
Cartrefi Cymru - The Charity that loves Co-operation

The word “co-operation” has two meanings. On a day to day basis, it means doing things together with others. This meaning is similar to “collaboration” and “partnership”. Cartrefi Cymru has always been committed to this sort of co-operation, and we are proud of our track record of partnerships with local authorities, housing associations, other charities, and community groups. We believe in the Welsh Government’s policies which promote collaboration, rather than competition, as the right way to deliver better public services even in these times of financial pressure.



But “co-operation” is also the word used to describe organisations and activities which are very specific in their nature. This sort of co-operation is based on seven internationally agreed principles, as follows:

- 1. Voluntary and Open Membership** - Co-operatives are voluntary organizations, open to all people able to use its services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination. ***(So no one can place you in a care co-op. You have to choose to join).***
- 2. Democratic Member Control** - Co-operatives are democratic organisations controlled for and by their members— for example, people who produce or buy or use the services of the co-operative—who actively participate in setting policies and making decisions. ***(So the decisions about your care and support are not made by faceless administrators or shareholders, but by people you have elected or can challenge as a voting member).***
- 3. Members' Economic Participation** - Members contribute to, and democratically control, the capital of the co-operative. ***(So you are not the helpless recipient of someone else’s largesse, but a contributor, and potentially a significant contributor).***
- 4. Autonomy and Independence** - Co-operatives are autonomous, self-help organizations controlled by their members. If the co-op enters into agreements with other organizations or raises capital from external sources, it is done so based on terms that ensure democratic control by the members and maintains the co-operatives autonomy. ***(So your care and support is more protected against changes you don’t agree with).***

5. Education, Training and Information - Co-operatives provide education and training for members, elected representatives, managers and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their co-operative. Members also inform the general public about the nature and benefits of co-operatives. *(So you as a user of your own care co-op can expect training too).*

6. Co-operation among Co-operatives - Co-operatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the co-operative movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures. *(So your care co-op is not alone, but part of a network of co-ops with shared values, potentially shared resources, and an interest in each other's success).*

7. Concern for Community - While focusing on member needs, co-operatives work for the sustainable development of communities through policies and programmes accepted by the members. *(So your co-op is outward looking, and seeking to support not just you as an individual member, but also the wider community in which you live).*

Even though Cartrefi Cymru is currently a charity with only a small number of members and senior managers making all the big decisions, we have become excited by these co-operative principles and we are now on a journey which we hope will revolutionise the way we work together as a big Cartrefi community. We support over 600 people to enjoy fulfilled lives as members of our communities all over Wales. We want them to have a strong voice and real control over the support they receive - just as they would in a member-led co-operative. We have over a 1000 staff. We want them to be as motivated and high-performing as they would be if they were running their own co-operative. We have hundreds of partners, both agencies and individuals, whether professionals or community members, who have a real interest in Cartrefi's success and whose views should be as important to us as they would be if they were voting members of the same co-operative.

Making the change from a top-down charity to a bottom-up co-operative will not be quick or easy, and we may find we can only go a part of the way for good reasons. But the journey is an exciting one, and the direction of travel is the right one. We want more democracy, more participation, more education for all, more concern for community, and more co-operation between like-minded agencies. We have user-participation forums. We want more, with more shared power. We have staff engagement forums. We want more...with more shared power. We have local partnership forums. We want more...with more shared power. We believe this will be good for us, and for all who are on the journey with us...and good for Wales.

We are playing a leading role in the promotion of co-operative approaches to social care and to this end we are working closely with the Wales Co-operative Centre, Co-ops Wales and UK, the Co-op Group Wales/Cymru, the Welsh Progressive Co-operators, Learning Disability Wales, and others. We are in the process of creating a Co-operative Consortium for Mid Wales, bringing together care providers, housing repair providers, community finance providers, local authority departments, and others who are prepared to sign up to the co-operative principles and work together with a shared agenda, rather than all competing, or hiding in our separate worlds.



If you would like to know more about Cartrefi Cymru's co-operative journey, or to join one of the Social Co-op Development Forums which we have helped to set up, please email us at:

coop@cartrefi.org

or

cydweith@cartrefi.org

For more background information on why and how we need to develop co-operative models of social care in Wales, follow the link below to read the Welsh Social Co-op Development Forum's submission to the Welsh Government's 2013 Co-operatives and Mutuals Commission.

[www.cartrefi.org/About us/Working in partnership](http://www.cartrefi.org/About%20us/Working%20in%20partnership)

"The challenges we are facing in the provision of social care may well be best addressed by co-operative solutions to involve all stakeholders. Cartrefi Cymru's pioneering work to explore the possibilities of a co-operative approach to social care is to be welcomed and helps put Wales at the forefront of efforts to find an engaging solution to one of the greatest problems facing our communities today".

(Mike Ash-Edwards, The Co-op Group Cymru/Wales)

"Cartrefi Cymru poses an important challenge to publicly funded third sector organisations. The public view of many charities is that their users may be consulted and involved but control is ultimately in the hands of an unelected few. In contrast, Social Co-operatives give ownership and governance rights to their service users, workers and volunteers. The challenge for voluntary organisations and charities is to take the leap of faith and commit to economic democracy".

(David Smith, Welsh Progressive Co-operators)

"Co-operative approaches can improve the quality of social care by giving a stronger voice and control to service users and workers.

With pressures on public finances, the time to innovate is now. The Wales Co-operative Centre is pleased to work alongside Cartrefi Cymru to put in place co-operative solutions that respond to the challenges we are facing".

(Derek Walker, CEO, Wales Co-operative Centre)