

August 2021

The journey so far

Create Your Space Mid Term Programme Evaluation Report



August 2021

Create Your Space Mid Term Programme Evaluation Report

A report to: The National Lottery
Community Fund (TNLCF)

Authored by: Nia Bryer and Heledd
Bebb

Browerdd, Heol yr Ysgol
Llanarthne, Sir Gaerfyrddin
SA32 8HJ

07792 609821
nia@ob3research.co.uk

38 Llewelyn Goch
St Fagans, Cardiff
CF5 6HR

07815 772242
heledd@ob3research.co.uk

| Contents | Page |
|---|-----------|
| 1. Introduction | 3 |
| 2. Programme implementation | 8 |
| 3. Progress and achievements | 20 |
| 4. Difference made | 35 |
| 5. Programme support and collaboration | 44 |
| 6. Lessons learned and the future | 48 |
| 7. Conclusions | 52 |

1. Introduction

1.1 OB3 Research was commissioned by The National Lottery Community Fund (TNLCF) in Wales to provide monitoring and evaluation support to Create Your Space (CYS) grant holders and to evaluate the overall impact of the seven-year programme, funded via the TNLCF in Wales.

1.2 As part of this requirement, OB3 has undertaken:

- an Impact Evaluation covering the CYS Development Phase, in October 2017
- a Foundation Phase Process Evaluation in December in 2018, providing a review of the programme set-up phase, including the extent to which community involvement had been embedded in project design and delivery, the effectiveness of early implementation and setting out early achievements and outputs.

1.3 This report sets out the findings of the Mid Term Evaluation, covering years two to four of the programme delivery. A Final Evaluation report will also be prepared, which will review programme delivery during years five to seven and provide an overall end of programme report.

The CYS programme

1.4 The CYS programme aims to transform open spaces in an environmentally sustainable way by bringing together community members to shape and deliver their communities. The CYS programme outcomes are three-fold:

- get local people fully involved in shaping the transformation of their local outdoor spaces
- enable people to transform the way they view and use outdoor spaces
- supporting organisations and communities to have the confidence and desire to take further action, to get involved in activities that improve their local communities.

1.5 The programme is underpinned by a set of underpinning principles, set out at Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1. Create Your Space underpinning principles

- Meaningful community engagement and involvement - purposeful participation
- Robust transparent partnership and collaboration
- Sound evidence-based decision making

- Recognising needs and opportunities
- Holistic approaches to coherent delivery of multiple benefits
- Creating connectivity
- Complementing and augmenting wider programmes and initiatives
- Strategic planning, effective timescales, and phased delivery
- Flexibility in funding and delivery
- Ensuring future sustainability
- Effective learning and delivery support
- Dedicated knowledgeable personnel
- Innovative monitoring and measurement of outcomes and impact

1.6 The programme has also been designed so that its aims and outcomes are consistent with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

1.7 The CYS programme makes available Welsh Government and TNLCF funding for £7.488m to six projects for a period of up to seven years, between 2017 and 2023. Three of the projects are based in north Wales and three in south east Wales. They vary in scale, with the largest project in receipt of nearly £2 million.

Table 1.1 An overview of the Create Your Space funded projects

| Project | Location | Start Date | Funding |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|------------|
| Welcome to our Woods | Treherbert, Rhondda Cynon Taf | 01 May 2017 | £1,016,881 |
| Roots to Shoots | Brymbo, Wrexham | 01 June 2017 | £1,996,482 |
| Woodland Routes to Wellbeing | Duffryn, Newport | 03 July 2017 | £1,453,861 |
| Vision for our Valley | Ynysybwl, Rhondda Cynon Taf | 01 August 2017 | £1,273,099 |
| Cwlwm Seiriol | Seiriol ward, Anglesey | 01 September 2017 | £1,098,000 |
| Our Back Yard | Connah's Quay, Flintshire | 01 November 2017 | £649,941 |

Purpose of this report

- 1.8 This report sets out the findings of our CYS Mid Term Evaluation. It reviews programme implementation over its first four years of delivery and the extent to which funded projects are achieving their outcomes. It considers:
- the extent to which the programme's aims and objectives are still in keeping with those set out originally for CYS
 - the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic upon funded projects provision
 - the extent to which CYS projects are securing meaningful community engagement and involvement
 - the effectiveness of project delivery and governance
 - the progress made by funded projects and the extent to which they are likely to achieve their aims and objectives
 - the main achievements across funded projects to date and the evidence for the difference they are having upon their communities
 - the main lessons learned to date and the key priorities for the remaining programme period.
- 1.9 The findings of the report should be considered in conjunction with those set out within the CYS Impact Evaluation Report for the Development Phase prepared in October 2017 and the Foundation Phase Report prepared in December 2018.
- 1.10 The key findings of the Foundation Phase Report were that:
- the CYS programme is an innovative and ambitious programme to support long-term projects which have the potential to generate meaningful long-term change within their communities
 - the programme and its funded projects are well aligned with Welsh Government policy and had significant potential to contribute towards the ambitions of the Future Generations and Well-being (Wales) Act
 - the structure of the programme, which has included a funded development phase and a foundation period, has been appropriate and pragmatic
 - the aims and objectives of funded projects were found to be in keeping with the overarching CYS programme objectives although the extent to which they were able to demonstrate that they were fully adopting the programme's underpinning principles differed

- projects which are led by local, community-based organisations located within the community they service were most likely to fully adopt programme principles
- projects had very different partnership structures in place and many projects were in fact umbrella programmes with several different strands of activities, often led by different lead partners
- it would be crucial for funded projects to identify and manage the risks associated with long-term funded intervention, including maintaining momentum and securing the ongoing commitment of community members and partner organisations
- all six projects had been able to make progress during the foundation period and had started to make some contribution to overall programme outputs such as outdoor space improvements, developing links between local and community organisations and recruitment of beneficiaries. Some had also been able to secure other sources of funding
- the collaboration and sharing of experience between projects was notable good practice.

Structure of this report

1.11 The structure of this report is set out as follows:

- chapter one provides an overview of the CYS programme, as well as the purpose of this report and the method deployed for undertaking the Mid Term Evaluation
- chapters two to five presents the findings of the desk review and fieldwork with representatives from TNLCF, funded projects, and CYS learning support providers
- chapter six offers our conclusions and recommendations for TNLCF to consider.

Method

1.12 The method adopted for undertaking this Mid Term Programme Evaluation has involved:

- developing a set of research instruments to inform interviews with TNLCF officials, representatives from the learning support contractor, and representatives from CYS funded projects
- undertaking a desk-based review of the following project level documentation:
 - annual reports submitted by the six projects between early 2019 and mid 2021
 - project level evaluation materials and reports

- other relevant monitoring and evaluation material prepared by CYS projects, including photographic and social media evidence.
- facilitating a focus group with three representatives from both learning support providers to gain their views on the programme
- facilitating a focus group with three representatives from TNLCF
- interviewing 14 representatives from each of the six CYS projects to include project managers, staff and key volunteers/community representatives
- drawing on our ongoing involvement with the six funded projects and preparing this Mid Term Evaluation report.

2. Programme implementation

2.1 This chapter sets out the findings of our fieldwork with CYS funded project representatives (including staff, volunteers, community members, and partner organisations), TNLCF staff, representatives from the two learning and support providers as well as a review of annual reports prepared by projects between early 2019 and early 2021. It covers programme aims and objectives as well as delivery arrangements, including community engagement, governance arrangements, promotion and marketing, monitoring and reporting.

CYS programme aims and objectives

2.2 Contributors thought that the purpose of the CYS programme and its funded projects continued to be focused upon transforming local communities by enhancing both environmental assets and the lives of those who live within in their community. Contributors still regarded the key programme principles as relevant and were considered to underpin project approaches.

2.3 In September 2019, some halfway into the programme delivery, CYS projects were asked to assess the extent to which they were adhering to 11 of the 13 programme principles (which related to the way of working), and in doing so were asked to set out the evidence for how they were adopting them. These scores are set out at Figure 2.1 and shows that projects scored themselves highly against the five principles of dedicated knowledgeable personnel; robust transparent partnership and collaboration; recognising needs and opportunities; delivering multiple benefits through holistic approaches; and creating connectivity. Projects scored themselves lower on the principles of effective timescales and phased delivery as well as future sustainability.

Figure 2.1: CYS projects self-assessment against programme principles (September 2019)

| | CYS Programme Principle | Cwlwm Seiriol | Roots to Shoots ¹ | Our Back Yard | Vision for our Valley | Welcome to our Woods | Woodland Routes to Wellbeing | Average |
|---|--|---------------|------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------|----------------------|------------------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Meaningful Community Engagement and Involvement – Purposeful Participation | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 3.3 |
| 2 | Robust Transparent Partnership and Collaboration | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3.7 |

¹ It should be noted that this self-assessment was completed in summer 2019 before Brymbo Heritage Trust lost access to the main site, when confidence was high. Subsequently some scores have reduced.

| | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 3 | Sound Evidence-based Decision Making | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 3.2 |
| 4 | Recognising Needs and Opportunities | 4 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 3.7 |
| 5 | Delivering Multiple Benefits Through Holistic Approaches | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 3.7 |
| 6 | Creating Connectivity | 3 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 3.7 |
| 7 | Complementing and Augmenting Wider Programmes and Initiatives | 3 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 3 | n/c | 3.4 |
| 8 | Effective Timescales and Phased Delivery | 2 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3.0 |
| 9 | Ensuring Future Sustainability | 2 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 3.0 |
| 10 | Dedicated Knowledgeable Personnel | 3 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3.8 |
| 11 | Innovative Monitoring and Measurement of Outcomes and Impact | 2 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3.2 |
| Total score | | 33 | 49 | 39 | 39 | 25 | 37 | 37 |

Source: Project self-assessment forms, September 2019 [Projects were asked to rate themselves from 1 to 5 against each principle where 1 = not doing anything to 5 = could not do any more to meet this principle]

2.4 Figure 2.2 sets out the key developments and progress reported by projects against each of these key programme principles, as at September 2019, together with some of the key issues and challenges faced at the time.

Figure 2.2: CYS projects self-assessment of progress against programme principles

| | CYS Programme Principle | Main developments | Issues and challenges |
|---|--|---|--|
| 1 | Meaningful Community Engagement and Involvement – Purposeful Participation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery of engagement events and activities held targeted at community members and groups • Engagement with schools, particularly primary schools • Activities and events covering a range of interests and ‘hooks’ including art, play, litter pick-ups etc • Establishment of subgroups such as ‘Friends of...’ for sub-projects and community visioning groups | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some projects starting from a low base in terms of community engagement, so involvement takes time |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | Robust Transparent Partnership and Collaboration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project steering groups established • Development of relationships with national organisations and local community groups • Steering groups attended by wide cross section of community including public, private, third sector, community groups and community champions/representatives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced attendance at steering group meetings in some cases and projects recognising need to reinvigorate and increase attendance • Difficulties establishing constructive working relationships with certain organisations e.g. in one case activities had to be suspended on site due to a breakdown in the relationship with landowners |
| 3 | Sound Evidence-based Decision Making | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities set out in work programmes informed by initial consultation and engagement work • Increasing use of social media tools over time to gather data and views • New additional activities informed by ongoing consultation and projects responding to opportunities and needs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community needs and requests not always falling into the project scope |
| 4 | Recognising Needs and Opportunities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of a visual project action plan in project offices to allow for community to view • Flexibility on the part of projects to adapt to new needs and opportunities as they arise e.g. one project exploring the acquisition of a new site | |
| 5 | Delivering Multiple Benefits Through Holistic Approaches | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many activities planned and delivered by projects offering multiple benefits (e.g. environmental benefits and new skills or improved health and wellbeing) | |
| 6 | Creating Connectivity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projects increasing connectivity by supporting or developing groups to use assets e.g. a strollers group using paths and trails assets • Projects interacting with people of all ages across the community | |
| 7 | Complementing and Augmenting Wider Programmes and Initiatives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong alignment with WFG Act • Alignment with other funding streams such as the Healthy Active Fund | |
| 8 | Effective Timescales and Phased Delivery | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular monitoring and review of delivery against project plans • Projects identifying alternative plans where original capital projects cannot be achieved | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation delays for capital projects associated with land transfer, licence agreements and permissions to access sites • Delays also experienced due to original plans being unrealistic |

| | | | |
|----|--|--|--|
| 9 | Ensuring Future Sustainability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projects actively exploring future income generation e.g. paid for services • Other grant funding sources also being explored and secured | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges associated with establishing a social enterprise to generate sustainable income |
| 10 | Dedicated Knowledgeable Personnel | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective use of volunteers with appropriate skills and knowledge • Appropriate staff team with experience and skills • Training programme for staff and volunteers e.g. woodland management and open access playwork | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff retention issues • Initial lack of staffing capacity |
| 11 | Innovative Monitoring and Measurement of Outcomes and Impact | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good use of a variety of tools, including standardised recognised tools such as the Warwickshire and Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale, and qualitative case studies • Projects regularly collecting and recording output data e.g. numbers engaged and attending activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projects recognising the need to improve monitoring and evaluation • Danger of community survey fatigue |

2.5 The Foundation Phase report found that funded projects were well aligned with Welsh Government policy and that proposed activities had the potential to positively contribute towards the goals of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act. Feedback gleaned over the course of the mid-term fieldwork suggested that this continued to be the case given that projects were actively delivering provisions which supported all seven well-being goals. Contributors stressed that projects were adopting a long-term approach to address local issues and involve local people to make decisions about the future of their communities. At the mid-term stage, projects provided evidence that they were positively contributing towards three of the well-being goals in particular:

- a resilient Wales, by maintaining and enhancing their local environment and biodiversity such as via outdoor volunteering activities
- a healthier Wales, by providing activities such as walking groups which help to improve people's physical and mental well-being
- more cohesive communities, by bringing key partners and community members together to plan and deliver change for their community.

Community engagement

- 2.6 The Foundation Phase report found that the level of meaningful community engagement and involvement across projects was mixed, largely as projects' starting positions differed significantly. However, by early 2020, all projects reported that community engagement had been strengthened and enhanced to different degrees, although the impending COVID-19 pandemic affected all projects. In most cases, community engagement waned over this period, particularly during lockdown periods. Some projects reported that project staff had been required to adopt a greater role in the planning and delivery of activities following COVID-19, on the basis that they had to adhere to new safety restrictions. By mid-2021, projects were actively pursuing opportunities to re-engage communities whilst adhering to government restrictions and guidelines on the number of people who could engage in events and activities.
- 2.7 Three projects have grappled with community engagement challenges over the first few years of delivery and in the case of one project this continues to be the case. In this project, Woodland Routes to Wellbeing, the four funded partner organisations have had to lead on activities, and engagement from residents within the immediate local community within the Duffryn estate is still fairly limited. Volunteers who engage with the project tend to be recruited from a wider geographical area. The COVID-19 pandemic has not helped, since it was felt that the project was starting to build local interest by early 2020, and the project will have to start over again in terms of stimulating community interest.
- 2.8 In the case of Cwlwm Seiriol, significant efforts have been made to transition the project from one which was largely driven by Menter Môn and employed staff to one where volunteers and community members are more actively involved. Whilst good progress has been made, there is still a need for further work to extent the volunteer base to be more inclusive and representative of the wider local community, as volunteers tend to be retired individuals with an active interest in green issues.
- 2.9 In the case of Our Back Yard, which also started from a fairly low base in terms of community engagement, the project made good progress up until the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. The project addressed the lack of community engagement by adapting its governance arrangements to allow for greater community input. The project developed a number of 'Friends of' groups such as Friends of Central Park, Friends of Wepre Park, Friends of Quayscape group and Friends of Llwyni Group Garden to help identify needs and

oversee activities. Project staff also reported that they started to respond to community requests for litter clean-ups, thereby ensuring that the project was better aligned to community needs and priorities.

- 2.10 Two projects in particular, *Welcome to our Woods* and *Vision for our Valley*, demonstrate good practice in terms of community engagement. *Welcome to our Woods* has built and strengthened over time its partnership of local community organisations and local champions, which include a Housing Association and local community members. The project has also recently appointed a Tree Warden who is employed for a few hours a day to maintain the woodland site but who can also keep in contact with local people who use the site but don't necessarily use online platforms. The *Vision for our Valley* project has established a Vision Group, which is focused on developing ideas and identifying community needs, and this is well attended by the local community.
- 2.11 The sixth project, *Roots to Shoots* achieved a range of success in community engagement, particularly with events, over its first two years of delivery. A local resident's group held successful family fetes, outside cinema evenings, and arts and music events, including *Brymbo Rocks*. Skills sharing activities also proved very successful as individuals set up an apiary and shared their knowledge of honey bees; *Brymbo Heritage Cider* worked with local people, schools and community groups to plant heritage fruit trees, harvest apples and produce apple juice, cider and cider vinegar; a youth skills project was established; and community members participated in nature walks and wildlife surveys.
- 2.12 One question raised during the mid-term fieldwork was whether project champions and staff needed to be truly embedded within their community and be from the locality itself. Some argued that where this was the case, projects had found community engagement easier as staff and champions already had existing relationships within the community to build upon. Across the three projects where community engagement had proved challenging it was recognised that the delivery team were not local residents. However, in some cases it was argued that having a more independent team also had its advantages as staff were not affiliated to, or restricted by, any local politics or disagreements.

Governance arrangements

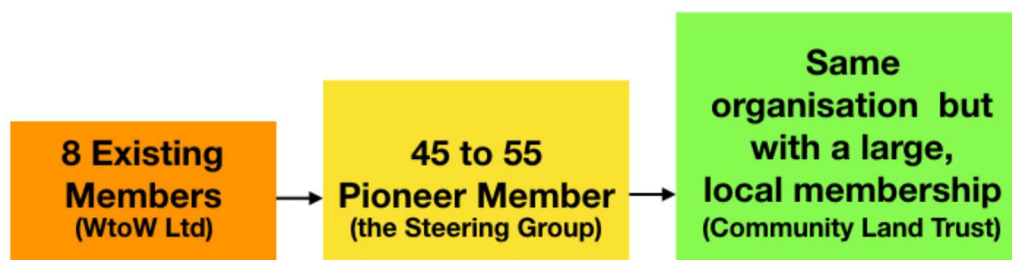
- 2.13 CYS projects have been on evolving journeys in terms of their governance and partnership arrangements. The governance arrangements at two projects (*Cwlwm Seiriol* and *Woodland*

Routes to Wellbeing) have largely remained unchanged since inception. In the case of Cwlwm Seiriol, the original partnership group, with Coed Cymru and Pont, is continuing to work well with each partner bringing their specific expertise to the project. Cwlwm Seiriol's steering group meets quarterly and involves various community and interest groups. This group provides strategic overview and work has been undertaken recently to look at how this group can provide more direct input and strengthen links with the community councils. Woodland Routes to Wellbeing continues to be led by a small partnership of four partner organisations (Duffryn Community Link, Keep Wales Tidy, Growing Space and the National Trust).

2.14 The main changes to the governance and partnership arrangements across the other four projects are:

- **Roots to Shoots:** Brymbo Heritage Trust continues to lead this project and the project reports directly to the board of trustees. The project steering group continues to meet, but there has been a notable absence of some key stakeholders such as the community council in meetings
- **Our Back Yard:** the project is still led by Groundwork North Wales but the original large steering group was reviewed and replaced. A new steering group was put in place in December 2020 with greater representation from the community itself, including local volunteers and residents
- **Vision for our Valley:** the project has strengthened and rebranded its partnership group as a Vision Group which now sits alongside the programme board. The structure is very much around Ynysybwl Regeneration Partnership supporting the community to deliver the projects for themselves, and the new structure reflects this, with the programme board undertaking a more facilitative role
- **Welcome to our Woods:** Welcome to Our Woods Ltd continues to act as the lead organisation with support from a wide partnership of local groups, organisations and individuals. It has plans to grow its membership in a phased way: the company currently has eight directors who are trustees of the limited company and the organisation intends to invite up to 50 pioneer community members (local stakeholders, volunteers, staff) to apply for Pioneer Membership. This group of Pioneer Members will agree new governance arrangements which can accommodate

large community involvement with the Welcome to our Woods legal vehicle changing from a limited company to a community organisation (limited by guarantee).



2.15 Two of the projects (Our Back Yard and Vision for our Valley) have developed several sub-groups to drive forward particularly developments and activities within their communities. In both cases, there is evidence of good community ownership and stewardship of assets and activities:

- Our Back Yard: a Connah’s Quay Greenspaces Forum has been launched and it is hoped to become self-sustaining by the end of the project. Steps were being taken to establish similar groups elsewhere, but progress was hindered by the pandemic and these groups will be reconvened in the near future
- Vision for our Valley: several subgroups have been formed to lead on aspects of the project. These include Friends of Butchers Pool, the Paths and Trails group, the Forestry Visitor Centre, and Young People’s group. For example, the Butchers Pool has a large committee which takes on the responsibility of running the site, maintenance, and lifeguarding arrangements with support as required from the project. A key element of the approach taken across the project is to include new, younger community members within each sub-group to work alongside ‘usual suspects’ to share knowledge, experience and encourage intergenerational working. It is likely that these sub-groups will be maintained post CYS as they are community led.

Delivery arrangements

2.16 The main changes relating to project delivery arrangements over the first half of the CYS programme include:

- one project (Roots to Shoots) has established a strong, multi-disciplinary team that has worked flexibly with the wider community

- three projects (Woodland Routes to Wellbeing, Welcome to our Woods, and Our Back Yard) have experienced project staff turnover, and in the case of one of these the project is currently being managed by its third project manager
- staff at one project (Vision for our Valley) relocated into a larger office following the COVID-19 pandemic, as their existing offices did not allow staff to work safely in a socially distanced manner. Ynysybwl Regeneration Partnership secured additional funding, via TNLCF's COVID-19 fund to achieve this. However, the space has not been utilised as much as expected by staff, largely due to continued home-working practices, nor the community for group activities. As such, the project is planning on moving back to its previous offices in order to reduce rental costs
- one project (Cwlwm Seiriol) has seen several iterations of its staffing structure, with different managers in place at various times during the initial phase of the project. It has expanded its delivery team recently and is contracting out work due to the volume of hands-on work required but remain under-staffed with little admin support.

Promotion and marketing

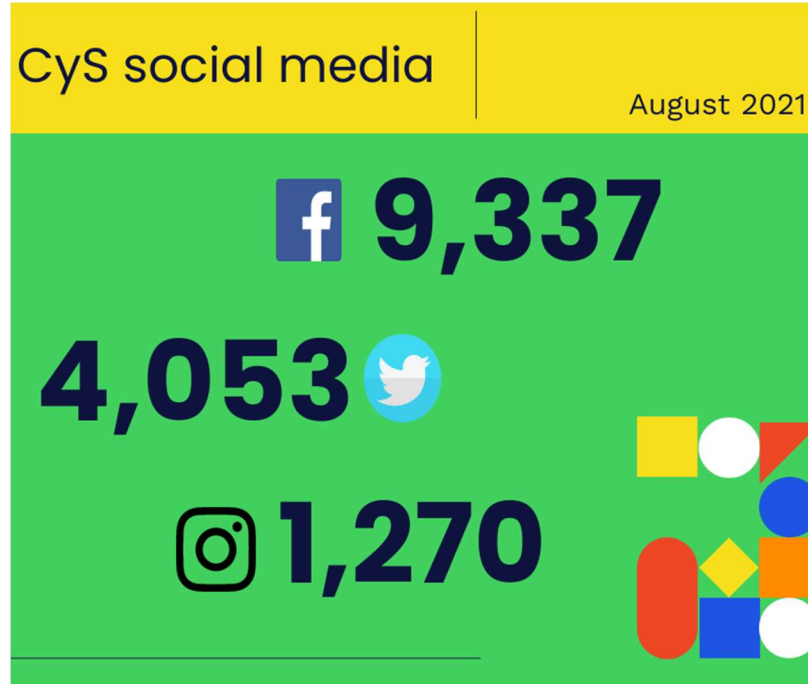
- 2.17 Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, all projects reported making effective use of a wide range of traditional promotional methods to reach their communities. These included methods such as posters, leaflet drops, emails, and newspaper articles. One project also used a community newsletter to provide an official update on project progress. Campaigns to recruit local volunteers continued to be an effective approach to engage community members. All projects also developed links with various other partner organisations to reach local networks and this proved particularly important for those projects which had less of an initial local presence within their communities.
- 2.18 In terms of good practice, one project has published a report which has been distributed to community members. A summary is set out at Figure 2.3.

Figure 2.3: An example of a CYS project report on achievements



- 2.19 All CYS projects have made use of social media to reach communities and promote their activities. Social media has been particularly important since the onset of the pandemic as it has helped projects sustain momentum and maintain contact with local communities. Projects reported the increasing importance of having a member of staff with expertise and capacity to manage their social media coverage as a result. Projects have commonly used Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to promote activities and events, to help recruit volunteers, to communicate progress and to stimulate discussion.
- 2.20 Projects monitor their social media use and followers, and data gleaned from their social media accounts at the mid-point stage in August 2021 is set out at Figure 2.4.

Figure 2.4: CYS projects social media reach in figures



2.21 Their coverage at an individual project level varies:

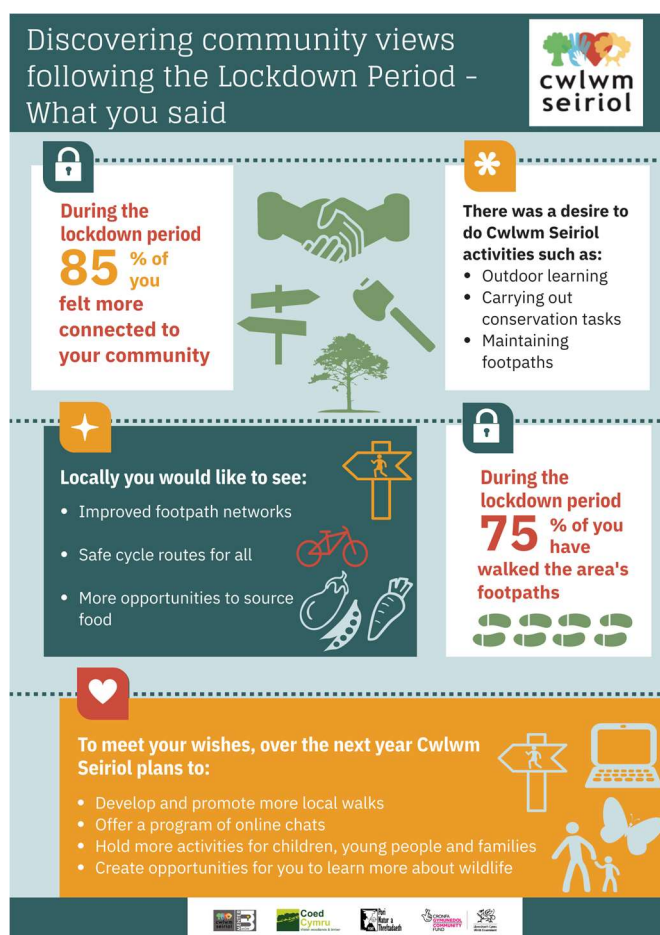
- Cwlwm Seiriol: 760 Facebook followers, 64 Instagram followers and 250 Twitter followers
- Our Back Yard: 996 Facebook followers; 157 Instagram followers and 222 Twitter followers
- Roots to Shoots: 2500+ Facebook followers, 877 Instagram followers and 850 Twitter followers²
- Vision for our Valley: 1,575 Facebook followers and 216 Twitter followers
- Welcome to our Woods: 2,997 Facebook followers and 2,280 Twitter followers
- Woodland Route to Wellbeing: 509 Facebook followers, 172 Instagram followers and 235 Twitter followers.

2.22 Social media platforms have been used effectively by some projects during the pandemic to deliver activities and events. Examples include:

² For Instagram and Twitter – followers are to the Brymbo Heritage Trust account

- an online photo competition held by Our Back Yard during the lockdown, as a way of engaging with school pupils during the period of restrictions. Pupils were encouraged to submit entries which involved interaction with local environment and greenspaces
- Cwlwm Seiriol has been utilising its Facebook page to provide updates on activities on site. This includes several short videos uploaded of plant surveys, tree cutting and scything. The video editing skills were gained from a learning session arranged by the NCLF and has proved very useful to the delivery team. During lockdown Cwlwm Seiriol also undertook a community survey via Facebook and shared the results in an infographic via its online platforms.

Figure 2.5: Cwlwm Seiriol infographic



3. Progress and achievements

3.1 This chapter sets out the progress and achievements made by funded CYS projects over the first half of the programme delivery period. The progress made prior and during the COVID-19 pandemic needs to be considered separately to a large extent, as the pandemic had a profound impact upon project's ability to engage with communities and deliver provision.

General progress

3.2 The progress made by CYS projects in achieving their original aims and objectives over their initial four-year period of the programme is mixed. Many project ideas and plans have already come into fruition, but others are either still in the pipeline or unlikely to materialise.

3.3 Several projects reported an increase in activities and provisions held within and for the community, be they playgroups, walking groups, volunteering groups and woodland management activities. This was thought to be particularly true for two projects (Cwlwm Seiriol and Woodland Routes to Wellbeing) who have been able to introduce such activities since the Foundation Phase. It was also the case that other projects such as Vision for our Valley were thought to have further stimulated community level activities since the Foundation Phase, to the extent that a member of the community observed that 'you hear people say there's so much going on in Ynysybwl now'.

3.4 In one case however, despite the progress made between 2017 and 2019, it was reported that the delays to the organisation's 'big ticket plans' as planned due to land transfer issues was creating resentment amongst particular groups of the community. One contributor involved with the project observed that community members were asking:

'where has all the money gone? They don't see any progress'.

3.1 The main factors accounting for any lack of progress relate to land and asset transfer issues and the COVID-19 pandemic:

Land and asset transfer issues

3.2 Land and asset transfer issues have impacted upon four of the CYS projects which raise questions about their ability to achieve their original plans:

- **Our Back Yard:** the original objective had been to access a local authority owned site, Golftyn Park, via a Capital Asset Transfer but this proved impossible. The project set out to secure a 10-year lease on the same site in order to undertake capital work. The opportunity to lease the land had to be advertised publicly as it is public open space and as such the process of responding and agreeing lease arrangements took time, and was only signed in September 2020
- **Roots to Shoots:** many of the project's objectives were reliant on gaining access via licence or lease agreements to land and buildings owned by Brymbo Development Ltd. Since this has not materialised, the project has had to resort to other activities, which are less ambitious but achievable within the remaining three years of the programme. At the time of drafting this mid-term report, the project was developing its work programme for the remaining three years of delivery
- **Vision for our Valley:** a key aspect of this project was to develop a physical Hub on the Lady Windsor's Colliery site. However, the project has been unable to secure access to the land, which is owned by the local authority due to a financial clawback restriction imposed upon the brownfield site by the Welsh Government should it be sold by the local authority. This was a flagship element of their project which is highly unlikely to be achieved during the programme delivery period. The project has now started to consider other potential sites for purchase and development of the Hub (such as an old GP practice). The new site will only be able to accommodate some of the project's original objectives which were intended for the Lady Windsor's Colliery site and it is unlikely that it will be able to accommodate the project's green and solar energy plans
- **Welcome to our Woods:** initial discussions with Natural Resources Wales to secure a management agreement for 85 hectares of Treherbert forest, ended with no agreement in place. However, another option is now being considered which would involve Natural Resources Wales and the Welcome to our Woods Community Land Trust jointly managing a larger area of forest around Treherbert. The plan would be co-produced by these partners and shared by the local community's vision. It would provide WtoW Community Land Trust with access to timber to allow a pilot wood processing project to be delivered. The project has also found that new opportunities

to secure assets, such as the library building, has enabled them to develop a high street presence which improves knowledge and use of their woodland activity.

COVID-19 pandemic

3.3 The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact upon the progress made by projects since March 2020. Activities were halted immediately in March 2020 in order to comply with government restrictions, staff were required to work from home, meetings were moved online, and projects reported a general loss in momentum which had been generated in the run up to the COVID-19 outbreak.

3.4 The pandemic had an impact upon three aspects of the CYS projects:

- staff: two projects furloughed staff at various points in time over the pandemic period. These projects reported that most staff returned from furlough in September 2020 but some staff were furloughed again during early 2021. In one case, different staff were furloughed at different points in time. The furloughing of staff helped to conserve funds which has allowed one project to request a project extension from TNLCF
- engagement: projects commonly reported that they were unable to engage with volunteers or participants on a face-to-face basis due to government restrictions. This impacted upon engagement with schools and the delivery of group events. Woodland Routes to Wellbeing for instance halted all volunteering activities and play groups during both lockdown period. Some projects found it difficult to get local people involved again when restrictions were eased as participants, particularly older people, lacked confidence to do so and were concerned about the health risks involved. One project mentioned how the impact on engagement suddenly provided different ways to engage with the community e.g. chats on the doorstep when delivering food and provided them with the opportunity to be agents of change and a period of 'reality testing' the resilience of their community connections
- provision: projects had to adhere to government restrictions when planning activities, which meant that for much of 2020 no face-to-face group activities were held. Activities were slowly introduced from the autumn of 2020 onwards when restrictions were lifted but were halted again during the short fire break and third lockdown from December 2020 until April 2021. Staff were concerned about the necessary health and safety measures which needed to be introduced in order to restart provisions

when restrictions were eased and significant efforts were deployed to ensure compliance with guidance, avoid transference and maintain social distance.

- 3.5 Projects were quick to respond to the impact of the pandemic upon their local communities and are to be commended for their efforts to help provide a front-line emergency response. Staff and their network of local people provided a range of support to people who were isolating or shielding including help with shopping, prescription collection, food bank deliveries, withdrawing money from banks, gardening and other essential errands. Some projects took on responsibility for sharing information about how people could stay safe within the pandemic by offering advice and guidance whilst others provided one to one phone support to vulnerable people. Other projects were actively involved in organising and delivering online sessions, such as regular quizzes or meetings for particular groups, to help combat social isolation and loneliness and to keep connected with volunteers and local people. At least two projects organised and delivered activity and play packs to children and their families during the first lockdown period.
- 3.6 Two projects (Cwlwm Seiriol and Welcome to our Woods) explored opportunities to deliver digital content and activities to replace their traditional face to face provision over the pandemic period. Welcome to our Woods prepared and hosted digital sessions covering subjects such as den building and exercising whilst Cwlwm Seiriol developed and hosted a series of monthly online talks. These online talks were either hosted independently or in collaboration with Plantlife as part of the process of establishing an Anglesey Meadows Group and covered themes such as meadow management, recording wildlife and equipment for managing meadows.
- 3.7 Project representatives frequently commented or reported that the restrictions introduced by the government during the pandemic period resulted in an increased interest across their communities in local nature and green spaces. Projects observed an increased use of local green spaces and whilst welcome, also brought about issues such as increased litter and damage to spaces in some areas. As restrictions began to be lifted, some projects reported that group activities were re-introduced, with those which were led by local communities being the first to do so e.g. walk and talk groups in the Vision for our Valley project as they were led by local volunteers.

3.8 Figure 3.1 sets out an overview of how CYS projects responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and adapted their activities to support local communities.




Figure 3.1 How CYS projects responded to the COVID-19 pandemic



People could not meet up face to face so

Projects engaged with their community virtually to help address loneliness and isolation

- Zoom meetings
- webinars
- on-line yoga
- on-line surveys

People who were shielding had greater restrictions so

Projects responded to local needs by

- helping with shopping, prescription collection and other errands
- got involved in residential garden maintenance work




Key project achievements

3.9 The key achievements across the six CYS projects over the first half of the programme delivery period are set out below:

Cwlwm Seiriol

- a monthly programme of online talks was held over the lockdown period
- weekly volunteering sessions were held prior to the pandemic and were reinstated when restrictions allowed it, with limited numbers attending due to government restrictions. Activities undertaken by volunteers have included footpath clearance, plant surveys, waymarking improvements, footpath improvements and repairs, installation and repairs of gates and willow coppicing
- a green prescribing pilot project has commenced which involves working with referred participants via the GP Surgery and Exercise Referral Scheme



- common land, road verges, meadows at various sites in Llanddona, Llaniestyn, Aberlleiniog and Llangoed are maintained and electric fences erected to allow for grazing
- a number of wildlife surveys have been arranged including fungus foray, a reptile survey, and harvest mouse survey. The project has also provided training to local people on monitoring healthy ash trees and identifying ash dieback disease



a

Roots to Shoots

- initial maintenance and landscape improvements were carried out at the Brymbo Heritage site. These included tree and scrub clearance, pathway improvements, creation of a new habitats through a new pond and dam, rejuvenation of existing ponds, ground clearance to form a barbecue area and accommodate a forest school project.
- establishment of an apiary, which is home to a colony of Welsh Black Bees. Ecology surveys shows that overall biodiversity levels have improved as a result of the habitat improvements, in particular for great crested newts
- upskilling local residents in chain saw and brush cutter use and community action such as 'Play Streets', music and art events, cinema events and Brymbo Rocks
- the delivery of 47 community play sessions at two other locations with 147 individual children having visited 446 times during term time as well as a forest school attended by 110 pupils from a local primary school



RHOS A JOHNSTOWN
Cynhellir yn ystod pob gwyliau Ysgol ac athrofa gwyliau mis Chwefror a'r Hafodig
2pm tan 4pm
Dydd Llun a Dydd Mawrth yn Mônau Cider (Dre Isaf)
Dydd Mercher ym Mryn y Bann
Dydd Iau a Dydd Gwener ym Mharc Ponciau

BRYMBO
Cynhellir yn ystod pob gwyliau Ysgol ac athrofa gwyliau mis Chwefror a'r Hafodig
11am tan 1pm
Dydd Llun a Dydd Iau Golygfa Cae
Dydd Mercher ym Maes Chwarae Llanerchaer Drove
Dydd Iau a dydd Gwener Cae Meryn, Taryfon

RHOSTYLLEN
Fai'n cynhellir yn ystod gwyliau'r haf yn unig
10am tan 1pm
Dydd Llun i Ddydd Gwener ar y caeau y tu ôl i Neuddi y Pwyll

Ariennir yr holl brosiectau gwaith chwarae gan gyngorwau cymuned lleoli.
Am fwy o fanylion am brosiectau gy'n cael eu cynnal yn ystod gwyliau ysgol, cyswlltech â Gwasanaeth Gyngorwedd i Deuluoedd Wrecsam or **01978 292094** neu ewch i www.wrecsam.gov.uk/chwarae

- the arrangement of other activities off site, including a car club event
- in all, the input of 160 volunteers has been recorded by the project. These volunteers have contributed 4,800 hours of time to various activities including project open days, orchard improvements, and the cider mill project.

Our Back Yard



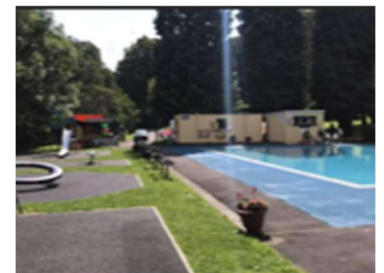
- the development of a volunteer group (although the sustainability of this group was impacted by COVID-19 and the project will need to work on rebuilding it). Activities undertaken by the volunteers have included woodland management scrub clearance, path maintenance and litter clearance
- training staff and volunteers: to date 19 volunteers and four members of staff have been trained and secured qualifications in areas such as first aid, hedge laying, woodland management, bushcraft and brushcutter skills

- Quayscape garden: the project has worked on this site, which is owned by Flintshire County Council, since the outset. A group of residents independently started to work on a derelict allotment site at Quayscape Garden and the project has worked with them to establish the Friends of Quayscape Gardens group
- Golftyn Park: initial preparatory work is underway for this capital project, which is expected to be tendered and completed by September 2021
- work with schools: the project has worked with four primary schools and one secondary school to develop skills and knowledge about the local environment. The interaction has involved the development of a digital trail in partnership with schools and the provision of environmental teaching resources. The project originally intended to deliver education sessions to all Years 3 and 4 pupils across the four primary schools and prior to COVID-19, they had achieved around half of their target. These will be continued when restrictions ease but, in the meantime, other activities, such as the developing of teaching resources and pollinating wildflower growing kits for schools have been prepared



Vision for our Valley

- Butchers Pool: Ynysybwl Regeneration Partnership secured a seven-year lease on the community pool from Rhondda Cynon Taf County Council in March 2019 and by July 2019, the pool was refurbished. The capital work involved refurbishing the pump house, installing new drains and filters, remodelling the changing rooms, replacing toilet facilities, and changing cubicles, resurfacing the pool and adding safety surfaces around the pool. During its first summer season in 2019, over 700 volunteering hours were given to the pool



- completion of the Caban Guto visitor centre at the Daerwynno forestry: a new visitor centre was opened in June 2021 and



operates a café offering light refreshments. The centre provides a focal point to those using the forestry. It is managed by a committee and staffed by volunteers

- Paths and Trails group: a group of community members representing the Clydach Ramblers, Daerwynno Outdoor Activity Centre, the Walk and Talk group, the Robbie Runners, a local Cycling Club and the Ynysybwl Pony Club have developed walking and running trails across the St Gwynno forest and the surrounding area to encourage people to enjoy the local countryside. The first walking trail, the Cribyn Du walk, has been waymarked and a leaflet to promote, has been prepared and distributed across the community
- Lady Windsor Colliery Site: this former colliery site was intended to be a flagship element of the project and would serve to provide a centre for Ynysybwl. However, despite various viability studies and efforts to negotiate a Community Asset Transfer with the local authority, issues on the site make it an unrealistic option. The costs associated with developing road access and dealing with contamination were considered too high
- by the end of year 3 the project had held 49 meetings with community members and groups and 165 people had attended various meetings, consultations, and events

Welcome to our Woods

- the creation of Cwm Saenren micro hydroelectric scheme which generated 131,560 kWh between Feb 2019 and Feb 2020

- the Old Rhondda Brewery Site: WtoW Ltd acquired this derelict site in December 2020 and it has been made safe in order to develop a woodland hub facility. Additional investment has been secured via the ENRaW³ fund to develop a timber community building



- the former Tapper garage site: A grant of £120k from the Welsh Government has been leveraged to develop the Crop Cycle Treherbert project on a previous former petrol station site. During the summer of 2021, the capital work which will involve new electricity, water, and sewage services, will be undertaken and facilities put in place for the community to get involved in food growing for the future. It will be a controlled environment food growing area, producing food which can be distributed locally and which will provide educational opportunities. partnership working has been a key element of WtoW including partnership working with Avant Cymru, the Bevan Foundation and Network Rail

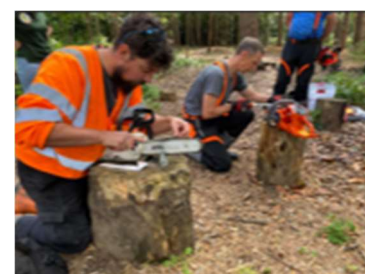


- Rhondda Skyline project: this provided WtoW with an opportunity to undertake more activities, in line with CYS, but on a bigger scale. Skyline has brought with it resources and a wider group of expertise. A project officer has been appointed with the funding and WtoW was successful in obtaining a Foundational Economy grant from Welsh Government. It has also enabled WtoW to input into more discussions locally and has increased visibility at a political level locally

Woodland Routes to Wellbeing

³ The Welsh Government's Enabling Natural Resources and Well-being Scheme

- volunteer recruitment: the project has focused on recruiting volunteers post the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of 24 volunteers were reported as being involved at the time of drafting in woodland maintenance work. Of these, some dozen volunteered regularly on a weekly basis. This was the maximum number which the project could support whilst adhering to COVID-19 risk assessments. Other volunteers were also involved in activities such as the garden at Tredegar House. Volunteers are drawn from both within the Duffryn community and further afield. Recruiting volunteers has become easier since the pandemic as people have a greater understanding of the benefit of being outdoors



- skills development: the project had arranged training for staff and volunteers including chipper and brush cutting, playwork, first aid, food and hygiene and willow weaving. Growing Space has delivered accredited training to 82 participants and 15 volunteers covering manual handling, environmental awareness, customer service, volunteering and community engagement, assertiveness and health and safety



- environmental improvements: the project has improved the Duffryn woodland by tidying the space, tackling fly tipping issues and making environmental improvements
- biodiversity enhancement: developments include installation of bat boxes, removal of invasive laurel growth, planting native fruit trees, building a hedgehog house



- play sessions: since the start of the project (to December 2020) the project has engaged with 583 local children within a total of 548 play sessions. Sessions had to be postponed over the lockdown periods but some 30 children are attending them regularly since being reintroduced. Sessions are being held within the Duffryn woodlands which helps to increase use of the outdoor spaces.



Key programme achievements

3.10 Some headline programme outputs over the first half of the delivery period, up until August 2021 are set out at Figures 3.2 to 3.6. These cover number of volunteers engaged, volunteer hours given to the project, engagement with school pupils, outdoor spaces developed or enhanced and litter cleared.

Figure 3.2: Volunteers engaged by the CYS programme



Figure 3.3: Volunteer hours given to the CYS programme



Figure 3.4: Litter cleared by the CYS programme



Figure 3.5: CYS programme outdoor space improvements

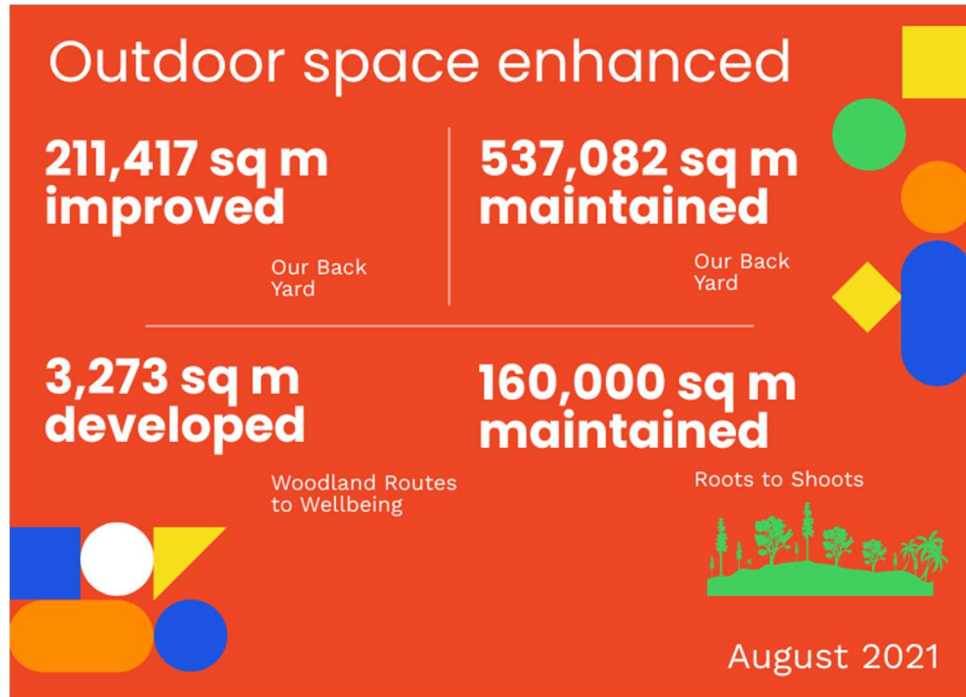
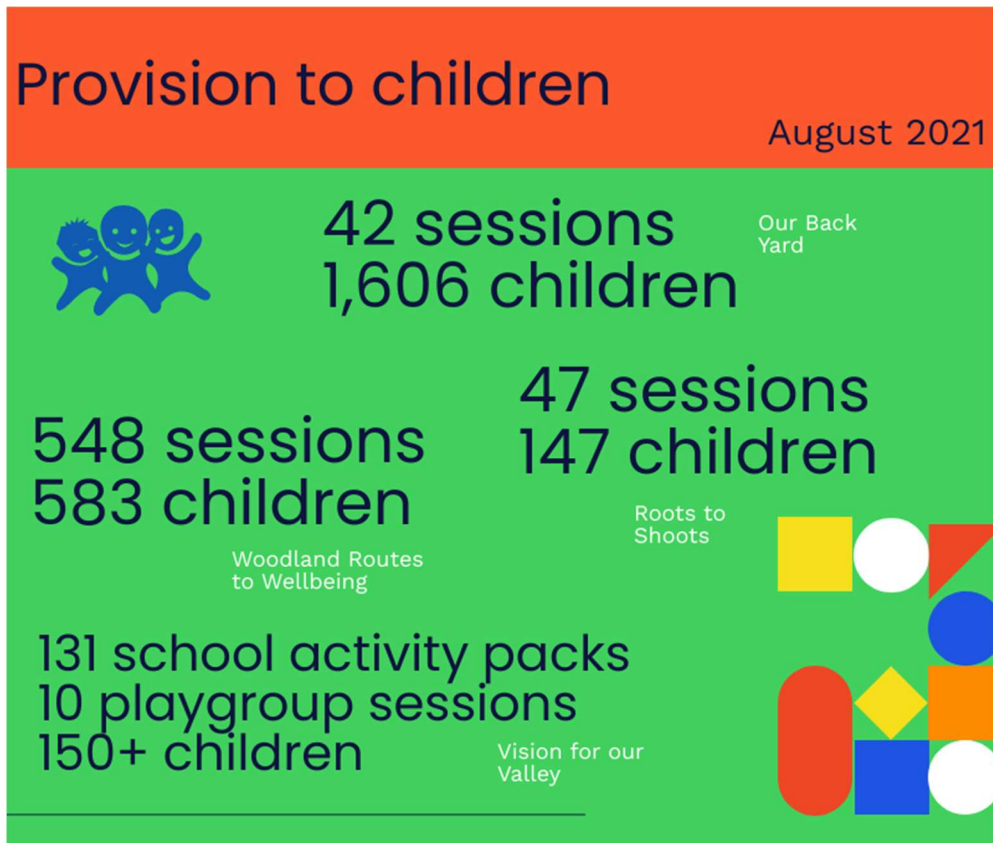


Figure 3.6: CYS programme provision to children



4. Difference made

- 4.1 This chapter considers the difference made by CYS projects at the mid-point stage, including the progress being made by projects against their outcome to become self-sustaining post CYS funding.
- 4.2 In considering the difference being made by CYS projects we return to consider the extent to which projects are achieving the six key outputs and five key outcomes set out within the programme's Theory of Change model, as summarised at Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.1 Create Your Space outputs

Output 1: Outdoor spaces developed, conserved, created or enhanced

Output 2: Links are in place between local and community organisations

Output 3: Beneficiaries are meaningfully involved in the development, design and delivery of the project

Output 4: Staff and volunteers receive training and developed improved skills and capacity

Output 5: Increase in the number of local people utilising outdoor spaces

Output 6: Creating sustainable businesses, jobs and leisure opportunities

Figure 4.2 Create Your Space outcomes

Outcome 1: Improving local environments and creating accessible outdoor spaces

Outcome 2: Communities taking more control over their local environment

Outcome 3: Improving understanding of the value of outdoor spaces to health and wellbeing

Outcome 4: Increasing community pride of place and community cohesion

Outcome 5: Increasing skills and experiences of local people

Programme outputs

- 4.3 A review of project annual reports suggests that projects have been successfully delivering activities which allow them to achieve most of these programme outputs. Many of these outputs are documented individually under each project's key achievements (at section 3 of this report), particularly in relation to the development of outdoor spaces (output 1) and use of outdoor spaces (output 5). For instance, Vision for our Valley reported that 2,500 visits were made to its refurbished Butchers Pool during the summer 2019 season⁴. There is also plenty of photographic evidence available via social media and annual reports of the outdoor spaces developed and enhanced (output 1) by projects.
- 4.4 All projects are also succeeding to develop and establish links with local and community organisations (output 2). Annual reports make regular reference to a wide range of groups and organisations who contribute to project steering groups, advise on project needs and priorities, refer beneficiaries into the project, collaborate with the project, and who deliver aspects of the project. These include those from the public, third and private sector. Projects regularly report that they have been able to develop good working relationships with their local authority, although these were sometimes restricted to particular departments. For instance one project reported to be working well with the countryside and environment department of the local authority but was finding it challenging establishing a similar relationship with the local authority's highway maintenance departments to discuss grass cutting.
- 4.5 Five of the six projects have been able to succeed in securing extensive, meaningful involvement of beneficiaries in the development and design of the project (output 3) whilst the sixth has made less progress in this respect, accepting that it operates within a very challenging setting in terms of engagement. This has already been discussed in detail at section three of this report.
- 4.6 All projects have elements of training and opportunities for staff and volunteers to gain new skills. These have focused on environmental and outdoor skills in the main, including skills around woodland management, gardening, growing food, landscape improvements and maintenance, wildlife surveys, footpath maintenance, willow coppicing and chipper and brush cutting training. One project has been able to provide other types of training opportunities including lifeguarding work experiences and bike maintenance.

⁴ It was not able to open during 2020 because of COVID-19 restrictions

- 4.7 There is less evidence at the mid-point phase that CYS projects have created sustainable jobs and businesses (output 6). However, two projects (Welcome to our Woods and Vision for our Valley) are involved in plans which could lead to the creation of social enterprises within the community, which could be maintained after the programme funding comes to an end. It will be important to explore these during the final programme evaluation.

Programme outcomes

- 4.8 The findings on the extent to which CYS projects are contributing towards CYS programme outcomes are similar to those being achieved for programme outputs in that overall, there is good evidence that projects are contributing well towards the five key outcomes set out in the Theory of Change model.

Outcome 1: Improving local environments and creating accessible outdoor spaces

- 4.9 There is very good evidence that projects are making a positive contribution to improving their local environments, by enhancing and maintaining outdoor and green spaces within their communities. These improvements could be grouped into those which focus on:
- habitat improvement: projects have been actively involved in wildflower planting, woodland management, improving wildlife corridors, creating habitat piles, scrub clearance, and undertaking wildlife surveys
 - improving access to the environment: projects have been clearing paths, maintaining existing paths, maintaining fencing and erecting/improving points of access, developing and erecting new signage, and maintaining exiting signage
 - removing litter and fly tipping: all projects have been involved in this type of activity, with two (Our Back Yard and Woodland Routes to Wellbeing) having focused significant efforts on this area of work due to it being a particular issue within their communities. For instance, Woodland Routes to Wellbeing report having collected 1,594 litter bags over their delivery period. Our Back Yard has removed 458 bags of litter over the course of the project and its Quay clean initiative, which involved getting local people, groups and schools involved in litter picking, was piloted in 2019. The project had intended to make this an annual event, but COVID-19 restrictions has not allowed this to date.

- 4.10 Local volunteers have been actively involved in these improvements which is promising in terms of ongoing maintenance post project funding. However, the increase in litter and fly tipping reported by projects during the pandemic period suggests that improvements could be short-lived in the absence of longer-term behavioural change and ownership from within communities.

Communities taking more control over their local environment

- 4.11 There is good evidence across four of the CYS projects that local communities are taking more control over their local environment whilst it is still early days for the other two. This outcome is being achieved effectively across projects which have established sub-groups to take responsibility for particular sites or developments or associations under the banner of 'friends of' particular green spaces.
- 4.12 Where projects have been able to secure access to community assets and land, there is good evidence that members of the local community are becoming stewards of those facilities. For instance, in Welcome to our Woods, the acquisition of the Old Brewery site in Treherbert has allowed local people to gain improved access to the woodland, as access to the forestry via the public footpath has since been established.
- 4.13 However, asset and land transfer issues as well as delays in securing lease agreements to take control over local spaces has restricted projects from fully achieving this outcome so far. For instance, in the case of Welcome to our Woods, plans for the local community to manage the woodland have not yet come to fruition because of difficulties gaining permission to the area whilst Vision for our Valley has experienced similar issues for an old colliery site within Ynysybwll.

Improving understanding of the value of outdoor spaces to health and wellbeing

- 4.14 All projects report a marked improvement in the use of outdoor spaces across their communities since the outset, although acknowledged that this increase would have been fuelled in part by the broader increase in use of local green spaces observed during the pandemic as a result of government restrictions. However, projects were confident that their activities and environmental improvements were helping to increase the use of outdoor spaces. It was also the case that projects felt that group-based activities arranged for community members, be that walking groups, volunteering sessions or playgroups, were

generating health and wellbeing benefits. These benefits included reduced social isolation, improved physical health, and improved mental health.

- 4.15 The evidence available to demonstrate that this outcome is being achieved is mostly anecdotal and there is very little, if any, evidence available at the project level to provide an indication of the scale of increase in use of specific outdoor spaces. For instance, none of the projects capture visitor/user numbers via counters to monitor trends over time although many projects do collect data for the number of people who engage in particular activities e.g. numbers attending walking groups or training sessions.

Increasing community pride of place and community cohesion

- 4.16 There is some evidence available that suggests an increase in community pride of place in particular. In one CYS project, Roots to Shoots, various partnerships developed with residents in the new estate near the Brymbo heritage site has seen residents develop an action plan to clear vegetation, paint metal railings and improve the whole streetscape. Similarly, the Plas Power colliery site has put up notice boards and has seen an increase in local people making use of the site for their mental and physical health and learning about the heritage and history.
- 4.17 Representatives at one CYS project thought that the project was making a positive contribution to improving community cohesion across the area, not least as it had helped to bring and better align activities, so as a result there is less duplication of effort and improved communication in place.
- 4.18 Those projects who seem to be able to demonstrate some anecdotal evidence of community cohesion are mainly those where the activities and priorities for projects have been developed from the ground up. As such, there is buy-in and a sense of ownership of the developments. However, there is yet to be much in the way of demonstrable evidence, by way of surveys or focus group feedback, to support this.

Increasing skills and experiences of local people

- 4.19 There is good evidence that projects are helping to increase the skills and experiences of local people through training provision and volunteering activities, although the numbers involved do vary from one project to another. Some projects work with small numbers of local people in an intensive way whilst others work with a greater number of people, but in a

less intensive way. The following are examples of how projects are increasing the skills and experiences of local people:

- Cwlwm Seiriol: has delivered various training to volunteers, including a recent session on learning to use a scythe and how to sharpen the blade
- Our Back Yard: this project delivered a 12-week training course to 12 young people focusing on first aid and practical environmental improvements. Activities included building a compost bay for a local allotment as well as building planters and benches for a range of locations around the town. In total 36 qualifications were gained, with two individuals moving to employment after the course and two moving on to training courses
- Roots to Shoots: has delivered training sessions on chainsaw and brush cutter use to volunteers, who gained the relevant qualifications, as well as training on ecology surveying, newt handling, bee keeping, orchard maintenance as well as apple juice, cider and vinegar production
- Vision for our Valley: the development of the Butchers Pool at Ynysybwl resulted in three young people employed as lifeguards during 2019 and a further 10 volunteers trained as lifeguards and in first aid.
- Woodland Routes to Wellbeing: has delivered several training sessions to volunteers and staff since COVID-19 restrictions have been removed, with seven having completed a recent chipper training course and two having completed brush cutting training.

Long-term sustainability of outcomes

- 4.1 Project representatives were very mindful of the need to plan their approach to focus upon the long-term sustainability of outcomes, although it was recognised that this was not always an easy task particularly in communities where engagement was still low and under development. In terms of good practice, activities which are led and managed by local community groups from the outset (e.g. Friends of Connahs Quay Park at Our Back Yard and the Butchers Pool Steering Group at Vision for our Valleys) were thought to be more likely to be sustained in the long term without project funding. Whilst still of value and benefit

to local communities, there is currently less clarity about how work undertaken by contractors and managed directly by project staff will be maintained in the long-term.

- 4.2 Many project representatives argued that there would always be a need for an ongoing co-ordination role post CYS funding, to drive forward developments and to mobilise volunteer input. This role would require funding and as such projects recognised that they needed to consider and start developing plans post-CYS. It was also observed however that not all activities needed to be funded, as it could possibly be incorporated into the core remit of partner organisations, such as community groups, charities, or schools.

Securing other funding

- 4.3 Five projects have successfully secured at least some other source of funding at the time of fieldwork. In total this currently amounts to over £6.2million.

Figure 4.3: Other funds secured by CYS projects



4.4 The additional sources of funding accessed by projects include:

- Our Back Yard: has secured some £111,000 additional funding, including from the Wales Challenge Fund, Parc Adfer and the Landfill Tax Credit Fund which is being used to improve biodiversity and the green infrastructure and improve access across various sites such as the Quay Wetlands, Broadoak, Llwyni Valley, Llwyn Quiet and Gathering Grounds sites
- Roots to Shoots: Brymbo Heritage Trust secured a grant of £1.096m from TNLCF and another from £4.147m from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to redevelop the Brymbo Steelworks site and transform it into a visitor attraction to include a heritage and learning centre, a community hub and business space. In addition it has secured two play grants from Wrexham Borough Council for £2,178 and a small amount of funding, £300, to run forest school sessions at a local primary school
- Vision for our Valley: has secured £530,000 additional funding including:
 - Welsh Government Rural Development Programme funding to support Green Connections, an environmental learning project
 - People and Places Community Lottery fund to support an enterprising future project for young people
 - Healthy Active Fund to support a Be-Active outdoor activity project to support people to get more active in the community
 - Natural Resources Wales Social Prescribing funding to support a Lean, Green and Healthy project which provides opportunities for people signposted by local GP surgeries
 - The Rank Foundation and Great Places (Community Lottery Fund) to support the Llechi Glo, Cefn Gwlad project which support and promotes community leadership and the Upcycle project, which employs an Upcycle Community Development Worker to repair and inspect redundant bikes
 - The Rank Foundation and Community Lottery Fund to support the Upcycle project to repair bikes
- Welcome to our Woods: has secured a total of £398,000 funding to date. The Skyline concept secured £238,000 of Foundational Economy funding from Welsh

Government and includes the funding of a dedicated project office. WtoW has also been awarded £40,000 via the Welsh Government's ENRaW fund for the development of a timber community building on the Old Rhondda Brewery Site. A further £120,000 has been secured from Welsh Government for the purchase of capital items for the Crop Cycle Treherbert project

- Woodland Routes to Wellbeing: has received a small grant for £3,500 from Newport City Council to assist with woodland development including the removal of laurel and new planting within the cleared area.

5. Programme support and collaboration

- 5.1 This chapter considers aspects of programme support including arrangements for monitoring and reporting, financial spend, collaboration between projects, the learning support provision and the role undertaken by TNLCF.

Monitoring and reporting to TNLCF

- 5.2 Projects are required to submit half-yearly and annual updates to TNLCF, using a reporting template. Project representatives were very positive about the monitoring and reporting requirements expected of them by TNLCF. These requirements were considered to be reasonable and TNLCF afforded projects good flexibility to amend their activities and financial profiles accordingly:

‘the Lottery was very adaptive ... so we were able to adapt our offer’

‘the flexibility of this project is so important and the Lottery have been brilliant – they could not do any more’.

- 5.3 The feedback from all funded projects about the role played by TNLCF was positive. TNLCF’s response during the pandemic period was highlighted as a major strength. This had been very welcome as all projects had been required to amend their provisions and delivery arrangements to accommodate the changing circumstances.
- 5.4 Not all project staff had been aware of the flexible approach offered by TNLCF, implying that it had not been communicated to staff by their organisation or previous post holders, and therefore suggesting a need for TNLCF to reiterate this point to new post holders. For instance, one project representative observed that ‘we were reluctant to go back to the lottery to change things’ as they were unsure how TNLCF would respond.
- 5.5 Two projects have prepared mid-term evaluation reports:
- Our Back Yard prepared an end of Year 3 internal report in December 2020
 - Woodland Routes to Wellbeing is currently preparing an evaluation report which is being undertaken by an independent evaluator.

Project spend

5.6 Table 5.1 shows project spend to date against their total funding. CYS projects have spent 51% of their allocated funding as at the end of July 2021. This varies by project, with Roots to Shoots having only spent 29% of their allocated funding and Our Back Yard having spent 65% (understandably because it is a five-year project). Just over a third of the remaining balance is capital allocations and Roots to Shoots accounts for a large proportion of this.

Table 5.1: CYS project spend to date (July 2021)

| Project | Funding Awarded | Additional COVID-19 top up grant | Total awarded | % spend to date | % balance remaining |
|------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| Cwlwm Seiriol | £1,098,000 | n/a | £1,098,000 | 51% | 49% |
| Roots to Shoots | £1,996,482 | n/a | £1,996,482 | 29% | 71% |
| Our Back Yard | £649,941 | £8,743**** | £658,684 | 65% | 35% |
| Vision for our Valley | £1,273,099 | £19,395*** | £1,292,494 | 59% | 41% |
| Welcome to our Woods | £1,016,881 | n/a | £1,016,881 | 65% | 35% |
| Woodland Routes to Wellbeing | £1,453,861 | £20,000 | £1,473,861 | 60% | 40% |
| Total | £7,488,264 | £48,138 | £7,536,402 | 51% | 49% |

Source: NCLF, as at 31st July 2021

*WTOW received no revenue payments in years 1 and 2, £71,576 in year 3 and £137,441 in year 4 (to 30.04.21)

** Duffryn have spent £34,192 capital budget but requested to transfer the remaining £73,855 to revenue. Therefore the new total revenue budget is £1,439,669. They also received additional Covid-19 funding in 2020 to provide food bags to the elderly and families during the pandemic.

*** Ynysybwl received additional Covid-19 funding in 2020 for new premises for 12 months to deliver community and services

**** Groundwork received an additional Covid-19 funding in 2020 to offer gardening and ground maintenance for isolated community members, organisations and schools

5.7 Feedback from projects suggest that two factors account for any underspend, with delays relating to capital projects accounting for most of the capital relating underspend. One project reported that they were underspending against their revenue allocation due to having furloughed staff over the pandemic period and were liaising with TNLCF to discuss the possibility of utilising this underspend to extend the project delivery period.

5.8 Feedback from projects and TNLCF representatives suggests that a strength of the CYS programme has been the flexibility afforded to projects to make changes to their budgets as required. Projects have been able to vire spend across their activities and from one year to another and this has been helpful, particularly given the impact of delays associated with capital investments and the pandemic.

- 5.9 As projects now enter their final half period of delivery, greater monitoring of spend will be required to ensure that capital funding be used effectively and to identify any areas of under-spend which could be used for other purposes, by the same or other projects.

Collaboration

- 5.10 Regular networking between CYS partners has been a prominent feature of the programme and is highly valued by funded projects.
- 5.11 Initial networking between partners involved site visits to each of the six funded partners. Face-to-face network meetings continued up until March 2020, when virtual network meetings were introduced following the introductions of restrictions associated with the pandemic. Virtual meetings have been held on a six-weekly basis and initially focused on exploring how projects were responding and adjusting their approaches in light of restrictions – including how projects were supporting with the emergency response within their communities. They later provided an avenue for project group members to share their worries and concerns, and an opportunity to ‘check-in’ and ensure that project staff were coping under the difficult circumstances. The sessions were used to share experiences and ideas, discuss good practice and collectively devise ways to continue with delivery during lockdown. At the time of preparing this report, over 25 events (face-to-face or virtual) had been arranged by the learning support partners.
- 5.12 The feedback about the value of the CYS network and collaboration has been exceptionally positive with contributors observing that the opportunities to meet up had been an ‘excellent’ aspect of the programme. Project representatives argued that there is a genuine collaboration in place between them and that the peer support works well:
- ‘it’s been a safe space. I’ve said things in that forum I’ve said nowhere else because you feel safe to say it there and you need to say it somewhere’
- ‘the network meetings have been fantastic – I wouldn’t have coped without them’.
- 5.13 There was a desire amongst some projects to see the collaboration extend to volunteers as well as project staff, as it was thought that this could provide an useful development opportunity for some of them in the future. It was suggested that this could be explored by projects over the remaining delivery period
- 5.14 Projects also felt that the learning from other projects that had been on a similar journey – with the Toxteth project visit providing really useful insights and great comfort when they

heard that they had experienced similar issues and managed to resolve them. Projects called for more opportunities to engage with projects that could provide this experience at this stage.

Learning and evaluation support

- 5.15 The support by SWE/BRO equates to 23 days per year of bespoke support spread across the six groups and can involve activities such as business planning, development of engagement strategies, acting as a critical friend, attending and running development sessions at steering group meetings, and co-developing annual delivery plans.
- 5.16 Feedback from project representatives about the learning support provided via SWE/BRO Partnership continued to be positive, as was the case at the foundation phase evaluation. Project representatives thought that the support provided value, particularly in terms of facilitating networking and the sharing of experiences between projects. Amongst the comments made were:

‘we’ve felt very backed up and supported all the way along. They’ve helped us find expertise and to network – they’re really helpful on bespoke requests’

‘the support has been invaluable and useful and we learn different things – a session on evaluation or a session with our steering group – they’re specific things that help us with our learning and generate ideas for us’

‘the support is quite general, it’s good but they can only offer generic advice ... a lot of our issues are localised [which the learning support provider is not in a position to help]’.

6. Lessons learned and the future

- 6.1 This chapter considers the main lessons learned by CYS projects and the priorities for the remaining programme period.

Lessons learned

- 6.2 A review of annual reports and feedback gleaned during the mid-term interviews suggests that the main lessons learned relate to three key issues around community involvement, strategic programme level engagement with key partners and difficulties planning and implementing capital developments.

Community involvement

- 6.3 CYS projects appear to be working at their most effective where there is strong community input and involvement to the design and delivery of the programme i.e. where members of the community are more than just recipients of activities. Effective projects are those which can tap into community knowledge, expertise, and skills. The hydroponics initiative within the Welcome to our Woods project was cited as one such example which has been able to draw heavily upon community expertise. Effective projects have also been able to engage community members to become environmental stewards for specific assets.

- 6.4 There is a danger that projects which struggle to engage with community members in a meaningful and sustainable way will find that communities will resort to their usual behaviours once CYS funding comes to an end. The Woodland Routes to Wellbeing is one such example: when project activities retracted during the pandemic, an increase in levels of vandalism, fly tipping and arson was observed across the estate. Very few of the volunteers who engage with this project are from the Duffryn estate itself and the project has struggled to recruit individuals from the locality to get involved in project governance arrangements.

Strategic programme level engagement

- 6.5 A second key lesson is that CYS projects require support and engagement from key partner organisations at a senior enough level to allow for ideas and plans to be realised and to help champion the programme when obstacles arise. Many projects reported to have struggled to engage with key organisations such as NRW, local authorities and town and community councils, at a senior enough level to gain the necessary access permissions to

deliver planned activities. One project (Vision for our Valley) was reliant on gaining access to NRW land to place way markers for their paths and trails. However, despite submitting three formal complaints to the organisation for their lack of response to their request, the project is still waiting for the issue to be resolved. Another project highlighted a breakdown in relationships with a local authority which resulted in one of its workstreams coming to an end.

- 6.6 A lack of strategic level support and the championing of the programme was considered to be a 'massive gap' in the underpinning logic for CYS, particularly in terms of the way the programme intended to help achieve the WFG Act principles. As such, there was a call for the programme to be championed by a senior Welsh Government official who could help projects address strategic issues such as access to land and assets:

'the programme is empowering communities but Welsh Government is not pulling its weight to make things happen'.

- 6.7 Similarly it was felt that there was a role for TNLCF going forward to increase awareness of CYS both internally (in terms of sharing any learning from the approach for other funding programmes) and selling the benefits more widely with other key partners including the Welsh Government.

Planning and implementing capital developments

- 6.7 All projects have an element of capital funding and in many cases, projects have experienced issues and delays in implementing capital projects. In many cases, other activities have been dependent upon the successful completion of capital developments and without these assets in place, other activities have been unable to commence.
- 6.8 Putting aside the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, many capital investments have taken longer than anticipated to be implemented and, in some cases, have required a greater level of funding. The development of the Caban Guto visitor centre at Vision for our Valley is one such example. This took much longer than expected to come to fruition due to a number of reasons including site complications (the site had not utilities, limited supply of electric off batteries and required an onsite cesspit); procurement difficulties (the preferred contractor was found to have a poor credit score and an alternative contractor had to be sourced); the plans not meeting building regulations and therefore had to be revised; as well

as implementation issues (including around sewage disposal which extended the delay and the costs). During this time the volunteer group who had been overseeing the work became disheartened due to the severity of issues faced. Some projects have not been able to make as much progress as they would like to have done on particular aspects. For instance, progress around enhancing biodiversity has not been as prominent across one project as intended although several plans are being considered e.g. development of wild gardens.

Future priorities

6.9 At the mid-point stage each CYS project has a unique set of priorities to achieve their aims and objectives by the end of the programme period in 2023. However, several common priorities can be identified, including:

- strengthening, and in some cases re-igniting, local community engagement as this has taken a dip in many cases over the pandemic period
- supporting local communities to take greater ownership of activities and provision, drawing upon good practice models identified earlier in the report
- focusing upon those activities which are achievable over the remaining two-year period and which are most likely to generate longer-term outcomes. It is also important for projects to deliver on visible improvements (erection of fences and signs and improvements to habitats) after the more stagnant eighteen months associated with the pandemic
- focusing on local partner organisations and community groups who can actively contribute to the project
- ensuring that all capital funding allocated to the project is used effectively. Two projects (Our Back Yard and Vision for our Valley) have capital funding to use before the end of the project. In the case of the Vision for our Valley, the project is in the process of purchasing the Old Engine house which would allow it to achieve its plans around health and wellbeing activities, bike hire and a nursery plant centres
- in the case of one project, Roots to Shoots, reviewing and redeveloping its work programme over the remaining delivery period, in light of concerns that the project's original plan remains uncertain due to asset transfer issues

- planning for the future, post CYS funding, to consider governance and delivery arrangements, sustainability of outcomes, skills development and further sources of income.

6.10 At a programme level, the key priorities for the future include:

- exploring ways of helping projects to address some of the strategic level issues which they have faced. It may be worth considering recruiting and bringing together strategic level advocates from within Welsh Government and NRW and even individual local councils where possible, to help address some of the common issues facing projects, particularly around asset transfer. Whilst Welsh Government representatives attend CYS network meetings, it was suggested that there needed to be greater clarity about their role as programme advocates i.e. there would be value in exploring whether these postholders could take these issues back to Welsh Government to address
- consider the interaction between the learning support provider and TNLCF funding officers so that key messages around the programme aims and objectives (and its ultimate outcomes) are regularly reinforced. For the final phase of CYS, the focus should move from funding targets and outputs to making better linkages with and delivery of the ethos of the programme
- consider whether funding of this nature needs to be awarded to projects which either have land transfer agreements in place or which are not dependent on land transfer in order to achieve their aims and objectives. Three of the six projects had initial commitment from partner organisations when submitting their CYS applications yet in two of these cases, their delivery has been hampered by land transfer issues.

7. Conclusions

- 7.1 At this mid-point stage all projects are signed up to, and making every possible effort to adopt, CYS programme principles and are positively contributing towards the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act goals. Projects have made very good inroads to develop and enhance meaningful community engagement and involvement, although the COVID-19 pandemic has had bearing upon progress and momentum. One project continues to struggle with local community engagement and must prioritise this issue over the remaining delivery period if the programme aims and objectives are to be fully achieved.
- 7.2 The risks associated with maintaining momentum and securing the on-going commitment of community members and partner organisations over a seven year period was raised during the foundation phase evaluation. Our findings at the mid-point stage suggests that these materialised in some cases but it is encouraging that projects have attempted to address issues such as reduced attendance at steering group meetings by reinvigorating arrangements and reassessing relationships to focus on those who are most engaged with their plans. There is also very good evidence across some projects of community groups taking ownership and stewardship of local assets and activities as these are more likely to be maintained post CYS.
- 7.3 Project promotion and marketing efforts have evolved over time and much greater use of social media has been made over the last 18 months, in response to the restrictions imposed as a result of the pandemic. The extent of social media reach into communities does vary across projects and is broadly reflective of the level of community engagement secured by projects in general. Online delivery methods became vital during the pandemic outbreak, but it appears that all projects are resorting to traditional face to face delivery at the time of drafting as this is better suited to achieving programme objectives.
- 7.4 The progress made by projects over their initial four-year period is mixed, although there is no doubt that all projects have been actively engaged in establishing and delivering new activities and provisions across their communities. A wide range of activities have been put in place, including play groups, woodland management activities and environmental clean ups. The two major factors which account for any lack of progress relate to land and asset transfer issues and the COVID-19 pandemic. Some projects have not been able to deliver flagship capital projects as a result of land and asset transfer issues and in the case of two projects, original capital developments are now unlikely to proceed. It is worth highlighting of course that projects benefit from long-term funding via CYS, and therefore have the

opportunity to amend work programmes in light of these challenges. Under shorter term funding arrangements, projects would have been drawing to a close at this mid-term stage having achieved much less sustainable outcomes given the impact of the pandemic.

- 7.5 Despite the pandemic having had a major impact upon project delivery since March 2020, the fact that all but one projects are funded over a seven-year window and have at least two years of funding remaining should allow them to make up for any lost ground. It is also worth reinforcing the point that projects have played an instrumental role in supporting their local communities during the pandemic and should be commended for their efforts to help provide a front-line emergency response during this time.
- 7.6 This mid-point evaluation report sets out a wide range of key achievements delivered by projects over their initial four-year period, which is evidence of how the programme is contributing towards the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act goals. These have often involved recruiting and mobilising local volunteers to maintain and enhance local green spaces, delivering children's play sessions, establishing community activities and groups, as well as implementing a range of capital improvements and developing new community assets. Capital funded improvements have included the creation of a micro hydro-electric scheme, refurbishment of a community outdoor pool area, acquisition, and work on derelict sites to develop community hub facilities and the development of a forestry visitor centre and café.
- 7.7 In terms of outcomes achieved there is evidence that CYS projects are contributing effectively towards the key outcomes set out within the programme's Theory of Change model. In particular CYS projects are making a positive contribution to improving their local environments and enhancing biodiversity by improving habitats, improving access to the environment, removing litter and fly tipping, and maintaining and enhancing green spaces. There is also good evidence across most of the CYS projects that local communities are taking greater control over their local environment and become stewards of their own facilities. There is less evidence at the mid-point stage that projects are creating sustainable jobs and businesses although promising plans are in place in at least two of the projects which may help to achieve this objective.
- 7.8 There are several lessons learnt around community involvement, strategic programme level engagement with key partners and issues associated with planning and implementing capital developments which most projects have had to grapple with. These issues are likely to continue for the remaining period of the programme and projects will need to be prioritise

these issued where they are being faced. These lessons learnt need to be considered within any future funding approach to be adopted TNLCF and the Welsh Government.

Recommendations

7.9 We offer the following set of recommendations, covering the remaining programme delivery and to inform the future:

Recommendation 1: Projects need to focus on making up for time lost due to the pandemic, and reinvigorate local community engagement where this might have waned

Recommendation 2: With around two years of CYS funding remaining, it is timely that projects now consider exit planning and the long-term sustainability of activities and outcomes. Two important considerations will be to strengthen community ownership and stewardship as well as explore other sources of funding, including income generation

Recommendation 3: Projects have made greater use of social media than would probably have otherwise been the case had the pandemic outbreak not happened. Social media accounts have been strong assets and projects need to consider how these can be maintained after CYS funding comes to an end

Recommendation 4: The programme needs to consider how some of the common strategic issues facing projects, particularly around land and asset transfer, can be raised with policy officials from within the Welsh Government, NRW and other key players from local and community councils. It may be worth arranging a mid-point programme seminar or conference to present the findings of this evaluation to key officials, to promote the programme achievements and to discuss how these strategic issues could be resolved in the future

Recommendation 5: There may be value in considering whether the CYS programme would benefit from securing strategic level commitment from key partners, including the Welsh Government, NRW, local authorities and town and community councils, via CYS programme champions or advocates, who could assist in taking up strategic level issues facing projects within their own organisations. Whilst Welsh Government officials attend CYS network meetings there may be a case for enhancing and formalising this role, ensuring that it is undertaken by individuals with the appropriate level of authority to raise

issues on behalf of projects. This would help ensure that the programme maximises its contribution towards the objectives of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act

Recommendation 6: Given the significant issues which projects have faced in relation to land and asset transfer issues, TNLCF may wish to consider whether funding of this nature in the future should be awarded to applicants who either already have land transfer agreements in place or are not dependent on land transfer in order to achieve their aims and objectives.