

**BEN**

Black Environment Network



## Informal learning partnerships for engaging with ethnic communities

Guidance for the Environmental and Heritage sectors

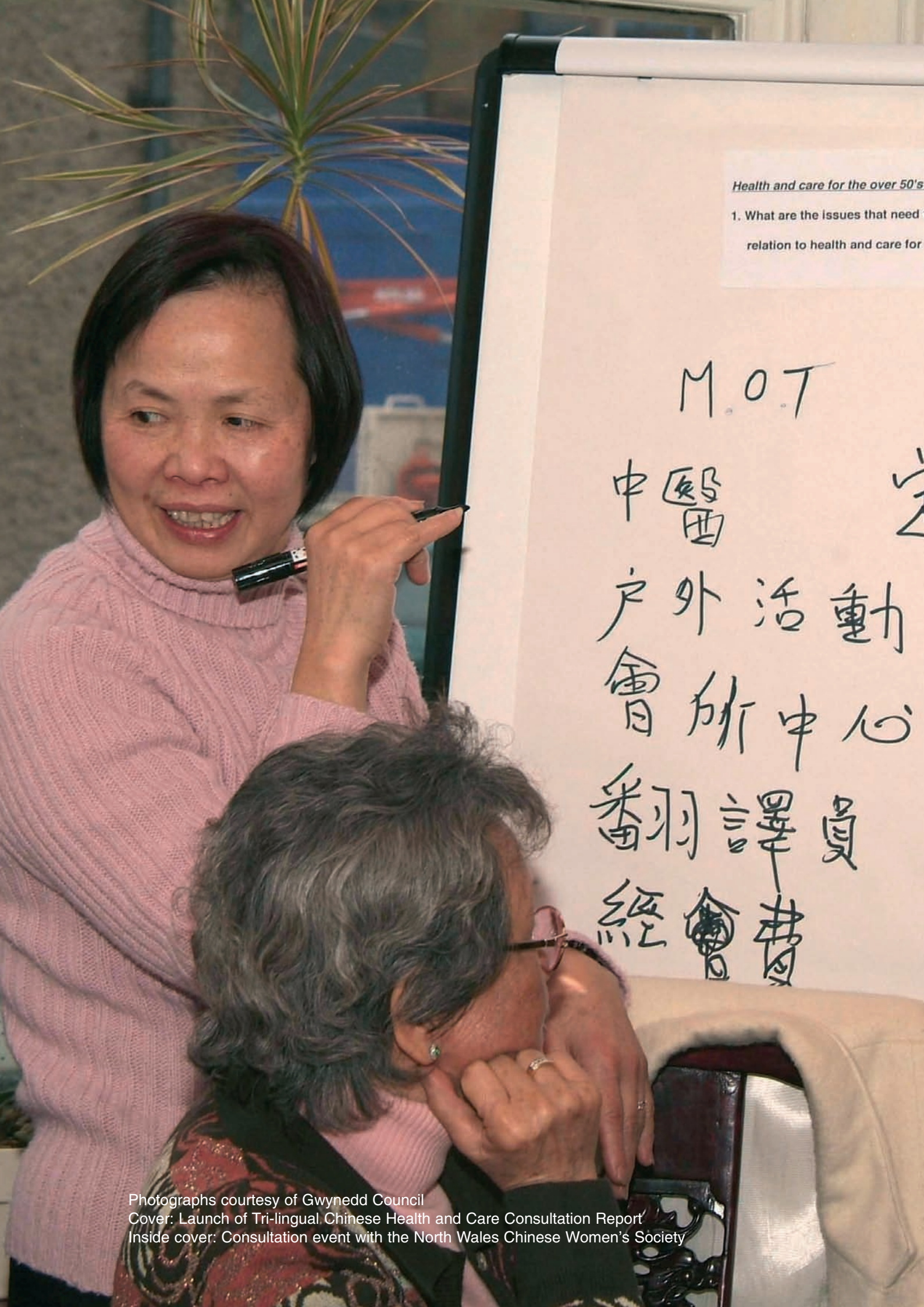
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## **CD – Process Matrix and Resources**

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Health and care for the over 50's

1. What are the issues that need  
relation to health and care for

M.O.T

中醫西

戶外活動  
會所中心

翻羽譯員

總會

Photographs courtesy of Gwynedd Council  
Cover: Launch of Tri-lingual Chinese Health and Care Consultation Report  
Inside cover: Consultation event with the North Wales Chinese Women's Society

## INTRODUCTION

### ***Who is this guide for?***

This guide is aimed at professional organisations that wish to involve ethnic communities. It is a 'how to' guide that provides practical information for those seeking greater ethnic inclusion.

### ***Why use this guide?***

Mainstream organisations (public and third sector alike) have been working hard through a variety of ways, to better engage with those traditionally excluded. Whilst this guide focuses on ethnic inclusion, the lessons it draws upon have equal validity across all aspects of social inclusion, with a particular relevance to rural, dispersed and emergent communities. This guide is therefore of value to all those interested in understanding practical ways of moving the environmental and heritage sectors towards an inclusive rather than exclusive approach.

It demonstrates an approach that is proactive (through seeking out and building learning partnerships) rather than reactive ("Are you interested in what we provide? If not, we are not interested in you").

Through its work, BEN finds that most people readily recognise and accept that ethnic community groups may be vulnerable and in need of support to enter new areas of endeavour, but that professional organisations often have enormous difficulties achieving this. Frontline staff, those directly involved with the public, are very few in number. Single education officers or say, wardens on nature reserves, are often completely overwhelmed and find themselves being the minority within their own organisations, with limited support or access to appropriate knowledge, skills or contacts. At other levels within organisations, those tasked with writing policy and strategies also find they are doing it in a vacuum, as they have never dealt with the people concerned.

Social inclusion is fairly new as a priority on the contemporary social agenda. The clear thinking needed to ensure a sound perspective of what it means to be socially inclusive and how to achieve inclusion is simply not there. Large organisations, used to their self-image of being seen as experts in their field, can find it difficult to stand up and say, "Actually we do not really know how to proceed".

This results in organisations reluctant to move forward their established practices and sticking with what they know. A good example is advertising job opportunities. The assumption is often made that advertising in the ethnic minority press or making a pronouncement in the mainstream press that 'we welcome applications from ethnic minorities' will lead to the required result; after all, it has always worked in sourcing employees before. This is then followed by the next apparently logical conclusion that "If ethnic minorities do not come forward, there must be something wrong with them. They are not interested". Quickly followed by, "of course, it is wrong to force people to be a part of what they are not interested in". Working with colleagues that do not have the wider understanding of what is needed, it is easy to come to the conclusion that all that is necessary has been done, while nothing changes.

Social inclusion is an exercise in community development. Some care needs to be taken here about the context. In the context of community development, not only community groups but also organisations are members of the community. Perhaps 'society' development should be considered as an alternative term to 'community' development. It is about establishing connections, relationships and partnerships between particular social groups and organisations so they can all benefit from each other.

***The BEN methodology, working to engage ethnic groups with the heritage and environment sectors, involves four stages:***

- 1. Identifying participants' agendas and needs***
- 2. Creating opportunities for people to meet (and creating opportunities for people to discover) and identify common agendas***
- 3. Developing capacity to engage with each other***
- 4. Following up***

The ultimate single indicator of successful relationship building is trust. In the ideal working relationship, a community group is convinced that people from mainstream organisations care about them. They believe that the support given will be about what they need. Similarly the staff of mainstream organisations will genuinely care about ethnic communities and have gained the skills to deliver on various fronts, confident that their organisation's remit will form part of the outcomes.

All of this can be achieved through creating structured informal learning partnerships. It is about working skilfully in the situations within which everything takes place.

We are working within a positive climate for social inclusion. Understanding of the need for a community approach is growing within many organisations and at government level. Efforts are being made to frame policy and strategy within a community development approach and allocate personnel time and organisational resources for this process. There is a huge prize at the end – a cohesive society with a better quality of life for everyone, and the vast missing contribution of socially excluded groups being a new force for change.

The BEN methodology has been at work for many years in urban areas, dealing with concentrations of ethnic minorities in inner city settings. What sets the BEN GWLAD Project apart is that it has taken place in a semi-rural setting. It is pioneering work that aimed to involve a very sparse population, with families and individuals spread across a very extensive geographical area.

With limited resources, in terms of personnel time, the BEN GWALD project had to focus very clearly on what we could successfully deliver. The project therefore focused on three interlinked initiatives, which, along with 20 years of experience of wider work towards ethnic inclusion in the environmental and heritage sectors, were used to support this guidance.

### ***How the guide works***

The guide focuses on two main themes:

- How to develop and structure an **informal learning partnership** towards inclusion in the environmental and heritage sectors.
- Working with **emergent and dispersed rural ethnic communities**

The guide starts by introducing BEN and explaining the background to the project (Section 1). The second section outlines the concept of informal learning and what BEN means by the term. It then explains a few of the basic principles behind informal learning. Section 3 describes the key stages in the process of effectively engaging employees or volunteers in informal learning. This should be read in conjunction with the summary process matrix for the three initiatives in the appendices.

The accompanying CD contains the appendices and supplementary information on the specific process followed for the three main initiatives covered in this publication (including supporting information and presentations). There is also a BEN resource list.

## SECTION 1 – BACKGROUND

“BEN seeks to enable full participation by ethnic communities in the built and natural environment. BEN takes the view that there is no such thing as a pure environmental or heritage project. A so-called pure environmental or heritage project is one that has neglected its social, cultural and economic context.”

*Judy Ling Wong, BEN Director*

### ***An introduction to Black Environment Network UK (BEN)***

Through its work, BEN has found that the most effective way of achieving results is by creating tailored informal learning partnerships. This allows for the unique characteristics and needs of different ethnic communities to be taken into account. It also allows for the potential offered by different provider organisations to be fully realised. A partnership approach bringing together members of ethnic communities and organisations from the environmental and heritage sectors draws out common ground that fuels the learning.

This learning in action approach leads to a substantial building up of new understanding, knowledge and skills through experience and exposure. It is particularly needed in situations in which factual presentations alone are inadequate. For further information about BEN, please visit [www.ben-network.org.uk](http://www.ben-network.org.uk)

### ***The BEN GWLAD project***

This project was set up to create new informal learning partnerships. It aimed to open up opportunities for ethnic communities across North Wales to access environmental and heritage activities in this context. Through this, it was hoped to build aspirations for lifelong learning, to gain new knowledge and skills, that may lead to jobs including those in the environmental and heritage sectors.

Funding came from Countryside Commission for Council and the ESF Equal Initiative. The ethos of all EQUAL Projects is about finding innovative and non-traditional ways of meeting the needs of a range of disadvantaged target groups. The BEN GWLAD Project came under EQUAL Theme E: Informal Learning.

Traditionally, projects involving ethnic minorities have targeted communities that are concentrated in the inner city areas. This project differs in that it reached out to the sparse population of ethnic communities in a semi-rural setting. Ethnic minorities here are ‘emergent’ community groups in the context of community development, with many families and individuals dispersed across a wide geographical area.

The BEN GWLAD project reached out to ethnic minority communities in North Wales. It opened up opportunities for them to learn more about how engaging with the heritage and natural environment can directly affect their lives for the better. The role of the BEN GWLAD Project was to:

- Motivate learning by linking the real life concerns of ethnic communities to opportunities in the environmental and heritage sectors that can offer solutions. For example, in the initiative with the Chinese community, members of the community identified health concerns for over-fifties as top priority. The BEN GWLAD Project linked this to the potential role of enjoyable visits and activities at environmental and heritage sites. The opportunity to combine agendas was provided by the fact that sites visit means walking and improving physical health, whilst going out as a group means stimulating new interests and bringing people out of isolation. This has wider benefits in protecting participants' mental health.

- Enabling people to discover new situations that stimulate the desire to participate and learn.
- Provide encouragement, guidance and support while building confidence.
- Design tailored training to provide the knowledge and skills to engage with the new situation.
- Facilitate and support reflective learning that connects knowledge and skills with experience, thereby gaining control of new situations.
- Stimulate and enable people to access information, expertise and resources that they need to direct their own future learning. For example, the suggestion that sending CCW staff to attend a range of community events and festivals to gain social and cultural awareness and build up contacts with key community members with knowledge and expertise, has been incorporated into the CCW Race Equality Action Plan.
- Facilitate partnerships that enable people to direct their own future learning.

The BEN GWLAD Project was able to achieve real learning outcomes for ethnic communities and personnel from environmental, heritage and other relevant organisations through:

- ***Supported networking events***
- ***Guidance and provision of knowledge related to policy development work***
- ***Providing stimulating enjoyable activities***
- ***Capacity building in the context of community development***
- ***Organising informal learning events***
- ***Providing tailored training workshops***
- ***Enabling those involved to organise their own informal learning events***

The work followed a common process, run across three related initiatives summarised in tabular form on the CD. All of these initiatives aimed to create a safe environment in which those involved could freely voice their insecurities and explore new ways to learn through the formation of informal learning partnerships. The three interlinked initiatives on which this guide focuses were:

**Initiative 1. Supporting the North Wales Chinese Women's Society to address the health needs of over-fifties** through linking them to what health services, environmental and heritage organisations, and Gwynedd Council have to offer.

**Initiative 2. Supporting the Countryside Council for Wales' Race Equality Focus Group** to formulate their Race Equality Action Plan

**Initiative 3. Connecting ethnic community groups and a full range of environmental and heritage organisations to each other** in the context of access to activities and information, through networking and sharing events.

## SECTION 2 – INFORMAL LEARNING

### What does BEN mean by *informal learning*?

BEN has found that ethnic groups, like any other group of people, learn best about the environment and heritage through direct experience. However to be effective these experiences need to both relate to their lives and be enjoyed through social relationships in which they feel safe. This allows them the space to explore their relationships with the natural environment and heritage from their own perspective.

“We wanted to see the birds, enjoy nature. It was not until we looked back later on that we realised we were learning all the time. We were discovering new things to do and making connections, finding out what else we need to learn. We started off thinking we only wanted to do something about health. It was all very serious but now we see that we can improve our physical health while enjoying ourselves. Who would have thought we had walked 5 miles just like that? The time just disappeared, chatting and looking at the beautiful surroundings. When we used to think about having to exercise, it all sounded very boring and expensive - you know, attending a gym. We are very motivated and really enthusiastic now.”

*Member of Chinese community*

Environmental, heritage, and other organisations do have policies and agendas in favour of supporting greater ethnic inclusion, but it is not until they are involved directly with ethnic groups that they really start to understand the significant social and cultural potential of their expertise and learn how to implement them within a wider perspective. This is when the excitement of sharing a journey begins.

“It revealed the potential of social and cultural meaning in our work to me. It led to some extraordinary conversations in our organisation. We now feel that what we do is more important than we realised...I feel much more motivated and want to engage more with members of ethnic communities now.”

*Staff member of an environmental organisation*

BEN has found that by creating supportive environments around common agendas, both sides are able to benefit. Many of the connections and revelations are familiar to BEN, but the process must be managed so that it is a discovery owned by all the participants. We should not reinvent the wheel but we must create learning situations in which people find their very own wheel! This is achieved through designing a programme of learning opportunities using observation, networking, reflection, information giving, doing and discussing. BEN refers to this as ‘purposefully structured informal learning’.

But be warned; it requires a lot of expertise and support to initiate this process, and also to structure and sustain the learning. Attention needs to be paid to emerging needs and riding on the energy created by achievements along the way. This requires a facilitation role that in this case was played by BEN.

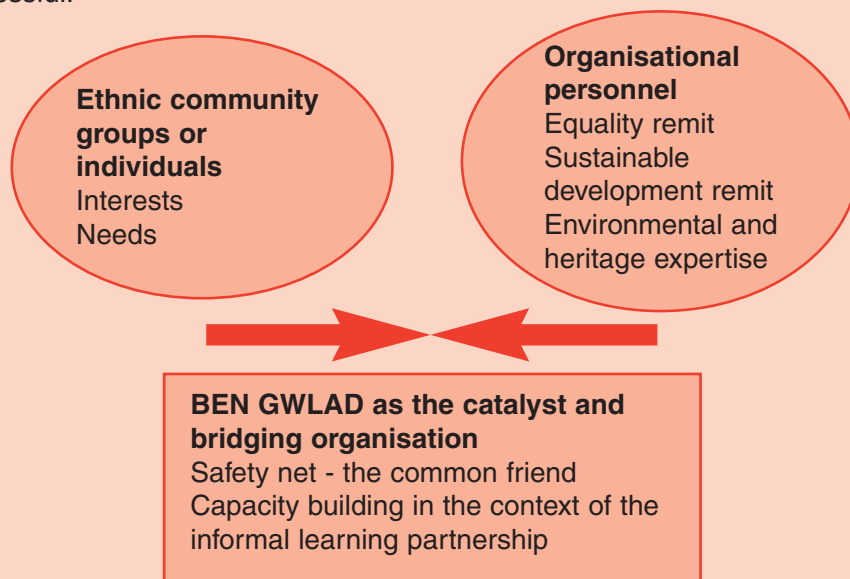
“BEN have found that through their work with any ethnic group, by beginning with enjoyment and trips, and linking into key life concerns, many people become active and interested in their role in shaping their lives and that of their community. They become motivated to take up the opportunity to learn and make a difference. They sometimes get so skilled up that they can aspire to new areas of employment so that they look forward to life in a different way.

In parallel, organisational personnel find it equally exciting to enter into a hitherto unknown part of society that is full of richness and potential. For many of them, knowing members of ethnic minorities completes their own historical identity.”

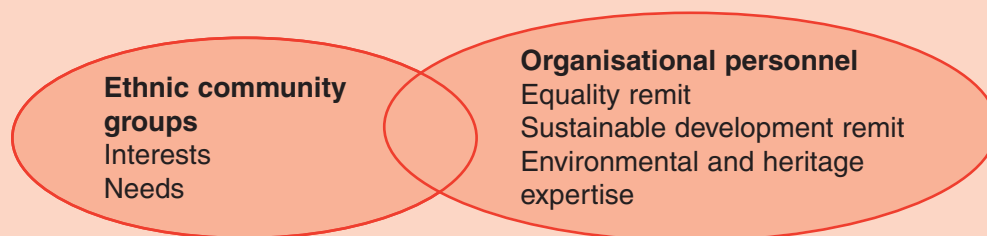
*Judy Ling Wong, BEN Director*

## A Process Approach

BEN positions itself as a catalyst for change, building the crucial partnerships that are needed between ethnic communities and different expert sectors. We are here to do ourselves out of a job if we are successful.



It is a very positive time for this work, as equality and sustainable development are high on the agenda. This means many expert organisations are prepared to extend their work with communities beyond their traditional focused remits, and look at the social, cultural and economic meanings of their activities. As the process unfolds, the ethnic groups' interests and needs merge with the potential of what expert organisations have to offer. Eventually they start to overlap and build common ground. Once a working relationship begins to take place, BEN starts to withdraw, whilst still providing a safety net by making itself very obviously available to be called back in. Engagement and learning then continue through the groups' and organisations' joint actions.



At the beginning it can be hard to clearly predict what will be achieved. But, as the process unfolds, participants are increasingly able to describe what they have learnt. When asked in the BEN GWLAD evaluation workshop, they were able to recognise a number of changes, reflected in statements of learning outcome such as “I have more confidence now. I have contacts within ethnic groups” or “I feel I would know where to go or who to ask if I need information about activities”. Other comments suggest they want more of this. As Judy Ling Wong says, it is about providing ‘purposeful help’.

### How does learning take place?

Once people are brought together and motivated by their own agendas, with the right guidance (or purposeful support), they can start to learn and benefit from one another's knowledge and skills. The presence of a bridging organisation, acting as a catalyst, is crucial. It plays the critical role of the common friend to both sides, whose agendas may initially appear to differ. Reassurance is important in terms of:

- Having a track record of success in building new partnerships between ethnic communities and the environmental and heritage sectors. “We are in good hands.”

- Taking on the role of a trusted trouble-shooter "There will be no disaster. If anything goes wrong, for example, if you do or say the wrong thing, we will sort it out"
- As a source of knowledge and understanding about the 'other side'. "You do not need to know everything right now. What you need at each stage is readily available from us."
- Access to a diverse network of community groups and organisations "Further expertise or community based connections can be readily identified as needed"

The role is also to support different forms of informal learning. Such mechanisms take a variety of forms:

- **Learn from**

Passing information or expertise on from those with a greater knowledge from which others can benefit. This has ranged from how to form and run a group, or create unthreatening environments, to knowledge of ethnic engagement.

- **Learn with**

People from the same type of organisation or social / cultural background learn with one another, building common, collective knowledge and developing an increasing shared group consciousness.

- **Learn about each other**

The coming together of different organisations and social or cultural groups provides an opportunity for people to learn about each other.

- **Experiential learning**

A vast amount can be learnt simply by being involved with new people, participating in an activity or discovering a new place.

- **Observation**

Observing people, situations or places.

- **Accessing information**

Knowing where to go or who to ask. Working out how to ask for information is often more important than the information itself.

- **Connections to new people and organisations**

The entire exercise rides on relaxing into building new relationships with people who are gatekeepers to knowledge, resources and expertise. This often results in partnerships that have the power to make a significant difference to the lives and remits of those involved

### **The Impact - voices of the participants**

The purposeful structured informal learning approach implemented by the BEN GWLAD project led to some very positive feedback:

"The consultation event put together by the community was much more successful and meaningful than any other consultation we have done...it was a completely different approach. From the outside it all looked so chaotic but the point is everyone was absolutely engaged. The information that came through was consistent and useful. We learnt that imposing our standard approach has held us and ethnic communities back in the past."

*Gwynedd Council officer*

"You cannot learn this sort of knowledge and skill in a classroom. You have to be in the real situation in the real world to find out what people in different organisations and in the council are like...getting used to the way they think, and finding out it is OK to say what our community needs. We now feel that we can shape a positive future together. It is a great feeling."

*Member of Chinese community group*

“This is a beautiful place. Some of us have been here in this area for 30 years and we never realised Penrhyn Castle has such wonderful extensive grounds. It goes on and on, with remarkable trees and plants in the gardens. We thought it was just some kind of grand house. And, to find that we are welcome is great.”

*Participant visiting Penrhyn Castle for the first time*

“Does no one mind that we come back again? Is it really only one pound to get in? Are we allowed to picnic? We never knew this beautiful place existed.”

*Delighted and amazed member of ethnic community group visiting Parc Glynllifon*

“We have learnt so much. It is one step at a time, but each step is a real step. You are not taught all sorts of theory that you do not ever use. The training to be a volunteer at our health and environment event was tailored to what we were going to do at the event. Then we went ahead and served the community as volunteers. It all worked. We are so proud. We want to do more and learn more”

*New volunteer from the Chinese community*

”There was no pressure for us to connect instantly. No one said that by the next time we meet you have had to have done this or that. It provided a supported setting in which we can develop trust over time. It is very hard for a large organisation set in its ways and in a hurry to have considered working in this important way. It allowed time for a situation to grow. Everyone involved was respected. We all felt that we have space to develop at our own pace. The process was fun and interesting. It was meaningful and keeps us motivated.”

*Staff member of a heritage organisation*

## SECTION 3 – KEY STAGES IN SUPPORTING INFORMAL LEARNING

This section describes the stages in the process of facilitating and structuring informal learning. It draws on various aspects of the three initiatives.

### STAGE 1 Identifying participants’ agendas and needs

People are motivated to learn if they can see a need or link to themselves such as a personal interest. This may relate to their ability to take action around pressing life concerns or the need to fulfil a work remit.

#### • *Bringing the essential players together*

##### *Initiative 1: Connecting new partners*

“It is really urgent for us to do something about the health of the older people in our community” Chinese activist

This dovetailed with the fact that members of Gwynedd Council were being driven by governmental policy to open out their services to diverse groups and connect with ethnic communities. Both parties were unsure about how to take this forward, but without the sense of possibility, neither would have moved forward. The connection facilitated and the support offered by BEN through the BEN GWLAD Project set the scene.

#### • *Enabling people to visualise new opportunities*

##### *Initiative 1 - Introducing new opportunities and revealing connections*

The expressed wish of environmental and heritage organisations was that they want to initiate activities that enable them to engage with ethnic minorities and over time build on this to have volunteers and employees from these communities.

BEN purposefully introduced the Chinese community to a wide range of new life interests, educational and volunteering opportunities. "This is lovely. Also we did not realise there is so much to learn. We would like to do more of everything."

"We can see ourselves and our children becoming connected to the environmental and heritage sectors. We have a lot to gain but we can also make a contribution. Maybe we can even think about working for heritage or environment." This nascent sense of possibility is spreading from a small nucleus into the wider community. In time we look forward to the community recognising the importance of the environmental and heritage sectors to their future.

- **Using a multi-faceted approach**

BEN emphasises the importance of generating a broad understanding through adopting a multi-faceted approach to identifying the agendas, needs and potential of all sectors. While many organisations tend to look inwards and focus on their main themes of work, BEN brings together social, cultural, environmental and economic concerns in all of its work. An integrated approach chimes in with what sustainable development calls for. The deepened understanding of sustainable development principles and practice is an issue for everyone.

Having carefully developed an understanding of the different needs, agendas and interests of the various participants, BEN proceeded to create new shared situations (informal learning partnerships). This meant carefully selecting the initial essential partners, in order to secure the basis for opening up the potential of the new situations. For each of the initiatives the partners were as follows:

*Initiative 1 - North Wales Chinese Women's Society, individual community activists, Gwynedd Council, Local Health Board and BEN*

*Initiative 2 - CCW Race Equality Focus Group and BEN*

*Initiative 3 - Ethnic community groups, environmental and heritage organisations (in North Wales), other relevant organisations and BEN*

For organisations, the support to enable staff to engage effectively with ethnic minorities needs to be strategic and come from a senior level. Organisational culture change needs to develop from being spearheaded by individuals, to gradually working towards an organisation that thinks strategically in terms of ethnic inclusion across all its work. In this process, staff move from being reactive to a lead from above (this may initially be a policy or national agenda) towards being collectively committed, in which they enjoy being proactive. This journey involves training and structured informal learning, both internal and external to an organisation.

## **STAGE 2** Creating opportunities for people to meet and identify common agendas

Amongst other methods, BEN GWLAD used various informal learning and sharing events to bring people together.

It is important to find different ways for people to engage and network informally without pressure. An event may simply have the aim of enabling participants to say 'I am not a complete stranger any more. I can ring up when I want to and feel related to whole new organisations or communities'.

Or it can just provide an opportunity to listen to each other, hear each other's ideas, issues and concerns or merely make contacts.

### *Initiative 1 – Chinese Health and Environment Consultation Event*

A consultation event for the Chinese Community. “ We came together for a consultation about health concerns around a social gathering. We were also supported to think about linking to the opportunities that environmental and heritage activities offer”. (See Tri-lingual Chinese Health and Care Consultation Report on CD)

### *Initiative 3 - Networking and Sharing Event*

Networking and Sharing Event for Ethnic Community Groups and Environmental and Heritage Organisations (See ‘Be Inspired’ powerpoint and programme on the CD). “Before this event was planned, BEN took time and effort to meet with or talk with each of us to explain the aims of the BEN GWLAD Project. As part of the event programme, ethnic minority individuals told stories about themselves. Time was also allocated for supported discussion, keeping the atmosphere open and friendly.”

Key working principles to note when organising an introductory event are:

- ***Start from where people are***

Do not kill off the potential of a situation by imposing a pre-conceived agenda. Understand each party's situation, for example the ethnic communities' lack of access to the countryside, and their perception (no matter that it may be wrong) of racism, or that it is meant 'only for white people'. It is important that the relational journey builds from their understanding and their needs, not yours.

- ***Don't assume people have no interest***

Sometimes it is more a matter of shifting priorities. New potential often gradually becomes visible through understanding where the connections are.

- ***Listen carefully to all sides***

This includes both the ethnic communities and the organisations. The task is to bring the mutual understanding closer together so that they become free to explore new potential. The baseline of a clear understanding of commonality and potential is at the centre of a multi-faceted integrated approach to involvement.

### *Initiative 3 - Key points from the first BEN GWLAD Learning, Sharing and Networking Event*

- The event brought ethnic community groups, environmental, heritage and other relevant organisations together through the facilitation of BEN.  
“BEN was there to connect us. There were people from very different organisations, for example from the heritage sector and representatives of communities. I talked to many different people over a bit of lunch. It's an easy context to make that connection...without an agenda to make things happen at once. It was stimulating...a different kind of journey.”
- A relaxed informal setting was created with time for people to meet. "It was perfect, talking to each other and listening to the presentations while enjoying interesting Chinese foods. Nobody minded us walking around to get more food and drink. We were all relaxed and happy."
- The event programme ensured that the voices of the different parties were heard through prepared short presentations. "A storytelling style rather than a reporting style really connected us with the personal stories of the community members. Most organisations expect a lecture on race legislation and what they should not do when working with ethnic groups."
- The powerpoint, “Be Inspired” (see the CD), was used to inspire people to make an imaginative leap and become excited by the potential of a new situation. "We gained

insight into innovative examples of good practice. That really helped us to gain confidence in taking a similar direction."

- The event factored in enough time for facilitated dialogue. "People who do not usually speak up were brought into the conversation through being asked questions about their communities, work, cultures, needs and aspirations. This support helped us all to identify potential and connect up with what we had to offer each other."

There are a number of aspects worth considering from the perspectives of ethnic communities:

- Most ethnic community groups are formed because of a particular identified need at a certain time. Usually this is around social problems or cultural needs and not directly about the natural environment or mainstream heritage. Time needs to be spent to build trust with group leaders and ethnic gatekeepers for them to be willing to share their groups' needs. This is the initial knowledge that will form the basis for the search for commonality.
- Once key peer leaders or activists in an ethnic community have been identified and engaged in discussions, they become the spearhead for what will happen.
- Wider ethnic engagement is usually likely to happen quite gradually.
- The opportunity to visit an interesting venue can sometimes be a significant revelation of what groups need or want, leading to clear themes for further learning and motivation to plan activities.

The process is one that continually identifies motivators and deals with barriers. Motivations can be built upon and efforts made to remove barriers with activities such as:

- ***Familiarisation***

"Visits to the sites so that we get to see the venue means we were prepared. It gave us the information and experience to guide our group and a chance to assess possible areas of concern"

- ***Informal discussions***

These provide a valuable addition to overcoming concerns. "We need to have some fun among the serious themes. Too much concentration on problem solving can be daunting and stifle solutions We talk about what stage we are at, how we had done things before and what is needed to be done next. It is like a needs analysis of our experience "

- ***Friendly contacts***

These must be established, especially with the personnel of mainstream organisations, as they are critical to contributing to a sense of security and belonging. "Simply being introduced to the site manager of a pleasant open site where we can picnic or do other activities of our own opens up the use of the site to our whole community. Many of us are nervous about whether we are 'allowed' to be in certain places, and what activities we are permitted to do. Also, if we need help, we can knock on the office door and expect see a friendly face, someone we have met." This sense of 'permission' and security may be all that is needed for them to simply get on with using the site and enjoying themselves. To keep the relationship going, the site manager may have to do nothing more than coming out to say the odd "hello" when he or she notices they are there.

This is just one simple aspect of 'customer care'. Organisations need to get the feel for how the members of ethnic communities view them and try to 'put themselves in their shoes'. Interventions need to be socially and culturally relevant and be based on an equal working partnership.

### **STAGE 3** Developing capacity to engage

Once motivation and a sense of possibility is in place, a continual assessment of need, in terms of capacity, is needed. Consideration should be given as to which form this will take. Beyond the obvious delivery of training and informational needs, expertise in community development and relational issues is fundamental here. The elements of the process covered in supporting the three BEN GWLAD initiatives gives an insight into the key questions that inform the process. These include:

- ***What needs to go into place in terms of community development to enable the next step to be taken?***

#### *Initiative 1 - Expanding organisational capacity to cope with growth*

Within ethnic communities, it is important to have leadership in the form of management committees and/or individual community activists to help ensure things happen. But these leaders need to see the need to build infrastructural capacity and connections within and without their community in order to be effective. Structured informal learning can purposefully deliver this. The Chinese Women's group was driven forward by three committed and enthusiastic community activists who needed to learn all kinds of new knowledge and skills. As their agenda gained momentum they were threatened with being overwhelmed. The project alerted them to the fact that they needed to recruit new volunteers urgently to build on their success. "We identified 7 new volunteers from amongst those attending English language courses at the local college. Working like this builds up support for us and gives us confidence to direct the future of our community. We now know that knowledge and skills are not enough. We need people capacity – what BEN calls community infrastructure."

The need for infrastructure development is equally true within the organisations. There needs to be someone at the top 'championing the cause' but at the same time, there has to be enough personnel and resources in place to respond to the workload resulting from successfully engaging with new groups.

- ***What experiences need to be introduced to enable people to consider moving in new directions?***

#### *Initiative 2 - Making knowledge and expertise available*

BEN supported CCW's Race Equality Focus Group through providing guidance in implementing an integrated informal learning approach. Its members were people of enormous goodwill. Judy Ling Wong, BEN's Director said "I brought a wealth of knowledge to a group of people who were keen to connect directly with what ethnic groups need. Whenever appropriate, I delivered 'mini-knowledge modules', feeding examples and facts into discussions. Encouragement, good humour, tolerance, mutual goodwill and passion for change - all of these interventions came together with the group's specific and expert knowledge of what their own organisation has to offer. Working together means that CCW has, in my opinion, the best Race Equality Action Plan I have ever seen."

- ***What knowledge or skills are missing?***

#### *Initiative 1 - Training new Chinese volunteers*

The BEN GWLAD Project trained the newly identified volunteers to be active for the first time at the information event. "It just felt like a great leap forward. We were trained and then we were there doing it. It all worked. We now know we can do more than we thought. We feel very very proud."

- **What are the barriers to using knowledge and skills already there?**

*Initiative 1 - Lack of interpreters*

There is no pool of professional Chinese-English or Chinese-Welsh bi-lingual interpreters in North Wales. “No number of information stands from the Health Board would have made any difference to the older members of our community at the information event without interpreters. Interpreters had come to from Manchester!”

**Key points for Professional Organisations**

The experience of the project, combined with BEN’s years of experience, suggest that there are a number of aspects worth highlighting:

- Senior management needs to realise that frontline staff tasked with ethnic inclusion agendas often feel unsure how to start and move forwards. They need support from personnel who are experienced in working with ethnic inclusion (from within the organisation or from outside).
- For many organisations, the presence of an expert ethnic minority representative has an impact as it helps to break down the effects of stereotyping. “There are very few ethnic minorities involved in policy and strategy development within heritage and environmental organisations. Ethnic minority representatives help to bring the real world of their beneficiaries into the organisation.”
- Storytelling and information giving about cultural richness helps to develop diverse views and knowledge of constraints, thereby pushing the boundaries of the ways in which things are seen or done within an organisation. Over time this builds up a volume of knowledge. “It put into place a genuine sense of connection to the different worlds of socially excluded groups for us. We could see that the process of mutual integration has started. This kind of purposeful ‘drip feed’ informal learning touches both our intellect and emotion. It is something that cannot be compressed into the time scales pushed for in a ‘quick fix’ approach. It is about growing together.”
- Structured informal learning needs to be purposefully built into the normal process of how organisations work.  
“Internally, organisational learning requires a structured approach that allows access to information and support to find the answers. Many of us who are tasked with ethnic inclusion feel isolated within our own organisation. It is important for us to be supported by strong commitment at a senior level. This should be proactive, providing opportunities for staff development through training and informal learning. We in turn will then be ready to support organisational culture change in the next stage when ethnic inclusion has started to become a reality.”
- Staff involved in external discussions and actions around ethnic inclusion will start to ask wider questions around the purpose of community inclusion in the heritage and environment generally. “Seeking answers to new questions can be a powerful force in fostering wider learning throughout the organisation.”
- Looking in to look out – perhaps best demonstrated by the initiative working with CCW. “CCW held an internal focus group (looking in) and identified the need to develop. Based on this we brought in Judy Ling Wong (for support in looking out).”
- Proactively bringing together individuals working on ethnic inclusion within an organisation and beyond builds networks of mutual support. “We began to feel that that we are ‘not alone’. We can benefit from each other, bounce off each others’ ideas and successes, share knowledge and contacts, and tackle similar issues together.” “The discussions around ethnic inclusion have also

started to change internal conversations in our organisation, raising wider philosophical issues. This has got people thinking about what the meaning is of what we are doing and has engaged everybody in a discussion around what is being done for diversity issues in general”.

#### **STAGE 4** Following up

Running a single event or enabling interaction is not an end in itself. It is important for all involved to realise that they have started a process now and they will need to continue with further opportunities and activities involving people and reacting to new needs as they arise. This was captured by a comment (made at the evaluation meeting with the organisations), stating the need for “keeping a sense of possibility”.

Managing informal learning situations is fundamentally about managing a process and NOT a preset agenda. Of course there is an initial agenda, but it is added to as the process of development unfolds – each stage sets a new agenda for learning. For this to be possible, it is important to be very clear about the ethos around which the learning revolves, so that potential is not stifled and innovative developments can flourish.

It is important that time is taken to reflect and learn. This is often called monitoring and evaluation. In the BEN GWLAD approach, finding time to discuss in a semi-structured and holistic way has been invaluable. This is supported by the feedback we received through participants’ questionnaires, workshops and one to one discussions. There is no single right way to do this, though the basic principles for purposefully putting structured informal learning are the same. The important thing is to facilitate learning and allow time for learning. Don’t just repeat activities without really considering how well they are working and how they can be improved. There will always be new challenges and a receptive well-supported and motivated group will respond to these as they arise.

BEN has found that the need for external support reduces as organisations and groups get to know one another. Confidence and capacity will steadily increase as knowledge, experience and contacts are built up but this must not lead to complacency. New questions and needs will arise. As people grow in their awareness of the informal learning process they become increasingly able to direct the process themselves. But to achieve this they need to reflect on and analyse their own growth.

In order to provide a creative and constantly refreshed informal learning environment that is able to continually generate new and innovative directions, one needs to always be vigilant. This involves:

- ***Developing the ability to recognise potential and which elements need to be drawn into the situation***
- ***Extending one’s network beyond the immediate area or remit***
- ***Remembering solutions can be multi-faceted***
- ***Moving in many directions through having diverse partners***

Different groups respond in different ways. Working with them to identify the most appropriate way requires flexibility and this has been a significant part of the BEN GWLAD formula for success. It is important to understand the participants, sound out their needs, and have a sense of how ready they are for the next step, before deciding on further activities. In time, members of organisations and communities will do this for themselves and for others.

## SECTION 4 – CONCLUSIONS AND LOOKING AHEAD

The power of a structured informal learning approach is that **the classroom is all around us**, if only we can see it and use it.

Gaining the confidence to engage with the right people and tapping into appropriate settings, are at the core of directing structured informal learning. Everything is linked. Working in this way means breaking boundaries between sectors, reaching out beyond the usual suspects and creating new situations.

Relationship building through the intervention of a bridging organisation has been crucial. But success means that this is gradually moving into the background. Informal dialogue and reflection has played an important role in the structured informal learning process. Ideas and leads, networks and support have often come through the provision of 'space' for these.

BEN GWLAD ran two workshops in May 2007 to discuss with participants the key learning from the programme and to brainstorm the future. It is clear there is a continuing and expanding agenda developing, since each interaction brings issues and opportunities together. There was an important sense of 'connectedness' that has developed between all the participants involved - members of ethnic communities, heritage and environmental organisations, and other associated organisations. They are all committed to a shared journey.

What is really special is that the will and confidence to move forward to tackle new issues is evident. The next steps are defining themselves already. For organisations it is about broadening the learning and encouraging the internal culture change while for the Chinese it is about how to consolidate the infrastructure of their community group and plan the next set of activities.

Most important is that they all have a greater sense of owning the direction they want to move in and being clearer on how to get there. Being supported as part of a widening network of goodwill and practical support helps to maintain momentum.

Finally, remember to be realistic and enjoy the ebb and flow of the developments. This is an approach that respects the pace of individual and organisational learning. If the participants are not enjoying themselves and energies are not being created to carry the process, it will not work. But when these conditions are created the potential to change for the better is immense.

# **BEN**

## Black Environment Network

### ***Working for full ethnic participation in the built and natural environment***

#### **Our Vision**

To have representation and participation, at all levels, of ethnic communities in the built and natural environment, which reflects the profile of the ethnic population in Britain

#### **Organisational Aims**

To represent issues and concerns relating to ethnic participation in the built and natural environment

To address current issues and concerns relating to ethnic participation in the built and natural environment

To develop training and consultancy services in order to underpin ethnic participation

To develop, strengthen and maintain the BEN Network

To secure resources in order to maintain and increase operations across the UK

*We use the word 'Black' symbolically, recognising that Black communities are the most visible of all ethnic communities. We work with Black, white and other ethnic communities.*

# BEN

Black Environment Network UK (BEN) is established to enable full participation by ethnic communities in the built and natural environment.

This publication gives guidance to support professional organisations in setting up informal learning partnerships to build up effective working relationships with ethnic communities. The opening up of opportunities for enjoyment and learning will contribute to a better quality of life and fuel aspiration to take up volunteering, training and employment within these sectors.

The guidance is based on methodology developed as a result of the work of the BEN GWLAD Project in North Wales, funded by the Countryside Council for Wales and the EQUAL programme of the European Union's Community Initiative under Theme E: Informal Learning.

Most of BEN's work has been in the inner cities where ethnic communities are concentrated. The work of the BEN GWLAD Project has been pioneering in forging ways of work within a semi-rural setting, finding solutions to engage 'emergent' ethnic community groups with families and individuals spread across a wide geographical area.

The BEN GWLAD Project (2005-2007) was funded and supported by:

|                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Bodelwyddan Castle                   | Gwynedd Local Health Board                       |
| Cadw                                 | Gwynedd Museum and Art Gallery                   |
| Carers Outreach                      | National Museum Wales                            |
| Coleg Menai                          | National Trust for England and Wales             |
| Conwy County Borough Council         | North Wales Chinese Women's Society              |
| Countryside Council for Wales (CCW)  | North Wales Race Equality Network (NWREN)        |
| Cynnwys                              | North Wales Wildlife Trust                       |
| Denbighshire County Council          | Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) |
| Environment Agency Wales             | Snowdonia National Park Authority                |
| Filippino Association of North Wales | Snowdonia Society                                |
| Forestry Commission Wales            | Snowdonia Wildlife Gardening Project             |
| Gateway Gardens Trust                | The Pension Service                              |
| Gwynedd Archive Services             | Together Creating Communities (TCC)              |
| Gwynedd Council                      | Wrexham County Borough Council                   |

Informal learning partnerships for engaging with ethnic communities

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