

Connecting culture, leisure and social care in Bridgend

Inspectors identified the inclusion of cultural, leisure and community wellbeing services within the wider social services portfolio as practice worth sharing.

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Setting the scene

During Care Inspectorate Wales' assurance check of adult services in Bridgend County Borough Council, inspectors identified the inclusion of cultural, leisure and community wellbeing services within the wider social services portfolio as practice worth sharing. This approach brings statutory social care services together with preventative and community-based opportunities delivered through key partners, including Awen Cultural Trust and Halo Leisure.

The model reflects a strengths-based approach that recognises that wellbeing depends on more than access to care and support services alone. By embedding culture, leisure and community wellbeing within the wider social services offer, Bridgend has developed a preventative approach that helps people remain active, connected and independent within their communities. The partnership tackles inequalities, reduces social isolation and supports health and wellbeing through community-based solutions.

What they did

Bridgend County Borough Council has incorporated cultural, leisure and community wellbeing services within its broader social services portfolio, creating a joined-up approach that supports people before their needs escalate and reduces reliance on statutory intervention. Through close partnership working with Halo Leisure, Awen Cultural Trust, health partners, voluntary organisations and community groups, the council and its partners have developed a range of preventative programmes to meet local needs.

Awen Cultural Trust gives people and communities opportunities to experience, enjoy and be inspired together through culture. Through libraries, heritage, arts and cultural activities, people can build confidence, develop social connections and participate in community life. Awen also supports programmes such as Feel Good for Life through mental stimulation activities, including quizzes, reminiscence, puzzles and creative activities.

Halo Leisure works in partnership with the local authority to deliver a range of wellbeing initiatives, including the Carers Respite Programme, Feel Good for Life and Autism-Friendly Swim Lessons.

These programmes help people improve their physical and emotional wellbeing, access peer support, reduce isolation and strengthen community connections. The partners address practical barriers to participation through measures such as free provision, replacement care and community transport.

The partnership also supports innovative initiatives such as volunteer driver schemes, intergenerational activities with local schools, dementia-friendly activities and regular multi-agency collaboration to identify needs and maximise community support.

Why it worked

This approach works well because partners have embedded it strategically across the broader social services portfolio rather than treating it as a standalone project. They recognise leisure, culture and wellbeing services as key contributors to prevention, resilience and community wellbeing.

Strong partnership working between social services, Halo Leisure, Awen Cultural Trust, health services and third-sector organisations creates a wider range of support options than traditional services alone can offer. This helps people access support earlier and engage in activities that reflect their interests, strengths and personal circumstances.

The approach also succeeds because partners actively remove barriers that can prevent people from engaging in community opportunities. These include replacement care for carers, accessible transport arrangements, online participation options and tailored support for people with specific needs, which helps ensure services are inclusive and accessible.

The difference it made

Inspectors found that this approach helps people access a wide range of opportunities that promote wellbeing, strengthen community connections and support independence. This helps prevent or delay the need for more intensive statutory intervention.

One example of the impact of this model is Halo Leisure's Carers Respite Programme. The six-week programme gives unpaid carers free wellbeing sessions alongside replacement care arrangements where required.

Participants can access physical activity, mindfulness and relaxation sessions, information and advice, healthy living support and peer support from other carers. Feedback showed improved wellbeing, reduced isolation and increased confidence to access wider opportunities and support networks.

Another example is Feel Good for Life, which supports people affected by dementia, loneliness and depression, alongside their carers, through physical activity and social engagement opportunities. The programme has supported more than 400 people and helped participants become more physically active, improve their confidence, strengthen social connections and reduce feelings of isolation. Ongoing evaluation showed significant improvements in participants' wellbeing, confidence, community connectedness and physical activity levels.

The partnership approach has also helped foster independent peer support networks and stronger community connections. Participants described developing lasting friendships and increasing their confidence to participate in community life. Volunteer transport schemes, intergenerational activities and community-led social opportunities have further strengthened people's sense of belonging and reduced the risk of social isolation.

Why this is practice worth sharing

This practice is worth sharing because partners have done more than provide leisure and cultural opportunities. They have strategically integrated culture, leisure and community wellbeing services within the wider social services portfolio, creating a preventative model that supports independence, promotes wellbeing and strengthens community connections.

Find out more

For further information about this approach, please contact:

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