

Additional evidence from Age Cymru:

Received on 12/04/19

Bore da / good morning,

I am emailing as promised to let you have further information for the Committee's inquiry into the arts and poverty. Please find attached:

- Case studies involving people developing confidence as a result of participating in Gwanwyn Clubs
- A case study on volunteering as a route into employment

The presentation at the Age Cymru Consultative Forum was given by the Book of You <https://www.bookofyou.co.uk/>, a social enterprise that works to support older people through life story work. There is a team of associates and experts in supporting older people who go and work one to one to put together a life story. They use an app to construct the story, which means a lot more can be done than with a physical book. Over 500 people had participated by October last year.

I have checked our records of the Age Alliance Wales focus groups with older people which we carried out in the winter of 2018-19. Beyond the barriers to engagement of poor transport links and disappearing community venues, there was nothing specific about engagement in the arts – but then, we did not ask that particular question at the time. During an earlier round of focus groups, in spring 2018, we did encounter members of the Purple Orchids, an arts and crafts based community group who meet in Wrexham to combat loneliness and social isolation. This group has received funding via a Community Inclusion Grant, but from time to time has also had to self-fund. However, Bethan Sayed AM's question was about inter-cultural analysis, and this group does not seem to be culturally diverse.

I hope this is helpful. Please let me know if you would like any further information.

Kind regards,

Valerie Billingham



Gwanwyn Clubs – Case Studies and Testimonials

Y Cartrefy Bontnewydd with Age Cymru Gwynedd a Môn

Case Study 1

We first met Participant 1 when she attended the Open day at Y Cartref . She saw what was on offer and signed up for the Gwanwyn project.

She had an interest in Arts and Crafts but because of illness she lost her confidence and was self-critical.

Through working with the artists Marian and Lora, Participant 1's confidence grew. She also enjoyed the metal work with D, an artist who joined the group at a later date.

Since attending Gwanwyn Participant 1 has made a new group of friends. She enjoys the social aspect and stays for lunch, with her husband joining on a regular basis.

Coming to the sessions gives Participant 1 something to look forward to weekly and says that it's great to get back into creative work.

Case Study 2

Participant 2 lives locally in the village and first learnt about the Gwanwyn project through a local advertisement. She came along to see what was on offer as she had an interest in textile work.

Being a part of the group and with the help of Lora's expertise, it helped her and led her into making some spectacular pieces at home.

She feels that everyone in the group helps each other, giving guidance and sharing ideas. She had played around with textiles in the past but has since found that she has a passion for the work.

Participant 2 lives alone and feels that she now has a purpose and that the group have become an extended family.

Although not so confident with painting, Marian has given her confidence and she is looking forward to further developing her skills.

Through attending the group she has also become a volunteer with Age Cymru Gwynedd a Môn.



Case Study 3

Participant 3 became interested after visiting our shop and speaking to a member of staff. She visited the café at Y Cartref to introduce herself and to speak of her interest.

Since having a stroke Participant 3 was part of a group which only ran for a short time, which left her feeling lost once it ended. She has now regained a feeling of enjoyment and being a part of something.

She feels that she has learnt so much and everyone gives something different to the group. Although Participant 3 is less confident than the rest of the group she feels that everyone helps her along leading her to gain confidence.

She enjoys all aspects of the work and feels very passionate about the group with her confidence growing on a weekly basis. She has become attached to the group and has made lifelong friends.

Case Study 4

Participant 4 is a member of the Men's Shed and when he was informed of the Gwanwyn Club he was very eager to join up.

Participant 4 didn't have much confidence when he first attended but his skills and confidence have improved greatly.

As a child he would enjoy copying pictures but never developed it further.

Since beginning the course he has grown and thoroughly enjoys the art work and has created many paintings.

He looks forward to each session and has begun painting at home.

His family have noticed an increasing improvement in his wellbeing.

Participant 4 has made new friends who encourage and support him and feels good to see others improving and to share thoughts and ideas.

Case Study 5

Participant 5 was referred to the Gwanwyn Club by the Red Cross. He needed help to get out of the house after suffering with his nerves after a serious illness.

Participant 5 has suffered tremendously after being diagnosed with prostate cancer and since joining the group he has unfortunately been diagnosed with cancer in the stomach.



He thoroughly enjoys attending and feels that Marian inspires him and encourages him.

He always enjoyed painting but didn't get round to doing it often as he led a busy life working as a headmaster. His confidence in art work has grown with the support he has received.

At the end of project exhibition Participant 5 made a speech thanking everyone for the opportunity he has been given.

The support and friendship given to Participant 5 has been a tremendous help to him and his wife, who joins the group for lunch after each session.

We were very proud of him as one of his paintings was sold which was a huge boost for him.

Aberystwyth Arts Centre with Age Cymru Ceredigion

Participant 1: The club's been fantastic. We've never been treated like "old people", but as a group of people with life experience who can still learn new skills. We're all still learning, it's given me a huge amount of self-esteem and self-worth. I'm no longer just Brenda who used to work for the Council and was made redundant, I'm Brenda who is creating her own art and is active with loads of other people. I'm hoping to put on a little exhibition of my work. I've been speaking to local venues about this, which is a massive transition for me.

Participant 2: I never thought that I could be creative. When I first got involved, everyone else seemed to know more than I did. Everyone seemed to be more creative, and making new friends, which I really wasn't ready for yet. I challenged myself to keep coming, and I'm so glad that I did. I now come to every session, and I've discovered that I can actually make something. I've started writing poetry, which I find comes quite easily to me. I've also started to make friends, the thought of which would have filled me with horror when I started. Even though I only live down the road, it had never occurred to me before that I could just go into an arts centre. I now feel like a "real artist" and feel like I have a right to be here. For the first time in my life, I'm being told that what I'm doing is OK. It can be hard to believe it. I'm starting to feel more confident, and finding it easier to get involved with other things now.

Participant 3: It came about for me at the perfect time. I'd unexpectedly been made redundant, and I'd lost my partner. I used to be an art and pottery teacher, but I hadn't done anything creative for a long time. The club has helped me to reconnect with my creativity, and I've even started doing my own art work again.

Participant 4: After my father passed away, my mother became ill with dementia. I became my Mum's carer, which was really challenging. I developed chronic depression and anxiety. I've been painting since I was twelve. I was inspired by Jackson Pollock, chucking paint at canvases. I suppose I was a bit of a rebel. I could never finish any of my paintings. I had loads of half-finished paintings at home, all getting damp and falling apart. Before the club, I wouldn't show my art to anyone. Now I



finish my paintings, and other people get to see them. My artwork has gained a life of its own outside of my home, and so have I.

Participant 5: When I retired, I moved to Aberystwyth to be closer to my family. I started to feel quite isolated, the only people I knew were my daughter and grandchildren. I needed to find something to do for myself. I've always been creative. I used to make costumes for theatre and television and was an interior designer and decorator for years. I've been covertly writing, drawing and painting for years, but had never shown anyone anything I'd made. The Gwanwyn club has allowed for all of this to come out into the open and start to share my art with others. I have a whole folder of various stories and poems that I'd been writing since the 1960s which are only now seeing the light of day!

Participant 3: When I first joined, I wasn't in a very good place. The creative work we've been doing here has been amazing. It's helped give me a foundation for moving on with my life

Participant 4: I was a bit nervous at first, like a child starting school for the first day. I started to get to know people, and then after a while you realise you don't just know the people, you know them through their artwork, and they know you through yours. With art, you're showing people about you. It doesn't just speak about who we are now, but also who we have been – all our pasts can come out. It helps you express who you really are inside.

Participant 5: I've learnt so much and had the opportunity to try out so many different things. The creative writing classes have opened up a whole new world for me. I've been writing new things and revisiting and rewriting some of my poems and stories from years ago. I've submitted some of my poems to a local magazine for publication. I'm always doing something creative now, whether here or at home. I've met so many lovely people, who are now really close friends. Getting together is the highlight of my week. Being creative seems to slow down the ageing process.



Volunteering for Age Cymru

I retired from my main profession as a Head Teacher in 2012 and since then I have worked in a number of places on a part time basis. I then decided to give up work to spend some time volunteering as this would still keep me occupied.

Initially I volunteered at the Civil Courts as an adviser to help the public get through the court system when they had no support themselves. I then decided that I would like to experience some diversity so I applied to work as a volunteer for Age Cymru as well, helping with administration in the Information & Advice department.

I started as a volunteer in March 2018. One of the Information & Advice officers then left her job and I was approached to see if I was interested in doing some part time employed work in that role. I agreed to 15 hours a week and was employed from May 2018 as an Information & Advice officer. As my circumstances have recently changed in January 2019 I have decided I would like to return to volunteering and I will be ending my paid employment at the end of May 2019. I will then return as a volunteer once again.

The only barrier I can think of concerning the opportunity to volunteer was the need to have an internet connection as this is where most volunteering opportunities are advertised. Also, by volunteering it did become a gateway to employment as I was approached to apply for the job because of my experience of working within the relevant department at Age Cymru.