

# AP CYMRU

## The Neurodiversity Charity 2024

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### IMPORTANCE OF TIME IMPACT STATEMENT



  
bluestone  
National Park Resort



# Impact

Our drive for a  
neuro inclusive  
Wales and BEYOND



# Headlines and Insights – July 2024





When my sons were younger, holiday breaks created such an important time for us as a family. Knowing how important these were to my family unit, this is something I have wanted to provide for our families since I began the charity.

It has taken a **WHILE** but I am so proud and excited that this is now a reality and part of our overall support programme and our aims for a **Neuro-Inclusive World For ALL!**

Karen xxx

# CEO Thoughts...

Short breaks, holidays and time away are a time of joy, celebration and change. For neurodivergent children, these changes can be both exciting yet challenging. As we approach any holiday break, it's important for parents and caregivers to have strategies in place to help their children navigate this period with confidence and comfort.

## Understanding the Challenge

Neurodivergent children may find changes in routine and environment to be overwhelming. A break from routine often brings a flurry of new activities, social gatherings and breaks in the usual schedule. While these changes are part of the important break, neurodivergent individuals often feel elevated anxiety and stress.

A holiday break is a wonderful time for families to create memories. By understanding the unique needs of our neurodivergent children and planning accordingly, we as parents can help our children enjoy the holidays whilst managing the changes that come with it, enabling us to be present to experience the memories as they are created!

This is why partnering with the right organisations is important for us as a charity.

# Family Testimonial 2023

“We were lucky enough to have been picked to have a family break and it couldn't have come at a better time for us. We decided to book a child friendly hotel which had a marvellous playroom and we also decided to spend two days at Peppa Pig World. It was Halloween time, and my daughter absolutely loved it! It even rained and my daughter had the best time jumping in muddy puddles! Which, of course, to her was living the dream!

It was incredible to have had the chance to not worry about the financial aspect of the trip, and to just focus on us as a family, which we don't often do at all. Through many appointments, ensuring we are meeting our girls needs and fighting to get her what she needs, it's easy to lose sight of what's most important...

...and that is quality time as a family.

So I really can't thank you enough. A massive thank you to everyone who works so hard at AP Cymru to give our children the chance to have the same fun experiences as others who do not have ALN. It has made the world of difference being able to access these activities and the funding for the family trip.”



**“I am so grateful for the opportunity through AP Cymru to have been able to spend quality time with my daughter as a family.”**



**“The trip was a huge success. My little boy is 5 and had the time of his life this past week. We had so many 'firsts' and we made so many memories, we will never forget it and honestly can't thank you enough.”**

## Family Testimonial 2024

“Check-in was really smooth, informative and easy as we didn't have to get out of the car as it was like a drive through. The accommodation was huge, spotless, well-stocked with everything you could need and had beautiful views. We had lots of visits from a squirrel!!! The swimming pool with multiple slides and a separate baby section was fab. The lazy river which went indoor/outdoor was amazing and was a huge hit with our son. We went swimming twice a day and it was free, lockers didn't need coins or padlocks and are free with keys.

There was so much to do for free, including the soft play, a huge bouncy castle, a glow disco, a teddy blue show, outdoor parks, nature walks, water play and sand play. We booked the Wacky Races plus Wake Up and Wiggle which were amazing. Guess what? Our son also did the zipwire which I couldn't believe he did.

We toasted marshmallows at Smokey Joe's, we had food in the farmhouse grill, cake and coffee in the coffee shop, went glow bowling and spent time at the lake. We even ventured into Tenby town. Every single staff member we came across were so lovely. At times, our young man struggled with understanding instructions but once I explained, they came down to his level and used simple instructions and were just so lovely, patient and understanding. They couldn't do enough, and this was all across the park, everyone we encountered.

Overall, we had the most amazing week. I truly believe this place has something for everyone. I can't thank you enough as our son did so many things this week we never would have thought to try, didn't think he would try or be able to do or had the chance to try. All of us had smiles on our faces for the entire time which is a first in itself.”

# Who are we and why DO we exist?

AP Cymru - The Neurodiversity Charity is based in Wales, UK. Our mission is to create a neuro-inclusive world for children, young people, and their families by providing guidance, knowledge and understanding of neurodiversity through authentic lived experience. We focus on education services, supporting families pre-diagnosis and beyond.

## What sets us apart?

### Lived Experience

The majority of our staff are neurodivergent themselves and parents of neurodivergent children. This unique perspective allows us to provide well-rounded, positive and understanding services tailored specifically for our families.

### Founder's Journey

The charity's founder and director started AP Cymru in 2008 after her youngest son was diagnosed autistic. Since then, her eldest son and herself have both received their autism diagnoses. Karen's extensive knowledge, both personally and professionally, drives the charity's compassionate approach.

### Diverse Team

AP Cymru boasts a fantastic team that delivers our services with a personal touch. We have been involved with thousands of neurodivergent individuals and their families, creating a warm and nurturing community.



**“The way to  
get started is  
to quit talking  
and begin  
doing”**

**–Walt Disney**

# CHANGE... Societal NOT Individual

Our Theory of Change is at the heart of all we do, underpinning:

- Why we are here,
- How what we are doing matters,
- How change will support the future generations of neurodivergent people in Wales,
- How change can build confidence, skills and personal success,
- How TIME is the greatest gift you can ever give to others,
- How TIME strengthens key relationships,
- Supporting activities, opportunities, events and training to improve mental health and improve overall well-being across ALL family units - big or small.

We are proud of our Family Experience Projects, our inclusive/exclusive activities and experience opportunities, our education and learning programmes, along with the professional clinic programmes we run which have developed since the birth of the charity. Until late 2023, the ability to support families with a much needed short break either as a family unit or as carers could not be achieved.

Knowing how important holiday breaks were to her family, Karen was passionate about achieving this support goal for our families. Truly understanding the benefits to each individual family member and each family unit, this became a goal for the team to source funding and appropriate charity partners for 2024 to launch the AP Cymru Holidays and Short Break Programme.



# CHANGE... Societal NOT Individual

Demand for our services continues to increase and the impact of the pandemic, cost of living crisis, food costs, plus the overall world economy are impacting families in Wales, with figures as high as 30% of children in Wales experiencing poverty.

Families are cutting back on all items that can be viewed as a “luxury” and that so-needed day out, few days away or full week's holiday is the first casualty for most families that are struggling financially.

The need for moments, time away from it all, from the day-to-day challenges of being parent/carers of neurodivergent children/young people and/or a neurodivergent individual has never been higher!

Families are reporting waiting times of over 37 months before being part of the NHS Neurodevelopment Pathway. And these time delays in appointments and support are known to be impacting mental health within family units.

The need for the positive impact of “TIME” to be felt by neurodivergent families and the impact of that “TIME” in bringing hope, smiles and confidence to faces.

The future has never been stronger!



16 July 2024 4:04 pm

# Let's Change... Hearts, Minds, Society, Culture and Perceptions

## Our strategy includes

**Information Provision and Widening Services** – Providing accurate, relevant information can influence attitudes. We share educational materials, statistics and expert opinions relating to neurodiversity. We also offer a full range of accredited and non-accredited training sessions. Through surveys, dialogue and group meetings we work to meet the requests of our family memberships.

**Communication-Persuasion Techniques** – Persuasive communication aims to change attitudes by appealing to emotions, logic or social norms.

## Our approach includes

**Source Credibility** – We use credible messengers, those that are Experts In Experience to convey messages, information, training, seminars, video information and more.

**Appeals** – Emotional and rational appeals that support the aims, values and vision of the charity.

**Social Norms** – Highlight what others perceive as desirable or acceptable behaviour, raise awareness, provide information to introduce new thoughts and improve understanding.

**Cognitive Dissonance Approach** – Theory suggests that people strive for consistency between attitudes and encourage actions aligned with the desired attitude. When behaviour contradicts existing attitudes, individuals may adjust their attitudes to reduce discomfort.

**Trust and Organisational Changes** – Our team ethos in an organisational context, trust plays a crucial role in information sharing across the team. Positive perceptions of recent organisational changes enhance trust, leading to more open communication within the organisation and beyond.

This year (2024) we've made progress against the goals of our "Theory of Change Societal Approach" thanks to the Welsh Government funding and strong valuable partnerships such as with Bluestone National Park. Not only are we able to demonstrate immediate benefit for families but are also able to drive progress towards our longer-term goal of making Wales truly Neuro-Inclusive for All.



# Evidence and data gathering!

Our impact data is gathered from multiple sources. Primary sources are from families and referrers as part of our short breaks holiday delivery process. We ask for feedback on the booking process, holiday experience and find out more about when and where families would like to take a break, what they would like to experience, holiday locations as well as special situations or considerations (such as accessibility needs) and how they'll be travelling. Importantly, what the break has meant to them as a family unit.

We know from experience and feedback, the barriers that Neurodivergent Families may face when taking part in tourism, hospitality and leisure. Using this 'Expert in Experience' knowledge we look for organisations that understand the challenges faced, are open to further training and development of their organisation by embarking on a training programme with us .

The lived experiences of our team, volunteers and families provides the expertise and model for the current programme and the further development of our AP Cymru Holidays and Short Break Programme (Funding dependent and partnership dependent).

Within this document are the aims of this programme and what we're here to deliver. This is focused on specific insight from families who have had a short-break holiday and will really help shape how we build our services to support neurodivergent families to access more opportunities in the future years to come.

Our overarching aim is for the AP Cymru Holidays and Short Break Programme to become a central element of our Parent/Carers Support and Well-being Service. The data and images to follow represents a cumulative picture of the current opportunities at the time of developing this report.





**At time of report we support...**

**627 Families**  
**3308 Individuals**  
**45% Children**  
**55% Adults**



**54 families will enjoy a short break by the end of 2024.**



**At the time of report, 429 applications have been received for our Short Breaks.**



**1,080 holiday days enjoyed.**



**25,920 hours of dedicated family time.**



**Average cost per individual per break £86.25**



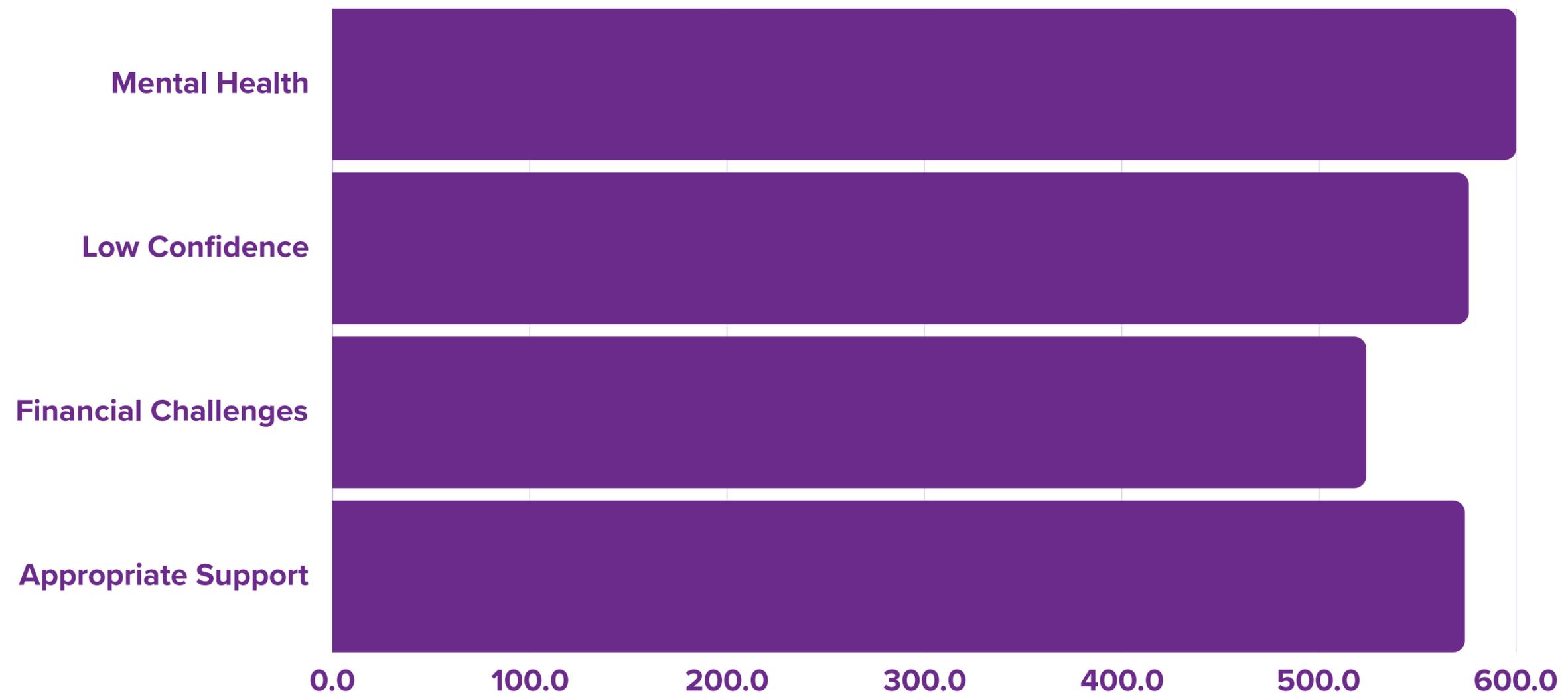
**46% of families would not have had a short break without our charity and funding.**



**Average family unit of 5 people equals 270 individuals.**

# Highlights... Short Breaks and Needs

On average, our families identify experiencing three or more key challenges/concerns in their day-to-day lives. The top four challenges facing families for 2024 are:



# Highlights... Short Breaks and Needs



Some of our funding is restricted to dedicated areas.

The core of funding support has come from funders within the South East Wales area.

Our 2023 funding gave families ownership of break selection as shown above.

Our 2024 partnership with Bluestone has ensured ALL funding spend remains in Wales.



**“Just WOW! No words to express how happy we have ALL been! Its been so FAB! My heart is swelling with these memories.”**

**“It can be so hard to find places where their needs are understood, accommodated and where we can experience something close to genuine relaxation!**

**Thank you AP Cymru for giving us this opportunity; we wouldn't have been able to afford a holiday this year especially during summer months. We now have fond memories to last a lifetime!”**



**“I don't have the words to express how grateful we are to AP Cymru and to Bluestone (and their friendly and supportive staff) for helping us to make such special memories! I hope more of our lovely families get the chance to enjoy this amazing gift!”**



“We are home after an amazing few days. It came at a perfect time as our two children are struggling so much with school at the moment, they needed a break. We are so grateful, we've had a tough year and would not have been able to have some time away this year if it wasn't for this beautiful break!”

“Thankyou you for a truly wonderful few time. It's been so much fun and so restorative for our family. We have spent time as a family with no demands of normal life and had fun together. Our children usually have a strained relationship, but they have spent quality time together which has been wonderful to see!”



“Thank you all so much for this opportunity, it has been absolutely amazing and has allowed us to be a family without the daily pressures of home life. Diolch yn Fawr!”

“Thank you so very much AP Cymru for our trip to Bluestone this week. To get away to such a calming and beautiful place was so special. We felt truly privileged to be able to come. We have spent times away from the stresses of daily life and been able to relax in a way that suits us as a family taking into account neurodiversities. Thank you so very much. True respite!”



Our ethos has always been that every family/carer has the right to enjoy time away from home together or alone – regardless of race, age, gender, orientation, faith, belief, ability or current circumstance.

We're reviewing our understanding of our social reach and impact as our short break programme grows and our understanding of barriers to engagement in leisure, hospitality and tourism for neurodivergent individuals and different neurodivergent family units.

These barriers can include:



All accessibility challenges



Public transport dependencies



Language and communication barriers



Pets, additional costs and challenges



Child poverty is a significant issue in Wales, with our country having the highest rates of child poverty in the UK. Approximately 1 in 3 children in Wales live in poverty. Poverty rates are highest amongst those with children. Financial burden is a key factor in NOT achieving a short break of any description. Poverty can have a devastating effect on a child's life chances, having a negative impact on their education, health and overall wellbeing.

2024 Welsh Child Poverty Strategy states 5 key objectives:

- 1 – entitlement (putting money in people's pockets).
- 2 – creating a Fair Work nation (leaving no one behind).
- 3 – building communities (accessible, joined-up services to meet community needs).
- 4 – inclusion (kind, compassionate and non-stigmatising services).
- 5 – enabling collaboration (at the regional and local level).

These objectives are reviewed in line with our charity services and we aim to aid the reduction of any financial burden of our families.

# Highlights... Social Value

- In Wales, the importance of social value is recognised through the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 which requires public bodies in Wales to think about the long-term impact of their decisions, to work better with people, communities and each other, and to prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change.
- We aim to align our services with the Well-being and Future Generations Act 2015.
- When considering the short breaks programme for 2024, the importance of income generation, jobs, tackling poverty, health equalities and reducing the impact of travel on the climate in Wales were considered.

## Social Value - Short Breaks For Carers

Independent research shows that for every £1 invested in a VisitWales funded holiday in 2023, a social value of £4.10 was returned. This impressive impact highlights the positive outcomes of short breaks/tourism/leisure/hospitality investments in Wales, benefiting the Welsh economy, local communities, families and individuals

Other return on investment that can be considered are:

1. Deloitte's return on investment (ROI) analysis of employee mental health interventions that was conducted as part of the research shows that, on average, for every £1 spent on supporting their people's mental health, employers get nearly £4.70 ROI in improved productivity.
2. Tourism notes an ROI of £21 for every £1 invested, with international visitors spend playing a large part.
3. The hospitality sector in Wales has shown a significant return on investment. For every £1 spent, the ROI is approximately £4.26.

# Highlights... Activities

Bluestone National Park offers a wide array of activities and lots of people tried new things as well as returning to some familiar favourites...

- 100% of our families took part in outdoor activities.
- 80% of our families visited nearby towns and villages.
- 100% of our families took part in physical activities eg. walking, cycling and swimming.
- 100% of our families said that having tried these activities on holiday, they were more likely to try again at home.

**“We have not long arrived home from Bluestone as we wanted to squeeze every minute out of our break! We have had an amazing time and didn't want to leave. We have spent time as a family with no demands of normal life and had fun together.**

**Our children usually have a strained relationship, but they have spent quality time together this week which has been wonderful to see. Bluestone has given them the space and freedom to explore and be their authentic selves. As parents we have been able to find the joy in raising our amazing neuro sparkly kids which sometimes gets lost in work/school life. Thank you, AP Cymru, for giving us this opportunity; we wouldn't have been able to afford a holiday this year especially during summer months. We now have fond memories to last a lifetime - THANKYOU!”**

# Highlights... Feedback

Our families are asked for feedback when they come back from a holiday or activity break and we always ask for frank and honest observations. As we plan to grow this element of our services. It is important that we understand the immediate benefit and impact of a break on an individual/the family unit.

**96%**

The majority of families reported a positive impact on their personal mental health and well-being and that of the family unit.

**96%**

A high number of carers/parents reported that it has helped them feel more comfortable and confident in taking a holiday with family in the future.

**96%**

A high volume confirmed that the experience would help them continue caring and that they felt stronger to do so.

**96%**

Most carers reported that the break had a positive impact on their family's ability to deal with the challenges that they faced daily.



# Highlights... Barriers to Break

We seek to further our understanding of the barriers that families/carers face to taking the opportunities presented for short breaks, activities and events.

We are fully aware that life can be complex and that each family's needs are different from the next. We are also informed by carers/parents that there are many re-occurring and connecting themes which affect any attempt to take a break. Often these are challenges that, if addressed, would make tourism, leisure and hospitality more accessible and inclusive for all.

Key highlights include:

- Families want to take part in leisure, tourism and hospitality, but often don't have access to the right support and information to know where to start. Attempting to take a break can be daunting if doing it for the first time or if feeling isolated and overwhelmed by information or concerns of how family members may behave.
- Families feel discouraged from taking part if they have additional physical, emotional or practical needs. Lack of information about how they will be catered for can be off-putting and the way that they are sometimes received by staff and other holiday makers can also have a negative impact on families. Historic negative challenges and experiences often prevent take-up of opportunities.
- Suitable accommodation in the right location and at the right price can be hard to find.
- If facilities available are not equipped for families with physical and/or neurodivergent needs (e.g., lack of training or understanding), it's a deal breaker for some families when choosing to take that break or not.
- Logistics of travel, time off work and being restricted to travelling in school holidays is a common theme.

**“Given the correct support and with the right accommodations, more families can be included in leisure, hospitality and tourism, and therefore achieve that much needed opportunity of a short break with AP Cymru – The Neurodiversity Charity.”**

# Aiming for change...

## Starting to deliver our vision, aims, aspirations and hopes

We've made real strides and will continue with positive progress to deliver our longer-term vision for the future of short funded breaks being accessible for ALL neurodivergent families in Wales. Our Making Change Programme continues, but we know we have a lot more work to do! Reaching this milestone of supporting our goal of providing opportunities for a selection of families to feel able to spend quality time away together has made further progress in understanding and breaking down barriers for neurodivergent people and has been a further step towards a neuro-inclusive Wales.

In 2023, 10 families had the opportunity for a short break. In 2024, 54 families will receive a short break opportunity. In 2025, we aim for 100 families to be able to access a short break with their family or alone and for the number of opportunities to continue.

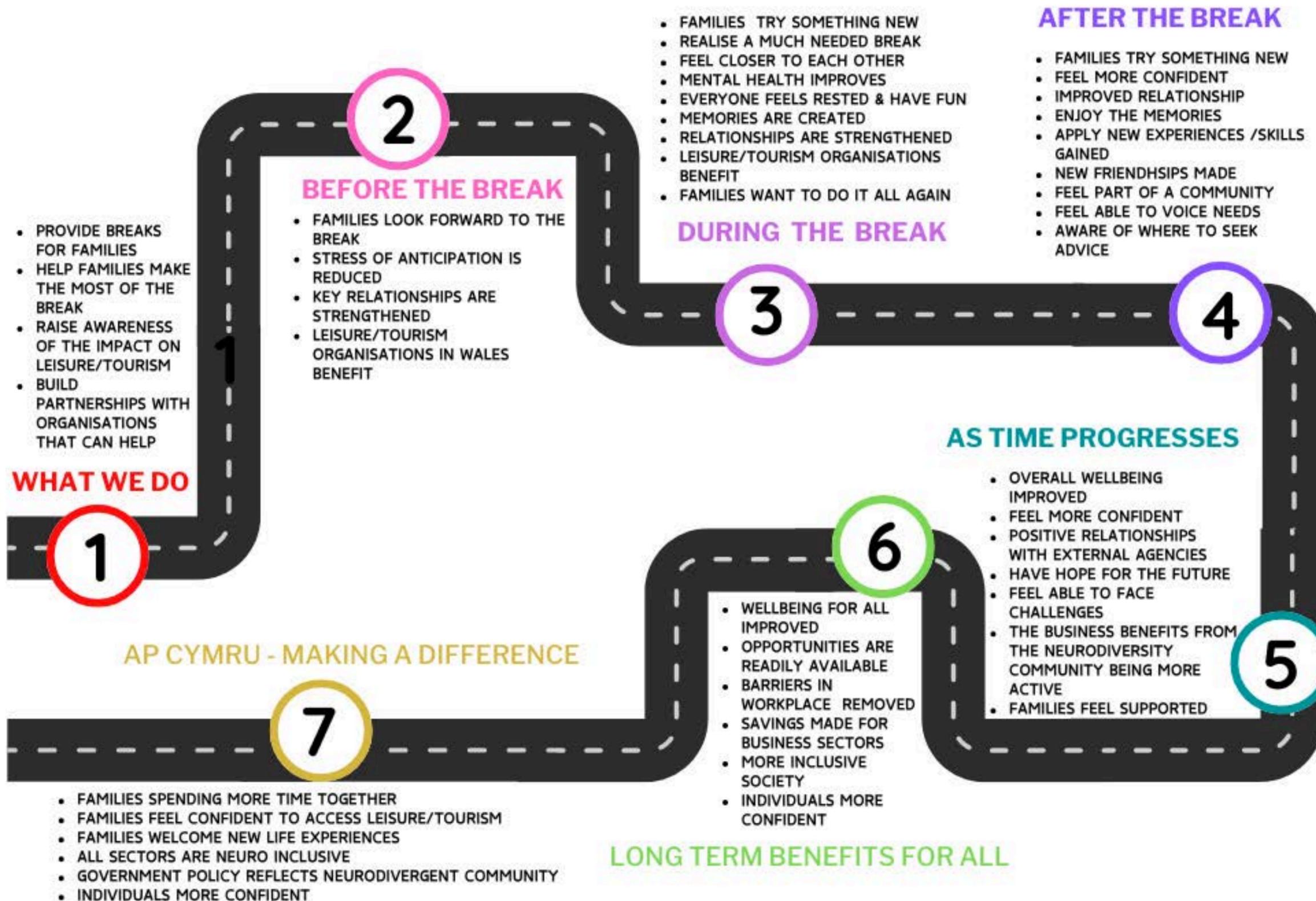
To aid this development we will continue to influence the tourism/leisure/hospitality industry and other sectors:

- Training, knowledge sharing, case studies, feedback and articles will help to remove the barriers to accessibility of short breaks and activities for neurodiverse families.
- Promotion of Fully Inclusive Workplaces in Wales aims to remove barriers and improve opportunities for Future Generation of neurodivergent people in Wales.

To aid this development we will continue to influence government:

- Taking every opportunity to Promote Fully Inclusive Workplaces in Wales aiming to remove barriers and improve opportunities for Future Generation of neurodivergent people in Wales.
- Raise awareness of and drive for change in the language around neurodiversity to promote positivity and remove historic negative perceptions of neurodivergent people in Wales.

# AP CYMRU - DRIVE 4 CHANGE





# Summary

In their Carer Breaks Guidance, the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) sets out that breaks are:

*“...something that carers want to use for themselves. It should be planned, meaningful and positive. The arrangements need to work for both the carer and the person they care for to be beneficial and improve carer wellbeing.”*

This report focuses on breaks longer than overnight stays and welcomes engagement from our member community in setting out the standards achieved and for developing the programme further.

The sister document looks at activities and education opportunities within charity.

We would like to extend our gratitude to our funders and charity partners, for enabling a wish, a dream, a hope and a passion to become a reality!



**AP Cymru**  
**The Neurodiversity Charity**  
[www.apcymru.org.uk](http://www.apcymru.org.uk)

**FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES**



**CHAMPIONING NEURO-INCLUSIVITY ACROSS WALES**

[WWW.APCYMRU.ORG.UK/TRAINING](http://WWW.APCYMRU.ORG.UK/TRAINING)

