



Rural Wisdom Evaluation

Case Study 4: Bringing the community together through Rural Wisdom - Leeswood Community Café, January 2020



At the start of Rural Wisdom each community came together to discuss the key issues for older people living there and how Rural Wisdom could help. These issues helped inform the priorities for the Development Workers, their engagement with older people and work with organisations. The following case study highlights one example of what has been achieved and sustained in Leeswood, North Wales.

“We’d been talking about trying to do a café ourselves for quite a few years but we’d felt it was a bit too much for us to do individually.”

(Local resident)

Every Thursday morning the Leeswood Community Centre opens its doors and invites local residents in for a cup of tea, slice of toast and friendly conversation. The Community Café, or **Sunshine Café**, as named by local school children, started over a year ago in response to older people raising the need for something that involved the community as a whole. Through Rural Wisdom the Development Worker has been a catalyst and co-ordinator for setting up the café. It has provided an opportunity that people at a local church had previously identified as a need.

Not only does the café provide a venue for people to share a joke with friends, enjoy an affordable cup of coffee, or find out what’s going on locally, it has been an example of how older people can contribute to the change they want to see in rural communities.

From the very outset volunteers have, over eight weekends, helped to decorate the room in readiness for opening; they have joined the café’s Age Friendly Steering Group and committed to setting up and running the café on a weekly basis.

The café also provides a forum for people to have a voice as councillors who attend can chat to local residents and find out what people’s issues are.



Bringing the community together - A hub for information and learning

Shortly after opening, café volunteers explained that the café offered something that was intergenerational. They'd had a parent with a 3-day old baby come in and had customers who were over 90 years old. There was a feeling that it had become part of people's routines to come into the café.

“As people leave they say ‘see you next week’.”

A year on, people involved with the café are still singing it's praises:

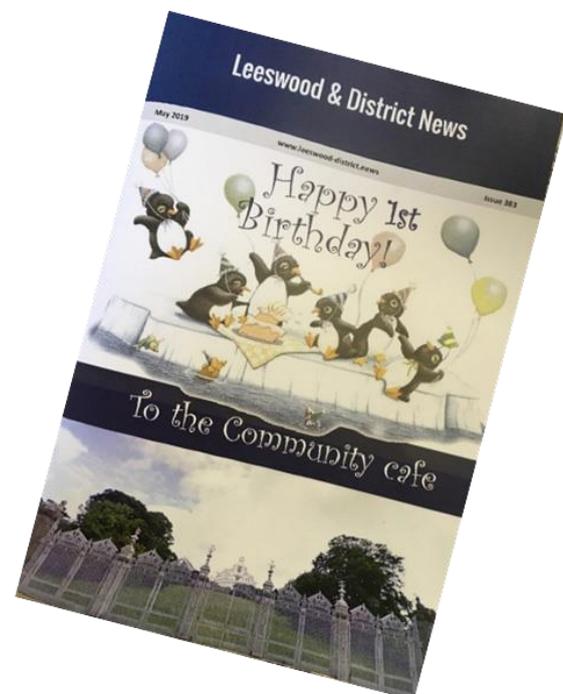
“The café has made a massive difference.”

There is a noticeable change in the range of customers that visit. For a long time, they didn't see many young parents with little children, but they have started to come now. Where some older people had thought that activities for men in the community were lacking, the community café is providing a venue for them to get together and it's making a difference:

“The three men that come in together, they meet in the café and they all have coffee and tea and toast. They take turns to pay one pays one week, another pays the other and so on. One of them said to me last week: “I really look forward to coming here, I really look forward to Thursday mornings, it's a big part of my week”.

In addition to offering a social space, the Development Worker has invited local organisations to the community café to provide information about their services and to connect with local people.

It has also become a hub for learning and development, for example a local college ran a 10-week course to teach people, of any age, how to use the tablet. As a result, a lady now skypes her grandchildren in Australia. Someone who used to live in the village contacted the Development Worker and offered to teach Welsh to anyone who wanted to turn up. They hold regular book sales as well. Residents feel that this wouldn't have happened if it hadn't had that part of the community centre set up as a café.



Local newsletter celebrating the café's first year anniversary

The future is bright



Photo of the notice board at the Sunshine café.

The Sunshine Café is also a place where people can find out about what's going on, either through their noticeboard or word of mouth. One resident explains:

“It’s like a little network really, everybody says. I mean there were people sat at the big table today, didn’t know there was a book sale on Saturday. So they all know now. You know, that’s the sort of link up you get.... I mean there might well have been a notice up somewhere but they haven’t seen the notice.”

With the Development Worker transitioning to work in a new community in North Wales the question of sustainability raises its inevitable head. However, for the people of Leeswood, it’s not one shadowed in doubt. There is a certainty that the café will continue.

There’s a sense that people will make the effort for the café because it’s been so successful and so enjoyable. The infrastructure and governance falling under the umbrella of the Age Friendly Communities Steering Group, also provides security. Through the volunteers there is a strong link between the Chapel and the café and whilst many people do not want to commit to putting their name on a rota they will often turn up and ask if they are needed and stay if they are. Financially, an abundance of paying customers each week is ensuring financial sustainable and even providing additional income which can supplement ongoing work with the school that was started through Rural Wisdom.

Resources

Find more information and resources at:
www.ruralwisdom.org

Other case studies from Rural Wisdom:

1. What's On (Milford Haven)
2. Transport Group (Highland Perthshire)
3. Intergenerational Work (Eaglesham)
4. Community Café (Leeswood)
5. Singing Group (Brechin)

All of the above documents are available to read here:

www.ndti.org.uk/news/rural-wisdom-evaluation

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