

Big Lottery Fund



Project Update Form

Foundation Year 1st May 2017 – 30th April 2018
Project name: Welcome to Our Woods-A Natural Future
Organisation name: Interlink RCT
Project ID: 10281693

WHAT PROGRESS HAVE WE MADE?

We are pleased to report progress has been excellent on a wide range of the priorities identified in our Foundation Year Delivery Plan, as follows:

Community Engagement and Supporting Volunteers

- Communications Strategy in place, including active Facebook page with users rising to 800.
- Successful September launch included over 100 local people.
- Community feasts have been attended by over 90 people.
- Halloween 'outdoor theatre show' attracted 45 people.
- Weekly food growing sessions at Ty Newydd allotments. The allotment open day attracted over 40 people.
- Woodland Saturday 'open access programme' in Cwmsaerbren began January 18
- Tonypany Fire station Community Event 24th March, CYS stall and activity, approx. 200 people involved.
- Rhondda Housing Association and V2C Tenant Scrutiny Teams made a visit to CYS on the 5th April 18.
- A well promoted and attended community launch of our micro-hydro scheme on April 14th, including pantomime, feast and consultation on Year 2 plans, attracted over 150 people.
- Referral schemes in place now with Job Centre and Communities for Work; and with voluntary agencies and GP clusters (through Interlink); and Rhondda Housing
- A full list of smaller, local community group's has been compiled and systematic approach to making contacts is now underway, e.g., PowerPoint presentation delivered to Treorci Oak Tree Hall Older People's Group; and local Women's Institute, approx. attended by 60 people in total.

- Training and training providers identified to support voluntary engagement and the work programme going forward.
- 80 people engaged regularly with practical activities and programme planning.

Our expected outputs from ***Community Engagement and Supporting Volunteers*** were lower than originally planned, due to delivery partner capacity issues reported during the year, with the lead staff member for engaging people not in work. This led to a change in contracts going forward for Year 2 with reduced hours.

We will continue to recognise the different ways in which people can be involved with CYS, from practical activities, promotion, planning, events and governance - and tailor engagement accordingly. For example: we have people volunteering in community gardens; 'community connectors' who link smaller local groups to programme activities, or who have simply agreed to publicise CYS activities; residents helping to plan area improvements local to them; businesses discussing the potential for Christmas fayres and tourism generally. **All forms of engagement will continue to be recorded and valued equally.**

Health & Wellbeing through Outdoor Spaces

- We have held positive meetings designing tailored activities with existing, local outdoor groups.
- Enabled the Treherbert Walking Group to take part in a Walk Leader course via the Ramblers Association.
- Walks arranged with local Muddy Boots Group and liaising with the Local Horse Society on discussing how to improve the state of local tracks.
- Agreed a partnership cooperating with Coed Lleol/Actif Woods.
- Working productively with Natural Resource Wales to improve Cwmsaerbren Woodland as a social forestry, health & wellbeing zone.
- Primary Health referral process to outdoor activities in place through Interlinks Wellbeing Coordinator (social prescribing).
- Working alongside Cwm Taf University Health Board staff, e.g. on nutrition.
- Drafting a full Green Exercise Social Prescription offer now underway

Health & Wellbeing results were also lower than expected in the first six months, due to the delivery partner capacity issues described. The need to accelerate this work in Year 2 was recognised through the monitoring and evaluation process, with a new delivery partner (using a trusted local provider who has supported the programme) deployed in Year 2 to deliver improved outcomes. In the final quarter we began to scope shorter programmes tied to research, e.g. requirements of the National Exercise Referral Schemes; programmes able to contribute to improving mental health. This will lead into a more formal; Green Exercise / Social Prescription scheme as this work develops.

We will accelerate the development of wider and more inclusive programmes of outdoor physical activity - suitable for all ages, levels of fitness and mobility, mental or physical health. This will involve, in partnership with local public land owners including NRW and RCTCBC, improving infrastructure to access woods, parks and other open spaces to enable activities to take place.

Partnership and Delivery Model

- The wider Welcome to Our Woods Partnership now comprises 10 public sector agencies, 11 voluntary organisations, 14 businesses, 2 community groups and 14 active individuals.
- As planned, 4 wider Welcome to Our Woods Partnership full meetings were held in Foundation Year. Although much work is (*and has been since 2013*), done through email or smaller meetings, attendance at full Partnership meetings has been increasing.
- The Chair, now a paid part-time worker in the Delivery Team, has been replaced by a local resident and employee of Rhondda Housing Association.
- Monitoring, evaluation and reporting procedures were put in place with the Big Lottery and Delivery partners by end of Quarter 1.
- An active in CYS Delivery Team Network met throughout the Foundation Year
- Delivery Team and Programme Management Board worked well. The Board will now progress to having more local community representation.
- Effective reporting, monitoring and evaluation meant we could review and prioritise and plan for the Year End and Year Two programme and budget. Crucial tasks were: Produce priority work-plans; re-align budgets; and committing resources to priority work plans; and consult on plans and timetable for Year 2. All tasks were completed on schedule

Partnership and Delivery model continues to develop and progress. From the Foundation Year, widening the Welcome to Our Woods Partnership, including establishing new forums to feed into both the Partnership and the Delivery team, will be a key focus in Year 2 on increasing community involvement in programme governance. We will also be concentrating on linking to statutory partners, which will be key to the co-design and co-production of services in the Upper Rhondda, e.g., Welsh Water, RCT Council Waste Services, Arriva Trains and Network Rail. Developing collaborative business models and new structures for the CYS programme will be a priority in Year 2.

The Growing Valley/Taste of the Rhondda

The Growing Valley:

- Tynewydd allotment site was cleared for new plots, supported by RCTCBC Tidy Towns team.
- A new container (tool store/mess-room) and polytunnel was designed, delivered and erected.
- Regular weekly sessions with volunteers and local people were held at Tynewydd. Existing Tynewydd plot holders and Committee are actively supporting the sessions.
- Maintenance work is being carried out at two other Community Gardens (Project Penyrenghlyn and Blaencwm Chapel Community Garden).
- Working with Treorchy Men's Sheds to open a 'Men's Shed' in Tynewydd.
- Working with Grow Rhondda and Forest View medical practice to promote social prescribing and community support (which may include a therapeutic garden).
- Working with Penyrenghlyn school to develop community garden space

A Taste of the Rhondda

- Four community feasts held, some using waste food.
- Kitchen refurbished for feasts and to prepare for outdoor events.
- A small catering group meeting regularly.
- First draft of 'A Taste of the Rhondda' cook-book produced.
- Working with consultant on ideas for an Open Food Network with a High Street shop front.
- Initial links with local producers and caterers now in place.
- Multi-agency meeting addressing food poverty held.

The Growing Valley has three sites to improve or develop in Year 2 - Penyreglyn School; Project Penyreglyn; and Forest View Medical Centre. A key task is to organize a range of informal horticultural training activities; networking growers on all sites; and supporting the development of a Men's Shed in Tynewydd. We will begin to promote and support networking for individual and 'street-based' growing.

We will complete scoping work for an on-line Open Food Network, building 'enterprise relationships', supporting local food economies and a basic High St Food Hub, which could supply a limited range of affordable staple food items, and provide a transport / delivery hub.

A Taste of the Rhondda will continue to develop the cook-book, recipes and catering group; deliver more community feasts and outdoor events and cooking with wood fuel.

Active Travel Route and Community Connecting Links

- A proposed Active Travel route for Upper Rhondda Fawr has been co-designed with RCTCBC, Sustrans and Rhondda Tunnel Society. RCTCBC has completed the first section.
- Three longer distance Community Connecting Links from Treherbert to Maerdy; Treherbert to Cwm Parc; and Treherbert to the Pen y Cymoedd Wind Farm track have been mapped. Our Drone contractor has been unable complete overhead views due to weather conditions, but will be completed in the near future.
- Supported development and promotion of Rhondda Walking App.
- Planning local access and river walks within villages using back lanes.
- Some minor trackway clearance after two bouts of heavy snow.
- Continuing liaison with Rhondda Tunnel Society on mutual interests.

Our priorities include developing a network of local routes which link people to outdoor spaces within their local area, e.g. back-lanes and riverbank access; to the wider countryside. This means considering more urban routes, linking adopted and unadopted back-lanes to green spaces, schools or other local facilities. In many cases, these safer, routes off-main roads exist; it is more a case of identifying obstacles, local people willing to maintain the routes and promoting their use.

Economic Forestry & Community Renewable Energy

- First micro-hydro scheme completed and generating electricity. Welsh Assembly Minister Hannah Blythyn visited on the 15th February 18.
- Developing biomass heating ideas with Rhondda Housing with a wider Rhondda Biofuel Business Plan.
- Completing detailed proposals for community timber extraction and maintenance on two sites with Natural Resource Wales.
- Woodland Training and Enterprise Group formed in December 2017.
- Aberystwyth University working with us on new biofuel crops.
- Productive discussions on land-use with RCTCBC; NRW; and with the new owners of the Fernhill Colliery Site.
- Plans continue to develop with Rhondda Housing for derelict High St site (Tappers)
- Oxford Brookes MBA Students developed 5 business ideas and will return to refine these ideas into business plans in Year 2.

Economic Forestry & Community Renewable Energy is the headline work-stream for the economic focus of Create Your Space. We completed our Foundation Year outcomes on local supply chains; business plans and skills to create jobs and economic opportunities from the local landscape, e.g. timber products and community renewable energy; with other opportunities including local food production; market-places, social forestry zones and cultural activities.

Culture is Natural

- Focused in Foundation Year on engaging younger people, developing towards a 'cultural forum'.
- Provided 11 sessions with young people at the Arts Surgery in Blaencwm.
- Provided 6 sessions at Treorchy School to 35 young people.
- Provided opening performance for the CYS Launch in September 17.
- Provided small evening entertainment celebrating local history delivered in September 17 for the CYS network visit.
- Achieved successful evening outdoor performance in the woods at Cwmsaerbren in November.
- Produced a pantomime for the Micro Hydro Open Day in April 18.
- Collaboration with local artist on potential new uses for the Watchman's Hut.
- Continued discussing the idea of an open-air festival with arts practitioners that operate in the Rhondda, e.g. building upon the Treorchy and Porth arts festivals.
- Christmas Craft Fayre event in collaboration with local artists, crafters and caterers.

Culture is Natural will continue in Year 2 to develop a cultural forum for younger people, which can be represented on the wider Welcome to Our Woods Partnership. We will now produce headline actions within a longer-term framework to develop an inclusive cultural strategy in the Upper Rhondda. RCTCBC has reconvened its Destination Management Partnership and relevant aims include making Treherbert station and local environment more inviting; a wider range of food/beverages; and more activity & events.

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

Unexpected outcomes

One small back-lane clearance with local residents near Treherbert Station did make us realise that properly maintained back-lanes can provide us with a network of community routes, whilst creating new spaces. Later in the year, ideas emerged to look at the whole area around Treherbert station, including linking to the other side of the tracks, Cwmsaerbren, where our micro-hydro station operates, and where we run social forestry activities; and to Treherbert Park. Arriva Trains and Network Rail have identified a Treherbert is seen as a priority to make more attractive.

Achievements which have been particularly encouraging include:

- The developing partnership with Rhondda Housing, building connections for CYS to address fuel and food poverty; possible trainees and new sole traders; engagement with local people whose voices are seldom heard.
- Renewing the delivery partnership with Valleys Kids to include for Year 2 some joint development work, particularly around outdoor / natural play.
- 'Co-design/production in practice' with RCTCBC, NRW with work developing with others e.g., Health Board, S.W. Fire and Rescue Service and S.W. Police.
- The developing interest and involvement from local landowners and businesses.
- Using asset based community development principles, discovering that we do have many people locally who want to and have the skills to help develop a natural future.
- A circular economy with local businesses contracted for works and services, providing value for money and sustaining local employment.
- Construction of our first community micro-hydro.
- Our local partnership Delivery Team, which is a different kind of model from most grant schemes, is functioning well, capable of responding flexibly to changing demands and resources.
- Programme Management Board has been challenging and productive.
- The development of the Welcome to Our Woods Partnership.

Problems we faced and how we tackled them

The capacity of a delivery partner was the only significant issue. This was managed by the collective effort of the Delivery Team and using sessional workers. The shortfall in activity around community engagement, volunteer support, and health & wellbeing has been addressed in Year 2 by increasing resources.

HOW WELL DID WE REACH EVERYONE WHO COULD BENEFIT

FROM THE PROJECT?

Our methods continue to be successful by making it easy for people to have the opportunity to engage, providing a wide range of different opportunities and locations to suit a wide variety of people. We provide a supportive and welcoming environment for all. We try to contact, involve and build on existing groups and networks to – the local community infrastructure.

We vary times, locations and our flexible and supportive to each individual. We use varied methods such as pop-up exhibitions, visual, musical and artistic methods; children & family activities; door-to-door and on-line surveys.

Current priorities are older people, those with ill-health or a disability (with a focus on loneliness & mental health); and the unwaged. We are tackling inequality through projects designed for those experiencing food and/or fuel poverty. We are making progress with community engagement and volunteer opportunities and those efforts will be boosted significantly in Year 2.

We have been identifying local Welsh speakers with an interest in the broad CYS programme – which means conversations around meetings and activities now include some Welsh being used (or heard) quite regularly – this has been a very positive change in recent months. We have also been identifying Cymraeg translators and/or speakers within the delivery partners, so we can offer new bilingual or single language activities with the option to deliver in Cymraeg.

To develop a communications strategy, specific actions in the Foundation Year were:

- Marketing and communications consultant (Gwyrdd) engaged for 5 days, call-off contract, to support and advise on developing the plan.
- Facebook page reviewed, with numbers following increasing from 500 to 800, developing well as the CYS 'village notice board'. In Year 2, we will explore connecting with other local pages, as part of broadening our links with local groups and organisations, and find our 'community connectors'.
- We added a twitter feed, agreed web domain names and set-up new CYS email accounts.
- A range of attractive CYS WtoW marketing materials have been produced, e.g. a roll-up banner, postcards produced and with others designed and budgeted for Year 2
- Website designed and ready to launch.

We will continue to broaden our communication, reaching out all community groups locally to see what common ground we have, plus testing newer, more interesting methods of individual engagement. We continue to develop the use of multi-media, e.g., short YouTube videos, drone footage, photo-journalism, rather longer, written articles

We will also look at the branding and marketing of more specific ideas or businesses within the programme, e.g., community renewable energy, particular sites for development.

HOW WE'LL USE OR SHARE WHAT WE'VE LEARNED FROM

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Our monitoring and evaluation system has been developed using the collective experience and suggestions of all delivery partners. We have now in use as appropriate: activity logs which record different kinds of voluntary action (e.g. developing plans, taking part in co-designing, planning and delivering activities, local business collaboration); registration forms; Delivery Partner Report Cards; and Programme Summary Card.

Our methods were reviewed with Lottery CYS consultants OB3 in March and April, with some minor adjustments now implemented. Reports, case studies and evaluations are shared with all partners, and other interested parties. We have played a full role in the CYS grant-holders Network and will continue to do so. . And we will also be exploring new evaluation methods using stories to help evaluate the programme through 'Most Significant Change'; and to capture more of the experience of local people of the impact of the programme.

CHANGES WE'LL MAKE BECAUSE OF WHAT WE LEARNED

Due to our original planning and progress we have made, the Year 2 business plan and work-stream has no significant changes. We have realigned some of the work of the Delivery Team, and brought in extra capacity, following the six-month review; Year 2 planning process and Year End Reporting.

Our seven year budget includes a revenue step-down in each year, built in to ensure we focused on income generation and sustainability. A minor change in Year 2 income generation is bringing additional wider partnership resources and joining up local programmes to provide added value.