

Welsh Association of Youth Clubs

THE MOBILE YOUTH UNIT

1977 – 1980

Dennis Frost

THE MOBILE YOUTH UNIT

Background

In the mid 1970s the Welsh Association of Youth Clubs, (WAYC) one of the foremost voluntary youth organisations in Wales, had a membership of 34,000 young people in 340 affiliated youth clubs encompassing church and chapel groups, village clubs, independent clubs, and local education authority youth centres. Established in 1934, and an autonomous division of the then National Association of Youth Clubs (NAYC) the WAYC is perhaps best described as a facilitating body. Its wide range of services incorporated training courses for leaders, potential leaders, and senior youth club members, festivals and competitions, members' councils at local, county and national level, adventurous pursuits, and insurance schemes. An innovative organisation, among its several enterprises was the introduction of clubs for Physically Handicapped and Able Bodied young people (PHAB). Conceivably its most valued contribution at the time, and in keeping with its original concepts, was the advice and assistance readily available from members of staff who regularly visited affiliated clubs.

The concern of the WAYC for the dedicated men and women who freely gave their time in the service of young people is perhaps reflected in a statement made at a meeting of the Executive Council when it was suggested that a simplified version of its aims and objects might be, 'to support the untiring, and sometimes unacknowledged endeavours of individual youth workers by helping reduce their sense of isolation, and hopefully make their task a little easier'. Whilst the stated aim of the WAYC (1976) was focused on young people – 'to help boys and girls to develop their physical, mental and spiritual capacities that they may grow to full maturity as individuals and members of society', the suggestion served to confirm an awareness of the needs of youth workers, particularly those in the rural areas.

Generous development grants were now available to alleviate the problem of deprivation in inner city areas, but unfortunately the needs of the rural areas appeared to have been neglected, resulting in wide spread discontent, and frustration.

Unemployment in remote scattered communities was growing, and with job prospects diminishing the only recourse for many young people was to sever cultural roots and seek employment elsewhere. The situation was further exacerbated by the paucity of public transport. At best sporadic, many young people were confined to their immediate environment. On one occasion when it was suggested that a member of the WAYC staff was in danger of becoming a peripatetic film projectionists, a hard pressed voluntary leader of a village club vehemently complained – 'the last bus for the nearest town leaves the village at six o'clock every evening – and does not return! I am doing my best to cater for disadvantaged youngsters who rarely see a decent film. There is no way we can afford the cost of hiring a film, a projector, and a projectionist, not even if the entire village turned out, and an admission fee charged'.

Inter-club activities a feature of rural youth work was on the wane, the cost of transport prohibitive. This was also reflected in a reduction of response from isolated communities to the WAYC's programme of sporting and cultural events, its residential training courses now primarily supported by youth workers and young people from urban areas. To counteract this trend arrangements were made to 'take training into local areas'. Non-residential one-day workshops were introduced as well as a series of evening courses held in successive clubs within a limited radius. The response was encouraging, but with the benefit of hindsight it is acknowledged that the subject matter might have been of secondary importance to the attraction of a change of environment, and the opportunity to exchange ideas, and share common problems.

Rural youth clubs met wherever accommodation was available – village halls, church halls, chapel vestries, and schools – their wide age range unacceptable in urban areas. Children as young as eight or nine years accompanied their older brothers and sisters, their presence tolerated as part of an inherited lifestyle.

Several reasons were advanced for the decline in voluntary leadership, not least the notion that everyone had to work longer hours to provide for basic material possessions, leisure time at a premium. In some quarters it was claimed that anyone prepared to work after normal hours should be recompensed, and that the education and welfare of children and young people was the responsibility of the State. This lack of adult support manifested itself in the closure of several village clubs, and there were instances of deputations being sent to the County Hall demanding the provision of a professional youth worker. Previously, when invited to establish a youth club, the WAYC representative invariably approached the local clergyman, head teacher, village policeman, postmistress or parish councillor for leadership contacts, but this source was rapidly diminishing, and it was not unusual to find a senior member running the local youth club.

Alert to the problem, some local authorities introduced peripatetic professional youth workers. Responsible for several one-night-a-week clubs, there was a tendency to concentrate on one club as a base to the detriment of the others. Additionally, here were examples of a professional worker being appointed to a club in the largest village, the young people from surrounding areas encouraged to travel to that centre, thus denigrating the avowed intent of protecting smaller rural communities.

Leisure Centres were being established in nearby towns, attracting young people from adjacent villages. Whilst this provision barely touched scattered communities in the hinterland, those residing within travel distance of these centres quickly became dissatisfied with the modest facilities of their village hall club. An example was given of a voluntary youth worker who claimed – ‘until recently my club was the focal point of village life. Limited premises and a lack of equipment were cheerfully accepted, and my members were involved in planning programmes, and entertaining themselves. With the advent of a Leisure Centre in a town four miles away, attendance has dropped alarmingly, and parents have been inundated with requests for expensive items of sports clothing’. And another – ‘there is a general exodus of young people from nearby villages to the nearest town. Clubs like mine cannot compete, many becoming children’s clubs. By about seven o’clock on most evenings, and apart from the local pub, our village is inhabited by the elderly and their grandchildren’.

It is perhaps necessary at this stage to emphasise that the foregoing was by no means universal, more a symptom of a potential malaise, traditional provision continuing unabated in the more sparsely populated areas.

Population

In 1976 whilst reviewing its services to the rural areas, the WAYC obtained population statistics from the most recent census returns, and it came as no surprise to find that the counties occupying the largest areas were the ones with the smallest population, and conversely, the smaller counties in size contained the highest density of population. For example, the county of Dyfed extending over 2,226 square miles had a population of 321,700, whilst Mid Glamorgan contained 540,100 residents in just 393 square miles. Similarly the county of Powys covering most of mid Wales with an area of 1,960 square miles had a population of only 100,800 compared with South Glamorgan’s dense population of 391,600 residing in a compact 161 square miles.

County	Area covered in square miles	Population
Gwynedd	1,493	224,200
Clwyd	937	374,800
Powys	1,960	100,800
Dyfed	2,226	321,700
West Glamorgan	315	371,700
Mid Glamorgan	393	540,100
South Glamorgan	161	391,600
Gwent	531	440,100
	<u>8,016</u>	<u>2,765,000</u>

Reviewing regionally, the figures indicated:

Industrial South Wales (West Glamorgan, Mid Glamorgan, South Glamorgan and Gwent)	1,400	1,743,500
North Wales (Gwynedd and Clwyd)	2,430	599,000
West Wales (Dyfed)	2,226	321,700
Mid Wales (Powys)	<u>1,960</u>	<u>100,800</u>
	<u>8,016</u>	<u>2,765,000</u>

Population figures for the Youth Service age range were not available, but from returns for the age groups 5-14 and 15-29, and as a rough guide, the number of young people in Wales between the ages of 14-21 was estimated as being approximately one-sixth of the total population.

	Dyfed	Powys
Total population	321,700	100,800
Youth Service age range (estimated at one-sixth)	53,600	16,800
	(17%)	(17%)

Turning to figures reflecting the percentage of Welsh Speakers per county, the most recent available statistics were those for 1971.

County	Welsh only	Welsh speaking*	Total population	Percentage Welsh speaking
Gwynedd	10,300	135,100	224,200	60%
Dyfed	7,500	159,100	321,700	50%
Powys	1,100	24,000	100,800	24%
Clwyd	4,600	74,000	374,800	20%
Glamorgan**	8,700	141,000	1,303,400	11%
Gwent	600	9,300	440,100	2%

* = Presumably bilingual, and **including** 'Welsh only'

** = Figures for the three counties of Glamorgan were not available.

THE CONCEPT

The Development Committee, the WAYC's 'Think Tank', comprised a dozen or so representatives of youth workers, young people, and members of staff drawn from a wide geographical area. Under the wise guidance of the Reverend Elwyn John of Beguildy (later Builth Wells, and Brecon) the group was devoted to free ranging discussion on a given topic. An agenda rarely necessary, brainstorming sessions the norm, debate and argument flowed.

Responsible for initiating several innovative projects of a pioneering nature, the group met at Newtown, the venue selected for its central location, and not as freely rumoured, perversely chosen as being equally inconvenient for all!

Charged with the task of investigating how best to respond to the changing needs of young people in rural areas, the Development Committee considered the problem at its meeting on **18 September 1976**. Examples were given of remote communities where the adolescent population was insufficient to warrant the formation of a youth club. Several instances were quoted of considerable difficulty being experienced in finding a suitable successor when a long-serving youth worker retired, or moved from the area. After further debate it was agreed that the problem of deprivation confronting young people in rural areas was caused by a scarcity of **suitable adult leadership, poor public transport** – sometimes non-existent – and **a lack of basic facilities**.

Fully aware that a major initiative was required, and that it was beyond the scope of a voluntary organisation to respond, nevertheless it was perceived that however modest, something had to be done. Mention was made of the merits of 'Mobile Youth Clubs'. A recent provision in a number of sparsely populated areas of the UK, they comprised converted buses, their interior modelled on a typical clubroom. In the absence of further details it was speculated that the innovation was intended as an experiment rather than a permanent provision. Whilst commending the enterprise, and aware of the advantages of providing a facility for communities lacking a youth provision, **greater concern was expressed for existing groups, many of whom were struggling for survival**.

With this in mind, and conscious that any proposal would at best provide a palliative for a diagnosed growing ailment, and that it would have to be viewed as a transitory piece of further research, the Development Committee recommended:

- The provision of a fully equipped **Mobile Youth Unit** to tour carefully selected rural areas.
- The purchase of a suitable vehicle equipped with a variety of audio-visual aids, indoor and outdoor games equipment, outdoor pursuit items, stacking chairs and tables, portable display boards, and minor office requisites.
- The need to limit the project to a clearly defined area of operation so that work in depth might be achieved.
- The appointment of an experienced professional youth worker with local back-up support.
- The introduction of safeguards against possible future frustration resulting from the provision of activities and equipment, which because of a lack of resources might not become a permanent feature.
- Selected parts of **Dyfed and Powys** be considered as being the most appropriate for the operation of the project.

Whilst welcoming the proposals the Executive Council considered it important to avoid possible duplication of provision by other voluntary youth organisations, and to seek their co-operation. In the ensuing discussion the following statistical information was considered:

In addition to uniformed organisations, and local education authority provision, the three principal organisations operating in Dyfed and Powys were:

	Number of Units	
	Dyfed	Powys
Urdd Gobaith Cymru (Welsh Language Youth) A mainly school based organisation, its activities conducted in the Welsh language.	256	282
Young Farmers Clubs Age range 14 plus with a large proportion over 17 years.	74	57
Welsh Association of Youth Clubs A servicing body catering for young people between the ages of 12-21.	82	31

The recommendations of the Development Committee received with enthusiasm, the Executive Council eventually agreed to:

- Apply to the Department of Education and Science (DES) for a Development Grant, the project to proceed only if total funding becomes available. (In other words – at no cost to the WAYC, whose resources were stretched to the limit).
- Selected parts of **Dyfed and Powys** to be the areas of operation.
- Advise, and seek co-operation of all other youth agencies working in those areas.
- Appoint a full-time youth worker for an experimental period of three years.
- Purchase a suitably large second-hand vehicle, and equip it in line with the recommendation.
- Clarify the aims and objects of the project as follows:

Visit existing affiliated youth groups in the designated areas, and place at their disposal the equipment contained in the vehicle, and the services of the Unit Leader.

Secondary, and only when circumstances permitted, visit communities where there was no provision for young people, and endeavour to establish a group.

Act as an agency to recruit and train volunteers, and encourage them to assume responsibility in a follow-up process.

A detailed application was then submitted to the DES and on **28 May 1977** the WAYC was advised that funding had been approved, and that a **grant of £7,000 a year for a period of three years** had been allocated for the provision of a Mobile Youth Unit.

PREPERATION

Of paramount importance to the success of the venture was the appointment of a **full-time Unit Leader** who should be suitably qualified and experienced, and possess a clean driving licence. A knowledge of the Welsh language deemed an advantage, it was hoped to make an appointment with a view to commencing operation by November 1977. Unfortunately, considerable difficulty was experienced in attracting suitable candidates. The first advertisements placed in the Times Education Supplement and the Western Mail in June 1977 attracted no response. The post was then re-advertised in local newspapers throughout Wales, several published in the Welsh language. Additionally, colleges offering courses in professional youth work were advised of the vacancy, and through the NAYC all county associations in England were informed. As a result, twelve enquiries were received, but none of the potential candidates returned a completed application.

At this stage, and very much aware of the timescale, permission was sought and received from the Welsh Office (now responsible for further education in Wales) for the start date of the project to be deferred.

Undaunted, a third series of advertisements were placed in December 1977 resulting in three applications. A few days prior to the interview, two applicants withdrew. This lack of response over a period of several months suggested the requirements for the position might have been somewhat ambitious for what could be perceived as a temporary post with little prospects. Later, discreet enquiries revealed that the principal impediment was the necessity for the successful candidate to move residence every six months or so, invalidating any possibility of a married person, or someone with a mortgage commitment considering the post.

At one time it seemed that the project might founder through lack of suitable leadership, but in the event, and with effect 1 April 1978, a young man with proven experience of voluntary youth work was appointed, the frustratingly protracted delay clearly evidenced in the following table:

Development Committee recommends	September 1976
Executive Council decision	October 1976
Apply for a Development Grant	November 1976
Development Grant approved	May 1977
First advertisement placed	June 1977
Second advertisement placed	August 1977
Colleges and NAYC advised	October 1977
Third advertisements placed	December 1977
Appointment made	April 1978
Project commenced	June 1978

Lacking a professional qualification and with little knowledge of the Welsh language, **Mark Williams** of Whitchurch, Cardiff, a sales representative to a manufacturing company, was a product of the WAYC. A senior youth club member, he had progressed through several training courses to the leadership of a voluntary youth club, and had been selected to assist at a junior summer school as a member of staff. A leading light in SHANDY (a group of ex-club members devoted to Social Help for the Aged, the Needy, and Deprived Young people) he had no domestic ties, and brought to the post dedication, enthusiasm, considerable 'salesmanship', and a determination to succeed.

His first months in post involved induction training at the Cardiff HQ of the WAYC. During this preparatory period a monitoring scheme and necessary administrative arrangements were introduced, and it was agreed to restrict visits to affiliated clubs to four evenings a week in order that the Unit might be available for its secondary role of stimulating interest in areas where there was no youth provision. Contact and support vital, the Unit Leader was provided with two sets of forms to be returned every two weeks, a duplicate set provided for the Regional Officer. The first return required day-by-day information of visits, and contacts made for the preceding period, (a virtual worksheet) the second advising engagements for the next two weeks. It was also arranged that the Unit Leader would telephone HQ at a prescribed day and time every week.

For its initial placement the Unit would be based at a small town where it would operate within a **radius of about thirty miles for six to eight months** before proceeding to a new location for a similar period. Renown for its enthusiasm, the homogeneous Vale of Teify group in Dyfed, comprising eighteen affiliated clubs was selected for the first placement. A local support group was formed to serve in an advisory and supporting role, similar arrangements made in other areas when the Unit moved on Affiliated clubs in Llandysul were then circulated with details of the project, its objects, and a list of available equipment. The notice also contained suggestions for the use of the Unit with simple conditions limiting clubs to no more than one visit a month, three weeks notice required. Further, the leader of the recipient club would have to be present, and be responsible for introducing the Unit, and for the conduct of the evening. Should items of equipment be damaged, the club would be responsible for any repairs or replacements. Booking forms were provided requesting details of the precise location of the premises, its approximate size, the number of members expected to be present, their age range, the type of service required, and two alternative dates and times for the proposed visit.

Attention was then given to the acquisition of a suitable vehicle, and with the benefit of advice a 35cwt **Transit Van with a Luton body** was deemed ideal for the purpose. Additional storage space was provided above the driving cab, and there was no necessity for the driver to possess a Heavy Goods Vehicle licence. A four year old vehicle with 47,000 registered miles was eventually located and viewed. A firm of consulting motor engineers was employed to inspect it, and apart from some minor adjustments, it was reported to be in good condition. An offer was made and accepted, and the vehicle was purchased. Full comprehensive insurance cover for five named drivers was obtained (Unit Leader and four others) as well as cover for the equipment whilst in transit. Arrangements were then made for it to be re-sprayed (white) and a sign writer was engaged to display on both its sides, and on its roller rear door the name of the WAYC, its logo, and the words 'Mobile Youth Unit' (red and black) in English and Welsh. It is perhaps of passing interest to note that there appeared to be no Welsh equivalent for the word 'mobile' – 'Uned Deithiol i Ieuenctid' accepted – 'Travelling Unit for Youth'. Additionally, the address and telephone number of the WAYC HQ was displayed on both side doors. Subsequently, and unintentionally, considerable publicity was obtained as the unit trundled its way around sparsely populated rural areas, resulting in several telephone calls requesting the use of the facility, and enquiries for membership of the WAYC.

A second-hand wardrobe and a chest of drawers were purchased and bolted onto the floor of the vehicle for the storage of smaller items of equipment.

Webbing straps were fitted to secure table tennis tables, and stout foam lined boxes were constructed to accommodate audio visual aids. Purchased from a consortium, the equipment included:

Audio Visual

- 16mm sound film projector
- Standard/Super 8mm film projector
- 1 large cine screen
- Audio record player/2 speakers
- A cassette recorder
- A sound/slide projector with a rotating drum
- 1 smaller cine screen
- Table amplifier and small microphone
- A projector stand
- Extension leads, plugs, cassettes and spare lamps

Outdoor Pursuits

- 72 ordnance survey maps in sets of 10 per area
- 2 double-burner calor gas cooking stoves, and gas cylinders
- Sets of portable cooking utensils

A large demonstration Silva compass, and 10 Silva compasses
2 lightweight tents for demonstration purposes

Indoor Games

2 table tennis tables
2 dartboards and sets of darts
1 'Unihoc' set
1 'Shula' set
Table tennis bats, nets and supports
A supply of table tennis balls
Assorted table games

Other Items

A portable typewriter
4 folding card tables
Portable display boards for exhibition purposes
2 white boards, and dry-marking pens
16 stacking chairs
Signboards indicating the purpose of the Unit, and the services of the WAYC

The Unit Leader was very much involved in all these transactions whilst receiving the benefit of advice from members of the WAYC staff based in rural areas. Towards the end of the induction period, the following arrangements were made:

Finance

- I. Authority from HQ would be required for expenditure in excess of £15 for equipment repair or replacement, and/or for servicing or repair of the vehicle.
- II. The Unit Leader was provided with a £50 float for petrol/oil, to be renewed monthly. (This was to prove woefully inadequate, the average monthly expenditure on these items varying between £90 - £120).
- III. Expenditure on meals necessary whilst on duty, postage, telephone calls, and minor incidentals would be met by the WAYC, the Unit Leader responsible for meeting the cost of personal accommodation and other meals.

Organisational

- a. Reports on the progress of the Unit, and any problems arising, would be reported at all meetings of the Development Committee, and the Executive Council.
- b. An annual report would be submitted to the Welsh Office, with particular reference to any changes made to the original scheme.
- c. Prior to the commencement of operation, officers of the local education authority concerned would be invited to view the Unit, and meet its leader with a view to co-operating. Similarly, the chief officers of voluntary youth organisations represented in the area would be advised of this new service, and invited to take advantage of it, providing that clubs affiliated to the WAYC received first priority.
- d. With the co-operation of the Church in Wales, a letter from the WAYC HQ was sent to Parish Vicars within the prescribed area, offering the services of the Unit either to established groups, or to assist in the formation of a new group.

- e. The Unit would avoid competing with any other voluntary or statutory youth organisation. Where such a provision existed, the services of the Unit might be offered, but on no account should attempts be made to establish a new youth club in that locality.

Finally, the Unit Leader was instructed to make contact with the members of his Support Group, visit every vicar and clergymen of other denominations, and offer to assist church/chapel based youth groups whilst rendering assistance to several recently affiliated clubs in the area. In the meantime the WAYC'S Regional Officer would request a meeting with the local education authority's youth officer, obtain advice on the needs of the area, and the availability of village schools should the occasion arise.

Furnished with this vast array of directions and information, and no doubt eager to make a start, Mark Williams spent a day in his allocated area in search of accommodation, and returned to report that the only suitable bed and breakfast establishment within his personal budget was a private room above a popular public house in the centre of Llandysul. At first viewed as a temporary measure, it proved ideal for the purpose. With the Unit securely accommodated within the confines of the pub's rear yard, it became the base of operation for the next twelve months.

OPERATIONAL

A small town on the banks of the river Teify, with a population of 2,213, a bi-lingual area, Welsh speaking predominant, Llandysul is located sixteen miles to the north of Carmarthen, twenty miles from Cardigan, and fourteen miles south of the coastal resort New Quay. It occupies a central position to more than twenty villages, with several distinct 'pockets' for convenient travel purposes.

(Cardigan)

Llechryd
Cenarth

Blaenporth
Beulah
Cwmcoy

Newcastle Emllyn
Drefach

(New Quay)

Rhydlewis
Fostrasol
Horeb

(Lampeter)

LLANDYSUL

Boncath
Capel Iwan
Trelech

Pentrecwrt
Saron
Cwmduad
Cynwil Elfed

Rhydowen
Llanfihangel
Pencader
Alltwallis

(Whitland)

(Carmarthen)

During the first phase of the project a great deal of useful information emerged which would have a marked bearing on future placements, not least the ineffectiveness of circular letters. The response from affiliated clubs was disappointing in the extreme. Distributed in June, a recognised fallow period for many rural youth clubs, the circulars were inevitably filed away for future reference, forgotten, or even discarded. With the benefit of hindsight it indicates that the timing of the launch might have been

inappropriate, the early autumn more suitable. In the event, and rather than await invitations, the Unit commenced to visit affiliated clubs on the premise that until the contents of the van was explored neither leaders nor members might be expected to be aware of the available support and service.

This direct approach proved successful, and over a period of twelve months, (June 1978 – June 1979) and without exception, every affiliated youth club in the area took full advantage of this new provision. At first viewed as a novelty, sometimes as an unwarranted intrusion, once the Unit was accepted none of the clubs failed to request additional visits, the initial break-through vital. In fact, and whilst guarding against being used as a 'programme filler', it was not unusual for some clubs to request the services of the Unit on four or five occasions during its first placement. The most sought after features included ideas for programmes, attractive new activities, the introduction of new games, film evenings, barbecues, map reading instruction, and demonstrations of lightweight camping.

Fifteen smaller communities where no WAYC provision existed were also visited, three possessing a flourishing branch of Urdd Gobaith Cymru, two others catered for by enthusiastic Young Farmers Clubs. With one exception it proved impossible to establish any form of involvement in the other villages, mainly due to an insufficient adolescent population, or the lack of adult support. In one instance, and assured of eventual adult commitment, the use of a village hall was secured, and the Unit Leader formed and led a one-night-a-week club of over thirty young people for a period of eight weeks. Unfortunately, the promised adult support failed to materialise. With other pressing commitments, the Unit Leader had no recourse other than to withdraw, and the embryo club folded. The young people concerned were left frustrated, a door of opportunity opened, only to be abruptly closed. A salutary lesson learned, it now became clear that there was no purpose in establishing a club without first ensuring the availability of a local management committee, and the services of adequate adult leadership.

The selected centre of operation appeared appropriate, particularly as there was no youth provision in several surrounding communities. In his final report the Unit Leader confirmed that the lack of adult support was the principal problem encountered. On two occasions he had made promising contact with young people, ensured the availability of premises, only to be thwarted when initial adult interest waned.

A number of observations were received from a variety of sources, including a suggestion that the vehicle was perhaps too large for its intended purpose. An alternative might have been to store the equipment at a local venue, and only essential items required for the evening carried in a smaller vehicle, thus reducing fuel consumption, and engine and tyre wear. This appeared to deny the considerable interest and prove impact resulting from the arrival of a large fully equipped unit in a small community. Perhaps more relevant, the Unit Leader reported that the small tables and stacking chairs were never used, and that available funds might have been put to better use. At the conclusion of the first placement it was recorded – 'A great deal has been learned, but it is a matter of concern that the experience was gained at the expense of communities in the Llandysul area'.

In consultation with the Unit Leader, and the local Support Group it was agreed that future priority be given to **existing youth groups**, irrespective of whether they were affiliated to the WAYC. Should time and opportunity permit, and before proceeding to attempt the formation of a new club, the Unit would endeavour to recruit and offer initial training to potential leaders.

After a break for a well-deserved holiday, the Unit Leader returned renewed and refreshed for his second placement at Llandrindod Wells, the administrative centre of Powys. A small holiday spa situated in the centre of the county, the town had a population of 3,400, and lay twenty-seven miles south of Newtown, and thirty miles north of Brecon.

Powys the most sparsely populated area in Wales with the Black Mountains protecting its eastern border with England, and the Cambrian Range to the West, apart from an industrial pocket in the far south-west its 1,960 square miles was devoted to agriculture. With so many widely scattered

communities it was decided that the Unit would seek to serve the entire county. Induction evenings would be held at convenient centres to acquaint youth workers with the potential of the Unit, whilst development work would be restricted to day-time periods. This direct initial approach received an enthusiastic response, and proved far more effective than circulars. Indeed, prior to the programme of induction evenings the rural bush telegraph demonstrated its effectiveness. Within a few days of the arrival of the Unit for its second placement it received a surprising response, sufficient to cover its first four weeks of operation.

Communities in the County of Powys

Adfa
Caerswrs
Llandinam **
Pantydwr
Rhayader #
Newtown (2)
Abeycwmhir
Llanbister #
Llanddewi #
Cross Gates #
Berriew Montgomery
Beguildy
Knighton **

LLANDRINDOD WELLS (3)

Howey
Newbridge on Wye
Llangamarch Wells **
Trallong **
Libanus #
Builth Wells
Bronllys #
Brecon
Hundred House
Gladestry
Talgarth **
Crickhowell

Italics = Affiliated Clubs (19)

** = Clubs that applied for membership of the WAYC following a visit by the Mobile Unit (5)

= Either a non-affiliated club, or having no youth provision (6)

Good working relationships were soon established with other agencies including the police, churches, and residential centres, whilst the co-operation of the local education authority youth officers, and the intermediate treatment officer was greatly appreciated. Within a short period a waiting-list had to be established to cope with the volume of work. In one instance, and for a period of six weeks, the Unit Leader took over the responsibility of operating a village club during the temporary absence of its leader. Whilst denying the services of the Unit on that particular evening, it ensured the continuity of the club.

Of interest is the diversity of services requested:

- Girls activities (GFS at Llanbister)
- Demonstrations of canoeing
- Map reading instruction and expeditions
- Assisting club to recruit instructors
- Liaison with a local WI at their request
- Organising a 'Unihoc' (a new game) county rally
- Working closely with officers of the Young Farmers Clubs
- Country Dancing
- Loaning out equipment, thus freeing the Unit Leader for other duties
- Training sessions on programme planning, and members' committees
- Games evenings, and film evenings
- Informal advice and assistance
- Etc

Whilst the Local Support Group found it necessary to meet on only two occasions, individually its members provided the Unit Leader with countless useful contacts.

Perhaps the most ambitious project undertaken by the Unit Leader was '**City Venture**' for members of Powys youth clubs. This took the form of a **residential week-end in Cardiff** with the object of providing 'a taste of city life'. A part-time youth club in Cardiff served as a residential base, and a team of senior members from the locality acted as caterers. The programme was supervised by the Regional Officer, the Unit Leader, and a female club leader from Powys. With the object of providing a view of urban life, the programme included:

- A visit to a power station
- Lunch at a local youth club
- A visit to Cardiff-Wales Airport
- A visit to an Industrial and Maritime Museum
- Visits to an open-air market and the Welsh Folk Museum

An opportunity was provided for swimming, and shopping, a coach tour of the city, and a disco evening. Twenty-one members from five rural youth clubs took advantage of this opportunity, and enthusiastic requests were received for the venture to be repeated.

The game of 'Unihoc', a proprietary brand name for a set of plastic hockey equipment, proved extremely popular as it could be played in limited premises without the fear of breaking windows. The response was sufficient to encourage the Unit Leader to stage an evening tournament for clubs within travelling distance of Llandrindod Wells. Over one hundred youngsters attended this fun event, resulting in an overwhelming demand to the manufacturers for sets of equipment. In retrospect, the Unit might have considered the viability of claiming commission on sales!

Publicity received attention throughout the operation of the project. Local newspapers in the selected areas were advised of the purpose and progress of the venture, and **two radio broadcasts** were made, on the 'Good Morning Wales' programme. The first one took place in a village club near Cardiff prior to the Unit's first placement, the second much later during a visit by the Unit to a rural club. A full recorded text of the latter is available, and against a background of excited young voices it was introduced with:

'Listeners to this programme will recall the launch some months ago of a Mobile Youth Unit by the Welsh Association of Youth Clubs. We have now followed its progress by seeing it in action in a rural youth club. This caravan-like unit with all sorts of useful equipment has travelled around youth clubs in the area, and we sent Mair Jenkins to find out how it was progressing, and what kind of service it provides. We have with us Mr Mark Williams, leader of the Unit...'

There followed a dialogue when the principal objects were discussed followed by a description of the type of equipment available, and an outline of the problems confronting young people in scattered communities. The programme concluded with an expression of opinion by some club members.

At the conclusion of the placement at Llandrindod Wells, the WAYC's Regional Officer reported:

'There can be little doubt that the Unit was used to good purpose. Quite often the Unit Leader had more requests for assistance than could be met in the short term. Whilst very little formal training was achieved, it is evident that the Unit extended the activities of many clubs, and the horizons of their members. There was no evidence of the formation of new clubs, due to largely to apathy encountered in local communities. From its inception it was recognised that the advantages to be gained would be limited, and the purpose of the Unit should be seen as one that encouraged self-help, rather than providing indefinite support'.

Similarly, extracts from the Unit Leader's final report touched on:

'It was fascinating to see how quickly the word spreads in a rural area! After just a few visits, I found myself travelling around every evening of the week as more and more requests were received. Had I been in the area longer I would have developed exchange visits between town and country. A great deal of help was received from club leaders who made requests for assistance instead of waiting for me to make suggestions. The good relationship that exists between the WAYC and the YFC (Young Farmers Clubs) has been strengthened. New items of games equipment were instant winners, whereas traditional games such as table tennis received less use. The two projectors, record player, and games equipment were in constant use, and will require to be serviced. On a personal note, much depended on the availability of suitable accommodation, and the sympathetic support of one's landlord to the unsociable hours worked.'

Details of the **finances** of the project are available, and it was noted that the cost of servicing and maintaining the vehicle, fuel consumption, and repairs and replacement of equipment exceeded the original budget. The vehicle was sold for £1,200 (compared with a purchase price of £1,700) and after deducting £84 for advertising and a final MOT, a net sum of £1,116 was refunded to the Welsh Office. Permission was granted for the equipment contained in the vehicle to be distributed to the Pools of Equipment held by the WAYC in its regions.

At the request of the Church in Wales, the Unit accompanied a **pilgrimage of young people** from Carmarthen to Tenby. A letter of appreciation was received from the Director of Social Services, Powys for the contribution made by the Unit Leader at a conference of Intermediate Treatment practitioners. The Unit was also put to good use at 'Treasure Trove' - a week's summer school for disabled and able-bodied young people - and for publicity purposes at the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show, Builth Wells, and the Anglesey Agricultural Show at Llangefni.

CONCLUSION

Envisaged as voyage of discovery whilst providing an itinerate resource, the Unit served to confirm previously held beliefs. More than that, it revealed the extent of isolation suffered by young people, the growing apathy of adults, and a lack of basic essentials. However, and perhaps unaware of it at the time, this period marked the beginning of a gradual decline in voluntary response to the needs of community life in both urban and rural areas.

The arrival of the Unit in a small community could not fail to attract attention. Whilst an encouraging response was received, it only manifested itself in Llandysul when the Unit was due to move on. This suggests that it might have been preferable had the Unit concentrated on one area for the entire period of the project, working in greater depth, following up initial contacts, and developing them.

It would be invidious to attempt to compare the impact of the Unit on the two placements, the first a training experience, the second an opportunity to put that experience into practice. At the conclusion of the project a number of comments were received from youth workers, not least the need to subsidise the cost of film hire (pre-video days) and that equipment be made available on long loan to groups of clubs until they could afford to purchase their own. It was also claimed that many of the problems of the rural areas were replicated in parts of industrial South Wales where limited public transport linking valley communities led to a similar sense of isolation.

Of significance was a growing body of opinion that a large fully equipped vehicle was of secondary importance to the availability of a professional youth worker who might enthuse, encourage, guide, and supply essential leadership. This led to the hypothesis that an endeavour be made to obtain funding for the appointment of several skilled Rural Activity Officers within prescribed locations, travelling in fully equipped small vans or estate cars, and acting as stimulators of worthwhile activities (Curriculum Development Officers).

The problems of irregular public transport, and the absence in many communities of a response to the needs of young people have already been addressed. With the passage of time, and with most families having access to private transport, much of the former has been alleviated, but unfortunately the latter remains a cause for concern. In many rural areas there exists an untapped reservoir of potential leadership within the ranks of senior youth club members who with training and encouragement might help ease the situation.

The WAYC had hoped to appoint an experienced qualified professional youth worker with a knowledge of the Welsh language to head up the scheme, but despite sustained attempts it failed to attract suitable candidates. Reasons for this lack of response have already been advanced, but undoubtedly the principal deterrent was the expectation that the appointed person would have to move residence every eight months or so. It therefore reflects considerably on the resilience, ingenuity, perseverance, and enthusiasm of Mark Williams the Unit Leader who overcame what at times must have appeared insurmountable problems. Equipped with a commendable degree of

self-sufficiency, an empathy with young people to which they quickly responded, and an ability to work unsociable hours over a sustained period, he cheerfully set about his task. At the conclusion of the project he enrolled as a full-time student on a two-year course in Youth and Community work on 30 September 1980.

Underpinning the several stated objectives of the project was a basic desire to draw attention to the needs of young people in rural areas, the foregoing a reflection of the vision and combined endeavours of those involved.