



Regenerate NPT: Project Closure Report

Project Organisation: Crynant Community Association

Project Name: Crynant Volunteer & Support Programme

Project Start Date: 13 July 2021 Project End Date: 31 January 2022

Date of Report: 11.02.2022

Attached Documents List:

There is a mandatory requirement to complete this document at Project Closure. The purpose of the report is to provide a project level document evidencing how well the project has performed against the original Business Plan delivered by the Local Partnership and Local Action Group during the lifetime of the project, and how it has contributed to the aims and objectives of the Local Partnership's Local Development Strategy. Project performance against the planned/approved costs, delivery timescales and Key Performance indicators will also be detailed. **Please try and keep within the maximum word count.**

1. Background: (briefly detail the background to the Project – 250 max)

The Community Association had a limited group of ad hoc volunteers but no 'official' programme of activities, training or recruitment and retention. During the pandemic, although everyone did their best, it was apparent that we needed to become much more organised in order to adequately serve our elderly and vulnerable residents and also engage with the young people of our small village and its surroundings.

The aim of the project was to kick-start a structured community volunteer programme by employing a Volunteer Development Officer (VDO) who could be appropriately trained and solely invested in raising the profile of the programme.

It was hoped that the VDO would provide a stable base for a programme by ensuring that skills learned were transferable which would enable a sustainable and maintainable programme for the future. During the first month, the VDO was to attend training courses focused on attracting and recruiting volunteers, volunteer safety and mental health awareness. Following this, the recruitment phase would centre on a mass-leaflet and social media campaign to connect with the community, drive awareness and put in place a 'Call to Action' for the attraction of volunteers. This would work in parallel with the VDO beginning to create the ongoing structure for a volunteer programme and actively start working, from the August period until December, to evaluate new volunteer sign-ups, capacity for the diversity of the volunteer work available, and a tailored evaluation of potential volunteer needs.

2. Project Outcomes as per application	Was this achieved? What supporting evidence is there of achievement? If not achieved, why not?
To kick-start a structured community volunteer programme by employing a Volunteer Development Officer (VDO) solely invested in raising the profile of	Yes – the VDO was employed on a 25 hour per week basis. This is evidenced through payslips as provided. The VDO worked flexibly throughout the entire period with evening and weekend hours

the programme.	along with WFH.
During the first month, the VDO will attend training courses focused on attracting and recruiting volunteers, volunteer safety and mental health awareness.	Yes though this also extended into other months. The vast majority of these courses were attended online and would particularly benefit other areas of work life. The courses were chosen to not only upskill the VDO but also the Community Association as a whole.
A mass-leaflet and social media campaign to connect with the community, drive awareness and put in place a 'Call to Action' for the attraction of volunteers.	A good marketing campaign was achieved and continues to run after the programme's end. We opted for a Facebook and website combination, taking into account our demographics
Recruiting volunteers, especially more females, older people, young people, people with disabilities and people with mental health issues to engage on a more proactive and specific basis.	Yes. In every area apart from young people we excelled the expectations of this objective. We keep record cards for all volunteers and now have a system where we can categorise and support those newcomers to our area.
VDO will disseminate the knowledge learned through access to training and development, to the other members in the programme.	Yes. The VDO has been able to lateral upskill other members of the programme throughout the work and has contributed to policy writing and understanding throughout the Association as a whole.
3. Strategic Achievements: (outline what the project has achieved in terms of alignment with LEADER Themes and Priorities and any contribution to national strategies - 300 max)	
Theme: 1	Priority: Accessible
<p>This project was predominantly going to be a physical, face-to-face programme which has meant that there would be certain limitations on who would be able to access all elements. However, we have found that this hasn't been a barrier if we are prepared (and were) to pivot our thinking. During lockdowns and restrictions of various activities, we have been able to arrange for people to contribute digitally if they wished and have been able to make use of our considerable outdoor spaces to facilitate smaller meetings. We have a very people-friendly community centre that we were able to use, including all of the tea, coffee and kitchen facilities. This also allows people to have a central hub where they can access information and gather under their own direction and for social as well as volunteer purposes. We have been able to accommodate volunteers with mental health challenges, behavioural and developmental differences, and all ages and genders.</p> <p>We have been able to accommodate a group who usually like to work outside but with a few members who cannot or couldn't that week, for example, where we have been able to give those that want to be involved a set of duties to create a welcoming base and signpost others or late comers to where the work is being carried out that day. We have been able to assist one gentleman with autism and communication issues into a role where he travels to help other people and food banks throughout our valley either collecting food or distributing it. He knows that he always has a start and endpoint for each session with us at the Community Centre.</p>	
4. With regards to your comments at application stage, how have you managed this project in terms of sustainability? (What plans have been put in place to maintain the project once it is completed? 400 words max)	
This project was granted a one-month extension due to the provision of a First Aid course for	

12 attendees that wouldn't have been able to go ahead face-to-face before Christmas. Even at this point, we were taking in new volunteers and starting to think about how we can now best expand and build on the programme.

We have, in February, been able to work with the Community Council as well and help with their volunteer needs, expanding our volunteer cohort by four. We've also been able to start benefitting from the word-of-mouth of our local community and are accepting new volunteers who are from our targeted young people age group and who initially need to complete work experience for a school achievement but who are staying with us or coming back in the half term. Where we were struggling to start getting to the young people age group, we were also conscious that other agencies such as the local Youth Club were also experiencing extremely low numbers – 4 or 5 participants on a good night.

Last week saw the Youth Club take in 26 members one night and we are confident that this is something that we will see mirrored within the Volunteer Programme as well.

The VDO has been successful in sourcing funding for their position until at least 31st March 2022 and is currently looking for new sources with a potentially different scope in trying to attract and liaise specifically with Young People and to address the emerging problems of food scarcity throughout the valley.

5. Project Beneficiaries:

Volunteers: We would like to recognise that the volunteers have been a fundamental force in this programme and as such, we would like to make sure that this group has seen a great benefit. As well as encouraging older people to become involved, the project has been aimed at reaching out to more women, young people and disabled people so that they become engaged in shaping future activities and achieve a real sense of community and are directly involved in the creation of a future for the programme. In turn, we have seen an increase in the confidence they've shown, good well-being motivation and a sense of belonging to, and ownership of the programme. Some volunteers have been able to benefit from professional qualifications and are very interested in furthering their learning to give something back.

We have recruited over twenty volunteers and are still receiving more requests now. Not all of these will be full time or able to give something to the programme physically every week, but they make a huge contribution in other ways – being available if needed, reporting anything that they see online (projects, new ventures, new ideas and even issues we need to escalate to other places). We've been especially fortunate to be able to accommodate the older generation and people with life difficulties that would otherwise see them reach a very limited number of people. We have amazing individual stories but they're all encompassed in a group of people who regularly interact and socialise together even when they wouldn't normally have come into contact with each other.

Residents who have connected with volunteers have been able to share the issues they are facing. They can see that their community is receiving real time support and friendship, reducing feelings of social isolation. Many residents are participating in sharing social media posts and making sure that the volunteers themselves are gaining recognition. The resident engagement with restrictions ending has increased, with more people messaging or posting to say thank you and well done. This has also benefitted the wider community as there seems to now be an increase in participation for other areas as well – people are asking us questions and receiving brilliant answers from the wider community – there appears to be a consensus that

<p>helping each other openly and without needing to keep generosity so hidden rather than humble, has been a noticeable mindset shift. We are visible in the community when litter picking, for example, and the children in the parks join in with the tai chi when we're outside.</p> <p>The Volunteer Development Officer has benefitted from the knowledge and experience gained through formal training, paid for by LEADER that can then be shared with volunteers to strengthen the programme and ensure that volunteers feel valued and an integral part of the programme.</p>
<p>6. Cross Cutting Themes: If relevant, briefly describe how your project contributed to the following themes:</p>
<p>Equal Opportunities:</p> <p>This project was crafted with the express intention of trying to be as inclusive as possible. We have been able to accommodate people with severe mental health difficulties, behavioural and developmental challenges, all ages, genders, races, and sexuality. There should be no barrier to people accessing a safe place and a structured programme and we hope that we have achieved this.</p>
<p>Sustainable Development including Economic, Environmental and Social</p> <p>This programme was always intended to continue running in some form and being relevant after the LEADER funding was completed. This has been achieved as the Volunteer programme will continue to run with the support of the Community Association and now the Community Council. We have already secured funding until March 31st and are currently looking for new avenues throughout other sectors. We will always work within the frameworks provided by the Community Association's economic, environmental and social policies.</p>
<p>Tackling Poverty and Social Exclusion</p> <p>This programme has particularly benefitted individuals who would otherwise feel extremely socially isolated or excluded and in one particular example, has helped to shine some light on the challenges faced by the carers of those in this position as well. When one of our volunteers is with us, it has allowed his mother and full-time carer the opportunity to have the only free time that she has to herself. She has been able to attend to her own needs for the first time since her son's diagnosis. This has been an extremely valuable lesson to learn – while this programme was always going to try and cater for the needs of all of our volunteers, we are continuing to learn about the deeper layers that poverty and social exclusion can really affect.</p>
<p>7. Conclusion Summary: Please provide a summary on the project's performance, identifying any key issues that need to be addressed:</p>
<p>a) Summary</p> <p>Overall, this project has been a real benefit to many people throughout the community and through the wider borough of Neath Port Talbot with many participants travelling from outside of Crynant to attend volunteer-run sessions and classes. The role of VDO has been and continues to be a valuable one and has allowed the Association to benefit from some much needed structure in how they connect with people post-pandemic.</p> <p>Covid has been a key issue in this project whether as a driving factor or as a pivot point. While it wouldn't be true to say that there were some issues that were inescapable due to Covid and restrictions, the project has been resilient in the main. We struggled with reaching out to Young People, but we seem to have struggled in the same way that other close organisations struggled in this area and we hope that we will experience the same upsurge as other organisations as well.</p>

This programme has been integral in exposing the differences within our communities as well as the similarities. While this can be taken as a negative expression, we have found that it is far from it. Where we have seen people struggle with their behaviour in groups, we have found them excellent teachers of other cohorts and where we have been expecting little engagement from other groups, we have been humbled by the interest shown. We know that we have a generally well-engaged community in some aspects, but it was a learning opportunity to try and figure out why people weren't supportive of certain activities in the first instance. We seem to have a community wary of online activity until they have seen something first-hand or in a physical capacity. This was important to find out and will feed into a range of activities in the future.

We would rightly be proud of the programme as it stands, but we should also continue to support and solidify the gains that we have made. This will be the next focus of any piece of work as it may be something that we have struggled with as an Association in the past. The VDO and the programme have brought some 50 – 70 new users to the Community Centre for various reasons and we know that we have seen some great reach on social networks.

In conclusion, there are areas where we have had to rethink and pivot in very short periods and there's still a lot of great work to complete and start on. This is something that the VDO would recommend to every community group and if possible, something for Community and Town Councils to also start looking at. We have been humbled and surprised by how much of a difference this can make to people.

b) Key Issues

Covid – This has been a changeable and unstable time for everyone and Covid is by far the most far reaching and unpredictable factor affecting the project. Some groups of people we would have counted to be volunteers were not happy conforming with the necessary requirements at the Community Centre (face masks & screens for example), and didn't come back to the programme at all. Unfortunately, we suspect they were also spreading misinformation throughout the community regarding this.

Social Media evidence – all of our social media posts were also posted on an app called Nextdoor which had great response and reach but wasn't able to be considered for the PI allocation due to the out-of-sequence way that it promotes content and the need for evaluators to also join the same group.

Training – mostly online provision, again due to Covid, which made us overrun in providing group classes.

Youth reach – not what we expected or desired at all. This is potentially something that would need to be specifically targeting and even new training regarding the social media networks that are being used by this age group.

c) What went well?

Recruitment of overall numbers of volunteers – we are continuing to process applications
The broadness of the programme – we have volunteers running classes, working indoors and outdoors, from a range of backgrounds, and with a range of skills. This has been a fantastic piece of social learning as well as a great opportunity for all involved. It should be particularly noted that these groups also aren't working in isolation and meet each other through the week.

Later stages interaction with the public – once they could see who the volunteers were and what they were doing, they were far more engaged and supportive.

Raising the profile of the Crynant in general, the Community Centre and the support of the Community Council going forwards. We have done something that has contributed to the village of Crynant being seen as a new provider of activities and social opportunities

throughout the valley. We have people from all over NPT attending and asking for information.

d) What didn't go well?

Engagement with young people – due to a combination of various issues. This could be better targeted in the next round of ideas and focus.

There wasn't enough thought put into what the volunteers may need to start up – particularly in terms of items like clothing (outdoors during the winter months) and contingency for speciality training such as chainsaw or specific first aid courses (not just at work courses). This is a good learning opportunity and will be considered in the future.

Initial public engagement – the residents are wary of social media campaigns but this is being addressed. We suspect other social groups may have also contributed in the early stages.

Evidencing PIs – as explained about with regards to Nextdoor

e) What could have been done differently?

More consideration for the weather and the season of the funding taking place should be taken in any application. Writing a grant bid in July should also consider ambient conditions in December.

We could have had different processes in place for spending money – this has been something that the Association will need to consider in general going forwards.

We could have specifically targeted groups but as this is almost a pilot programme on a broad level, it has done a good job in uncovering new areas for learning.

We could have tried to engage with school systems far sooner and understood more of the needs of the Community Challenge aspect of the Welsh Bac.

We could have tried to pivot with Covid a little more to attempt the larger social gatherings or surgeries but we wanted to make sure we were as safe as possible.

We could have surveyed people at the beginning of the programme but we will definitely do this now that we know the residents are more familiar with us.

8. TO BE COMPLETED BY LEAD BODY:				
Project Performance – Financial & Indicator Achievements: (detailed performance against approved timescales and budget expectation, including reasons for all variances)				
a) Performance indicator achievement against targets approved: Final position:				
PI Reference	Approved Target	Total Achieved	Justification for underachievement	How has achievement been evidenced
LD.CL.006	Number of Information dissemination actions/promotional and/or marketing activities to raise awareness of the LDS			
	20	13		Social media postings
LD.CL.007	Number of stakeholders engaged			
	20	19		Volunteer record cards
LD.CL.008	Number of Participants supported			
	10	17		Attendance sheets
NPT01	Communities engaged			
	1	1		
NPT02	Groups engaged			
	2	0		
NPT03	Number of young people participating in the project			
	5	2		
NPT04	Number of women participating in the project			
	4	21		Record cards, attendance sheets
NPT05	Number of Welsh speakers participating in the project			
	4	5		Record cards, attendance sheets
NPT06	Number of older people participating in the project			
	8	28		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Record cards, attendance sheets
NPT07	Number people with disabilities participating in the project			
	2	2		Record cards, attendance sheets
NPT09	Number of under-employed individuals participating in the project			
	1	1		Crynant CC confirmation letter 10.02.22
NPT10	Number of participants receiving formal training			
	5	5		First Aid Training Certificates
NPT12	Advice or support surgeries in community facilities			
	1	0		
b) Pilot Activities/Projects: Outlining all of the stages and activities, including the timelines. To promote externally and link to the Wales Rural Network Website. Attached <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable for this project <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
c) Feasibility Studies: To promote externally and link to the Wales Rural Network Website. Attached <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable for this project <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
d) Project Closure Financial Position against original approved: (following final claim)				
Timescales	Original Approved		Adjusted Approved	Final Closure Date
	From	To		
	13.7.21	31.12.21	31.1.22	31.1.22
e) Summary of Financial Performance				
		Original Approved	Adjusted Approved	Final Claim
Total Project Costs		£10,008.75	£10,987.75	£10,987.75
RDP Funding		£8,008.75	£,8,790.20	£8,791.95
Levered Funding		£2,000.00	£2,197.55	£2,195.80
Intervention Rates	% RDP	80%	80%	80%
	% Match	20%	20%	20%

