

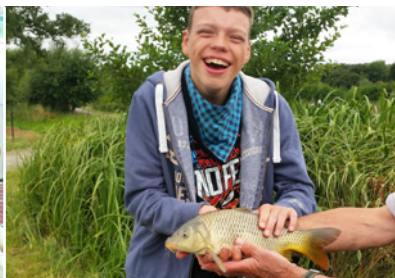


# the Building Bridges project

IMPACT REPORT 2013-17



A BRIDGES CENTRE INITIATIVE  
OPERATING THROUGHOUT MONMOUTHSHIRE



# Contents

Introduction.....	1
How it works .....	2
Creating local opportunities .....	5
Making friends and building confidence.....	6
Activities, adventure and learning.....	8
Our 'pyramid of empowerment'.....	10
Key-working and family support.....	13
Making a difference.....	14
Our team and their contact information.....	16
Thank you and supporters.....	17

**The Building Bridges Project** is a social enterprise, funded by the National Lottery, working across Monmouthshire. It is a Bridges Centre initiative.

Bridges Centre, Drybridge Park, Monmouth NP25 5AS  
(Charity No.1079085)

“ The (Building Bridges) project took me from existing to living. ”



Activities, fun, friendship and work-related experiences for young people with additional needs aged between 14 and 25 in Monmouthshire.

## Introduction

The Building Bridges Project is a county-wide initiative, based in Monmouth. Monmouthshire is split into three areas; Monmouth, Abergavenny and Chepstow and Caldicot with a project focus in each area.

Our aim is to support and encourage young people with additional needs to engage in their local communities; broadening their social networks, making friends, confidence building and learning social skills.

Our focus is on sustainability; supporting young people to make connections with individuals and groups that outlive the life of our project. We do this through one-to-one and group work encompassing social, leisure and work-related activities.

The young people we have worked with to date have achieved far more than we envisaged for the project when it started.

They have gained confidence, friendships, relationships, self-awareness, independence, employability skills and enthusiasm for life. Several now live independently, others have gained employment, attended college, passed their driving test and made long-standing relationships.

“ 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. ”

## How it works...

Our aim is to find out all about the young people we work with; their hopes, dreams and aspirations, and then try to find ways to help them achieve the things that are important to them and for them.

Having met our young people and their families, our project workers go out into the local community to explore the most suitable opportunities, and the best people to link up with. In some cases, where suitable opportunities do not exist, we explore setting-up small groups so that like-minded young people can experience a new or existing interest in the company of others. This provides a relaxed and informal atmosphere to help ease social anxiety and offers the opportunity to build relationships through a common interest.

### Monmouth area

The Monmouth area covers surrounding villages such as Llandogo and Skenfrith.

### Abergavenny area

Abergavenny area engagement extends to Raglan, Little Mill, Gilwern and Grosmont.

### Chepstow & Caldicot areas

In the south of the county the project covers the Chepstow and Severnside areas including Magor, Caerwent and the villages in the lower Wye Valley.

“The project’s target has been significantly exceeded with a total of 226 young people being involved within the Building Bridges project.”





## Creating local opportunities

Where local opportunities do exist, we work alongside young people to give them confidence to build a social network within the group setting. This could be within a club, work place, gym or voluntary placement among others.

In Monmouth, young people have linked in with the local fishing group where they have had fun fishing with the club and learning new skills. Some of the young people have joined the club and made new friends in their community giving them confidence and a feeling of belonging.

In Abergavenny, young people have linked in with a new community centre, joining in with community groups and activities, delivering

leaflets, cooking for events and using the various spaces to hang out, having fun and getting to know the people who live in their local area. This has given them a sense of being within their community, building their confidence and improving their wellbeing.

In Magor, a group of young people set up a pop-up shop in the community while their local shop was closed for refurbishment. The young people learnt new skills and got to know people in their local community. One young person gained employment in the new shop when it reopened.

“ (Building Bridges) 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. ”

## Making friends and building confidence

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

- Parents and young people said that engagement with Building Bridges has taught young people to trust staff and, in turn, trust other young people
- Parents also commented that Building Bridges has enabled young people to learn skills for independent living as well as skills for living in an adult world

- Our independent 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
- Therapeutic interventions, such as support with OCD, anger management, anxiety and depression, have benefitted young people coping with conditions exacerbated by severe social isolation prior to joining the project.

“ Before Building Bridges I couldn't speak to anyone in school and so had no friends. I spent time mainly at home, watching TV or reading. Now I have loads of friends from coming to Building Bridges... ”





## Activities, adventure and learning

Young people on the project have exceeded everybody's expectations. For example, some set up a community coffee shop whilst others have worked hard to gain a Duke of Edinburgh Award. Many volunteer at community projects across the county, such as at the Bridges Centre in Monmouth. Some have learnt to swim, climb, hill walk, cycle, sail, canoe, build rafts and shelters. Others have learnt to play pool, petanque, belly-dance, drum, dance and cook.

“ They do more than help with setting up, or sorting out access to activities. Look at the impact they have with families and how they support independence and really help move people on. ”

Together with our young people we have run a cycling event, camping trips, cinema clubs, a baking business, and managed an AirBnB let. We have also set up and are involved in regular youth clubs, drama and dance groups, swimming groups, football groups and golfing sessions.

These activities continually encourage young people to learn more about their local communities, the environment and social issues.

We are particularly proud of those young people who presented at conferences and schools talking about the project, their lives and disability awareness. Likewise of those who have given feedback to the local council, social services and the Welsh Government.

“ My daughter is now involved in the community and independent with her peer group. A happy sociable young person. ”



## Our 'pyramid of empowerment'

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 five 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 lower mechanisms need to be in place before mechanisms higher up the pyramid can be achieved.

*Excerpt from Section 6, 'Working Models of Innovative Practice', of our independent evaluator's report.*





## Key-working and family support

Building Bridges 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 our key-working model are shown in this diagram.



*Excerpt from Section 6, 'Working Models of Innovative Practice', of our independent evaluator's report.*

## Making a difference

### The project's impact on young people included:

- Reduced social isolation
- Increased wellbeing
- Increased confidence and self-esteem
- Increased independence
- Development of aspirations
- Improved family relationships.

### The project's impact on communities included:

- Increased social inclusion
- Advances in disability equality
- Social enterprises established
- Reduction of NEETs (young people Not in Employment, Education or Training).

### The project's impact on family life included:

- Parents needing less crisis support/services
- Family life was described as 'normalised'.

### The project's impact on services included:

- Reduction in the need for crisis services
- Less friction in relationships between families and statutory services
- Good signposting – avoiding ineffective referrals
- Solution-focused education opportunities
- Cost-effective
- Alternative source of respite and summer schemes.

“ The workers are very responsive – they seem to work all hours and go above and beyond. A lifeline to me. ”

Courtesy of our independent evaluators CARP COLLABORATIONS. The full evaluation report is available to download at [www.carpcollaborations.org](http://www.carpcollaborations.org)





# Our team and contact information

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**Bridges Centre**

**The Santander Foundation**

**Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations (GAVO)**

**Frank Sutton Ltd**

We'd also like to thank all those who have worked with us and contributed to addressing our objectives across Monmouthshire, in particular our project team and steering group.

We'd also like to say how much we, and the young people who engage with the project, appreciate the generosity and commitment of our volunteers.



**ARIENNIR GAN Y LOTERI  
LOTTERY FUNDED**



**BRIDGES CENTRE**



# the Building Bridges project

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