



# My Day My Life Service Review

**Report produced for Monmouthshire County Council**

**Authors:** Ainsley Bladon, Becky Holmes & Mark John-Williams

Practice Solutions Ltd

March 2023

## Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. The history of the My Day My Life Service in North and Central Monmouthshire.....	6
3. What people told Us: My Day My Life participants.....	9
4. What people told us: family members.....	14
5. What people told us: employees in the service.....	16
6. What people told us: other council employees and community organisations.....	20
7. Conclusions.....	22
8. Recommendations and next steps.....	23
Appendix A: Participant Letter (Workshops).....	26
Appendix B: Engagement Dates.....	27
Appendix C: Sharing Our Findings.....	28

# 1. Introduction

Monmouthshire County Council asked Practice Solutions Ltd. to undertake an independent review of the My Day My Life service, which provides day support for people in North and Central Monmouthshire (Abergavenny and Monmouth areas).

The review is grounded in the key principles of voice and control, prevention and early intervention, well-being and co-production set out by the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

This report is about what we did and what people told us. It also includes recommendations to the council about the future for the My Day My Life service and how it should be delivered.

## What is in this report?

- A history of the service.
- What people told us.
- Recommendations about what the council should do next.

## What did we do?

We read reports and documents that told us about the history of the service.

We met with the council to understand more about the My Day My Life service. The council gave us a list of all the people who might want to talk with us about their views, experiences and opinions.

It was agreed that we would contact people from different groups.

- People who use the My Day My Life service now and their families.
- People who used the activity centres before Covid.
- People who might use the service in the future.
- People who work for the service now.
- Other people who work in the council and know about the service.
- People who have jobs at other community agencies that work with the service.

Between December 2022 and February 2023, we talked to people in different ways so that there were no barriers to getting fully involved in the review.

- Meeting with people who use the service and their families in person. to talk about what they feel and think about the service. We visited Abergavenny and Monmouth on six different days.
- Holding two workshops to understand more about participants, including what they like to do and what is important to them.
- Meeting with staff in person and on the computer (using video conferencing) to understand their thoughts and views.
- Asking people who used to drop into the service to complete a survey and share their experiences.
- Hearing from families about young people who might use the service in future so that we know more about their interests and hopes for the future.

We used various ways to communicate.

- Sending easy read and picture photo symbol invitations and inviting participants to bring along someone close to them if they wished.
- Using visual aids and creative forms of expression.
- Asking participants to bring photos and items that show what is important to them, working with chart paper, markers, and sticky notes.
- Having shared conversations about what and who is important in individual lives through person-centred and simple community mapping tools.

The council has asked us to make recommendations about what further action is needed. Once we had looked at all the evidence and considered what would be most helpful, we sent our list of recommendations to all the people we had spoken to, as well as those who did not speak to us during the engagement period. This was to make sure that they agreed with the recommendations in this report.

We then finished writing our independent report. It will be given to the council which may ask other people for their opinions before deciding what to do next.

## **Who took part – participants in My Day My Life**

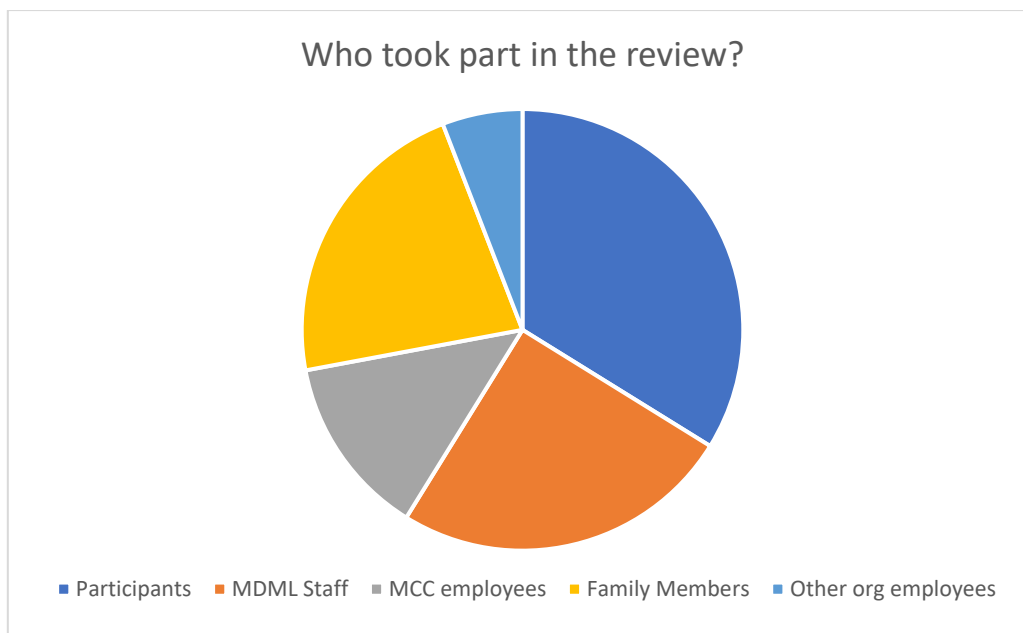
We spoke to:

- 4 out of 12 people who used to drop into the centres completed surveys
- 2 people who used to participate in My Day My Life attended in person events with their siblings.
- 6 out of 11 current participants in Abergavenny attended in person events
- 9 out of 11 current participants in Monmouthshire took part. 6 attended in person events, 2 people were represented by family members and 1 person gave comments by phone
- 2 out of 6 people of transition age were represented by family members

Overall, out of the 41 people we contacted, 23 chose to take part in the review (56%)

Current participants were the highest attendees, at 68% attendance rate

We also spoke to family members, community organisation employees, and other Monmouthshire County Council staff such as social workers and managers. More detail can be found in the table below



Participants	Family Members	Employees of MDML	Other Monmouthshire Council employees	Community Organisation employees
23 out of 40 contacted participants took part in the review	15	17	9	4

### What happened next?

The council has asked us to make recommendations about what further action is needed. Once we had looked at all the evidence and considered what would be most helpful, we sent our list of recommendations to all the people we had spoken to during the engagement period, as well as those who did not speak to us. This was to make sure that they agreed with the recommendations in this report.

We then finished writing our independent report. It will be given to the council which may ask other people for their opinions before deciding what to do next.

## 2. The history of the My Day My Life Service in North and Central Monmouthshire

### How the My Day My Life service started

We learned a lot about the service.

Before 2014, the council had a day centre. People visited a building between 10am and 3pm Monday to Friday and they did different activities together. Mostly, all the participants did the same activities.

In 2014, the council decided to do things differently. This meant using a person-centred approach with decisions about which activities to do and where, based on people's strengths and what matters to them. The principles of the new service are set out in the box below.

*There will be opportunities for individuals to experience a fulfilled life by joining in community activity. Decisions will be citizen-led.*

*This is about real participation in activity, not observing or low-level access such as talking to someone. This is about becoming a genuine and active participant in life with the ability to make a contribution.*

*Wherever possible, people are supported into mainstream rather than disability specific opportunities within the community.*

*People are offered individual and bespoke support to access opportunities. This is about working with people's strengths, not needs.*

*People are encouraged to develop in the activities in which they participate and become increasingly independent.*

*There will be active and continuous engagement with the people who love and care for the individual most.*

*Serious effort will be invested to guarantee a significant community response.*

*There will be a need for a base (Hub) within the community where people are able to go for peer support and which acts as safety net.*

The new way of doing things meant that people still did some activities in buildings, but they also went out more into their communities.

Participants were able to choose the way they spent their day - doing things that were most important and meaningful to them with the help of a support worker where necessary.

People were able to enjoy activities at a range of community venues, such as Dance Blast, gardening, and running a community café. There were also My Day My Life hubs, which had on-site pastimes like art and pottery.

This was a big change for everyone. Staff received training to help with the new way of working and the council had advice from an expert in person-centred planning to make sure it got things right.

The service was looking to introduce a six-steps approach.

- 1) Ask permission.
- 2) Meet with those who are important.
- 3) Ask different questions (like 'what matters to you' / 'what is your best life').
- 4) Look at complementary and supplementary solutions (making connections and building relationships).
- 5) Make it happen.
- 6) Review / reflect.

Moving forward with a completely new way of working has been a long journey for participants and their families and staff members alike. The service began operating social enterprises like a print shop and café, which gave participants valuable job skills, alongside a range of social, health and wellbeing and expressive activities.

A service review in 2019 highlighted that, while the new service philosophy had created these new opportunities, it also presented challenges.

By March 2020, everyone had moved away from a traditional day service, with some success in helping people become more independent. The range of new activities included touch trust, yoga, and tea dances. The Abergavenny hub was closed two days a week, and the two Monmouth hubs had combined, as more people accessed mainstream community activities.

### **During the Covid-19 pandemic (2020-2022)**

With the onset of national Covid-19 pandemic restrictions from March 2020, all public buildings needed to close temporarily.

During this time, people were offered individual support on a priority basis. Those living in supported accommodation received a service in their home. Because of restrictions, people were mostly going out for walks or for coffee when the shops were open. All over Wales, people were not allowed to meet. Some staff members and participants were shielding. During the pandemic, many newer staff were redeployed or moved to other jobs.

This meant that the usual My Day My Life service was very different for a long period of time.

### **After the Covid-19 pandemic (2022-2023)**

The council decided that people living in supported housing should continue receiving support from staff at their home, who could take them out rather than having a different support worker through My Day My Life. These individuals were not included in the review.

Far fewer people are now using the service. As of June 2022, over 50% fewer people were involved than before the pandemic. For this reason, there are now too many employees and most are working a few hours each week. Some staff are also working in the Individual Support Service (ISS), which has more participants.

When the restrictions were lifted, the buildings remained temporarily closed while the council considered next steps. It commissioned this review.

Community activities have started again, although not all of them re-opened after Covid-19.

## Other things to know.

There are other services for people with learning disabilities in North and Central Monmouthshire. These include:

- **The Individual Support Service:** This is much like My Day My Life. It helps people with their short-term goals, like being more independent and doing things like taking the bus or learning to cook. People meet with a support worker and work together to achieve these goals. The main difference is that My Day My Life is a longer-term service and the Individual Support Service has many more participants.
- **My Mates:** This is a social group run by the council that arranges activities which people can attend independently or with their support worker. The goal is making friendships and close personal relationships. It has won a Social Care Wales award for innovation.
- **Community organisations:** There is a range of organisations and charities available for individuals with learning disabilities such as People First, Growing Space, Dance Blast, the Bridges Centre, and employment agencies. Some are sponsored by the council and others are independent.
- **Direct Payments:** Under this scheme, people receive money from social services to employ their own support privately from whoever they choose.
- **Supported Living:** This is housing for people with learning disabilities, with the focus on being as independent as possible.



### 3. What people told us: My Day My Life participants

Practice Solutions contacted 40 individuals by phone and letters were sent regarding events. Over half of current participants in the My Day My Life service chose to meet with us, to talk in person. Four people were represented by parents because they were not available on activity days.

Of those who could not participate, this was usually because they were unwell or very busy during the Christmas period. We held additional events and workshops in January and February to better understand what people wanted from the service.

After the engagement activities, we then sent emails or easy read letters to all participants (even those who couldn't make the in-person meetings). Our draft recommendations were shared with them, giving everyone a final chance to comment about whether or not they agreed with our suggestions.

#### **'My Day My Life' Engagement Workshops**

Within the workshops we wanted to create opportunities for more informal conversation, moving away from an interview situation. This enabled us to get to know people in a more relaxed way. Because 'My Day My life' tries to be a person-centred and community-focused service, we decided to use similar approaches in the workshops.

We focused on 3 themes:

- What are your passions and interests and what do people like and admire about you? (Based on the 'one page profile' approach)
- What is your community? What are the important places and faces in your life? We used a 'community mapping' poster to record people's responses.
- What does a good life and service look like for you? What would you like to see?

In this way, we were able to have a positive, engaging and meaningful session, where we got to know the people who use the service and learned about what makes them tick, what works for them and what is important to them.

- In total, 15/22 current participants took part in the review (68%).
- 6 out of 11 current participants in Abergavenny (55%) met with us in person.
- 9 out of 11 current participants in Monmouthshire (82%) met with us in person and one person provided comments by telephone.
- We also spoke with 2 families of young adults who are in transition.
- We had 4 surveys returned from people who used to drop into the service, out of 12 that we'd written to. We also spoke to 2 previous participants in the programme who accompanied siblings.

## Previous My Day My Life participants

We provided a survey to some of the previous My Day My Life participants who used to drop in at the day centres. 4 out of 12 people completed the surveys. Here is what they said.

### What did you like most about MDML?

- It was a safe place to be
- the other people that went and the activities
- I liked doing my artwork, and socialising with my friends
- Very good time in the hub

### What were your favourite activities?

Using the computer, Drumming, Glass Painting, Art, Office activities, Radio, Drawing, Socialising with friends, community Cafe

---

*I felt I was filling my day with worthwhile activities.*

---

### What would you like to be happening at MDML in the future?

- If the My Day My Life re-opened, I could continue seeing my friends and doing my artwork
- Going back to how it was before
- I would like MDML to continue, for I really appreciated the support
- More activities and days out

### What did you not like about MDML?

- 3 people stated that there was nothing they did not like
- They stopped some of my favourite activities but they moaned when we went on the computers

---

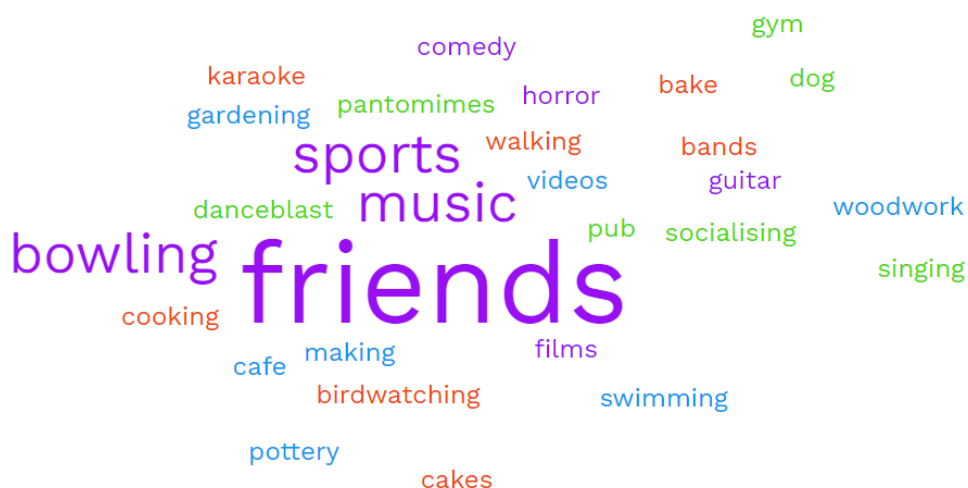
*I was really satisfied with the service it provided.*

---

## Current My Day My Life participants.

### Experiences of the service

People taking part in the My Day My Life service have many different interests! Here are some they shared with us:



Participants spoke about all the activities they have enjoyed while using the My Day My Life service. These included job skills like running a print shop and café, doing pottery, attending events, taking part in social activities with their friends, going to the theatre, creating a fashion show, pursuing hobbies and going to the cinema or bowling .

Participants expressed disappointment with the range of activities currently available. They spoke about missing their friends who used to do gardening and other group activities with them. They also described the loss of job skills activities which are no longer running.

### The impact of Covid-19

The impact of restrictions during the pandemic and building closures has been considerable. Participants spoke about missing their friends and feeling lonely during this period. While the situation was not avoidable, many had hoped to get back to their routines following the lifting of restrictions and they feel dismayed that buildings have not re-opened and many activities are not available.

One participant said they were taken off the service list because they did not want to do the activities on offer, even though their review noted that the only reason for their preferred activities not happening was the restrictions in place. Another person said no one called and that made them feel sad.

### What people did not like so much about the My Day My Life service

There were areas where some people wished things could be different.

One person spoke about feeling upset when they tried to see their friend who lives in supported accommodation after the pandemic but the friend was not allowed out - the support worker in the housing scheme was not available).

Some people expressed concern about the costs of taking part in the new service model as participants pay for their own activities of choice.

One participant commented that “management do not listen to you and never return your calls.”

### Future vision

In our workshops, participants created murals showing activities in their town as well as describing what good looks like.

---

*We should all attend the meetings about My Day My Life as the changes affect us.*

---



Here are some of the ideas.

- Schools and colleges should know about the service.
- There should be meaningful work for individuals like the craft studio we used to have.
- There should be group activities as well as individual ones.
- The public should be able to come in, look at the arts and crafts and go to the café.
- It should be in the middle of town.
- It should be clear what the service is.
- There should be some kind of transport.
- There should be a place where people can interact.
- A good service would include arts and crafts.
- All the services should link better.
- Communication should be better.
- There should be a service map that shows what services are available, to whom and where.
- Participants should be involved in working with the council to design services together.

Participants asked to have access to building(s) that can have a number of functions, including:

- being a meeting place.
- having somewhere to practice skills.
- knowing there is somewhere to go that is safe and accessible.

What was most important was to have a range of activities and outings / events that are meaningful and stimulating and that promote socialising with others.

Participants felt a mix of time out in groups or individually as well as accessing indoor activities was important - some in community venues and some in designated My Day My Life venues.

## Young people who may access the My Day My Life service in future.

### The transition experience

For young people aged 16-18 who have a learning disability, support is provided to help them make the transition from children services to adult services. This includes having a social worker who helps the young person decide their next steps, whether this is further education, employment or moving towards independent or supported living.

Some young people may choose to access the My Day My Life service or the Individual Support Service. The families we spoke to were unsure about what the My Day My Life service involves, having not received information about it from the council.

### Future vision

For young people, there were different ideas about which activities to do. Families told us they would not wish to access a traditional day centre model, and they would probably be more interested in evening and weekend activities with people of the same age (especially if they are continuing with studies or working).

Families indicated it would be useful to spend more time talking to transition-age young people about the different options, so that they can make informed decisions. Themes they considered important were employment or activities oriented towards life skill development - like work experience in catering, charity work, work with animals and learning more about how to manage money, stay in good health and about rights.

Some examples of the activities for those aged 18-25 taking place in the community include outdoor and wildlife activities, camping, climbing and canoeing. These are quite different to the activities currently taking place within the My Day My Life service and they should be considered when thinking about what younger participants might want.

---

*It should be someone's job to tell you what's available and to connect everything up. I mostly find things out by looking online and talking to people but never hear from the council.*

---

Families of younger people noted that transport can be an issue, particularly when parents work during the day and have use of the car.

Communication was felt to be very important – families were not sure what was available.

There was some anxiety about what comes next for young people making the transition to adult services. Families we spoke to were unclear what that would mean. One family member noted that their respite was cancelled suddenly as their child had turned 18. They did not find out until the respite home called and told them the day before her last session. This came as a real shock.

## 4. What people told us: family members

15 family members took part in the review. Some met with us in person and others attended workshops with My Day My Life participants.

After we had agreed the recommendations, we shared them with family members who spoke to us on their own, to make sure we had captured their views correctly.

### Experiences of the My Day My Life service

Families strongly supported about the idea of individual goals and support for participants, and finding meaningful activities to do.

Some families said that having only a couple of hours a week is not sufficient. It does not enable the participant or families to have healthy time apart from one another and outside the house.

Families feel that, since the pandemic, the service has not returned to how it was before and that the quality of the service is not as good.

Some families had concerns about how they would afford to keep paying for activities, given the cost-of-living crisis.

### The impact of Covid-19

Family members maintained that things had been very difficult since the pandemic and the changes made to the My Day My Life service. There had been a lack of communication from the council about what was happening and big adjustments had to be made when hours and support had been cut during and after the pandemic.

One person noted that, during the pandemic, their family received 3 phone calls over 2 years. One participant was offered a zoom course / walk around town but did not want this. While acknowledging that restrictions prevented 'business as usual', participants felt annoyed and frustrated.

There were few opportunities available in the community. Staff often had to adapt and provide more urgent support like shopping for essentials. Some families said that they felt abandoned during this period.

Many parents felt that activities have been less meaningful since the end of the pandemic, with limited variety available. Hours of support are much shorter since 1:1 replaced the day centre model of service.

Some families felt that potentially enjoyable opportunities could not be made available because of staff reluctance to take part. One parent commented that 'the staff refuse to take my child anywhere as they find them difficult'.

Since the pandemic, families have been feeling let down by lack of access to buildings. 'My son does not like just walking around the park every week, that is his only time out of the house sometimes and he misses his friends'.

### Future vision

Family members agreed that a mixture of 1:1 and more group / social activities is needed, both to maximise independence and to support personal growth and development.

Families felt that there should be a specific building for the service but participants should also go out and enjoy community life. Buildings should be able to accommodate care needs such as blending food and toileting as currently this is a barrier to being away from home.

Families regarded integrating with the community as important. It enables people to learn how to speak normally to individuals with disabilities. Not everyone understands that you need to talk to the person in the wheelchair rather than to a staff member who is with them. This can be changed by having local fun events and activities that everyone can do together.

## Buildings

My Day My Life has used many different buildings over the years. We asked review participants which buildings they like the best. There were a lot of suggestions!



Shire Hall  
Bridges Centre, Drybridge House  
Park Street Abergavenny  
Monmouth hub / library  
St Thomas Church Hall  
Tudor Street  
Local village halls  
Rockfield Community Centre  
Mardi Park  
Over Monnow

Family members told us what is most important in any building that the council chooses to use.

- A place to feel safe and 'like I belong'.
- A place that is 'our own'.
- Appropriate toilet facilities with changing places.
- Different spaces for activities like a kitchen and garden.
- Located where all the action is in the town centre, not out of the way.
- Outdoor space for BBQs and activities.
- A meeting place for participants but also used by community / the public.
- Somewhere with a sensory room.
- A balance of communal areas and quiet spaces.

## 5. What people told us: Employees in the service

We wrote to staff and contacted them by email / letter to invite them to take part.

We spoke to staff during 6 'in person' days and online over several days.

We then sent emails or letters to all staff sharing our draft recommendations, to give everyone a chance to comment.

- 6 Monmouth staff took part in conversations – 5 chose to take part by phone or video call and 1 in person.  
9 Abergavenny staff took part in conversations – 8 opted to take part in person, and 1 by phone.  
2 service managers were involved.

### Experiences of working for the My Day My Life service

Most staff working for My Day My Life are part-time. Some are semi-retired or work just a few hours a week. Since the end of the pandemic, there have been fewer participants and extra staff. Most staff said that they are happy with their existing hours and they would not want to change them by working after hours or on weekends. Some people felt that new hours would be acceptable.

We asked staff about the shift away from the traditional day service model to 1:1 support and a brand new way of working. This had been a difficult transition for some of those who had worked in a day centre for a very long time. However, employees spoke positively about the changes. They described how each person had a review when the new service model was introduced and some new activities were identified, such as cooking and seaside visits. Activities that used to involve everyone (such as aromatherapy and arts and crafts) were enjoyable but not everyone in the group wanted to do them. Staff felt that it was a positive move to introduce a more mixed approach. Older participants generally found the transition to support work more challenging than the younger ones did, partly because they saw activities as more of a way to pass the time than something more meaningful.

When asked what it was like work for the service, staff had a number of positive comments.

- Staff spoke warmly about their relationships with participants and many had worked with the council for many years. They value the time they spend with individuals and feel they are making a positive difference in that person's life.
- Staff felt positive about the changed model that had been introduced and thought that it was time to move forward with the My Day My Life approach.
- Staff enjoyed facilitating activities.

There were some aspects of the work they would change.

- Since the pandemic, regular team meetings and supervision had not taken place, or were hard to attend as many people only work some days each week.
- Planning new activities is difficult because sometimes staff are only assigned participants a day or two beforehand.
- Lone working and not being connected to a team can be isolating and demotivating.

Staff reported that they are feeling anxious about the future. There are fewer participants and not enough hours. They worry that they might lose their jobs.



Employee well-being will be very important going forward. Clear, positive and compassionate leadership must be in place to make changes. It is important that leaders create a culture of team working and provide training and development opportunities for individual staff with appropriate supervision and support.

## Person-centred planning

**Person centred** means putting the person at the centre of planning their own services. And making sure their wants, needs and values guide decision



Staff members embraced the concept of person-centred planning. However, they have found it quite difficult to put into practice, for various reasons.

- There is no clear process in place for care planning - e.g., plans are not documented and many staff members do not have access to computers or email addresses, to communicate with the social work team.
- Case notes do not record activities and so it is difficult to chart progress towards goals or even share information about which activities an individual enjoys. This means that new staff members have no records that would enable them to be aware of an individual's likes and needs or any concerns.
- Because they work part-time, staff members felt there were not enough opportunities for planning.
- The approach has been quite ad hoc, asking a person on the day what they want to do. Some staff members shared their perception that, because of their vulnerabilities, many participants will just say yes to whatever is suggested even if it is not something they enjoy or find meaningful.

---

*I can tell at a glance how the people I work with are feeling because we have worked together for such a long time.*

---

## Risk assessment.

Staff members advised us that they do not undertake risk assessments. Some of them said this was not necessary because it is important that participants are enabled to take positive risks. Another staff member noted that, if there was a particular risk for a person or if they were injured, then an assessment should be done.

It is essential that risk assessment forms a proactive part of care planning for all participants, to identify any potential issues. All staff members should be aware of an individual's risk factors when planning activities, with easy access to pertinent information such as physical health conditions. This does not mean that any activities with risk should be avoided but it does ensure that informed decisions can be taken and mitigation strategies can be put in place to reduce risk where it exists. For example, without being able to access the computer, how would a staff member know about a life-threatening food allergy when taking someone out for a meal? This issue must be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Social workers do complete care plans for each individual but My Day My Life staff reported that, for the most part, they are not involved in this process. A referral for the service is received and the staff are then assigned to participants.

## The impact of Covid-19

The pandemic was a tough time for employees and participants. Some members of staff had to shield because of health conditions and others were redeployed to support critical activities relating to the pandemic. A few staff members spoke about how the lack of structure and routine was challenging. They reflected on how difficult it was for people they supported when they were unable to enjoy the usual activities. In particular, staff members were conscious of the impact on participants of not seeing friends.

Staff members reported that, since Covid-19, fewer activities have been available. However, a brief review of community activities in North and Central Monmouthshire showed that there is a wide range of potential activities in place. Evidence for this was available from advertised activities online, leaflets in community hubs and public spaces, posters advertising events, and from speaking with community partners.

Staff members note that the increased cost-of-living has been prohibitive for many people. They identified potential barriers to getting access to activities.

- Inclement weather.
- Transport restrictions – some employees do not drive and not all participants have access to a wheelchair-friendly car. Abergavenny staff have access to a pool car but this is not the case in Monmouth.
- Staff are not always comfortable doing some activities because of their health limitations or inability to swim.
- There is no activity schedule or central place to learn about what is happening locally.

There did seem to be some confusion among staff members about access criteria to My Mates and whether participants can attend an activity without a support worker.

The review made clear that there is not a consistent effort made to identify new opportunities. Staff in the service are not regularly engaging with community partners in developing person-centred, bespoke activities based on individual needs and wishes.

## Future vision

No staff members wanted to return to the traditional day centre model. All expressed a desire to have a mixed model, combining buildings-based and outreach support work.

From an employee perspective, benefits to having bespoke buildings include:

- participants seeing friends and having a meeting space;
- somewhere to hold holiday and special events;



## 6. What people told us: other council employees and community organisations

We spoke with a range of other council employees associated with the service, including social workers and programme leads. We also asked 4 community organisation employees for their views.

Other Council Employees	Social Workers	Community Organisation Staff
5	4	4

### Experiences of the service

Council employees felt that the service has gone off course since the pandemic. Many noted that participants used to really enjoy employment skills activities and also that the things people used to do seemed more purposeful. All felt more could be done to make use of activities that are available.

Some people felt that the transition to a more person-centred approach had been difficult for some staff in the My Day My Life service.

Council employees felt that there should be better communication between services and that positive leadership would help to bring together staff from across a range of services.

### Impact of Covid-19

Council employees noted that, since the pandemic, there is limited evidence of participants meeting up with others. Most activities continue to centre on using local parks or cafés or going for walks, rather than the more novel activities seen when the service first developed. Some staff have expressed reluctance to undertake new activities like swimming or trampolining. This has limited the ability of the service to fulfil the needs of those who wish to take part in these pursuits. It was noted that some staff in the service have good ideas for novel activities which would be fun as a group - such as adaptive sailing, paddle boarding at the reservoir or going to shows out of town. Because of 1:1 allocated time slots and staff availability, in practice these types of activities were not taking place.

Council employees expressed concern that, if they are not invited to develop their own ideas using appropriate person-centred planning, some participants will just say 'yes' to most suggestions.

Social workers have stopped referring people to the My Day My Life service because they feel the Individual Support Service has more to offer now and that the two are very similar. They feel employees in the Individual Support Service are more willing to do a wider range of activities.

---

*Time moves on but people don't always move with it.*

---

### Future vision

In common with other people we spoke to, everyone was in favour of having buildings and also doing individual and group activities out in the community. They felt there is a need to 'think outside the box' and find creative new ideas. The staffing model should have flexible hours and clear job descriptions. The service should consider roles such as activities coordinator, day centre manager, and outreach manager. Each employee should have responsibility for some of these functions.

Employees in the council felt that MDML staff should be offered more training and support. Social workers indicated that having a better understanding of positive behavioural support approaches would help support workers in their jobs and to help them feel more confident in different situations.

Many employees noted concerns about the lack of recording and planning. They thought it essential that employees of My Day My Life document their time spent with individuals and that they record individual progress, concerns or issues.

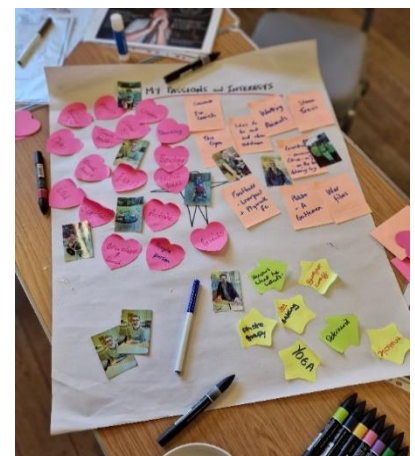
Social work teams and My Day MY Life staff should work more closely together to do care planning and reviews with individuals and their families.

The programme should be designed with everyone together and include the views of the wider learning disability community such as community organisations and charities as well as the health team (occupational therapists, speech and language therapists and so on). Council employees also felt that more could be done to improve the offer of support to others with neurodevelopmental conditions like autism and Asperger's syndrome, who currently do not have access to this type of person-centred planning.

### Community organisations

Community organisation employees felt that, since the pandemic, My Day My Life has lost its way. Participants are taking part in fewer activities and many of the people who used to use the service are now being supported in their accommodation settings and no longer attend community venues as they once did. There is a concern that these individuals may not be enjoying the same opportunities because of staffing pressures.

Staff in community organisations felt that both buildings-based and 1:1 / group support are needed. They hope to continue being involved with My Day My Life participants in future and want to work together with staff from the service.



## 7. Conclusions

Initially, when the council moved away from providing traditional day services, this was challenging for both staff, participants and families. However, they responded well to the challenges involved, such as working differently and having a new routine. The shift did happen and with positive results. Everyone spoke about a time when the My Day My Life service was offering a good variety of individual and group activities and support.

The programme achieved much in the first few years, including running social enterprise activities. There was evidence that individuals had moved towards greater independence.

Over time and especially with the impact of Covid-19, the service drifted away from its original principles and the number of participants decreased.

Our review found a lot of concern amongst participants, families and employees, as well as uncertainty and a lack of clear direction. The decline in participant numbers appears to be matched by a loss of opportunities and ambition. Participants and their families have been affected badly by this drift and the ongoing closure of buildings. Staff are looking for leadership and a renewed commitment from the council.

All this is partly a consequence of the need to find ways of responding to unprecedented change for people, communities and public services such as local authorities.

The problems have been made worse by the coming together of numerous challenges such as the cost-of-living crisis, resource limitations and the lasting impact of the pandemic. Limited resources are having a serious impact on people's daily lives as well as the availability of support services. Participants, families, and employees are feeling very anxious about the future.

In response, the council will need urgently to take steps that will restore and develop the positive aspects of the My Day My Life service. This will require a commitment to making timely plans and decisions, providing positive leadership and implementing practical changes. The programme of reform should be developed in full partnership with participants, their families, staff and stakeholders.

The new service model must fit within a wider strategic offer for people with learning disabilities in Monmouthshire, which focuses upon supporting people to take part in community activities and helping services to become genuinely more person-centred.

The evidence from our review is that a return to the core My Day My Life principles which were actively pursued prior to the Covid-19 pandemic would win widespread support and make a major contribution to improving the opportunities available to people with learning disabilities and support their participation in meaningful activities centred around personal goals and development.

## 8. Recommendations and next steps

### 1. The council will need to take steps to restore and develop the positive aspects of the My Day My Life service.

This will require a commitment to making timely plans and decisions, implementing practical changes, and providing positive leadership. The programme of reform should be developed in full partnership with participants, their families, staff and stakeholders. It must fit within a wider strategy and offer for people with learning disabilities in Monmouthshire, one which focuses upon supporting people to take part in community activities and helping services to become genuinely more person-centred.

### 2. The My Day My Life service should return to the principles it set out at the start.

The council needs to work with people to put in place and maintain a clear process for person-centred planning. It will be important that My Day My Life staff, social workers and colleagues from other organisations work more closely together. A joint training programme would help to produce a more unified approach.

The process should include having tools that will help people to communicate what they want and need (including easy read, sign language, creative activities, using computers and photo symbols). Families should be involved in these 'what matters to me' conversations but the focus should be on the individual, their goals and strengths.

### 3. The council should consider the range of opportunities and activities that will be made available to participants in the service.

All staff should be involved in this enterprise but the council may want to consider appointing a full-time, dedicated activities coordinator(s). Their responsibilities would include providing support for ongoing engagement with communities in the work of scoping new opportunities and in preparing regular communications and updates on available activities and events. This will help to support individuals in making choices based on their interests and goals, as well as identifying any gaps where new services may need to be commissioned.

Activities might include:

- Finding paid work
- Volunteering
- Social events and seeing friends
- Sports
- Healthy living
- Community events
- Entertainment
- Travelling out of area for events when needed.
- Being as independent as possible by learning new skills

The activities coordinator could also support staff to develop and maintain relationships with community partners and to explore new ideas creatively with participants. Staff should be supported in making available a wide range of activities.

#### **4. The service should adopt more flexible working hours**

The service should be offered in the evenings and on weekends, rather than a traditional 9-5 daytime model. It is essential that staff are involved from the start in considering the implications, especially as it is likely to involve adjustments to employee terms and conditions.

#### **5. The service needs to have stable, compassionate and person-centred leadership.**

To make the service as successful as possible, the council should focus on making sure that employees feel supported and productive through:

- Effective communication and regular team meetings in both the Monmouth and Abergavenny areas.
- Regular supervision.
- Training and development opportunities, including person-centred care planning training.
- Creating an environment where staff can get understanding, respect and recognition that they are valued, so that they can reach their full potential and do their best at work.

Refreshed job descriptions and terms and conditions may be needed to reflect this commitment by the council and to protect time for development and support.

#### **6. The programme will have a clear process to document what is happening.**

This means that:

- All staff have access to and know how to use a computer.
- Records of each contact are kept and made accessible.
- Risk assessments take place, based on individual needs.
- Employees have immediate access to care plans and can see important information like health conditions and allergies.
- Regular reviews take place with the individual, their family, their social worker, My Day My Life staff and other important people involved in their care and support.

#### **7. The service should have safe and accessible buildings.**

Everyone said that the people using the My Day My Life service need to have available to them safe and accessible buildings. While many potential buildings were identified, we heard differing views on whether there should be one fixed building or an option of using rooms in several buildings throughout the week – for example, having a Tuesday cookery workshop and running a café on weekends.

There was concern that, without proper oversight, having spaces could result in a drift back towards more outdated 'day centre' models. It is essential, therefore, that the council engages closely with individual participants and their families in setting up and maintaining the new service model.

**Accessible** buildings are easy for everyone to get into and around. Whatever their needs are.

The council should seek also to increase the number of public buildings and changing places that are appropriate for individuals who have physical health needs, so that anyone with a physical disability feels able to spend more time out in their communities.



## **8. People and families should be meaningfully involved in making changes.**

Now that we know more about the service and how it is running, the council will need to work very closely with people and families to co-design the new service. Using a co-production approach means people with a learning disability from the wider community should be involved too. The council should engage and consult regularly with everyone who might have a view to understand what they think, and to share ideas and suggestions. The most important voices need to be individuals who have learning disabilities and their families, as they are the ones who will receive the support. This also includes young people who may use the service in future. It means working together with people across the rest of the local authority to understand their views and to put in place a consistent service offer across the county.

## **9. Monmouthshire should think about all learning disability services**

The council should consider how all their different services can work better together. This means thinking about

- Whether the Individual Support Service and My Day My Life should be combined because they are very similar and there are not enough participants in the My Day My Life service.
- How support is offered to people of different ages.
- How people can access different types of support without barriers - for example, attending a My Mates activity, or joining in a special celebration event, or accessing activities from supported accommodation. Many of these options will not have any costs but will increase the range of things people can do.

## **10. There should be a map of all the services in Monmouthshire**

Most people we spoke to said they were unsure about the full range of services and support that the council offers. It would be great to have a map of these and a regular activities calendar, so people know what opportunities are available and how they can access them. This will help the public to understand what is happening and it will improve communication.

## **Next Steps**

This report will now be shared with Monmouthshire County Council for review and action.

**Thank You!**

*The Practice Solutions team would like to thank everyone that took part in this review. We were really pleased with the level of engagement by all involved, and the depth of care everybody showed for ensuring that future Monmouthshire services for individuals with learning disabilities and their families are as great as they can be.*

## Appendix A: Participant Letter (Workshops)



Mark

Ainsley

Becky

Sherona

### JOIN US TO HAVE YOUR SAY ABOUT THE MY DAY MY LIFE PROGRAM!

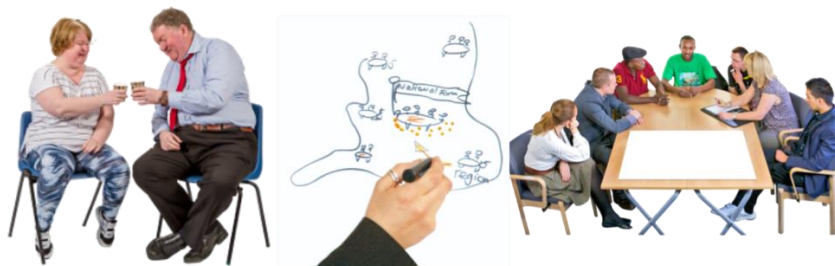
We are talking to people about the *My Day My Life* program.

We want to know more about what's important to you!

We are holding a workshop – there will be creative activities and fun ways to share your ideas and get involved.

There will also be coffee and cake.

Bring along whoever you would like – please also bring small items or photos that represent your interests so we can learn more about you!



**WHEN:** 12 and 13 January 2023

**WHERE:**

- **12<sup>th</sup> January** 1.00pm to 3.30pm at St Michael's Centre, 10a Pen-y-Pound Road, Abergavenny, NP7 5UD
- **13<sup>th</sup> January** 10.00am to 12.30pm at Bridges, The Ballroom, Drybridge Park, Monmouth, NP25 5AS

**HOW:** Email the team at [\[email\]](#) to book your spaces.

Practice Solutions is an independent organisation that is working in partnership with Monmouthshire County Council to review the *My Day, My Life Service*. This is so that the council can continue to develop the service and to ensure that it is having the most benefit possible to you. We are writing to you as a participant of the *My Day, My Life* service to see if you would like to share your views with the team.

As well as the workshop above you can also meet with a team member in person, one to one, to share your ideas – let us know if you would like a meeting.

## Appendix B: Engagement Dates

We met with participants and their families as well as staff in person at both Abergavenny Town Hall (library) and Monmouth community hub on the following dates in late 2022 and early 2023.

- 6th December
- 15th December
- 20th December
- 12th January
- 13th January
- 6th February

We also met with staff online on several dates between December and February based on individual participant availability.

## Appendix C: Sharing Our Findings

We wrote out again to everyone that we had contacted to share with them what we had found after the engagement period ended – this included participants and families, employees and community partners. We shared easy-read version of the recommendations and asked people to let us know about any comments they had. All participants had pre-stamped return envelopes and all employees had emails.

After posting out the draft recommendations in easy read format, 11 people provided additional comments - including 1 additional participant and 1 additional social worker, 2 family members and 4 employees of the council, plus 4 My Day My Life staff members (counted in the numbers above). Everyone was happy with our suggestions overall with no substantive changes made.

### SHARING MY IDEAS ABOUT THE SUGGESTIONS (feedback form posted out)

**This is what I thought of the suggestions**



**This is what I liked about the suggestions**



**This is what I would change about the suggestions**



**Other ideas I have about My Day My Life**

