



COMMUNITY- BASED YOUTH WORK TRAINING PILOT

FINAL REPORT - JANUARY 2022

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Introduction

Background and objectives

The Community-Based Youth Work Training Pilot was developed as a response to a significant lack of qualified Youth Workers throughout Wales, as testified by NPT Youth Service. This lack has led to significant gaps in youth provision within the local area and further afield, with rural Wales being particularly impacted. Acting as a trial for the potential development of similar apprenticeship schemes elsewhere, the pilot aimed to provide locally identified trainees with an initial qualification in youth work alongside practical, community-based experience within established projects. Although it has focused on the Upper Amman and Twrch Valleys, its findings are intended to influence similar projects elsewhere in the future; ultimately, a successful Community-Based Youth Work Apprenticeship Scheme could address the gaps in existing youth provision by developing a new generation of qualified Youth Workers, bolstering youth work support and increasing provisions for young people in our communities.

Local context

The Upper Amman and Twrch Valleys are rural and isolated, with poor transport links to other areas. A higher proportion of the population describes experiencing poor health compared to the Welsh average, with above-average unemployment levels also reported. As much as 18% of the total population is aged 11-24, and recent months have seen an increase in anti-social behaviour, substance abuse and underage drinking, which can be linked to the lack of youth provisions within the area. This was the case even before the pandemic, which has further exacerbated the issue and led to an increase in reports of poor mental health, loneliness and isolation among the young.

Existing youth provisions within the area

Youth services are a powerful means of engaging with and inspiring young people. The provision of these services within our area, however, is severely stretched. NPT Youth Service had established a youth club at Cwmllynfell Welfare Hall, but this was suspended in 2020, in part due to the Covid-19 pandemic but also as a result of the lack of qualified youth workers available to run the session. Other youth clubs are available in Ammanford, Port Talbot, Pontardawe and Neath, but due to poor transport links, young people in the Upper Amman Valley are largely unable to access them.

Canolfan Maerdy and Maerdy Youth

The pilot was delivered within the Upper Amman Valley by Canolfan Maerdy in Tai'rgwaith. Established in 2009 as the successor to Amman Valley Enterprise and a registered charity, its mission is to identify the gaps in community services and to facilitate the development of new and existing services as required. The centre provides a community transport service, food hub, community café, day nursery and youth club.

Maerdy Youth was established in January 2015 and has enjoyed significant success in the past, at one point having over 270 registered members. One of only two accessible youth clubs in the area, Maerdy Youth delivered a varied and targeted programme of activities for young people including indoor and outdoor sports, arts and crafts sessions, visiting speakers, a youth forum and residential trips. Along with the youth club at Cwmllynfell Welfare Hall, it was forced to close at the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, exacerbating the lack of youth provision within the community.

First phase

A Stepping Stone to Youth Work

Canolfan Maerdy partnered with Adult Learning Wales to deliver the initial *A Stepping Stone to Youth Work* training programme. The AWL course comprises a series of eight accredited units, each covering a fundamental aspect of youth work:

- Roles, Responsibilities and Rights within a Voluntary Youth Work Setting
- Activity planning in a Youth Work Setting
- Principles, Philosophy and Practices of Youth Work
- Equality and Diversity
- Developing an Organisation's Local Capacity to Meet Young People's Needs
- Promoting Young People's Participation
- Safeguarding in a Youth Work Setting
- Youth Work Placement

The course was delivered at Canolfan Maerdy in three sessions per week over four weeks, and was successfully completed by all four trainees and the Administrative Assistant, all of whom now hold an initial qualification in Youth Work as a result.

Recruitment of trainees

Four trainees were recruited for the project via the UK Government's Kickstart Scheme, which was launched in 2020 with the aim of finding government-funded placements for disadvantaged 16- to 24-year-olds at risk of long-term unemployment.

Three of the trainees faced significant barriers in finding work, having never been in long-term employment and having few or no qualifications. All four were underemployed and three reported experiencing anxiety and/or poor mental health. The four trainees were employed at Canolfan Maerdy on six-month contracts of 25 hours per week, 15 of which were spent completing *A Stepping Stone to Youth Work* training with AWL.

Rhiannon Breakspear

A 24-year-old single mother of two living in Garnant, Rhiannon's work experience was limited to a small number of short-term jobs in care homes, none of which she felt she had benefited from. She described experiencing severe anxiety and reported having no clear idea about what kind of work she would enjoy.

Megan Escott

Since leaving school with 4 GCSE's in 2017, Megan's employment history had been irregular, with no position lasting for more than a few months. She had a small amount of experience in childcare along with a Level 2 qualification. Even before joining the project, Megan's ambition was to become a youth worker, having benefited from youth provision during her own childhood and adolescence.

Alex Bevan

Alex had completed an NVQ Level 2 in Hospitality at Coleg Sir Gâr along with a Level 2 Award in Food Safety in Catering, but at 22 years old he had never been employed prior to this pilot scheme. With no work history or experience and few workplace skills, Alex was at risk of becoming chronically unemployed.

Joshua Howell

The most qualified of the four, 18-year-old Josh completed two A-levels and the Welsh Baccalaureate in 2021. Since then he had been working on a casual basis at a pub and gaining work experience at his mother's solicitors firm. With a keen interest in fitness, his long-term goal is to join the army.

Recruitment of Lead Youth Worker and part-time Youth Support Worker

The lack of youth workers within Neath Port Talbot and elsewhere was keenly felt at the onset of this pilot when Canolfan Maerdy began advertising for an appropriately qualified person to fill the post of Lead Youth Worker. No level 3-qualified Youth Workers were available, and few qualified people showed an interest in the position. Based on my previous experience as a teacher I decided to apply and was successful. I was supported in the role by level 2-qualified part-time Youth Support Worker Hannah Howells.

Second phase

Re-establishing Maerdy Youth

With Maerdy Youth closed since early 2020, the next step was to publicise and ultimately reopen the youth club. Ongoing Covid restrictions meant that we could not undertake as many promotional activities as we would have liked. We had planned for the trainee Youth Workers to visit the local primary and secondary schools giving presentations to promote the project, but none could accommodate us due to the regulations. Posters were placed in businesses in the surrounding communities and the trainees undertook outreach work, handing out flyers and engaging with local young people directly. We also made use of both our own and Canolfan Maerdy's social media pages to inform the public that the youth club was reopening, and our posts were shared by other youth-focused organisations in the area. Advertising was placed in all the local schools, each of which sent email and SMS alerts to parents on our behalf. The trainees had an advertising and sign-up stall at Canolfan Maerdy's Christmas event on the 21st of December and were also present to engage with

young people at the opening of Upper Amman Valley Community Transport's Electric Bike Scheme on the 21st of January.

Our first session, held on Wednesday, 10th of November at Canolfan Maerdy, had only two attendees; happily this number has grown steadily. We have now reached 26 members, with more joining every week.

Engagement with local organisations

In our initial bid, we outlined the intention for the trainees to undertake placements at other youth-focused organisations alongside their time at Maerdy Youth. Our efforts to put this into practice were thwarted at every turn by Covid restrictions. Enquiries were made with Organised Kaos Youth Circus Ltd., Mess up the Mess Youth Theatre Ltd., Pontardawe Arts Centre, Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen Boxing Club and Neath Port Talbot Youth Service- all were either unable to accommodate the trainees due to number restrictions or their services were limited by home-working and/or staffing issues.

Despite these challenges, some progress has been made and the situation is improving. The trainees held a successful Human Hungry Hippos session at Cwmllynfell Welfare Hall on the 15th of December and this was well attended. Neath Port Talbot Youth Service has reopened their youth club in Cwmllynfell on Wednesday evenings and Maerdy Youth, in partnership with StreetGames Wales, will be holding a weekly sports session there on Thursday evenings. We have also collaborated with Organised Kaos Youth Circus to deliver several circus skills sessions. Mess up the Mess Theatre will be delivering a series of workshops in technical theatre and drama. South Wales Police have enthusiastically engaged with the pilot scheme, taking part in several sessions and enlisting some of our members in its Young Voices Conversation forum. Most of the provisions run by Neath Port Talbot Youth Services are now reopening and we are taking steps to find placements for the trainees in their youth clubs.

Neath Port Talbot Youth Fund: Maerdy YouthFest 22

During the early part of their training, Alex, Megan, Joshua and Rhiannon put forward a successful bid to the Neath Port Talbot Youth Fund. The funding will be used to hold a youth engagement event within the community. It will serve a dual purpose: it will act as a promotional tool for the Youth Work Training Scheme and other participating organisations, whilst also providing an opportunity for the trainees to engage with young people in the area and gain a better understanding of their needs and aspirations.

The youth engagement event- now named YouthFest 22- was initially set for January 29th. With the emergence of the omicron variant in late 2021, however, we thought it prudent to delay; it is now planned to take place on March 5th. A variety of local organisations will be joining us for the event and we are viewing it as a potentially annual celebration of Youth Services throughout the community.

StreetGames

Maerdy Youth joined the StreetGames Network in late 2021. A nationwide charity aimed at enhancing the lives of disadvantaged young people through sport, their mission holds particular relevance for the Upper Amman and Twrch Valleys, where sports provision is limited. Following consultation between Maerdy Youth, StreetGames' Gareth Winmill, the Youth Worker trainees and youth club members, a successful bid for a portion of StreetGames' Winter Wellbeing funding was put forward in early January 2022. Beginning in February, StreetGames will be facilitating one session per week with Maerdy Youth, alternating between Cwmllynfell Welfare Hall and Canolfan Maerdy and continuing for ten weeks. A significant portion of the funding will be spent purchasing pop-up and/or easily transportable sports equipment for use at both sites, and StreetGames will be providing additional Doorstep Sports training to the four trainees, complementing their initial qualification in Youth Work.

Performance indicators

Given the project's time constraints and the unavoidable limitations imposed by Covid, achieving the targets was challenging in some cases. There is strong evidence to suggest, however, that in better times each individual target would have been far exceeded.

Opportunities for in-person promotion were hard to come by. The trainees attended two events to publicise the project and we were able to make good use of social media in reaching out to the community. Marketing material was also disseminated throughout the area. Many positive relationships have been built with organisations and individuals in our community- with several becoming stakeholders in the project- and existing relationships have been strengthened. The number of participants who engaged with the project is low compared with the figure we would have expected to reach had Covid restrictions not been a factor; the YouthFest event postponed until March could easily have doubled the figure given here, and we expect it to be very well-attended by members of each of the communities engaged: Tai'rgwaith, Garnant, Cwmgors, Cwmllynfell, Ystradowen, Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen and Lower Brynaman.

All four of the trainees were underemployed before the start of the project, three of them long-term. In addition, the pilot created one full-time position for a Lead Youth Worker, a part-time position for a Youth Support Worker and a second part-time position for an Administrative Assistant, all of which have been secured for the immediate future beyond January 2022.

Groups engaged

Maerdy Youth and Cwmllynfell Welfare Hall have developed a fruitful working relationship that will allow us to share resources to the benefit of young people across our communities, with valuable input from Neath Port Talbot Youth Service and StreetGames. TTS Practical Science, Awel Aman Tawe, Mess up the Mess Youth Theatre and others previously mentioned elsewhere in this report have also engaged with the project, having been

present at youth club sessions and/or agreeing to participate in the upcoming youth engagement event on March 5th.

Participant demographics

Along with our 26 youth club members, the young people who engaged with the project includes the four Youth Worker trainees and the project's administrative assistant. This pilot was spearheaded and staffed primarily by women, and several older people were directly involved with its design and implementation; several more took part in youth club sessions. Our inability to engage more directly with Welsh-medium schools in the area impacted the number of Welsh-speakers participating with the project, as did the other limitations imposed by Covid regulations. Five of our youth club members are Welsh-speaking as are two of the trainees, the Lead Youth Worker, and the Support Youth Worker. Again, had the youth engagement event gone ahead on January 29th as originally intended we would have expected these figures to be significantly higher.

Enquiries were made with Neath Port Talbot Youth Services to arrange a RADS (Relationship Advice Drop-In Service) counsellor for the youth club, but due to their resources being under such pressure they were unable to accommodate our request. We also contacted Mind and WCDA for the same purpose but they too were unable to help. A counsellor will be attending the youth club to provide a weekly drop-in mental health service to our members from February 9th 2022; she has been booked for three sessions, paid for via funding from the Winter Wellbeing grant. These sessions were originally planned to begin in January but have been postponed due to Covid regulations. A workshop for young people in health and fitness took place at Canolfan Maerdy and was delivered by trainee Youth Worker Joshua Howell with support and guidance from the Lead Youth Worker and Support Youth Worker. A second workshop covering healthy relationships was delivered by trainee Youth Worker Rhiannon Breakspear, also with support.

Initial findings and recommendations

Increasing youth provision

The project was initially conceived in response to a lack of qualified youth workers within the borough and beyond, and it has demonstrated great potential in addressing this issue. Three of the four trainees are now expressing a desire to progress their training to a Level 2 qualification in order to pursue careers in Youth and Community Work. A larger scheme, if given more time, could employ a greater number of young people and support their training to a Level 2 qualification, thereby allowing them to register with the EWC as fully-qualified Youth Support Workers.

Empowering young people and increasing employability

The pilot succeeded in its aims to support individuals in overcoming barriers to employment. In addition to their successful completion of an initial qualification in Youth Work, they have developed valuable workplace skills such as organisation, creative thinking and cooperation. All four have now taken ownership over the youth club- they are

responsible for planning its activities and are capable of running each session with only minimal support from the Lead Youth Worker. They have become highly motivated, confident individuals with an increased sense of self-belief that they will carry with them long after the project's end.

Increased community cooperation

The pilot scheme has encouraged and facilitated greater cooperation and resource-sharing between youth-focused organisations throughout the area. Links have been established with other youth services in the community and cross-sector, increasing capacity. Although staffing issues related to the pandemic and Covid restrictions made it difficult for us to take advantage of these links as much as we would have liked, the project has demonstrated the potential for a larger scheme to bolster existing youth provision with strengthened partnerships and increased cooperation at the community level.

Testimonials

Included below are testimonials provided by the four trainee youth workers, as originally written.

Rhiannon Breakspear

As a 24 year old single mother I have worked many jobs, many I did not fit into or enjoy. From working in KFC, to being a carer, to working in Argos and to working on a farm. I came across Canolfan Maerdys' job listing but brushed it off multiple times as I thought I just wouldn't have a chance. I spoke with my work coach and she thought I should give it a go. I applied and didn't get it. Later, I received a phone call asking if I could start Monday as someone else had dropped out. I immediately said "yes".

3 months on I am like a different person. My confidence has grown and I find it a lot easier communicating with people now. I've always been great with kids after having 2 of my own. However, the Youth we work with are a whole other ball game. In these past couple of weeks I have made bonds and relationships that I never thought I could.

I believe this project is great for people who don't have the confidence to pursue their dreams or those who are just curious about the role.

After a rough start at the Centre I didn't think I would last this long but I'm glad I did. I've grown to like my colleagues and actually look forward to the week ahead. I've made friendships with the most unlikely people that I know I'll have for a very long time. My only complaint is that it will be ending soon and I'll be sad to leave a job that suits me so perfectly. It's a great project and I'm glad it's there.

Written by Rhiannon Breakspear (Youth Trainee Worker At Canolfan Maerdy)
17/01/2022

Joshua Howell

Working at Canolfan Maerdy has benefited me in a variety of ways such as helping me develop my confidence and work ethic through various different types of work and activities. I have also gained a varied amount of skills while working at Canolfan Maerdy which will help me later in life such as improved social and I.T. skills while doing things like preparing and executing youth club sessions. Throughout working in Canolfan Maerdy I have learnt various things about myself such as my natural ability to work with people and charismatically lead youth club sessions. In my opinion Canolfan Maerdy has provided me with a comfortable, welcoming and stable workspace which I have thoroughly enjoyed working at.

Megan Escott

This project means a lot to me as an individual as it has given me so many opportunities and also the chance to experience what it really is like to be a youth worker. As an individual I have always wanted to be a youth worker and this project has given me that opportunity and I am really grateful for this amazing experience.

As an individual I have benefited so much from gaining loads of experience of running youth clubs, gaining different qualifications. Skills I have learned throughout this project would be, one punctuality because I wasn't very punctual before beginning this project. My team work skills have improved and I feel I enjoy working as a team more. I have gained a lot of confidence and feel as if my anxiety has improved and this is because I have had so many people supporting and helping build my confidence. Before this project one of my fears was phoning or answering someone and I have overcome this by phoning young people's parents.

Things I have learned about myself would be, I can do anything I put my mind too as long as I try.

Alex Bevan

This project has really improved my mindset and shown me how fulfilling it is working with young people and seeing how much fun they're having enjoying the youth club sessions we have planned and it's built up my confidence in myself massively, working with my team on the project and planning things with them is an experience I will never forget.

This is such a good organisation, I've never worked somewhere I've felt so at home and feel like I can tell the management anything, anything I have brought up has been understood and taken fully on board. I didn't expect this all to mean as much to me as it has so far.