



## Stories from the Gwanwyn Festival Celebrating creativity in older age

November 2016

Want to take part in Gwanwyn in May 2017? Applications for the Community Grant Scheme are now open!

**At Gwanwyn we're all about participation. We think it should be you on stage and your work on the walls of the gallery. We're passionate that older people across Wales should have as many opportunities to explore their creativity as possible.**

As part of our commitment to that vision, each May's Gwanwyn Festival includes a special programme of events across Wales under the umbrella of our Community Grant Scheme, which is funded by Welsh Government.

Grants of up to £500 are available, and have been used to fund all kinds of projects in all kinds of places. We've worked with Wales' biggest venues and smallest community groups and have funded African drumming workshops, dance groups, yarn bombings, art exhibitions and jazz jams. We've seen events in venues including museums, theatres, community centres, sheds, care homes, hospitals, factories and libraries. Applications open in October and close in December. We then announce the recipients in January and they deliver the project in May.

Last year was Gwanwyn's tenth birthday, which saw £19,500 spent on 46 different projects. There's no such thing as a typical Gwanwyn project, but the money is often used to hire artists or tutors to lead workshops, for equipment and materials, to book venues, to arrange travel to and from the workshop, promotion, and even publishing costs.

Community Grant Scheme projects are primarily to encourage arts participation from older people, but we also like to see intergenerational projects where possible. Often care homes or drop in centres have made links with local schools or youth clubs and used these as opportunities to skill swap, share experiences, or break down barriers between different age groups in a particular community.



Image created by participants in Venue Cymru's 'Pixelsticking' workshop

We aim for the people who take part in Community Grant Scheme projects to come away with enhanced levels of wellbeing, or feel the special sense of achievement that comes with doing something creative, or just to enjoy a few hours of stimulating social contact. One of the most common reactions people express in their feedback to us is a sense of 'well I never thought I could do that!'

Gwanwyn also aspires to create a legacy with the community grants. We want people to share and develop their skills. For example, an art workshop might not just cater to the participants. It could also be an opportunity for staff members at a particular community venue to become more confident in leading arts activities themselves throughout the year. If you work at a care home, you might like to find out more about our [cARTrefu](#) project, which enables artists to complete short residencies at care homes and pass on their skills in this way.





Participants at Parama2's *Making It!* script writing workshops prepare to share their work at the Wales Millennium Centre during Gwanwyn Festival

Festival Coordinator Emma Robinson is on hand with support and advice.

Age Cymru's External Relations Manager, Iwan Rhys Roberts, is also available to advise you on how to promote your event and secure press coverage.

We reached almost a million people with our media campaign last May, generating 29 pieces of coverage, including guest spots for Emma Robinson on the Made in Cardiff TV station and BBC Radio Wales. Emma also wrote a feature article about the tenth anniversary of Gwanwyn for Cardiff NOW magazine, and there were 16 newspaper and online articles about our local events. Our tenth anniversary birthday celebration events also secured good coverage.

To be eligible for a Gwanwyn community grant you need to be a properly constituted organisation, and provide an opportunity for older people to participate in some kind of creative activity. We're particularly keen to target groups or individuals who are socially isolated or living in disadvantaged circumstances.

In addition your event would need to meet at least one of our other criteria:

- promote health and wellbeing
- be opportunity to perform, exhibit or display work to general public
- be an event primarily for over 50s
- challenge negative stereotypes of aging
- attract new members for the host organisation

We also like projects that can obtain match funding, so perhaps look into whether our £500 could net you an extra £200 from another funding source, or even a local business. In 2015 our community grant scheme projects raised an extra £7000 in match funding.

We make the application process as simple as possible to reflect the diversity of our organisers and encourage applications from as many people as possible. If you need any help at all with the application process, our

We can offer help composing press releases, designing posters and other advertising materials and offer tips and encouragement in getting the word out to as many people as possible.

You can also take advantage of Gwanwyn Festival's social media networks. If you haven't already done so please take a moment to follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) and join in the conversation online.

Applications for Gwanwyn community grant scheme 2017 are now open via our [website](#) and close on **Wednesday 7 December**.

Good luck with your application!

Contact us: [gwanwyn@agecymru.org.uk](mailto:gwanwyn@agecymru.org.uk)



Tystion TAN Dance perform *In The Spinning Lights* at Gwanwyn Dance Night at Dance House

## Linda Jane James and Dewi Morris—T.E.A. Projects

**Visual artist Linda Jane James and environmental educator Dewi Morris of Close Encounters with Nature work together on Brooks Art's T.E.A. Projects. For Gwanwyn 2016 they ran Gabions of Curiosity workshops in a Welshpool care home.**

Can you tell us a little about what went on in the Gabion workshops?

Dewi: T.E.A first primed the caring team to ensure that the day care patients were on board with the Gabions of Curiosity project.

We got the staff to ask the visitors and their families or carers to bring in objects that reminded them and others of their life histories and could fit inside the gabion, which was to be filled with their help over the week T.E.A were in residence. The gabions were then planted up with bee pollinating plants and installed in their garden

Linda: We raided the fantastic storage cupboard of the day centre. It was like walking into a sweetshop for me. Full of string, ropes, thread, material and odds and ends for crafting and leftover projects already started by past attendees at the centre. We had a dedicated room so we could make lots of mess and leave it out over the duration of the project.

Attendees had already collected together a lot of their own random objects that had meaning to them and their lives. Once we started it and stories started to emerge we found an energy from the people to bring in further items to enhance our gabion. I was really pleased when one farmer brought in his old baler twine and a sack of straw, and someone else bought in a cow milker.

We fiddled and twiddled, explored how to connect and enhance the objects. Each attendee made their own choices, some worked on their own, while others sat together and nattered as we helped them to create the work and encourage story-telling and conversation.

How did all this activity enhance the lives of participants?

Linda: They get working with their hands. Most attendees to centres such as this tend to sit in rows, sometimes doing knitting or puzzles but mostly without any particular purpose. They shared a project and they not only had to help each other, but also were able to help us with some of their own

remembered hand skills.

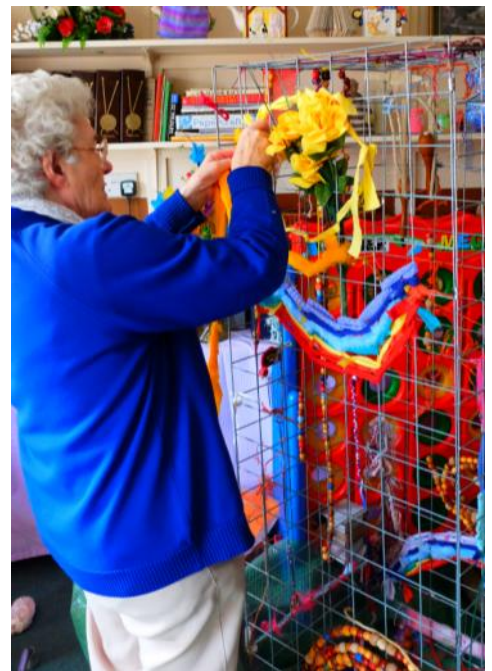
Using their hands (and therefore minds) in a new way or a way remembered from long ago was great physical exercise for hand and brain. Some attendees with arthritis had thought they could no longer do anything.

It was a joy to see the sense of achievement and discovery that hands could still create something useful.

Dewi: Staff were taken aback at the response of some of their more quiet and less extrovert visitors.

The restoration of manual dexterity levels of some of the visitors surprised the care staff and prompted them to recalibrate their assessment of the motility and mental health of the visitors. This was a truly amazing part of the project and exactly what TEA hoped to achieve.

How did your Gwanwyn event fit into your other projects?



A participant at the workshop decorating a gabion

Dewi: T.E.A. (Trade Environment Art) Projects is a new initiative that explores how local businesses can use art and nature as catalysts which connect local communities, promote environmentally aware enterprises and provide a rich educational experience for all participants.

Linda: I am a visual installation artist. I work with found materials and find imaginative ways to connect and make visible an expression of thought.

This was a great project for me as it was the first time I had discovered the potential of gabions as a structure to work with. The scale and shape of the gabion has opened up lots of opportunities in my own work both as artist for myself and in working with schools and community groups. It was



Dewi Morris (left) with workshop participants admiring their handiwork



Gabions of Curiosity

great to see an idea emerge from the paper and provide a wealth of interaction for the attendees.

Can you tell us about your favourite Gwanwyn moment?

Dewi: A lady with badly arthritic hands reaching up and seizing the needle I was failing to thread. She instantly threaded it and got on with the task! It clearly impressed on her carers that she had more get up and go than they had thought.

Linda: For me it was seeing it all come together, and seeing how the gabion

expressed the essence of all the people in the room.

I remember a sight-loss attendee who really engaged with the textures and objects during the workshop. She was telling stories and then at the final showing, was really excited about touching all the objects through the gaps in the gabion.

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## Mike Stevens—Suitcase Theatre



Mike Stevens

**Mike Stevens' Suitcase Theatre is based in Flintshire. They've been the recipient of several community grants over the years and in 2016 took their performance of Shakespeare 400 to Theatr Clwyd. We asked Mike about the impact community grants have had on Suitcase Theatre.**

Off the top of my head, I guess we've done about five Gwanwyn events.

One of the good things has been bringing a wide variety of art forms together – dancing, singing, voice work, acting, drama – in different locations. We've worked in Buckley, Connah's Quay, Wrexham, Denbigh and Mold, which has extended our range and brought different members of the community together and also brought us new members.



Pete Crump as Pyramus and Niall Borthwick as Thisbe, in costume to perform an extract from A Midsummer Night's Dream for Shakespeare 400



David Girvan, Niall Borthwick, and Pete Crump in costume to perform an extract from A Midsummer Night's Dream for Shakespeare 400

The community grant has helped Suitcase in a variety of ways.

For instance, when we put together *Pack Up Your Troubles*, which focused on the First World War, we were able to utilise the space in the theatre which we had already booked for the performance of a new play, by using the same stage set and putting on the Gwanwyn event on the Saturday afternoon.

It has also enabled us to focus on special activities, so that for example, by doing the Shakespeare event this year, we were able to offer voice and speech workshops as an additional form of training for our members.

Another good feature has been finding opportunities to work with groups we otherwise wouldn't have come into contact with: for example this year we found a local recorder group, and we were able to incorporate them into our Shakespeare event.

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## Kelly Barr—National Dance Company Wales

**Kelly Barr is the Community and Engagement Officer at the National Dance Company of Wales. She helped us bring together older people's dance groups for a special Gwanwyn Dance Night as part of our tenth birthday celebrations.**

How did National Dance Company Wales come to be involved with Gwanwyn Festival?

Gwanwyn Dance Night started off as a conversation between NDC Wales, Rubicon, Striking Attitudes and Age Cymru. It transpired that we were all keen to showcase some of the wonderful work that was being created by older people in Wales, and we were super-keen to open up the Dance House to everyone.

We were all aware of the great work being done as part of the Gwanwyn Festival and it was the ideal time for us to open up our doors to a new audience.

Tell us a bit about the workshops you organized for the 10th Birthday celebrations at Theatr Clwyd and Venue Cymru? What could participants expect?

We were performing our spring tour of *Folk* in North Wales during May so it was the perfect opportunity to work with two fantastic venues and engage with older people in these areas.



Betsan Llwyd performs *Croesi Traeth* at Gwanwyn Dance Night at Dance House. Choreography by Catherine Young. Photo by Mark Douet

The participants had the opportunity to take part in an NDC Wales workshop, run by two of our company dancers, as well as to see *Folk* at Theatr Clwyd.

Our workshops are all about the joy of movement, whether you're a seasoned pro or totally new to dance. We aim to create an environment where all participants can have a go and just enjoy the opportunity to get moving. Participants of all ages love to engage with the company dancers and get to know us a little bit better.

What are the benefits of dance training for older people?

The benefits of dance training for older people are the same for all people. Dancing and moving increases our health and well-being; allowing us to socialise, express emotions, try something new and improve our confidence. You only have to pop your head into a Zumba class to see what a positive experience dancing as a group can be!

How was the collaboration with Rubicon, Striking Attitudes and TAN Dance at Dance House?

Gwanwyn Dance Night wouldn't have been the success that it was without the collaboration between these organisations. All



Good News From The Future perform *What Comes Next...* at Gwanwyn Dance Night at Dance House. Choreography by Mike Pearson and company members. Photo by Mark Douet

## Join the discussion on Facebook and Twitter

The conversation continues online. Get the latest news, events and pictures from Gwanwyn when you connect with us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), or by [e-mail](#).



Participants in a workshop at Gwanwyn Dance Night at Dance House.  
Photo by Mark Douet

brought varied and exciting performances, as well as bringing the participants themselves who embraced the experience whole-heartedly.

It was amazing to see such a range of people performing together, from the wonderful intergenerational performance by Rubicon to the eldest participant of the day, who was 92, from the group Memories/Atgofion.

What kinds of things would you like to see come out of these kinds of events?

I'd love to continue to see these groups perform to the public, so more people can see the diversity of the talent in Wales. I hope that everyone involved feels a new connection with National Dance Company Wales and continue to visit us at the Dance House. Many have already expressed an interest in our new evening classes!

Caroline Finn, our Artistic Director, said, 'It was so inspiring to see such a range of works - the honesty, the emotion, the physicality and the humour made for a wonderful evening and I very much look forward to the next time!'

Do you see NDC Wales doing more work with Gwanwyn and with older dancers in future?

Absolutely! We can't wait to see how we can get involved again next year!

Contact: [Kelly.Barr@ndcwales.co.uk](mailto:Kelly.Barr@ndcwales.co.uk)

### See you next time ...

**Finally, we would like to say an enormous thank you everybody who participated in Gwanwyn's 10th birthday celebration in May.**

It was easily the biggest and best festival programme we've put together—over 70 groups took part in events involving 10,000 people across the country.

Whether you came along to one of our 10th birthday parties at your local arts venue or

attended the first ever Gwanwyn Dance Night at Dance House in Cardiff, or if you took part in one of our multitude of workshops or performances, or simply sat in the audience and enjoyed the show we'd like to take our hats off to you! Thanks so much for an amazing Gwanwyn.

We're already working on next year's programme and have some BIG surprises in the pipeline, so watch this space!

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