



## **Consultation response**

### **Count me In**

### **Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee**

### **National Assembly for Wales**

**December 2018**

#### **Introduction**

1. Age Cymru is the leading charity working to improve the lives of all older people in Wales. We believe older people should be able to lead healthy and fulfilled lives, have adequate income, access to high quality services and the opportunity to shape their own future. We seek to provide a strong voice for all older people in Wales and to raise awareness of the issues of importance to them.
2. We are pleased to respond to the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee's 'Count me In' consultation looking into how publicly funded bodies can use culture to tackle poverty and social exclusion in Wales.
3. Loneliness and isolation are a daily reality for many older people. 75,000 older people in Wales reported 'always or often' feeling lonely, and there is increasing evidence that this can have severe implications for physical and mental health. People may become increasingly isolated in later life for diverse reasons, including retirement, bereavement, ill health, a lack of local services or transport and a poor physical environment. Currently over 100,000 older people in Wales are estimated to live in poverty. Some older people miss out on socialising or activities because even small charges for these, or the costs of transport, are beyond them. This means that some people barely leave their home, resulting in chronic loneliness and what we increasingly understand to be the severe health impacts associated with this.
4. Age Cymru runs a number of programmes and projects designed to enable older people who are socially excluded or living in poverty to participate in the arts and culture. These are discussed below. Further, more detailed information is available in the publications cited and hyperlinked in the footnotes.

## **How effective has the Welsh Government been in improving participation in and access to culture for people in poverty?**

5. Age Cymru receives funding from the Welsh Government to run the Gwanwyn Festival each year in May; celebrating creativity in older age. Age Cymru distributes grants of £500 to 40 - 50 organisations each year, across Wales, who are running cultural events and activities in their locality. This grass-roots approach allows Age Cymru to reach a diverse range of older people who may be socially or physically excluded from culture ordinarily, or who are living in poverty.
6. Age Cymru produced an evaluation document for its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary that highlighted the importance of these events and their impact on the older people of Wales.<sup>i</sup> Of those participants who took part in the evaluation, 92% of those who engaged in artistic expression reported benefit, 89% reported benefit to their well-being as a result of attending a Gwanwyn event and 62% now do something creative on a regular basis as a result of their participation in a Gwanwyn activity.
7. Age Cymru is able to work with partners to more effectively reach those in social or financial poverty, through projects like 'Pimp My Uke', which was run in partnership with Men's Sheds Cymru.<sup>ii</sup> Men's Sheds Cymru specialise in reaching disengaged men through a local shed or provision that allows men to work 'shoulder to shoulder'.
8. 'Pimp My Uke'<sup>iii</sup> was a venture between Men's Sheds Cymru and Age Cymru that successfully engaged older men in the arts. Men's Sheds across Wales were given kits to make their own ukuleles and provided with musical tuition to learn to play their 'pimped' instruments. 150 members from Sheds all across Wales came together to perform in St David's Hall, Cardiff, as part of the Gwanwyn festival which celebrates creativity in older age. The event provided the first opportunity for all Sheds in Wales to come together, and for some members it was the first time they had left their local community for a number of years.
9. Following on from the hugely successful 'Pimp My Uke' project, Men's Sheds across Wales came together in Cardiff for an EiSHEDfod - a nod to the traditional format of the Welsh Eisteddfod and a celebration of all things creative from Sheds across Wales. The event was presented in partnership with Age Cymru's Gwanwyn programme. This light hearted and enjoyable event created an opportunity for Sheds across Wales to come together and socialise, share their work and find out more about each other, and for Sheddors to take part in new activities and learn new skills. There were performances and workshops, and a range of categories for people to enter their newly created pieces, made in advance of the day.

## **How effective have the efforts of Welsh Government sponsored bodies and local government been in using culture to tackle poverty?**

10. Through Arts Council Wales, Age Cymru has received funding to run a series of day clubs in Aberystwyth Arts Centre (in partnership with Age Cymru Ceredigion) and Age Cymru Gwynedd a Môn, where participants who had been identified as living in social poverty and/or isolation were brought together for an art club, taking part in high-quality and innovative arts activities.

'I never thought that I could be creative. When I first got involved, everyone else seemed to know more than I did. Everyone seemed to be more creative, and making new friends, which I really wasn't ready for yet. I challenged myself to keep coming, and I'm so glad that I did. I now come to every session, and I've discovered that I can actually make something. I've started writing poetry, which I find comes quite easily to me. I've also started to make friends, the thought of which would have filled me with horror when I started. Even though I only live down the road, it had never occurred to me before that I could just go into an arts centre. I now feel like a "real artist" and feel like I have a right to be here. For the first time in my life, I'm being told that what I'm doing is OK. It can be hard to believe it. I'm starting to feel more confident, and finding it easier to get involved with other things now.'<sup>iv</sup>

11. The Aberystwyth Club is now a self-sufficient regular art club.
12. cARTrefu, a project joint funded by Arts Council Wales and Baring Foundation, has been running since 2015 with the goal of improving creative and cultural provision in care homes across Wales. So far, Age Cymru has delivered artistic residencies in over 25% of care homes, not only in those that are privately owned, but also local authority owned.
13. 'I was having a perfectly horrible day until we did this. I feel completely differently now'<sup>v</sup> The cARTrefu Evaluation Report published in October 2017 proved that cARTrefu had a statistically significant impact on the well-being of the care homes residents, many of whom are living on low incomes or at risk of becoming isolated.
14. The Age-Friendly Culture Network, comprised of representatives from Age Cymru, Arts Council Wales, National Museums and the office for the Older Peoples Commissioner through Ageing Well in Wales aims to develop innovative and practical ways to engage with older people and to improve their quality of life and well-being. The Network ran a series of Learning and Networking Events in 2018, the report for which we are anticipating soon. Discussion points included: how to make better use of our cultural spaces, giving permission to play and making things fun, keeping things physical and setting the standard.

15. We hope that these comments are useful and would be happy to provide further information if required.

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<sup>i</sup> Gwanwyn Festival: Celebrating Creativity in Older Age, 10 Year Anniversary publication

[https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-cymru/documents/gwanwyn/gwanwyn\\_bro\\_english.pdf](https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-cymru/documents/gwanwyn/gwanwyn_bro_english.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> <http://gwanwyn.org.uk/events/dulcimers-and-ukuleles-squirrels-nest-open-day/>

<sup>iii</sup> Age Cymru (2017/18) A spotlight on tackling loneliness and social isolation among older people. EnvisAGE No. 12, “The Men’s Sheds movement in Wales – an insight from the Squirrel’s Nest”, article by Robert Visintainer.

<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-cymru/documents/policy/envisage/envisage-2017-e.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> Anecdote from one of the participants in the Aberystwyth Gwanwyn Club

<sup>v</sup> Care Home resident quote, from cARTrefu Evaluation Report: 2015 – 2017, Creating Artists in Residents

<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-cymru/documents/cartrefu/age-cymru-english---evaluation-report.pdf>