

# Helping Working Families

Programme Review



# Contents

Introduction	3
What Helping Working Families achieved	4
Outputs and outcomes	7
What difference has Helping Working Families made for people and families?	7
What have we learnt about co-production in this context?	11
Co-production and time	11
Conclusion	12

## Cover image

Flourish - Cardiff Community Housing Association  
Flourish was a recipient of funding through Helping Working Families

## Introduction

The National Lottery Community Fund developed Helping Working Families to tackle in-work poverty. It came about after our 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. In 2018 the National Lottery funded programme awarded £6.2 million to 13 projects across Wales. The projects would build on the strengths already present within families and communities and involve the wider community and those that benefited from their services to develop their own enduring and resilient solutions to in-work poverty.

As the cost-of-living crisis continues, learning from the successes of this programme has become even more important. This summary paper presents the headline findings from the review, but we recommend that you [read the full version](#) to see the full extent of what has been achieved and the difference made by the programme.

# What Helping Working Families achieved

The diversity of delivery organisations and the co-produced nature of the projects resulted in activities and services that varied considerably. The types of organisations carrying out 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
- a social entrepreneurship CIC (Community Interest Company).

The projects and where they were based:

Project name	Organisation	Operating region	Based in	Services
Working Well	Action in Caerau and Ely (ACE)	South	Cardiff	Food; training; activities; money saving; support
Helping Families Work	Bron Afon	South	Cwmbran	Activities; money saving; food
Flourish	Cardiff Community Housing Association (CCHA)	South	Cardiff	Food; support; activities; money saving
Working Families Organising for Change	Citizens Cymru	South/Mid	Cardiff	Training; campaigning; money saving
Making Work - Work for All	Creating Enterprise C.I.C.	North	Conwy	Activities; training; money saving
Working Together Project, Felinfoel	Felinfoel Family Centre	Mid	Llanelli	Activities; training

<b>Project name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Operating region</b>	<b>Based in</b>	<b>Services</b>
<b>Stronger Together</b>	Foothold Cymru	Mid	Llanelli	Activities; money saving; training
<b>Home-Start Working Families</b>	Home-Start Cymru	All Wales		Activities; support; food; training; money saving
<b>Llandrindod Wells Together for Wellbeing</b>	Severn Wye Energy Agency	Mid	Llandrindod Wells	Activities; support; training; money saving
<b>We Can Work it Out</b>	South Riverside Community Development Centre (SRCDC)	South	Cardiff	Training; support; food; activities; campaigning
<b>Swansea Working Family Carer Project</b>	Swansea Carers Centre	Mid	Swansea	Activities; support; training
<b>Gweithio i'r teulu - Working for the family</b>	United Welsh Housing Association	South	Caerphilly	Activities; support; training; money saving
<b>Connecting Communities</b>	Valleys Kids	South	Tonypandy	Food; activities; money saving



Many services focused on reducing costs for families by setting up initiatives such as school uniform exchanges, clothes and toy banks, libraries of things and repair cafes. Community pantries and kitchens also proved popular, with many pivoting to deliver food parcels during the COVID-19 lockdowns. For more detail on this type of project, you can [read the Impact Case Study we recently published about Foothold Cymru.](#)

Some activities were things that families would not otherwise have been able to afford like family trips out, or summer activities, with activity packs being prepared and distributed during COVID-19 lockdowns to relieve some of the tension of being stuck at home.

Other projects focused on training, qualifications, and upskilling participants, with some providing one-to-one support and mentoring or advocacy services. Information, advice, toolkits and hubs for resources were also developed and provided, and in some cases, participants identified a need for peer support groups.

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.

# 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 produced outputs that add to their legacy and sustainability. Some examples of these are toolkits, [online advice](#), and signposting hubs; the [Creating Loyalty app](#) in Conwy; [The Hive](#) community building in Llandrindod Wells; and a book of lockdown poems published by Cardiff Community Housing Association's Flourish project. A [research report](#) written by NEF following the development phase for South Riverside Community Development Centre'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, for example:
  - 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
- Improvements to mental health and wellbeing; feeling of belonging and reduced isolation:
  - Improved social networking, peer support, community awareness and reduced loneliness
  - Breaking down barriers between people from diverse backgrounds
- 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
- Access to advice and support

- Structural change and/or advocacy, for example:
  - 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





# What difference has Helping Working Families made for people and families?

The review considers the qualitative impact of the programme at three 'levels': the impact on families; the impact on those more deeply involved with the co-production process; and the impact on the wider landscape.

For individuals, the impacts centre on increased financial resilience and quality of life, health and wellbeing, and skills acquisition. The full report is rich with case studies and quotes illustrating these impacts; a selection of them is provided below:

“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, Action in Caerau and Ely**

“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. Also, the workers of the project were always there to listen and check on how we were doing as a family during lockdown.”

**Service user of Felinfoel Family Centre's 'Working Together' Project**

“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.”

**Rhian, participant in HomeStart Cymru's project**

“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.”

**Service user of United Welsh’s ‘Gweithio i’r teulu - Working for the family’. It set up a Working Wardrobe to provide people with excellent quality and suitable clothes for work and interviews.**

For those who both used the services and become more engaged in the co-production element of the projects, many reported that having their voices heard empowered them to speak up more in other aspects of their life where they may not have felt able to do so before. Co-production empowered people to develop their skills and take on new challenges – this is evidenced by participants across the programme later finding employment with the organisations that once supported them, and in one case, starting their own business.

The review also highlights the ‘ripple effect’ of this empowerment through co-production. In one example, it gave a participant the confidence to become a governor at her child’s primary school and advocate for more inclusive approaches. Citizen’s Cymru explicitly used co-production as a tool for developing their participants’ skills in community leadership and organising, so that they themselves could go on and organise others in the future.

“[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.”

**Participant in SRCDC’s ‘We Can Work It Out’ Project**

Many projects also reported that the programme enabled them to network and collaborate more with other local organisations, with some starting to think of themselves as part of an eco-system of local organisations, rather than working in isolation.

# What have we learnt about co-production in this context?

## The capacity to engage

The capacity of people to engage with co-production is very much linked to their own personal circumstances and backgrounds. Those who experience social inequity like poverty are usually subject to several influences that cause or impact upon their personal circumstances. The interconnected nature of these influences is referred to as 'intersectionality', particularly in relation to those factors that perpetuate disadvantage or discrimination. Three key intersections were identified that influenced people's involvement, commitment, and creativity within co-production:

- **Location** - in rural parts of Wales the participants faced significant barriers in travelling to and from the various stakeholder centres which impacted their ability to engage in co-production.
- **Class** - the people who engage in co-production, and are also service users, appear to be on a wide societal spectrum, including people on benefits, unpaid carers, large families and single parents. Projects are aware of the complexities and struggles their communities face and use co-production as a means of empowerment and support.
- **Mental health and well-being** - projects reported that service users 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 that adapted their outreach services and were flexible and adaptable appear to be the ones that highlighted stronger co-production involvement post-COVID.

## Co-production and time

It takes time to do co-production well; and the longer-term funding offered through the programme allowed for this. Service users are, after all, in long-term situations themselves: as parents; as parent-carers, as low-paid workers. Time is also needed to build relationships with the people being supported, for them to gain confidence and to develop their skills. Projects soon discovered that approaching people with the expectation that they would at once 'co-produce' did not work because people engage at differing levels. It is as much of a 'journey' for project staff, too. Without the time and flexibility to be responsive and reflexive to changing situations and needs, true co-production would not be able to happen.

## Conclusion

This brief has summarised the outcomes and impacts of the Helping Working Families programme, and highlighted the ability of co-production as a means to make a positive difference beyond simply providing (much-needed) services. Co-production is an integrated and reflexive approach that has become the standard for the Fund's thematic programmes in Wales due to the empowerment and agency it offers service users, as well as the flexibility it affords organisations and projects. The programme impacted on the lives of many families across Wales who experience in-work-poverty, and the learning from it can feed into responses to the ongoing cost of living crisis.



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