

Background to PRIME Cymru

PRIME Cymru (The Prince's Initiative for Mature Enterprise in Wales) was founded by HRH the Prince of Wales in 2001 to provide advice and support to individuals over the age of 50 who are economically inactive, under employed or at risk of redundancy and potentially be at risk of being marginalised and facing older age poverty.

“In 2001 I founded PRIME Cymru because I felt that the experience and skills of many older people were being wasted..... Society is worse off by not using the skills and experience of older people to fullest advantage.... PRIME Cymru is determined to develop new ideas and approaches to enable older people in Wales to remain economically active” HRH The Prince of Wales

Since its establishment in 2001 PRIME Cymru has been, and still remains, the only organisation in Wales dedicated to providing tailored advice and support to the economically inactive 50 plus age group. We provide one-to-one support to individuals to develop self-employment opportunities, secure sustainable employment, provide opportunities for skills, confidence and qualification development together with volunteering opportunities for those furthest from the labour market as a stepping stone to more formal economic activity. The charity now runs the largest mentoring programme in Wales with over 360 volunteer mentors. All of the volunteer mentors have been recruited because of their skills, knowledge and expertise to be able to support our clients on a one-to-one basis offering a sounding board and acting as a critical friend in the clients' travel towards employment or self-employment. All mentors complete a professionally designed training programme and are supported by staff employed by the charity.

Achievements and Impact

The charity has been very successful in engaging with over 25,000 individuals in Wales providing bespoke practical tailored support, advice and guidance to assist them with remaining in or returning to economic activity.

Since being established in 2001, the charity has supported:

- Over **8,500** individuals to return to sustained economic activity
- In excess of **2,800** individuals to take-up volunteering opportunities to develop skills and confidence to move closer to the labour market
- More than **2,500** individuals to undertake training or further learning opportunities
- Many others to reconsider their long-term futures and recognise their transferable skills which are much needed in new employment markets

Each year the charity contributes greatly to the Welsh economy by:

- Providing in excess of **42,000** hours of volunteer mentoring time which is valued at over **£1.1m** to the economy
- Providing a Social Return on Investment (SROI) of an estimated **£2.4m** in the reduction of payments out-of-work benefits per annum
- Operating a low cost high impact programme where the average cost of assisting an individual to return to economic activity is less than **£750**

Without the support of PRIME Cymru many of our clients say that they would have been consigned to the “scrapheap” and would have faced health issues related to inactivity and definite older age poverty. They have said -

“...without PRIME Cymru I was facing a dismal future where my age was over shadowing my skills They helped me realise my dream of starting a business and I can’t thank them enough” Bridgend area client

“...when I thought there was no hope of finding a job again at my age PRIME Cymru helped me realise there were opportunities out there and how to maximise my potential....I am now fully employed once again providing for my family and my future!” Flintshire area client

“...being well over 50 and out of work for a number of years my confidence had hit rock bottom and I didn’t know which way to turn....I was given a flyer about PRIME Cymru and made contact....with the help and support of their outreach worker I undertook some volunteering which helped build my confidence again and made me realise that I can still contribute – job next! Carmarthenshire area client

“PRIME Cymru’s mentor smoothed the choppy waters of starting up a business, offering valid and supportive advice and guidance” Cardiff area client

The Need

In Wales over 1 in 3 of all older people aged 50 to retirement age are currently not working. This is a total of around 240,000 people. Of these, around two thirds are registered for incapacity or other benefits. These figures are continuing to increase as a result of the current economic climate where research has shown that a person over the age of 50 is 5 times more likely to be made redundant and is 8 times less likely to find alternative employment than a person in the 18-30 age group. In addition, the number of people over the age of 50 who are considered as NEETS (Not in Education, Employment or Training) is over 4 times the number of those in the 16-24 age group.

Research carried out by the Office of National Statistics and others shows that around one third of all those currently inactive would like to work. Changes to the rules governing incapacity benefit will mean that older people with a health problem will be encouraged to return to work – this is likely to increase the number of older people having to seek employment/self-employment by up to an additional 30,000. However, bespoke services for the 50+ cohort to assist with addressing their often multiple barriers to returning to economic activity in Wales are not provided by the mainstream statutory provider network.

With the population living longer, and with the pension age steadily increasing, more people will need to continue to earn a living into their 60s and maybe 70s to reduce the impact of older age poverty. The 2006 Age Discrimination legislation will help older people who wish to continue to work, but this needs to be complemented by practical support and help from various quarters, including the voluntary sector. It is imperative that PRIME Cymru plays a leading role in this by being an enabler, innovator and advocate of schemes to provide practical help to support older people by utilising its many years of valuable experience.