

## **Building active communities - the contribution of the voluntary sector in South West Wales**

### **The voluntary sector in south west Wales**

There are more than 3,500 voluntary organisations in the counties of Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire, Swansea, and Neath and Port Talbot. They include, among others, small community groups, organisations which are branches or members of national charities, and community led initiatives which play a leading role in the regeneration of their areas.

Together they contribute millions of pounds to the local economy both by attracting funds to the area and in generating their own income. This is in addition to the vital contribution they make to the social fabric of south west Wales and to its environmental and cultural well being.

### **The infrastructure of the sector**

Voluntary action in south west Wales is supported locally by a network of four County Voluntary Councils (CVCs) and at a national level by WCVA. These organisations give support to the sector by providing information and advice services, training opportunities and a development service for new or changing organisations.

They also play a central role in facilitating the representation of voluntary and community organisations to other sectors. This representation is mediated through the Compact between Government and the voluntary sector, and local compacts between the CVCs and their local authorities and other statutory agencies in their area. CVCs have a duty to ensure representation from across the whole of the sector, not just from their members.

### **Why the voluntary sector matters**

The third sector in Wales consist of a broad range of people, organisations and community groups who act independently of the state, for the public benefit, and not for private financial gain. It can tackle needs which are beyond the capabilities and resources of the public sector and which cannot be met in purely commercial terms.

The sector includes voluntary organisations, community groups, volunteers, self-help groups, community co-operatives and enterprises, and faith organisations.

The voluntary sector matters because it:

- reaches parts of the population that institutions and businesses cannot;
- builds community leadership and confidence;
- offers people a way to participate and to give something back to their community.

Voluntary action binds communities together - it is an essential ingredient in building active communities.