



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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Summer of Fun evaluation (summary)

A process evaluation of a scheme supporting the wellbeing of children and young people (aged 0 to 25)

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Background, aims and methodology

On 16 June 2021, the Welsh Government announced a £5 million Summer of Fun for children and young people aged 0 to 25 to play and participate in leisure, recreational, sporting and cultural activities to help rebuild their social and emotional skills in both Welsh and English. The fund was awarded to local authorities to provide access to activities to support the social, emotional, physical and mental wellbeing of all children and young people. That, in turn, is integral to supporting them in reengaging with learning and education, enabling all children and young people to reach their full potential and critical in the recovery of the COVID-19 pandemic. The programme was delivered from 01 July to 31 September 2021.

Ecorys delivered a mixed methods process evaluation of the SoF programme. The evaluation aims were to assess the programme; how it was implemented across local authorities; perceived outcomes for its participants and gather learning to inform future policy and practice.

Rich and varied insights were gathered from qualitative interviews with 15 senior stakeholders, 19 local authority SoF leads, and 27 children and young people. A breadth of views were gained from 969 programme participants and 249

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providers, who completed an online survey. Management information was analysed from 409 providers. A virtual round table event involved discussion of early findings with local authority leads and providers and co-development of the conclusions and recommendations.

Findings

Programme reach

Over 67,500 children and young people were reached by the SoF programme 2021 across Wales. Almost half of all providers offered family activities, alongside children and young person facing activities. Reach was better among younger age groups, with 70% of participants aged 5 to 11. Only 7% of participants were aged 16 to 25. Most local authorities struggled to know how to best engage older age group.

Local authority leads sought to develop inclusive programmes. Reach by ethnicity was in alignment with the national population, with 9% of programme participants being Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic. Across participants, 5% had additional learning needs (ALN) and disabled people accounted for 3%. Welsh medium provision was available: 43% of SoF sessions were delivered with bilingual aspects and 11% of sessions were delivered solely in Welsh medium. Local authority leads in some areas reported a lack of specialist provision for those with additional needs and Welsh language.

Local authority programme implementation

Local authorities reported that the funding offered additionality to business-as-usual provision. Local authorities broadly adopted one of three SoF delivery models. Most local authorities had both open access and targeted provision (Model 1). Some local authorities had a largely open access (Model 2) or entirely targeted programme (Model 3). Local authority approaches depended on local interpretation of the guidance, team capacity, and whether they had an existing summer offer to build on.

A key challenge was the short timeframe between funding announcement and programme start date. As a result, most local authorities started delivery in late July 2021. Most local authorities favoured working with existing approved providers for efficiency but there was evidence of some local authorities appointing new providers. Local authority leads explained that there was limited time and capacity to quality assure delivery. Providers received differing levels of guidance, support, and training depending on the local authority they worked with.

Participant motivations and enablers to attend

Parents, children and young people reported three key motivators to attend SoF: firstly, as it was free-to-access; secondly, the chance to try a variety of activities that they otherwise may not have had access to; and finally, the opportunity to spend time out of the home and meet people. Additionally, children and young people were motivated to attend by the prospect of having fun. The friendliness of provider staff further encouraged attendance. Providers believed the key barriers for participant attendance to SoF activities related to transport, parent/carer related reasons and concerns about COVID-19 or self-isolation.

Programme outcomes and benefits

Almost all (99%) of the children and young people who completed the participant survey reported that they had fun attending SoF activities. Programme participants were supported to re-engage with community provision and develop a range of personal and social skills following the lockdowns. It also supported the physical and mental wellbeing of participants.

Providers benefited from much-needed financial investment following lockdowns. They developed relationships with new children and young people. Local authority leads believed that communities felt positive about the investment in them. A potential unintended outcome is that SoF has raised local community expectations of having a similar programme next year.

Conclusions and recommendations

There was widespread support for the programme across national and local stakeholders. The SoF programme provided children and young people with a range of opportunities to play, socialise and have fun.

Senior stakeholders, local authorities and children and young people recommended sustained funding to support COVID-19 recovery of children and young people over the longer-term. Local authorities saw potential to build on their learning from the 2021 SoF programme. Similarly, providers wanted to build on the relationships they had formed with children and young people.

Recommendations emerging from the research to enhance future provision included:

- retain the focus on fun and play
- longer-term investment in year round provision for children and young people
- the inclusion of food provision or light refreshments
- allow sufficient time to effectively plan and set-up programmes
- strengthen support for local authorities
 - clarification on use funding for childcare, open access or targeted provision
 - spaces for local authorities to share learning and good practice
 - support for programme marketing and branding
 - streamline reporting and evaluation processes.
- refine provider appointment, support and delivery
 - help national providers to better support the programme
 - strengthening quality assurance of delivery
 - space for parents at provision
- enhance reach and inclusivity for 16 to 25 year olds, children with ALN and disabilities and of Welsh medium provision

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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