


MORE HERE THAN MEETS THE EYE

AMPLIFY CYMRU STORYBOOK





**THIS BOOK IS A PRESENTATION OF
RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS
ABOUT COMMUNITIES WHICH HAVE
EMERGED THROUGH THE AMPLIFY
CYMRU PROGRAMME.**

ABOUT THIS STORYBOOK

About Amplify Cymru

For the past 12 months The Young Foundation, in collaboration with the Welsh Government and local organizations, has been working in the communities of Aberystwyth, Connah's Quay and Port Talbot to deliver a programme of participatory ethnographic research connected with support for grass-roots and early stage community innovations.

The programme is based on the idea that if we want social change to be successful and sustainable at the community level, it needs an emphasis on, and understanding of, what communities need and want, as well as what they are already doing. It needs to recognise the potential for community-led solutions which build on community insights, priorities and aspirations. This builds on a foundation of previous work and evidence around sustainable change-making and community innovation.

So often, development hasn't been sustainable because it hasn't matched people's needs and aspirations. This can be a widespread problem – across the UK and beyond. Sometimes it is based on a latent belief that communities have little to offer in a policy and development context, which can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Communities are not recognised for what they have to give and are giving, or 'given the permission' to feed into change. This programme recognises that much greater emphasis is needed than has previously been recognised by national and local policy, funding and support, on the potential of communities to drive change.

Our programme implements this idea by developing a locally-led platform for listening to and amplifying community voices (ethnographic research), developing community-led solutions (co-creation), and supporting these ideas to initiation and scale (acceleration).

About the research which formed part of Amplify Cymru

Throughout the research we have focused on listening to and understanding three key communities, Aberystwyth, Connah's Quay and Port Talbot. Over 350 people contributed to the research and been consulted on their ideas about their lives, the challenges their communities face with and the opportunities and aspirations they have, as well as the actions they are taking every day to support them. Some people have taken part in workshops, in-depth interviews and discussion sessions, and some have sat on park benches and shared a bit of their day with us, taken us coasteering or shared a cup of tea in their homes. We thank the communities for their time and support of this research, and for sharing their stories and aspirations. Taken together this research constitutes evidence on the challenges people face and the assets and opportunities present in their communities; it offers valuable insight into community actions and how we to better support and foster them. We've complemented those research activities with interviews with expert stakeholders across Wales, who have given their advice on some of the issues and opportunities for sustainable change which includes and involves communities.

This 'storybook' brings together the findings and the voices of people in each community, as well as pen portraits, and accompanies a longer research report.

IMPORTANCE OF PLACE

In Wales there is a deep sense of place. Place is a key way that people think about how to deal with, challenge and change social issues. Loyalty and connection to place can inform people's lives and preferences, and to some extent the decisions that they make or the way they experience things.

People care deeply about the places where they are from and live and this can inform the ways that they care for each other and their communities.

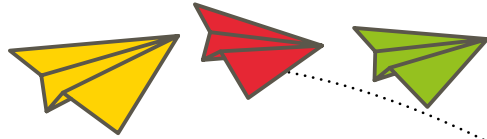
The resonance of place and its importance also helps us think about how to support people living in these communities.

Places are not simply geographical spaces but are **socially and culturally situating**. They are places where people feel they belong and where they find a sense of identity. Their feelings about place inform the commitment that people feel they have to others.

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No. I wouldn't want to move from the Quay. I was born here, spent my whole life here, and will probably die here. I feel this is the place where I belong, and it belongs to me.

Councillor, Connah's Quay



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It is nice to be back in Wales, amongst friendly people. People just stop you in the street to talk. It's great. I've never known anywhere so friendly.

Resident, Port Talbot

Equally, the places themselves, and their geographical features – hills, rivers, valleys and mountains – are great sources of pride. They generate that essential feeling of quality of life.

Although there are different communities of interest in any place – age, occupation, common interest, religion, ethnicity – **the place-based community is a strong organising principle for many people, due to proximity to others, shared history and local networks of support.**



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A lot of it is actually about what I can offer my family and myself in terms of living out in the landscape, and being outside, and being able to be outside as much as possible. I love being in nature and I love the woods and I love the sea and the mountains. And I think it's really, really important for me that my children experience that as well and don't have this whole thing where their lives are inside and they're not experiencing what's going on.

Employee, Heritage sector, Aberystwyth

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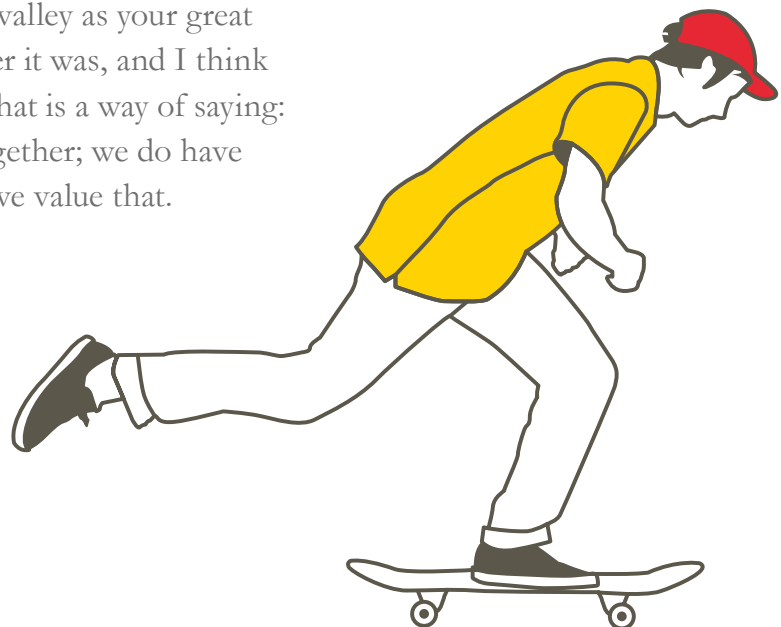
I love that if you meet someone you don't know, you will talk to them about where they come from, their work, their family until you find some connection, no matter how tenuous – that their great, great Auntie Nora knew someone from the same valley as your great Uncle's Mum, or whatever it was, and I think that's very powerful, as that is a way of saying: Yes, we are all knitted together; we do have things in common, and we value that.

Ecologist, Aberystwyth

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In Wales you ask 'where are you from?'... In England you ask 'what do you do?'

Director, Employment Sector, Wales



BARRIERS AND INEQUALITIES

Yet many people report feeling that their place is overlooked in favour of big cities or celebrated beauty spots in Wales. People in each [case study] community felt, to various degrees, that their places – be these whole towns or certain areas within the towns – were not recognised for all the positive things that they had to offer.

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The concept that people have got of Port Talbot is that it is just one dirty steel town. And actually, if you come inland just a little bit you can see what we've got. It's just wrong to consider it that way.

Resident, Port Talbot

Instead, there is a shared belief that those from outside often hold negative perceptions of them, which are based on ideas of decline and deprivation, or as places in need of outsider help.

This runs counter to people's own experience of the rich ideas and assets in each place.

However, people do increasingly feel (in some cases, have felt for years) that they have fewer opportunities to 'get on' or achieve in their places than they once had. This is particularly expressed around routes to employment, and the mismatch between the pathways and opportunities that exist in each of the places. **Moving away for opportunities has become a fact of life.**

Hidden poverty is an issue for people living in some communities. Zero hours contracts, seasonal work, and high housing costs can feed into this and undermine wellbeing, especially when combined with threats to valued public services. For some people, there is a sense of a 'two tier' society divided between those who can and cannot access the high quality of life.

People can also be disadvantaged by their geographical isolation which makes it more difficult to access the opportunities and services that they require, especially disadvantaging those who are less mobile or do not own a car. This adds to the sense of being overlooked.

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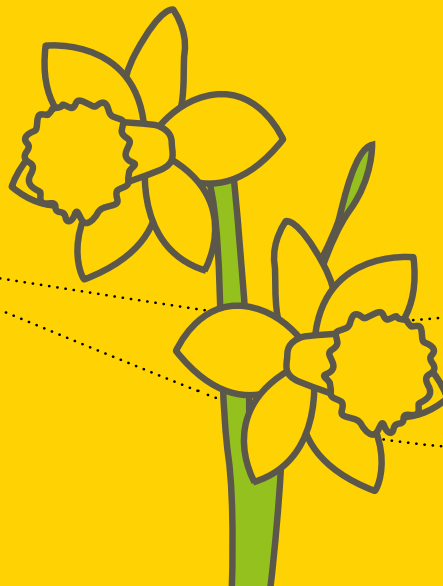
It wasn't my desire to get out of Port Talbot [when I went to study at university]. I was homesick. It was assumed that people would move.

Director, Engineering firm, Port Talbot

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Mental health treatment is just a joke. You get no support as a family, and then obviously it is the problem of all the distances that people have to travel to get help and support... These are the kinds of extremes of living in a place like Aberystwyth where you're at the end of the line. Which can be an idyllic place to live until you need help.

Heritage sector employee, Aberystwyth



Concerns are often expressed as loss. This loss is experienced in many ways, for example the loss of industry in some towns. **Loss can also relate to shared values or knowledge, or the loss of mutually reinforcing cultural and social practices that help make a place feel like home.**

This loss also feeds into a fear about what **the future for young people will be** – what opportunities may be available to them, and what will happen to the community if people continue to move away.

But for newcomers things can also be very difficult, and sometimes excluding:

These experiences – of loss, isolation and a lack of opportunities – can impact the way that people experience the places where they live.

It can feel that this preference to be part of a local network deeply grounded in place is overlooked and not recognised in policy terms or as part of knowledge about the community when decisions are made.

This can add to the feeling of a ‘two-tier society’ in another way – where there is a divide between those who make the decisions about a place and those who are impacted by them. Development being ‘done to’ rather than involving people is a key concern.

People want to have more of a say in decisions about their community – decisions such as the choice of replacement for the well-loved lido which burnt down; over the use of community spaces such as disused shops; or about the decisions on where new housing will be located.

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I’m born and bred in the Quay, but there doesn’t seem to be as many people you know around anymore, who are from the Quay.

Community group discussion, Connah’s Quay

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I can’t find a place and things to do here. People are kind, respectful, polite. But we cannot make friends. We stay together, we go to [name’s] house... People are polite, kind, but they are closed.

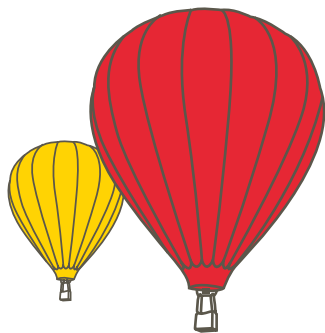
Refugee, Aberystwyth

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Our voices are not heard. We have forms which we fill in with housing complaints but the housing officer actually says that they ‘go in the bin’... I do feel sorry for people; lots of people are involved in the area but they don’t listen. Those in power... think we are all scum.

Resident, Connah’s Quay





These are inequalities. They are deeply embedded. They surface in lack of employment, lack of further education opportunities, industries being shut down, or a lack of local health or transport services. Geographical remoteness can become social or political remoteness or division.

Inequalities surface in the perceptions that others have of your town, or the fact that your town is becoming a commuter belt where you don't know people any more, that they tried to shut the motorway entry to your town as if as if people visiting wasn't important.

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When they closed the slip road to the M4 I was thinking ‘my god, the one town that suffers from the scar of the M4 can't use the M4’. And when they're on about it being a safety issue shouldn't you then close all those junctions around Cardiff and Newport because they get just as congested, but oh no they wouldn't dare do that but you can do it to Port Talbot. Why is that?

Director, Engineering firm, Port Talbot

It is felt when others in the place you live seem to be able to achieve a quality of life that seems unreachable, despite the hours you work, when the poverty in your community remains hidden and unrecognised.

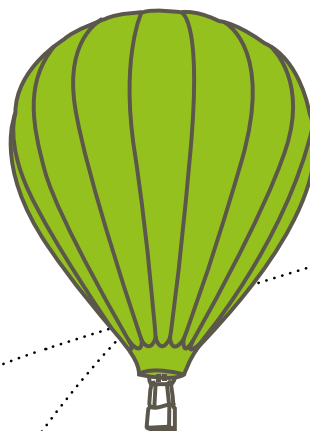
It can manifest in having to travel an hour and a half to access mental health services from Aberystwyth; or the fact that the college campus based in Port Talbot doesn't offer A-levels, instead young people have to travel to the campus in Neath, which is both geographically and socially distant; or in having to travel to Chester for your son to play in a football club because there is not seen to be enough demand in Connah's Quay.

It is felt when the place you live has such a bad reputation that people just don't seem to see beyond the bad news stories.

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It doesn't matter what we do, decisions are being made anyway.

Walking tour, Port Talbot



ASSETS IN PLACES

Each town has a wealth of natural resources such as mountains, beaches and rivers which provide opportunities for recreational activities which contribute to people's quality of life and help build a sense of satisfaction in place.

These landscape and recreational features influence and help people's wellbeing at difficult times, especially as they are free to access.

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Since we've lost a lot of employment... I've noticed a massive increase in the people down on the beach, just walking down on the beach, taking their kids down on the beach playing football or a game of cricket, because it's not an expensive day out.

Boxing Secretary, Port Talbot

There are also natural resources which are not widely known – Port Talbot has a world class mountain bike centre, reputed to be one of the top ten in the world, and Connah's Quay a beautiful park and riverside – these places give people a deep sense of pride.

People often come together to maintain and sustain them – there is a lot of care for the natural environment.

Likewise, people enjoy the landscapes and gain pleasure from simply walking about their towns.

Each place is rich in history, activities and culture. This is often well celebrated, for example through heritage trails, local history groups, theatre, music and sport.

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I love the beach, I love the mountain walks, the reservoirs. I've got a dog so I love exploring with the dog.

Christian worker, Port Talbot

They are a source of pride, adding to community bonds. This sense of place-based community is especially vibrant at **times of celebration**. Festivals such as the Senses of the Dragon Festival in Port Talbot, the Aberystwyth town and lantern festival, and the Connah's Quay festival are events where **people come together to celebrate their towns and all of the positive things they value about their places**.

These events **bring to life and make visible the sense of community** that exists in less visible forms at other times, **allowing people to celebrate their areas, and share their own story of their worth and value. They help challenge negative narratives and perceptions**.

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To have a recognised
community park, for a place
like us. That's something.

Workshop discussion, Connah's Quay



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One of the most important things to me is knowing my neighbours, and knowing we would help each other. If people lose their dog, or need driving somewhere, people do that. They help each other.

Heritage sector employee, Aberystwyth



Close social proximity and supportive networks are also a significant part of life and part of what makes these places feel unique and special to the people who live there.

For some this is historical, born from working hard together and facing tough challenges together. This has created deep social bonds which help a sense of socially influenced resilience.

Kinship and close social ties are strongly valued and seen to be a key feature of what makes people want to live and stay.

In everyday life people support each other.

People in each community are particularly proud of how hard they work: both in employment and to ensure the sustainability of the towns resources and finances by looking after natural resources for the future, and in the things they do to for the community.

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We are really good at surviving hard times. We had the steel industry collapse with most of the population out of work, but we made it through! Those bonds from years ago are still strong because the people here survived together.

Health and Safety Officer, Connah's Quay

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The community is a wonderful place to live. There is a lot of generosity. For instance, [supermarket] have been very supportive of the foodbank but the women generally working in [the supermarket] have given their time and resources to help us.

Volunteer, Port Talbot

Care for others is a particular value for people who live in these communities. People in each place feel themselves to be mutually supportive and help each other practical ways as an everyday action.

They act on it at **different scales** to look after each other.

This support provides a sense of resilience and acknowledgement, which is even more important when it is felt that others have a negative perception of the place.

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There's a lot of good people in Connah's Quay. There is a lot of good people who want to do good things for Connah's Quay. Not in ambitious sort of way, but want to do things... Not for their own personal gain but for the good of the community. Born and bred in Connah's Quay. They want to make Connah's Quay the best place that it can be.

Teacher, Connah's Quay



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You don't disappear under the radar. People do see you. People care here.

Social worker, Aberystwyth

ACTION AND SOCIAL INNOVATION

Across each community people are taking actions to improve the quality of life for those who live there. The people in each community are brimming with charity, action, goodwill, and social innovation – this takes many forms, such as schemes to challenge food waste or encourage greater activity in public green space.

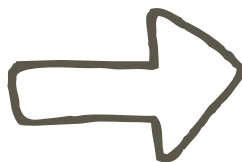
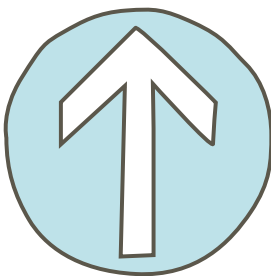
People have a strong interest in supporting local initiatives because of their loyalty to the places they live and their love for the community they live in.

These actions are often focussed around four key areas:

- **Creating a sense of community and belonging:** In the face of change or antisocial behaviour; for example a community café as an affordable space for people to come together, to make new friends, and learn new skills; or a town festival to bring people together despite their different backgrounds and interests.
- **Challenging loss:** Preserving or repurposing local assets for current and future generations; for example the cleaner in a local community centre preventing its closure by taking it on herself or the 20 year old young person opting to run the local library.
- **Creating alternatives through sustainable living goals:** For example challenging food waste by acting as an intermediary between supermarkets and local charities; or campaigning for the care and protection of green spaces.
- **Supporting one another to act:** Offering support to others in the community; for example the boxing gym acting as an unofficial jobs centre; or community forums which support community led ideas by bringing them together and marketing good news stories.

People across communities in Wales want the ideas and actions people take to be recognised and valued.

But they also recognise that they need support – they do not feel like they can do it all on their own. Providing support for them is essential for people across communities in Wales.



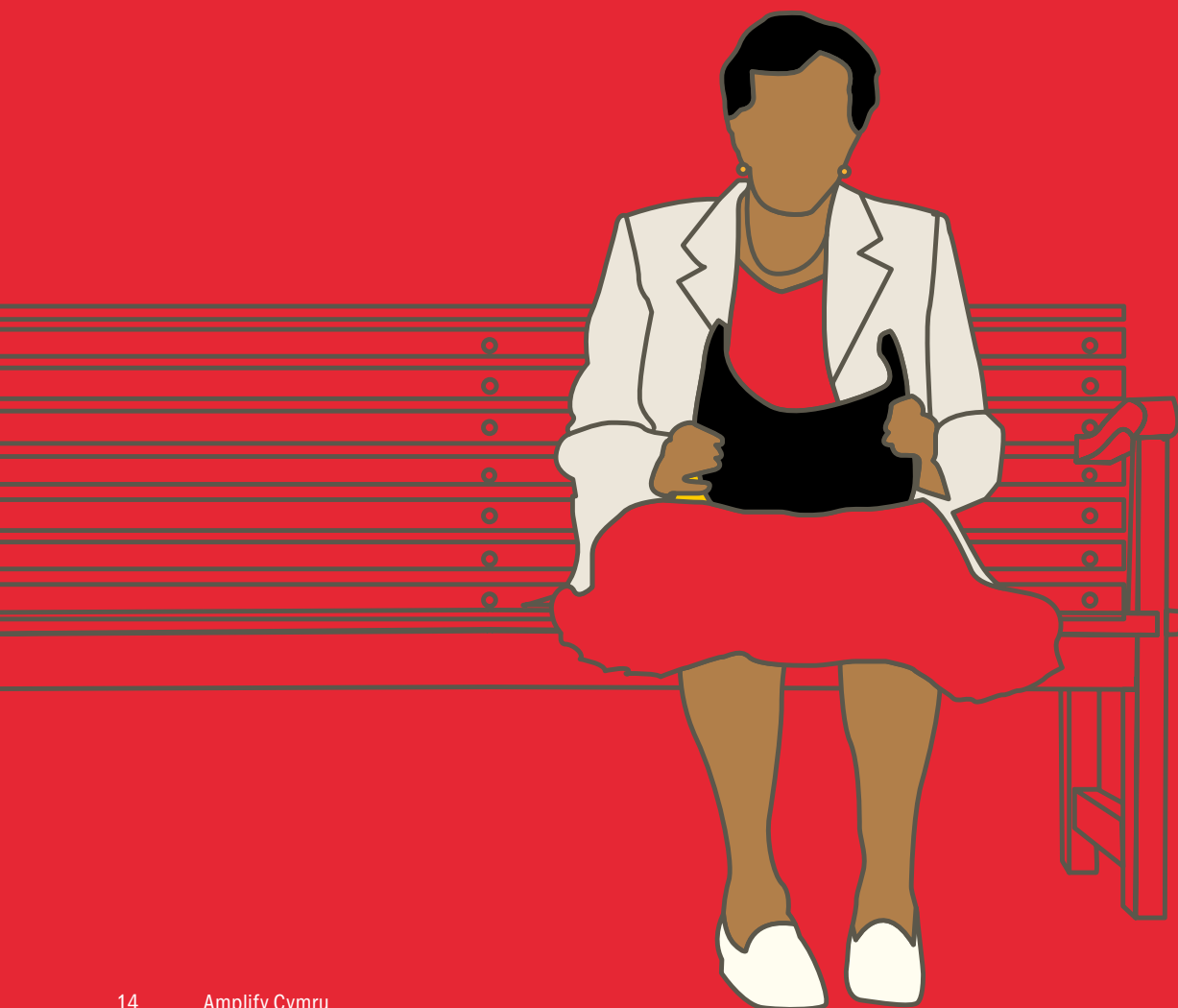


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I'd been a cleaner [in the community centre] for 30 years... We're part of the community, I do things with the church, the little things. I've always helped [my husband] in his community work, helped as in gone and done the shopping, gone and organised things. I thought well, instead of it closing I want to take it on, I want to keep it open. We need something in the community for the community.

Resident, Port Talbot

LIST OF SOCIAL INNOVATIONS



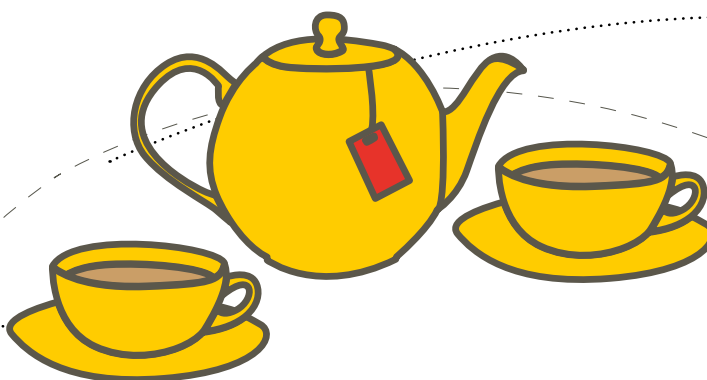
COMMUNITY AND BELONGING

Libby's Dementia Café: This already successful community café seeks to offer a programme of fun and engaging activities, as well as providing a communal space for people with dementia and those who support them to get information/advice and connect to others with similar problems.

Connah's Quay Town Council infrastructure project: The town council are taking forward a project centred on integrating formal transport infrastructure with local needs. The aim is to better make use of formal transport lines and provisions to enhance public spaces and the enjoyment of Connah's Quay residents.

Town-wide arts festival: Building on Aberystwyth's rich cultural offering, this project takes the form of a large-scale creative festival. Seeking to employ the asset of the abundance of artists in Aberystwyth, the festival would bring the people of Aberystwyth and visitors together with local artists to take part in a range of creative workshops and showcases.

St. Paul's – Development of Community Centre and Café: St Paul's Methodist Centre is a valuable community resource comprising rooms which are rented out at low cost to community groups. A weekday coffee bar run by volunteers from the church provides snacks and drinks at affordable prices. This year we are celebrating our Silver Jubilee as the building was opened 25 years ago. We would like to raise the profile of the centre as a valuable community resource whilst also developing and refurbishing the facilities to ensure that it continues to be a valuable community resource for the next 25 years. This will include practical refurbishments and developing the coffee bar to increase its potential as a hub for the community and with the aim of increasing community cohesion.



CREATING ALTERNATIVES

SHARE – Supporting Homeless Assisting Refugees Everywhere: A skill-share model that will provide workshops, courses and opportunities to people who are homeless or have been recently housed around Connah’s Quay. The courses are devised in response to participant needs and skill deficits. The aim of SHARE is to break the cycle of homelessness, increase individuals’ chances of remaining in a tenancy and help them to obtain either paid or voluntary employment.

Aber Food Surplus: Aber Food Surplus aims to reduce food waste by redistributing edible fit-for-consumption food to contribute to local food security, and facilitate attitude and behaviour change focused on food sustainability. The project aims to provide volunteering opportunities for the local community enhancing social capital. Furthermore, the project hopes to develop into a food surplus café and “hub” of community activity inspiring and empowering local people to deliver community-led initiatives and events, for example skill shares, cookery classes, and courses.

Tyfu Aber/Grow Aber: A network of gardens around Aberystwyth which will provide fresh produce for sale to local businesses, including the university, hotels and restaurants, as well as to the public. It will provide volunteering opportunities for the general public and therapeutic placements for people with mental health problems and other special needs, and it will hold courses and social events in order to share gardening skills with the local community and bring people together around food.

Arts on Prescription: A programme in partnership with HAUL Arts in Health and the Penparcau Community Forum. The programme will offer residents of Penparcau the opportunity to engage in creative opportunities that will enhance individual self-esteem, health and wellbeing and promote community confidence and cohesion; proposed initiatives include arts workshops, informal training, peer to peer support groups and a toolkit on event planning.

Striate (Creative Network): A community focused film and music production-company. Aiming to get people who have been long term housebound, unemployed or depressed in Port Talbot involved in being creative and community activity. Starting with an online series about Welsh life conceptualized and created by the community.



DOING TOGETHER

Woodwork to Wellness: Bringing together all manner of "craft" skills in a fully-equipped workshop environment, aiming to put people at ease while also providing a space for citizens to be challenged with a range of hands-on tasks.

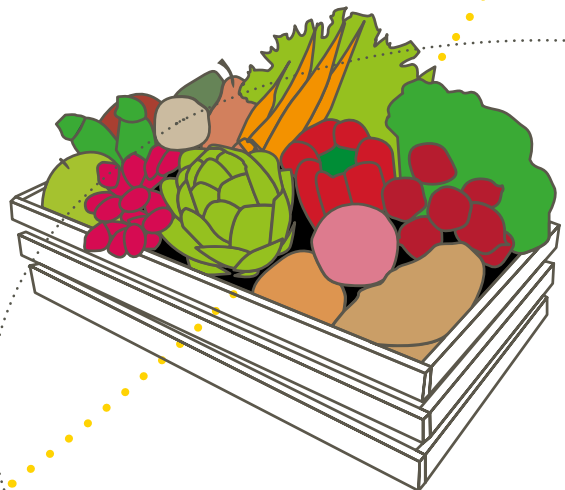
Deeside.com community news forum: Building an online hyperlocal community news forum to project positive stories about Connah's Quay. Providing a valuable platform for community based initiatives, public events in the town and social entrepreneurs engaging in social business projects. It aims to create increased community cohesion and foster pride and recognition.

Community Gym: By working with the Local Education Authority, this project will support local vulnerable children in achieving their best educational attainment through all varieties of sport.

Radio Deeside community hub network: Creating a Community Hub Network, anchored by a building that is accessible to all groups in the community and will build strong working relationships with other local community services. By creating a unique network between a range of local group, groups will be able to exchange advice, share resources, and pool knowledge to facilitate in providing the best possible service throughout Connah's Quay and the surrounding area.

Ninja Kitchen: An alternative education community café with a training kitchen and meet-and-greet space, which aims to engage with young people. Targeted at youth 11-16, the project aims to engage and motivate them through training in cookery and front of house skills. The café would also host coffee mornings called 'knit and natter' and bring the elderly out of their homes to meet youngsters as a way of promoting cross-generational understanding.

Let's Talk About Food: Developing a one-day interactive educational package for primary school children, aged 7 and above, centred on making bread together. The aim of the day would be to provide children with an informative and enjoyable session where they can learn about, and discuss, key food-related issues. This include how food reaches our plates; how land is used; the implications of climate change; the implications of population growth; questions of social justice (from farm to table); what it means to have a 'healthy' diet.



WHY WE DO IT

places to care and do

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My biggest support has been community connections. In a lot of ways we can help each other; in some cases connect and do joint projects and in other ways just support each other in using each others' services.

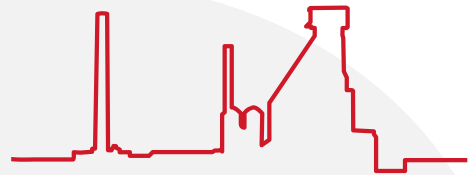
Anne-Marie, Striate



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[W]e like the idea that community can do something about it [food waste] themselves – they can make a change, take on retailers, establish a community solution.

Chris Byrne, Food Hub



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Inequality of opportunities [drives me to keep doing the work that I do]. I want to ensure that the most vulnerable people have access to the services that they need.

Chris Ryan, Arts on Prescription



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I like seeing people come together and facilitating that.

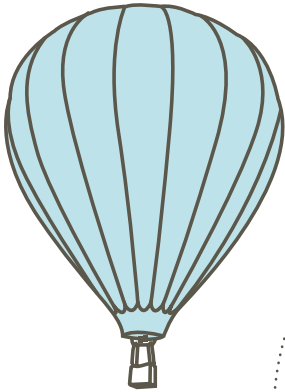
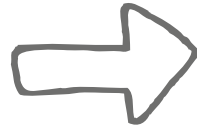
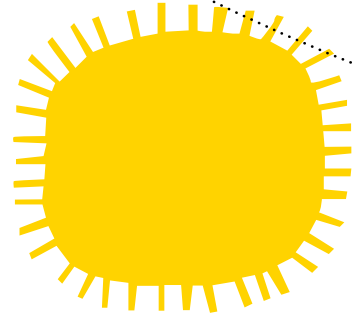
Ruth Flatman, St Paul's Methodist Lunch Club

places to belong and be

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I want to make the best out of a bad situation. Sometimes it's their last chance, as most of the kids I work with are on the border of being excluded. I would never give up on them. The school system has given up on them and not given them the right tools to start with.

Sera Coles, Ninja Kitchen



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I'm involved in lots of things on a voluntary basis, but the reason I have the luxury of being able to spend time on those things is because I'm in a reasonably well paid, flexible job where nobody is monitoring me. If I didn't have the job I've got, then I wouldn't have the luxury of being involved in voluntary projects because I wouldn't have the energy and I wouldn't have the time.

Naomi Salmon, Let's talk about food

places to celebrate

ABERYSTYWTH

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I don't know whether it's particular to Aber, but I do think we have a very strong community. And it's not something that we notice ourselves until other people mention them.

Heritage sector employee



PEN PORTRAIT ABERYSTWYTH

By Cath Sherrell, community researcher

Aberystwyth is a small town on the coast of Mid Wales. It has a population of 13,000 which swells to approximately 22,000 with students, and another 6,000 in the immediate surrounding area. Aber has a remarkable number of facilities and institutions for a town of its size including the University, Bronglais Hospital, The Arts Centres and the National Library of Wales. **It is in a beautiful isolated rural location with the sea in front and mountains behind, and yet has a many of the facilities and opportunities of a much larger place.**

“

I think everyone who lives in Aberystwyth really likes the place. It's quite a distinctive place and it's probably a bit to do with its' isolation from any other similar sized towns. But it's sort of developed its own culture.

Local councillor

sports clubs and opportunities to get involved. There are lots of community choirs, theatre groups, artist groups and societies, community activist groups, Welsh language organisations and events, a local monthly glossy magazine set up by local people specifically to celebrate Aberystwyth and its people. Aberystwyth is also distinctive in that there is a lot of Welsh spoken in the town and surrounding area. **There are many, many festivals** which add to the vibrancy of the town celebrating photography, horror, food, film, art, music and big public events like the Carnival, and Aberystwyth town show and Lantern parade.

People like this about living here – they love the fact that it is quirky and unique. But some people worry that it could lose what makes it special if they allow the development of too many large supermarkets / shops. However, others are desperate for more choice without having to travel too far. Sometimes its isolation can feel like its undoing, especially when services seem to be under threat.

Aber is also a seaside town with a pier, three beaches and a beautiful Victorian Promenade.

It is small and easy to get around – people like the fact that they can walk to most places.

The different areas of the town have quite distinct identities, with Penparcau in particular having a strong sense of community and a more established, less transient population.

People here are used to doing things for themselves. The fact that it is so far from other places means that people tend to be quite self-sufficient and pro-active and make things happen.

There are lots of groups, organizations and societies. There are many community events,

Aberystwyth can give a very good quality of life, and there is the feeling that you can live here on not very much – particularly people who have chosen to move here specifically for the quality of life, and are prepared to live a certain lifestyle to stay. **However, this can hide the fact that for many, it can be a real struggle here. The number of professional organisations and as one person put it ‘middle class visibility’ can be a stark contrast to the lives of people on low incomes and benefits. Along with the well paid professional jobs, there are a lot of minimum wage, zero-hours posts.**

The isolation can be a strength but also its undoing. There was intense local worry and a very active campaign when the hospital was threatened with closure. The next nearest is one and a half hours drive away and over two hours by public transport. The threat of reduced services remains, and some key... but the threat of reduced services remain, and some key departments, like the mental health ward have gone, causing dreadful problems to individuals and families affected. **Rents and housing costs are relatively expensive here, and should you lose your job, there can be very limited alternative employment opportunities, especially for young people.** Transport links are very limited. It is also an ‘end of the line’ town, and has a relatively high proportion of vulnerable people. Generally, there is still a supportive attitude to people in this situation – something which isn’t always the case elsewhere.

There is great community cohesion. It is a very friendly and easy place to live. It keeps coming top in many ‘Best of’ lists: the safest, the friendliest, the place people are most likely to say hello to each other in the street, the place you’re most likely to get a hug (giving rise to the title ‘the Cwtch (Welsh for hug) capital of Wales!’), and whilst many of these are probably not the result of the most rigorous of research, this feeling was very definitely borne out by many of the people I spoke to.

Aber is small and people know and look after each other. For example, when the floods happened, there was a wonderful community response with many people helping clear up / offering places for people to stay / donating clothes and other items. There is also a strong feeling that people look out for each other – often quietly, but people are aware of each other and willing to help if necessary. It is also very diverse and tolerant. It was one of the first places in the UK to take a group of Syrian refugees. There was a very active local pressure group pushing for this, but it was also strongly supported by the local authority and AM / MP. The welfare officer at the University told us that it is known in the student trans community as a safe place to transition, and has had a long reputation as a safe place for LGBT people – not the obvious thing people would imagine when they think of a small town in Mid Wales.

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There is lots going on for different communities. It is creative. You have to be prepared to find things and join in.

Mental health nurse





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There's a good community. For example during the terrible flooding a couple of years ago, everyone pulled together, it really showed the community spirit.

Council leader

VOICES OF ABERYSTWYTH

“

There's a lot of food establishments in Aberystwyth now that are really – you know, if you came here from London or wherever you'd say this is really nice, it would fit in with a sort of cool Londoner sensibility even.

Local councillor

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One of the things people really value about the area is that it is a 'safe place' – the people I work with tell me that it is 'a good place to bring up children'.

Youth pastor

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We really like living here. It's great for us as a family. We very enjoy the town. It's small and friendly, but doesn't feel too rural. It has all the things you need and, particularly if you live in town, all within walking distance.

Vicar

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It often feels like there are 3 events on that I'd like to attend that clash on one night!

Student nurse

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There's lots of free stuff in Aber, like the beach, outside, mountains, nature, which you can enjoy with no money at all. And being outside is a key thing for quality of life.

Workshop discussion

CONNAH'S QUAY

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To be Connah's Quay is to
be proud of Connah's Quay.
Living and belonging here.

Retired steel worker

PEN PORTRAIT CONNAH'S QUAY

By Andy Dunbobbin, community researcher

The town of Connah's Quay is located in North East Wales and is in the county of Flintshire. Two other towns, Shotton and Queensferry, are in close proximity and together the three towns are known as Deeside, after to the River Dee. Connah's Quay's population is approximately 17,500 whereas the cumulative of Deeside is

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I can simply say straightaway if you ask me Connah's Quay... Because it's small but big. It's clean, tidy. Don't know, just like it.

Polish business owner

22,000. **Having lived in Connah's Quay the whole of my life and all my Mum's side of the family being from 'the Quay', I found out (by carrying out a more focused approach through the research) how Connah's Quay has changed so much in more than just geographical terms.**

Connah's Quay is a large town with three traditional areas within it. Locally they are named as West End, The Park and Wepre. People from these areas have a 'slang' identity: Westenders, Parkies and Wepre. For example, the people who live in Wepre are thought of as better off because housing is larger. **Despite the different parts of the town, the place Connah's Quay has a real sense of belonging for its people.**

Wepre Park is where all residents of Connah's Quay connect with each other. It is valued as a place where people from all different parts of Connah's Quay feel able to belong. It is used by 200,000 visitors each year. I think it would be fair to say that the attraction of Wepre Park encourages people from neighbouring towns to congregate there, especially when the Connah's Quay Festival is on. Yet you can go to the top of Wepre, on the outskirts of the town, and feel a distance – there are no shops in this part of Connah's Quay and it is emotively distant from the town. Local transport is a problem in this part of the town. Buses aren't regular and people are heavily reliant on cars or taxis.

Across most views in Connah's Quay you can see the steelworks and the industrial estate. Shotton steelworks used to play a large part of how the communities of Connah's Quay and neighbouring towns would integrate. **It was the largest employer in the area and gave the whole of Deeside a strong local economy. And there were local independent shops back then when the High Street was much busier. Connah's Quay market used to have a large number of traders coming along. People feel that these things have been lost with the great number of redundancies from the steelworks.**

From the conversations I've had, the feeling of nostalgia is strong, especially with the older 'Quayites'. People who move into Connah's Quay are accepted after time but if your family is from the Quay, you're accepted far quicker. Connah's Quay people are proud, hardworking people. **The are strong, independent people who are not afraid of giving support to those in need.**

There are a number of groups who offer so much to the people of Connah's Quay. Friends of Wepre Park, Libby's Café, and the Quay Watermans Association to name a few. They all volunteer their time but can also feel distant from each other.

Throughout the Amplify Cymru programme, people have said how useful it has been in bringing together people who do not usually work with each other.

Connah's Quay has a lot of assets, ranging from community cafés to a swimming pool and a heritage centre. **The people of Connah's Quay know how important these places are, along with open spaces and they really value them.**

The swimming baths have recently been taken over by the community through a Community Asset Transfer. The people here deeply value these resources as well as the easy access to open spaces.

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I love the Quay. I like living here as my family are close to me and also because of family connections historically.

Councillor

“

Well you look at everything that's going on now, there's more now with the festivals that are going on. The community events that you see at the Civic Hall and up at Wepre Park. There is loads of stuff going on, and that was never as popular as it is now. I think that's a good thing.

Medic

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I admire Wepre Park because it's a hub for the Quay. There's always something to do up there. It brings people together.

Town and County Councillor

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The local people are sometimes shy to new people that they meet. Perhaps this gives a negative reflection? But then when there is an opportunity to actually interact with each other, through a project or something with a shared goal, the group thrives and develops stronger bonds.

Health and Safety Officer





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Well we've got everything haven't we really? You've got the swimming baths, the library, the leisure centres, the sports centre, the college, the parks, the castle... There's loads to do, the shops are good.

First aider

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Most people who live in the Quay work and although the town has grown and more people have moved into the area, they seem friendly enough. I love the Quay. I like living here as my family are close to me and also because of family connections historically.

Town and County Councillor

VOICES OF CONNAH'S QUAY

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We have lived in Connah's Quay for 52 years. It was an easy choice to stay. We have good neighbours and our family around us. It is an easy trip to Chester and also to the sea-side areas. It's a short walk to our local park, which thanks to the improvements is an excellent place for children and adults to enjoy.

Retired resident

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I still enjoy, with my little one, the delights of Wepre Park.

Boxer

PORT TALBOT

“

The thing with Port Talbot it is I guess you've got to live it to appreciate it. I mean, there's always something going on around here. I guess that, you know, if I went to any other town this size I would just look at it as a normal town. Only if you live here do you kind of understand it.

Community activist



PEN PORTRAIT PORT TALBOT

By Cam Boam, community researcher

The town of Port Talbot, which is part of the county borough of Neath Port Talbot, and the Afan Valley, which overlooks the town, have a joint population size of roughly 51,000. These areas are rich in both human and natural resources. As a community researcher, I have spent the past 8 months getting to know the communities living and working in these places and in that time it has become increasingly clear to me that Port Talbot and the Valley don't get the celebratory attention they deserve.

Port Talbot and the Valley are brimming with hard working, innovative individuals who are committed to their communities. That commitment shows through in the locals' willingness to make connections with others and talk things through. As one resident of Port Talbot described it to me:

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You could knock on-,
you go out there and you
knock ten doors and I
guarantee you ten doors
would probably offer
you a cup of tea, Come
on in, have a chat, come
and sit down.

Self-employed, Port Talbot

Port Talbot town has a diverse range of communities within it. Most well-known is the Sandfields estate which was originally built to house the steel works workforce and now, according to locals, has a concentrated number of younger residents. Margam, by contrast, is known locally for having a 'millionaires' row'. Margam itself is served by a road that runs from this area, through to Taibach and then straight into the centre of town. The road is far from uniform, with a mixture of commercial premises, community run buildings, homes and indications of industry. Then there are residents who live near the base of the M4 and the road networks that connect with it, who incorporate its geography into their day-to-day lives.

A lot of the individuals I've met in these communities and in the villages in the Afan Valley have invested qualities such as dedication to community and innovative thinking into building a wide range of informal support networks. **I have come across several examples of community run organisations that work to ensure a flow of information within the community**, from community run libraries, which not only provide access to literature, but also run enriching activities such as film nights, to a hyperlocal news service that was run by volunteers who sourced news from the community itself.

I have also commonly found that community run organisations offer so much more than their primary service. Organisations like Bulldogs Boxing Gym not only provide opportunities to improve fitness, they also support young people into employment. The Aberavon Rugby Club makes its facilities freely available to all community groups. TDM dance school, in Sandfields, designs classes around the needs of its community. These are just a few examples, but each example is indicative of the way that many organisations in Port Talbot and the Valley provide holistic services. **‘Service’ is perhaps the wrong word. Some of these organisations and centres have been described as second homes, places for personal growth and sharing of values.**

While it’s currently the case that Port Talbot town doesn’t have a museum or an arts centre, this isn’t a reflection of the creativity in the town and Valley. As well as the dance schools, and amateur theatre groups, including a youth theatre, the area also has several festivals and a regular music night in Taibach. The Taibach Triangle, as it is known, takes place on a Sunday with three bands playing in three of the Taibach pubs. The night has become a regular fixture for a lot of local people and another point for community gathering. The creative industries in general are becoming more prominent in Port Talbot, with multiple television, film and video production studios also established in the area.

There are some concerns within the community about the futures of young people in Port Talbot and the Valley; however the young people themselves are very aspirational, with many school age children planning to become teachers, scientists, chefs, footballers, midwives, professional rugby players, drivers, professional swimmers, service men and women, firefighters, civil engineers, car dealers, journalists and artists. Their own concerns for the town and

villages in the Valley focused on the protection of the environment. I also came across many examples of young people in their twenties and thirties setting up organisations and businesses for themselves and for the benefit of their communities. **Young people in Port Talbot are very proud of their town, only moving away for employment opportunities, and often returning later.**

The people of Port Talbot and the Valley are also especially proud of their beach and hills. For many these are what make Port Talbot and the Valley a beautiful place to live. Aberavon beach stretches for 3 miles, skirting Sandfields and overlooking Swansea Bay. I’ve walked along the promenade there on a bright August day and enjoyed the buzz coming from the Aquasplash playpool and the cafes. I’ve also constantly enjoyed the views up towards the Valley and walks along parts of the bike track at the top of the Valley. Both beach and Valley are regular sites for local sports and leisure activities, as well as backdrops to everyday life. **It is undoubtedly true that the identity of those living in the area is strongly tied in with this natural landscape and most, if not all, seek to preserve it.**

“

We’ve got a beautiful beach and lovely countryside and the people here are great. I think so anyway. I don’t know. It is what you make of it and some people, sort of, condemn it for being terrible and then are miserable. I think if you’ve got a more positive attitude to it, you find positive things about it.

Community activist



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We don't sell ourselves enough. We have a world class mountain bike centre 2 miles up the Valley – one of the top ten in the world.

Boxing coach

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Those people with that more negative narrative, they tend to make more noise...that's why community organising and building and engaging that sense of community cohesion and energy is so important because it's the only way to tackle that narrative and I hope one day to defeat it.

MP

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There's nothing wrong with Port Talbot, it's a lovely place to be. Don't get me wrong, it has the same problems like a lot of other places out there. You know, there are people on the poverty line, like a lot of places. Yes, you drive past the steelworks and it smells. At the same time there are wonderful things, there are beautiful things about Port Talbot as well.

Business owner

VOICES OF PORT TALBOT

“

Port Talbot reminds me of where I grew up; I think it's a great place. I grew up in a mining village, in a mining community. So whilst I say it was quite intimidating at first, I think it's because I hadn't lived or worked anywhere like this for about 10 years.

Manager, Charity Sector



WHAT WOULD PEOPLE LIKE?

Suggestions for a fairer future

- We would like the things that we are doing to be recognised and supported – through the business environment, through linking up with others, by being able to access networks which we've felt and been excluded from.
- We would like better marketing and telling of the good stories, not just the bad ones – we want to see alternative media outlets, and local press celebrating the good things going on in each town.
- **We would like not to be scrutinised by outsiders for all the wrong reasons, but to be recognised for the right reasons too.**
- **We would like recognition of the hidden poverty that exists and responsibility from all people and organisations in a place towards fighting it.**
- We would like to be involved. We would like to be the drivers of decisions at a local level. We want to be part of development, not have it done to us.
- We should be celebrating the change makers! Recognising what people are doing in the communities to make change happen.
- **We would like recognition of how hard community organisations work – often doubling up to facilitate important networks and to provide essential support that is being lost elsewhere.**

We want people to recognise that despite all of the things we are doing, we can't do it alone. We need help and support to make sure that everyone has the opportunity to 'get on' in these places that they love and care for.





For more information please email us at Amplify@youngfoundation.org