

# PLAS MADOC LEISURE CENTRE

## SUMMARY

- Name of Organisation/ Parent Organisation: Splash Community Leisure Trust
- Start Date: 2014
- Number of Employees: 44
- Number of Volunteers: 15
- Structure: Charity
- Turnover: £850,000
- Website: [www.plas-madoc.com](http://www.plas-madoc.com)

## PRODUCT/SERVICE

Plas Madoc Leisure Centre, built in the early 1970s, was once a local authority-owned facility, but re-opened its doors to the public under community ownership in Dec 2014, following the local authority's decision to close it in April 2014. Since then, the leisure centre has gone from strength to strength, creating local jobs and providing essential health and fitness facilities for the people of Wrexham.

Now leased from the local authority and operated by 'Splash Community Trust' and with charitable status, all of Wrexham's other ex-local authority leisure amenities have become part of 'Freedom Leisure', a private trust.

The leisure centre has now become a self-sustaining and award-winning Social Enterprise, embedded within its community. Located within a large housing estate, it incorporates a swimming pool, gym, squash court, spin and aerobic studio, climbing wall, soft play centre, café and meeting rooms, and is successfully meeting the health needs of the local community with over 850 local members of all ages. The leisure centre continues to draw visitors from all over North East Wales, Shropshire, Cheshire and Liverpool and attracts thousands of people each year.

Having been previously viewed as an unsustainable drain on public resources, it has been transformed into a financially viable community asset, and is now one of the largest employers within the area.

## ACHIEVEMENTS

General Manager, Denise Chadwick, talks about the range of community health and sports initiatives that take place within the leisure centre, from children's swimming lessons, to GP referral schemes, a cancer pre-op group and cardiac rehabilitation group. If the community had not come together to save the leisure centre it is unlikely that people would engage with these types of health initiatives if they had to travel 6-8 miles by bus to a facility in Wrexham. She adds that when the

leisure centre closed for 8 months, GPs saw a sharp decline in the take-up of GP referrals to alternative leisure centres.

Denise previously worked for Wrexham County Council's leisure services, and has noticed a marked difference between the leisure centre under local authority and community management. She believes now the leisure centre is much freer to be able to make decisions and be reactive to community needs in a way that it wasn't previously able to do. An example is during the 2016 European Football Championship when staff realised that there was no fan zone in Wrexham for people to watch the Wales match. They quickly galvanised the local community, with a local business sponsoring a large screen and within 3 days had built a fan zone in the leisure centre.

The community knows it must support the leisure centre for it to be sustained, creating a sense of ownership and engagement that didn't previously exist. Initiatives such as offering local residents half-price memberships, has helped to boost this engagement and achieve sustained ongoing membership by local people.

Part of the success of the centre has come from a process of scrutinising every aspect of the business and rationalising all its operations and outgoings to achieve a more sustainable model. Significant savings have been made by replacing the 44-year old boilers with new ultra-efficient models, that have reduced gas bills by approximately £1,000 a month. Also, reviewing and amending opening hours in line with natural peaks and troughs of activity, has reduced staffing and heating costs to a far more manageable level.

Investing in equipment upgrades has also been critical to the success in rising gym memberships, with state-of-the-art equipment bought in with part-loan finance and part-re-investment of profits.

Denise also feels that the staff are now far more motivated than they ever had been, feeling like they are connected and part of the leisure centre and its success. It is somewhere staff want to be and look forward to coming into work.

### CHALLENGES

It was clear that at its time of proposed closure, the local authority was not in support of trying to keep it open, and it was a battle on behalf of the community to challenge the decision. It was felt by the community members that there was an expectation it would fail. There had also been a lack of investment in the site over the last 10 years, as it had been earmarked for closure for some time as it was one of the largest sites which would create the biggest saving.

Luckily, several local people decided to form a trust and were able to persuade other active supporters to assist in producing a comprehensive business plan. A local solicitor ensured that the trust's interests were protected with regard to any legal

documents. This combination put forward a strong case for the leisure centre to successfully operate under community management.

Over time, the relationship has strengthened as the success of the leisure centre has been established.

### WHAT COULD BE DONE DIFFERENTLY?

Although there is no expectation of financial support from the authority, it would be helpful if they were able to provide some form of help, particularly on aspects such as HR, payroll and legal services which would be of little cost to the local authority as those services already exist.

### SUCCESS CRITERIA

Attracting capital investment is seen as key to the long-term viability of the leisure centre as they have spent large amounts on upgrading the facility, equipment and improving efficiencies, particularly with regard to heating and light.

Scrutinising every part of the business to see where savings can be made, is always going to be a vital part of continuity in an environment of funding cuts and competition for grants.

Being independent lends itself to creativity and innovation and finding new ways of doing things which can help to circumnavigate problems. For example, they could not afford to buy new lockers when the new pound coins came into circulation and so they had some coin tokens made and personalised with the leisure centre branding so that people could pay a pound to purchase one (like the trolley tokens). This enabled people to support the leisure centre financially while overcoming the issue of needing to spend thousands of pounds on new lockers.



