Eco centres take economic downturn hit

Two of Wales’s pioneering eco organisations have been hit by the recession, with one having to lay off staff and the other being forced to dramatically restucture.

Eco Centre Wales – which was a unique campaign group when it was established more than 30 years ago – will cease to exist in its current form from March 31. The centre employs 13 people at its headquarters in Newport, Pembrokeshire and North Wales Advice Centre in Mold, Flintshire. And 11 workers at the Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT) in Machynlleth, Powys, have lost their jobs as a result of the shutdown of a cafe and vegetarian food store run by its trading arm. The rest of the business – including educational activities and a shop and restaurant on its Dyfi Valley site – will continue to operate as normal.

Eco Centre Wales Director Jake Hollyfield said its problems were as ‘a direct result of insufficient funding to maintain its current range of activities at the level required to be effective’. He added: ‘Despite the very best efforts of all the staff involved, it has not been possible to overcome the shortfall in funds required to support the organisation to deliver its projects and programmes at a level of quality that is demanded by its members, staff and users alike.

‘It will mark the end of 33 years of pioneering and innovation in the field of fuel poverty, sustainable energy advice and support and climate change and environmental education.’

The centre once had funding partnerships with 10 local authorities, but this has fallen to just two in the past few years because of public sector funding cuts.

‘As a result of the change in the funding and operating landscape in 2009, our trustees commissioned a review of our work with the aim of drawing up a forward development and operating plan,’ said Mr Hollyfield.

‘This identified our key strengths and what we wanted to concentrate on. It also examined weaknesses and looked at how we might support our activities in the future.

‘Really, 2012 should have been a turn around year for us. We were quite successful at winning some contracts that brought us in the crucial unrestricted income, but were very unlucky on the grant funding. So we did not replenish our reserves as anticipated and here we are, having effectively run out of money.’

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The next round of awards for youth volunteering grants in Wales is now open for applications for 2013-14.

The aim of the GwirVol Youth Volunteering Grants scheme is to support the delivery of a wide range of new volunteering opportunities in Wales and overseas that will support the step change in access to volunteering for young people aged 14-25 and especially for disadvantaged young people.

The GwirVol grant scheme offers three different strands of funding:
• Creating Opportunities
• Millennium Volunteers
• International

You can get more information and download the application forms and guidance at www.gwirvol.org

The deadline for applications is 2pm Wednesday 5 June 2013.

GwirVol also runs the StreetGames grants which are open all year with no closing date. Please note: GwirVol will only be holding one grant round in 2013-2014. There will be no second round for September-November 2013.

Mr Hollyfield said it was a testament to the organisation that much of what was considered ‘fringe and radical’ was now mainstream.

‘It can rightly claim to have blazed a trail over its life, and could be said to be a victim of its own success. Where it was once operating on its own in the delivery of innovative projects and services, there is now a very crowded marketplace with a wide range of energy groups, both professional and voluntary.’

This, coupled with severely limited funding, meant there would inevitably be intense competition. And while the Eco Centre was originally a grassroots community group, it was now more established and had a level of bureaucracy that needed supporting.

‘Although our costs are not actually that high in real terms, we will compare unfavourably with a lower cost project application. Given the squeeze on funds, especially in the public sector, the other funding bodies will select the lower cost - and therefore arguably better value for money - projects and groups.’

However, the North Wales Energy Advice Centre, supported by Flintshire County Council, is re-launching as a self-governing social enterprise on 1 April.

Mr Hollyfield said the Council’s commitment to a funded partnership on organisational restructuring, and Dorothy Dalton of Governance magazine with top tips on how to avoid numerous governance pitfalls.

A selection of invaluable workshops will include a round-up of employment law developments; the legal requirements your website must adhere to; managing VAT and becoming a charitable incorporated organisation.

There will also be ample opportunities for networking.

You can book your place at www.wcva.org.uk – do it before 22 April for £20 off the marked price.
WCVA has responded to the Commission on Devolution in Wales’ call for evidence on the powers of the National Assembly for Wales.

The Commission, chaired by former Clerk to the National Assembly Paul Silk, published its first report on the financial powers of the Assembly at the end of 2012. It then moved on to examine the powers of the National Assembly for Wales and in particular the boundaries between devolved and non-devolved areas of responsibility.

WCVA’s response was developed in consultation with the third sector, agreed by WCVA’s board and endorsed by a number of local, regional and national third sector organisations.

It highlights the importance of ensuring that the devolution settlement is transparent, accessible and easy for third sector organisations to engage with. It includes the following 3 major recommendations:

- WCVA believes that the ‘reserved powers’ model of devolution should be adopted in Wales. (This means that we would have the power to legislate in all areas except for those specifically reserved to Westminster, as opposed to the current situation where we can only legislate on the areas that are specifically listed as devolved to Wales – the reserved powers model is in operation in Scotland)
- WCVA believes that the principles of transparency, clarity and accessibility should underpin the devolution settlement.
- WCVA believes that regardless of the specifics of the devolution settlement, intergovernmental relations are in need of serious improvement and that individuals and communities should not suffer as a result of poor communications between governments.

The Welsh Government and the three opposition parties at the Assembly have published their own responses to the Commission, all of which call for some changes to the current devolution settlement.

The Commission will be undertaking further engagement work on this issue before reporting back to the UK Government in 2014. Whilst constitutional issues may seem remote for many organisations focussed on frontline service delivery or competing policy priorities the implications of changes to Wales’ constitutional structure are of great importance to those we work with and for.

Far too few people in Wales understand our political structures and we believe that those of us who have the opportunity to have a say in how Wales works owe it to those who do not to get involved. We hope that our response, and its endorsement from across the sector, goes some way towards this.

You can read our full response on our website where you can also find out more about an event we are holding, in partnership with a number of other organisations, where you can find out more about the Commission’s work and how changes to the devolution settlement could affect you.

Discount increased on newspaper copying licence

A discount for charities on the licence to copy and republish newspaper content has now been increased.

The Newspaper Licensing Agency has upped the discount on its charity licence from £150 to a maximum of £390.

This licence allows for the paper and digital copying of articles from national, regional and certain foreign newspapers and websites, and the redistribution of content.

Those who already have an NLA charity licence will find the discount applied at their next renewal.

Tanzeer Ahmed, Head of Renewals at the Newspaper Licensing Agency, said:

‘The NLA’s increase in the charitable discounts supports those charities most in need whilst ensuring newspaper publishers reliant upon NLA fees are fairly remunerated by larger charities benefiting from PR exposure in their titles.’

You can find out more details about the licence by going to www.nla.co.uk.

WCVA calls for clear, transparent and accessible powers for Wales

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Jobs website for third sector

A n alternative recruitment package tailored for the third sector is a joint venture between WCVA and the Big Issue in Wales.

www.recruit3.org.uk carries a wide range of paid positions and trustee vacancies each week, and adverts will also appear for a week in Big Issue Cymru, published on Mondays, and Network Jobs magazine, published on Wednesdays.

For more information about finding opportunities and advertising, visit recruit3.org.uk.

WCVA Helpdesk
Call 0800 2888 329
Monday – Friday
9am – 5pm
help@wcva.org.uk
www.wcva.org.uk
Sharing good practice and developing the use of the Welsh language in the third sector

Emily Cole from Mentrau Iaith Cymru and Dai Bryer from Urdd Gobaith Cymru report on the role of third sector organisations in expanding and promoting the use of the Welsh language.

Among the topics discussed at the Third Sector Group meetings with the Department for Education and Skills is the role of third sector organisations and the Welsh language. These meetings are facilitated by WCVA in order to present and discuss major issues with the Minister for Education and Skills.

With the publication of the Welsh Government’s Welsh Language Strategy, A Living Language: A Language for Living, last year, the Welsh language became an important issue for the Group to discuss, and is now considering what role third sector organisations should have in expanding and supporting the use of the language.

The Strategy’s vision is to see the Welsh language thrive and between 2012-17 the Government would like to see:
• an increase in the number of people who both speak and use the language
• more opportunities for people to use Welsh
• an increase in people’s confidence and fluency in the language
• an increase in people’s awareness of the value of Welsh, both as part of our national heritage and as a useful skill in modern life
• the strengthening of the position of the Welsh language in our communities
• strong representation of the Welsh language throughout the digital media.

Following discussions with representatives from the third sector and Welsh Government, a paper was produced and presented at the Ministerial meeting in November 2012. The following questions were considered:
• Should the third sector play a key role in implementing the Welsh language strategy?
• What contribution can the sector make in increasing the use of Welsh?
• What kind of support and guidance is needed to help third sector organisations to increase their use of Welsh?

It was agreed that the third sector, as a major employer in Wales, has a key role to play in implementing the Welsh language strategy and in providing services, support and advice through the medium of Welsh. By increasing their use of Welsh, third sector organisations can contribute to the quality of Welsh speakers’ experiences and raise the status of the language, and the confidence of its speakers to use it more often in our communities.

Ensuring more Welsh speaking staff and volunteers can enable organisations to provide face to face services in Welsh, and the work of the Welsh for Adults centres can support staff and volunteers to improve their language skills.

Estyn Llaw offers various training, advice and development services to enable service providers to develop and increase their use of Welsh. Advice and support is also provided locally by Mentrau Iaith who work closely with third sector partners and the county voluntary councils.

The Welsh Language Commissioner has an important role to play and each local authority will also need to operate in compliance with the Commissioner’s standards when working with the third sector and operating multi-agency government programmes.

Following the Ministerial meeting, the recommendations listed in the paper were accepted by the Welsh Government, stating the importance of third sector organisations’ co-operation in order to achieve the aim of the Welsh Language Strategy.

The Group’s representatives would like to invite third sector organisations to contact them with examples of how they’re working to develop the use of Welsh as part of their services and in the workplace, including good practice in terms of policy, customer care, publicity and communication.

Contact Dai Bryer, Urdd Gobaith Cymru (dai.bryer@urdd.org) or Emily Cole, Mentrau Iaith Cymru (emily@mentrauiaith.org) for a copy of the discussion paper or if you’d like to contribute to the discussion and draw attention to your good work.

Is the CIO the right structure for you?

The Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) is finally available, after considerable delays, and many voluntary organisations are now considering adopting this legal structure.

It won’t necessarily be the best structure for everyone though, so it is right for you?

If you are interested in potentially registering your organisation as a CIO but you want to find out more, look no further. WCVA are offering training, delivered by Geldards law firm, which aims to provide you with an understanding of the legal structures available (including the CIO), help you to decide which structure is right for your organisation, and explain what is specifically involved in becoming a CIO if that is the structure that you choose.

The training, which is being run in three venues across Wales during April and May 2013, is suitable for staff and trustees/management committee members of voluntary organisations, and no prior knowledge of charitable status and incorporation is necessary. To find out more and to book your place on this course go to http://www.wcva.org.uk/training-and-events/training
Call for ‘strengthened’ sustainability bill

A group of 11 third sector organisations have called for changes to the Welsh Government’s ‘weak’ proposed sustainability bill. A consultation on the Sustainable Development Bill White Paper closed recently, a Bill which First Minister Carwyn Jones said reflected the Welsh Government’s ‘commitment to sustainability’. However, the group of organisations – including WCVA, WWF Cymru, Oxfam Cymru, Fairtrade Wales and others – believe the Bill requires substantial strengthening in order to deliver.

The organisations hope the Bill can make a difference in several areas, including tackling climate change, providing green jobs, improving the engagement of communities in issues that matter to them, and promoting co-production of public services.

However, they have said that the White Paper’s proposals fail to live up to the Programme for Government, in which the Welsh Government declared its aim for Wales ‘to become a “one planet” nation, putting sustainable development at the heart of government’.

Jessica McQuade, Senior Policy Officer at WCVA: ‘Sustainable development is not just an environmental issue, it is also about how we improve the lives of people in Wales, without impacting negatively on the world we live in. ‘We can integrate these considerations into the way we do things in Wales which will have a positive impact on Wales and the planet we share’.

Among their concerns is that Government and public bodies are only required to give ‘consideration’ to sustainable development and that this only applies to ‘high level’ strategies, rather than the everyday decisions that the Welsh Government and public bodies take which have impact on sustainability.

The organisations strongly believe that the duty needs to cover key aspects that impact on delivery and lead to sustainability outcomes, such as procurement and the budget. They fear that the current proposals will fail to make a real difference to the way the Government and public sector operate and will lead to business as usual rather than the step change that is needed for Wales to become a ‘one planet’ nation.

Anne Meikle, Head of WWF Cymru and representing the group of organisations, said: ‘This Bill, done properly, has the potential to make a big difference, improving our environment, strengthening the Welsh language, economy and society and making Wales a world leading sustainable nation.

‘To deliver what is needed to meet the promises of ministers and what is needed for present and future generations, it is clear that we now need strong legislation.

‘We want the Government to re-write this Bill so that it actually delivers a sustainable Wales. Unless we see major changes, Wales will fall far short of being a world-leading sustainable nation.’

WCVA’s response can be found at www.wcva.org.uk.

Local Service Boards asked for views on partnership working within sustainable development

Local Service Boards have been invited to give their views on partnership working within sustainable development.

On 4 March 2013, the Welsh Government’s consultation closed on a White Paper for a Sustainable Development Bill. The consultation invited views on plans for legislation to place a Sustainable Development (SD) duty on some organisations in Wales and create a new independent SD body.

The Welsh Government are exploring whether they could use the Bill to simplify the legislation underpinning local partnership working and clarifying and strengthening the role of Local Service Boards (LSBs).

To this end, Carl Sargeant AM, Minister for Local Government and Communities, has issued a discussion paper to invite LSB members’ views on:

• Ensuring that commissioning is evidence-based and outcomes-focused;
• Making LSBs statutory;
• Enabling LSBs to form ‘delivery groups’ to undertake commissioning;
• Ensuring partnership working is subject to cross-cutting duties;
• Integrated plans and delivery to be scrutinised by local government.

The Minister said: ‘It is only through working together that we will continue to improve outcomes for people and communities at a time of continuing financial austerity. ‘It is right therefore that we prepare the ground by strengthening the governance around partnership working in the context of the proposed Sustainable Development duty, while ensuring there is a clear line of sight to local democratic processes and the role of elected members.’

The discussion paper includes proposals to make LSBs statutory, with a defined membership. These proposals raise important issues about the breadth of representation on LSBs, as they explicitly do not include two current members of LSBs: Welsh Government and the third sector, currently represented by County Voluntary Councils (CVCs).

Although it would be beyond the scope of this legislation to impose statutory duties on independent voluntary organisations, the current proposals suggest the possibility of a looser relationship.

It is WCVA’s view that CVCs should have an integral role in LSBs, to represent third sector views, and we therefore propose that this legal technicality is overcome through placing a duty on the LSB to invite the CVC to be a member.

WCVA’s response to the Sustainable Development Bill is available at www.wcva.org.uk
A community garden in Cardiff receiving funding from a major environmental initiative has been encouraging local volunteers to grow their own vegetables and inspiring others to take part in sustainable development projects.

Canton Community Garden, which is based at Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff, provides volunteers with opportunities to grow their own produce and therefore reduce food miles while inspiring visitors and passers-by to start planting for wildlife and the table.

The group has received over £12,000 in funding in the past from Environment Wales, a partnership initiative administered by WCVA. The grant has enabled the group to buy tools, equipment, shrubs and trees and to hold training sessions, awareness-raising activities and to work with local school and community groups.

Environment Wales is a partnership of organisations in the third sector, funded by the Welsh Government. The initiative aims to contribute to sustainable development by supporting and encouraging voluntary action to protect and improve the environment of Wales.

As part of WCVA’s activities during Climate Week (4 – 10 March), Chief Executive, Graham Benfield, OBE, visited the garden. He was given the opportunity to chat with volunteers Michael Goode and Roger Phillips (pictured below), Carol Jones from Chapter and tour the facility.

Since its creation in 2009, Canton Community Garden has gone from strength to strength, laying the garden’s foundations, including areas for growing vegetables and areas suitable for wildlife habitation. The group has been working with Chapter Arts Centre since January 2010.

Canton Community Garden Volunteer Michael Goode said: ‘The funding we have received from Environment Wales has been invaluable to the success of the project and enabled us to work with local schools and community groups on a variety of garden related projects.’

Awareness sessions have been held to educate people on the importance of locally grown and sourced produce, and the garden has held harvest festivals and Christmas fairs. Over 150 volunteers have now contributed their time to the garden since it opened.

Following the visit, Graham Benfield said: ‘I would like to thank Canton Community Garden for a most enlightening and enjoyable afternoon. The dedication of their volunteers is astounding, and their work really does make an incredible difference to the wellbeing of their community, as well as being a key contribution in the fight against climate change.’

More information on WCVA’s work to combat climate change is available at www.wcva.org.uk.

• Environment Wales is a partnership of organisations in the third sector, funded by the Welsh Government. Its aim is to contribute to sustainable development by supporting and encouraging voluntary action to protect and improve the environment. www.environment-wales.org. The partnership is made up of TCV, Cylch, Cynnal Cymru- Sustain Wales, Groundwork Cymru, Keep Wales Tidy, National Trust, WCVA and Wildlife Trusts Wales.

Three weeks left to nominate in Wales Volunteer of the Year Awards 2013

Nominations are now open for WCVA’s awards scheme recognising the work of the many dedicated and inspirational individuals and groups of volunteers across the country.

The Wales Volunteer of the Year Awards are presented annually in June and have five nomination categories:

• adults (age 25 and over) • young people (under 25 years) • groups • green’ volunteers • trustees

The closing date for nominations is 12 April. Forms will be available to download as Word documents, and you can also fill in an electronic form at wcva.org.uk. Hard copies are available from WCVA’s Helpdesk by calling 0800 2888 329. Alternatively follow us at facebook.com/walescva and twitter.com/walescva and search for #voty2013.