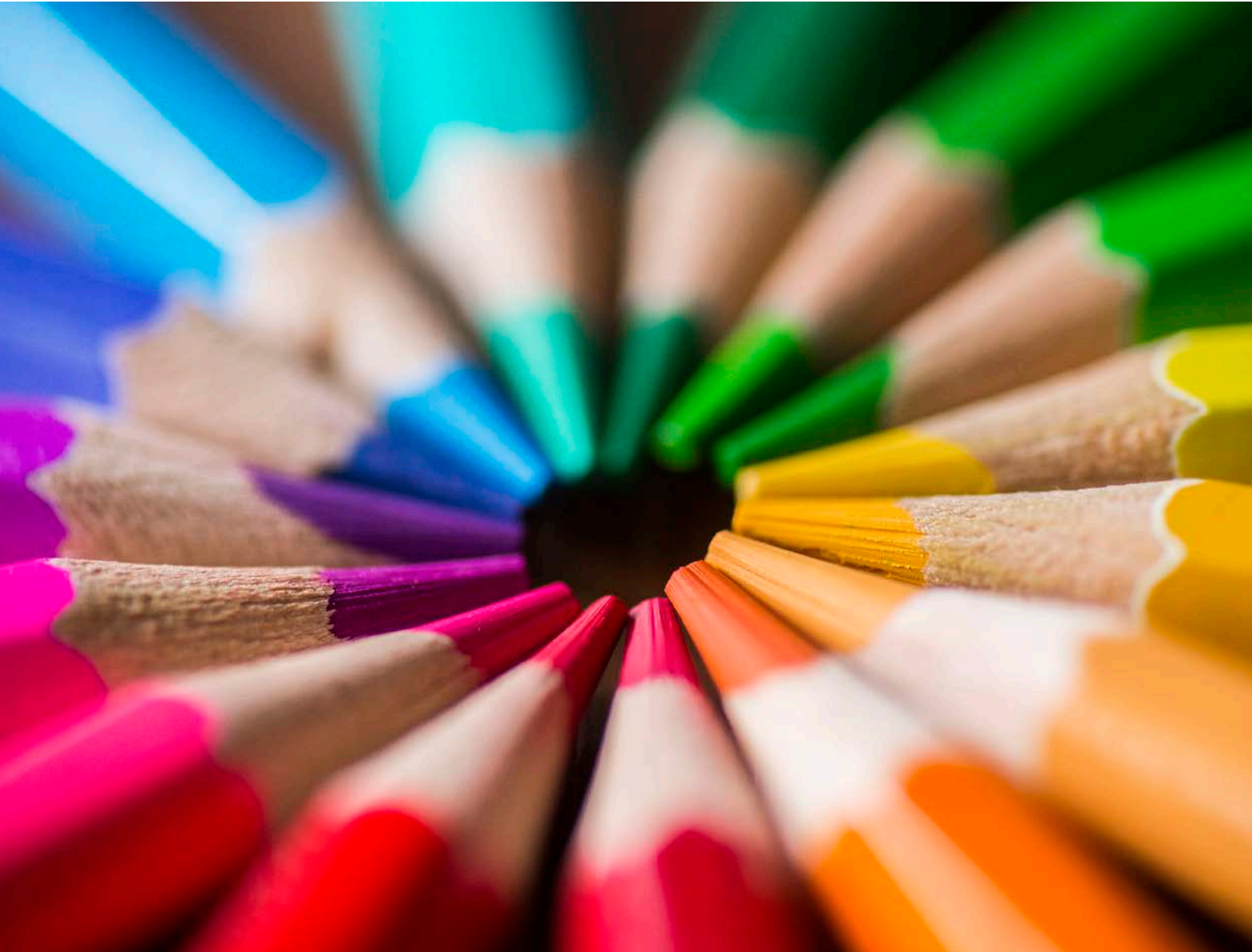




# CASCADE Partnership



Ymchwil Iechyd  
a Gofal Cymru  
Health and Care  
Research Wales



**2020 - 2021**  
**Annual report**





## CASCADE Infrastructure partners





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# 1. Director's Overview

The aim of the CASCADE Partnership is to improve outcomes and experiences for children, parents and others involved with children's social care (CSC), in Wales and internationally. We do this by undertaking high quality research, involving children and parents in our work, and actively engaging the sector in making use of our findings.

Our partnership brings together the Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre (CASCADE) in the School of Social Sciences, the Centre for Human Development Science in the School of Psychology, the Centre for Trials Research (all at Cardiff University) and the Secure Anonymised Information Linkage Databank (SAIL) (at Swansea University). This allows us to combine in-depth understanding of children's social care with international excellence in evaluative research, developmental psychology, and data linkage.

This report reviews the first year of our infrastructure funding, from April 2020 to the end of March 2021. This was a year like no other – with a global pandemic disrupting plans and requiring us all to think creatively about how to work together in challenging times. It has not been an easy year, yet overall, it has been an exceptionally successful start for the partnership. We have exceeded our own expectations in grant capture and publications and in sector engagement and influence. We have also laid the foundations for longer term success through closer collaborative work, as well as seeing individual researchers win awards and make professional progress. It is a pleasure to share some of that success in this report.

## Donald Forrester

Professor of Child and Family Social Work, Cardiff University, Director of the CASCADE Partnership



*“CASCADE is one of the leading children's social care research centres in the UK. Through key studies such as the evaluation of social workers in schools or secure accommodation they have helped us to develop and deliver crucial government programmes aimed at improving outcomes for children and their families.”*

### Isabelle Trowler

Chief Social Worker for Children and Families in England

## 2. Who's Who in the CASCADE Partnership

The Partnership brings together four research centres. We are led by a Governance Board which meets quarterly – though much of our dynamism and the generation of new ideas comes from the work we do together developing and delivering specific projects or areas of work and regular awaydays and seminars.



**Donald Forrester** is Professor of Child and Family Social Work and Director of CASCADE. He is Director of the Partnership and has responsibility for overseeing all its' work.



**Mike Robling** is Professor and Director of Population Health Trials at the CTR. He leads the contribution of the CTR and has a key role developing complex and innovative evaluative methods for children's social care (CSC).



**Alyson Rees** is Reader in Social Work and Assistant Director of CASCADE. Alyson leads our all-Wales social care research engagement work – known as ExChange.



**Jonathan Scourfield** is Professor of Social Work and Deputy Director of CASCADE. He has a key role in developing our work applying data linkage to children's social care.



**David Wilkins** is Senior Lecturer in Social Work and Assistant Director of CASCADE. David has lead responsibility for developing the external profile, influence, and impact of the Partnership.



**Jo Parry** is Centre Manager at CASCADE and leads on the efficient delivery of professional services support across the Partnership.



**David Ford** is Professor of Informatics and Director of Population Data Science based in Swansea University Medical School. He leads the contribution of SAIL, supporting the development of a portfolio of studies using advanced data linkage methods applied to CSC.



**Katherine Shelton** is Professor of Psychology and Director of the Centre for Human Development Science at Cardiff University. Katherine leads on developing a portfolio of studies looking at the psychological effects of involvement with CSC such as care and adoption and how to improve outcomes for children.

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## Our research is divided into two main work packages

**Evaluative research** – historically very little research in CSC has evaluated ‘what works’. This is partly because such research is complicated and challenging. We seek to generate effective and innovative methods to meet these challenges.

**Data linkage** – analysing and linking existing data offers the opportunity to research needs, services, and outcomes in CSC in ways not possible to date. We bring together cutting edge methodological and infrastructure support to deliver new and ground-breaking research in this area.

## This research is made possible by two important supporting work packages

**Public involvement** – we seek to involve children, young people, parents and carers across all our work, and Health and Care Research Wales funding has allowed us to develop groups and networks to facilitate this.

**Public engagement and research support** – professional services team support our research, and enable one of the largest research engagement efforts in the UK, through our all-Wales social care ExChange network.

*“The Cascade Partnership has had a tremendous year under the new Health and Care Research Wales infrastructure funding, amassing a substantial portfolio of potentially very impactful projects, and developing truly meaningful engagement with social care providers and users of children’s social care services. We are particularly pleased that we are developing highly novel linked data approaches to understanding pathways and outcomes for children in care.”*

**Prof. David Ford**

SAIL Databank, Swansea University

*“We have made significant advances this year with respect to interdisciplinary project development, enabling us to begin to tackle unanswered questions and challenges in the domain of children’s social care with new insights, methodological approaches and collaborative enterprise.”*

**Prof. Katherine Shelton**

CASCADE Partner, School of Psychology



### 3. Summary of the year

#### Core Metrics

Reporting period: **2020/2021**



**Health and Care Research Wales infrastructure award to the group**



Direct funding awarded

**£534k**

Jobs created through direct funding



#### Grants won during reporting period

Grants won	Led by group	Group collaborating
Number	<b>14</b>	<b>2</b>
Value	<b>£2.1m</b>	<b>£74.4k</b>
Funding to Wales	<b>£2.1m</b>	<b>£74.4k</b>
Funding to group	<b>£2m</b>	<b>£22.6k</b>
Additional jobs created for Wales	<b>23</b>	<b>1</b>
Additional jobs created for group	<b>23</b>	<b>1</b>



Number of publications



Number of public engagement events



Number of public involvement opportunities



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## Research success

We have had remarkable success in grant capture. In our first year we obtained 16 new grants (total value £2.2 million), and are waiting to hear the outcome for nine others, six of which have been shortlisted. New grant highlights include the social workers in schools randomized controlled trial (RCT) – the biggest RCT in CSC ever undertaken in the UK, key studies in relation to child sexual and criminal exploitation, policy relevant research aimed at reducing the need for children to be in care in Wales and a programme of ground-breaking studies involving data linkage. Each of these has its own focus section in our report.

These are important studies, many exploring new topics, developing methodological innovations, or creating research with policy and practice implications. It has also been wonderful to see our success in widening the pool of principal investigators (PIs) – our portfolio of 32 projects involves 19 PIs. This has not happened by accident – the infrastructure funding has allowed us to focus on developing the skills and confidence of early and mid-career researchers through training, mentorship and support in bid development and project delivery. We have also continued to support and supervise 52 doctoral students across the CASCADE Partnership. We have an active and growing community of postgraduates involved in the Centres, with many obtaining research experience working on our projects.

Collaborative working across the partnership has been enhanced – almost all our larger bids this year involved two or more of our Centres. This reflects a substantial increase in cross-Centre collaboration.

## Sharing our research

Just as important has been our success in sharing research findings. We have published 27 articles, plus 10 reports and seven other publications. A particular highlight was Dr. Martin Elliott winning the Article of the Year award from both the British Journal of Social Work and the European Social Work Research Association for his important work on poverty and care rates in Wales.

The infrastructure funding has also allowed us to establish the work of ExChange on a more secure basis. ExChange is the all-Wales social care research engagement network. The core of Exchange's work used to be workshops and conferences. The pandemic required some swift reorganising – and we now offer an array of online events and resources. These have proved very successful, allowing busy practitioners to access events, talks, podcasts and blogs as they need them.





## Making a difference

The ultimate purpose of the CASCADE Partnership is to make a positive difference for children and families. It has therefore been encouraging to see the widening reach of our work. Some of this is through direct involvement in studies: for instance, the social workers in schools RCT is working with 291 schools in England and almost 300 social care workers have taken part in Schwartz Rounds as part of our RCT. We also work closely with practitioners in many local authorities in Wales and elsewhere doing smaller evaluations and action research, which tend to have more immediate impact as well as sometimes leading to larger scale projects.

At a policy level, our work on why care rates in Wales are so high is feeding into national and local policy development. In England, an Independent Review of Children's Social Care has been launched, with a remit to introduce extensive reforms. CASCADE has presented research evidence and recommendations to the Review team, and I am sitting on the Evidence Panel for the Review.

We are also developing more international links. We are delighted that Professor Colette McAuley has joined the Centre as an Honorary Professor and is developing our international work on child well-being. Professor Heather Taussig is joining us from the University of Denver – one of the leading centres for social work research in the USA – on a Fulbright Fellowship. We are now involved in studies in Denmark and Finland using methodological approaches developed in CASCADE and we have a partnership with the Catholic University of Milan, one of the foremost centres for social work in Italy, to provide annual teaching for their PhD students in evaluative methodologies.

A central aim for the Partnership is to involve children, young people and parents with direct experience of CSC in shaping and guiding our work. Developing this area during a pandemic has been particularly difficult. Nonetheless, through the dedication of our involvement lead, we have continued to work with an existing network of care experienced young people, and developed new networks of other service user groups, including a group of mothers with experience of child protection, all of which have helped inform our studies and grant applications.

This report provides more detail on our first year – with facts and figures, infographics and case studies. We hope that it brings to life the work we have done. It has been an exceptional first year by any standards. Considering that it was undertaken during a time of such change and challenge makes it even more remarkable. This would not have been possible without the incredible team we have across the Partnership – and the rich network of friends and collaborators we are fortunate enough to have developed.

It is my good fortune as a Director to write such an introduction outlining the achievements of our first year – success built upon the expertise, dedication and hard work of many. For those involved, I hope you feel that this report reflects the work we have done. For those not yet involved, I hope this report provides a sense of the difference that the CASCADE Partnership is dedicated to making for children and their families in Wales and beyond.

**Donald Forrester**

On behalf of the CASCADE Partnership

## 4. Our research approach

Here we provide some case studies of research from our first year as a funded partnership.

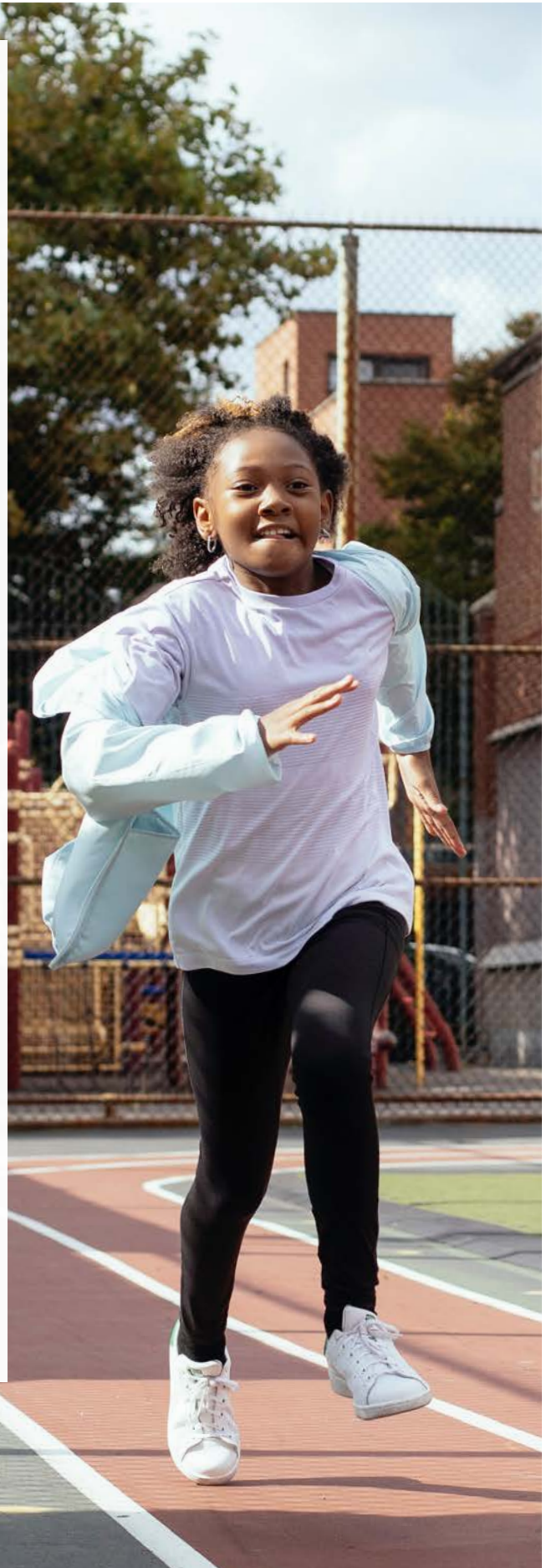
We provide these in relation to:

- Evaluative Research
- Data linkage
- Making a difference

*“CASCADE played a key role in setting up the What Works Centre – and continues to be one of our most important partners in developing a robust evidence base for children’s social care. Their researchers are a critical part of our ambition to revolutionise and improve research in children’s social care. This includes our Social Workers in Schools trial which is the largest trial in children’s social care in the UK.”*

**Michael Sanders**

Chief Executive What Works  
for Children’s Social Care



## Evaluative research

A key aim for the Partnership is to improve the quality and quantity of research focussed on finding out what happens in CSC. We have had enormous success in obtaining grants in this area.

Here we describe two of our key studies.

### The SWIS trial – a randomised controlled trial of school-based social work

#### Need for the Study

‘Social workers in schools’ (SWIS) is a Department for Education-funded trial in England. The central idea is that having a social worker based within a secondary school can have several benefits. These include improving the service delivered to children and families, enhancing interagency working, reducing risks to children and the need for child protection or care, and helping children to have better outcomes.

#### Method

The trial involves 21 local authorities and 291 schools in England – making it, we believe, the largest RCT undertaken in CSC in the UK, ever. The study compares outcomes between schools that have a social worker and those that continue as normal, without a social worker based on the premises. Schools were selected randomly from a pool put forward by local authorities (LAs) to receive a social worker, so that we can be confident any differences we observe are due to the presence of the social worker on-site.

The primary outcome we are testing is child protection enquiries, but we will also analyse other social care and educational outcomes to see what impact the intervention has. The study will also consider the costs of hosting social workers in schools, and an implementation and process component which will explore how and why the intervention operates as it does.

The study involves a multi-institutional team from Cardiff (CASCADE and Centre for Trials Research) and Oxford (Nuffield Department of Primary Care Health Sciences). Total funding to date is around £750,000.

#### Impact and Influence

The Department for Education have indicated that, if the results are favourable, they plan to expand it to all local authorities in England. The findings are likely to have a direct impact on policy decisions, across England and with the potential for international interest – as well as implications for Wales. A final report will be published in June 2023.

#### David Westlake

Principal Investigator, Social Workers in Schools trial



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# Can Schwartz Rounds help social care staff manage work-related stress? A randomised controlled trial in England

## Need for the Study

Schwartz Rounds (SRs) are widely used in healthcare settings but have not previously been evaluated in CSC. SRs are monthly meetings, open to all staff, in which people come together and share stories about the social and emotional impact of their work. SRs offer a potentially helpful way of supporting social workers and other social care staff to manage the demands of practice and provide the best possible service for children and their families.

## Method

This 24-month project is being undertaken in partnership with twelve local authorities in England, funded by What Works for Children's Social Care. The aim is to test whether attendance at SRs helps reduce work-related stress, and what benefits this might have for personal well-being, collegiate relationships and direct work with families.

## Findings

Phase one of the project, which concluded in 2020, involved staff from six local authorities, with SRs delivered in-person. Phase two of the project, which concluded in June 2021, involved six more authorities, with SRs delivered virtually due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Interim findings from phase one indicated that regular attendance was associated with reduced stress levels, a reduction in serious psychological problems, and fewer days of sickness-related absence. The qualitative feedback from staff was overwhelmingly positive, with a range of benefits identified in relation to personal well-being, relationships with colleagues and working with families.

## Impact and Influence

We are currently working on the final report for the project. Most of the local authorities involved have continued to provide SRs for their staff, beyond the end of the trial. This suggests that for many of them, they have experienced the value of SRs and see them as one important component for supporting social care staff.

### Dr. David Wilkins

Principal Investigator, Schwartz Rounds trial



## Data linkage

Our second key area for research development is data linkage – using existing administrative datasets, so that we can understand patterns of service use and key outcomes. Data linkage offers us the opportunity to undertake much longer follow-up and analyse much larger and more representative samples than other kinds of research. We have several new projects in this area, but here want to report on our work relating to secure accommodation, which started with more conventional research and has now evolved to use existing datasets.

## Secure Accommodation

### Need for the Study

Children referred to Secure Children's Homes by local authorities are among the most at risk in the UK, with typical histories of consistent neglect and abuse. Referrals to Secure Children's Homes are made when children display such serious and risky behaviours that they cannot be safely managed within the usual care system. Secure Children's Homes care for children in a locked environment and placing minors in these settings is controversial. This, and the scarcity of evidence about the experiences and outcomes for children placed in these homes, has triggered concern at the highest levels of policy and practice. This concern is compounded by our awareness that not all children referred to Secure Children's Homes are offered a place, with many accommodated in placements found or created by their local authority instead.

### Methods

CASCADE has carried out two ground-breaking studies focussed on Secure Children's Homes, one finishing and one starting in 2020. The first was commissioned by Social Care Wales and explored the experiences and outcomes for a cohort of children referred to Secure Children's Homes for welfare reasons. The second linked referral information to data on children in care across England, to map the placements and outcomes for children who went into Secure Children's Homes and a comparison group who were referred but were not accommodated due to a lack of spaces. The study included a cost/benefit analysis.

### Findings

Findings from the first study highlighted the failure of the system to address and manage the behaviours of the children in community-based settings, and how the resultant placement breakdowns led to further escalations of behaviours and increasing difficulties in finding new placements. This often resulted in less-than-optimal care and a worsening in the child's situation.

*Continued...*

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While time spent in a Secure Children's Homes often had a positive impact – with many children responding well to the routine safe environment once settled – other factors including traumatic experiences of transition and reception into the unit and the austere environment of some units were difficult and perceived as inappropriate by the children, as was sharing accommodation with residents who entered through the criminal justice system. A major theme identified throughout children's trajectories before, within and after was the lack of provision of sufficient mental health support. Where good consistent services were provided, the children tended to make better progress. Unfortunately, this was rare.

The data linkage study found that about two-fifths of the children referred to a Secure Children's Home were placed in alternative accommodation. A history of challenging behaviours, offending, gang association and sexually harming behaviours increased this likelihood, as did being male and older – so secure accommodation was not dealing with the children with the very highest levels of need. More of the children placed in an alternative accommodation were quickly re-referred to a Secure Children's Home or other secure setting after leaving, with outcomes for both groups being comparatively poor. Provision of secure accommodation appeared a very expensive option.

### **Impact and influence**

The findings are already having a major influence, with the Welsh and English governments planning ringfenced funding for jointly commissioned projects which provide safe accommodation for children with complex high end emotional and behavioural needs. Secure accommodation is also one area that the Independent Review of Children's Social Care in England is focused on. Our research interest in this area remains active – with proposals linking large datasets to explore long-term outcomes and comparing approaches across the four nations of the UK being prepared. This is a key group of children; current provision is very expensive and there are serious questions about how we might ensure it is more effective.

#### **Dr. Annie Williams**

Principal Investigator, Secure Children's Homes studies





## Research impact

We hope all our work makes a difference – but some of our studies are particularly close to practice. These offer us the opportunity to develop in-depth understandings of the challenges faced by professionals, families and children – and the possibility of making a more immediate positive difference.

*“CASCADE researchers have developed our work to address the drivers and effective responses for children and young people who have been exploited and/or drawn into criminality. Dr Clive Diaz was awarded funding to examine the implementation of the new Safeguarding Children from Child Sexual Exploitation guidance. This guidance has been developed by CASCADE’s Dr Sophie Hallett based on her extensive research in this area. Dr Nina Maxwell was awarded funding in partnership with Barnardo’s for a project aimed at developing a coordinated community response to child criminal exploitation and a separate project to evaluate Action for Children’s Serious Organised Crime Early Intervention Service, a pioneering programme available in England, Scotland and Wales and aimed at diverting young people away from a life of serious organised crime.... CASCADE reports have been used to inform the priority areas for the Violence Prevention Unit for the forthcoming year.”*

**Jonathan Drake**

Director, Wales Violence Prevention Unit

## County lines: a co-ordinated Welsh community response to child criminal exploitation.

This 18-month project is being undertaken in partnership with Barnardo’s and is supported by the All-Wales Violence Prevention Unit who have prioritised the prevention of serious violence linked to criminal exploitation and serious organised crime as one of their key areas for the forthcoming year. The project aims to develop a toolkit in collaboration with young people, parents and practitioners that enhances service and community responses to young people at risk or involved in child criminal exploitation (CCE). Project findings will be used to inform practice by making a significant contribution to what is known about CCE in Wales and what interventions and approaches are most effective.

The project consists of three phases. Phase one began in October and involves identifying how children are targeted, recruited and involved in criminal exploitation across Wales, and examining what approaches and interventions are most effective for the identification, prevention and safeguarding of children at risk of being criminally exploited. In phase two an effective service response will be developed by an expert panel chaired by Jan Pickles OBE (former Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner) and comprising young people and parents with lived experience and a range of stakeholders from statutory and non-statutory sectors. This design is based on the principles of co-production included in the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, with professionals working with those in need of care and support to identify solutions. Finally, in phase three the toolkit will be piloted and refined using an action research model.

**Dr. Nina Maxwell**

Principal Investigator, County lines project.

## Research achievements



Dr. Martin Elliott, a CASCADE Partnership researcher, has won not one, but two, awards for his paper on child welfare inequalities, winning both the European Social Work Research Association award for an outstanding publication from a PhD thesis and the BASW Kay McDougall prize for the best publication in the British Journal of Social Work in 2020. Dr. Elliott said, "to be given recognition for your research and writing as an early career researcher is brilliant. To win two awards for the first journal article I've written on my own was a real shock".



Two researchers within the CASCADE Partnership are taking part in this year's Welsh Crucible programme, a series of meetings and workshops for interdisciplinary researchers and future research leaders across Wales. With the programme taking place online for the first time, Dr. Hannah Bayfield and Dr. Nina Maxwell spent two days sharing their research with researchers from sciences, social sciences, arts, and humanities, as well as media experts and policy makers from across the UK. "Doing sessions like this online can be daunting," Hannah commented, "but the Welsh Crucible team have put together a stimulating and engaging programme. I'm looking forward to the next sessions already." Welsh Crucible continues with sessions in June and July.

*"I feel so honoured to be conducting my Fulbright Scholar Award at CASCADE. The breadth and depth of the Centre's research on children's social care, coupled with their genuine commitment to translating findings to inform policy and practice, is unparalleled. CASCADE's scholarship across disciplines and service sectors, using both qualitative and quantitative methods, is unique for university-based research centres. I appreciate their staff's willingness to collaborate with me on a host of projects during my time at Cardiff University, which should lead to new international partnerships that promise to improve outcomes for children and families on both sides of the Atlantic."*

**Prof. Heather Taussig**

University of Denver's Graduate School of Social Work



## 5. Engagement and Involvement

### Spreading the word: Media

We have worked hard to develop a high-quality digital media presence; this has been even more crucial in a year where it felt like our entire lives went online. In the last year we have:

- Developed newly launched websites for ExChange and CASCADE, ensuring promotion of the CASCADE Partnership.
- Hosted online events and presentations.
- Launched an exciting new podcast series.
- Implemented a series of online conference themes.
- Increased the engagement of our Twitter accounts.



#### Media Highlights 2020-2021



**29.3k**

Webpage views



**3953**

Followers



**2598**

Videos watched



**53.8k**

Bulletin opens

*“It has been pleasing to see the CASCADE Partnership and ExChange going from strength to strength. The new ExChange conference series model is working well, and we have had a great interest and uptake. The necessity of moving on-line has had a positive impact, as we have had increased attendance at events, with people being able to just ‘pop in’ for a lunch time seminar. It has also meant we have been able to extend our reach, providing a range of international speakers, with delegates able to attend from outside Wales. Recording sessions has also allowed people to access research and information at their leisure.”*

**Dr. Alyson Rees**

Assistant Director, CASCADE



## Engaging the sector: the ExChange network

ExChange is the All-Wales social care research engagement network. Initially funded through the School for Social Care Research, from October 2020 the CASCADE Partnership became the home of ExChange. ExChange seeks to engage the social care sector with research by providing events and resources, for both adult and CSC.

The pandemic created substantial challenges for ExChange. Our normal offer of face-to-face workshops and conferences had to be cancelled, and we rapidly moved to online delivery. This has proved enormously successful. More than 1,200 people have attended events online, with a similar number accessing them later – and we now have 1,300 people on our fortnightly email list. We are active on social media and have seen our followers on twitter accounts increase by 15% in the last year.

We have ambitious and exciting plans to expand this reach still further, by organising events around six themed conference series each year, increasing our blogs and article reviews, providing podcasts, and improving our social media presence. Online delivery has meant we were able to add international speakers to our roster – and we are now attracting viewers from as far afield as the USA, Australia and Scandinavia.

Our first year has also seen the establishment of a stakeholder group of practitioners, and an advisory group of senior UK academics who provide recommendations on future content.



### ExChange Live Events 2020-2021



**24**  
Events



**835**  
Attendees



**50%** increase in ExChange network subscribers



#### International reach

ExChange network now has members from **USA, Denmark, Sweden, Belgium, China, Australia, Portugal, Germany, Italy, Norway**

*“ExChange webinars have been great, helping me stay up to date during the pandemic. The article reviews on the website are very good too. Thank you.”*

*“Great to have the recordings of webinars freely available to watch at own convenience.”*

*“Bitesize bulletins have been effective, clear and informative.”*

*“Without your resources and free workshops, social workers in Wales would be struggling to access research and evidence which is necessary and vital for their practice.”*

**British Association of Social Workers (BASW)**

## Public involvement

We strive to involve children, care experienced young people, parents, and carers across our work – helping shape the research agenda, providing constructive criticism of our ideas and helping us share our findings. This part of our work was probably the most hard hit by the pandemic – good engagement work, more than anything, is built on relationships, and developing relationships with new people is much harder to achieve when we cannot meet in person.

The fact that this area of our work has progressed so much in difficult circumstances is a tribute to the extraordinary commitment of Rachael Vaughan, our dedicated involvement worker. Key developments have included:



**Establishing a strategic board of experts by experience** to oversee and support the development of the CASCADE Partnership's involvement work. The board will review and monitor our progress as well as offer centre-wide ideas in line with **public involvement standards**. Members include those with experience of care, adoption, homelessness, fostering and child protection as a parent. The group was established in September 2020 and is currently made up of existing contacts through our wider engagement and involvement work. Examples of their contribution are:

- Developing our paid placement: the group suggested offering bespoke administrative or event opportunities, the types of support that would be useful and feedback on a recruitment strategy.
- Advising and supporting us to recruit and develop our Parents Research Advisory Group.
- The group has provided critical and meaningful feedback on how best to engage with public, in terms of social media and our website.

*“Always such an incredible boost to feel you could be making a difference to others, so I’m super grateful for the opportunity!”*

**Involvement Board member**

## Setting up a Parents Research advisory group

All members of our new Parents Research Advisory group have lived experience of CSC as parents and carers. This group was established in December 2020 and has already made an invaluable contribution to our work. As the group grows, we will be offering Research Methods training to all members to support their feedback and contribution to our research. We also provide remuneration for their time and cover expenses in line with public involvement standards. We will continue to develop this work and create a network of parents with lived experience of CSC to engage and get involved in a range of ways in the Partnership. We are committed to providing opportunities for those who would like to contribute in a meaningful way. Examples of initial impact include:

- Providing concrete feedback on research questions and how to frame findings for two of our projects – one exploring how parental factors affect children coming into care and the other interpreting a survey of social workers about care rates in Wales.
- Highlighting issues and priorities that should be researched, for CASCADE Partnership to consider in developing new projects.

*“The group gave a really helpful overview of some of the family/ household issues that they felt were pertinent in effecting how decisions local authorities make decisions about how to take children into care ... please let them know how helpful I think it will be to get their input when I develop the focus groups to run in local authorities.”*

**Dr. Nell Warner**  
CASCADE Researcher

## Public Involvement Activities



- **CASCADE Voices** 11 activities
- **CASCADE Involvement Board** 3 activities
- **CASCADE Parent's research advisory group** 5 activities
- **Other opportunities** 17 activities

including feedback sessions, research collaboration, peer researcher training and support.

## Developing wider networks

As well as involving the public directly, our wider networks of public engagement are supporting our research and our ability to engage the sector. This includes:

- Health and Care Research Wales Public Engagement Strategy Working Group.
- Health and Care Research Wales for Public Engagement and Involvement Forum.
- Co-Production Network Wales.
- Voices From Care Cymru Policy board.
- DECIPHer Public Involvement Steering Group.



## Continuing our work with CASCADE Voices

This group of care-experienced young people advise on research projects from design to dissemination, and represents an established collaboration between Voices from Care Cymru and CASCADE. Training in research methods and group facilitation are provided by CASCADE. During the pandemic this group has successfully moved online and meets monthly. This move online has provided opportunities for those who live further from Cardiff to get more involved and the way we work has been decided with the group. Examples of their contributions include:

- Trialling online research methods, including the use of activities to be completed with researchers over Zoom. The group were able to give detailed advice and feedback to improve research and develop more engaging creative methods to use while conducting research remotely.
- The group inspired and collaborated on the CASCADE and Voices from Care Cymru [COVID-19 care leavers research project](#), a study aimed to explore care leavers' experiences of lockdown restrictions. This involved highlighting the initial issue, validating the results, then co-producing and delivering a dissemination activities, including a workshop at the Kempe Centre International online conference and an [ExChange event](#).

*"I enjoy it and I like how we get to see what happens with the research and information we provide."*

*"I think for me the best thing is knowing I've had an impact. When researchers come back, and they've used what I've said."*

**CASCADE Voices young people**

## Employing care experienced young people

Our infrastructure funding includes paid work opportunities for care experienced young people – so they can enrich our work and to support their career development. This is an element that we have agreed to postpone due to the pandemic – we will now offer more opportunities in the next two years when we can meet in-person and provide a more helpful experience. Despite this, a Peer Researcher (a member of CASCADE Voices) has been employed to work on a collaborative study with DECIPHER, CASCADE and the Fostering Network Cymru. The project is funded by the TRIUMPH network and will explore how to develop online programmes for care-experienced young people.

*"I have been working on all the information documents for young people, developing the interview questions and doing the interviews with Rachael. As part of testing the language in the questions I supported a user involvement feedback session with The Fostering Network's young people's group... I've learnt how to interview people and how unpredictable it can be. That's the biggest thing I've learnt. I've learnt that research happens a lot slower than I thought. Someone with lived experience can speak the same language as the participants. Peer Researchers can explain things to young people better and can help both young people and researchers understand the different perspectives."*

**CASCADE Peer Researcher**

## 6. Conclusion

We hope this report provides you with a sense of the first year of the CASCADE Partnership. It has been a year full of challenges, but we have risen to them with huge energy and determination.

We have had exceptional success in grant capture, developing researchers, and in publishing our research. Some elements of our work – particularly how we engage the sector – have been improved by the pivot to online delivery. The area that has been most challenging – involving children and parents – has seen important positive developments but will undoubtedly become stronger when we can meet in-person.

Next year sees CASCADE move into new premises. The world's first Social Science Research Park (SBARC | SPARK) will provide further opportunities for cross-centre, external partnership, and collaborative working, involving industry, the public and third sectors. Interdisciplinary research groups will combine in new ways in a bespoke environment, to generate new knowledge and novel solutions to major societal problems. We will have the strategic challenge of continuing our success in grant capture, while delivering the ambitious programme we are already working on.

Yet in some ways these are superficial issues. Deeper challenges are to ensure that our work is innovative, relevant, and can make a positive difference. The secret to our success so far is that we continually try to keep focused on these more fundamental aims. By doing so, we aim to build on the very encouraging initial success of the Partnership.

**Prof. Donald Forrester**

Director, CASCADE Partnership

