**Welsh Learner plans in place for a number of Social Workers**

The Welsh Government recognise that for many Welsh speakers, being able to use their own language is likely to be fundamental to their care. For this reason it wants to strengthen Welsh language services within health, social services and social care. Mwy na Geiriau / More Than Just Words is a strategic framework which seeks to make sure that where people need a service in welsh, they are offered this. This is called an ‘Active offer’. As well as this the Social Services and Well-being Act (Wales) will transform the way Social Services are delivered and asks us to ensure that our customers are at the centre of what we do, that we listen to them and that we think about their culture, beliefs and language.

People with Disabilities often has difficulties with communication. This may be because of a learning disability, social communication disorder such as Autism, or a physical or sensory impairment. It is therefore even more important that we are able to communicate with the person in their language of choice.

**WHAT’S CHANGED**

Conwy encompasses a large rural area where 66% of the population speak welsh. Conwy Disability Service has historically struggled to employ Social Workers who are bilingual. Where we have advertised welsh essential posts, the response has been poor. We therefore concluded some time ago that a different strategy was needed to ensure that we are able to make an ‘Active offer’. There are a group of people within the service who have been educated through the medium of welsh but as adults lack confidence in speaking welsh. We have identified and encouraged these individuals to develop their confidence in using the language by enabling access to welsh improver courses and setting up informal sessions within the work place to practice with welsh speaking colleagues. In addition where we have been unsuccessful in filling a welsh essential post we have then re-advertised as welsh advantageous with a proviso that the offer and contract of employment will include the requirement to learn welsh.

We are able to offer Social Workers supervision through the medium of welsh which provides a further opportunity for those less confident to practice their language skills. Within the service we are also fortunate to have a Practice Teacher who completed their Social Work training through the medium of welsh and is therefore able to support student Social Workers who similarly wish to complete their training through the medium of welsh. We have had two such students in the past 12 months.

Within the team individual staff are becoming more aware of the importance of being able to communicate with others in their preferred language and more staff are beginning to express an interest in learning welsh as part of their own professional development.

**WHAT DIFFERENCE HAS IT MADE?**

The team are now aware of the importance of making an ‘Active offer’ and the actual real difference that being able to speak with someone in their preferred language makes to people and to our assessment of needs and circumstances. We take great care to ensure that service users do not just accept contact with a monolingual worker because they are worried that they may have to wait longer if they ask for somebody who is bilingual. Referral information is checked carefully for information that will indicate the person is likely to be more comfortable with a welsh speaking worker so that people are not put in the position of having to ask.