

It's our Birthday!

Today, 16 March, is our two-year anniversary of registration as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation and we wanted to celebrate it with all of you. We were going to have a party, but we've just been too busy to organise it.

It's been very busy here over the last two years so we thought we'd celebrate by looking back over the amazing things we've achieved in such a short space of time.

When we first set up, there were just two people scurrying away in the middle of the nights trying to find information that would help us signpost people to specialist support services. We struggled to find information and we soon realised that it was because there were very few specialist services in Wales, and even fewer that provided specialist direct support. We found some services that would help people who had experienced or witnessed homophobic, biphobic and transphobic hate incidents and crimes. We found a few local LGBT youth groups dotted around Wales (but these didn't exist in many areas). There are some national information and signposting services, but again, we wondered where these were signposting people who wanted to access specific emotional and practical support. In short, we just knew that we had to make things better, easier and accessible.

So, what did we do?

Well, what we didn't do was sleep much! We set off on our journey to create a gender and sexual diversity specialist organisation that provides a wide range of emotional, practical and counselling support as well as information, signposting and advocacy. For more information about all the services we now provide just two years on, check out the [support](#) section of our website, and [request support](#) if you think there's something we can do to help you (or someone you know).

Keep reading for some of our highlights over the last 2 years.



Plant it, and it will grow

When we began, we were focussing on the 5 local authorities of Gwent. This was great because it allowed us to dedicate our efforts, time and limited resources to a specific area. We have been very grateful for the support of Connect Gwent, the Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent and Gwent Police who have supported the work we began within the area. Without this tremendous support, we wouldn't have been able to develop the services we offer today.

It wasn't long until we realised we needed to break down those barriers and offer support to people much further away. We set about doing this quite early on as we were receiving requests from people right across South and Mid Wales. But this became quite confusing. We were still known as Umbrella Gwent and we felt that prevented people from even contacting us to ask for help.

In 2016, we officially changed our working name to **Umbrella Cymru** and launched the new national brand.

Since doing that, we've been flooded with requests for support from all over the country. More and more people have come to us asking for information and support – and we've been very happy to help.



It's a numbers game

From March 2015 to now, we've widened our reach, and the number of requests we receive for support have increased by over **493%**.

In real terms, that's an increase from the 14 people in total who requested support in the first three months (April – June 15) to the last three months (Dec 16 – Feb 17) when we received **69 requests**.

Looking at the figures today (16 March 2017), we've already received 15 requests for support this month.



We anticipate that by the end of the month we will have received an average of **1** new request per day.

Ask and you shall get

We attend as many events throughout the year as we can and we know that we're reaching people who need our support by doing this, as we usually come back from every event with at least one or two direct requests for support. This isn't our main source of requests though, and we put a lot of the increase down to our brand new accessible website.

We spent a long time building our new website with the fantastic help of Dreem Media who put up with Nick's attention to detail and perfectionist ways. We salute you!

We now have a great looking website that makes it very easy for people to request support, report a crime and get information. This has been one of our biggest achievements this year, but the work has been ongoing for quite some time. We know we've got so much more to do on the website, but we really hope that you like it.

People Support People

It's all well and good that we have a website that makes it easy for people to request support, but with the number of people who need our help growing, we knew we had to increase the number of people available to support them. So, we did.

We have a rolling programme of training student social workers who not only learn so much during their 4-6 months on placement with us, but are fantastic at delivering face to face support. We're constantly expanding our intake of students to build a wider, more skilled and responsive team. This model has been so successful, we're planning on expanding it much wider across Wales so that we have support workers in every area. This will of course take time, but we've tested it across 10 local authorities, and it works a treat.



Enough is never enough!

We might have a great team of student Social Workers working tirelessly to support clients, but we knew that it still wasn't enough. So, last year we launched a recruitment project across the 5 local authorities in Gwent as a pilot. This is just coming to an end, and we've successfully recruited some brilliant and passionate volunteer support workers. We're currently in the process of training them up, and they'll be ready to help in no time.

We're hoping to replicate this recruitment drive right across Wales since we've tried it out and it works. This will really help us reach far more people without having to build in lengthy waiting times.

Waiting lists can be frustrating to people and we're doing everything we can NOT to have them. We really appreciate the dedication and commitment our new volunteers have shown, and we're so very lucky to have them on board.

We're also very grateful to the Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent who has supported this project financially with a contribution of £9900, enabling us to recruit and train so many new members of our team.

Here, there (but not quite) everywhere

Throughout the year, we really try to attend as many different events as we can with an information stand and some of our team on hand to answer any questions people might have about what we do and how they can get support. We know that we're not able to attend every great event that happens across Wales, but we're trying our best to be as many as possible.

Last year we were at so many, we wouldn't know where to begin telling about the great time we had at them. Some of them really stand out though, and we're very grateful to have been part of them.



One event sticks in Nick's mind as he was humbled to speak at it. This was the Vigil arranged by Rainbow Newport following the devastating events in Orlando. If you couldn't make it, watch the video of his speech [HERE](#).

This was one of many vigils Nick attended around this time and was saddened by the news himself. Another was a vigil in Aberystwyth and Cardiff. You can also read his message he published at the time [HERE](#).

What else have we been up to?

Well, quite a few things. We're really pleased to have been asked to co-deliver a week of training for Dyfed-Powys Police LGB&T Liaison officers. This was a fantastic week-long course with a brilliant group of officers and staff from across the force. And we're really look forward to the second course in a few months. This is a great source of support for any LGB&T+ person who has experienced or witnessed crime or antisocial behaviour in the Dyfed-Powys force area – and we're glad to be a part of this work.

We've continued our quiz nights in Pontypool with the brilliant support of Out at Tesco and Tesco Extra, Pontypridd. These are monthly coffee and quiz nights that are great to meet people. We've published dates for 2017 [HERE](#).

We've held a few drop-in events and 'surgeries' in libraries and community centres, and we want to continue this into the future.

During LGBT History Month 2017, we held our first make-up night for transgender women. This was a huge success and we can't wait to do it again. We're exploring options for events for trans men too and we're excited to try some of the ideas we've had. We're also very keen to hear from anyone if they have events they would like us to arrange.

We love young people and youth groups too, and we've been so lucky to be invited to several groups and events to celebrate gender and sexual diversity and history.



Sparkle has become a permanent fixture in our annual calendar as well as Pride Cymru annual events. As well as the main event, Nick thoroughly enjoyed delivering at the first LGB&T Youth Conference in Cardiff.

Over the last two years we've been to so many places and met some truly inspirational people that we could go on and on. But we just want to say thank you to everyone we've met, everyone who has supported our work, and to all the people we've supported.

So, what next?

We've got loads of ideas and lists upon lists of things we want to do. Unfortunately, we can't do it all over night (although we would love to be able to), but we're very excited to keep moving forward.

We're particularly excited to continue developing our website this year, and we're looking forward to continuing to roll out our specialist training.

We're pleased to be working with so many schools and education providers across the country and we'll be getting to more this year to provide even more support to pupils, teachers, staff and families.

We're grateful to be part of the Wales NHS Gender Identity Group to represent the views of clients in the discussions about healthcare - lots more to come on this work, we're sure.

We want to do more, be in more places, recruit more people and continue to expand our services right across Wales.

A final message...

So, to mark our anniversary, we want to thank you all for your support along the way. We really couldn't do it without you.



THANK YOU

