Creating a Safe Space to be Myself:

An Evaluation of the Children's Transition Group at CUBE

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Contents

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Introduction

Community United Barry 4 Everyone (CUBE) is a community enterprise in Barry, South Wales that was developed using co-production with the local community and professionals. CUBE operates from 'The Gallery' a multi-functional space that offers a 'one-stop' service centre and events setting embedded within a coffee house. CUBE continues to develop using a strong value base with coproduction and restorative approaches at its core, ensuring that the local community feel empowered and real ownership over what CUBE is, what it does, and where it might develop in the future. CUBE recognises the lived experience and expertise that the local community have of their own lives and the challenges they face and so believe that this should guide their practice and service provision for individuals and families.

Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre (CASCADE) at Cardiff University partnered with CUBE between 2021 and 2022 to evaluate the model of practice, the services, and the experiences of the CUBE team and the local community who engage with CUBE (Williams, Bayfield, and Lyttleton-Smith, 2022). One of the Key findings of the report (Williams, Bayfield, and Lyttleton-Smith, 2022: p3) stated that "The community have voiced a desire for extended services and must be included in honest discussions about what can be provided and co-produce how to make it happen." It was clear that following the findings of this report further engagement with the community of Barry was needed to understand what new and or extended services they felt were needed to meet their needs.

CUBE Community Needs

Since 2023 a potential range of needs had been identified with members of the CUBE / Barry community and the CUBE team. It was highlighted that there were three main demographics of the community that needed further support services and these were identified as:

1. Adult men aged over 25 who due to a complexity of factors do not access services to support their needs including: mental health, self-harm and suicidal ideation, masculinity and identity, parenting, socialisation, neurodiversity, family/partner relationships, cost of living, and employment.

2. Young Adults aged 18-25 who like the above adult men group are struggling with a range of issues, with perhaps a central feature being identity and belonging.

3. Children/Young People aged 10-15 who are also facing challenges and issues outlined above, including sexual identity issues, and due to covid have missed out on 'usual' transition experiences from primary to secondary school. These children/young people are presenting as disengaged from education, family, and healthy prosocial relationships.

Although the CUBE team had observed the needs of these groups, as well as hearing this from the local community, and so were confident that these three groups needed specific support; the values, ethos, and ethics of CUBE ensure that all new provision should be co-created with members of their community to ensure best practice and appropriate service development. Higher Plain Research and Education Ltd, an independent academic working within youth and community practice, facilitated a small-scale engagement to test, challenge, and better understand the needs of the three groups identified. Focus groups and informal interviews were achieved in July 2023 with a diverse range of community members.

A report was written for CUBE by Higher Plain Research and Education Ltd providing an overview of the engagement process and an analysis of the themes from the 18 different focus groups and informal interviews over the two days. This report captured a clear need for support services for children and young people.

Needs for Children (8-11)

During the two days only a small number of children were spoken to directly but they offered some strong and important narratives and these were supported by the perspectives of parents and practitioners that worked with children, parents, and or families.

Parental 'abandonment' and school bullying creating complex needs

The most common experiences for children in the community seemed to be dealing with the breakdown in the relationship with a significant family member and or dealing with the future transition to secondary school. Due to these two challenges, there were resultant behavioural, emotional, and psychological experiences including anxiety, anger, stress, depression, feelings of abandonment, and isolation and loss of control over their life.

One practitioner said that 'children need their basic needs supported, so feeling safe, feeling they belong, feeling love, and food and a home too. I think a lot of kids don't feel safe or that they belong' and many agreed and also pointed out that children are still treated as not fully human and that this needed to change and that 'children need to know how to be more assertive with adults and know their rights to say no and have choice' and that 'parents, family members, and teachers all need to know this too' and the feeling was that this power dynamic and treating children this way was a key reason so many children felt they couldn't speak up and ask for help.

One child talked about how they 'keep getting angry with it all and I need to learn to control my anger' but that they were 'getting better at it and I know it's not my fault now.' Indeed, the therapeutic work that CUBE offers with children, as well as the wider parenting support, and the welcoming coffee house environment meant that 'CUBE makes me feel safe and listened to' and so it's 'helped me overcome what's happening and understand it more.' There was real understanding of self from children and one child said that 'I need to be able to express myself and I used to be closed and not talking to people but CUBE helped me open up and talking about it makes me feel more in control.'

The impact of the CUBE therapeutic work was particularly powerful and all children spoken to felt they had changed positively with one child feeling much more confident and enjoying their life more and that 'I'm better at school now and not so upset, I'm enjoying school' and another stating that are 'feeling more calm, less angry, I talk about my feelings more.' The children who engaged were extremely articulate and showed real depth of understanding about how they were before support and where they were now they were accessing support and where they wanted to go to be fully happy and feeling positive. It is an observation as children do not use such language and terminology but the children illustrated a real reflective approach to their own development and a growing self-agency and empowerment over their own personal growth.

Increased need of services

Despite the clear positive experiences of children who are engaged with CUBE many felt that they 'need more of this type of support (one to one therapy) but I'd also like group stuff, fun stuff, the summer activities look fun.' Other children agreed, as did parents and some of the practitioners, and so an increase of current provision is arguably needed at CUBE as well as development of different more social and informal activities like those within the summer project.

Many parents and practitioners who were involved in discussions believed that CUBE could have even more impact if they worked with children transitioning to secondary school with one practitioner stating 'I see the younger ones, like 9, now starting to get worried about secondary school, it's like this big thing in the near future and it causes anxiety and stress.' Another agreed and said 'Yes totally, the younger ones who are a few years from secondary, they are maturing so much faster these days, starting puberty at 10 and all the social aspects too.' During this discussion several people spoke of the need for earlier transition work with children and many said that 'CUBE should work in schools helping transition to secondary and have stuff on at CUBE too including in the school holidays.' In relation to school themed support there were a great deal of conversations on bullying in schools and how there is so much work that is needed to challenge this negative experience for many within the school system. Many parents and practitioners said words similar to that there is 'so much bullying in schools if you are a bit different or even a bit quiet. More work is needed to support children in schools both primary and secondary' suggesting that CUBE could enter this space and offer such support services.

Needs of Young People (12 – 17)

Several young people engaged over the two days as well as perspectives gained from parents and practitioners offering some clear themes for consideration.

Feelings of belonging and mental health challenges

Young people seem to be experiencing 'so many challenges like social anxiety, isolation, relationship advice needs, you know what is a healthy relationship' as one practitioner summarised whilst another agreed and added that 'mental health especially, after covid, it's still not like it was, it's had a lasting effect' and that there 'is so much bullying in schools it's awful.' Other practitioners also highlighted how 'Cyber bullying is everywhere and it's so dangerous as they can get to you anywhere. It destroys young lives. So yeah something that helps young people with that is needed.'

Many parents and practitioners felt that 'there needs to be more for 13–16-year-olds so they have support, there is nothing in Barry' There were also some parents and practitioners that raised that a lot of young people, due to a range of reasons including the pandemic experience, family breakdown, bullying, and struggling with identity and belonging, were experiencing trauma and needed therapeutic intervention as well as wider young people's support services. Finally, many also felt that 'toxic masculinity stuff in young boys (aged 11-15) and you can see them living up and acting up to the stereotypes' and how these negatively affected girls and boys understandings of what was usual, 'normal' and expected in relationships.

Therapeutic support and self-agency development

When asked what services young people needed to support the challenges identified and discussed above many agreed, and although using different phrases and words, stated that they need services that supported 'anger management and positive displacement of anger with positive activities like football, or exercise, or music, or anything that's positive' and informal education work that explored 'gender stuff, sexuality, healthy relationships, consent, choice and respect.'

Several practitioners stated that in respect of LGBTQIA+ identities and gender identities 'there needs to be more education to simplify it all so there is choice, but not so it is so daunting that the choice can cause mental health issues, like anxiety and stress. You know for children, then young people, then adults too. Age-appropriate depth and simplicity when it is with children and young people.' Practitioners also felt they need support in understanding this more so they could support young people more effectively with one practitioner stating that 'practitioners find it difficult in the LGBTQIA+ and gender space as there are so many gender identities, I think I was told there are 100 now. Imagine having to think you need to choose a gender identity at 9 years old and thinking which of these 100 am I. It must be so stressful and overwhelming.'

Everyone agreed that more services were needed and perhaps the key needed service was therapeutic support such as counselling or child therapy. One practitioner stated that 'there's no hope going through your GP as it's like a year or so waiting list and unless your child has actually tried to kill themselves they often refuse to refer them, it's a joke, and then it can be too late.'

The young people who discussed their lives and challenges were very open and outlined their experiences which reflects those captured above. What was needed they felt were a range of services that gave them 'a toolkit really to help myself as there is so much going on' at CUBE where 'I feel safe, as it's friendly and known with familiar faces.' Young people also wanted somewhere they felt they belonged and more social 'fun' opportunities, with one young person illustrating this and voiced a want for 'more activities and social stuff like an open mic night, stand-up comedy, DJ workshop, day's out, sports stuff. I'd come and if people knew about here they'd come too. There's nothing like that for young people in Barry.'

Emerging need for support for neurodivergent young people

Although only one parent and two practitioners stated this need it is important to raise the issue of neurodiversity. One practitioner stated that 'It's new to me this, but I'm understanding that there is a lot of support needed with neurodiversity, so not just autism but all of it, you know.' The other practitioner agreed during this conversation and one parent said that 'a safe space for neurodivergent teens is needed' and that perhaps offering 'social opportunities to learn life skills.'

The development of the Criw CUBE Crew Teenagers Group

The CUBE's response to the Engagement Report in July 2023 was to listen to the community, illustrating their co-produced ethos, and they developed a project, in the words of the project lead,

> 'to give the children and young people a voice, a sense of belonging, an understanding and regulating of their emotions.'

The facilitators of the project co-created the project content and focus with children and young people from the Barry community who were interested in being part of the new group. The ask from the facilitators to this group of children and young people was what should they develop that would be helpful to them now and in the future and what might be helpful for other children and young people who might join the group at a later date.

CRIW / Crew Model of Practice

Criw / Crew Teenagers Club is an 8-week project that works on the theory of change, enabling Children and Young People to have a voice whilst being heard and feeling a sense of belonging and identity in their community. This project has been delivered bilingually by two fluent Welsh practitioners, Sarah Greenslade and Charlotte Jones. The project was facilitated both face-to-face and online so to meet the needs of the children and young people who participated.

The children and young people designed their own cover for their workbook & illustrated the internal pages how they wished so that they created a bespoke handbook for them to use after the group had finished.

The 8-week programme, as highlighted focused on meeting the needs that the engagement report highlighted and that the children and young people who were part of this first group shared that they needed. Ultimately,

> this project was aimed at creating a safe space where children and young people could develop a sense of belonging and gain increased self-awareness, self-agency, and well-being, using informal conversation within a flexible but themed learning syllabus, that was co-created with the children and young people

to meet their needs, which included:

Session 1 - I am Unique. (Identity)

Participants drew their fingerprint, along the lines of the fingerprint they wrote about themselves. The outcome was the participants were able to see how unique they were.

Session 2 - School, where do I fit in (Transition, Relationships & Identity)

This session focused on what makes it difficult to fit in at school. Participants recorded their worries which led to a discussion, the outcome was, everyone is different and that's ok.

Session 3 - Friendships (Relationships)

This session focused on friendships. "Do you still have the same friends now as you did when you were 5?" was asked. The discussion led to writing about a scenario of falling out with a friend and how they resolved the falling out. The participants were able to use a simple version of conflict resolution in this scenario.

Session 4 - What makes a good relationship?(Relationships)

This session focused on Trust, what is a relationship and how many different types of relationships they have in their lives. The outcome of the session was that the participants were able to understand how they are connected to different people.

Session 5 - Effective Communication (Conflict Resolution)

The participants used the three-part model of effective communication, ''Talking, Listening, and Understanding' in this session. The participants were able to express their needs, frustrations and resolve any conflict or arguments effectively making them more confident to tackle difficult situation in the future.

Session 6 - Gender Identity (Identity)

This session was discussion based on what is gender identity, pronouns-are they a good or bad thing. The desired outcome is for the participants to feel confident in using whatever pronoun they want & to be able to articulate their reasons without fear or worry.

Session 7 - Self Care

This session was developed by the group as it was important to them to discuss how we look after ourselves. Some of the participants found this difficult, their view on self-care was keeping the body clean. The outcome of this session was all participants were able to tell the difference between emotional and physical self-care.

Session 8 – Anger

This session focused on what situations make you angry and what can we do to understand our anger. The group were able to distinguish the different types of anger, how it felt in the body whilst developing their vocabulary for using different words for anger. The desirable outcome is that the participants are able to understand their triggers and be able to diffuse situations before anger takes over.

Aims of this Evaluation Report

The purpose of this small-scale evaluation of the new Criw / Crew Teenagers Club at CUBE is too evaluate the experiences and impact on the children and young people who engaged with this provision. This report will also highlight and discuss the understandings on the content, approach, process, and impact from the experiences of the CUBE practitioners that created and facilitated it. By achieving this the evaluation seeks to essentially assess the Criw / Crew Teenagers Club and what:

1. needs and challenges were for the children and young people who participated in the project and what impact the engagement in the project had on them;

2. learning there is from the project in terms of its approach, process, and content;

3. could be developed and / or added in future groups to support more effective practice

4. learning there is in this evaluation that relates to the wider literature on children's and young people transitions and youth work practice

Executive Summary

This evaluation report has captured the experiences and impact of the new pilot project for children and young people at CUBE in Barry, south Wales. This provision is called 'CRIW / CREW Teenagers CUBE' and is essentially a children and young people's group provision that supports the ongoing and varied transitions and other life experiences of the people that engage. All aspects of this project were co-created with the children and young people who are part of the group and this the includes the themes and areas of learning within the 8-week programme that was facilitated with the group.

The methodology of analysis for this evaluation used a qualitative approach as they are useful within social science and health research and have an important role to play in gaining deep understandings of the people that participate in them. Focus groups are commonly employed in social research with children and young people because they can, if effectively facilitated, create safe spaces for in-depth conversation. It has also been highlighted that they can mitigate against power imbalances between the researcher and children and young people (Alder et al, 2019; NSPCC, 2024; and UK Research and Innovation, 2023) that can occur in interview methods (Shaw et al, 2011). de St Croix and Doherty (2024) add that to really 'capture the magic' of youth work practice more innovative and inclusive methods must be used. This evaluation adhered to all of the ethical considerations discussed above and was in keeping with the British Sociological Association's (2017) statement of ethical practice for social research.

This evaluation report captures the experiences from the first children and young person transition group at CUBE that was facilitated between January 2024 and April 2024. The 8-week programme at CRIW / CREW was aimed to increase self-awareness and develop knowledge and skills to develop healthy responses to the challenges of transitions and wider life and deal with emotions and behaviours in more positive

ways. The programme had a strong focus on understanding anxiety, depression and sadness, and anger and angry behaviours and being able to better cope with these experiences in positive ways. The project also focused on developing positive self-esteem and confidence and a healthy self-image. All of these themes for learning were aimed at

> supporting the children and young people to feel greater control and empowerment over their lives so they could feel greater connection, belonging, and resilience within school, with their peers, within the families and community, and when on their own.

The outcomes captured within the focus groups with the CRIW / CREW group and CUBE practitioners and within the case studies illustrates that the transition approach effectively and powerfully supports the children and young people in their lives which are complex and have multiple challenges and layers. The outcomes have specifically supported children and young people to take healthy 'ownership' and agency over the transitions in their lives, the ACE's they have and or are currently experiencing, and develop a sense of belonging and positive self-identity they had not experienced before engagement with the CRIW / CREW both in terms of their individual identities, their CRIW group community, within their families and feeling a real part of the CUBE community within Barry, south Wales.

This evaluation report has found that

> the CRIW / CREW project is a high-quality practice example of a children's and young person transition project that supports ACE's using trauma-informed practice, whilst also embodying what is characterized as good youth work practice.

These findings should not be taken lightly and it is clearly a well thought out project that uses co-production and a strong understanding of the theory, policy, and practice of high-quality work with children and young people.

There is strong evidence that this project should continue and develop to meet further needs of children and young people in the Barry locality. The successful and effective 'blending' of a therapeutic approach with such a strong programme of learning that also implements good youth work practice is to be commended and this model of practice could be utilized in other localities and within other services including family focused provision within social services and youth justice.

Recommendations for Future Practice

1. Evaluation report findings should be shared with appropriate practitioners, academic, service commissioners, senior leaders, and policy practitioners within networks, forums, symposiums, and conferences.

2. The project should continue in the long-term and secure funding to ensure this

3. The project could viably have two age range groups to support deeper learning for both younger and older cohorts in relation to age-appropriate themes and experiences.

4. This model of practice would be an ideal approach within a whole-family service and or youth justice setting and this should be explored with appropriate partners.

5. This project should be implemented into the Side-by-Side whole family restorative practice model and provision at CUBE.

Approach to Evaluation & Research

The methodology of analysis for this evaluation used a qualitative approach. Adler et al (2019) states that qualitative methods are useful within social science and health research and have an important role to play in gaining deep understandings of the people that participate in them. Alder et al (2019) also highlights that focus groups are an effective tool for research with children and young people and the use of a focus group was the chosen method for this evaluation.

> Focus groups are commonly employed in social research with children and young people because they can, if effectively facilitated, create safe spaces for in-depth conversation.

It has also been highlighted that they can mitigate against power imbalances between the researcher and children and young people (Alder et al, 2019; NSPCC, 2024; and UK Research and Innovation, 2023) that can occur in interview methods (Shaw et al, 2011). de St Croix and Doherty (2024) add that to really 'capture the magic' of youth work practice more innovative and inclusive methods must be used.

Alder et al (2019) propose that ethical considerations in conducting focus groups with children and young people is the same as other qualitative methods but needs to be thought out to meet the needs, experiences, and capacity of this cohort. It is therefore important that there is a consideration on how to best assess for informed consent, how to provide a full and understood explanation of the purposes of the focus group, and that participation is genuinely voluntary and that a person understands that they can withdraw at any time. The focus group facilitator also needs to highlight if there are any risks and or potential to cause harm due to the participation in the focus group. Finally, the focus group participants need to understand whether what is shared during the focus group is confidential and that anonymity will be maintained (Alder et al, 2019; NSPCC,

2024; and UK Research and Innovation, 2023). All of the children and young people who participated in the focus group were spoken to about the reasons for the focus group and the themes for discussion. The children and young people's right to be part of the focus group or not was highlighted and if there were any risks or potential for cause of harm. We discussed this and the children and young people thought there was little risk or potential for harm as the focus group themes related to their experiences of the new CRIW / CREW group and they all stated they were happy to be involved in the focus group. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed to all participants and it was explained that there would be no use of names and that some details would be changed or removed to ensure anonymity.

So that the children and young people felt comfortable and that they knew the focus group facilitator they met the facilitator a month before the focus group. The focus group facilitator introduced themselves and then played an 'ice-breaker' game of getting to know each other based on hobbies, music, and more general life. It is also important to note that the focus group facilitator is a nationally qualified youth worker and an experienced inclusive social researcher and so this also supported ethical practice that was focused on the needs and rights of the children and young people who participated.

It has also been found that when conducting focus groups with children the use of simple language with concrete questions are most effective (NSPCC, 2024; Sandberg et al, 2017; and UK Research and Innovation, 2023). An example of such language has been provided by Lund et al (2016) who advises that for focus groups with younger children that the use of questions with 'what' or 'how' and support with prompts such as 'what does everyone else think?' or 'Do others have different ideas.' The focus on the use of age-appropriate language that is simple is a common theme in the guidance literature (NSPCC, 2024; and UK Research and Innovation, 2023). The focus group questions and themes for this evaluation was mindful of the need for such language and ensured such language and phrases were used because the age range of the group was 9 to 13.

The timing of a focus group has also been found to be important when facilitating with children and young people and the timing should consider the lives of the people taking part. It

has also been captured that good practice in terms of size, duration, and location for a focus group with children is ideally four to six children and or young people, for up to 60 minutes and at a location that is known and appropriate to the all members (Alder et al, 2019; and NSPCC, 2024). The focus group with the children and young people for this evaluation took place at the usual time of the CRIW / CREW provision (which was chosen to meet the children and young people's needs), at the usual location based within the community, and the focus group took 50 minutes with five children and young people participating in the focus group (with one participating online) and so adhered to best practice guidelines.

The focus group themes for discussion were guided by the transition project lead in terms of experiences and challenges observed in the children and young people during the project duration and of course by the use of appropriate literature to support a short but thematically relevant range of themes to discuss.

There was also the facilitation of a practitioner focus group which included both of the practitioners that supported the children and young people within the CRIW / CREW transition group and so this also adds another layer and depth to the evaluation of this project.

This evaluation adhered to all of the ethical considerations discussed above and was in keeping with the British Sociological Association's (2017) statement of ethical practice for social research.

This evaluation report captures the experiences from the first children and young person transition group at CUBE that was facilitated between January 2024 and April 2024.

Analysis & Discussion

Following the focus group with the children and young people the discussions were analysed and their experiences of their lives as well as those from participating in the CRIW / CREW group were captured within seven themes. The themes that have been constructed include the challenges they experience in their lives and then in respect of the engagement with CRIW / CREW how they have developed: a stronger sense of self, feelings of social connectivity and belonging, increased happiness and life satisfaction, developing knowledge and skills to better regulate their emotions and behaviour, and finally feeling more empowered to engage with their lives in positive ways.

Children and Young People's challenges in their Lives

There was high commonality across the group in the challenges that they faced in their daily lives. Indeed, most of the children and young people shared that they experienced high anxiety, worrying about their futures, feelings of anger and acting out aggressively, and that they often felt 'burnt-out.' The reasons that the children and young people gave for feeling like this was due to a number of factors including; bullying at school, feeling that they weren't normal, and due to not feeling they could be their true selves very often through fear of judgement and not fitting in with their peers, there was also some reference to home life being stressful.

One young person who had recently had a diagnosis of autism explained that at school and in other social settings that

> 'I mask a lot and it's hard to understand how I feel as I make myself feel certain ways. I'm not sure how to act. It's exhausting.'

Another young person who had also received the same diagnosis agreed and said 'I mask when I'm really scared, mostly in school when I feel I don't fit. I've never really had friends.' Another young person said 'I feel condemned to act like I'm normal and I'm so worried about me for later school life as I just want to be me and not get bullied masking who I am is so tiring.'

Another theme was that was highlighted was being bullied at school for 'well people say I'm gay and so they bully me about that' and a few of the other young people added 'yeah, me too.' There was not much conversation on homophobic bullying but it was clearly an issue that the young people were experiencing and maybe they didn't feel able to discuss this in any depth. You will see from the case studies and the practitioner focus group that this is indeed a negative experience that this group of young people are experiencing.

Another young person highlighted the general pressure of the school and the home environment and felt that 'I'm always at school or at home and I have to be good in those places, it's hard. I don't get a break.' One of the other young people agreed and added

> 'it just feels so much and I used to get really angry with everything and lost it and couldn't control it, then I'd get into trouble.'

This led to a discussion and agreement amongst the group that they found life quite hard 'I'm just often worried or anxious and it all feels too much' another added 'yeah me too and I get sad.'

Developing a stronger sense of self

The group all acknowledged that since coming to the CRIW / CREW that they could 'be more open and just be myself' another young person said that 'I don't have to mask here and I'm more me.' All of the group also said that they felt 'more confident and know it's ok to be who I am' and sentences similar to 'I like me now, it feels ok to be me.'

There were also experiences where the young people felt they couldn't be their true selves in social situation like with peers or within school settings. One young person explained, when talking about masking their self that 'well I've got to play the game really, like be a certain way so it's easier for me to not stand out, be different, you know, um, like smile and try to read the situation and act the right way.' This young person repeated phrases throughout the focus group about how 'exhausting it all is to pretend to be someone else at school just to get by and fit in' some of the other young people agreed. One young person added, 'that's why this is so good as we can just all come and just be, it's fun, its easy and I don't have to pretend.'

Feelings connected and belonging

Many of the young people shared how they didn't have many or any real friends until the start of CRIW / CREW due to not feeling they are accepted at school or in other young people's groups or clubs. One young person said

> 'I feel close to my family but I've never had friends or a best friend, but now I do, everyone here in this group is really cool and they're all my friends.'

All of the young people responded to this and agreed with 'no you're cool' and 'yeah we're all so close here' or similar phrases.

It is important to highlight how disconnected the young people felt they were from the school environment and their wider social world where they felt they didn't belong and couldn't be themselves. There was clearly a great deal of pressure felt and energy used up by the young people who were part of the focus group in simply surviving in such settings. Many of the CRIW / CREW group had recently had a diagnosis of neurodiversity with autism and ADHD being the two main diagnosis. The young people identified that it was due to their conditions that they felt it was hard to fit in at school and how it affected their ability to make friends and feel a sense of belonging in a space. One young person captured this clearly when they said,

> 'I just find it hard to not mask as I feel uncomfortable a lot of the time, but I want to make it easy for everyone so I mask, but then that's not me, so I never feel like I belong anywhere, but now I do. I belong here, I feel so much calmer when I'm here.'

Another important element to the group was having 'our own space away from everything' and one young person added 'I love my family but they are annoying too and so I need this space to get away and just chill.' Everyone laughed at this but all agreed that 'our own space is important, its ours, its safe and its fun being all together.'

The way that the CUBE facilitators made the group feel and how important this was to the group was also powerfully evident. One young person said 'it's not like school or home I'm respected here, they listen, they don't judge'

another agreed and joined in with 'yeah and I feel safe and it's our group our community'. Another young person stated that 'well I feel respected by my family but it's different here, it's really supportive, and cool, it's ours.' Again a few of the group added 'and we helped create it, we designed the logo and the name, it's so cool.'

Increased happiness and life satisfaction

When discussing what the CRIW / CREW group had been like for them and how it has supported them it was really clear that the whole group had increased in their general happiness and life satisfaction. The discussion at this point became a bit of a 'free for all' and all of the young people spoke out phrases illustrating this including; 'It's helped me and helped my confidence, they're great here, Sarah and Charlotte are the best, helped with my diagnosis,

> I look forward to this every week, I'm happier now more me, It's given me confidence to be me and just accept me and be me at school, I worry less and smile more, I'm less anxious and don't feel like I'm going to explode everywhere,

I'm cagillians more relaxed and happy now, life is just better and easier, I'm so much more positive now and life is good.'

It is important to break this down a little and highlight that these phrases illustrate an increase in self-identified personal happiness and life satisfaction but also arguably captures how the young people have developed greater hope and optimism for their lives and futures and have started to like and accepts who they are more. All of these elements are fundamental for positive well-being as has been captured in the literature discussed later in this report.

Developing knowledge and skills to support negative emotions and behaviour

The programme of learning that has been co-created with the CRIW / CREW group, outlined above within the 'development of the CRIW / CREW section' creates an informal environment to provide the children and young people a voice, a sense of belonging, and focuses on raising awareness of self to gain better understanding and regulation of their emotions so that they can feel more empowered within their lives. Due to this one of the themes for discussion related to the programme of learning and what it was like for the young people.

One young person said 'I like being kind but I can't always control my anger and so I used to get angry a lot but I'm better at controlling that now.' Another young person agreed and shared that

> 'we've learnt a tool box here, a tool box for life, it helps us deal with stuff like homophobic bullying, school, family, my diagnosis and how all this makes me feel. I can calm myself now and slow it down and think and talk.'

Feeling more Empowered

The sessions with CRIW / CREW meant that over the course of the programme of learning the young people increased their confidence, self-esteem, and became more comfortable in their identities and able to be themselves with feeling judged. The group also gained knowledge and understanding on their emotions and behaviours and were better able to regulate these and learnt tools for calming down and thinking more clearly. In this way the experiences during the programme of learning meant that by the end of the 8-weeks all of the children and young people felt better able to engage with their worlds. They highlighted how they could make more informed choices because they knew how their emotions and behaviours worked. They shared that they had a safe space they could explore who they were in, without judgement and with peer and practitioner support. All of these areas of increased understanding and growth indicate greater self-agency and empowerment for their current and future lives. One young person illustrates this well when they said

'before CRIW I would worry a lot about myself at school and the future, would I need to pretend and not really relax and be me, I worried if I was me it would ruin my future in school and later in life'

with college and just forever really. I'm better now as I know that I can be me and that's it ok to be different and it's other people's problems if they don't understand me or like me. I can only be happy if I'm all me.' Another young person explained how school had changed for them and that 'I'm happier now, more confident, I can join in more at school now and I couldn't before, it's getting easier for me.'

Within a family setting there was also evidence of feeling empowered and one young person happily explained that

'I used to get so angry, a lot, and I couldn't control it and I'd get aggressive and take it out on my family. But now I've learnt a tool box of things and so when I feel bad or start to get angry I take myself away and draw, I do slow breathing, then I can talk about it not just get angry or lose it.'

Welsh Language

The fact that the CRIW / CREW group is a bilingual language provision was also highlighted as really important. Many of the group spoke Welsh and for some it was their first language and so being able to communicate in the language they were most comfortable in was so important as it was part of their identities. There was not much discussion on this theme but it was simply spoken about as needed and as one young person said in a matter-of-fact way, 'well we're Welsh, we speak Welsh, so CRIW needed to support Welsh too obviously.'

Using colour to explain own development and personal change

As a final exercise or game, the focus group facilitator asked each member of CRIW / CREW what colour they were at the start of joining the group and now at the end of the group. The colours below show the change and all of the young people explained they used a colour they really didn't like at the start and that in a way represented themselves. The red represented unhappy and angry, the ugly yellow was that the young person felt that way, the grey was because their life was dull and not happy, the muted brown represented mud and feeling stuck, and the dark blue was related to feeling unhappy and sad.

As you can see the final colours at the end of the project are brighter and again all of the children spoke of how they felt brighter, better, happier, and all used their favourite colours to represent who they are now.

Red to **Green**

Ugly Yellow to **Pastel Yellow**

Grey to **Green**

Muted Brown to **Yellow**

Dark Blue to **Burgundy**

Practitioner Experiences

The lead for this project provided an overview of what they felt the children and young people were going through in their lives who had accessed the CRIW / CREW group to support the development of focus group themes for discussion. They stated that the children and young people have faced many challenges and these have included:

- struggling with their Identity as they have come out as part of the

- LGBTQIA+ community at a young age;

- general anxiety with many children transitioning from primary school to secondary school. This anxiety starts at year 5 and follows onto year 6 and then into the start of their first year of high school;

- difficulty dealing with the after effects of the pandemic hard and are grieving for the life they had, family members who may have died during lockdown, and missing out on being at school and taking part in social activities.

After the 8-week programme for CRIW / CREW had finished a focus group was facilitated with the transition group practitioners. Their experiences and observations were captured of the project including: the challenges children and young people were facing; the focus, approach, and process of the 8-week programme; the impact they observed in the children and young people; and professional challenges and CRIW / CREW project needs going forward. All facilitators for the project were part of this focus group which was made up of the two facilitators.
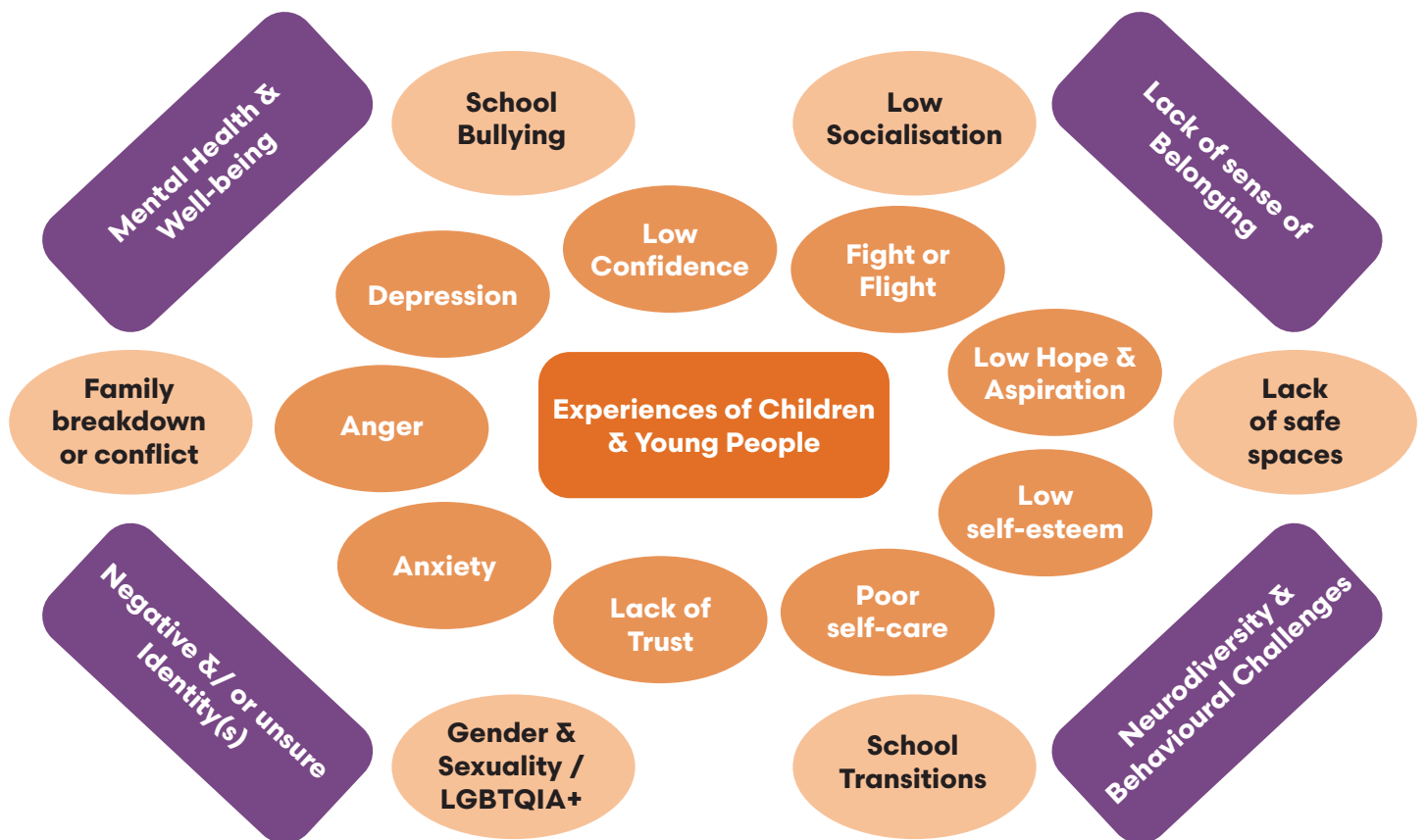
Children and Young People's challenges and experiences

The discussion with the project practitioners highlighted a significant range of challenges and experiences that the children and young people were going through who accessed the CRIW / CREW group. The 'list' of challenges was long but the overarching themes were that

the children and young people were struggling with finding a sense of belonging within their lives both at home, within school and more socially with peers,

dealing with new neurodiversity and or behavioural diagnosis, general mental health and well-being and how all of these challenges meant that they were all experiencing difficulty in the development of individual positive identity(s) and 'were unsure of who they were or afraid perhaps of who they were.' This is captured in the below diagram illustrating the overarching thematic challenges in green, and the secondary lived experience contexts in blue, with the feelings and emotions that the practitioners explained the children and young people had due to all of these influences in red.

Mental Health & Well-being

School Bullying

Low Socialisation

Lack of sense of Belonging

Low Confidence

Depression

Fight or Flight

Low Hope & Aspiration

Lack of safe spaces

Family breakdown or conflict

Anger

Experiences of Children & Young People

Low self-esteem

Anxiety

Lack of Trust

Poor self-care

Negative &/ or unsure Identity(s)

Gender & Sexuality / LGBTQIA+

School Transitions

Neurodiversity & Behavioural Challenges

It's clear when reflecting on the image above that the young people engaged with CRIW / CREW are facing a great deal in their lives with multiple transitions. This was described by the practitioner team as

'multiple and ongoing transitions, so not just primary to secondary school but other transitions like puberty and adolescent development, family transitions in terms of family structure, but also broader identity transitions which include neurodiversity diagnosis and understanding own sexuality and gender.'

All of these transitions, contexts of lived experiences meant that all of the CRIW / CREW group experienced most of the emotions captured above in red and it is fair to state that this was exhausting and stressful for them.

The focus, approach, and process of the 8-week programme

When discussing the model of practice that the CRIW / CREW transition group project practitioners use to support children and young people there was a clear approach and process. One of the practitioners said that the underlying theory was the theory of change and that the way they used the model was

'well we work with the children to identify their challenges and where they want to go, what do they need and want. Then we work with them to achieve that.'

The whole programme and CRIW was built from their experiences, wants, needs, and ideas. That's how we developed the 8-week program in essence.'

When asked for more explanation or what did the programme 'do' and how did it work, the practitioners explained that it worked alongside the group to 'reflect in our group and share what's going on in their lives and what their problems, worries, and challenges are' and the other practitioner agreed and added 'then we support the children and they support each other in problem solving, working out goals and solutions to help those worries and challenges, we use scenarios quite a lot to act out, try out, different solutions or ways to deal with the things they're going through, like being angry or anxious.' It was asserted that 'this work always

starts from where the young people are at, sometimes it's simple fun stuff and other times it deeper. There is a syllabus or themes within the programme but this was created at the start through co-production with the group and it changes during the project based on their needs.' One of the practitioners added that

'in essence the programme is aimed at raising self-awareness, understanding brain functioning and behaviours and then learning ways to support healthy behaviours in relation to emotions and feelings. It's giving children the tools to take control and feel empowered.'

They have so much going on and after covid, the normal transition to secondary or just being in school is all quite stressful and it's not been normal with covid, if you get me. But I must add it's also about fun and it's not all therapeutic stuff, sometimes we just do art, eat cake, and just chat!.'

When discussing the environment of CRIW / CREW the practitioners pointed out that the CRIW / CREW is 'a safe space, no judgement, not a school feel, confidential and away from their stressors and that could be school, peers, family, all of it, it's a space for them and it's owned by them, it's theirs.'

Impact observed in the children and young people

Both of the practitioners summarised that 'the first running of this has just been amazing, it really has, the change in the children has been remarkable' and the other practitioner responded, 'absolutely, it's been so powerful to see the changes and the group have been so supportive of each other they really helped each other, they're all really close friends now and they never had that, many of them have said they never had a friend until this group.'

When asked for what changes have they observed in the group, the response from both practitioners was that they had 'seen the young people just grow, grow in confidence, self-esteem, and hope' it was added that

'they are just so much happier and they are enjoying their lives, better experiences in school, at home, and how they see themselves, much more positive.'

It was also raised that 'through the programme the young people are getting to know themselves better and learn how to help themselves during stress, anger, and just the day to day of life, which they found stressful' the other practitioner agreed and added that 'it's all that and they have become more assertive, they say they have life plans now and are looking forward to the future, they have purpose and goals.' It was also highlighted that the group had developed better communication skills and were 'better at listening, talking, sharing ideas even if they didn't agree' and they 'were able to now able to resolve conflicts more appropriately.'

The friendships that had been developed over the 8-weeks was clearly a powerful outcome experienced by the CRIW / CREW group as many had never had a friend before as highlighted above. Indeed, all of the group struggled with social contexts and lack of peer friendships. One of the practitioners shared that 'I might get emotional but you can see they are all so close, they are really there for each other and not just that but they all get on and have fun, it's a safe space to share the deep stuff but it's more than that too it's a friendship space that they've never had.

> They belong, they feel it and just think we have young people here with autism who couldn't give you eye contact and now they come in on their own and order a drink and cake and speak to everyone at CUBE, it's just amazing.'

The other practitioner agreed and added 'it's not just us though that is saying this, it's the children themselves and the parents too, they can't believe how positive it's been for their children.'

Professional learning and CRIW / CREW Project Needs

The final theme for discussion with the CRIW / CREW practitioners was their own professional learning and what was needed going forward for the transition project.

In terms of professional 'personal' learning there was a useful discussion on how the group has needed them as practitioners to use their broad and deep 'bank' of knowledge and skills. One of the practitioners stated that 'I've had to use my experience in education and school settings, as well as my knowledge on child and adolescent development, and combine it all, it's second nature but now we're talking about it, it's complex.' The practitioners and the facilitator talked about reflective practice and both of the practitioners felt that whilst facilitating the group they were outwardly relaxed and 'chatty' but they were also observing body language and verbal cues and questioning how to respond to certain conversations and offer support whilst giving space. It was clear a lot of reflection was present and the practitioners agreed that they were 'reflecting in action' in the moment and that this was the 'second nature' that they referred to.

In terms of the CRIW / CREW transition group both of the practitioners were positive that it needed to continue. One of the practitioners said 'they need this, socially for most it's all they have, and it is their only safe space away from school, peers, and family, it's their safe space.' The other practitioner agreed and added

> 'let's not forget they are all still going transitions and they will continue to, for some it will be puberty and secondary school next and for the older ones it will be GCSE's, college, and beyond. Transitions don't stop and so CUBE needs to support this as an ongoing provision.'

The focus group facilitator highlighted the age range of the group and that it included primary and secondary school age children and young people and asked if they thought it would be useful for two groups. The practitioners thought that it would be good but only if there were enough children and young people to justify this, and one said 'yeah absolutely, this is just the first running of the 8-week programme and so with more word of mouth and getting it out there it

could easily be two groups and that would make sense.' The other practitioner added 'this group has worked really well but maybe we would have talked about gender and sexuality a bit more deeply if it was just the older young people, we did discuss it but it was more surface level stuff really.'

Another development that was suggested was that the older young people could act as mentors for younger children and young people as the CRIW / CREW developed and that the older young people had already suggested this and were keen to take on that sort of role when the second running of the 8-week programme started.

Both facilitators also highlighted a need that the weekly sessions should be longer and more one and half hours to two hours so there could be a more consistent space for socialisation and other 'fun' activities like hobbies, crafts, other leisure activities, and music. One of the practitioners reflected that 'the 8-week programme has been really effective and so this needs to continue but you can tell they also really liked the times it was more play and fun based and they've asked for that and so we should be able to give that space to them.' The other practitioner agreed and said 'yeah the therapeutic stuff is brilliant but as we've said this has become their only friendship space too so we should support that more fully and in its way it is therapeutic and supports their happiness, personal growth and well-being.'

The final need highlighted by both practitioners was the need for a long-term sustainable project and therefore more funding was needed to ensure CRIW / CREW continued and grew as was needed to meet the needs of children and young people in the Barry and CUBE community.

Case Studies of Children and Young People who access the Transition Group

Case Study One

History:

"David" is an 11-year-old bilingual CYP. He originally accessed CUBE for support for anxiety. During his session it was apparent that he didn't fit in anywhere as he saw himself as different. The Transition group was suggested as part of his IDP (Individual Development Plan) for when he start high school in September. The group has been a very positive experience for him, he looks forward to coming every week, knows that it is a safe space and the topics we discuss are relevant to him.

How they have changed

Practitioner: Become more self-aware, not so angry with everyone and everything now he has an ASD (Autistic Spectrum Disorder) diagnosis. He doesn't feel labelled he feels he is now prepared for whatever life throws at him; he knows now how to deal with it.

Young Person: Look forward to coming to group, a better understanding of their ASD diagnosis.

Peers: Would make a really good best friend, even more cool than when we first met him.

Outcome: By the end of the pilot "David" was very much at ease with facing the challenge of high school. "David" was happy that he had made a friend who already attends his new high school and said he was really looking forward to seeing a face he knew on the first day of high school. The group has given "David" confidence in being able to be his true self and not to be labelled as someone who has ASD.

Feedback from parent.

We've certainly seen a difference in our son and are pleased he's been able to join and partake in Criw CUBE. He's been supported by CUBE and other interventions of late, CUBE has specifically helped him with:

> He is more balanced, content, and calm and able to walk away from situations that would have enflamed him previously. He's more attuned with his emotions and is reflective in his approach to social situations.

Whilst he doesn't share the specifics of Criw Cube with us - we loved seeing his book and now understand why his self-care and hygiene has improved and have a better understanding of what pushes his buttons. He loves CUBE and we were touched to hear from his school receptionist who recently dropped him off at a session that he was clearly very "much at home at CUBE". Diolch

Case Study Two

History:

"Ellie" is a 14-year-old bilingual; CYP. They originally came to CUBE to develop a better understanding of social situations and social anxiety. They were socially isolated due to a diagnosis of ASD. The transition group has given them a safe environment to be able to make friends, understand socially acceptable behaviours and be themselves. They identify as non-binary and uses they/them pronouns, they were very happy that their pronouns were never challenged and were accepted.

How they have changed

Practitioner: Far more confident, no social anxiety talking to peers,

Young Person: Liked making new friends and being with people the same as them. (ASD Diagnosis)

Peers: Really cool person, funny, friendly, a really good friend.

Outcome: "Ellie" has gained so much from the group. "Ellie" has become so much more self-confidence, from talking to people she has never met before, making significant eye contact and being able to be "Ellie" with no judgement or fear of rejection. This has been a wonderful experience to be part of.

Feedback from parent.

CUBE has given my child a place to go, where they feel safe, loved and far from different. Humour is accepted and encouraged. Tears if needed are accepted and encouraged. No question is too big and no hug is ever small.

> More importantly - it's a weekly date to keep, to look forward too. Something that gets my child out of the house. Something that doesn't require my child to be anything else but themself.

We would love to think this would be an ongoing support, especially during term time, as my child finds school so draining - and needs that thing to look forward too.

Before CUBE, my child didn't look at people. Now, my child sees people, recognises a friend.

Before CUBE and the gallery, my child couldn't make a choice. At CUBE, my child has their own drink and makes smaller choices, like what cake to have. This is just massive, in ways that I cannot even explain.

Sarah, I cannot thank you enough! Or Charlotte and Ffion - you have given my child a sample of life and how it can be with support - and it's not half bad!

Case Study Three

History:

"Billy" is a 12-year-old male, he originally attended CUBE due to emotional dysregulation. He has been diagnosed with ADHD and ASD. He also displayed a disconnect at times from his mum, which was triggering his anger outbursts. He had just started at a local school, after some time away from mainstream school, he was struggling to make and maintain friendships. It was also evident that he was not coping with the structure of mainstream school.

"Billy" attended 6x 1:1 sessions where we focused on our own emotions, we looked at emotional intelligence and the brain, we looked in detail at the brain and how our fight/flight/freeze will often hijack our logical thinking and result in us reacting to situations rather than respond to them. We looked at strategies to support ourselves to making choices about our behaviour.

After the 6 sessions, it was evident that "Billy" would benefit from further support, focusing on school life, friendships, identity and belonging, it was decided he would be a good candidate for "Criw CUBE Crew".

How they have changed

Practitioner; "Billy" settled well into group, it was evident from the start that he felt

comfortable and relaxed within the setting. He was able to recognise that the other children were a lot like him. "Billy" was at ease and engaged throughout, and contributed to group discussions and independent questions.

Young Person; I love coming to group, I look forward to being myself, I don't have to worry about being sensible like in school, because Charlotte and Sarah let me be myself. I have made new friends, who are just like me. "Billy " said he would love to come back to CUBE.

Peers; The group said that "Billy" was funny and a bit hyper but he has become more "Chilled". He doesn't swear as much as he did at the start of group. He is really nice to be around.

Outcome

By the end of the group sessions, it was evident that "Billy" had gained a wealth of strategies to manage his difficulties, and negative thoughts about himself. "Billy" was more confident about his own identity, he expressed that moving forward, he would be able to manage his self-regulation better, as he realised that he could be himself and that was "okay". He had a sense of belonging, which he expressed. It has been a pleasure working with such a lovely boy, whose struggles have been lessened due to the commitment to the group.

Feedback from parent

I just wanted to reach out to tell you how much the transition group you ran, has helped my son.

As you know he has struggled for years to make friends and 'fit in' with people. Every transition for him has been a struggle. From Junior School to High School, from one class, to a different class. From being a two-parent family, to a single parent family. The transition from child to teen. They have all taken their toll on him.

> My son doesn't express his emotions in the same way you or I do. To be honest, he spends a lot of his time quite dysregulated and in a constant state of flight of flight mode. I just wanted to say your little group has been the ONLY thing he has looked forward to going to.

Seriously though, he has flourished somewhat in the past few weeks. He is more able to work out his feelings. It has also helped him to think through the past few days in school and work

out why X Y and Z may have happened.

Children learn and understand things better when engaged, and I'm not sure how you did it (I think the hot chocolate and cake helped), but he has learnt a LOT more about himself.

I just wanted to say many many thanks to you, Charlotte, Lisa and all at CUBE, for everything you do.

Your groups would be beneficial if run in all schools where children are dysregulated and struggling with their emotions.

Thank you.

Case study Four
History:

"Kevin" is a 10-year-old boy, who originally attended CUBE due to heightened anxiety. He was struggling in school, and was unable to self-regulate in certain circumstances. "Kevin" would become anxious about daily life; he would often fall behind school tasks as he would be consumed by his anxious thoughts. "Kevin" was also struggling with being bullied due to his timid nature, and being a "people pleaser", he would often look to adults for validation rather than gaining friendships. "Kevin" has ASD traits, but hadn't had a diagnosis.

"Kevin" attended 6x sessions of our "Understanding Anxiety" group, it was evident that he struggled to focus on tasks in school from discussion about his worries. He masked very well, and would appear confident. During the sessions we looked at emotional intelligence, where we focused on our own emotions, we looked in detail at the brain and how our fight/flight/freeze will often hijack our logical thinking and result in us reacting to situations rather than respond to them. We looked at strategies to support ourselves to think more logically.

After the 6 sessions, it was evident that "Billy" would benefit from further support, focusing on school life, friendships, identity and belonging, it was decided he would be a good candidate for "Criw CUBE Crew". "Kevin" attended the group sessions via TEAMS, as he was unable to travel to The Gallery at this present time. His workbook and material was posted to him.

How they have changed

Practitioner: "Kevin" was quiet at first during the sessions, but he soon became comfortable with the members of the group. He was engaged throughout, and would communicate with the

group when prompted, by week 3, "Kevin" was more settled, and the rest of the group included him in conversation.

Young Person: I loved being a part of the group, I have learnt so much about being myself, I feel more confident and things that bothered me in school, don't anymore. I used to be quite anxious about school, but I'm okay now. I feel calmer and don't worry so much about what other people think of me.

Peers; The group said that "Kevin" has "grown up" , they thought he was a bit quiet but they now feel he is loads more confident and the group would really like to meet him in person.

Outcome

By the end of the group sessions "Kevin" had blossomed, he went from being a quiet child, to one who spoke with confidence and maturity. He had developed a sense of identity and belonging. He no longer had anxiety surrounding school, he had adopted a new way of logical thinking, and was able to use strategies to support this. "Kevin" is a lovely boy who has been committed to the group, and as a result, he can see the changes himself.

Feedback from parent

> I believe the pilot scheme has been very beneficial to my son. It has made him aware of his own feelings, recognising them himself and understanding them.

Doing the worksheet 'What pushes my buttons' really made him think about this.

The checklist is a great idea, even though we do some at home, with someone else reinforcing it, it encouraged him to do it more. Also emphasized bodily changes that will start happening whilst also transitioning to comprehensive school. It is nice to see him express his worries/concerns within a group as with any child sometimes they don't want to with parents.

I have to say my son has spoken a lot more about comprehensive and is more keen to ask question at home and in school. I have noticed he is finding the friendship groups in school slightly easier. He has 2 long term friends, however he has been mixing with a lot more people and he has told me it's the triangle, where he listens and tries to take others feelings into consideration.

The session on gender I do believe should be gauged on an individual basis, taking into consideration what year group they are in and maturity. You recognised this and my son sat out of this session.

My son is starting to understand that not everyone's behaviour is the same and behaviour we may deem unacceptable, unfortunately does happen regular. e.g. swearing on the bus on journey to school. My son was able to move away and then once off the bus was keen to tell me why, with me reinforcing that some people think it's okay to do that but we don't in our family.

My son is very keen to engage with the CUBE programme and doesn't forget each week, usually reminding me. I think it has made him more confident and open with me about talking about feelings going up to comprehensive.

If any other CUBE sessions were offered, I would try ever attempt to get him to session as I believe physically being with others with have greater benefits.

Working with Children and Young People through Transitions and the CRIW model

Children and young people in England and Wales experienced increased and significant challenges due to the Covid pandemic that started in 2020 in the UK. However, despite the pandemic being largely controlled and lockdowns ending in July 2021,

> children and young people are still currently reporting lower subjective wellbeing than before the pandemic (Department of Education, 2023).

Despite the arguable return to 'normal' life post-pandemic, the anxiousness scores amongst primary and secondary school children and young people in 2022 is higher than in 2020-21 (Department of Education, 2023) and they also report lower happiness in general life and within school when compared to the last seven years. (The Children's Society, 2015-2022). The incidence of 'probable' mental health conditions and eating disorders has also risen in children and young people since the pandemic (NHS Digital, 2022). When analysing the effects of the Covid pandemic research has concluded that

> the pandemic has caused ongoing and longer-term mental health and wellbeing challenges for children and young people (Bevilacqua et al; 2023; and Pearcey et al, 2021).

The experiences of school for children and young people also offers a worrying picture, especially for those from lower socio-economic areas and those from ethnic minority backgrounds. These children and young people were more likely to feel unsafe in school and not feel like they belong at school which also meant there were lower levels of motivation to learn and motivation and or ability to concentrate in class. In addition to these findings, if a child

or young person had a diagnosis that they had Specific Educational Needs (SEN) they were even more likely to face challenges at school and lack the ability to concentrate in class (Department of Education, 2023). Bullying in school has also been highlighted as a significant issue with one in every four children in primary school and one in every five young people in secondary school reporting this in England and Wales (Department of Education, 2022).

Overall, the experiences and self-evaluation of wellbeing of children and young people in England and Wales since the pandemic has been poor with higher levels of low happiness with family, friends, and school and that feelings of loneliness contributed to higher levels of negative mental health (Department of Education, 2023). Reflecting on the experiences captured within the evidence base above it is evident that it reflects the conversations with practitioners of CUBE and the experiences and challenges faced by the children and young people who are engaged with the CRIW / CREW transition project.

Transition Experiences of Children and Young People

Indeed, when reflecting on the wellbeing of children and young people in the UK it is not hard to understand that school experiences are central to wellbeing. It is not therefore surprising to find that the transition experiences of children from primary to secondary school can be challenging and that many have negative experiences which impact on both their education and wellbeing generally (Aurelie et al; 2024; and Jindal-Snape et al, 2023).

> Aurelie et al (2024) explain that children often have worry about losing friends, making new friends and fitting-in, experiencing bullying, and finding their way around a new school; feeling a sense of belonging and connectedness seem key for positive transitions.

The younger children who engage with the CRIW / CREW project all found they faced and were worried about similar challenges and realities about transitioning from primary to secondary school.

Negative transition experiences can then result in the increase of more reactive emotional and behavioural responses often labelled as

problematic within the school context (Palmu et al, 2018). Jackson and Schulenberg (2013) also found that middle school to high school transition caused challenges to psychological wellbeing and meant that some young people used alcohol as a coping mechanism to deal with this. Aurelie et al (2024) also highlight how when negative transition is experienced, children are more likely to engage less at school, risk drop-out, have increased depression and anxiety and some will engage with criminal behaviour including violence and anti-social behaviour. Again, when reflecting on the age range of the CRIW / CREW transition group it was 9 to 14 years old and spans two major school transitions in that the younger children were worries about starting secondary school and the older young people were starting to think about GCSE's options and taking their GCSE's and that meant thoughts of the future and chooses for college.

> The emotional and psychological experiences of the children and young people at CRIW / CREW mirror some of the literature here and also were / are dealing with being labelled as problematic at school due to behaviour 'issues' and didn't always feel safe at school and some of the group had moved school due to this.

There were also high experiences of depression or acute sadness within the group at CRIW / CREW and high anxiety with all of the children and young people who engaged in the focus group. Anti-social behaviour is a loaded term perhaps but several of the children and young people shared that they had dealt with feeling a lack of belonging and safety at school with angry and violent behaviours at times both at school and within the family home.

When exploring the experiences of children and young people with SEN, Peter and Brooks (2016) found higher rates of stress and anxiety for young people with Aspergers syndrome and they argue that where there are children with a SEN then they are more likely to experience heightened levels of anxiety due to the changes associated with transition experiences. Donaldson et al (2023) also commented that children and young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds were more likely to experience mental health and wellbeing challenges during educational

transitions. Palmu et al (2018) also highlights how children who have behavioural issues can also experience difficult transition from primary to secondary school. Aurelie et al (2024) surmises that a wide range of different groups of

> children from 'underserved communities' may find transition more challenging due to their support needs not being met. As has been captured in the case studies, the practitioner focus group and the children and young people's focus group the children and young people all have a number of characteristics, or identities, and can be 'labelled' in certain ways.

Some of the children and young people in the group had a recent diagnosis of Autism and some also a diagnosis of ADHD. Although not spoken about directly, the Barry locality is one of the most deprived areas in Wales using the Welsh Index for Multiple Deprivation (Department of Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, 2024) and over 30% of Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in Barry are in the top 20% most deprived in Wales in terms of Income. Some of the children and young people in the CRIW / CREW are in a family with low socio-economic status and so are arguably more susceptible to experiencing mental health and well-being challenges; the children and young people in the CRIW / CREW have certainly all shared they have had mental health and wellbeing challenges, also observed by the CUBE practitioners.

> When reading the literature on children and young people and transitions it is useful to highlight that there is growing acknowledgement that understandings of transition should not just relate to primary to secondary or secondary to college transitions.

Indeed, transitions outside the educational context are multiple and there are a high variability of transitions that children and young people experience in their lives to adulthood as well as other factors that accompany transition periods relating to family and other social contexts. Due to this policy and practice should support transitions across all of the life domains

of children and young people and not simply within school contexts (Jindal-Snape et al, 2023).

> This is also true of the CRIW / CREW children and young people who were not only dealing with school transitions but also the effects of post-Covid life, for some family breakdown and conflict, and others new neurodiversity diagnosis, and a for a few a growing understanding about their own gender and sexuality.

The hyper-complexity of experiences and transitions within the group needs to be acknowledged because there is a wide range of needs within the CRIW / CREW group that required appropriate and effective support. Adverse Childhood Experiences and Trauma

The reality that children and young people experience other challenges that are not solely part of the transitions they experience is important, because it provides the understanding that transitioning is not the only potential cause for poor mental health and wellbeing. Indeed, one of the growing and prolific areas of study in children and young people's well-being and future life experiences as an adult is the effects of, and how to support and counteract Adverse Childhood Experiences or ACE's as they are commonly abbreviated to.

> Bunting et al (2023) conclude that the research and literature on ACE's indicates that where there are ACE's within a family there is high likelihood for lower physical, mental, and emotional health in later life.

These findings have also been found in child, young people, and early adulthood studies highlighting poor outcomes in early adulthood including lower subjective rating of health and life satisfaction, more frequent depression and anxiety symptoms, and use of substances such as tobacco, alcohol and marijuana. (Mersky et al, 2013). Hughes et al (2017) when analysing the literature found that when a person has four or more ACE's they are three times more likely to experience a current mental health condition, six times more likely to experience a mental

health condition over a lifetime, and nine times more likely to experience self-harm and suicidal ideation. ACE's were also associated with poor physical activity, obesity, diabetes, problematic alcohol and substance use, sexual risk taking, and interpersonal violence (Hughes et al, 2017).

> Karatekin et al (2022: p3) captures how there is still debate on what constitutes as an ACE but offers that 'Broadly speaking, ACEs refer to developmentally disruptive risk factors that increase the probability of negative outcomes.'

Karatekin et al's (2022) provides an excellent and substantive review of the evidence base and the operational definition of ACE's and what constitutes as an ACE. A thorough review of this work is not the purpose of this report but it is important to illustrate what experiences can be regarded and accepted as an ACE. When reading Karatekin et al's (2022: p7) work they found that within the literature from across the Americas, Europe, and South Asia, ACE's were considered to include:

- **Child maltreatment** such as psychological, physical, neglect and sexual abuse.

- **Household dysfunction** such as a family member with a mental health condition, substance use, criminal justice engagement, and domestic violence.

- **Lack of a two-parent home** due to separation, death or parent, foster care, adoption.

- **Socioeconomic difficulties** in terms of financial hardship, state support, homelessness, residential instability, neighbourhood violence, under-resourced schools.

- **Other experiences of victimisation** including exposure to violence outside home, bullying by peers, discrimination due to identities.

- **Other Serious Illnesses, accidents and death** relating to illness, accident or hospitalisation of child or significant other, death of significant other (not parent as in other item), exposure to natural disaster.

- **Other Traumatic experiences** not captured above

> When reflecting on what constitutes an ACE in the literature and the conversations within the focus group with practitioners and using the case studies in this report, it is clear that some of the children and young people had been through one or more ACE's.

It can therefore be argued that without appropriate and effective support the children and young people would be more likely to experience the ongoing negative impact of their ACE's as children, young people, young adults, and in later adult life as highlighted in the above literature. Within the group the ACE's that had been experienced all but one of the categories above including; child maltreatment, household dysfunction, lack of a two-parent home, socioeconomic difficulties, other experiences of victimisation such as bullying and discrimination, and other traumatic experiences.

Supporting Positive Transitions and ACE's

Jindal-Snape et al (2023) highlight how policy and practice need to apply the evidence base appropriately to support children and young people during the many transitions in their journeys towards adulthood. The key learning from their work is that

> transitions are multiple and complex with a diverse range of factors and influences and so support and interventions need to be across the life experiences and domains of children and young people and not in isolation at school.

Therefore, Jindal-Snape et al (2023) suggest that such focus and provision should include within school support but also include opportunity to promote and develop positive relationships in other social settings with participation in sports, clubs, and of interest to this report, youth groups. The argument is that this approach will offer consistent and multi-settings support for transitions in children and young people offering opportunity and likelihood of long-term positive impact (Jindal-Snape et al, 2023) especially for those with negative mental health and wellbeing and from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Donaldson et al, 2023).

> It is useful to highlight therefore that the transition project at CUBE seeks to meet the needs of multiple transitions across the age range of the group at CRIW / CREW and has acknowledged the need for an ongoing and long-term project that supports the needs of children and young people who access the CUBE.

As already highlighted, the children who engage with the CRIW / CREW all have experienced low mental health and well-being and some are from lower socioeconomic areas and so are even more in need of such ongoing transition provision.

Bunting et al (2023) argue that although ACE's clearly have a detrimental effect on child, young people, young adult, and adult lives, there should be greater focus on support services and interventions that support the development and personal growth of resilience and protective factors. Indeed, there has been a call for building resilience with children on an individual, family, and community level and creating opportunity for Positive Childhood Experiences (PCE's) to counteract or lessen the effects of ACE's (Bunting et al, 2023; Masten, 2015; and Narayan et al 2018). Sodberg et al (2023) adds further weight to this position but uses the term 'adaptive coping' and found that developing cognitive and behavioural strategies to handle the internal and external challenges that ACE's can have, if done over time can develop into habitual adaptive coping which can counteract the effects of ACE's.

Hughes et al (2017) and Crandal et al (2019) add to this and suggests that a public health approach should be used to promoting PCE's to support better lifelong health. Their study found that 'counter-ACEs' protect against poor health and wellbeing and promote positive health and wellbeing throughout adulthood regardless of the number of ACE's a child had faced. Crandal et al (2019) found that PCE's protected against stress, depression, suicidal ideation, and sleep difficulty and resulted in people reporting healthier eating, better cognition, internal control, positive psychology, and greater connection to their family.

This is significant in relation to the CRIW / CREW transition 8-week programme and model / approach to supporting the children and young people that engage with it. It is

clear when looking at the 8-week programme, the discussion with practitioners at CUBE, the focus group with the children and young people, and the case studies, that the aim of the transition group is to develop greater self-awareness, self-agency, and well-being, using informal conversation within a flexible but themed learning syllabus. The 8-week programme explores developing; a healthy and positive self-identity and belonging, positive communication and developing healthy relationships, and dealing with conflict, anger, and emotions. Most importantly, the children and young people recognised and felt that they had developed a stronger and more positive sense of self, felt greater social connections and a sense of belonging, had increased happiness and life satisfaction, had developed knowledge and skills for dealing with their emotions and behaviours, and overall felt greater self-agency and were empowered to engage with less fear, anxiety, and anger with the other areas of their lives like within school and in their family.

> It is accurate and fair to conclude that the 8-week programme for CRIW / CREW supported the increase of resilience, protective factors, and adaptive coping needed to counter-act or 'work through' the ACE's the children and young people were going through.

Although the CRIW / CREW project is for children and young people, created by children and young people, it also needs to be highlighted, and this is particularly captured within the case studies, that

> the approach to the transition group also supports appropriate working with and alongside parents of the children engaged in the project and is based within the CUBE a community led project.

This therefore also supports the need for provision to be supported on an individual, family, and community level as highlighted in the literature (Bunting et al, 2023; Masten, 2015; and Narayan et al 2018).

Another article regarding the use of using 'counter-ACE's' to reduce the impact of ACE's is by Sege and Brown (2017) and this has strong resonance with the CRIW / CREW group as it

also focuses on parental relationships. Sege and Brown introduce the HOPE framework which stands for 'Health Outcomes from Positive Experiences' and have found positive success in using this framework. The founding understanding of the framework is that positive experiences that foster and develop healthy development and wellbeing and healthy attachment and resilience are central to recovery from, and mitigation of ACE's and other environmental influences. The framework further highlights that there is a need to develop skills in four key areas and these include (captured in the below table from Sege and Brown: p82): supportive relationships that are nurturing; safe, stable, protective, and equitable environments for living, playing, developing, and learning; social and emotional skills; and developing positive social interactions and connections.

Table 2. Positive Childhood Experiences in HOPE Framework

Category of Positive Experiences	Examples of Key Positive Childhood Experiences
Being in nurturing, supportive relationships	Having: • Secure attachments • Warm, responsive, sustained relationships • A physically and mentally healthy parent • A parent who can provide supportive care given their unique physical characteristics and circumstances • Trusting relationships with peers and other adults
Living, developing, playing, and learning in safe, stable, protective, and equitable environments	Having: • A safe and stable home • Adequate nutrition and sufficient sleep • High-quality learning opportunities • Opportunities for play and physical activity • Access to high-quality medical and dental care
Having opportunities for constructive social engagement and to develop a sense of connectedness	Experiencing: • Involvement in social institutions and environments • Fun and joy in activities and with others • Success and accomplishment • Awareness of one's cultural customs and traditions • A sense of belonging and personal value
Learning social and emotional competencies	Learning: • Behavioural, emotional, and cognitive self-regulation • Executive function skills • Positive character traits • Self-awareness and social cognition • Functional, productive responses to challenges

The model has a high focus on the family relationship and has found that when children felt their family supported them during difficult experiences, that the parent(s) or care givers knew their friends and activities, that children felt they could speak to their parents, and that their parents could manage their own stress in relation to parenting, then outcomes for child despite their ACE's were positive.

Sege and Brown (2017: p80) propose three guiding principles for understanding the HOPE framework and putting these into practice:

1. Positive and negative factors that impact child health exist in all domains of the social ecology. Thus, the interplay among individual, relational, community, and societal factors must be addressed in order to achieve optimal child health outcomes.

2. Child and parent health and well-being are inextricably linked. Thus, positive experiences must promote child health, parent health, and a healthy parent–child relationship.

3. Child health incorporates physical, cognitive, social, and emotional outcomes and these are illustrated below from Sege and Brown (2017: p81)

Table 1. Child Health Outcomes of Focus in the HOPE Framework

Developmental Domain	Child Health Outcomes
Physical	• Basic physiological needs met • Immunity to common childhood diseases • Healthy weight for height and developmental milestones met • Adequate physical activity • Good physical and dental health
Cognitive	• Vocabulary and language development • Early literacy and numeracy • Problem-solving skills • Age-appropriate general knowledge • Positive ideas about self
Social	• Secure attachment with a trusting adult • Ability to form and sustain health relationships • Constructive engagement in social institutions and environments • Seeking help when needed • Social cognition (eg, ability to read nonverbal social cues)
Emotional	• Positive feelings about self • Ability to display cognitive, bahavioural, emotional control • Executive function skills • Character strengths • Comfortable personal, gender, and racial or cultural identity • Managing stress and functioning well when faces with stressors, challenges, or adversity

It is again pleasing to see that the CRIW / CREW model and approach aligns well to the HOPE framework outlined above. The positive outcomes of the 8-week programme used in the CRIW / CREW transition group has been well documented so far within this report and the process that the children and young people have engaged with can all be seen as positive childhood or young person experiences (PCE's). Indeed, as already discussed above, and clear to see within the analysis of the focus groups and from the case studies

the transition project has effectively and successfully supported experiences that foster and develop healthy development and wellbeing and healthy attachment and resilience that are deemed so central to recovery from, and mitigation of ACE's and other environmental influences (Sege and Brown, 2017).

When evaluating whether the approach to support children and young people who engaged with the CRIW / CREW fulfil Sege and Brown's (2017: p80) three guiding principles for understanding the HOPE framework and putting these into practice it is clear that it does meet these principles. The practitioners and the children and young people understood, needed, and wanted support dealing with all aspects and areas of their lives and so not just at school and with school transitions. The 8-week programme explored all of their experiences on an individual, relational, community, and societal level and supported personal development and growth to address these levels and positive health and well-being outcomes. The project also supported a focus on healthy family relationships and dealing with emotions, anger, and conflict within the home. The need of a family focus is further supported because CUBE is a project based within the Barry community that also supports a whole-family restorative practice model there

has been appropriate engagement with the parents of the children and young people who engage with the CRIW / CREW. Indeed, some of the children and young people who are part of the CRIW / CREW were initially supported more therapeutically through the Side-by-Side whole family project and were asked if they wanted to be part of the CRIW / CREW. Finally, the founding understanding of the 8-week programme and from the practitioners approach to practice is that children and young people need support that incorporates physical, cognitive, social, and emotional outcomes and this was achieved through discussion over the 8-weeks. Indeed, during the 8-weeks there was discussion and learning relating to healthy eating and exercise (physical), problem-solving and developing positive ideas of self (cognitive), developing positive and healthy attachments and relationships as well as being able to ask for help or support (social), and learning skills to manage stress, emotions, and behaviours and also developing positive identities in relation to gender, sexuality, and neurodiversity (emotional).

Ultimately, all of the literature discussed in this section suggests a need for a public health within community and family approach that focuses on both prevention work to reduce development of ACE's for children and young people, support for impact of ACE's, as well as provision of PCE's to counteract the effects of ACE's. PCE's should be focused on building resilience, positive social connectedness, safe and trusted environments, and psychological and emotional health. When such a model is implemented then it is a realistic and effective model of practice to support children, young people, and adults in their wellbeing and health, especially in vulnerable populations with higher incidence of ACE's (Crandal et al, 2019; Hughes et al, 2017; and Sege and Brown, 2017) and

> this has been reflected in the outcomes and impact of the CRIW / CREW transition project and would arguably be a useful model of practice in other localities and should continue within the CUBE service provision as there is clearly a high need.

Trauma-Informed Practice

In Wales, ACE Hub Wales, which is a part of Public Health Wales provides a Welsh context for understanding and developing good practice in Wales on ACE's. ACE Hub Wales and Traumatic Stress Wales published a framework for a Trauma-Informed Wales in 2022 offering a societal approach to understanding, preventing and supporting the impacts of ACE's, trauma and adversity.

The Framework offers a vision of practice that is strengths-based and outcomes focused and highlights what support individuals, families, and communities should expect across Wales in terms of their trauma-informed support. The framework proposes that trauma-informed practice should work with people based on their individual, family, and community needs and support healing and personal growth whilst using processes that mean people feel safe, valued, and connected and are personalised, co-produced, and specialist where needed. This brief summary mirrors strongly what the CRIW / CREW transition model of practice achieves and this has been powerfully supported across all focus group analysis and discussion and the case studies.

The framework and definition of trauma-informed practice embodies both an evidence-informed approach and a culturally specific one that is relevant to Wales and how certain Welsh communities are disproportionality affected by adversity and trauma and that this has strong links to socio-economic and social factors. In Wales a trauma-informed approach has been defined as (ACE Hub Wales and Traumatic Stress Wales, 2022: p10):

"A trauma-informed approach recognises that everyone has a role in sensitively facilitating opportunities and life chances for people affected by trauma and adversity.

It is an approach where a person, family, community, organisation, service or system takes account of the widespread impact of adversity and trauma and understands potential ways of preventing, healing and overcoming this as an individual or with the support of others, including communities and services.

It is where people recognise the multiple presentations of being affected by trauma in individuals, families, communities, staff, and others in organisations and systems across all Welsh society.

In this approach knowledge about trauma and its effects are integrated into policies, procedures, and practices. It seeks to actively resist traumatising people again and prevent and mitigate adverse consequences, prioritising physical and emotional safety and commits to 'do no harm' in practice and to proactively support and help affected people make their own informed decisions.''

The CRIW / CREW model of practice meets this definition well and when referring to the all of the analysis in this report

it is clear that the practitioner team embody a trauma-informed approach and that one of the underlying understandings of the CRIW / CREW approach to practice

is that trauma can cause deep rooted emotional and behavioural issues that need to be effectively supported for appropriate healing and personal growth.

Indeed, the CRIW / CREW transition group approach is one that is embedded within the Barry community, works with the whole family where appropriate, and uses a co-creation process to develop engagement themes and increase individual well-being with the added benefit of supporting wider family conflict when evident.

The trauma-informed framework also includes five practice principles and these are captured below (ACE Hub Wales and Traumatic Stress Wales, 2022: p11)

The 5 Practice Principles

A universal approach that does no harm, proactively supports and encompasses community-led approaches, prevention initiatives and specialist therapies to enable transformation within systems.

Person centred: the person is always at the centre of a trauma-informed approach. It takes a co-productive collaborative cross-sector approach to identifying, understanding and supporting the person's needs. It promotes psychological and physical safety by promoting choice, collaboration and transparency.

Relationship-focused: safe, supportive, emphatic, compassionate and trusting relationships are central to a trauma-informed approach.

Resilience and strengths-focused: a trauma-informed approach builds on the natural resilience of individuals, families and communities.

Inclusive: a trauma-informed approach recognises the impact of diversity, discrimination and racism. It understands the impact of cultural, historic and gender inequalities and is inclusive of everyone in society.

When using these five practice principles as a lens to evaluate the practice of the CRIW / CREW project it is a quick process to know that they represent excellent trauma-informed practice. The CUBE uses a community-led approach which is known to all who access its services and this was evident from the focus group with the children and young people. The CRIW / CREW 8-week programme also has demonstrated through the focus group with children and young people, the case studies, and the practitioners focus group that it is relationship focused, inclusive, and supports the development of resilience and focuses on building on people strengths.

> Therefore, the approach used within the CRIW / CREW transition project does clearly meet the five principles of trauma-informed practice.

The final theme for discussion in relation to the Wales Trauma-Informed Practice Framework (2022) is the four defined practice levels they have identified within it; the four levels are: Trauma-aware, Trauma-skilled, Trauma-enhanced, and Specialist providers. The levels describe the different roles that people may have within a variety of contexts and represent a spectrum rather than a hierarchy and are all underpinned by the five practice principles. The overarching themes within the levels of practice ae that services should be compassionate and empathic, co-created, and support greater self-awareness and self-determination in the individual, family, and community.

The CRIW / CREW project illustrates good practice in relation to being Trauma–aware and meet some of the 'what looks good' examples highlighted within the framework (ACE Hub Wales and Traumatic Stress Wales, 2022: p13-14). Indeed, all of the projects at CUBE have had practitioners that have invested in training and the CUBE has developed trauma-informed policies and ways of working and their overarching practice model is one based in reflective practice. As has been illustrated within this report the CRIW / CREW transition project is one that uses 'compassion, kindness and supportive and facilitating relationships within the family.' It is also easy to assert that the 8-week programme of the CRIW / CREW project also 'strengthens existing individual positive coping mechanisms and the development of resilience from childhood adversity and other traumatic events' and ensures the support

process if one that is 'inclusive, involved and connected to community' and supports the development of 'control of destiny and management of emotions.' The work that the CRIW / CREW project achieve also 'helps to foster supportive relationships within families/ other support networks and communities' and works with children and where appropriate their parents or care-givers to support 'understanding that distressing reactions to trauma are normal but not universal and can be overcome' by promoting positive and empowering ways to respond to trauma that also 'reduces stigma, labelling and victim-blaming.' The CRIW / CREW approach also has powerfully shown that the process 'provides the individual or family with opportunities for wellbeing and resilience building, prioritising their preferences and needs.' It is fair to state that the CRIW / CREW project and CUBE operates at a Trauma-aware level of practice.

When analysing whether the CRIW / CREW project fulfils what it means to be 'Trauma-Skilled' it is obvious that it does when referring to the Framework (ACE Hub Wales and Traumatic Stress Wales, 2022: p15-16). The CRIW / CREW approach of supporting children and young people clearly aligns to focusing 'on providing safety and promoting trust, preventing and mitigating the impacts of adversity and other traumatic experiences, and preventing traumatising people again' as outlined under this level of practice; this type of relationship is well captured within the focus groups and case studies in this report. When assessing if the CRIW / CREW project 'provides the individual or family with compassionate, person-centred and individualised support and care in language that they understand' it is clear that such practice is the CUBE way when referring to the focus group and case study feedback in this report and it also important to highlight the provision of the bilingual provision of the CRIW / CREW in relation to the need for appropriate language. The focus group with practitioners also shared how the CRIW / CREW 'practitioners recognise the impact that life experiences and social factors have on individuals, and recognise the prevalence and range of adversity, traumatic experiences and impacts' and that all of the team had clear understanding of 'the central importance of safe relationships and the importance of trust' and having practice that meant 'access to support is needs led and responses informed by an understanding

of the experience of the individual' and that 'Individuals receive the support that they need to achieve more positive outcomes for their health, physical and mental wellbeing.'

CUBE and their CRIW / CREW project is also 'Trauma-Enhanced' as characterised within the Trauma-Informed Practice Framework (ACE Hub Wales and Traumatic Stress Wales, 2022: p16-17). It is fair to state that all the CUBE team 'have regular and intensive interactions with people known to have been affected by adversity/ traumatic experiences, and who provide specific supports or interventions' and that part of their reflective process seeks to support children and young people who are 'experiencing negative coping strategies and behaviour' to 'understand that this may be rooted in their trauma experience(s) even if this is no longer taking place.'

The CRIW / CREW transition project is also an example of a 'Specialist provider' level as defined within the Trauma-Informed Practice Framework (ACE Hub Wales and Traumatic Stress Wales, 2022: p18-19). This is due to the CRIW / CREW project being a service that provides 'low or high intensity, formal evidence-based or evidence-informed interventions for people impacted by traumatic events' and as captured within the practitioners focus groups it has been developed using research and an evidence-informed approach. CUBE and all their projects also focus on using co-production in their assessment and planning work with individuals and families which is another element of the characteristic of a specialist provider. It is true to also state that all children and young people that have engaged with CRIW / CREW felt 'safe when accessing specialist support and supported to make choices through trust and collaboration with practitioners and services' and that practitioners offered support that was 'compassionate, collaborative and person-centred.' Finally, children and young people that have engaged with CRIW / CREW are part of their own learning and development and so are part of understanding and evaluating 'their own outcomes using wellbeing measures, goal-based outcomes, and satisfaction measures, to ensure that the therapies are helpful and meaningful to them.' This evaluation and report is part of that inclusive process and the findings of this report will be shared with the CRIW / CREW group using an informal youth work approach.

A Youth Work Approach and CRIW / CREW

Youth Work has a long history in the UK of effectively and appropriately supporting children and young people, mostly between 11 and 19 but the work can be with children from the age of 8 to young adults up to the age of 25 (NYA, 2024).

Sonneveld et al (2020) states that youth work has often focused on supporting socially vulnerable young people to develop positive social networks and connections, enhance participation in social settings, and support their wider needs so that they can make informed choices and gain greater self-agency and feel empowered in their lives. They further highlight that youth work practice is characterised by young people choosing to participate and that the process of engagement should start from their own experiences, needs, and interests and build on the strengths and assets of young people (NYA, 2024).

All of the literature on defining what youth work is, and the processes that youth work should use or embody when practising, offer clear commonality and consensus. Youth work is often a form of informal education that uses conversation as the main 'tool' to support young people in their lives. In this way youth work has strong elements of not planning work according to a set syllabus, like is often the experience within school structures; therefore, youth work is flexible and led by the young person / people. However, there is also strong agreement that youth work uses non-formal education which has elements of structure and 'syllabus' but uses this as a flexible guiding process to meet young people's needs; for example it is accepted that young people may experiment with substances and sexual activity and so conversations around these common experiences can be planned to some degree as can workshop style sessions if young people have highlighted this as a need they'd like to explore and learn more about. Youth work can also take place in a variety of settings and these include (not exhaustive); youth clubs, youth cafes, art groups, schools, outreach and detached settings, residential settings, and health settings and are supported within the statutory, voluntary / third sector, and the private sector.

The depth of literature over the last 40 years on what youth work is and can be is extensive and the seminal texts can be easily found if this

of interest (Batsleer, 2008; Davies, 2015; Jeffs and Smith, 1987; Wood and Hine, 2009; and Young, 1999 – please note these are just a small example of seminal youth work texts and of course this is wholly subjective to the writer of this report).

When reflecting on this brief overview of what the academic literature states youth work is, the aims of youth work, and the processes it implements to achieve its aims it is clear that the practice that is currently being achieved by the CRIW / CREW transition group is good youth work practice. It is fair to state that the CRIW / CREW offers a co-created 8-week programme based on children and young people's needs and uses some planned learning together with more fluid 'on the day' flexibility as required.

> Conversation and reflective learning is the key 'tool' for CRIW / CREW within a safe, secure, and friendly environment that feels 'owned' by the children and young people.

When discussing a policy perspective (which is also certainly very useful and of academic interest) the National Youth Agency's (NYA, 2024) National Youth Work Curriculum is of interest to this evaluation report. The NYA (2024) agree with the previously discussed literature above and highlight the flexible approach needed to achieve good youth work practice. The NYA also agree that good youth work is directed by young people and their experiences and needs and includes pre-planned activities to meet known needs. The NYA (2024: p6) outline such learning includes:

1. Situated learning (location of practice), including community and culture;

2. Experiential learning (learning through experience), including critical dialogue;

3. Developmental group work, including peer education;

4. Creativity in learning, including play-based education.

The CRIW / CREW 8-week programme mirrors all of these elements and processes and certainly takes a flexible approach, the programme has also been directed by the children and young people on their own needs and experiences and the 8-week was created from this process and contains pre-planned

activities to meet the highlighted needs. It is fair to state that the 8-week programme also offers within the community situated learning, experiential learning where the children and young people are learning from their experiences using reflective practice and critical discussion, they do so within a small group and at times due to need there is space within the group to be more creative and engage with arts and play.

The NYA (2024: p9) also highlight the four cornerstones of the youth work curriculum framework which capture the overarching aims of youth work, which include:

1. Education. Youth work offers informal learning opportunities that can complement formal learning in schools and colleges. It gives young people the opportunity to learn – about themselves, about others, about issues they care about or that concern them and about society and how to engage in their communities;

2. Empowerment. Youth work helps young people to develop the skills and confidence to make decisions and act on issues that affect their own lives, the lives of others, their communities and society. This enables young people to take control, have a voice and get involved as advocates;

3. Equality. Youth work is for all young people. It respects differences and builds connections between different groups and individuals. It recognises and promotes human rights, social justice and anti-oppressive practices, supporting and challenging young people to reflect on their understanding of themselves and their behaviour towards others;

4. Participation. Youth work supports young people and works with them to become partners and leaders in their own learning, to help them gain influence over issues they are concerned about and to engage them with democratic processes.

Again,

> the CRIW / CREW transition group embodies all of these overarching aims of youth work as defined by the NYA (2024).

The 8-week programme offers the opportunity to learn about themselves and others (Education), it supports the development of skills and confidence to deal with their own challenges in their lives (Empowerment), it also supports the exploration of difference, human rights, and issues like discrimination in relation to gender and sexuality, as well as healthy and respectful relationships with others (Equality), finally, the co-creation approach at CUBE supports self-direction ad decision making over their own learning in a democratic and inclusive way (Participation.) The NYA (2024) also states how good youth work creates belonging and community and works in partnership with young people and family and communities which again has been clearly captured in this evaluation report.

Finally, from the NYA (2023) is guidance on how youth work aligns to transitional safeguarding which in turn aligns well to the CRIW / CREW transition project. The NYA (2023) highlight the need for appropriate support through the transitions in children and young people's lives to adulthood and that this includes many transitions. The NYA (2023) suggest that youth workers are the practitioners that are best placed to work alongside and support young people during their transitions and that youth workers could work more clearly with other services to ensure that there is more effective understanding and support of the needs of children and young people going through transition. Furthermore, the guidance suggests that youth workers are ideally placed to support transition for children and young people with multiple challenges and needs including those that have care experience, experience of family harm, experience a disability or mental health condition, have a neurodiversity diagnosis, are from the LGBTQIA+ community, or are engaged with the youth justice or criminal justice system. Ní Charraighe and Reynolds (2024) propose that youth work is (and has always) supported young people with their mental health and wellbeing. They suggest that this should be acknowledged more and that youth work should be seen more readily as the initial provider of mental health and wellbeing support for young people as it so

often is, especially since the pandemic where mental health has now reached such worrying levels in children and young people.

> Against this backdrop of literature and discussion of it in relation to the CREW / CRIW transition project, it is obvious that the practitioners for CREW / CRIW fulfil the aims, values, processes, and outcomes of good youth work.

The project also supports the transitions of children and young people with more complex needs as outlined within the literature discussed in this section of the report.

Conclusion & Recommendations

This evaluation report has captured the experiences and impact of the new pilot project for children and young people at CUBE in Barry, south Wales. This provision is called 'Criw CUBE Crew Teenagers Group' and is essentially a children and young peoples group provision that supports the ongoing and varied transitions and other life experiences of the people that engage. All aspects of this project were co-created with the children and young people who are part of the group and this the includes the themes and areas of learning within the 8-week programme that was facilitated with the group.

The 8-week programme at CRIW / CREW was aimed to increase self-awareness and develop knowledge and skills to develop healthy responses to the challenges of transitions and wider life and deal with emotions and behaviours in more positive ways. The programme had a strong focus on understanding anxiety, depression and sadness, and anger and angry behaviours and being able to better cope with these experiences in positive ways. The project also focused on developing positive self-esteem and confidence and a healthy self-image. All of these themes for learning were aimed at supporting the children and young people to feel greater control and empowerment over their lives so they could feel greater connection, belonging, and resilience within school, with their peers, within the families and community, and when on their own.

The outcomes captured within the focus groups with the CRIW / CREW group and CUBE practitioners and within the case studies illustrates that the transition approach effectively and powerfully supports the children and young people in their lives which are complex and have multiple challenges and layers.

The outcomes have specifically supported children and young people to take healthy 'ownership' and agency over the transitions in their lives, the ACE's they have and or are currently experiencing, and develop a sense of belonging and positive self-identity they had not experienced before engagement with the CRIW / CREW both in terms of their individual identities, their CRIW group community, within their families and feeling a real part of the CUBE community within Barry, south Wales.

This evaluation report has also highlighted how the CRIW / CREW project is a high-quality practice example of a children's and young person transition project that supports ACE's using trauma-informed practice,

whilst also embodying what is characterized as good youth work practice. These findings should not be taken lightly and it is clearly a well thought out project that uses co-production and a strong understanding of the theory, policy, and practice of high-quality work with children and young people.

There is strong evidence that this project should continue and develop to meet further needs of children and young people in the Barry locality. The successful and effective 'blending' of a therapeutic approach with such a strong programme of learning that also implements good youth work practice is to be commended and this model of practice could be utilized in other localities and within other services including family focused provision within social services and youth justice.

Recommendations for Future Practice

1. Evaluation report findings should be shared with appropriate practitioners, academic, service commissioners, senior leaders, and policy practitioners within networks, forums, symposiums, and conferences.

2. The project should continue in the long-term and secure funding to ensure this

3. The project could viably have two age range groups to support deeper learning for both younger and older cohorts in relation to age-appropriate themes and experiences.

4. This model of practice would be an ideal approach within a whole-family service and or youth justice setting and this should be explored with appropriate partners.

5. This project should be implemented into the Side-by-Side whole family restorative practice model and provision at CUBE.
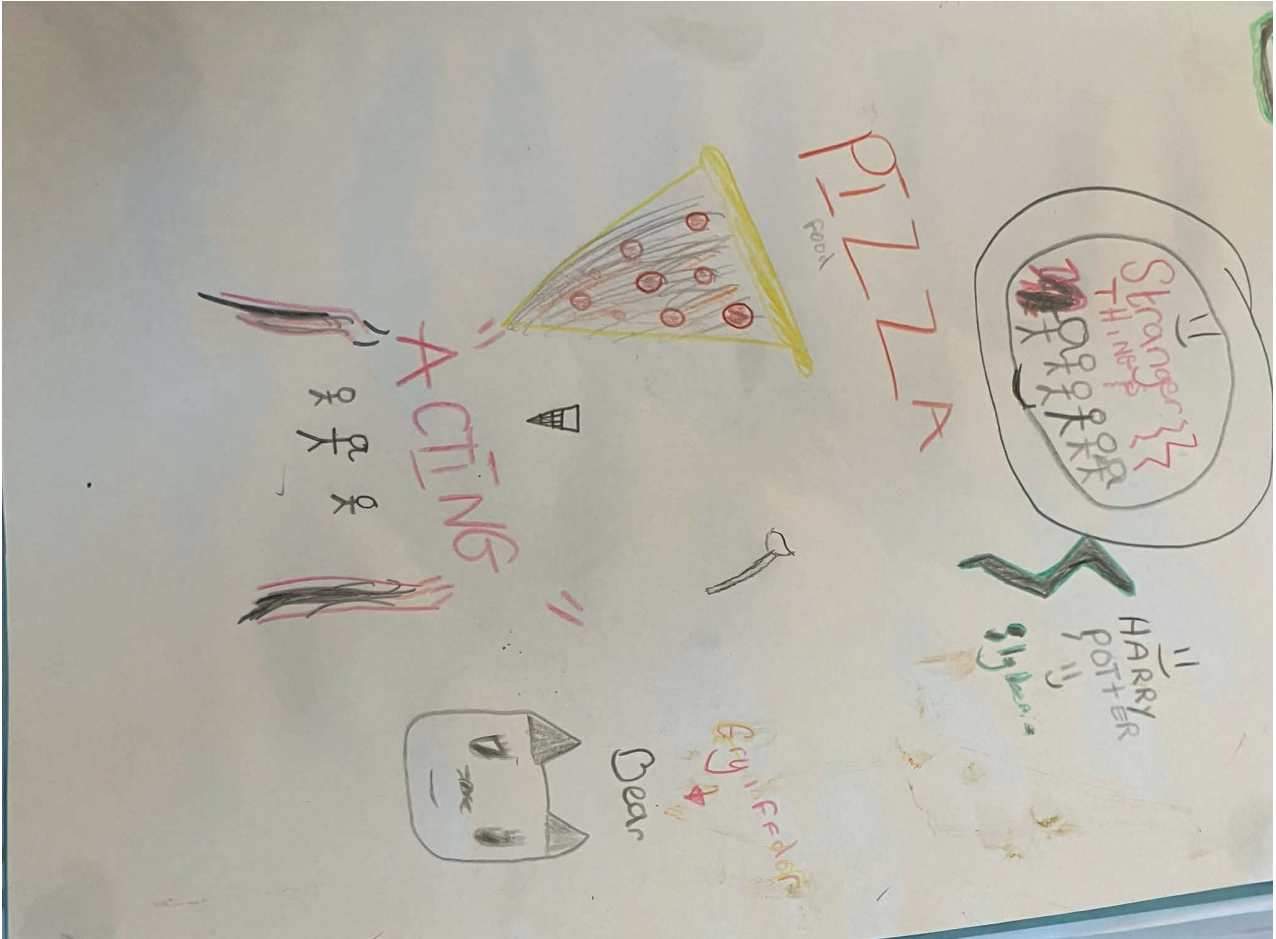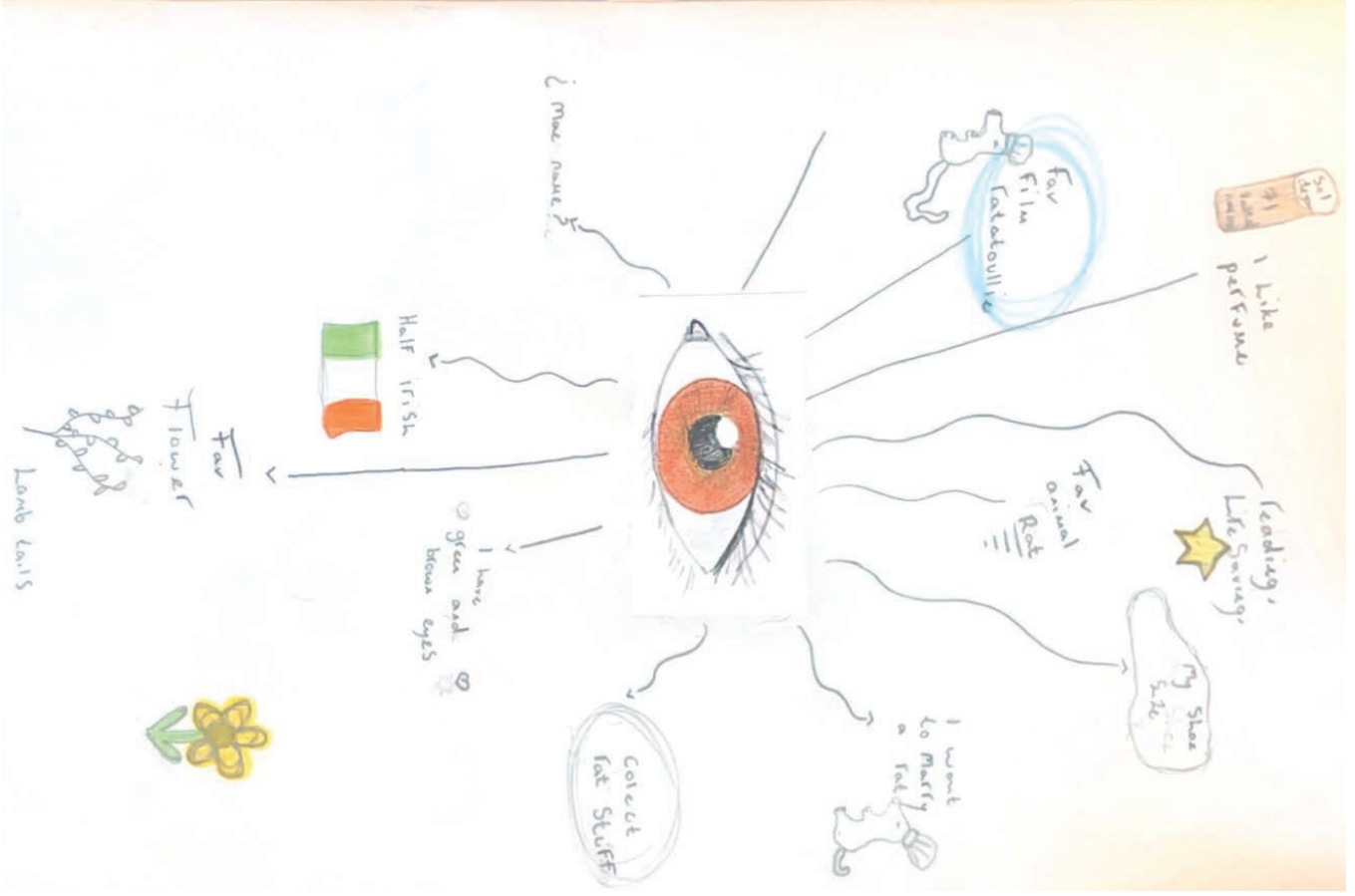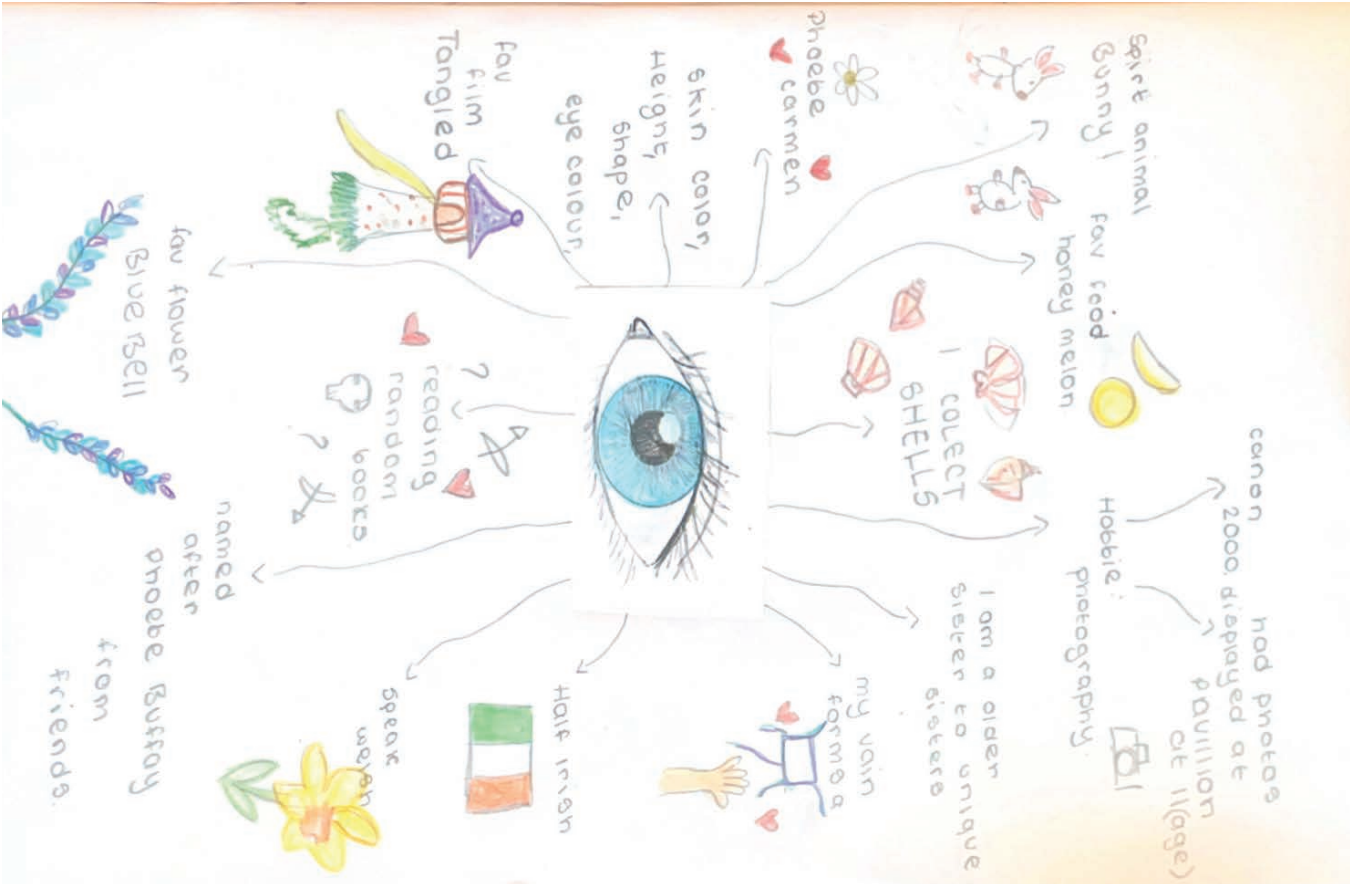
Criw Artwork

I would like to thank the children and young people for speaking to me and supporting this evaluation, which is essentially of their lives and how the Criw group has supported them. I feel very privileged to have been allowed into your worlds, just for a short time and to listen, and I hope, really hear YOUR TRUTHS, challenges, and reflections, on your lives. THANK YOU again for supporting me to complete this evaluation of the Criw group. I know that the CUBE team are massively PROUD OF YOU and that your engagement over the course of the 8-week programme of Criw has been so INSPIRING and REWARDING for Sarah and Charlotte and the wider team.
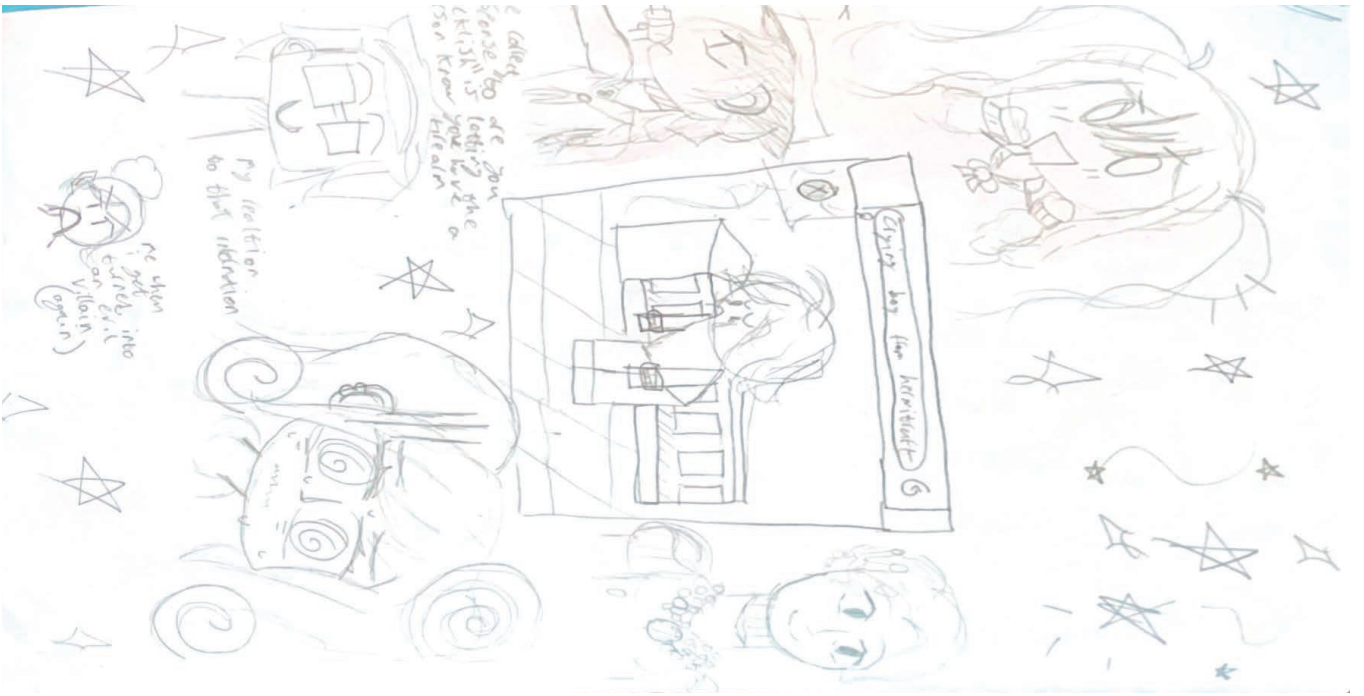
Criw you are all SUPERSTARS and I wish you the very best of luck in YOUR FUTURES and I know from speaking to you that you now have THE CONFIDENCE and SKILLS to support yourself and your own PERSONAL JOURNEY and support each other as a GROUP OF FRIENDS!!!

Big High Fives and Fist bumps - Mark

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Bunny!

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