

Solva Care - speaking from experience

Solva Care is a successful community project, delivering social care to those in need in our community. We are now in our fifth year and have extended and developed our work. We will be the first local community based project in Wales and the UK that will integrate domiciliary services with a voluntary service, extend into preventative work to promote well being and self help and delay early dependency on services. We are also developing a network with statutory and non statutory agencies to share service delivery and benefit from the learning to come out of the project. At a community level, it will enable us to increase the number of service users with whom we work. Joint working will be increased and we will be able to offer a fuller, more integrated holistic service and improved continuity of care. We have also developed a toolkit aimed at supporting and encouraging other small rural communities seeking to set up their own community based care delivery system and, incidentally, to secure a sustainable future.

In exploring this new model of service delivery we are able to benefit directly from both local knowledge and expertise and from the expertise of those who have joined our community, bringing knowledge and experience of other systems. Our small business list is supporting local people in their efforts to create successful enterprises, as will the Direct Payments pooling scheme we are developing as a means of helping people to have more say in their own care. We are also working to take further the signposting/ Information hub which our Pilot Phase Co-ordinator has initiated in response to local need and will also make progress in supporting local people working as privately employed carers in gaining training and qualifications through Pembrokeshire College. We have a weekly drop in session in our local surgery and work closely with them to support those in need.

We speak from experience of working in a rural community which is seeking sustainability against a background of cuts to services and increasing financial constraints. Rural communities across the country are in need- there is no easy access to services or to experts, often there are no focus points.

The Current situation

The promise of the Future Generations Act has not yet been realised, for a variety of reasons, some of which are covered below. There is an urgent need to recognise the key role of the local community in improving well being. Sustainable healthy thriving communities lead to similar communities at regional and National level. There is unlikely to be any change unless we are able to learn from what we know and from what the Corona Virus crisis has taught us.

We do not need, yet again, to define the problems. They are well known and well documented and have been brought into high relief by Covid. We need to focus on solutions and to have more clarity about meeting individual need. If we have learned anything in the past months, it is that the words and phrases we need to remember are

Community, flexibility, responsiveness, working together, bottom up not top down, can do,

We need to stop rehearsing problems and start sorting solutions.

As the virus spread, local communities formed their groups, outside formal public bodies. Priorities - Food, Prescriptions, medicines, were established locally, immediately. They met local individual need, they were not just 'nice' - they were essential. They proved that a practical and light touch, an enabling approach, gives better results than a fixed response approach. Those receiving help can also give help and many of them want to - it makes them feel part of the community again and it keeps the community

sustainable. The volunteers were there ready, when, at the start, public staff were not on duty and phones were not answered.

Small scale is key. Local is key. Getting bigger is not the answer. More problems occur when you get too big and spread too far. Local volunteers know their community, they are not a temporary solution to the 'covid problem' they can be an on going means of giving communities some confidence in their own ability to solve their own problems. To accept and meet need, not to assess and prioritise it. Local community groups are bottom up, not top down and can react flexibly to meeting need. They should be the ones to set goals, define objectives, work to reach targets at their own local level.

Such groups do need a structure, volunteers need to be managed, people lose heart, drop out and need training and support. Leadership is needed but again this is best done locally, rigid rules don't help, rather the contrary. Over time, trust develops. Doing the right thing becomes easier on a local basis. There is, or can be, a shared identity, shared community sense. The community voice, made up of a mixture of religions, activities, gender, age, race, culture, arrives at a shared vision. Volunteers spread the workload and flexible working helped increase the numbers of volunteers life skills and professional skills being equally valuable in this work. We are currently looking at ways of recruiting more men and more young people.

In some areas, the Local Authority might be seen as 'taking over' after the event, listing groups, using the 'should and must' culture. The talk comes to be about risk assessments and Insurance, slowing things down, getting back to 'normal'. Other Local Authorities saw what was happening and some offered support –helped groups to connect, signposting to groups offering help, and helping with admin, clerical, IT, mobile phones leaflets and posters .

The development of community groups means that Councils can learn where at risk groups and people are, what they need and how best to work with local Community Groups to meet the need. They also learn which Community Councils are operative and which are not. Some funding is needed – both immediate short term and longer term and decisions taken as to how best it should be allocated.

IT came into its own with Zoom and Teams but many especially the elderly are not on line and tend to use the telephone or face to face. There is a need for help and support to enable these people to become familiar with IT. Zoom has brought more people in and has made them more aware of public bodies and how they work and think.

The FGA

The Future Generations Act focuses on engaging people in a consultative capacity but in effect, many Authorities , beset by multiple problems, simply go through the motions, so there is no real change, no focus on building on the needs of communities, delivering in best possible way to meet those needs, working together to meet them. There is no local strategy, nor any real national strategy, apart from the Act, and there is no Minister or member with responsibility to drive it . The Act requires consultation, but consultation has a bad name, people have lost faith in it – the Act is perceived as another example of top down policy making instead of a means of promoting the role of community and of community organisations in delivering services.

The Act leaves action largely at the discretion of public bodies which allows for local innovation and flexibility, but also allows for public bodies to go through the motions without realising real change. Public Services Boards in particular seem to have little to do with local communities, they do not seem to report to them nor do they request evidence from them. A closer working relationship might be of advantage to both.

Not many local communities are aware of the Act and its implications. Those who are aware of it tend to be more policy-focused, know how it works and its implications but also tend not to go beyond doing what they must do. Smaller community groups complain about relationships being characterised by poor communication, lack of trust, risk aversion, silo working and – in some cases – professional bias; the Act hasn't changed the attitude of public bodies. Working practises stay the same. There seems to have been little real attempt to 'make it work' The National Wellbeing Indicators and National Survey, and a recent review of the Acts sustainable development principles by Audit Wales would bear this impression out.

However, one would hope that some public bodies worked positively with community groups to help out. That they refrained from an overly authoritarian approach and worked to support and encourage the groups in their efforts. The role of the County and Community Councillor must also be important in this, since they can be a conduit for smaller community groups, to enable access to other services and organisations.

If communities are to be truly sustainable, then decisions made now will not put the future in jeopardy. Councils and groups in the future will need to make decisions and will be greatly helped if as many options as possible are open to them. We need to look to the future and keep it open, when taking decisions in the present.

FGA Act report 2020

The report published in 2020 refers consistently to 'public bodies' as being the authority which should be bringing about change. It lists 7 sectors where these Public Bodies should be working together to 'make things better'. The working together requirement is critical since actions in one sector have repercussions in the others. Silo working does not, in fact, work. The goals are listed and set out in coloured blocks – Public bodies have a legal obligation to reach the goals, they need to integrate their work and take no action which has only a single outcome./impact but there is little evidence of this in practice.

The Report lists the top 20 Policy recommendations and the top 20 Process recommendations and comments that there is a lack of integration between goals and objectives pointing out that the goals should be the starting point from which the objectives should be developed, not as often happens, objectives being agreed and goals made to fit them.

The top down one size fits all approach does not lead to positive, real change. Currently we are perpetuating inequalities not removing them and this has been made more evident during the Covid crisis. Poverty, isolation, homelessness, abuse, mental illness, loss of employment, failure of the small business, etc etc all brought into sharp focus. We need to concentrate on building assets within communities and empowering people to provide support rather than relying on statutory public bodies to implement National policies which are meant to cover all possible situations everywhere and which in fact rarely cover even the basics.

So, what should we do?

Promote the Act and what it is trying to do, publicise it

Implementing the Act is more likely if we involve local people and communities – ask them to make it happen.

We need to promote the role of community-based organisations and improve public body understanding of the community sector. It should be properly resourced.

Develop a means of measuring well being of communities and use it to support communities to change.

Fund a communities policy, put someone in charge

Research how public bodies and councils work and how they relate to each other and how they relate to community groups

Work with WLGA and other groups to celebrate and recommend good practice on working together to build strong communities.

Solva Care - we are evidence that the community based bottom up approach can work and that it can be developed to cover all aspects of community well being.

We are currently working on several projects designed to encourage and support other communities concerned about their sustainability and about the welfare of the people who live there.

We are working with Cardiganshire to support a community setting up their own version of Solva Care, using our toolkit as a guidebook.

We are also working with members of the third sector in Pembrokeshire to identify and support four communities to set up their versions of Solva Care, again using the toolkit as a guidebook and we will be mentoring these groups in Cardiganshire and in our home county.

Working with the County Council, the LHB, PAVS and Planed, we have formed a group aimed at effecting real change in the County. Together for Change is looking to make real the changes which we all feel must be made to facilitate and support people working at ground level delivering on a community basis, meeting the needs of individuals in the community to deliver an integrated holistic whole community response.

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Chair