

# The People and Work Unit

## 1984-2009: the first 25 years

*Dedicated to the memory of the Rev. Ray Taylor, co-founder and first Chairperson of the People and Work Unit.*

The People and Work Unit is a not-for-profit company and a registered charity that works in the field of education, economic and social research. The aim of the People and Work Unit is to make a real difference to people's lives and it works through a linked approach of high quality research and evaluation work and innovative action-research projects.

The Unit has never had any core funding. The self-generated action-research<sup>1</sup> work is funded through charitable trusts and public funding and the Unit also earns income from commissioned work done for the public and voluntary sectors. Any surplus earned through the research and evaluation contracts goes into our action-research work. Our action-research work aims to explore what it takes to tackle the most deeply rooted inequalities, targeting this investment at the individuals and actions that can make the greatest impact on the community.

The main resource that the Unit has is the people who work with it. It has a strong team of highly qualified and experienced researchers and of community based project workers and is managed by a voluntary board of Trustees drawn from the private, public and voluntary sectors. In 2009 the Unit has an employed staff of eleven and a board of seven trustees. In addition the Unit has 'associates' who are frequently involved in its work.



<sup>1</sup> A process described by Lewin as a spiral of steps comprising a circle of planning, action and fact-finding about the result of the action, which leads to social change (Lewin 1946)

**Origins** - Twenty-five years ago, when the People and Work Unit was launched as an independent charity, the Welsh economy was going through a period of turmoil and change. The Unit was established in April 1984, a month after the start of the last national Miners' Strike signalled the final gasps of the dominance of heavy industry in Wales. Wales was struggling to develop a new type of economy and with the social and economic impacts of structural change in employment.

Welsh communities were formed around employment, from the rural villages that served farming and processed its products, to the stretched out hillside housing typical of the South Wales Valleys that were developed for the coal industry. Employment provided an infrastructure that bound communities, giving a common experience which, at best, fostered cooperation to create and run their own services, including libraries, hospitals, social care and scholarship. Poverty, risk and insecurity were always present and it would be wrong to regret the industrial and agricultural past without counting the high cost they exacted in human misery. But labour market changes brought new challenges to Wales in the 1980s including the splintering of the economy into fragments of work that provided neighbours with very different, and often competitive, experiences. This individualisation brought new freedom and choice to some, exclusion and stress to others.

The People and Work Unit set out to explore these changes, on a stated premise that by better understanding what was happening, it would be able to contribute to reducing the social inequalities that were becoming increasingly intransigent. The founders of the Unit, led by Joe Miller and our first Chairman, Ray Taylor, focused on action-research as a methodology and this has remained our core approach. Our action-research programmes have focused on how individuals who have been disadvantaged by economic change can be supported to catch up with, and make best use of, the opportunities available. Inevitably this has involved us in exploring why they were left behind in the first place and what it would take to tackle some of these underlying causal factors.

The Unit has always seen learning as the key tool in tackling inequalities and much of the Unit's work in the last decade has been focused on schools and post compulsory education. In our action-research work we have been looking at what it takes to break the cycles of poverty that are evident in families and whole communities, and how support, guidance and teaching can be developed to make a sustainable difference to those trapped in poverty. We have also started to work with partners to explore how community cultures support inequalities by inhibiting change and how to impact on these. The Unit's website offers an insight into what the People and Work Unit is doing now and what is planned and how this links into this core ethic.

Inevitably as we passed our twenty-fifth anniversary we reflected on what we had been doing for the last quarter of a century. In many ways the conclusion was depressing. Looking back at reports and papers written in 1984 much was recognisable today. For example, in the report that launched the People and Work Unit, a study of the social impacts of the slim down of the Llanwern Steelworks, Joe Miller concluded:

*“individuals differ in their capacity to mobilise their latent potential, and the quality of social support available to the person can considerably influence the outcome. It is important that professional helpers should be ready to intervene in favour of solutions which will increase self-confidence, maturity and ability to cope with stress ...”* these concepts of individual behaviour and need would seem to be equally applicable to communities. (Situation Vacant. CDF. 1982. p.71)

This conclusion still drives the People and Work Unit's thinking, twenty-five years later. Understanding why some individuals are so much less able to thrive in learning than others, and the ways that social support operates to enhance or inhibit that ability, still shapes the Unit's work today. We have come to the conclusion that this work is at the core of tackling child poverty in Wales since lack of qualifications is the greatest predictor of poverty and parental education still largely determines the qualification levels a child will attain. 32% of children in Wales<sup>2</sup> live in poverty and the real inequality is that most of these will hand their poverty on to their children. Until and unless we can break these cycles of inequalities that lie at the heart of Welsh society, child poverty will always have lifelong consequences and parental poverty will continue to predict the outcomes of children.

After twenty-five years the People and Work Unit is still convinced that education is the most powerful tool Wales has to break that cycle.

<sup>2</sup> National Statistics (2008) Mid Year Population Estimates.

## Changing Lives

Using an action-research methodology has meant that the Unit has been able to explore these issues with the people they most effect whilst giving them the opportunity to change their lives. From its inception the Unit has worked to offer both its staff and project participants the highest quality learning it could to give them the opportunity to gain new skills and qualifications and demonstrate their sustainable impacts.

From the Ladder project (1997-2001) which supported its nine project workers to become professionals in their own communities, to Build It (2002-2007) which enabled sixteen young people to qualify in skilled trades and Life Support (2003-2008) which helped twelve people embark on university degree courses after leaving school, in some cases, with no qualifications at all, the Unit has worked to demonstrate what can be achieved when people are supported to develop their potential.

Our aim, in all our project work, is to influence mainstream provision. In the last twenty-five years the Unit has made a real difference to the lives of hundreds of people but we recognise that the solution to child poverty ultimately lies with mainstream services and their capacity to meet needs and that this is where the knowledge and understanding we have developed will have its greatest impact.

There have been examples of where we have been successful in this but there is also a lot more to do. The Unit is, therefore, planning that much of its work in the next ten years will focus on two key areas around learning and its role in tackling child poverty:

- How people can make better use of mainstream services to improve their lives
- How services can improve to better support people to improve their lives.

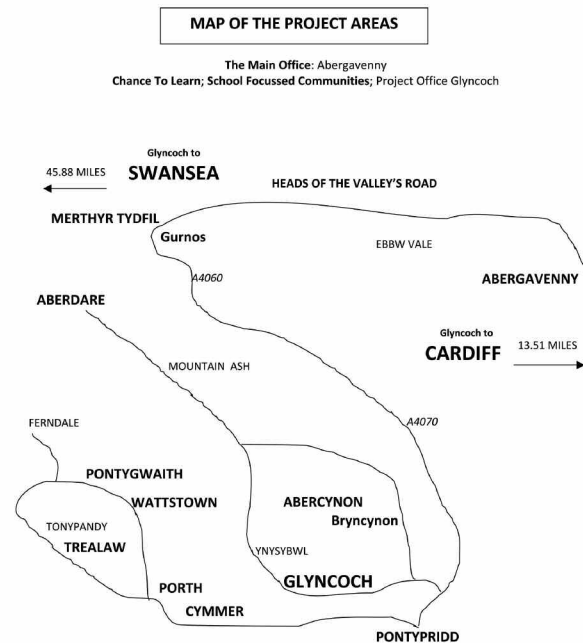


## **Current Action-Research Programmes**

The Unit's initial approach is to map the experiences of families living in poverty to identify how services interact with them, whilst also providing them with support to get the best out of mainstream services. The Unit is working with the Glyncoch Partnership, a local partnership of residents and key support agencies developed through the Communities First Programme<sup>3</sup> to plan and manage the regeneration of Glyncoch.

In 2008 the Partnership identified helping children and young people achieve more in school as one of their two key priorities. The People and Work Unit was invited in by the Partnership and has added four new areas of work in Glyncoch focusing on children in the two Primary Schools and their families; local young people at High School and their families; young people who are NEET (not in education, training or employment) and adults with low or no qualifications, to an existing programme of youthwork, community development and community enterprise.

<sup>3</sup> A Welsh Assembly Government flagship programme launched in 2001 as a long-term strategy to tackle the social and economic problems of the poorest communities



GLYNCOCH TO	BRYN CYNON 2 MILES	PORTH 3.5 MILE	ABERGAVENNY 31 MILES	GURNOS 14.87 MILES
PONTYPRIDD 2.5 MILES	WATTSTOWN 7 MILES	CYMMER 2.43 MILES	PONTYGWAITH 7.9 MILES	TREALAW 7 MILES



This work forms an ambitious and innovative approach to tackling child poverty that aims to transform the attitudes, aspirations and skills of an entire community, by mobilising the community around the goal of doing the best for their children<sup>4</sup>, working to link the school, family and community in a way that will be unique within Wales. Aspects of the approach are also being tested in four other Communities First programme areas.

The aim of this work is to address child poverty by increasing the power of communities to support children and young people to achieve in education and of services to provide effective support to families and their communities.

Ten people working in the community, including five of the Unit's staff, are being supported and trained to adopt an ethnographic approach, taking the role of participant observers and amateurs while recording their observations.

Reflective diaries and online blogs are being used to generate an initial ongoing interpretation of the data with community members, policy makers and service providers encouraged to provide their own recordings.

The People and Work Unit's community workers are involved in three core programmes:

- Chance to Learn
- Build It Glyncoch (BIG)
- School Focused Communities

<sup>4</sup> Cabinet office (2008). *Aspiration and attainment amongst young people in deprived communities: Analysis and discussion paper*, December 2008, [http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/109339/aspirations\\_evidence\\_pack.pdf](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/109339/aspirations_evidence_pack.pdf)



**Chance to Learn 2008-2011**

Funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.



The remit for Chance to Learn is to support community members in all forms of post-16 learning with the object of improving access to, and retention within, mainstream education and training opportunities. Occasionally this will mean the worker running a course to model what is possible but usually the idea is to help other providers (from the statutory and third sectors) to survey local needs, recruit clients and help with progression.

Sue Barrow, the project worker, is based in Glyncoch but also works in Bryncynon in the Cynon Valley and Gurnos in Merthyr Tydfil (both similarly disadvantaged).

The project aims to work with a total of 120 people over three years and has already supported over 50 in its first year.



## Build It Glyncoch (BIG) 2008-2013

Funded by the Rank Foundation



The BIG project aims to support young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) to become re-engaged with learning and gain skills in construction trades. A core group of five young people, with the support of up to twenty others from time to time, have undertaken a whole series of projects within Glyncoch from painting rooms in the social and rugby clubs and in the local school, to refurbishments in the community centre and making benches and wooden planters to improve the local environment.

In the Spring the team took on a void flat owned by RCT Homes (a local housing association which manages property previously owned by the Council) and completely renovated it before it was occupied by a local mother and baby. In September 2009 four of the core team started courses in Merthyr College in construction trades. The project leader, Hywel Williams, also started his degree course in Youth and Community work having successfully completed a Foundation Studies course in year 1 (both with the YMCA George Williams College).



## School Focused Communities

Funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and the Welsh Assembly Government Outcomes Fund.



This project is working with five Communities First areas in Rhondda Cynon Taf to build links between the community and schools and to support pupils and their families to get the best they can out of their school years. The Paul Hamlyn Foundation funded element will follow two year groups from Glyncoch as they progress through their first three years of secondary school and then to decision making after receiving their GCSE results. Sam Turner is working with the pupils and their families providing support to improve attendance and behaviour.

The other project workers are linked to Cymmer, Trealaw, Wattstown & Ynyshir, Pontygwaith and Glyncoch Communities First Partnerships and working with school pupils and families from these areas. Each will seek to develop an in-depth relationship with at least ten families in their area.

## A Brighter Future

Funded by the Welsh Assembly Government, New Ideas Fund



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government

In partnership with the Glyncoch Partnership, Pontypridd High School, Cefn and Craig Yr Hesg Primary Schools and with the support of Professor David Egan of UWIC, the People and Work Unit surveyed all year 7 (first year) pupils in the secondary school before Christmas 2008. The results were analysed by pupils' home areas and the findings for Glyncoch pupils compared to those of pupils from other areas.

The findings were explored in greater depth through interviews with pupils and parents from Glyncoch undertaken by the Unit's action-research project staff working in the community. The report 'A Brighter Future' (available from the website) identified findings around social and emotional literacy, parental attitudes and expectations of school and acquisition of basic skills and will inform our programme of work over the next few years. One initial outcome of this work has been the decision to focus on the development of a cross-cutting literacy and oracy strategy for work in the community over the next year.

## Child Poverty

The People and Work Unit is working with Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council on researching the impacts of child poverty in the county and how successful local services are in mitigating these impacts. The research will draw on the findings of the School Focused Communities workers but also involves an intensive study of ten young people and their families in each of three local schools. The schools have identified workers who will provide support to the families and pupils over the course of a year, whilst mapping their needs and contacts with services. Between them, this study and the School Focussed Communities programme will provide 80 family case-studies for 2009/2010 and offer an insight into the 'lived experience' of poverty in one Welsh county.

## Research Work

The Unit's commissioned research includes a blend of national research for the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) and national charities; and 'local' research for Local Authorities and local community organisations. Recent work for the WAG includes evaluations of the School Effectiveness Framework pilots, Raising Attainment and Individual Standards of Education in Wales (RAISE), Learning Pathways 14-19; research into the impact and benefits of the youth service in Wales and relationships between Children and Young People's Partnerships, 14-19 Networks and Youth Offending Teams for the Assembly Government. The Unit also helped develop an access and inclusion strategy for Merthyr Tydfil CBC; and a 'hard to reach' learner strategy for Bridgend CBC. In addition, we have undertaken our own research, funded by the WAG's New Ideas Fund into the influence of role models in deprived communities; into debt and poverty, in partnership with the 3Gs Development Trust (Merthyr Tydfil); and into the barriers to partnership working, with Save the Children Cymru.



**Dr Sarah Lloyd-Jones** ([sarah.lloyd-jones@peopleandworkunit.org.uk](mailto:sarah.lloyd-jones@peopleandworkunit.org.uk)) was one of the founding members of the PWU and has been its director for over 15 years. Her PhD thesis with Cardiff University was entitled, 'A map of transition for young people in the South Wales Valleys' (2005) and was based on longitudinal research into the education, training and employment experiences of 54 young people in South Wales who left school with no or low qualifications (below CQFW Level 1).



**Dr Duncan Holtom** ([duncan.holtom@peopleandworkunit.org.uk](mailto:duncan.holtom@peopleandworkunit.org.uk)) is the Head of Research for the People and Work Unit and joined the Unit in 2004. Before joining the Unit, he completed his Masters degree (MSc. Econ with distinction) and his PhD (Development Studies) at the University of Swansea and worked as an Associate at the Universities of Swansea and Queensland, Australia. Duncan plans and manages the Unit's commissioned work and oversees the research process in the Action-Research programmes.

## Action-Research programmes



**James Hall** ([james.hall@peopleandworkunit.org.uk](mailto:james.hall@peopleandworkunit.org.uk)) joined the Unit in 2008 after a ten year career with the BBC as a director and producer. He has a Diploma and MPhil in Pastoral Theology from Cardiff University and a first degree from the University of Oxford (Theology). He had been both a Baptist Minister and Industrial Missioner before working for the BBC. James manages the Unit's Action-Research programme.



**Rhodri Bowen** ([rhodri.bowen@peopleandworkunit.org.uk](mailto:rhodri.bowen@peopleandworkunit.org.uk)) is a researcher with the Unit. Rhodri completed his Masters Degree in Marketing at the University of Glamorgan, and his undergraduate degree at Swansea University. He worked for the National Museum & Galleries of Wales and as a Research Assistant at Cardiff University before joining the Unit in 2005. Rhodri is an experienced researcher and evaluator, with postgraduate training in both quantitative and qualitative research methods and manages much of our quantitative work. He also undertakes research fieldwork in both English and Welsh.



**Jodie Sims** (jodie.sims@peopleandworkunit.org.uk) joined the Unit as a researcher at the beginning of 2008 after completing a Masters degree in Criminology and Criminal Justice (with distinction) at the University of Glamorgan and an undergraduate degree at Swansea University. She also worked as a volunteer with Ogwr DASH (a drug and alcohol self-help charity). Jodie has done a lot of work on literature searches and undertakes research fieldwork in both English and Welsh.



**Tina Griffin** (admin@peopleandworkunit.org.uk) is the Unit's administrator. Tina completed her degree as a mature student in Newport University and qualified as a further education tutor. She worked on the Life Support project as a tutor before taking over the administration of the Unit in 2008. She has recently completed a course on research work with children with Edinburgh University.

### Action Research workers



**Sue Barrow** (sue.barrow@peopleandworkunit.org.uk) runs the Chance to Learn programme. She has a degree in Sports Therapy and in Counselling and is a qualified further education tutor. Sue has worked as a tutor in further education colleges and is a counsellor with Eye to Eye Wales.



**Hywel Williams** (hywel.williams@peopleandworkunit.org.uk) runs the Build It Glyncoch (BIG) programme. A qualified carpenter, Hywel worked in the construction industry for 9 years before joining the Unit. He is a qualified rugby coach and has completed Higher Education Foundation studies and is now studying for a degree in youth and community work.

**Sam Turner** (sam.turner@peopleandworkunit.org.uk) works with School Focussed Communities in Glyncoch. Sam worked for ACAS for 8 years before becoming a community health worker for the NHS and then a community partnership support worker.

**Jess Adams** (jess.adams@peopleandworkunit.org.uk) works with School Focussed Communities in Glyncoch and Wattstown & Ynyshir. Jess completed her degree at Leeds University and worked as an assistant to a Member of Parliament and with an international charity before returning home to Pontypridd. She started working in Glyncoch in 2008, working with Pontypridd High School before joining the SFC project.

**Mark Hutton** (mark.hutton@peopleandworkunit.org.uk) works with School Focussed Communities in Trealaw. Mark worked in industry (Bosch) for 18 years and in 2003 launched a health and fitness programme for children and young people in the local community, working first as a volunteer and then as self-employed. Since working part-time for the SFC project he has also taken on a role in time-banking for Trealaw Communities First Partnership.

**Lesia Whitehead** (lesa.whitehead@peopleandworkunit.org.uk) works with School Focussed Communities in Pontygwaith and Cymmer. Before joining the Unit in 2009 Lesia had worked supporting children and their families in both primary and secondary sectors.

**Neville Macdonald**, who is also working on the School Focussed Communities project is the lead youth worker with Cymmer Communities First. He also plays in international rock band, Skin. Nev piloted work in Porth County Community School (2008-09) with support from RCTBC which has helped in the development of the SFC project.

## Accounts

The People and Work Unit's, 32 auditors are Dorrell Oliver & Co of Abergavenny.

### 2008 Audited Accounts

<b>Fund Balance at January 1<sup>st</sup> 2008</b>	<b>£145,180</b>
<b>Income</b>	<b>£365,329</b>
Of which:	
Restricted	£138,122
Unrestricted	£226,960
<b>Expenditure</b>	<b>£339,070</b>
Of which:	
Charitable	£334,122
Governance costs	£ 4,948
<b>Fund Balances at December 31<sup>st</sup> 2008</b>	<b>£171,349</b>

The People and Work Unit has benefited from the guidance, support and funding of many agencies over the last twenty-five years and we are grateful to them all. In recent years the Rank Foundation, Oak Foundation, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and Paul Hamlyn Foundation have all funded aspects of our work. We wish, in particular, to record our debt of gratitude to the Rank Foundation. The Rank Foundation has supported the Unit's Action Research programme for over sixteen years, providing encouragement and critical reflection as well as funding, and its contribution has enabled much of the development of the Unit's work.

**The People and Work Unit is managed by  
a voluntary Board of Trustees:**

Judith Jones (Chairperson); Archie McCaffer (Vice Chairperson);  
Philip Watkins (Treasurer); Ian Radley;  
Denzil Jones; Gordon Davies and Hugh Edney.

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