The Making the Connections team are based within the 15 convergence areas of Wales and are employed to support Third Sector organisations within each of the counties to be more informed and engaged in the design and delivery of public services.

As part of their role each Making the Connections Officer will keep Third Sector organisations within their area more informed of their Local Service Boards (LSB) key priorities and what is happening in each of their areas, how to be Involved and also give them the opportunity to know what is happening throughout Wales to ensure good information sharing.

In order to support this, the Making the Connections team have developed this E-newsletter which we will send to you each quarter. The E-newsletter will have articles which will keep you informed of key messages, information and advice which we hope you will find useful.

A E-newsletter will be produced and sent to you throughout the project with the last edition being available by March 2015.

Should you have any queries, regarding any of the information or projects in this edition or in the future, you can contact your Making the Connections Officer at your local voluntary service. There are also hyperlinks throughout the E-newsletter should you wish to find out more.
The Making the Connections third sector project forms part of a larger national LSB ESF project designed to help drive improvements to public services in Convergence areas of Wales. See here for further information about the national project.

Making the Connections enables WCVA and the local county voluntary councils (CVCs) to strengthen the third sector’s involvement with Local Service Boards and the public service delivery for which they are responsible.

Too much to do and not enough people to do it?

During the Summer and Autumn 2012, the Making the Connections Officers came into post with the Project Officer, Tricia Jones starting in August 2012.

What role does the Making the Connections Officer (MtC) have in your area?

- Help third sector organisations to get more involved in delivering services in the main areas of work that the LSB is focussed on;
- Support third sector organisations to work better in partnership with other third sector groups and with statutory services like Health, the local authorities and the Police;
- Make sure that third sector organisations are kept up to date with everything happening under the LSB;
- Enable local people to have more say about the way local services are run;
- Support third sector organisations to have more of a say when it comes to the way local services are designed and run.

It is the LSB’s job to make sure that the services represented by its members, work together, so that people living in their area get the best deal possible. In the areas of Wales where rural isolation / high unemployment and lack of jobs are particular problems, the CVC now has an officer to support the LSB.

The MtC is project managed by the WCVA and is delivered using Results Based Accountability which aligns the activity and successes on the ground with the ultimate aims of the wider project.

As the work of the local MtC Officers supports the success of the LSB’s Single Integrated Plan (SIP), each one is unique to its area. If you would like to see a copy of the Single Integrated Plan in your area, please contact your local CVC and speak to your Making the Connections Officer.

Inside our new E-newsletter you will see some of the great work which has already started, as well as information which will enable you to share good practice throughout Wales.
A Chief Executive’s view …

Heidi Bennett, Chief Executive of Bridgend Association of Voluntary Organisations (BAVO)

The local Making the Connections Officers (MtC) will work to support the sectors ability to co-produce and deliver local services, but will also engage local citizens and service users in influencing the design of those services.

The potential benefits of the project will include closer partnership working between sectors and agencies, a more engaged community, efficient, flexible and quality services that closer meet the needs of individuals from the outset, and improved sustainability of services over the longer term.

In economic challenging times, there is a lot the third sector can offer with the right Investment. The MtC local Officers are key to pulling all the elements together, and without this project – there would be little spare capacity to make any proactive difference, so we are thrilled WG and WEFO have had the foresight to fund this ambitious programme.

Single Integrated Plans — Welsh Government’s View …

Local Service Boards, including representatives from the third sector, have worked hard to ensure Single Integrated Plans (SIP) are now in place in 21 out of the 22 local areas in Wales.

SIPs set out clearly how LSB partners will work together to improve wellbeing of people and communities in their area. They provide evidence to demonstrate how the specific needs of communities were identified and set out what outcomes they are working to achieve. That said, there is a substantial variation in terms of the level of detail, clarity, style and content of each plan. Similarly, the principles of Results Based Accountability as an outcome focussed planning framework and performance management tool have been used to a greater or lesser extent by different local authorities.

It is the view of the Welsh Government that a well evidenced SIP that reflects the needs of the local population is the way forward if we are to break cycles of dependency and prevent the persistence of poor outcomes from one generation to the next.

We recognise that this is a learning curve for all partners. With this in mind, we have been working to establish good practice, building on the lessons learnt, with the aim of raising standards across the board. At this early stage we have mostly focused on the needs assessment, working with the analytical community through a series of stakeholder events and building networks to strengthen capacity in this area.

We value the important contribution that CVCs make to the delivery of effective services. They play a key role in driving forward this partnership working by providing representatives on LSBs to be the voice of the third sector and of hard to reach groups and local communities. We will continue to work with the Wales Council for Voluntary Action and the third sector to build on what has been achieved so far, with the aim of improving service delivery.
Hear My Voice

Bridgend County Together Partnership Plan was out to public consultation between January and March 2013. It was set out to consult on the key priorities for the county borough which would focus on where Bridgend County Borough Council will direct their resources in the future.

**BAVO** wanted to give third sector organisations the opportunity to have a say on the proposals as the plan will affect everyone who lives, works and visits the county borough.

In March, **BAVO** hosted an interactive ‘Hear my Voice’ event at Bethlehem Church Life Centre, Cefn Cribwr, to enable local third sector organisations to engage in the consultation entitled ‘Bridgend County Together’ on the Local Service Board’s (LSB) new Single Integrated Partnership Plan. 28 third sector organisations attended the event along with service users and those from partner organisations within the local authority, health board and South Wales Police.

Presentations were given by the Chief Executive of **Bridgend County Borough Council** Darren Mepham and Chair of the **Local Service Board (LSB)** on the work of the LSB and the Single Integrated plan, the LSB Partnership Manager and the Making the Connections Officer. The event included interactive workshops, which enabled a well informed discussion with third sector organisations, letting them have their voices heard.

The key themes which came out of the event were;
- Transport to include cost and accessibility;
- Lack of understanding and awareness of strategies;
- Wording in priorities and actions need to be better defined, more specific with less;
- Terminology;
- Lack of awareness of services in and across the County Borough;

Disabled People Together: Our rights and how to use them?

On March 15th **Carwen Griffith**, Making the Connections officer for **Ceredigion Association Voluntary Organisations (CAVO)** organised and facilitated an event entitled ‘Disabled People Together- know your rights and how to use them’.

They informed third sector organisations working with disabled people to have their say about the work being carried out by the Local Service Board (LSB).
Welfare Reform World Café event

Debbie Doig Evans, Denbighshire Voluntary Service Council’s (DVSC)

In February the Making the Connections Officer, hosted a World Café event for members of Denbighshire’s Advice Network who are affected by the incoming welfare reforms at the Pavilion Theatre.

A World Café gives an opportunity for people to come together in a relaxed atmosphere, they spend time at each table talking together about a focused question so that ideas, knowledge and information is shared and ‘cross-pollinated’. With music playing in the background, the participants were encouraged to openly debate the questions on each table and scribble their ideas and thoughts down on the paper table cloths supplied.

The groups discussed questions such as what impact the reforms will have both on individuals claiming benefits and on the organisations that support and advise them; how can we raise awareness of the changes and identifying support needed to meet these new demands.

The participants who came along valued the time to network and openly discuss the challenges that lie ahead for services users and those organisations that support them. As result of the session we plan to facilitate an action group to look at the priority areas identified and work together to implement them.

LSB Priority Workshops

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council for Voluntary Service has recently facilitated two workshops to explore how the third sector can help identify and address the real needs that exist within each of the five key priorities set out by the Local Service Board (LSB) and to explore possible solutions.

The five key priorities identified by the LSB as a focus for shared and determined action with Neath Port Talbot are:

- Jobs;
- Welfare Reform;
- Protecting the Vulnerable;
- Inequities in Health and Well-being;
- Transport;

Participants were asked to highlight key issues in their area of work, as well as identifying what to do as individual organisations and as a sector to meet those needs and provide a solution focused approach by the Third Sector in Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council.

Highlighted issues included, a lack of individuals understanding of the effects of welfare reform, need for local transport solutions, digital inclusion agenda, especially in light of ‘digital by default’.

Some of the solutions suggested to these issues included additional hours at local community education facilities to help access the internet and web based forms and a myth busting campaign to send the right messages out to individuals about welfare reform.
Partnership working

**Tackling poverty**

Torfaen Voluntary Alliance (TVA) has been working closely with Torfaen Citizens Advice Bureau and Credit Union on the tackling poverty agenda. Bringing these two organisations together, TVA has also been working with the Disability Advice Project.

As of April 2013 these organisations will work together daily with TVA at their outreach centre to assist with the tackling poverty agenda and the Welfare Reforms. This partnership meets the priorities of the Local Service Board under the Making the Connections Project.

**Partnership working with the voluntary sector to protect residents**

North Wales Fire and Rescue Service are working in partnership with Voluntary Sector organisations to protect residents in the region.

Staff from the service, in partnership with the voluntary services councils for Denbighshire and Conwy, held a workshop for employees who work within Voluntary Sector organisations in both counties at the Rhyl Community Fire Station.

Kim Waller, Voluntary Sector Co-ordinator said: “This is the first time that we have held an event to look at partnership working between North Wales Fire and Rescue Service and the voluntary sector. I was very pleased to see a number of organisations represented at the event which highlights that fire safety plays an important role within their agendas too.

“We want to ensure that the third sector voice is heard and that we as a service can engage with these organisations at every opportunity and that they can have an input in the way in which we develop and deliver our services to residents in Conwy and Denbighshire.

“By striking up the partnership with the voluntary sector organisations, we are able to get our advice and equipment to those who really need it.”

Debbie Doig Evans and Sabina Dunkling, the Making the Connections Project Officers at Denbighshire Voluntary Service Council (DVSC) and Conwy Voluntary Service Council (CVSC) explained: “Our project is all about getting the third sector involved in helping shape and deliver public services. Often staff and volunteers in the third sector are best placed to ensure services are delivered appropriately to the most vulnerable and by working closely together with the fire service we can really make a difference. I hope we can run further sessions like this one and continue to develop services collaboratively.”
Working with the voluntary sector

Enhancing partnership working to improve service’s was a key theme of a meeting convened by Anglesey County Council titled ‘Working with the Voluntary sector’. The meeting included key representatives from the third sector and discussed areas for the joint planning and delivery of services.

Following on from the meeting the Medrwn Mon ‘Making the Connections’ Project Officer was involved in writing a joint paper on co-production and elderly care provision on Anglesey. The paper has been written in conjunction with the Anglesey Council Social Services department and the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Local Service Board Manager.

Medrwn Mon’s contribution to the paper discusses how the Third Sector on Anglesey can contribute to improved elderly care provision in part through asset based approaches, such as co-production. The document discusses the economic and demographic landscape on Anglesey and highlights the need to work more closely together, and with communities, in order to ensure services are improved in the long term despite significant challenges. The paper indicates a shift in focus towards preventative services, enablement and promoting independence.

Keeping your House in Order:

This is the new project by Mantell Gwynedd to: ensure that third sector organisations are better prepared to run public services, and that:

- More organisations in Gwynedd can undertake the local authority’s procurement ‘healthcheck’;
- More organisations in Gwynedd have improved their equality monitoring systems, and their environmental policies and procedures;
- More organisations in Gwynedd are aware of the commissioning and procurement process;
- More organisations in Gwynedd receive training on collaboration.

Mantell Gwynedd will now provide one-to-one support to the 95 organisations that answered their questionnaire based on policies and procedures within their organisations.

The Making the Connections Officer and Social Enterprise Officer organised a series of ‘keeping your house in order’ workshops. The first will be held in a ‘joint’ conference with the Social Enterprise Officer, Youth and Children Facilitator and Health, Social Care and Welfare Facilitator in June.

The conference will include a presentation on the role of the Local Service Board and the Single Integrated Plan (SIP); The Local Tendering Process and Local Social Enterprises as well as practical workshops. Earlier in the year a workshop was held on Environmental systems.
Making the Connections

Community Voice:

The successful Big Lottery Community Voice bid of £827,667 provides an exciting opportunity for Community Voice projects to explore new and innovative ways of reaching the communities of Pembrokeshire.

Eight successful projects are ready to work with groups whose voice are often quietest. Together they will engage 4,800 people, including carers, older people, young homeless people and people with learning difficulties or visual impairments. Activities will include a community theatre which explores and identifies ways people can influence the delivery of services and a moving stories project which will produce digital stories exploring the lives of those with diverse needs.

Julie Kirk, the Local Service Board Link Officer at Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services (PAVS) has a significant role to play in helping to connect the projects with the Local Service Board, through her seat on the Engagement Strategy Development Group. The work of the projects will make a significant contribution to the Pembrokeshire Local Service Board Engagement Strategy and offers a real opportunity to change the way service providers engage with service users. Making the Connections also has a wider role to play, through supporting the Community Voice projects to access training opportunities and adopting environmental and equality monitoring policies.

There will also be an annual event to share learning from the projects. The LSB partners and commissioners of services will be invited to ensure that they have first-hand understanding of user needs. The potential for the future includes co-production and collaboration and stronger voices for service users in Pembrokeshire and ultimately better outcomes for the people of Pembrokeshire.

£11 Million in total has been awarded across Wales to strengthen community voice. Ten voluntary services were successful in obtaining money which will help communities influence services, polices and decisions which affect them enabling them to have their needs met better. Voluntary services which were successful include, Pembrokeshire, Conwy, Gwent, Cardiff, the Vale, Swansea and Bridgend.

For further information what is happening in different areas click here.
Third Sector Brokers:

A new service has been introduced in Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion to help people to manage their health conditions better and to support them to live Independently in their own homes. This is also available in Pembrokeshire.

Delivered by the Council for Voluntary Services in each area; Carmarthenshire Association of Voluntary Services (CAVS), Ceredigion Association of Voluntary Organisations (CAVO) and Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services (PAVS); in partnership with the local authority and Hywel Dda Health Board, the ‘third sector broker’ service aims to increase awareness and uptake of the services provided by voluntary or independent organisations – such as befriending schemes and support services offered by organisations such as the British Red Cross and Age Cymru.

The service is funded by the European Social Fund, through Welsh Government. Debbie Bence, CAVS Third Sector Broker Project Manager said: “The third sector has a lot to offer, and this service will increase people’s knowledge of the range of services available to help them live more independently.

“The brokers will be able to signpost people to appropriate services, whilst supporting health and social care staff to make the most of the services available. By mapping existing services, they will also be able to create a comprehensive database and identify gaps in provision.”

Healthy Partnerships Project:

The Making the Connections Officer in Swansea, supported the development of a successful bid under the Local Service Board ESF grant programme with Welsh Government. The bid was awarded to develop an existing pilot which has been run in the county borough and will support the development of the ‘Healthy Partnerships’ project to be rolled out across Swansea, Neath Port Talbot and Bridgend county boroughs.

The main aim of this project is to develop a robust trialled model of collaborative arrangements between primary health care providers and the third sector which will develop a complementary service for patients supporting self care and independence. The project will also be an opportunity to share information which will encourage primary health providers and third sector to join up in other areas within the ABMU area.

The project will disseminate information through the different sectors and will raise public knowledge of where this support can be accessed. Local citizens will be better informed and empowered about the range of holistic support that is offered by health focused third sector organisations.

The project will develop effective collaborative working amongst all partners through the project will ensure that the most relevant services are delivered and can be accessed by citizens; this will help to address the challenges of the health inequalities in the more deprived areas, forming close links with the Communities First teams in the county boroughs.
Collaboration:

Siaradwn Ni – Lets Talk

Suicide is a major public health issue in Wales and further afield. On average, 300 people die by suicide each year in Wales – putting this into perspective, this means that 70% more people die by suicide than in road traffic accidents each year. Since 2000, Bridgend and Neath Port Talbot county boroughs have experienced significantly higher levels than the national average and following a spike of suicides in the Bridgend County Borough area in 2007/2008 and its international coverage labeling Bridgend County Borough as the Suicide Capital of the World, it was deemed essential to develop a co-ordinated approach to reduce suicide levels and ultimately develop a more resilient community where early recognition of issues could lead to early recovery.

Although the numbers who die by suicide are low compared to some other causes of death, the social and emotional consequences are felt much wider, as suicide affects not just families and friends but resonates through whole communities. It has been described to have a legacy where a wound never heals.

How was the project started?
The Siaradwn Ni – Lets Talk programme was set up as a multi-agency consortium between third sector organisations, Bridgend County Borough Council and ABM University Health Board. It was developed as a classic example of out-sourcing Tier Zero support services which is to concentrating on early identification, intervention and recovery rather than moving people through primary intosecondary based health and social care services.

What does the project aim to achieve?
The Siaradwn Ni – Lets Talk programme aims to reduce stigma and improve public awareness in relation to mental health, therefore providing a legacy of knowledge regarding mental health, wellbeing and suicide reduction across the geographical boundaries.

The establishment of the Big Lottery Mental Health Matters fund promoted a collaboration between statutory and non-statutory partners across the two county boroughs of Bridgend and Neath Port Talbot.

This programme, as an example, demonstrates how the third sector can and does operate in conjunction with frontline practitioners who are looking for referrals routes for individuals that do, or do not require further mental health and emotional well being care assessment, or for those who require more in-depth support on a small group or one to one basis.

The programme aims to drive up confidence, self esteem and independence within our communities as well as directly supporting those who have been affected by suicide through counselling and cognitive behavioral therapy.

As an example of co-production, the programme builds on partners’ existing strengths and capabilities. This recognises and builds upon partner agencies skills and abilities and results in added value to the programme as a whole.
Are there any third sector stakeholders involved in the project?
The programme has six independent charities referred to as Stakeholders who provide formal and informal community based support to community members and professionals across Bridgend, Neath and Port Talbot county boroughs. These providers were chosen on their ability to deliver specific aspects relating to wellbeing activities and are proven experts in engaging with hard to reach communities. Third sector organisations are key, as they are operational within the heart of our communities and hold less barriers to engagement than that of statutory sector services.

How is the project funded?
The project is funded for five years under the Big Lottery fund and is currently in its fourth year. Funding for the project enabled two project officers to be employed. Following feedback from stakeholders, this was later altered to reflect, one Officer and one PR and Marketing Officer.

What have been the achievements of the project so far?
The direct achievements of the programme (to December 2012) are:

- Three conferences (Women MH, Men MH and Aspergers) – 281 delegates;
- OCN Peer mentoring, relationship handling, getting and giving support – 391 OCN level 1 & 2;
- 10 week emotional health and wellbeing courses (vulnerable young people) – 59 delegates;
- Introduction courses health and well being courses (as above) – 99 delegates
- ASIST Life savers training – 926 life guards trained;
- 338 bereavement by suicide sessions provided to 118 people / families;
- 1,142 cognitive behavioral therapy sessions provided to 278 clients;
- Listening skills courses – 290 achieving OCN Level 1 or 2;
- 251 young homeless people engaged with to develop personal development plans.

What is the future of the project?
Due to constraints, direct funding of the programme will not continue past the lifespan of the Big Lottery funding. The sustainability of the programme is through the identified learning which will shape the future of mental health Tier Zero community based service provision.

The new service will be developed to direct people to more appropriate types of support rather than entering primary and secondary health services. Therefore, part of the legacy associated with the Siaradwn Ni programme has been the way it has been used to define and develop the remodeling of adult mental health services across the whole health region.

The Siaradwn Ni programme has taught policy makers about the range of training and activity programmes that can be provided to support the ethos of reaching people before they become seriously ill.

Success of the project
A firm relationship has been built on respect and trust with all agencies delivering on the agreed targets. Statutory partners are now more likely to refer to a wide range of third sector organisations with the confidence that those referrals will be dealt with in a professional and specialist manner. Across the ABMU health board area, partners are redesigning mental health with a view of commissioning more Tier Zero services across the health footprint. As such, the learning taken from the Siaradwn Ni programme has been embedded throughout this strategic regional redesign of services.
Third Sector Events:

Working Together Event:

As part of the Making the Connections project and in the spirit of working strategically together to deliver the Single Integrated Plan (SIP) Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil (VAMT) held an event to begin to look at the ambitious delivery needed to realise the vision of the SIP. It is recognised that no single organisation can meet the total needs of a community and all are facing financial pressures. Consequently, there should be opportunity for third sector organisations to support in the design and delivery, of public services. As a result, Making the Connections organised an event to explore the sectors understanding and readiness to deliver and assist in the design of public services.

The event informed the sector about service delivery and design through relevant presentations. These included:

**Preparing for service delivery, Gareth Coles, WCVA.**
Gareth responded to several questions after his presentation and recommended that organisations become familiar with the following information:

- [Welsh Governments Grants Centre of Excellence](#)
- [Value Wales](#)
- [Can Do Toolkit 2 – SME-friendly procurement](#)
- [Co-production](#), Ruth Dineen, Founder, [All in this Together](#)

**Wales Well Being Bond, Alun Jones**
[Click here](#) for an example of a working social investment bond

The presentations were followed by open space discussions where attendees generated the topics they wished to discuss and from points made actions were added. The feedback from the event was positive with attendees finding the content of the day useful to their day to day work. Attendees also saw the need for a third sector strategic forum.

New Website:

Carmarthenshire Association of Voluntary Services launched a new website, [www.thirdsectorcarms.org.uk](http://www.thirdsectorcarms.org.uk); a virtual space for representatives to communicate with the third sector. Here’s an overview of the website:

- **Representation:** the skills qualities, requirements etc
- **Current Opportunities:** representation opportunities in Carmarthenshire
- **Nomination Form:** candidates can nominate themselves if they meet the requirements
- **Representatives:** the third sector can contact their representatives to raise any issues etc
- **Report Form:** all representatives have to feedback after each planning group meeting
- **Report From Entries:** the third sector can view the report forms
In March, Carmarthenshire Association of Voluntary Services (CAVS) held a third sector funding network forum at Tumble Hall in Llanelli. Organisations from the public and third sector were invited to network with one another, share information and have a stand. The event was held in conjunction with the Compact Annual Conference. A variety of speakers contributed to the event, including:

The Making the Connections Officer from CAVS, launched the Third Sector Carms website, www.thirdsectorcarms.org.uk. The aim of the website is to engage digitally with the third sector through a digital hub. On the website; representatives’ report back to the third sector after their planning group meetings; nominate and vote for third sector representatives; contact representatives about issues to raise in the meetings etc. View presentation.

Carmarthenshire’s Local Service Board (LSB) Support Officer attended to provide an overview of the LSB. She provided some background information about the LSB and explained the Carmarthenshire Single integrated Plan has been implemented since 2011. Over the past six months the team have been working on the needs assessment to support the SIP. The document will be kept updated and ensure that Carmarthenshire’s needs are met.

Helen Martin gave an update about collaborative communities in Carmarthenshire. Helen explained that the project aims to encourage organisations to work collaboratively. The project involves working with varied groups, enterprises and training groups.

Ruth Dineen from Co-production Training gave a presentation about co-production with useful examples. This raised some interesting questions and discussion among those in the audience. Alun Jones from WCVA linked in well with Ruth, giving a presentation about the Wales Well Being Bond. View presentations.

An information exchange session finished the forum. The forum itself was well attended with free lunch provided. To include those that were unable to attend the mornings’ events; the forum was filmed for the first time with thanks to Alun Jones from CVC Media. View videos.

Carmarthenshire’s Third Sector Forum ensures that the voluntary sector is effectively represented in Carmarthenshire’s policy making. It provides the opportunity for Carmarthenshire’s third sector organisations to increase their voice across Carmarthenshire, which has the strength to influence policy at statutory level.

The Forum provides the opportunity to debate matters of concern in Carmarthenshire, ensuring effective communication, collaborative working and consultation between the third and statutory sector. Third sector representatives will report information back to the sector from their meetings; likewise the information from the forums will be reported back to the statutory sector at statutory partnership meetings.