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Social Care **Wales**



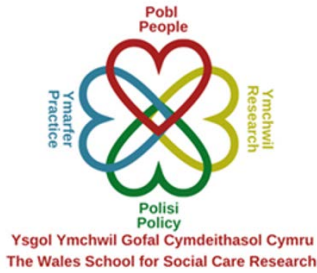
Approaches to community resilience: executive summary

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Executive summary

Resilient communities are strong, flexible and connected. They support community well-being and nurture a sense of belonging, providing opportunities for people to give and receive support. Recent legislation in Wales has people and communities at its heart: the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act and Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act emphasise co-production and involvement, prevention, early intervention and the role of communities.

There is a growing need to support and enhance community resilience as austerity continues to hit public services and we need to find sustainable ways to support people. This report provides evidence for planning and developing community resilience initiatives. It is based on evidence from a literature review, focus groups, interviews and case studies from across Wales. In the report, we describe how people are building community resilience and well-being, including community-led actions like neighbourliness, community developments such as time banking and service-led approaches, for example social prescribing.

Evidence in the report shows a range of benefits to building community resilience. It can improve people's physical, mental and emotional health, their well-being and quality of life. Community initiatives can improve both individual and community confidence and sense of control, while providing person-centred, flexible and nuanced support. Some studies report that community initiatives can lead to a reduced reliance on public services, including potential cost savings, reduced staff workload and better value for money. In the words of one focus group participant, *'a little support early on can save a lot of suffering, service need and cost later'*.

Building community resilience and well-being needs to start with what is happening within communities and avoid undermining, devaluing or removing what people have already done. People are important assets in planning and organising community-based support. They know about living in their communities and what is needed, and can bring assets such as friendships, networks, time, a sense of identity, enthusiasm and motivation that go beyond anything organisations can provide. It is important to understand this to be able to support communities; not as customers or people accessing services, which can be alienating, but as partners. It means putting traditional approaches to one side and understanding the difference between what professionals think they are doing and what communities see them doing. It means encouraging community-led innovation and learning to develop a range of different approaches. *'Community ownership is key. They mustn't be only passive recipients'* (focus group participant).

Our evidence shows that culture needs to change within both communities and public services, so they can work together to overcome a culture of dependency. Genuine partnership working between communities and professionals strengthens their respective knowledge and skills: *'everybody has something to give and a part to play, it doesn't matter how'* (focus group participant).

One of the most important ways to support community well-being is to nurture and create opportunities for people to connect socially beyond their immediate networks. Drawing in people who are not usually active in their communities can help address loneliness and isolation, creating a more cohesive community. It can reduce stigmatisation and support traditionally marginalised people to feel more included. As people gain opportunities to engage within their communities, they increase their activity, can build awareness of issues such as dementia, and develop transferable skills, for example through volunteering.

Professionals can support communities to find a stronger voice, break down barriers and navigate systems where needed. However, they need to engage, *'negotiate and communicate well to build trust and confidence with community groups. If we had gone in with a map of how it was all going to happen and with long term plans it wouldn't have worked, local people wouldn't have accepted it'* (focus group participant). They also need to be supported by strong leadership, from within both communities and partner agencies, that encourages genuine sharing and collaboration. People (from within or outside the community) who connect others, supporting them to build relationships and find their own way, are important and inspiring agents who contribute to building the resilience of the community.

Public sector activity needs to align across a number of areas and organisations with the overall aim of supporting community well-being. Decisions in a range of departments or organisations could have a significant impact on community resilience. For example transport, youth clubs, leisure centres and public toilets will all impact on people's social activity and well-being. The focus can't be limited to health and social care.

The public sector could support community initiatives by enabling easier access to often low levels of funding and *'to allow funding of less formal groups who support strengthening community resilience'* (focus group participant). Tendering for funding is unlikely for some groups, yet community groups and organisations need to be able to cope with potential increases in demand. Some will need investment to grow if it is what they want; others need to be respected for their role and choices, as increasing in size can affect their dynamics and usefulness.

We also need to think carefully about what needs to be measured. Monitoring and evaluation through statistics can show the breadth of access, but personal stories about impact are more meaningful and offer real insights into the depth of impact. Social Return on Investment (SROI) measures the social, environmental and economic value of money invested and could be a useful way to measure the impact – although not everything that counts can be counted. Whichever method we use needs to measure what matters most to community members.

In practice, successful projects often include a mix of approaches, building in flexibility to innovate and adapt to what the community needs. Evidence from practice tells us that **how** you do it can be more important than **what** you do. The following draft guiding principles for building community well-being and resilience, support this approach and have been drawn from the evidence in this report.

PRINCIPLES for building resilient communities

- 1. Start by building trust and reciprocal relationships.** Listen, respond and value everyone's contribution.
- 2. Make all information easily available, appropriate and jargon free.** Increase everyone's knowledge and understanding, and encourage citizens to make their own decisions. Circulate good quality, understandable information through community groups, local networks, the voluntary sector and personal invitation.
- 3. Encourage and enable everyone to take part in local social and community activities, if they choose.** Taking part in the community and activities of choice breaks down isolation, develops a sense of belonging and purpose, creates friendships, makes people feel better and more confident, and opens up access to information, support and help.
- 4. Involve people to make a difference.** Taking an active co-productive approach gives a real chance to increase interest, as well as influence policy, service design and delivery from an early stage¹. Be imaginative in how you involve people and use a variety of methods which make it easier for people to be co-producers.
- 5. Recognise and always build on existing community assets.** Everyone has skills, and knowledge that they can share and the networks in local communities are the greatest asset. There may also be community groups and activities, places to meet, local services and buildings which contribute to having a vibrant and resilient community.
- 6. Increase and open up opportunities for people to build relationships and connect with each other across their community.** Activities need to be what citizens want and run by themselves where possible (rather than what 'experts' think they need), low cost, offered in accessible venues and avoid stigmatising people who take part.
- 7. Work with citizens in local communities.** Listen and respond to the community; citizens are best placed to know what is needed locally. Leave plans at the door and work jointly to take an approach that will build resilient communities.
- 8. Encourage and support local ownership and decision-making in service design and delivery.** Embed the principles of co-production so that citizens are empowered to make decisions about their own life and community. Find new creative ways for professionals and communities to work together.
- 9. Recognise the challenge.** Developing community resilience and well-being will often mean thinking and doing things differently, which can be a real cultural challenge.
- 10. Focus on promoting people's well-being.** Following the *Five Ways to Well-being*² will promote good mental health for all.
- 11. Make sure everyone has the opportunity to be involved.** Identify specific groups and work with them to target and shape resources. Work together to prioritise what is important and help them take action without undermining their control.

National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales 2011, Participation Cymru, Welsh Government; <https://participation.cymru/en/principles/>
Five Ways to Wellbeing New Economics Foundation; <https://neweconomics.org/>

12. Work with the community to develop appropriate and meaningful ways to record evaluate change. Stories are powerful ways to show change within communities, bringing life to numbers that count 'how much' or 'how often'. Measure what matters, ensuring that targets do not distract and undermine efforts to build resilience.

13. Invest in community projects and build sustainability. Make the link between listening acting. Long-term, stable funding increases sustainability for community projects and those who provide skilled support. It enables people's confidence and involvement to grow at a natural community-led pace. Sustainability is truly achieved when a legacy of learning and capability is left within the community, so everyone can continue to do things for themselves, long after an initiative has finished.

14. Communicate progress and share the learning. Keeping everyone informed and acting on promises are essential to build and keep trust. Sharing lessons learnt as well as successes will increase reflection, learning and improve practice.