

In 1925 over 1500 members attended the AGM of the Tredegar Medical Aid Society.

Contrast this picture with modern day.

The new health agencies deliver services to patients. There are no members, no AGM's. When was the last time your health provider held an AGM?

The new agencies rarely describe the public as members, more often they are referred to as clients, customers, service users, patients, beneficiaries, consumers. This is the language of the market economy not mutualism.

The challenge for agencies is to revitalise the involvement of citizens by addressing new ways to replenish the diminishing stock of mutual capital.



To increase the stock of mutual capital we should:

REVIEW agencies that clearly create dependencies without any mutuality. They are history.

SUPPORT agencies that treat people as assets rather than problems, valuing their work. We need them more than ever.

REVIEW funding to agencies that cannot provide evidence of consistent involvement of service users in the design, delivery and evaluation of their services. They are not required in the 21st Century.

SUPPORT agencies that greatly increase the number of active citizens. They are the truly public spirited institutions of the future.

ACCREDIT citizen engagement, embedding the best values of our mutual past into our future collective affairs.

Building these new mutual relationships will not be easy, but they are key to making public services work



It's the Culture

Bill Clinton famously reminded himself how to win a presidential election with the line, "*It's the Economy, stupid.*" Admittedly, money is a powerful tool for economic regeneration, but if we want to rebuild social capital and civilise economic relationships, we need to view reality through the lens of social values.

If we take a few steps back into the history of socialism, we recall that radical culture *'is the use of collective action to transform society and so, lift all of us together'* Aneurin Bevan. The core values of that culture were mutuality, fraternity, equality of opportunity and social justice. Things that money will never buy.



The new agencies culture

Contrast this picture with now. Instead of active, thriving community institutions, we have professional agencies delivering an array of services to passive consumers. When service users are asked to give their time to governance, design or delivery of services by working alongside salaried workers you may now hear people say "*Why should I do this without getting paid?*" instead of "*I'm doing this because it's part of my culture*"

Without idealising a participatory past or caricaturing people now as only out for what they can get, we may wonder where has that *social energy* gone which drove the old community institutions? Why has the professionalisation of care, learning and community development led to the *passivity* that is so apparent in community life today? Why are the new agencies having difficulty engaging with people in communities? Why are we creating a culture where there is plethora of community services, but very little sense of community?

Can this gigantic culture shift only be put down to the usual suspects: the welfare state, mass consumerism, modern work patterns, changes in gender roles, the death of God, the erosion of faith in social institutions?

Fair Exchange

Modern day culture assumes that the only currency available for measuring human effort is *money*. We wish to set alongside this the complementary currency of *time* and describe how communities in South Wales are using this new currency to raise the value of engagement.

The community of Blaengarw is part of the former South Wales coalfield and is home to the Creation Development Trust. When the Blaengarw Workmen's Hall was threatened with closure, the management for the building was devolved from the local authority to the Creation Development Trust. From the outset the Trust recognised the value of their voluntary members and wanted to thank them for their work. They asked them to consider a new system of exchange that accredited every hour of work with 'time credits'. The idea being that if you give an hour to the Hall or the community you receive an hour in return - a fair exchange. In turn, time credits are used to access educational, social and cultural events on a quid pro quo hourly basis.



Time Banking

People have often focused on time banking as a person-to-person exchange network. Yet its untapped potential for underwriting wider community participation and bringing about lasting change is far more powerful than this. We have only just begun to discover how time banking may be applied to increasing participation in community centres, youth work, healthy living centres, adult learning and environmental activities.

Time banking makes mutualism visible, proclaiming a civil message, "*people and agencies working together to achieve common outcomes*". This is the spirit of mutualism, the give and take between agencies and citizens that built radical socialism.

All too often the new agencies fail to create relationships of mutuality, instead they generate one-way traffic. If the new agencies are going to build active constituencies they need to say to beneficiaries, "*We want you to work with us, we want to work together because we know the service will be better.*" This requires professionals to value the contributions of service users, giving them new status as co-producers mutually engaged in civic work.

The old agencies culture

A century ago a host of community institutions, mutual aid societies, educational settlement trusts and Miners' Welfare Halls flourished on a mixed economy of paid workers, active members plus voluntary management. The old agencies fired people's imaginations, mobilising large constituencies. This was participatory democracy, people and agencies working together to create a social force for common good.

The pioneers of the old agencies knew when they worked in the heavy industries that 'time is money'. They also knew that 'free time' was their own. People gave their 'free time' working with the old agencies to build a culture for change. Their time was the source of the collective energy that raised community institutions, sustaining communitarianism and their fight for social justice.