

# Caer Las



Support work is varied and rewarding



CEO Jim Bird-Waddington

**B**ased in South Wales, Caer Las is a charity that works with some of the most marginalised and socially excluded people in the region, with its primary focus being on preventing homelessness. Integral to its work is the belief that people are not defined by their problems and that no one should be left behind. CEO Jim Bird-Waddington offers a further insight into the charity and its manner of operating.

## Helping people live the life they want to live

Caer Las' overarching purpose is to:

- » Prevent homelessness
- » Help people access appropriate accommodation
- » Help people secure an income
- » Support people to sustain their tenancy and develop their life skills
- » Assist people to develop a sense of well-being and participate in community life
- » Foster confidence and self-belief
- » Assist clients to move towards a level of inclusion and well-being to which they personally aspire

The vision for our work begins with the belief that people's problems and deficits are things that they experience and are not a part of their identity. We believe that the individuals with whom we work are the very best experts on their own life and that they have inherent resourcefulness, strengths and abilities, which they can draw upon to bring about desired change in their thinking and behaviours.

## FACTS ABOUT CAER LAS

- » CEO: Jim Bird-Waddington
- » Founded in 1975
- » Located in South Wales
- » Services: Housing and support
- » No. of employees: 94
- » We assist almost 2,000 people across the course of a year
- » [www.caerlas.org](http://www.caerlas.org)

“Our staff are trained in the skills of solution-focused practice”

We have a long history of successes; however, we're looking to further formalise and professionalise our projects, to assure policymakers and commissioners that our services are among the most effective and affordable forms of provision. We currently operate across four South Wales local authority areas: Bridgend, Neath-Port Talbot, Swansea and Carmarthenshire.

### From my perspective

Sometimes, talking is the most powerful tool for effective change. It's not just our practical efforts that can make the difference. Wherever possible, we look to build relationships and construct conversations with our clients, with the hope this can lead them towards their hoped-for outcomes.

Our support methodology is borrowed from the world of psychotherapy. Our staff are trained in the skills of solution-focused practice. SFP was pioneered in Milwaukee in the 1980s by social workers Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg. It is a goal-orientated, collaborative approach to psychotherapeutic change that is co-constructed by client and practitioner. The practitioner follows the client's lead and responds with a series of precisely constructed questions. It focuses on addressing what clients want to

achieve, exploring the construction of a solution rather than the history and archaeology of a problem.

### A strong commitment to values

Underpinning our efforts, from start to finish, is a set of core values that we strive to keep at the forefront of our thinking, and we constantly place the client at the centre of all that we do.

Empowerment is fundamental to our work. The successful outcomes that clients attain are largely attributable to the fact that the support delivered is co-produced with the client at every stage – even down to the precision and nuance of the solution-focused language, which includes using phrases like, “What would you be pleased to notice if...?”, rather than, “Let's set some goals.”

Respect is our second core value. Everyone who comes to us seeking a service is treated with dignity and respect. Whatever behaviours or lifestyle choices people exhibit, whatever personal circumstances have led them to seek a service from Caer Las, they are accepted without judgement.

Fairness is another core value that drives us. We do not discriminate based on any trait or characteristic –

Sharing stories on staff Christmas jumper day



We provide a wide range of services:

- » Advice, advocacy and drop-in
- » 24-hour homelessness hostel
- » Recovery project
- » Housing First
- » Shared housing (supported)
- » 24-hour mental health accommodation with support
- » Tenancy support services
- » Community and activity



Clients have their own band

everyone deserves a fair chance to fully participate in all aspects of citizenship.

Commitment. There is no doubt that this line of work is challenging, demanding and difficult. We could not operate as an organisation without the dedication our staff show to the people who rely on us for services.

## Challenges

Although our staff are phenomenally dedicated, skilled and caring, they are also unique, which means that one of our biggest challenges is recruitment. We are finding that recruiting the right people is more of a challenge now than at any time in the last three decades. Our goal is to find people who have the right mixture of passion, talent and resilience. In an age where university education is becoming prohibitively expensive and apprenticeships are growing, Caer Las can offer some fabulously rewarding work, with a comprehensive training package. We continually seek to recruit people who have the right aptitude.

Most of our work is funded by public money. We are competing with similar organisations for support contracts offered by local authorities and the Welsh Government. Commissioners must decide which of us offers the best prospect of improving outcomes for clients. In a sector that

has historically proven its worth by narrative, we are setting up measures that can provide empirical evidence of our impact, results and progress. It is imperative that those who commission via the public purse know that their investment offers value for money.

This more analytical way of working will not only assist us; it will help statutory services more generally. Judging from our own figures, demand in these areas is always rising, so society is persistently required to think harder and more closely about these issues. It's a conversation that I want Caer Las to be at the forefront of by paying greater attention to collection and analysis of data, getting involved with academic bodies and taking part in research studies.

## Next steps

As we look to the future, I anticipate huge change. We are launching new, innovative Housing First projects; working towards all our schemes being "psychologically informed environments"; and developing an evidence base for all our methods, with the goal of influencing not just commissioners but wider society. My sincere hope is that our efforts will bring us and society's most vulnerable a brighter future.

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