

CAMPAIGN TO END LONELINESS

LONELINESS IN WEST WALES



December 2020

Foreword

The Campaign to End Loneliness has been able to focus on West Wales with the support of the National Lottery Community Fund since 2017. As the grant winds down, we want to leave a legacy for that work in the form of this report which brings together the learning and insight of the many committed individuals and organisations we have been fortunate enough to work with. It has been produced in partnership with the charity Tempo Time Credits.

Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion, with their many rural and isolated communities, have specific challenges in ending loneliness. Furthermore, West Wales is one of the poorest regions in Northern Europe. Two of the main sectors of the economy are tourism and agriculture, which are seasonal and, particularly in the case of farming, solitary.

On top of that, a quarter of the population is over the age of 65. This is set to increase as older people move to these areas to retire, while younger people move away for education and work. This will leave fewer opportunities for meaningful intergenerational connections.

However, this report is not just a list of problems. It describes the needs and gives, at last, some of the solutions. We are highlighting the fantastic work already going on in West Wales, work which builds on the strengths of the region's communities. We aim to highlight good practice and innovation so that it can be spread.

We planned this work and started to execute it before the global pandemic which had a huge effect on our social interactions. It has meant we have been unable to have the face-to-face conversations we would have liked and has made us reliant on the phone to gather a lot of the evidence. COVID-19 has also led to many changes in the way services are delivered, but we have found innovations that will outlast the pandemic.

As we emerge from this period, we have come to appreciate the value of our social relationships more than ever and to understand the need to build communities and tackle loneliness. This report helps provide a roadmap for how we can do just that.

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Contents

- INTRODUCTION 5
- WHAT IS LONELINESS? 7
 - Key Risk Factors 9
 - Transitions in Life that Can Contribute to Loneliness: 10
- LONELINESS IN WALES 11
 - Key Institutions 15
 - Key Drivers of Policy and Delivery 15
- LONELINESS IN WEST WALES 17
 - Population Demographics 17
 - Poverty 18
 - Welsh Language 19
 - Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Community 21
- PROMISING APPROACHES FRAMEWORK 22
 - CONNECTORS SERVICES 23
 - Community Connector Schemes in West Wales 23
- GATEWAY INFRASTRUCTURE 26
 - TRANSPORT 26
 - DIGITAL 29
 - BUILT ENVIRONMENT 30
- DIRECT SOLUTIONS 20
 - ONE-TO-ONE 33
 - GROUPS 33
- AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES 37
- ASSET BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT 39
- VOLUNTEERING 40
- NEIGHBOURHOOD APPROACHES 43
 - Organisations Working to Alleviate Loneliness in West Wales 44
- THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 47
 - Tackling Loneliness in West Wales During COVID-19 47
- CONCLUSION 49
 - RECOMMENDATIONS 50
- ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 54
 - Appendix 1: Resources 55



INTRODUCTION

This report has been produced by the Campaign to End Loneliness to enable the development of an understanding of the factors which contribute to loneliness in the West Wales region, and to identify effective interventions and their similarities, with regard to targeted interventions to reduce loneliness.

There are nine million lonely people in the UK and four million of them are older people, many of whom find that constant loneliness is the hardest thing to overcome, and lack the friendship and support we all need. We believe that people of all ages should be enabled to make connections that matter.

Since 2017, a National Lottery Community Fund grant has enabled us to work on the ground in West Wales. We chose to develop the Campaign in Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire where ending loneliness is a specific challenge since those counties contain many rural and isolated communities and older populations.

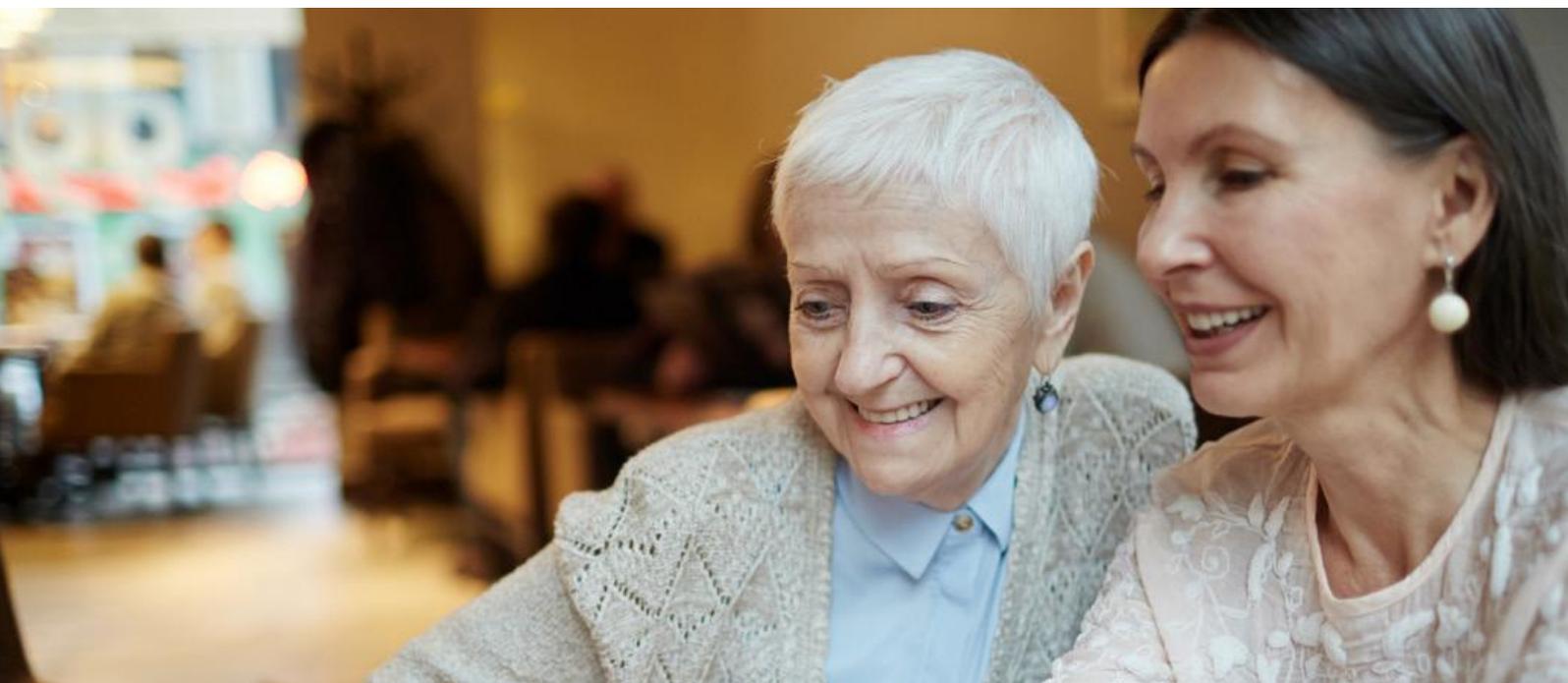
West Wales includes a range of diverse urban and rural communities which provide us with an opportunity to see how geographic isolation impacts on loneliness, for example, in terms of the effect of limited public transport links.

Furthermore, the region has a disproportionate representation of:

- Welsh language users
- Older people
- Older migrants/retirees who may have limited social networks in their new communities

A quarter of West Wales' population is aged over 65. This is set to increase as older people retire to these areas, and younger people move away for education and employment opportunities, potentially leaving fewer chances for meaningful intergenerational connections.

Welsh is a first language in many communities which can increase feelings of isolation both for native Welsh speakers, who may increasingly rely on services and support delivered only



in English, and for older people who move to the region and might struggle to build new social networks. Retirees are drawn to West Wales because of its breathtaking scenery or because they have fond memories of family holidays.

There are several innovative approaches being taken in the region covering grassroots/ community initiatives and structured interventions, delivered by established third sector agencies and the public sector. We have been working with people, organisations and businesses across Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire to ensure that everyone is playing their part in ending loneliness.

This report represents some of the findings from our work. It showcases innovative approaches to tackling loneliness in West Wales which may be of relevance to other areas. It also considers how these approaches can be built upon to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to make connections that matter to them.

We conclude with recommendations as to how organisations can be supported to implement Welsh Government-led policy proposals.

While writing this report, the COVID-19 pandemic hit the UK. This led to the cancellation of the regional stakeholder events we had planned to inform part of this work. As a result, much of the material included here arose from desk-based research, remote interviews and surveys and was collected prior to programmes being affected by the crisis.

We returned to interviewees to discuss the impact of COVID-19 in the early autumn, and have included a chapter on the evolution of services during the pandemic and how they addressed the crisis.

WHAT IS LONELINESS?

The Welsh Government strategy, Connected Communities,¹ defines loneliness as

“... a subjective, unwelcome feeling of lack or loss of social relationships. It happens when there is a difference between the social relationships we have and those we want.”

It is often spoken of in the same breath as social isolation but there are important distinctions. While social isolation is an objective state – defined in terms of the quantity of social relationships and contacts – loneliness is a subjective experience. It is deeply personal – its causes, consequences and, indeed, its existence are impossible to determine without reference to the individual and their values, needs, wishes and feelings.²

It can be experienced in different ways and at different times. It can affect anyone, at any age or stage of life. However, it is when loneliness becomes chronic – when we are lonely often or always – that it is harmful.

In our recent report, The Psychology of Loneliness, we explored in more detail the core components of the experience of loneliness, and how it impacts on, and is impacted by, our psychological characteristics and states³.



¹ Welsh Government (2020) Connected Communities: A strategy for tackling loneliness and social isolation and building stronger social connections

² Campaign to End Loneliness (2020) [The Psychology of Loneliness: Why it matters and what we can do](#)

³ Campaign to End Loneliness (2020) [The Psychology of Loneliness](#)

Growing public attention to loneliness in our communities has been accompanied by a shift in our understanding of its impact, and, in particular, its implications for mental and physical health. We now know, for example, that:

- Loneliness can increase your risk of premature death by 26%⁴
- Loneliness, living alone and poor social connections are as great a risk to your health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day⁵
- Loneliness and social isolation are associated with an increased risk of coronary heart disease and strokes⁶
- Loneliness increases the risk of high blood pressure⁷
- Loneliness with severe depression is associated with early mortality⁸ and is a risk factor for depression in later life⁹
- Loneliness increases individuals' risk of cognitive decline, and one study concluded that lonely people have a 64% increased chance of developing clinical dementia¹⁰

A recent study commissioned by the UK Government concluded that a conservative estimate of the cost implications of severe loneliness was around £9,537 per person every year¹¹.



⁴ Holt-Lunstad, 2010

⁵ Holt-Lunstad, 2010

⁶ Valtorta, N.K., Kanaan, M., Gilbody, S., Ronzi, S. and Hanratty, B. (2016) Loneliness and social isolation as risk factors for coronary heart disease and stroke: systematic review and meta-analysis of longitudinal observational studies; *Heart*, 102(13)

⁷ Hawkey, L.C., Thisted, R.A., Masi, C.M. and Cacioppo, J.T., 2010. Loneliness predicts increased blood pressure: 5-year cross-lagged analyses in middle-aged and older adults; *Psychology and ageing*

⁸ Holwerda, T.J., van Tilburg, T.G., Deeg, D.J., Schutter, N., Van, R., Dekker, J., Stek, M.L., Beekman, A.T. and Schoevers, R.A. (2016) Impact of loneliness and depression on mortality: results from the Longitudinal Ageing Study Amsterdam

⁹ Courtin, E. & Knapp, M. (2017) Social isolation, loneliness and health in old age: a scoping review

¹⁰ See <http://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/threat-to-health/>; Rico-Urbe LA., Caballero FF., Martín-María N., Cabello M., Ayuso-Mateos JL., Miret M. (2018) Association of loneliness with all-cause mortality: A meta-analysis, *PLoS One*, 2018; 13(1):e0190033, doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0190033

¹¹ Peytrignet, S., Garforth-Bles, S., Keohane K. (2020) [Loneliness monetisation report](#)

Key Risk Factors

Evidence suggests that key risk factors include:

- **Age** – people aged 75 and over are at greater risk of loneliness than younger older people. In West Wales 16% of residents are over 75
- **Ethnicity and language** – some older people from black, Asian and minority ethnic groups report higher levels of loneliness than their white British counterparts¹²

Language is an important factor in West Wales. Approximately one-third of older people in West Wales are fluent in Welsh and more comfortable speaking Welsh than English

- **Living arrangements and marital status** – those who live alone are twice as likely to report feeling lonely¹³. In West Wales 45% of over 65s live alone, higher than the national average
- **Geography** – West Wales is largely rural and studies suggest that loneliness levels are higher in such areas
- **Housing** – 70-90% of older people spend most of their time at home¹⁴ and there is growing evidence that those living in residential care experience worrying levels of loneliness and isolation¹⁵
- **Health and disability status** – those reporting poor mental or physical health, and disabled people, are more likely to be lonely.¹⁶ Research by Sense shows that up to 50% of disabled people are lonely on any given day.¹⁷ In West Wales, 26% of people are classified as long-term sick which is higher than the national average
- **Poverty** – people on low incomes are more likely to be lonely. In West Wales, 13,895 people over 65 are in income deprivation¹⁸
- **Psychological characteristics and responses** – our loneliness levels are linked to how we understand, make sense of, and respond to, social situations, and to our attitudes towards ourselves and to ageing
- **Providing informal care** – carers face particular barriers to connection.¹⁹ Around one in eight people in West Wales provide unpaid care with a significant proportion doing at least 20 to 50 hours of unpaid care a week.²⁰

¹² Victor C.R., Burholt V., Martin W. (2012) [Loneliness and ethnic minority elders in Great Britain: an exploratory study](#); J Cross Cult Gerontol. 2012 Mar; 27(1):65-78; <https://www.ageing-better.org.uk/who-is-at-risk-missing-out-data-release>

¹³ ONS [Insights into Loneliness, Older People and Well-being](#), 2015

¹⁴ ODMP, 2006 cited in Careter and Hillcoat-Nallétamby, 2015: 3

¹⁵ Victor, C (2012) Loneliness in care homes: a neglected area of research? – Aging Health, Vol. 8, No. 6 , Pages 637-646

¹⁶ Sense (2017) [“Someone cares if I’m not there”](#) Addressing loneliness in disabled people, Sense; Emerson E., Fortune N., Llewellyn G., Stancliffe R. (2020). Loneliness, social support, social isolation and wellbeing among working age adults with and without disability: Cross sectional study. Disabil Health J. 2020;100965. doi:10.1016/j.dhjo.2020.100965

¹⁷ See <https://www.sense.org.uk/support-us/campaigns/loneliness/>

¹⁸ Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) 2019

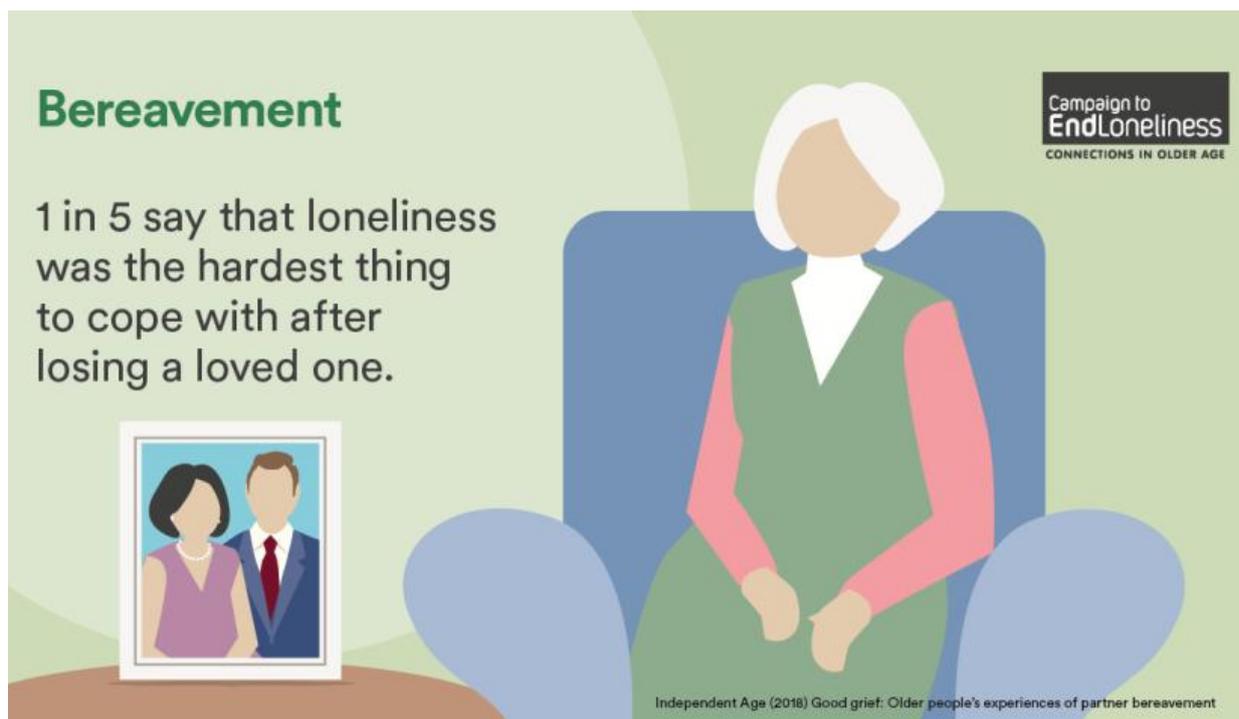
¹⁹ Carers UK (2017) The world shrinks: Carer loneliness; Carers Week (2019) Getting Carers Connected.

²⁰ <https://www.wwcp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/West-Wales-Population-Assessment-March-2017.pdf> p62

- **Sexual orientation** – studies show high levels of loneliness among older LGBTQ+ people ²¹ A Welsh Government review²² concluded that Welsh LGBTQ+ people have very different types of family support structures (to non-LGBTQ+people). For example, “older LGBTQ+ people are less likely to have children, less likely to have contact with their family due to family estrangements and [their families] not accepting them as they are.” LGBTQ+ people are less likely to have the same support structures in place as those not identifying as LGBTQ+ as they get older, and “their support network of friends and peers reduces with age as this network experiences the same care needs as they do.” This is supported by further evidence from Stonewall.²³

Transitions in Life that Can Contribute to Loneliness:

- Bereavement, becoming widowed
- Retirement
- Geographical relocation
- Living in a residential care home
- Becoming a carer



²¹ See Age UK (2015) [Evidence Review: Loneliness in Later Life](#); Campaign to End Loneliness (2020) [The Psychology of Loneliness](#); ONS (2018) [Loneliness – What characteristics and circumstances are associated with feeling lonely?](#)

²² Welsh Government (2019) [Review of the impact of loneliness and social isolation on health and well-being and whether people who experience loneliness/social isolation have higher use of public services](#) GSR report number 46/2019

²³ Stonewall [2011] [Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People in Later Life \(2011\)](#)

LONELINESS IN WALES

“Preventing people of all ages from becoming lonely and/or socially isolated must... be a national priority for us. It will not only improve people’s lives, but it will also help reduce demand for health and social services in the future and ensure our communities and the social fabric that binds them together are as resilient as they can be.”

(Ministerial Foreword, Welsh Government’s Connected Communities Strategy)²⁴

Policy-makers, health professionals and the wider public have increasingly recognised the serious impacts of loneliness with the topic being addressed in several major policy strategies in Wales over the past decade. This has led to significant changes in the way the public sector operates.

Key Institutions

Future Generations Commissioner for Wales

Established as part of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015,²⁵ the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales is an independent role (appointed by the Welsh Government) which supports Welsh public bodies and policy makers to consider the long-term impact of their decisions. The Commissioner is influential in the development of key policy areas, including transport.

Local Health Boards/Health Trusts

Healthcare services in Wales are delivered by seven Local Health Boards (LHBs), responsible for delivering all services within their geographic area.²⁶ The Hywel Dda University Health Board serves Mid and West Wales.²⁷

Older People’s Commissioner for Wales

Established by the Commissioner for Older People (Wales) Act 2006,²⁸ the Older People’s Commissioner²⁹ serves as an independent voice and champion for the over 60s in Wales and is appointed by the Welsh Government. The Commissioner has legal powers to review and hold to account public bodies. The role’s aim is to make Wales “the best place in the world to grow older”. Heléna Herklots, the current Commissioner, took up post in 2018 and one of her three priorities is to “enable everyone to age well”³⁰ by supporting the establishment of age-friendly communities. The Campaign to End Loneliness has recognised age-friendly communities as a key structural enabler to preventing loneliness.³¹

²⁴ Welsh Government (2020) Connected Communities

²⁵ Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

²⁶ <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/nhswalesaboutus/structure>

²⁷ <https://hduhb.nhs.wales/about-us/your-health-board/>

²⁸ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/30/contents>

²⁹ <https://www.olderpeoplewales.com/>

³⁰ <https://www.olderpeoplewales.com/en/ageing-well.aspx>

³¹ Campaign to End Loneliness (2015) Promising approaches to reducing loneliness and isolation in later life

Public Health Wales

Public Health Wales,³² a national public health agency, is one of the 11 organisations which makes up NHS Wales. It works to protect and improve health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities in Wales.

Its long-term strategic goals for loneliness include:³³

- Supporting the development of a health and care system focused on prevention and early intervention
- Improving mental wellbeing and resilience

Public Service Boards (PSBs)

Established via the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, each Welsh local authority area has established PSBs,³⁴ responsible for conducting annual wellbeing assessments and publishing local wellbeing plans in line with the Act's requirements. PSBs consists of representatives from the local authority, health board, fire and rescue and Natural Resources Wales, in addition to at least one representative from local voluntary organisations and the third sector.

West Wales has three PSBs, relating to each of its local authorities:

- Carmarthenshire³⁵
- Ceredigion³⁶
- Pembrokeshire³⁷

Regional Partnership Boards (RPBs)

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014³⁸ established RPBs in each health board area in Wales in 2016. They have a strategic responsibility to co-ordinate and improve the delivery of social services at a regional level.³⁹ Membership of each RPB consists of a minimum of senior representatives from the LHB, directors of local authority social services, and representatives of local voluntary groups, third sector organisations and carers. RPBs must undertake and publish a population needs assessment for each Senedd Cymru electoral cycle.

West Wales Care Partnership (WWCP)⁴⁰ is the RPB for West Wales. It is supported by a Regional Collaboration Unit, hosted by Carmarthenshire County Council. Its most recent population needs assessment was published in 2017.⁴¹

³² <https://phw.nhs.wales/>

³³ <https://phw.nhs.wales/about-us/our-priorities/>

³⁴ <https://gov.wales/public-services-boards>

³⁵ <http://www.thecarmarthenshirewewant.wales/the-board/>

³⁶ <https://www.ceredigion.gov.uk/your-council/partnerships/ceredigion-public-services-board/>

³⁷ <https://www.pembrokeshire.gov.uk/public-services-board>

³⁸ [Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014](#)

³⁹ <https://socialcare.wales/hub/sswbact-regional-partnership-boards>

⁴⁰ <https://www.wwcp.org.uk/>

⁴¹ West Wales Care Partnership [West Wales Population Assessment March 2017](#)

Senedd Cymru⁴²

The devolved parliament for Wales, Senedd Cymru, is composed of 60 elected Members of the Senedd (MS'). Forty AMs represent specific constituencies. The remaining twenty are divided between five regions. Each person in Wales is represented by a constituency AM and four regional AMs.

Social Care Wales

Social Care Wales⁴³ is a Welsh Government sponsored body which works to improve social care standards. It has recently been conducting research and engagement [initiatives?] around the development of more resilient communities⁴⁴ with clear links to tackling loneliness.

Welsh Government⁴⁵

The Welsh Government has policy-making powers in various areas relevant to loneliness, including health and social care, housing, transport, local government and the Welsh language.

Welsh Language Commissioner

Established by the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011, the Welsh Language Commissioner⁴⁶ is an independent role appointed by the Welsh Government. It is responsible for promoting Welsh language use, with powers to set standards for its use in public bodies. Aled Roberts⁴⁷ is the current Commissioner, appointed in 2019. The Commissioner's non-renewable term of office is seven years.

⁴² <https://www.assembly.wales>

⁴³ <https://socialcare.wales/>

⁴⁴ Social Care Wales (2018) [Approaches to community resilience \(2018\)](#)

⁴⁵ <https://gov.wales/>

⁴⁶ <http://www.comisiynyddygydraeg.cymru/>

⁴⁷ <http://www.comisiynyddygydraeg.cymru/English/Commissioner/thecommissioner/Pages/TheCommissioner.aspx>



Key Drivers of Policy and Delivery

Welsh Government's Loneliness and Social Isolation Strategy

The Welsh Government's Connected Communities: A strategy for tackling loneliness and social isolation and building stronger social connections⁴⁸ was published in February 2020, prior to the national lockdown, and set out a vision for a connected Wales. The strategy has a £1.4 million Loneliness and Social Isolation Fund to be spent over three years.

Its four priority areas are:

- Increasing opportunities for people to connect
- Improving community infrastructure which supports connected communities
- Cohesive and supportive communities
- Building awareness and promoting positive attitudes

A Healthier Wales

The Welsh Government published its strategy and action plan, A Healthier Wales,⁴⁹ in 2018 to improve health levels, and promote greater independence [of individuals?] in Wales. It aims to further the development of new community-based models of health and social care, recognising the need to change the way health and care services are delivered to more effectively tackle loneliness and isolation.

Prosperity for All

Prosperity for All⁵⁰ is the Welsh Government's national strategy published in 2017 as part of its Programme for Government, Taking Wales Forward,⁵¹ which established the headline commitments for delivery by 2021.

It takes key commitments and places them in a long-term context, establishing how they fit with the wider work of the Welsh public service to lay the foundations for achieving prosperity for all. It highlights the necessity to tackle loneliness as a key to meeting the strategy's aim of improving health and wellbeing.

Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014

The Act provides the legal framework for improving the wellbeing of those who need care and support, including carers, and for transforming social services in Wales.

It obliges local authorities, LHBs and Welsh Government ministers to work together to promote and support the wellbeing of everyone who needs care and support. The Act led to the establishment of RPBs.

⁴⁸ Welsh Government (2020) Connected Communities

⁴⁹ Welsh Government (2018) [A Healthier Wales: our Plan for Health and Social Care](#)

⁵⁰ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2017-10/prosperity-for-all-the-national-strategy.pdf>

⁵¹ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2017-08/taking-wales-forward.pdf>

Strategy for Older People in Wales 2013-2023⁵²

This is the Welsh Government strategy to improve the lives and wellbeing of all older people. It recognised the essential role that good social relationships play in older people's wellbeing and has a clear focus on the need for local authorities to address their loneliness. It also established Ageing Well in Wales⁵³ which is hosted and chaired by the Older People's Commissioner for Wales, and is a partnership of individuals, community groups, national and local government and major public and third sector agencies. The first programme of its kind in the UK, it contributes to, and complements, the Welsh Government's Strategy for Older People. The Welsh Government has recently launched a public consultation on the successor to the existing strategy which is called A Strategy for an Ageing Society.

Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

The Act requires all public bodies in Wales to consider the long-term impacts of their decisions, to work more closely with communities and to take a more joined-up approach to resolving common problems. It led to the establishment of PSBs in each Welsh local authority area.

There are 46 national wellbeing indicators which are used to assess progress towards the achievement of the seven defined wellbeing goals. National Wellbeing Indicator 30 concerns the "percentage of people who are lonely", to assess progress towards achieving the wellbeing goals of a healthier Wales, a more equal Wales and a Wales of cohesive communities.

More than Just Words

More than just words⁵⁴ is the Welsh Government's Strategic Framework for the Welsh Language in Health and Social Care. It aims to:

- Ensure that Welsh speakers' language needs are met
- Provide Welsh language services for those who need them
- Demonstrate that language plays an important part in the quality of care and that it is not seen as a mere "add-on"

It is a proactive approach to language choice and need in Wales, placing the responsibility for providing Welsh language services on service providers as opposed to the service users.

⁵² Welsh Government [The Strategy for Older People in Wales 2013-2023](#) and [Strategy for an ageing society: age friendly Wales](#)

⁵³ <https://www.ageingwellinwales.com/>

⁵⁴ Welsh Government [More than just words: Follow-on Strategic Framework for Welsh Language Services in Health, Social Services and Social Care 2016 - 2019](#)

LONELINESS IN WEST WALES

Initially, the Welsh Campaign Manager for the Campaign to End Loneliness focused on Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire. However, capacity was soon overtaken by work with the Welsh Government on the development of a national loneliness strategy.

The Campaign Manager spoke to stakeholders from various organisations who highlighted two key components of the loneliness experience in West Wales: high rurality and the prevalence of the Welsh language.

They considered funding to be one of the biggest challenges to the provision of dedicated projects to tackling loneliness, rather than simply dealing with it as a part of a wider service. Many groups said they had limited capacity particularly to support volunteers.

While these remain key issues for those delivering loneliness interventions, we have identified further areas for development as part of this research.

In the following pages we will look at the situation in West Wales and explore successful interventions in the context of our Promising Approaches framework.⁵⁵

Population Demographics

The population of Wales is around 3.15 million, over 855,000 of whom are aged 60 or above and represent more than 25% of the total population.⁵⁶ By 2030, this is predicted to exceed one million of which older people will represent one-third.⁵⁷

The current estimated population for the West Wales region comprising Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire is 387,284.⁵⁸ The number of older people in West Wales is higher than the national average.

Location	Age Range					
	0-14	15-29	30-44	45-64	65-74	75+
Carmarthenshire	16.5%	15.5%	16.2%	28%	13%	10.8%
Ceredigion	13.9%	22.8%	11.7%	26.2%	13.7%	11.6%
Pembrokeshire	16%	15.2%	14.9%	27.9%	14.1%	11.9%
Wales	16.8%	18.5%	17.4%	26.3%	11.5%	9.5%

Mid-2019 age and gender distribution⁵⁹

West Wales experiences high levels of inward migration of the over 65s with a 31% migration rate to Pembrokeshire, of which 87% are aged 65 or over.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Campaign to End Loneliness (2020) [Promising Approaches Revisited: Effective action on loneliness in later life](#)

⁵⁶ ONS [Mid-2019 Population estimates](#)

⁵⁷ ONS (2019) [Population projections for local authorities](#)

⁵⁸ ONS Mid-2019 Population estimates

⁵⁹ <https://stats.wales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Population-and-Migration/Population/Distributions/agedistributionofpopulation-by-gender-year>

⁶⁰ Hywel Dda University Health Board (2018) [Understanding the Needs of our Local Population](#)

The number of retired people is greater than the national average.⁶¹ Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire have a significantly higher than average long-term sick population.

	Pembrokeshire	Ceredigion	Carmarthenshire	Wales
Retired	19.1%	10.4%	18.7%	15.1%
Long-term sick	29.4%	16.4%	32.2%	27.6%

Source: NOMIS (Official Labour Market Statistics)

According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Census 2011, there are more than 47,000 unpaid carers representing 12.5% of residents in West Wales.

- Women aged between 50 and 64 years provided the greatest share of care
- 7.2% of the population provided between one and 19 hours of unpaid care each week
- 1.7% provided between 20 and 49 hours of unpaid care each week
- 3.5% provided more than 50 hours of unpaid care each week

Poverty

West Wales is one of the poorest regions in Northern Europe: 13,895 people over the age of 65 are in income deprivation.⁶²

The literature review conducted as part of the Welsh Government’s [2019] Review of the impact of loneliness and social isolation on health and well-being and whether people who experience loneliness/social isolation have higher use of public services⁶³ cites poverty as the variable which has the greatest impact on loneliness because:

- Poverty reduces people’s ability to travel, interact with others and expand their social network
- Those whose lives have transitioned into a caring role often fail to recognise their altered status, remaining unaware of their entitlements to benefits and grants
- People who previously received help [which was no longer available to them], increasingly relied on informal carers which, in turn, increased the risk of loneliness and social isolation, adversely affecting their physical and mental health
- Issues such as public service spending cuts, lack of public transport, particularly on-demand/responsive transport, for example voluntary transport schemes, prevented older people from accessing wider services to increase their social interaction
- The closure of day centres has left fewer affordable places in which to hold meetings and provide activities which has led to older people experiencing more social isolation and loneliness

The National Survey for Wales 2019-20 found that 41% of people living in material deprivation were lonely as compared to 12% not in material deprivation.

⁶⁰ Hywel Dda University Health Board (2018) Understanding the Needs of our Local Population

⁶¹ NOMIS (Official Labour Market Statistics) Economic inactivity (Jul 2019-Jun 2020)

⁶² Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) 2019

⁶³ Welsh Government (2019) Review of the impact of loneliness and social isolation on health and well-being and whether people who experience loneliness/social isolation have higher use of public services

Welsh Language

It is estimated that over 25% of the Welsh population speak some Welsh, and 88,000 are fluent,⁶⁴ of whom approximately one-third are older people and feel more comfortable speaking Welsh than English.⁶⁵ In West Wales, the number of Welsh speakers is significantly higher than the national average, particularly in older age groups.⁶⁶

Age Range	Carmarthenshire	Ceredigion	Pembrokeshire	West Wales	Wales
50-54	38%	44%	13%	31%	13%
55-59	39%	42%	14%	32%	13%
60-64	40%	39%	14%	31%	13%
65-69	45%	42%	15%	34%	15%
70-74	46%	45%	15%	35%	15%
75-79	50%	49%	15%	38%	16%
80-84	53%	51%	17%	41%	18%
85+	57%	51%	17%	43%	19%
All (aged 3+)	44%	47%	19%	37%	19%

While the figures highlight the importance of offering a bilingual service across the region, only 44% of the 25 organisations surveyed, who delivered loneliness interventions in West Wales, offered such a service, a fact which could prove an additional barrier to Welsh speakers seeking support. As highlighted in *More than Just Words*,⁶⁷ care and language go hand-in-hand and the quality of care can be compromised by the failure to communicate with people in their first language.

Some of the organisations interviewed gave examples of vulnerable service users with conditions such as dementia, or following a stroke, who were only able to communicate in Welsh, their first language, and were at risk of exclusion from some services.

⁶⁴ Welsh Government (2015) [Welsh language use in Wales, 2013-15](#)

⁶⁵ Older People's Commissioner for Wales (2019) [State of the nation: An overview of growing older in Wales](#)

⁶⁶ ONS 2011

⁶⁷ Welsh Government *More than just words*

Three out of the four priority groups identified by the Welsh Government as requiring Welsh language services are highlighted as being at risk of loneliness in Promising Approaches. [They are]:

- Older people
- People with learning disabilities
- People with mental health problems

These groups are particularly vulnerable if they do not receive care in the language of their choosing.

All statutory partners in West Wales are signed up to the More than Just Words strategy which places the responsibility for ensuring the availability of Welsh language services upon service providers as opposed to the service users.

However, the Welsh Language Commissioner's assurance report 2019-2020⁶⁸ found that, as with the previous year, performance by organisations was weaker for personal services – where a Welsh speaking member of staff needs to be available at a specific location at the point at which the service is accessed in order to provide a personal service. While just over half of telephone calls were dealt with in Welsh, fewer than half of all reception enquiries were dealt with in Welsh.

Public sector organisations in Wales must provide a Welsh language service. This may be through Welsh language standards or schemes, depending on the particular organisation. Businesses and charities offer their Welsh language services on a voluntary basis.

To date, those in the third sector who have engaged with the Welsh Language Commissioner's accreditation process have been larger organisations, with few smaller organisations undertaking the assessment or accessing the training. This could be related to staff capacity, or to a mistaken perception that they must immediately implement all the Commissioner's suggestions. The Welsh Language Commissioner offers a self-assessment tool⁶⁹ for businesses and charities to identify where their organisation could use Welsh for the benefit of service users and customers; and his team provide support to develop together a Cynnig Cymraeg (Welsh Offer),⁷⁰ unique to the [particular] organisation.

⁶⁸ Closing the Gap: The Welsh Language Commissioner's assurance report 2019-20

⁶⁹ <http://www.comisiynyddygydraeg.cymru/English/Publications%20List/20200911%20Assurance%20report%202019-20.pdf>
p11

⁷⁰ <http://www.comisiynyddygydraeg.cymru/hybu/en/Pages/Welsh-offer.aspx>

Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Community

While 2011 Census data shows that the BAME population in West Wales made up less than 2% of the population (compared to 4.4% in Wales), more recent Welsh Government data from Local Labour Force Survey/Annual Population Survey: Ethnicity by Welsh local authority indicates both of these figures have increased.

Area	Percentage of People who are Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic
Carmarthenshire	3.9%
Ceredigion	1.3%
Pembrokeshire	1.9%
West Wales	2.4%
Wales	5.8%

Source: Local Labour Force Survey/Annual Population Survey: Ethnicity by Welsh local authority, 2020⁷¹

Loneliness is significantly higher among some older people from minority ethnic communities, and key risk factors for loneliness are more prevalent among older people from BAME backgrounds.⁷²

Also, language and cultural requirements sometimes necessitate that interventions be designed specifically for these communities. However the West Wales Population Assessment 2017⁷³ highlights the lack of consistent data available to inform an understanding of these groups and other minority and marginalised groups.

⁷¹ <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Equality-and-Diversity/Ethnicity/ethnicity-by-area-ethnicgroup>

⁷² Victor C.R., Burholt V., Martin W. (2012) Loneliness and ethnic minority elders in Great Britain: an exploratory study; J Cross Cult Gerontol. 2012 Mar; 27(1):65-78; <https://www.ageing-better.org.uk/who-is-at-risk-missing-out-data-release>

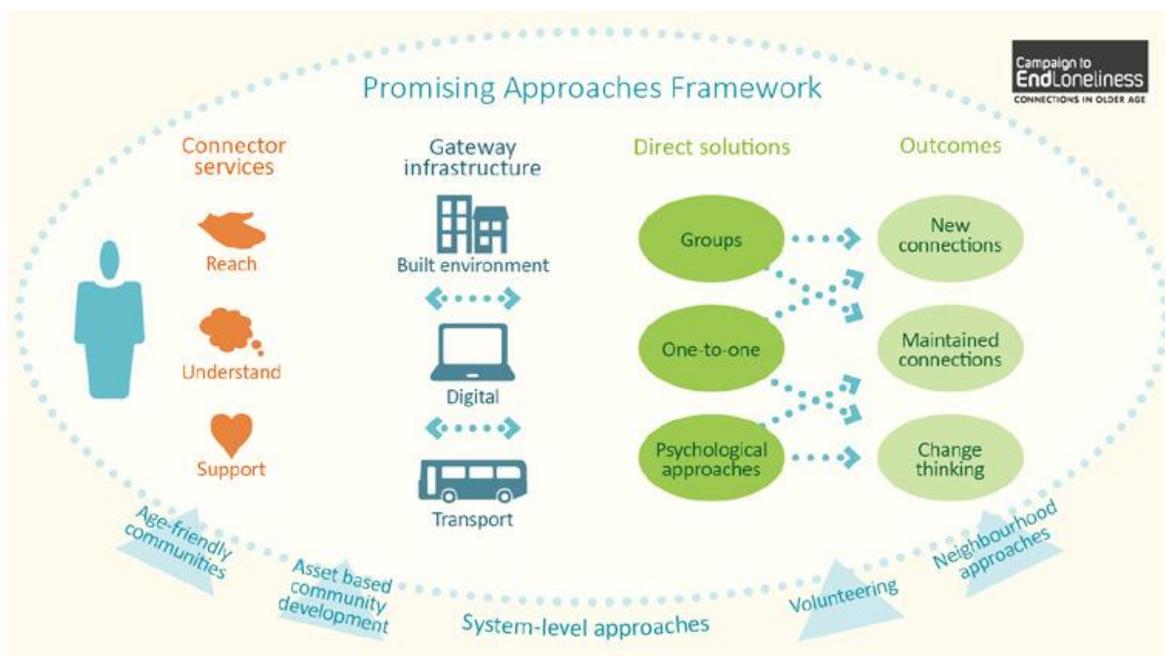
⁷³ West Wales Care Partnership [West Wales Population Assessment March 2017](#)

PROMISING APPROACHES FRAMEWORK

The Campaign to End Loneliness has developed a Promising Approaches framework for understanding different ways to address loneliness, and how they work in a community, to create an effective response to people’s experience of loneliness.

The framework can help organisations that deliver interventions to identify where their work fits in the wider set of approaches to addressing the issue. It can help organisations to understand the unique contribution they make to the work, and to identify the kinds of organisations they might link with to strengthen the overall community response.

The approaches we showcase here relate primarily to work with older adults in the context of West Wales.



CONNECTORS SERVICES

Connector services are necessary to provide the loneliest individuals with the support they need to access and engage with the direct solutions available in communities.

Connector services are those which:

- Reach lonely individuals
- Understand the nature of an individual's loneliness in order to offer a personalised response
- Support lonely individuals to access appropriate services, helping them overcome practical and emotional barriers

Community Connector Schemes in West Wales

Community Connectors operate in Pembrokeshire and Ceredigion.

In Pembrokeshire, they are run by the Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services (PAVS),⁷⁴ funded by the Integrated Care Fund and Pembrokeshire County Council Adult Social Care. In Ceredigion, [they are] run by Porth y Gymuned (PyG),⁷⁵ part of Ceredigion County Council.

The services are available to anyone regardless of age, income or personal circumstances, and take a holistic approach, working closely with GPs, health colleagues, social services, third sector and community groups, Mid and West Wales Fire Brigade and Dyfed Powys Police.

They aim to:

- Improve connections for people in their community
- Connect people to information, advice and assistance appropriate to their needs
- Support people to take positive steps to improve their health and wellbeing
- Prevent unnecessary use of statutory services and work with the individual to consider other options that are available to them

They will even accompany people to meet social groups and organisations if they find the first steps daunting. Both teams use Dewis Cymru,⁷⁶ the online directory of services across Wales to search for what is available in the local area.

⁷⁴ www.pavs.org.uk

⁷⁵ <http://www.ceredigion.gov.uk/resident/social-care-wellbeing/the-wellbeing-and-care-pathway/porth-y-gymuned/>

⁷⁶ www.dewis.wales



In Pembrokeshire, the schemes support over 140 individuals and volunteers while Ceredigion received 446 enquiries during the first year of their project.

They have identified the main local challenges which may result in people, especially older people, becoming lonely as follows:

- Lack of flexible community transport, an ongoing issue in rural areas – few or no links to main transport services and those that are available are too expensive for many people
- Lack of local knowledge of activities and events
- Lack of digital skills, preventing individuals from finding out about opportunities available to them
- Mental ill health, mainly low-level anxiety/depression
- Enquiries are mainly from individuals or neighbours/families of those without formal or informal support networks. Where there are family/neighbours/friends present, they tend to be working or otherwise unable to support the individual themselves, yet the individual may not meet the threshold for any statutory intervention
- Changes to mobility/life changing health conditions
- Loss of confidence and social skills after prolonged isolation
- A high number of enquiries were from recently widowed individuals who had retired to the area with their spouse and found themselves alone

The Community Connectors have found the following to be the most effective activities, particularly in relation to people who might be lonely or who are at a risk of becoming lonely:

- Informal friendship groups
- Lunch clubs
- Library services
- Community hall activities: coffee mornings, knit and natter groups, plant sales
- Theatre
- Cinema
- Choir groups
- Sports clubs, for example mat bowls
- Arts and crafts workshops
- Exercise classes, including seated exercise
- Educational classes, particularly IT

One-to-one befriending, shopping support and practical help at home are widely requested but there is insufficient capacity to meet the demand.

GATEWAY INFRASTRUCTURE

Gateway infrastructure helps people to connect and is vital for an effective community response to loneliness. Where it is unavailable, inappropriate or inaccessible, it renders service delivery difficult and makes it hard for people to connect.

This infrastructure includes:

- Transport
- Digital technology
- The built environment

TRANSPORT

West Wales is the second-most sparsely populated health board area in Wales,⁷⁷ presenting significant challenges to public transport provision.

A lack of accessible private and public transport, as well as fears about using public transport often as a result of hate crime and harassment, are factors which apparently contribute to higher levels of isolation and loneliness in disabled people.⁸⁰ These findings were based on interviews with key organisations as part of the Welsh Government's Review of the impact of loneliness and social isolation on health and well-being.

The Disability Wales survey which aimed to capture disabled people's experiences of using taxis and private hire vehicles across Wales in 2017, found that 64% of respondents had experienced problems. Respondents in Pembrokeshire highlighted a lack of accessible vehicles, as did those in Carmarthenshire who had also experienced guide dog refusals.⁸¹

As 55% of those over 65 in West Wales report having a long-term illness or disability,⁸² this issue affects the majority of older people in the region.

The Transport Fit for Future Generations report⁸³ highlighted that transport poverty is exacerbated by policy-making geared towards motorised travel as the main means for accessing employment and services, which excludes people who do not have access to a car or adequate alternative transport options. It said that the situation is worse in rural areas where jobs and services are widely dispersed, and by rising or fluctuating fuel price trends.

⁷⁷ West Wales Care Partnership [West Wales Population Assessment March 2017](#)

⁷⁸ <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Transport/Roads/Lengths-and-Conditions/roadlength-by-typeofroad-localauthority-year>

⁷⁹ <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Population-and-Migration/Population/Estimates/Local-Authority/populationestimates-by-localauthority-age>

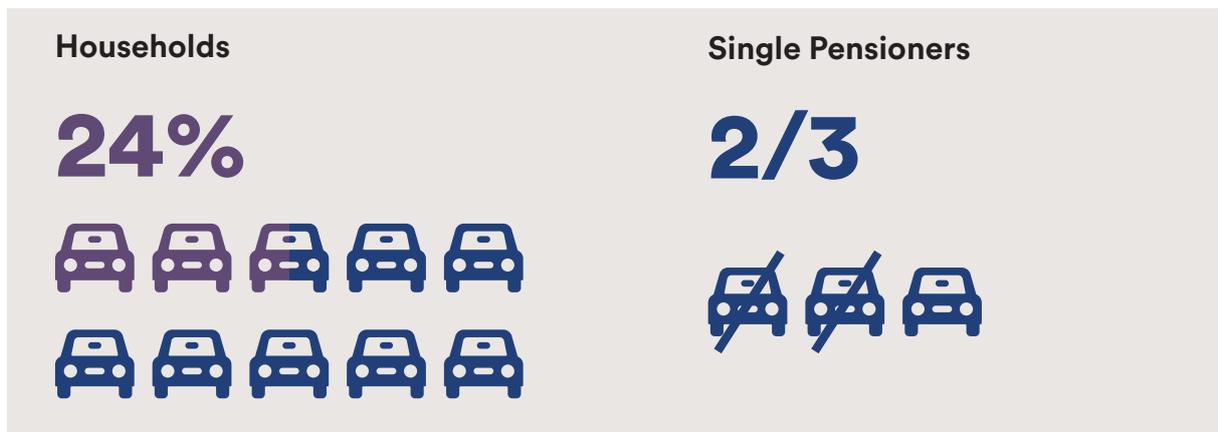
⁸⁰ Welsh Government (2019) Review of the impact of loneliness and social isolation on health and well-being and whether people who experience loneliness/social isolation have higher use of public services

⁸¹ Disability Wales (2017) [Access to taxis and private hire vehicles: the experiences of disabled people in Wales](#)

⁸² Hywel Dda University Health Board, 2016

⁸³ Future Generations Commissioner for Wales (2018) [Transport Fit for Future Generations](#)

The most recent Welsh Government data on car ownership showed that 24% of households in Wales did not own a vehicle in 2011/12⁸⁴ and two thirds of single pensioners had no car.⁸⁵



Bwcabus

Bwcabus⁸⁶ operates in North Carmarthenshire/South Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire, and is a multi-partner project developed with an EU Rural Development Fund grant.

It is a flexible, bookable local bus service, designed to meet the needs of rural residents. The Bwcabus rural transportation model operates within a specific zone providing both fixed route services and pre-booked demand responsive journeys.

Normally, passengers are collected from their nearest bus stop, but exceptions to this rule are:

- Passengers with mobility difficulties may be picked up and set down at or near to their home providing it is safe and practical to do so
- Passengers living in rural and isolated areas with no designated bus stops may be collected and set down at or near to their home providing this is on the public highway

Dolen Teifi

Dolen Teifi ⁸⁷ is a non-profit making organisation and a registered charity which provides affordable and accessible transport to individuals, organisations and groups, to help achieve social change in the Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion counties.

Founded by volunteers from the enterprise group Llandysul and Pont-Tyweli Ymlaen Cyf to provide sustainable community transport for the people of Llandysul, demand for their accessible vehicles in other areas of West Wales led the group to offer transport in communities throughout Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire. A key element is the offer of a door-to-door service for people who might otherwise struggle to get to service points.

⁸⁴ Welsh Government (2013) People and Licensing and Vehicle Ownership, 2012 – Statistical Bulletin

⁸⁵ Older People's Commissioner for Wales (2013) "A thousand little barriers"

⁸⁶ <https://www.bwcabus.traveline-cymru.info/>

⁸⁷ <http://www.dolenteifi.org.uk/dolenteifi/home>

Dolen Teifi operates eight fully accessible minibuses, two wheelchair-accessible cars and one MPV electric accessible car. A further three MPV electric accessible cars will be operating by the end of 2020, located within the communities they serve.

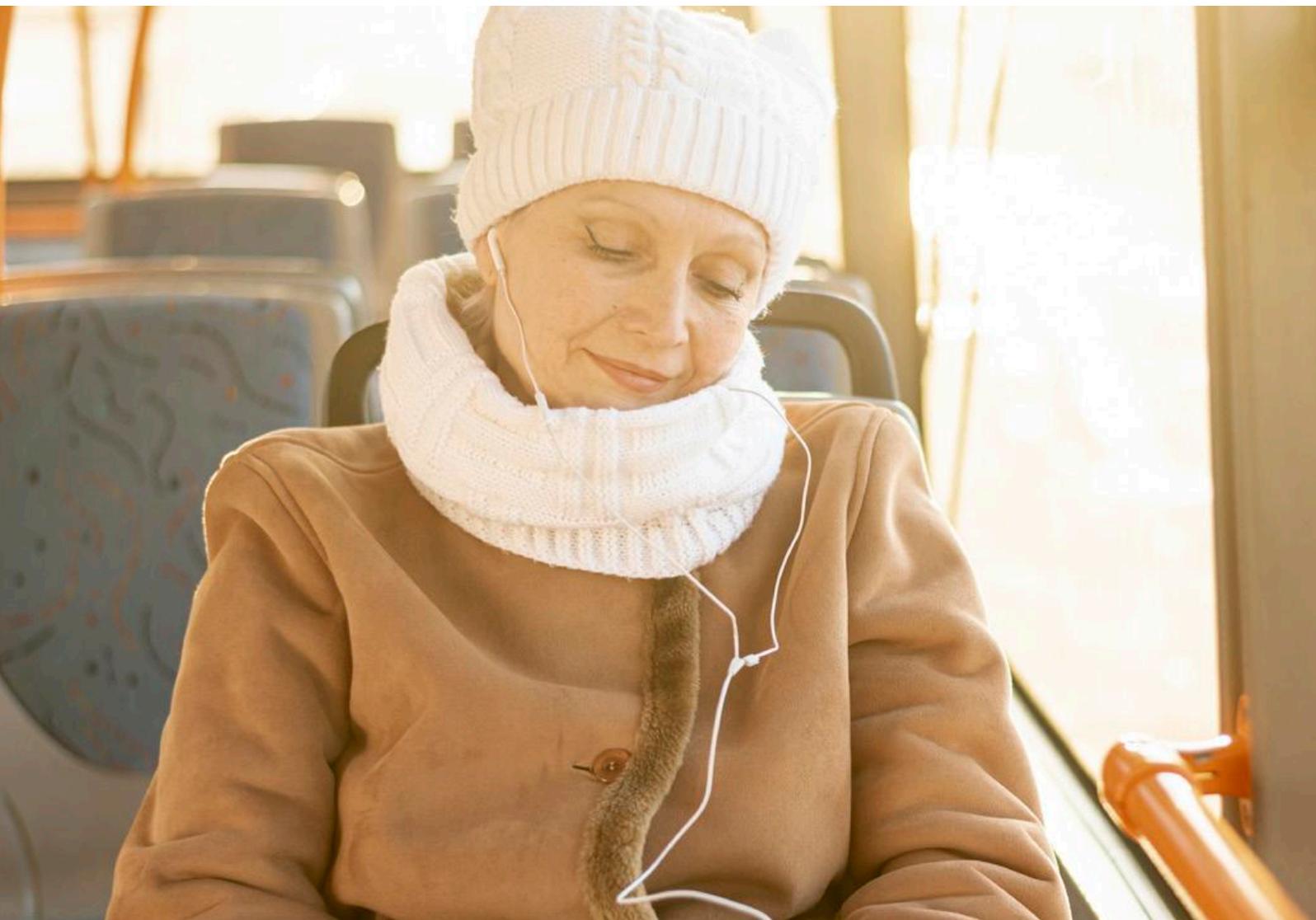
Their expansion was made possible by grants from funders, including the Welsh Government, Big Lottery and Brechfa Forest Wind Farm, all of whom recognised their community's need for the provisions offered by Dolen Teifi.

The vehicles are available for groups, self-drive, individuals and organisations to provide access to essential community services such as trips, social activities, visits to the doctor, dentists and hospital appointments. More than half of their volunteer drivers are Welsh speakers.

More recently they allowed Help Llandysul, a group set up in response to challenges posed by COVID-19, to assist individuals or families who have to shield or who need support, to use one of their buses for shopping or going to hospital.

In an average year, Dolen Teifi would make the equivalent of at least 32,000 trips. This year they made just over 100 as a result of the pandemic.

The organisation has a strong relationship with all of its volunteers and they have kept in touch with their volunteer drivers, many of whom are older people. Where possible they have found alternative ways for volunteers to give time to the organisation and their community, particularly those with underlying health conditions who have been experiencing isolation as a result, for example by collecting and delivering items for the local food bank.



DIGITAL

The Wales Co-operative Centre identified the three main barriers to digital inclusion⁸⁸ as:

- Lack of skills
- Lack of access (including broadband connectivity, affordability and accessibility)
- Lack of motivation (including interest and trust)

While the number of older people using the internet is increasing, their participation is still less than younger age groups; 75% of men and 68% of women aged 65 to 74 use the internet, compared with 97% of 16 to 49-year olds.⁸⁹ For people aged over 75, this drops to 40%.

The National Survey for Wales, 2018-19: Internet use and digital skills found that 79% of people with a limiting long-standing illness, disability or infirmity made personal use of the internet, compared with 93% of those without such a condition.⁹⁰

With an increasing number of services and information only available online, a lack of [internet] access is likely to exacerbate loneliness and isolation among older people, particularly for those with mobility issues.⁹¹

Digital Communities Wales

Digital Communities Wales - Digital Confidence, Health and Well-being (DCW) exists to reduce digital exclusion in Wales. The aim is for everyone to have the skills, access and motivation to be a confident digital technology user.

DCW is funded by the Welsh Government and is delivered by the Wales Co-operative Centre⁹² in partnership with the Good Things Foundation⁹³ and Swansea University⁹⁴ who are disseminating the learning, and stimulating debate around policy in this area. The programme began in 2019 and will run for three years.

Delivery focusses on reaching anyone who is not online, and partnership is working with organisations that directly support it. DCW work with third and public sector bodies and large private sector organisations, including health and social care providers.

Their website features a wide range of case studies illustrating their work across Wales to promote digital inclusion, including details of West Wales digital champion and volunteer, Peter Loughran.⁹⁵

⁸⁸ Wales Co-operative (2018) [Digital Inclusion in health and care in Wales](#), p12

⁸⁹ Wales Co-operative (2018) [Digital Inclusion in health and care in Wales](#), p14

⁹⁰ [National Survey for Wales, 2018-19 Internet use and digital skills](#)

⁹¹ ActiveAge (2010) [The social and economic benefits of older people actively contributing to community capacity and ways in which ICT can enable this to happen](#), BusinessLab: Aberdeen

⁹² <https://wales.coop/get-our-help/our-projects/digital-communities-wales/>

⁹³ <https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/>

⁹⁴ <https://www.swansea.ac.uk/morganacademy/>

⁹⁵ <https://www.digitalcommunities.gov.wales/case-studies/volunteer-peter/>

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Built environment is a new addition to the Promising Approaches framework which experts strongly emphasised in our discussions.

People need places and spaces in which to connect in their communities, and the quality of the design and accessibility of the built environment could either enable or disable people in connecting with one another.

Our “built environment” category encompasses a broad range of approaches which include:

- Designing housing to support people to get out and about, and to encourage connection between residents (for example in the provision of communal areas). Housing was identified as a key service in Wales [as a result of a perception that many] homes were not properly adapted and people felt they had become trapped⁹⁶
- Planning public spaces to give people confidence to leave their homes by providing good lighting, well-kept pavements, benches and public toilets
- Providing accessible and affordable community spaces in which groups can meet
- Ensuring cafés, pubs, shops and libraries offer places which are inclusive and accessible for people to meet informally and for groups to use
- Making private sector spaces, such as spare meeting rooms, available for use by the wider community
- Care homes and supported housing schemes offering their communal spaces for use by the wider community

Accommodation

If you live alone and lack social connections, the effect on your health is equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

In West Wales more than 40,000 over 65s live alone, representing 45% of their age group. This number is in line with the national average⁹⁷ and is expected to increase significantly over the next 10 to 20 years.⁹⁸

The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) uses an area-based measure: WIMD is calculated for all small areas (Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs)) in Wales. Following the 2011 Census, 1,909 LSOAs were defined in Wales and they have an average population of 1,600 people. WIMD is based on indicators that consider the aggregate characteristics of the people living in the area. The housing domain identifies inadequate housing in terms of physical and living conditions and availability. Living conditions refers to the suitability of the housing for its inhabitant(s), for example in terms of health and safety, and necessary adaptations. In 2019, the local authority with the highest concentration of areas in the most deprived 10% in Wales was Ceredigion (28.3%).⁹⁹ Carmarthenshire had 11.6% and Pembrokeshire 7% of their small areas in the most deprived 10% in Wales.

⁹⁷ Welsh Government (2018) [Household estimates for Wales, mid-2018](#)

⁹⁸ West Wales Care Partnership West Wales Population Assessment March 2017

⁹⁹ The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019

Community Venues

Community halls and centres are often the hub of communities. They provide focal points for many villages and towns across West Wales and are a base for services and activities which can alleviate loneliness and promote better connections.

There are 61 community halls in Ceredigion,¹⁰⁰ 58 in Pembrokeshire¹⁰¹ and 75 in Carmarthenshire.¹⁰² There is insufficient information to provide definitive numbers of those providing inclusive access, but based on the listings (uploaded by venue representatives) it is clear that accessibility varies widely between venues.

Disability Wales¹⁰³ defines inclusive access as that which ensures that everyone can get to, into and around developments, and take part in activities and services provided. “Everyone” includes parents with buggies, older people, people with less than perfect sight, hearing, mobility or understanding of the world around them.¹⁰⁴



¹⁰⁰ <https://ceredigionhalls.org.uk/directory>

¹⁰¹ <http://pembrokeshirehalls.org.uk/the-halls/>

¹⁰² <https://www.carmarthenshirehalls.org.uk/>

¹⁰³ <https://www.disabilitywales.org/>

¹⁰⁴ Disability Wales (2018) [Planning for Inclusive Access in Wales: Good Practice Guidance Toolkit](#)

DIRECT SOLUTIONS

Direct solutions offer people a route to achieving a better match between the relationships they have and those they want to have. They help to reduce loneliness by:

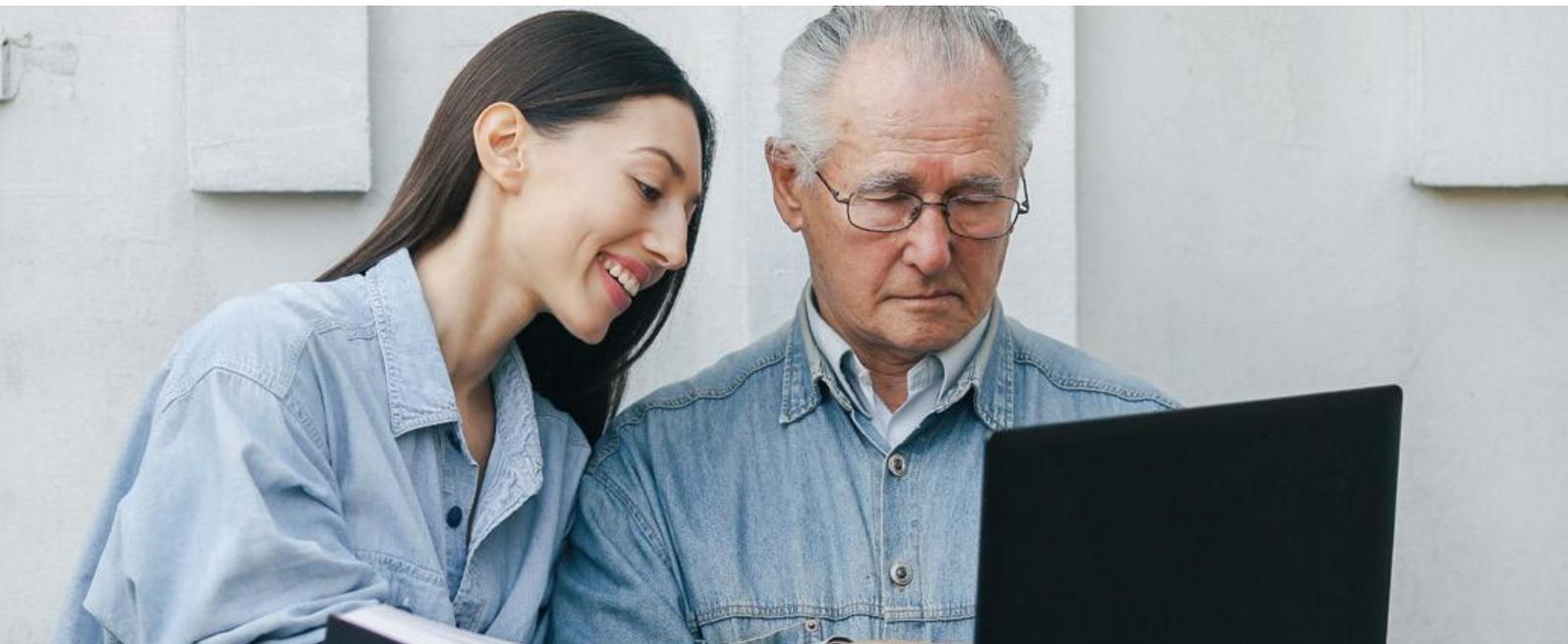
- Supporting individuals to improve or maintain existing relationships
- Fostering and enabling new connections
- Helping people to change their thinking about their social connections

ONE-TO-ONE

Befriending remains one of the most common forms of loneliness intervention. For those who are unable to connect socially with groups outside, long-term one-to-one friendship support at home has long been the only available solution. The most common form is traditional befriending services through which an older person is matched with a worker or volunteer who visits or telephones them on a regular basis.

People who use befriending schemes value:

- Good conversational skills
- Empathy
- Opportunities for emotional support
- Reciprocal social exchange through safe confiding relationships¹⁰⁵



¹⁰⁵ Lester, H., Mead, N., Chew-Graham, C., Gask, L., Reilly, S. (2012) An exploration of the value and mechanisms of befriending for older adults in England *Ageing & Society*, vol. 32, pp. 307-238; Kharicha K., Iliffe S., Manthorpe J., Chew-Graham CA., Cattan M., Goodman C., Kirby-Barr M., Whitehouse JH., Walters K. (2017) What do older people experiencing loneliness think about primary care or community based interventions to reduce loneliness? A qualitative study in England. *Health Soc Care Community*, doi: 10.1111/hsc.12438

Age Cymru Dyfed

Age Cymru Ceredigion and Age Cymru Sir Gar merged to become Age Cymru Dyfed¹⁰⁶ in April 2020 and covers Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire.

Its key objective is to develop and deliver specialist support services and interventions, primarily for older people and their families, at home and in the community. It works with individuals to provide a tailored service and support specific to the individual's needs.

Previously it delivered projects which aimed to tackle the causes of loneliness, like digital exclusion. Its current Digital Inclusion project has volunteers supporting older people to access and use technology.

It also has a telephone befriending project, Call in Time, a free service run by Age UK for people aged 60 and over. It matches people with a trained and supported volunteer who shares interests with those they befriend and who will call them for a weekly chat.

Age Cymru Dyfed's new project, Befriending Life Links, aims to tackle loneliness with kindness. It focusses on building a community rather than a service, and supports people over the age of 50 who have become socially isolated, withdrawn, lost their confidence or have a low sense of wellbeing.

GROUPS

For people who would benefit from making new connections, participating in group activities will, in most cases, be the most effective route.

However, it is important that approaches are tailored to individual preferences and needs.¹⁰⁷

Arts 4 Wellbeing, Ceredigion

Arts 4 Wellbeing hosted a series of Compassionate Communities which are weekly intergenerational activities led by the community for the community in local venues. These social drop-in sessions acted as a hub to which local GPs and third sector organisations could refer individuals who were at risk of becoming lonely or isolated.

The arts and group work were used to build self-esteem. They support individuals to:

- Overcome barriers to participation
- Improve self confidence
- Develop a more positive image of self and others
- Recognise and accept their potential
- Increase motivation through experiencing success and developing a growth mindset

Attendees were from a wide range of age groups and backgrounds, and sessions covered a variety of creative techniques to inspire the communities they worked with. Sessions brought people together to talk about their lives and experiences.

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru/dyfed/>

¹⁰⁷ Victor, C., Mansfield, L., Kay, T., Daykin, N., Lane, J., Grigsby Duffy, L., Tomlinson, A., Meads, C. (2018) [An overview of reviews: the effectiveness of interventions to address loneliness at all stages of the life-course](#), What Works Centre for Wellbeing

Arts 4 Wellbeing aim in all of their projects to create a supportive space for those who might feel isolated, in which they are allowed to open up, support each other and create meaningful connections.

The Compassionate Communities sessions successfully supported large numbers of participants with varying needs. The interim report highlighted the following outcomes for individuals and their communities:

- Made new friends
- Learned new creative skills
- Started supporting each other outside the group sessions
- Strengthened relationships with community venues and local schools
- Supported with fundraising to ensure the groups were self-sustaining beyond the life of the project

Full details of the work [Arts 4 Wellbeing?] have undertaken with Compassionate Communities can be found [here](#).

Carmarthenshire LGBTQ+ Hub

Launched in August 2019, the LGBTQ+ Hub is part of Community Engagement, Technology, Media and Arts (CETMA),¹⁰⁸ a social enterprise based in Llanelli. It provides support services and group activities for the Carmarthenshire LGBTQ+ Community.

The project is open to all ages and is free to access thanks to funding support from the National Lottery. Prior to launch they conducted a community consultation and found a gap in provision for LGBTQ+ youth, trans and 50+ services.

They aim to:

- Set up a regular drop-in session in a safe environment for members of the LGBTQ+ community
- Give LGBTQ+ community members the ability to comment via all platforms
- Increase LGBTQ+ community participation
- Publicise LGBTQ+ support via events
- Upskill LGBTQ+ volunteers to raise their employability skills (if required)
- Encourage the LGBTQ+ community to engage more effectively with the local authority and other organisations, for example the police and community cohesion officers, to encourage participation and involvement

The Project Co-ordinator reaches out to community groups, attending sessions and meetings to share information on the LGBTQ+ hub with service users/potential service users. People also hear about the Carmarthenshire LGBTQ+ support group through interagency meetings, social media (where they have a strong presence) and through the events they support such as Pride festivals.

Their COVID-19 adaptation involved moving their services online, including weekly coffee mornings, and creating an online hub for five regions in Carmarthenshire, working with the towns and communities in those areas.

¹⁰⁸ <https://cetma.org.uk/>



CETMA found that the rurality of Carmarthenshire, which has limited internet access in some areas, as well as the fact that some people lack the technology to participate, was a barrier to many older service users staying connected to the service. To solve the problem, they secured additional funding from the National Lottery Communities Fund to buy digital tools like tablets and smartphones preloaded with data (that could be used without internet access) to create a “Digital Library”. Recognising that Wi-Fi access was limited in some areas, they also provided Wi-Fi boosters. Service users are now able to loan these appliances for free to help them access the new online services.

Llanelli Multicultural Network

Llanelli Multicultural Network¹⁰⁹ exists to develop a network that brings the people of Llanelli and Carmarthenshire together through public and private events, social gatherings, volunteering and by having a virtual presence and providing support for ethnic minorities.

Their aims include:

- Reducing social isolation and increasing equality of opportunity for people from different cultural backgrounds, particularly from BAME and Gypsy and Roma Traveller communities
- Increasing intercultural understanding, tolerance and community cohesion through the celebration and recognition of people from different cultural backgrounds, including the Welsh culture

¹⁰⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/Llanelli-Multicultural-Network-LMCN-1549662662012223/>

AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES

Older People's Commissioner

Heléna Herklots, Older People's Commissioner for Wales, has committed to making Wales a nation of age-friendly communities, a key structural approach to help reduce loneliness in older people.

In an age-friendly community, services, local groups, businesses and residents work together to make changes to support people to lead healthy and independent lives and to continue to do the things that matter to them as they get older. Being age-friendly means designing our communities and services with older people, not just for them.

Age-friendly communities:

- Recognise that older people should have a say in decisions which affect them and their communities
- Enable older people to interact with others and to participate in social activities to help maintain positive mental health and wellbeing
- Support older people's choices with effective infrastructure, accessible information and by fostering opportunities for inclusion and participation in community life
- Challenge ageism by encouraging positive interactions and learning between people of different ages
- Support older people with choices to remain employed, thus contributing to their economic security and independence, and allowing the workplace to benefit from their skills and experiences

At local authority level, all 22 Welsh authorities are signed up to the 2013 Dublin Declaration, a European framework establishing a commitment to uphold a set of principles for measuring, benchmarking and driving future development of age-friendly communities. This demonstrates that local authorities in Wales are committed to creating communities that are inclusive and supportive for all, regardless of their age.

In Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire work is underway to deliver on their local strategies and to support their 50+ Forums, independent groups of people aged over 50 who meet to discuss issues affecting older people. They have continued to work towards becoming age-friendly counties. Meanwhile, they have had positive discussions with the Commissioner about seeking formal Age-friendly Communities recognition from the World Health Organization.

ASSET BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Asset Based Community Development is an approach based on the principle that identifying and mobilising individual and community “assets” [is more effective] than focusing on problems and needs, or “deficits”.

Solva Care, Pembrokeshire

Solva Care, a community organisation, was set up in 2014 in Solva village by the Community Council as a pilot project to provide support for older people because of the many gaps in existing services. It brings people together to help support older people to stay independent in their own homes. The scheme relies on volunteers who offer their time doing cooking, driving or just befriending, and who are then matched to local needs. Residents can self-refer to get assistance.

Following community consultation, funding was obtained from the Sustainable Development Fund for the first two years of the scheme after which it was extended for another two years. In 2019, Solva Care received Big Lottery funding for an additional five years of delivery [until 2024].

Approximately 35 volunteers provide support for 30 people in the village. At times there have been up to 50 residents needing assistance. They do anything other than “hands on” care, with the majority of requests being for transport support like taking people to the doctor’s surgery, shops, hospital appointments and to attend events.



They also provide:

- Dog walking or walking with people to keep them company
- Pop-in visits for those who cannot get out
- Respite for family carers – volunteers step in to allow the carers a few hours' respite
- Organisation of events – Friday club (started by the Alzheimer's Society) in the village hall where people play the ukulele, host quizzes and yoga classes (chair-based yoga for the less mobile)
- Community trips

A key factor in Solva Care's success has been the paid Co-ordinator role, carried out by Lena Dixon, which covers administrative tasks and thus frees the community members to volunteer for roles they actively want. Lena's role involves significant responsibility and commitment for tasks that it might be unfair to ask a volunteer to undertake or that might otherwise be difficult. She believes that the village hall has been integral to keeping the community and their service connected.

Rural Health Wales have recently been funded to test the Solva Care model in two other Ceredigion communities.

VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering can be both an enabler for effective loneliness interventions and a way to prevent loneliness.

Involving people as volunteers gives them the opportunity to participate rather than receive, and to engage in a socially valued role. Positive experiences of volunteering can give people a sense of purpose and identity which can be vital factors in [influencing] how they feel about their social connections. Therefore, building an emphasis on volunteering into the strategic approach to loneliness can be an effective way of delivering cost-effective interventions in a community.

Rural Wisdom

Rural Wisdom is a partnership project involving Volunteering Matters Cymru, Outside the Box and the National Development Team for Inclusion. Funded by the Big Lottery Fund and currently in year four, the project is taking place across Wales and Scotland and aims to:

- Tackle the issues which older people identify as priorities for their communities and to develop opportunities for them to shape the community they live in
- Develop community-led activities to include and support older people and devise activities that help communities work well for people as they get older
- Build upon and encourage the wealth of skills and experience that older people can offer and encourage others to value this bank of skills in the community
- Explore and identify the impact of all the above and their power to contribute to greater change

Following this, the partnership will share learning within the project and beyond in the hope that other communities can apply this learning with the aim of altering the face of rural living across the UK in the future.



In West Wales, Rural Wisdom has worked with the communities of Milford Haven and Dale Peninsula (including the villages Dale, Marloes and St Ishmaels). In the beginning, each community came together to discuss the key issues affecting older residents and ways in which Rural Wisdom could help. These issues helped to inform the priorities for the development workers, their engagement with older people and work with other organisations.

To date, they have:

- Engaged with 1,521 local residents
- Engaged with 202 community groups
- Hosted 121 stakeholder meetings

The project's most significant achievement is the development of an events listing for Milford which led to several positive outcomes for the town, including by raising the profile of community activities and services for those who were not online.

Since its launch meeting in 2017, attended by 30 people, the events listing project quickly grew to a group of almost 100. These contributors provided suggestions for local activities, community transport, clubs, special events and information from libraries and local centres about the available resources. They also proof-read the final content before circulation.

Volunteers distributed the literature through nine local outlets, and the listing soon became a widely used referral resource for health professionals and residents.

Once the listing's production and distribution process was firmly established, Senior Project Development Co-ordinator, Rachel Evans, sought to transfer its ownership to the community. Milford Youth Matters took on the management role, offering further opportunities to local young people to develop skills in writing, editing, graphic design, photography, advertising and liaising with printers and business administration.

Today, the events listing is thriving and is self-sustained through advertising revenue.

Contrasting communities were deliberately chosen for this project to gain an understanding of how rural settings differ from more urban settings in terms of people becoming lonely, and also to better understand feelings of loneliness.

Whilst Milford town is officially classed as rural, it has a population of approximately 13,000 and is different from the other villages Rural Wisdom worked with. For example, Dale's population is only 225 and its few venues open only on a seasonal basis. The villages of Marloes, and St Ishmaels have less than 1,100 inhabitants.

The project found that Milford has the infrastructure to enable better social connection, but potentially more "hidden loneliness". In comparison, living in a smaller village had its benefits as, generally, everyone knows each other. However, this can also pose problems for those, new to the area, to integrate when friendship groups are already well established and difficult to penetrate.

The Rural Wisdom Stage 1 Evaluation highlighted the following key lessons:

- Development workers are a vehicle for change – they are engaged with their community and are, therefore, aware of needs and other issues, and can facilitate contact with public services or organisations to help older people engage directly to influence provision
- Older people need links to those running a variety of services to be able to voice their views and ideas directly on the support they want and need for day-to-day living, and how this can be brought into their community
- Older people are more likely to be motivated to use their skills and experience to lead change if they feel an activity is one that the community wants, and when they can see results of their time and effort
- Being made to feel welcome is important for people who want to join a group or activity
- People may need encouragement to “get involved” as confidence, self-esteem and motivation can play a key part in enabling them to get support or join activities
- Transport is vital for many older people to reach health services and activities in their community
- It is important that older people know where to get information on community activities and public services

Over the past decade, befriending and social groups have proved very useful to older, isolated people in the county – Volunteering Matters have extensive experience of developing these methods and have seen first-hand how they can tackle loneliness.

Digital technology has been used to great effect during the COVID-19 restrictions to keep the project connected with in-house colleagues and throughout its networks, promoting the best communication possible. Staff and volunteers have risen to the challenge of working remotely and being innovative to overcome obstacles in the way of physical interaction. Innovations include a new Coronavirus Response project, replicable throughout the country.



NEIGHBOURHOOD APPROACHES

Connect to Kindness, West Wales

Connect to Kindness is a programme supported by the Welsh Government as part of A Healthier West Wales. It is being delivered by representatives from each of the counties' local authorities, County Voluntary Council (CVC) and PHBs. It focusses on the development of a regional set of activities to incentivise active citizenship. It is based on an intergenerational approach that fosters and nurtures connections to alleviate loneliness and isolation.

The Connect to Kindness programme is seeking to build on this work through:

- Rolling out Connect to Kindness sessions
- Developing Community Champions and working with Social Prescribers¹¹¹ and Community Connectors
- Finding out what is important to individuals and communities using Connect to Kindness as a community engagement resource
- Using Connect to Kindness to make wider community networks

The project aims to:

- Change social attitudes
- Increase community services based on community needs, improving health and wellbeing
- Engage with hard-to-reach communities

In 2019, the programme launched the West Wales is Kind Investment Fund to support intergenerational projects in Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire.

Funding was available for regional and county-based projects, including small scale community projects, that linked younger and older people with a view to developing knowledge and skills, improving social connection and reducing the risk of loneliness and isolation.

Sixteen projects in the region have received funding for children to record video stories for, and send messages and letters to, older people in their communities. Some of the funded projects have adapted to deliver their work electronically as a result of COVID-19, while others that were reliant on face-to-face contact have found the pandemic and its associated restrictions to be a substantial barrier. Connect to Kindness is working with them to find solutions that will enable their projects to succeed.

¹¹¹ Philippa Watkins, National Assembly for Wales Research Service (2017) [What is Social Prescribing?](#)

The bilingual Connect to Kindness online platform, developed as part of the programme, promotes informal person-to-person volunteering and will help communities to connect and support each other virtually, building their resilience and reducing loneliness and social isolation. People using the platforms can submit offers of support and requests for support on a wide variety of themes. It is underpinned by the Time Credits earn and spend to incentivise involvement.

They launched the online platform before the planned testing period due to COVID-19. This meant that learning had to take place while they were delivering and promoting the new platform which was challenging because people were flooded with online pandemic-related information by other organisations and services.

The project's resources are now entirely digital, including the public awareness raising training sessions on the importance of kindness, and can be found below:

Carmarthenshire: <https://connectcarmarthenshire.org.uk>

Ceredigion: <https://connectceredigion.org.uk>

Pembrokeshire: <https://connectpembrokeshire.org.uk>

By taking a regional approach, Connect to Kindness has been able to share resources, experiences and good practice, avoid duplication of existing services and focus on “filling the gaps”.

Organisations Working to Alleviate Loneliness in West Wales

We surveyed organisations across West Wales involved in delivering interventions to alleviate loneliness. Those who responded identified their main activities as follows:

- 29% - direct one-to-one support (for example befriending, counselling, community connectors, local area co-ordination)
- 21% - social prescribing
- 21% - working to help create more connected communities (supporting participation through volunteering, community development work etc)
- 17% - organising groups, clubs and activities specifically for older people
- 8% - helping people to access information and services (particularly transport and technology)
- 4% - organising groups, clubs and activities with no age qualification
- 80% were working in partnership with other organisations and services

Respondents reported that the most effective ways of promoting their work were:

1. Referrals to their services from other organisations/healthcare professionals
2. Facebook
3. Face-to-face, for example attendance at community events/venues

When asked what they thought would make the biggest difference to help alleviate loneliness in West Wales, several themes emerged:

- Bespoke interventions, based on the individual's needs
- A change in societal attitudes to loneliness, and its associated stigma which proved a barrier for those seeking help
- Increased feelings of purpose and belonging
- Improved transport
- Improved funding mechanisms
- Awareness raising about existing services and events
- Increased ability to reach the hard-to-reach
- More services delivered in a group setting
- Better partnership with organisations and services



THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

Loneliness has been brought to the forefront of discussions about how lockdown affects individuals. For many people there was, and continues to be, necessary periods of social isolation, including more prolonged isolation for those who are shielding. Lockdown has highlighted just how important our social connections are and how it feels to be deprived of them.

In Wales, funding from the Welsh Government's £1.4 million Loneliness and Social Isolation Fund, associated with their Connected Communities strategy, has been repurposed to support their COVID-19 response. In year one of the Fund, it has had to address the COVID-19-loneliness and social isolation challenge and £400,000 has been used for the Ffrind mewn Angen/Friend in Need initiative. This consists of a weekly telephone call from an Age Cymru volunteer as well as advice and support from Age Cymru for informal volunteers who are helping older people.

Welsh Government are currently reviewing how to use the remainder of the Loneliness and Social Isolation Fund over the next two years.

Meanwhile, the £24 million Welsh Government's Third Sector COVID-19 Response Fund, whilst not specifically set up to tackle loneliness and isolation, is being used to help this sector continue its support work.



During the first lockdown, the Welsh Language Commissioner's office provided a free translation service to third sector organisations to enable them to communicate with service users in their preferred language. The demand for this service illustrated the need for further support for the sector to develop their Welsh language offer.

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales published the Leave No-One Behind¹¹² report in August 2020, calling for a range of immediate and longer term action to ensure that older people, disproportionately affected by the pandemic, get the help and support they need and are not excluded while Wales deals with COVID-19, and looks towards its recovery.

The pandemic has highlighted the digital divide in Wales [and] many services have been forced to move online. The Older People's Commissioner flagged the risk of excluding a significant number of older people, and the need to ensure that accessible non-digital options continue to be available; she recommended that the financial gains resulting from the reduced costs of delivering digital services should be invested to maximize digital inclusion across communities by supporting older people to get online.

The Commissioner suggested the following actions for public bodies:

Immediate Actions

- Public bodies take action to ensure that public health messaging is communicated more effectively to older people
- Undertake community-level audits of vulnerable older people who have been digitally excluded during the pandemic, and provide user-friendly devices with access to the internet

Longer-term Actions

- Establish a right to digital connectivity – viewing digital infrastructure as an essential service for the whole population which should be affordable
- Introduce a social tariff for internet access, and work towards the provision of free universal access
- Place a duty on public bodies in Wales to demonstrate how they will engage with and serve citizens who are not online
- Health boards and local authorities establish outreach programmes to build digital confidence in order for older people to access digital public services, building upon the work being delivered by DCW

Tackling Loneliness in West Wales During COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on many organisations delivering interventions to address loneliness in West Wales.

Dewis Cymru,¹¹³ the national well-being resource directory for Wales, has seen a 48% rise in the number of service views in West Wales in October compared to March 2020. This indicates increased demand for well-being support in the area.

We spoke to organisations whose work is featured in this report about their response to the pandemic and a number of key challenges (explored below) became clear.

¹¹² Older People's Commissioner for Wales (2020) [Leave no-one behind: Action for an age-friendly recovery](#)

¹¹³ <https://www.dewis.wales/>

Adapting Operations

Many organisations had to quickly reconsider and adapt their offer, in some cases several times, in response to the changing situation. It is a testament to their resilience and flexibility that they did so in a matter of weeks in order to support their service users in the most appropriate way.

Accessing Community Venues

Several organisations who had previously delivered their services from community venues reported that, despite the easing of restrictions, many venues remained closed. This was in part due to management committees being unclear on the changing rules, and partly to many committees being populated by older volunteers who were isolating or shielding.

For some, this meant seeking alternative venues while others had to suspend service provision.

Remote Delivery

Many organisations were forced to move from a face-to-face delivery model to remote delivery, using the following methods:

- Telephone – particularly during the initial lockdown phase
- Online
- Doorstep visits
- Posting resources

Some reported that remote delivery had the positive side effect of helping new service users to access the organisation. However, in cases where existing service users either could not, or did not want to, use technology, their engagement with the organisation was reduced.

Engaging Volunteers

Promising Approaches highlights volunteering as one way to keep people active and engaged. The huge increase in volunteering during lockdown increased the capacity of some organisations to support individuals to meet basic needs like grocery shopping and fetching prescriptions.

However, their usual volunteering base was reduced because most volunteers were over 60 and had to shield or had health and safety concerns. This may have increased people's feelings of loneliness and removed a structure they previously relied upon.

There was uncertainty about how to sustain the original enthusiasm for volunteering. As lockdown eased and people returned to work following furlough, volunteer numbers dropped but demand for support remained high. Organisations reported barriers to resuming services and re-engaging volunteers due to concerns about infection on both sides. Following a surge of "community spirit" in early lockdown, several months down the line there is a general fatigue for volunteering due to return to work or exhaustion.

CONCLUSION

West Wales can be characterised as having multiple features which contribute to loneliness:

- West Wales is the second most sparsely populated health board area in Wales with limited public transport links which could lead to social isolation and contribute to poverty. In the all-Wales context of deprivation in terms of access to services - measured by the time it takes to travel to a range of services as a proxy for wider physical access to services - Ceredigion Local Authority had the second highest proportion of small areas (50%) in the most deprived 10%.¹¹⁴ The most deprived small area was in Carmarthenshire (Cynnwyl Gaeo).
- Digital exclusion, particularly since COVID-19, could have a serious impact on people's ability to stay connected, find reliable information, shop for necessities and stay healthy. Approximately three quarters of people aged 65 to 74, and less than half of those over 75, are online in Wales
- A high proportion of older people many of whom live alone: 45% of over 65s live alone, a number which is expected to increase significantly over the next 10 to 20 years¹¹⁵
- Large scale inward migration of retirees with limited social networks in the area. Pembrokeshire has a 31% inward migration rate, of whom 87% are aged 65 or over
- Significant numbers of older people who are Welsh first language speakers combined with inadequate Welsh-language service provision to support older people. In the 50 to 54 age group, 31% speak Welsh compared to the national average across Wales of 13%. In the over 85s group, 43% speak Welsh compared to the Welsh national average of 19%¹¹⁶
- Comparatively high levels of relative poverty, with 13,895 people over the age of 65 being in income deprivation

People experience loneliness for many different reasons, and we each experience loneliness differently. For some, feelings of loneliness are transitory. For those who experience chronic loneliness, the right help and assistance, delivered at the right time and place, and in the right language, is crucial.

There is no "one size fits all" intervention which can tackle such a personal and complex emotional condition. However, interventions and activities which directly support people suffering chronic loneliness, and create more supportive communities where people can easily make and maintain meaningful connections, are necessary.

¹¹⁴ Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) 2019

¹¹⁵ West Wales Care Partnership West Wales Population Assessment March 2017f

¹¹⁶ ONS, 2011

According to the British Red Cross report *Trapped in a Bubble: An investigation into triggers for loneliness in the UK*,¹¹⁷ cross-organisation collaboration in delivering sustainable solutions is key to addressing loneliness. It sets out the way all aspects of society - individuals, businesses, community groups or voluntary organisations - can play a role in prevention and early response.

Many of the more successful initiatives in West Wales share common factors:

- Strong partnerships between public, third sector and communities
- A flexible approach that considers what works in practice and what people want
- Adoption of an asset-based approach which builds upon existing strengths of individuals and communities

While current levels of political interest in loneliness are to be welcomed, it is important to ensure that this translates into sustained and meaningful change for individuals and communities. A lack of sustainable and long-term funding is the main challenge for many of the groups that we spoke to. More work is needed to show the economic benefits of interventions which reduce loneliness, with effective interventions incorporated into core funding of local health and social services delivery.

The creation of an environment where a wide range of diverse, community-based activities can flourish is the key to the effective reduction of loneliness. Diversity of services and activities is essential to enable people of different ages, with different interests and backgrounds to make meaningful connections at a local level. Such an approach may be challenging for funding bodies which have traditionally looked for opportunities to scale up specific initiatives as opposed to supporting smaller grassroots initiatives to help them “scale outwards”.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We have identified the following areas for development in West Wales:

- **Welsh language:** investment is necessary to enable more organisations to upgrade and embed their Welsh language offer into their services and to provide adequate numbers of service providers who can speak to service users in their preferred language. Organisations should consider utilising the resources provided by the Welsh Language Commissioner, including training and support to develop their Welsh language plan
- **Transport:** due to the numbers of older people in the area and the gap in services supporting people to access transport, there is a vital need for affordable, convenient, reliable and safe transport to ensure that older people can use services, continue to participate in community life and stay connected to friends and family
- **Digital:** uplift is necessary, as is greater investment to ensure people are digitally upskilled and that wrap around support is provided to build people’s confidence in using the necessary technology beyond initial training. Access to free or more affordable Wi-Fi and data must be considered because poverty levels prevent many from taking advantage of the internet

¹¹⁷ British Red Cross (2016) [Trapped in a Bubble: An investigation into triggers for loneliness in the UK](#)

- Encouraging inclusion: being welcomed to a community activity has a major influence on whether an older person will return. Warm Welcome initiatives could be explored in West Wales, similar to those used by Ageing Better in Camden,¹¹⁸ to support people new to the area and those who are “harder to reach”. The Warm Welcome Approach includes greeting people on arrival at community venues and beyond, identifying and responding to interests, developing a welcoming ethos and a sense of group belonging, involvement and ownership. Their Practitioner’s Guide is available [here](#)
- Re-engaging older people into volunteering: when people give time to their community they can maintain or develop a sense of purpose and achievement. As a result of the pandemic, additional consideration and support should be given by organisations to suitable ways of involving them, including through remote and more flexible options. This is important to ensure organisations can benefit from older people’s skills, and older people can benefit from this vital route to connection
- Older people who suffer chronic loneliness: research for our Psychology of Loneliness report found that there are several psychological approaches that can help. Cognitive behavioural therapy, mindfulness and positive psychology are backed up by the most relevant research evidence



¹¹⁸ <http://www.ageingbetterincamden.org.uk/>

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

...helps people understand and challenge their automatic thoughts and feelings to help reduce loneliness.



The illustration shows a person from the chest up, wearing a teal vest over a pink shirt. Their head is replaced by a large, dark red brain shape. Inside the brain, there are several tangled, colorful lines (pink, blue, green, yellow) representing complex or automatic thoughts. Three horizontal lines extend from the right side of the brain towards the person's face, suggesting a process of reflection or challenge. In the top right corner of the graphic, there is a logo for 'Campaign to End Loneliness' with the tagline 'CONNECTIONS IN OLDER AGE'.

CBT helps people understand and thereby change some of their thoughts, feelings and behaviours so they can manage their difficulties. It is widely used in the NHS and evidence suggests that it can address loneliness in later life^{121, 122, 123}

Mindfulness

Mindfulness

...can help people become aware of negative thoughts which can undermine efforts to be more connected to others.



The illustration shows a person with dark skin sitting in a red chair. They are wearing a light blue long-sleeved top and teal trousers. Three curved lines with numbers 1, 2, and 3 are drawn around their head, representing the process of becoming aware of thoughts. In the top right corner of the graphic, there is a logo for 'Campaign to End Loneliness' with the tagline 'CONNECTIONS IN OLDER AGE'.

Mindfulness can help people to become aware of their thoughts during difficult times and choose to accept or reject them. Some research-based evidence suggests that mindfulness can alleviate loneliness in older populations¹²⁴ and the wider adult population.¹²⁵ The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence¹²⁶ recommend it for treating depression.

¹²² Jarvis, M.A., Padmanabhanunni, A., & Chipps, J. (2019) An Evaluation of a Low-Intensity Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Health - Supported Intervention to Reduce Loneliness in Older People, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 16, 1305-1319

¹²³ Theeke, L.A., Mallow, J.A., Moore, J., McBurney, A., Rellick, S., & VanGilder, R. (2016). Effectiveness of LISTEN on loneliness, neuroimmunological stress response, psychosocial functioning, quality of life, and physical health measures of chronic illness, *International Journal of Nursing Sciences*, 3, 242-251

¹²⁴ Creswell, J.D., Irwin, M., Burkund, L., Lieberman, M., Arevalo, M. J., Breen, E., & Cole, S. (2012) Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction training reduces loneliness and proinflammatory gene expression in older adults: A small randomized controlled trial, *Brain, Behavior and Immunity*, 26, 1095-1101

¹²⁵ Lindsay, E.K., Young, S., Brown, K. W., Smyth, J.M., & Creswell, J.D. (2019). Mindfulness training reduces loneliness and increases social contact in a randomized controlled trial, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 116, 3488-3493

¹²⁶ <https://www.nice.org.uk/>

Positive Psychology



Positive psychology promotes positive emotions, helping people to override negative feelings and thought patterns.

The above psychological approaches have the potential to tackle loneliness in three broad categories:

1. Individuals can understand how loneliness affects them and those around them and build this understanding into their everyday lives. It can be promoted by public campaigning.
2. Organisations providing services for people experiencing loneliness can adjust their work to use some of the learning about the psychology of loneliness. Group activities, social prescribing and emerging psycho-education courses can use these insights to improve the design of their services. Many already do so.
3. There is a group of people who suffer chronic loneliness which may be associated with a complex set of problems or may result from difficult life events like bereavement. One-to-one support focused on helping them alleviate loneliness with psychological techniques could be the best option for them.

We call on organisations working with older people to:

- Identify aspects of their work which effectively address the psychology of loneliness
- Design future work programmes to explicitly include psychological approaches to loneliness
- Evaluate the impact of these programmes on reducing loneliness

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Campaign to End Loneliness would like to express its gratitude to several individuals and organisations for their contribution to this report:

Rod Bowen, Dolen Teifi

Anne Callaghan, Campaign to End Loneliness

Lena Dixon, Solva Care

Gethin Edwards, Welsh Language Commissioners' Office

Rachel Evans, Volunteering Matters

Penny Hall, Welsh Government

Heléna Herklots CBE , Older People's Commissioner for Wales
Steve Huxton, Independent Consultant

Gwyneth Jones, PAVS

Kate Jopling, Jopling Consulting

Peter McIlroy, Age Cymru Dyfed

David McKinney, Older People's Commissioner for Wales' Office

Dr Deborah Morgan, Centre for Ageing and Dementia Research

Jodie Phillips, Data Cymru

Cyra Shimmel, Ceredigion County Council

Susan Smith, Carmarthenshire County Council

Roxanne Treacy, Tempo Time Credits

Sara Wentworth, Arts 4 Wellbeing

Alison Wood, Welsh Government

Thanks also to all those who completed our survey and attended our online forum to discuss the impact of COVID-19.

Appendix 1: Resources

DEWIS CYMRU

Dewis Cymru¹²⁷ is the national well-being resource directory for Wales. The website is owned and funded by the 22 local authorities and has been adopted as part of their local Information Advice and Assistance service (under the Social Services and Well-being Act). Dewis Cymru shares information from a wide range of local and national organisations and services, allowing individuals choice and control over which services best meet their needs, including anything from childminders, lunch clubs and mental health services to residential care homes.

As well as a directory of practical support, it has lots of information about being well, being safe, being at home, and being sociable. However, it is keen to expand and is encouraging inclusion of more services provided by grassroots community groups.

INFOENGINE

Infoengine¹²⁸ is the directory of third sector services in Wales. It highlights a wide variety of excellent voluntary and community services which can provide information and support so that individuals can make informed choices.

Infoengine is provided by Third Sector Support Wales,¹²⁹ a partnership of CVCs and Wales Council for Voluntary Action.

The Older People's Commissioner

The Older People's Commissioner has brought together a checklist within the Making Wales a nation of age-friendly communities publication which individuals can use to identify and potentially raise issues for correction with the relevant authority.

[The Commissioner] has also developed a series of resources including Advocacy Resources Hub, Engagement Toolkit, Commissioner's Case Book and a Good Practice Hub.¹³¹

OPERAT (Older People's External Residential Assessment Tool)

Swansea University has developed OPERAT,¹³² a checklist by which people can assess their local area while out walking, with results uploaded online, and a score given in relation to how age-friendly their area is.

Campaign to End Loneliness

The Campaign developed resources¹³³ including ideas for how we can all combat social isolation and look out for each other. The resources also link to the latest guidance and advice from the government, charities and experts on how to stay safe and healthy. Recent key publications include, [Promising Approaches Revisited: Effective action on loneliness in later life](#) and [The Psychology of Loneliness](#)

¹²⁷ www.dewis.wales

¹²⁸ <https://en.infoengine.cymru/>

¹²⁹ <https://thirdsectorsupport.wales/>

¹³⁰ Ageing Well in Wales and CYMRU Older People's Alliance (2018) Making Wales a nation of age-friendly communities A practical guide to creating change in your community

¹³¹ <https://www.olderpeoplewales.com/en/assistance.aspx>

¹³² <https://www.operat.co.uk/>

¹³³ <https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/blog/coronavirus-and-social-isolation/>

Digital Communities Wales (DCW)

As older people who want to access health services and keep in touch with family are the least likely to have internet access at home,¹³⁴ the Welsh Government's Digital Communities provides a webpage which explains the range of online support it provides during the pandemic, including training courses and online resources. This includes support for people to become digital companions who help people they know to access digital services.

Centre for Ageing and Dementia Research (CADR)¹³⁶

An internationally recognised, multi-disciplinary research network consisting of researchers from Bangor, Cardiff and Swansea universities, CADR has conducted extensive and influential work around loneliness.



¹³⁴ Wales Co-operative (2018) Digital Inclusion in health and care in Wales

¹³⁵ <https://www.digitalcommunities.gov.wales/covid-19/>

¹³⁶ <http://www.cadr.cymru/>



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