



# Valleys Kids

## Arts Welsh Language Policy 2025-2026

November 2025



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## Introduction and Context

Valleys Kids Arts team's key focus is our award-winning youth arts project Sparc. In 2024 we were able to include our visual arts work formerly in our portfolio, predominantly working with older adults. Increasingly we are developing a community focus to this work, tackling social isolation and loneliness, it has enriched our portfolio and offered new opportunities.

Valleys Kids has inclusivity at its heart. We recognise that we live in an increasingly unequal society and this is most apparent in the South Wales Valleys where we have some of the poorest communities in Europe. Socio-economic inequality remains the scourge of our current society

*"The South Wales Valleys shows inequality across a range of health, wellbeing and education indicators". Our Valleys, Our Future (2017).*

Valleys Kids arts plan takes place exclusively in previously designated Community First areas ensuring that we reach some of the most deprived communities in Wales.

## Context for developing the Welsh Language

Our approach to developing our Welsh language plan ties into our equalities plan strategy. Whilst the Welsh language is not formally included under the Equalities Act, the Welsh Language Act 2010 legislates for the promotion and facilitation of Welsh. Since February 2011, Welsh has official-language status, and we recognise that the Welsh Government and Arts Council of Wales are committed to developing a bilingual Wales. In the Government's strategy, 'Cymraeg 2050: a million Welsh speakers', the Government set out ambitious targets to deliver on this, and we are committed to supporting this process.

We live in an area where 19.6 % of the population speaks Welsh (2011 Census). However, there is a demand for Welsh language education in our communities, particularly amongst the younger generation, and an increased interest in wanting to learn and speak Welsh.

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Our approach to a Welsh language plan has to fit in with our context. In our work, we are actively seeking to engage the most vulnerable and challenging young people and older adults in Wales. Therefore, excellent communication is paramount. One of the successes of Sparc, our youth arts project, is that 80% of the current team were raised in our communities and were participants themselves- they understand from their direct experience the challenges that young people face in the South Wales Valleys. Within the team there is an interest and a willingness to develop the Welsh language through our work, but we are not all confident Welsh speakers, so we welcome training and support to do this in the most effective way.

The Arts Council of Wales's useful bilingual toolkit acknowledges that "people with Welsh language skills are younger than those without, and a higher proportion of them belong to the ABC1 non-manual classes". This does not reflect our context and therefore we wanted to adopt a very open, inclusive approach to our plan to ensure its effectiveness. The focus of our work is to build the confidence and self- esteem of our participants; to encourage their aspirations and to empower them to make the changes they want in their lives.

Encouraging young people and older adults to learn about their culture, heritage and the Welsh language can be impactful and when we have visited other countries, they have been keen to share their culture and language with others. Our role is to encourage them to develop practice bilingually in a non-judgmental and supportive way.

We have agreed targets with the Arts Council of Wales to improve our Welsh language provision, and we are confident that we can meet these. We seek to create a creative and playful approach that will encourage both our staff and communities to embrace a holistic approach to both the language and the rich cultural traditions of the South Wales Valleys. We are delighted that Rhodri Trefor has been appointed as the Welsh learning co-ordinator for the Arts Council of Wales - this is precisely the kind of practical support that we need, and we will take full advantage of the support and courses available.

*"I want to listen to your concerns, suggestions, and any barriers you have about learning Welsh". Rhodri Trefor*

2024 offered us all the opportunity of a lifetime, when the Eisteddfod came to Pontypridd, enabling us to fully participate in the event, from our AIR being part of the organising committee, to our young people and emerging artists, performing and visiting the event, immersing themselves in the experience and getting fully involved.

Prior to the Festival, we held consultations with our young people to see how they wanted to participate, and we were delighted that young people from our youth theatres were all keen to attend.

Young people from our Penygraig and Rhydyfelin Youth Theatres attended the Eisteddfod for the first time. Many of them are neuro-divergent so attending something new takes careful planning and preparation by our Deputy Director. They had a wonderful time despite the pouring rain! They visited the Welsh Learners tent, the Pencil Breakers performance, workshops in music and theatrical make up. It was an exciting experience for them all and they said they would like to return.

Pencil Breaker's work was performed at the Eisteddfod for the first time. Professional artists, Menna Rogers and Deborah Newton-Williams, directed by Bethan Marlow performed their creative pieces in the Paned o Gê tent and after the session, our most long-standing member did a Q&A about the work.

This was such a successful intervention, it sparked a deeper conversation with the participants and artists involved in the Eisteddfod, about the need for a space for writers in RCT, who want to develop their Welsh Language writing. This has led to a new project Sgwennu Radical, enabling perspectives from queer, disabled, neuro diverse, activist, Welsh language writers to emerge - led by Bethan Marlow.

The first iteration of this was a collaboration with Mess up the Mess and Queertawe in Swansea, we were invited to contribute to their Festival and presented 'Whispering Teacups' an installation made up of short pieces that were English, Welsh and bilingual. Audience members were invited to join a tea party, where they could pick up the teacups and listen to pieces described by their 'tea quality' whether smoky and aromatic or strong and tangy. The weekly Pencil Breakers sessions are always bilingual but the opportunity for additional sessions solely in Welsh has allowed for new voices to emerge.

We continue to support Leeway production and look for opportunities to collaborate after the success of the 10-minute musical, but Angharad Lee played such a pivotal role in the Eisteddfod this year, this became her key focus so currently we haven't pursued any more project work with the company.

Art in the Attic was a fringe venue for the Eisteddfod. As a member of the Eisteddfod Arts sub-committee, our Artist in Residence, was fully involved in the process, throughout. She attended the opening event, held at Y Lle Celf (The Art Place) which was an excellent place to network with other artists, organisations and the exhibiting artists.

The AIR was also invited to be a steward at Y Lle Celf, as a welsh learner, this involvement on the committee and attending subsequent events was invaluable and really developed her confidence.

Our Artist in Residence hosted an exhibition at Art in the Attic, containing the work of previous/past gold medal winners, Corona. The artwork was part of a private collection of artist Thomas Williams.

### **Eisteddfod Schools Work**

Our Artist in Residence built an excellent relationship with local school Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Llwyncelyn. She delivered an art workshop, centred around one of the pupils leaving the school to emigrate to Australia. The class created artwork in the style of Aboriginal art, using dots to create intricate pieces of art. The artwork was later displayed at the Art in the Attic gallery, alongside other artwork which formed an exhibition, this body of work was jointly curated with the teacher and AIR as part of the Urdd Eisteddfod with involvement from the children.

Our Artist in Residence also delivered a workshop to the pupils, which took place at the Factory, this centered around the history of Corona Pop which originated there and made the venue famous.

### **Welsh Language Schools Work**

The AIR supported a school placement for a student from the local Welsh language Comprehensive School, Cymmer and this was highly successful. In the lead up to the Eisteddfod, young people also rehearsed their performance for the Urdd Eisteddfod at the Factory and shared this with parents.

### **Welsh Language & Bilingual Performances**

We piloted our first afternoon Family show with the wonderful Familia Del Noche and Frogs in Bogs, involving themes of climate change and caring for the environment.

Sherman Theatre performed Red Riding Hood to a capacity audience of local Welsh speaking schools.

We hosted The Ragged Theatre Collective with a bilingual performance of 'Binderala'. This was a beautiful original piece, again centred on climate justice. The piece was set to an original score, with traditional instruments and haunting lyrics.

## Targets achieved in 2024-2025

- All our marketing material for production is fully bilingual.
- Valleys Kids Arts Plan developed a new bilingual digital marketing strategy, to regularly update and refresh our content.
- Welsh and bilingual content increased on Sparc's Twitter, Facebook and Instagram accounts with support from the Wales Millennium Centre.
- Bilingual content is now produced across all Valleys Kids social media platforms highlighting Sparc's work and demonstrating active support for the Welsh language.
- Pencil Breaker's work was performed at the Eisteddfod for the first time,
- Professional artists, Menna Rogers and Deborah Newton-Williams, directed by Bethan Marlow performed Pencil Breakers creative pieces in the Paned o Gê tent.
- Sparc's most long-standing Pencil Breakers member did a Q&A about the work.
- 15 young people from the Penygraig and Rhydyfelin Youth Theatre's attended the Eisteddfod for the first time, all of them enjoyed the experience and would attend again,
- Art in the Attic was a fringe venue for the Eisteddfod. We ran an exhibition containing the work of previous/past gold medal winners, Corona. The artwork was part of a private collection of artist Thomas Williams
- AIR delivered an art workshop in Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Llwyncelyn. The artwork was later displayed at the Art in the Attic gallery as part of a wider exhibition of their work for the Urdd Eisteddfod.
- AIR delivered a workshop to the pupils of Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Llwyncelyn at the Factory around the history of Corona Pop at the Factory.
- AIR Supported school placement student from Welsh language Comprehensive School
- We hosted The Urdd Eisteddfod concert rehearsal including a sharing for their parents.
- Artists at the Gate exhibition at the Art in the Attic gallery delivered their event bilingually
- AIR attends the opening event at Y Lle Celf and is a steward for the venue, an excellent place to network with other artists, organisations and exhibiting artists.

- Sparc hosted three Welsh Language and Bilingual performances, Frogs and Bogs, Red Riding Hood and The Ragged Theatre Collective 'Binderella'
- Sparc's Deputy Director led on planning the Eisteddfod programme, as our most experienced Welsh Learner.
- Team members attend regular Welsh classes. Our Deputy is now at an advanced level. Our AIR passed her Cwrs Mynediad 1 & 2 /Entry Course Level 1 & 2 and enrolled on Sylfaen in the New Year.
- We have Welsh speakers on our Board and in our Senior Leadership team.

## Key Creative Practitioners

### Working with Bethan Marlow

Bethan Marlow is a Sparc Associate, and she has been our Lead Welsh Language Artist on a number of key projects including a major youth-led commission with the Wales Millennium Centre and supporting our Gŵyl Fach. She supported us in celebrating Sparc's 25th Anniversary by mentoring our emerging producers in running their scratch night. She regularly runs Pencil Breakers, which is described as a Disabled, Queer, Activist writing group, producing work bilingually. This year, she supported our work at the Eisteddfod directing Pencil Breakers and meeting and greeting the young people when they arrived. She directed 'Whispering teacups' to perform at Queertawe in collaboration with Mess up the Mess. Bethan is a queer artist whose work is intersectional, bilingual and at times, multilingual.

She supported Sparc throughout the pandemic and beyond to develop several bilingual platforms, including a digital platform, Shwmae Cymraeg. She helps us to extend our Welsh language practice and encourages us to work in exciting, fun, accessible and innovative ways.

### Trac Cymru

Sparc has been invited to be part of a wonderful new project with Trac Cymru, in RCT called Can y Cymoedd (When Valleys Sing).

It's a Heritage Lottery funded project, to create new 'folk' songs based on local heritage, working with school children and youth groups. There is the opportunity to

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work with a professional songwriter over an eight-week period, the project also includes a trip to a local heritage site and a final recording session. We are exploring the potential of working with Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Llwyncelyn so that the young people could perform their piece alongside launching their St Davids' day exhibition.

## Targets for 2025/26

### Communication and Marketing

In 2023, Valleys Kids worked with the amazing Design Dough Company to launch a new, fit for purpose, interactive, bilingual website and brand. This created a coherent 'umbrella' identity for Valleys Kids embracing different elements of our projects and programming. Each area had our own identifiable colour logo. This enabled us to refresh and develop the Sparc brand whilst maintaining our own Sparc website, which will enable more traffic and interest to be generated about our work, across the platforms. We also have a more coherent message and social media campaign under the strapline 'We are all Valleys Kids' mirroring our wider Valleys Kids Arts plan.

This commitment to a fully bilingual brand gives a clear message to our participants and funders with regard to the Welsh language and allows us to reach a wider audience and develop our identity. In the last year, Valleys Kids have created bilingual content across their platforms featuring our work. Our youth arts worker, who is responsible for social media campaigns, and refreshing our web content, utilises video and digital newsletters to market our work.

This year, Valleys Kid formed a marketing and publicity group across Valleys Kids, working with our partners Admiral Insurance and their highly experienced marketing team, to develop a wider strategy for our work. We have also formed a relationship with Manchester Business School, who are supporting us with our marketing strategy, working particularly for the Factory on a strategic project. Here it is important to emphasise the Welsh language context of our work and ensure that it is embedded at every level.

**Target:** Our dedicated Youth Arts Worker will continue to update and develop Sparc's bilingual identity and website. She will work with the young people & the team to develop digital content and market our productions involving young people in social media campaigns that develop their skill set. The Director of Arts will work closely with

Admiral Insurance marketing team and Manchester Business School to develop the arts marketing strand of our work and ensure it is fully bilingual.

**Person Responsible: Artistic Director/ dedicated arts worker/AIR**

**Timeline: April 2025 – March 2026**

## Staff Training

Our most experienced Welsh speaker has completed five years of Welsh language education and received her fourth WJEC-approved qualification. This year, she led our work with the Eisteddfod. She has just been accepted for a second time onto the prestigious Creative Leadership Programme with the Arts Council of Wales. She is passionate about introducing Welsh in a learning context and runs her sessions bilingually.

As a member of the visual arts sub-committee for the Eisteddfod, the AIR regularly attended meetings and sessions that were held bilingually. As a beginner Welsh learner, she has recently undertaken Cwrs Mynediad 1 & 2 /Entry Course Level 1 & 2. She is now studying Sylfaen.

**Target:** Key staff to attend Welsh language lessons within work time.

**Person Responsible: Artistic Director**

**Timeline: April 2025 – March 2026**

## Regular Sessions

Encourage and work with our participants whether welsh speakers or learners creating a fun, enjoyable environment to share and practice welsh in all our creative practice. To deliver and enable participants to contribute to the language of their choice.

Target:

100 welsh language/bilingual sessions

275 attendances

**Person Responsible: Artistic Director**

**Timeline: April 2025 – March 2026**

## Bilingual Theatre and Arts Events

As part of our programme, Sparc runs professional and community arts events. Our audience is predominantly local young people, some of whom have never experienced live theatre events. This year, we are due to host Blaidd by Flossy and Boo, a bilingual children's show. This is our first time working with the company. We will host The Frog Prince, for our Welsh language schools, with the Sherman Theatre. We are looking at a production later in the year with Familia Del Noche. We continue to explore the work of new companies who focus on bilingual and Welsh Language productions.

Target:

4 Welsh Language/bilingual performances by professional companies.

**Person Responsible: Artistic Director**

**Timeline: April 2025 – October 2026**

## Sgwennu Radical Project

Sgwennu Radical Project is a Welsh language creative writing project that amplifies voices in their rawest form. It's about supporting writers to explore what they have to say to the world in any literature form that excites them. It's also about providing a space for the work to be heard and performed in front of an audience. And then, it's encouraging the writers to find avenues and contacts to take this work further afield as a stepping stone into the Welsh language creative industry.

Led by Bethan Marlow, she is currently supporting 3 writers in finding their voice in Welsh. One is a learner, feeling that she has so much to say but scared she doesn't have the words to say it. Another feels at home speaking Welsh but is unsure whether a Welsh audience will want to hear her kind of story. And a fluent Welsh speaker that is convinced that their Welsh is a strange mix of regions and not as good as "the real Welsh speakers".

The form the plays can take could be a new theatre piece, a radio play or a collection of poems. Bethan is also mentoring them on their careers and how to take this work to theatre producers and companies across Wales as a way of introducing these new, incredible writers.

### Targets

28 creative writing sessions

15 Development sessions for 3 welsh language emerging writers

1 writer's showcase event

2 trips to Welsh language/ bilingual events

**Person Responsible: Artistic Director**

**Timeline: April 2025 – October 2026**

## Trac Cymru

Sparc is seeking to work with Trac Cymru, Sparc and local schools to develop a new partnership, the focus of this is to produce a new original piece that can be performed at the Factory in Porth, alongside a new arts exhibition of children's work for St Davids Day. For young people it provides the opportunity to create new work that expresses what they want to say about their valleys and home in a highly creative way. For Sparc we want to use this as a platform to work more closely with Trac Cymru, developing a new strand of Welsh Language work.

**Target:** to work with Sparc, a local school and Trac Cymrus' professional Welsh language songwriter. To develop an original folk track that can be recorded and performed by the children.

8 sessions

1 visit to recording studio

1 heritage visit

1 local performance

**Person Responsible: Artistic Director**

**Timeline: April 2025 – October 2026**

## Visual Arts Schools Work

Our AIR already has an established relationship with Llwyncelyn School, our local Welsh-medium school, and continues to develop opportunities for workshops with the children.

Their exhibition featured work for the Urdd Eisteddfod, and it gave the children and their parents and grandparents an opportunity to see their wonderful creations in a professional setting. The children were thrilled to host their families and took great pride in showing off their work. This was followed by a further exhibition in March 2025 which was equally successful.

Continuing to develop our existing relationship with our local Welsh Language primary school, we will also seek to engage with a local secondary Welsh Language school to create opportunities for workshops to be delivered at the school and at the Factory, Porth.

We are also seeking to develop a collaboration with Trac Cymru and the local Welsh language schools culminating in an Art Exhibition and performance for St David's day at the Factory.

**Target:** To develop a Welsh language and bilingual schools programme for visual arts by working with local schools and utilising Art in the Attic to promote and support their work.

2 workshops at Welsh Medium Schools

2 workshops at the Factory with opportunities to exhibit artwork at the Art in the Attic gallery.

**Person responsible: Artist in Residence**

**Timeline: June 2025 – June 2026**

## Valleys Voices – Heritage Project

Valleys Kids are part of the National Lottery Heritage Fund and are working closely with The People's Collection Wales and Glamorgan Archives to gain expertise and advice around how we collate and archive the heritage of Valleys Kids, through our project Valleys Voices.

We have received training and are in the process of selecting significant material for archiving and preparing for the communities, past and present, to share their stories and memories with us, through a series of recordings, both video and audio, and the written word.

We have established a relationship between Valleys Kids, and the Peoples Collection Wales and Valleys Kids continue to meet local people, collect stories, and sift through the many images, taken over the years, in readiness, to populate our space, on People's Collection Wales.

As both sites are fully bilingual, we will ensure going forward that we transcribe and translate in both Welsh and English, giving us another opportunity to integrate the Welsh language into our everyday working practice.

In the coming year, this project will be brought to fruition and will include bilingual interviews and stories presented as part of the collection, culminating in an exhibition at Art in the Attic.

**Action 7:** To develop a living archive of Valleys Kids' remarkable contribution to the cultural life of the Valleys and Wales, with Glamorgan Archives and People's Collection of Wales.

**Person responsible:** AIR (lead)

**Timeline:** Project completion November 2025.

## Monitoring and Measuring the Plan

- We now have a Valleys Kids Art Board that meets quarterly and has been in operation for over a year. The Chair of Valleys Kids also chairs the Valleys Kids Art Board ensuring continuity and bringing any key issues to the attention of the trustees.
- The Valleys Kids Art Board is administered and overseen by the Director of Arts (formerly the Artistic Director of Sparc)
- All actions outlined in the plan will be reviewed and reported on alongside our strategic targets at the VK Arts Board.
- The new Management team (including the Director of Arts) are responsible for the Board's representation, and it will monitor the progress of Welsh speakers on our Board on a yearly basis when the Board Members are up for review.
- Our Business Plan attends to how we will make our work more attractive to fluent Welsh speakers and learners. We will monitor the progress of this through our discussions with key stakeholders and most importantly, with our participants and will continue to evaluate the process.

**Our Business Plan submitted in March 2023 and updated yearly, has a yearly action plan which reflects the Welsh Language Plan, this also highlights the key issues that will need to be acted upon in the forthcoming year.**

## Embracing Change

1. For Board members, Valleys Kids Arts plan is outward looking, embracing a bilingual approach to our work and demonstrating this through our creative process.
2. For Staff, a more confident approach to the Welsh language, which is enabling and supportive, and plays to our strengths.
3. For our participants, a 'can-do attitude' to the Welsh language which increases their confidence and allows them to express themselves through the language of their choice.