

# Knighton Community Hub Project Report

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## Introduction

This project was developed to address the following issues:

- Rural isolation
- Lack of local services
- Access to information
- Withdrawal of services
- Low qualification levels among the population
- Poorly paid jobs
- High levels of child poverty
- The need for a focal point for services

The project outcomes were as follows:

This project aims to establish a robust health and wellbeing information and informal support network in Knighton and District, with the following primary objective:

To ensure that the residents of Knighton and District can access the quality information that they need when they need it, in order to make good, informed choices, live healthy lives and maintain their own individual and community wellbeing in a sustainable way for the long term.

This is particularly relevant during the covid pandemic, with the proliferation of unverified information and rumour circulating widely.

We aimed to provide this service in the following ways:

- Through a physical point of access to up-to-date written, verbal and digital information at the Community Centre and library, building on existing partnership work with the Community Connector, Housing Support, Job Centre Plus and bringing in new partners
- Provision of an information assistant and development of trained volunteer support to enable residents to find, assess and use resources effectively
- Provision of an outreach library and information support network, training and empowering volunteers and service users with accurate knowledge to share with their families, neighbours and friends
- Provision of a housebound delivery service of library books and information, with particular emphasis on housebound and isolating people, and ensuring that the service is inclusive
- Provision of digital help and support with accessing robust health and wellbeing information during ongoing pandemic, including the development of the necessary digital skills to access health services which are increasingly only available online.

For the purposes of this project, health information is defined as information which supports people to live a healthy lifestyle in their community, so includes community information about organisations, clubs and societies which provide social interaction, overcoming loneliness and isolation in this remote rural area of East Radnorshire. Support with job seeking, benefits and housing will also contribute to overall health and wellbeing.



We know that there are many people in the remote rural area who need support to be able to access and interpret quality information, particularly in this era of “fake news”; we want to help them to develop the skills to be able to identify and use reputable sources of up-to-date information.

We then aim for people to share their skills and knowledge within their own communities, to support others, building a stronger, informed and sustainable network for the long-term future.

Key outcomes:

- People are better informed and supported to make good life choices and live their lives their way
- People are treated with dignity and respect through an inclusive, local and bilingual service provision; geography, poverty and lack of digital skills are overcome as barriers to access
- People are supported to develop their knowledge and skills locally, building capacity and confidence to share this widely with their peers
- Families and carers are supported to access information, where the individual may lack mental capacity to use the service.

The project is a partnership between the Knighton and District Community Centre, a registered charity and the Powys County Council Library Service. The County Council Library has been co-located in the Knighton Community Centre since 2017. The Community Centre was refurbished in 2017 with funding from the Welsh Government and Powys County Council after the Community Centre had commissioned an independent review of its future direction. The bid for capital work was accompanied by a Lottery Bid to develop a Community Hub, which was the preferred option for future development, but this was unsuccessful. Nevertheless, the Management Committee developed the Community Hub under the leadership of volunteers with the help of some short-term funding.

In the period after refurbishment, the Community Centre took on a contract with PAVO to provide a Volunteer Centre and developed a Library Café on Tuesdays as a drop in for people to make contact with helping agencies. The opportunity to maximise the benefits of the partnership work with Powys County Council, and PAVO, our Council for Voluntary Service together with other public bodies and smaller voluntary organisations was given to us by the award of funding from the Arwain-LEADER programme. The strong relationship between the Community Centre and the Powys County Council Head of the Library Service has been the major factor in developing the partnership, and in developing this programme.

The delivery of the programme has been made very challenging by the parallel challenges of Covid, and the Community Centre and Library has been closed or only open intermittently during the programme period. It has therefore been necessary to use other methods (social media, email, online video meetings, phone, newsletters) to reach people in other ways.

## Challenge

Knighton is an isolated community with poor access to services. Part of our catchment area, Beguildy, the north-western part our catchment area has the second worst access to services in Wales<sup>1</sup>:



The closure of local services (1 GP Surgery, Mobile Library, bus to Newtown, all Banks, County Council office, Tourist Information Office) has meant that local people have struggled to find information services. The Library Service is the single publicly accessible service locally. The Library Service has offered signposting and support with digital services for many years, but resources are limited to the District Librarian working for 20 hours a week and library volunteers.

The implementation and management of a new service has been extremely challenging during the Covid pandemic for the following reasons:

1. It has not been possible to re-open some of the planned services because of the Welsh regulations about Covid;
2. Where services have re-opened, they have been limited.
3. There have been different regulations applying to the library and the community centre.

Within the time frame of the project, these complex differences are plotted in this table:

2021	Wales Covid Alert Level *	Tuesday Drop In	Thursday Drop In	Facebook Page	Advice and Information Service
February	4	Closed	Delivered Service only	Available	Phone/Facebook only
March	3	Closed	Delivered Service only	Available	Phone/Facebook only
April	2	Closed	Delivered Service only	Available	Phone/Facebook only
May	1	Open	Delivered Service only	Available	In person
June	1	Open	Open	Available	In person
July	0	Open	Open	Available	In person
August	0	Open	Open	Available	In person
September	0	Open	Open	Available	In person
October	0	Open	Open	Available	In person
November	4	Open	Open	Available	In person
December	4	Closed	Closed	Available	Phone/Facebook only
2022					
January	2	Open	Delivered service only	Available	Part in person
February	0	Open	Open	Available	In person
March	0	Open	Open	Available	In person

\* information supplied by Louise Hardwick PAVO  
Development Officer, formerly for Community Buildings

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## Solution

**Staffing** The Community Centre already employed a Hub Co-ordinator. This post holder was transferred to the project in February 2021. It was planned that the project would also employ an Information Assistant. This post proved difficult to fill to the standards we required in the job description and person specification, but an appointment was finally made in April 2021 of a candidate who met the requirements of the person specification, but she was not able to start until May 2021. This meant that the project was supported by the Hub Coordinator working 30 hours a week and an Information Officer working for 18 hours a week, supported by a Project Manager (Volunteer), District Librarian and Community Centre volunteers. The last three were used as 'match funding'. The hours undertaken by the last three have greatly exceeded the predicted hours in the original application.

**Communications** The external context of delivering during the Covid pandemic was challenging and the Community Centre was shut or subject to severe restrictions during most of the project period. Restrictions were only removed in August 21, and the Community Centre suffered an outbreak associated with an outdoor event in September 2021 but remained open, closing again at Christmas 2021 because of the omicron virus. Much of the work of the project during the periods of lockdown and partial closure took place via Zoom, email or social media. A previous Facebook page devoted to the Coronavirus response was renamed 'Advice from the Hub' and a regular newsletter was hand delivered several times to all households in the area by volunteers.

**Services Delivered** The Community Hub re-opened its Tuesday café drop-in services, offering advice from the Information Assistant, in May 2021. This has slowly re-attracted caring services to take part in being available to the public and has included DWP, Powys County Council Housing, Credu Carers, Pobl and Help for Hearing (RNIB) and the PAVO Community Connector. We have also facilitated the move of a Drop In/free lunch facility from a local Church to the Community Centre. This was in danger of closure. This meets every Thursday and offers a delivered lunch to local residents. This enabled library books to also be delivered, some to remote houses and for information to be included in the bags. A Community Newsletter was developed, and hand delivered quarterly by volunteers including to remote parts of the area. A Community Directory was also prepared and delivered to every household.





Comm Newsletter plus Hub Info distributed July 2021



Community Directory



**Equalities work** Previous survey evidence collected by the Community Centre indicated a lack of engagement by ethnic minority groups with the community and an invisibility of the groups, even though we were aware of significant numbers of EU citizens in the area. Following the award of funding from the Community Cohesion Programme, staff and volunteers developed a short film *Knighton is my home* [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Vw2qlRox\\_0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Vw2qlRox_0) with help from the Hub Co-ordinator and Information Officer. The Hub Co-ordinator applied for further funding for an International Day held in November 2021 and attended by representatives from multi faith groups. At the same time, we began to post in Polish and Hungarian to reach EU nationals.



**The Knighton Community Centre**

November 8, 2021 · 🌐



To Hungarian speakers and thanks to Beatrix Frajda for the translation:

A Knighton-Közösségi csoport Megrendezi a Fény Fesztiválját azaz Nemzetközi Napot szervez november 28-án, vasárnap 2 és 4 között a Knighton Közösségi Központban. Ez a Karácsonyi visszazámlálás első eseménye, amelyet a Gyülekezetek együtt és más Knighton csoportok, köztük a Tower House Gallery szervez. Reméljük, hogy több vallási hagyományból és etnikumból/nemzetiségből érkeznek emberek. A gyerekeket szeretettel várják, lesznek programok és gyermekgondozó is jelen lesz. A rendezvény teljesen ingyenes, frissítőket és harapnivalókat biztosítunk. Lehetőség lesz beszélgetni és újra megnézni a Knighton az otthonom című filmünket. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Vw2qlRox\\_0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Vw2qlRox_0) Ha kérdése van, vagy asztalt szeretne foglalni, hívja a 07581055508 telefonszámot.

*Hungarian posting on Facebook*

We were also aware that there were sections of the local population who did not use the library and were reluctant to come into the Community Centre, so we decided to run a number of car boot sales with representation of the project as a car boot. These have been very successful with users visiting the Community Market (operating at the same time) and subsequently coming into Community Centre.

**Stakeholder Engagement and Joint Planning** This is an area which has created some difficulty. A Management Group was established which met several times but proved to be difficult to sustain due to the demands of sustaining a service during Covid. Thereafter, the project was jointly managed by the Project Manager with the County Librarian, who were in very regular contact. The day-to-day management of the project was through fortnightly staff meetings between the Library and the Community Centre, with the project being discussed at almost every meeting. The Hub Co-ordinator tried to establish a local project group, but it proved difficult to engage with other groups, again because of the demands of Covid. At the same time, PAVO had established regular Locality Network Meetings. The Hub Co-ordinator attended and reported on the project and received feedback from other groups, and also remained in regular contact with groups active in Knighton, such as Churches Together, Knighton Community Support and the Knighton GPs.

**Volunteer Engagement** One of the goals of the project was to engage volunteers. Whilst the project has succeeded in recruiting volunteers to deliver newsletters and run the cafes, it has been less successful in training volunteers to act as sign posters, and we only trained 2 volunteers one of whom subsequently moved to another voluntary group using the Hub.





**Sustainability** It has been challenging to demonstrate the value of the project because of the constraints of the pandemic, but the Management Committee of the Community Centre decided that they wanted it to continue. Unfortunately, by January 2022, there was no funding beyond the beginning of April 2022. The Management Committee agreed funding from their own reserves to keep the project functioning. Fortunately, towards the end of March 2022, further funding became available through a WCVA grant until 2023.

## Benefit

**Joint work between the County Council and the Community Centre** We have worked very closely with the County Librarian on the project. She has been able to signpost us to other departments. Her knowledge of the range of services in Powys is very good and she has been able to help us develop the service. As a result, through new funding under the UK Community Renewal Fund, we are jointly developing a Digital Hub in Knighton and have a joint staff member who is assisting people in using technology. We have also had grant funding to develop the garden area outside the library. Powys County Council also funded a small pod /office, because we lacked facilities for private interviewing for the Library or the Community Centre. Although we were not able to use it until recently, it is a very helpful addition to our facilities.



*Volunteer advises user in the pod*

**Overall development of the Community Centre** There was a degree of ambivalence both within the Community Centre Management Committee and in the local population about the development of Hub Services. As the Secretary of the Community Centre, I am aware that there is a far greater acceptance that the role of the Centre has changed, and that it includes the Library, Information



Services and the Hub services. Within the community, a survey also reflects this change with Information Services ranked 3, just above Car Boot sales.

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Services for families / youth services	78.49%	135
Library	73.84%	127
Volunteer bureau / volunteer bank	44.19%	76
Digital Hub / Access to computers and equipment	41.86%	72
Youth services	3.49%	6
Services for older people	3.49%	6
Advice and Information	61.05%	105
Community Market / Car Boot Sales	55.23%	95
Car Boot sales	0.58%	1
Mental health / learning disability	48.26%	83
Community Market	0.00%	0
Flicks in the Sticks / Films / Culture and the Arts	50.58%	87
Welsh language activities	25.00%	43
Learning disability	1.74%	3
The bar / cafes	1.74%	3
Community garden	41.28%	71
Education and training to improve skills	54.65%	94
Leisure classes	58.72%	101
Classes for fitness and health	2.33%	4
Culture and the arts	1.16%	2
Local and family history	1.16%	2
Hirings	0.58%	1
Events which bring the community together	78.49%	135
Other comment	Responses 12.79%	22
<b>Total Respondents: 172</b>		

**Covid Recovery** The project has helped the Community Centre to manage the recovery of services after the end of the pandemic. Reinstatement of in person services have been very hard, both in terms of encouraging the public to return in person, and other agencies to come and participate in the Hub. Agency participation has depended on the agreement of the agency concerned and some health-based agencies have been very reluctant to return to in person services. The presence of the staff members has meant that the process can be carefully managed. Looking at the library usage for 2021 in Knighton, I am advised by the Principal Librarian that ‘Although the library was open for most of 21/22, there were covid restrictions in place, particularly social distancing, screens and mask wearing. This impacted usage dramatically – for financial year 2021/22, there were only 3,089 visits compared to 16,990 for 2019/20 (pre covid, up till the first lockdown in March 2020).

**New Services** As a result of the project, we have been able to develop new services at our Tuesday and Thursday Drop Ins. Issues with alcohol and drug abuse were identified as a result of emergency re-housing of people with drugs/alcohol problems during the pandemic and we were able to negotiate with a drugs/alcohol charity



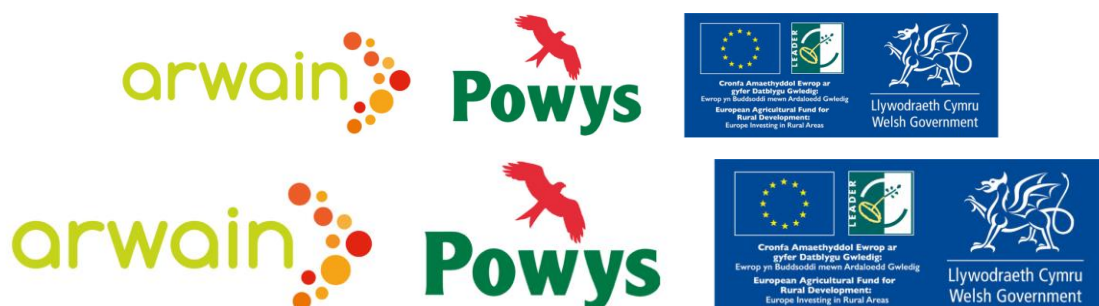
**Engagement with volunteers** We were able to recruit additional volunteers to support the project. Whilst we have been less successful in recruiting volunteers for the specialist role of signposting. We have developed our volunteers' group as a result of this project and are following this after the project ended by working towards an Investors in Volunteers quality award.

### Spin offs from the project

- Staff in the project became aware of the need for services for youth, and young families through consultation with other groups in the community. Successful grant applications have been made for funding for a youth work project and a Family Centre project. Both these projects have been extremely successful in terms of the numbers attending the sessions and the value ascribed to the projects by the local community.
- Our greater engagement with minority groups has resulted in two younger people from ethnic minorities (Polish and British – Ghanaian) joining our Management Committee.
- Whilst not a project objective, a number of staff and volunteers from the Community Centre have moved on to post graduate training or better paid jobs. This has included one of the project staff who has moved to working as a Development Officer for RNID – Cymru, a volunteer who obtained a place on a post graduate medical degree at Swansea University and another staff member who is now working as a Development Officer for PAVO. There are few opportunities in the area to gain experience in project management, working with volunteers and the community and we are delighted to see staff and volunteers progressing and improving community self-confidence.
- Further new projects identified in discussion, and now implemented are a Youth Project and a Family Centre.

## Result

As a result of the funding, the project was able to develop and consolidate the Community Hub through the Covid pandemic and assist 48 community members directly (117 episodes of support) as well as ensure that accurate information was distributed to every household through newsletters on a number of occasions.



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