



## Co-Production in Action

**Arts Factory**  
**Health & Wellbeing Group**  
ICF Dementia

### **The adverse impact of loneliness and isolation has been widely researched and discussed across a range of social sectors.**

Conclusions indicate that this distinct feeling of sadness or distress about being by yourself or feeling disconnected from the world around you can have a serious effect on both the physical and mental health of those who have to endure it. As such, the tackling of loneliness and isolation has become a key priority with both National Strategy and for the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Partnership Board who, under the Welsh Government Integrated Care Fund initiative, has commissioned a number of projects and services across the region to connect and empower citizens to overcome such adversities and transform community life.

Based in Ferndale, Rhondda Cynon Taff, Arts Factory Health and Wellbeing Group was formed under this initiative to offer support to community members aged 18+ who are facing loneliness and isolation as a result of diverse social factors. This includes but is not limited to

older people, as well as those living with a health condition, as they are increasingly vulnerable to experiencing this. The projects aim was to create a unique support environment, led by the needs and desires of those who accessed it, and free from socially constructed labels such as 'Dementia Group' which can often restrict or reduce engagement.

The group offers a friendly, warm, non-judgemental place for community members to come and meet/make new friends; participate in worthwhile activities; and feel like they still have a reason to live. It has become a place of sanctuary where those in need of support can find it, and those in need of some time out from caring duties can experience a much needed breathing space, helping them to re-energise and live life fully whilst providing necessary support to those they care for.



Attendance and engagement of group members at group events and activities is high. Group member feedback has suggested that this is because everyone is encouraged to have a voice, and that their voice is listened to and acknowledged to determine how the project operates and the activities that it undertakes on a continual basis. This is achieved through a bottom-up approach, using accessible mechanisms for group members to feedback their ideas, experiences and opinions to shape the service as it evolves. Equally, group members are encouraged and empowered to take on some responsibilities to aid this service development, blurring boundaries between service delivery and the receiving of services in a way that not only promotes group ownership, but reinforces the ideals of equality and individual self-worth.

Through this process, the role of Arts Factory project staff has also shifted and evolved. At the beginning of the project their role was as a delivering agency to put on activities for local community members and encourage them to attend. Now this role has changed to one of group facilitation, individual skills and talents identification and mentorship which has led to an increasing of both project capacity and reach, and the ensuring of the long-term sustainability of this vital community based support service to overcome the effects of loneliness and isolation within the local community.

## Engagement Tools utilised:

- Mind Mapping Techniques
- Questionnaires
- Informal Feedback in group context
- One-to-One Discussions

## Why is this co-production:

- Equal relations between provider and user of service that is built on trust and respect
- Empowerment and opportunity creation to give everybody a voice
- Working in the best interests of ALL involved: Needs Driven Service
- Creation of social networks to create peer support mechanisms
- Use of diverse engagement and evaluation tools as a catalyst for change and service development
- Development of participant responsibility and ownership