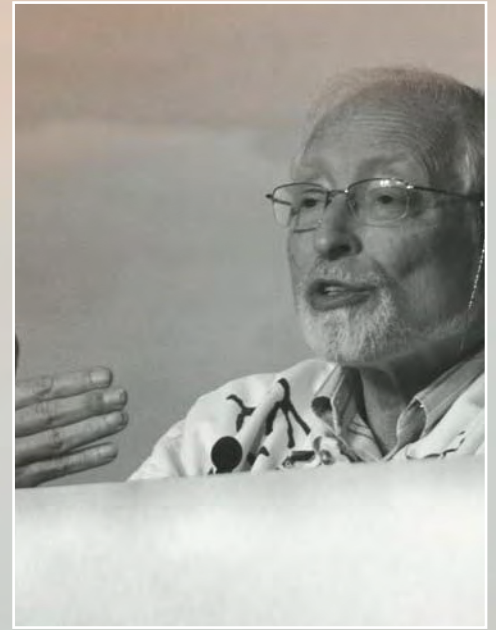


# BUILDING AND TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES

The communities in the long-fingered valleys of South Wales were at one time an essential part of Britain's economy, digging out the coal that produced the electricity that made the UK hum.



Now, these one-time hard-working communities are economic backwaters, where high unemployment, poverty, and social depression are standard. Yet these same valleys are the home of what may be a new social revolution.

Faced with the traumas of economic decline, the Welsh valleys are now pioneers in the use of a local currency and Time Banking as a way for rebuilding community that is gaining interest around the world. Founded in 1980, Time Banking has now spread to 24 countries. In Wales, it was introduced into the Welsh valleys by the Wales Institute for Community Currencies (WICC) in 2003.

Underlying Time Banking is a framework for rebuilding community, called co-production, that builds on the idea that by itself, "delivery" of services cannot work. No services – government or private – can ever succeed if they fail to enlist and engage the individuals or the communities who use them. Teachers cannot teach if students will not learn. Doctors can treat illness, but they cannot make a person well. Police can arrest the criminals, but they cannot make a community a place where you and I would want to live.

What that means in practice is that recipients must be asked to step in – not as "recipients" but as full-fledged partners. Their work must be recognised, honoured and rewarded. It means, too, that public service professionals should be seeing themselves as catalysts for change. Rather than fixing problems, co-production means recognising and building on the strengths of service recipients.

When service recipients have no space to contribute, they are sent a message we certainly do not mean to send. The message is: "You have nothing that I want, need or value." With this message it is hardly a wonder that service recipients often appear to be ungrateful and even resentful. It makes no difference if the services are of high quality, or if they have been carefully delivered. One-way services leave the receivers powerless and unvalued. So it should not surprise us if service recipients either reject or manipulate the systems aimed at helping them.

There is another and better way to achieve change. As professional helpers, we must understand that our most powerful role is to be catalysts, partnering with communities, families and individuals, so that they can lead in taking the actions that will

build resiliency and well-being. Home, family and community is a special kind of economic system that runs mainly on the fuel of relationships. This is the core economy and our goal must be to build a partnership between that economy and the mainstream economy, powered by money, out of which we, as paid professionals, operate.

To achieve this we have to understand that there will never be enough money to pay for all the work that must be done by family and community members. Instead, we must always bear in mind that the resources and skills we can tap into organisationally can be used to recognise, honour and reward the work being done by those who receive our services.

At WICC in South Wales, that message has been taken to heart. Through Time Banking, community members earn time credits for the partnering roles they play, earning one time credit for each hour they contribute. They can use the credits for trips, classes and community events, or for services from one another. As they do so, they are rebuilding and transforming their community. At the same time, they are helping the non-profit organisations achieve their missions. This win-win, strength-based approach, is breathing new life into the valleys. As it does, all those involved are modelling a new approach to social service that is being watched around the world.

**For information about WICC please telephone 01495 712 923 or email [wicc@newport.ac.uk](mailto:wicc@newport.ac.uk)**

**'Time Banking in Action' – the 2007 International Time Banking Conference will take place November 1-3 in Madison, Wisconsin. Visit [www.timebanks.org](http://www.timebanks.org) for more details.**

### **Biography - Edgar S. Cahn**

Edgar S. Cahn, founder of Time Banking, author of *No More Throw-Away People: The Co-Production Imperative*, and a keynote speaker at the Wales Public Service Summer School, 2007.

Edgar Cahn concluded his Summer School presentation with a verse that inspired many delegates:

**I asked for strength and God gave me difficulties to make me strong.**

**I asked for wisdom and God gave me problems to learn to solve.**

**I asked for prosperity and God gave me a brain and brawn to work**

**I asked for courage and God gave me dangers to overcome.**

**I asked for love and God gave me people to help.**

**I asked for favours and God gave me opportunities.**

**I received nothing I wanted.**

**I received everything I needed.**

**Suffi poem** - attributed to Hazrat Inaya Khan

