

Issue 84:
Spring 2022.



Newsletter:

Community Link

Connected, resilient,
sustainable communities.

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Welcome to our spring newsletter

As we emerge from the pandemic we are faced with lots of opportunities and also many challenging issues, including mental wellbeing and energy bills. We hope to work with all our members to respond to these issues.

Mental Wellbeing

We have seen a substantial increase in the number of people experiencing low-level mental health issues. A recent report suggests one in three adults' mental wellbeing has worsened over the last 12 months backing up local figures from the population needs analysis and 100 days of engagement. For some groups such as more isolated older people as well as children and young people who may have additional support needs, the issues and need for support is even greater. Many organisations including our own Wellbeing Service are receiving more and more complex requests for support. We are lucky in RCT to be able to rely on exceptional people and groups to provide help in the local community and excellent mental health support.

On a positive note, we have received excellent feedback from meetings that groups have had with Paul Mears, the Chief Executive of Cwm Taf University Health Board and his team. They have been out and about meeting local groups to find out more about what they do and the pressures they are under.

Energy Bill Shock

The huge increase in energy costs are having a knock-on effect with groups running and using community facilities. Already, we are hearing news of groups experiencing a five-fold increase in bills. Simultaneously, many activities have not restarted, with a lot of people feeling anxious about getting out and about and rejoining community activities. This is set to get much worse in October when bills rise once again and temperatures drop.

We want and need community facilities that are warm, welcoming, and fully used by the local community for sports, playgroups and bingo. With the threat of increased charges to use buildings, our vital community-led groups and activities are at risk. We are looking to work with some of our partners such as Pen Y Cymoedd Wind Farm, the Coalfields Regeneration Trust and RCTCBC to see how we can better collaborate to support community facilities to reduce their energy use.

For advice and support, please contact our Community Advice Team:

E: communityadvice@interlinkrct.org.uk.

T: 01443 846200.

Warm welcomes and fond farewells

Everyone at Interlink RCT has worked extremely hard over the last two years through the pandemic. The organisation wants to express its thanks for their commitment, professionalism, enthusiasm and support. We are lucky to have such a dedicated team of incredible people. Also, we would like to thank Katelyn Burch, Stacey Williams, Meriel Gough and Julie Lomas who have recently left the organisation, and wish them every success with their future careers and aspirations.

Fresh faces

We've welcomed new staff members to replenish our team with their skills. They are:

- Emily Whiteman-Cranston, Young

People's Coordinator

- Lauren McCubbin, Community Advice Coordinator (Volunteering)
- Shaun Parfitt, Mental Health Service Involvement Officer
- Sharron Davies, Wellbeing Coordinator

Kickstart

Kickstart supports 16-to-24-year-olds on Universal Credit who are at risk of long-term unemployment to access work. The scheme gives them six months' paid work to gain experience and skills, better preparing them for future opportunities. Julie Edwards, our Community Advice Manager, is enthusiastic about providing young, local people with paid jobs, firmly believing that young people often need a boost up the ladder.



The first of our three Kickstart Youth Engagement Officers, Kian Rees, lives in the Rhondda and joined in December 2021. Joshua Stadden from the Taf area started in January 2022, and Ceri Davies from the Cynon Valley began in March 2022.

Since joining us at Interlink RCT, they have:

- shown a high level of digital skills
- done learning and development
- worked with peers on the 'Mind our Future' National Lottery application
- contributed to the Community Advice Team's wider work to support volunteers, and community and voluntary organisations

'It's important that young people in RCT have access to opportunities such as Kickstart. It may be short-term, but with the right support, learning and training, the impact will be long-lasting. It has been great to work alongside Kian, Josh and Ceri, and I am sure they will achieve great things in the future'.

Julie Edwards,
Community Advice Manager.

'It's been great for us at Interlink RCT. They make us realise what it was like to be starting out but more importantly, give us such a different perspective and new ideas. They have really added another dimension to the work of the Community Advice Team.'

Simon James,
Chief Executive.



Total workshops/events delivered:

2



Attendees at workshops/events:

72



68 Members registered on Connect RCT this quarter.



We've been busy about RCT

Community Cuppa Events

Pontypridd Town Council has partnered with several organisations to hold 'Community Cuppa' events. Based at Pontypridd Museum, the events invite the public in for a free hot drink and snack among stalls run by community organisations. Our Wellbeing Team has had a regular presence since they began in March. The events are an excellent way of communicating face-to-face with members of the public offline.

The first event coincided with St David's Day, and Shrove Tuesday. Free Welsh cakes and pancakes were available, and 50 people attended. Apart from us, the organisations in attendance were:

- Men's Shed
- RCT County Borough Council
- Pontypridd Town Council
- Staying Well at Work
- Valleys Kids

There were several positive responses:

"This has been the first time that I have been out in a while. Great to see people. Five stars!"

Pension Credit Awareness Event

This event was held to raise awareness of Pension Credit. The benefit tops up older people's income, and it's important to spread the word while government statistics show many are unaware of it during a time of rising living costs. The day was held at The Feel Good Factory in Mountain Ash at the end of March, with one of our Community Coordinators in attendance alongside Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) RCT.

Ten people sought advice. Most wanted to know if they were entitled to more money, and four made follow-up appointments with CAB for further

information. One person was supported to make a claim for Attendance Allowance, and all were offered advice around their energy bills. In addition, CAB provided freebies including low energy lightbulbs, torches, radiator keys, and more, with Interlink RCT supplying refreshments.

Social Value Event Report

In early February, Cwm Taf Regional Partnership Board and the area's three county voluntary councils held this meeting about social value. The online event discussed how we promote, develop and measure social value. Also, it raised awareness about the

development of a new regional plan for how to promote social value and the 'Health and Social Care Regional Integration Fund'. Over a hundred members of public, community and voluntary organisations attended.

The meeting was very successful. This was demonstrated by the number of attendees, the quality of the presentations and films, workshop discussions and the feedback. It gave an opportunity to learn from 'on the ground' experience of how groups deliver and measure 'social value' to improve wellbeing. Also, it promoted the Regional Partnership Board's plans. They include:

- co-producing a population needs assessment
- addressing identified needs through investing in a regional plan via a Health and Social Care Regional Integration Fund

The event led to the creation of the [Social Value Event Report which you can download here](#), or access via this QR code:



Sustainable Food Network Event

In late February, the Sustainable Food Network held its first face-to-face network event. Multiple organisations from the voluntary and community sector attended at the Feel Good Factory, including the Soil Association, Pontypridd Foodbank and Rhondda Housing Association. It was an opportunity for members to meet, share ideas and form the network's charter and vision.

This network aims to ensure that all people living, working in or visiting Rhondda Cynon Taf can access healthy, tasty, affordable food. Also, the food should be good for the environment and the local economy. The network consists of 80 places across the UK striving to create a healthier, more sustainable, more equitable food system. It relies on local collaboration between policy makers, businesses and civil society.

Rhondda Cynon Taf joined the Sustainable Food Places Programme in October 2021. It has the ambitious goal of becoming a Sustainable Food Place. Currently, the Sustainable Food Network is setting up subgroups looking at specific areas.

For more information on the Sustainable Food Network or to join their mailing list, contact Sam Evans, Sustainable Food Coordinator, via Sam.Evans@rctcbc.gov.uk.

Lights, camera, community action!

Earlier this year, the Wellbeing Team made a film showing the impact local community groups and organisations have on people's health and wellbeing.



Several people bravely came forward to say how local services had helped them in the pandemic. Showcasing the sector's vital grassroots services, the film features several providers including:

- Bryncynon Strategy
- Cynon Valley Organics
- Men's Mental Health Group
- Mothers Matter

It illustrates how collaborating is key, and helps everyone. We're really proud of the film, and want to thank everyone who contributed. You can [watch the Wellbeing Service film via this link](#) or this QR code:



Also, we made a film about our work with the winter pressures funding. We offered the grants to the local voluntary sector so groups could put on activities or extra support to help people through winter more healthily. You can see [the winter pressures film here on our Youtube page](#), or via the QR code at the top of the next column:



Outdoor Green Social Prescribing Network for RCT

Coed Lleol, The Outdoor Partnership and Interlink RCT are collaborating to support an Outdoor Green Social Prescribing Network for RCT. The network aims to:

- increase opportunities for social prescribing to green and outdoor activities
- effectively promote health and wellbeing opportunities to local people
- develop new and collaborative approaches to accessing the outdoors for health and wellbeing
- develop opportunities to be active outdoors while improving the local environment

If you run outdoor activities and want to join the network, please contact Alison Moore from Coed Lleol for further details on alisonmoore@smallwoods.org.uk

COVID-19 response grant shown in action

With BAVO and VAMT, we've been administering the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Mental Health Covid Response Grant. The fund is for projects that address low-level mental health and wellbeing issues, as shown in a recent film that we made with Tanio and Ray of Light Cancer Support Wales. Shot this winter, it shows the kind of support we've enabled in RCT, Bridgend and Merthyr Tydfil county boroughs.

You can [watch the film on our YouTube channel](#) or via this QR code:



So far, the scheme has supported 12 projects which aided over 2000 individuals through the pandemic. They had increased access to the outdoors, the arts, and new digital services for isolated people.

"I've lived in Pontypridd since March 2020 and have found it difficult to meet up with people and get to know people in the community due to the pandemic. The first 'Walk the Art' session I attended I met a new friend and we've already arranged to meet for coffee! I now feel a bit less isolated."

Local resident.

We've had the website builders in

Thanks to our web agency Design Dough, we relaunched our website in February. www.InterlinkRCT.org.uk has a new design, which presents its information much more effectively.

Already, over a thousand people visit the site on average every month. Its pages feature photography of community groups in Rhondda Cynon Taf, and we streamlined its text to make it easier to find information. You can sign up to our regular bulletins via the form on the homepage too.

Young people prepare for a better tomorrow

We have recruited a team of youth volunteers to work on the Mind Our Future Project (MOF). MOF is about putting young people in the lead, creating a positive difference, and a mentally healthier future. In February, the project

Funding which we awarded

Funding body: Interlink RCT			
Recipient organisation	Scheme	Project title	Amount awarded
Artis Community	Graig and Penycoedcae Community Fund	Crafty Cuppa	£1,375
Graig Club (Graig FC)	Graig and Penycoedcae Community Fund	GFC Mini Section	£438
Temple Baptist Church	Graig and Penycoedcae Community Fund	Kitchen Refurbishment	£878
Penycoedcae Residents Group	Graig and Penycoedcae Community Fund	Highlands Outdoor Project	£750
Friends of Graig Mountain	Graig and Penycoedcae Community Fund	Graig Mountain	£1,000
Artis Community	Interlink Vol Factor Grant	Yma: Youth Podcast	£1,000
Red Valley FC	Taff Ely Wind Farm Fund	Training Equipment	£500
Gilfach Goch Community Association - GGCA	Taff Ely Wind Farm Fund	Pottery Classes	£600
Garden Village Ladies Arts and Crafts	Taff Ely Wind Farm Fund	Craft Club	£150
Ti a Fi Tylagarw	Sydney Albert Fund	Meithrin Cymru Ti a Fi	£250
Artis Community	Sydney Albert Fund	YMa Takeover Project	£100
Parent Support Group, Cynon Valley Pals	Sydney Albert Fund	Outdoor Activities	£250
Lil Amigos	Sydney Albert Fund	Outdoor Play Equipment	£250
Cylch Meithrin Seren Fach	Sydney Albert Fund	New wellbeing area	£480
Cynon Valley Play and Leisure for Special Children PALS	Sydney Albert Fund	Outdoor activity centre	£250

Funding which we supported

Funding body	Recipient organisation	Scheme	Project	Amount awarded
Pen Y Cymoedd Wind Farm Community Fund	Llais Y Cwm	Pen y Cymoedd Community Fund	Sessional worker and resources.	£5,000
Pen Y Cymoedd Wind Farm Community Fund	Cefn Don Allotments	Pen y Cymoedd Community Fund	Tidying their allotment community engagement.	£1,648.05
Pen Y Cymoedd Wind Farm Community Fund	Cwmdare Miners Welfare Club	Pen y Cymoedd Community Fund	Events for the community.	£1,275
Pen Y Cymoedd Wind Farm Community Fund	Ynyswen Miners' Welfare Hall	Pen y Cymoedd Community Fund	Fence and refresh.	£5,000
Pen Y Cymoedd Wind Farm Community Fund	Timecentres UK Ltd	Pen y Cymoedd Community Fund	Timecentre, Hourcoin.	£5,000
Pen Y Cymoedd Wind Farm Community Fund	Aberdare Town FC	Pen y Cymoedd Community Fund	Under 15's funding.	£2,526.82
Pen Y Cymoedd Wind Farm Community Fund	Cwmparc Boys and Girls Club	Pen y Cymoedd Community Fund	Activity.	£5,000
Pen Y Cymoedd Wind Farm Community Fund	Hirwaun and Penderyn Community Garden Shop	Pen y Cymoedd Community Fund	New times.	£1,100
Pen Y Cymoedd Wind Farm Community Fund	Avant Cymru	Pen y Cymoedd Community Fund	New activity.	£1,100
Pen Y Cymoedd Wind Farm Community Fund	St Matthews Church	Pen y Cymoedd Community Fund	Activity.	£25,800
Pen Y Cymoedd Wind Farm Community Fund	Cwmparc Community Association	Pen y Cymoedd Community Fund	Small group activity.	£5,000
Welsh Government, Cardiff	Autism Life Centres	Mabon Trust	ALC.	£500
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council	Tylorstown Rugby Football Club	RCTCBC Major Improvement Fund	Tylorstown Minis.	£50,000

Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board	ASD Rainbows	ICF Children and Families Grant	ASD Rainbows	£20,000
Coalfields Regeneration Trust	Gelligaled Park Community Action Group	Coalfields Regeneration Trust Community Grant Programme	A MUGA for Gelligaled Park Ystrad	£7,000
The National Lottery Community Fund, Cardiff	Bryncynon Strategy	People and Places	Bryncynon Strategy	£250,000
National Lottery Heritage Fund	Pontypridd Town Council	HLF Our Heritage	Wider Health Activity	£91,000
People's Postcode Lottery	Hot Jam	Magic Little Grants	Equipment for song writing and performance.	£500
Moondance Foundation	Autism Life Centres	Moondance COVID-19	Rent.	£5,000

A fresh challenge makes Lynsey a new person

Lynsey had been volunteering in the area of substance misuse. However as a recovering alcoholic with a history of mental ill-health and ADHD, it was taking a toll on her, and so she wanted to move into volunteering around autism and learning difficulties. She had experience in this field, and, still wishing to help people, she wanted to give back to the community as well as the wider learning difficulties field. Interlink RCT was able to help in reallocating her.

Our Volunteering Officer made her feel welcome through the process. She found a role for Lynsey as a volunteer support worker and group facilitator with the Arts Factory. In this way, Lynsey supported their health and wellbeing club, which included overseeing exercise and wellbeing activities as well as a drop-

in coffee morning. Also, she provided support to adults with autism or learning disabilities, and people on work or learning placements through social services.

She helped to provide a place for isolated people to have a chat over a cuppa, and be involved in wellbeing activities. Indeed her volunteering work helped many vulnerable people. Her previous experience of supporting people with substance misuse issues even came in handy in this role as she used it to lift attendees' wellbeing.

Being placed with the Arts Factory gave Lynsey structure and a routine. Also, she got a sense of achievement, while it became a major feel good factor in her life knowing that she was supporting people. Lynsey feels that the volunteering gave her confidence a boost too. It helped her with her health and wellbeing, while giving her more skills and experience. Lynsey found a new sense of self-worth.



Synergy at Bryncynon Strategy

Bryncynon Strategy approached us at Interlink RCT for help with simplifying internal processes. Much of this work took place in January, and so early in the year, we linked them up with a peer mentor, Lisa Wills, to assist them. She provided excellent guidance which made the project much more orderly.

The manager undertaking the project, Lee Thomas, had a lot to do. What he had been assigned was much more than was on his action plan, which had just been improving reporting to the board. He was relieved to discuss the situation, and with Lisa, they strategised a way forward which covered building and staffing duties. Lee used Lisa to discuss ideas, concerns and issues, while getting advice on specific scenarios. It was an opportunity to speak to someone like-minded from a similar organisation in a similar area, who understood his challenges.

Firstly, the manager worked with trustees to make the staff structure clearer and more streamlined. Then staff better understood their roles and responsibilities, as well as who to go to if they needed support. Now, Lee felt that he could push the charity forward more. The board were happy with the new reporting structure, and Lee's job title changed so staff knew who they should report to, as well as who was in charge of daily matters.

The experience increased Lee's confidence and knowledge.

“The support received was fantastic. I already knew my mentor from previous work, which made the process for myself far easier as there was no ice breaking to be made and I knew I could rely on the guidance received from them.”
Lee Thomas, Head of Operations at Bryncynon Strategy.

The Wellbeing Coordinators' activities and results

January - March

575 referrals received

The Wellbeing Coordination Service consists of a team of Wellbeing Coordinators and Community Coordinators. They help support individuals with any social, emotional and practical needs by linking them to activities, groups and services in their community. The Coordinators can help with a range of issues, which include:

- housing, benefits and financial issues
- loneliness and isolation
- emotional health and wellbeing
- healthy lifestyle choices
- connecting to local groups and activities
- accessing specialist services and support
- employment, volunteering or learning

The most common issues for referrals were:

Mental health

Loneliness and isolation/befriending

Community information requests

We made **386** referrals into the community and voluntary sector to achieve 'what matters' to people.

We signposted people to the community and voluntary sector a further **774** times.



There were **4,256** hours of activity and support.



The difference between surviving and thriving

Fleeing domestic abuse, Yvonne had to move into a home with no furnishings. Shortly after coming to the area, the council's Single Point of Access referred her to one of our Wellbeing Coordinators.

On contacting Yvonne, it was clear to the Coordinator that the empty property was reducing her health and wellbeing significantly. There was only a kettle there, which she used to make pot noodles. Deciding it was important to furnish the home, The Coordinator referred Yvonne to Citizens Advice to help her apply to the Discretionary Assistance Fund. This would help her to get a cooker and tumble dryer. As Yvonne loved to cook, this was very important to her. Also, the Coordinator issued her with a

foodbank voucher tailored to her situation. The Coordinator contacted Darren at Signposted Cymru, who rallied members of their community to donate toiletries, furniture, a bed, bedding, kitchen utensils, clothes and more.

“Thank you so much for all your help and support and so quickly. I haven't felt this happy in a long time. I really thought I would struggle with getting back on my feet, but knowing we have a good community and you to talk to, I feel so much better having moved here. Thank you so much.”

Yvonne.

“This is really great. . .A very good example of working with the community. I spoke with Yvonne on Friday and she was overwhelmed with gratitude.”

Leanne from the Single Point of Access.



The Community Coordinators' activities and results

January - March

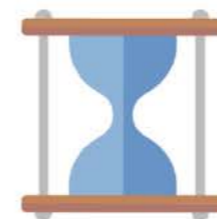
137 referrals received...

....with these issues from most frequent to least:

- social isolation
- community information request
- mental health
- befriending
- bereavement
- foodbank

They signposted people to community, voluntary and statutory services

281 times.



There were **1,556** hours of activity and support.

A phonecall that was music to Janet's ears

At the start of the year, the Resilience Hub referred Janet to our Community Coordinator Team. Having just moved to a new community, Janet felt isolated and lonely.

A Coordinator called her to talk things over. During the call, she learnt that Janet also suffered with anxiety and depression. Janet had a significant amount of debt, and there were things that she still needed for her new property including furniture. An interest in music was important to her too.

The Coordinator gave Janet details of a community café advertised as a meeting point for people to get to know

each other. They referred Janet to a six-week music course which used music as a form of mindfulness to help people manage anxiety and depression. The Coordinator told Janet that she could be deemed a 'vulnerable debtor' due to her mental health issues, and advised her to inform the local Citizens Advice branch of her vulnerable debtor status, which she provided contact details for. Also, she gave Janet information on local charity shops, including details for 'Too Good to Waste' which specialises in furniture.

Now, Janet is feeling much better. Having been going to the local café, she has met some lovely people, and is really enjoying the music course. She has told Citizens Advice of her vulnerable debtor status, and has booked an appointment with them. Janet has made several visits to the charity shops, and hopes to visit 'Too Good to Waste' soon.



List of networks

- Children, Young People and Families.
- Managing Volunteers.
- Health, Social Care and Wellbeing.
- Cwm Taf Mental Health Forum.
- Outdoor Green Social Prescribing.

If you would like further information about these networks, please email info@interlinkrct.org.uk.

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