

CF 15

Ymchwiliad i dlodi yng Nghymru: Cymunedau yn Gyntaf – yr hyn a ddysgwyd
Inquiry into poverty in Wales: Communities First – lessons learnt

Ymateb gan: Samaritans Cymru

Response from: Samaritans Cymru

About Samaritans Cymru:

Samaritans is a registered charity aimed at providing emotional support to anyone in emotional distress. In Wales, Samaritans work locally and nationally to raise awareness of their service and reach out into local communities to support people who are struggling to cope. They seek to use their expertise and experience to improve policy and practice and are active contributors to the development and implementation of Wales Suicide and Self Harm Prevention Action Plan 'Talk to Me 2'

Samaritans exist to reduce the number of people who die by suicide. Whilst suicide can often be viewed in isolation, it is important to identify the breadth and complexity of risk factors which preclude suicide and suicide attempts.

The link between poverty and suicide in Wales

1. Socioeconomic disadvantage or living in an area of socioeconomic deprivation increases the risk of suicidal behaviour. For example, men from the lowest socio-economic group living in the most deprived areas are approximately ten times more likely to die by suicide than those in affluent areas. In Wales, every local authority has a unique geography, economy, and population; it follows that a profile of deprivation and associated suicide risk will also vary between local populations. At a time when nearly a quarter of the Welsh population lives in poverty, we are committed to policy approaches in suicide prevention that mitigate the devastating effects of socioeconomic disadvantage in Wales. We need greater recognition that suicide is linked to socioeconomic disadvantage, but we also need to dispel the myth that many deaths by suicide must therefore be inevitable.
2. In 2016, Samaritans commissioned eight leading social scientists to review and extend the existing body of knowledge on the link between suicide and socioeconomic deprivation. In 2017, we launched the findings of this research in the report [‘Dying from Inequality’](#) –
 - Areas of higher socioeconomic deprivation tend to have higher rates of suicide.

- Men are more vulnerable to the adverse effects of economic recession, including suicide risk, than women.
- People who are unemployed are two to three times more likely to die by suicide than those in employment.
- Increases in suicide rates are linked to economic recessions.
- The greater the level of deprivation experienced by an individual, the higher their risk of suicidal behaviour.
- The least skilled occupations (e.g. construction workers) have higher rates of suicide.
- A low level of educational attainment and no home ownership increase an individual's risk of suicide.

What worked about the Communities First programme?

3. Loneliness and isolation can have a serious impact on physical and mental health and is a risk factor for suicidal behaviour and suicide; it is one of the most common reasons that people call our helpline in the UK. A lack of community and social connection can make an individual more vulnerable to mental health issues, suicidal thinking and behaviour and therefore, social connection is a protective factor for individual suicide risk. Community and outreach groups and volunteering are interventions which can help to tackle public health issues including loneliness and isolation and poor mental health. In terms of achieving the protective factor of social connection, the theme or nature of community and outreach groups and volunteering can be extensive and wide-ranging. Digital literacy, sports, basic numeracy, arts and crafts, music and coffee mornings are all examples of groups which achieve the outcome of social connection; all of which were accessible through the Communities First programme.

How local authorities will decide which projects continue to receive funding after June 2017

4. It is vital that Communities First schemes are recognised for their health benefits; social connectedness tackles mental health issues and loneliness and isolation, and can work to reduce the strain on health and social care services. Projects which involve community and outreach groups or community participation should therefore be assessed on their ability to increase community cohesion and reduce social isolation.
5. With reduced funding of 70% until March 2018, it is vital that local authorities assess the impact of project closures on local wellbeing. As discussed, social connectedness improves mental health and

wellbeing, and as such, measures should be taken to mitigate any threats to local wellbeing. This is aligned with the sustainable development principle which has been put in place by the Well-being of Future Generations Act. Local authorities and public bodies need to make sure that when making their decisions on project funding for Communities First, they take into account the impact they could have on their community in the future.

Case Study: The 3G's Men's Project

6. *The following case study, provided to us by Keep Wales Tidy, illustrates our stance on the power of community groups in Wales.*

The 3G's Men's Project is an outreach group based in Gurnos and Galon Uchaf in Merthyr Tydfil. The group is open to all and provides an opportunity for men to learn, volunteer and socialise. The group was formed by 3GS Development Trust, a community-led organisation which houses Communities First locally and is made up of volunteers from both Communities First and Keep Wales Tidy. Its creation was due to a lack of support and provision to men, who are a high-risk group for loneliness, isolation and suicide. At this stage, in 2015, around 90% of individuals in this community that engaged with Communities First in that cluster were female.

The following testimonials and quotes were given to Keep Wales Tidy by members and relatives of the 3G's Men's Project -

“I'm prone to having bouts of depression and I definitely find going out and about makes me feel better. I've spoken with my doctor about it and told him that the different practical work with Keep Wales Tidy makes me feel better in myself. The doctor has put all of this on my records and has recommended I carry on volunteering. He's advised me to keep in touch with Jake at Keep Wales Tidy so that I do something regularly. I'm now doing at least one day a week but make an extra effort if I feel down. This works for me”.

“The project has helped loads of people in our community. When I became the sole carer for my child I started to suffer from depression, the project helped me gain qualifications, got me into voluntary work and gave me a chance to put the skills I was taught to use where I now help on a regular voluntary basis on projects that really make a difference”

“My husband, Karl, has dementia, and if it wasn’t for the project I don’t know what he would be doing. Karl has always been an active member in the local community, running marathons all over the world, raising thousands for charities. Karl was also a taxi driver for 30 years, and all this came to a crashing end when he was diagnosed with dementia. As he was still in his 50’s he didn’t want to join in the main stream groups that were available to him as everyone was a great deal older than him. This group is his life line; everyday he asks what is the men’s group doing today. There’s a broader benefit to the community too, as Karl’s involvement with the group means there’s less strain on the health and care services.”