

MEDRWN MÔN - ANGLESEY COMMUNITY HUBS

SUMMARY

- Name of Organisation/ Parent Organisation: Medrwn Môn
- Start Date: 2013
- Number of Employees: N/A
- Number of Volunteers: N/A
- Structure: Each Hub has its own Structure
- Turnover: N/A

PRODUCT/SERVICE

This case study presents a wider asset-based development scheme led by Anglesey CVC's Medrwn Môn that has helped to transform community services across Anglesey, through a process of asset-based community development. This 'place-shaping' work has revitalised community action, creating an innovative solution to community engagement.

The project comprises of 9 community hubs across the area, that have all been refurbished for their communities to access free of charge. With a range of different hub models, the innovative scheme includes 4 community lounges which allow community members access with key-pad entry and which operate with a 'leave as you find' policy. The approach removes the need for committees, policies and procedures, simplifying the process so that communities can easily come together and develop activities, groups and initiatives based on their own priorities.

In the Seiriol ward, a minibus has also been made available to connect people between their two hubs and the local leisure centre. Medrwn Môn employ local asset co-ordinators to help individuals access support within their own communities, via the hub's activities and networks.

Since its inception, the scheme has seen the growth and stimulation of many different community groups and initiatives that have sprung from the community hub network, bringing back into use a range of disused or neglected community assets.

HISTORY

Medrwn Môn had begun the process of community consultation in 2013, through the lottery funded strategic Community Voice programme, that brought together and funded 9 different communities of interest (all of whom had been the most likely not to engage in local activity). The aim was to facilitate a wider conversation about the needs of specific groups of people in the community, including people with

disabilities, homeless people, those with health conditions and others experiencing inequality.

This project was closely followed by a local authority review that brought to light the need for much stronger community engagement. Medrwn Môn were then tasked with leading an asset-based community-led consultation programme to identify what people wanted for their communities, and to create a community asset map of Anglesey - initially beginning in the Seiriol ward in the south east of the island.

This led to an intensive period of engagement and conversation with a wide range of partners (such as the leisure centre, social Services and the local service board), with a view to creating a new vision that could develop far more effective ways of working together.

The work was a major undertaking, requiring conversations with communities in the Seiriol ward, asking them to talk about what improvements they wanted to see, what strengths and resources they had and what could be positively built on.

The work in Seiriol in establishing the first community hub model resulted in the community-led concept of a group of 7 community hubs across the island that could be easily sustained at low cost by the community in which they existed, using pre-existing assets and resources. The vision was for the hubs to be simple to look after and easy to access, so that groups could use them whenever they wanted.

The Seiriol model also requested a minibus to help tackle accessibility and wanted the hubs to be decorated and fitted out so that they were ready for use. The resulting hubs are free for the community to use and operated on a 'leave as you find' basis.

The hubs are supported by a network of local asset co-ordinators who help to connect people in the community with their hub, enabling them to access group support and networks within their local area. This is similar to a social prescribing approach, encouraging natural support systems within the community where people support people and improved health and wellbeing outcomes begin to emerge for individuals and the wider community. This works particularly well where people can be brought together around shared interests and activity groups that take place at the hubs.

The hubs themselves are all different, according to what was available in each community. Four of the hubs are 'community lounges' that were disused community warden schemes on the main housing estates of the island. The community lounges include a large living room, kitchen area and two toilets. Two of the hubs are existing community centres, one is a village hall, and one is a community pub, the Iorweth Arms.

ACHIEVEMENTS

The model is extremely sustainable as there is little bureaucracy involved. Because the hubs work together, it has removed any element of competition between them. Local groups are free to fundraise and develop their own groups and activities, but the hub network is designed to remove onerous management of venues and keep things simple. So far, the system has worked well, with far greater usage of community venues that had fallen into decline. With the community taking ownership and looking after the venues (reporting any repair issues to the local authority), the relationship has created a sense of mutuality and shared responsibility.

A range of activities have been stimulated through the network of hubs including a Men's Shed community growing scheme, and a range of classes such as dementia groups, yoga and dance classes, children's activities, and adult education classes. Having a local community asset provides a focus for local community action, enabling them to recognise gaps and find ways of addressing them, using their own skills, resources and networks to make things happen. An unintentional, but beneficial outcome of the hubs, has been the way in which they've brought the old and young together in a way that wasn't previously happening.

Facilitated by the Isle of Anglesey County Council's Adult Social Services Department, the hub network now meets quarterly and is a place where people can swap ideas, share knowledge and equipment, and pool resources.

As the building communities model and approach to social prescribing on an asset-based approach proves itself each year, the health board and local authorities have welcomed the scheme and have funded the positions of local asset co-ordinators, recognising the preventative benefits to health and wellbeing and the enrichment of local community life that the project brings.

WHAT COULD BE DONE DIFFERENTLY?

In the past there was little understanding by authorities of the principles of community engagement and how to talk to people in a meaningful way. As part of this project, Medrwn Môn have delivered training to the local authority which has changed the way in which they write and consult, using easy read language and a less formal tone. It is essential that any approach to engagement is delivered appropriately to avoid it being tokenistic. This echoes what other community leaders have said about the importance of statutory bodies being prepared to listen and have meaningful dialogue with their communities, to be open to new ideas and willing to keep lines of communication open and to really be interested in what local people have to say.

SUCCESS CRITERIA

Lyndsey Campbell-Williams from Medrwn Môn, is the project lead for the Anglesey Community Hubs initiative, and says that a key part of the approach to this 'place shaping' exercise was the quality of the consultation process which was carefully planned and structured to ensure that meaningful conversations were had with all parts of the community. Lyndsey describes how it was important to keep the conversations positive, focusing on the strengths in the community, and how they could be built on. Sitting round the table with a coffee and having conversations where people were able to debate, disagree and find solutions, was critical in creating a sense of ownership, interest and connection to the plans going forward.

Empowering and supporting communities to undertake their own community mapping and consultation was also key to ensuring that there was as wide engagement as possible. Medrwn Môn felt that asking communities to talk to their friends and neighbours via established community networks was a far easier and natural approach than an electronic survey for example.

Lyndsey reports that the ability to understand the principles of true and meaningful engagement, coupled with the local knowledge and familiarity of CVC staff members and their long standing knowledge of their communities helped to create a plan which was community-led and which ultimately the community itself would engage with once established.

Keeping the process open and flexible is important, as is not setting time limits - things continue to evolve and this is a good thing.

Seed funding was an important aspect of establishing the project - small grants (such as a £20k grant from the Integrated Care Fund) were able to help refurbish the hubs and purchase small items of equipment, meaning groups had access to functional spaces and items they needed to run activities and take ideas forward.

Retaining an informal approach has also been important. Removing layers of bureaucracy and keeping things simple has ensured that community members are not deterred from becoming involved and continue to have ownership and control.

Lastly, Lyndsey says that Medrwn Môn always tries to demonstrate how they have listened to the community and acted, i.e. 'You said... We did', which helps achieve a sense of direct action informed by the process of consultation.