



Gofal Cymdeithasol **Cymru**
Social Care **Wales**

Approaches to community resilience: Executive summary

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Contact details

This summary is based on *Approaches to Community Resilience*,
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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 and Future Generations (Wales) Act emphasise co-production, 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 need for health and social care 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*' (focus group participant).

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: from 'doing things for people' to 'what can we do for ourselves?' (focus group participant). Genuine partnership working between communities and professionals values and 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 health activity, build awareness of issues such as dementia and develop transferrable skills 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, can be skilled, important and inspiring facilitators.

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 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 impact. Examples include an evaluation in Gwynedd showing £5 in social value created by every £1 invested in supporting parent carers. Whichever methods we use, they need to measure what matters most to community members.

In practice successful projects often include a mix of approaches, building in flexibility to innovate, try something new 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 below for building community well-being and resilience support this approach and have been drawn from the evidence in this report.

DRAFT PRINCIPLES for building resilient communities

- 1. Make all information easily available, appropriate and jargon free.** Good quality understandable information can be passed on through community groups and networks increasing knowledge, understanding and empowering people to make decisions for themselves (which is what is aimed for).
- 2. Encourage and enable all to take part in local social and community activities, if they so choose.** Taking part in the community and activity of their choice breaks down isolation, develops a sense of belonging, creates friendships, makes people feel better, and opens up access to information, support and help.
- 3. Engage with people to make a difference.** Engagement gives a real chance to increase interest and involvement as well as influence policy, service design and delivery from an early stage. See *National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales*.
- 4. Recognise and always build on existing community assets.** The people themselves, their time, skills, knowledge and networks are the greatest asset a community has. Others include community groups and activities, places to meet, local services and buildings.
- 5. Increase and open up opportunities for local people to build relationships and connect with each other.** Activities need to be what people want, (rather than what “experts” think they need) low cost, offered in accessible venues and not self-stigmatising by taking part.
- 6. Work with people, don't do things to them.** Work in a “bottom up” way, listening and responding to the community. Ask people what they need – they are best placed to know what is needed locally then work jointly with them to enable them to do things for themselves.
- 7. Encourage and support local ownership and decision making in service design and delivery.** People feel empowered when they can take decisions about their own community. Find new creative ways of working with communities to meet their needs. Start by building trust – take off the suits, go to them, listen and respect their contribution. Everyone has something to contribute.
- 8. Focus on promoting people's well-being.** Following the ‘Five Ways to Well-being’ advice will promote good mental health for all.
- 9. Identify groups most at need and target and shape resources specifically for them.** Work in partnership with them to prioritise their needs and help them address these without undermining their control of what happens to them.
- 10. Develop appropriate and meaningful ways with the community to record and evaluate change.** Stories and narratives are powerful ways of showing change within communities. Some pre-set outcome measures and targets can distract and undermine efforts to build resilience.
- 11. Invest in community projects and build sustainability.** Commitment to long term stable funding for community projects and those who provide skilled support increases sustainability by enabling the growth of people's confidence and participation at a natural community-led pace. Sustainability is truly achieved when a legacy of learning and capability is left within the community, so people can continue to do things for themselves, long after an initiative has finished.
- 12. Communicate progress and share the learning.** Keeping everyone informed and always acting on promises are essential if people are to remain involved. Sharing lessons learnt as well as successes will increase reflection, learning and improve practice.