



Sustainable Steps Wales Case Study

Y Dref Werdd - Cymuned Cynaliadwy



May 2024

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THE ORGANISATION

Y Dref Werdd is based in Blaenau Ffestiniog in Gwynedd.

Y Dref Werdd was set up as environmental community project that was first established through the Communities First programme back in 2006. It was formed as a group that would protect and enhance the local environment in Bro Ffestiniog through a wide range of projects.



The charity uses the local environment to improve wellbeing, skills, and the local economy.

In addition to the Cymuned Cynaliadwy, Bro Ffestiniog project, Y Dref Werdd runs a community fridge, pantry and drop-in centre.

The organisation supports people with benefit checks, making job applications, energy and utilities. This fills a local gap and ensures that people are not held back by broader life challenges.

THE PROJECT

The Cymuned Cynaliadwy, Bro Ffestiniog project recognises that many people feel powerless to tackle climate change, feeling that they cannot afford to take action. Y Dref Werdd identified a strong appetite in schools to include nature education in the new curriculum, but not all teachers are comfortable with outdoor education.

The project will convert electric bikes, develop a market garden, establish a tree nursery and plant 3000 trees.

The project covers the areas of Blaenau, Tanygrisiau and Manod. There are 7 Primary Schools in the area. Y Dref Werdd aims to be a leader for the community and show people that they can make a difference and take actions.



BARRIERS TO INSPIRING PEOPLE

Some people have an attitude of *"Climate change doesn't affect me. It happens in another country."*

Getting people to volunteer is hard. When people are in debt and relying on a food bank, volunteering isn't high on the agenda. For this reason, Y Dref Werdd supports people to access benefits and sort out debts so they can get involved.

There are people hard to reach, such as those with substance misuse, which is a big problem in the community. Welsh speaking communities have their own old networks and can be difficult to reach through projects. When you hold events it's the same people. Y Dref Werdd is trying to engage with a homeless charity to get them to show that they are contributing to the community.

HOW DID THEY GO ABOUT INSPIRING PEOPLE?

The organisation recognises that people must be engaged initially through what matters to them. People want to socialise, people want to keep warm, people want to learn new skills. Some volunteers just want to be given a job and do anything. Some have very specific requests, one guy spends all his time at one community garden, won't work anywhere else and is not interested in the wider work.

People need to have a sense of ownership. Y Dref Werdd built a food prep/BBQ area for families to use during the day and young people to "hang out" in the evenings. Firewood is provided and people are told, "Don't go crazy and clean up after

yourselves" and that's exactly what has happened. Once engaged, the project can move on to work with the community. The project built relationships with the tough guys in the community who then made sure everyone treated the area with respect. It was built next to a large social housing estate that traditionally wouldn't get involved in community projects. They built the market garden there and made it open access. This gave people a place to be and they could make their own mind up about what was going on. When they were comfy with the space they started to get involved with the project and volunteer. This important step has enabled behaviour change.

People are inspired by the wider work and see change with the projects that are developed.

Activities have to be fun and engaging. Skilled staff work with the community. Personal interaction keeps people engaged. People want to go back and see others because they are fun and engaging.

The project runs open days for the tree nursery and community garden and they talk about what's going on there. From these conversations, they can then highlight climate change and ask people to get involved. The hub or repair café refer people to the project when they come in for more general support. Y Dref Werdd provides a pathway of support from general support, foodbank and referrals to social prescribing and then on to this project.



Y Dref Werdd's tree nursery is collocated with one of their community gardens so people can either volunteer at the nursery or simply enjoy spending time in nature at the community garden.

Having a practical project to get involved with such as the bikes gave some groups such as the Men's Shed a focus and enabled them to get involved. Now Y Dref Werdd has a relationship with this group.

The schools in the area are looking at the effects of climate change and biodiversity and how they can take action. Litter picks get them involved in practical action. 3-4 sessions per school.



Pupils from the local high school who find it difficult in school (and are at risk of dropping out or exclusion) volunteer at the market garden so they are volunteering, learning and because of the skills of the staff wanting to come back and do more.

The community needs to see that they are getting something out of the project. The bikes for example will be more expensive to hire for tourists than local people. This income stream will also help towards the sustainability of the project.

People are kept engaged by giving them practical tasks to do such as the market garden, planting, shifting compost and harvesting. Skills are developed so people feel they are making progress.

The project helps people to understand why they are doing it not just how to do it.

WHAT IMPACT HAS THE PROJECT HAD?

Impacts of the project have been felt by individuals and can be seen within the organisation and wider community.

Individual Behaviour Change

Individuals take what they have learnt in the market garden back into their own homes. Some have even taken learning about growing trees home. It is still early days on the project so there will be more learning to follow.

Organisation Impacts

These have been huge. The funding has ensured that the organisation can develop projects that were on a wish list e.g. tree nursery. The grant has allowed it to start. In future it may have a commercial focus, it may stay with Y Dref Werdd or might be its own entity. Educational stuff has now had a more focus on climate change and sustainability. Two years ago, Y Dref Werdd never thought they would be developing electric bikes for the community and for tourism which will be commercial.

Community Impacts

The sites have provided resources to the community and are well used on a regular basis. The community garden is well used for people to sit on picnic benches, or as a place for children to play. The outdoor kitchen is used by young people, but they tidy up after themselves. The bike shop and repair café are well used by the community. New signs are going up above the doors to show it's a trusted local organisation – people have asked for the sign because Y Dref Werdd is theirs and they want to know it's a safe and trusted place.



Y Dref Werdd's bike workshop is renovating donated bikes to make them into electric bikes that can be used by local people to get around or rented to tourists to generate income.

LEARNING

Make stuff fun and engaging.

Its really hard work. Most of the community have a fair share of social issues. A lot of people that are engaged have issues which makes it harder. It takes more than 3 years to get people fully on board. 10 years is more realistic. A lot of the volunteers themselves have additional needs and therefore need to be supported which takes time.

The project has learnt a lot when developing the tree nursery. It has made a massive difference as they can now grow their own trees to plant and also can now sell to other people. It was low cost to set up, £10k capital investment (further grant brought in on top of SSW) from Eryri National Park.

Staff time and the skills staff bring is the most important thing for projects, once you have these skills in place, capital investment can be brought in.

There is a constant dilemma with what the community wants and what funding is for.

The project keeps evaluation simple. The form involves 3 questions and a smiley face. They ask people what they like and disliked. One young person's answer was *"There was litter where we were today"*. When asked what could be done about it the group said a litter pick and that's what they did the next time they met up.



Y Dref Werdd's market garden grows food that is distributed to the community at their "Hwb" and teaches volunteers the skills to grow the same produce in their own gardens.