

Cyngor Ieuenctid Cymru
Wales Youth Agency



Newslines

occasional papers on issues for youth workers

**Young People, Youth Work
and
Town and Community
Councils**

**Young People, Youth Work
and
Town and Community
Councils**

Liam Kealy, August 1998

Wales Youth Agency

Leslie Court, Lon y Llyn, Caerphilly CF83 1BQ

Tel 01222 880088 Fax 01222 880824

This document is also available on our website at <http://wya.newi.ac.uk>

INTRODUCTION:

"Almost every evening fifteen to forty young men gather at the Llan...Similar numbers will be seen at Dolanog and Pontllogel...At the Llan they will sometimes play football...a few will take a drink. The main centre of attraction is one of the shops ...or the enclosed pavement outside the shop door which gives them a grandstand view of people passing up and down... they will remain there until almost midnight drinking, smoking, eating, chatting, bantering and remarking on passers by...

The youth group derives considerable amusement from ridiculing and embarrassing its elders and indulging in practical jokes. In such pranks they always act under the cover of darkness so that no blame can be attached to any particular one of them and they never give one another away if a joke leads to trouble... people who really antagonise the young men lay themselves open to various forms of retaliation...

These young men form a fairly definite youth group... Some years ago the Rector endeavoured to give the young men better facilities. The old schoolroom was thrown open to them for one or two nights a week, and games such as table tennis were placed at their disposal. But the young men were rather contemptuous of this well-meant effort to canalise their energies, and those who took advantage of the facilities proved unruly and rather destructive... Recently an Aelwyd Urdd Gobaith has been more successful and has been attended by girls as well as boys. But these are formal meetings organised for the young people by their elders... They do not replace the traditional society of the young men."

From *Life in the Welsh Countryside*: Alwyn D.Rees, University College of Wales, Aberystwyth. 1950

The activities of young people have been a concern for communities in Wales for a long time now. The above extract is taken from research that was conducted in a rural community during the summers of 1939 and 1940. However, many people recognise the scenario portrayed as a contemporary picture in many villages and towns in Wales.

Issues concerning young people are a constant theme for communities across Wales. Young people are viewed as either a problem, about which something must be done. Or they are viewed more positively as having a contribution to make to community life and should be supported to develop the skills, knowledge and personal qualities, which will help them, make that contribution. Communities also recognise the range of issues and problems faced by young people today. These include the dangers posed to young people, by their use of public spaces; a decline in the range of facilities available to young people or in their access to facilities; the stress posed by uncertain futures.

Town and Community Councils across Wales are responding positively to these concerns and many Councils are introducing a range of measures which seek to support young people and gain their participation in community life.

The Wales Youth Agency is keen to support these developments and during autumn 1997 convened two seminars that explored the role of Town and Community Councils in developing services for young people. The Agency was enthused by the diversity of provision which became apparent during those two seminars and undertook to prepare this briefing document to disseminate information about developments and enable other Town and Community Councils to establish their own provision.

Following the two seminars the agency circulated a questionnaire to seminar participants to gain more detail about the provision which was being made and I would like to thank those councils which responded.

TOWN AND COMMUNITY COUNCIL INITIATIVES WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

In the main Town and Community Councils support initiatives with young people through the implementation of six themes. These are:

- The establishment of shadow youth councils
- The employment of youth workers
- The implementation of time specific projects
- Creating facilities for young people and children.
- By providing financial assistance for youth groups or organisations.
- By contributing to Multi Agency Initiatives. (Chepstow, Carmarthen)

It should be noted that these initiatives need not be exclusive of each other but that they may be interdependent. For example, shadow youth councils may advise on the creation of facilities for young people or establish other time specific projects.

Establishing Shadow Youth Councils

A number of Town and Community Councils in Wales have set up shadow youth councils as a way of engaging young people in community life, enabling them to experience democratic processes, advise the council on issues concerning young people and how the council may resolve them and to provide young people with a platform to express their collective views.

For example, Newquay Town Council has worked with young people to establish a Youth Council. An electoral register of 13 - 17 year olds in the town was created and elections were held under local government rules. Nine youth councillors were elected. The Town Council received financial support from the County Council which match funded the project.

The Town Council view the benefits of the project as enabling young people to participate in community life; to emphasise the importance of young people to the community; to listen to the views of young people; to offer responsibility to young people and to enable young people to experience democratic processes. The most successful aspect of the project has been the enthusiasm displayed by young people.

The Bay of Colwyn Town Council has also established a youth council. The initiative was carried forward by a working party of councillors, and other organisations including the youth service, Youth Choices, the Police, Social Services and a solicitor. Some 2700 questionnaires were distributed to young people aged between 11-17. 870 returns were received of which 176 expressed an interest in forming a youth council. These 176 young people were invited to attend a meeting, to which 60 attended. From this meeting 24 young people were elected to a youth council, which subsequently elected officers. The youth council is supported by the Town Clerk, who also acts as an adviser to young people. The Town Council has also allocated a substantial budget to the youth council, to spend as they see fit.

The Chair of the youth council spoke at the seminar in North Wales and gave a positive view of the development and the support that young people were receiving from the Town Council. He described a project that the youth council had initiated concerning the building of sports facilities for young people in three areas of the council's district. Sports walls were erected in areas frequented by young people and were proving to be very popular. The project represented a considerable investment by the Town Council and demonstrates their commitment towards young people.

At the seminar in Carmarthen two speakers described their experience of working with Youth Councils. The first described an initiative established by Ammanford Town Council that was similar in its implementation, to that of the Newquay initiative. However, the Cwmaman Youth Council described by the second speaker was uniquely different.

Cwmaman Youth Council was established as a project between young people and the youth service. Young people can become involved as and when they are able to and want to. This has some benefits for young people as they can vary their commitment according to the effect of other pressures on their lives. The Youth Council have been successful in securing substantial lottery funding to develop a young people's resource centre in Cwmaman and members of the council are currently responsible for spending those resources and overseeing the building and development of the centre.

The youth council has received support from the Town Council, in the same way that Town and Community Councils offer financial assistance to other organisations in their area. However, because the youth council is not formally attached to the Town Council it is able to attract other funding which may not be available to Youth Councils who are formally supported by statutory bodies.

Other Town and Community Councils, including Fishguard, Llanidloes, Carmarthen and Pencoed have established youth councils in recent years. In Fishguard youth organisations in the town were invited to send representatives to a youth council which undertook roles similar those already described. Llanidloes Town Council undertook a similar process as part of preparing plans for Llanidloes 2000. Young people were therefore able to present their views and ideas as to the future development of the town.

It is apparent therefore that a variety of methods are used to engage with young people in order to make certain that a range of young peoples views are sought and that young people with different interests can contribute to the process of democracy.

Employing Youth Workers

A number of Town and Community Councils, most notably in Wrexham, have taken steps to employ youth workers as detached workers, to make contact with young people on the streets, in parks or in other situations where young people gather. The purpose of this kind of work is to develop a programme of activities that is relevant to the young people with whom the worker makes contact. Detached youth work is a very successful way of working with young people and Town and Community Councils have shown tremendous foresight in creating provision like this.

For example, in a project implemented by Llantrisant Community Council and Beddau Community Education Centre, the community council works in partnership with the community education service to employ a detached worker who initiates a range of projects with young people. This style of partnership is important in order to bring a range of resources to youth work.

In Wrexham the youth service and Town and Community Councils work through service level agreements in order to finance detached work and carry out the necessary management and administrative requirements. Town and Community Councils finance the work and the youth service provides management and administrative systems.

Offa Community Council, however, employ their own worker who works as a member of the detached work team in Wrexham. The worker has been employed full-time for a number of years and has been able to establish a range of projects, including environmental work, homework clubs and leisure-based activities.

Implementing Time Specific Projects.

A number of Town and Community Councils are involved in the delivery of short-term projects for young people, often in partnership with other agencies.

For example Ystradgynlais Town Council and Powys Community Department worked together, during the summer of 1997 to deliver a teenscheme to young people in the area. This involved the organisation of a range of activities over the summer period for young people. Workers made

contact with young people who congregated outside the library, the Welfare Hall and other parts of the village. During the summer period 54 young people were involved as a result of this work.

The project leader also liaised with local agencies and members of the public in order to explain the purposes of the project. Positive feedback about the project was received from the Town Council, local facility managers, the Police, residents and young people. The outcomes of the project included the number of young people involved, a reduction in alcohol abuse and vandalism; and positive comments from parents who were pleased with the range of organised activities available during the school summer break.

Ystradgynlais Town Council has funded Teenscheme again in 1998, and similar schemes have now been established in other areas of Powys, in partnership with Town or Community Councils.

A number of other Town and Community Councils support playschemes for young people and children during the school summer break. Dunvant Community Council in Swansea has organised a playscheme for the previous 14 years. The scheme is aimed at 5 to 12 year olds and runs for two weeks.

Chepstow Town Council has also run a playscheme for a number of years, for a younger age group. However, the playscheme is staffed by some 24 playleaders and voluntary helpers aged 18 - 24. This is a nice example of how young peoples' interests and talents can be engaged to benefit other members of the community. Experiences such as running playschemes also provide a platform for young people to move into a range of career paths, including playwork, youth work and leisure.

Creating Facilities for Young People and Children.

As part of its strategy for working with young people, the Bay of Colwyn Town Council has erected sports walls in three locations throughout its constituency. These are multi purpose sports areas that provide facilities for playing soccer and basketball. Seating areas can be incorporated into the design as can litter bins and picnic tables. Sports walls are made from vandal resistant material and provide for long term low maintenance. Surface areas are made from an impact absorbing material.

Sports walls are very popular and the ones in the Bay of Colwyn area are heavily used by young people. They provide young people with opportunities to play soccer, basketball and a variety of other games as well as a social area.

A similar initiative has been developed by Newtown Town Council, which has created an outdoor youth multisports and meeting area. Informal use of the sports area is high and the council would like to see the sports area used in a more formal way.

Chepstow Town Council has been involved in two projects that create facilities for young people. The first project involved the establishment of a community centre, which necessarily caters for a range of different user groups including young people. The Town Council has more recently been involved in establishing a charity, Chepstow Action for Youth, which is seeking to provide a drop in centre for young people. The Bay of Colwyn Town Council has also been seeking to establish drop in centres for young people. Llangynidyr Community Centre provides free use of its facilities to young peoples groups. The local community council and community centre committee work together to support initiatives like these. The community council also supports a youth sports club.

Providing Financial Assistance to Youth Organisations.

Community and Town Councils have a long history of providing grants to young peoples' organisations. This is an important contribution which councils can make, particularly in rural areas of Wales where there may be few facilities for young people. Community and Town Councils can encourage new developments through the provision of grant aid, as well as support

existing organisations. For example Ruthin Town Council has recently given financial aid to a group of young people who want to establish facilities and activities for other young people in the town. Community and Town councils could be pro-active in encouraging youth organisations to apply for grant aid and extend their level of activities.

Multi Agency Initiatives

A number of Town and Community Councils reported their involvement in multi agency initiatives that focused on young people. Community and Town councils are well placed to contribute towards developments like these, as they are central to the life of local communities.

The most common partnership reported was between a community council and the respective county council and this document has provided examples already of such partnerships. However, Town and Community Councils also work with the Police, local Church groups, residents associations and local charities.

For example, the project described earlier in Ruthin started via the involvement of the Town Council and two charities in the town. It has since pulled in support from the youth service and community safety unit, both county council departments, a local enterprise agency who have helped young people prepare a business plan and the local council for voluntary services.

The project described in Newtown involved the Town council, the Police the Evangelical Church and residents associations. Chepstow Town Council has worked with leisure Services to implement playschemes and Llanfihangel Rhos -y-Corn has worked with the Sports Council for Wales and various local groups to establish sporting activities for young people and children.

Multi agency work brings a range of benefits to initiatives focusing on young people. Differences of expertise and knowledge, different resources in terms of finance, administration and management systems and mutual support being the most obvious.

The Wales Youth Agency recommends that community and town councils seek the support of other agencies in developing initiatives with young people. Similarly community and town councils should proactively lend their support and assistance to the initiatives developed by other agencies as the project will be enriched by their involvement.

RAISING THE MONEY

The finance for most of the initiatives described has been raised either by a community and town council through its precept or by working in partnership with other organisations.

Community and Town Councils can raise money through its precept via monies for leisure provision or as a community safety initiative. Part 3 of the Local Government and Rating Act 1997 confers powers on Town and Community Councils in Wales to raise money for community safety initiatives. Although this was originally intended for CCTV purposes some councils have taken a more liberal view of this power and used these monies to develop community safety initiatives with young people.

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP.

Much has been made of the benefits of working in partnership with other organisations in this document. The principal relationship which should be developed is with the respective county council. County councils have a range of resources at their disposal, which can support community and town councils in their endeavours, (From finance to insurance arrangements.) Moreover many county councils in Wales are beginning to develop their role as enablers rather than provide a total package of services themselves.

The following list provides an idea of the range of support that may be available from county councils:

- Payroll facilities
- Insurance facilities
- Employment procedures
- Management and supervision of workers
- Funding advice
- Information
- A range of activities for young people
- Financial pump priming
- Networks
- Police clearances
- Research
- Service level agreements

The range and type of support available from county councils will vary and community and town councils should make approaches to their respective county council. The youth service department would be an appropriate starting point and a contact list is provided in Appendix...

SUMMARY

In summary the Wales Youth Agency recommends that Town and Community Councils seek to implement initiatives for and with young people within their constituency. We recommend that these initiatives be carried forward in partnership with other organisations, particularly the Youth Service department of the respective county council.

The Wales Youth Agency is keen to support Town and Community Councils in their endeavours. The Agency publishes a six weekly newsletter, Pigeon, which provides organisations with a range of information pertaining to youth work. The Agency also publishes a twice-yearly magazine for youth workers. Similarly an information enquiry service operates from the Agency, and also has a library service with an extensive stock of books, games and other resources available.

Finally the Wales Youth Agency can provide consultative support to Town and Community Councils in the initial stage of developing work with young people.

Bibliography:

Carolyn Willow (1997) Hear! Hear! Promoting Children and Young People's Participation in Local Government. ISBN 1 8979 57 25 4 Available from Local Government Information Unit 1-5 bath Street London EC1V 9QQ Tel: 0171 608 1051. Price £15.00

Save the Children (1997) All Together Now: Community Participation for Children and Young People. ISBN 1 899120 53 X Available from Save the Children, Publication Sales, 17 Grove Lane, London SE5 8RD Tel: 0171 703 5400

Matthews H, Limb M, Taylor M (1997) The Right to Say: The development of youth councils/forums within the UK. Available from the Centre for Children and Youth, Park Campus, Nene College of Higher Education, Northampton. NN2 7AL Tel: 01604 735500