



## **Case Study Ceredigion County Council**

### **Project (activity):**

Working with the Ceredigion County Council, Nature Reserves Officer and Ceredigion Association of Voluntary Organisations (CAVO)

### **Background summary**

As a result of our initial meeting with Council staff, we identified several potential areas of support;

- Support existing volunteer groups, and the development of potential new groups on Local Nature Reserves and wildlife sites.
- Develop and advertise 'High quality' volunteering opportunities for volunteer-led activity within the Council.
- Scoping existing volunteer activity across Council departments – for example Countryside, Rights of Way, Education. Link up opportunities and volunteers.
- Support with setting up systems, processes and support initial set up for a County-wide Tree Warden Scheme.
- Scope potential for volunteering in care homes grounds.

We planned an initial scoping exercise to collect and share information on volunteering across the Council and highlight areas where different departments can work together or learn from each other and enable a consistent approach to volunteer support. This included discussing a single point of contact within the Council for volunteering opportunities, and potential for expanding volunteering opportunities, including a hope for support to set up one of the first Council-Wide Tree Warden Schemes.

However, after our initial contacts at the Council could not continue working with us due to illness, we shifted focus to the following two streams;

- Working with the new Nature Reserves Officer to support expansion of their countryside volunteering offer. Offering to help with systems and processes to make sure both offers (groups and individuals) are resourced and supported, and roles and responsibilities of each side are communicated via consistent offer and support.
- Working with CAVO to facilitate networking meetings (online and in person) for Council staff who support and manage volunteering – sharing experiences, knowledge and 'filling in the gaps' followed by training in managing and supporting volunteers.

Llais y Goedwig met with CAVO in October 2024 on the above workstreams, where several networking sessions were proposed, plus scoping of the current volunteer offer and training in volunteer management.

Unfortunately however, despite repeated attempts to move these proposals forward, it sadly proved impossible owing to lack of response and, we suspect, lack of capacity within the CAVO team, despite initial enthusiasm.

We have since held follow up conversations individually with Countryside and Rights of Way teams, alongside survey responses received, to explore current opportunities, areas for support and potential crossover. See end of this Document for the results of those conversations.

**What worked well, what didn't work so well:**

Our initial main council contacts were unable to engage with us due to illness and the pressures of work, so our engagement in this region had to change and adapt at several stages.

It quickly became clear, through contact with both CCC and CAVO via existing relationships that there was little communication between Council departments on matters pertaining to volunteering and that some of the aspirations of the Countryside Department were already being delivered elsewhere in the Council.

Owing to lack of direct contact with the council, we pivoted to working more directly with the local County Voluntary Council CAVO, but found again, that capacity was such that we simply couldn't progress our ideas.

Flexibility and thinking slightly outside the box has become one of the key themes of our work during this project. As a result of these challenges however, some of the 'work arounds' we put in place have actually led to a broader knowledge and input into the project than would have been the case otherwise.

**What has been learnt:**

There is a wide array of volunteering at many levels across the Council, with little communication between them:

- Ramblers & Coastal Path Volunteers
- Aberystwyth Conservation Volunteers
- Adopt a Path (RoW)
- Actif Ceredigion – Health Walks
- Ceredigion Museum
- Theatr Felinfach
- Youth Justice

Based on more recent conversations with individual teams, we have also learnt of other potential areas for support, which can be explored in more detail in year 2 of the project.



Ceredigion County Council's Countryside team has a strong working relationship with Aberystwyth university's conservation volunteers programme (ACV) which was an interesting case study in itself, particularly as many of the other local authorities have a desire to engage younger volunteers. However, it does not appear from the work completed, or through the survey response received, that the conservation team currently has capacity to consider their volunteering offer more holistically. There are possible new projects on the horizon with no volunteer base, and no existing process for recruitment. This could be something we could support with, either individually, or in tandem with other council departments

In comparison, the Rights of Way team has two well established and successful volunteer programmes (Regular work parties and 'adopt a path'). As a result they have a large pool of regular volunteers. The former group are managed by their local rangers, and the latter are self-managed, meaning less pressure on one single person, but no single point of contact. They are exploring setting up a third group, which sits somewhere between the two, and is based on successful comparable programmes within Pembrokeshire. Setting this up, and perhaps brokering additional sharing of best practice with Pembrokeshire, could be an area that Llais y Goedwig could support them with in the coming months.



### **Conclusion:**

The survey responses received from the Countryside team (though a new team member) showed that there is minimal detail taken from volunteers around their skills or motivations, they do not currently advertise with Volunteering Wales, or have strong links with CVCs or other third parties beyond the university, with no resources for facilitated sessions to streamline processes and procedures. There is no central 'pool' of volunteers, or those interested in volunteering. There is a strong partnership in place with Aberystwyth University which allows a great deal of work to be completed across 8 council sites, but with little capacity to extend/diversify their volunteer base.

In contrast, the Rights of Way team has longstanding successful volunteer programs, with a large pool of really dedicated volunteers who work week in week out, in all weathers, on distinct projects with local rangers. However each department currently works on their own projects, which is understandable due to the nature of the work undertaken (e.g. very much focused on rights of way). There does however exist a possibility for Llais y Goedwig to support each department independently, and look for opportunities to share resources, should it prove to be beneficial and/or appropriate.

On this occasion, the true conclusion is that we've been unable to find a way to overcome the barriers we've found within the time that we have. The capacity of the teams involved was such that we simply couldn't progress our ideas, geared though they were, to improving capacity.

Based on more recent conversations with individual team members however, there could be the potential to work more closely with Ceredigion in the coming months. In particular on the Trail Champions initiative.