

Building Livelihoods & Strengthening Communities in Wales

External Evaluation

April 2016

Arad Research

www.aradresearch.com

arad
research

Contents

- Contents2**
- Executive Summary3**
- 1. Introduction10**
- 2. Design and Delivery12**
 - 2.1 Project Initiation..... 12
 - 2.2 Overview of the constituent partner projects..... 16
- 3. Findings: Operation and delivery23**
 - 3.1 Activities and support provided..... 23
 - 3.2 Numbers engaged..... 28
 - 3.3 Success factors..... 28
- 4. Impact34**
 - 4.1 Intended Outcomes 34
 - 4.2 Project Outcome 1: Marginalised people will develop skills and build confidence to improve their livelihoods and life chances. 34
 - 4.3 Project Outcome 2: Marginalised people from different backgrounds will be more involved in community activities. 36
 - 4.4 Project Outcome 3: Community groups will have a better understanding of the needs of different people and groups in their neighbourhoods and how to meet them. ... 37
 - 4.5 Project Outcome 4: Marginalised people will say that they receive more and better services that meet their needs. 38
- 5. Conclusions39**
 - 5.1 Summary of findings..... 39
 - 5.2 Recommendations 40
- Annex 1: Methodology42**

Executive Summary

This is a summary of the evaluation undertaken by Arad Research which includes key lessons, recommendations for others doing similar work, and policy recommendations for service providers and decision makers.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Building Livelihoods and Strengthening Communities in Wales Project (hereafter the Livelihoods Project) has worked with marginalised people and communities across Wales, using Oxfam's Sustainable Livelihoods Approach to help individuals and families maximise their assets and abilities in order to tackle poverty. Oxfam Cymru, supported by the Big Lottery Fund (Wales) and Unilever, co-ordinated the three year project between September 2012 and February 2016, working with the following partner organisations:

- **African Community Centre, Swansea** (refugees and asylum-seekers);
- **Caia Park Partnership, Wrexham** (people with physical and/or learning disabilities);
- **Denbighshire Voluntary Services Council & The Foryd Centre, Rhyl** (older people aged 50+);
- **DOVE Workshop, Banwen, Neath** (geographically isolated and long-term unemployed people);
- **Duffryn Community Link, Newport** (young families, single parents and those with mental or physical health issues);
- **Glyncoch Community Regeneration, Pontypridd** (families with primary school-age children);
- **South Riverside Community Development Centre, Cardiff** (people from black and minority ethnic [BME] communities);
- **Sylfaen Cymunedol Cyfyngedig, Caernarfon** (young people not in education, employment or training [NEETs]);
- **The Wallich Clifford Community, Ebbw Vale** (people homeless or at risk of homelessness).

THE SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS APPROACH

The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) is a participatory approach focusing on people's lives as a whole. Complementing the approach is a variety of practical tools to support its implementation. The SLA identifies people's abilities and strengths by dividing an individual's assets into five areas:

Human assets	Education & skills, health
Social assets	Family, friends, neighbours, groups
Public assets	Local services, facilities and amenities
Financial assets	Wages, benefits, loans
Physical assets	Housing, vehicles, work equipment

“People are like a ball of wool, lots of different strands – money, housing, social life. It is important to not talk but listen to their story, like pulling out the strands and finding where the main problem is.”

Project worker

PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS

Over 1,000 beneficiaries participated in the Livelihoods Project in total (Table 1 presents some of the project’s achievements).

Project activity/ outcome	Target	Number achieved
Beneficiaries receiving intensive support	527	494
Beneficiaries receiving other support	345	629
Beneficiaries reporting new skills and confidence	1091	636
Beneficiaries more involved in community activities	344	648
Beneficiaries accessing more/better services	460	489
Beneficiaries who have measurably improved their livelihood	575	306
Peer mentors trained	114	109
Beneficiaries gaining paid employment	n/a	94

Project activities delivered included the following:

One-to-one support and guidance was provided by all partner organisations, with the SLA tools used as a starting point with participants. This involved working with individuals holistically as project workers assisted participants in taking control of their lives. By its nature this one-to-one support involved as many hours of intensive support for the individual participants as necessary, however and whenever that support was needed.

“With other agencies you are just a number, part of a system; with Livelihoods the relationship has time to develop.”

Project participant

Peer mentoring courses were available for participants from all partner organisations to provide them with the skills to enable them to support others within the project and in the wider community. The training was delivered as a pan-Wales group, providing opportunities for peer mentors to develop a network with others which they found valuable. The confidence participants developed as a result of the peer mentoring training resulted in them not only mentoring others but also organising and running activities for the project and strengthening the links between the partner organisations and their community.

Training, courses and workshops were made available to all participants, with many welcoming the opportunity to receive accreditation following completion of a course. The type of training provided was determined by the requirements of the participants and delivered at the project bases or local colleges. The content of courses varied; asylum-seekers and refugees valued being able to improve their English skills; other participants benefited more from a gentle introduction to training and education through craft or cookery sessions. Some gained employment as a result of training provided, for example being able to renew licences required to work on specific machinery.

Excursions were organised via the Livelihoods Project, providing opportunities for participants to visit places locally and further afield, aiming to broaden their horizons and allowing them to get to know one another in a different environment.

“I don’t go into town really so [a group restaurant visit] was something new”.

Project participant

“Cycling with Pedal Power (cycling charity on a Livelihoods trip) helped to break down cultural barriers and for some families the trip to Barry Island was their first ever visit, [...] it was their first time using public transport and many said that they would never have been able to do the trip themselves.”

Project worker

Volunteering has been an important activity for all of the partner organisations. In some instances participants have been able to volunteer and support the delivery of the project directly following training they have received, for example teaching English, peer mentoring other participants and supporting individuals with job searches. Others have volunteered in the wider community.

“We have had a lot of opportunities through the project that we didn’t know existed [...] – do something in the community three or four times a week”.

Project participant

Other group activities emerged during the course of the project as participants proposed training, workshops and other initiatives such as gardening, running and knitting groups.

“The group meet every week, providing participants with structure and ‘knitting therapy’. The Livelihoods participants are supported by volunteers who pass on their skills and provide support, with members drawn from across three different south Wales valleys”.

Project volunteer

PROJECT OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

The project broadly achieved its outcomes and activity targets, providing valuable opportunities for project participants. Over 1,000 participants received support across the nine areas. As shown in Table 1, slightly fewer participants than anticipated received intensive support, due in the most part to participants’ preferences: some participants dipped in and out of the project’s support rather than engaging on a linear basis, or engaged primarily to deal with a specific pressing issue, such as a job loss, sanctioning, reduction in benefits or other immediate crisis situation. This higher than anticipated

demand for non-intensive support affected the numbers achieved in other target areas, with fewer participants worked with intensively than anticipated, and therefore fewer than anticipated reporting gaining new skills and confidence, or measurably improved livelihoods. Other targets, particularly those relating to greater community involvement and access to services, were not affected by this, and were actually exceeded.

The project also had four intended outcomes, as follows:

Outcome 1: Marginalised people will develop skills and build confidence to improve their livelihoods and life chances

- All participants and workers believed that there had been many and varied opportunities to develop skills.
- Participants received focused training such as English language skills, health and safety and food hygiene, and were also able to access other courses such as mindfulness and craft workshops.
- Project participants felt training opportunities were important for their future, with some securing employment as a direct result of the training received.
- Peer mentoring within the project to support others has provided individuals with valuable skills and experience and improved their confidence.
- When combined with practical support (such as arranging and/or covering the costs of transport, arranging training, access to a computer and training in IT), the overall support has had the effect of helping break down whatever barrier participants had in taking part more fully in their community or in training or employment.
- Projects collected baseline and follow-up data from participants on all aspects of their livelihoods (e.g. money, access to community groups and access to services). This evidence showed that an average overall improvement of 15.9% was made by baselined participants.

“If it wasn’t for [the project worker] I wouldn’t have any self-purpose, don’t know where I’d be. [The project worker] is my rock, she knows me, everything was falling apart until I met her.”

“I was stuck in the house but now I have more confidence, I know where to come for help if things are bad.”

“[The project is] helping my health and my mind, and communication”.

“Without [the project] I’d be back in there [prison] now.”

Project participants

Outcome 2: Marginalised people from different backgrounds will be more involved in community activities

- All local projects have addressed involvement in community activities, with examples ranging from: parents being supported to establish and run a toddler group, family fun days, opportunities for participants to visit places they would not otherwise have done, support to attend tenants’ meetings, a running club, starting a cinema club for local older people, gardening and allotment groups, and establishing and running a women’s chat group.

- Many participants volunteered within the project and their local community.
- Groups facilitated by the project brought project participants and other community residents together to follow shared interests.
- Volunteers from the local community also said their involvement with the project had positively impacted upon their mental health.

“They’ve all been to a residents meeting to say their piece. They’d never have done that before [Livelihoods].”

Project worker

Outcome 3: Community groups will have a better understanding of the needs of different people and groups in their neighbourhoods and how to meet them

- More than 100 community structures reported better understanding of the needs of marginalised people.
- More than 50 service providers noted at least one change to their service and attributed this to the project.
- The partner organisations delivering the Livelihoods project built on existing links with their communities – the intensive and flexible provision under this project enabled them to deepen their knowledge of their communities and work with new participants who would not otherwise have engaged or sustained their engagement with the support available.

“The biggest thing is that the project has created a community that supports each other, and can talk to each other.”

Project participants

Outcome 4: Marginalised people will say that they receive more and better services that meet their needs

- Participants noted that their health and well-being improved as a result of the support received directly from the project worker and the other participants, including accompanying them to meetings where necessary.
- The project enabled a local need for people to support one another in informal settings to be fulfilled.
- Some participants noted that they are now better informed and able to support others.
- Referrals between different agencies ensured participants received the most suitable advice and support to their needs.

Focus group participants reported that they now tell others where to come if they need help and that they feel knowledgeable: “The project has given us the knowledge to help other people. It has been enlightening”.

Participant focus group

Additional, wider impacts of the project included:

- Volunteers from the local community supporting the project reporting improvements in their wellbeing.
- Project participants becoming more involved in their local communities via volunteering the project has initiated and as a result improving the local environment.
- Successful outcomes for the project in obtaining external funding for some activities and roles, such as the Knit & Natter group in Ebbw Vale, or Tiny Tiddlers and Games Night in Glyncoch, has meant new initiatives are becoming embedded independently of the project. Indeed the Knit and Natter group is now supported by funding from the Big Lottery, Halifax and Sainsbury's.

KEY LESSONS

1. The SLA has proved a suitable tool in providing a structure to determine actions needed to improve individual livelihoods.
2. The flexibility of the SLA as a toolkit and approach, and being able to adapt and apply it as appropriate, supporting participants intensively at some times, and non-intensively at others according to their needs, is one of its key strengths.
3. It can take time for project workers to establish a relationship with the local community so this needs to be built into any planned interventions or projects.
4. Supporting project participants via one-to-one personalised guidance and support resulted in improvements in well-being, confidence and the sustainability of their livelihoods.
5. The flexibility of individualised support has been a major factor in the success of the project; despite being very time-intensive for workers to offer, this type of support is crucial for any project seeking to address the livelihoods issues of marginalised people.
6. Peer mentor training results in increased confidence and development of skills benefiting not just the individual but the wider community as well.
7. Working with other partner organisations such as Jobcentre Plus and Communities First has enabled individuals to be signposted to appropriate support, but many marginalised individuals require more than signposting – for example, needing workers to actually accompany them to meetings and appointments if that signposting is to succeed.
8. Access to appropriate transport and the provision of accredited training courses is crucial for people as they aim to improve their situation and move into work.
9. Networking between the partner organisations across Wales convened by Oxfam has strengthened project delivery.
10. SLA project workers provide a strong and important link between the many different agencies that individuals access for support; they can be the “friend that knows stuff”, especially in relation to how services work, that marginalised people often lack in their support networks.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation has highlighted a number of benefits of using a range of SLA methods and tools to engage and work with marginalised people. In conclusion, it makes the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1: The SLA should continue to be disseminated to service providers and adopted as a method for empowering individuals to secure a more sustainable livelihood; there is also potential for it to be used more widely, for example with schools and young people.

Recommendation 2: It is important to continue to improve the livelihoods of those in marginalised communities through utilising a holistic approach to their situation. A key strength of the SLA is that by working holistically it uncovers the real issue(s), not just the most obvious surface problem.

Recommendation 3: Funders need to recognise the significance of flexible funding arrangements when seeking to improve the livelihoods of individuals in marginalised communities. Assets-based analyses of marginalised people's problems are only of value if accompanied by creative, assets-based solutions, as those problems rarely fit neatly into the one thematic area (be it housing, training, employment, debt, substance misuse or any other area), which is usually all any particular service for marginalised people can help with.

Recommendation 4: Minimum participation numbers required by some learning providers to deliver in isolated areas should be more flexible if opportunities are to improve for those living there. For projects to be truly accessible, an 'outreach' element should be included for those communities lacking adequate transport options.

Recommendation 5: Projects supporting marginalised groups should strive to secure continuation funding for SLA-based work, as without this vulnerable people are left without support; there are no other projects that combine an assets-based approach with the ability to also provide bespoke, assets-based solutions and the kind of personal support, up to and including the 'handholding' often needed for marginalised people to be able to begin to implement and access those solutions for themselves.

Recommendation 6: Oxfam should disseminate learning from the project as widely as possible, so that providers can ensure that any future interventions aimed at addressing the needs of marginalised people identify and respond to those needs in a flexible and holistic manner, providing more intensive and bespoke provision where required.

1. Introduction

Arad Research was commissioned by Oxfam Cymru to undertake an evaluation of the *Building Livelihoods and Strengthening Communities in Wales* project (the 'Livelihoods Project').

The Livelihoods Project was a three year project running from September 2012 to February 2016 and funded by the Big Lottery Fund, Oxfam and Unilever. The project worked with nine communities across Wales using the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (see section 2.2 for further details). Oxfam Cymru worked in partnership with nine partner organisations in marginalised communities across Wales to deliver the project, with those organisations specialising in working with particular disadvantaged groups in their local area. The partner organisations and their target audiences were:

- African Community Centre, Swansea (refugees and asylum-seekers);
- Caia Park Partnership, Wrexham (people with physical and/or learning disabilities);
- Denbighshire Voluntary Services Council and The Foryd Centre, Rhyl (older people aged 50+);
- DOVE Workshop, Banwen, Neath (geographically isolated and long-term unemployed people);
- Duffryn Community Link, Newport (young families, single parents and those with mental or physical health issues);
- Glyncoch Community Regeneration, Pontypridd (families with primary school-age children);
- South Riverside Community Development Centre, Cardiff (people from black and minority ethnic [BME] communities);
- Sylfaen Cymunedol Cyfyngedig, Caernarfon (young people not in education, employment or training [NEETs]);
- The Wallich Clifford Community, Ebbw Vale (people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness).

This evaluation has assessed the operation and delivery of the project and the extent to which the project achieved its intended outcomes. Key lessons and recommendations for service providers and decision makers that have arisen from the experience of the project and its participants are also presented.

EVALUATION AIM AND METHODOLOGY

The principal aim of this evaluation has been to review the extent to which the project achieved its intended outcomes, with a view to informing agencies working in similar fields to plan their future services. The methodology applied included desk research of Oxfam documentation, the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach documentation, and project monitoring reports. Fieldwork involved one-to-one interviews and focus groups with project participants in the nine project areas, and consultations with project staff.

The focus groups and interviews with participants were structured around a number of topics such as participants' motivations for becoming involved and the types of support and activities received and any changes experienced since taking part. The interviews with project workers focused on the activities delivered, their impacts on individuals and the local community, and potential sustainability of activities. Others consulted included Oxfam Cymru representatives, other workers at partner centres and a small number of other agencies involved with supporting project activities such as volunteers, Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales. Annex 1 provides more detail.

This final report presents findings from the fieldwork undertaken during October and November 2015 as the project was drawing to an end.

2. Design and Delivery

The first part of this chapter provides some background to the project and then presents an overview of the different project elements delivered in Wales.

2.1 Project Initiation

The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) has been an important tool in international development since the early 1990s, being a dominant feature of initiatives delivered by the UK Government's Department for International Development (DfID) and development organisations, such as Oxfam, to alleviate poverty and improve people's lives. Oxfam GB first used the SLA internally as a staff development tool, and externally as an approach to support community development. The approach examines people's lives as a whole and starts from their strengths, assets and resources rather than their needs, from what they have rather than what they lack. Box 1 provides an overview of the SLA.

2.1.1 Testing the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach with communities and organisations

Its first application in Wales in 2007 was focused on identifying community responses to people experiencing debt. Oxfam Cymru worked with South Riverside Community Development Centre and Splotlands Credit Union in Cardiff to explore how people survived and what the organisations could learn from this about communities' coping mechanisms to ensure more sustainable livelihoods for people locally. In 2009, Community Development Cymru adapted an SLA toolkit to fit the Welsh context, resulting in the SLA Toolkit for Wales, which allowed Oxfam Cymru to pilot the SLA to a wider group of organisations.

Based on this initial work, Oxfam funded a small project in 2009 with partners in Cardiff and Newport, as well as the Trussell Trust and Community Development Cymru, to look further at the potential of the SLA as a community development tool. This project highlighted the need for policy responses to poverty to take into account the different types of resources and connections between individuals. It found that these elements were important in gaining an understanding of how people live, and in determining the most appropriate approach to ensure a sustainable livelihood – in other words, the SLA also had potential as a tool to help individuals, not just community groups or organisations.

The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA)

The SLA is a method of understanding the experiences of people living in poverty. It is based on Oxfam's experience that people experiencing poverty have abilities and assets that can be used to help them manage and improve their lives. The SLA is a participatory approach focusing on people's lives as a whole and contains a variety of practical tools to support its implementation¹. The SLA identifies people's abilities and strengths and aims to help people improve and manage their lives using an asset-based method to empower individuals and communities to achieve a sustainable and fulfilled future. SLA divides an individual's assets into five areas.

Human assets	education and skills • health
Social assets	family • friends • neighbours • groups
Public assets	local services • facilities & amenities
Financial assets	wages • benefits • loans
Physical assets	housing • vehicle • work equipment

Project workers attended SLA training at the beginning of the project and proceeded to use the toolkit to support individuals as well as facilitating group sessions. Elements of the SLA toolkit were used by project workers, with some proving more popular than others in assisting them to support and provide guidance to participants. Whilst paper copies of templates were suggested as resources during sessions, some project workers found participants were not keen on paper-based exercises. As a result project workers used the tools without necessarily completing them on paper every time – as one project worker put it, 'always us[ing] the toolkit in my head'. Some of the tools from the toolkit favoured by project workers and participants included:

- OK/Not OK Timeline
- Structured Interviews
- Mapping Public Assets
- The Assets Pentagon
- Livelihoods Ladder

Project workers welcomed the toolkit at the outset of building relationships with individuals as 'it helps you see the person in totality' to gain a picture of who they are.

2.1.2 Working with individuals

Based on this insight, Oxfam made a successful application in 2012 to the Big Lottery Fund in Wales for the Building Livelihoods & Strengthening Communities in Wales project to examine whether the SLA could work with individuals nationwide. Working with the nine partner organisations outlined in Chapter 1, project workers were recruited and the project set out to offer intensive and non-intensive personal support through activities such as developing personal development plans; supporting participants to get help from other

¹ Oxfam. 2013. *The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach: Toolkit for Wales*. Available at: <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/the-sustainable-livelihoods-approach-toolkit-for-wales-297233>

services; accompanying participants to meetings with service providers; offering participants emotional support; support to become involved in social activities; or help to find or get to a job, work experience or volunteer placement. In short, whatever help a person might need to make their livelihood more sustainable. The project has also provided livelihoods support for community groups, peer mentoring opportunities, networking, learning and sharing experiences, and support for service providers to improve their work with individuals.

2.1.3 Funding the Livelihoods Project

The Livelihoods Project was co-ordinated by Oxfam Cymru and supported by the Big Lottery Fund (Wales) and Unilever between September 2012 and December 2015, with a short extension to March 2016 to allow for an underspend caused by the lack of project activity in the project’s first quarter. The total project budget was £1,108,881. This was made up of £842,775 funding support from the Big Lottery Fund over the three years, supplemented by some other sources, as set out in table 2.1. This modest budget covered the salaries of a part time worker in each of the nine organisations and running costs.

Table 2.1 Funding of the Building Livelihoods and Strengthening Communities in Wales Project

Donor	Total
Big Lottery: People and Places	£842,775
Oxfam	£177,404
Unilever	£88,702
Total	£1,108,881

Source: Building Livelihoods and Strengthening Communities in Wales Project Plan

2.1.4 Setting aims, objectives and targets

The Livelihoods Project was designed using Oxfam Cymru’s experience of delivering previous SLA projects in Wales. It was set up to ‘investigate a new approach to supporting those who are socially excluded and most in need across Wales’², with ‘each livelihoods worker [facilitating] sessions with individuals and groups in which they reflect on their own situations and identify their strengths and capabilities so that they become their own ‘agents for change’’. The targets agreed are set out in Table 2.2. Oxfam Cymru and its nine partners recorded progress and achievements regularly via monitoring reports and evaluations. Table 2.2 also collates the achievements of the project against its different indicators.

A project steering group met quarterly to review progress and regular network meetings took place at the different project locations across Wales attended by participants from all partners.

² Oxfam Cymru (2011) Building Livelihoods & Strengthening Communities: Project Plan 2012 – 2015

Table 2.2: Targets and achievements of the Livelihoods Project

Project activity /outcome indicator	Target	Number achieved
Beneficiaries receiving intensive support	527	494
Beneficiaries receiving other support	345	629
Community structures receiving support	81	89
Peer mentors trained	114	109
Service providers trained	63	71
Beneficiaries reporting new skills and confidence	1091	636
Beneficiaries more involved in community activities	344	648
Beneficiaries accessing more/better services and attributing this to the project	460	489
Beneficiaries who have measurably improved their livelihood	575	306
Beneficiaries gaining paid employment	n/a	94
Community structures reporting better understanding of the needs of marginalised people	69	111
Service providers who can cite at least one change to their service and attribute this to the project	68	58

Source: Building Livelihoods and Strengthening Communities in Wales Project - Big Lottery Fund Monitoring.

The Livelihoods Project set itself four intended outcomes (see also chapter 4):

- Project Outcome 1: Marginalised people will develop skills and build confidence to improve their livelihoods and life chances.
- Project Outcome 2: Marginalised people from different backgrounds will be more involved in community activities.
- Project Outcome 3: Community groups will have a better understanding of the needs of different people & groups in their neighbourhoods and how to meet them.
- Project Outcome 4: Marginalised people will say that they receive more and better services that meet their needs.

2.1.5 Wales context

The Welsh Government's commitment to social justice and equality of opportunity is driving forward the priority in Wales to tackle poverty by prioritising the needs of the poorest and

aiming to protect those most at risk of poverty and exclusion³. The Welsh Government's Communities First Programme for tackling poverty and social disadvantage in the most deprived communities has worked through local partnerships since 2001 and continues to provide funding to narrow education, skills and health gaps across Wales⁴. However, the National Assembly for Wales' Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee's Inquiry into Poverty in Wales: Poverty and Inequality (2015), were 'deeply concerned' at the 'Welsh Government's lack of progress in reducing poverty, particularly given its long-term commitment and investment in the issue'.⁵ The Committee highlighted the Welsh Government's approach of focusing on 'treating the symptoms of poverty rather than the root causes' as a concern. With the *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015* striving to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales⁶, the Welsh Government continues to emphasise the importance of tackling poverty, but progress is yet to be clearly evidenced.

This review of the work of Oxfam Cymru and its partners in implementing the SLA in marginalised communities in Wales comes at an important time in addressing the needs of individuals and communities who require support to maximise their assets and abilities to tackle poverty.

Project worker

The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach

'People are like a ball of wool, lots of different strands – money, housing, social life'.

It was important to *'not talk but listen to their story, like pulling out the strands and finding where the main problem is'.*

2.2 Overview of the constituent partner projects

The Livelihoods Project comprises a diverse mix of projects and activities. There are commonalities across the nine partner organisations, notably the use of the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach to underpin the project, the emphasis on providing intensive support, the development of peer mentors, and the fact that the projects are targeted at certain groups.

The following provides an overview of the partnerships, key activities, participation numbers and feedback for the Livelihoods Project between September 2012 and February 2016.

³ Welsh Government. 2012. *Tackling Poverty Action Plan 2012-2016*, p. 1. Available at: <http://gov.wales/docs/dsjlg/publications/socialjustice/120625tackpovplanen.pdf>

⁴ Communities First. <http://gov.wales/topics/people-and-communities/communities/communitiesfirst/?lang=en>

⁵ National Assembly for Wales. 2015. *Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee's Inquiry into Poverty in Wales: Poverty and Inequality*, p. 17. Available at: <http://www.assembly.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld10252/cr-ld10252-e.pdf>

⁶ The Act will require public bodies listed therein to consider the long term implications of decisions, work more effectively with people and communities, look to prevent problems arising and take a more joined-up approach.

2.2.1 African Community Centre

Location: Swansea

Participants: Refugees and asylum-seekers

The African Community Centre in Swansea provides a drop-in centre for the local community, supporting a wide range of ethnic minority people (including refugees and asylum-seekers) to participate in African or Caribbean cultural activities and to support people to integrate and participate in the local community, improve skills and move closer to the workplace. The Livelihoods project activities delivered over the duration of the project included:

- English classes, both formal and informal;
- Counselling;
- One-to-one support and guidance;
- Peer mentoring;
- Training courses;
- Volunteering opportunities.

The focus for training courses and workshops was determined following one-to-one sessions and group discussions with project participants. Examples of courses completed by participants included: Health and Safety, Food Hygiene, IT and Photography, with participants receiving certificates on completion. In some instances the training organised has been more focused on an individual's needs, for example completion of the CELTA (Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), organised for participants who volunteered with the delivery of English classes at the centre, as well as enrolment on other courses in the locality, e.g. a 10 week sewing course. Seven participants trained as peer mentors, with some going on to be involved in the Swansea City of Sanctuary project and others supporting the project worker in delivering activities and mentoring participants informally. One-to-one support has included accompanying participants to the job centre, assistance with housing, and more focused job preparation via seeking out volunteering opportunities and mock interviews.

2.2.2 Caia Park Partnership

Location: Caia Park Estate, Wrexham

Participants: Focus on people with physical and learning difficulties, later expanded to all area's residents

The Caia Park Partnership has been in existence for some fifteen years and has grown to an organisation employing more than fifteen staff. Its centre is a hub for a range of services and projects for people of all ages including a community café, tenancy support, delivering youth clubs and mentoring to young people, family support, day-care for older people and a trading arm made up of a number of community enterprises (a day nursery, food co-op, crafts workshop, training etc).

The Livelihoods Project worked with individuals with physical or learning disabilities, mental health problems or substance misuse issues who are economically inactive and looking to get back into work. People tended to be identified and referred to the project through Caia Park's existing services, via the job centre or through word of mouth. Activities supported by the project included:

- Courses such as food and cookery, manual handling, health and safety, IT, employability skills, craft taster sessions and budgeting;
- Excursions to a museum, to visit another Livelihoods Project partner, to a food festival, and a meal together at a restaurant;
- Individualised support – for example making a link with tenancy support, referrals to counselling, liaising with social services, completing CVs and job applications, and completing benefits application forms;
- Making the link to other partnership projects such as a food bank and gardening on the allotment;
- Produced a Livelihoods recipe booklet;
- Support to attend residents meetings;
- Weekly drop-ins.

2.2.3 Denbighshire Voluntary Services Council

Location: Rhyl

Participants: Focus on ages 50+, later expanded to all ages

Denbighshire Voluntary Services Council's Livelihoods Project was delivered via the Foryd Centre in Rhyl and originally focused on people aged 55 and over, with many having lost jobs and were having to cope with the rise in the retirement age. However, it became apparent that all age groups face similar challenges and the project broadened to support all ages. Activities delivered included:

- Camping trip;
- Group support meetings;
- One-to-one support;
- Peer mentoring;
- Sustainable Livelihoods Approach training for service providers;
- Training courses.

Over the duration of the project more than 60 participants engaged with the support, and more have benefited from the 'drop-in' aspect and signposting to other agencies. One-to-one support was the main focus in Rhyl, with local agencies such as the Jobcentre Plus and Scope referring participants to the Foryd Centre. Courses delivered have included First Aid at Work (Welsh Ambulance) and mental health awareness courses – self-awareness, anxiety (Mind). The group decided to 'do something different' and organised a camping trip to Snowdonia. One individual completed training with the project and following a successful bid for funding is now employed supporting participants at the Foryd Centre with welfare benefit problems.

As a result of lobbying by the group, questions were raised in UK Parliament focusing on job seekers allowance and the hours required for job searching. The project worker intends to remain in post at the Foryd Centre from February 2016 on a voluntary basis for the short term while Denbighshire Voluntary Services Council seek a funding solution to be able to continue the project.

2.2.4 DOVE Workshop

Location: Banwen, Neath

Participants: Long-term unemployed living in a geographically isolated area

The Dove Workshop was established as a training and community centre in Banwen by local women in the aftermath of the miners' strike of the mid 1980's. It provides a range of learning, volunteering and work opportunities in the community and the centre itself is a base for a credit union, IT facilities, a library, community garden, day nursery, and community café.

The Livelihoods Project provided mentoring and support to those who were long term unemployed, economically inactive or in low paid unsustainable work. Project activities included:

- Drop-in sessions offering support;
- Family fun days;
- Support in using computers;
- Volunteering – through the link with Oxfam, a group volunteered at the five day Camp Bestival festival in 2015, gaining stewarding skills and new experiences.

Woodworking sessions became a regular activity and they were a linchpin for other support. Their weekly sessions were regularly attended by a group of mostly men, and support was offered informally, and skills and confidence were built as a result. These workshops were linked to a community enterprise selling wooden crafts, so participants were able to see their products being sold too.

2.2.5 Duffryn Community Link

Location: Duffryn, Newport

Participants: Young families, single parents and those with mental or physical ill-health

Duffryn Community Link works with economically inactive and unemployed vulnerable families in Duffryn, Newport. The project was originally delivered in partnership with Duffryn Infant School and involved parents through the school's 'nurture' group (a programme for children who struggle to engage in learning). Over time the project expanded to work with more families who received ongoing one-to-one support to find solutions to their problems and overcome challenges. Some joined the project as a result of referrals from probation or social services, communications with the school and 'word of mouth'. All the participants

have children, a small number have grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Personal referrals increased as the project became more established; participants were aware of newcomers to the area and were pro-active in welcoming them. This was particularly important for those without family or friends in the area. Project activities included:

- Allotment club;
- Christmas parties;
- Courses and workshops;
- Day trips for families;
- Facilitating a food bank;
- One-to-one support and peer mentoring;
- Running club;
- Volunteering.

Many activities supported the local community, with participants volunteering their time gardening at a local sheltered housing complex and organising a cinema club and parties for local older people. There have been family trips during the school holidays to Porthcawl, Barry and Margam Park. Ideas for activities and training were decided upon by the project group. Twenty families on low incomes were originally supported, but when the group began organising a food bank, this rose to over 50 families. A broad variety of courses and workshops were delivered to the group: confidence building, cooking on a budget, criminology, first aid, food hygiene, health and safety, manual handling, mindfulness and painting and decorating. The project has provided a neutral location and opportunity to hold community meetings with the council and police to help address anti-social behaviour in the area. Working with the council, the group organised a clean-up to combat the increase in rubbish being dumped. Access to citizen's advice and probation services were also organised for participants and the project maintained a close link with social services.

2.2.6 Glyncoch Community Regeneration

Location: Glyncoch, Rhondda Cynon Taf
Participants: Families of primary school-aged children

The project was hosted by Glyncoch Community Regeneration which also works in partnership with other organisations such as Communities First. The Livelihoods project focused on vulnerable families experiencing poverty, and mainly worked with parents of primary-aged children (having identified a gap in provision for that group).

The Livelihoods worker provided one-to-one support, supported the personal development of participants and encouraged and supported activities such as:

- Courses – e.g. an accredited flower arranging course leading to an OCN in enterprise and sessions of work experience, first aid, English and Maths;
- Exchange visit to another Livelihoods Group;
- Excursions (e.g. to the seaside and the zoo);
- Hosting family fun events;
- Parenting programmes;

- Personal support for participants (for example finding volunteering opportunities with view to leading to work; liaising between the parent of an older child and a NEET worker, support with CV and interview skills);
- Supporting a new parent and toddler group;
- Supporting group of mums running a games night;
- Training to service providers (from the local authority, Jobcentre Plus, and other charities and third sector) in using the SLA toolkit.

2.2.7 South Riverside Community Development Centre

Location: South Riverside, Cardiff

Participants: Focus on black and minority ethnic communities, later expanded to all area's residents

The South Riverside Community Development Centre engages with people in and out of work, those on Job Seekers Allowance and asylum-seekers. Project activities have included:

- Allotments and gardening club;
- Courses and workshops (e.g. mindfulness, self-confidence);
- One-to-one support and guidance;
- Peer mentoring;
- Sustainable Livelihoods Approach training for stakeholders;
- Women's chat group.

A key element of the Livelihoods Project in Cardiff has been 'women mentoring women'. Peer mentors help with a job club at the centre, providing support to fill in application forms, develop CVs and improve interview technique. Networks with external agencies mean the project can support women meeting their individual requirements. Following successful peer mentor training a 'women's chat' group was established (February 2015); a number of volunteers could see that there was a need for a safe environment for women in the area to come together, and this was particularly important for Muslim women to be able to meet in a women-only environment. Since February the group's volunteer organisers have successfully arranged many different activities including knitting, keep fit, jewellery making, cooking on a budget and several day trips (Barry Island, Cosmeston Lakes and cycling with Pedal Power). The group also provided a safe environment for women to practice and improve their English language skills.

2.2.8 Sylfaen Cymunedol Cyfyngedig

Location: Caernarfon

Participants: Young people not in education, employment or training

Sylfaen Cymunedol Cyfyngedig was established in 2001 to provide work and training for young people and communities in some of the most disadvantaged areas in North West Wales.

The Livelihoods Project worked with economically inactive and unemployed young people aged 16-24 in the Peblig area of Caernarfon. During the first two summers the onus was on getting to know the young people and becoming a familiar face. Summer holiday activities were arranged such as a coastering trip and quad biking. The majority of the work with participants has been personalised one-to-one support to help young people into training and employment such as:

- Accompany the young person on the first day of college;
- Attend multi-agency meetings;
- Carrying out job and course searches, arranging training;
- Developing interview skills;
- Ensuring that the young people can make it to a course or interview (e.g. by paying for the transport);
- Help with CV writing;
- Liaising with careers officers, college tutors and others;
- Support for the wider family, including help with grant application forms (e.g. Education maintenance forms).

2.2.9 The Wallich Clifford Community

Location: Ebbw Vale

Participants: Homeless people and those at risk of homelessness

The Wallich Clifford Community, Ebbw Vale, supports the homeless and those at risk of becoming homeless. Due to the individual focus of the services offered by the Wallich it was necessary for the Livelihoods project worker to approach local community organisations, such as health clinics, Jobcentre Plus, Communities First, Flying Start and Families First at the outset to establish participants. Project activities delivered included:

- Courses and workshops;
- Craft groups;
- Day trips for families and children;
- Knit and natter groups;
- One-to-one support;
- Working with Jobcentre Plus.

One-to-one support and guidance has been delivered at a variety of locations by the project worker; during Jobcentre Plus outreach sessions, at participant's homes, or while accompanying individuals out in the community. The project worker facilitated courses for participants such as mindfulness, cooking, budgeting, art therapy and learning about social policy.

3. Findings: Operation and delivery

This chapter presents detail regarding the activities delivered, including the numbers engaged and concludes by highlighting success factors identified during the evaluation. Feedback on project activities received from project participants is included along with feedback from project staff and other service providers involved. Mini case studies illustrate the experiences of some of the project participants. (Participant names have been changed to protect their identity.)

3.1 Activities and support provided

Project participants received bespoke support with no time-limit, no restrictions on how many times someone could access support, and no set agenda to achieve a target (e.g. find a job or go on a course) – just an aim to help the person move forward at their own pace to improve their livelihoods. As such one-to-one support was a key part of the delivery, which then sometimes led to training, group work, mentoring, volunteering and other activities.

3.1.1 One-to-one support and guidance

The nature and approach of the one-to-one support and guidance delivered by project workers varied slightly across Wales, reflecting the differing target groups for each location. The SLA tools were used as a starting point, with participants identifying their assets to enable project workers to assist them in taking control of their life. By its nature one-to-one support can involve many hours of intensive support for the individual concerned, and if applicable, their family. Such support included identifying volunteering and job opportunities, assistance with housing, determining relevant training, building self-confidence and preparing participants for job interviews. One-to-one support enabled participants to build self-confidence and successfully obtain both voluntary and paid employment, as mini case study 1 illustrates.

Mini case study 1

From voluntary cleaning to full time employment

A project worker discovered that Helen who was cleaning voluntarily for the organisation, held a Master's degree. Following support from project staff, Helen engaged in more voluntary work, both for the organisation and elsewhere. At the same time project staff helped Helen to develop her confidence to apply for jobs, including conducting a mock interview. Helen was successful in gaining work as a support worker and has since changed jobs, working full time for a much larger organisation.

Assistance with form filling to claim correct benefits and when applying for courses and employment also formed an element of the one-to-one support. Participants noted how they relied upon such support, '[the project worker] is my rock, she knows me, and everything was falling apart until I met [the project worker]'. Some participants recognised that they

had not been going out much before their involvement, with the project worker 'giving me an excuse to go out'. By the very nature of one-to-one support and guidance, it allows the project worker to provide bespoke guidance and signpost individuals to appropriate agencies to support their needs, as illustrated in mini case study 2.

Mini case study 2

One-to-one support

Following a job centre referral to the Livelihoods Project, John, an ex-offender on sickness benefit, was supported to engage with a Communities First programme to obtain qualifications. Following a number of successes, which also involved a work placement, the employer was impressed and offered John a job, who had been unemployed for almost 20 years. Working together, job centre personnel and Livelihoods' staff ensured John was able to access support and funding to be able to accept the job offer.

Project staff reflected on the value of one-to-one support as it 'helps to understand the issues beyond the surface'. However, it was noted by some project staff that fewer people overall were supported due to the length of time required to provide guidance effectively on a one-to-one basis.

3.1.2 Peer mentoring

A key part of the project's design was to incorporate an element of peer mentoring. This built on the existing informal mentoring already identified in many communities, and described as 'formalising what happens naturally'. Peer mentoring courses were made available in all project areas in order to train participants with the skills that would enable them to support others within the project and in the wider community. As a direct result of this training, opportunities emerged for individuals to help project staff with the running of activities or the introduction of new activities. The responsibility placed on the participants in this role was welcomed and once established, worked well. As the peer mentor training was delivered as a pan-Wales group, it allowed peer mentors to develop a valuable network with others. Participants' confidence also increased, allowing them to instigate other activities, such as a weekly women's chat group or help in an informal way within their community, as illustrated in mini case study 3.

Mini case study 3

Confidence gained from peer mentoring

Completing the peer mentoring course gave Isabella more confidence to talk to people and know the type of questions to ask that would help them. As a result of improvements in confidence, Isabella felt able to volunteer in a charity shop and reflected that 'as you meet people you are asked to say things and make friends and this gradually builds confidence'.

Along with the establishment of new groups, peer mentors also took on individual 'clients' in a job club, providing support to complete application forms, develop curriculum vitae and practice interview techniques. Project workers saw peer mentors as ambassadors and advocates who were able to see the potential of others in their community.

Peer mentors (and some other participants) also took part in the regular network meetings that took place at different locations across Wales. The network meetings provided an opportunity to share project experiences and deliver training. Examples of sessions during the network meetings included: Mindfulness, the Modern Welfare State, social media campaigns and Welsh Assembly engagement training.

Mini case study 4

Route to peer mentoring

Dave initially came to the Livelihoods project looking for help finding work in construction. After starting the SLA with his Livelihoods worker, it became apparent there were more underlying problems at hand; Dave had also turned to drugs and alcohol and was effectively homeless, moving between the homes of friends and sleeping on their sofas. SLA analysis revealed that the cause of all these issues was due to not knowing if he had fathered a child; two years ago, he had been in a relationship, and his partner had had a child, but had said the baby was not his. This was what had sent Dave went off the rails, made him start drinking heavily, and left him sofa surfing. As the Livelihoods project helps both identify and find solutions to underlying problems like this, rather than just surface problems, such as a lack of employment, the project then supported Dave by negotiating with the mother of the child and paying for a paternity test. The result was positive - he was the father of the little girl, and from then on he was able to clean up his whole act. He became a peer mentor on the Livelihoods project, then completed a work placement with the help of the Livelihoods worker, and is now a full-time youth worker himself, helping others in a similar situation to the one he had been in when he first came to the project. In his words, "Since meeting my Livelihoods worker I've had so much help getting myself back on my feet. She's helped me to do loads of things I didn't know were available. The Livelihoods worker was the only person who could help. For me, services are better because I have more support to deal with the technicalities and difficulties of dealing with service providers. She's helped me in every way she can."

Source: Case study provided to Oxfam by partner organisation.

3.1.3 Training, courses and workshops

A wide variety of training opportunities were made available to all participants, including a jewellery workshop, the first aid at work qualification, a criminology course and mindfulness. The training and courses were delivered to groups at the project base with some individuals also receiving funding to attend local colleges and obtain more formal qualifications, such as the CELTA (Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). These learning opportunities were facilitated by a variety of organisations including Mind, local colleges and once individuals were trained they facilitated the learning themselves. This was the case in the African Community Centre, Swansea, with English classes organised

by participants and at South Riverside, Cardiff participants, who drew on their own skills to run workshops for the group, for example cooking on a budget.

Many participants received certificates, for example in food hygiene and health and safety, which they felt were important to help them in the future, once they received their right to remain and/or were well enough to seek employment.

3.1.4 Excursions

For many living in some of the areas targeted by the Livelihoods project there are few opportunities to afford to take their families on trips. As a result, the Livelihoods project facilitated trips both locally and further afield, aimed at broadening the horizons of participants and to allow them to 'get to know one another in a different environment'. Such occasions varied from day trips to Barry Island and Weston Super Mare to a cycling trip with Pedal Power⁷ in Cardiff, with others venturing to Snowdonia or Camp Bestival festival.

Examples: Broadening horizons

- I. *Cycling with Pedal Power helped to break down cultural barriers and for some families the trip to Barry Island was their first ever visit, even though they had lived in Cardiff for many years – it was their first time using public transport and many commented that they would never have been able to do the trip themselves.*
- II. *The idea to camp for a few days in Snowdonia originated from the group wanting to do something different – they were able to spend more time together: 'getting to the top of Snowdon was a highlight'.*
- III. *By organising a volunteering trip to Camp Bestival festival 2015, individuals gained valuable work experience, bonded as a group and were able to visit a different part of the UK, which for a few was a new experience.*

3.1.5 Volunteering

Volunteering has been an important thread for all of the communities involved in the Livelihoods project. In some instances participants have been able to volunteer and support the delivery of the project directly following training, for example teaching English, peer mentoring other participants and supporting individuals with job searches. Others have volunteered in the wider community as a result of the introductions made during the project and the improved confidence they acquired as a consequence of the support received. Participants have gone on to volunteer for local charities and undertake community based initiatives, such as rubbish clearing and helping with the gardens of a local sheltered housing complex.

⁷ Pedal Power is a Cardiff based charity that encourages and enables children and adults of all ages and abilities to experience the benefits of cycling.

3.1.6 Other group activities

Across the different projects many different group activities and courses were initiated according to the preferences of the group. Other regular group activities ranged from allotment club/gardening group to a running club and a knit and natter group, as discussed in mini case study 5.

Examples: Organising group activities

- I. A knitting group, raising money for charities, has been meeting in Ebbw Vale since 2011. A volunteer organiser and other knitters launched a group specifically for women linked to the Livelihoods project in 2015. The group of about 15 meet every week, including during school holidays, providing participants with structure and “knitting therapy”. The Livelihoods’ participants were supported by volunteers who passed on their skills and provided support, with members drawn from across three different south Wales valleys. The group successfully sourced funding for new equipment and trips from the Big Lottery, the Halifax and Sainsbury’s. In Jan 2016, a sewing machine was sourced and ‘make do and mend’ classes are now being delivered. Trips to source materials and to visit Wonderwool, in Builth Wells, are also planned.*
- II. Gardening in the community and growing on an allotment have provided focus for some participants at South Riverside Community Development Centre and Duffryn Community Links. People meet regularly with some participants responsible for organising the group. After harvesting the produce, the group share in cooking a group meal.*

All projects addressed the diverse needs of participants, by offering parenting groups, organising family fun days as well as groups to help participants with job searches, application forms and providing advice for access to other service providers.

3.1.7 Work with partners and advocacy

Individual partner organisations and the project collectively have played an advocacy role in bringing to wider attention the challenging livelihoods of individuals in communities across Wales. For example, in Glyncoch, by using the SLA, unfair treatment by the Work Programme was unearthed. Case studies were then formed and were submitted as evidence to the Welsh Select Committee.

Oxfam Cymru is delivering a training pilot for the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) personnel, training staff located across Wales to use the SLA toolkit within their work. The pilot originated from feedback collected from the Livelihoods groups proposing suggestions to improve participants’ communications and dealings with the DWP. As a result, the SLA provides the opportunity for DWP personnel to explore ‘stepping into someone else’s

shoes' and uses 'real life case studies' to develop a better understanding of the situations individuals face. Oxfam Cymru also attends DWP strategic board meetings.

Project workers also shared the SLA with other stakeholders, with one project worker suggesting the potential of taking the toolkit into schools for children who have difficulties.

3.2 Numbers engaged

Over 1,000 beneficiaries received support across the nine areas. As shown in table 2.2 slightly fewer beneficiaries than anticipated received intensive support, due in the most part to their preferences: many participants tended to dip in and out of the project's support rather than engaging on a linear basis. They sometimes engaged to deal with a specific pressing issue, such as a job loss, sanctioning, reduction in benefits or other immediate crisis situations. This higher than anticipated demand for non-intensive support affected the numbers achieved in other target areas, with fewer participants worked with intensively than anticipated, and therefore fewer than anticipated reporting gaining new skills and confidence, or measurably improved livelihoods. Other targets, particularly those relating to greater community involvement and access to services, were not affected by this, and were actually exceeded.

3.3 Success factors

The feedback received during the evaluation interviews was universally positive. The following provides feedback on the project activities from participants, project workers and others involved in delivering elements of the projects.

3.3.1 Engagement

Reasons for engagement with the Livelihoods project varied. In some instances individuals were referred via the probation or social services, job clubs or directly from Jobcentre Plus, via their child's school or they had discovered the group online. For others it was a recommendation by 'word of mouth' in the community or as a result of previous engagement with activities delivered at the partner organisation.

This varied nature – and levels – of engagement enabled the project to help those that fall between the cracks of other existing services and to work well with other services. Indeed, the SLA approach can add significant value to the other existing services and initiatives to not only help those that miss out on existing services but to also create a meaningful dialogue to better support those that don't: the SLA can act as a two way information resource to better support the beneficiary and better inform the service provider.

Mini case study 5

Helping those that fall between the cracks, Duffryn Infant School

The nurture group at Duffryn Infant School works with 12 of the most vulnerable children

in the school and as such works with 12 of the most vulnerable families. The nurture group teacher explained how the link with the Oxfam Livelihood Role enables her to signpost to support agencies, to better understand a child's background and to support the families.

As a result of working with the Livelihoods workers she has been able to,

- *Involve parents in all aspects of school life*
- *Become a more trusted teacher*
- *Enable parents to feel comfortable to come into school and share their problems/ask for help*
- *Help build resilience in families*
- *Model appropriate relationships to children,*
- *and given parents and families the ability to sustain their own livelihoods- jobs, courses, community activities*

The teacher explained how the link with Livelihoods works in practice:

- *Incident Day 1: A parent comes to the door, crying, shaking and distressed. Has just been verbally assaulted by a neighbour and threatened with physical violence in front of the children.*
- *Step 1: Invite parent into school, teaching assistant takes the child and younger brother to have breakfast.*
- *Step 2: Oxfam Livelihoods worker (project worker) contacted, on site within the hour. Takes parent to Forest Family Centre for a cup of tea and to talk about the incident.*
- *Step 3: Newport City Homes contacted by the project worker, mediator to be sent out this week.*
- *Step 4: Awaiting mediator, project worker is to attend the flat and talk to the neighbours to calm the situation.*
- *Step 5: An agreement was made to keep the living conditions calm and civil.*
- *Step 6: Letters of application written by school and project worker to move family from their home. Meanwhile parent referred to mental health team for assessment and counselling, put on Nurturing parent course and assisted with routines for children at home.*
- *Step 7 Success. Family moved, settled in their new house. Parent receiving regular support. Children happier.*

Source: Adapted from the presentation given at the end of Project event

3.3.2 Personalised approach

All participants recognised the value of the one-to-one support and guidance they had received, acknowledging the benefits of a focused personalised approach. The nature of the support varied depending on individual circumstances, for example support to solve problems with tax credit underpayments, searching for relevant training courses, chatting over a coffee and supporting a family with a local day trip. The advocacy role of the project worker was recognised and valued by participants as they valued them speaking up for people: "it is essential for people like [the project worker] to be there to speak up for people".

Example: Feedback from participants

“If it wasn’t for [the project worker] I wouldn’t have any self-purpose, don’t know where I’d be. [The project worker] is my rock, she knows me, and everything was falling apart until I met her.”

“[The project worker] gives me an excuse to go out, and because she helped me I am helping others.”

With other agencies “you are just a number, part of a system”; with Livelihoods the relationship has time to develop, there are mental health benefits – us coming together, companionship and importantly “not having people judge you, it’s open to all, your voice is heard”.

Before joining “I was alone, very nervous” and at home with “too much to worry about”.

3.3.3 Flexibility

The flexibility of the project in allowing for participants to influence the nature of activities was also welcomed by all those consulted as the participants themselves, and workers, determined the activities according to local requirements. There was no set agenda and no particular restrictions as to timing or number of hours. For instance, at one project, an exercise class was proposed, at another a trip away for participants, while another offered more certified courses at the request of the participants. The importance of being able to complete training courses and receive certificates was also raised by participants: “they will help for the future”. The importance of acquiring English language skills was raised by participants at the African Community Centre, Swansea, with communication noted as key as they wanted to settle in Wales.

This flexibility in the delivery was accompanied with a flexibility of funding and project workers explained how they were far freer to fund activities (such as trips, training, travel costs) than compared to other projects delivered in their locality

Mini case study 6

Funding freedom

Rhys was in his late 50s, living in the Valleys. He'd lost his job as a security guard when the firm went bust four years before and become long-term unemployed. He'd resigned himself to living frugally, allowing himself only £17 per week for food. He was referred to the Livelihoods project by a job centre worker as he had lost all his confidence. The first thing the Livelihoods worker did was start to rebuild this confidence by giving him 1-1 support to improve his employability skills (e.g. on interview techniques). As a result, he went for an interview, and then got successfully offered a job. Because the job was far away though, and the shifts at unsociable hours, he initially had to turn it down as public

transport wouldn't have been able to get him there. The Livelihoods worker again stepped in, organising a loan from Rhys' sister to buy an old car, funding the insurance for the car from her own budget and getting the job centre to agree to pay his petrol costs for an initial period of time. The worker also helped him access a foodbank to tide him over the gap between his benefits stopping and his first pay cheque arriving. Rhys has been in full-time work ever since, and as a result of the experience from the initial job far away, has now been able to find job with better hours closer to home, so he no longer needs any support or help with his travel costs at all. As he puts it, "I became fed up with never having any money and staying in. I can now buy some new clothes and go for a coffee with a friend. I'm not asking for much, am I?"

Source: Case study provided by project to Oxfam

3.3.4 Peer mentoring

Peer mentoring has meant participants have acquired new skills. At one group the success of the peer mentoring course resulted in the development of a women's chat group. For others completing the training "improved confidence" and provided them with the skills to help others in the community. For some the peer mentor training led on to other courses such as mindfulness and even employment.

3.3.5 Volunteering

The volunteering that some participants completed also benefitted their well-being and confidence. In some instances participants volunteered with project activity delivery, such as teaching English, with one participant noting that it "feels good, love being busy – so being busy helps me feel better". Another participant noted that volunteering in a couple of charity shops had helped improve their confidence and as a result positively impacted on the rest of the family –"if my son is happy, I'm happy". Participants also compared the changes that their involvement in the project activities had meant, with one reflecting that before she had attended the group she was "tied to the house" with "shopping the highlight of the week".

Feedback from participants

“I’ve gained confidence and skills, and I’ve done more in my forties than I’ve done in the rest of my life.”

“We have had a lot of opportunities through the project that we didn’t know existed [...] we do something in the community three or four times a week.”

“I’ve been on the estate for 30 years and done more in the past two years than in the rest of my life.”

“Our livelihoods project goes above and beyond the group.”

3.3.6 Livelihoods Workers

The project was delivered by project staff, generally appointed to work three days a week, and managed by the organisation in which they were located. The importance of the flexibility of the project was highlighted by all those consulted, as they reflected upon the importance of being able to adapt to an individual’s needs and circumstances and tailoring the support needed. For some participants this was intensive support over a number of sessions, whereas for others it may have involved signposting to another agency. These referrals were viewed as successful as according to one project worker “each agency does something others can’t do”.

The one-to-one support and guidance “helps to understand the issues beyond the surface”. However, it was noted by project workers that the time required to provide this support effectively meant that fewer people could be seen. The opportunities provided by the Livelihoods project have meant that organisations have been able to work with new people, those not ready to “sit in a class or join a group”. Several of the workers commented that the level and type of support required “could have easily taken up a whole week”. Despite this workload, up until the final three months of the project the project had 100% retention with its project workers.

3.3.7 Partners

The project worked in collaboration with other partners, and the rigidity of other services’ funding compared to the flexibility of the Livelihoods project meant that the Project often funded the solution to the participant’s livelihoods problems that other agencies could not, resulting in successful returns to work. In some instances there was a more formalised working relationship with referrals working between the Livelihoods project and Jobcentre Plus for example. At other times the relationship developed as a result of sourcing support for individuals or organising activities. For example volunteers supporting activities noted that their involvement had positively impacted upon their sense of well-being, with friendships developing across the group: “it changed my life, somewhere to go and meet other people”.

The demand for courses and training was sometimes difficult to fulfil as some providers required a minimum number of participants and in some instances this was difficult to achieve. The flexibility of the Livelihoods project meant that access to all could be provided and “it is a shame more projects are not like it [...] the Government are very caught up on the postcode”, and this doesn’t always reflect the needs of an individual or family.

Mini case study 7

Flexible funding

Joe had been out of work for nearly two years, a machinery licence needed renewing. The job centre was unable to fund the renewal, protective clothing or the bus fare needed for the one day course. Livelihoods funded the course and equipment (approximately £220 in total). Joe passed the course “with flying colours, gained a job and is still in full time employment”.

4. Impact

This section focuses on the difference that the Livelihoods Project made. Each of the intended outcomes set out in section 2.1 are considered in turn. The section draws on the evidence presented in earlier chapters of this report and as such the evidence is drawn from participants and staff.

4.1 Intended Outcomes

The Livelihoods Project set out four intended outcomes, this section considers each in turn.

- Project Outcome 1: Marginalised people will develop skills and build confidence to improve their livelihoods and life chances.
- Project Outcome 2: Marginalised people from different backgrounds will be more involved in community activities.
- Project Outcome 3: Community groups will have a better understanding of the needs of different people & groups in their neighbourhoods and how to meet them.
- Project Outcome 4: Marginalised people will say that they receive more and better services that meet their needs.

All beneficiaries, staff and other service providers interviewed as part of this evaluation were very positive about the impacts on those who had been supported, especially in terms of helping those who would not otherwise be able or willing to engage with a more formal programme of advice or training. The evidence shows that the flexible, intensive SLA support makes a difference to the projects' clients and that the assets-based approach is one that enables workers to work meaningfully with the participants in order to improve their livelihoods and life chances

4.2 Project Outcome 1: Marginalised people will develop skills and build confidence to improve their livelihoods and life chances.

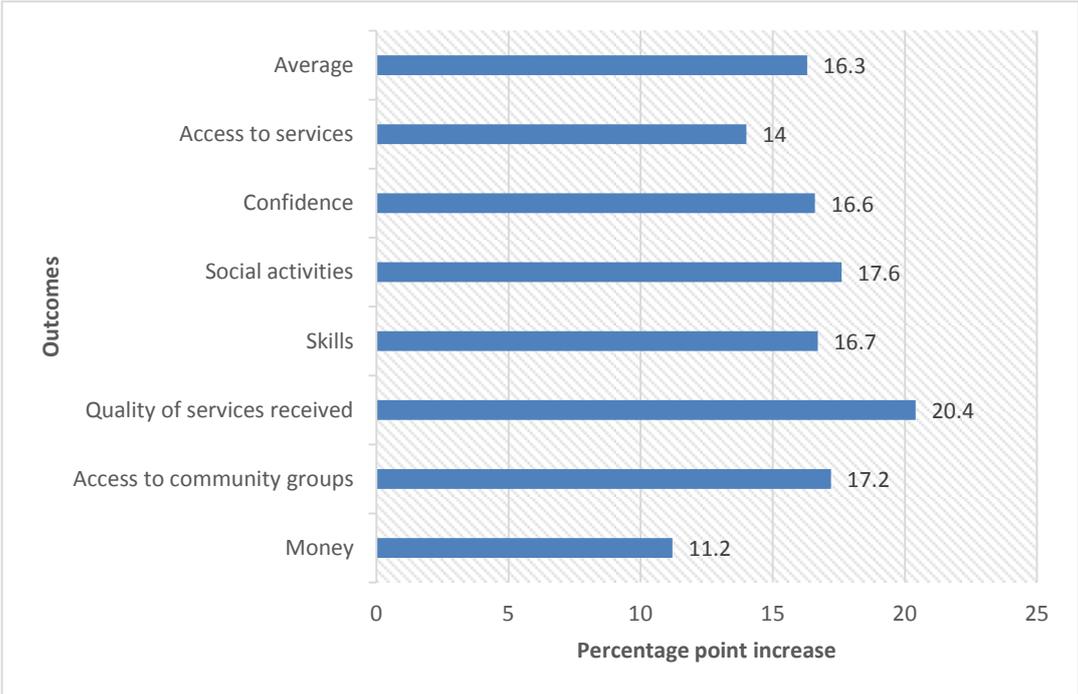
All participants and workers interviewed believed that there had been many and varied opportunities to develop skills. In many cases the types of impact included 'hard' outcomes, such as skills improved through certified training (for example manual handling, first aid and several others in Wrexham and entrepreneurship skills in Glyncoch), but also those 'softer' impacts relating to raised confidence and career aspirations amongst participants.

There was also recognition that, in many cases, the Livelihoods support had acted as the very first step towards obtaining employment,

Everyone knows they are welcome at the Job Club, 'it is very different to the library job club – have to be quiet there' it is not strict, 'ours is tea and biscuits and a cake if there is a birthday, the door is always open, people are approachable, not stand-offish'. (Cardiff focus group)

The rationale of Livelihoods is that life chances are improved if people are supported intensively and that their lives are considered in the round. Quantitative evidence (in the form of pre and post questionnaires) collected by the project suggests that this was the case for a significant number of participants, with an average improvement in terms of livelihood sustainability of 16.3 per cent across all participants. Figure 4.1 presents percentage point improvements for the different outcomes since involvement in the project for participants across the nine partner projects, demonstrating that the biggest reported increase was in the quality of services received.

Figure 4.1. Outcomes for the Livelihoods Project participants.



Source: Oxfam Cymru’s Building Livelihoods and Strengthening Communities Baseline Questionnaire data.

Qualitative evidence collected by the project and in consultations for this evaluation also suggests that livelihoods were improved. At the same time, however, caution should still be employed when drawing project-wide conclusions for several reasons, including that changes in livelihood sustainability may not be seen within a relatively short period of time. Participants also often did not actively ‘enrol’ on the Livelihoods project with a definite view to improving their livelihoods, but instead, because they had a specific problem that needed an urgent solution. Some participants also struggled to articulate or reflect on how their lives had changed.

Nevertheless participants and staff identified several outcomes such as the project improving the motivation and enthusiasm of their participants and participants developing several new skills including job searching, interview skills, communication skills, and dealing with professionals.

When combined with practical support (e.g. arranging and/or covering the costs of transport, arranging training, access to a computer and training in IT) the overall support had the effect of helping break down whatever barrier participants had in taking part more fully in their community or in training or employment.

Some of the workers interviewed noted that it was too early to see the full extent of the Livelihoods Project's impacts on participants, in the form of progression into employment or a new role, or a lessened vulnerability to crises etc. However, interviewees were clear that they perceived 'softer' impacts, such as improved confidence, better time-keeping, more knowledge about job searching, or a wider circle of friends, as prerequisites, to some of the more concrete indicators of improved life chances. It allowed projects to 'work with people who we weren't working with – people who weren't ready to sit in a class every week or who had more entrenched mental health issues' (Cardiff consultation). This suggests that there is synergy between the various types of impact, for instance, a participant may have been supported into an employment or training opportunity, but often this would be accompanied by increases in confidence or higher self-esteem generally, increased awareness of where to go for help should problems arise, better time-keeping, and a network of others to share experiences. In the shorter term there were more immediate and apparent impact on livelihoods, when the worker was able to support participants at a time of crisis. Several of the projects explained that their participants were being sanctioned (payments being reduced or stopped) by the job centre for not searching for work or being unable to travel to an appointment and yet did not have the skills nor the resources to resolve this. The project was able to support them in using IT and help them carry out job searches and with practical skills.

4.3 Project Outcome 2: Marginalised people from different backgrounds will be more involved in community activities.

All local projects have addressed involvement in community activities in their different ways with examples ranging from parents being supported to establish and run a toddler group, family fun days, opportunities to visit places they would not have otherwise have done, support to attend tenants meetings; starting a running club, starting a cinema club for an area's older people and establishing and running a women's chat group.

All of the local projects offered one-to-one sessions which in several cases led to participation in group sessions. These group sessions in turn were a first step towards a greater involvement in community activities. Furthermore, with the help of the Livelihoods Project's support, addressing a seemingly small yet crucial issue then released the participant's' time and effort (in practical and emotional terms) to address other home and life issues.

In a sense the new groups created were a community in itself, with a Foryd Centre participant explaining that the 'best thing' about the project was that it had 'created a community that supports each other, can talk to each other'. All projects had arranged trips for participants and these succeeded in broadening horizons. The Cardiff group for example

explained that a trip to the seaside at Barry Island broke down cultural barriers, and for some participants the trip was their first visit there even though they had lived in Cardiff for several years, and for some it was their first time using public transport, and they 'wouldn't have gone unless organised'.

In Wrexham the group celebrated the creation of a recipe booklet with a trip to a Chinese restaurant – for most of the participants it was their first experience of such a restaurant, as they 'don't go into town really so that was something new'. Another participant would not have been able to eat in front of others at the start of the project but was able to join in. In Wrexham too, one of the participants explained how the sessions and group work on a food theme had led her to 'volunteer to help others now' and was involved in a community garden and food cooperative.

The intended outcome of involvement in community activities was not as easy for all projects however. Sylfaen in Caernarfon targeted young people and found that opportunities for community activities for this age group were limited. Nevertheless the project hosted summer activity days for the young people and in a broader sense, the greater involvement of some of their young participants in college or other training could be viewed as a community activity.

4.4 Project Outcome 3: Community groups will have a better understanding of the needs of different people and groups in their neighbourhoods and how to meet them.

Many of the partner organisations delivering the Livelihoods project built on work which was already being delivered and which had already proved to be effective locally (and had been delivering under the previous Wales Livelihoods project). All projects were delivered by organisations working at the heart of their communities and the projects provided evidence to show that their delivery of Livelihoods deepened their understanding of the needs of people in their community. Workers explained how Livelihoods 'allowed us to work with people who we weren't working with previously', which in turn enabled projects to build relationships and 'make inroads to other parts of the community'.

The role of the peer mentors in particular was influential here, with the projects gaining information from the mentors to help shape the design and delivery of the Livelihoods project and the organisation as a whole. One group further explained how Livelihoods had contributed to organisational learning, and that their experience of Livelihoods and working with people flexibly, intensively and using an assets-based approach influenced what kind of funding they would apply for in the future.

Projects were also tasked with working with other organisations and agencies to help them understand the needs of their clients. The projects approached this in their own way, with Sylfaen for example bringing service providers together to create an ongoing local partnership, that met quarterly and Riverside hosting a training event (designed by their peer mentors) for large employers to better understand how they could widen access and better engage with their local community.

A couple of the Livelihoods workers observed that although they had shared the SLA with colleagues in other organisations there was a limit to how far workers in other organisations could take on board any elements of the approach as they tended to have larger caseloads, less time with participants and specific targets to meet.

4.5 Project Outcome 4: Marginalised people will say that they receive more and better services that meet their needs.

The individual projects collected monitoring data and demonstrated that 489 participants accessed more or better services and attributed this to the project (slightly above the target – see table 2.2). Data collected by the nine projects in baseline and follow-up questionnaires demonstrated that the biggest change in livelihoods reported by beneficiaries since starting with the project was a change in the quality of services received (see figure 4.1).

The SLA is a good conduit for the improvement of services, as explained by one participant,

With other agencies 'you are just a number, part of a system' with Livelihoods the relationship has time to develop, there are mental health benefits, as coming together, companionship and importantly 'not having people judge you, it's open to all, your voice is heard'. (Cardiff focus group)

One result of intensive support was a diversity of referrals to the projects and a raised awareness by participants of the range of support available to them. Links were made with Jobcentre Plus, the Home Office, colleges, the local council and others. The links with other service providers and the models of partnership working varied from area to area, reflecting the bespoke and locally-distinctive nature of the Livelihoods Project.

Another successful outcome for the project was obtaining external funding for further activities, such as the Knit & Natter group in Ebbw Vale, or Tiny Tiddlers and Games Night in Glyncoch. This has led to new initiatives to become embedded in the community and independently from the project.

5. Conclusions

Findings from this evaluation are encouraging, with participants, staff and wider partners extremely positive in their views concerning the delivery of the Livelihoods Project. A key strength of the project, contributors suggest, has been the flexibility and the way in which it has been able to intensively support in whatever way needed while taking into full account participants assets and circumstances.

Quantitative evidence of impact is also available, though it can only be early indications in a project of this nature where the effects may only be realised or become apparent over time as changes to livelihoods become embedded. Nevertheless, the evaluation has found evidence that participants report feeling less isolated, more engaged and have become more resilient.

5.1 Summary of findings

The SLA has proved a suitable tool in providing structure to determine actions needed to improve individual livelihoods. The toolkit provided project workers with a manageable approach to identify individual's assets and assist them in finding solutions. In some instances project workers used the tool kit in paper form, but the flexibility of the approach meant they applied the tools during discussions easily too.

The flexibility of the SLA as a toolkit and approach, and being able to adapt and apply it as appropriate, supporting participants intensively at some times, and non-intensively at others according to their needs, is one of its key strengths.

It can take time for project workers to establish a relationship with the local community so this needs to be built into any planned interventions or projects. Participants needed time to trust project workers as a result of being 'let down' in the past by different agencies and initially viewing the project as social services. SLA project workers provide a strong and important link between the many different agencies that individuals access for support; they can be the "friend that knows stuff", especially in relation to how services work, that marginalised people often lack in their support networks.

Supporting project participants via one-to-one personalised guidance and support resulted in improvements in well-being and confidence and the sustainability of their livelihoods. Project workers supported participants to determine appropriate training courses and referrals to other agencies needed. This resulted in the facilitation of a variety of training provision from certified courses to more workshop based experiences.

The flexibility of individualised support has been a major factor in the success of the project; despite being very time intensive for project workers to offer, this type of support is crucial for any project seeking to address the livelihoods issues of marginalised people. Project workers were generally employed for three days a week working with a small number of

beneficiaries due to the intensive nature requiring extended periods of their time. However, in some instances support required was minimal and once an individual had been signposted to the relevant agency they no longer required support. Access to appropriate transport and the provision of accredited training courses is crucial for people as they aim to improve their situation and move into work.

Peer mentor training resulted in increased confidence and development of skills benefiting not just the individual but the wider community as well. Trained peer mentors supported the delivery of the project for some organisations, the skills acquired meant individuals were confident to support others via activities such as Job Clubs. They also applied the skills within their communities, supporting individuals and signposting others to relevant service providers.

Working with other partner organisations such as Jobcentre Plus and Communities First enabled project workers to signpost participants to appropriate support, but many marginalised individuals require more than signposting, for example, needing workers to actually accompany them to meetings and appointments if that signposting is to succeed. Referrals to the Livelihood project from other agencies also meant individuals were able to receive personalised support other agencies were unable to deliver. Project workers often acted as advocates and provided participants with the knowledge and confidence to improve their situation.

Networking between the partner organisations across Wales has strengthened project delivery, and the regular all-Wales meetings enabled learning and good practice to be shared between workers and participants.

5.2 Recommendations

The research has highlighted a number of benefits of using a range of SLA methods and tools to engage and work with marginalised people. It has been a valuable tool.

Recommendation 1: The SLA should continue to be disseminated to service providers and adopted as a method for empowering individuals to secure a more sustainable livelihood; there is also potential for it to be used more widely, for example with schools and young people.

While many projects were able to build on existing partnership, the project has helped reinforce and advance links between partners tackling poverty in local areas. Many projects explained that there was potentially a high demand for the type of support provided (and the limit on their numbers was one of capacity not demand).

Recommendation 2: It is important to continue to improve the livelihoods of those in marginalised communities through utilising a holistic approach to their situation. A key strength of the SLA is that by working holistically it uncovers the real issue or issues, not just the most obvious surface problem.

Recommendation 3: Funders need to recognise the significance of flexible funding arrangements when seeking to improve the livelihoods of individuals in marginalised communities. Assets-based analyses of marginalised people's problems are only of value if accompanied by creative, assets-based solutions, as those problems rarely fit neatly into the one thematic area (be it housing, training, employment, debt, substance misuse or any other area), which is usually what any particular service for marginalised people can help with.

The success of, and continued need for, a source of intensive, flexible bespoke support has raised the question of how partners and other funders can most effectively prioritise provision.

Recommendation 4: Minimum participation numbers required by some learning providers to deliver in isolated areas could be more flexible if opportunities are to improve for those living there. For projects to be truly accessible, an 'outreach' element should be included for those communities lacking adequate transport options.

Recommendation 5: Projects supporting marginalised groups should strive to secure continuation funding for SLA-based work, as without this vulnerable people are left without support; there are no other projects that combine an assets-based approach with the ability to also provide bespoke, assets-based solutions and the kind of personal support, up to and including the 'handholding' often needed for marginalised people to be able to begin to implement and access those solutions for themselves.

The variety of activities delivered through the Livelihoods Project, tailored to address individual assets and needs, has been seen as a success factor. Projects were designed in such a way as to enable lighter touch or more intensive support as required.

Recommendation 6: Oxfam should disseminate learning from the project as widely as possible, so that providers can ensure that any future interventions aimed at addressing the needs of marginalised people identify and respond to those needs in a flexible and holistic manner, providing more intensive and bespoke provision where required.

Annex 1: Methodology

The methodology applied included desk research of Oxfam documentation, the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach documentation and project monitoring reports. Fieldwork involved one-to-one interviews and focus groups with project participants in the nine project areas and consultations with project staff.

The focus groups and interviews were structured around a number of topics such as participants' motivations for becoming involved in the project; the types of support and activities and what has changed since taking part. The interviews with project workers focused on the activities delivered, their impacts on individuals and the local community, and potential sustainability of activities. Others consulted included two Oxfam Cymru representatives, other workers at partner centres and other agencies involved with supporting project activities and volunteers. A summary of those interviewed for each of the partner organisation is listed below.

Project	Project worker/s	Participants
African Community Centre (Swansea)	1	6 (3 male and 3 female)
Caia Park Partnership (Wrexham)	2 (current and former)	7 (3 female, 4 male as a group); 1 male individually.
DOVE Workshop (Banwen, Neath)	1	5 (4 male, 1 female)
Denbighshire Voluntary Services Council (with the Foryd Centre, Rhyl)	1	6 (1 male and 5 female)
Duffryn Community Link (Newport)	2 (job-share)	10 (all female)
Glyncoch Community Regeneration (Pontypridd)	2 (current and former)	3 (2 female, 1 male)
South Riverside Community Development Centre (Cardiff)	1	6 (1 male and 5 female)
Sylfaen Cymunedol Cyfyngedig (Caernarfon)	1	2 male and 1 female parent.
The Wallich (Ebbw Vale)	1	3 (1 male and 2 female)