



Evaluation report of the 'Building Bridges' project

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June 2017



the **Building Bridges** project



LOTTERY FUNDED

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

'Building Bridges' was a four year project based in Monmouthshire funded by The Big Lottery Fund under the Bright New Future's programme. The project had 4 objectives and six indicators all of which have met or exceeded. It has worked with 226 young disabled people to build socialising opportunities, confidence and skills enabling positive transitions to adulthood. Each year it has provided more than 48 activities to enable young people to gain new experiences and has worked with 46 community groups and organisations to further the inclusion of disabled young people within community activities and opportunities. It has found 75 volunteer work placements for young people, supported 26 young people to gain paid employment and 90 young people to gain skills for travelling independently.

The project has undertaken exceptionally high quality work that has unanimously been praised by statutory services, parents, young people and community organisations. It has worked to a social inclusion agenda coupled with a family support key working model and towards individual empowerment. Utilising person centred approaches it has supported young people in their own words to move 'from existing' to 'living' and 'having a life.' The work of the project has had a deep impact upon the young people and parents who have engaged with the project; increasing individuals' mental and physical well being, adding quality to family life and family dynamics and reducing the need for crisis services. For the young people within the project, the most important impact has been gaining self worth and having lasting friendships.

There is key learning from the project regarding the devastating experience of social isolation when young disabled people are not supported during transition, the need for community groups and facilities to learn about disability equality and how to facilitate inclusion and the need to have employment support and part time learning opportunities.

SECTION 1: BACKGROUND RATIONALE TO THE 'BUILDING BRIDGES PROJECT' AND THE EVALUATION

Summary of the Building Bridges project

The Building Bridges project was a 4 year, Big Lottery Funded project within the Bright New Futures programme. It has supported young people aged between 14 and 25 with additional needs living in Monmouthshire during transition to adulthood to raise self esteem, social networks and confidence and further social inclusion.

Purpose of the evaluation

The Big Lottery required annual evaluations and a final report. The aims of the evaluation were:

- To evaluate the extent to which the 4 project outcomes and associated change indicators have been met.
- To comment upon the process of meeting the project targets, specifically identifying good practice and potential causes for concern.
- In line with the Big Lottery Fund's guidelines, to consider issues of effectiveness and impact of the project's work.

Evaluation methods

Each year the evaluation methods have altered slightly, but maintained consistency through ensuring that parents and young people were involved and that project monitoring data was utilised. Each year methods have included:

- Analysis of project monitoring data such as project activity sheets, registers and monitoring reports.
- Focus groups, questionnaires and interviews with 107 parents; with approximately one fifth being involved in the annual evaluations at the end of every year for four years.
- Focus groups and interviews with a total of 75 young people, approximately 15 of whom have been involved in at least 2 consecutive years of annual evaluation activities.
- Participant observation at 7 events, including summer activities and youth group nights that have engaged with parents, partner agencies and young people.
- Interviews and questionnaires with 11 community groups.
- 12 interviews with volunteers.
- 5 Phone interviews with statutory partners representing the careers service, education, social services, disability sports and youth service provision.

There are caveats to the evaluation due to the methods used. Firstly, there was no representative sampling of young people or parents, since the evaluation engaged with those who were willing to participate. Secondly, there has been little contact with those who have only received one to one work or did not engage with the project. However, the aim of the evaluation has been to measure progress against the targets and therefore participants who have most engaged are those who will have helped progress towards targets. This report therefore offers a general overview rather than an exact representative account.

What is being evaluated?

The project undertakes a variety of different tasks which include:

- Support to meet other young people.
- Home visits- initial meetings and introductions, advice to parents, health and well being advice to young people, sexual health and positive relationship work, emotional well being and mental health signposting.
- One to one working- for young people to learn independent travel, for involvement in a community group of their choosing.
- School visits- with families to secure placements or support transition planning.
- Cross agency reviews and meetings- to secure education placements, transition plans, social services etc.
- Project planning.
- Delivery of a variety of activities including regional starter groups.

Each year Building Bridges has delivered between 46 and 52 activities. There are 3 regional starter groups in each geographical area of the county which are drop in youth groups for young people from Building Bridges to meet each other. However, the project is also linked into numerous community groups and has facilitated a number of activity days, in addition to supporting one to one volunteer and work placements. The different activities undertaken serve to offer opportunities for socialising, raise confidence and build independence. The activities can be divided into the following categories:

Examples of the range of activities are:

- *Socialising*- These activities offer a chance for young people to meet each other and experience youth group activities within a supportive environment or just have an opportunity to meet together and chat in community spaces. They have included 5 youth clubs run by building Bridges which act as starter groups for young people to join in, social events, inclusive youth groups, minecraft group, and a local initiative, my life my cafe.
- *Kitchen skills*: There have been numerous opportunities for young people to learn to cook, bake, and implement food hygiene.
- *Sports*- A wide range of sporting activities have been delivered enabling socialising but also introducing team skills and confidence building. Examples include multi

sports, bike bash, bowling, swimming, cycling, pool, petanque, football, gym, golf and T'ai Chi tasters.

- *Outside and environment activities*: A range of outdoor and risk activities have been offered including camping and the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme, fishing, geo-caching, bat walks, barbeques, kayaking and canoeing, rafting, sailing, and archery.
- *Performance/ arts*- There have been numerous arts opportunities including drama, performing arts tasters, light painting, belly dancing, Yam Jams DJ sessions, Fynnon theatre group, crafts, pottery, painting, music, Oragami and dance.
- *Therapies*- Specific therapeutic workshops have been provided including drama therapy, sensory sessions, anger management workshops and one to one support managing anxiety and recovery from abusive relationships.
- *Films/ shows*- There have been numerous trips to see shows and films. These have ranged from serious productions to comedies and musical theatre.
- *Transition to adulthood skills*- A range of skills have been learnt through activities specifically aimed at those of transition age. These include day trips and shopping (focusing upon independent travel and using money) big nights out and one to one support with college options.
- *Preparation for work*- 101 paid employment and volunteering opportunities have been provided including costume inventory at a local theatre, volunteering with older people, Monmouthshire museum service, charity shops; the set-up of 4 social enterprises including a food co-op and gardening business, and various paid work roles.

Who was involved in Building Bridges?

The target was to work with 160 young people, but this was significantly exceeded with a total of 226 young people being involved within the Building Bridges project.

Of those who engaged 35% were female and 65% male. 51% were aged between 14 and 19 years old and 49% aged between 20 and 26 years old, (but age was not available for 25 young people). There was a low percentage of participants who spoke through the medium of Welsh, but this is reflective of the general Welsh speaking population within the county area of Monmouthshire. Similarly, the number of black and minority ethnic participants was low, reflective of the county averages, with 97% of participants identifying as UK white, and 3% from a minority ethnic community.

ASSESSING OBJECTIVE 1- LEARNING FROM THE PROJECT WILL BE USED TO INFORM FUTURE POLICY, BEST PRACTICE AND SERVICES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN TRANSITION

Indicator 1: The project is reviewed annually and an end of project evaluation report is produced and circulated to project partners and other interested parties. 1 review report is written every year, including feedback from young people, families and other partners.

Indicator 2: The project is reviewed annually and an end of project evaluation report is produced and circulated to project partners and other interested parties. 1 final evaluation report due in 4th year.

Both of these indicators have been exceeded. Throughout the project, monitoring has been undertaken on a quarterly and annual basis and regular review meetings have been undertaken with parents, young people and other interested practitioners and professionals. There have been quarterly active steering group meetings which have included young people and parents. Annually there have been evaluation reports produced with external evaluation occurring from the end of year 2 and the reports circulated to steering group members, partner agencies and available on websites.

There have been a number of activities to disseminate learning, good practice and young people's experiences throughout the project:

- Year 2- 2 project events where 7 young people gave presentations and 4 showed their digital stories.
- Year 2- digital stories played to steering group members.
- Year 2- One peer volunteer appeared within the local media regarding their involvement in the Best Buddies scheme and an associated trip to America.
- Year 3- 3 young people met with the staff team at Children in Wales' 'Young Wales' project; the main mechanism for young people's participation in Wales. Young people travelled from Monmouthshire to Cardiff to talk about the support they needed during transition
- Year 3- A rapporteur visit from 'Young Wales' to the Building Bridges Raglan summer camp to meet with 15 young people to discuss the issues further.
- Year 3- 18 young people were consulted about friendship patterns and social isolation during transition, to inform the development of a DRILL programme grant for a participatory research project.
- Year 4- Successful application to the DRILL programme and 8 young people recruited as peer researchers on a work placement because of their knowledge of isolation and friendship patterns.
- Year 4- A few young people became involved with Monmouthshire Youth Council.
- Year 4- The project has inputted to the Monmouthshire strategy planning group.
- Year 4- the project met with Monmouthshire social work and commissioners to highlight the innovative aspects to their work and seek further funding
- Year 4- The big event. This was a project celebration held in June 2017. It had high levels of participation from young people and focused upon the project's successes.

SECTION 3: ASSESSING OBJECTIVE 2: YOUNG DISABLED PEOPLE WILL TAKE PART IN A BROADER RANGE OF SOCIAL LEISURE AND/ OR WORK RELATED ACTIVITIES, LEADING TO REDUCED SOCIAL ISOLATION

Indicator: Young disabled people report an increase in social, leisure and/or work-related activities, and an improvement in their 'social support network' (using language that the young person understands).

All of the young people and parents within the evaluation reported an increase in social, leisure and work related activities, and an increase was observable within secondary data. This indicator has been fully met with some outstanding practice undertaken to enable young people to have wider social networks. The extent to which there have been an increase in social activities has depended upon the length of time a young person had been with Bridges, what difficulties they faced in making friends and how much support they needed to maintain friendships. All of the young people within the evaluation attended at least one club on a regular (mainly weekly) basis and many have developed hobbies, gained part time employment, and have very active social lives both within and beyond Building Bridges.

The level of social isolation experienced by many young people prior to Building Bridges should not be underestimated. The vast majority of parents and young people described circumstances prior to attending Building Bridges as very lonely; with young people spending the majority of their free time alone at home with family being the sole source of socialising opportunities. The quotes below were echoed by almost three quarters of the parents and young people:

‘Building Bridges has changed her life. Before she was existing, just getting by and now she feels she is living.’ [parent]

‘She has no local friends at all. Before Building Bridges she was at home with her family. Building Bridges has given her a social network but she still needs friends outside of the Building Bridges activities.’ [parent]

‘Before I had their 1 to 1; I was at home with my brother all the time.’ [young person]

‘Before Building Bridges I couldn’t speak to anyone in school in Caldicott and so had no friends. I spent time mainly at home, watching TV or reading. Now I have friends. For years before no one would talk to me, they would just say ‘hi’. Now I have loads of friends from coming to Building Bridges, all across the county.’ [young person]

‘It’s given my son something to look forward to every week.’ [parent]

Learning skills to be able socialise

The project has not just provided young people with opportunities to socialise but has supported young people with the skills to enable friendships to be made and grow. Young people explained that the project facilitated initial contact between them if they had similar interests; reminded them to stay in contact outside of activities and supported friendship communication:

‘Other clubs have been all about computers but here making friends is facilitated and happens a lot.’ [young person in focus group]

The project has supported young people to understand the nuances of friendships. Young people stated that they had made new friends but also explained that this was different to the friendships that they had within education environments. They stated that within Building Bridges they had connections between each other and were beginning to understand relationships between people:

‘It’s Ok not to be accepted by everyone, and it’s OK not to be friends with everyone.’

‘But there’s a difference between a classmate and a friend.’

Friendships were also observed to be made with all young people. Researchers observed that young people who had limited communication or did not use words to speak had friends at groups they attended and other young people would refer to them as friends, with no attention given to disabilities or difficulties that the young person faced. Often young people with very limited verbal communication would be given a role within a friendship group, such as pool umpire, football kicker, or parachute collector, and other young people ensured they communicated with them clearly and often so they were not excluded. A young person explained:

‘[this is] One of the most welcoming and inclusive groups ever. I so look forward to coming here.’

Anecdotally, friendships with young people who have limited verbal communication appeared to take longer to form and the young people who had limited friendships appeared to be those who needed carers or parents to remain with them.

3-stage pattern of developing friendships

For young people who attended group activities there was a clear three- staged pattern of friendship development. Young people were at different stages, as progression of friendships varied according to individual needs, circumstances and learning pace. This pattern was only observable towards the end of year 3, after substantial work to raise confidence and skills had been undertaken for a period of time. Supporting friendship formation required long term input and would not occur through just providing activities. A

long term funding structure would be needed to enable the three stages to be reached for young people with complex support needs.

Stage 1: arriving at Building Bridges- few friendships and experiencing isolation

As explained in the subsection above, all of the parents and young people involved within the evaluation stated that before Building Bridges they had few, in any, friendships.

Stage 2: Socialising within Building Bridges

It was very clear that if young people engaged with Building Bridges group activities they made friends. When asked about friendships, young people said:

‘I have other YP who are Building Bridges people, but non outside of Building Bridges.’

‘Happy- it’s funny, we have a laugh. I now have a friendship group.’

During participant observation evaluators saw friendships being made. For example, during a raft building activity day 2 boys were kicking around a football whilst another was standing on the side watching. The 2 boys kicked the ball to him and he joined in the game. After a few minutes they stopped and the evaluator asked them if they ever met up outside of Building Bridges. One of them said:

‘Us two are Friends, he is just an acquaintance’ (pointing to the 3rd boy). Then he turned to this boy and asked him ‘Do you want to join the ‘Circle of Trust’?’ They explained to him that they meet in a coffee shop in town every Friday at 4pm, they exchanged mobile phone numbers and made the arrangements. [direct quote from fieldwork notes]

Whilst this is one example it was not an isolated incident and once friendships groups were made, researchers observed them to be welcoming and respectful, not cliquey and lasted for the duration of the project.

Stage 3: Making friends beyond Building Bridges

Young people made friends beyond Building Bridges activities in two ways. Firstly, some young people met Building Bridges friends outside of the project activities. A young person’s sibling said that her sister had made a friend, which is her first friend, and they go to the park on their own, which is 5 minutes from their house. Other young people said:

‘I’ve joined an origami society in Abergavenny and am making friends there.’ [young person]

‘X does see her friends outside of Building Bridges now’. [parent]

‘I have friends now outside of Building Bridges and last Sunday me and X went on a trip. I wouldn’t have done this before being involved with Building Bridges. They encouraged me to do it.’ [young person]

Secondly, young people have made friends in other settings because of the skills and confidence they have gained from being at Building Bridges. In group interviews young people said that they had made new friends at school or college because they had learnt to be able to talk to strangers. Others said:

‘I have new friends outside the project [from skills in meeting new people gained from the project]. There are 4 of us going on holiday together to Spain.’

‘I have 3 or 4 new friends from Building Bridges. We now meet outside the project too. I have friends outside of Building Bridges too now and I didn’t used to have.’

‘I have new friends and we meet outside Building Bridges.’

‘He’s socialising with other people outside Building Bridges.’ [parent]

This pattern of friendship development shows that individuals are not just joining in an activity but they are actively making friends and for some young people this extends to using socialising skills beyond the project and developing friendships beyond facilitated groups.

Summary conclusions regarding project objective 2

Building Bridges has exceeded the target of 160 young people taking part in a broader range of social, leisure and/or work-related activities. This has reduced social isolation and has led to the majority of young people having a wider social network and the formation of deep and lasting friendships. Additionally, the project has enabled young people to overcome fears of meeting strangers and learn the complexities of friendship formation. In terms of project legacy; some young people will continue their friendships regardless of project continuation, but others may find that they are put into a position of extreme isolation once the regional starter groups and facilitated activities cease. The level of isolation that was commonly experienced by young people prior to the project should not be ignored and is commented upon in Section 7 regarding the impact the project has had.

SECTION 4: ASSESSING OBJECTIVE 3- YOUNG DISABLED PEOPLE WILL HAVE INCREASED CONFIDENCE AND SKILLS SO THEY CAN SUCCESSFULLY MANAGE TRANSITIONS AND LEAD FULL, ACTIVE LIVES

Indicator: Young people report that they have increased confidence and skills to get involved in community life. Young person's views will be supplemented, where appropriate, by trusted supporters such as family members.

Unanimously, parents and young people reported that they had increased confidence and skills from their involvement with the Building Bridges and therefore this indicator has been exceeded. There was not data for young people who chose not to be involved in the project or for young people who have not been involved within group activities. This section therefore reports only upon those young people who have been fully engaged and it is likely that increases in confidence varied according to the level of engagement. Examples of increased confidence from project worker activity sheets showed that becoming more confident was person-centred; for some young people confidence was raised to travel alone or take a part time job, for others it was to have the confidence to be in the same room as strangers or, as one parent explained:

‘I was able to leave my daughter alone just in the company of other young people she felt comfortable with.’

The extent to which the increase in confidence enabled young people to become engaged in community life depended upon the length of time a young person had been with Building Bridges. Within evaluation data gathering, all parents and young people made comments such as:

‘There’s definitely an increase in confidence. We can see a hell of a lot of changes.’
[parent]

‘Building Bridges has literally changed X’s life, and I mean LITERALLY! She really wanted to come here today, she is so different, her confidence has sky-rocketed!’
[parent]

‘I struggle with some people.’ Buddy- ‘she used to be very quiet but she is more confident now to speak out.’ [young person and friend conversation]

‘More confident. It was that I wouldn’t go out. Excited! Bit nervous of people I don’t know.’ [young person]

‘I have learnt to be in groups of people. Before i couldn’t be in a group of people. I couldn’t talk to anyone. I’ve even now given a presentation to a group!’ [young person]

Skills learnt as identified by young people

Parents and young people were unanimous that Building Bridges enabled them to learn new skills. The following list details the skills that young people themselves felt they had learnt:

- About respect and disability- young people said they are learning about certain conditions, and how to respect different needs.
- Friendship skills- Young people said they were now able to compromise, communicate more easily, get along with people, know when to say 'no' to people, help each other and be more patient.
- Life skills and independence- Young people identified cooking, baking, travelling alone, being able to make choices, doing things for oneself, thinking of leaving parents' homes and staying out late as skills for adulthood.
- Outdoor education- Taking risks and undertaking new activities such as camping, sailing and canoeing.
- Practical hobbies- young people have started to have hobbies, some of which involve attending groups such as origami or dance and other that are done at home such as baking.

Seven methods for building confidence

The project has implemented seven different mechanisms for building young people's confidence. The variation in confidence building has enabled young people to feel confident holistically, rather than just in one or two skills.

1. Building confidence through exposure to controlled risk

Young people mentioned how outdoor sports and camping had increased their confidence because:

'Camping teaches you to take matters into your own hands.'

'Camping – first time overnight away from home.'

During participant observation evaluators observed how young people were encouraged to jump into deep water from rafts but they had life jackets and therefore, although it felt risky, it was completely safe. Young people explained that they gained confidence and self-esteem from undertaking activities that felt scary but they succeeded in undertaking them; such as going canoeing and not capsizing. These activities enabled young people to learn to assess risks, overcome fears, undertake new experiences and gain a sense of achievement.

2. Building confidence through raising self-esteem

Feeling accepted, included and heard within Building Bridges activities has enabled young people to have confidence about themselves. This theme of confidence building was unanimous among the young people that were involved within the evaluation and reiterated by at least a third of the parents. Young people's explanations offered the clearest evidence:

'I value myself and what I want is OK.'

'I feel important when I come here, that I matter.'

'Being completely accepted for who I am is very confidence-building.'

'Lifted self-esteem.'

'Helped self-worth and understanding.'

'More belief in myself; more hope for the future.'

3. Building confidence through trust

Parents and young people said that Building Bridges had taught young people to trust staff and, in turn, trust other young people.

'Biggest impact is on my confidence. I wouldn't leave home before. But now knowing Building Bridges is there. They have workers that visit and are reachable.' [young person]

'It has given my son great opportunities to be socialising with other young people and people with different backgrounds, including all the helpers and him, and that has made my son gain trust toward people once again.' [parent]

'I'm supported and there's someone to talk to.' [young person]

4. Building confidence through giving and receiving peer support

Evaluators observed how peer support was facilitated and developed over the course of the project. Once trust was established between the young people they felt able to share concerns and frustrations and offer each other advice and support.

'We're all like one big extended family. You don't have to rely upon parents because they've taught us independence and we have each other.' [fieldwork notes, not verbatim]

'They go on a camping trip every year and this really helps with confidence levels as they do team building activities.' [parent]

5. Building confidence through giving choices

The project offered young people choices from initial meetings in terms of what they wanted support with, what activities they wanted to attend, what happened at regular club nights and through involvement within the project itself. Offering choices enables young people to make their own decisions and learn that their own decisions can be trusted:

'I have choices now. Before, [Building Bridges] I didn't know I had any choices.' [young person]

‘Making choices helps to become assertive.’ [parent]

‘X used to go to everything but now chooses in terms of energy and money. He has begun to follow the same pattern of adulthood choices as his brother at university just in a different way. For example, in freshers and the first year you go to everything but then work it out ... I never thought both sons would follow the same pattern.’ [parent]

6. Building confidence through fostering independence

Building Bridges has enabled young people to learn skills for independent living as well as skills for living in an adult world, as parents commented:

‘The WI cooking course has given life skills. And independent living skills through cleaning and cooking.’

‘The project stretches the YP’s boundaries.’

‘It has helped my daughter with her confidence, getting out of the house, taking public transport on her own and with different skills such as baking and cooking.’

‘It has given them an independent existence, one that does not involve their parents making all the decisions’

7. Building confidence through therapeutic support

Many of the young people have received a variety of therapeutic interventions. Some of these have stemmed from coping with conditions exacerbated by severe social isolation prior to joining the project and include support with OCD, anger management, anxiety and depression:

‘Since joining Building Bridges I realise I’m not so bad.’

‘The project took me from existing to living.’

‘I’m not alone now. I felt incredibly alone. I started suffering from OCD, anxiety and had my learning difficulty and I was all alone. Now I’m far less left out.’

Approximately one third of the young people spoke about bullying experiences and explained that gaining confidence enabled them to talk about bullying as well as overcome the emotions they felt about what had happened to them.

‘You don’t get bullied here; I did at school.’

‘Before Building Bridges I was living in forest of Dean. I faced xenophobia because my face looks Asian. I was bullied relentlessly because of my ethnicity and disability.’

A small minority (approximately 2% of all of the young people worked with) Building Bridges were being supported therapeutically in recovering from experiences of unsafe

independence. Two young people spoke about issues of mate crime and vulnerability to exploitation and crime via people pretending to be friends; three young women talked about domestic abuse within exploitative relationships and one young man discussed street homelessness where he had been assumed to not need support (particularly from a benefits point of view).

Summary conclusions of project objective 3

Building Bridges has exceeded the target of 160 young people having increased confidence and skills. In addition it has contributed to enabling young people to lead full and active lives through increasing their independence and supporting the development of other associated social skills, particularly those who have engaged in group activities.

‘My girl is now involved in the community and independent with her peer group. A happy sociable young person.’

There may be an issue that for many of the young people their ‘full and active life’ is reliant upon the activities that Building Bridges has provided and this could lead to difficulties if the project is not sustained. Some of the young people are very clearly involved in mainstream community life and have learnt life skills that will continue beyond the life of the project. However, other young people may lose confidence and may not have the opportunity to continue to increase their skills if the project ends.

SECTION 5: ASSESSING OBJECTIVE 4- THE SERVICES PROVIDED BY A RANGE OF ORGANISATIONS IN MONMOUTHSHIRE WILL BE WIDENED AND AUGMENTED BY THE PARTICIPATION OF MORE YOUNG DISABLED PEOPLE IN THEIR ACTIVITIES. THIS WILL IMPROVE PARTNERSHIP WORKING TO PRODUCE MORE JOINED UP, HOLISTIC LOCAL OPTIONS

Indicator 1: Community groups will report increases in the number of young disabled people who are joining in their activities.

The target for the number of community groups worked with is 40 over the course of the project. For clarity, the evaluator has used the term 'community group' to only refer to activities that are run by, or in partnership with, other organisations and therefore does not include the segregated activities run solely by Building Bridges. Building Bridges has worked with 46 community groups and organisations. The work that has been undertaken with community groups has included:

- Building sustainability- staff built community groups' capacity to continue to include disabled young people without support from Building Bridges staff. This has successfully occurred within a variety of groups, including golf clubs, Taekwondo and swimming groups.
- Building capacity- Building Bridges staff have spent time working with community organisations and staff to support their confidence and build their skills in facilitating inclusion.
- Supporting individual young people- Individual disabled young people have needed different types of support to begin to join community groups. The approach to support is person centred but can include learning independent travel, social skills, buddying and mentoring, use of fading techniques etc.

There was a 3 stage process to a young person joining a group. Firstly, staff contacted the group organisers and discussed what was involved. Secondly, the project worker attended the first session with one or more young people, offering them support when needed and to see how they get on. Lastly, in some cases, the project worker faded so that the young person continued attending without support. In other instances further support was found or problems arose that require solving. Informal training was given to group leaders if necessary.

All of the community groups reported increased numbers of young disabled people joining their activities, but additionally reported that Building Bridges had helped their organisation or group to sustain the participation of disabled people and that the involvement of disabled young people had enhanced the activities that they had. Whilst only a quarter of the target number of groups were involved in the evaluation; the data offers some key insights into community inclusion.

'The key for me has been mixing together young people with additional needs with mainstream services and activities. It has allowed me to develop awareness with staff and young people of the needs of young people with disabilities and about their

conditions as well. Clearly this has allowed young people with or without disabilities to develop their interpersonal skills with each other.'

Increased inclusion and the values of inclusion

Most of the community groups interviewed expressed a belief in inclusivity; and were grateful to building bridges in enabling them to be accessible to disabled young people:

'The club is open to all and has disabled and non disabled members. I think young people with disabilities should be able to get involved.'

'The building bridges young people really enjoy the mix, as do the other volunteers, who are mainly older people. This is an integrated project.'

'The project has enabled our organisation to develop a positive relationship with a very hard-to-reach sector of our community; without the Building Bridges project it is difficult to imagine how [we] would have engaged with this group of young people.'

The need to train staff to be able to support and facilitate inclusion

The majority of community group leaders welcomed training and support from Building Bridges to feel more confident in supporting disabled young people and ensuring they were accessible. The following quotes highlight how inclusion could not be assumed to occur without relevant skills and understanding of equality.

'About five or six of our members have completed training courses on disability awareness, Autism and first aid, we have also been DBS checked.'

'At the start to be honest I was dreading working with this group of young people, as I didn't really know what to expect ... I didn't really understand the conditions and the issues that the young people face.'

'The other volunteers on the project have gained a lot of understanding and skills by working with the young people; mainly around Autism'

'As a group they have enabled us to think about how we present information, engage with other young people and provide activity and experience that is relevant to the needs and requirements of young people with disabilities.'

Working to mutual benefit

All of the community groups expressed a mutual benefit, suggesting that organisations and the whole community benefit when organisations and communities become accessible.

‘We have been involved in a range of initiatives that we feel have benefitted the young people taking part, and our organisation, immensely.’

‘The young people are a real assets to our volunteering the project.’

‘Young people from the comprehensive gained a wealth of understanding of disability issues by working together with the young people from Building Bridges.’

Volunteers from one of the community organisations reported that they felt they had a role to play in supporting the local town to be more inclusive, and that it can help young disabled people to know that there will be familiar faces in certain community places, whilst two leaders of other community organisations explained how valuable Building Bridges was to life in the town. It was apparent that there was a perceived equality and mutual support between these community organisations and Building Bridges.

Four types of community groups

There were four different types of community groups that Building Bridges has worked with.

1. Mainstream community ‘clubs’

‘Clubs’ refers to groups that are within community settings which meet on a regular basis, not run by Building Bridges and are not specifically for disabled people. The variety and number of community clubs that Building Bridges has worked with is evidence of both a person centred approach whereby young people are choosing what they wish to join and a high level of networking and partnership development.

2. Partnership working with community organisations

‘Community organisation’ in this context is being used to describe organisations rather than places which offer community based interactions, for example The Abergavenny Community Enterprise Partnership. The activities undertaken by these organisations may or may not be specifically for disabled young people, but they enabled disabled young people to go out and use their community facilities.

‘The partnerships that have been formed have been a positive impact on the community.’ [parent]

3. Volunteering and work placements

Work experience and volunteering does not make community groups more inclusive per se, but they are mechanisms that contribute to raising disability awareness within the community and create more inclusive community facilities and spaces, as explained by a parent:

‘Through volunteering and work experience you reach a wider community. It gets the young people out and their faces known. Exposure to the greater public is very good.’ [parent]

Building Bridges has undertaken a range of employment support that both builds community capacity and the young people's skills that are needed for employment. Employment support has included one to one support for paid employment, learning enterprise skills, work experience placements, and volunteering. In some instances work placements and volunteering have led to paid employment. Building Bridges has enabled young people to found 3 social business ventures and worked with a number of community spaces or local businesses to provide employment and volunteering opportunities. These vary from supported employment within supermarkets and at a local theatre, environmental volunteering, work placements with young children, and volunteering in community groups such as a Minecraft gaming club. There was substantial evidence that Building Bridges is enabling young people to be present within their communities as well as supporting community facilities and local businesses to include disabled young people. In total Building Bridges has enabled 75 volunteering or voluntary work experience placement and supported 26 young people to gain paid employment.

4. Using community spaces

Whilst not specifically a 'community group' community inclusion is facilitated when disabled young people are introduced to community spaces and gain the confidence to use them. Initiatives such as the big nights out, or using local community centres for the regional starter groups have introduced young people to their local community spaces and in some instances acted as a stepping stone to other activities. The 'staying safe' and 'big nights out' activities have taught young people about personal safety when in community settings in late evening. These experiences are vital for young people, not only to stay safe, but to also feel able to go out into community spaces alongside non-disabled people of a similar age, acting as a facilitated step on the road to social inclusion at a community level.

By the end of year 3 the support given to young people to access community spaces and training provided to staff in community facilities enabled young people to go to new places, without support and outside of Building Bridges, or attend non segregated activities such as swimming, the pub, setting up a cinema club, shopping in Newport and Cwmbran and meeting friends in cafes. This increase in using community facilities only occurred during year 3 because it took time for young people to have confidence and experience to be able to do it. In addition to knowing how to access facilities within the community, parents explained that:

'Building Bridges is challenging them [young people] to face everyday situations such as paying for meals and planning meeting up times.'

'I think they [BB] are an important element in bridging the gap between disabled young people and their community; a gap that sometimes feels insurmountable.'

'BB has been that important bridge into the community, from structured activity to self-management.'

Indicator 2: 40% of young people, parents and professionals will report improvements in the way that statutory services are working to support young people with their life/transition plans.

The evaluation has not included quantitative methodology and therefore cannot categorically state that 40% of young people, parents and professionals have reported improvements with the way statutory services work with them. Young people did not generally comment upon their experiences of statutory services beyond whether they had a positive or negative experience on school or college. All 5 of the statutory services interviewed for the evaluation reported positive improvements in their ability and process of working with families during transition, evidenced by the following quotes:

‘Our staff are far more aware and have developed skills through their involvement with Building Bridges. For example I referred a young person with acquired brain injury into our services with BB support and I know that before BB’s involvement our staff would have been really wary about getting involved and working with an individual with such needs.’

‘We could learn from their approach to safeguarding and risk management, where they identify potential issues very quickly and plan for them. They have been very informative on this element of their work.’

‘Clearly Building Bridges’ work has had an impact on reducing staff anxiety about working with certain teams. Our service isn’t a specialist one, over and above being a youth service working with young people, but BB has been able to develop knowledge and understanding about disability.’

‘From my perspective, when conducting annual reviews the needs of young people are now far more at the forefront of my thinking, in relation to the issues that they face and also thinking about how their behaviour and reactions to situations may influence an individual’s thinking.’

Most parents reported improvements in their relationships with statutory services and explained how Building Bridges had helped sign post them to services or supported them to access services when they had previously not been able to secure the engagement of services. However, this is not to suggest that parents said there are no problems within their relationships with statutory services, or that any particular statutory service is working in a new way; but that, through supporting families and young people with education placements, social services reviews and other meetings, most families feel an improvement within some of their relationships with statutory services.

‘Building Bridges staff go to meetings and ask questions that we may forget as parents. Our child’s behaviour is normal life so we do not see what we should ask.’

‘The staff here have stepped in and worked with our social worker to help our children progress in the school system.’

‘Building Bridges helped with appointing a PA for my daughter and rather than opening doors, it has helped to identify where the doors were in the first place!’

‘They go into schools and link with social services. They are very supportive in that way. For example, Building Bridges staff go to reviews with social services and have a supportive role.’

‘The name is what it does, it really does build bridges- between Social Services, education and other young people. It breaks down the walls of lack of understanding.’

Parents negative experiences and low confidence with statutory services

Whilst there is evidence that points to improvements in the way statutory services work with families during transition; most parents had had some very negative experiences of statutory services and found that Building Bridges alleviated some of the problems they had faced in terms of access to services and getting information. There is little evidence beyond the limited phone interviews with 5 statutory services that suggests the improvements that have taken place will be sustained. Generally parents reported that statutory services are ‘still battles’ and ‘a brick wall’ with comments such as Building Bridges is:

‘The first thing I haven’t had to fight for’

And:

‘As for access to services, well that has always been difficult and nothing has changed with that, other than Building Bridges has often been the catalyst, raising awareness to the extent that now my son is able, and will continue, to be involved with social activities outside the Building Bridges setting.’

‘Building Bridges staff start with a ‘how can we achieve this?’ attitude. Quite often we are faced with a ‘that will cost too much’ or a straight-forward ‘no’ response.’

Parents had low confidence in many statutory services but Building Bridges staff helped this improve:

‘By understanding her needs and communicating them to others - often we are dealing with agencies who do not actually know my daughter and yet are meant to help decide what will be best for her.’

Carrying the load for over stretched services

There was some evidence that suggested the current economic conditions were resulting in reductions of statutory service staff time and that Building Bridges was being used to fill in

gaps which were once undertaken by statutory services. Parents, professionals and community groups commented with:

‘I don’t know what we do would do without BB.’ [statutory service]

‘Schools simply haven’t had the capacity to do these additional things with young people.’ [parent]

‘My workload just kept increasing and got to the stage where I didn’t have the time to do the initial 1-2-1 work to set up young people up for engagement in activities. BB came along at the right time and provided that transition support that I (and my colleague) had been doing’ [statutory service]

‘[they] linked us to careers Wales- careers have such little time.’ [parent]

‘In a way, it’s had a negative impact on some services that view Bridges as ‘carrying the can’ for offering disabled services.’ [statutory service]

In conclusion to this indicator, whilst statutory services and families’ relationships have improved there is no specific pattern to this improvement. There is not one particular service that has improved. This suggests that rather than improvements being systemic they are down to individualised relationship building and relevant to particular young people’s circumstances. This does not mean the changes are not sustainable, but that they tend to reside within staff in statutory services rather than systems which they use. The main evidence of improvements related to an opening of relationships between statutory services and families that has been facilitated by Building Bridges and is suggestive that families have needed some facilitated support to be able to access statutory service:

‘Social services have just got involved because of Building Bridges.’ [parent]

‘They have helped us access to education and get an SEN.’ [parent]

‘Staff have helped with finding college placement.’ [parent]

‘They have had a huge impact upon helping with employment and Further Education issues and doing such things as working to ensure access to transport so that young people can get to events and activities.’ [statutory service]

‘BB have been able to work with young people on a 1-2-1 basis to do this, helping increase confidence and worked on things such as developing a young person’s CV and supporting them into volunteering opportunities. They have been able to fill gaps for the post-16 age group and with school leavers.’ [statutory service]

‘Building Bridges have offered bespoke work that has helped with ‘career management’ transition that has touched on lots of aspects for a young person; providing a fuller picture.’

Conclusions regarding meeting the criteria for objective 4

Both indicators within project objective 4 have been exceeded; both numerically and in quality of work. The second indicator regarding reported improvements in statutory services is an estimate; and was not within young people's experiences for discussion. However, more than half of parents and all statutory services reported improvements although there were no discernible systemic patterns of change.

The project has worked with an impressive range of community clubs, organisations, local businesses and community facilities, building capacity within communities to facilitate inclusion and be accessible whilst also enabling young people to have the knowledge and confidence to feel a part of community activities.

SECTION 6: WORKING MODELS FOR INNOVATIVE PRACTICE

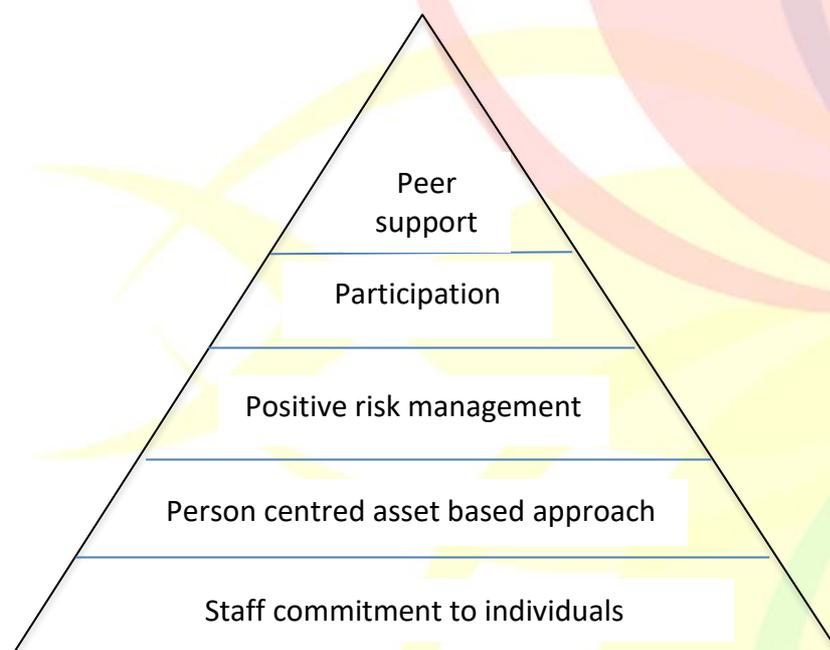
Building Bridges has enabled young people to learn social and personal skills to be able to join in; including coping with anxiety, learning independent travel, managing finances, coping with bullying, social skills and friendship etiquette, empowering them for independent and co-dependent living, as explained by a professional in statutory services:

‘What they do is more than help with setting up, or sorting out access to activities. Look at the impact that they have with families, or how they support independence and can really help to move people on. They offer key transition support and really help young people with their aspirations.’

The Building Bridges project has worked to three models that have been implemented simultaneously and holistically- an empowerment model, a key working model and a progression model, each of which has involved highly innovative practice. Behind these 3 models has been an agenda of social inclusion, with project direction and strategy involving building the capacity of mainstream communities and services to understand, support and welcome disabled young people within their groups. This section details each of these approaches in turn in order to document learning and legacy from the project.

An empowerment model

The Empowerment model Building Bridges has created has been developed through innovation and pragmatism rather than the implementation of an “off the shelf” theory. It comprises of 5 mechanisms that need to be implemented to build individual capacity and lifestyle choices and avoid a dependency upon specific services. Each mechanism works as a foundation to the next one, so the bottom mechanisms need to be in place before mechanisms higher up the pyramid can be achieved.



1. Staff commitment

Staff had a commitment to the individual young people and took a 'can do' approach to working with young people. It was evident that the Building Bridges project had an ethos of being *of* service, rather simply being *a* service. This is summed up by project workers stating in focus groups:

'You should be more of my boss'

High commitment was partly due to the key working role that staff took on. Young people described how different project workers were more like friends, but that they still challenge them and support them when they need it and family members praised the communication of staff, appreciating out of hours texts and phonecalls:

'The Building Bridges team are very helpful, responsive and cheerful. They have done a lot to lift our spirits and to engage with our child. They go the extra mile to deliver a quality experience.'

'The workers are very responsive- they seem to work all hours and go above and beyond. A lifeline to me'

2. Positive risk management

Through having commitment to individuals the project had to work with risk in a different way in order to provide person centred opportunities, and positive key working. For example to enable young people to learn bus routes they put in place steps to manage the risk that young people may get lost. They have helped with finances, and there is a risk that budgets would not be managed, so they worked up to household budget for those living independently. Camping and outdoor sports involve all kinds of risks and supporting new friends to push wheelchairs can risk accident. There was clear positive risk management rather than risk avoidance to enable independence, friendship growth and to demonstrate to participants how to manage risks in everyday life.

3. Person centred and asset based approaches

The project has put individual choices first. Workers were observed to demonstrate skills to young people and were easily able to switch between methods of support depending upon the person they were interacting with and what lifestyle choices they wanted to implement. They worked to each young person's pace, so whilst all young people were progressing through different aspects of the project; that progression was related to their own pace with no worker trying to speed up progression or slow it down that could lead to dependency:

'Because B.B. staff understand young disabled people and treat them in the way that the individual needs. They are making a big bridge between young disabled people and their community.'

'If you make a suggestion they facilitate it'

4. Participation

The project has embedded participation in two ways within their work- firstly through joining in activities and enabling group belonging and secondly through giving voice and shared decision making. Young people described how they are listened to and heard by project workers:

‘Problems and solutions are being identified by the young people therefore they can be part of the steering group.’

Young people have been involved in service development ideas, evaluation and choice of activities as well as their own progress within the project:

‘Flexibility in the group – activities are arranged which suit the individual’s preferences.’

5. Facilitation of peer support and peer learning

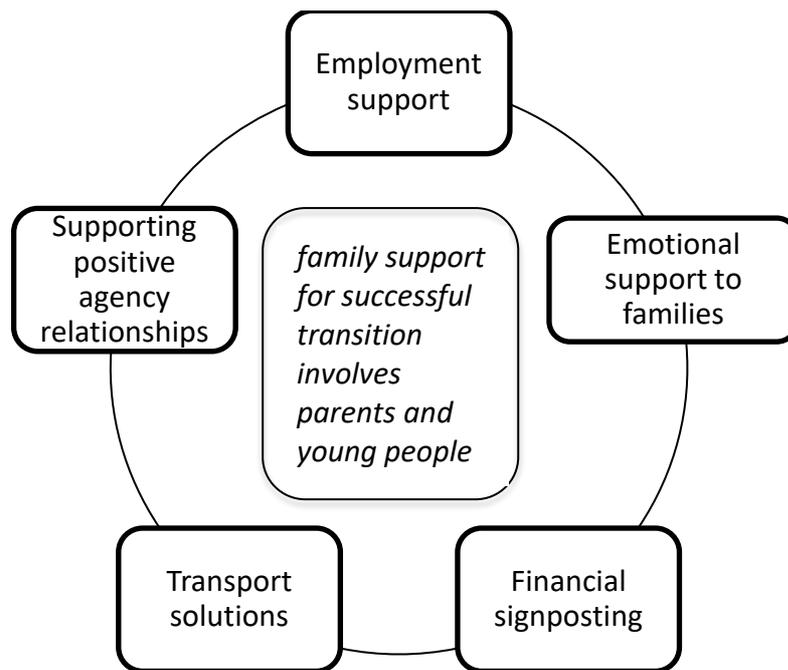
Young people and parents spoke about how the project facilitates peer to peer support and learning. Whilst this is the general nature of reciprocal friendship, the project has stepped beyond just providing activities in a room, to enabling young people to learn from each other; thus building friendship, trust, responsibility and confidence. Young people were particularly appreciative of travel buddies and learning hobbies from each other and they felt empowered through having the opportunity and responsibility of helping others learn. Peer support and learning has been fundamental to developing life outside Building Bridges and avoiding service dependency.

‘Allowed to be herself here. She can choose what she does, conversations with friends etc. no judgements or criticisms. This then empowers other young people.’
[parent]

‘BB is very varied and helps young people see that they can live alone. They facilitate peer support.’ [parent]

Key working and family support model

The project workers not only support the young person; but work to a key working model that recognises they are situated within families and that families may need signposting or support. Implementing the empowerment model means that the exact nature of key working is tailored firstly to the needs and preferences of the young person and key working is highly pragmatic in terms of “do what needs to be done” to improve the transition process. The different aspects of the key working model are shown below.



1. Support for employment

Parents, young people and partner agencies spoke about the vocational skills that had been learnt with Building Bridges and how difficult it is for disabled young people to gain employment related skills. Volunteering, work placements and help with job applications and interviews were all cited as vital to transition and Building Bridges has supported all of these work related activities:

‘Vocational side: Job applications, Interview technique – needs more of this.’

‘The shop was good. It got them out there, got it working. It’s hard to get work experience without Building Bridges.’

‘BB helps them look beyond childhood, looking at things such as voluntary work, work experience and general employability.’

2. Emotional support to families

The parents of young disabled people are often managing a dual role of parenting and caring. The key working model recognised the role that parents and family have in young people's lives and how each role changes during transition to adulthood. Work with families was individualised and included emotional support that enabled parents to share their hopes and concerns for their adolescent children. Some parents described how this helped them think of possibilities for their child’s future.

‘It’s given me another direction of thought – possibilities and ways forward for my son.’ [parent]

‘BB helps us with child development, and to understand what’s next.’ [parent]

‘BB has allowed us to initiate conversations about what happens next and to start to develop some thinking about (semi) independent accommodation. We are developing a plan for the future.’ [quote from researcher notes and not verbatim]

‘It is almost as if BB ... help inform the learning of parents in helping them let go and develop each young person’s independence. BB really has helped shape the family dynamic and perhaps create a more relaxed atmosphere with the family.’ [social work]

‘They’re kind of like wise siblings.’ [young person]

3. Financial sign posting and referrals

The project has helped individual young people with household budgeting but also supported parents to access financial help or benefits that they are entitled to, often direct payments or other forms of social care support.

‘Within 2 weeks of the referral into BB meetings with the family and daughter had been set up, the project sorted out Direct Payments, access to appropriate benefits was facilitated and supported.’

4. Transport solutions

40% (90 people) of the project participants have received support to learn to travel independently or had travel training. There are multiple transport difficulties in rural counties and disabled young people face additional barriers in being to use public transport. However; the project has worked on an individualised basis to explore the transport barriers for each person and work out solutions that have included lift shares, cross project transport buddies, and training for independent travel.

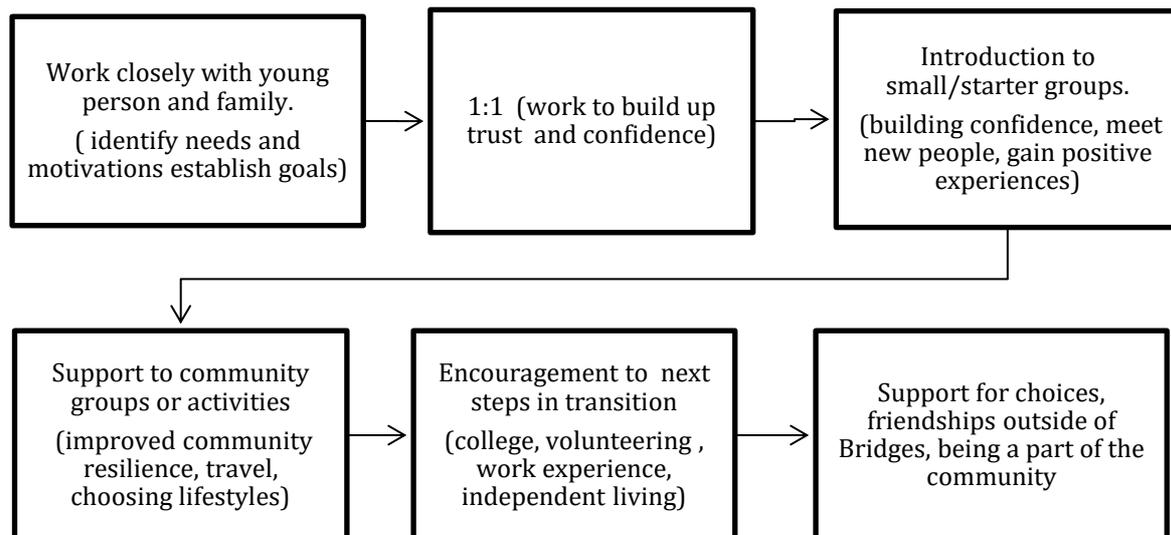
5. Facilitating relationships with services

As detailed in the previous section, Building Bridges has supported young people and families with practicalities such as transition plans or college places as well as facilitating access to services and improving relationships between families and statutory services.

Working to a progression model

Operationally, Building Bridges has enabled young people to progress within its’ service. This takes the form of the flow chart below, but using this model alongside an empowerment model has meant that each young person has progressed to and within each stage in their own time and according to their own choices.

‘Building Bridges staff introduce you to everyone and try to pair you up with someone with the same interests. They take you aside to make sure that you are ok. It’s like having an extra parent, without them being a parent, or a friend.’



Young people needed different amounts of time to move through this model. For example, during observation of a parachute game at one of the starter groups one young person had just got to grips with being in a room with other people, others were learning to stand next to people or hold a parachute that others were also holding. Some just participated by putting equipment away at the end. They were each in a process of learning about friendships and how to overcome the difficulties they faced and these processes have to be facilitated at the young person's pace.

Working to a social inclusion agenda

Building Bridges has aimed to facilitate social inclusion and build capacity for social inclusion.

1. Building social inclusion externally through utilisation of wide networks

Building Bridges has developed a very wide network of partner organisations, which it has used strategically to build capacity for inclusion. The project has had contact with many businesses local to Monmouthshire, community groups and services within a wide geographical area (for example, from Gloucester museum to Coleg Gwent Cross Keys campus) and across sectors. Many of these organisations have been supported by the project to either extend their existing provision for disabled young people or to start to include disabled young people within their services as detailed in section 5 regarding work with community groups. One practitioner in youth work commented:

'For me it's not about treating people differently, just because they have a disability, but is about knowing what extra support someone might need to facilitate their attendance and continued involvement.'

'The groups and organisations need an intermediary to help the disabled young person access the group and the groups need the intermediary to help them

understand the needs of the young person. Once these things are established the confidence of the young person needs to be nurtured and maintained in order for that young person to continue to be happy and attending.' [youth services]

2. Building disability awareness and a respect agenda

Within the project young people have developed an understanding of their own, and each other's, disabilities, and how to extend tolerance to each other and others. Evaluators observed mutual respect and inclusivity during participant observation through the use of cooperative games where everyone was rewarded, adaptations to enable everyone to join in, and mutual support between workers, volunteers and young people to undertake outdoor activities. Young people and parents explained how the project helped them understand disability, each other's differences and maintain respect for each other:

'Accepting and tolerant- Hard to understand and learn, but a big thing.' [parent]

'Understand disability, self-reflection and feeling OK in self. Tolerance and acceptance of each other.' [young person]

'There is a label and stigma to disability but Building Bridges reduces this.' [young person]

'Respect- there's not disrespect here' [young person]

Additionally, young people have gained the confidence and awareness that disability does not hold a stigma and that disabled people can be, and should be, a part of the wider community:

'Mum's view is that she [daughter] hid away for 4 years on account of her disability, but has developed the confidence to let people know. The younger generation have a greater awareness of such issues' [researcher notes, not verbatim]

Conclusions

Without a progression model and an empowerment model, a service like Building Bridges would be at risk of building ever increased attendance at segregated activity clubs and developing a dependency upon a service. By using these 2 models and having an agenda of increased social inclusion Building Bridges has increased both the communities' ability to support individuals, and worked on a one to one basis with families and young people to help them realise aspirations and learn skills for adulthood. It should be made explicit that the models have been most successful for young people who have not needed significant amounts of time to build confidence or who have not needed permanent one to one support. Whilst these models may work for this client group, Building Bridges has not had the organisational capacity to undertake more intensive support work, which may be needed to enable young people with complex support needs to move through the progression model.

SECTION 7: ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF THE PROJECT

The Building Bridges project has had a number of impacts. The impact for young people at the start of the progression model outlined in Section 6 will not be as great as the impact upon young people who were at the end of the model.

Impact upon young people

- Reduced social isolation- The majority of young people had few, if any, friends prior to Building Bridges and describe staying in the house by themselves.
- Increased well being- the majority of young people explain reduction in poor mental health that came from isolation and increased physical health due to exercise and understanding of healthy living.
- Increased confidence and self esteem- Through making friends and feeling a part of the community young people gain confidence to be independent and develop aspirations.
- Increased independence- all young people gained travel skills, financial skills, feel able to make choices, respect for self and others.
- Development of aspirations- young people developed hobbies, relationships, career aspirations, education goals and housing options.
- Improved family relationships and reduction of tensions- parents felt more supported through contact with each other and other services reducing their feeling of fear about the future. Increased independence leads to less stress within family life and less need for crisis services.

Impact upon communities

- Increased social inclusion- staff learnt how to include and offer support to disabled people and young people learnt how to use community facilities.
- Advances in disability equality- Disabled young people have found a place within communities and have become more welcomed within them.
- New businesses- social businesses were established.
- Reduction of NEETs- Disabled young people were no longer NEET because they had support to access education, develop travel solutions, experience volunteering and gain paid employment.
- Family support- Families felt more supported through contact with each other and gained information to reduce their feeling of fear about the future.

Impact upon parents and family life

- Parents had time to themselves and were therefore less stressed needing less crisis support or crisis services.
- Parents had time to focus upon siblings and other family members.
- Family life was described as 'normalised' as young people had socialising, learning and employment opportunities similar to their non disabled peers.

- Family life was described as less stressful because young people had developed the confidence to contribute to family discussions.

Impact upon services

- Reduction in the need for crisis services- families were more able to cope.
- Less friction in relationships between families and statutory services (particularly education and social work).
- Signposting to the right services reduced wasting staff time and avoided ineffective referrals.
- Advising families so they understood service provision, thresholds and the need for positive relationships.
- Solution focused education opportunities- e.g. job coaching, shadowing rather than segregated courses- led to more learning opportunities and employment.
- Avoided higher levels of direct payments, saving money for services.
- Low level assessment of need.
- Cost effective model compared to other service delivery models.
- Continuation work done for statutory services.
- Provision of alternative source of respite and summer schemes.

SECTION 8: CONCLUSIONS

Assessing progress against the project objectives and indicators

All of the project objectives and indicators have been met and exceeded, whilst the quality of work undertaken by Building Bridges was almost universally described as exceptional. It should be remembered that this positive outcome may only apply to young people and families that engaged fully with the project; and will apply particularly to those who have both attended group sessions and received some individualised support such as with reviews or for work placements.

Key learning

The three models of working were implemented simultaneously alongside a values base of inclusion. This could not have been implemented without effective partnership working, highly skilled staff and an ability to be flexible in order to accommodate a fully person centred way of working. The impacts of the project are evidence based, diverse and wide reaching.

Key messages for Welsh Government

1. Work on implementing anti- bullying policies and the hate crime framework, as it relates to young people with additional needs.
2. Strengthen the national forums so young people with additional needs have a platform to speak out to decision makers about the issues that are affecting them.
3. Enable colleges to deliver part time vocational courses and apprenticeships. Many young people with additional needs require flexibility in study options that are currently not available.
4. Ensure better training in disability equality at local government levels.

Key messages for statutory services

1. Social inclusion does not just happen. Community groups and facilities need support to understand disability equality and how to implement it.
2. Young people need time and one to one support before they are able to access activities and make friends. Just providing activities does not mean they are accessible.
3. Some parents have fears about mainstream settings based upon very negative experiences that have harmed young people. Key working and family support are needed during transition years to overcome these experiences and support parents to change parenting and caring roles. This benefits the whole family and enables aspirations to be built.

4. There is significant fear from parents if the service offered by Building bridges is discontinued, with comments being 'I just don't know how we will cope'.
5. There is fear among young people about what they will do if Building Bridges does not continue. These young people are significantly disadvantaged and at risk from severe social isolation.
6. There is fear among services about Building bridges being discontinued. The careers' service, youth service, social work team and education personnel all expressed concern that they have no capacity to pick up the work the service does; that transition will become disjointed and there will be a spike in unemployment among young disabled people. There is also concern that the therapeutic interventions offered will stop and result in young people being at increased risk of harm.

