

What worked and didn't work about the Communities First programme

1. The Communities First programme has played a vital part in the empowerment of local communities. Through the programme individuals have gained the skills to become actively involved in the decisions that affect their Communities. This approach has been unique with elements of the original programme being reflected in the Future Generations Act, *"An approach which deals with the root causes of poverty, recognises that communities are best placed to decide at a local level where to focus efforts, and is not limited by the postcode people live in"*, confirming the importance of empowering local communities to ensure sustainable change.
2. Whilst it has not been possible to calculate the total amount of savings that the programme has made through the health, employment and learning programmes, prevention has been central throughout the programme.
3. The programme has made a substantial difference to the lives of hundreds of people within Carmarthenshire. One of the positive aspects of this programme has been that it is designed for communities and therefore has been able to adapt to meet the local needs. Through this approach, barriers have been removed allowing individuals to be involved in the design making process, local strategies and development of projects.
4. The capacity building process saw an increase in the numbers of individuals that were active in their communities through volunteering and participating in projects in their area. Although, in the early days of the programme, the guidance was very much driven from a communities view point and as such, engagement from key partners like Local Authorities was difficult as staff and communities felt it was for them, and them alone to find the solutions to many of the issues in their communities. At times engagement was difficult.
5. The partnership working approach has seen the joining up of services and sharing of resources. An example of this was the establishment of outreach blood clinics in partnership with NHS. The project was identified by community representations as a need and was later established with partners and continues to be delivered in the area.
6. Although early focus on just capacity building led to lack of focus and as such a negative view of the programme because there were limited tangible outcomes.
7. The programme brought about a unique approach to volunteering and encouraged individuals from diverse back groups to become empowered through the process. During the capacity building stage over 50 new community groups were established as a result of the programme.
8. New community groups became constituted and were supported to access millions of pounds of external funding. Capital and revenue projects were delivered across the Communities First areas and included the following schemes; Morfa Spray and Play,

Penymorfa redevelopment, Felinfoel Community Resource Centre, Bigyn Park, Llwynhendy MUGA, Llwynhendy play area, Llwynhendy allotments, Felinfoel Mill Wheel, Pantyffynnon Play area and West End Development and numerous Church and Chapel renovations. Revenue funding was secured to deliver the Build your Own Future employment skills project, a Youth Outreach Scheme and a Sports Development Programme.

9. Baseline data was not identified by WG or by partnership areas at the programme inception, therefore programme evaluation was almost impossible.
10. Measuring the long term impact that the programme had on the individuals was not carried out in the initial years of the programme. As a result, there was limited recording of statistics and outcomes achieved during this period.
11. Following the capacity building stage, the programme became outcome led which was welcomed by all, as this was an opportunity to work more strategically with key partners, whilst still working alongside the Community. The monitoring and evaluation processes were improved with a clear direction and more targeted approach.
12. This targeted process worked well and was streamlined in 2013 to focus on three key strategic themes and the delivery of the Community Involvement Plan. The streamlining of the themes worked well in the Carmarthenshire area with the prioritisation on projects that would encourage individuals to access employment. The new programme (since 2013) very much improved and partners took a fundamental interest in the job outcome approach to tackle poverty.
13. Since 2013, participants and staff have been very much open to support from agencies as the mind set was more strategic and saw the benefit of wider collaboration as no one body could make the impact and achieve the outcomes on their own. During 2016/17 over 65 partners from the public and third sectors have worked with Communities First to support communities.
14. The Communities First programme in Carmarthenshire has successfully implemented a number of Welsh Government funded pilots. One of the initial programmes was the Carmarthenshire Debt and Benefit Project. The programme started in 2007 and has continued to be a focus in the Prosperity work stream with over 1247 receiving support since 2013, with millions of pounds of personal debt addressed. The ethos of the Communities first Programme enabled individuals to self refer to access programmes that took place in a safe and comfortable environment within their communities, making the project a success. Carmarthenshire also hosted the Regional Collaboration and Improvement Officer to regionally align the WG funded Tackling Poverty programmes and have piloted Lift, Momentum and the Fusion Programme. This has strengthened the delivery of the core programme and created new partnerships with arts, heritage and culture partners.

15. Case Study 1

Becoming unemployed through sickness affected Paul greatly, reducing his confidence in his abilities whilst having a negative impact on his self-esteem. During the initial stages of the C1st programme, Paul engaged with Communities First and became involved in the local Communities First Partnership, Local Action Groups and volunteered with the Communities

First Team. As Paul's confidence and self-esteem began to grow he became involved with additional organisations and groups and was the area representative for the local Town Council. The activities improved his confidence and aspirations and led to Paul attending a series of non-accredited training sessions, improving both numeracy and literacy skills and completing accredited Community Development training. Paul then signed up to University to complete a Social Inclusion degree. Upon completion Paul undertook a placement with the Communities First Team to gain experience which complemented his degree. Paul also attended Communities First Goals Clubs where he became more positive about seeking work, whilst gaining skills in I.T, job searching, application writing and preparing for interviews.

In addition to the continuous support from the Communities First Programme Paul then became a participant in the Lift Programme and began receiving intensive mentoring support from the advisors. This support and increase in confidence led to Paul completing work placements with the NHS and in the DVLA. One of the key points in Paul's journey that stood out for the team was in March 2017 during a Communities First Wellbeing Event, Paul was in attendance as a provider from the Time to Change campaign and advocate for Mental Health.

"Through the programme I was able to connect with the community and become less isolated. The community began to become more active, cohesive and more positive. My interest for Community Development grew and this was followed by political awareness and interest. The programme has been a part of my recovery journey and has been fabulous and helped me to believe in myself. My goal now is to work in the Community Development Sector". Paul (May 2017)

16. Since 2013 over 300 individuals in the Cluster area have secured employment through Communities First support, with 963 individuals gaining an accredited qualification that has supported them to upskill ready for employment. With changes to Adult Community Learning Funding and Adult Learning transitioning to the Colleges there became a gap in provisions with minimal accredited and non accredited training being offered to individuals in communities. Communities First were able to accommodate the local needs and support individuals through basic skill courses, practical courses, self employment courses, through to retail, construction and other related employment courses. Since 2013 over 1055 individuals have accessed basic skills support. The shift towards training for employment has worked exceptionally well in the area. If this were to cease this would present a negative impact on individuals from the Cluster and partner organisations who utilise the training programmes.

17. As a result of local mapping of services a wellbeing programme has been developed to meet the needs that have been highlighted by residents and Public Health Wales. With the increased awareness of mental health issues and increased need of services, there have been limited services for individuals to access. One to one counselling sessions are not available at low or no cost unless offered by an employer, with the other option being group session workshops where information is presented to the audience. The flexibility of the Communities First Programme to meet local needs, enabled the creation of a programme that has encompassed the Five Ways to Wellbeing model to support individuals with low levels of stress, anxiety and depression over a 6 week period. During April 2016 - March 2017, 501 individuals have accessed support from this programme, confirming the need for the provision. There is currently no other organisation or programme locally that is offering this support to individuals. If this programme was

withdrawn there would be a gap in services which would impact heavily on the other services including health and welfare support.

18. The Carmarthenshire Time Credits programme is partly funded by Communities First and through this over 1300 individuals have become volunteers in the area. Through earning time credits, participants have gained skills, enhanced their wellbeing and are able to 'spend' the credits in local facilities. Over 12,000 volunteer hours have been generated during 2016 - 2017. Through earning Time Credits participants in Carmarthenshire have reported that 85% feel more able to contribute to the community, 66% are feeling more confident, 72% can afford to do more things, 19% report improved mental health, 64% feel less isolated and lonely and 84% report improved quality of life.

How Local Authorities will decide which projects continue to receive funding after June 2017

19. The evaluation of the programmes in line with the local needs and baseline data is central to this decision process. There are structures in place to ensure that the information is collated through various methodology. This has included data collated from participants, groups and organisations, using a range of quantitative and qualitative methods. Local, Regional and National statistics have been analysed to identify potential gaps in services. This information will be presented to the Communities First Board (public, private and community representatives) and through key structures within the Local Authority to the PSB for consideration. The Communities First Team and key partner organisations will be consulted throughout the process. The focus will continue to be on employment support and employability skills.

How different poverty reduction programmes (Communities for Work, Lift, Flying Start etc.) will change as a result of the end of Communities First.

20. The Communities First Programme has added value to all of the poverty reduction programmes, through the delivery of key programmes. These key programmes have supported learning, health and employment, in addition to engaging and empowering the community through the Community Involvement Plan. Over 3000 residents per year have engaged with the Communities First programme in Carmarthenshire. Without this support there would be gaps in services for the most hard to reach individuals in the community. The Communities First engagement and empowerment activity has also provided a vital resource for partners to engage with communities to inform their delivery.
21. Engagement has been a critical aspect of the Communities First Programme and has been utilised by the other programmes including Lift and Communities for Work to increase their client base. Support for protected characteristic groups and individuals who are harder to reach has been a key aspect of the Communities First programme. The ability to engage and interact in the groups has been an enabling factor in increasing the numbers of individuals accessing mainstream and other funded services. This has included work with gypsy traveler families, disability groups and individuals experiencing substance misuse or mental health issues. Engagement with Communities First has been a first step for many individuals prior to accessing other services.

22. Case Study 2

Elizabeth is an individual that is resident within the Glanymor Ward in the Cluster Area and has been engaging with the Communities First Programme since 2013. Her initial engagement consisted of attending events and activities with her children and participating in non accredited taster sessions. Through ongoing support Elizabeth then successfully completed a Level 1 Caring for Children course in 2014 and was keen to build her CV of skills and qualifications as she wanted to return to work when her youngest child started school. Elizabeth continued to engage with Communities First by attending a range of activities including Read, Write Inc., Brands v's Bargains, Nurture Group and Play Learn and Create. At the Play Learn and Create event Elizabeth was referred by the C1st Learning Team to the Communities for Work programme.

Through C4W, Elizabeth attended an 'All Set for Employment' course which included resilience skills, appearance for work and food and mood. Through support from the C4W Mentor Elizabeth has secured a work placement at a local School and is progressing towards her chosen career working with Children.

23. The other poverty reduction programmes have had an opportunity to engage with residents through the 100+ outreach events that have been organised by Communities First since 2013. The Communities First programme has also been able to offer one on one and group support in Flying Start and Families First venues to support their clients on a weekly basis. The C1st programme has offered pathways of progression for participants of Flying Start and Families First activities, including accredited and non-accredited learning opportunities for parents, plus digital skills, financial capability and employment support. C1st are a partner in the Team around the Family approach to support families.
24. Communities First has been a key partner in capital programmes including Vibrant and Viable Places to provide opportunities for residents to access training, work placement and employment opportunities.
25. The Communities First programme has been instrumental in supporting young people to reach their full potential through the implementation of programmes that have improved attendance, attainment and behavior in schools. Working alongside the Families First Youth workers in the Secondary Schools 467 young people have had opportunities to participate in alternative curriculum programmes, volunteering, art and culture initiatives and additional learning support since 2013.
26. Within Primary Schools, 2335 children have received additional support and 936 parents report that they are more confident in engaging with in their child's learning as a direct result of the support from Communities First. This contributes to the work that the Families First, TAF, Family Centres and Flying Start do in the local areas.
27. Communities First is a main provider of digital projects for all of the poverty programmes with 701 individuals accessing support since 2013. With technologies advancing, the Communities First programme has continuously developed the digital programmes to meet the identified needs of the individual and local employers. If this activity was to cease, it would have detrimental affects on individuals within Cluster as the digital programmes also provide support for financial literacy, accessing employment and offering support for ongoing changes in the benefits system.