

# PENPARCAU COMMUNITY FORUM

## SUMMARY

- Name of Organisation/ Parent Organisation: Penparcau Community Forum
- Start Date: 2004, relaunched as Penparcau Community Forum in 2012
- Number of Employees: 6
- Number of Volunteers: 70
- Structure: Charity and Company Ltd by Guarantee
- Turnover: £149,000
- Website: [www.penparcau.cymru](http://www.penparcau.cymru)

## PRODUCT/SERVICE

Penparcau Community Forum is a community-based organisation whose mission is to *"Give Penparcau a strong collective voice by developing an engaged, empowered, resilient and sustainable community."*

The village of Penparcau, is primarily made up of a large housing estate on the outskirts of Aberystwyth, consisting of approximately 1,200 households with over 3,200 residents.

A recent survey indicates that 39.5% children and young people in the area live in poverty.

When the area was no longer eligible for support from Communities First (the Welsh Government programme for tackling poverty), the residents formed Penparcau Community Forum to promote and facilitate long-term sustainable community development and activities. The Forum aims to create a vibrant inclusive community where people can feel safe and proud to be living or working within the village, and to bring individuals, groups and organisations together to determine the long-term needs of Penparcau.

Housed within Penparcau Community Centre, The Community Forum is a charity managed by a committee composed of local community members. The Community Forum is essentially the community centre and hub for Penparcau.

The Community Forum and hub provide a local community development service, supporting local volunteering initiatives and community groups to develop, including a weekly youth forum, senior citizen's group, Welsh language classes and a dementia support group amongst other things. Having re-located from a shop unit on the local high street, to a purpose-built community centre in 2017, the forum has managed to successfully sustain itself following the demise of Communities First, and re-launch itself as a newly independent community hub.

### HISTORY

Penparcau Community Forum came into being late in 2012, in response to the news that the village's Communities First office was to close at the end of March 2013. Communities First had achieved a great deal to bolster locals' awareness and opportunities in a range of areas including health, employment and education, so trustees were keen to ensure it was replaced with something meaningful. The outgoing Communities First co-ordinator was employed to run the office and with funding from the People's Health Trust, continued in post for some years. More recently, Karen Roberts was appointed as forum manager, with support from National Lottery Funding. Additionally, the forum has the input of trustees from the local community who support the task of managing and sustaining the organisation. The Forum was incorporated as a company limited by guarantee on 9 September 2015.

### ACHIEVEMENTS

A key achievement of the Penparcau Forum has been the development of a range of community activities that respond directly to community need. Manager Karen Roberts describes how creating a dialogue with the community from the start has been crucial in successful engagement with the community. This has been particularly important as there had been an element of mistrust from certain parts of the community, with them not feeling it was 'for them'. Over time this has been overcome as perceptions have changed, and user numbers have slowly increased as more demand-led activities have developed. For example, one person who previously said that they would never step inside the building, has recently become a volunteer.

One successful initiative has been the community transport service, providing a weekly volunteer-led shopping service for elderly and vulnerable people in the community. The service also collects people to bring them to the regular senior citizen group, bringing older people together on a weekly basis to socialise and meet their friends.

The Youth Forum is an active group, meeting every Friday night as a youth club. Over the years this has helped to create a generation of younger people engaged in the organisation - one long standing Youth Forum member has recently taken on the role of a trustee at the age of 21, bringing a new perspective and input to the trustee board.

The Coronavirus pandemic has added a new dimension of activity to the Penparcau Forum which according to Karen, has proved to be a vital community network for the distribution of food and medication throughout the area, proving the value of the community hub and its ability to quickly galvanise community action.

One of the key outcomes for the area continues to be the ability of the hub to bring people together. Providing a wide range of activities that cater for different age

groups and abilities helps people to get to know each other, and for connections to be made as people build their confidence in accessing the space and its groups and activities. The café has also created an additional opportunity for people to convene, as well as providing volunteering opportunities for the community, and a small additional income stream.

Karen says that providing low-cost opportunities such as art, drama and dance classes on people's doorsteps is a key service and means that local people's lives are being enriched. These are things that they would not be accessing otherwise, due to the expense of such activities within Aberystwyth, low car ownership and public transport barriers into the town.

### CHALLENGES

A big challenge for the Forum has been the transition from being a Communities First initiative to an independent charity. This has been in terms of funding, but also in terms of perception by the local community. Karen Roberts describes how people have judged the organisation as being 'council run' and traditionally not wanted to be involved. There was also a previous culture of providing activities and services for free which they have now had to move away from. She says the reality is that local people are happy to pay a small amount for things, helping to make them more sustainable in the long run.

The organisation is funded until 2023 with National Lottery and People's Health Trust funding, providing a vital 'financial cushion', and the charity is undertaking its own fundraising and income generation activity to help increase the financial viability. In terms of enterprise, the centre must be careful not to vie with the current local amenities in the area and therefore must explore carefully with the community, the types of activity they can focus on without destabilising local business.

The challenge is now around creating a community-led model where local people are empowered to facilitate their own future use and direction of the asset in their power.

### SUCCESS CRITERIA

Karen says that having a board of local trustees helps immensely - they are easily available and proactive in making things happen.

Ensuring an ongoing dialogue with communities is key. Consulting with people about what their priorities and needs are before you do anything is vital. Keeping the conversation ongoing is important, it should not just be a one-off thing.

Communication is vital between the trustees, staff, volunteers and community - making sure that there are clear lines of communication and no sense of hierarchy. This includes having an ethos of everyone mucking in together to make things happen.

## MAPPING COMMUNITY ASSETS IN WALES: CASE STUDY

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*"We always visit the forum, whether it's for an event being held or just a hot chocolate. The staff are always friendly and very welcoming and it's an absolute pleasure to hold a conversation with any of them. As a parent I didn't realise just how many services were available in general and the forum provides so many of them. You have so much to offer from the cafe to the Christmas fayres, the amount of events and activities you hold are absolutely brilliant. I couldn't recommend this environment enough."* Community Member

Science Class



Food Distribution