

For the past twenty years I have been working in the context of community arts, developing projects in some of Wales' poorest communities in the Heads of the Valleys, East. This focuses on using participation in the arts as the catalyst for effecting change, driven by the strategic priorities of Wales – helping people build the skills they need for employment, to get the qualifications they need and to improve their health and well-being. A major challenge for us all has been in improving levels of literacy and in encouraging parental support for children's learning.

Central to this approach has been the need for cultural organisations to work in partnership with other agencies in order to have a more effective – and more engaging – approach. We work with a huge variety of partners but one of the most stalwart, reliable and creative partners is Literature Wales, via their Community Participation projects.

This support is not always in the form of a financial contribution – more frequently it is about creative input, encouragement, expertise and connecting with other initiatives. However, the results of such collaboration have always been tangible and useful and this needs to be acknowledged. This partnership approach has meant that we have been able to add value to many of our projects by integrating elements that nurture literacy and learning skills that might not otherwise have been possible.

In 2007, in my capacity as Senior Arts Development of Caerphilly CBC, I worked with Literature Wales (then, Academi) to set up the South Wales Valleys Literature Development Initiative. Since then this has reached over 37,000 in communities across the Valleys, running over 250 projects and over 900 workshops – an impressive achievement.

In my present job, I encounter many young people who have benefitted from the Young Writers Squad scheme who then go on to other and tell me about the hugely significant difference that membership of the Squad has made to them. This is only one of so many programmes that Literature Wales has championed that make a huge impact for relatively little outlay.

We are currently working together to introduce an exciting new method of engaging young people with reading, developing and adapting an Italian innovation so that it can benefit children in our bilingual nation.

I very much hope to be able continue this vibrant working relationship with Literature Wales, knowing how effectively this organisation reaches our most disadvantaged communities. It appears that many people are unaware of this crucial aspect of their work – and how much we would miss their help and support if this function were devolved to another organisation that didn't have their considerable experience and expertise.