

## **Low Budget Campaign – ‘These are our voices’ - Foster Wales Mural**

### **30-word description**

53% of children in care are 11+. They need stable homes but face outdated perceptions. ‘These are our voices’ campaign creatively engaged care-experienced young people, resulting in +126.6% fostering enquiries.

### **1000-word entry**

#### *Brief, objectives and budget*

There are nearly 5,000 children in foster care across Wales. 53% of those are aged 11+.

Many have faced extreme hardship and adversity and desperately need stable homes to provide support through adolescence into adulthood.

Foster Wales (FW), a national network of 22 Welsh Local Authority fostering services, exists to recruit and support foster carers to build better futures for children.

In late 2023, FW required a campaign to challenge outdated perceptions of teens in care (+11) with the aim of recruiting more LA foster carers to care for this demographic of young people.

Objectives:

- 1) Recruit more local authority foster carers for 11-18 years old, particularly in Cwm Taf Morgannwg where there is a higher density of this age group in care.
- 2) Raise awareness of the number of teenagers in care through media coverage min. 10 pieces.
- 3) Provide an opportunity for five care experienced young people to be involved in the campaign.

#### *The idea, research, and planning*

To ensure voices of care experienced young people were at the heart of this campaign, we worked closely with a group aged 11-16 from the Cwm Taf area throughout campaign development and delivery.

We wanted to bring their experiences to life in a way that empowered and upskilled them, but also challenged misconceptions amongst the wider public, and encouraged people to consider fostering a teen.

We consulted with Voices from Care Cymru (a support network for young people in care) attended their steering group meetings and met with social workers from Welsh children’s charity, TGP Cymru, to gather well rounded insights into the sector, and to ensure best practice safeguarding while working with the young people.

We conducted in-person sessions with our cohort of young people, to build trust, hear their experiences and explore the impact of misconceptions on their lives.

The overwhelming response was that they were labelled as ‘trouble’ simply because they were in care, placing responsibility and blame upon them, for things that were often beyond their control.

We conducted public focus groups, which highlighted negative portrayals in media as a key contributor to negative beliefs.

With both insights in mind, we knew we had to give young people an opportunity to reframe the narrative around young people in care by offering them a safe, creative outlet to share their stories, which we could then use to appeal to press/media and provide a lasting reminder to members of the public around the transformative nature of foster care.

This is how ‘these are our voices’ was born.

### *Strategy, creativity and innovation*

We set up a creative workshop with the former Children’s Laureate Wales, Connor Allen to work with young people to create a piece of poetry which shares their life experiences and challenged people’s views on teens in care.

This workshop helped to upskill the young people in creative communication, offered a positive and relevant role model through the workshop leader, and offered mentorship opportunities for older care leavers to work alongside younger teens in foster care.

We wanted to take this one step further and create a lasting piece of art for both the young people and the public to view, so we enlisted the support of local artist, Bryce Davies, Peaceful Progress to visualise the words as a 40-foot mural in Cwm Taf Morgannwg’s biggest town, Bridgend.

Working closely with the local council, we secured a position near a local shopping centre and college where audience footfall (families, women aged 35-55, the young people’s peers) was high.

Using a QR code, passersby could scan to see the digital version of the poem, alongside the young people’s blog and more information on how to enquire to become a foster carer.

We launched the mural with an event which was attended by media, Foster Wales, Welsh Government, local councillors and sector representatives. The young people were also given an opportunity to view the mural privately, for safeguarding reasons.

### **Delivery/implementation of tactics**

- **June:** Public focus groups
- **July:** Attended VFCC Steering Group
- **Aug:** Sessions with TGP Cymru and young people

- **September:** Creative Workshop with Connor and young people
- **October:** Designed the bi-lingual mural
- **November:** Finalised placement of mural, planned PR
- **December:** Unveiling and launch event, media coverage

*Measurement, evaluation and impact*

### **1. Recruit more local authority foster carers for 11-18 years old, particularly in Cwm Taf Morgannwg**

Across the Cwm Taf Morgannwg region YOY enquiries **doubled** when the campaign went live. They anticipated 25 enquiries between November-January. They received 54, exceeding expectations by **+116%**.

This meant the region exceeded their annual enquiry target within nine months.

In Bridgend (where the mural sits) enquiries reached 36 between Nov-Jan, a YOY increase of **+126.6%**, and web traffic increased **+119%** YOY in the same period.

### **2. Raise awareness of the number of teenagers in care through 10 pieces of media coverage**

We secured 15 pieces of media coverage, including BBC Radio Wales, Yahoo News, Glamorgan Gazette and South Wales Argus. It was shared by Newport Online and received two pieces of national sector press (Children and Young People Now, Fairer Fostering). It was also included in the e-newsletter sent by Bridgend council to every subscribed resident. **(+50%)**

### **3. Provide an opportunity for 5 care experienced young people to gain work experience through the campaign.**

15 young people were involved in the research and the workshops **(+150%)**

Importantly the campaign received 100% positive sentiment from the young people, they all felt their voices were heard. This is a direct quote from a social worker:

“The young people were really impressed, and shocked with how big the mural was. They felt this project was just the start. They shared how they would love to develop similar things in different areas of Bridgend and showcase different themes such as education and family. It’s really inspired them.”