cwmpas

Cymunedau **Digidol Cymru** | **Digital Communities Wales**
Hyder Digidol, Iechyd a Lles | Digital Confidence, Health and Well-being

Llywodraeth Cymru
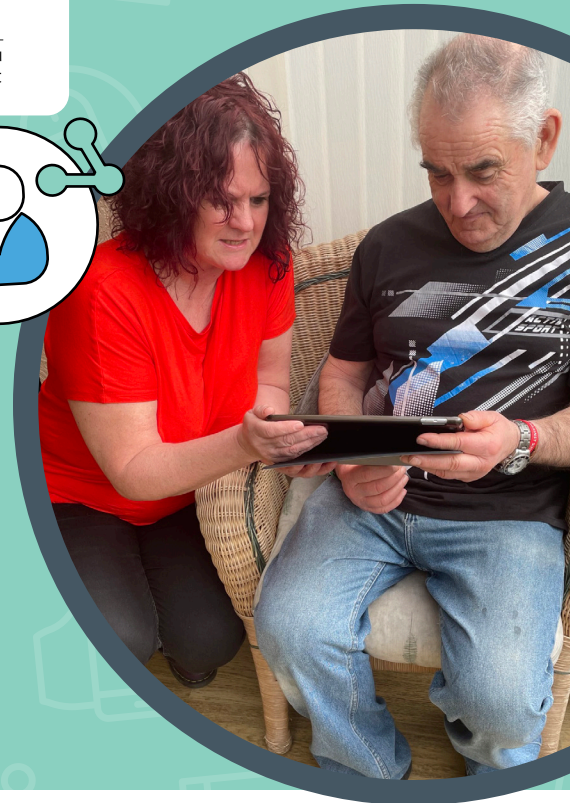Welsh Government

Case study

Eryri Co-Operative

Eryri Co-Operative's Gwenda Hughes discusses how their E-chat platform and digital inclusion projects across Gwynedd have helped their communities to feel connected and empowered.

Eryri Co-Operative is a person-centred not-for-profit organisation providing health and wellness services across North Wales. With support from Social Business Wales, the Co-Operative began developing and growing a network of volunteers to support vulnerable and isolated members of their communities. Gwenda talks about the Co-Operative's movement into digital services as they set up a befriending e-chat service with the support of Digital Communities Wales.

After a phone call with Digital Community Wales in early 2021 and in the middle of a pandemic, Gwenda began her planning for this E-chat service.

She said:

"

We were looking at putting a face-to-face support service in place to help re-enable people within our communities but that couldn't happen... I identified, especially in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, the need to develop a befriending service online, so I got a lot of help setting it up and applied for different pots of funding.

"

Their E-Sgwrs or E-Chat platform, which launched on 1st March (St David's day) 2021, helps to support digitally excluded people of all ages through loneliness and isolation by connecting them with others.

Gwenda said:

> **"** After the social exclusion throughout the pandemic, people really benefitted from seeing a human being on the other side of the screen and having that kind of contact in the safety of their own home.
>
> There's a feel-good factor to the whole project and it's been so well received. **"**

To support people in developing digital skills, Eryri Co-Operative also works one-to-one with members of the community to help them learn to use email, do online shopping, adapt accessibility setting on their devices and set up social media.

> **"** People have found that their family will come in and just [quickly] do digital tasks for them. They don't show them what [they're doing] which means the person cannot then do it for themselves independently... So I'd sit down and prompt and say '
> You now have a go and I am here to guide you through the steps and answer any questions you may have.' **"**

Though some of the tasks people ask for support with are 'everyday' to some, Gwenda discusses how valuable these sessions are for people's wellbeing and independence. Being able to make their own video calls to family, for example, or order their own food, are invaluable gains from the support they access through Eryri Co-Operative's digital services.

> **"** It's been challenging but it's so exciting when you see somebody going from having no digital skills to then being able to join a Zoom meeting or do their own online Tesco's shopping. You then don't need to worry about individuals who are isolated as they are able to order their food shopping online and get it delivered to their doorstep. **"**

To develop their digital offer even further, Eryri Co-Operative worked with DCW's Pathfinder project to access mobile tablet devices to loan out in the community. They deliver tips and training alongside the loan to help people test the waters and decide if it's something they might benefit from owning. Gwenda shares how their loaning and training with voice-activated devices have helped carers to leave messages for those they care for while they are away.

She said:

> We give respite to carers, but we can also provide emotional or digital support too. It's to help their wellbeing because they can struggle when supporting their loved ones.

One of the things that makes the digital inclusion work of Eryri Co-Operative stronger is their partnership with third sector organisations such as a local housing association. It's hoped that this could be the route to ensuring they are able to deliver support to the community long-term.

> There's always something I'm looking at developing and if I see an opportunity then we'll explore it.

Through the launch of their Caffi Cysylltu drop-in sessions, Eryri Co-Operative continues to extend their network of digital support by going into rural communities with a growing network of volunteers. Bringing together both training and befriending aspects of their support, Caffi Cysylltu helps to give people not only the confidence to get online and use technology, but also the chance to meet new friends.

Gwenda explained:

> It's a drop-in session targeting slightly more rural areas rather than the big towns. People come in to see us if they need a bit of techy support. And the other element of Caffi Cysylltu is a befriending centre so people that are lonely and isolated come in, meet others for a chat over a 'paned' as we say in Wales, over a cuppa. It's just re-engaging and bringing the community together.

Eryri Co-Op engages with and supports their community through a range of means and they use their curiosity about the people they work with to guide the services they offer. They have also made use of Welsh Government's Winter Hardship funding, an initiative aimed at individuals who don't have access to internet or enabled digital devices, to support their most vulnerable clients. The money awarded was used to purchase a wide range of devices such as smart speakers to promote inclusion and mental health for unpaid carers and their families. Devices secured through the scheme were also donated to unpaid carers caring for loved ones living with dementia.

Gwenda said:

"
Our work is very much growing and that need is not going to go away because a lot of people aren't going to go back to [working from] offices, so digital is the way forward. It's just adapting it and our ways of life, for the benefit and the wellbeing of those people that we're supporting.
"

Three top tips from Eryri Co-Operative

1. **Assess the needs of the community and how you'll meet them**
2. **Build a sustainable plan of action and keep building on your own skills**
3. **Evaluate the impact you're having by talking to the people you're helping**
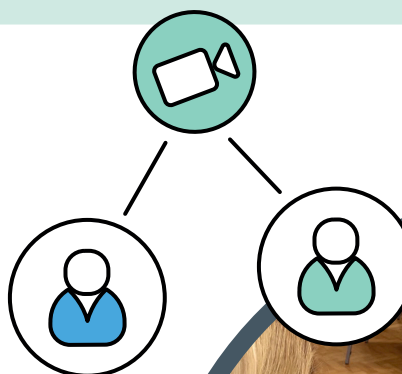
Help your community learn life-changing digital skills with our free training. Get involved here:

digitalcommunities.gov.wales   0300 111 5050   @DC_Wales