



Sustainable Steps Wales Case Study

Gilfach Goch Community Association Our Future



May 2024

Case Study - Gilfach Goch

THE ORGANISATION

Gilfach Goch is a small community in Rhondda Cynon Taf, close to the boundary with Bridgend County Borough.

Gilfach Goch Community Association Limited, (GGCA) is a registered charity and company limited by guarantee. Its aim as a charity is, "to promote any charitable purpose for the benefit of the community in Gilfach Goch and in particular the advancement of education, the promotion of good health and the relief of poverty, distress and sickness".



The Association takes a whole community approach. It runs a large Community Centre where a wide range of community activities take place, including exercise classes, cooking classes, Knit and Natter sessions, a Men's Shed and a Mother and Toddler Group.

The Centre has a footfall of over 4,500 visits per month. It is a hub that connects people to a wide range of support and activities as well as a space for people to interact with each other. Through its network of other organisations across South Wales it is able to act as a portal for services that alone it may not be able to offer e.g. recent collaboration with a Library of Things in Maerdy has enabled the Community Centre to offer electrical equipment for hire because that organisation has the relevant safeguards in place.

THE PROJECT

The aim of the "Our Future" project is to reduce waste and change behaviours. Its aims are to:

- Reduce carbon emissions.
- Engage a diverse range of individuals.
- Upskill individuals.
- Share learning.

BARRIERS TO INSPIRING PEOPLE

GGCA realised through their engagement with community members that there was a wide gulf between those people passionate about climate change and others who question the seriousness or even existence of a climate emergency. The Association recognised that these groups were poles apart.

The Association identified lack of awareness and lack of knowledge as two main barriers.

Some people were not aware of how much waste they were generating and were not equating their personal behaviour with impacts on the climate. Case studies illustrate this well.

"Whilst calculating X's carbon footprint assessment with him, he was surprised by the types of questions he was asked and couldn't understand why some of the questions were relevant. After discussing his results and the impact of his behaviour, relating to each question asked, he admitted to never thinking about his own actions having any impact on climate change, in the grand scheme of things."

Some people just do not believe that their individual actions can make any difference.

"I'd not thought about how me as an individual can make any real difference, but I suppose, when you put it like that, if we all do our little bit, it will make a difference. I'm going to start re-filling my plastic bottles with water and squash and stop buying new ones all the time."

Some believe that it is the government's responsibility to sort it out, not realising the impact of everyone's actions.

There is scepticism about believing what the media says, some believing that it is scaremongering. Others are influenced in other ways by the media. There is a belief that the behaviours of others, often portrayed in the media, has far more impact than their own so why should they change. An example would be politicians using private jets to fly off to a climate conference.

People are time poor these days and will often fall back on the easy option, even if this is bad for the environment.

HOW DID THEY GO ABOUT INSPIRING PEOPLE?

GGCA has used a face-to-face approach, with individuals and groups. They say it is about knowing the people and knowing which buttons to press i.e. what motivates people. It is about what makes sense for people and their families.

The cost of living is the major concern for people at the moment. GGCA recognises that there are opportunities to introduce conversations about the climate as part of the response. Upcycling, recycling and reusing clothing and cookery classes are ways of saving money as well as promoting carbon saving behaviours. Working with participants through various carbon reducing activities is an effective way to introduce conversations about the climate emergency. This approach encourages people to take sustainable actions to reduce their own carbon footprint and helps them to reduce the impact on the climate for future generations.

Food based activities are important as a way of getting across messages. Activities include cookery classes, growing produce in the Centre's own allotment and raised beds and schemes which aim to reduce food waste such as the project with the local Co-operative store distributing food at sell by / best before date.

Some individuals react well to personal challenges e.g. seeing by how much they can cut their waste. For others, simply counting food waste bags has enlightened them as to the cumulative impact of individual behaviour. Case studies show that, through the uptake of simple actions, people changed behaviour. Individuals are

encouraged to be more aware of their waste, especially those who put food waste in with general waste. When they have seen how many food waste bags they generate, they are shocked.

Group activities, especially creative sessions are fun as well as informative. An example is the making of basic watering cans from repurposed plastic milk bottles.

Group activities are ways in which people learn from each other through tips and exchange of knowledge. Examples may include raising awareness of the impact of turning off lights when not in a room or closing the fridge door, not leaving it open until returning retrieved food.

Key people in the community are effective ways of getting messages across. A member of staff for example was enthusiastic about a particular heated throw she had bought, pointing out that, although it was slightly more expensive than a lot on the market, the running costs were far less than competitors. This intelligence was cascaded through word of mouth in the organisation and to the wider community. GGA staff reported a number of people who had purchased the item resulting in them reducing their energy costs as well as keeping warm.

It is fair to say that some people reduced general waste due to enforced 3 weekly collections by the Council. This focussed minds and highlighted the amount of waste being generated.

GGCA has also led by example by changing their own behaviours as an organisation. Examples of this include changing all lights in the building to energy efficient sensor lights and changing the expansion tank for the heating system, resulting in a more efficient and cost-effective heating system.

Changing working practices has been an element of this leading by example. GGCA stopped reacting to staff requests and ordering items on a daily basis. By implementing a weekly system, this cut down on the number of deliveries, often from the same supplier.



Community members at Gilfach Goch Community Association preparing a meal, whilst discussing food waste.

WHAT IMPACT HAS THE PROJECT HAD?

The impacts of the project have been felt at individual/ family level, for the organisation (GGCA) and wider community.

Individual Behaviour Change

Individuals have recorded the following behaviour change.

- Stopped running the tap whilst cleaning teeth.
- Turned down temperature on thermostat at home.
- Changed lightbulbs to LED bulbs.
- Walked children to playscheme instead of driving.
- Started recycling food waste.
- Reduced online shopping frequency.
- Bought seasonal produce and batch cooked to reduce food waste.
- Reduced consumption of meat
- Upcycled old clothes in sewing class.
- Installed water butt at home.

GGCA has a baseline data tool in the form of a climate quiz which can then be used to track individual understanding and behaviour change. As the project progresses this tool will be able to quantify the impact the project is having.

Organisation Impacts

GGCA needs to be aware of the rising costs of delivering its activity. Although too early to quantify the savings they have made to their own organisational operations, they are aware of the significance of their own behaviour changes.

GGCA is also increasingly aware of its own role in supporting greater education in the community including activities that used to be delivered through school such as home economics or outdoor activities.

The complementary nature of GGCA activities is clear. All have a role in reinforcing the climate change message, from the Men's Shed to the allotment and everything between.

Community Impacts

The cascading of knowledge and information has been achieved through a wide range of group activities. The role of key people advocating within the community is important.



Group sessions are an effective way for people to discuss tips for saving resources and provide opportunities for GGCA to introduce conversations about climate change.

LEARNING

Community Association staff report that the process of inspiring people has been a steep learning curve for them as well as for the people they are trying to inspire. They have learnt:

- That everyone is at a different starting point in the climate conversation and need to go at their own pace. Some will move slowly from point A to point B whilst others will go quickly to point G or beyond.
- Changing behaviours takes time but GGCA, as a trusted encourager, provider of space and facilitator of conversations is a vital cog in the wheel.
- Having a dedicated, passionate staff team is important. People respond to the personal approach and will listen to tips and knowledge disseminated by key people.
- Raising awareness through practical activities is important.
- Some people respond well to challenges. Others learn through interaction with others in a group situation.
- GGCA leads by example.



Gilfach Goch Community Association provides recycling bags for the local community to make recycling easy.