

Ysgol Bro Banw

The Big Bocs Bwyd opened to the public at Ysgol Bro Banw in December. Six months of necessary planning and paperwork had yielded concrete results. At first, the school's main concern was whether it could secure a sufficient supply of foodstuffs to meet latent demand that it was certain would quickly materialise. A further concern was the potential impact on the local micro economy as there was a real worry that business could be inadvertently drawn away from the local High Street. As a consequence of these concerns the service was only promoted to families within the school to begin with.

The service has now grown, and the project has matured within the school. A garden area has been developed, with raised planters, poly tunnels and an orchard of fruit trees. The children grow, harvest, cook and eat the food that is produced. The food they produce is often frozen and made available for families to take away. The importance of giving children authentic experiences is recognised. The children learn about where food comes from and the importance of healthy eating.



The Big Bocs Bwyd at Ysgol Bro Banw has become more than a food outlet. Preloved clothes are now collected and distributed; in addition, parents are sign posted to other outlets where they can access funds to purchase household goods such as washing machines and fridges. Through activities such as these, the school views itself as a valuable community resource.

An area of continuing concern is the need to ensure that there is a sufficient supply of food to meet demand. Consequently, the school proactively seeks out new partners who are willing to donate food and thereby sustain a consistent supply of foodstuffs. In addition to the supply from FareShare Cymru, surplus food from local supermarkets and small shops are collected and distributed to families.



The response from families has been extremely positive. Many said that they visited the Big Bocs Bwyd frequently and found it an invaluable help during the current cost of living crisis. The “pay as you feel” ethos was welcomed and supported. One parent commented that on some days the service presents her with the only way she can feed her family.

Big Bocs Bwyd is seen as accessible and easy to use and many commented that they would like to see it open more often. The service offers more than financial benefits for parents. The parents like the connections they make via the service as it provides opportunities to meet new people and engage socially. The children recognise that by using the food Apps they can inform parents of available food and curtail waste. The parents feel that they are supporting the school and simultaneously helping to reduce food waste.

The school has aimed to incorporate and promote the project's ethos and values within the wider curriculum of the school. For example, children within all year groups have an environmental challenge to focus on. These challenges include sustainable fashion, planning and making meals, or reducing food waste.



The next big step is to ensure the ethos of Curriculum for Wales and the Four Purposes by embedding the work of Big Bocs Bwyd within the school curriculum. Big Bocs Bwyd is currently a project that sits alongside the curriculum of the school with selected groups of children involved. These children are developing the skills and understanding of growing food, cooking, sustainability, enterprise, and marketing. This occurs alongside the application of associated skills such as, team working, literacy, numeracy and digital learning. The full embedment of the project in the curriculum will promote these transferable skills and ensure their development for all children.

Plans are in place to further promote the programme. The school has secured a successful National Lottery bid. This will involve the development of a kitchen area. A member of staff will be employed to undertake cooking activities with the children. Once established, the school has plans to develop the area to provide opportunities for parents to participate in a community café venture. The school has already undertaken smaller projects with families, cooking and sharing their favourite recipes.



The children are excellent ambassadors for the Big Bocs Bwyd project. They attend conferences and present at local events, communicating effectively about the work they have undertaken. The children call themselves the Waste Wizards, and they have won the "Minimum Miles" food award for creating a meal from their vegetable garden.

The plan is for more children to be directly involved in the running of the Big Bocs Bwyd. The children readily recognise the value of Big Bocs Bwyd to the community, the importance of sustainability and the benefits that arise from healthy eating. One staff member noted about the children that, “There’s a focus in the classroom. The children find a challenge in the community and tackle it. They see themselves as “change makers”. The children have many suggestions for developing the shop and increasing the footfall. They want to increase the amount of food they sell and establish links with local shops to increase donations. The children have suggested developing a café alongside the shop and engaging with the wider community to offer good quality, locally sourced food.



Parents are very supportive of the service and clearly value the support it gives.

“I am a carer and because my husband works as well, we can't get benefits such as free school meals. I manage on £40 a week, I have 2 days' worth of electricity left and half a week of petrol to travel to work in Carmarthen. I've had food (from Big Bocs Bwyd) today to make packed lunches for the children for the week.”

“I use it a lot. It promotes healthy eating; the children are involved in running it and it's supporting the school. It saves food going to waste and I use it to add to my supermarket shop.”

“It’s invaluable. I have four children and things have got a lot harder recently to feed 6 of us. I use it every time it’s open.”

“It’s friendly, non judgemental, nice staff who are helpful. The children like choosing things, I meet new people and I can practise my Welsh.”

The support for Big Bocs Bwyd amongst the community is clear but if the project is to be sustainable, the school recognises that it needs to continue to be imaginative and creative in the use of its resources. The school enlists the support of the staff, it’s parents and the children to do this, and between them, they have the ideas to make it happen.

Staff working on the project recognise the need to access grants and to liaise with local gardeners and producers. One idea being considered is the creation of a vegetable box scheme from the school garden to sell to those who can afford the market price. Other options under consideration include the setting up of a community café, establishment of a local co-operative of market gardeners and creating a data base to share and access surplus food in the locality. The latter initiative would help address the perennial problem of matching demand and supply.



Ysgol Bro Banw has demonstrated how Big Bocs Bwyd can offer authentic learning experiences for children whilst offering affordable food to families in the local community. As one volunteer said:

“I’ve been helping since it opened a year ago. It’s grown during this time with the raised bed garden to grow fresh produce and children cooking. It’s for the community not just for parents at the school and a place to meet lots of different people. I get regulars but it’s great when new people come. Lots of parents rely on microwave meals as they are reluctant to cook from scratch as it’s expensive to put the cooker on. This (Big Bocs Bwyd) helps a lot with the financial crisis.”

In the final analysis, it is the testimony of its users that demonstrates and validates the Big Bocs Bwyd project.