

All Wales Arts Health & Wellbeing Network

A few years back Engage Cymru secured project funding from ACW and the Rayne Foundation to pilot visual arts interventions in a range of arts and health settings, including galleries, museums and dementia assessment units in North Wales with Betsi Cadwaladr UHB. It soon became clear there was a wealth of amazing and innovative arts health and wellbeing practice taking place in the North, but also across the whole of Wales, yet few networking opportunities to share practice between the regions. North Wales did, and still do, have the North Wales Arts & Health Partnership which brings together arts and health professionals to share practice, apply for project funding and run projects but there was no equivalent in South or Mid Wales. That's not to say there wasn't partnership working taking place and practice being shared, but there was no formal network.

Three years ago ACW introduced a new round of funding called Sharing Together – this is their strategic initiative aimed at encouraging the development of networking opportunities.

The Sharing Together offered the opportunity to develop an All Wales Arts Health & Wellbeing Network, and we have received a small pot of funding to do this for the past couple of years. We started out with just a handful of Network members, but this has now grown to 50. Membership is open to all arts and health professionals and represents arts and health coordinators from a number of health boards; arts organisations; artist facilitators; local authority officers and academics.

The Network has become an important hub to facilitate sharing skills, knowledge and expertise; providing peer support; encouraging collaborative working; sharing resources; debating issues and discussing ideas for partnership working.

The Network is currently coordinated by Engage Cymru, and to date we've been organising three meetings per year. On the whole this has worked well with meetings being hosted by a number of Network members in South and Mid Wales, with video conferencing link to North Wales colleagues on one occasion. I won't deny that the geography of Wales and members' busy timetables do not make it easy for us all from across Wales to meet face to face and this is something we need to address.

Meetings have included presentations from Network members, as well as invited speakers, including Alex Coulter of AHSW who offered valuable guidance and top tips in terms of raising the profile of the Network and the practice in Wales.

In 2016 Engage Cymru delivered 'The Art of Health in Wales' symposium and showcase at Celf o Gwmpas, Llandridnod Wells. Link to event summary report and video presentations:- <http://www.engage.org/cymruresources.aspx>

Last year South and Mid Wales Network members secured Seed Funding from Artworks Cymru as part of the PHF Special Initiative to develop an Artists in Hospital Toolkit.

Link to Toolkit:- <http://artworks.cymru/Artists-in-Hospitals-Toolkit>

Link to Wales Arts Health & Wellbeing web page (on ABMUHB website), hosted and maintained by Prue Thimbleby:- <http://www.artsinhealth.wales/>

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