



Communities First Advice and Support Service: case studies



Communications support to challenge stereotyping and stigma – 3GS Merthyr Tydfil

Background

The 3Gs Development Trust is a social enterprise that acts as the Grant Recipient Body for the Communities First Programme. It develops and delivers a wide variety of projects and activities that enable people to improve their skills, knowledge and confidence in the Gurnos, Galon Uchaf and Penydarren areas of Merthyr Tydfil.

The area has over the years been subject to merciless stereotyping by the print media, which has led to the area being stigmatised and labelled as an area where all the world's social ills are evident. This negative labelling has been picked up by broadcast media who reinforce this stigmatisation by making it the first port of call for stories of poor health, high crime, benefit scroungers and all forms of anti social behaviour. The 3Gs Development Trust receive around two inquiries each week from various media organisations who, on the whole, are looking for access to and information on residents who are experiencing some form of social disadvantage. Over the years, the 3Gs Development Trust has attempted to influence this media coverage by actively promoting news of its work and the positive outcomes that are achieved by local people, but it seems that good news is not 'good' news.

Support given

In an attempt to challenge the stigma the CF Advice Service commissioned Angela Elniff-Larsen from Angles Consulting, on the Trust's behalf, to undertake review of the external communications of the organisation.

This involved assessing 3G's communications root and branch, including a SWOT analysis, situational audit, and consultation with lead staff and board members of the 3Gs to assess and improve their understanding of their role in the 'communication loop'.

Angela produced a draft Communications Strategy and operational plan whose objectivity and independence provided a critical perspective of our work.



Local impact

3G's now has a robust framework for managing external communications to include proactive use of new technologies and social media (eg, Facebook and Twitter) and we have reviewed our newsletter and website. The communications plan has prompted us to produce news copy on our projects and activities on a monthly basis. We have also increased the accessibility of information about the 3Gs.

Staff and board members have been made aware of the importance of handling enquires from the media with great care and to seek approval from the board and Lead Officer in responses. We have identified a range of training needs that will equip us with the tools to deal with the media more effectively and to improve our operations.

The future

We intend to constantly bombard the media with positive news stories from the Gurnos. We recognise that we need to challenge the negative image of the area that has been created by the media. Whether this approach will change the dominant news values that exist in the mainstream media is yet to be seen.

Organisational and policy development support – Glyncoch Community Regeneration Ltd

Background

In 2010, Glyncoch was challenged with raising £1.3 million to redevelop a dilapidated community centre and finding a new host for the Communities First Programme after six years of support from a local housing association. Local people pulled together to form Glyncoch Community Regeneration Ltd.

In order to meet this challenge, board members of Glyncoch Community Regeneration (GCR) and Communities First staff were anxious to ensure that they had the capacity to fulfil their responsibilities fully and in a very short period of time.



Support given

CF Staff and GCR set out to develop an organisational development plan and, with help from the CF Advice Service at WCVA, this was drawn up. The key focus was to develop robust governance, HR policies and procedures and financial management. The CF Advice Service commissioned Creation Development Trust and Bryncynon Community Revival Strategy to share policies and systems they have developed with GCR. Added to this tailor-made package of support was aid from Protocol 4 Business to design appropriate policies for GCR drawing on the experience of the two experienced community hubs.

Local impact

GCR is now fully up and running, with board members and staff confident about operational and HR policies and procedures, as well as sound financial governance. The Communities First administrator is now running payroll successfully and is currently setting up a stakeholder pension scheme.

The real significance of this support is that Glyncoch is now in the position to raise so much more funding and take control of its own destiny, rather than continuously asking an external organisation to ensure activities and hold funds on behalf of the community. Furthermore, local people are now firmly in the driving seat and rising to the challenge.

The future

GCR now has the confidence and the capacity to act as a driver for regeneration locally and undertake the following challenges locally within the next few years:

- raise 1.3 million and redevelop the Community Centre into a hub of learning and enterprise
- set up a community-owned wind turbine project which will generate £100,000 per year for the estate
- facilitate a village centre redevelopment
- continue to regenerate dilapidated public spaces
- develop social enterprises particularly relating to the growing 'green economy' to increase locally based employment opportunities

Support to set up an arms-length company for two CF Partnerships – Holywell and Flintshire

Background

Members of Rural North Flintshire and Holywell Communities First Partnerships felt it necessary to embrace new ideas and trading initiatives that would support the growth of the social economy sector in Flintshire.

Ahead of Communities First moving into a new phase, it seemed opportune from late 2010 that the two Communities First areas moved to coordinate their work and share and pool resources. This new structure would need to not only overarch both Partnership Boards but remain accountable to both communities.

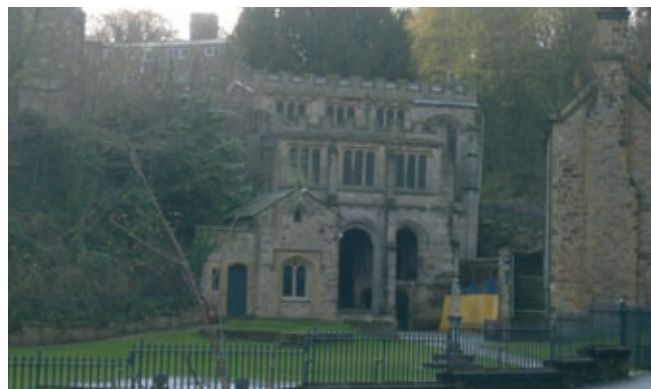
Support given

The CF Advice Service has been vital in supporting Rural North Flintshire and Holywell Communities First set up a Company Limited by Guarantee. It commissioned Amgen Consultants to work with both boards and the Co-ordinator to:

- explain the role and responsibilities of Directors
- establish objectives of a new company – The West Flintshire Community Enterprises
- draw up articles
- facilitation of planning and other discussions, and leading on initial Director meetings

The two communities have worked towards this over a period of 12 months, beginning with both staff teams. Since the West Flintshire Community Enterprises will represent communities on regeneration issues working hand in hand with Flintshire County Council, the Local Health Board, Colleges and Universities, and local partners such as Holywell Town Council, there has been a process of awareness-raising among these as well.

The CF Advice Service also commissioned additional support from Flintshire Local Voluntary Council to draw up the Memorandum and Articles of Association.



Local impact

The support on roles and responsibilities has helped Partnership members understand and recognise how company status awards them greater protection and allows for taking on assets and liabilities in order to sustain activities into the future. The company status provides access to funding sources that are not currently available.

The new Company is already managing assets – the Art and Craft Mill in Holywell, which houses a café and art and craft activity – and Greenfield Dock and Woodland are further assets ‘in the pipeline’. Since the Craft Mill is located next to St Winifrede’s Well it is ideally situated to showcase traditional craft-making techniques and promote unique handmade products to tourists.

By sourcing materials, goods and services locally, local suppliers and the local supply chain are being sustained, as well as seeking to reduce the carbon footprint. There are also community development activities of a more ‘traditional’ nature, including craft workshops in the community for people with disabilities and health issues; exciting opportunities for people of all ages to train for a career in the tourism and customer care sectors; and provision of work placements for woodworking, art, textile and fashion students.

The future

The West Flintshire Community Enterprises will in time provide business support, mentoring, advice services and financial assistance to groups and organisations within the communities looking to develop social enterprise activities. In so doing it will help them take the next step towards becoming more sustainable in the long term.

The Social Enterprise has aims to deliver environmental benefits in time such as allowing for the support of local organisations to develop employment and income-generation activities related to solar power installations.

Governance and review support to instigate audit requirements – Plas Cybi CF Partnership

Background

The move to separate the Partnership from the Grant Recipient Body (GRB) was instigated following recommendations by the Internal Audit which cited the need for 'adequate separation between the organisation performing the Partnership function and that charged with the responsibilities of the GRB'.

Concerns about how to proceed, duplication of duties and extra costs were raised by the Directors in response to this recommendation and independent advice and support for the exercise was sought from the Communities First Advice Service.

The need to clarify the staffing structure and the separate functions of the Partnership and GRB was also complicated by income generation and funding from other grant providers. It was soon apparent that a full review of staff job descriptions would be required and current funding arrangements were discussed.



The need for progressive change that would not put too much pressure on either Plas Cybi Partnership Ltd or the Partnership was deemed important by all parties. Too large a change in one move would risk undermining the excellent services being delivered at present. Moreover, such a change could also mean that existing personnel (paid or unpaid) might become unhappy and leave, which would weaken the expertise necessary to execute change effectively.

Support given

The CF Advice Service commissioned Shirley David from Business and Employment Support and Training to work with the directors and staff. The job descriptions of the Co-ordinator, Finance Officer and Administrator, in discussion with the post holders, were analysed in order to identify the aspects of these roles that were undertaken for the GRB or the Partnership. The division of duties was more clearly listed each job description.

In due course, all other staff members' job descriptions were also reviewed and amended.

The need to distinguish between the Grant Recipient Body and the Partnership by having different names was discussed. As Plas Cybi Partnership Ltd is a charity and registered company and will remain as the GRB; it would be difficult to change the name of the GRB and clearer to give a new name to the Partnership.

A report was provided to the Directors outlining the proposed structure and showing how the existing staff would fit within it. The report also outlined role descriptions for the Partnership officers and the Directors of Plas Cybi Partnership Ltd.

Local impact

The assistance given by Shirley David made a complicated process relatively easy. Her knowledge and understanding of the issues ensured that the Partnership and directors were given all the necessary and relevant information and options. Had we been facing this issue alone without support it would have been much more complex and time-consuming.

The future

At the time of writing there remains a degree of uncertainty about the future of the CF programme. Until there is clarity about the future the directors have sought permission to postpone implementing the new structure and organisation.

Support to evaluate and evidence the outcomes – Llwynhendy CF Partnership

Background

Communities First Llwynhendy approached the CF Advice Service in late 2010 for assistance with undertaking a whole community evaluation of progress against a baseline consultation undertaken in 2003 to establish what had changed in Llwynhendy, what had improved, and what challenges the community felt were still there. In essence, the exercise would measure the distance travelled by Communities First in Llwynhendy and prove which outcomes had been, or are being, achieved.

Support given

The CF Advice Service commissioned Dynamix to support and enable the community to undertake its own evaluation and consultation activities. A series of meetings with community volunteers helped plan how they would like to consult and engage with the community and identified which methodologies would be used.

In January 2011, Dynamix undertook some initial research with the community at an annual community event. Over 150 residents attended and it served to raise awareness of the consultation, establish there was community interest and to give the community their say in how they would like to be consulted. Following on from this the broad themes and questions that needed to be addressed were decided, and two planning sessions were undertaken with volunteers: youth volunteers (aged 11 – 19) and adult volunteers aged 20+.



The youth volunteers' commitment was particularly strong and they, with the support of Dynamix, took the lead in the consultations from that point forward.

There were seven community events which Dynamix guided us in hosting, along with the facilitation of an internet survey via the Llwynhendy Communities First Facebook page.

Local impact and the future

Dynamix were consultative, participative, creative and adaptive throughout. Activities were designed to be fun and active. Everyone could take part and the community was able to give its opinions honestly and openly.

The exercise has served to raise the awareness of CF in Llwynhendy as a whole. We have a robust document which can be shared with not only the residents but with all organisations involved with the ongoing work in Llwynhendy. It will also serve as a valuable resource that the CF team will use to highlight to Welsh Government the positive outcomes that have been achieved in the Llwynhendy ward.

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