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Comic Relief Organisational Growth Fund 2020-21 Pilot

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Introduction

In July 2019 WCVA announced the launch of the new pilot scheme the Comic Relief Community Fund in Wales (CRCF). In partnership with regional County Voluntary Council (CVC) leads, WCVA successfully delivers this scheme as an intermediary of Comic Relief (CR). To ensure that CR funding reached grassroots groups WCVA designed a scheme with two elements: Small Community grants with a value of £1,000-£10,000, delivered via CVCs and larger grants for organisational growth, via WCVA with a value between £30,000-£60,000.

The Organisational Growth grants awarded £240,000 to six organisations across Wales for projects which would build organisational capacity, develop a new area of work, or fill a skills deficit. The grant was highly competitive receiving 95 applications.

Grants were awarded in December 2019 with project delivery starting January 2020. Consequently, the pilot scheme was greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic with all organisations successfully adapting delivery in challenging circumstances.

This report includes the adaptations, achievements, and organisational growth of the 6 projects awarded under the first Comic Relief Organisational Growth Fund. Despite unusual and difficult circumstances, all organisations were able to successfully deliver their projects building capacity, resilience, and income for the future.

Mid Wales Rape Support Centre

BACKGROUND

The Mid Wales Rape Support Centre works with survivors of sexual assault and rape throughout mid Wales, many of whom have found difficulties in accessing appropriate services previously.

In 2019, when the organisation applied for funding, Dyfed-Powys Police received 977 reports of rape and sexual abuse with national reports in England and Wales rising by 7% to 162,030 (ONS 2019).

Sadly, the British Crime Survey reports that only 15% of victims of sexual violence disclose what has happened, meaning the number of people in need of support is far higher than police reports suggest.

The Mid Wales Rape Support Centre recognised that demand for specialist sexual violence services in the area was exceeding capacity, exacerbated by lack of local counselling training courses with the nearest one being a three-and-a-half hour round trip.

To increase the capacity of the organisation and the number of specialist counsellors in the area, the Mid Wales Rape Support Centre were awarded £59,295 through the Comic Relief Organisational Growth Fund to develop and deliver accredited counselling courses.

PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS

Since the funding was awarded in 2019, 27 people have already completed a *Level 2 in Counselling Course* and are now embarking on their *Level 3 Certificate in Counselling Course* to become qualified counsellors.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown restrictions, the Mid Wales Rape Support Centre took the decision to move the delivery of the courses online. This decision proved to be hugely

successful, removing geographic barriers faced in rural mid Wales and extending the reach of the project.

Such has been the popularity of the course in this format that a further 36 people enrolled in their new *Level 2* course that started in September 2021, with participants from Mid-Wales and even further afield in Swansea, Cardiff, and Newport.

The grant also funded a Regional Development Officer, who has forged new relationships with local agencies and enhanced existing partnerships. These relationships have been vital during the delivery period as the organisation adapted to COVID-19 restrictions.

Through collaborative working the Mid Wales Rape Support Centre have been able to give and receive support from other local organisations to ensure that services continued to run, and that people continue to be supported.

Within 2 days of the first lockdown starting, the Regional Development Officer with other members of staff developed an online training package for social care staff who were supporting clients remotely, along with resource materials that could be sent to their clients. This course was shared with local agencies (both voluntary and statutory) to help them to adapt to remote working.

Going forward, the role of the Regional Development Officer will take on more responsibility for business development, particularly in relation to increasing the services provided for the community, and in the development and promotion of their counselling college.

ORGANISATIONAL GROWTH

The development and delivery of accredited counselling courses is creating a local pool of qualified counsellors who will provide support to clients, and to clients of the wider social care sector in Mid Wales. Existing clients have already benefitted from the increased services and consequently reduced waiting lists.

The development of the counselling courses has not only provided an increase in capacity but have also provided a new income stream for the organisation as course fees contribute to essential core costs.

The grant provided the initial upfront investment of finances, time and resources required to establish the project, and now the organisation has happily reported the project has become self-sustaining, producing a small surplus.

As the project develops, the profitability will increase and help towards the organisation's goal of achieving self-sustainability and reducing grant dependency.

As part of the training courses, volunteering placements are offered to trainees. This reciprocal arrangement provides them with the practice hours required for their qualification, while also providing with much needed additional support for clients.

This ensures sustainability for the organisation in the short term to reduce waiting lists and strain on existing staff while creating an enduring pool of talent for the whole region.

Further developments are already underway, with the development of qualifications at Level 4, 5 and 6. This will provide a full range of qualifications and establish the Mid Wales Rape Support Centre as a specialist counselling college.

'While this grant has not been the largest that we have received, it has certainly been one of the most impactful. The nature of the grant has enabled us to invest in our future, rather than just reacting to the here and now,' says Mike Wilkinson, Deputy Chief Executive.

'The benefits have already been significant, but the grant will continue to create a lasting legacy in terms of the future of our organisation, the learning and employment prospects for local people, and most importantly the support that will be provided for many vulnerable people in our communities in the years to come.'

CASE STUDY

Yvonne recently completed *Level 2 Counselling course*. She was interested in becoming a counsellor but could not access a local course. Therefore, when the opportunity arose with the Mid Wales Rape Support Centre, she was absolutely delighted.

‘I really enjoyed the course, and I learned so much that has been helpful in both my professional and personal life,’ says Yvonne. ‘It also helped me to decide on my future career; I want to help others by becoming a qualified trauma counsellor.’

Yvonne has enrolled on the *Level 3 Counselling course* and is on her way to achieving her ambition of becoming a qualified counsellor. During her course she will be offered a volunteer placement at the Mid Wales Rape Support Centre to gain invaluable counselling experience.

It is hoped that after Yvonne achieves her qualification the Centre will be able offer her employment as a qualified counsellor in the future.

COURSE PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

‘It was an overall positive experience, despite a very difficult year and I feel it has put me in good stead to further my counselling skills studies.’

‘Really enjoyable course, looking forward to the Level 3 course.’

‘I have appreciated the support and encouragement I have received from both tutor and peers throughout the course- this has changed my view of myself and my ability in this field of work dramatically and I do not think I would have had the confidence to continue without this.’

‘The relationships formed between the community and tutor, and the focus on how our own well-being; I appreciated the emphasis on this throughout the course. I also really valued and learned from the practical listening skills training.’

'The course met my expectations; I feel we have bonded as a group. I have definitely become more self-aware & have a greater understanding of counselling skills.'

'I feel that for a first time delivered course it was done extremely well. Despite the barriers of distance learning I have developed a close bond with some members of the group and with the tutor which I really valued.'

'I think it is really great that you are offering something like this in Aberystwyth, where there is such a great need.'

'An absolute fantastic course, the tutor was amazing; she was very knowledgeable in what she was teaching and had a fantastic way of getting her point across to enable us to understand. I have grown as an individual from where I was when I first started the course to now and re-learnt the art of journaling.'

Grow Cardiff

BACKGROUND

Grow Cardiff is a grassroots charity that exists to provide hands-on support to people of all ages and backgrounds, helping them come together to create and sustain shared, edible, wildlife-friendly growing spaces across Cardiff and beyond.

Launched in June 2015, the charity was developed by local people for local people. Uninspiring urban plots are transformed into nature-filled, buzzing hubs, and lives and communities are transformed too.

Before applying to the Comic Relief Organisational Growth Fund, Grow Cardiff undertook a review of the organisation's vision, mission and activities and identified a need for further strategic development.

By reviewing all aspects of the charity and developing an initial strategic plan, Grow Cardiff stakeholders collectively identified the key areas for the charity to focus development.

Grow Cardiff were awarded £48,952 through the Comic Relief Organisational Growth Fund to contribute towards the Director's salary. By giving the Director dedicated time to consider 'the bigger picture' the organisation would develop stronger 'roots' - a stronger core for the charity to sustain healthy 'shoots' – sustainable, healthy new and existing projects that use community gardening as a multi-purpose tool to enact lasting social change in local communities across Cardiff.

A portion of the funding was allocated to evaluate the existing Grow Well social prescribing project, to inform future projects, and develop a new website to improve the reach of the organisation.

PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS: 'GROW CARDIFF: FROM START-UP MODE TO SUSTAINABLE MODEL OF GROWTH, OUR STORY FROM SMALL SEEDLING TO THRIVING TREE'

Dedicated resource to fund the Director's salary has been described by Grow Cardiff as a 'root and branch shift'. The previous model where the salary was funded through direct project work left little time for organisational development. But because of the Comic Relief Organisational Growth Fund the Director was able to dedicate time to the development of the charity resulting in 7 key outcomes:

1. Development of Grow Cardiff's Strategic Plan

Trustees and staff spent considerable time discussing what matters about Grow Cardiff's work, resulting in volunteers re-writing and extending the existing Strategic Plan.

Trustees, staff and volunteers received support in writing the improved plan from Cardiff Third Sector Council and Social Business Wales to improve its clarity and impact.

Since the document has been finalised and implemented it has become 'an invaluable tool to support the delivery and sustainability of the organisation', enabling Grow Cardiff to focus on the next steps, what the organisation stands for, and focus leadership's intentions to be a progressive forward-thinking organisation.

'The Strategic Plan has helped us to focus on where we put our energy, to grow and develop,' says Isla Horton, Director of Grow Cardiff. 'We have chosen to focus on our social prescribing work, educational work and supporting people to grow from home (a new theme of work which emerged through the pandemic).'

2. Developing Social Prescribing to therapeutic community gardens: The Grow Well Project

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, Grow Cardiff's existing social prescribing work has grown significantly over the last 18 months. When

lockdown hit and gardens were forced to close, staff were able to reimagine the social prescribing work, shifting to support vulnerable adults to grow from home.

Grow Cardiff worked with approximately 300 different households, sending out 'everything you need to grow from home' seed growing kits, and delivering 100 grow bag kits and plug plants to households in southwest Cardiff.

Recognising that other community gardens and organisations were similarly supporting people to grow from home, staff worked to create a Cardiff Growing Together network, which together shared over 12,000 plug plants for people to grow their own fruit, vegetables and herbs at home for health and well-being.

This has evolved into the Edible Cardiff network which Grow Cardiff continues to actively support by sitting on the Development Committee.

'Having time to create and develop this network and the logistics of the giveaway was only possible with your support,' adds Isla.

The support of the grant also created time to work towards becoming a Bevan Exemplar project, successfully applying to be National Social Prescribing Award finalists 2021 (Nature category), increasing staffing, securing a third site, embedding the project into the local NHS social prescribing network, and launching 'Growing Companions' - a sister project which continues to support vulnerable adults to grow from home and connect with others.

3. Development of Grow Cardiff's Educational Work

Prior to 2020, Grow Cardiff's educational work was ad hoc and delivered by the Director. During lockdown, mindful that many young people were unable to continue with their usual activities or spend as much time outside as usual, the Director successfully pitched a project to the Moondance Foundation: Sow Some Sunshine.

This project went on to support over 500 children in hub schools to grow their own sunflowers, vegetables, and herbs.

Grow Cardiff was able to employ a new Schools Engagement Officer and a digital artist to deliver resources to schools and support the activities through an updated website which ran 'how to' videos, competitions, games and on-line support for children and staff to grow through the lockdown.

At the end of the project, Grow Cardiff pitched to continue the schools work, this time working with five schools in disadvantaged areas of the city, teaching them to grow through the autumn and winter.

The project has continued to attract other schools and children's organisations to work with Grow Cardiff and have partnered with schools in Neath Port Talbot, the Children's University, Cardiff Healthy & Sustainable Schools programme, Summer Holiday Enhancement Programme and Summer of Smiles (in partnership with Cardiff Council).

Additionally, a pilot was launched with Trees for Cities, a London based organisation, delivering the Engagement phase of their Edible Playgrounds programme. This has developed into a 10-school-a-year project for this year and 20 for the following 2 years, securing £30K in 2021 and similarly in the following years.

This funding represents a significant development in sustaining the schools programme and leaving a legacy of a whole school approach to embracing gardening and growing.

'We are extremely serious about children learning to grow - a skill that has largely been confined to a small number of children in after school clubs.,' says Isla.

'We want to create a revolution in children's growing across Cardiff - that every child learns to grow and that this is interwoven through the curriculum as the Forest Schools Programme has become.

‘This is very ambitious, but we believe that with your help we have started something that will fundamentally impact children and the culture of learning in schools for years to come’.

The next step is to develop a ‘Garden Schools’ training programme, like the Forest Schools accreditation programme and the organisation is in talks with the National Botanical Garden of Wales to develop this.

4. Development of Monitoring & Evaluation

Grow Cardiff have begun to develop an organisational monitoring and evaluation framework with trustees and staff; however, the impacts of the national lockdown delayed this progress.

Throughout the pandemic Grow Cardiff have continued to work closely with the Wales School of Social Prescribing to monitor and evaluate the Grow Well social prescribing project.

Grow Cardiff have also partnered with TrustLinks, a renowned social prescribing organisation in England, sharing best practice and networking together with other organisations delivering social prescribing for health and well-being throughout the UK.

‘We are excited to be on the cutting edge of social prescribing monitoring and evaluation work in Wales,’ says Isla.

‘Without your support, I would never have had the time to be able to invest in this area of work.

‘We believe that evidencing the impact of our work is key to it being funded and sustainable and therefore your support has been invaluable.’

This work is being continued in collaboration with partners and with the support of Social Business Wales.

5. Development of a new Grow Cardiff website

During the grant period, Grow Cardiff engaged a website designer to build a website. Although it is still very much a work in progress, the decision was taken to launch the Sow Some Sunshine project using the new website as a key tool to engage children and staff from schools.

There are plans to further develop the website before the main growing season begins in 2022.

6. Trustee development

The founding Chair and Treasurer of Grow Cardiff left the organisation in 2020 forming an understandable gap in the organisation during a challenging time.

Trustees continued to meet throughout the pandemic via Zoom (including holding an AGM) and took part in Trustee training where all aspects of the role were discussed.

A new Chair and Treasurer has now been appointed, bringing fresh experience and focusing on further strategic developments to secure the sustainability of the organisation.

7. Developing new ways of working

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic Grow Cardiff they had envisaged developing further social prescribing projects and a 'green holiday club'.

But as the pandemic developed these plans were put on hold and redesigned to support hundreds of children to 'grow from home', setting up school hubs and creating 'Growing Champions'.

'We are very proud to have worked in new ways we had not previously thought possible! It has taught us that we can be highly flexible, adapt at pace and still make a lasting difference in people's lives even when all the norms had disappeared'

By creating rigorous COVID-19 risk assessments, Grow Cardiff were one of the first organisations to resume activity when restrictions allowed.

Volunteers returned to the gardens and have repeatedly spoken to staff about the value of meeting outside and gaining a sense of community and friendships.

Grow Cardiff are working to engage more people who have become lonely because of the pandemic.

ORGANISATIONAL GROWTH

‘The Comic Relief grant has had some of the most far-reaching significance for Grow Cardiff of any grant or support we have received. I cannot overstate the importance and impact of your support to our organisational growth and sustainability,’ says Isla.

‘The grant has enabled us to have the breathing space to explore, develop, overcome and achieve so much in the last 18 months. As an organisation we have grown from fragile start-up mode to a sustainable model of growth: deeper roots and strong shoots.

‘Without your support I am quite certain we would not have been able to achieve this fundamental transition, which in turn has enabled a thriving future legacy for the people and community gardens we support.

‘Above all, the grant has given us the precious commodity of time for our staff, our trustees and I to invest in the organisation’s core work, rather than a constant focus on delivering projects.

‘Your support has meant a sea change for Grow Cardiff, we really cannot thank you enough for the grant and for the support of the grant officers who have been outstanding. Thank you so very much.’

The Comic Relief Organisational Growth Fund has positively impacted the sustainability of Grow Cardiff by:

- Allowing staff to focus on strategic aims and objectives and invest time in reaching them.

- Creating a foundation to weather the pandemic and explore positive responses through entirely new approaches.
- Giving time to explore and develop existing and new project ideas and to secure funding to support them. Over the last year, as well as securing emergency Covid funding for existing work, Grow Cardiff have secured a two year, £99K grant from NHS Charities Together for Grow Well, £30K in funding from Trees for Cities, £30K towards the Director's salary (from April 2021), £15K from Track 2000 to mentor and support volunteers at Riverside Community Garden, £9K from Awards for All to develop Growing Companions.
- It has given 'breathing space' for trustees to review, plan and think ahead, rather than responding to immediate shortfalls in funding.
- Providing time to support staff to develop in their roles, supported by the Director
- Providing time for the Director and trustees to review key policies and procedures.
- Providing time for the Director and staff to develop a 'Lead Volunteer' programme.
- Providing time for the Director and staff to develop relationships with other key partners and organisations in the NHS, third sector, Cardiff Council and Schools.
- Enabling investment in best practice: demonstrated through being one of only two third sector organisations accepted in a cohort of 50 organisations onto the Bevan Exemplar programme.
- Giving time to celebrate and share best practice and achievements: demonstrated by being short-listed as finalists in the National Social Prescribing Awards (Nature) category

- Increasing reach: at the start of 2020 Grow Cardiff had 20 followers on Twitter. They now have 1374! The online presence has significantly increased the organisation's reach by having time to invest in social media and the new website.
- Established a new base at Grange Pavilion, hiring a large room on site every week for staff to have one-to-one meetings with the Director and regular team meetings every month. This has increased the sense of 'team' and supporting each other.
- Increasing staffing and resource capacity across all projects. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, Grow Cardiff have increased their staff team from two part-time employees (equivalent of 1.4 full time staff) at the start of the funding to five part-time employees (soon to be six), equivalent to 3.44 full time employees, plus sessional staff.

STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

'Here... I found I feel safe. I trust the people here. I found I've got a new community, so in some ways it's bit like being with family. I feel very happy and my confidence has changed tremendously' - Patient Volunteer at the Dusty Forge Community Garden, Grow Well project

'As a GP and Community Director of the cluster, I have seen the benefits of the project in supporting patients who are suffering with social isolation and other psychosocial problems. I have seen patients who have struggled for many years, thrive in the supportive environment of the Grow Well garden. The close relationship with Primary Care enables a holistic approach to care and the colocation of the project in a GP practice helps to change the perception of GP surgeries to a place of wellbeing. Practice staff feedback shows that the project is valued by all members of the primary care team in promoting health and wellbeing and supporting patients.' - Dr Karen Pardy, SW Cardiff Cluster Director

'Quite Inspirational' - description of Grow Well by members of the NHS Charities Together panel in response to a successful funding application

for Grow Well for two years' funding (£99K), in partnership with Cardiff & Vale Health Charity.

Community Care & Wellbeing Service (CCAWS)

BACKGROUND

Community Care & Wellbeing Service (CCAWS) are a mental health and wellbeing charity that serves the community in Cardiff through counselling, befriending and advocacy. In 2019 CCAWS applied to the Comic Relief Organisational Growth Fund as they had experienced a 50% increase in demand for services with a backlog of approximately 40 referrals at any one time.

CCAWS recognised that the IT infrastructure in place was not fit for purpose and was a limiting factor in the organisation's efficiency and capacity. The server was ineffective and unable to support an upgrade to Microsoft Office 365 meaning all systems and procedure were paper based.

CCAWS were awarded £22,928 through the Comic Relief Organisational Growth Fund to introduce a new IT infrastructure upgrade. The new IT infrastructure would streamline operations, improve operational efficiency, and lead to an overall improved response to client referrals.

PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS

As part of the IT infrastructure upgrade the grant funded the purchase of:

- 3x new desktop computers
- 3x laptops
- 2x tablets
- Mobile phones
- New server upgrade to the Cloud

As the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent national lockdowns came into effect the new IT equipment became more instrumental than previously anticipated.

‘At the time this was something unprecedented and which we were unprepared for,’ says Fehmida Ahmed CCAWS Community Manager. ‘It was our new IT infrastructure which saved us and enabled us to continue operating with little or no disruption to our services.

‘We would not have had any laptops for home working, once the ‘stay at home’ rules came into force. We had mobile phones to communicate with whilst working out of the office.’

The grant also updated software packages to include:

- Zoom package
- MS Office online & app
- Upgrade of internal client database
- Adobe
- MS Teams
- MS Forms
- MS Power Automate
- Website and social media updates

The upgraded Zoom package became instrumental in enabling the delivery of 50-minute counselling sessions and two-hour online psycho-education courses.

The online courses offered easy to use coping strategies and were a means to connect with people virtually and reduce feelings of loneliness

and isolation. Fehmida described the project as 'pivotal' in enabling virtual operation.

The grant was also able to fund an IT & Project Support Officer who, along with providing IT support, arranged 'wellbeing check-in' calls with all of CCAWS most vulnerable clients throughout lockdown.

The additional expertise and capacity provided by this post ensured a smooth transition of services to virtual delivery. The staff positions funded through the grant were frontline workers who kept the door of the service open throughout the pandemic for the most vulnerable in the community who did not have access to a phone or internet connection.

As a result of the IT infrastructure upgrade CCAWS were able to deliver the Community in Mind project and provide a mental health and wellbeing service to over 500 people in Cardiff from diverse ethnic minority community backgrounds.

'Our organisation received more referrals in the year of this project, and we would not have been able to cope with the demand had we not received this grant from Comic Relief,' adds Fehmida.

ORGANISATIONAL GROWTH

CCAWS now has a robust and modern IT infrastructure suitable for flexible working and ensuring a more efficient service. It is predicted that the new system will have a lasting legacy for the next 10 years safeguarding the virtual services provided by CCAWS.

'We feel stronger and more robust as an organisation, thanks to the organisational growth grant,' says Fehmida.

Due to the improved IT, infrastructure staff were able to develop a greater volunteer pool who were instrumental in supporting the service through the pandemic.

Volunteers ensured each referral was logged accurately and that support was arranged efficiently. The new pool of volunteers have also been

trained as peer supporters and advocates for people with mental health needs in their local communities.

The recruitment, training and implementation of the volunteers would not have been as effective without appropriate IT equipment, resulting in an increased capacity for the organisation and additional value for clients.

Outdated paper-based forms and systems have been updated with online replacements to ensure ease of access and efficiency in delivery. The seamless move to virtual delivery has been commended by the community resulting in a nomination by their local CVC for an award from the High Sheriff of South Glamorgan for outstanding services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

CASE STUDY

The Community in Mind (CiM) project aim was to provide multilingual and culturally sensitive support to a community facing challenges with their mental health and wellbeing.

The core principle of CiM is to deliver holistic and tailored support to enhance the mental, social, emotional resilience and spiritual strength of individuals, thereby leading to overall improved community wellbeing.

The project supported over 500 people from the diverse communities of Cardiff and Southeast Wales, and although not foreseen at the time, was a timely response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

It provided online and telephone counselling, virtual befriending, and issue-based advocacy. The project also delivered a programme of psycho-education courses.

The Organisation Growth Grant funded a complete overhaul of CCAWS' existing failing technology systems, with a new fit-for purpose IT infrastructure, with the ability to deliver remote and virtual services.

The impact was huge and has meant that they have grown as an organisation and are able to support more people across the diverse communities they serve. Systems are more robust and efficient, enabling better client experiences and better-quality support.

The CiM Project Officers were able to provide front line response and support to people with concerns about their mental health and wellbeing. They provided a listening ear, co-ordinated wellbeing check in calls, and co-ordinated one-to-one support.

One Project Officer further designed and developed a virtual befriending training and recruited new volunteer befrienders to offer social and emotional support to people feeling increasingly isolated due to the pandemic.

Their beneficiaries are mostly people from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, who now have a support organisation with a fresh new modern look, and enhanced up-to-date IT facilities, which are evidently crucial in these times more than ever.

CCAWS now function as a contemporary charity organisation that has the facilities to operate in the new virtual world we live in.

BENEFICIARY FEEDBACK

‘I don’t know where I’d be without CCAWS. I have OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder) which I was managing well for years. But when this pandemic hit, it all came back. I was afraid and fearful, thinking that the germs would contaminate me. I started hand washing again, but to an extreme level. I still feel on edge and scared. It was my befriender who saved me. Just talking to her once a week gave me hope and reassurance. I don’t think I could have got through it without her. She knew the right things to say.’

‘CCAWS gave me mechanisms to improve my self-doubts and challenge the beliefs that could be wrong about me. CCAWS reminded me of something wonderful and that was to be more kind to myself.’

'The service was very helpful because it helped me to understand my personal needs and techniques for better mental health.'

VOLUNTEER FEEDBACK

'CCAWS enabled me the opportunity to develop both my professional skills and my personal attributes. Through interacting with clients, I was able to gain greater knowledge on several mental health issues, and how to create a healthy working relationship with these clients. The training CCAWS gives you helps prepare you for the role extremely well, and the supervision I received helped increase my competence level whilst working with my clients. Everyone at the charity is extremely helpful and are readily available if you are ever stuck with something. Overall, I thoroughly enjoyed my time at CCAWS, hearing how grateful the clients are for your time is something that will stick with me forever, and I could not recommend becoming a befriender enough!'

'The support at CCAWS feels well-rounded and holistic. It isn't just a counselling service but can also help clients sort other issues through advocacy. They don't just give up on a person and see things through. They are only a small team, but it feels like a community.'

'CCAWS has been for me an amazing experience not only as an organisation that helped me to get the most of my placement as therapist but also as place to share and learn from others. CCAWS has given me the opportunity to develop my skills as counsellor and trainer. Its staff has encouraged me, believed in my capacities. Hence, I felt motivated to work and participate. I still do'.

'I worked with very diverse clients: migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, women, men, older, younger...people who required few sessions to overcome anxiety to longer sessions to understand their trauma. Depression, anxiety, trauma and personality disorders have been the most common presentations. For some of the cases, there was need to refer to higher level of intervention; however, most of them successfully obtained the tools they needed to manage their own distress.'

Sistema Cymru - Codi'r Tô

BACKGROUND

Sistema Cymru - Codi'r Tô (Raise the Roof) is a grassroots community regeneration project which uses music to improve the lives of young people and the communities in which they live.

Established in 2014 by a group of local people who were driven to address child poverty in their community, Codi'r Tô adopted the Venezuelan El Sistema programme and teaching method.

The project is delivered primarily through the medium of Welsh, one of only a handful of projects delivered through a minority language.

At the time of applying to the Comic Relief Organisational Growth Fund, Sistema Cymru were facing financial uncertainty due to the withdrawal of core funding from Art Council Wales. Consequently, there was a recognised need to diversify income streams and strengthen the organisational capacity.

Sistema Cymru were awarded £38,387 to employ a Business Development Officer and Fundraising Consultant to build capacity for the future delivery of the programme.

IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic created numerous challenges for Sistema Cymru and affected the delivery of the project as planned. Codi'r Tô relies on direct contact with schools and students to successfully incorporate all elements and skills. Understandably school closures and lockdown measures initially prevented the usual project delivery.

In April 2020 five members of teaching staff were furloughed under the government Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and the project co-ordinator reduced working hours by 20%. Despite this, staff at Codi'r Tô were able to overcome the isolation and lockdown challenges by swiftly

adapting to online lessons and virtual activities that encouraged and motivated the students and parents over this difficult period.

The uncertainty created by the pandemic had a knock-on effect to the viability of fundraising efforts in an unreliable funding landscape. Taking into consideration Codi'r Tô's demographic and audience, it quickly became apparent that community fundraising would be insensitive and inefficient use of resources.

The decision was taken to use the time as an opportunity to prepare and grow Codi'r Tô to be ready for events, activities, and workshops in the future.

'The COVID-19 pandemic has presented countless challenges along the way of trying to develop Codi'r Tô's fundraising efforts,' says Carys Bowen, Codi'r Tô Co-ordinator 'With the combination of working remotely and internet connection woes, the surrounding communities affected financially due to the pandemic, national lockdowns, self-isolating etc., working efficiently has proven to be difficult at times.'

PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS

To better capture the programmes impact on addressing poverty within the community, Codi'r Tô undertook a review of monitoring and evaluation procedures resulting in a new standardised framework.

The review was led by Sheleagh Llewelyn of Richard Newton Consulting who was funded by the Comic Relief Organisational Growth Fund alongside staff from Codi'r Tô. The framework has been built into the delivery of the programme used flexibly to work in both school and community settings and meets all your reporting requirements. The elements are:

- Annual reporting
- Baseline data
- Participant Portfolio

- Questionnaire for participants
- Questionnaires for teachers
- Questionnaires for partners / volunteers
- Case studies
- Recording community events
- Measuring impacts

The grant was also used to reimagine the brand of Codi'r Tô to better capture the message and culture of the project. New illustrations along with rebranded fonts and colours are being used to develop new merchandise and build brand awareness across in the community.

The redesigned brand is also being used online though a renewed focus on social media presence. The grant enabled Codi'r Tô to invest in software to streamline, monitor and diversify social media activity.

A combined use of Hootsuite, MailChimp and Canva has transformed the online presence of the project, providing engaging branded content throughout the COVID-19 national lockdowns. This included the online campaign 'Meet Our Tutors' which ran across Facebook and Instagram to personalise the activity to online viewers, as well as a six-monthly newsletter distributed by Hootsuite to share information and encourage online fundraising. The software has benefitted the sustainability of the organisation increasing the efficiency of the work and more than halving the time taken to monitor engagement.

The grant was also able to fund a Business Development Officer who focused on diversifying funding though building corporate partnerships and community fundraising support. A number of local businesses indicated interest in developing relationships for corporate partnerships but unfortunately the COVID-19 pandemic considerably slowed progress in this area, so the work is ongoing.

Equally, due to the social demographic the projects works with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic greatly affected the communities capacity to support fundraising during the grant period. The improved online presence has helped build community support and the introduction of information sheets and sign-up sheets for Friends of Codi'r Tô has helped to build a volunteer base. As the impacts of the pandemic ease the Friends of Codi'r Tô will help develop future fundraising ideas in the community.

'As Co-ordinator, I could only concentrate on grant applications, supported by Richard Newton Consulting – having extra support from Eleanor [Business Development officer] meant that for the first time we could connect with local businesses and members of the community and develop our online presence, therefore developing new ways of working,' adds Carys.

'Trust and grant funding will continue to form a significant percentage of Codi'r Tô's funding mix over the coming 3 years and beyond, but for the first time, we had the resources to develop our community and online activities.'

ORGANISATIONAL GROWTH

Despite challenges presented by the pandemic, the grant funding was effectively used to employ a Business Development Officer and Fundraising Consultant - Richard Newton Consulting. Both posts worked with existing staff to ensure the project survived the lockdown and could be in a stable position to grow in the future.

During lockdown Richard Newton Consulting secured 3 emergency Covid 19 grants from Steve Morgan Foundation, Samuel Gardner Memorial Trust and The Foyle Foundation – a total of £9,164.

This funding paid for additional percussion instruments and technical equipment including new laptops and recording equipment, enabling the project to continue though the pandemic as well as providing ongoing additional resource.

An additional £43,000 in grants has been secured through grant fundraising support from Richard Newton Consulting from The Peoples Postcode Lottery, Trusthouse Foundation, Thomas Howell's Education Fund for North Wales, Gwendoline and Margaret Davies Trust, David Family Foundation, Ty Cerdd and Louis Nicholas Residuary Charitable Trust – a total of £52,164 secured during the Comic Relief grant period which will sustain the project for the next 6 months.

The additional funding will enable Codi'r Tô to extend tutor hours providing teaching to over 500 pupils - an increase of over 110 pupils since normal activities before the pandemic. Codi'r Tô will also be able to invest in new brass and percussion instruments for young musicians to borrow.

THOUGHTS FROM A TUTOR

'It was fantastic in April to return to school for face-to-face sessions with Nursery and Reception children. During my first visit to Ysgol Maesincla, a 5 year old girl put an envelope on the table for me to collect on my way out. Inside the envelope were some paper hearts that she had been busy colouring and cutting out especially to welcome me back!

'Also, it will be difficult to forget the huge smile on the face of a girl in Reception who was obviously delighted to see me in school instead of on a screen!

'Developing new ways to provide musical activities for the children has been challenging. Sometimes, technology lets us down, and it can be difficult to gauge the children's reactions through the screen. In spite of that, it has been a positive year.

'I have learnt many new skills while creating weekly videos for the children. It has been a good opportunity to develop my relationship with the teachers in the schools through e-mail discussions and while working together during virtual sessions.

'I have also learnt how to stream on Facebook Live using "Streamlabs OBS". I hope that the varied experiences of this year will help us to be more flexible and to react positively to challenges in the future.'

- Lucy Clement Evans – Foundation Phase Tutor

CASE STUDY

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EgmcjYHjapI>

FEEDBACK

'Mi oedd videos Bari a'r criw yn cadw iddi fynd drwy'r lockdown mae wrth ei bodd gyda Codi'r Tô. Diolch i chi x' ('Videos by Bari and the crew kept her going during lockdown, she loves Codi'r Tô. Thank you') – Participant's parent

'Gwych diolch o galon i chi. Fydd y dyswgyr wrth eu boddau yn gweld y fideo yma. Edrych ymlaen i weld y canlyniadau.' ('Brilliant, thank you so much. The learners will be delighted to see this video. Looking forward to seeing the results') – Gareth Wyn Jones, Headteacher Ysgol Glancegin

Bridgend YMCA

BACKGROUND

Bridgend YMCA enables and empowers children and young people to maximise their potential through social, physical, cultural, and emotional activities. Bridgend YMCA has been operational since 1897 and underwent a transformational development in 2015 to better meet the needs of the community.

From this point the organisation experienced three years of growth and were able to lead on numerous community youth projects. However, the Board and leadership team identified a skills gap and a need for professional finance, evaluation and monitoring to enable further expansion and growth.

Bridgend YMCA were awarded £36,287 through the Comic Relief Organisational Growth Fund to hire a Compliance, Finance & Governance Officer which would increase the capacity of the management team to develop a three-year business plan and focus on organisational growth.

IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic and consequent national lockdowns greatly affected Bridgend YMCA and the delivery of their project with the Comic Relief Organisational Growth Fund.

After not finding a successful candidate in the first round of interviews for the Officer post, the second round were due to take place 24 March 2020 but were unfortunately delayed due to national lockdown. This combined with the furlough of staff meant the decision was taken to rethink the strategy for delivering the project aims in the unusual context of the pandemic.

‘The Compliance, Performance and Finance role demands a broad skillset, and we were perhaps ambitious thinking that this could be delivered by one person. This situation has been exacerbated by the

lockdown, with reduced potential employee mobility...in discussions with our Board, we are aiming to mitigate risks and maximise the benefits to the YMCA over the course of the Comic Relief funding, which is crucial in facilitating a key period of growth and transformation' – Youth Development Officer

It was agreed that instead of the grant being used for a full-time employee, Bridgend YMCA would reprofile and employ freelance specialists on short-term contracts. This enabled the organisation to recruit the required expertise needed to build systems and 'secure a sustainable road map into the future'.

In addition to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, the team at Bridgend YMCA were coping with personal tragedy as the center manager suffered a heart attack and staff were coping with family bereavement. All of which understandably affected the wider organisation and delivery of the project.

'We constantly had to adapt and change in line with the changing COVID guidelines and with young people's expectations, thoughts, and fears.'

PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS

After redesigning the project to hire external consultants, staff were able to make progress towards the planned organisational development. In addition to paid consultants, Bridgend YMCA reached out to other local groups to formalise mutually beneficial partnerships of support.

Valley Kids is an organisation with a similar role as Bridgend YMCA in a neighboring county, who offered their fundraising and governance expertise to advise on job descriptions and the development of new policies to support this grant.

This has now been formalised to a reciprocal agreement of joint support. Bridgend YMCA were also able to secure pro bono financial forecasting from a local accountancy firm to help shape a business plan for financial growth.

The main output from this project has been the successful development of a 3-year [Business Development Plan](#). The aim of the plan is to mitigate risk and maximise the benefits to the YMCA to facilitate a key period of growth and transformation. The plan identifies the need for a 'new and improved YMCA in the county of Bridgend' in response to local government austerity measures against a renewed interest in the YMCA's services from the community.

To achieve this the Board of trustees has suggested that Bridgend YMCA are ideally placed to thrive under a new operational or co-production model. The development plan has prioritised 3 strategic aims to achieve the vision of a thriving co-production model to sustain the organisation:

- To provide young people with participation opportunities to develop skills for life
- To anticipate and respond to the changing needs of young people and the youth sector
- To be the leading voice for the youth sector across Bridgend

Bridgend YMCA have been able to appoint a new board member to help meet the skills gap in relation to organisational policy. The new board member has experience in achieving PQASSO quality standards and Investors in People awards and provided links to the Interim Youth Work Board and the Youth Work Quality Mark, all of which Bridgend YMCA are currently pursuing.

The grant has been used to engage software consultants to develop IT infrastructure including and updating software and streamlining office systems. This enabled LGBTQ+ and disabilities clubs to move online during the national lockdown. The consultants also created a new website to increase the membership offer and develop new peripatetic services.

Comic Relief funding enabled Bridgend YMCA to improve finance systems by purchasing access to Quickbooks software. This software means that accounts can be created instantly instead of annually so that the Board and the Leadership team get an accurate view of the current

financial pressures on the organisation to facilitate forecasting and planning.

With the grant providing additional business support and an increase in staff time and capacity, Bridgend YMCA staff have been able to meet, build partnerships, plan, and deliver much needed projects.

For example, increased capacity gave staff the time to plan and deliver the 'Together for Young People' event. The event created the opportunity for local services to meet and discuss their work and look at new opportunities to develop services for young people and for partnership work. Over 40 different organisations attended, all of whom are working with young people.

The event highlighted the need for stronger partnerships and communication across the Borough. From this event a subgroup has been created regarding young people and mental health to look at pathways and gaps. This group's aim is to ensure wherever a young person is with their mental health that there is a service available and accessible to them. One of the group members has said:

'Since the beginning of our partnership with Bridgend YMCA and the events they have organised and delivered we now have an amazing emotional health programme for young people. I constantly refer young people to the service and the feedback that we have received from them has been positive, I have had the opportunity to see first-hand shy awkward lonely adolescents blossom over the weeks, the room resounds with laughter and chatter. A win-win for everyone!'

Between lockdowns Bridgend YMCA met with Job Centre Plus and Assisted Recovery in the Community, re-established a successful ground-breaking project and delivered the first pilot. The need for Emotional Health projects has increased dramatically, and staff are currently applying for additional funds to support a full-time project.

ORGANISATIONAL GROWTH

Here's how Reg Denley, the YMCA Bridgend Centre manager feels the Comic Relief Organisational Growth Fund has contributed to organisational growth:

'The funding has been crucial in facilitating a key period of transformation and sustainability and we are confident that more positive growth will follow once COVID regulations allow.

The grant has enabled the development of business support systems and the organisation to develop a new strategy. Bridgend YMCA has had the capacity to be strategic in their approach to develop their work for young people, with young people.

The time saving provided from the recruitment of Business support for 12 months, IT support for three months and Marketing support for three months has provided the management team with the time to develop Bridgend YMCA's Business Strategy and develop our work further with young people. This has enabled the expansion and development of services for children and young people and with the newly developed partnerships.

Due to the time created from this funding and the new strategy this funding has had an impact not on the now for young people but for the future'.

Cruse Bereavement Care North Wales

BACKGROUND

Cruse Bereavement Care has been helping people who are struggling with grief and bereavement for over 60 years as the UK's leading bereavement charity. Cruse Bereavement Care North Wales is the main provider of bereavement support for people of all ages in North Wales providing specialist information, face-to-face and phone support.

Due to the increasing demand for support Cruse Bereavement Care North Wales were awarded £39,959 to diversify the range of services available and create 'Support for All'. The aim was by increasing the range of support there would be an improved choice of services to best fit the individual while reducing waiting times.

IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

COVID-19 placed unprecedented pressure on Cruse Bereavement Care and demanded rapid adaptation. Cruse Bereavement Care North Wales were able to completely digitise the organisational infrastructure rapidly with the aim of preventing any break in support for clients.

The transition from support in person to remote support was seamless with all volunteers keeping continuous contact with those clients they were supporting at the time of the initial lockdown.

The organisation has also reported a significant decrease in fundraising with the cancellation of planned activities.

'As COVID-19 has impacted on our service delivery, so has it impacted on our budgets. Fundraising has become more difficult without our normal public events available and additionally, the financial pressures felt nationally has restricted many people's ability to donate. Although

adaptations to fundraising have been possible (national online fundraising events), grants from organisations such as Comic Relief have become more important for our sustainable growth and improved capacity to reach those most in need.' – Hub Manager

PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS

Before the receipt of the Comic Relief Organisational Growth grant, Cruse Bereavement Care North Wales delivered one-to-one support to adults and children in the community, face to face, or by telephone for those unable to access face to face support.

The grant has enabled the organisation to diversify the range of services available, providing increased choice and flexibility for bereaved people to access Cruse bereavement support.

The funding has been used to develop new services under the umbrella of 'Support for All' - including digital Understanding Your Bereavement support sessions, a group support group, and peer support group.

Diversifying service provision has not just helped with the support of bereaved people but also had a wider positive impact on the recruitment of volunteers - the continuation of which has been possible through the pandemic due to the digitising of the whole volunteer journey from recruitment to interviews and training via Zoom.

This has expanded the recruitment reach by removing geographical constraints of travelling to offices for interviews and training which has also reduced time needed for logistical concerns for staff and trainers.

It has facilitated greater and more flexible access to continued training and supervision once volunteers are recruited. Existing volunteers have received Continuous Professional Development including Sudden and Traumatic Death, First Contact Assessment and Triage training and all have been trained in delivering remote support sessions by telephone/online.

The addition funds have supported the recruitment and training of Bereavement Volunteer Supervisors to deliver vital additional support and supervision to volunteers dealing with complex and distressing calls.

In March 2020 Cruse Bereavement Care North Wales had 126 Volunteers which increased to 139 by August. Since January 2021 26 new volunteer have completed all training with eight in the process of training.

ORGANISATIONAL GROWTH

By enabling the adaptation of service delivery and therefore reach, Comic Relief Organisational Growth Fund has positively impacted and enhanced Cruse' long term sustainability.

Despite the increased demand and pressure on services due to the pandemic the organisation has been able to continue and increase pre covid levels of service. From April 2020 to March 2021 volunteers delivered additional 457 hours of support compared to the previous year.

The re-design of the Understanding Your Bereavement sessions to facilitate online delivery has created additional benefits including unlimited attendance, lower delivery cost, removal of geographical limitations to attendance and delivery and the ability for clients to attend from their home.

The events had previously been piloted successfully under a Bags of Help grant from Tesco, within Gwynedd and Anglesey. These events provided by Zoom act as a welcome to new clients across North Wales when referred to Cruse. They are optional and work to ensure all clients feel included at an early stage and have information and support whilst awaiting allocation of a Bereavement Volunteer.

Where necessary individual clients are offered follow-up digital support to ensure they can access the event. If clients cannot or do not want to attend the event their case moves straight to the allocation stage where their needs are discussed with a suitably experienced and qualified volunteer, and they are allocated for one to one or group support depending on their preference.

Attendance at these events has varied from between 6 to 17 attendees with an average 10 per session. The number of people attending these events is continuing to increase. The success of the sessions delivered in this format has promoted Cruse Bereavement to extend the programme to across all of Wales.

Online peer-support launched as a direct result of the Comic Relief Organisational Growth fund is now well established and regularly attended. Hope Through Loss was originally piloted as a one-off peer-support event on 29 February 2020.

The national lockdown a few weeks later delayed the continuation of the successful event but after a significant amount of preparation, risk assessment and careful planning, Hope Through Loss launched online in summer 2020.

There have now been 10 events and the format of large group introductions followed by two periods of smaller group breakout room sessions has been well received by those in attendance. It is clear from feedback from the groups are constantly positive.

'I very much appreciate being invited to the event and even after one session, I feel included and part of a very special group of people. It's hard to put into words, how I felt after the session, but I felt like I had been given the opportunity to offload, tell my story and be listened to by people who wanted to listen. I look forward to the next session.'

'It was lovely to see you and everyone else on the Zoom call. Prior to attending the event, I was unsure what to expect. However, as soon as I joined, I felt welcomed by everyone and this put me at ease. The event was very emotional, but it was good to be able to both speak and listen to others who are going through similar circumstances, to know that I was not alone and how it was ok to have these feelings. The group was non-judgemental and totally understood when I expressed my thoughts and feelings'

Statistical analysis of people accesses the services provided through the Support for All' programme shows that on average the ratio of Female to

Male accessing bereavement support is 13:7. Cruse Bereavement are now exploring if there could be a potential benefit to exploring options for Male Specific Bereavement Support group to meet this need.

The new support options delivered through this grant have all be well received by both clients and volunteers. Learnings from the 'Support for all' programme will continue to inform future services and provide insights and for all Cruse Bereavement branches.

'The full impact of the diversifying of support options is yet to be felt due to the impact of the pandemic. The addition of individual, group and peer support available by Zoom has undoubtedly positively impacted the sustainability of the organisation through the COVID-19 pandemic, but ultimately the benefits of these additional services will be fully felt and measurable once a return to in person support is a safe and viable option for everyone' – Project Officer

FEEDBACK

'I live alone and the past 15 months of the pandemic have been hard, so I very much value the opportunity to meet up with other people, especially as everyone understands what it's really like to lose a loved one. Our circumstances may be different, but our experience of grief and trying to make a life post-bereavement are similar in lots of ways.

'I really enjoyed the session earlier this week. I found afterwards that it had churned up a lot of feelings for me, but in a good way I think. I sometimes feel 'guilty' that I haven't moved on much since my husband died but hearing other people's stories and experiences made me see that grief has its own path and patterns. It was great for me not to feel so isolated too, and I found some of the group's experiences quite humbling. In short, it did me good!

'First of all, thank you for inviting me along to my first Hope Through Loss Zoom meeting and the next one in a couple of weeks. I know I've said it previously, but after attending Monday evening's meeting I'd say you have all done one incredibly amazing job with the organisation and got the format bang on. After attending the meeting, I would say I wanted it

to carry on a bit longer, I was enjoying myself. It was also lovely to catch up with yourself and all the new members. Looking forward to our next session. I'm looking forward to seeing you all again along with maybe some more new and familiar faces.'

'The meeting was helpful to me in another way too. I mentioned that I had just lost my sister-in-law, and I've found that the experience of listening to and acknowledging the other group members in a supportive and non-judgemental way, has helped me when talking with my brother about his loss.'

'I found the whole meeting helpful, just listening to others, and being listened to in turn, were helpful, and healing in a way.'

'I felt the breakout rooms were helpful as they felt more intimate and for those individuals who maybe struggle to talk in large groups this is great.'

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