



DECIPHER

Centre for Development, Evaluation, Complexity  
and Implementation in Public Health Improvement  
A Public Health Research Centre of Excellence

# ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22



Ymchwil Iechyd  
a Gofal **Cymru**  
Health and Care  
Research **Wales**



Ariennir gan  
**Lywodraeth Cymru**  
Funded by  
**Welsh Government**

<https://decipher.uk.net>



# 1. INTRODUCTION

On behalf of the DECIPHer team I am pleased to present our second annual report for the centre, which brings together multidisciplinary experts to tackle key public health issues with a focus on the health and wellbeing of children and young people.

We build unique public health research capacity in Wales. This includes a vibrant research led teaching program, international short courses, undergraduate and postgraduate placements, international secondments and a successful researcher careers programme. This supports early career researchers to move from PhDs to fellowships and then to become principal investigators. This helps us to collaborate with other academic centres across Wales, the UK and internationally to bring innovative research approaches to public health issues. In this, we also work closely with partners in Public Health Wales and with other national and local stakeholders to develop, evaluate and implement effective health policies that make a difference. We also place great emphasis on involving the public in our work, from research development and study conduct to translation and impact.

Public Health Improvement Research Networks (PHIRNs) ensure our academic, policy, practice and public collaborations are meaningful and effective. These networks facilitate Research Development Groups (RDGs) to secure research funding, support the conduct of studies and translate evidence across four research programme areas. These areas are i) healthy public policy, ii) healthy settings and organisations, iii) healthy social relationships, and iv) methodological innovation in public health intervention science. These programmes are co-led with more senior staff supporting mid-career researchers to support sustainability and build capacity in Wales.

PHIRNs allow us to address complex problems and take a partnership approach. For example, activities in the Schools Health Research Network (SHRN) support Welsh Government national indicators and are currently mentioned in over 30 Welsh policy or strategy documents. SHRN also provides data reports for Public Health Wales, Educational Consortia, Local Education Authorities (LEAs), Local Health Boards (LHBs) and schools across Wales. It also supports a multi-million pound portfolio of research studies and innovative approaches to translation and capacity development. We continue to develop our networks in secondary and primary schools, with young people in the community and with parents and carers.

What follows, highlights our key successes this year in capacity development, research programme activity and our collaborations and engagement to promote impact. In generating and translating excellent, co-produced and cross policy relevant research evidence, we contribute to key policy priorities in Wales, which align with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and which seek to improve the health and wellbeing of the population of Wales while reducing inequalities.



**Professor Simon Murphy**  
Director of DECIPHer

# 2. WHO WE ARE AND HOW WE OPERATE

DECIPHer investigators are drawn from the School of Social Sciences and School of Medicine at Cardiff University and Public Health Wales. We come together as a Strategic Partnership Board to oversee the work of the Centre, and are supported by a Public Involvement Steering Group and a Scientific Advisory Board. The day to day delivery and management of the centre resides with the DECIPHer Executive Team.

## DECIPHer Executive Team



**Dr. Rhiannon Evans**  
Co-Lead Healthy Families and Relationships



**Dr. Jemma Hawkins**  
Co-Lead PHIRNs & Methodological Innovation in Public Health Intervention Science



**Dr. Sara Jones**  
DECIPHer Centre Manager



**Prof. Graham Moore**  
Deputy Director of DECIPHer Co-Lead Healthy Public Policy



**Dr. Kelly Morgan**  
Contract Research Representative



**Prof. Simon Murphy**  
Director of DECIPHer & Co-Lead SHRN & Healthy Settings and Organisations



**Dr. Honor Young**  
Co-Lead Healthy Settings and Organisations

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## DECIPHer Co-Investigators



**Dr. Julie Bishop**  
Co-Lead PHIRNs



**Prof. Amanda Robinson**  
Co-Lead Healthy Public Policy



**Prof. Michael Robling**  
Co-Lead Methodological Innovation in Public Health Intervention Science



**Dr. Jeremy Segrott**  
Public Involvement Lead & Co-Lead Healthy Families and Relationships



**Joan Roberts**  
Co-Lead SHRN



**Dr. Jamie White**  
Research Development Support Group

# 3. CORE METRICS

Reporting period: 2021/2022

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



Direct funding awarded  
**£525.7k**

Jobs created through direct funding



## Grants won during reporting period

Grants won	Led by group	Group collaborating
Number	<b>14</b>	<b>18</b>
Value	<b>£2.51m</b>	<b>£12.45m</b>
Funding to Wales	<b>£2.51m</b>	<b>£3.10m</b>
Funding to group	<b>£2.45m</b>	<b>£792.9k</b>
Additional jobs created for Wales	<b>17</b>	<b>19</b>
Additional jobs created for group	<b>17</b>	<b>7</b>



Number of publications



Number of public engagement events



Number of public involvement opportunities

DECIPHer is funded by Welsh Government through Health and Care Research Wales. This year we received a grant of £525,735 and our collaborations have secured 32 new research studies with a value of over £14.96m, £5.6m of which came to Wales. Fourteen of these studies were led by DECIPHer and £3.24m came directly to our centre. Of particular note is the award of the £2.5m DATAMIND, Health Data Research Hub for Mental Health, a collaboration led by Swansea University which builds on a previous MRC Pathfinder award in linking the work of School Health Research Network (SHRN) and the Secure Anonymised Information Linkage (SAIL) databank. As well as key success with infrastructure, funding has supported a wide range of projects which are detailed in our research programmes section.

Our success has resulted in 36 additional jobs created in Wales, 24 of them within our centre. DECIPHer has also supported 75 collaborative activities and events with our stakeholders to co-produce and translate our research. This has included task and finish research bid development groups and consultation events with UK Research

and Innovation (UKRI) and Wellcome Trust. Meanwhile, we have produced 57 publications including refereed journal articles and published reports and guidance. This year, we have also successfully supported and delivered 60 public engagement events; this includes presentations by our centre staff, DECIPHer online events and our international programme of short courses.

Over the year, DECIPHer made significant contributions supporting policy development and evaluation, with Welsh Government, UK and international activity. This includes membership of the Welsh Government Tobacco Working Group, the COVID-19 Technical Advisory Cell for Children and Education, the Ministerial Task and Finish Group for the Whole School Approach to Mental Health, an acknowledgment in the Welsh Government consultation response on the Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) Statutory Guidance and code, and work with UNESCO, to support the drafting of 'Guidelines to Mainstream Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in Education Systems'.

# 4. DEVELOPING CAPACITY

## 4.1 Public Health Improvement Research Networks (PHIRNS)



Julie Bishop



Jemma Hawkins

DECIPHer develops network infrastructure to co-produce intervention research and promote translation by drawing on strong partnerships with policy and practice. Dr Julie Bishop, a DECIPHer co-investigator with responsibility for co-leading PHIRN development and Director of Health Improvement Public Health Wales, reflects on the value of our approach:

One of the approaches to developing research capacity and capability through network development continues to include strengthening and consolidating links with Public Health Wales through embedded and co-located staff and through shared networks. Inevitably, this work has been impacted by the pandemic but is being re-energised through the COVID-19 recovery phase. The most established networks exist in the context of schools, particularly through the Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes, and this joint working is evidence of the evolution and integration that has been achieved between PHIRN and key national public health programmes. Public Health Wales is undertaking a significant transformation programme and this has provided opportunities to strengthen and align the partnership between SHRN and the Network, with the Network taking a key role in recruiting to the survey. The use of the survey data is specifically included in the new assessment tool for the Whole School Approach to Mental and Emotional Wellbeing, and the development of the new monitoring and evaluation framework of

the Healthy Schools Network is likely to include a similar approach. We will be using the survey data within the monitoring frameworks of other key public health policies e.g. Tobacco, in partnership with Welsh Government. The learning from the school sector is being used to adopt a network approach in relation to workplace health and wellbeing which will be increasingly important during a period of unprecedented change in the nature of work.

### Public Health Intervention Responsive Studies Teams (PHIRSTs)

PHIRSTs are another element of our network development in which academic researchers are partnered up with local authorities to co-produce evaluations of existing local authority public health interventions. There are now six PHIRST teams across the UK funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), and DECIPHer Senior Research Fellow Dr Kelly Morgan along with investigators Prof Simon Murphy and Dr Jemma Hawkins are part of a Bristol/Cardiff Universities collaboration named 'PHIRST Insight'.

PHIRST Insight are currently working on evaluations of six local authority interventions from across the UK, with two of these being led by researchers in DECIPHer. The interventions span a range of public health issues and populations across the life course including: growth mindset training for teachers, universal provision of free school meals, a community kitchen scheme, active travel infrastructure, community mental health projects, and a tool to identify and prevent malnutrition in older adults. Our approach to developing these evaluations focuses on co-production and collaboration between policy makers, practitioners, the public, and researchers.

**Dr Hayley Reed is a Research Associate in DECIPHer working on the Mindset Teams PHIRST project. This is an intervention which aims to support the development of a growth mindset culture in Scottish schools in order to improve learning resilience for health and education outcomes. Here she reflects on her time with DECIPHer**



"I have been involved with DECIPHer since 2011 when I was appointed as the Involving Young People Research Officer. I was responsible for supporting public involvement in the Centre, with my main task being the development of one of the UK's first youth advisory groups Advice Leading to Public Health Advancement (ALPHA), which is still an exemplar of leading public involvement. During my five years in this role, I gained invaluable intervention research experience as I supported ALPHA to be involved in 17 intervention projects with researchers and policymakers, and I was a steering group member for three intervention trials. This sparked my interest in undertaking my own research about how interventions can be co-produced with school stakeholders.

With the support of DECIPHer colleagues, I was successful in gaining a PhD Studentship which started in 2017. My research involved a systematic review to establish a co-production process that supported the development of school-specific wellbeing interventions. I delivered this in two schools whilst using a process evaluation to refine the co-production process. Concurrently, I was able to contribute to two other reviews, one on young carers' mental health and the other on peer influences on smoking, and to work on two projects on practitioner training in Restorative Approaches, and Veteran and family mental health. All of this allowed me to expand my research knowledge and skillset. My future aspiration is to obtain a Fellowship grant so I can expand my intervention expertise into adapting successful interventions to Wales which can address young people's mental health issues."

**Dr Elinor Coulman is a Research Fellow who joined us on a secondment from the Centre for Trials Research in 2021 when an opportunity arose for a PHIRST researcher in DECIPHer. She reflects on her experience working with us**



"I had worked for the Centre for Trials Research (CTR) for ten years as a Research Associate/ Trial Manager and the secondment provided an opportunity to expand my active involvement in population health research. The PHIRST initiative involves working with local authority partners to evaluate work that is already happening in local government. The project I am working on evaluates the implementation of the Patients Association Nutrition Checklist by Eat Well Age Well/ Scottish Borders. It also assesses the impact of the Checklist on both older adults and the social care, housing and voluntary sector organisations utilising the Checklist in the communities. The role has enabled me to utilise my skills and experience gained whilst managing a broad range of behaviour change, public health and complex interventions. It also allowed me to engage with public health research from its conception, and to lead the co-production of the evaluation, with vital support from the project leads. DECIPHer is an engaging and constructive working environment, and it has provided a fantastic opportunity to develop strong cross-centre collaborations within Cardiff University. Since working at DECIPHer, I have gained a Research Fellow position within the CTR, a development fully supported by the Executive Team. I intend to pursue my career as an independent researcher and I hope to secure my own grant funding, contributing to the public health research portfolio in DECIPHer."

## 4.2 National and international short courses



We have continued to deliver our capacity development offering courses mostly online due to ongoing COVID-19 restriction. Over the last year we have delivered adapted online versions of all three of our annual short courses, as well as three international bespoke courses.

A condensed version of our annual 5-day training course was delivered in June 2021 as an online collection of 3 half-day workshops combined with 1:1 discussion sessions with DECIPHer researchers. This shortened course was focused on current new developments and areas of expertise within DECIPHer, providing a combination of introductory grounding in complexity and public health intervention with a deeper look at specialist topic areas of public involvement and new guidance for intervention adaptation.

The course was extremely popular and was oversubscribed within a week of opening registrations. It attracted an international audience with attendees from the UK, Ireland, Luxembourg, Japan and Australia and representation across various fields of public health and healthcare including mental health, physiotherapy, palliative care, global health, dental sciences and respiratory medicine. Likewise, the online version of our 1-day process evaluation course in September 2021 was oversubscribed with delegates from within Wales and the UK as well as international attendees representing academia, policy and clinical settings. Following the success of our online training course on 'how to involve young people in the design and conduct of research', delivered in collaboration with Health and Care Research Wales in January 2021, Peter Gee and Dr Jeremy Segrott ran another offering of this course again in June.

Our international capacity development takes the form of established regular short courses as well as requests for bespoke one-off courses. Our established international courses include an accredited doctoral training course on developing and evaluating complex interventions for Karolinska Institute in Sweden (led by Dr Jemma Hawkins and Prof Graham Moore), and teaching on co-production and process evaluation for researchers and doctoral students at Aalborg University, Denmark (led by Dr Rhiannon Evans and Dr Rachel Brown). These courses were delivered again in June and October 2021 respectively, with some of the teaching in Denmark delivered in-person, and both receiving extremely positive feedback.

Over the last 12 months we have also received requests for bespoke capacity development from UK and international institutions including National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) School of Social Care Research, Canterbury Christ Church University and the Chile Ministry of Health. An online 2-day training course on an introduction to evaluating complex interventions was delivered by Dr Jemma Hawkins, Dr Rachel Brown and Prof Graham Moore in October 2021 to academics from Canterbury Christ Church University and their collaborators from four Universities in Palestine as part of a Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) collaboration. Discussions are ongoing with contacts in the Chile Ministry of Health regarding the development of a bespoke course, and in the meantime some staff members from the ministry attended the 1-day process evaluation course in September 2021.

## 4.3 Supporting research and professional services staff development

This year we were pleased to congratulate Professor Graham Moore on being appointed a Health and Care Research Wales Senior Research Leader and joining the Cardiff University Professorial Leadership Programme. We also saw two of our DECIPHer staff, Dr Rachel Brown and Dr Sara Long, promoted to Research Fellow and Dr Rebecca Anthony - Nominated for Research Trainee of the year at the Association for Child & Adolescent Mental Health Awards. Kelly Morgan was appointed as theme lead for population level change for the Welsh Institute of Physical Activity, Health and Sport and for the health and wellbeing theme for the ONS/ Cardiff University strategic collaboration. This year also saw two of our students awarded their PhDs, Dr Edward Janes for his thesis on *Caring Lives: What do young people who care for family members need to thrive?* and Dr Hayley Reed for her work on developing methodological guidance for the co-production of health interventions in secondary schools. We have also supported a significant number of our staff to progress in their careers. We asked some of them to reflect on their experiences with DECIPHer.

**Sophie Jones - Hailing from Blackwood, Sophie is a degree qualified Youth and Community Worker who has recently completed her PGCE PCET at Cardiff Metropolitan University and is currently undertaking an MSc in Applied Public Health. She joined ALPHA at the age of 14, not knowing how the experience would inspire and shape her future career.**



"When I joined ALPHA at 14, I wasn't really sure what it was or what I'd get from it. But I gained so much. I may be biased but ALPHA is such an amazing group and it's so unique. I developed professionally and personally from being involved.

"Firstly, it gave me a whole new friendship group and I made friends for life. I was able to meet others from across the South Wales region and hear their perspectives on research which were often different to mine, which were informed by growing up in a small town in the valleys. The broadening of my network and the interpersonal

and life skills I built up over time have been invaluable. When I first started ALPHA, I'd never travelled to Cardiff without my mum, I had very low confidence and was very shy. Which absolutely isn't the case anymore!

"Alongside the personal, ALPHA unintentionally gave me a career. After school, I went to college but left very early on. For a few months, I was a NEET (not in Education, Employment or Training) but I was still attending ALPHA sessions. It was at this time that I applied for my Youth and Community work degree. While I didn't meet the minimum qualifications for entry, I was offered an interview and spoke about my ALPHA experience and involvement in young people's public health research. I was made an unconditional offer. This was the beginning of my interest in research and collaborative ways of working, and my degree, PGCE, master's studies and job all involve young people, community, and public health.

"I left ALPHA and became an employee of DECIPHer in January 2019, as the sessional youth worker for ALPHA. I was super excited to link my experience and skills and shape the future of the group. This September, I became the Senior Public Involvement Officer, leaving the youth work sector behind but pursuing an exciting change in direction to bring my youth work and public health knowledge together. My role now is to ensure the voices of the public and young people are heard within research at DECIPHer. Ensuring all public involvement is diverse and inclusive. It's an exciting role and it allows me to work with inspiring people and learn about great work and research involving young people and communities.

"DECIPHer is a well-established and respected research centre, leading best practice. It's a privilege to work with such dedicated colleagues and I'm forever learning from our researchers. While I'm new in post and have just begun my master's studies, I know that I'd like to pursue a career in research in the future – focusing on young people, youth work and public health. With so many inspiring people around me in DECIPHer, I'm learning from the best every day."

### Dr Edward Janes

"My involvement in DECIPHer began in 2014 when I applied for the Sessional Youth Worker role with ALPHA, DECIPHer's youth advisory group. The role amounted to a few hours a week, but I continued this for several years alongside developing and managing projects for a children's rights charity, and later Cardiff Council's research team. Working with ALPHA was initially just fun but supporting and facilitating sessions led to a good grounding and increasing interest in public health.

I expressed an interest in studying for a PhD and, having been initially unsuccessful in applying for a funded studentship, DECIPHer supported me to attend their short course on developing and evaluating interventions. This was hugely beneficial in terms of informing future bids, and I developed my own application for a study on young carers that was ultimately successful.

My PhD supervisors, Professor G.J Melendez-Torres (in DECIPHer) and Professor Donald Forrester (in CASCADE Partnership, the children's social care research centre), were fantastic in recognising my intention to do something different and supporting this, even when it meant sometimes (often!) taking the harder path. This included the development of quantitative skills, and the result was a mixed methods PhD that sought to tackle longstanding issues in young carers research.

Studying in DECIPHer was a fantastic chance to be involved in a busy research centre, and I took full advantage of opportunities to work on projects, sit on the Public Involvement Steering Group and manage the DECIPHer forum. Between the centre, my supervisors and the research topic itself, it has been an amazing few years.

Having finished my studies in late 2021, I am currently working as a Research Associate on the (Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research and Data) WISERD Education Multi-Cohort Study (WEMCS), a longitudinal research study. In addition, I am currently writing papers on my doctoral study and actively looking to undertake further young carers research in the future."



### Safia Ouerghi - A 2021 graduate in Psychology, Safia was introduced to ALPHA and DECIPHer through a third-year professional placement. Now, she's taking the first step in her research career and following her passion for public health improvement.

"In the final year of my undergraduate degree – here at Cardiff University's School of Psychology – I completed various placements, organised by GoWales. I was given the opportunity to do a three-month support role placement (in 2020) with ALPHA, which involved helping to facilitate and design the ALPHA sessions under the supervision of a Senior Public Involvement Officer.

ALPHA allows young people to have a say in interventions and strategies that are intended to support them and their wellbeing, directly informing and improving research design. After my placement ended, I was eager to join ALPHA as a member because I witnessed first-hand the importance of public involvement within research. Participating in ALPHA also helped me develop many skills, not least analytical skills through the evaluation of research methodologies. From being involved as a member and from having a support role with ALPHA, I came to understand my passion for public health research.

I've since joined DECIPHer as a Research Assistant, developing and implementing data collection for the School Health Research Network (SHRN). Currently, I'm involved in a project that aims to expand the established secondary-based School Health Research Network into primary schools across Wales. We're at the stage of evaluating feasibility, tackling the issues that present themselves, and piloting survey methods and their suitability for younger children. It's an exciting project to be part of and one which aligns with my interests.

DECIPHer's work is so important as it involves communicating directly with targeted populations to improve and tackle health issues and inequalities. Taking account of a range of issues when approaching the research, rather than separating them out, allows us to see how they influence each other and develop a better understanding of correlations between them, leading to tailored interventions. This is an exciting first role in research for me and I'm keen to develop further, potentially undertaking a master's degree and a PhD in the future. I'm passionate about public health research and how we can translate that research into tangible health improvements for people and populations around the world."



### Bethan Pell

"My incredible journey with DECIPHer began in 2018. I had been working as a Research Associate with the Centre for Trials Research (CTR), which I enjoyed - but I was really keen to pursue my research interests in domestic violence and abuse (DVA) and healthy relationships, with the ultimate view to undertake a PhD. Connecting with academic colleagues Dr Jamie White and Dr Honor Young led to my first opportunity with DECIPHer; assisting in data collection and analysis in The JACK Trial. This was where I first developed my insight into the intricacies of designing and testing complex interventions for children and young people's health and wellbeing improvement.

Following this, DECIPHer continued to encourage and support me in pursuit of my research interests and career aspirations, culminating in various roles and opportunities with DECIPHer. I was involved as a Co-Investigator on a study with domestic abuse survivors (led by Prof G.J. Melendez-Torres and Prof Amanda Robinson), working with Dr Rhiannon Evans and Dr Honor Young. Then in January 2021, I successfully acquired a full time Research Associate post, working on the CHARMING study with Dr Kelly Morgan and Dr Jemma Hawkins, as well as assisting in the qualitative component of the Primary SHRN Pilot. All these roles helped to strengthen and combine my skills and experience in implementing complex research in different settings, conducting sensitive research with children and young people, collecting and analysing large and complex qualitative and quantitative datasets and process evaluation. Additionally, I was able to take up teaching opportunities and supervise an undergraduate dissertation to enhance my pedagogical experiences. All of this whilst learning directly from colleagues in DECIPHer I felt inspired by!

This confirmed my commitment to career progression within academia and research in the DECIPHer Centre. Through continued support and guidance from Dr Rhiannon Evans and Dr Honor Young, I was encouraged to consider my own research ideas in the area of DVA. Dr Rhiannon Evans supported me to seek stakeholder input to establish and align these ideas with research priorities. Thus, in a Health and Care Research Wales Conference I led an inter-disciplinary workshop to identify future research priorities for DVA research in Wales (<https://decipher.uk.net/blog/hosting-a-dva-research-workshop-online-what-did-we-learn/>).



One of the key priorities was additional research understanding intergenerational violence (i.e. child to parent violence) in Wales and with support from Dr Rhiannon Evans and Dr Honor Young, I formed a PhD proposal for which I secured ESRC 1+3 Doctoral Funding.

I am now in my first year of my 1+3 ESRC Studentship – and I ultimately have the incredible DECIPHer Centre to thank for this. Their help and support spurred me to pursue my PhD goal and I feel very lucky to be part of such a fantastic centre!"

### Dr Stephen Jennings

"I first became involved with DECIPHer as a fieldworker across various studies. Prior to this I had worked in primary schools running literacy and numeracy interventions, and during this time I became interested in pupils' mental health and wellbeing, particularly how their experiences of various educational interventions might interrelate with their mental health. As luck would have it, a HCRW PhD studentship arose at DECIPHer focused on exploring pupils' experiences of interventions in primary schools. As you can imagine I jumped at the chance... and luckily was awarded it!

Fast-forward five years and I was awarded my PhD in April 2021 under the excellent guidance of Prof Simon Murphy and Dr Rhiannon Evans. I learnt a huge amount about qualitative research methods and had the flexibility to develop my own ways of co-researching with 9–11-year-olds, as well as using more established techniques.

My time at DECIPHer has helped me enormously in my current role as MSc Lead at the Centre of Health Sciences Education, University of Bristol, where I supervise education MSc projects as well as focusing on my own research and teaching. I will be shortly working towards the Senior Fellowship of Advance HE and have steadily managed to publish work, though this can always be improved! I am also co-lead of a cross-Faculty education research initiative which brings together qualitative researchers from medicine, anatomy, veterinary education, and dentistry. Looking to the future I hope to be fortunate enough to continue to collaborate with amazing colleagues interested in improving teaching and learning provision in Higher Education".



# 5. RESEARCH PROGRAMMES

## 5.1 Healthy Public Policy



Graham Moore



Amanda Robinson

child friendly reporting on the [Newsround](#) website. These analyses will be replicated with older adolescents shortly, once SHRN 2021 secondary school survey data are ready for analysis. Supporting children's mental health in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic will require action at multiple levels of society. While not the whole picture, schools will play an important part in this. Pupils' return to school after a second round of closures, when our primary school data were collected, coincided with provision of new statutory guidance on implementation of a whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing. Connecting to the healthy settings research programme, our Welsh Government funded [theory of change and evaluability assessment](#) of the Whole School Approach was published in January 2021. Our data on child and adolescent mental health prior to implementation provide important context for ongoing work with the **Wolfson Centre for Young People's Mental Health**, which will evaluate the implementation and impacts of this statutory guidance in Wales.



The Healthy Public Policy programme aims to:

- i) provide timely and robust evidence to influence decisions by national and local government organisations, to improve population health and reduce inequalities, and
- ii) evaluate implementation and impacts of policy decisions on population health and inequalities.

As a new programme for 2020-25, it has only thus far existed in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, a key aim of this programme has been understanding impacts of the pandemic, and policy responses to it, on health and health inequalities.

Welsh Government funded pilot work on the expansion of the **School Health Research Network into primary schools** has enabled us to examine changes in children's mental health. We found a marked increase in child emotional difficulties from [2019 to 2021](#), though little evidence of change in behavioural difficulties. The study also found that children rated relationships with teachers highly, with these remaining strong through the pandemic. Findings were published in a [report](#) on the SHRN website, and in a [peer reviewed article](#), and have been communicated via ministerial briefings, and media engagement work, including

Connecting to the DECIPHer research programme on healthy social relationships, DECIPHer researchers have also concluded their evaluation of the [Health Pathfinder programme](#), established in eight sites to transform the health response to domestic violence and abuse in acute, mental health and primary care services. Collaboration and co-location with specialist domestic abuse services is a key component of these complex interventions, which led to more disclosures, earlier identification, more and more appropriate referrals for specialist support, and more people helped to safety and sooner. In collaboration with one of our local specialist services, Cardiff Women's Aid, we examined police referrals for domestic violence and abuse before and during the first COVID-19 lockdown. Our [analysis of routine service data](#) found that police referrals to the service did not increase substantially during lockdown. However, there were major changes in who reported incidents of abuse. Children became the main sources of third party police contacts during the period while schools remained closed to most pupils, with other third parties taking up more of a role within this as society began to reopen. Findings were presented in November 2021 at the Institute of Government & Public Policy (IGPP) Online Conference "Tackling Domestic Violence and Abuse 2021". Further connecting to the healthy relationships programme, new questions have been added to the 2021 SHRN survey on children's perceptions of new Welsh Government legislation to remove the physical punishment defence, to provide children with the same protections from assault as adults. DECIPHer team members have worked with colleagues in the Health and Care Research Wales funded centre, CASCADE Partnership, to develop potential research focused on this policy.

Beyond our main focus on child and adolescent health, two DECIPHer investigators (Prof Mike Robling and Prof Graham Moore) were investigators on the UKRI funded **COVID Health and Help Seeking Behaviours Study**, which connects several Health and Care Research Wales infrastructures including collaboration with the Centre for Trials Research and Health Wise Wales. This was underway at the time of the last report, but has now produced a number of [publications](#), finding for example, that many people avoided [seeking help](#) for potential cancer symptoms during the pandemic for reasons including worries about adding strain to an overstretched health system. Findings have been disseminated widely to a range of lay, academic and policy audiences. Building on our track record in tobacco control policy in Wales, in partnership with the U.K. Prevention Research Partnership (UKPRP) consortium **Shaping Public Health policies To RedUce harm (SPECTRUM)** (co-investigators Prof Graham Moore and Dr. Julie Bishop), we have supported the expansion of the Smoking and Alcohol Toolkit Surveys from England to Wales and Scotland. DECIPHer staff have engaged with Welsh Government Stakeholder groups in development of Wales' tobacco control strategy and delivery plan. Policy work was postponed by the pandemic, but with the emphasis of the strategy on future generations, data collected within DECIPHer will form one of the key data sources to monitor progress as the strategy is implemented.

## 5.2 Healthy Settings and Organisations



Simon Murphy



Honor Young

The Healthy Settings and Organisations programme aims to develop and evaluate system approaches to improving population health, as well as understanding their implementation. Most of our work to date has taken place in education settings, with schools in particular representing important settings to address young people's developing health and wellbeing needs. Here we highlight a number of key health areas we have developed as part of our education settings research.

### Supporting mental health and wellbeing in schools

This period saw considerable interest in the continued expansion of the School Health Research Network into Primary Schools which has examined the mental health of primary school pupils and the impacts of COVID-19. This period also saw the publication of [Theory of Change and Evaluability Assessment of the Whole School Approach to Mental Health](#). Both these studies connect to our Healthy Public Policy research programme and further details can be found on page 12.

Turning to connections to our Healthy Social Relationships Programme, we saw the publication of the final report of the [review of statutory school and community-based counselling services](#).

The research was commissioned to assess the fitness for purpose of current statutory counselling services for children and young people aged 11-18 years, and to understand what appropriate services for younger children should include. This research will inform policy decisions focused on meeting the needs of children and young people in Wales and will support the design of potential primary school counselling services. The final report has been published by Welsh Government

with the DECIPHer research team presenting to the ministerial task and finish group. This will be followed by a formal policy response to the research.

### Supporting young people's sexual health

Following successful data collection in 6th forms and Further Education colleges across England and Wales, the Sex and Relationships in Further Education (SaFE) pilot randomised control trial has begun intervention delivery. The SaFE trial is piloting a new sexual health and dating and relationship violence intervention for use in Further Education settings. Eight sites across England and Wales are currently taking part, with intervention sites receiving staff training to promote sexual health and recognise and respond to dating, relationship and gender-based violence, as well as free, confidential onsite sexual health and relationship services.

This period has seen the commencement of a new collaborative research project with Cardiff University, DECIPHer, UCL and the NSPCC; 'Sexuality Education+'. Led by Prof EJ Renold at Cardiff University, this exploratory research project will take a participatory approach to explore how young people are negotiating their own and others' gender and sexual identities, bodies, relationships and cultures. It will explore how and where young people are learning about Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and health education topics, how they are seeking support and what they would like to learn about. The project will provide valuable insight into children's understanding of healthy relationships, sex and sexuality education, as well as their help-seeking behaviours and will be used to support the NSPCC's service development, policy work and communications.

### Free school breakfasts and lunches

Dr Hannah Littlecott's research on the positive link between breakfast consumption and educational outcomes was cited by the [Welsh Government in their response to the Annual Report of the Children's Commissioner for Wales 2020-21](#). Dr Littlecott also ran a fringe event at the Plaid Cymru party conference on the link between breakfast consumption and educational outcomes and its relevance to both continuing the free school breakfast policy and implementing the free school lunches (Universal Free School Meals) policy in primary schools.

### Supporting physical activity in primary schools

CHARMING (CHOosing Active Role Models to INspire Girls) aims to examine the feasibility and acceptability of a cluster randomised controlled trial of a school-based community linked role-model program. The programme is designed to increase and sustain physical activity levels among 9-10 year old girls and aligns with Welsh Government's objectives to help more children and young people meet the Chief Medical Officer physical activity guidelines ([Healthy Weight, Healthy Wales 2020](#)).

Beginning in January 2021, the study involves six primary schools in South Wales. To date, four intervention schools have received the CHARMING programme, which included a community role model delivering a weekly taster session and the attendance of older pupils ('peer role models') from adjoining secondary schools. Data collection has included girls completing a survey and wearing a 7-day activity monitor at baseline and 12-month follow-up, alongside an embedded process evaluation. As the study approaches its final stages, the team are currently completing follow-up data collection and undertaking analyses, prior to the write up of findings. The results will contribute to the evidence base on improving outcomes for young girls' physical activity, including potential unintended consequences of targeting intervention at girls only. Importantly, the study will inform decisions on whether and how to proceed to a full-scale evaluation of the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of CHARMING.

## 5.3 Healthy Social Relationships



Rhiannon Evans



Jeremy Segrott

The DECIPHer Healthy Social Relationships programme continues to grow in progressing impactful research that supported the development, adaptation and evaluation of interventions to improve health and wellbeing through stronger social relationships. The work on the programme addresses three key themes: preventing domestic violence and abuse; developing family-based health and well-being interventions and school-based interventions with a family component; and improving the health and wellbeing of care-experienced children and young people. We also have a clearer theme on adoption.

### Preventing domestic violence and abuse

This theme focuses on preventing and reducing the impact of DVA. We have secured a new ESRC PhD studentship (Bethan Pell), which commenced in September 2021. The PhD will make a significant contribution to a growing issue of child-parent violence, with the aim of identifying future intervention needs and potential theories of change. In September 2021 we also published our evaluation of the Health Pathfinder intervention which aims to improve the support provided to women who experience intimate partner violence.

### Family-based health and wellbeing interventions

Dr Rhiannon Evans is also working with colleagues from CASCADE Partnership and Centre for Trials Research (CTR) at Cardiff University, and collaborators from the University of Oxford to conduct the NIHR PHR funded Family VOICE research project. The study is evaluating the effectiveness and implementation of Family Group Conferencing, which is an intervention that brings together family members in a meeting to discuss children who need support and protection, and to plan for looking after them.

### Health and wellbeing of care-experienced children and young people

This theme includes research that explores the health and wellbeing of children and young people, who have been in care, with a current emphasis on mental health. We have recently published a study as part of the Transdisciplinary Research for the Improvement of Youth Mental Public Health (TRIUMPH) network, and in collaboration with the Fostering Network in Wales. The study explored the experiences of online or blended mental health provision for children and young people, carers and professionals, providing recommendations to improve future practice. The study has led to follow-on funding, to co-produce an assessment of the relevance and usefulness of online support services for this group. DECIPHer are also in the latter stages of completing a complex systems systematic review synthesising evidence on interventions to address life satisfaction, mental health and suicide in this group. We also continue to build capacity around the related area of young carers, with Dr Ed Janes successfully defended his PhD in 2022 on the mental health and wellbeing of this population.

### Health and well-being of adopted children and young people

This theme has a particular focus on promoting the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people who have been adopted. Dr Rebecca Anthony has contributed to an NIHR evidence review, which highlighted that adopted children may develop specific types of post-traumatic stress depending on the patterns of adversity experienced in early childhood. The study identified the need for tailored mental health support based on the types of adversity young people have experienced in their lives, and found a particular opportunity for early intervention for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in preventing or reducing mental health and developmental issues. This year, Dr Anthony was also awarded a Professor Beatrice Edgell grant by the British Psychological Association to support career development for Early Career Researchers, which will be used to involve adoptive parents in a forthcoming grant application.

### Developing collaborations

The centre continues to collaborate with key partners, notably the Wolfson Centre for Young People's Mental Health. The collaboration led a number of research studies for the Welsh Government to develop service provision in relation to school and community based mental health intervention. This included a recently published review of school and community-based counselling services, which provided recommendation for the optimisation of current provision and extension to primary school aged children from 4 years and older. DECIPHer presented the Ministerial Briefing in March 2022 and will work with the Welsh Government to progress recommendations.

DECIPHer is also progressing a number of international collaborations. In the summer of 2021, Cardiff University hosted Professor Heather Taussig from the University of Denver. Professor Taussig has been working with Dr Evans to progress publications around the types and sources of social support for individuals who have been in care, and the impacts on mental health [symptoms](#).



## 5.4 Methodological Innovations in Public Health Science



Jemma Hawkins



Mike Robling

### Knowledge translation into and out of Wales; providing guidance for policy makers, practitioners and researchers

Following publication on our website of the DECIPHer-led 'ADAPT guidance' funded by the Medical Research Council and National Institute for Health Research, the academic paper describing the guidance was published in the British Medical Journal in August 2021 (1). This fills a gap in the evidence base regarding how to carefully and systematically adapt effective interventions to new contexts, with consideration of how to achieve a good fit between the intervention and the new context. The lead authors Graham Moore and Rhiannon Evans, along with their co-authors, continue to disseminate the guidance widely including presentations at the Colorado Pragmatic Research in Health Conference (May 2021), the European Society for Prevention Research Conference (October, 2021) and to early career researchers within the TRIUMPH network (September, 2021). DECIPHer researchers have been actively involved in new proposals for studies to apply the guidance to adapting interventions to new contexts. One of these, that has recently been funded, is focused on applying the ADAPT guidance to adapting a dementia support mobile health intervention for use in Peru as part of a new global health research collaboration.

The ADAPT guidance was also recently cited in the newly updated guidance from the Medical Research Council and National Institute for Health Research on developing and evaluating complex interventions (September 2021). Several of our other DECIPHer methods publications were also cited in this guidance document (2, 3, 4, 5, 6), and these continue to inform new DECIPHer research studies. This includes a recently funded study which will apply our framework for co-producing and prototyping public health interventions to the next phases of development of an intervention to enhance work-related back pain management in the transport and construction industries both in Wales and internationally. It also includes a PhD study being undertaken in Aarhus University, Denmark, which is applying the framework to the development of a social prescribing intervention to increase physical activity among inactive Danes.

### Methodological capacity development in public health intervention science

DECIPHer continues to deliver capacity development opportunities in the field of public health intervention science to researchers and practitioners via its suite of internationally recognised methodology short courses and bespoke training courses both in Wales and internationally as detailed on page 8.

Outside of short course delivery, DECIPHer researchers have continued to be invited to deliver methods-related capacity development through other ad-hoc training and engagement events, both within the UK and further afield. This includes invited presentations to the Public Health Wales Speciality Registrars to explore how registrars can become involved in research, and an online presentation by Dr James White to South Wales members of the Royal Statistics Society. Professor Mike Robling and Dr Jeremy Segrott delivered an invited online webinar on feasibility trials in social care research in July. On an international level, methods-related capacity development opportunities have included individual engagement events with a variety of audiences, more information on these events can be found in the section on international collaborations (pages 25-28).

1. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n1679>
2. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s12889-017-4695-8>
3. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.h1258>
4. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1356389018803219>
5. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmph.2016.12.005>
6. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40814-018-0290-8>
7. <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/bmjopen/12/2/e049960.full.pdf>



### Using routine data to evaluate health and social care interventions

The use of routine data to evaluate public health and social care interventions is a key methodological focus within DECIPHer and its partnership with the Centre for Trials Research and The Secure Anonymised Information Linkage Databank (SAIL). Two studies exemplify this in our current work.

Cardiff has led on the evaluation of the specialist health visiting programme, the Family Nurse Partnership (FNP) with a programme of work dating back to 2008. DECIPHer investigator and Director for Population Health Trials in the Centre for Trials Research, Professor Mike Robling led the NIHR PRP funded Building Blocks trial of FNP. In February 2022 his team published their new article in the BMJ Open (7) describing families recruited during pregnancy and now followed-up to age 7 years old (BB:2-6 study). The study used previously collected trial data matched to health, education and social care records in England using a privacy protecting model of data linkage. As such approaches may be unfamiliar to members of the public and the data involved may be particularly sensitive, the study benefited from early input from the ALPHA group in DECIPHer. Combined with input from other groups of young people, we used ALPHA's feedback to co-develop animations describing how such data can be a powerful tool for researchers when evaluating complex interventions. See the output from this 'Getting Animated' project here: <https://evidencinghomevisiting.co.uk/getting-animated/>. The study data, its

model of data linkage and learning from the study now form the basis of two collaborations between Cardiff University and University College, London spanning three studies. The Cardiff team are also using data linkage to evaluate the same home-visiting intervention in Scotland using a natural experiment (see: <https://ijpds.org/article/view/1154>). All of these studies enjoy a direct link to policy and the BB:2-6 study has been used to inform the commissioning of FNP in England. For more information see the study team's microsite: <https://evidencinghomevisiting.co.uk/>. The BB:2-6 study article published in February also describes the strengths and limitations of using routine health and social data and the potential pitfalls of running an open label public health trial in the UK.

The second example of data linkage to support public health trials is the ongoing SWIS trial led by Dr David Westlake in CASCADE Partnership, with co-investigators in DECIPHer and CTR. The SWIS study is evaluating how basing social workers in schools may improve how education and children's social care work together to respond to safeguarding concerns and improve student wellbeing. Routine administrative data are being collected for children in nearly 300 schools across 21 local authorities. This study is made possible by the potential of routine data to inform the main study outcomes, rather than a reliance upon families having to self-report outcomes.

# 6. COLLABORATIONS, ENGAGEMENT AND IMPACTS

## 6.1 Working with school stakeholders: the School Health Research Network (SHRN)



Joan Roberts



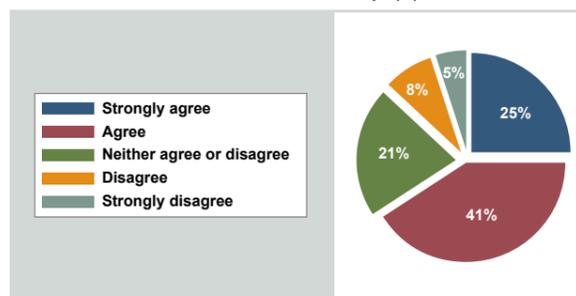
Simon Murphy

This year we have had the opportunity to support sister network activity and to work towards harmonising measures in Scotland, Manchester, London, Bradford and the South West of England as our innovation has diffused across the UK. This year also saw the successful completion of the first phase of the SHRN primary school development study (which you can read about in our Healthy Public Policy Research section on pages 12-13). This has informed our plans with Welsh Government and Public Health Wales for phase 2 integration in the next reporting period.

SHRN, set up in 2013, was the first national network of its kind in the world. It brings together all the maintained, mainstream secondary schools in Wales with academic researchers, policy makers and practitioners from health, education and social care to promote an evidence informed approach to improving young people's health and wellbeing in the school setting.

This year was our biennial Student Health and Wellbeing secondary school survey, the first since our pre-pandemic 2019 data collection. The survey was available to schools from September to December and during this time 202 schools (95%) took part. When the survey closed, 134,638 students had taken part. Our School Environment Questionnaire, completed by senior leadership teams was administered between January and March this year and was completed by 81% (n=170) of SHRN schools. These response rates were particularly heartening given the ongoing demands on schools and we are extremely grateful to all our participating schools and pupils. This data will provide a critical pre and post picture of the impact of COVID-19 on young people's health and wellbeing. Data has been fed back to schools and regional stakeholders in tailored reports and we will be producing a ministerial briefing report on mental health and wellbeing and a national indicators report in the next reporting period.

Figure 4.45 Support at school for students who feel unhappy, worried or unable to cope (%)



Base: All respondents in years 7 to 11 who gave an answer, surveyed between September and December 2019 (n=107,040)

You can find some of the key policies we have influenced this year here:

**Director of Public Health Annual Report:**  
<https://cavuhb.nhs.wales/files/public-health/key-publications/dph-report-2020-pdf/>

**National Indicators dataset:**  
<https://stats.wales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Health-and-Social-Care/well-being>

**Tobacco control delivery plan:**  
<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2021-10/tobacco-control-delivery-plan-2022-to-2024.pdf>

**WSA evaluability assessment:**  
<https://gov.wales/whole-school-approach-mental-and-emotional-wellbeing-evaluability-assessment>

### Supporting Welsh Government Policies

Simon Murphy continues to support the Ministerial Task and Finish Group for the Whole School Approach to Mental Health and, in collaboration with the Wolfson Centre for Young People's Mental Health, SHRN is supporting its evaluation. We continue to engage actively with Welsh policy and practice partners, including Welsh Government and Public Health Wales, to ensure SHRN data informs emerging policy issues affecting children's health and wellbeing. In 2021, SHRN data was a key source for Welsh Government's Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. National Indicators set and informed localised recovery planning for children and young people within the Annual Report of the Director of Public Health for Cardiff and Vale (Oct 2021). SHRN data will also support national progress monitoring as Welsh Government seek to implement a new Tobacco Control Strategy for Wales, PHW delivery plans for improving active travel and continues to inform the Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Wellbeing. A SHRN webinar on *The value of the School Environment Survey to support school health and wellbeing in Wales* was held on 01 December 2021 and was presented by Dr Nick Page, Cardiff University and Dr Julie Bishop, Public Health Wales.

## Schools using their SHRN data: An example from Powys

The Powys Wellbeing Group for secondary school leaders was one of several groups to grow from the Secondary School Improvement Strategy in the authority. It is a recently formed group that meets virtually to ensure ease of access within this large, geographically spread authority and it is facilitated by a school wellbeing lead with support from the local authority. The value of the group to support educational priorities and COVID-19 recovery across all schools in Powys has been recognised. It was decided that data from the School Health Research Network at a school and Local Authority (LA) level would provide an invaluable focus for the group, as all schools have participated within the latest round of the student survey. As the lead explained: 'Using the schools and Powys-wide data will help strengthen a culture of sharing practice amongst schools, to allow all to flourish. With SHRN data being available every two years, this will allow for an ongoing cycle of reflection and action.' Claire Jones Deputy Headteacher, Crickhowell High School.

To complement this, a Powys pupil-voice wellbeing group has also been developed. Plans are in place that once the 2021/22 SHRN data is available for schools, the young people will consider this which will allow their views to be considered in conjunction with those of the senior staff at the wellbeing group. The Senior Public Involvement Office for DECIPHer is providing support for

the young people to evaluate this process. The lead explained: 'Pupil Voice gives learners from across Powys a real say in the issues that affect them. Their positive contributions allow them to actively be involved in the development of their schools and wider communities. This platform demonstrates a Powys-wide commitment to listening to the views and experiences of all our pupils.' Rhiannon Rhys-Jones, Assistant Headteacher Ysgol Calon Cymru.

These groups provide a strategic approach to wellbeing which will be reflected in school development plans. In a geographically dispersed authority, the groups have encouraged a supportive and collaborative approach to health across Powys secondary schools with SHRN data at its heart. Local Healthy School staff contribute to the groups and recognise their value with the SHRN data to inform the focus of their work as well as encouraging a unified whole school approach to health and wellbeing across Powys. Yan James, a local authority officer supporting the work of the groups said: 'The SHRN data will be invaluable to Powys schools to support learner wellbeing and school improvement. It will provide schools with reliable, high-quality data to support their work. It will also provide the local authority with a clear steer of how best to support schools with learner health and wellbeing.'



### Supporting SHRN Research Studies

Researchers from across Wales and beyond can apply for SHRN portfolio adoption for their studies. Adopted studies can benefit from support from SHRN researchers, the public and schools in developing studies, access to a network of research-ready schools with a data infrastructure, support with school recruitment and opportunities to collaborate and share knowledge with our network of policy, practice and academic partners to promote impact. To date, we have adopted 80 studies with a value of £35,388,906. Twelve of those were new studies this year with a value of £7,650,374. Our schools also highlight the value of being part of the research process, illustrated by this quote from a teacher who took part in one of our studies:

"Taking part in the DECIPHer research project has afforded me the opportunity to stop and reflect - something there is very little time to do in the normal school day. The questions, and my responses to these questions, meant that I realised that we have done more work on the National Curriculum for Wales (NCfW) than I might have initially thought. This was pleasing. The session also gave me time to consider the way ahead. It was good to be able to have the chance to explain what my concerns are (in particular, assessment in the Health and Wellbeing Areas of Learning and Experience (AOLE)) and - more importantly - to consider the question about what impact the NCfW will have on pupils in the future as well as on society. I left the interview with a renewed sense of purpose and enthusiasm."



## 6.2 Working with the public and ALPHA

Our new Senior Public Involvement Officer, Sophie Jones, started in September following the move of our previous Officer Peter Gee to a position with Health and Care Research Wales. It was great to welcome Sophie to her new post and to benefit from her considerable skills and experiences, which you can read about in our Capacity Development section on page 9.

ADVICE LEADING TO PUBLIC HEALTH ADVANCEMENT

# ALPHA

DECIPHER'S RESEARCH ADVISORY GROUP OF YOUNG PEOPLE

### ALPHA

Our young people's advisory group, ALPHA, has continued to play a huge role in our work. A research advisory group of young people aged 14-25, ALPHA's input helps ensure DECIPHER research is relevant to young people and their needs. Since September, ALPHA has participated in 9 ALPHA sessions co-producing our research studies and funding bids. We have 40 active members aged between 14-22 years old and identify as 27 female, 12 males and 1 non-binary young person. 12 young people have participated in online ALPHA sessions and one face to face session since September 2021.

Alongside this, we have continued to develop our infrastructure in Wales and across the UK. Our refreshed Public Involvement Steering Group draws from young people and organisations across the Welsh research infrastructure and now meets quarterly to develop collaborative strategies. We have continued to support the newly launched Wolfson centre by supporting the development of their Youth Advisory Group (YAG).

### Developing involvement and partnerships

We have continued to trial the development of the National Student Advisory Group (NSAG) with ALPHA and Public Involvement Steering Group (PISG) members. We are now developing the website so we can engage more schools across Wales to ensure young people have access to more opportunities to have their voices heard in research across Wales. The pandemic has evidenced the need for and how effective online engagement can be to engage a wider audience of young people geographically. The development of the foundation phase of a platform for parents/carers network still continues. We have also supported secondary schools across Powys to develop an online pupil voice network to ensure young people can discuss health and wellbeing with different themes at each online meeting held throughout the academic year.

Our young people have also supported a national lottery bid for more support to be provided to neurodiverse young people in schools in order to develop a more inclusive learning environment. The young people were involved from the start of the bid where they established best practice in schools and presented to the national lottery for funding.



# DEVELOPING INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT



Beyond our delivery of short courses to various international audiences outlined in our Developing Capacity section, DECIPHER staff are also involved in developing international collaborations and disseminating research findings through conference presentations and meetings.



## International collaborations and research group engagements

**June 2021:** Dr Rhiannon Evans presented 'DECIPHER: Overview and Opportunities for Collaboration' at the Universite Claude Bernard, Lyon.

Dr Evans also worked with UNESCO, United Nations to support drafting of 'Guidelines to Mainstream Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in Education Systems' for member states.

**September 2021:** Dr Jemma Hawkins began supervising PhD student Kasja Soderhielm at Karolinska Institute in Sweden as part of a four-supervisor team.

**January 2022:** Following undertaking a part-time position with LMU Munich in 2020/2021 working on a project to develop an evidence ecosystem for COVID-19, Dr Hannah Littlecott began a further part-time position working with the team.

**February 2022:** Prof Graham Moore was invited to be a second supervisor with Eva Rehfuss on a PhD for Stephan Voss at the LMU Munich in Germany.

Prof Graham Moore was also invited to act as a PhD viva examiner for Markus Saarijarvi at the Institute of Health and Care Sciences at Sahlgrenska Academy, University of Gothenburg in Sweden.

Dr Jemma Hawkins gave an online presentation on intervention development for a meeting of the Primary Sector Network for Developing Complex Interventions at Aarhus University, Denmark.

**March 2022:** Dr Yulia Shenderovich was [involved with work](#) to provide tips for parents in Ukraine affected by the war.

## Conference presentations

**May 2021:** Prof Graham Moore gave an online presentation on the ADAPT guidance to approximately 400 participants of the Colorado Pragmatic Research in Health Conference.

Dr Jeremy Segrott gave a talk on the challenges of creating digital prevention interventions at the Third International Work Conference on Prevention (III JIPRE).

Dr Yulia Shenderovich gave two talks at the Global Implementation Conference 2021, on 'Future of Implementation - Equity on a Global Scale' and 'Dissemination and Scale-up of a Suite of Evidence-based Parenting Programs in Low- and Middle-Income Countries'.

**July 2021:** Bethan Pell presented on using visual timelines in telephone interviews at the International Institute of Qualitative Methodology 20th Annual Conference.

**September 2021:** Dr Rebecca Anthony gave an online presentation about patterns of adversity and post-traumatic stress among children adopted from care at the European Scientific Association on Residential and Family Care for Children and Adolescents Conference XVI.

**October 2021:** Dr Rhiannon Evans and Rachel Parker gave presentations at the IASR/AFSP International Summit on Suicide Research Virtual Conference, one of which was a collaborative presentation with Prof Heather Taussig from the University of Denver's Graduate School of Social Work.



## Research meetings, capacity development and dissemination

**April 2021:** Dr Yulia Shenderovich attended a meeting of the Board of Directors of the Global Implementation Society, of which she is a member.

**July 2021:** Dr Yulia Shenderovich gave the online presentation 'Identifying adolescents at highest risk of antiretroviral treatment non-adherence: Helping healthcare providers and community-based organisations' to representatives of international organisations (World Health Organisation, UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Office, Frontline AIDS).

**October 2021:** Dr Jemma Hawkins delivered an invited online lecture on evaluation and complex systems thinking to a doctoral training event for PhD students at Karolinska Institute.

**November 2021:** Dr Yulia Shenderovich gave an online research presentation on 'Tracking Intervention Adaptations in Practice (the FAIR Study)' to researchers from Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

Dr Yulia Shenderovich presented findings from the Furaha Adolescent Implementation Research Study to researchers and third sector staff from Tanzania, South Africa and UK.

**January 2022:** Dr Yulia Shenderovich participated in a panel discussion on 'Transferability of Implementation Research Methods, Competencies and Capacity Building Across Sectors' as part of a 'Cross-Sectoral Learning in Implementation Research' online seminar, attended primarily by staff from UNICEF offices.

**February 2022:** Yulia Shenderovich attended a meeting of the UNICEF Adolescent Mental Health Tools Technical Advisory Group.

**June 2021:** Dr Jeremy Segrott was invited to act as a PhD viva examiner for Karin Streiman's thesis at the School of Governance, Law and Society of Tallinn University, Estonia.

# Namibian Fellows Visit Wales



L-R: Honor Young, Cynthia Haihambo, Rosa Persendt, Rachel Freeman, Ndinelago Shilongo; Ayesha Wentworth, Rhiannon Evans and Rakel Kavena Shalyefu

DECIPHer has been particularly pleased to welcome six mid-career Namibian professionals to DECIPHer to study how girls' education can lead to female empowerment. Cardiff's award-winning Phoenix Project secured Centre Status for up to six Commonwealth Professional Fellowships which will allow the recipients to collaborate and develop new skills around girls' education – the theme for this year's awards.

*"DECIPHer staff are knowledgeable and have a sense of humanity. Teamwork is treasured through co-production and a multidisciplinary approach." Dina*

The visiting Fellows - Cynthia Haihambo, Rosa Persendt, Rachel Freeman, Ndinelago Shilongo, Ayesha Wentworth and Rakel Kavena Shalyefu - are spending three months collaborating with researchers from the DECIPHer research centre and their partners. During their studies Fellows will have access to a wide range of DECIPHer facilities including leadership training and reflective learning workshops. The placements will reinforce the Namibian Government's drive to reduce teenage pregnancies through greater female empowerment and education.

*There is something special about DECIPHer. People are friendly and willing to share ideas. Our programme is rich and insightful... We have seminars and presentations from the best of the best and that's what I love about being here." Cynthia*

Welcoming the Fellowships, Dr Nyambe Associate Dean, School of Education, at the University of Namibia (UNAM), said "this is indeed excellent news, bringing a moment of hope for our girls' education. The University of Namibia embraces any opportunity that is intended to empower the girl child and enhances girls' education." Dr Honor Young said: "We are delighted to secure the Commonwealth Fellowships and are looking forward to collaborating and learning with colleagues at the University of Namibia as we work towards our shared goal of gender equality in education." Dr Rhiannon Evans added: "This is an exciting opportunity for DECIPHer. International collaboration is a vital part of our work and we hope this will be the start of a rich and impactful future relationship."

*Even though our context and that of Wales are so different, they are so similar in many ways. We face the same challenges at different levels, and there is so much that we can learn from each other and take from each other to strengthen our interventions in these complex contexts." Ayesha - Quotes from [Fellows' blogs](#)*

## 7. CONCLUSION

Looking back on this year has highlighted significant successes and important strategic developments for DECIPHer. Of particular note was the promotion of two of our staff to Research Fellow, providing critical mid-career capacity in the centre and the success of our co-leadership model of programme leadership in securing significant research income and enhanced capacity in cross-cutting research programme activity.

In terms of network development, we met key year two aims in schools. This included a successful Welsh Government funded study to expand our work in primary schools and enhance secondary school partnerships in Scotland, Manchester, London, Bradford and SouthWest England. We have also successfully developed our cross-UK networks as part of the PHIRST initiative and we are working to build on these with additional collaborative bids with Local Government to address health determinants.

The period also saw an increase in DECIPHer's international activities. Despite having to maintain a predominately online approach, we have expanded our short course delivery and our global collaborations. We were particularly pleased to be able to promote new courses in our methodological innovation for evidence adaption across contexts and to have welcomed our Namibian Fellows, a collaboration on promoting girls access to education which we hope to develop over the coming years.

This year has also seen a welcome return to in-person working and a move to our new offices in part of the newly built [Social Science Research Park](#). Here we are co-located with 10 other social science-led research centres, as well as policy and practice colleagues. We are looking forward to the opportunities this will provide for increased partnership work and for welcoming all our stakeholders to the first campus of its type in the world. The coming year will also see an increased importance for our SHRN pre and post pandemic data. This will be used at multiple levels and support legislation such as the Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015), Public Health Wales Act (2017) and Social Service and Wellbeing Act

(2014); as well as policies such as the Whole School Approach to Mental Health, the National Obesity Strategy and the transformation of the Curriculum in Wales.



Image: Will Scott

To end this report, the DECIPHer centre would like to take this opportunity to honour the memory of one of our colleagues, Dr Heather Trickey, who passed away last year. Heather joined DECIPHer in 2012 to undertake a PhD in socioeconomic and systemic barriers to breastfeeding and was awarded her doctorate in 2020.



Dr Heather Trickey

During her time with us, she led a successful programme of research as a Research Fellow in Public Health and Parenthood and worked closely with collaborators to develop evidence informed policy and practice that had real impacts. As Heather put it "she hopped the fence" between academic research departments, the civil service and the third sector and placed people and their lived experiences at the centre of her work. Her energy and enthusiasm are greatly missed but her legacy within the centre and her research endures.



