



The Rural Wellbeing Outreach Programme

Innovative Communities

SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH IN THE VALLEYS

It is generally agreed that there is a strong correlation between deprivation and mental health, and with the Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr valley communities housing some of the most deprived areas of Wales there was a strong need for funding to help support its inhabitants.

Since 2015 Valley Steps, a south Wales valleys wellbeing charity, has been delivering wellbeing courses to help and support those local communities. Data held by Valley Steps and consultation with stakeholders indicated that there was a need for additional resources for the more isolated rural and semi-rural communities of Cwm Taf.

Valleys Steps identified the opportunity to create and develop a programme to improve health and wellbeing, promote social inclusion and in turn reduce poverty. Applying to Rural Action Cwm Taf for the LEADER Rural Development Programme funding, Valley Steps wanted to provide a free outreach service delivering mindfulness, wellbeing and outdoor activities to the rural communities of Cwm Taf.



BENEFITS OF THE FUNDING

In August 2020 the project was funded over £52,000 through the Welsh Government Rural Communities – Rural Development Programme 2014 – 2020, which is funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the Welsh Government, and in partnership with the local authority and Coed Lleol, a charity improving the health and wellbeing of people across Wales through woodland and nature based activities, the Rural Wellbeing Outreach Programme began.

Through this partnership with Coed Lleol, Valleys Steps utilised the natural assets of the area through outdoor wellbeing activities. This represented a unique opportunity to pilot a combined offer between Valleys Steps and Coed Lleol.

Valley Steps also created an important link with Rhondda Housing Association (RHA) that proved very effective in reaching the hardest to reach audiences.

The innovative service delivered a blended offer of online provision due to COVID-19 restrictions and community provision when COVID-19 social distancing measures allowed.





This collaborative offer was delivered in community venues and locations at the heart of the communities, with beneficiaries playing a lead role in the ongoing development of the service.

THE FUTURE'S BRIGHT...

During the year of funding The Rural Wellbeing Outreach Programme delivered 77 local free courses with nearly 271 participants with 93% scoring an increased in their wellbeing.



“At the heart of what we do is our passionate belief that everyone should have the opportunity to learn ways of managing the common psychological difficulties that we all face at times in life such as stress, low mood and anxiety.

“The focus of the project was to develop links with existing community groups to raise awareness of mental health and wellbeing while delivering psycho-educational programmes to smaller groups in the most deprived areas of South Wales.

“Our goals were met by improving the wellbeing of individuals engaged and assisting in the resilience of the wider community in which they live. We also created volunteering opportunities for beneficiaries as a means to developing a pathway into employment and education.

“Receiving the Rural Development Programme funding was invaluable and ensured that we could deliver our services to the hardest to reach communities in the Cwm Taf area.

“We believe that we made a difference to these people’s lives for the future, to make it easy for them to take the first step to understanding themselves, to managing life’s difficulties and improving their everyday well-being.”

Richard Bundy, Director of Valley Steps