

Giving young children a voice in community programmes



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Dechrau'n Gryf / Starting Strong



Research overview & workshop findings



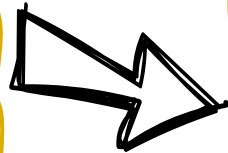
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THE PROCESS

Workshops
with children



Workshops
with parents



Schools
develop
activities



Evaluation of
activities



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CHILDREN'S WORKSHOPS

Background



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WHO TOOK PART?



117
children
took part in
workshops



Across 10
different
primary
schools and
early years
settings

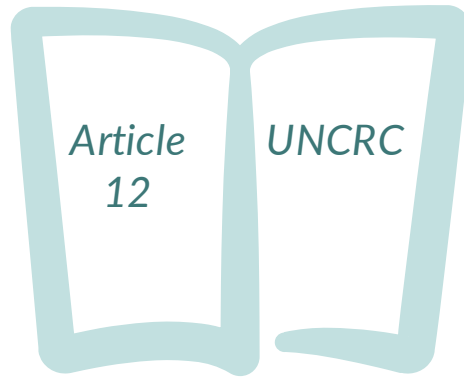
8/10 schools
were in 25%
most deprived
areas in Wales

An average of
39% of children
were eligible for
free school meals

WHAT DID WE ASK?

- What do children think could be done at home to help them to prepare for starting school?
- What do children think could be done at school to help them to feel settled?
- What do children think they need to know about school in advance of their first day?

WHY DID WE LISTEN TO CHILDREN?



**Children have a right
to be listened to**



**They have important
insights and
experience to share**



HOW DID WE LISTEN?

- Workshops took place in nurseries/schools and were facilitated by a combination of familiar teachers, support staff, and Save the Children staff
- Children's responses are captured through notetaking and outputs from activities in the session (e.g. drawings, voting)
- Thematic analysis was undertaken to identify key findings and insights

CHILDREN'S WORKSHOPS

Findings: Experiences

"Sad because I wanted to stay home"

**"Some are happy to
start school..."**

**...and some are sad to
leave."**

"I felt happy"

"I was a bit nervous and scared ..."

... because I was scared of the other children ..."

"Happy to come and excited ..."

... Mammy bringing me to school ..."

... but sad to leave Mammy."

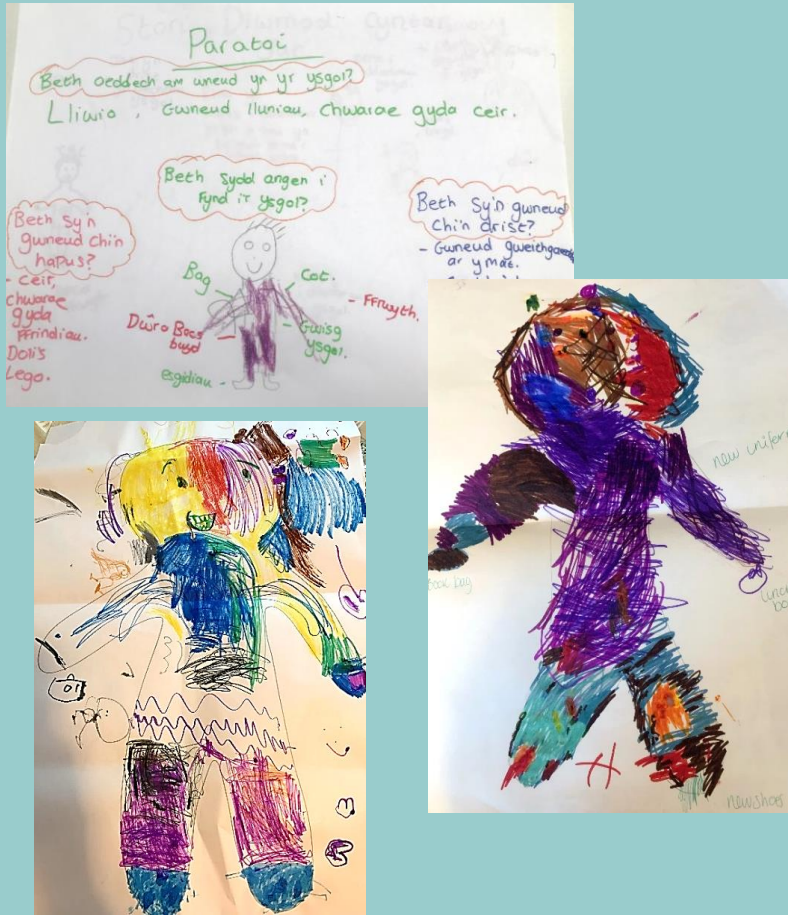
... I feel happy now ..."

... because I've met all my friends."



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AT HOME: THE PRACTICAL SIDE



Children's drawings from various workshops focusing on what children need before they start school

Taken by teachers at local partner schools

When asked about what they were going to need when starting school, the majority of children focused on the material items they felt they needed.

Most commonly, children focused on items that are associated with school such as lunchboxes, backpacks, new shoes, and uniforms.

"I'm going to have lunch in my backpack ...

... and toys and water ...

... and homework and writing!"

AT HOME: THE EMOTIONAL SIDE

“I didn’t want to go to school ...

... but hugs help”

- Children wanted parents and carers to recognise the importance of the event in a positive and supportive way.
- This took a number of different forms including presents, treats, affection, and talking about what they were going to do, or had done at school.

AT SCHOOL

Children who **had yet to start school** highlighted a number of different worries

“Big bells might hurt my ears”

“They might tell you off for being naughty”

“If somebody is hitting me or not playing nice”

Those children who **had recently started school** highlighted focused on the positives of going to school

“I love my teacher”

“I like all of the girls and some of the boys”

“Arts and crafts are the best bit”



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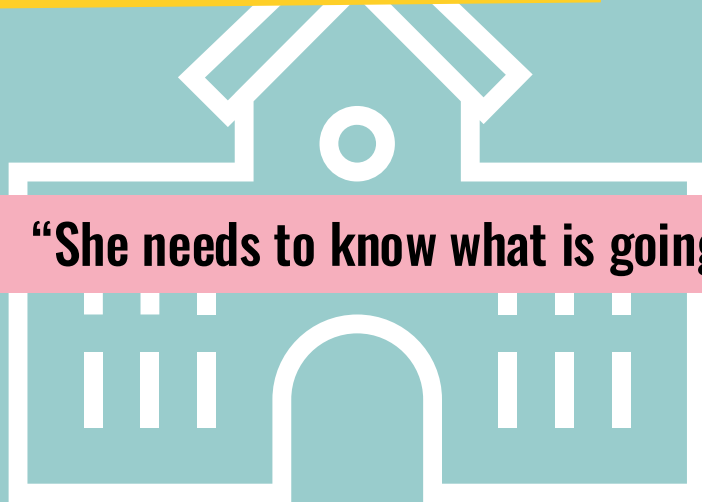
WHAT SHOULD CHILDREN KNOW?

Knowing the place

“Show us where the toilets are”

“She needs to know what is going to happen”

“They need to know to do good sitting”



Knowing the people

“You need to find a best friend ...

... the teacher will help you”



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WHAT SHOULD TEACHERS KNOW?

As well as asking what children need to know, we also asked what teachers should know about children when they start school. In their responses, children focused primarily on their preferences, the things they liked and disliked:

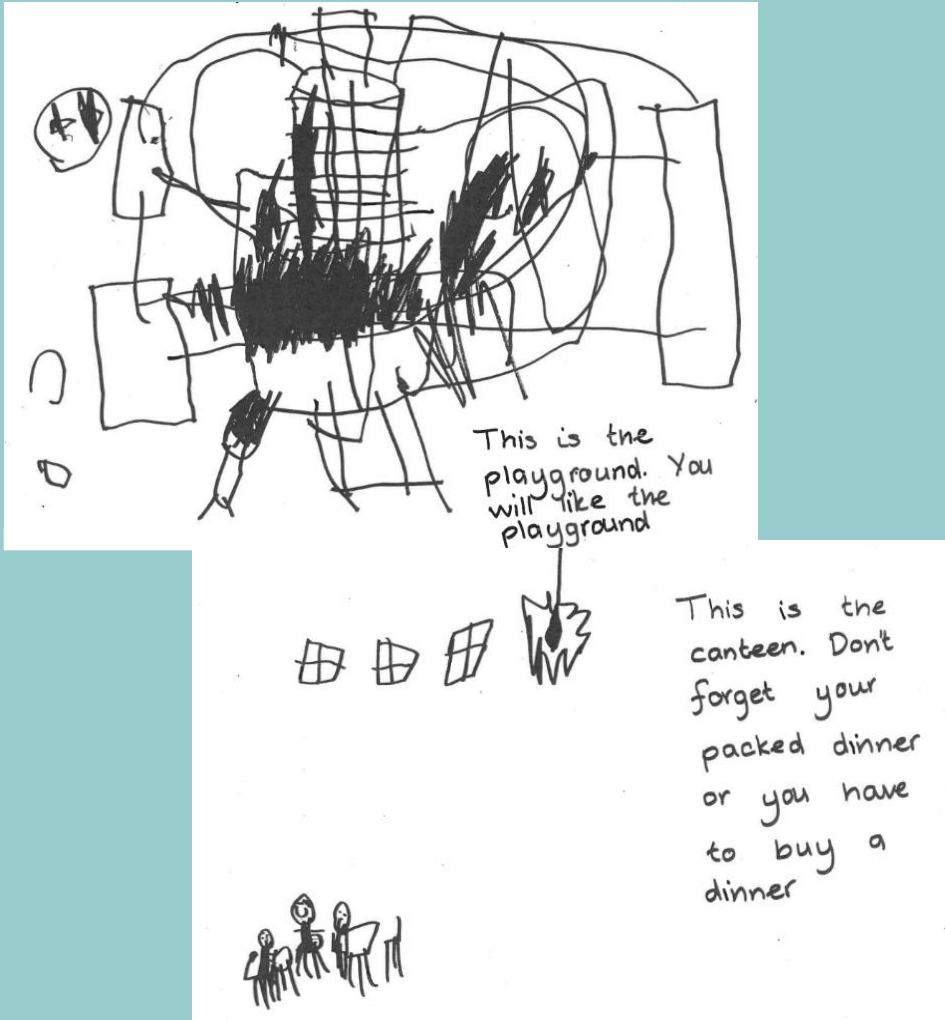
“They really need to know I love maths ...

... do you want me to tell you this sum I know?”

“I feel sad when people don’t listen to me”

“I need someone to play with me”

A DESIRE TO HELP



“I’d be their friend”

“You’ll be fine all day but miss your mummy!”

“Cause people are sad we play with them and be friends”

Children’s drawings offering advice to children who are about to start school (with added captions added by teachers using children’s own words)

Taken by teachers at a local partner school

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Starting school is a big event in the lives of young children and their families, with most children feeling sad or nervous



At home, it's important for parents and carers to recognise the material and emotional side of starting school



Children wanted to know about the place (with all its routines and rules) about the people (other pupils and teachers) before they started



Those children who had recently started school showed a desire and ability to help others who were about to go through the same transition



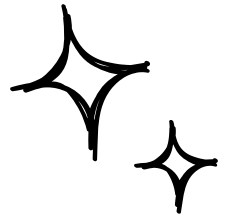
Children were also keen for teachers to know their likes and dislikes



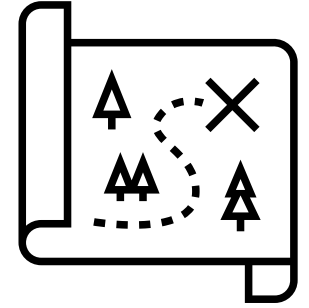


LEARNING FROM THE EHANGU PROJECT

Testing a place-based approach to improving Early Years outcomes in Ely and Caerau

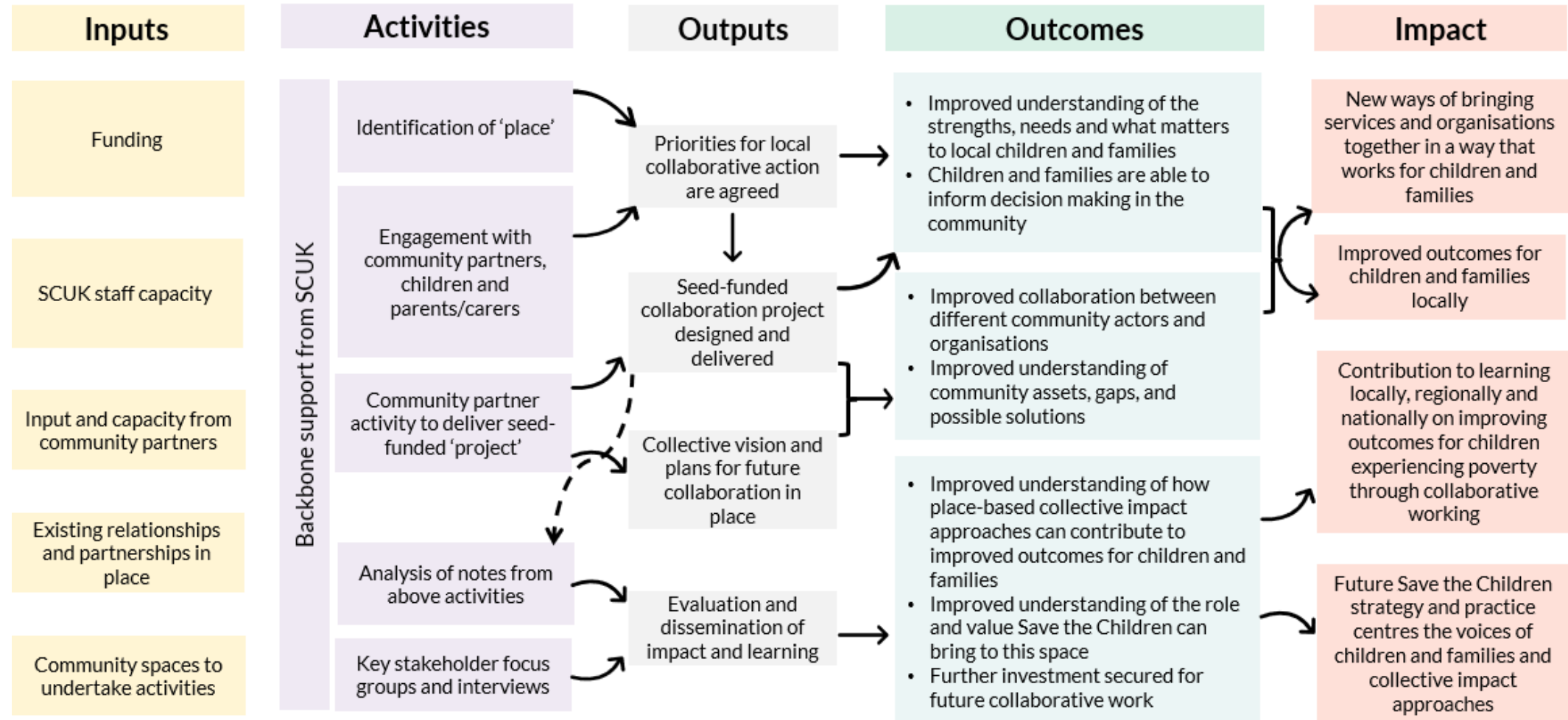


BACKGROUND



- Key elements of '*how*' **place-based systems change** work in Cardiff emerged
- 'Ehangu'/ 'Expand' pilot project designed **to test an approach** for how SCUK can support place-based collective impact
- **Driven by our core values:** sharing power, listening to the voices of children and families, investing in relationships and exploring our role as catalysts of change.

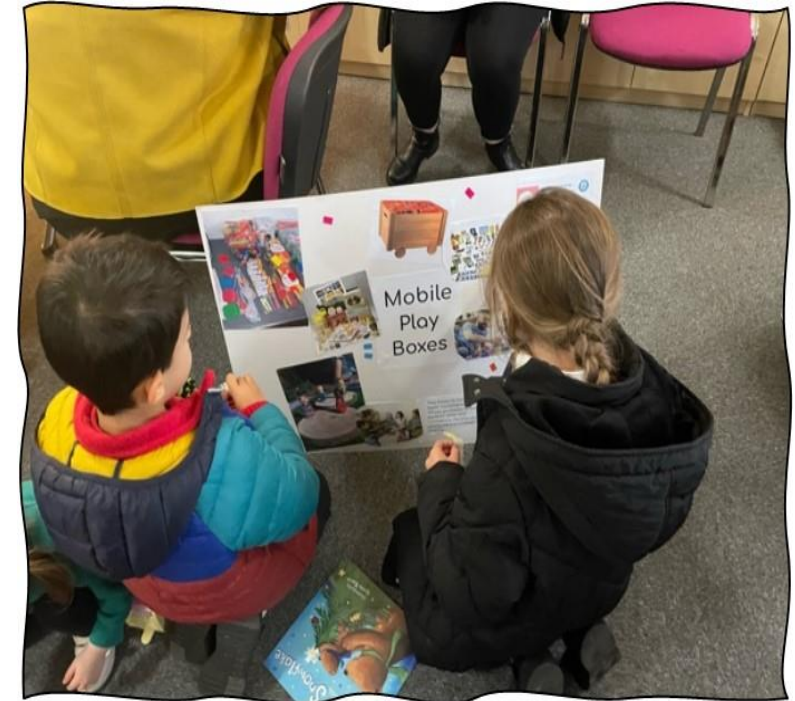
EHANGU: THEORY OF CHANGE



EHANGU: IN ACTION

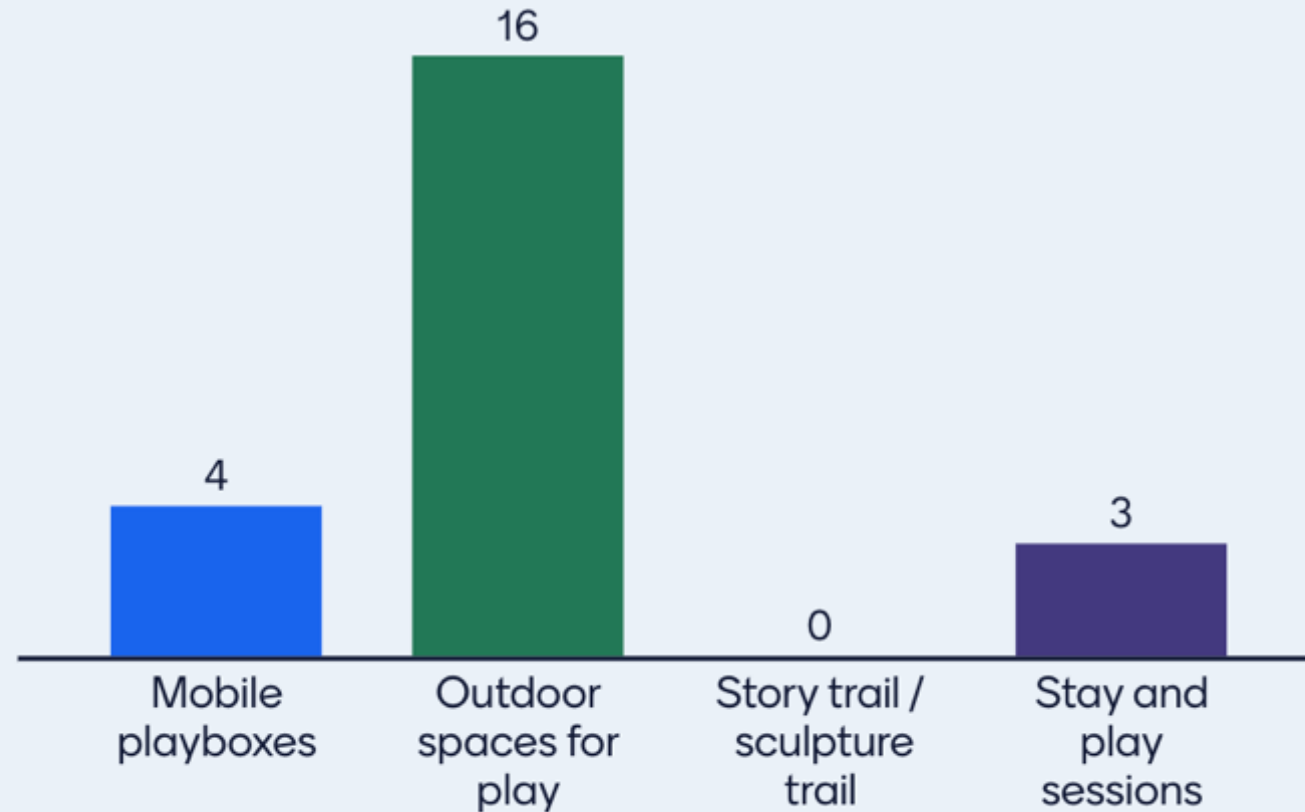


- Ely and Caerau in Cardiff was chosen as the 'place' for Ehangu.
- Action in Caerau and Ely (ACE) and Ely and Caerau Children's Centre (ECCC) were lead partners.
- Strengths, needs and opportunities in the local area were explored through a series of workshops and engagement events attended by children, parents, partners and professionals between March – December 2023



Photos above: Children and families voting for their favourite idea at the 'deciding the project' workshop in December 2023

Vote for your favourite idea!



'DAN Y COED' / 'UNDER THE TREES'

Role Play

Free
play

Creative
play

Loose
parts

Movement

MESSY PLAY

Pilot aims:

- safe, age-appropriate **space for <5s to play outside**
- **learning** through play
- **parents to connect** and support one another
- **building relationships and trust** between families with young children and young people



3 sites across Ely and Caerau:

- Diana Gardens
- ECCC gardens
- Ysgol Gymraeg Nant Caerau



25 young people from Cardiff West Community High School were involved with creating safe outdoor spaces and helped with set up and facilitation of play sessions.

Photo: Young people creating a safe play space at Diana Garden, Ely.

Dan y Coed outdoor play sessions began in April 2024 and ran throughout the spring and summer reaching:

- Over 244 children
- 160 adults
- 400+ participants during the 'Summer of Play' festival



Photo: Dan y Coed session at ECCC.



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EVALUATION AIM & METHODS

AIM: To measure the overall impact and effectiveness of the *Ehangu* approach and understand the impact on children, families, young people and professionals who participated in the Dan y Coed pilot project.

METHODS:

1. Group reflective sessions with partners on Ehangu approach and Dan y Coed delivery / sustainability (ACE, ECCC, Flying Start)
2. **Observations of children** and families who participated in Dan y Coed sessions
3. **Feedback from children**, families and young people
4. Reflections from partners on session delivery
5. Photographs, case studies and interviews.

Data collection took place between May and September 2024

‘DAN Y COED’ – IMPACT

What did families think of Dan y Coed sessions?



**I loved playing with the
playdough and the sand
It's my favourite!**

- Child, age 3.

Toddlers were inquisitive asking questions about the pond such as ‘Why are there sometimes ripples in the water?’”

- Partner observation



Photo: Children engaged in play during a Dan y Coed session at ECCC.



Sky from Cardiff West Community High School at ECCC, interviewed by Hywel Squires (ACE).



LEARNING HIGHLIGHTS: IMPACT OF 'DAN Y COED'

- Dan y Coed has created **safe, engaging** outdoor spaces in Ely and Caerau where babies, children and families can engage in **play, connect, and learn** together.
- **Barriers** have been **broken down** between families, young people and professionals – **Trust** has been built.
- **Children, young people and professionals** have grown in **confidence** and developed a range of new **skills**.
- Partners have realized the **true value** in **collaborative working** and sharing resources, experience and skills.
- The outdoor spaces created are now **community assets** to be used & developed further.

“

There was a child with additional learning needs and the mum said, 'he never plays with anybody' and she saw him interacting...and whether that was an outdoor environment that was letting him explore and play, not feel restricted. - Partner

”

“

I've noticed my granddaughter is more confident and has made new friends.

- Grandparent

”



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LEARNING HIGHLIGHTS: 'EHANGU'

- **Effective place-based collaboration requires shared values, trust, openness to new ways of working, and a focus on building strong relationships.**
- **Power should be shared, with all voices—especially children and families—equally contributing to the vision for change.**
- **Save the Children plays a key role in moderating power and ensuring communities lead decision-making.**
- **Non-transactional funding supports flexibility and fosters collaboration.**
- **Shared ownership of learning and evaluation helps to create an environment of continuous learning and adaptation.**

“

I've seen a change in their mindsets of sharing is good, collaborating is good, we can do more together.

Annamaria Bevan, ECCC

”

“

I think (without Save the Children) we would have struggled to have the voice of the community members, parents, in the same way and I think that's the big value added from STC.

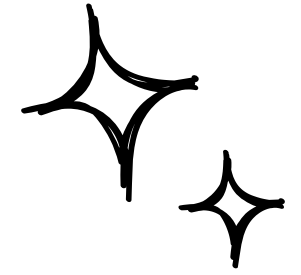
Sam Froud-Powell, ACE

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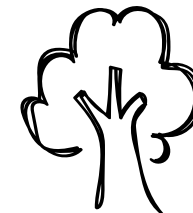
CONCLUSION



Collaborative Impact: Ehangu's place-based approach has fostered collaborative partnerships and community involvement, leading to positive changes for families and young children in Ely and Caerau.

Community Engagement Spaces: Projects like the Dan y Coed community garden offer safe, interactive spaces that encourage family connection, shared learning, and new play experiences.

Guiding Future Initiatives: Insights from this project, particularly around collaboration, shared leadership, and family-centered approaches, will shape future efforts to build resilient early childhood systems and supportive communities.



A young girl with dark hair, wearing a red and white patterned dress, is raising her right hand in a classroom setting. She is looking upwards with a focused expression. In the background, other students are visible, including a girl with long dark hair and another wearing a blue headscarf. The classroom has wooden walls and a window with colorful glass blocks. A large purple banner with the word 'QUESTIONS?' is overlaid on the image.

QUESTIONS?

THANK YOU



CONTACT US AND LEARN MORE

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