

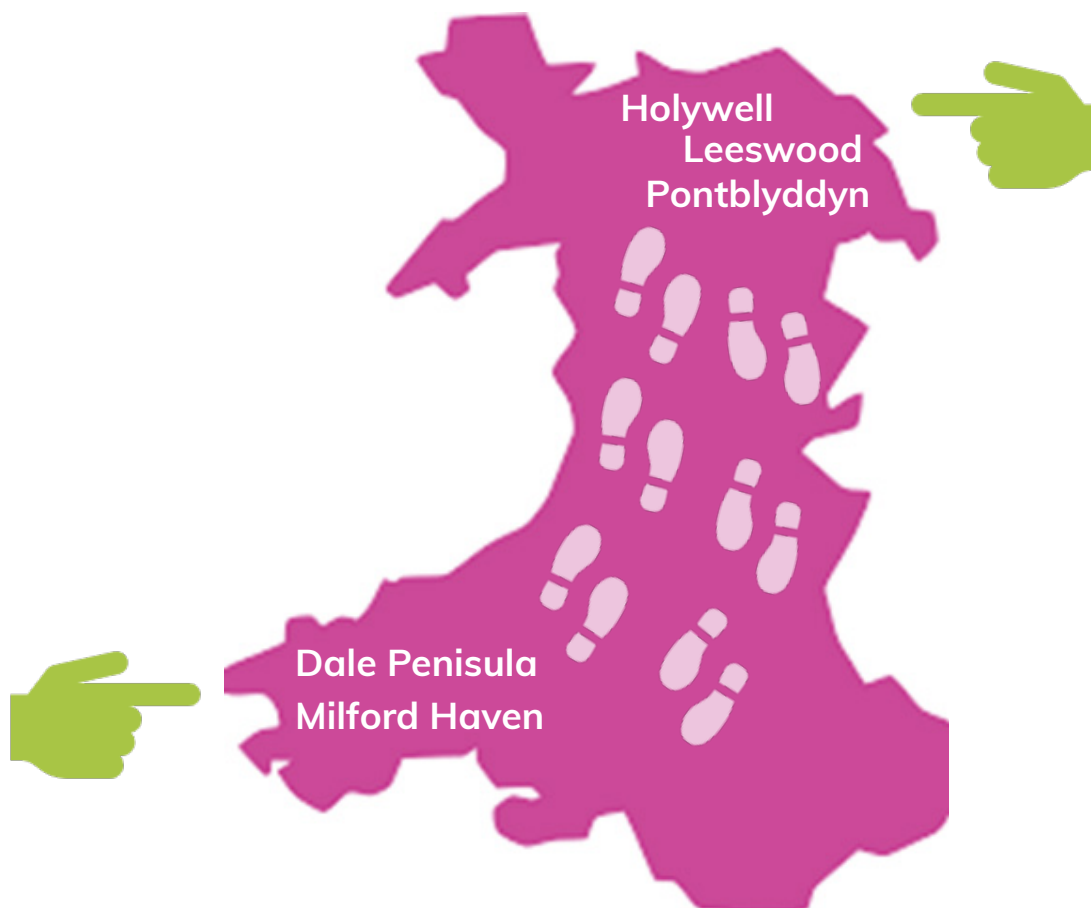


Rural Wisdom New ways of working lead to new partnerships: A story from Wales



Rural Wisdom is a project for older people in Scotland and Wales which aimed to reduce social isolation and loneliness through community development and volunteering led by older people in these locations.

In Wales, Rural Wisdom worked in Leeswood and Pontblyddyn, Holywell, Milford Haven, and the Dale Peninsula. Between 2017 and February 2020, the Welsh Development Workers worked in their communities, connecting with each other and their Scottish counterparts, when possible. But in many instances, connecting with one another required travelling long distances to meet face-to-face, rather than online.



Connections during COVID-19

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit the UK in March 2020, Rural Wisdom's work stopped overnight and the way the workers connected immediately changed. All communication between sites became digital, with Teams and Zooms used to meet regularly for planning, sharing and checking in on what was happening in each region.



This change meant that the Rural Wisdom team in both home nations became better connected and, as it became 'normal' to meet online, a series of 'Online Conversation starters' were set up. These were new and independent networks of people connected online over a common interest. Some of the topics covered in these networks included:



Men's mental health where Men2Men, a new social and mental health group for men in Pembrokeshire, were guests, sharing ideas with Men's Shed from South Lanarkshire.



Older people's policy in rural areas. Helena Herklots, the Wales Commissioner for Older People, was able to spend time with a mix of interested parties in Scotland.



Community project Celivery in rural areas, where an open and honest discussion took place about partnership working across health and social care sectors.

More partnerships

In parallel to these new networks, the Development Workers in both nations began connecting with wider and more varied networks than previously, again due to meetings and conversations taking place online with less need to travel. This allowed a very organic way of working to develop in Pembrokeshire and in turn a strong profile in the county. As time went on, the Development Worker in West Wales, Rachel, began talks with the Hywel Dda University Health Board, the County Council and key 3rd sector organisations about how she could work with them in Pembrokeshire. This led to a new partnership being created where Volunteering Matters joined the PIVOT partnership in the area and then to playing a key role in the evolution of the Pembrokeshire Hub, initially formed to respond to COVID need.

PIVOT, which stands for Pembrokeshire Intermediate Voluntary Organisations Team, provides volunteer community support to help prevent unnecessary hospital admissions or support upon being discharged from hospital. It is a partnership between British Red Cross, Pembrokeshire Association of Community Transport Organisations (PACTO), Royal Voluntary Service, Care & Repair, Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services (PAVS) and now Rural Wisdom/Volunteering Matters Cymru.



With partnerships established and working successfully in Pembrokeshire, an 'online conversation starter' was set up for a group of invited interested parties from across Wales and Scotland in September 2021. This initial conversation about PIVOT sparked a lot of interest, and led to an open webinar taking place in early November 2021 around the broader subject of forming productive cross-sector partnerships. This webinar saw over 30 people attend including NHS Scotland and numerous local authority areas from both home nations, who heard how PIVOT works, what is involved to make the partnership work, as well as what can be learnt and translated to other regions interested in the model.

This sharing will hopefully lead to a lasting legacy from Rural Wisdom within both home nations, that would not have been possible without the pandemic-driven shift to working online to connect communities, services and organisations related to the projects aims. More Conversation Starters are planned past the end of the funded life of Rural Wisdom, to establish the habit of sharing good practice.

In the first stage of Rural Wisdom, Development Workers worked closely with older people and their communities to identify and address the key issues, achieve the project outcomes and create sustainable change. In Stage 2, Development Workers introduced Rural Wisdom to new, rural communities in Wales and Scotland applying the learning from Stage 1 to address local priorities and achieve the same overarching project outcomes.

Scotland: Stage 1 Eaglesham, Highland Perthshire, North Angus
Stage 2 Moray Scottish Borders
Wales: Stage 1 Leeswood & Pontblyddyn, Milford Haven
Stage 2 Holywell and Dale Peninsula

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Resources

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

