



Bringing People Together **on Line**

Rick Wilson of Community Lives Consortium talks about a website that has been developed as a partnership between; City and County of Swansea, the Swansea Learning Disability Provider Forum, and the web development company CDSM called People and Places.

People and Places is a website for people who want to be supported:

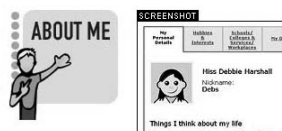
- To stay at the centre of their circle of friends, families, and supporters, whether they live locally or a long way away.
- To collect and share information about themselves and their lives through video, pictures and sound recordings as well as words and writing.
- To plan their lives in a person centred way that makes the most of the way that they communicate.

In Swansea we call this website Swansea People, and we worked together to build this website to help us all to communicate together more effectively. We funded this development with a combination of money from local agencies and funding from Service Principles Service Responses. This website has since been purchased by Neath Port Talbot, Powys, Carmarthen, and Denbighshire, with many more individuals, agencies and local authorities in Wales and England expressing an interest in using it in the near future.

Firstly, what is 'People and Places'?

Well, the jargon for People and Places is that it is a social networking website. There are lots of social networking sites available to the public, My Space, Face Book, and Bebo to name a few. We think that People and Places is different because it has been specifically designed to support people who could be potentially vulnerable while using the web, it has also been designed to be very simple to use using the principles of Inclusive Communication.

What can you do using 'People and Places'?



There is an About Me area which is a person-centred profile of the person where they can put pictures, videos and recordings of themselves together with written documents; these can be kept private or shared with other people and places members.



People can not automatically get access to People and Places, their membership needs to be approved. When people join they usually get as many people in their personal planning team to join with them.



People can also plan their life on line, together with their friends and supporters. All activities can be recorded as photos or other media.



People are starting to keep diaries in pictures, sounds and words that are a record of own life rather than recordings about their services.

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It is easy to send picture, video or word based messages to each other using the messaging service which is only available to members of the site.



Getting in contact with other group members and finding out about what is going on is possible using the message boards.



The new groups section lets agencies have their own sites in People and Places; we are currently talking to the local self advocacy groups and our county planning group about how they can use this to talk directly to service users and their supporters.

We also have new ways that you can use 'People and Places' in development at the moment, including:

- My Money – This will help People and their supporters, Appointees and Deputies to manage their money together in a way that everybody can be involved. We are very excited about this because we think

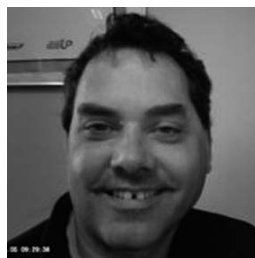
that this will help people manage monies such as Direct Payments, Individual Budgets, and Independent Living Fund far more effectively.

- My Health – This will help people to keep track of information that can help them stay healthy; it will help them to manage appointments with doctors and other health professionals. It will also help them get involved in things that will help them to stay fit and healthy.

What do People think about People and Places so far?

In Swansea we have about 100 registered members of Swansea People, currently about 30 of them are people who use services. By next March we plan to have 300 members of which 100 are service users, and by March 2010 we plan to have 800 members in Swansea of which 400 will be people who use services.

People who use Swansea People are very positive about it.



- Stephen is a day service user and uses this site for fun and to look for old acquaintances.

"We get to use the Swansea People website on Fridays when we go to Swansea Vale with Gary. I saw my friend, Victor's picture on the site last week; we used to play rugby together."

Photograph by Alex



I am going to send him a message and see if he wants to meet up".

- Patricia is currently looking for employment in IT and is disabled. She is using the site to find other people with the same interests as she feels she could be of help to them.

"I am hoping to use the site to show people my skills and help anyone in the same situation".

- Alex is a talented photographer and is using Swansea People to display his work. He is also part of the Information Communication Group, members of day services that provide valuable work in the community. They will be using the site to share dairies, communicate and provide information on the services they provide.
- Staff are working with people to make videos about their lives and to share them for fun, or to use them formally in meetings to show what they want or need. You can look at some examples of this by going to www.communitylives.co.uk/swanseapeople.shtml.
- Cathy Murray Principal Officer of the City & County of Swansea says:

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It is still early days in using this tool in Swansea but already we are seeing the benefits of individuals expressing their views, wishes and sharing their experience with friends, family and staff within services. There is much to do in building up the infrastructures to enable people with a learning disability to use Swansea People in services, homes etc but what exciting work!

We are really pleased with the progress that is being made. However the major issue is helping services to make the cultural change from documenting (almost always in writing) the performance of services, to working with people to record the quality of their lives.

This is a remarkably tough battle, and in some ways having 'People and Places' is the easy part. However it is a battle that is slowly being won by; having a clear agreed strategy, good information, focussed staff training, lots of discussion and expert guidance. This process is managed in Swansea by the our Provider Forum and Supported by Andrea Kennedy our Swansea People Support Officer.

You can find a copy of our 3 year strategy for Swansea People at www.communitylives.co.uk/swanseapeople.shtml.

Some of the big steps in this strategy include:

- Making sure that people who live in supported housing and use day centres have regular access to broadband enabled computers.

- That people and agencies get advice and access to simple cameras, video recorders, and sound recorders.
- Staff receive accredited training in Promoting Independence through the use of Computers.
- That Care Planning formally documents people's access to computers and the internet and gives them choices about how they choose to plan and record their lives.
- Ensure there are clear policies and arrangements for making sure that people are safe and their information is secure on-line.
- That agencies working in Swansea are committed to implementing this strategy and using the web tools in place.

It is now hard for us to imagine a person centred 'self directed' future without us using the internet and tools like 'People and Places' to support people to live their lives and express themselves to their friends and supporters.

What will happen next?

We are very keen to widen out the People and Places community, both by working together with the authorities who have already bought it to help people to get the most out of it, and by also supporting other authorities, agencies and individuals to get access to it.

Up until now it has only been available to be purchased by Local Authorities, we are working on a new way of purchasing it

per licence as an annual subscription. Once this is in place individual's can buy in to the service, or agencies can buy it for the people that they serve.

The money from these subscriptions, and the other sales, will enable the 'People and Places' partnership group and the web designers CDSM to continue to support and develop this service.

In many ways it is hard to guess where People and Places will go next, this is because as more people use it the more ideas they bring, however what is clear is the enthusiasm and excitement of people who now can watch their lives grow in pictures, videos, sounds and words in front of their eyes on-line and say to the people they know this is me, 'this is my life'.

For more information about Swansea People please go to: www.communitylives.co.uk/swanseapeople.shtml, or contact Andrea Kennedy on 01792 646640.

For more information about People and Places please go to: <http://www.cdsm.co.uk/products/pandp/index.htm>, or contact Debbie Marshall on 01792 463485.

*You can also go to:
Swansea People at <http://www.swansea-people.co.uk>
Neath Port Talbot people at <http://www.npt-people.co.uk>
Link Us Online in Carmarthen at <http://www.linkusonline.co.uk>
Denbighshire People at <http://www.denbighshirepeople.co.uk>*

For can find out more about People and Places in Powys by contacting John Moorhouse (John.Moorhouse@powys.gov.uk)