

# Community-led Transformation Programme report



Spring 2022

# Executive Summary



# The challenge

Wales has a strong history of community action - a tradition that's been thrown into sharp relief in recent times, first with the floods then the global pandemic. Both have made clear the capacity of people and communities in Wales to rise to unprecedented challenges. In this context, WCVA and voluntary sector leaders came together with People Powered Results to work with community groups to explore:

**How voluntary organisations and statutory services can support communities to develop capacity to respond to challenges and opportunities to build a fairer, greener, healthier future.**

This question reflects the recommendations of the Third Sector Partnership Council (TSPC) Recovery Sub-Group on the need to actively engage communities in building the future.

A **transformation programme** focussed on practical action was launched in June 2021 to investigate it using WCVA research, TSPC Recovery sub-group recommendations and sector expertise. It aimed to support local teams to:

- explore how they work with voluntary organisations and public services
- generate learning to inform future policy to empower communities
- consider how to embed support for community participation into government thinking

# Programme outline

The programme set-up a **National Leadership Group** (NLG) with policy-makers, voluntary leaders and pioneers of change. They created a **learning agenda** for place-based teams to explore along with coaching from PPR.



Three local teams, picked by open call, explored the agenda through **4 key questions** that reflected challenges and opportunities facing community action:

- **How can communities develop their activities post-Covid-19?**
- **What does it take to build relationships that share power to put communities 'in the driving seat'?**
- **How can everyone participate in and benefit from community action?**
- **How can a shared understanding of the value of community action develop?**

With PPR support, the very different teams examined their own aims and reflected on what they thought would help community action thrive. Each **team** had a unique perspective:

- **Credu in Powys** worked with carers to co-design innovative care
- **Llanrhian in Pembrokeshire** aimed to connect diverse communities
- **Cwmbwrla in Swansea** met local needs by organising events and activities

# What we learned...

**We learned that to create strong, vibrant communities, with capacity to develop their own vision of a fairer, healthier, greener future, policy-makers and funders need to recognise how local groups can:**

- unite a wide range of people, with skills and ambitions
- work across sectors and boundaries
- prioritise the things that matter to people
- build strength, connection and wellbeing locally

**We learned that the challenges limiting community-led potential, include:**

- groups loosely connected structures that can be agile in a crisis but hampers strategic planning and collaboration with larger organisations longer-term
- the lack of resource, space or time to reflect on or evaluate their activities or agree a future vision, especially where the members have competing aims and ambitions
- the lack of trusted, effective relationships with service providers and policy-makers to give groups the confidence and means to act on local priorities

# Next steps

There is currently energy around empowering communities. The question for organisations working with local groups is **what support do they need to do more of what matters?**

Programme teams identified as vital the need for voluntary and statutory partners to create trusting relationships that empower action and co-production by listening to local groups. This reflects themes identified by TSPC Recovery sub-groups, while the diversity of programme teams underlined TSPC observations on the need to develop new relationships that reflect how volunteering is changing.

**Practical ways to ensure community-led groups are heard and develop powerful relationships include:**

- coaching, training and creation of safe spaces where groups can explore local priorities and work collaboratively with larger organisation without feeling excluded or unheard
- devolving power to communities through structures that work from the ground-up to create dynamic connections between people, places and decision-makers
- using collective imagination to upskill communities and help them reimagine their future
- prioritising innovative ways to support participation that reflects community priorities through grants and resourcing for local activity, evaluated on engagement

*See slide 7 for breakdown of next steps by sector*

# Community-led groups need recognition and practical support from all sectors to thrive

## Voluntary sector

**PROVIDE RESOURCES** inc. coaching, training, space for visioning, and help to plan collaborative working.

**PRIORITISE MENTOR SUPPORT** for groups, help them stay informed and connect with policy.

**PROMOTE THE VALUES** of community-led action.

## Funders

**PROVIDE UNRESTRICTED FUNDING** for local priorities building on learning from Covid.

**PRIORITISE STRATEGIES TO CUT RED TAPE** - evaluate impact creatively.

**PROMOTE LISTENING** that supports local priorities and future vision.

## Statutory services

**PROVIDE INFORMATION** and connections so groups can develop trusted local relationships.

**PRIORITISE CO-DESIGN** with community groups.

**PROMOTE** listening to learn from active community-led groups.

## Policy makers

**PROVIDE SUPPORT** that puts community-led action first.

**PRIORITISE POLICY** for community-led action

**PROMOTE COLLABORATION** and challenge top down strategies and structures.

# What people said...

From the start, participants worked with the programme to test their insights. What's emerged is a practical reflection on how to support change..... Here are some reflections from teams and NLG

If we can empower communities to take more control of their lives things will change. Listening has made us realise the potential we all have  
*(NLG member)*

We need to work on the intractable issues of our time: housing, environment and community wellbeing

Trust is fundamental. Building trust is vital, but it's so hard. Listening to people is what builds trust.

We need to trust people to do what's important, building from the ground-up and offer community-led groups some unconditional support  
*(NLG member)*

Community groups often feel voluntary and statutory organisations make demands that feel like a burden

How public services interact, or fail to, can be a barrier to participative local communities. There is power in communities, but the barriers are hard to overcome

Communities have enormous capacity to take action but relationships needs to be there

# How the programme worked:



Teams reflected on their local activities through the lens of the learning questions set by the National Leadership Group.

This generated insights for WCVA, Welsh Government and the NLG. All participants considered how future policy can help community groups meet Wales' broader vision of a fairer, greener, healthier future.

**The next slide visualises the way the learning flowed and informed the programme to create an agenda for change.**

# Supporting change: local and national

## Llanrhian: Connecting rural communities

Increase engagement and belonging of community members living in Llanrhian

## Credu: Understanding the care economy

Strengthen informal care sector through the insights and skills of carers in Powys

## Cwmbwrla: Understanding what's worked

Take stock of work and build on the community action facilitated during the pandemic



Insights from the teams feed into the four learning questions set with the NLG members

This learning feeds into rethinking how the system supports community activity...

### Supporting co design and collaboration

- Build priorities locally to progress in next few years to create impactful change

### Shifting policy

- Focusing on ways of working with active communities to increase capacity to work with others on local and strategic priorities

To meet the vision of...



a fairer, greener, healthier future

# Looking at the learning agenda...

The following slides examine each of the four questions set by the learning agenda from the point of view of programme participants - see the full report for more detail - the learning is summarised below:

**Volunteering:** Groups identified a need for greater recognition of and support for community-led action at all levels with voluntary and statutory organisations supporting wider participation.

**Support:** The impact of community-led action is often 'invisible', as "not everything important is measurable, and not everything measurable is important". Community-led groups need support to reflect on their impact. Voluntary organisations are uniquely placed to support groups, while funders can find new models that reflect local needs and what matters to community-led groups.

**Relationships:** Community-led groups describe developing relationships 'at the pace of trust'. There needs to be greater understanding of the importance of trusting relationships where groups feel heard. Teams and the NLG also noted they often feel forced to fit in with priorities set by funders and policy-makers. This rarely fits with their own understanding of local priorities and can divert them from meeting local need. Recognising the unique relationship groups have with their community and providing practical support will enable them to do more to boost recovery.

## 1. How can communities **adapt, maintain and sustain** their efforts and infrastructure **post-covid**?

Community groups often grow out of a crisis. They may not last beyond the immediate need, but Covid has shown their potential. Where they can adapt and sustain, groups have the local knowledge and connections that can create change. They are often time and resource poor and struggle to find consistent funding because they do not conform to traditional volunteering models. But the programme has shown their energy is empowering and they can co-produce approaches that boost wellbeing. The teams and the NLG identified potential for further collaboration to help local groups adapt and sustain their efforts.

### **Culture/ principles: an example**

Teams valued being open to new ideas. The Credu team worked with a member to start an informal club. It wasn't part of the plan, but they had the skills and the club boosted local connection and wellbeing.

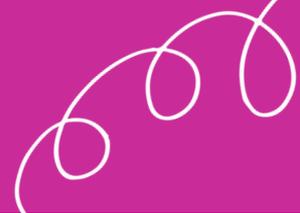
Openness is key to sustainability. It attracts new people, generates energy and can help underpin public services. NLG members felt this open spirit was an essential element of effective local action.

**Next steps:** Consider how County Voluntary Councils, statutory partners etc can help groups develop their own strategy, by:

- mapping community activity to identify and connect local groups
- providing support locally for community groups to connect across sectors with the more structured voluntary, third and statutory services
- enabling community groups, including informal groups without legal structures, to access flexible, "no-strings-attached" funding and organisational support (back office function, training etc.) to respond to opportunity and challenge
- creating space for community groups to consider the impact of their interventions on local communities and how to sustain or pivot activities
- promoting greater appreciation of the unique value of local groups

**Key learning:** Support groups with practical help that enables them to stay open and responsive to local needs

## 2. What does it take to build **collaborative relationships across sectors that share, create and release power** - putting people 'in the driving seat'?



Programme teams rely on trusted relationships, forged through repeated positive experiences. These relationships often link cross-sector partners, including public and voluntary organisations. They are often characterised as contrasting to those with 'officialdom', which are seen as process-driven, prescriptive and "deaf" to local voices. These powerful relationships were described by programme teams as being built "at the pace of trust".

### **Culture/ principles:**

- Think about how to create the conditions for open conversations
- Start from a place that recognises everyone has a stake in building resilience as we all live in communities
- Recognise the fact that all stakeholders share values

### **Next steps:**

Examine how existing structures for example CVCs or local government can work with community-led teams to develop effective relationships that:

- provide unrestricted support for groups to consider their strategy for resilience
- enable information to flow between public, voluntary services & local groups
- provide space for community groups & public services to reflect on local data and consider joint activities
- create space for community groups to develop dynamic relationships with partners that recognises the need to address inherent power imbalances and identify opportunities for joint action
- explore place-based models with a focus on building shared understanding

**Key learning:** Teams valued trusted relationships that built confidence. They felt consistent support like that provided by this programme would help them explore challenges and plan for the future. Voluntary and statutory partners can create space to boost capacity, build partnerships and create a shared understanding of community action. Support can include coaching and other levers for change such as unrestricted funding, governance or comms support.

### 3. How can **everyone in communities** access, contribute to, participate in and benefit from community action?

All the programme teams ran activities with little regular funding. They relied on other partners, for example, working with a local area coordinator to organise day-to-day running or provide meeting spaces. Where relationships are weak, groups lack capacity. This can limit access, especially to people who are less likely to take up traditional volunteer roles. Community-led groups attract people who don't identify as volunteers but will take part in community activities.

#### **Culture/ principles**

- Respect people's willingness to get involved on their terms
- Pushing too hard can hamper progress - focus on building relationships through listening
- Prioritise activities that engage communities over interventions that have explicit strategic goals

**Next steps:** Consider how voluntary and statutory partners can work with Welsh Government to support groups to grow by:

- prioritising support for groups through existing roles like local area coordinators
- considering the potential for unrestricted funding for hyper local activities that boost participation
- promoting activities through existing voluntary and statutory networks to build confidence in local action
- adding capacity to groups through training in key skills to open-up access and participation
- thinking about the need for community spaces to bring people together
- recognising that diversity needs a variety of opportunities and activities, beyond those that currently attract funding.

**Key learning:** Groups often engage widely despite limited resources and capacity. For community action to play a more significant role in increasing participation better relationships with partners and more resources will be needed to promote a wider range of local, place-based activities.

#### 4. How can a **shared understanding of the value** of community action be developed and demonstrated?

There is real impetus to explore community led action. Teams felt strongly that their work had value and was valued in their community. There was less sense of a shared understanding of that value across sectors with some examples of very different perspectives. Groups often described a power imbalance with organisations evaluating impact very differently to local people and funders having strategic priorities that did not align with what matters locally.

##### **Culture/ principles**

- Respect local commitment to doing what matters for their community
- Provide spaces where local people can meet to share views and reflect on priorities
- Create a flow of information and space for groups to reflect on shared values with cross-sector partners locally

**Next steps:** Consider building trusted relationships and shared understanding between local groups and cross-sector partners by:

- providing space for them to reflect on joint responses to local priorities
- supporting community groups to develop dynamic relationships with potential partners to identify more opportunities for joint action
- exploring more place-based models where the focus is on developing a shared understanding of what matters to build local capacity and engagement
- working with communities to measure what matters to them to evaluate the impact of community action
- local and national government taking a lead in making explicit the significance of local, place-based action in helping build back better
- appreciating how listening is key to creating dynamic, powerful relationships

**Key learning:** National and local government, with voluntary and statutory sectors, can support local groups to articulate the value of community action.

# Where next for teams?

The programme has provided all three teams with support to reflect on their activities and future vision. Each now has a forward plan built on that reflection, although with very different priorities:

**Credu in Powys** co-designing informal care to support families:

- develop new partnerships to create potential for innovative co-produced support with other sectors
- develop new trusted relationships with existing partners including Powys County Council, Office of the Future Generations Commissioner to explore future potential

**Llanrhian in North West Pembrokeshire** connecting diverse, dispersed communities

- build on their community activities to engage more people and develop connections locally
- gather and analyse information to capture community aims and ambitions
- In the longer-term pursue bigger picture ambitions around affordable housing and sustainability

**Cwmbwrla in Swansea** creating events to support connection and community development

- build on their vision to be bigger than the sum of their parts and deliver more effective local support
- develop ways to measure the impact of their work and communicate its value

The full Community-led Transformation programme report which follows examines the programme from the teams' perspective and explores the learning agenda in greater detail

# Practical action programme report



# In the practical action programme report

<b>Programme report</b>	
<b>Background</b>	
- <a href="#">How the programme started</a>	18
- <a href="#">Who's involved</a>	20
- <a href="#">How it works</a>	21
- <a href="#">Setting the learning agenda and objectives</a>	22
<b>Team journeys</b>	23
- <a href="#">Llanrhian</a>	24
- <a href="#">Credu</a>	31
- <a href="#">Cwmbwrla</a>	38
<b><a href="#">Overall programme learning</a></b>	44
<b>Appendices</b>	56
- <a href="#">Team visuals</a>	57
- <a href="#">Ystradgynlais Thursday Club poster</a>	60
- <a href="#">Listening event summary</a>	61

# How the programme started

People Powered Results has been pioneering new approaches to achieving change and innovation in systems since 2014. PPR works with place-based teams and people closest to the issues to create the space and develop the shared vision needed to make change real

**In June 2020** WCVA and experienced sector leaders, facilitated by PPR, articulated a vision for the future of:

- A green, just path to recovery with long-term planning over 10-20 years
- A vibrant voluntary sector leading recovery
- A healthier and more equal Wales
- A strong, engaged and empowered population, with inclusive, cohesive, diverse communities.

Building on this vision, and reflecting the [Better Futures Wales Community Foresight](#) project, in **June 2021** working with a wide spectrum of voluntary sector leaders, PPR designed a structured, facilitated **Transformation Programme** to investigate how place-based teams, experimenting with locally-owned approaches to recovery, can inform national, strategic goals, focussing on the role of volunteering in creating change.

# Why community groups?

Covid 19 led to a surge in community activity and, linked to this, an interest in:

- How community groups create local resource
- How they fit into more traditional volunteer models and work with statutory services
- How community-led action can work with existing infrastructure to create wellbeing

Three very different community groups, each with cross-sector support, joined the programme in June 2021 to reflect on what their activities tell us about building stronger communities. These groups shared key characteristics and challenges.

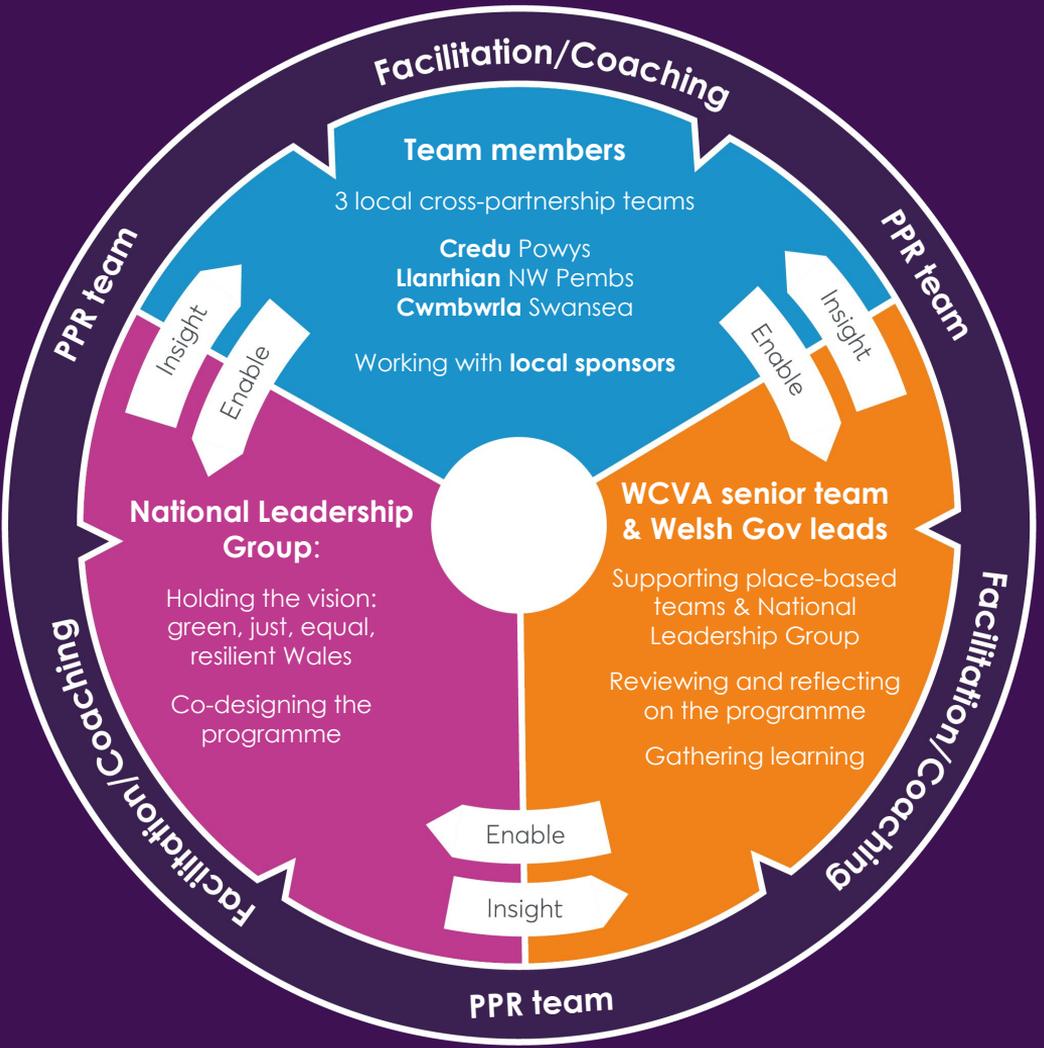
## They are:

- Agile
- Connected
- Responsive

## While keen to increase:

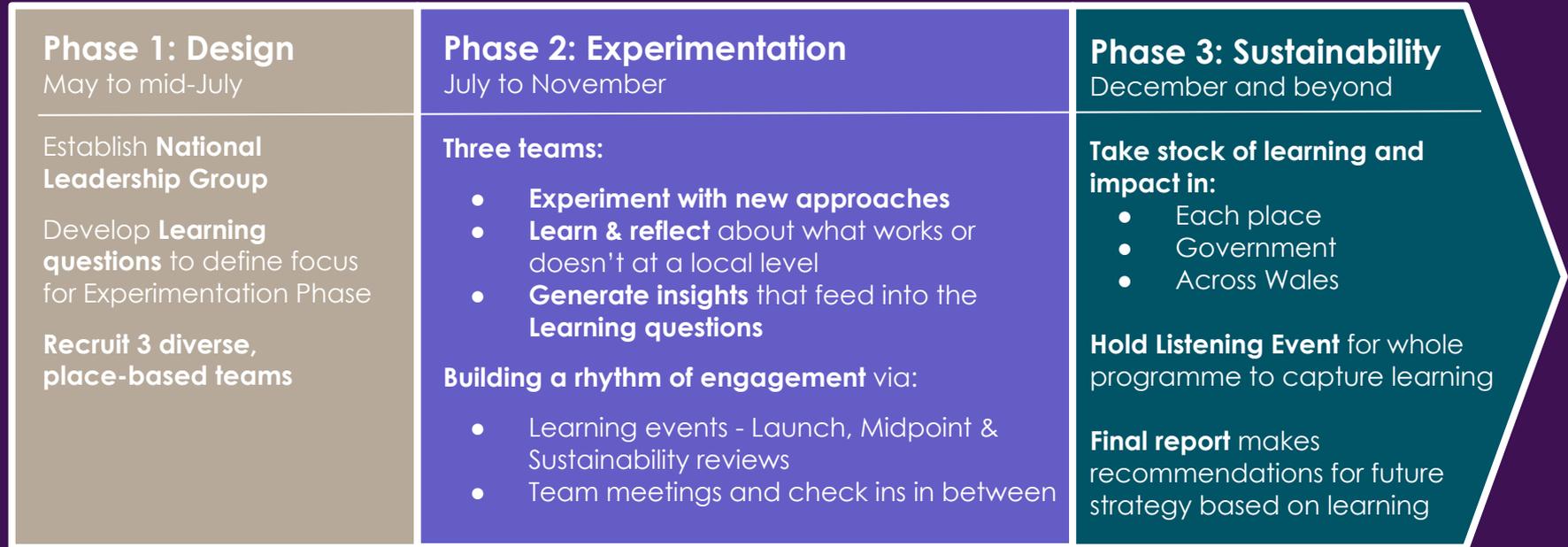
- Voice
- Recognition
- Capacity to reflect on their role as well as act to meet immediate needs

# Who's been involved in the programme?



# Programme Overview

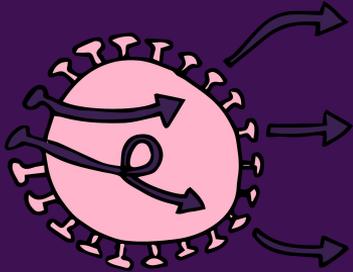
The community-led transformation programme was designed in three phases:



← Regular coaching and facilitation provided throughout →

# Setting a learning agenda

During the design phase, the **National Leadership Group**, **WCVA** and **Welsh Government** considered the shared vision for a better future, research from the pandemic and priorities set by the Third sector recovery plan to come up with the following questions to explore with teams with the aim of setting a learning agenda for the programme:



1. How can communities **adapt, maintain and sustain** their efforts and infrastructure **post-Covid-19**?



2. What does it take to build sustainable, **collaborative relationships across sectors that share, create and release power** - putting citizens and communities 'in the driving seat'?



3. How can **everyone in communities** access, contribute to, participate in and benefit from community action?



4. How can a **shared understanding of the value** of community action be developed and demonstrated?

# Team journeys

Llanrhian Connected  
Community

Credu Connecting  
Carers

Cwmbwrla Community  
Events





# Llanrhian Connected Community

**Location:** North Pembrokeshire rural/ coastal communities

## The focus for the programme

Improve the lives of local people through connection, instilling a sense of belonging in an area of isolated, diverse communities. Llanrhian Connected Community facilitated connection in the area (hosting events and connecting groups with one another), and invited the community to explore and engage in issues such as environmental stewardship and affordable housing.

# Llanrhian's journey on the community-led transformation programme

**21st July:**

Launch event, focused on learning from pandemic and building a vision

**20th August:**

Hub in the Pub planning, systems change and informal constellations

**5th October:**

Mid-point review, revisiting purpose, vision and potential, action planning

**29th November:**

Informal check-in, why did we get involved, what's on our minds, and what's next?

**4th August:**

Ways of working and identifying opportunities

**20th September:**

Hub in the Pub check-in and planning

**11th November:**

Reflecting on Hub in the Pub, planning next steps

**7th December:**

Sustainability review - planning for 2022, community builders and event design

Ad hoc team/one on one coaching throughout

# What does the team bring to their community?

Early in the programme, we supported the group to think through what strengths, skills and experience they bring to their community, to start to build the sense of what they could do as a group. **In the team's own words:**

I have my roots in this area, and have lived away and come back with a broader experience. **I know the value of community.**

I bring **a belief that communities can and should do more**, which was demonstrated throughout the pandemic.

I bring **big picture thinking**. I bring **connection** with other agencies and the council, and am an avid **networker**. I bring leadership that is about empowering others.

I bring **a desire to make a difference**, and a strong connection with the **environment** and our place in it.

I bring **bilingualism**, and a **pride** in being able to communicate with people in whichever language they prefer.

## Who's on Llanrhian's team?

The team was made up of 7 people, including a local County Councillor, a Community Link Officer, a Community Councillor, and 4 local residents keen to use their skills and experience to make a difference in the community.



We explored the team's vision for the area and their role within it.  
Creating a shared vision and ways of working was a big part of team sessions.

### A connected community is...

...one where all within the community feel as though they are a significant part of a larger whole; that they matter.

...one where the economy is not skewed to be reliant on tourism.

...one where the needs of future generations are planned for.

...one where people feel energised and engaged; where people feel empowered to initiate change.

...a community that knows itself.

### What is Llanrhian Connected Community's role?

To **connect people** across the area to **raise overall standards and outcomes** for the region. LCC will carry out an assessment of **local housing needs**, promote **volunteering** to increase wellbeing, improve the **economy** and safeguard the **environment**. They will support efforts that foster **community cohesion** and resilience, helping people feel more directly connected to other people and to place.

The work of Llanrhian Connected Community spans from **small acts of kindness** right up to creating a **Community Land Trust** that could mitigate the impact of **second homes** in the area and provide affordable housing for people who want to stay in the region but might otherwise be priced out. There is a tension between the actions the group can take now and the bigger vision they are serving, and they have had to ask themselves, many times, **what is enough?**

# What has emerged from Llanrhian Connected Community's journey?

## *Becoming aware of themselves*

Llanrhian Connected Community was formed as a way to reimagine relationships within the ward, and to mitigate the impact of second-home ownership in the region. It sought to **grow a sense of belonging** for all living in the area - from locals who have lived there for generations to new incoming residents. It sought to bridge the social, cultural, generational and technological divides in the community.

While Llanrhian Connected Community has put on events, such as *Hub in the Pub*, in an effort to connect locals, businesses and community interest groups, **the team is very aware of their own blind spots**. They know that there are community members that haven't attended their events, and they're keen to hear from them as to what they would like to see happen in the region and how they would like to engage. They have conducted a community survey, which was sent out online through community newsletters and QR codes in local shops, as well as via paper copies which were handed out to local businesses and groups and collected by LCC team members. The insights from the survey have confirmed the assumptions of the group as to what their community members are interested in engaging with, and will inform the work of the team moving forward. Broadly, **housing, Welsh culture and language and environmental stewardship have been highlighted as themes** that the community can coalesce around and become involved in, thereby fostering connection in the first instance and involving them in the bigger vision of a *Connected Community* in the second.

# What's emerged from Llanrhian Connected Community's journey? *Learning and reflections*

- There are people that the team will never reach. They are aware of **blind spots** and will **build momentum** working with people who do engage.
- People find it easier to **connect with tangible concepts** such as housing, environment and Welsh culture rather than abstract ideas of building wellbeing. The team will work to model community wellbeing by supporting connection around the things people are interested in and understand.
- It is important to be able to communicate with people not only in the **language of their choice**, but in the right dialect of Welsh as well. How the team communicates will have a real impact on the accessibility of the team's ideas and people's willingness to get involved.
- It's important to recognise the value of groups like this and **link them into existing organised voluntary, third and statutory sectors** to increase their capacity to develop activities.
- **Developing trusting relationships** with more highly structured partners will add resources and capacity to otherwise loosely structured community-led groups.
- Community change work in ambiguous and uncertain contexts requires lots of time/space to establish a common vision and goals, direction of travel, and roles within the team. **Resourcing oneself for this kind of**

**work is essential.**

## What did we hear?

During the workshops, the team grappled with where their efforts were best placed to make an impact, as captured below:

**“As well as doing something about the bins and the dog poo, we need to be working on some of the big, intractable issues of our time: affordable housing, environmental stewardship and community wellbeing”**

# What's next for Llanrhian Connected Community?

## Events:

### TBG/Eco Dewi Community Climate Fund

- Engage the community around climate action
- Learn about what aspects of climate action are important to people

### Housing/Community Land Trust

- Engage the community around affordable housing and a community land trust
- Recruit those interested in being part of a housing initiative

### St. David's Day

- Engage the community around Welsh culture and heritage

## Connected community inquiry:

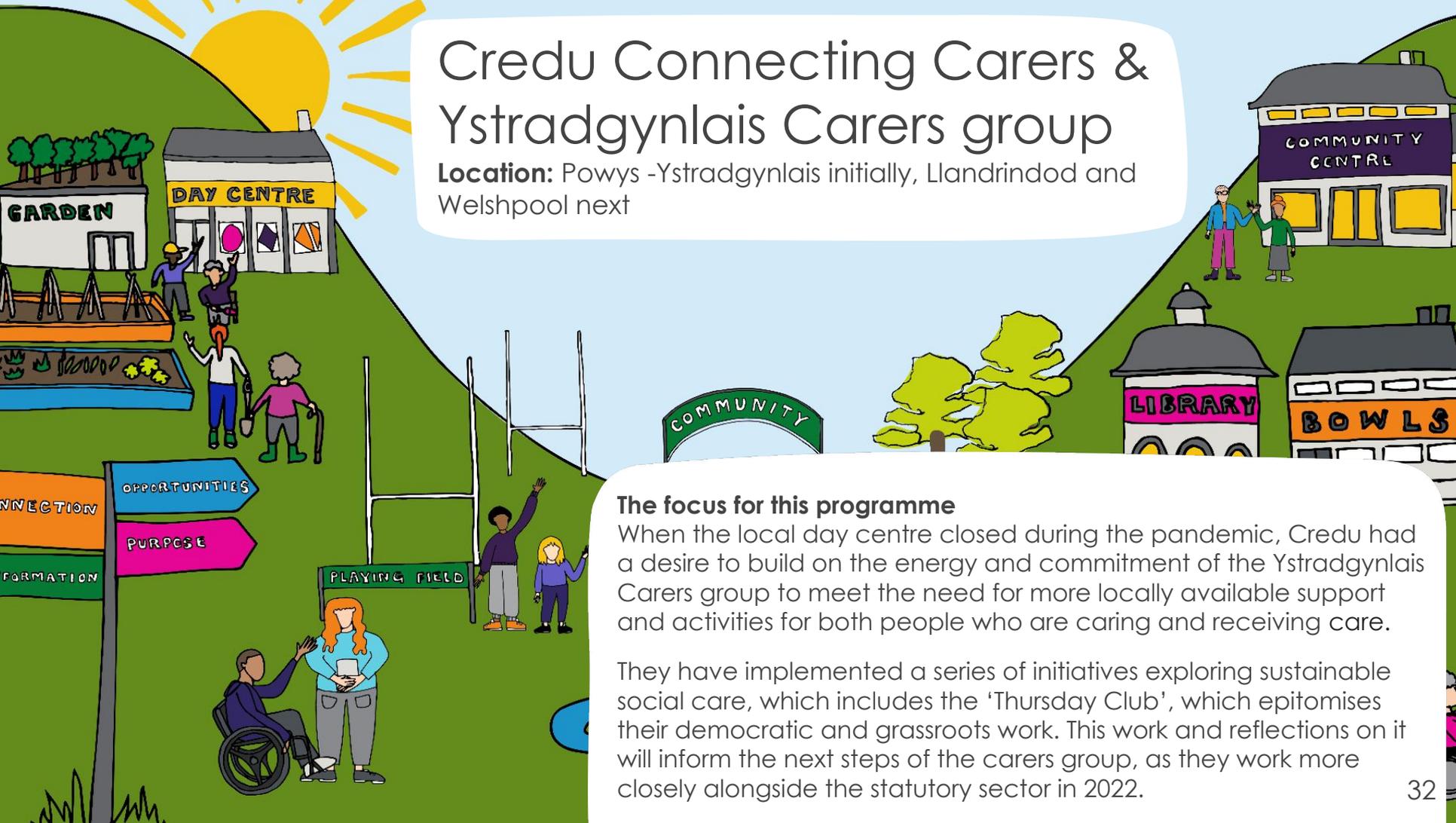
- Continuing to engage to build relationships
- Analyse survey responses
- Produce report, including baseline assessments
- Determine themes for engagement
- Play back the themes identified as important to the community in the survey
- Recruit 'Community Builders'

How can we make sure that we're engaging with **those who have been here for generations** and **those newer to the community** and build on their collective strengths and outlooks?

What is the balance between **national policy** and **local implementation**? The issues we want to work on are huge!

What is a connected community? **Are we doers or facilitators?** How do we help people feel a sense of ownership over the issues that matter to them?





# Credu Connecting Carers & Ystradgynlais Carers group

**Location:** Powys -Ystradgynlais initially, Llandrindod and Welshpool next

## The focus for this programme

When the local day centre closed during the pandemic, Credu had a desire to build on the energy and commitment of the Ystradgynlais Carers group to meet the need for more locally available support and activities for both people who are caring and receiving care.

They have implemented a series of initiatives exploring sustainable social care, which includes the 'Thursday Club', which epitomises their democratic and grassroots work. This work and reflections on it will inform the next steps of the carers group, as they work more closely alongside the statutory sector in 2022.

# Credu & Ystradgynlais Carers' journey on the community-led transformation programme\*



\*Credu & the Ystradgynlais Carers had already met 4 times in the spring of 2021 before they joined the community-led transformation programme

# What are the team's 'superhero' strengths?

Early in the programme, we supported the group to think through what individual assets, skills and qualities they bring to their community to start to build the sense of what they could do as a group. **In the team's own words:**

Lived experience of being disabled.  
Interest in disability and giving voice  
to others

Listening and  
bringing people  
together

A font of  
knowledge and  
strategy

Will fight/ speak up  
for what I believe  
in

Thinking outside  
the box

Brilliant and strong,  
resilient

## Who's on the team?

This diverse team was made up members from the Ystradgynlais Carer's Group, working alongside core Ceredu staff, the local Community Connector from Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations (PAVO) with key support from the Local Authority including the Day Centre Managers and Social Care Delivery, all of whom were keen to work across sectors to bring about change in the community.



# What's emerged from Credu and Ystradgynlais Carers' journey?

## Success of the 'Thursday Club'

During the programme the group explored and made progress on various activities, including a **community garden**, a **local information resource** and a **listening campaign** to hear what matters to the people of Ystradgynlais. However, the biggest success has been the **Thursday Club**: a space for carers and others in the community to come together in the absence of the local day centre which closed during the pandemic. This a democratic space held in the local Bowls Club and run by the local carers group that is open to anyone. The group works hard to make it **accessible and inclusive** with a range of activities, including a regular group walk. Participants have spanned the age groups from 18 to 88.

Thursday Club, which the group say is run by '**people power**', provides lots that the day centre didn't. It's more accessible because there is no threshold for attending and it is a space for friendship, connection and conversation around local and national strategy. **They are keen to not lose this as we emerge from the crisis point of the pandemic.**

However, the group is also keen to highlight that **this space cannot and should not be a replacement for the day centre**. Not only did the day centre have trained staff who are able to meet specific, high-support needs, it also meant that informal carers knew they were able to leave those they care for in trained and safe hands, so they could have a break.

While the pandemic has enabled them to begin to explore the intersection of formal and informal care, the group has been thoughtful about the intention of Thursday Club, including who is involved, how they model distributed leadership and making sure they're do not undermine the day centre. They hope Thursday Club can be modelled across Wales as an:

- **easy access alternative to day centres**, that frees up day centres provision for those with greater needs
- or a **hybrid model** able to sit alongside the day centre as a boost to local wellbeing

# What's emerged from Credu and Ystradgynlais Carers' journey?

## Values and ways of working

Credu staff have also recently become trainers in an approach called '**Collaborative Communication**' which has helped the whole team working together with more kindness and **listening to each other with greater empathy**. This training focuses on having empowering conversations to understand how people would like to live and then supporting them to move towards a good life. In November they delivered this 2 day training to a mixture of 'professionals' and carers, and people on the training found it was 'good to meet the professionals in another capacity' and experience a range of perspectives.

With more capacity, Credu are keen to keep delivering this training, as they note a **gap in opportunities such as this for citizens** to be upskilled and supported to think through their own problems.

This training, alongside Asset Based Community Development training, speaks to many of Credu and the carer groups' values and ways of working which make them the effective group they are. We have seen citizens, third sector staff and statutory sector representatives come together in this team, with local authority staff noting the **non-adversarial approach** to working that is taken, while citizens note the **availability and respect** of those in the statutory sector, both of which have enabled the group to **build relationships across sectors**. The quotes below reflect these values:

"[We need to] support each other to get it wrong, and celebrate together when we get it right"

*Credu team member*

"What has been really special about this programme is the time to come together, and feel it as a shared dilemma, in the adversity."

*Powys County Council rep*

"A fo ben, bid bont"/"If you want to be a leader, be a bridge"

*Welsh proverb shared by a Credu team member*

# What are the team grappling with now?

"How to **co-produce** the way forward when day centres/ services do open again, **how can we make them better than before?**"

Making sure they're modelling **effective co-production** which empowers and supports citizens to do what matters to them.

"People are frustrated that they can't have their say, but we've been able to do that [with the Thursday Club] and have great action as a result, **so how can we take this model further afield?**"

How to maintain the benefits of their '**people powered**' approach, while making sure the **statutory sector continues to provide the services** that it needs to.

How to continue supporting and spreading this work with their current **capacity**.



# What are the next steps for Credu and Ystradgynlais Carers?

## Carers group to explore how to build a hybrid model of support for all

- Continuing conversations about the partnership between Thursday Club, Credu and the council: how to work together in the future to explore the intersection of formal and informal care
- Meeting in late January in advance of decisions on the day centre reopening
- Continue to find ways of cultivating meaningful collaborative relationships between people, state and third sector on a locality basis
- Thursday Club exploring ways of becoming a constituted group

## Scale to other areas

- Explore how this model can be taken to other areas, including Welshpool and Llandrindod

## Continue working on their other ideas:

- Community garden
- Community information resource
- Deliver more Collaborative Communication training
- Link in with other groups locally

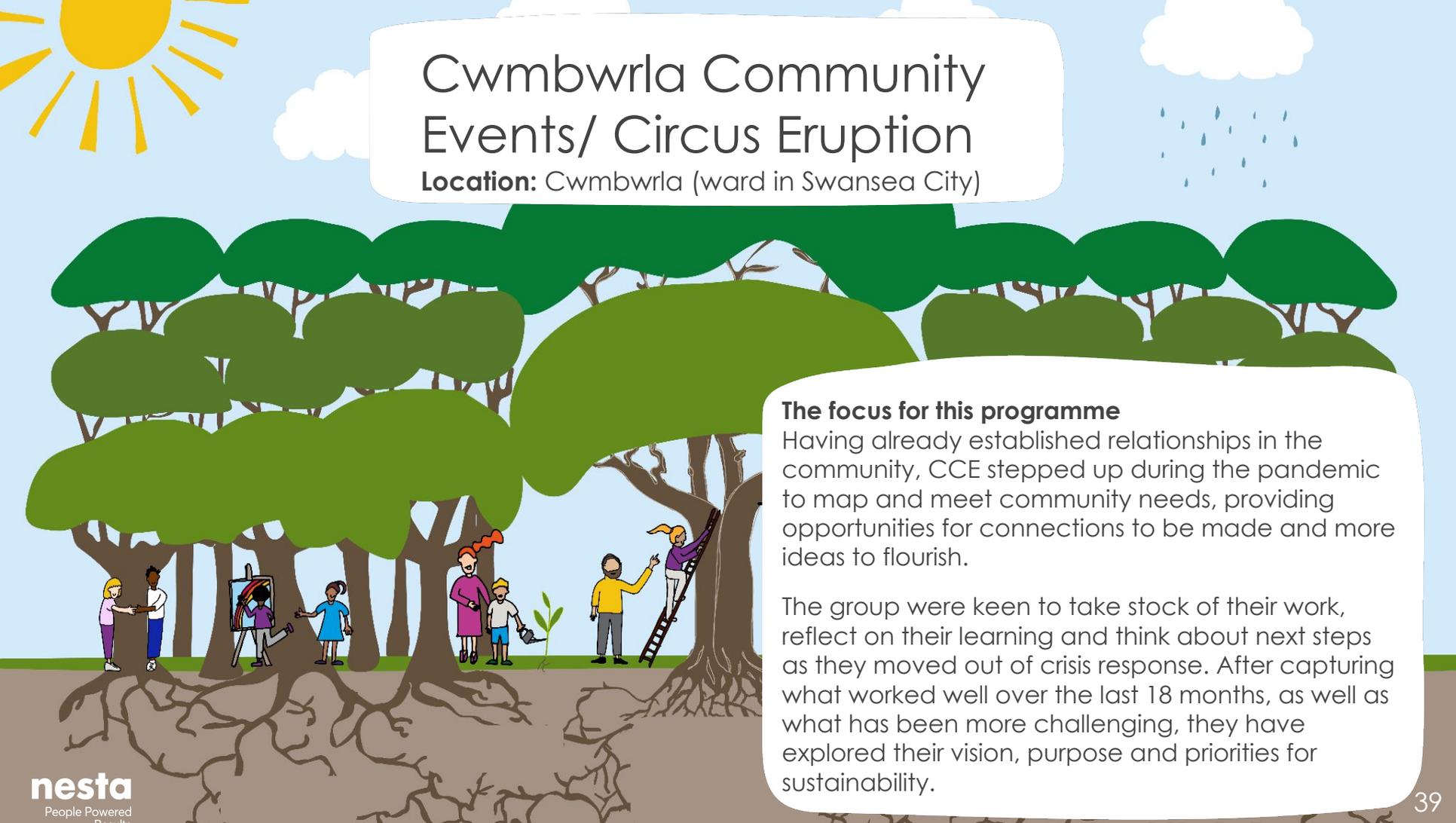
## Seek additional capacity

The team is keen to continue working on the Thursday Club, their other ideas and delivering their training. In order to do this however they would need additional funding to increase their capacity.

"I don't want this to stop; we can really democratise things" **Credu team member**

"It was really obvious that the potential impacts of the work Credu are doing engaging their community can be a catalyst for action that with benefits that reach beyond the carer community, including intergenerational connections, sharing skills and knowledge."

**National Leadership Group**

The background of the slide is a colorful illustration of a park. At the top left is a bright yellow sun with rays. At the top right is a white cloud with rain falling. The middle ground is filled with several green trees of varying sizes. In the foreground, several stylized human figures are engaged in various activities: one person is painting a rainbow on an easel, another is watering a small plant, and others are standing and talking. The ground is brown with visible tree roots.

# Cwmbwrla Community Events/ Circus Eruption

**Location:** Cwmbwrla (ward in Swansea City)

## **The focus for this programme**

Having already established relationships in the community, CCE stepped up during the pandemic to map and meet community needs, providing opportunities for connections to be made and more ideas to flourish.

The group were keen to take stock of their work, reflect on their learning and think about next steps as they moved out of crisis response. After capturing what worked well over the last 18 months, as well as what has been more challenging, they have explored their vision, purpose and priorities for sustainability.

# Cwmbwrla's journey on the community-led transformation programme

**21st July**

Launch event, focused on learning from pandemic and building a vision

**6th September**

Workshop, exploring learning and reflections from pandemic further

**12th October**

Midpoint Review, building vision and priorities going forward

**17th November**

Workshop, building out purpose, visions and next steps

**7th December**

Sustainability Review, taking stock of work so far and planning for the future

# What motivates the Cwmbwrla Community Events team?

We asked the group to think through what motivates them in the work they do with their community.

## In the team's own words:

"I grew up in a very supportive community and really experienced first hand the benefits of that - **I feel everyone deserves to have that 'village' around them** and I want to play my part in creating that if I can - for my neighbours, friends, and for my children and their future"

Wanting our organisation to support and serve what's needed... and **evolve** along with everyone else, **not imposing something**, being useful and making a positive difference"

"Seeing the benefits and the results we achieve together. **Everyone else's motivation and enthusiasm keeps me going and inspires me.** Also the relationships that are built with the community and people we support is very rewarding"

"To **see the best in people** and allow them to be able to use their skills and passions. To see other people in the community benefit from the group's collaboration and care for them as a community. **To see a community come together for the wellbeing of everyone.**"

## Who's on Cwmbwrla's team?

This diverse team is made up of members from across the ward of Cwmbwrla, including local residents, members of Circus Eruption, local churches and a local councillor, all of whom were keen to work across sectors to bring about change in the community.



# What's emerged from Cwmbwrla's journey? *Learning and reflections*

The group had a huge amount to reflect on from during and before the pandemic:

- The group was able to be **fast, agile and responsive** during the crisis, making the most of people's existing skills and experience, as well as maintaining a **flexible approach to roles**.
  - They were able to **work well with other organisations** locally to ensure they were sharing resources, spaces and values of being person-centred.
  - They worked closely with their **Local Area Coordinator (LAC)**: "our Local Area Coordinator is a regular, welcome presence and **the work of LACs should not be underestimated**". Their LAC was both a part of a team and a bridge to the statutory sector, which allowed for clear flows of information.
  - They maintained their emphasis on **creative and fun activities** which they have found to be particularly important for **inclusive co-design**.
- While the group was able to be flexible with roles during the pandemic, this raised questions about **capacity in the long-term** as people's everyday responsibilities return.
  - One of the group's strengths was their organic approach to organising themselves. However, as they looked to apply for more funding, this raised questions around **how to work with funders that are much more structured and hierarchical**, without compromising the trusted personal relationships at the heart of their network.

# What's emerged from Cwmbwrla's journey? *Vision and purpose*

After taking stock of their successes and challenges, the group considered what this means for them going forward.

## The difference they want to make now:

### For people

- Feel the benefits of being part of a **collective community**.
- Have their **strengths highlighted** and built on.

### In national conversations

- **Collaborate** with other agencies and tell their story.
- Highlight **“the power of community** and how different conversations can lead to different outcomes for everyone in a community.”
- Shine a light and have an **impact on unnecessary bureaucratic barriers**.

## Activities going forward

- Providing **opportunities for people** to share their skills and knowledge is still key to the group's core function.
- Continue to **focus on events** 'to promote fun, family, welcome, and inclusivity'.
- Consider how they might want to bring **activism** more intentionally to their work to influence national conversations.

## Key takeaways

After reflecting on their position now, the group have discussed **not wanting to become too structured and over-professionalised** as they move out of the pandemic and start to apply for more formal funding routes. This is to avoid losing their organic approach based on trust and strong relationships. They have acknowledged that **they're good at what they do** and so they want to instead double down on doing that as well as they can.

'Simple is beautiful'

Cwmbwrla  
team  
member

# What are the next steps for Cwmbwrla?

## Updated approach for events:

- Agreement that there will be 4 events a year as standard, with litter picks every other month.
- Build messaging to ensure community knows to expect these.
- Make sure people are being reached out to to proactively to join events.
- Tightening approach to planning, thinking about strategy, feedback and evaluation.

## Reflecting as a group

- Make space for reflection around events - before and after.
- As a group, come together and agree what the best way to reflect is.

## Defining and demonstrating impact

- Exploring the impact they want to have and how they'll demonstrate this.
- Building skills in fundraising/ reporting back to funders.

## Community mapping

- Taking stock of who they work with currently, who else they could work with, and mapping what each group does to ensure they complement each other.

"Reflection, communication, consideration, organisation"

*Priorities as defined by Cwmbwrla team member*

# Overall programme learning

This section reflects on insights generated on all four learning questions set at the start of the programme.

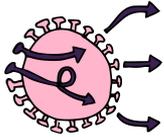
The recommendations that follow are framed with reference to the 3 key themes outlined by the TSPC to Welsh Government as key to building future resilience, that is:

- Volunteering
- Relationships
- Support



# Overview: learning questions and emerging themes:

1. How can communities **adapt, maintain and sustain** their efforts and infrastructure **post-covid**?



How access to **funding** and **organisational capacity** impacts community orgs

The value of **engaged communities** in crisis response

**Conditions that enable or disempower:** what is the statutory, voluntary, third sector role currently?

2. What does it take to build sustainable, **collaborative relationships across sectors that share, create and release power** - putting citizens and communities 'in the driving seat'?



The **roles and structures** helpful in community groups

How building **trust** and **deep listening** supports relationships

How **power dynamics** work in **co-production**

Leveraging credibility and **cross-sector collaboration**

3. How can **everyone in communities** access, contribute to, participate in and benefit from community action?



**Who accesses services** and when? Who isn't? What does this tell us?

The importance of having **physical spaces** for engagement

How to engage different people/groups to meet **shared goals**

What **seeds civic engagement**?

4. How can a **shared understanding of the value** of community action be developed and demonstrated?

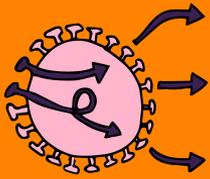


The **role of volunteers** and the **voluntary sector** within communities

The **need to listen** across boundaries, sectors and communities

How structures/processes **promote or prevent community action**

Spaces for **cross-sector engagement, learning and collaboration.**



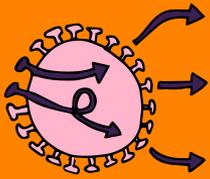
## 1. How can communities **adapt, maintain and sustain** their efforts and infrastructure **post-covid**?

Across the programme teams highlighted the importance of having support to reflect on their activities in the context of their sector or local strategy. They welcomed the chance to develop capacity to respond to community needs beyond crisis response. They articulated questions such as:

- How do we keep momentum when access to funding becomes more difficult?
- How can we sustain the initiatives begun throughout covid? How can we support those community volunteers?
- What might the interplay between local initiatives such as the Thursday Club, run by carers with Credu, and statutory services look like, post-pandemic?

Teams reflected that **relationships** between communities and partners built on **respect and trust** gave volunteers the confidence to act. For example, Credu's Thursday club was developed out of carers understanding their own needs and Credu's willingness to support carers' to organise activities that work for them. The team is now working with the Social Care Delivery Manager at Powys County Council to co-design a more collective approach to meeting the needs of carers and the people they support. This collaboration is a template for similar partnerships between the formal and informal care

Finally, they emphasised the value of community **volunteers** in understanding local needs and knowing how to build local resilience, acknowledged as an essential part of building a better future. In particular, they highlighted the value of active communities even where those activities aren't serving an explicit policy or strategy goal.



## 1. How can communities **adapt, maintain and sustain** their efforts and infrastructure **post-covid**?

**Loosely-structured, hyper democratic groups** and networks were able to respond at pace with agility to the Covid crisis and to the flooding that preceded it. But throughout the programme, teams have reflected on the difficulty of finding a role beyond the impetus of a crisis, particularly when that relies on working with organisations that are more highly structured.

Cwmbwrla Community Events stepped up during Covid, forming working relationships with the local authority through the local area coordinator. They see opportunities to develop their role as more than a local events provider with support from other local organisations, but recognise the challenges involved in further growth.

For CCE, being loosely-structured has enabled them to call on **personal relationships** developed over time with people and groups, all based on **trust**. During the pandemic, they had a lot of capacity in the network and a **free flow of information** from the statutory sector through the local area coordinator. They built a host of activities to support the community. They were able to sign-post statutory help to those in the community.

**Challenges** arise when their loose, cooperative structure is overburdened with administrative or strategic decision-making tasks that stretch the capacity of the group. Practical **support** could help them find space to reflect on the future, recruit more **volunteers** and build trusting **relationships** locally. Support could include back office functions, space to meet and reflect, help with funding or support to understand local strategy and how their work relates to it. This kind of support can be provided by partners in other sectors, but will need to be built on the development of the trusting relationships that CCE value and that gives them confidence.



## 2. What does it take to build sustainable, **collaborative relationships across sectors that share, create and release power** - putting citizens and communities 'in the driving seat'?

Teams and the NLG recognised challenges to building collaborative relationships that released power to put people in the driving seat. This includes finding spaces and building relationships where **loosely structured community groups** could interact with existing statutory structures and the semi-professionalised voluntary sector.

All three teams had successful relationships, but also reflected on the imbalance in power dynamics. They noted that:

- Being reliant on **funding** means a need to conform to set operating models, and focus on pre-determined themes that may differ from what the community has expressed a need or desire for.
- Communication can be a challenge, including **how organisations listen to community-led groups**, what they hear, and assumptions in the **language** used around expectations of leadership and capacity to deliver measurable outcomes.
- A potential clash of perspectives around what might look messy or chaotic from the outside actually being an **organic process of relationship building or organisational structuring**.
- A disconnect between the goals and ambitions of community groups and expectations around how these groups can backfill for limited statutory or voluntary services.
- The need for a greater degree of **nuance around how impact is measured** and evaluated in assessing the role/ effectiveness of community engagement.



2. What does it take to build sustainable, **collaborative relationships across sectors that share, create and release power** - putting citizens and communities 'in the driving seat'?

All three groups rely on trusted collaborative relationships to deliver their activities. Each has a key person or enabler in other cross-sector organisations that help them make things happen. For example: Credu has Jen and Marie from Powys Young and Adult Carers (a third sector group), Llanrhian has local councillor Neil, and Nia, a grant funded Community Link Officer, while Cwmbwrla work closely with Emma, Swansea Council's Local Area Coordinator

The teams rely on their trusted links to the statutory and voluntary sectors, but also highlighted that outside these **relationships** they often experience a disconnect between community-led **volunteers** and public service partners. They see themselves at the bottom of a top-down, hierarchical structure, where their unique needs and capacity aren't recognised. They have no direct influence on what's imposed from above and the lack of **support** impacts on their ability to grow and develop greater capacity to meet community needs.

**Credibility:** Credu also reflected how working on this programme with a recognised innovation expert like People Powered Results at Nesta provides them with credibility. Powys County Council invested time in engaging and supporting carers, so people in the community felt they were being heard. Llanrhian too felt empowered by having a supportive organisation to give credibility to their activities. That raises the question of what organisation can hold this role for community-led groups in the future?



2. What does it take to build sustainable, **collaborative relationships across sectors that share, create and release power** - putting citizens and communities 'in the driving seat'?

Credu reflected that pushing too hard for action or results without building trusting relationships first can derail community groups. To get deep learning and effective co-production you need to build in time for people to build trust. This is underscored by their training in Collaborative Communication.

For Cwmbwrla, making space and time for relationships and human connection was crucial. The LAC role allowed people to get direct help and feel heard by the local authority. This, in turn, reinforced the credibility and accessibility of CCE in the eyes of the community.

Creating an environment of mutual understanding was considered crucial to the empowerment of communities. This was easier during the pandemic. No one was responsible for Covid, so there was no "blame" attached to the needs being met. People felt able to respond for the common good.

The NLG also recognised the importance of being 'in place' with people, building relationships and taking the opportunity to meet 'in real life' with people when was possible. In this context, having a venue locally was a significant advantage. The Credu team reflected on the value of building relationships with local venues like the Bowls Club that hosted their Thursday Club meeting. Developing good relationships helped them harness local resources and build capacity in communities to create positive change for local people.



### 3. How can **everyone in communities** access, contribute to, participate in and benefit from community action?

All three programme teams have developed conscious or unconscious feedback loops to **include people and encourage participation**. Llanrhian, for example, ran a community survey to understand local priorities, others gather feedback locally at activities or events. These kind of feedback loops are built on powerful **personal relationships** developed over time. The processes involved **can appear slow or unresponsive**, especially where there is an external goal driving activity, for example a funder or statutory partner that requires a quicker more comprehensive response.

**Physical venues are extremely important** in providing a place to convene and gather community insights. All teams are navigating how to use spaces currently under statutory control with varying levels of openness and trust. Physical hubs in communities become more integral to community-led transformation because of digital inequalities in communities. Challenges around how to build relationships with powerful statutory partners when negotiating access can feel burdensome, and some community groups explore business-owned spaces as alternative local partners. There were examples of ingenious place-finding throughout the programme. Credu, for example, hosted their Thursday Club at the Bowls Club, which fostered new connections in the community, new championship of the Thursday Club, and a new set of activities for those joining. Llanrhian made use of the spaces where people already congregated in the community the pub, the school, the petrol station and shop, as well as halls that other community groups utilise.



### 3. How can **everyone in communities** access, contribute to, participate in and benefit from community action?

Communities aren't a monolith. Often, people don't see themselves as **volunteers** and they want different levels of involvement. Civic engagement is linked to broader themes of accessibility, equity and belonging in communities. As a society, we should be moving towards engagement that enables people to feel involved, appreciated and able to have impact.

**Sharing training and resources** locally has also been recognised as a way of upskilling people to enable them to take an active part in community action. Forced collaboration can cause problems where there are deep divisions. In Llanrhian they aimed to unite the community through shared interests. They are also learning about community engagement and participation from tracking who (and who doesn't) attends their events.

For Cwmbwrla, **creativity and fun is key** to bringing people together & collecting the authentic community stories they need to understand the needs of their community and their impact on people. They are working towards getting a proper sense of inclusive co-design, and a community vision that cuts through bureaucracy.

They want to see more of the kind of dynamic risk assessment Circus Eruption might do when working with vulnerable young people on stilt-walking. During the pandemic, that type of risk assessment became the norm, but that sense of people having permission to participate is less evident outside a crisis. Reimagining the culture around risk and community engagement could allow them to reach more people and those who often aren't reachable, but would require a different approach in grants and funding.



#### 4. How can a **shared understanding of the value** of community action be developed and demonstrated?

Teams have strongly articulated how good **relationships** with the statutory and voluntary/ third sector organisations are important. How those sectors listen, advocate and work to remove barriers is key to creating and sustaining local capacity. Hierarchical structures, like those in the statutory and service sectors, can put pressure on loose community networks, disrupting their capacity to respond to local needs. The process of securing funding from these sectors can mean community projects reflect the goals of funders, rather than local priorities.

How community-led transformation is measured was an area of concern. Local action often doesn't fit traditional funding schemes and groups find it hard to develop consistent measurement criteria. For example, Llanrhian team member Neil Prior talks about the inadequacy of standard assessments of impact in a [blog](#) written for the programme.

Another time-consuming and bureaucratic process for the teams is applying for funding. For example, all of Cwmbwrla's resources go into reaching the people in their community. This leaves little energy for dealing with the bureaucracy around funding, or for the reflective spaces that could help refine their approach, vision and narrative. Meeting funding requirements can leave community groups feeling they have to create a parallel structures to meet the standards set by funders. This imposition of 'structure' on loose local networks can feel like pressure to community-led efforts, disrupting the group's capacity to understand or respond to local needs.



#### 4. How can a **shared understanding of the value** of community action be developed and demonstrated?

Community groups have **different perspectives** to members of the same groups who represent statutory or voluntary organisations and are recompensed as such. These sectors can seem bureaucratic and adhere to structures, values and ways of working that are antithetical to community-led organisations. Engaging volunteers then becomes a way to anchor the work of community-led groups to a set of organisational goals that do not reflect local needs. Working with community volunteers to refine and iterate policy would help to **develop a shared language** between the statutory sector and communities in Wales.

Community volunteers are often the **visionaries and/or the doers** in communities, with first-hand experience of what could be done to make things better. They are an untapped resource of innovation and creative problem solving.

The teams reflected on the role CVC's can play in building a shared understanding of the value of community action. They appreciated how this programme has provided a **coaching space to reflect and explore thinking**, with one team suggesting that CVC infrastructure could provide this. This would enable nuanced reflection on emerging needs and capitalise on the existing capacity (of CVC's) to meet them.

Clear value has also been expressed in creating spaces for civil society and the public sector to explore emergent thinking/ theory around community engagement in different fields. The teams see a value in space to process and think about what to take away, and put in practice, as well as on ways to feed their practical learning back into the theory.

# nesta

People Powered  
Results

## Get in touch!

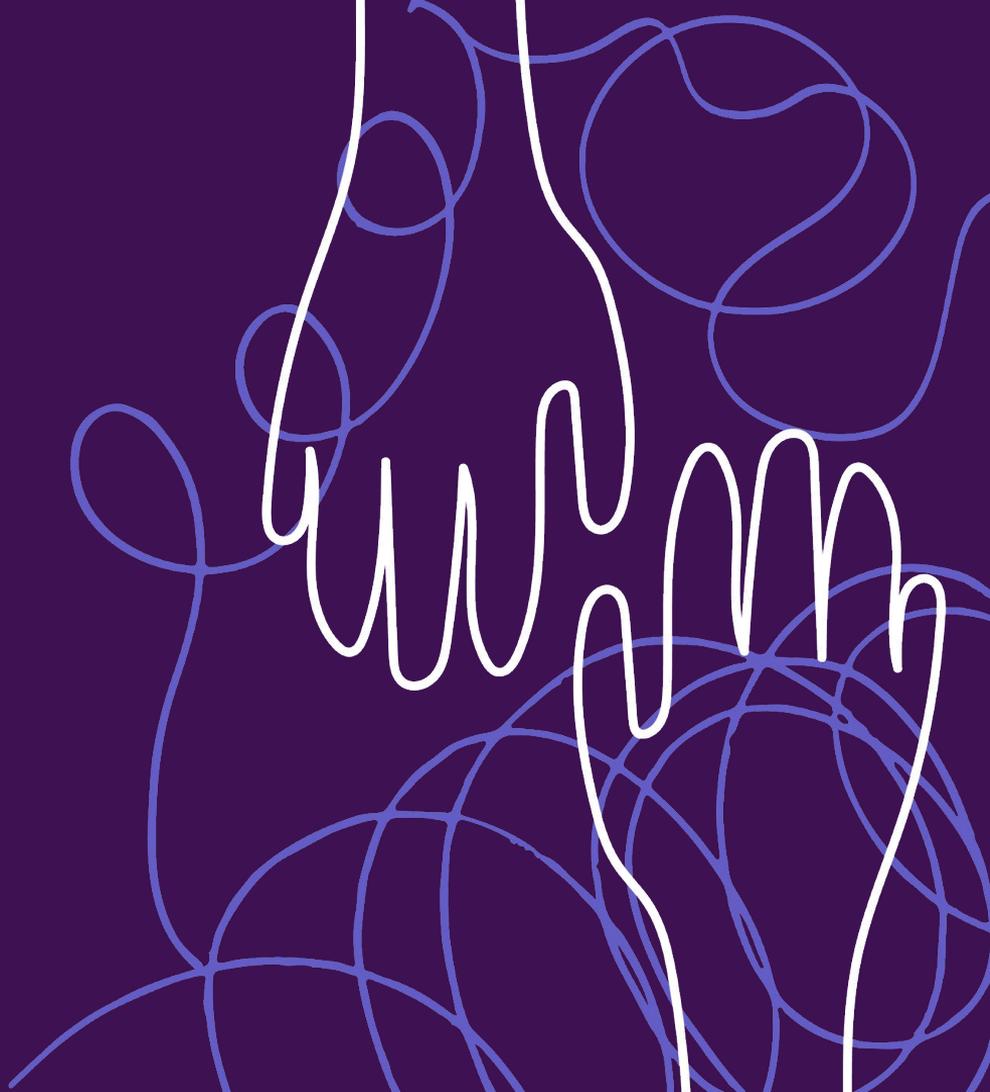
[babs.lewis@nesta.org.uk](mailto:babs.lewis@nesta.org.uk)

[policy@wcva.cymru](mailto:policy@wcva.cymru)

[nesta.org.uk](http://nesta.org.uk)



[@ppresults](https://twitter.com/ppresults)



# Appendices



# Vision for Llanrhian Connected Community

This image is designed to capture the range of activities and themes explored during the programme, including environmental stewardship, affordable housing and connected communities



# Vision for the community of Ystradgynlais

Inspired by the words of the team in their workshops, this image captures the vision they have for the community, the types of activities people can take part in, and is designed so the team can use it in invitations and communications.



# The Cwmbwrla Forest Vision

The Cwmbwrla forest grew out of the midpoint review event where the team came together to discuss the things they really value in the Cwmbwrla community, and the vision for the future.

**Sky:** External support to fertilise the community. This could be funding, or other support.

**Upper canopy:** The parishes, roles and organisations involved in the community.

**Lower canopy:** Activities we can see happening

**Ground level:** Here you'll find people in the community. Seeds are grown, ideas are happening.

**Soil & roots:** This is where the values sit. The things that aren't visible but have to be there in order for the trees to grow.



# Ystradgynlais Thursday Club poster

## Clwb Dydd Iau Thursday Club

**OPEN TO ALL 10am-3pm**

**Bowls Club, Ynyscedwyn Road, Ystradgynlais  
On bus route, easy to park, disabled  
access.**

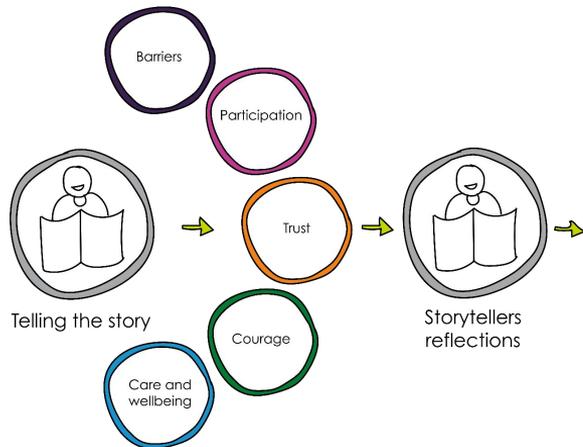


- 10-11 Social welcome and a cuppa
- 11-12 Wheelchair & buggy friendly gentle walk for all abilities, tailored to you (wear warm, comfortable clothes & shoes for the weather).
- 12-1 A light lunch (either bring your own or join us)
- 1-3 Activities, games, chat, sharing what you like doing - we welcome any skills and talents

**Join us anytime you can**

**(you can stay for whole day or come to a part of the day)**

# Listening event: December 15th, 2021



Programme participants came together to share and listen to the stories that prompted them into community action. Credu provided some markers of an active listening environment, and listeners listened to the storytellers through the lenses of barriers, participation, trust, courage, and care/wellbeing. The quotes on the right detail some of the insights that were shared.

