

The **Gwent** Best Start in Life: Community of Practice Quarterly Newsletter

Giving **EVERY** baby and child the best start in life

Autumn Edition 2026

Welcome to our Autumn edition of the Gwent Best Start in Life Community of Practice e-newsletter! As we move into the autumn months, we hope you have enjoyed a restful summer and are looking forward to the season ahead. This edition shares updates, learning and examples of the great work taking place across Gwent to support babies, young children and families, helping to give every child the best possible start in life.



Regional Delivery Plan **Progress Update**

In our previous e-newsletter, we shared that work was underway to develop the Gwent Best Start in Life Regional Delivery Plan. Since then, significant progress has been made through collaboration with partners across the Early Years system.

A Delivery Plan has now been developed, setting out the actions that will make the greatest difference to improving outcomes for babies, children and families across Gwent. Lead partners have been identified for 5 of the 6 priority areas:

1. Planning the best pregnancy for me and my family
2. Building strong emotional and mental health for me and my family
3. Supporting my family with my development from baby to child to help me be ready to start school
4. Ensuring my home is warm, safe and secure for me and my family
5. Helping my family to maximise their income to meet my needs
6. Helping me and my family access high quality, inclusive childcare

Alongside this, we have mapped current activity and progress against the Three Foundation Stones of the 👉 **Public Health Wales: Early Years Framework for Action** to identify strengths, opportunities and areas for further development.

The Delivery Plan (and accompanying documents) have now been shared with the Gwent Public Services Board for review and feedback. Following this, they will be refined before engagement begins with families across Gwent to ensure their views and experiences help shape the final approach.

We are particularly keen to work with our Community of Practice members during this phase. Whether through sharing engagement opportunities or connecting us with families and community groups, your support will be invaluable in ensuring the voices of babies, children and families remain at the heart of our approach. Further details will be shared soon.

Gwent Highlights

Celebrating Funding for To & Fro Initiative

Home-Start Cymru has secured £189,000 to deliver To and Fro, a new three-year project supporting families with babies aged 6-15 months. Delivered in partnership between **ABUHB Speech Language & Therapy, Gwent Public Health Team and Health Visiting**, the programme will provide home visits, parent and baby groups, volunteer support, and specialist speech and language input to help parents build their babies' early communication skills and strengthen parent-child relationships. The project will initially operate in Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen before expanding to Newport and Monmouthshire, with the aim of supporting around 300 families across Gwent.

👉 Click here to read this incredible news in the [South Wales Argus!](#)

Blaenau Gwent- Childcare and Play Awards 2026:

Mrs Puddleducks Day Nursery, Rassau, Ebbw Vale won the **Gwobr Ymrwymiad HSPSS – the Commitment to the Healthy & Sustainable Pre-School Scheme Award 2026**. Through consistent effort, openness to learning and a strong commitment to giving children the best possible start in life, this setting has continued to grow and strengthen its practice. **Great work!**



Caerphilly- Play in the Park:

This summer, Caerphilly Early Years and Childcare Service and Caerphilly Play celebrated five years of **Play in the Park**. Families enjoyed free lunches, arts and crafts, outdoor play, and activities promoting screen-free family time, including creating device boxes to use at home. To mark the anniversary, families helped name the new Caerphilly Play Panda, with the winning entry being Pip. **It was a fantastic summer of play, creativity and family fun!**



Newport- 'Chat with Me':

The **Newport Early Years Speech and Language Therapy team** won a 'Highly Commended' award at ABUHB's 2026 staff recognition awards in the 'Partnership Working' category, for their 'Chat With Me' book which was co-produced in partnership with Newport Local Authority and parents. The book is bilingual and follows 'Cas' inspired by 'Casnewydd' going on adventures around Newport using simple rhymes and familiar city landmarks. It is designed to promote interactive reading, encourage conversations beyond the book, and support children's speech, language and communication development. **Congratulations!**



Gwent Highlights

Monmouthshire- Teddy Bears' Picnic:

This summer, Monmouthshire's Early Years Team hosted a Teddy Bears' Picnic to celebrate the vital role local childminders play in supporting young children and families. The event brought childminders and children together for a fun day outdoors, while also providing opportunities to connect, share ideas and build support networks. One childminder thanked the team, saying the children "really enjoyed making new friends" and were "full of giggles and laughter on the way home." The picnic highlighted the value of the childminding community and their contribution to giving children the best start in life. What a wonderful day!



Torfaen- 20 Year Celebrations:

This summer, Torfaen celebrated 20 years of Flying Start and 20 years of Cwmbran Integrated Children's Centre with a week-long programme showcasing partnership working across health, early years and community services. Coinciding with National Breastfeeding Week and National Playday, the event welcomed more than 670 visitors and featured themed activities including Party Day, Teddy Bears' Picnic, Animals Day, Beach Day and Cynefin. The celebrations highlighted two decades of positive impact for local children and families. What an achievement!



Promoting Healthy Weight in Children

1 in 4

**children aged 4-5 years
in Gwent are living with
overweight or obesity.**

A child who enjoys
VEGETABLES will
eat more of them

👉 **TastEd** offer Early Years settings, schools and parents a set of activities designed to give children the chance to experience new fruits and vegetables in a positive way. You can access training videos, easy to use lesson plans and activity ideas meaning in no time you'll be ready to deliver TastEd in your setting or home.



Helping Build a Breastfeeding-Friendly Gwent

Creating welcoming spaces, trusted support and connected communities

Supporting families to breastfeed is everyone's business and plays an important part in giving every baby the best start in life. Small actions can make a big difference to a family's breastfeeding journey, helping parents feel welcomed, supported and confident when feeding their baby in their local community.

How Can You Help?

- Signpost families to Breastfeeding Welcome Venues across Gwent, helping them identify welcoming spaces where they can breastfeed while out and about. View the map here [👉 Breastfeeding Welcome Venues](#)
- Join the growing network of Breastfeeding Welcome venues and help create breastfeeding-friendly communities. [👉 Register here!](#)
- Signpost families to trusted support and resources:
 - [👉 ABUHB Responsive Feeding Team](#)
 - [👉 The Breastfeeding Network](#)
 - [👉 The National Breastfeeding Helpline](#)
- Encourage families to access local Antenatal Breastfeeding Workshops (see below).

Antenatal Breastfeeding Workshops

Breastfeeding workshops provide families with an opportunity to access support, build confidence and connect with other parents in a welcoming environment. You can signpost families to the local Antenatal Breastfeeding Workshops and community groups via the [👉 Gwent Early Years Services Eventbrite Page.](#)

Hear what families have said about the difference these groups have made.



Launch of A Tongue Tie Clinic

Since launching in April, the ABUHB Tongue Tie Clinic has been supporting families experiencing feeding difficulties linked to tongue tie.

If families have concerns about feeding, they should speak to their Midwife or Health Visitor, who can make a referral where appropriate, or they can email the [Infant Feeding Service](#) for advice and support. See some of the amazing feedback the service has received below:

"I really appreciate that the appointment was not rushed. I was given lots of support, validation for how I was feeling."

"So grateful for this service as it has helped my baby so much"

"Everything was interesting, as I'm very new to this."

"The session was excellent, I learnt a lot, and I am surprised by what I didn't know."

"[There was] no pressure to force mums to choose breastfeeding"

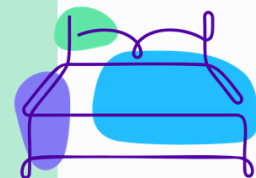
Safe Storage of Breastmilk		
Milk	Place	Maximum Time
Fresh Breastmilk including colostrum	Room Temperature	6 hours
	Fridge at 5°C-10°C	3 days
	Fridge at 4°C or lower	5 days If temperature rises above 4°C after 3 days, then use within 6 hours.
Frozen Breastmilk	Freezer at -18°C or lower	6 Months
Defrosting Breastmilk	When defrosting in the fridge	Usually takes 12 hours to defrost, use as soon as fully defrosted
	When defrosting outside the fridge	Use as soon as fully defrosted

Stay Connected

Take a look at what's coming up across the region, from events and consultations to guidance updates and helpful resources.

The Lullaby Trust - Early Years Hub

👉 **The Lullaby Trust** have created an Early Years Hub on their website where you can find tailored safer sleep guidance and training as well as resources to download or purchase, including a full early years guide, a handy poster for your notice board or staff room, and an audit checklist to use regularly in your setting.



Every day, you work with care and dedication, often under pressure with limited resources. We hope this new Early Years Hub will support you in your day-to-day work, guiding you on how to keep your settings as sleep safe as possible.

Early Years Toileting Team (EYTT): New referral process

The EYTT now supports children up to their **7th birthday** with toileting needs linked to developmental differences, including ALN and neurodevelopmental needs, whether diagnosed or not. Support for constipation in children aged 6 months+ continues.

Referrals can now **only** be made by **health professionals** using the new referral form and after a care plan has been trialled.

👉 **Education and local authority staff** should contact the child's Health Visitor or School Nurse. They can also contact the **Health Visiting Service** or **School Nursing Service**.

👉 **Parents/carers** can speak to their GP for assessment and referral if required.

For the health professional referral form and any enquiries, please contact:

👉 **ABB.EarlyYearsToiletingTeam@wales.nhs.uk**

Did you know the Health Board's Melo website, offers a wide range of free self-help resources for parents-to-be and new parents?

Living Life to the Full offers free online courses and resources for people who are pregnant or adjusting to life as a new parent. Available 24/7 and completed at a pace that suits the individual, the course uses books, videos and audio resources to support learning.

The courses help improve emotional wellbeing during pregnancy and early parenthood, covering topics such as preparing for birth, building secure attachment and self-care. Take a look at the resources available, try out a course yourself to feel confident recommending them to families. 👉 **[Melo Cymru](#)**

melo

The Voice of the Infant: Expert Insight Videos

Babies and infants communicate their needs and feelings in a variety of ways, both verbally and non-verbally. Listening to the voice of the infant helps us to understand their lived experience and what they need from the adults around them.

👉 [NSPCC Learning](#) have released a series of expert insight films that have been designed to help practitioners who work with babies and infants to identify the infant's voice and incorporate it into their practice.

Watch the films here 👉 [The Voice of the Infant](#)



Gwent Neurodiversity Early Support Hub

Earlier this year, The ABUHB CAMHS Neurodiversity Early Support Hub (NESH) launched the 👉 [Gwent Neurodiversity Website](#) which provides a single, accessible source of trusted information for professionals and families across Gwent. You can find clear guidance on 👉 [understanding neurodiversity](#), local support pathways, resources to promote early help and inclusive practice, and signposting to services, training and community support, alongside 👉 [videos and podcasts](#).



Early identification of neurodivergence is important as children will only start to flourish if their ways of behaving and learning are recognised and responded to. As professionals, you are often best placed to pick up on some of the signs of neurodiversity such as sensory processing, communication, focus, and emotional regulation.

You might be interested in the upcoming training sessions organised by [Children in Wales](#) (please note there is an associated cost):

👉 [Neurodiversity: Supporting Children, Young People and Families](#)

👉 [ADHD: An Understanding for Practitioners](#)



Baby Bundles

Baby Bundles provide free essential items, information, and support for eligible families in Wales. Eligibility is assessed during pregnancy, with registration usually completed by a Midwife at the 25-week antenatal appointment.

If registration is missed, Midwives or Health Visitors can register babies up to four months of age. Foster carers, adoptive parents, and parents through surrogacy may also be eligible. 👉 [Baby Bundles](#)

Mobile phones in schools

Welsh Government are seeking views on draft guidance to support schools in restricting the use of mobile phones during the school day. The consultation ends on 2nd December 2026 👉 [Have your say](#).

Ready to Learn, Ready to Grow: Evaluation Findings



In 2025-26, Newport City Council, in partnership with Home-Start Cymru and the Gwent Public Health Team secured Welsh Government funding through the Child Poverty Innovation and Supporting Communities Grant to explore how we can better support children and families experiencing poverty to be ready for school. We are now pleased to share the findings from the Ready to Learn, Ready to Grow evaluation.

The project worked directly with families across Gwent while also engaging parents and practitioners to better understand school readiness and the impact of poverty on child development. The evaluation found that many children needed support with key developmental skills before starting school, particularly communication and language, social interaction, emotional development and independence.

Encouragingly, the project demonstrated positive improvements for many children and parents, showing the value of early, targeted support and strong partnership working. The findings also highlighted a shared recognition that school readiness is about much more than academic skills alone.

The report recommends strengthening multi-agency collaboration, developing a shared understanding of school readiness across services, and building on effective practice across Gwent. Partners are now working together to take forward these recommendations and improve outcomes for children and families across the region.



Want to find out more? Keep an eye out for the full Ready to Learn Ready to Grow Evaluation Report!

Start Strong

In our Spring 2026 e-newsletter, we mentioned a new UK-wide organisation called **Start Strong** which focuses on ensuring **every baby and young child has the opportunity to thrive, regardless of the circumstances into which they are born.**

Since then, Start Strong have created a 👉 **ten-year strategy** which centres on three ambitions: changing the conversation about early childhood, building a broad movement for change and supporting governments to take bold, long-term action.

As dedicated practitioners, across the early years sector, you work tirelessly every day to support babies, children and families, making a real and lasting difference in their communities.

Start Strong are developing a new National Vision which combines different insights and evidence to create a vision and priorities that reflect both what babies and children need to thrive and the kind of society people want to build.

We are encouraging the residents of Gwent to have their say by taking part in their survey 👉 **Have your say**. Babies, children and young people should also be a part of the conversation. You can find an 👉 **activity pack online** to help listen to and capture their ideas and experiences.

Every child matters but not every child gets a fair start.

Vaccinations Save Lives

Flu can be a serious illness and spreads easily during the winter months. Ensuring our communities are vaccinated is the best way to help protect yourselves and those around you from becoming seriously unwell. Read more about 🙌 [Flu vaccinations](#)

Across 🙌 [Gwent in 2025/2026](#), flu vaccine uptake was:

49.6%

for 2 year olds

50.4%

for 3 year olds

78.1%

**for 4 - 10 year olds
at school based sessions**

The biggest gap in flu vaccine uptake is among 2 and 3 year olds, with children in more deprived areas less likely to be vaccinated.

Every conversation counts.

By talking to families about the benefits of flu vaccination, addressing concerns and signposting to local services, you can help increase uptake, reduce inequalities and give more children the protection they need this winter.

Take a look at the 🙌 [Flu Vaccines Communication Toolkit for nurseries and schools](#) to help guide how you can communicate this message with families.



Vaccination Brief Advice

As well as the above toolkit, there is also a free interactive training session for you to build your confidence in discussing vaccinations with families.

The session covers the benefits of vaccination, addresses common concerns and myth busting, and provides practical skills for supportive, evidence-based conversations to help improve vaccine uptake and reduce inequalities across Gwent. For further information or to book a place, please contact 🙌 ABB.HealthProtection@wales.nhs.uk

Important Reminder for Pregnant Women



Pregnant women are strongly encouraged to get their flu vaccine, as flu can be more serious during pregnancy and may increase the risk of complications for both mother and baby. Pregnant women are also eligible for RSV and whooping cough (Pertussis) vaccinations.

For more information about flu vaccinations, eligibility and how to get vaccinated, visit: 🙌 [Flu Vaccinations](#)

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Coming Up: Best Start in Life Webinars

We're delighted to invite you to our upcoming Best Start in Life webinars. Together, we'll explore practice through a lens of equity and inclusion, considering which children and families are left behind, the barriers they face and how small changes in our approach can make meaningful differences.

The webinars offer space to reflect on how we can strengthen what we do in our roles, close gaps in support and better respond to what babies, children and families need to thrive.

How.... supports every baby and child, in Gwent, to have the Best Start in Life.

Understanding the NEST/NYTH Framework and Children's Rights

 11 November 2026 |  10:00am

 Delivered by: Rebecca Stanton | Regional Children and Families Transformation Lead and NEST/NYTH Lead for Gwent | **ABUHB**

 Register [HERE!](#)

SAVE THE DATE

 13 January 2027 |  10:00am

 Delivered by: TBC

 Register [HERE!](#)

 Missed a session? Catch up on previous webinars on our dedicated [BSiL CoP YouTube channel](#).



Join the Community

Become a member by completing our [membership form](#) here!

Contribute to future E-Newsletters

Have resources, insights or good practice to share? Send us your content via our [online form](#) here!

Any Questions? Email us at: ABB.BSiL.CoP@wales.nhs.uk

Together, we can ensure EVERY baby and child has the best start in life.

