



Co-Production in Action: COVID Response series

VAMT and Merthyr Valleys Homes Wellbeing and Activity Packs

ICF Older People and Children and Young People

As lockdown intensified across the country, Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil (VAMT) and Merthyr Valleys Homes workers based at Calon Las Community Hub become increasingly concerned about the potential impact loneliness due to COVID-19 and the lockdown restrictions was having on community members across the Gurnos and wider Merthyr Tydfil community. As a result they decided that they would like to do something positive for older vulnerable people who may be isolated at home.

Following the identification of ICF small grant COVID-19 response funding, VAMT alongside partners from Merthyr Valleys Homes (MVH) and the Merthyr Valleys Homes Youth Project (formally known as 3G's Youth Project) came together to develop a bid to tackle these areas of concern, helping to combat loneliness and isolation during lockdown and increase the mental wellbeing of those they planned to engage through the delivery of stimulating wellbeing activity packs. The project was successful in securing the grant funding bringing £1000 response funding to the Gurnos area of Merthyr Tydfil.

The project partners then reached out to other local community groups working with older people to share the project idea, generate input and identify those who may benefit from the receipt of a wellbeing activity pack. Delivery of the packs also gave

opportunity for 1:1 conversations to take place with recipients and to enquire if any further help was needed, allowing for wider signposting and collaboration opportunities.

A total of 106 packs were issued across the Gurnos area and all were gratefully received, with recipients indicating that they invoked a sense of connectedness at a time when there was a lot of fear and uncertainty within the community due to COVID-19, as individuals felt that someone was looking out for them and their wider needs. Each of the packs also contained a lot of local and national information relating to COVID-19 and in particular where else individuals could obtain ongoing support.

This model of support proved extremely successful and as a result was taken on and expanded further by Ryan Bevan the Loneliness and Isolation Officer at VAMT and replicated for other groups and individuals across Rhondda Cynon Taf. *“I wanted to use the wellbeing and mindfulness packs to target and engage with community members who were extremely lonely and isolated. By this I mean that they do not have access to any online resources, IT equipment or smartphone, and therefore the packs were used to ease the burden and isolation COVID-19 had caused”* – **Ryan Bevan**, Loneliness and Isolation Officer

Similarly, some of the funding sourced for the packs was also allocated to target children and young people who were also socially isolated from their peers during lockdown. When considering the packs for this age group, the project partners decided that a ‘snack pack’ and ‘hygiene pack’ would be more beneficial, especially since children under 16 years were discouraged from going to local shops. Providing these snack packs gave the young people who received them something to look forward to and enjoy, but also promoted a healthy routine in terms of hygiene and eating habits. Additionally, these packs lightened the burden being faced by parents, especially those who would have usually benefited from the free school meals scheme. Through the lockdown period the project was able to issue 53 snack packs and 53 hygiene packs.

As lockdown measures eased through the summer of 2020, the project identified that there was a continued need to help children and young people as they prepared to return to school. As a result, the project also created some Back to School packs to help recipients both mentally and physically prepare to go back to school.

“Working in partnership with other organisations and community projects has really benefitted all involved. We have been able to work together and identify families, young people and community members who were in need at that time and work together to meet that need. As a team it provided us with an opportunity to be out in the community safely and check-in with the young people and also their parents. While delivering the packs we were able to establish what other support we could provide but also signpost to other support initiatives that were being delivered across the community” – **Sarah Williams**, Senior Youth Workers, MVH Youth

Engagement Tools utilised:

- Community Visibility
- One-to-one Discussions
- Collaborative Working with Partner Organisations

Why is this co-production:

- Working in the best interests of all involved: Needs Driven Service
- Creating opportunities for Collaboration between different third sector organisations to provide holistic support through collaboration and signposting.
- Sharing of resources to ensure maximised reach, impact and benefit to citizens.
- Ongoing citizen needs identification and consultation to inform future project developments.
- Replication of a working model of support to reach other citizens in different locations, with adaptations to specific areas of need.

