Community pantries; community cafes; food parcels
Campaigning/community organising	6	Campaigning on housing issues, Living Wage campaigns, voter registration for 16-18-year-olds
Community events	6	The <a href="#">HAF summer events programme</a> ; Community clean-ups; Butetown Community Market
Lending libraries and repair cafes	5	Laptop lending; Tool Libraries; Libraries of Things
1-2-1 support	4	More of this than explicitly noted. Includes mentoring as employment support, emotional support, holistic support
Miscellaneous	3	Developing a community hub; an app with discounts for local businesses; co-produced childcare
<b>Total</b>	<b>113</b>	

Due to the variety and range of projects, it is difficult to capture total numbers of participants or beneficiaries. Some projects gave an overview of total people reached while others only did this for strands of their activity. It should also be noted that these numbers are just from the third year of operation rather than the entirety of funding.

However, numbers we do have are:

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>People supported</b>
Action in Caerau and Ely (ACE)	1012 people benefitted through 5 projects
Foothold Cymru	162 households, or around 486 individuals. Expected to deliver a social return on investment (SROI) of £3.50 for every £1 invested.
Cardiff Community Housing Association (CCHA)	150 families a week use the pantry; uniforms to over 580 families; 250 people a week involved in summer activities; 80 'Flourishers' attended an evaluation weekend
Felinfoel Family Centre	61 families reached

Creating Enterprise	308 children attended summer activities; 272 families and 60 local businesses use the discount app; 101 Christmas activity packs were delivered
Home-Start Cymru	138 households, or around 470 individuals
Severn Wye Energy Agency	60 activity packs a week; 963 families using the uniform exchange; 579 families using the baby bank; 1,600 family visits to over 65 events
Swansea Carer's Centre	1244 people involved in outreach/giveaways; 624 received training; 480 attended coffee mornings; 720 people supported through advocacy
South Riverside Community Development Centre (SRCDC)	1,325 people from Black, Asian, and other minority ethnic backgrounds were supported over the full duration of the project
Citizens Cymru	Over 3,174 people developed their confidence and skills in community organising. Of those, 794 (over 25%) were from a disadvantaged background including (but not limited to) low income, socially isolated, and/or from Black, Asian, and other minority ethnic communities.
United Welsh	Their School Uniform recycling event was attended by 56 families, with an average saving per family of £39, totalling £2,184.

### Outputs and outcomes

In addition to engaging and supporting thousands of people and giving families access to a range of training, support and activities, many projects have produced outputs that add to their legacy and sustainability. Some examples of these are toolkits, online advice, and signposting hubs (e.g., Swansea Carer's Centre, ACE); the Creating Loyalty app; The Hive community building in Llandrindod Wells; a book of lockdown poems published by CCHA's Flourish project.

A [research report](#) written by NEF following the development phase for SRCDC's 'We Can Work It Out' project was described as a valuable resource for considering "the policy needs associated with race equality in Wales" by Minister for Social Justice, Jane Hutt.

The types of outcomes reported by projects include:

- Reduced waste, increased savings, and increased availability of essentials
  - Foothold Cymru reported that 3.3 tonnes of tools and 3.5 tonnes of clothes and toys were kept out of landfill/recirculated through their services. 303 households saved an average of £426 per family per year by using the different libraries, doing home improvements by themselves, and picking up practical money saving tips.

- ACE reported an average saving per family per year of £750 on food costs; and an estimated overall saving of £57,650 on tools etc. 90 items were repaired through the Repair Café and many of these were high-value items.
- Severn Wye reported savings to the value of £49,602 for their baby bank; and £47,500 for the uniform exchange
- Parents able to spend quality time with their children and have access to new opportunities and experiences for their families
- Access to advice and support
- Feeling of belonging/overcoming isolation
  - Improved social networking, peer support, community awareness and reduced loneliness
  - Breaking down barriers between people from diverse backgrounds
  - Improvements to mental health and wellbeing
- Increased confidence, self-esteem, and empowerment of those involved with co-production
- Increased skills, qualifications and access to training and volunteer experiences, in some cases leading to people getting better jobs
- Material improvements such as a wage increase for social care workers; reduced water and energy bills
- Structural change and/or advocacy
  - People with lived experience taking part in strategic consultations such as the participation in Race Equality Action Partnership consultation, feedback on Senedd's Childcare Lived Experience Inquiry
  - Networks and positive working relationships developed between community organisations in geographical areas

Subsequent sections of this review will consider these qualitative outcomes in more detail.

## 4. Co-production

### Co-production and Intersectionality

In the focus groups and one-to-one interviews, we found that co-production is intricately linked to the intersectionality of the beneficiaries. The term can potentially create confusion. Policy makers use it sometimes inconsistently and with ambiguity. In the recent years, the term has gained popularity, and it has been interpreted and discussed in several ways.

According to one intersectionality perspective, inequities are never the result of single factors. Rather, they are the outcome of intersections of different social locations, power relations and experiences. Intersectionality promotes an understanding of human beings as shaped by ‘race’/ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, geography, disability/ability, mental health. These experiences occur within a context of power structures of power (e.g., laws, policies etc). and they are shaped by forms of privilege and oppression such as colonialism, racism, homophobia, amongst others.<sup>3</sup>

For this review, we identified three key intersections that influence the beneficiaries’ involvement, commitment, and creativity with co-production: location, class, and mental health.

### Location

According to the findings, in rural parts of Wales beneficiaries face significant barriers in travelling to and from the various stakeholder centres. Thus, engaging in co-production becomes a struggle for beneficiaries - the lack of suitable and accessible transportation is one of the primary issues.

Creating Enterprise:

*“I think a barrier may be that there’s limited businesses we can get on in North Wales. So, a lot of the families we work with, some might not be able to drive, for example. So, if we are getting a business, you know, far out, what is the point the family’s not going to be able to get there? And, and then it is hard to go to a business in North Wales and get them to give some sort of discount when they were struggling themselves. So, trying to get easily accessible businesses on board it was challenging time. That was the difficult part.”*

### Class

The beneficiaries who engage in co-production, and are also service users, appear to be on a wide societal spectrum, from people on benefits and those who experience ‘in work poverty,’ from large families to people living by themselves. The projects are aware of the complexities and struggles their communities face. They use co-production as a means of empowerment and support.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://resources.equityinitiative.org/handle/ei/433>

Tremorfa pantry:

*“It is people on benefits. So, we are thinking about that in the evenings for people who are working by themselves. And it is not an accident that people are in this situation, getting benefits. And they must pay the electric bill, gas bills. How can they manage them? We will help you out as best as we can.”*

Creating Enterprise:

*“Our project is to help working families that struggle financially in certain areas. And so, there is two aspects to our project. When working with the families, they decided that one of the aspects that they struggled with was childcare, and after school clubs, events, things. And so, we co-produced the project with the families and the after-school activities. And so, we do all kinds of events. So, the families have just formed a group now to do a cooking group.”*

Swansea Carers’ Centre:

*“And I think seeing the impact the cost of living has on the families, you know, mums are struggling, and dads are struggling and try to home-school their children who have disabilities. So, what we come together and provide some fun for them to do together as a family, bringing a little bit of happiness to them at such a tough time”.*

### Mental Health and Well-being

All projects reported that they are aware that their beneficiaries struggled with mental health issues during and post-COVID. Feelings of social isolation, loneliness and anxiety became increasingly substantial barriers to co-production. The organisations struggled to keep the beneficiaries motivated during such unprecedented times and many disengaged. The organisations had to adapt their outreach services, as they had a duty of care. The projects that were flexible and adaptable in their outreach support appear to be the ones that highlight stronger co-production involvement post-COVID and staff satisfaction.

Action in Caerau and Ely:

*“We are giving them a 10-minute time slot so we can do a welfare check on people. So that has carried on to this day, which is helpful to a lot of people. And so, for that, we get to know them, we are a close-knit family. It is nice to speak to somebody, it is nice to have a conversation, but a lot of people still struggle. So, we try and make it as best and as pleasant as possible. I decorate the place like for Halloween. It makes people smile and I love that.”*

Tremorfa Pantry:

*“So, a lot of people obviously had families and children at home, and it was exceedingly difficult for them. So, to keep us and them sane we have a chat occasionally. And then also there was we help each other so if someone were isolating when one of us would either go shopping for them or we would cook for each other. So, it made us get closer we connected more through the pandemic.”*

### Co-production and COVID-19

COVID-19 was a prevalent issue in all the interviews and focus groups.

Interestingly, when it came to discussing COVID-19’s impact on co-production, all organisations/interviewees split their work into three distinct blocks: 1) pre-COVID 2) during COVID 3) post-COVID. In this section we are following this line of logic. Moreover, they all brought up the significance COVID-19 had on their co-productive approach, especially since most of their beneficiaries are people from marginalised and/or underprivileged backgrounds that were disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

### Pre-COVID and meeting needs

For most projects, pre-COVID co-production was based on face-to-face discussions on what the organisations could offer, in terms of services, time, staff and costs, and how this affected the beneficiaries.

Swansea Carer’s Centre:

*“Back then, young parents were at a point when they should be building their own careers and having to split themselves attending services and things that take up a lot of their time outside of school with appointments, hospital appointments, mental health appointments, behavioural appointments. This was the normal life for many, many people. And some parents have kids with various disabilities and competing needs.*

*The parents would come into the centre, and they knew would give them immediate support. Knowing that that support is there long-term can change how you meet your needs. And that there are other people out there who are willing to help you. Prior to COVID-19, all our training and our meetings were face-to-face. And it was during that lunch break, where everybody gets to meet each other, and they start to talk, and this formed the basis of our co-production.”*

Flourish:

*“We started the group just before COVID happened. And it is just a bunch of women who get together from different communities, just to have*

*discussions once a week or circle discussion, which can be you know, any topic that the women choose to discuss. And we also had different events that we put on for the women and the children as well. And within the communities we have had events such as the International Women's Day where we got together, had different culture foods, just got to know different people within the community and their cultures. So, our group is really focused on the women who have nothing else really to do. We just want to get together and just to focus on themselves."*

#### During COVID and dealing with barriers

The breakout of the pandemic and the restrictions coincided with the take-off for most projects, as it was the beginning of their funding period. COVID-19 was a significant barrier for all organisations, who had to cancel projects, heavily re-think their processes, policies, and adapt practices to be able to provide much-needed services to their beneficiaries. During that time, for most organisations, co-production practices transformed from organisation-led to beneficiary-led, primarily due to the high-risk that COVID posed for the communities.

#### Tremorfa Pantry:

*"When we started before COVID it was a tiny little cupboard. And we had about 20 families a week spread over four mornings, while having tea and toast and little raffles and just little coffee mornings and a bag of food as a bonus. And then with the lockdowns we went over 300 families a week, and the delivered food went up to a ton. I think at one point it was two times a week, which is so much food. 150 people coming to the door and having a bag. And then as the restrictions eased, we could have people come in, and now they are back to being able to choose what they want, which is always nice, you know."*

Co-production became a powerful ally to all organisations, as they had to almost rely on co-production exclusively to help their beneficiaries survive the pandemic.

#### Flourish:

*"I am feeling a little bit that Flourish is meant to be there for COVID. Because of the wonderful structures these groups have put in place we never stopped our services. Every other organization stopped for six-eight weeks, regrouped, and then delivered. Whereas we were the only people on the ground doing it, because of the structure the groups have put in place previously. It was all about co-production and real ownership to the groups that helped. Co-production was the heart of any decision, via WhatsApp and Teams. So, they would be still telling us what to do. And they were getting the people there. There was one point in the first week of COVID, where Samantha and all her mates took out the push chairs, got food, and were delivering it up and down the street. And I was*



*sat on my bed coordinating it. So, you would not have had that without COVID. People created their own strength and support system for each other.”*

ACE describes how COVID was a catalyst for change in their way of working:

*“Everyone was so screen fatigued. At that point, it was more of an emphasis on board games, and old-fashioned family fun, getting people around the table. Playing these board games is quite expensive, and people could not necessarily afford to buy them. So, the families told us that they needed them, and we were able to get them. Same with the mindfulness cards. It was encouraging young people to use that time outside, you know, in a positive way. And again, that has evolved in the world of post COVID with a mindfulness playgroup. COVID helped us be more responsive and flexible; support in the delivery and allowed us to give the families the responsibility of what they want to do”.*

Swansea Carer’s Centre noted the empowerment that came from parents being involved in co-production rather than being ‘done to’:

*“During COVID, when children could not go out and mix, we delivered lots of craft packs, to families who could not come out and do things, realising that children were home, and that resources would be slim for those families. But when it was time to come back out, we did lots of training on ‘back to school anxiety,’ realising that that was going to be a problem for the families and the children. We also did some training on ‘how to play safe outside.’ And these co-produced sessions were incredible. Because professionals all telling parents what your child cannot do and that is devastating. So, for us and the parents designing the training sessions together empowered them so much.”*

Creating Enterprise described how they made use of digital platforms to continue co-production:

*“COVID obviously hit massively. We could not do face to face sessions for a while because of COVID. But it was important that the families still thought of this project as active. So, we used something called Padlet, where they all put ideas on for names and what they wanted on the app, what businesses they wanted on board. When we got the names, we did a poll to narrow it down. And that was where ‘Creating Loyalty’ came from. We got businesses on board, the families contacted businesses, we will have volunteers go out to businesses, or ring them. Families were reaching out to businesses and using the app. So, if the families prefer not to use the app, then they can use their loyalty card. I could have all the ideas in the world. And I want to remember my ideas, but it must come from the families”.*

### Post-COVID-19 & lessons learnt

All organisations point out that they have not been able to go back to ‘business as usual’ and they had to continue to adapt their services by undertaking active co-production initiatives. There is a sense of togetherness and real community that got built because of COVID-19. All organisations are positive on how co-production and community have continued to work so closely post-pandemic, as they were able to alter all services to be fit for purpose to all beneficiaries.

Swansea Carer’s Centre:

*“Post COVID things have changed enormously. We are doing one training session and get two or three times the numbers. But you miss a lot of that dialogue that I felt was important and is the basis of our co-production. We have made sure that at the end of each session, we do a little Zoom poll, it has not been quite as expansive as maybe an evaluation sheet would have been in person. But it is a quick and effortless way to make sure that we had some feedback from people. Coming out of COVID, it has been quite a surprise that instead of people initially have not wanted to come back, they said they wanted to continue Zoom. We found that people are not coming back to our drop-in days at the centre, we are trying to do a lot more outreach work, but people have really retreated and stay in with what is comfortable in the communities or with groups that they are familiar with. So, we are doing a lot more outreach work for co-production - to see how they feel and what they really want.”*

ACE:

*“I mean, from a learning point of view, we can take a step back, which was quite interesting in terms of how things have changed because obviously things we have developed during COVID, which we have taken forward as well to develop to the experience of COVID. Such as the way that the pantry runs - it was originally designed for people to have more space and less contact that post-COVID has translated into being a space to have a polite conversation, have a cuppa and meet friends. And we have kept that because it is what people want. So, we are running the project differently and the changes have been quite positive.”*

ACE:

*“I think COVID got us to be more connected. Even though it was hard in the beginning. People came together through social media, like WhatsApp and stayed, connected, we all got closer”.*

### Co-production and time

The concept of *time* came up often in the interviews and focus groups in relation to a few interlinked areas: the time needed to do co-production well; and the longer-term funding that allowed for an iterative and co-productive approach. Underpinning these are the long-term nature of the situations that beneficiaries from this demographic are in - as parents, as parent-carers, as low-paid workers in a stagnating economy.

*“When you have a parent-carer come through your door, it is not like other caring duties that may come later in your life. If you have a child with a disability, it is for life, it is a long-term role. So, you need to be involved in things that can move forward and adapt with you, but also can move those parent-carers forward on their own, and hand them on to the next step of their journey. What they need changes from one year to the next. So, you must be able to be able to adapt to meet those ongoing needs. And it is only if you have a longevity to a project that you can meet those needs.” - Angela Maguire, Swansea Carer’s Project*

Different projects addressed the systemic issue of in-work poverty in separate ways, all of which needed long-term thinking. Some focused on training and upskilling individuals to give them more opportunities for better paid work. Citizens Cymru ran at the community level, by supporting groups to campaign for the Living Wage in their workplaces and in the Senedd. Action in Caerau and Ely (ACE) found that their on-the-ground work has made them well-positioned to feed into policy:

*“The other thing that we have been concerned about recently is the increased cost of living. And this project has helped us shine a light on working families who really are struggling. There is a bit of a misconception that employment is a greater return on poverty but that is only true if the employment is excellent quality. The work that we are doing with the Data Foundation gives us that two-pronged approach whereby we can offer the practical support, and the things that families need, but we are also raising this at policy level too. And I think this project has just been the platform for that.”*

### Co-production as a journey

There are many reasons why co-production takes time, such as the time needed to build relationships of trust. Another aspect that came up in interviews and focus groups was time for people to gain confidence and develop their skills. Projects discovered that going to a group of people with the expectation that they would at once ‘co-produce’ did not work. One project worker felt that the first stages were “dry and difficult” and that they had to ‘sneak’ co-production in. Another noted that people engage at different levels, and not everyone will engage at the level of ‘full’ co-production at once:

*“The learning is that it is a slow process. Co-production, and people's journeys to being able to take leadership and ownership over a project does not necessarily happen straightaway, people need to sometimes engage as somebody that benefits, because that is the way that somebody will come through the door. Those people have the lived experience and with the right opportunities they can really grow into leadership. Whereas if you are inviting people who already were happy to lead the projects to come and do that straightaway, you would not have those people that had that. It is about growing and building something, you need to have a pathway for people to join different at points without [at once] saying, ‘okay, you're in charge of the project.’ It takes time for people to get the confidence and to feel that they can do it, to have the knowledge, and that is a long-term process of development. If you have a project that only lasts a year, it is exceedingly difficult for people to have the time to be able to really go along that [path]. Yes, for me, co-production is a journey. And projects need to kind of be mindful of the time that it might take for people to travel through their journeys.”*  
ACE focus group

This relates to the type of people that projects felt it was important to hear from. Heather, the project worker for Cardiff Community Housing Association's Flourish project, sought out people who were 'not the usual suspects':

*“We decided from the offset that we wanted to be a bit purist about co-production. Not to impose something. And we were lucky that we were given quite a wide scope by CCHA. They did not micromanage us and they let us develop it and go in the direction that the communities wanted it to go in... We decided incredibly early on that we did not want to go to prove leaders of communities; we wanted to get to people. And we wanted to do that as flexibly as we could. So, we organised play groups and nurseries, we talked to people on street corners. For example, in Tremorfa, when we arrived there was about six women and all their children. People were sad that Communities First was not in place. So, a lot of their thoughts was a little bit like replicas of Communities First, which was interesting. But they were generous and took us on tours and introduced us to people in Tremorfa.”*

Alongside Flourish's 'purist' approach to co-production was being noticeably clear from the start that the people and the communities had to take ownership, and they would not put something on because people said they should:

*“There were some challenges where people wanted us to do more. And initially we would, but then we would always back off.”*

This has enabled all their different volunteer-led projects and groups to be able to claim ownership, which Heather said was hugely positive and empowering for the participants.

However, Flourish found that their approach to co-production was not always appreciated by other organisations, and that they had to be protective of their groups to preserve their autonomy and stop other organisations from ‘steamrolling’ in:

*“What they do not understand is that this relationship is built upon trust. So, for example, [organisation name] wanted to give the pantry £2000, and then they said, we will be sending in a dietician. We said, we will send your money back.”*

#### The importance of long-term funding for projects

In addition to the time taken to build relationships with participants and develop their confidence and skills, projects needed time to learn from and iteratively develop their own ways of working. One project worker said:

*“There’s lots of things I would do differently with hindsight. But I do not regret it because the naivety helps get the engagement in the first place. Sometimes it is good not to understand things and you just go in and see what happens. So, there is a lot of stuff I would do differently, but that is only with the benefit of hindsight. What happened beautifully was year on year, you were learning from any mistakes or the pitfalls, and you were changing things up then. So, you get quite flexible.”*

Co-production is a journey not just for ‘beneficiaries,’ but for the project staff and the projects and organisations themselves. Without the time and flexibility to be responsive and reflexive to changing situations and needs, true co-production would not be able to happen. Interestingly, it seems that both stability (or consistency) and flexibility are bound together: the stability of long-term funding allows for flexibility in approach and methods.

In a similar vein to this stability/flexibility dynamic, Angela from Swansea Carer’s Centre noted the importance of past learning and knowledge as a place to build from, alongside the longer-term shifts and changes in people and society:

*“The long-term impact is a particularly important part of it. Because over the years with each project, you gain learning that can be passed on to the next project, and how things shift and change over time, how people present. So, you need to take that past learning to create strength as you go forward, you are standing on the shoulders of past projects in doing that.*

*“That is the advantage of having projects over time; you can map those changes a bit, and you think, okay, it is a bit like a pendulum, it will swing back, things will change, again. You learn to be very fluid once you have had a couple of projects - what they wanted two years ago, four years ago, has changed. Because services in the community change, you know, schools, attitudes, all these things change. So, you must be able to move along with these.”*

## Sustainability

In turn, the benefits provided by longer-term funding, relationship-building and co-production led to more sustainable outcomes. Jasmine Pilling from Creating Enterprise noted towards the end of their project that:

*“It is only now that we are properly being able to form these groups and the friendships. And so, there will be a lot of work in this next year to make sure that it is sustainable. Like with the Creative Loyalty [app], it might not have worked had we not had the extra time. But now we have thought, we need to add a map to the app to show where the nearest location is for people to get these offers. We thought of all these ideas after using this app for what, two years, but now I would use it more, [because we have been able to add] there was more features. So had we have not had this time, it would not be as sustainable. I think going forward those projects, especially these kinds of projects, would benefit more from being long term. To prove these groups.”*

Conversely, allowing projects to fail was also an important aspect relating to sustainability. Heather from CCHA described making the difficult decision to not step in and save a childcare club because this would not be sustainable in the medium-term when funding ended:

*“It was too successful in a lot of respects, for this group of women to manage. They did a beautiful club for about eight months. But they found it quite hard managing their own children, managing other people's children, and they were friends who started to fall out a bit. And so, we took quite a brave decision to say, ‘we are not going to rescue this. If you do not want to do it, it is fine. You know that you have found what is difficult about that and for that style of project.’ But at the same time, they started a pantry from a cupboard. And we were noticeably clear from day one. That stuff had to be sustainable without us as we were only there for a brief period.”*

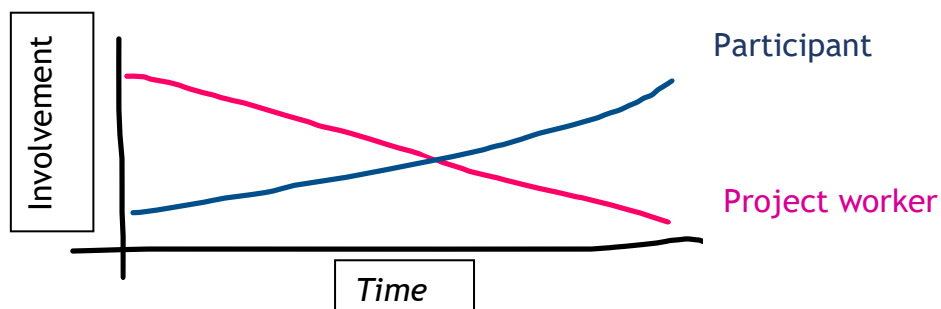
Even though the childcare club did not continue, the Community Pantry went from strength to strength and continues to run after the end of the funding. Had the participants not been able to focus their energy on the pantry, the outcome may have been different.

Fiona, Senior Community Organiser at Citizens Cymru, joked that co-production in community organising is like ‘working yourself out of a job,’ because the aim is to empower people and develop their skills to act themselves (although this job is ongoing because there should always be new people to work with). In this way, co-production should have an inherently sustainable outcome, as it should build the ability of individuals, who can then go on to make change in other areas too.

An example of this can be seen with Jenny, a focus group participant from Tremorfa Pantry (part of CCHA’s Flourish project), who said that she had taken the co-production approach into other spheres of her life. She is now a governor at her children’s primary school and credits Flourish with helping her develop the confidence to put herself out there. The school has set up a Pupil’s Voice system for children to give their input on what they want, including trips and activities, and more parents now get involved while before it was more ‘closed door.’ On co-production, she says:

*“It’s so involving for everyone; I think everyone feels valued when they have that.”*

Project workers tended to describe the support they gave to co-production participants as initially greater, but always with the intention of ‘backing off’ over time. This has been visualised in the graph below and illustrates how co-production’s aims are aligned with aspects of sustainability or ‘legacy.’



## 5. Impact: a qualitative summary

The activities and services described in Section 3 show the variety of ways in which people received help from Helping Working Families, from savings on essentials like food and school uniforms, to the chance to spend quality time as a family having experiences, they would not otherwise have been able to afford. Other support included advocacy, peer support and mentoring, and access to skills and qualifications training that enabled parents to see new directions for their lives or find better-paid work. In some cases, support from the programme had outcomes such as achieving a commitment to the living wage for social care workers, or leading to participants setting up their own businesses.

The question of how to measure impact for co-produced projects came up in focus groups and interviews. Project staff described the tension between quantification or short-term measuring versus change over time and holistic, long-term impact:

*“Do you measure it on each visit: have they got the information they needed? Have we helped them? Or do you look at their progress over time? My bottom line is, when somebody comes to us in the first instance, they need to leave feeling more empowered than when they came in. Because otherwise they will not come back. ... Things like the training we run is much easier to measure, because you can say, right, we have had X amount of people on that session. And we will do a little evaluation at the end. What did they think? Was it helpful? What do they want next? So those sorts of things are much easier to quantify, then the support structures that we put in place. So very often, if people want an evaluation, I put in a case study, because it really paints a vastly different picture to your stats, and your training evaluation, tick, tick, tick, how did it go?” - Angela Maguire, Swansea Carer’s Centre*

The ACE focus group mentioned that in addition to the impacts being long-term, they are not necessarily neatly tied to one project or initiative:

*“You’re not doing something in isolation, you need to connect what is like a family of projects. ... because often people will join several different projects, some of which might be funded from a different funding source. And to untangle that is quite hard. They are all part of the same holistic service if you like.”*

This section will use quotes and case studies to illustrate the qualitative outcomes and impact of Helping Working Families according to three ‘levels’ of impact:

1. The impact on beneficiaries
2. The impact of co-production
3. The impact on the wider landscape



### Impact on service users

This describes the impact on people accessing or using the services/activities, who may not have been as fully involved as the co-production participants and volunteers but still benefitted greatly.

### **Increased financial resilience and quality of life**

ACE's 'Working Well' project had a community pantry based around a membership model. The pantry offered delivery services during COVID and has become a vital community hub where people can chat, as well as helping with their food costs:

*"The pantry has meant that I am able to afford food for my family, not just the basic essentials but other luxuries too that I wouldn't be able to afford."*

*"The pantry is so much more than food, it's about checking in on people, building relationships with them, having fun and most importantly solidarity, we all struggle. The pantry is a safe place to get food but also have fun and take a moment to forget your worries and breathe".*

Sarah - lead volunteer for the Pantry

One strand of South Riverside Community Development Centre's 'We Can Work It Out' project worked in partnership with the Oasis Centre to support asylum seekers and refugees in Cardiff. They found that holistic support was needed especially as asylum seekers cannot take on paid work, and as such they provided a lot of signposting and individual support. One of their reported outcomes was increased financial resilience, as illustrated in Aicha's case study below.

#### **CASE STUDY: WCWIO OUTCOME I - Increased financial resilience**

Aicha\* (39 year old female, Middle Eastern/Latino background)

"Whenever I need help I ring in. My asylum registration card wasn't here, the project helped me with that. Lots of my problems were solved with that. I was having trouble with my accommodation, the worker referred me to children's services. She helped me find an emergency dentist for my daughter, I would never have been able to do this without her. The project also helped with school uniforms for my children (pupil development grant applications). When I came here first I thought I was alone and that I couldn't do anything, but since meeting [the WCWIO project worker] I feel like I can do the things that are impossible..."

\* Name changed for confidentiality reasons

In partnership with Moxie People and Platform for Change, United Welsh set up a Working Wardrobe to provide people with excellent quality and suitable clothes for work and interviews. One of their users said:

*“Initially, I was nervous about coming down; I was not sure how people would react to me asking to use the service. I felt instantly at ease from the moment I walked in. No one judged me, and I left feeling like I had been on a VIP shopping trip with all the support I had! I know I will look good in my new clothes. Thank you to you all, you honestly do not know how much this means to me.”*

Some projects set up ‘lending libraries’ of tools and other useful but expensive items that are often only used infrequently, and DIY skills support. The following case study from CBSA (now Foothold Cymru) and their ‘Stronger Together’ story highlights the direct link between the financial savings such initiatives provide, and mental health and quality of life outcomes.

#### **Lucy’s Story - Foothold Cymru**

*“To everyone else, we are doing well. We both work, have two little boys, and have just moved into a lovely house. In reality, it’s a struggle every day and I have to count pennies, wondering how we will pay the bills every month. I’ve gone without food so the kids can eat several times.”*

This is what Lucy, one of the Stronger Together members told us during a recent Craft and Chat session. The sessions were set up to help teach and share crafting and repair skills, as well as build a friendship/support group with families.

The Craft and Chat session is a safe space, and as the members began to attend regularly and started to build relationships with each other, they would often share stories about how they struggled to survive pay day to pay day. Mostly, members would share tips on where to go for free days out with children, supermarket deals and the best local shops to go to, but now and again someone would open up and sometimes take the group by surprise as Lucy did. Lucy and her husband both work full time, but were both furloughed as a result of COVID, and the 20% drop in income hit them hard. As Lucy explained:

*“A lot of my friends saved a fortune in petrol as they stayed home during COVID, but we both walk to work as we can’t afford a car, so we didn’t make savings there. The children being home from school was lovely, but they don’t stop eating so the food bill shot up. We were already on a tight budget, but we were also moving to a new home, so all our savings had gone on moving costs, removal vans and buying new beds for the boys”.*

Lucy joined Stronger Together as a Toolshed member and found it invaluable when her family moved. She loaned a carpet cleaner, so she did not need to pay a professional and she could keep the carpets already in the house. The Toolshed has a free donations area, and Lucy was given some paint so that she could decorate, and instructions and guidance from the Toolshed team on how to refurbish some second hand furniture she had found on Freecycle. She borrowed drills and sanders so that she could carry out the DIY she needed to without the worry of paying for the tools. Lucy and her family are now settled in their new home, and both she and her husband are back in work full time. The children are back in school, and although money is still tight, knowing that the Stronger Together project is there not only to provide practical support with home repairs they need, but also to give advice and peer support from other families has helped Lucy to feel more positive about the future.

*“During COVID, I really thought this was it. There were times when I had no idea how we would manage. I thought Carl and I would split up, we would lose our house and the girls be taken into care. My mind raced and I was having anxiety attacks and always seeing the worst. If it wasn’t for Stronger Together and the Toolshed we would be sitting on concrete floors and the girls sleeping in my bed. The money we saved meant we could start to make the house our home, and I have new friends too who all help with giving tips on saving money day to day.”*

### Quality time

One strand of Creating Enterprise’s ‘Making Work - Work for All’ project in Conwy, North Wales, was to link up with local independent businesses for in-person activities when possible and activity packs during COVID. Here are some quotes from their families and businesses:

*“We were dreading Christmas time not being able to see the rest of the family, but the packs really made us appreciate what we have at home. We loved decorating the mugs and enjoyed our hot chocolates with a festive film.”*

*“Thank you for today Freddy had an amazing time! I am glad I booked annual leave we cannot wait for more over the summer!”*

*“Thank you so much for today I have loved having family time with my girls. We are so looking forward to the weekend events so their dad can join us.”*

Importantly, projects provided activities that families would not otherwise have been able to afford, as the testimonies below show:

*“Thank you for giving me and the children opportunities to have quality family time together enjoying things we wouldn't be able to afford”. ACE - Working Well Project*

## Felinfoel Family Centre - Working Together Project:

“The Initial implementation of the project allowed me and my children to take part in amazing activities that I could not afford or justify as a one income household. So, this was incredible for both me and my children. After the lockdown due to COVID, the activity packs where a welcome break for us from the 24/7 at home, it gave the kids something to look forward to every week and they had so much for every Thursday doing the crafts as a family. Also, the workers of the project where always there to listen and check on how we were doing as a family during lockdown. They are always asking for advice on what the families want and looking for engagement with the provided activities.”

Activities and trips allowed families to have quality time together, but also increased their access to new experiences. One project even arranged minibus training for parents so that they could organise their own trips. Quality time and new experiences were also highlighted in the ‘We Can Work It Out’ project, as shown in Korey’s case study below:

### CASE STUDY: WCWIO OUTCOME II - Increased social capital

Korey\* (female asylum seeker, Black African background)

“The project worker invited me to take part in the project. I was involved in online sessions during lockdown, then park play sessions, then nature play sessions. It was fun and my baby loved it. It was a way to get us involved in a different activity, and help the kids to meet with other kids, and also help me to meet with other families.”

“Knowing there is a different approach to kids’ play (different activities, both outdoor and indoor) helps with the mental well-being for me and my baby.”

“I could help the organisers to be able to communicate with the other families. Also if there is a means to get other families to be able to come out of their comfort zone to meet other people, I could help.”

\* Name changed for confidentiality reasons

## Training and skills

Following requests from families, Creating Enterprise put on a range of training which participants found immensely helpful. The following quotes are from attendees at an Autism Awareness session:



Some of the training provided led to certificates and qualifications that enabled participants to get better work, for example Swansea Carer's Centre's Teaching Assistant training and South Riverside Community Development Centre's Interpretation training and construction skills certification. Other trainings, like the autism awareness mentioned above, helped parents and families on an interpersonal level.

## Isolation and loneliness

Another key thread running through many of the projects and their activities was the reduction in isolation and loneliness for people who took part, and the knock-on wellbeing benefits from this. HomeStart Cymru's 'Home-Start Working Families' project operated in 11 local authority areas across all of Wales, and many of their sub-groups focused on peer support. The following quotes illustrate the positive impact of these:

*“I look forward for every Friday to meet the group ... as I feel it's me time and I do not feel lonely anymore as I made friends with one of the ladies in the group and we managed to meet face to face in the library.”*

*“Before attending the Home-Start group, I felt so lonely. Just me and my baby at home. I plucked up the courage to attend the group and the dark cloud over my head started to disappear. I felt so welcomed and to have a chat and a cuppa with the other mums was something I looked forward to every week and I even went with the other mums on a day out that they had planned!”*

A pan-Wales peer support group for fathers also proved to be hugely beneficial for its members and their families:

*“The group has provided me with friends, advice, and people to share life experiences with. There is less pressure on my wife due to the advice I am given. It has helped me with toilet training my son and he now sleeps better too.”*

*“I kept putting off coming to the group, but I am so glad I came in the end. Listening to the other stories and struggles makes me realise I am not alone, and it really does help to talk.”*

Rhian’s case study below shows the importance of a consistent safe space in getting her through a difficult period of her life

#### **Case study - Rhian, HomeStart Cymru**

Rhian was referred by her GP to the HWF group in 2019 to receive support with anxiety, depression, isolation and coping with a complicated family situation following returning to the UK after living in Thailand. The HWF group met in person once a week prior to the pandemic, once lockdown began the group continued via Zoom. When Rhian first joined her husband was still in Thailand and went through a long process to gain his visa for the UK. Through coproduction, the group drove the direction of the support they needed. Rhian benefitted from CBT elements to the group and other coping techniques to manage mental health concerns, and peer support around mental health and parenting. The group also provided a space for members to work on their personal development, which in turn impacted positively on the quality of their family lives. Rhian was initially caring for her children full time and claiming Universal Credit. Rhian then returned to work and her husband was able to join them in the UK. Throughout all of these changes the HWF group provided consistent support on the issues that Rhian and her family faced, from mental health to financial pressures, housing concerns and child behaviour.

*“I joined the HWF group during one of the worst periods of my life. There were many uncertainties and I was struggling to cope, particularly affected by my poor mental health. Our group was a lifeline for me, a regular and constant safe space for me and the other members. We drove the group and with the incredible help of the HomeStart staff were able to work on our mental health and strategies to maintain that health and confront our daily struggles. During my time in the group my family went through a lot of changes and the group helped me to cope with everything that was going on. I honestly don’t know how I would have coped without it. Myself and my family are in a much better place now, I wouldn’t have believed it a few years ago, and I know this group played a big part in that.”*

Additionally, two other members of previous groups have now also moved on in their personal development and became HomeStart Cymru employees. This meant that we were able to offer a group to new families as the original group wound down, and increasingly connect with referrers and new families who could benefit from the support.

#### Impact of co-production on participants

Co-production practitioners recognise that there are different ‘levels of participation’ based on an individual’s circumstances and experiences, and that engagement can change over time. While the impact of co-production was the focus of Section 4, this section displays the empowerment and personal development of the co-production participants and volunteers who were able to be more deeply involved in the projects. Participants found it invaluable to have their voice heard, and this in turn could empower them to speak up more in their lives and in contexts where they may not have felt able to before.

HomeStart Cymru:

*“I’m heard, my voice is heard” and this is “our think tank” where the group is “sharing new ideas and different ways of looking at things...I can choose, I have a choice.”*

SRCDC - We Can Work It Out:

*“[The project]’s support gave us a platform to discuss matters such as childcare needs for working parents and parents in education, and training to improve prospects of better earnings and lifestyles. It has taught me how to talk to people in a position of power and how you can let your voice be heard by them. It has made me more confident as a person and made me look at matters in a distinct perspective.”*

From a focus group with staff from ACE:

#### **Sarah’s Story**

*“Sarah is an example of someone who’s really kind of grown and developed in an amazing way throughout the project. She joined as a member right at the beginning, and then was invited to become a volunteer for the project... she really found her place in the pantry team and built skills, her confidence improved so much. When she first started was really shy and not happy to speak in public. And that’s really developed over the course of her volunteering. She became a lead volunteer - she’s taken a leadership role with the project, with good support from working with the team and others in the organization. But since then, she’s really done so many amazing things. She went on a trip to London to look at other project models, which was the first time she was in London. She had a really great experience meeting other people and other projects there, and she’s gone on to present to the Local Pantry conference in Manchester.”*

## Creating Enterprise:

### Natalia's Story

Volunteer, Natalia, had a very difficult two years dealing with personal and health issues. She joined the project in 2020, but decided to formally become a volunteer in April 2021 as part of her plan to turn her life around. From not being able to pick up the phone, she has become an invaluable asset to the project, approaching venues and activity providers, helping out at events and encouraging businesses to get involved in Creating Loyalty.

Natalia said: *"I really needed something like this project. I can already see my confidence improving and I have loved starting to plan the events."*

Natalia's video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oz1nqp-RkN0>

Jasmine Pilling, a project worker at Creating Enterprise, told us that she worked with Natalia to develop her confidence and it has been wonderful to see what she has achieved. She highlighted that the project not only helps the children but helps the families as a whole.

These stories also show that the commitment of project staff to support participants' development could be a vital part of their journey, and one that may not have taken place without the focus on co-production. Fiona Meldrum, Senior Community Organiser at Citizens Cymru, and project worker on their 'Working Families Organising for Change' project, noted that you had to be committed to allowing someone to reach their full potential. This approach takes time and requires greater support and input initially, but this should be tapered off to allow participants the chance to grow and develop their skills.

The Swansea Working Family Carer Project was run by Swansea Carer's Centre and provided a range of advocacy services, training, and support. In addition to this more tangible support for carers, they have been able to give carers a space to grow within the restraints of their responsibilities:

*"We have a family that has six children, one with profound cerebral palsy, four of them autistic. And she is a single parent, clever woman, went through all of this, went back to university, and did a degree in social policy, but no chance of ever going to work effectively in amongst all of this. But she sits on quite a lot of panels for us because she also needs a stimulating outlet for herself. But the logistics of her life mean that by the time she can go to work, she will have been out of the workplace for 30 years, with no experience or skills as such to go back with them."*

Interview with Angela Maguire, project co-ordinator



Participants who had prior experience of volunteering before becoming part of a Helping Working Families project noted the difference that the co-production approach had.

*“The main thing is that everyone just wants to get together; people do want to share their experiences; they do want to make the community better and accessible to everyone. So that is one thing, that is the same. But the difference is I feel like this time around it is going to work hopefully, and the group will last longer, because a lot of groups I have been before having they have died off after starting out well. People are excited, and they want to do stuff, but then it just does not happen. But I feel like this time around is different, because I have had the support from the community and from Flourish, that hopefully will stay longer.”*

Focus group participant Asaad, a Flourisher from CCHA’s ‘Flourish’ project

### Impact on the wider landscape

The empowerment of individuals through co-production, as well as having personal and community benefits directly through Helping Working Families projects, has also had further-reaching outcomes. This was illustrated in Section 3.3 by Jenny from the Tremorfa Pantry, who has become a governor at her child’s primary school and been a catalyst for change in making it easier for pupils and parents to get involved. If someone is supported to see their strength and find their voice in one area, there is a good chance that this will occur in isolation and will positively impact other areas of their life and their community. Indeed, this was the explicit approach of Citizens Cymru, who developed participants’ skills in leadership and community organising so that they could then go on to organise others. Thus, the impact of empowerment through co-production spreads out like ripples in a pond.

At an intra-organisational level, many staff reported how rewarding they found it to work on a programme like this that allowed them to develop close relationships of trust with their communities and see the direct benefits of their work. At a project level, many noted the importance of the long-term funding in being able to continually learn, improve and adapt, as described in an earlier section. In some cases, co-production was a new way of working for an organisation and one which had a positive change on their ways of working.

Many projects also mentioned that the programme had enabled them to network and collaborate more with other local organisations, and some started to think of themselves as part of an ‘eco-system.’ This idea is illustrated in the following network diagram of The Hive community space in Llandrindod Wells which was developed as part of Severn Wye Energy Agency’s ‘Llandrindod Wells Together for Wellbeing’ project.



Positioning themselves in a wider landscape was also beneficial to organisations' ability to effect change and see how they might be best placed to tackle an issue, as this quote from Angela highlights:

*“You think, okay, there is a recurrent problem somewhere, which points to it being more systematic rather than personal to one family. So, you can look at contacting that authority or look to see what is going wrong in the system. Because either we can set up meetings with education or health or wherever and discuss and say, look, there is a bit of an issue here. Or you could create more training for the parents to meet that need. But that is where you discover what is currently causing issues for the families and get those dialogues going as to how they want to manage that.”*

Alongside understanding where a particular organisation is situated in a wider context or eco-system is an awareness of their limitations. One organisation mentioned that while childcare was a major issue raised by co-production participants, addressing it would have been beyond their means to do well on a small geographical scale, but their research meant that they could feed into policy:

*“We did see what we could do; we put a lot of time and effort into trying to unpack all that, but it needs changes in national policy. And we*

*concluded that if we wanted to look at childcare, it is a separate project. It is something that we need to have a big resource for and be able to fund, and the worst thing we could do is try and do something [small], put 20 grand into it and do an absolute dog's dinner of it. It is better not to try than to do a bad job. ... But looking into meant that we did research and found shocking things like the proportion of parents that are going into debt to fund childcare. And we were able to put that into policies, so it had an impact in that sense.”*

Focus group with Severn Wye staff

Through the examples and case studies presented in this paper we can see the impact of the programme rippling outwards from the individuals immediately involved (project workers and co-production participants), to the projects they set up and the benefit these had on their communities, to the ability to effect change locally and nationally.

These ripples have also had an impact on the way we do things at the Fund in Wales. Helping Working Families was the first programme in Wales that had a regular programme of grant holder learning activities throughout its lifetime. This took the form of a co-produced learning focus for each year, and annual learning events that brought grant holders together to share learning and information around that focus. In addition to the annual events, there were smaller, semi-regular shared learning sessions through which grant holders could share advice and ideas or discuss topics of interest. These topics were dynamic and evolved according to the stage of projects - for example, an initial learning focus was around co-production while later focuses were around sustainability and evaluation (although co-production was always present in discussions).

This approach was extremely beneficial for each project's iterative and reflexive approach to developing based on learning. Now it is standard for thematic programmes in Wales to have a co-produced learning programme that brings together grant holders to learn and discuss areas of interest (see Helping End Homelessness and Mind Our Future).

## 6. Conclusion

In this review, we highlighted how impactful the programme has been, as well as highlighting the need for similar thematic programmes nationally. Helping Working Families and the programme's success around co-production has been dependent on various parameters, as per the above findings. The programme impacted positively on the lives of many families across Wales who experience in-work-poverty.

The programme's key criteria, as listed in this review, alongside the panel's Funding decisions, were based on a reflexive approach, that allowed each third sector organisation to define their own outcomes based on the needs of their beneficiaries, which were expressed in their specific co-produced approaches. Co-production is an integrated approach that offers empowerment and agency to its beneficiaries, as well as much needed flexibility. This approach has become the standard for thematic programmes in Wales. The learning from this review can feed into responses to the ongoing cost of living crisis.

## **Annex A: research methodology and data collection**

### Research Design - Grounded Theory approach

The use of Grounded Theory interconnects the research design and the collected data. Grounded theory's systematic procedures generate concepts and themes which derive from an initial set of qualitative descriptions, in this case transcripts of stakeholders discussing their experiences of co-production in Wales. The data is organised to accommodate the development and coding of thematic categories, by using a hierarchical tree network, to index those categories. The value of Grounded Theory lies in the methodological style that allows researchers to examine the data without preconceived ideas; through paying close attention to emerging patterns in the data, resulting in empirically responsive and relevant research.

### Sampling Framework

We used a mixture of targeted sampling to ensure geographic spread, and a random sampling strategy to make sure that we maintain a fair approach and give all projects the same chance of being picked up for interviewing. The reasons for adopting a random strategy assume that there is a huge diversity of organisations, and they have diverse ways of sharing their unique experiences and lessons learnt. Specific attention was paid in recruiting organisations from all Welsh regions with them aim to amplify the voices of organisations that we seldomly hear from thus, democratise the research approach.

### Data Collection Methods

The data collection includes traditional qualitative methods such as audio recorded focus groups, and one-to-one interviews, supplemented by monitoring reports provided by the projects. This allows us to provide an overview of all project activities as well as the more in-depth analysis gained through a smaller number of interviews and focus groups.

### Focus groups

We conducted 4 focus groups. The focus group discussions were shaped by thematic priorities, sector specific issues that relate to co-production and the Fund's funding aims and goals. During these focus groups the participants shared experiences of lessons learnt, good practice regarding the end of the project's funding cycle and co-production.

### One-to-one interviews

The authors conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with key sector respondents, representing the distinct groups of expertise, and co-production engagement. These one-to-one interviews are well suited to the exploration of complex issues relating to co-production such as COVID's impact and are a good method to adopt since we want to uncover people's attitudes, beliefs, opinions, experience, and understanding. Qualitative, one-to-one interviews are well matched to this explorative data collection since we aim at understanding complex social situations. One-to-one interviewing is appropriate for the discussion of

sensitive issues because of the limits to confidentiality and disclosure to others is not problematic, especially when involving Third Sector Bodies with competing interests.

#### Evaluation reports and case studies provided by the organisations

Each project submits an end of year monitoring report to the Fund. We have used these to provide a slightly more quantitative overview of the activities and outputs of the programme. Some projects also submitted case studies and/or videos, and we have used quotes from these where relevant to illustrate analytic themes.

#### Data Analysis

For the data analysis, we use grounded theory to explain social processes around interpretation and using tools, such as intensive one-to-one interviews- all key ingredients for data collection and analysis (Robrecht, 1995).<sup>4</sup> Grounded theory allows for in depth investigation into experiences that are unique or complex. As such, qualitative interviews using a reflexive model are seen as collaboration between participant and researcher (Ryan & Golden, 2006).<sup>5</sup>

For the one-to-one interviews, both face-to-face and online and focus groups, the researchers created a set of open-ended questions, to keep the interviews informal and conversational.

This allowed participants to discuss their experiences (personal/organisational) in depth. We separated the semi-structured interviews into three distinct sections that are represented by a diverse set of questions:

- initial open-ended questions,
- intermediate questions,
- ending questions.

A fourth category was added containing probing questions, which was used as the guideline to eliminate intrusiveness.

Each of the four sections explore a different aspect of the participants' experiences. The initial open-ended questions serve a double purpose as it will allow the participant to give their own account. The intermediate questions allow for the exploration of themes and ideas but also address any new concepts that the participant may bring up in the first section. The ending questions are more follow-up questions for clarification purposes to ensure that we have understood their point. Closing questions will be used to make sure the interview exit is respectful to the participant.

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<sup>4</sup> Robrecht, LC. (1995). Grounded theory: evolving methods. *Qualitative Health Res*, 19, (5)169–77.

<sup>5</sup> Ryan, L., Golden, A., (2006), Tick the box please: A reflexive approach to doing qualitative social research, *Sociology*, 40, (6), 1191-1200.

### Coding strategy

Converting data into codes is one of grounded theory's most significant analytic approaches. Codes will be created through data extrication to start making analytical sense. Grounded theory coding fragments the data and, thus, connections between codes emerge that lead to theory construction (Charmaz, 2012).<sup>6</sup>

We adopt three grounded theory coding phases:

1. Starting with initial line-by-line coding, which is recommended when examining empirical problems in interviews, as it offers the opportunity to take a closer look at the participant narrative (Glaser, 1978).<sup>7</sup>
2. We then proceeded with focused coding, which provides a clear theoretical direction, with the purpose of making sense of the large data as it directs the analysis down more conceptual paths (Charmaz, 2002; 2003).<sup>8</sup>
3. And finally, theoretical coding as means of conceptualisation, as it is a process through which the relationships between codes are explored and get integrated into theory and abstract analysis (Glaser, 2005).<sup>9</sup>

Grounded theory coding ensures that the collected data is approached, understood, and analysed with care, eliminating any nuances. Each phase of coding adds a different layer of data interaction that feeds into the next, thus, creating an analytic and theoretical chain.

### Description of data

#### *Focus groups and interviews*

One focus group was conducted with five participants who were involved in co-production on three different projects. Although we tried to recruit geographically diverse participants, all those who attended were based in Cardiff. The focus group was conducted online, but two of the groups had two attendees who were physically present in the room with each other.

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<sup>6</sup> Charmaz, K. (2012). The Power and Potential of Grounded Theory. *Medical Sociology Online*, 6, (6), 2-15.

<sup>7</sup> Glaser, B. (1978). *Theoretical sensitivity Advances in the methodology of grounded theory*. Sociology Press, Mill Valley.

<sup>8</sup> Charmaz, K. (2002). Grounded theory analysis, *Handbook of interview research*, 675–694. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Charmaz, K. (2003). Grounded theory, *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods*, pp. 81–110. London: Sage.

<sup>9</sup> Glaser, B. (2005). *The grounded theory perspective 111: Theoretical coding*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

Of the 13 projects, we aimed to speak to project workers from around half of these. Most of the interviews and focus groups were conducted online and two were conducted in person. The organisations interviewed and the regions they operate within are shown below. Foothold Cymru was also interviewed by the UK Knowledge and Learning Team for an upcoming Impact Case Study, which will be incorporated into this report once available.

Grant holder	Interviewee/ participants	Geographic location	Format
Cardiff Community Housing Association (CCHA)	Heather McDowall, Maryan Mohammed	Cardiff (Southeast and Central Wales)	Focus group - in person
Creating Enterprise	Jasmine Pilling	Conwy (North Wales)	Interview - online
Swansea Carer's Centre	Angela Maguire	Swansea (Mid and West Wales)	Interview - online
Action in Caerau and Ely (ACE)	Sam Froud-Powell, Nerys Sheehan, Becki Miller	Cardiff (Southeast and Central Wales)	Focus group - online
Citizens Cymru	Fiona Meldrum	Multi-region	Interview - in person
Severn Wye Energy Agency	Dave Gittins, Liz Bickerton, Lynne Frost	Llandrindod Wells (Mid and West Wales)	Focus group - online

### *Monitoring reports*

We collated evaluation and monitoring reports submitted after the third year of operation, and in one case, an end of project report, as most projects were still in progress at the time of authoring this report. In total, we have reports for 11 of the 13 projects (two had deadline extensions). As there is a wide range and diversity of projects, the information in the reports is varied, and each has various levels of detail, especially regarding numerical data. Most of these were written by the organisations themselves, except for South Riverside Community Development Centre's end of project report, which was written by external evaluators, Social Effectiveness Research Centre.



## Annex B: list of funded projects

Project name	Organisation	Operating region	Based in	Money awarded
Working Well	Action in Caerau and Ely (ACE)	South	Cardiff	£498,343
Helping Families Work	Bron Afon	South	Cwmbran	£275,000
Flourish	Cardiff Community Housing Association (CCHA)	South	Cardiff	£472,834
Working Families Organising for Change	Citizens Cymru	South/Mid	Cardiff	£499,364
Making Work - Work for All	Creating Enterprise C.I.C.	North	Conwy	£499,990
Working Together Project, Felinfoel	Felinfoel Family Centre	Mid	Llanelli	£210,773
Stronger Together	Foothold Cymru	Mid	Llanelli	£490,606
Home-Start Working Families	Home-Start Cymru	All Wales		£499,129
Llandrindod Wells Together for Wellbeing	Severn Wye Energy Agency	Mid	Llandrindod Wells	£499,420
We Can Work it Out	South Riverside Community Development Centre (SRCDC)	South	Cardiff	£494,612
Swansea Working Family Carer Project	Swansea Carers Centre	Mid	Swansea	£498,185
Gweithio i'r teulu - Working for the family	United Welsh Housing Association	South	Caerphilly	£500,000
Connecting Communities	Valleys Kids	South	Tonypandy	£499,440