

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Places of Change Cymru: From Exclusion to Employment

**A pan-Wales vision for employment
and training for vulnerable people**

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1. The research

1.1. The Places of Change Cymru (POCC) consortium commissioned this qualitative research in order to gain information for its bid to the Wales European Funding Office for European Structural Funds in the 2014-20 tranche of funding. Service users, directors and project leaders in third sector organisations were contacted and their views were gained in focus groups and semi-structured interviews. These charities and housing associations work with socially excluded people in all 15 of the local authorities in the Welsh convergence areas. In all, 98 service users and 26 organisational staff participated in the research.

1.2. The POCC model, based on the successful Places of Change programme in England, aims to support homeless and vulnerable people by

- 1) Assisting people to overcome barriers to training and employment
- 2) Providing a wide range of accredited training
- 3) Assisting people in finding and sustaining employment, and supporting the development of micro-businesses.

1.3. It is difficult to estimate the total number of homeless people in Wales, since it is very difficult to gain an accurate picture of the number of rough sleepers. However, recent statistics show an overall trend in increasing homelessness, a situation which is likely to be exacerbated following the introduction of welfare reforms set out in the UK government's Welfare Reform Act of 2012.

1.4. A range of services have been developed in Wales, since the 1980s. Initially accommodation, and subsequently, support, were set up to help homeless people. The services have tended to be divided into those supporting 16-24 year olds and those for people over 25. Housing associations and larger voluntary organisations own properties and collect rent, whereas smaller organisations rely on short-term funding. Supporting People is now a key funder for both larger and smaller organisations throughout Wales.

2. The findings

2.1. The researchers were told of a number of projects that support people at vulnerable points in their lives. A wide range of services are provided: night shelters, breakfast runs, drop-in centres and 'Night stop' cater particularly to street homeless people. Hostels and supported accommodation provide temporary accommodation while floating support works with tenants in either private or social housing i.e. in properties owned by housing associations or local authorities. The provision of accommodation was seen as the most valuable service by the service users.

2.2. Service users also valued the support that they were given by the various organisations working around the convergence areas of Wales. They told us that they appreciated being treated with respect, being offered options rather than being told what to do and by simply

having someone to talk to. We found this type of support to be in depth and tailored to individual needs.

2.3. Service providers told us that sometimes it takes a while for service users to be able to engage with services: some are not ready for the service. This was particularly the case for some young people and for people over 25 with complex problems such as mental health and/or substance misuse issues.

2.4. Organisations' directors and project leaders, as well as service users, identified several gaps in service provision in the local authority areas studied. These include: lack of direct access and emergency beds in some areas as well as an acute lack of move-on accommodation. This latter provision is likely to get worse as a result of the introduction of the under-occupancy charge ('bedroom tax') in welfare reform. There is also a shortage of 'wet house' accommodation and places for people with complex needs.

2.5. It can be difficult to engage young people with education and training and people of all ages with employment. Organisations told us that it is better to offer training within projects as a useful first step. Service users are more likely to engage with training if they are in an environment they know and in which they feel safe and not stigmatized.

2.6. There is an overwhelming difficulty with finding suitable mainstream jobs due to a shortage of employment throughout Wales, especially in post-industrial and rural areas. The organisations are starting to think about how to overcome this situation and are in the process of developing links with the private sector and establishing their own schemes and social enterprises.

2.7. Both mental health services and specialist support to deal with substance misuse issues are difficult to access at any age. Young people often fall through the net as they are between child and adult mental health services. Organisations' directors and project leaders talked of service users having to experience a crisis before mental health services could be accessed. One service user told us that he felt he had to break the law, as the only way he could access detox was through prison. The provision of a nurse from a local GP's surgery at a drop-in centre in Swansea is highly valued by service users and is a service that could be replicated in other areas.

2.8. Service users can be digitally excluded. Some are finding it difficult to access IT services within their accommodation while other projects are providing the internet and access to computers to enable their service users to sign on online and also to search for jobs, as required for the receipt of benefits. Most service users found Job Centres unhelpful with regard to both provision of IT equipment and advice.

2.9. As services in Wales have grown up organically to meet local need, there is inconsistency in provision across Wales. Rurality presents challenges to organisations working in rural areas in terms of transport and staff time costs. Service users also find it difficult to access services when transport is infrequent and expensive in relation to their benefits. Some organisations have developed some innovative ways of overcoming the

challenges of working in predominantly rural areas, for example in holding outreach surgeries in local towns or people's homes, and in providing travel warrants.

3. The Places of Change Cymru approach

3.1. The POCC model is a three-pronged approach to combat social exclusion: 1) tackling barriers to employment and increasing self-esteem and confidence; 2) providing activities and training to engage people and give them qualifications; and 3) supporting people into work, whether this is in-house social enterprises or mainstream employment.

We were shown how it is possible for clients to move between the three types of provision – either moving forwards and even backwards where appropriate. The Cyrenians' ESF-funded drop-in centre, the Dragon Arts activity and training centre and the CESA employment service provide a good model for supporting service users at all three levels.

3.2. Most of the organisations participating in the research already have well-developed services which offer activities to their clients - such as art and music projects, film evenings, and activities outside the premises such as bowling and paintballing. They are also offering a range of accredited Agored (formerly Open College Network) courses which lead to qualifications. Examples of courses provided include independent living skills, numeracy and literacy, budgeting and cookery.

3.3. Organisations recognise that the next logical step is to move clients into employment. They have begun this process through four main routes:

- 1) Working with other agencies, such as Careers Wales, to access opportunities for work and work experience programmes
- 2) Providing unpaid volunteer positions in their own organisations in order to provide work experience
- 3) Developing new social enterprises in order to provide voluntary work experience and sometimes paid work
- 4) Initiating schemes such as peer mentoring in order to employ service users.

3.4. These initiatives are just beginning to start and the time seems right to build on these foundations through projects such as the Cyrenians Employment Support Agency. This works with public and private sector employers and has successfully found employment for over 1000 service users in the Swansea area. The Guilford Report (2013) suggests that European Structural Fund investment should be targeted at building on economic demand drivers across Wales. These are likely to encompass partnerships between the private and public sector and could include energy projects in North Wales, the electrification of the railways in South Wales, the development of a high speed broadband network across Wales and also the development of infrastructure projects, including the building of homes, across Wales.

3.5. The POCC model advocates the setting up of enterprise hubs where services around accommodation; the provision of activities; training; and support into work can be combined and centralised. Organisations suggested that hubs should be set up in the main

urban centres where services are already concentrated. However, organisations working in rural areas thought that satellite hubs will also be required in order to make the training accessible to as many service users as possible.

4. Good practice and recommendations

4.1. Several examples of good practice were identified during the research. It is proposed that this good practice is shared between organisations, possibly via the Rough Sleepers Cymru network or Cymorth Cymru.

Examples include:

- Facilitation of service user involvement in how services operate through a range of activities including service user forum meetings, evaluation forms, residents' meetings and tenants informing organisational strategy at housing association Board meetings.
- Preventative and advice work by organisations such as Pembrokeshire Care Society and Caer Las Cymru.
- Non-judgmental drop-in centres and hostel provision by organisations like North Wales Housing Association and the Wallich.
- Good relationships with local communities built up by organisations like Adref.
- Flexible approaches to supporting service users to get employment which already fit in with the POCC model by Cyrenians Cymru.
- The development of peer mentoring experience by organisations like Gisda.
- The initiation of the 'Nightstop' service by Digartref Ynys Môn in which spare rooms and caravans are provided as emergency cover for young homeless people.
- The encouragement of family mediation by organisations such as Solas.
- Volunteering within and from outside projects, as practised by Solas and the Wallich.
- The provision of an employment skills and development manager, as with Gwalia.
- The establishment of social enterprises, as set up by Ceredigion Care Society, Cyrenians Cymru and Gisda.
- Working with partner organisations as United Welsh Housing has done with the local authority and the Heads of the Valleys Partnership to develop a community hub in Bargoed, and Digartref Ynys Môn is doing with the North Wales Wildlife Trust to train young people in rural skills.
- The development of transnational links and cultural exchanges for service users by Gisda and Cyrenians Cymru.
- A commitment to the Welsh language as with Ceredigion Care Society's provision of bilingual leaflets and information and by employment of mostly bilingual staff by North Wales Housing Association, Gisda and Digartref Ynys Môn.
- Working with the private sector to provide accommodation and jobs, as with Clwyd Alyn's innovative scheme to provide move-on accommodation and the recent establishment of links with local businesses by Gwalia, Gisda and Digartref Ynys Môn.

4.2. Recommendations relating to gaps in service provision are that there should be provision of more:

- Direct access beds, 'wet' accommodation projects, more move-on flats or houses, together with more supported accommodation for people with 'complex needs'.
- In-house nurses and other links with GPs; more mental health services, particularly for young people, as well as better access to counselling and detox services.
- Better access to computers and advice/tuition as well as the development of communication links through the use of social media.
- Subsidised food schemes and food banks.
- Recognition that even though in accommodation for 'single people', a number of service users have children and seek access to them; they will need move on accommodation which will allow children to stay. As Legal Aid is being cut back, there needs to be increased awareness of this issue.

4.3. The main focus for POCC bids should be in developing schemes which support homeless and vulnerable people into employment. This includes the development of work placements, social enterprises, partnerships with employers and employment agencies. Service providers and service users agree that this is the next step.

Recommendations relating to the POCC bid are to:

1. Distinguish between services for young people and those over 25; develop partnerships with Rathbone and the Princes Trust for young people.
2. Provide some projects which incorporate accommodation and training in the same venue in appropriate local contexts. This will overcome difficulties in finding accommodation and provide a safe, stigma-free environment for homeless and vulnerable people.
3. Develop more volunteering opportunities for service users and members of the wider community; develop links with local volunteering agencies.
4. Be aware of 'demand drivers' in Wales such as energy developments and the electrification of the railways; work with the private sector, public sector as well as developing social enterprises and other forms of in-house protected employment.
5. Build in mechanisms to recruit service users and ex-service users as employees in Place of Change Cymru projects.
6. Link with opportunities created by schemes such as Houses to Homes; take advantage of public bodies' obligations to consider 'social value' in procurement.
7. Develop more peer mentoring schemes.
8. Campaign for a change in benefits rules that prohibit volunteering for more than 16 hours per week.
9. Develop services in response to the welfare reforms which are expected to increase demand.
10. Be aware of how services link with EU and Welsh Government policy initiative contexts.
11. Develop partnerships with the private sector for accommodation as well as job opportunities.
12. Campaign for better services within Job Centres, in particular for the provision of computers and advice; adapt the Work Programme and assure that vulnerable people are supported effectively through partnerships with specialist agencies.

13. Create more links with prisons with regard to training, accessing benefits and awareness of local accommodation options.
14. Organisations could combine within regions in order to make bids for POCC funding; or they could combine across regions because of specialism, e.g. agencies working with young people in the South and in the North of Wales. The researchers support a regional model.
15. When shaping POCC bids, make sure that at least one bid should be tailored to young people and at least one bid should be tailored to people of working age over 25.
16. POCC funding should cover a worker/small team in each region who/which is specialized in work placements, social enterprises, links with Job Centres and the private sector.
17. Funding should also cover the development of complex monitoring and data collection systems necessary for European funding. Provision of video conferencing facilities should be costed into projects so that communication across geographical areas is facilitated.
18. The exchange of good practice could improve services and lead to new developments.
19. Embed bilingualism into Places of Change Cymru services.
20. Develop partnerships transnationally in order to transfer good practice and to provide service users with opportunities which will enhance their training and employment experiences.
21. Consider projects which are for women-focused in order to cater for 'hidden homeless' women. Offer women training in non-traditionally female jobs such as construction.

5. Conclusions

The evidence presented in this report suggests that the Places of Change Cymru approach could build on the many areas of good practice already in operation throughout Wales. Service users have commented very favourably on the accommodation and support work provided in projects and organisations are ensuring that their support work is a key aspect of their service provision. Great strides have been made in terms of tackling barriers to social exclusion through activities and training.

These successes could be built on to move, more comprehensively and consistently, to support into employment - where this is appropriate for service users' individual situations and their readiness to participate in the mainstream employment market. This must be backed up with the continued development of in-house training and employment schemes as there is a need to provide such activities in a place where service users feel safe and comfortable and thus more likely to engage. These activities, training and support into employment should create a flexible continuum of services to recognise the changing needs of vulnerable service users.

The development of hubs is supported but, in rural areas, there will be a need for satellite hubs so that more service users can access services. It is also necessary to pay attention to

the need to tailor POCC services appropriately to different age groups in order that young people are able to engage and participate.

Organisations in Wales are well placed to develop links with their European counterparts by building on several Welsh organisations' membership of FEANTSA and existing transnational partnerships. There is already a successful ESF-funded scheme in the Swansea Bay area, the Cyrenians Supported Employment and Training Project, which reflects the POCC model and focusses on providing activities, training, social enterprises, and support into employment.

The POCC model also fits in well with the Welsh Government policy priorities of tackling homelessness, poverty and social exclusion. There is an enthusiasm and preparedness to participate in the POCC initiative; the timing is right to build on existing foundations. The research evidence suggests that Places of Change Cymru could make a real difference to the lives of homeless and vulnerable people and that this approach is the next logical step for services in Wales.