

## Carmarthenshire Youth Council

***“We aim to be the voice for the views of young people in Carmarthenshire by creating opportunities for young people to participate meaningfully in decision making on issues that impact on their lives and to bring about positive change.”***

### Background

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (Annex B) states that Local Authorities have a duty to support a County Youth Forum/Council as a representative body of young people to act as a channel for young people’s views across their local authority and represent those views to local and national decision-making bodies.

They should aim to be as inclusive as possible in terms of geographical spread, age, gender and to represent specialist needs and more marginalised young people. For County Youth Forums/Councils to operate effectively, they will need to be adequately supported by Local Authorities who should consider what support is required to do this. They should be informed and linked to their local democratic structures. They will also need to be effectively linked into national participation structures such as Young Wales, the Children’s Commissioner for Wales, and the National Assembly for Wales.

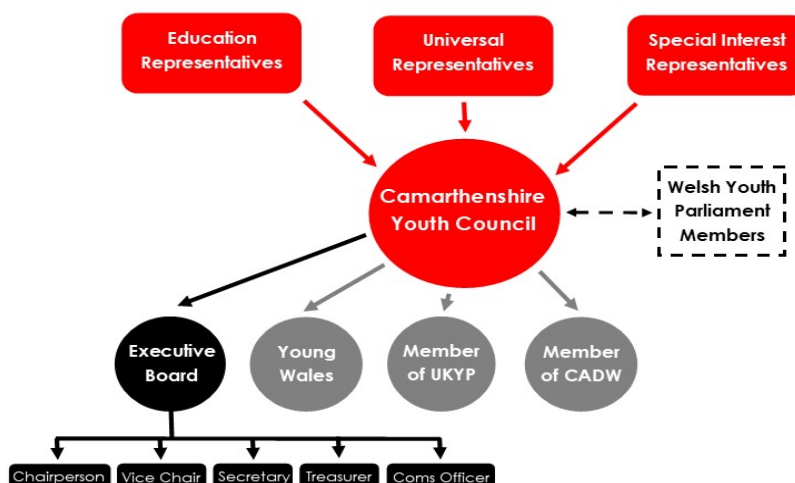
Carmarthenshire Youth Council (CYC) celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> Birthday last Autumn, having been established in 2003 by young people for the benefit of the young people of Carmarthenshire.

The Youth Council is a group of young people aged 11 – 21 years from across Carmarthenshire who act as a voice for young people by representing the views and opinions of all young people in the county.

### Carmarthenshire Youth Council Aims:

- To benefit all young people in Carmarthenshire who are aged 0 to 25 years old.
- To be a voice for all children and young people in Carmarthenshire.
- To bring about positive change and development.
- To create opportunities for young people to become involved in decision making / democratic processes on a local, national, and international level.
- Improve services provided to children and young people in Carmarthenshire.

### CYC Structure:



## **CYC Membership:**

CYC is made up of a possible 42 members representing 3 main areas:

### Education

Young people from Secondary and Special School Councils, private schools, students at Coleg Sir Gar and University of Wales Trinity St David. (14 positions).

### Universal

Any young people aged 11- 21 years living, studying, or working in Carmarthenshire (14 positions).

### Special Interest

Any young people who may have experience of:

- Homelessness.
- The youth justice system.
- Who are not engaged in education, training, or employment (NEET).

Aswell as young people who:

- have a disability.
- are part of the young LGBTQ+ community.
- are from ethnic minority groups and/or the Gypsy, Roma Travelling community.
- are care experienced young people or care leavers.
- are young carers.
- are the son or daughter of foster carer.
- are a Child in Need of Care and Support.
- are a refugee or a migrant.
- are first language Welsh.
- are from the young farming community or who live rurally.

Since the establishment of the Welsh Youth Parliament, we also have positions for the three young people representing the constitutional areas in Carmarthenshire who have the opportunity to be co-opted on to the Youth Council to ensure communication and effective working to give Carmarthenshire's young people a voice nationally.

CYC continues to meet every last Monday of the calendar month to act upon on issues raised by young people and to develop projects and initiatives which encourage young people's participation.

Currently, due to capacity and resources we have a core group of 20 active young people from across Carmarthenshire who attend monthly meetings, subgroup meetings and away days.

Due to the third Welsh Youth Parliament term ending recently and elections taking place in November, the co-opted positions are currently vacant.

## **CYC REPRESENTATION AND DEMOCRACY**

### **ASDAN Local Councillor Shadowing Award**

7 Young People have completed their ASDAN Local Councillor Shadowing Award. During the past year they had an opportunity to shadow local Cabinet Members to gain an insight into their roles, responsibilities and to raise awareness of local democracy and to strengthen the relationship with decision makers.

The award gives young people the opportunity to learn first-hand what the County Council does. Members attended Ward visits, gaining insights about local issues, they visited amenities such

as Pembrey Country Park and learnt about its history and its new developments, explored the workings of Cwm Environmental at Nantycaws, attended full council and scrutiny meetings and took part in one-to-one sessions with the councillors.

### **Welsh Youth Parliament (WYP)**

During both Welsh Youth Parliamentary Terms, CYC has been fortunate to have active WYP Members regularly engaging in and attending meetings; Term 1 - 2019/21 - three young people; Term 2 - 2021/23 - one young person. Over the past 24 months, our member of the WYP has been an important part of CYC leading on the Young People's Mental Health Research through attending events, meetings and residential to represent the County.

Over the past twelve months we have taken up opportunities to be involved in the issues put forward to Welsh Government - Sustainable Ways, Young Minds Matter and My School Day.

### **UK Youth Parliament**

For over a decade, we have had a UK Youth Parliament Member representing the voice of young people in Carmarthenshire at a UK national level. UKYPs hold their position for two years. During this time, they are responsible for leading on the Make Your Mark Ballot, attending monthly meetings and events. Involvement culminates in representing Carmarthenshire and Wales at the Annual Sitting, held in the House of Commons, London.

In 2017, the UK saw the youngest person (aged 14 years old) from Carmarthenshire be elected as a Debate Lead and address the House from the despatch box at the annual event.

### **Young Wales**

An initiative funded by Welsh Government that gives young people the opportunities to raise issues that are important to them and to ensure their voices are heard by decision makers, policy officers, Welsh Government officials and Ministers.

One CYC Member represents Carmarthenshire on the Young Wales Management Advisory Board and they have had the opportunity to attend a round table event with MS Julie Morgan, Deputy Minister for Social Services and Sally Holland; they have also contributed to the content and launch of a book 'Pause, Play, Fast Forward' celebrating Children's Rights. Production of the book included interviewing ministers such as Julie Morgan, meeting with illustrators and ensuring that the book would be accessible to all.

Throughout the years, many CYC Members have represented Carmarthenshire in at Young Wales events such as the Youth Festival, celebrating World Children's Day, taking part in workshops raising awareness on issues important to young people, meeting and presenting reports to Ministers. Projects young people have been involved with include the creation of a young people friendly animation for Welsh Government explaining the importance of the Budget Improvement Plan for Wales.

### **CADW (Regional Junior Safeguarding Childrens Board)**

We continue to support and contribute to the work of CADW. 5 young people regularly attend meetings and take part in residential weekends to plan for the Regional Group.

CYC Members were integral to the creation and production of a Safeguarding Training Animation created for CYSUR Mid and West Wales Safeguarding Board. Last year CYC Members were presented with awards to recognise their involvement and contribution to the animation.

### **Wider Representation**

CYC Members have numerous opportunities to represent their areas, Carmarthenshire, and

Wales in a variety of events, meetings, and projects. Locally, and most recently CYC Members have:

- Attended and presented at Dyfed Powys Police and Crime Commissioner Youth Engagement Conference.
- Been involved in meeting with ESTYN Inspectors to share their views and opinions on secondary education in the County in preparation for the Department's inspection.

Members have been fortunate to have a number of European visits and opportunities, such as:

- Representing Wales at an Eurochild Conference where they met the Queen of Belgium and contributed to the European Children's Rights Programme,
- Two members attended a weeklong International Youth Conference held in Poland designed to promote the human rights of young people in the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of youth policy.
- 6 members participated in the Bendegeidfran Project, in partnership with Urdd Gobaith Cymru. The project funded by an EU grant aimed to establish a joint cross-border initiative, which focuses upon the cultural co-operation between youth agencies in Ireland and Wales.
- CYC hosted a group of young people from Kilkenny, Ireland to share their experiences and good practice. CYC members were fortunate to visit Kilkenny and were invited to attend the Kilkenny Comhairle na nÓg to deliver a presentation on creating genuine and inclusive participation of young people in decision making and local democracy.
- Most recently, a CYC member represented Wales and the UK in the *Island of Ireland Peace Park: Youth Symposium* held in Belgium and was one of fifteen young adults who were invited by Youth Bank International, to create a new Modern Peace Pledge that reflects today's priorities.

Also, involvement in unforgettable experiences such as:

- Attending the official openings of the Welsh Assembly Government.
- Attending Queen Elizabeth's Garden Party.

CYC Members actively seek opportunities that promote participation and support children's rights. In previous years, members have been proud to represent young people on projects with:

- Welcoming Syrian refugees.
- Attending theatre forums exploring Disability Hate Crime.
- Contributing to Global Awareness Days.
- Representing Carmarthenshire in the fourth Atlantic Youth Forum Conference at Wilton Park, West Sussex. This conference provided an opportunity for young Americans, Canadians, and Europeans to gain insights into each other's concerns and perceptions on key challenges facing their countries and the international community.
- Attending the Annual British Youth Council Conventions in Nottingham, Cardiff, and London.

## **CAMPAIGNS AND PROJECT WORK**

CYC seeks to influence decisions on a number of issues affecting children and young people in Carmarthenshire and Wales. From listening to young people, looking at consultation results and using intelligence from participation mechanisms (e.g. UKYP, Young Wales, Make Your Mark) CYC identifies and prioritises issues affecting young people to address, and if needed, to campaign on. Over the years, CYC has championed issues such as Bullying, Children's Rights,

Mental Health. CYC led the fight for Period Dignity, and most recently highlighting Domestic Violence.

### **Period Poverty**

The 2018 Make Your Mark Ballot results highlighted Period Poverty as an issue facing young people in Carmarthenshire, voted as the 5<sup>th</sup> issue across the County, but was top issue in one specific area of the County. Shocked to learn how some young girls stay at home from school due to not having adequate protection whilst on their period encouraged CYC to develop the Period Poverty Sir Gâr Project (sometime before Welsh Government's Period Dignity work) to ensure no girls have their right to education compromised whilst being on their period.

In the first year (thanks to a boost by Welsh Government Grant) CYC, in partnership with the Youth Support Service (YSS), organised boxes to supply schools, youth projects and originations with products. In the first year a total of 177,760 products were distributed across Carmarthenshire, with over 50 additional locations (such as shops, leisure centres, cafes) providing collection points. During the Covid pandemic the Youth Support Service (YSS) was contacted by young people who could no longer access products due to lockdown, and in response, 147 mailpacks of products were sent out to young people mitigate this issue.

### **Never Silence the Violence**

CYC has been working with several services and partners on a bilingual DocuDrama which aims to raise awareness of domestic violence, specifically looking at the key stages after reporting domestic abuse. The young people felt that this was important as everyone focuses on reporting domestic abuse whilst the aftermath is rarely spoken about. This causes people to feel like they can't report anything as not knowing what will happen afterwards is scary.

Young people took part in a training session on filming skills to prepare for the creation of the 'Never Silence the Violence' DocuDrama and have been actively involved in starring roles, filming, and interviewing professionals such as Dyfed Powys Police, Children's Services and CarmDas for the Project. The DocuDrama is anticipated to be launched in the Summer of 2024.

### **Recruitment and Selection**

For over a decade, CYC members have participated in the selection and recruitment process of Carmarthenshire County Council staff, having a meaningful influence in the decision being made. They have been involved in a wide range of interview panels and/or assessments e.g. CCC Youth Participation Worker and the CCC Director of Places and Infrastructure.

Involving CYC in the process provides ownership and responsibility for the person they recruit to a service they use, likewise, services are more likely to appoint staff who respect children and young people and vice-versa. Young people bring unique skills to the interview process which differ to that of professionals; they look for qualities in a candidate that professionals may not look for, and therefore they can strengthen the interview process.

### **Youth Conferences**

Since 2004, the Annual Youth Conference has become a permanent fixture in the CYC's year. Traditionally it attracts just under 200 young people and professionals and has provided a spotlight on several issues affecting young people from Mental Health, Bullying, Future Opportunities, Domestic Violence, School Curriculum, Speak Up just to name a few.

The conferences have been essential to the work of CYC providing a platform for young people to speak directly with decision makers, to raise awareness, to provide a place where young people can safely share their opinions and make a difference.

## **Votes At 16**

CYC championed and led the way to lowering the voting age to 16 years old. In 2007, at a Funky Dragon AGM, over 70 young people voted by secret ballot that lowering the voting age would be Funky Dragon's main priority for 2008. Fed up with being ignored by key decision makers and political processes, CYC Members led the national campaign to the then National Assembly for Wales where 44 members voted in favour of dropping the voting age to 16. Assembly Members from all parties backed the motion that 16-year-olds should be entitled to vote in general and local elections the foundations to the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

## **Stori Harriet**

A pledge created by CYC championing mental health issues by encouraging people to start a conversation as it could make a huge difference to someone's life.

The campaign was inspired by a CYC Member's personal life story. CYC received great support and backing for the campaign #StoriHarriet which people signed as a promise to start a conversation as it could change a life. Winning Carmarthenshire Radio Child of Courage Award was a testament to the member's work and recognition of their individual strength, fight, and courage that they have shown during difficult times.

## **Stand Up to Bullying**

A campaign that originated from a Youth Conference saw the CYC produced a report that included 5 recommendations for schools highlighted by young people as the main issues that needed to be addressed.

The report was presented at our Secondary Head Teachers' Meeting and Departmental Managers' Meeting. Nationally, the Stand Up to Bullying Report gathered momentum and CYC was asked to attend a National Conference and to contribute to a National Anti-Bullying Workshop, sharing their work and findings to the delegation. Also, via the National Anti-Bullying Group run by Young Wales, CYC Members had the opportunity to meet with Ministers so their findings could be shared to influence the Welsh Government Anti-Bullying Policy for Schools.

## **CHILDREN'S RIGHTS**

### **Children's Rights Promise**

In 2016, Carmarthenshire Youth Council secured a commitment to Children's Rights from Carmarthenshire County Council leaders and officers who signed Carmarthenshire's Children's Rights Promise. The Promise makes sure that the rights of children and young people from Carmarthenshire will be respected, taken seriously, and considered when the County Council is making decisions. The promise demonstrates the Council's commitment *to meet minimum standards when making decisions that affect our lives as Children and Young People.*

### **Raising Awareness**

Young People continue to inform CYC and professionals that they do not know about Children's Rights; CYC members have been involved in developing and creating the CCC Introduction to Children's Rights Training Resources that will be given to schools to support the new curriculum.

### **Rights Ambassadors**

Prior to the Covid pandemic, CYC spread the word on Children's Rights by training and supporting Children's Rights Community Ambassadors. The scheme is run by the Children's Commissioner for Wales and encourages young people to be involved in *monthly missions*. Missions are consultation-type activities on issues important to young people such as transport to school, school dinners and school calendar. The information collected is used by the Children's Commissioner in her response to Welsh Government. The role of encourages young

people to raise awareness of children's rights to children and young people across Carmarthenshire.

### **UNCRC Training**

Over the past two years, nine young people completed Participation and Children's Rights Training delivered by Children in Wales; 12 young people attend Children's Rights Training delivered by CCC.

In preparation for our conference 20 young people attended and completed UNCRC Training the Trainer sessions, with 16 of those young people delivering a workshop at the conference.

### **Rights Together: A Celebration of Children's Rights**

To celebrate 20 years of the CYC and to raise awareness of Children's Rights, in the Autumn CYC planned, organised, and delivered their Annual Youth Conference, "Rights Together". The aim of the conference was to empower young people by raising awareness of their rights. Empowering young people with knowledge of their rights is transformative. It equips them to navigate challenges and support themselves.

The conference was a major success with over 150 young people and professionals from across Carmarthenshire in attendance. The positive feedback received from attendees and guests is a testament to the hard work of everyone involved. CYC Conference planners also gained many new skills and lots of experience on how to organise a large-scale event, helped develop young people's understanding of children's rights, from organising different games that including the articles of the UNCRC, to thinking about which organisations to invite.

The conference did not only inspire participants with knowledge of their rights, but also ignited a passion for positive change and started conversations. This experience has fuelled their commitment to continue advocating for children's rights in the future.

## **CONSULTATION**

### **Our Voice, Our Vote, Our Future**

A new annual youth consultation developed in partnership with CCC Youth Support Service was launched in October 2023. CYC reached out to all our Secondary Schools to ask them to provide two topics/motions that were most important to them and the wider school.

An event took place in November 2023 where school pupils from across the county met to present, debate and decided on the issues that will be used to create their first Our Voice Ballot Paper. Voting was open for all young people aged 11–18-year-old across Carmarthenshire, giving them the opportunity to voice their opinions and have their say on what matters to them. A staggering 5,221 young people voted, resulting in the top three most important topics voted by young people were:

1. Teach real life lessons (1051 votes)
2. More outdoor lessons to be taught in School (945 votes)
3. Stop bullying (595 votes)

Officially announced at their AGM in July 2023, Teach Real Life Lessons has become CYC's priority issue for the coming year.

### **Make Your Mark**

2023 has been the first year for CYC not to support the National Make Youth Mark Ballot, due to a decision to hold a local consultation that will highlight issues important to our young people.

Up until then every year CYC Lead, encouraged and supported young people in

Carmarthenshire to take part in a national Make Your Mark Ballot. It is the largest youth consultation across the UK, and an opportunity for young people aged 11 – 18 years across Carmarthenshire to get involved and vote on the most important issues to them. The five top issues affecting young people across the UK are then debated at the Annual Sitting held in the House of Commons in November.

Carmarthenshire UKYP traditionally leads on the project by training other members and getting support from secondary schools, youth projects and organisations across the county to get as many young people as possible involved in the ballot. CYC members also offer to visit as many secondary schools and youth projects in Carmarthenshire as possible to encourage them to get involved and have their say on a UK level.

## **Consultations**

CYC does not only take part in consultations, but it also organises and supports internal and external consultation opportunities for young people to raise their concerns, views, opinions, and suggestions on issues important to them. Some important or recent consultations young people have been involved with are:

- CCC Carers Pathways City Deal Project.
- WG Child Poverty Plan Consultation.
- School in Reach consultation on Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing.
- CCC Play and Recreational Activities.
- CCC Budget Consultation.
- Walled Garden Project.
- WG Cost of Living.
- Camdas - New communication and awareness raising campaign for young people on Violence Against Women Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence.
- Welsh Youth Parliament Mental Health research.
- CARHMS and Young Carers by CiW Wales.
- Ysgol a Fi – Returning to School after Lockdown.

## **Residential Experiences and Away Days**

A Summer Residential has been a staple of the CYC's Calendar; for many members, it may be the first time that they are away from their family. Residential weekends are encouraged due to the benefits such as developing independence, improved confidence, and self-esteem, and can improve group relationships.

During the Summer Camp members work on specific tasks, develop projects, plan events, take part in team building activities, but most of all they make life-long memories.

CYC holds a number of away days throughout the year. These provide great opportunities as members spend more time together to work on specific projects, receive training, take part in team games, problem solving activities all improving confidence and leadership skills.

## **RECOGNITION AND ACHIEVEMENTS**

The dedication of CYC, both as an organisation and by individual members, has been acknowledged over the years with prestigious local and national Awards. CYC has been recognised by:

- Winning CAVS Organisation of the year.
- Being presented the High Sheriff Award for Voluntary Organisation of the Year by Thomas O 'S Lloyd of Dryslwyn.



- Winning the National Young Volunteers Paid with Respect - Inspirational Young Person in Wales Award for their dedication and commitment to CYC.
- Winning Carmarthenshire's Community Champion Award.
- Winning Radio Carmarthenshire's Young Volunteer of the Year.
- Community Hero Award, Child of Courage.
- Carmarthenshire Radio Child of Courage Award.

Along with other young people who access the YSS, CYC Members have been fundamental in the success of obtaining the Youth Service Gold Quality Mark. Young people's participation was central to the application and service with young people providing case-studies, testimonials and some attended a meeting with the Assessors.

## **CONCLUSION FROM CYC MEMBERSHIP**

*"The impact CYC has had on the development of young people is immense. Many of the members of CYC have gained confidence in speaking up and interacting with people, whether it's members of the council, members of the public or other young people. At the same time, members have gained experience in speech writing and project management. These skills and experiences have helped mould young people to be confident and skilled as they become young adults. This is what CYC is about. This is why I am proud to be part of CYC and now Vice-Chair of CYC, being part of a group that is used to teach, support and encourage young people to use their voices, and to use their ideas to create a better environment for young people. This is why I strive to take the support I was given from CYC to feel I was able to grow and use it to support the young people of CYC, for their ideas to flourish and to have their voices heard.*

*Young people need to be actively engaged in decision-making processes as their perspectives and experiences offer invaluable insights into shaping a more inclusive and forward-thinking society. By involving the youth of today, we ensure that policies and initiatives address the needs and concerns of the next generation, and it helps to grow a sense of ownership and empowerment among them. Additionally, including young voices promotes diversity of thought, encourages innovation, and strengthens their principles by cultivating a culture of civic participation from an early age. Ultimately, engaging youth in decision-making not only benefits society today but also lays the groundwork for a more sustainable and equitable future.*

*CYC helps to achieve this by giving opportunities such as participating in opportunities including policy discussions, community projects, and youth-led campaigns, members of the CYC plays an important role in creating positive change and building a more inclusive and vibrant society."*