

# Case Study



## Project

Venture Out

## Organisation

Bridgend County Borough Council

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## About the Organisation

The Mentro Allan project in Bridgend focuses on two geographical areas of the Garw and Ogmere valleys and targets the 50+ age group.

## Project overview

The project aims to improve the physical and mental well-being of 50+ in the area. When the project started there was little information on the availability of local outdoor areas. One of the aims of the project is to produce targeted information and involve participants in the production of printed materials.

In the last nine months, with the appointment of the new co-ordinator, the focus has changed from getting the project up and running to what has and what hasn't worked well. The project is also focussing on encouraging sustainability and ownership.

The activities in Bridgend include Nordic Walking, cycling, social strolls and Tai Chi. The activity timetable has increased from five hours a week to eighteen hours a week. In addition to the planned weekly activities there is a special events calendar which includes one-off events such as making wild flower hanging baskets, community gardening, map reading and a love your park week.

With a change of co-ordinator nine months ago, there has been an effort to take groups of people out of the Bridgend borough to other places of interest. There have been visits to the Millennium Quay in Llanelli, the Botanic Gardens in Carmarthenshire, the Pembrey Country Park and a trip to Kenfig Nature Reserve which incorporated a 5 kilometre walk and a talk by a historian. These visits have been very successful and have proved popular.

## What was achieved?

The project has attracted 384 participants in the three years of operation.

At the beginning only one co-ordinator was involved but another part-time employee has been appointed to deliver activities. This has allowed the co-ordinator to get more people involved with the activities.

The project has generated health related improvements through activities as well as contributing to people's social lives. The activities succeed to get people together and provide enjoyment in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. Along with the health and well-being aspect, the activities generate other benefits including an appreciation of local history and wildlife.

## How did the project get people involved?

The project has formed effective links with organisations in the area. For example, the project works in partnership with Communities First which helps involve people in the project. A Communities First representative collects one of the Nordic walk participants from her home in Lewistown and takes her to and from the activity. This particular individual has been suffering from mental health related problems and so a friendly and familiar face has supported her out of the house and this has been critical to allow her to take part in walks.

The project also works very closely with representatives from Countryside Wales as well as Parks & Playing Fields. They also worked very closely with the Local Health Board. More recently, the project has been working with branch surgeries where the support workers have found the Bridgend project an effective way of supporting individuals in the area.

The project also used the local media to advertise events as outlined in the next section.



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## What was innovative and what worked well?

The project uses the local radio stations to advertise activities. They have created two Welsh radio characters, Iestyn and Myfanwy. The radio advert is a conversation between the two characters about healthy eating and exercise and has proved a big hit within the local area.

A newsletter is also sent to 7,000 homes which summarises the purpose of the project, the activities on offer and ways of contacting the co-ordinator to get involved. The activity leaflet is also very effective as it outlines the activities available to participants and when they are being held.

The project also attempts to use the best providers when it comes to organising activity leaders for taster sessions and other events such as Bushcraft.

The project constantly refers back to users and volunteers. The project runs group sessions with service users and volunteers twice monthly. This is an opportunity for the co-ordinator to consider which activities need to be planned during the coming months. This helps ensure that the project reflects the needs of the participants which in turn helps to ensure that participation is maintained. This information is then fed to partners through the sub-group meetings.

The project has found a need to adjust to a softer approach when targeting individuals and groups of people to participate in activities. The *Slim Line* group for instance clearly wanted to get involved with the activities for quite some time, and after a while, they finally decided to take part. It takes time to develop trust and so the project found it better to plant the seed and let it germinate.

## The future...

Despite some consideration being given to spreading delivery to other parts of Bridgend, it is hoped that the project will remain in the Garw and Ogmere valleys.

Although the project has not approached Bridgend County Borough Council regarding the future of the project, the co-ordinator is preparing a paper which will outline possible plans for the future. The work being carried out for this paper will involve looking at the possibility of working with different partners and pulling different people together to fund the work.

For those individuals that have been trained by the project, it is believed that they will continue with the work although it will be difficult to achieve the same levels of service without funding.

## Were there any unexpected outcomes?

Since her time on the project, the co-ordinator feels that the project has had a general impact on the community as a whole. She has noticed a shift from particular communities sticking together to more of an involvement between communities during activities and trips. This has been one of the positive outcomes from the past couple of months.

## Lessons from the project

There are a number of lessons that can be learned from the Bridgend project in attracting participants and improving the effectiveness of projects.

- Consultation with users and volunteers. It is important to find out what people want to do and adjust the delivery to take this into account.
- Advertising through local media. The local radio advert highlights the project and communicates the message in a fun way.
- Linking with other organisations. For both delivery and attracting new participants, links with other projects play a vital part.
- Staff continuity. The project did not have a co-ordinator for five months and this had major impact on the project as there was no leadership or clear direction through this period.