



Sparkle Leisure Evaluation Report 2025/26

Sparkle Leisure

Sparkle (South Wales) directly supports children and young people with disabilities and/or developmental difficulties, and their families, across Gwent.

Sparkle is the charity partner of Serennu, Nevill Hall and Caerphilly Children's Centres; services are provided from the centres and community venues within their catchment areas, which cover Newport, Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Torfaen and Monmouthshire.

The guiding principle for Sparkle is to ensure that children and young people with disabilities and/or developmental difficulties, and their families, are fully supported and able to participate in valued childhood experiences, with access to the same range of opportunities, life experiences, activities and community services as any other child and their family.

Sparkle delivers specialist leisure activities, such as play and youth clubs, tailored to meet the complex needs of the children and young people the charity supports, providing them with a range of valuable childhood experiences that they would not otherwise be able to access.

Mainstream leisure activities and clubs are often not equipped to support those with complex disabilities; many of the children and young people Sparkle supports require 1:1 or even 2:1 support, are non-verbal or have significant communication difficulties, experience challenging behaviour, and/or have medical conditions which require constant monitoring, medication and specialist equipment.

The aim of Sparkle leisure clubs is to help children and young people develop important skills and increase their confidence, whilst also being a fun and safe space to interact with their peers.



Sparkle Feedback

Children and young people access the leisure clubs on a fortnightly basis. Currently, 257 children access the clubs across the 3 catchment areas, with 42 on the waiting list for a space.



In March 2026, parents/carers of children and young people accessing Sparkle's leisure clubs were invited to complete a feedback survey on their child's progress in the club over the past year. Responses were received from 69 parents/carers, and a summary of their comments presented below;

Happiness and Enjoyment

Many of the parents/carers who completed the survey shared that they felt their children were happier since accessing Sparkle clubs, and that this happiness was present both at club sessions and in the home environment.

“Much happier and more confident. Seems less anxious and will try new things. When she comes home from club she is so relaxed and happy. It also gives her siblings some quality time with me which they enjoy and I feel really important” (P31)



They shared that children express excitement about the clubs and show less signs of anxiety.

“[He] was really anxious about coming to tech club when he first started and worried he wouldn't make friends. Now it's one of his favourite things to do.” (P7)

“[He] absolutely loves club and is excited to go every time and will not be left anywhere without mum normally” (P40)

“It is the ONLY activity where she will get excited and willingly attend! She gets so excited to see other people ‘like her’” (P65)

The clubs are child-led, meaning the children have the power to influence the activities within their clubs so that they can pursue their interests in a supported environment. This has allowed these young people to develop new interests and provided a sense of autonomy in their lives.

“[He] loves coming to play club, I think the sessions have enabled him to feel valued and heard” (P56)

“He is always excited and has taken more of an interest in drawing and paint since attending club” (P57)

“She happily joins in with games, arts and crafts, and cookery activities. This has been especially meaningful for her as a child with additional needs, as having a safe and supportive space to take part and express herself is so important.” (P37)

Routine and Familiarity

Regular attendance at club sessions becomes a part of the children's routine, with this being highly important to many of the children who access Sparkle.

“He loves having a routine where he's going to his club.” (P19)

“[He] started coming to club a few months ago. Already the club has had a positive impact on his routine. He really enjoys the activities and being out of the house. I can tell on drop offs that [he] is familiar.” (P5)

Consistent routines and familiarity with spaces and people provide reassurance for the children, helps reduce anxiety and allows children to feel safe and secure.

“[She] experiences huge separation anxiety and Sparkle clubs are the only clubs we can access without her having that huge anxiety. She is familiar with the building and created familiar relationships over the years which has really helped her.” (P45)

“Being able to participate with a club and being included in such a fab group. He loves going every week. What helps him is having the same member of staff that know him really well and know his needs and he recognises them each week.” (P21)

However, some children need longer to settle into the routine of fortnightly sessions, and breaks for holidays can disrupt this routine.

“The alternating weeks can cause Jasper to become upset especially when it comes to half terms.” (P68)

Safe and Comfortable Space

Sparkle clubs take place in venues specifically designed to meet the needs of children with complex needs. This means spaces are physically safe and comfortable for the children and young people.

“I think it’s great that children have the opportunity to play in a safe environment where they are understood and have access to lots of play opportunities.” (P27)

Specially trained Leisure Support Workers provide tailored support for the children, often on a 1-2-1 basis, so that they are able to meaningfully engage in the activities.

“He feels safe when in club and really enjoys the support he has from the adults. It’s the highlight of his week going there and it is the only place we feel happy knowing he is being very well looked after.” (P6)

This supportive and nurturing environment enables the children to be comfortable to be themselves.

“Definitely feeling comfortable to be himself at club and not being constantly judged or labelled ‘always naughty’. Due to him really struggling in school, he is able to enjoy going somewhere where he has a 121 which he needs for his safety and able to be himself and happy too. He really does rely on his club so much.” (P21)

This fosters a sense of belonging and ownership of the clubs among the children and young people.

“So happy my daughter has her own club to go to just like her siblings. Sparkle club is so special and the staff are brilliant and really care.” (P31)

“[He] understands he is now not on his own and there are other children who have differing needs. He previously felt like he didn’t belong when attending social clubs within a mainstream setting.” (P56)

Skills

Confidence and communication skills, such as indicating wants and needs verbally or non-verbally and following instructions, were most achieved by children and young people over the last year.

“Over this year he's gained more confidence and it's the only club he looks forward to going to. After leaving some of his other ALN clubs he only uses Sparkle and they have been amazing with him.” (P16)

“*[His] voice has come on a lot so we have been able to engage in conversations about friends or carers at club.*” (P14)

“*[He] has recently started to ask for club and building it into his now and next routine. He has done this without any prompt and was amazing for us as parents to hear him request club.*” (P69)

Independence – such as choosing activities or completing a task with minimal support – was most achieved or worked towards, with only 3% of children not making progress against this skill.

“*[He] brings his own money to youth club to spend at the tuck shop which has given him a little bit of independence. He loves being able to wear whatever he wants without judgement and enjoys chatting to staff about his specific interests without fear of judgement.*” (P60)

Strong progress was made against physical skills – such as balance, coordination and motor skills – and social skills – such as turn taking and listening to others.

“*[He] has become more confident in socialising with others outside of club when I take him to ALN play sessions*” (P19)

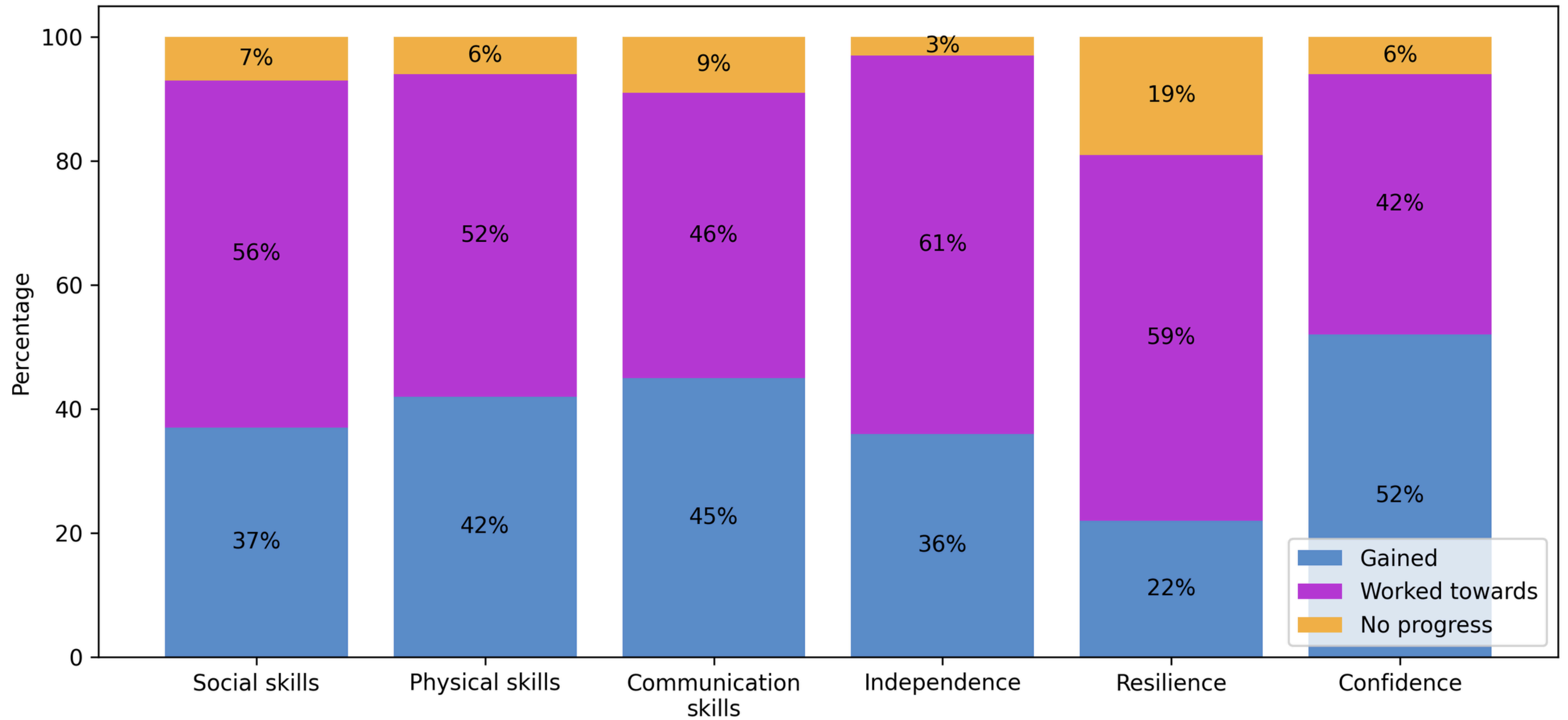
“*Since accessing Sparkle she has learnt to catch a ball, she loves coming to her sessions.*” (P26)

“*[He] will now share a trampoline! And plays alongside others.*” (P29)

Skills

The least progress was made against 'resilience', with 19% not progressing against this skill, however the majority of young people gained or made progress against the skill.

Achievement of skills



How Can We Improve?

A few suggestions for how Sparkle can continue to improve the leisure services offered were made, including:

- A review of the offer for teenagers, including a youth club for the Caerphilly catchment area and activities at family events which are aimed at older children as well as activities for young children.
- Greater communication from leisure staff following sessions, including details of the activities undertaken by the children and opportunities to discuss their child's progress with staff.
- Some felt there could be more consistency with staff members and that more frequent sessions would help support routines.
- A few comments were made regarding the ongoing issues with the swimming pool disrupting swimming lessons.

Conclusion

Over the past year, Sparkle has continued to deliver specialist leisure activities which allow children and young people with disabilities and/or developmental difficulties to access the same childhood opportunities as any other child. Feedback from their parents/carers demonstrates that the children experience happiness and enjoyment at the sessions, and benefit from the routine and familiar, safe environment. The children have gained confidence and made substantial progress against a number of skills over the year, including independence, communication and social skills.