

Together - Let's Keep on Supporting People in Wales!

Around three quarters of a million lives have been transformed through the Supporting People Programme in Wales during the past twelve years.

To highlight twelve years of success and emphasise the importance of securing future funding for the Supporting People Programme, Community Housing Cymru (CHC) and Cymorth Cymru are holding a 'celebration event' in the Senedd today (May 18).

The event coincides with the launch of the 'Let's Keep on Supporting People campaign', run by CHC and Cymorth Cymru. The campaign champions the importance of the Supporting People (SP) programme. Each year, SP helps more than 60,000 disadvantaged and vulnerable people to live independently through various projects running up and down the country. SP is a flagship Welsh Government programme and also plays a key role in tackling and preventing homelessness. It funds a variety of services to support a range of people at risk of homelessness including people who are victims of domestic abuse, those with mental or physical health problems and learning disabilities, ex-service personnel and older people.

For many people, and for many reasons, maintaining a safe, secure home is not always possible without support. SP helps people to build, or rebuild, the kind of lives we all want for ourselves, our friends and our families.

SP services have also played a crucial role in helping those affected by welfare reform. An average of £2,392 is spent on every person helped by SP. In 2014/15, the SP budget was £134.4m. It was cut by £10m to £124.4m for 2015/16. CHC and Cymorth Cymru say the £10m cut in funding to SP could have potentially helped more than 4,000 extra people. By comparison, weekly delivery of NHS services in Wales is around £113m.

With budgets being continually squeezed, the SP programme is at risk from potential further cuts at the next Assembly budget.

The Let's Keep on Supporting People campaign aims to not only safeguard future funding for SP, but also evidences the need for increased funding in order to help even more 'at risk' people. The SP 'celebration' at the Senedd will showcase how people's lives have been transformed by SP and highlight how, without it, costs to Wales' NHS and social services would increase long term.

Stuart Ropke, Group Chief Executive of CHC, said: "The Supporting People programme provides a safety net to vulnerable people and to the already strained NHS and social services in Wales. Without further increased funding for SP, health and social services budgets will rocket and buckle under the strain.

"SP funds services which are invaluable to the most disadvantaged in our communities and also acts as a vital preventative measure. It reduces demand and saves health and social services money in the long term. The importance of increased funding for the SP programme cannot be emphasised enough. You only need to listen to SP service users' stories to discover the difference SP has made to so many lives."

Cymorth Cymru Director, Auriol Miller, said: “One of the real strengths of the Supporting People Programme is that it works across boundaries and client groups, and the results and benefits are seen in many different policy areas.

As well as the significant savings it delivers to health and social services, SP also plays a key role in tackling poverty and mitigating the impact of welfare reform. We know that Wales has been disproportionately affected by welfare reform and, with another £12bn of cuts to come, vulnerable people are set to be hit even harder.

Now, more than ever, we need to shout about the huge benefits of SP and do all we can to ensure that this essential safety net continues to be protected. But this event is not just about campaigning – it is about celebrating the successes of a programme that provides essential support to many thousands of people in Wales each year.”

Speakers at today’s Let’s Keep on Supporting People ‘celebration’ include the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty, Lesley Griffiths; CHC’s Group Chief Executive, Stuart Ropke; and Cymorth Cymru’s Director, Auriol Miller. Guests and speakers will also include service users and providers from various SP related projects around Wales, as well as politicians.

Case study 1: South Wales

Former bus driver Stephen Cole, aged 51, lives in Penarth. He believes he would probably not be alive today without the intervention and help he received via an SP funded scheme.

He said: “Things were going great until I was seriously assaulted at work. This had negative effects on both my physical and mental health. I attended counselling to help me come to terms with what had happened but it didn’t help. I was too scared to leave the house and if I did I would experience anxiety and panic attacks. I started drinking and at one stage I was drinking nine litres of white cider a day. My wife decided she had had enough of my behaviour and left. We are now divorced. I knew things couldn’t continue so I went to see my doctor. I was referred to a specialist and diagnosed with paranoid agoraphobia. I was also referred to Newlands (drug & alcohol centre in the Vale) where I received counselling and other services to help reduce my drinking. I met one of Hafod Care’s Independent Living Advisors at Newlands and they referred me to the Windsor Road Project in Penarth - this is one of Hafod’s supported housing schemes for people with mental health issues. I have been living in Windsor Road since October 2014 and have received a wide range of help from the support staff. This includes managing my tenancy, help with budgeting, taking up old hobbies and taking part in social activities like the gardening club. This helps to keep me busy and I haven’t had a drink for ages. I honestly think if I hadn’t moved into the Hafod supported housing scheme, I would probably be dead now.”

Case study 2: North Wales

Before her involvement with an SP project, 76 year-old Renee Williams was isolated and lacking confidence after the death of her partner Jon. However in 2010, Renee moved into a sheltered scheme in Old Colwyn, North Wales, as she wanted to feel a part of a community and improve her health and wellbeing. Since this time the grandmother of 11 and great grandmother of one's life has changed significantly, encouraged by an Independent Living Coordinator to become part of the community and get involved in activities and clubs. The programmes and groups that Renee is involved with have all been in some way linked and made possible by Conwy County Borough Council Supporting People Grant which allows housing association Cartrefi Conwy to provide Independent Living Services to older and vulnerable tenants. Renee says that having access to the Independent Living Service has changed her life in more ways than one, including social inclusion and improving her confidence. She feels empowered to live independently but with the peace of mind that comes from her contact with her Independent Living Coordinator (ILC) when required. She now has a true passion for life and her enthusiasm and hours of weekly involvement in her community has also had a positive effect on others to get involved, including her own sister, neighbours and residents in their community. Renee remains enthusiastic about learning new skills and this eagerness to learn has led to her taking an active role in various tenant groups with Cartrefi Conwy. This includes roles on their tenant forum, communications group and scrutiny panel. She even won an award for her photography work after taking part in a digital inclusion and photography course organised by Cartrefi Conwy. Her work and that of fellow group members was showcased at Venue Cymru, Llandudno, last summer.

Case study 3: South Wales

Eighteen months ago Lisa Welch, from Caerphilly, was experiencing severe depression. Her illness was having a profound impact on her life and she was struggling to fulfil everyday tasks such as dressing, leaving the house and paying her bills. She was also experiencing physical health issues that were further compounding her mental health problems. Lisa was also having problems paying the rent for her housing association property. As a result of this, her housing officer identified that Lisa might be experiencing mental health problems and referred her to Gofal's Tenancy Support Scheme, which is funded by the Supporting People programme. Lisa started receiving support from this scheme to address some of the issues that were having a negative impact on her mental health. Although her journey of recovery wasn't easy, Lisa has made significant progress and is now leading a fulfilled and independent life.

Lisa said: "My support worker started taking the pressure off me. It was such a relief. It was like a big weight off my shoulders. To have my life back, to start taking control of my own life means so much. I feel there's so much more out there for me now. With the help of Gofal, I have seen the light at the end of the tunnel." As a result of the support she received from Gofal's Tenancy Support Scheme, Lisa decided to access Gofal's Pathways to Employment project which supports people to gain the skills and confidence to engage in education, volunteering or work. Lisa has now become an extremely active and inspiring volunteer, helping individuals, her community and Wales in a number of ways, including helping to run a local fruit and veg cooperative. While her volunteering work is

supporting Lisa's recovery and helping her to build confidence and skills for the future, she is also making a valuable contribution to individuals and the wider community.

Case study 4: North Wales

Pete Wright's life was previously one involving crime and drugs until supported housing transformed his life for the better. Pete of Conwy explained: "Before I came to live in supported housing my life was rather chaotic. I'd spent numerous times in hospital under section and lived a life of crime and drugs. I came to live in North Wales and moved in with my mum but before long my mental health deteriorated again and I was back in hospital. I realised at this point that I needed support and that moving back with mum wouldn't be good for either of us. My key worker within the mental health team found me a place in a shared house in a supported housing scheme. Whilst there, my mental health stabilised, I have managed to stay away from drugs and crime and totally changed my life. The support has taught me how to manage a tenancy and I have just last week moved into my own flat. I'll still get floating support for a while to make sure I manage and I'm really optimistic about the future. I can't thank North Wales Housing enough for giving me the chance."

Editors' notes:

To arrange an interview with Stuart Ropke (CHC), Auriol Miller (Cymorth Cymru) or a case study please contact Sarah Harris at CHC on 029 2067 4821, sarah-harris@chcymru.org.uk (Thursday, May 14 only) or Jodi Cox at Cymorth Cymru 029 2055 3687/07788314733 - jodicox@cymorthcymru.org.uk.

Further case studies are available upon request.

The hashtag for the Let's Keep on Supporting People campaign is:

#supportingpeoplewales

The Let's Keep on Supporting People event takes place on May 18, at the Senedd. Timings are as follows:

12:00 – Event starts

12:15 – Speeches

13:00 – Networking, lunch and opportunity for media interviews

13:30 – Event ends

The event will be preceded by a photo call on the steps of The Senedd at 11.50am.

1. The Supporting People (SP) Programme is a flagship Welsh Government programme that supports more than 60,000 people each year to live as independently as they can. It funds a variety of services to support a wide range of marginalised people at risk of housing crisis, including people at risk of homelessness; families fleeing domestic abuse; people dealing with mental or physical health problems, or learning disabilities; ex-service personnel; care

leavers; and older people in need of support. <http://gov.wales/topics/housing-and-regeneration/services-and-support/supporting-people/?lang=en>

2. Cymorth Cymru is the umbrella body for providers of homelessness, housing related support and social care services in Wales. Our members provide a wide range of support to enable people to live as independently as they possibly can, or build a positive future after a difficult period in their lives. We act as the 'voice of the sector', working in partnership with members, policy makers and other stakeholders to prevent and homelessness and improve the quality of life for people who are marginalised or at risk of housing crisis across Wales. www.cymorthcymru.org.uk
3. Community Housing Cymru (CHC) is the representative body for housing associations and community mutuals in Wales, which are all not-for profit organisations. Our members work closely with local government, third sector organisations and the Welsh Government to provide a range of services in communities across Wales. Our conference, training and networking opportunities, along with our publications and website, ensure that the Welsh social housing movement is kept fully informed. www.chcymru.org.uk