

BUILDING LIVELIHOODS AND STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES IN WALES

FINAL REPORT: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



ARIENNIR GAN Y LOTERI
LOTTERY FUNDED



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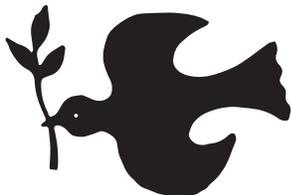
OXFAM

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Building Livelihoods and Strengthening Communities in Wales project (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 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).

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.



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 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



Table 1: Key targets and achievements of the Livelihoods Project

Project activity/ outcome	Target	Number achieved*
Beneficiaries receiving intensive support	527	492
Beneficiaries receiving other support	345	625
Beneficiaries reporting new skills and confidence	1091	624
Beneficiaries more involved in community activities	344	637
Beneficiaries accessing more/better services	460	477
Beneficiaries who have measurably improved their livelihood	575	303
Peer mentors trained	114	110
Beneficiaries gaining paid employment	n/a	90

**up to December 2015 – end of project figures will be available once all formal project activity has ceased in March 2016.*

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 that 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

"I enjoy it [the course], there's a good crew of people there. I know more people now."

Project participant, having been supported to attend a part-time literacy course

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.

"It's a weight off my mind to share with people and they may think of things I haven't."

"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". The worker added that "we are more recognised in the community – as being able to help."

Participant Focus Group

Wider impacts of the project included:

- Volunteers from the local community supporting the project reporting improvements in their well-being.
- 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 from the project.

The 'knit and natter group' [is] now supported by the Big Lottery, Halifax and Sainsbury's.

Project Volunteer

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.

