



Gwanwyn Festival
Celebrating creativity
in older age

Gwanwyn: a potted history

A national festival celebrating creativity in older age

Covering the length and breadth of Wales

Began in 2007

Over 3,500 events

Over 75,000 people

£250,000 issued to local community groups to take part

490 grants issued to local community groups

96% of participants would like to attend more Gwanwyn events

92% of participants who engaged in artistic expression reported benefit



89% reported benefit to their well-being as a result of attending a Gwanwyn event

62% now do something creative on a regular basis as a result of their participation in Gwanwyn activity

Led by Age Cymru and supported by Welsh Government and Arts Council of Wales

Delivered in partnership with over 75 organisations each year

“ Approaching retirement and plucking up the courage to be more creative. Gwanwyn has come just at the right time and feels like a good start! Thank you. ”

It's good to look back but it's rude to stare

Gwanwyn, which means spring in Welsh, celebrates older age as a time of opportunity for renewal, growth and creativity. The festival offers opportunities for greater participation by older people in the arts, be it visual arts, drama, storytelling, music, literature, photography, dance or film. During May, groups and individuals join together in a wide range of venues and locations across Wales in an explosion of paint, clay, photography, theatre, dance, creative writing, film, storytelling, and much more. It is a time for performance, exhibition, workshops, discussion, networking and most importantly fun!

Gwanwyn celebrates its 10th birthday this year, providing a timely opportunity to look back at the festival's achievements and share a small flavour of the work created over the past ten years. With Roy Bailey's quote in mind (above), I've been very conscious that this exercise should not merely look back with rose tinted glasses but wanted to provide the opportunity to showcase the best of what Gwanwyn has achieved and to provide inspiration for your future creative endeavours. It is by no means an exhaustive look at all the work but a selection to demonstrate the variety of work that takes place.

We all want Wales to be a good place to grow older and the arts and creativity are absolutely fundamental to that aspiration; fostering inclusion, alleviating loneliness, improving well-being and quite simply, creating and taking part in exciting work for the enjoyment of all.

Inspired by Bealtaine, Ireland's national celebration of creativity as we age, Gwanwyn was established by Age Cymru in 2007.



I joined Gwanwyn's path only a few years ago so would like to extend my thanks to all organisers, partners, participants and volunteers (both past, present and future) who have made Gwanwyn the festival it is today. Without you there wouldn't be so much colour, vibrancy and energy emanating from the work which enables Gwanwyn to showcase the very best of creativity in older age.

I hope you take this moment to enjoy all that Gwanwyn is and please do join us as we develop the work over the next ten years to make Gwanwyn all it can be!

**Emma Robinson,
Arts and Creativity Programme Manager,
Age Cymru
2016**



Gillian Clarke, the National Poet of Wales (2008–2016), was commissioned to write a poem to celebrate the 10th birthday. Her response was *Life-Painting* and she shares her thoughts on how she approached the commissioning process:

“ I am aware that it is impossible to write a poem about an abstract idea such as ‘creativity’. All artists need things, the physical world of colour, sound, weather, place, people. ‘Creativity’ covers all the arts and crafts, and the people who make it. Art is about life. As a child I loved the colour-names in my paint-box, so I began with the words for colours, like dipping a brush. I imagined my listener as someone like you, man or woman, remembering a life, being a child, being happy, sad, afraid, day or night, summer or winter, and remaking it in art. Every human being growing older has treasure stored in memory, and art is a way to share it. ”

Life-Painting

A word, a colour. Somewhere a woman sings,
and you remember -the moment brings
that hour again, and the summer child
alive inside you dips a brush in gold,
then blue for dark. You colour what you heard:
children at play; the evensong of birds.

Or winter, by the fire long ago,
watching your mother sifting flour like snow.
Tell it in words, or paint-box poetry:
Rose Madder, Ochre, Lapis, Indigo,
colour-names that waken memory,
a lamplit room, groan of a wind-blown tree.

A moment, and your whole life wakes to flow
in *Rose Madder, Ochre, Lapis, Indigo.*

Gillian Clarke
National Poet of Wales, 2008–2016

Inspirational poet Professor Gwyn Thomas was commissioned to write a poem for the very first festival. Gwyn passed away in April 2016 and we would like to honour his life and work by sharing his poem, written when he was the National Poet of Wales in 2007.



GWANWYN

There are some of us, at sixty,
Who are tempted to set our bums down
And feet up
And to sit in comfort staring
At the endless barren wastes of a screen
And those black holes in it
That are cosmic in dimensions
And forever ready to suck out
Of any viewer - into a vast unhide-bound maw
Any flickering of life,

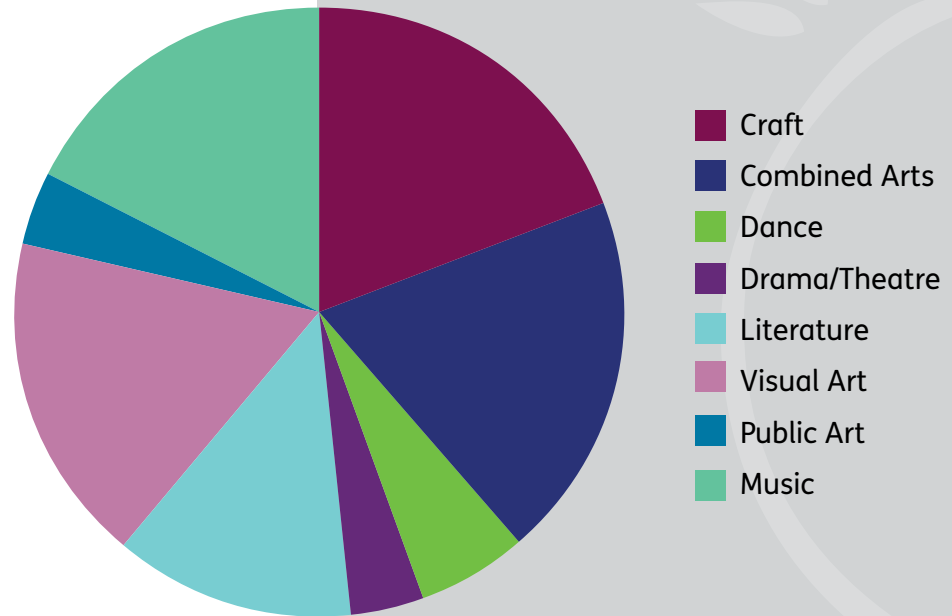
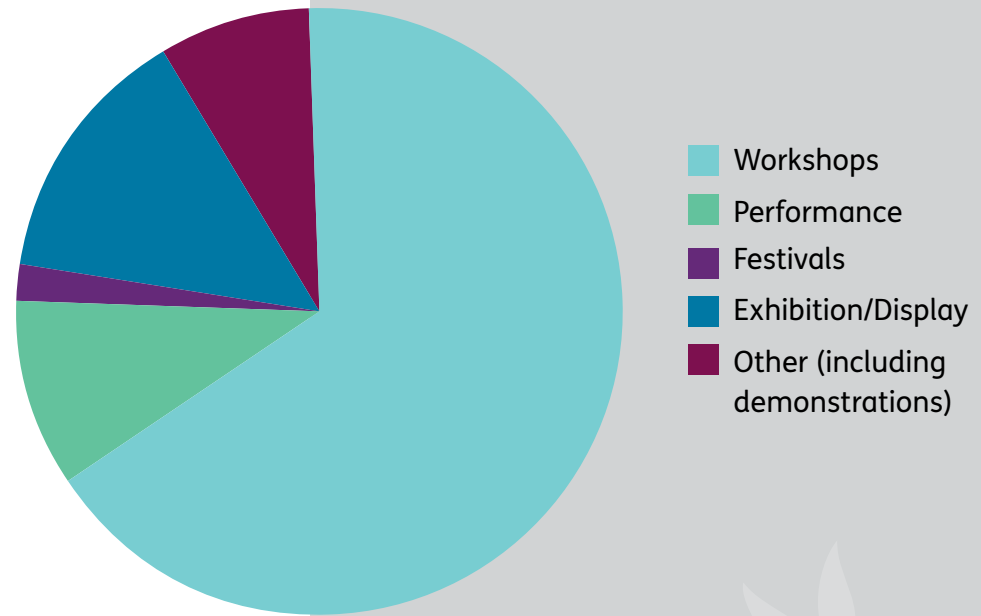
Any inclination towards
A mite of original thought or action.
And if we are not careful
We may find ourselves freewheeling
Smoothly, unperturbedly
In a shroud of a total and black
Lack of imagination
Into a grave to turn to dust,
Or a furnace to be burnt to ashes.
That is, if we do not possess

The will to not let go
Of the eternal springtime of imagining.
So, come out, friends, and dance,
Compose and sing;
Insist on feeling still and tasting still
The great wonder of the world.
Let's show all men that we are still alive.

Gwyn Thomas
National Poet of Wales, 2007

Gwanwyn: a little bit of everything

Gwanwyn encourages creativity in all art forms. The festival offers huge opportunities to take part in workshops and also performances, demonstrations and other festivals.





Dance

“ an inspired and overwhelming appreciation of the older dancer ”

Shake a Leg

Gwanwyn, in partnership with Rubicon Dance, wanted to encourage increased leadership and development of dance activity for the benefit of older people in the community and engage them in regular sessions that are fun, social but also promote health and fitness.

The *Shake a Leg* manual was created as a simple introduction to planning and teaching classes for older people. 21 dance teachers also received training to develop their skills and confidence.

This led to **Stepping Into Spring**, a celebration of older people’s dance groups from across

Wales, at Sherman Cymru in 2014. Striking Attitudes, Tystion (TAN Dance), Senior Moment(UM) (Powys Dance), NuWave (Rubicon Dance), Atgofion (Rhondda Cynon Taf) and Rhuddem Dance (Theatr Felinfach) led a 70 strong cast.

Parkour

Cardiff Bay’s urban playground was taken over by older people during the festival in 2014 and 2015, who were discovering the contemporary blend of parkour and dance, led by Parkour Dance. The workshops taught the principles of Parkour, overcoming physical obstacles in an urban environment. Everything from railings to children’s climbing frames were utilised in the pursuit to keep older people active and limber; providing a fun and positive environment for participants to become more aware of their body, improve balance and ability to fall without causing too much harm. All helping towards increasing confidence and alleviating fear of falling. Injuries from falls are by far the greatest cause of hospitalisation among older people and falling is the primary cause of over 40% of admissions to a nursing home.

Gwanwyn, in partnership with the Wales Millennium Centre, is establishing a regular Parkour for older people group in South Wales and will offer training for Welsh Parkour coaches to extend their practice to include classes for older people.





CAIN

Gwanwyn has supported CAIN, an older people's dance group based in Caernarfon, led by Cai Tomos. Inspired by the Company of Elders from Sadler's Wells, CAIN began in 2012. One of their dancers explains how CAIN puts the 'joie' back into the 'vivre'

“ We learn so much, a kind of understanding which can be quiet and tender or strong and powerful and in which we dance a connection to whatever it is which binds us together. Whatever age we are!

It's important that CAIN is a performance group. Although I always benefit from every class I attend the aim of our work is to be able to perform in front of an audience, Gwanwyn has given us the opportunity. My muscles, joints, my whole body benefits from our classes and also from performance. My memory is also improved as I need to remember the sequence of the piece. Remembering and performing well gives me more confidence in other aspects of my life. In CAIN we are constantly learning about what our physical bodies can achieve but there is also other learning – about who we are, what we need, how to relate to others. There are hard lessons to learn in growing older but dancing helps me recognise the positives and keep the spiral of positivity moving upwards rather than give in to the difficulties. ”

Striking Attitudes

Gwanwyn asked Caroline Lamb, Artistic Director and Choreographer from Striking Attitudes Dance Theatre, to reflect on her involvement with the festival;

“ *When I was 10 I desperately wanted to be a ballet dancer. I attended Saturday morning classes with Miss Fisher – a small and terrifying lady with short red hair and spent hours at home perusing 'Every Child's Book of Dance and Ballet'*

Now, having grown up a little, I run a professional dance theatre company with our rehearsal director, Janet Fieldsend. Striking Attitudes works with older dancers, both professional and community, providing creative and performance opportunities.

I have been involved with Gwanwyn since it first began; making our first dance film 'Remains to Be Seen'. The best part of Gwanwyn is seeing the huge range of creative opportunities that the festival provides from saxophone workshops, parkour for older participants to African drumming and story telling. It focuses on the creativity of older people and gives them a valuable platform.

The festival is all about carrying on – carrying on being creative and having a voice as we age. It's a life-affirming event that lets the rest of the world know we don't need to lie down and quietly fade away as we get older, and that age does not have to be a barrier to leading a creatively fulfilled life. The festival promotes the idea of a vigorous and active older age –one that is positive and still creatively challenging.

Gwanwyn goes from strength to strength. Please get involved – jump in there – don't think twice! The Gwanwyn festival is stimulating, energizing and great fun! You won't regret it! ”



Theatre

“ I’ve spent my whole life getting to know others, but this performance has taught me to get to know me ”

From Page to Stage

Gwanwyn, in partnership with Tŷ Newydd National Writing Centre of Wales, encouraged and developed new writing for the Welsh drama scene. Working on parallel strands in English and Welsh, writers attended two residencies to work on ideas for new plays for use by Welsh amateur drama companies. The writers were mentored by Gilly Adams and Aled Jones Williams who provided a real boost to their writing confidence and creative energy.

Company 6.5

Company 6.5, Sherman Cymru’s Senior Theatre Group, and Sherman Youth Theatre took part in an intergenerational summer school leading to three performances of *Still Here. Still Here*, directed by Philip Mackenzie and Iwan Brioc, took the form of an experiential sensory labyrinth where each audience member took an individual journey through the dark labyrinth to experience and interact with a series of ‘pods’, each led by a single participant.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart for the first slow dance of my life. It touched me deeply



Have a go Shakespeare

Shakespeare Link’s series of ‘Have-a-go Shakespeare’ workshops opened the works of the bard up to rurally isolated older people in Powys. Participation in the workshops led to some of the ‘Have-a-goers’ joining the Willow Globe Community Company’s production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

“ I can’t tell you how important ‘Have-a-go’ and our guided rebirth as Shakespeare groupies has been to us in a year full of unwelcome ambushes. Gwanwyn and Mr William Shakespeare have been more effective than a ward full of physicians. Bless you. ”

Third Act Critics

One of the most exciting developments in Welsh Arts in recent years

Third Act Critics is an independent organisation available to people aged 50+. Through expert guidance, members are able to explore the role of the arts critic, and discover different ways to respond to arts, culture and sport. The programme gives budding critics aged 50+ the opportunity to see dynamic cultural and sporting events and get their voices heard. Initially funded by Gwanwyn, the scheme is always looking for new members.

“ They have broken down barriers and asked questions about who actually gets to critique art. It is this democratisation of criticism that is crucial to a healthy and thriving artistic community that listens to everyone. ”

Literature

“ This experience has made me feel that I still have a life ”

What I Know

Gwanwyn Festival commissioned writer Briony Goffin to work with people whose voices often go unheard. These included carers, care home residents, older prisoners and nuns. Working in the medium of lists, beginning with the question “What do you know?” resulted in profound and moving compositions. Briony writes “*this project soon became for me about the individuals, rather than the groups to which they belonged. Subsequently, each piece of writing that has emerged is deeply personal and has involved a profound and often courageous journey. Whilst the work has undeniably emerged from four fascinating and distinct worlds, it is too easy to be tantalised by context. For me, this is the writing of many wonderful and extraordinary individuals and should be responded to in recognition of this, human to human.*”

“ I now know, because of my loneliness, when in company I talk too much. ”

“ I know George Best was the greatest footballer, ever I know that I’m not afraid of the dark. ”

“ I know what it’s like to have a stroke
I know what it’s like to place a baby up for adoption
I know that I like French and would like to learn it
I have known good times. ”



Aged to Perfection

Aged to Perfection was a small book with big ideas. Featuring new work from older writers across Wales, the book was never meant to sit on a bookshelf but was designed to be passed on, with over 1,000 copies beginning their journey at the Hay Literature Festival launch in 2010. Copies made it as far as Australia, New Zealand and even Everest Base Camp.

So keep your eyes peeled, you may spot a copy of *Aged to Perfection* on your travels. Please let us know if you do!

Dyma Ni (Here We Are)

Meeting monthly in Caernarfon Library, Disability Arts Cymru’s Welsh language creative writing group teamed up with author Siân Northey to create and publish new work; *Dyma Ni (Here We Are)*

Members of the group live with a range of medical conditions and long term illnesses and their commitment to creative writing enhances their confidence and self value.

“ I have been battling a long term illness for many years. The things I am able to do have decreased and my world has become smaller as a result. This project has expanded my horizons and has helped me to feel that I have some kind of identity once again. ”

Visual Art

“ Doing something creative is very conducive to peace of mind, it fights stress and lowers my blood pressure, a bonus! ”



No Regrets

Gwanwyn commissioned Cardiff-based photographer, Michal Iwanowski, to create a new public art work that challenged preconceived ideas and stereotypes of older people and what it is to grow older in Wales. This commission sought to be bold, shocking

and intimate and examined the stories behind older people's tattoos and asked the question 'do they really regret their tattoo in older age?'

No Regrets premiered at Fat Cap graffiti studios, Cardiff and visitors were invited to add their thoughts, comments and any regrets onto the exhibition itself.

Fifty over Fifty

Butetown History and Arts Centre presented *Fifty over Fifty*, showcasing fifty inspirational portraits and stories of women connected to the history of Butetown and the newly developed Cardiff Bay. The exhibition presented an insight into their achievements and motivation that empowers them in their extraordinary lives.

I 'heart' books

Visual artist Emma Prentice accompanied the mobile library service on their routes across Rhondda Cynon Taf. She joined the drivers for ten days and encouraged customers to put pen to paper and re-create their favourite book covers and quotes, using craft packs that could be left with each customer to complete in their own time.

A selection of the work created was combined into a huge Mondrian-esque collage, installed at Aberdare library, providing the opportunity to raise awareness of this hidden community and for housebound customers to feel part of something in their community.

“ I'm in my 100's so I don't read as much now. I like a mystery. I like to guess the culprit. ”

“ I like a mystery. I'd be lost without the talking books. ”

“ I turn the rubbish off on the TV and read in bed. I love reading. ”

“ I like Alan Titchmarsh books, a bit of romance and a bit of naughty. ”

Craft

“ I was feeling fed up and low when I came, I feel much better now ”

Killing Time

Originally commissioned for Philip Glass' MATA festival in New York, contemporary composer Jobina Tinnemans asked knitters to use specially prepared needles to generate electronic sounds that formed an integral part of *Killing Time's* composition. The piece recreated the natural sound of Pembrokeshire, in which the movement of the knitter's needles created a 'random sequencing sampler' that mimicked birdsong, wind and waves.

The knitted 'scores' created a physical memory of each performance as each knitting performer adds their own work to the same piece during the performance.



Pimp My Uke

Pimp My Uke, in partnership with Men's Sheds Cymru, provided Men's Sheds from across Wales with kits and materials to make their own ukuleles. They received musical tuition to learn to play their 'pimped' instruments. 150 members from Sheds all across Wales came together for a sharing event and performance at St David's Hall, Cardiff, with talks from a luthier, workshops, performances from Cardiff Uke Nights and the Plucking Fourstrings. It provided the first opportunity for all Sheds to come together and for some members it was the first time they had left their local community for a number of years.

A ukulele kit was even sent to Australia – the home of the Men's Sheds initiative – and a group of ukulele learners are pimping their own ukes in Port Macquarie, New South Wales.

The majority of Men's Sheds members are older men, who have experienced depression, isolation and other mental states which have impacted negatively on their lives. Taking part really increased the confidence of individuals; with new skills being discovered and a real and visible increase to the sense of well-being for those who took part.

“ The event was remarkable in so many ways; made even more delightful for the wonderful sense of spontaneity and sharing. Over-riding everything though was the great sense of achievement, self esteem and well being felt by all the members; to say they were buoyant and excited is an understatement. They still speak about the event to this day. ”





Music

“ There are good gigs and there are great gigs, and then there are gigs to which being present is a privilege ”

Folk legend Peggy Seeger joined Gwanwyn in 2015, her 80th birthday year. Peggy, famed as the muse who inspired her late husband Ewan MacColl to write his enduring masterpiece *The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face*, wrote in anticipation of her performance:

“ I don't know how you define youth, but to me youth is 50. So it's wonderful that the festival is being held in honour of and for people over 50. My golden years were from about 40 to 65, which is quite old in itself. Us older people have a huge amount to give to society if we are used. Many of us end up in nursing homes like we've been shuffled off and hidden away. Our wisdom, knowledge and experience need to be used. We need to feel part of things and a festival like this will really help. I'm very much looking forward to coming to Merthyr because I haven't given a concert for 13 months after being very sick. I had an emergency operation last April and I came within an ace of not being here. So the show on Saturday is going to be a celebration for me that my nose is going to be well and truly back against the grindstone. I'm delighted that such a festival exists. ”

Musical Memories Choir

Singing is hugely beneficial for people living with dementia as the muscle memory of performing can last beyond the stage where verbal language is lost. A pilot project at the Red Cafe in Swansea, saw choir leaders from the Welsh National Opera leading rehearsals and performances as part of the Gwanwyn Festival.

“ It is a time in the week when members can leave their home and come together with others and laugh and enjoy company in a stimulating environment. The singing itself is beneficial physically with breathing and movement, emotionally with a feeling of connectedness and wellbeing, and therapeutically with a connection to memories and reminiscences. Performing boosts self esteem and brings a sense of self worth and connectedness to the wider community. For the audiences at our performances I think it is positive to see people whose lives are affected by a pretty bleak disease living, enjoying life and expressing themselves creatively. It demonstrates that it is possible to live well with dementia. ”

Forget Me Not Chorus

The Forget Me Not Chorus is a Cardiff-based charity that supports people with dementia and their families with weekly singing and creative workshops. They gave a food themed performance in Caerphilly Castle's spectacular banqueting hall, to an audience of family and friends.



Multi-arts

“ I defy anybody not to be moved ”

Butetown Women's Day

Women and children from the Somali, Yemeni, Sudanese, Indian, Bengali, Pakistani and other communities from Butetown joined together for a special Gwanwyn festival. Jamad Jibril of BAWSO explains:

“ The room burst with fun, energy and community spirit when everyone joined together to dance and perform music guaranteed to get you dancing – I defy anybody not to be moved! Gwanwyn's multicultural festival is such an important event, not only for bringing all the communities together but also for building that bridge between the young and old generations. ”



Comedy Camp

Laughter is the best medicine

In 2011, Gwanwyn and the Cardiff Comedy Festival set out to find Wales' funniest over 50s. Those who were brave enough took part in a two week intensive training course with professional comedians, culminating in a live public performance at the Glee Club in Cardiff Bay. One of the participants, Phil Westcott, had never performed stand up comedy in his life before joining the Comedy Camp, and he went on to become a semi-professional comedian, performing and organising gigs on the Welsh circuit, as well as popular comedy festivals in London.

He talks to Gwanwyn about how taking that first step to apply and take part changed his life.

“ I saw an ad on CEEFAX, on television looking for Wales' funniest over 50s. I'd been living with depression and just sat on the sofa watching day time television.

The workshops, the audition, nothing can prepare you for the first time – my first joke was about my daughter and 30 seconds before I went on stage I couldn't remember her name! Not a clue!

Then a fortnight later I was on the stage at the Glee club in Cardiff! It was mind blowing. Standing on the stage before the event I was thinking of all the comedians who have stood on that stage – I've stood on the same stage as Lee Evans (he is one of my heroes) – I love Lee Evans. He's played there, all the big names you name them, Michael McIntyre, all played there – I could feel it.

It probably wasn't my best performance but it felt like it was because I was on such a



high – going out onto that stage. It was my first sense of 'oh yeah – I can control you lot' – commanding, I'm in control of this from now on – if you'd have heckled me you would've been in trouble cos I was was on fire and I finished my set and it went down well. I will never forget that experience.

What would you say to people who are interested in starting something, but keep making excuses?

I'd encourage people to put themselves outside of their comfort zone. Try to do something that they never ever would think they were capable of doing. Cos I didn't, well, I must have thought that I was capable of doing it otherwise I would never have tried, but I would never have thought that I would ever been paid for it – I've been paid a few times now. That makes me a professional comedian. ”

Arts and Health

“ Gwanwyn is shaping the future of dementia assessment ”

Gwanwyn has developed a reputation of delivering high quality art projects for people who are living with dementia. We have worked closely with a number of health boards across Wales to deliver projects for people on dementia assessment units.

In Your Minds Eye, at the Royal Glamorgan hospital, was born out of the desire to make the environment more stimulating and to explore how the artworks could be used as part of the assessment process on the ward.



Artists worked with patients, their families and staff to make arts a part of daily life on the ward. The project's legacy includes a new sign for the Seren ward, art work that transformed the empty spaces on the corridors and a dedicated arts and creative space on the ward to run arts workshops.

“ *The patients were being engaged in something constructive and the staff were becoming more motivated... Families of patients were pleased to see their loved ones taking part in activities no matter how big or small a part they played. From an assessment perspective these processes allowed us to gauge the patients' concentration levels, dexterity levels and ability to follow instruction. For me as the ward manager, I cannot thank Gwanwyn enough for agreeing to try something very new and different. It has helped us shape the future of dementia assessment in hospital wards.* ”

Tactile Art

Gwanwyn worked with students from Cardiff School of Art and Design to design tactile art for use in the new adult mental health unit in Llandough Hospital. The piece was made up of a variety of 3D materials to create a stimulus for patients, staff, family and carers to touch, play with and talk about. This also helped reduce anxiety levels of the patients on the ward. Professor Marcus Longley, Deputy Chair of Cardiff and Vale University Health Board, said at the unveiling of the piece “*it was really inspiring to see the imaginative and cutting edge services you have all created in Llandough, and a great privilege for me to be there. Your partnership with Age Cymru and the young artists are a great example of care which goes beyond good to excellent.*”



cARTrefu

CARTrefu is Gwanwyn's partner project, delivering arts residencies in care homes across Wales. cARTrefu's aim is to make daily life in care homes more creative. cARTrefu works with sixteen artists in four different art forms, who all receive mentoring from an expert in their area. The project will deliver 128 art residencies over two years and offers dance, drama, music, poetry, felt making, photography and much more to residents and staff.

We couldn't do it without you

Gwanwyn works in partnership with over 75 organisations each year from across Wales. Thank you to all who have worked so hard to support and deliver Gwanwyn events.

It's great to be encouraged to try something new, you are never too old

Get involved

If you've been inspired by these stories, there are a number of ways you can get involved in Gwanwyn.

- Take part in one of the hundreds of workshops, events or performances during the month of May
- Organise your own events with support from the Gwanwyn Community Grant scheme
- Share your voice and contribute to the discussions about arts and older people by joining the Third Act critics scheme
- If you work in adult health and social care, be inspired by the use of art and creativity to improve the health and well-being of service users
- As an organiser of arts and creative events, are your events accessible to older people? Are your venues and activities age friendly?
- Corporate support – want to raise the profile of your business? Talk to us about a corporate partnership and we'll tell you how we can help
- Donate – Every donation, small or large, is truly valued as it really does make a difference to us continuing our work

We are really keen to hear from you to make sure the very best of work is being supported, created, celebrated and shared, so please get in touch on gwanwyn@agecymru.org.uk or call **02920 431 540**

“ Thanks to the Gwanwyn Festival, thousands of older people across Wales have had the opportunity to explore their creativity and take part in a huge range of different creative activities.

But more than that, the Gwanwyn Festival has challenged assumptions about the kinds of activities that older people can enjoy and proved that it's never too late to try something new.

Well done for an outstanding ten years, and here's to more amazing work on behalf of older people in the years ahead! ”

Sarah Rochira, Older People's Commissioner for Wales

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