



# Connecting the community through partnership

**Gareth Matthews reports on how Perthyn's Community Connections Day Service, organised from Y Pwynt in Llanelli, has worked in partnership with local organisations, the local authority and most importantly the people who use the service to develop meaningful roles and friendships in their local community.**

The service had originally been built around a traditional day service based at a hall in Llanelli, set up for a group of individuals that had come through child services together, and whose parents wanted them to stay together moving into adult services. It was seen to be a good service as, although it followed a segregated service model, it was smaller than most day services and therefore considered more individualised.

Whilst reviews with individuals and their families showed that they were happy with the existing service, we recognised that often people had not had the experiences to consider other options. We worked with people to help them really think about what they wanted to do now and in the future,



Nick

generating new ideas and things they may just like to try. Confidence was something that came up over and over again, so one of the first new opportunities was to bring in a tutor to deliver sessions for the group aimed at building confidence and social communication with new people. This was just for this group but a necessary step to more community integration.

## New opportunities

We then looked for opportunities for new activities and gaps we might need to develop opportunities ourselves. We agreed that:

- The activities should be in a natural community setting and open to everybody.
- The opportunities offered should promote the people we are supporting as valued, competent and participating members of the community.
- That people would have opportunities to be with people other than paid Community Connections staff.
- If there was a learning need identified for anyone before joining a community based activity or group, that this stepping stone would be set up by us in a natural community setting wherever possible.
- If there wasn't a natural activity or venue available in the community, we would set this up at Y Pwynt, again as a stepping stone. As an example, one of the areas initially identified as difficult was to find venues that were practical and with the necessary adaptations for people to learn to prepare and cook food. While the aim for some people is to develop the skills and confidence to attend a college course or integrated 'night class', for others it was to be able to learn skills for life. So Y Pwynt has a fully adapted kitchen, which is also a resource the local community can use.

Using the local knowledge of everyone involved along with the team at Carmarthenshire Association of Voluntary Services we identified what the area had to offer. Links were made to organise and support a wider variety of options for people. There are currently up to 6 different opportunities a day which focus on:

### Education, Learning and Skill Development

- Partnership working has developed strong links with local colleges and businesses which allows people to access a wide variety of learning and educational opportunities.

### Social, Leisure, Health and Fitness

- The development and maintenance of social skills is a key element in helping individuals to increasing independence. Community Connections facilitates people accessing naturally occurring activities in the community.

### Employment and Volunteering

- This has included steps to employment such as college courses to help learn necessary skills or work placements to help gain confidence and an understanding of the expectations, routines and commitment that are related to paid employment. We work in partnership with many local businesses and trusts such as Ramps skate park and Down to Earth environmental project.

## Joint working with Down to Earth

One example of where joint working has worked well is with Down to Earth. Perthyn have been working with Down to Earth for the past three years and have developed an excellent partnership, providing varying opportunities to small groups of participants, with support provided by Down to Earth workers and Perthyn's Community Connections team.

Barney O'Kane, Lead Facilitator with Down to Earth said *"The fantastic support from the Perthyn staff who really understand the needs of the participants and already have great trusting relationships with them, provides excellent motivation and modelling of good practice. This fast tracks the chances of the participants getting the most out of the eight to ten week programme (a day a week) and we feel we work well with the Perthyn staff to get the most out of the sessions for the participants. The workers are also very helpful in supporting us in monitoring and paperwork with the gang when it is required by our funders. We greatly enjoy working with Perthyn and feel like we have a bunch of friends turning up each week. Long may it continue"*



**"I like coming here because it keeps me busy; I'm always out and about. I'm learning to dance at the moment and its keeping me fit." Nigel**

## Connecting the community through partnership

These volunteering opportunities have not only helped people develop skills but also develop relationships and confidence that has in turn opened new doors to increased opportunities.

### Open Day

Once the new style service had been up and running for around 10 months, we held an open day with families, looking to get feedback from them regarding the changes. It is fair to say that when we get it wrong they can be a tough crowd, which is what you hope for from the main advocates for their family members, but the efforts of everyone who was committed to the change was rewarded with really positive the feedback:

---

*“He is thoroughly enjoying it, always talking about his day and comes home tired which is the sign of a productive day”*

---

“He has developed a lot in the past twelve months, especially taking part in Down to earth, his confidence is growing”  
“She comes home happy and talks about her day, can’t get better than that”

This is just a start though; there are still a lot of opportunities and partnerships out there to be tapped into, and part of our mission is make people aware of what they could benefit from working together.

The Mayor of Llanelli, Councillor Bill Thomas attended the opening of Y Pwynt, our new base for the day service, in September. Having seen the effect joint working has had on

both the service and the community he is keen to lend his support to further and has started by organising a networking evening in the debating chambers. We are hoping that events like this will not only help us at Perthyn realise the full potential of joint working in the community, but help other organisations too in this challenging financial climate.

We have also recently had a visit from the local Assembly Member, Lee Waters. Lee said

---

*“Local authorities, business owners and charities need to work together and offer an inclusive environment for individuals who often find it difficult to develop skills that other people sometimes take for granted.”*

---

To achieve this, every organisation in Llanelli needs to do their bit and I’m pleased to see that we are moving in the right direction.

Perthyn are doing a wonderful job of coordinating services to make sure that people with learning disabilities enjoy as many opportunities as the rest of us. During my visit I was hugely impressed by the enthusiasm of the staff and the environment that they had created. I met several people who use the facility and they were all keen to tell me how much they enjoy what’s on offer and how it’s benefitted them”

Perthyn are currently recruiting support worker and management positions in the expanding Community Connections Service. If you are interested in discussing this further please contact Gareth Matthews at [gareth.matthews@perthyn.org.uk](mailto:gareth.matthews@perthyn.org.uk) or visit [www.perthyn.org.uk](http://www.perthyn.org.uk) for an application pack.

**Gareth Matthews**  
Perthyn



**“I like the service because I come to meet friends and to learn new things, it makes me happy. I really enjoyed the life skills course and learning to ride a bike.” Colin**

## Key Points

- **The Community Connections Service** had originally been built around a traditional day service based at a hall in Llanelli. Whilst individuals and their families were happy with the existing service, it was recognised that often people had not had the experiences to consider other options.
- **Some people lacked the confidence** necessary to try new opportunities so training sessions were arranged to help people.
- **Links were made** to organise and support a wide variety of options for people. There are currently up to 6 different opportunities a day.
- **Perthyn has been praised** by Individuals, families and partner organisations for the work it is doing with Community Connections.