

# HOPE IN THE FACE OF AUSTERITY:

## WOMEN AND WORK IN YSTRADGYNLAIS

A Bevan Foundation report for Joyce Watson AM  
March 2014

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## Foreword by Joyce Watson AM



In politics, these days, people talk a lot about evidence-based policy making. I am all for poring over statistics to make well-informed decisions, but that must never mean losing sight of the people that the numbers represent.

Figures help describe the economic barriers facing women in Wales and Britain today. Rising child care costs; the growth of part-time employment and zero hour contracts; cuts to benefit payments and the impact of welfare reforms – numbers tell a compelling story. However, they do not tell the whole story.

I commissioned the Bevan Foundation to dig below the figures, to find out how women in the Ystradgynlais area have been and continue to be affected by recent social and economic trends and political decisions.

Arguments need facts, after all. The evidence presented in this report will inform my work as an Assembly member. I will use it, and I hope other policy makers will use it, to make the case for greater support for women in Ystradgynlais, Wales and elsewhere in the UK.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joyce Watson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Joyce Watson AM/AC**

*Assembly Member for Mid and West Wales*

*Aelod y Cynulliad dros Canolbarth a Gorllewin Cymru*

# 1. Introduction

- 1.1. Women across Wales and the UK experience considerable inequality at work. They are less likely to work than men, and when they do work they are found in a relatively narrow range of typically female jobs, often working part-time, with lower pay and fewer opportunities for progression. In many parts of Wales, women's employment has been affected by the current economic downturn and by the loss of jobs from manufacturing in the 1980s and 1990s. They are being further affected by changes to almost all social security benefits.
- 1.2. The Ystradgynlais area is no exception. The closure of local factories such as the local watch factory hit women hard, and today less than half of women of working age in the area have a job. Those women who do work often do so in part-time, low-paid jobs, often doing typically female roles, with few opportunities for advancement. Women in the Ystradgynlais area are much more dependent on various social security benefits than elsewhere, with changes to benefits, often resulting in considerable hardship. In the context of a weak local economy and rising prices, welfare reform could bring yet more very major challenges to local people.
- 1.3. This report explores the issues facing women in the workforce in Ystradgynlais and district. It uses a mixture of figures from the 2011 Census of Population and other government figures for the ward of Ystradgynlais, the results of a questionnaire survey of 163 women living in the Ystradgynlais area, and a focus group discussion with four women who were not currently working, held in January 2014. More information about the research methods used is appendix 1.
- 1.4. The findings highlight the very considerable challenges that face women and their families living in the coming years, whether or not they are working. They suggest that, without action to support women and to provide the most basic of safety nets, the progress made in women's lives of the last half century will be undone.
- 1.5. The report was commissioned by Joyce Watson AM for Mid and West Wales. However, the research process was conducted totally independently by the Bevan Foundation - the report and conclusions are the sole responsibility of the author, Dr Victoria Winckler, Director of the Bevan Foundation.
- 1.6. We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Communities First Neath Port Talbot Western Cluster, which includes the Ystradgynlais area, with distributing the questionnaires and organising the focus group, and also several third sector organisations and individuals in Ystradgynlais and district who encouraged women

to complete the survey. Most important of all, grateful thanks are due to the women who shared their experiences so freely in the questionnaire responses and the focus group – we hope that the conclusions and recommendations in this report help them.

## 2. Women's Work in and around Ystradgynlais

- 2.1. Women in the Ystradgynlais area have a long history of paid work, working in a variety of industries with the former watch factory – known as the Tick Tock – being particularly important. In 1991, 54% of women aged 16-64 were economically active, only slightly below the rate for Wales (58.5%).
- 2.2. The long decline of manufacturing has taken its toll on the area. By 2011, the economic activity rate of women aged 16-74 was virtually unchanged in twenty years, at 54.9%, whilst that of women in Wales as a whole had continued its rise, to 61.3%. The proportion of women in the Ystradgynlais ward who are in employment is even lower still - less than half (47.1%) aged 16-74 were in employment compared with 54.6% of women in Wales. In our survey, a slightly higher proportion were in employment (61.3%) and a further 15.6% said they would like a job.

### Women in Work

- 2.3. Economic activity is particularly low amongst older women in the area. Nearly two thirds (65.2%) of women aged 16-24 and more than three-quarters (75.9%) of women aged 25-49 are economically active, compared with less than half (43.5%) of women aged 50-64. Part of the reason is that the 50-64 age group includes women who have retired before the age of 65, although this is not the only explanation.

### *Hours of Work*

- 2.4. As elsewhere in Wales, women in Ystradgynlais and district often work part-time (defined as fewer than 30 hours a week). According to the 2011 Census, more than four out of ten (43.6%) employed women aged 16-74 work part-time, compared with one in eight men (12.4%). A similar proportion of working women in our survey said they were working part-time (42.8%).
- 2.5. Many women work part-time because the arrangement suits them. It enables them to combine employment with other responsibilities such as caring for children or studying. However the last few years have seen a sharp increase in the proportion of people who are working part-time involuntarily, i.e. because they cannot find a full-time job. In Wales, nearly 1 in 5 part-time employees wanted a full-time job in

the year to September 2013.<sup>1</sup> Amongst the women who responded to our survey, 43% of part-timers agreed that they would like to work more hours and 20% of women full-timers also said this.

- 2.6. A third of **all** women who were working said that would like to work longer hours. Add to this the one in seven women who said they would like a job but don't have one, and there appears to be a very significant under-utilisation of women in the local workforce.

### *Pay*

- 2.7. There is no information available about rates of pay and earnings for the Ystradgynlais area, but statistics for Powys and Neath Port Talbot show that women there earn substantially less than the Welsh average. Median gross weekly pay for full-time women workers in Powys is £52.90 less than for all-Wales, while female full-timers in Neath Port Talbot earn £32.50 a week less, at £369 and £389.40 per week respectively. Gross median weekly earnings for women part-timers in Powys and Neath Port Talbot are, surprisingly, both higher than the Welsh average at £175.70 and £197.10 a week respectively, although this seems to be associated with part-timers working longer hours, as the difference in hourly earnings for part-time women workers in Powys and Neath Port Talbot compared with the Welsh average is much smaller, at £0.40 and £0.60 an hour respectively.
- 2.8. Women are generally dissatisfied with their pay. Only a quarter (27%) of working women in our survey agreed that their rate of pay was good. More than four out of ten in the survey (42%) disagreed that they had a good rate of pay, with there being little difference in view between full-timers and part-timers.

### *Job opportunities*

- 2.9. The majority of women in Ystradgynlais and district work in typically female occupations. More than one in five work in caring, leisure or other service occupations, and one in six work in elementary occupations. The big employers today are health and education, which provide work for more than four out of ten women in the area. The only other industry to account for more than ten per cent of women's jobs is wholesale and retail.
- 2.10. Three-quarters of women in our survey disagreed that there were plenty of jobs available to suit them. Women who were not working were even more likely to say this than women in work. Their views are borne out by an analysis of various job

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<sup>1</sup> ONS (2014) **Regional Labour Market Statistics**, January. Available at: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/re-reference-tables.html?edition=tcm%3A77-296370>

search websites. The UK Government site, Universal Job Match,<sup>2</sup> generated a total of 98 jobs within a five mile radius of Ystradgynlais. Of these 98, 69 were commission-only roles mainly of retail operatives, catalogue distributors and sales personnel. The 29 waged roles were in a mix of craft skills (plumber, carpenter, tiler), care work and catering, with many being part-time and / or variable hours. An indication of the level of demand for work in the area is that a full-time retail assistant job at Farm Foods, Pontardawe, advertised on the Reed recruitment agency website attracted more than 100 applications in just five days of being posted to the site.<sup>3</sup>

- 2.11. There are more job opportunities in larger centres such as Neath and Swansea, which are 25 mins and 50 mins away from Ystradgynlais respectively by bus. Travel from the outskirts of Ystradgynlais to and from locations away from Neath or Swansea town centres can take a great deal longer. For example, according to Traveline Cymru, getting from Ystalyfera to the Amazon site in Swansea takes about two hours each way, with it being impossible to arrive before 9 am.
- 2.12. The impact of limited public transport on women's job opportunities is considerable. In Ystradgynlais ward, 18% of all households do not have a car or van, with the figure rising to 40% amongst people living in social housing. Even when the household has a car, it may not be available for the woman in the household to use, for example if her partner uses the vehicle to get to his workplace.
- 2.13. Amongst the women in the focus group, only one was currently driving. Two of the four women did not hold a license at all, nor did they have a car in their household. One of the non-drivers described the effect on her job search:

*I'd like to be a support worker ... work one-to-one with people ... that's the sort of work I think I'd like to do. ... I don't drive so it's got to be in the area where I live basically otherwise you're talking about going on the bus and you're talking about 3 or 4 hours to get to Swansea and back and that's a long day. If the dole would pay for me to learn to drive I'd be fine – or give me a scooter, I'd be right then!*

- 2.14. The women who could not drive also said that bus fares were a very significant burden on their limited budgets. For example, the return bus fare from Ystalyfera to Ystradgynlais is £5.40 – a very substantial chunk out of £71.70 a week job

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<sup>2</sup> Accessed 13<sup>th</sup> February 2014

<sup>3</sup> Reed recruitment <http://www.reed.co.uk/jobs/full-time-retail-assistant/24342923#/jobs/farmfoods/p6511/retail/pontardawe?fulltime=True> accessed 13<sup>th</sup> February 2014



seekers' allowance. A trip to Swansea cost even more and was regarded as out of the question for the low earnings that they expected to receive – the adult return fare of £6.90 is more than an hour's pay at the minimum wage.

- 2.15. Long days were a particular problem for women with children who had to take them to school, as the time taken to travel on top of school start and finish times left very little time to do a paid job.

## Women not in employment

- 2.16. Being out of employment is a very common experience for women in Ystradgynlais – about half of all women aged 16-74 did not have a job in 2011. A total of 466 women were either unemployed (4.5% of all women) or economically inactive (45.1% of all women). The main reason that women said that they weren't working is that they are retired.

### *The impact of disability and ill-health*

- 2.17. For women who are not retired, disability and long-term ill-health are the most common reason for not working – half of all non-retired economically inactive women said this was the reason they weren't working. Amongst women in our survey who were not working, a similar proportion (45%) said that they didn't work because of disability or illness.
- 2.18. There is a very close relationship between long-term illness or disability and being economically inactive. Nearly three-quarters of women (72.1%) who have no health condition or disability are economically active compared with just one in five women whose day to day activities are limited a little and just one in twenty women whose day to day activities are limited a lot.
- 2.19. Our survey did not ask women about the nature of their disability or illness, but in Wales as a whole, nearly half of women who claimed Employment and Support Allowance in May 2013 did so because of a mental or behavioural disorder. Overall, 14% of women in Wales currently experience a mental illness.<sup>4</sup>
- 2.20. The impact of disability and ill-health on women's ability to work was graphically illustrated in the focus group we held. Two of the women who participated were not currently working because of, in one case, short-term ill-health, and in the other, a long-term mental health condition. The third woman's partner was not

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<sup>4</sup> Welsh Health Survey 2012

working because of mental ill-health. All four women had experienced mental ill-health in the past. It was clear from the discussion that when they had been ill, at times finding or keeping a job had been extremely difficult, as even the simplest tasks had been a struggle for them.

*I had quite a bad year then with my depression ... I [eventually] took redundancy, and then I thought right, OK, what am I going to do next? And I did go and do a driving instructor's course ... and I qualified as a driving instructor. But I then started worrying about the responsibility because there are days when I can't get out of bed ... I started worrying then what if there's a person supposed to be doing their test, and that completely freaked me and that was the end of that.*

*It's only in the last few months that I can honestly say that I can concentrate on reading and doing crosswords and things like that. Because I just would pick up a book and think, oh I can't do this, ... and I've always read. I couldn't, I couldn't take it in, I'd have to go back over it ... I couldn't concentrate.*

- 2.21. These findings are deeply worrying. Not only is mental ill-health relatively common amongst women, it is a very significant factor in women being unable to work. There is a viscous circle here, with lack of work contributing to poor mental health, which in turn makes it more difficult to find and keep a job. In these circumstances, it seems that 'incentivising' people into work through cuts in benefit, tough 'conditionality' on benefit receipt and the threat of sanctions is wholly inappropriate, particularly when jobs are few and far between with intense competition.

## Qualifications

- 2.22. The proportion of women in the Ystradgynlais area who have qualifications is low. Only one third of women aged 16 and over have qualifications above the equivalent of NVQ level 2 (e.g. five or more GCSEs at grades A\*-C) and just under a third of women have no qualifications at all. Nearly six out of ten women in our survey said that they would like to learn a new skill or obtain a qualification, with women who were already in employment being significantly more likely to want to learn than women who were not working.
- 2.23. Given the association between disability and ill-health and women not working, the lower interest in learning amongst non-working women is not surprising. Two of the women in the focus group were currently working towards qualifications at

Dove workshop in Banwen said that their confidence had been very low at the beginning, and that they had needed considerable one-to-one support at first.

## Conclusions

- 2.24. Women in the Ystradgynlais area face a triple whammy. Not only are job opportunities in the area few and far between, the jobs that are available are mostly (though not exclusively) low paid, part-time and often typically female jobs. On top of this, the majority of women lack the formal qualifications they would need to get any higher level, better paid jobs and many do not have the means of traveling to jobs elsewhere.
- 2.25. We are not arguing that these difficulties are unique to women – they are not, for men too have experienced significant job loss and now have very limited opportunities too. But the fact remains that men are more likely to work than women, have generally better paid jobs and a wider range of opportunities.
- 2.26. The challenges of the labour market are all the greater when welfare reform is taken into account – this is explored in the next section.

## 3. Welfare Reform

- 3.1. Social security benefits for people of working-age are undergoing massive changes. There is not a single benefit for people who are working and those who are not that is not being changed in some way. The changes affect:
- The amount of benefit received – with many being frozen or pegged at the lower Consumer Price Index rather than Retail Price Index, or being capped in some way.
  - Eligibility for benefit – eligibility for many benefits has been considerably tightened, with new rules on housing benefit, Employment and Support Allowance and Working Tax Credit, to name just a few, reducing the benefits received by many individuals and households.
  - Entitlement to benefit – limits on some contribution-based benefits have been introduced.
- 3.2. It is estimated that the cost of welfare reform is, *on average*, £500 per year per person of working age in Wales, although the impact on some individuals and households affected by multiple changes is very much more. Even if the gains from increased personal tax allowances are taken into account, at approximately £175 per tax payer per year, the net effect of austerity is that individuals on average are £8-10 a week worse off.
- 3.3. The introduction of Universal Credit in the next few years is widely expected to increase pressure on household budgets still further. Although the amount of Universal Credit most people receive is likely to be broadly the same as current benefit rates, it will be paid monthly, in arrears, in a single lump sum to a single bank account. There are fears that the new payment arrangements will make budgeting much more difficult and reduce women's independence.
- 3.4. Crucially, welfare reform is reported to affect women more than men. Not only are women generally more reliant on social security benefits because of their low pay and responsibility for children, they are also more likely to need the safety net of benefits, for example in the event of a breakdown in a relationship or because of their own or a child's disability or poor health.
- 3.5. Welfare reform has put people in Ystradgynlais and nearby communities under severe pressure. The area has a relatively high level of claims by both women and men for various in- and out-of-work Department for Work and Pensions benefits. The proportion of women claiming a benefit in the Ystradgynlais ward is more than

twice as great as in the whole of Wales. In May 2013, more than a quarter (27.2%) of women of working age in Ystradgynlais itself claimed a DWP benefit<sup>5</sup> compared with 24.7% of men (220 women claimants and 195 men claimants). In addition, households may claim Housing Benefit, help with Council Tax and Working Tax Credit but data on these claims are not available for small areas such as wards, or by gender as claims are made by the household.

- 3.6. In our survey, we found that altogether, half the women claimed at least one benefit for working age people, the most frequently claimed being housing benefit and help with council tax. Amongst the women in the focus group, three received ESA either in their own right or through their partner, and once received JSA. Three also received housing benefit.
- 3.7. Our survey found that welfare reform is already affecting a substantial proportion of claimants. Nearly four out of ten of responses to our survey said that the amount of benefit that they received had either gone down or stopped altogether. The benefit that was reported to have stopped most often was ESA, reflecting the outcomes of Work Capability Assessments which, on average, find about six out of ten claimants 'fit for work'.
- 3.8. Some survey respondents described the changes that had affected them:

*I had my ESA stopped, they messed up my appeal shockingly. I couldn't handle the stress - once I had won my appeal they tried to put me through it again, I stopped claiming benefit and now have to work from home as self-employed, and am worse off*

- 3.9. None of the women in the focus group who claimed ESA had been affected by the Work Capability Assessment to date. One was in the work-related activity group, involving occasional meetings with Working Links which she found quite helpful, and the other received ESA while she recovered from a short-term health problem.
- 3.10. The other significant change reported by women in the survey was to housing benefit, which 30% of those responding to the question saying it had gone down or stopped altogether.

*I'm a mature student in university. My housing benefit does not cover my rent which leaves me short as I am unable to work being a full-time student and*

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<sup>5</sup> Jobseekers' Allowance, Incapacity Benefit / Employment and Support Allowance, Carers' Allowance, Disability Living Allowance, Income Support, Bereavement benefits.

*single mum*

3.11. In the focus group, one woman was affected by 'bedroom tax', as one of her children is at university. She did not want to move to a bedsit or a one bedroom flat, even if she could find one, as she wanted her child to be able to come home occasionally. Another participant said she did not want her children, aged 5 and 2, to share the one bedroom she was allowed for them by housing benefit rules, so the younger child shared her and her partner's bedroom so that the elder child had a room to himself.

3.12. What became clear was that because the changes to benefits are cumulative, some claimants are affected several times over, losing significant sums as a result. Responses to the survey illustrate this:

*I am on a reduced rate of ESA as I have been found fit for work and am awaiting an appeal. Housing Benefit has gone down as I have a spare bedroom.*

*I am too unwell to work but I was found fit for work. I had to appeal, it was successful. I have now got the money back. I have lost some housing benefit as I am regarded as having a spare room. I do not have a spare room - I have 2 daughters aged 2 and 14 - they cannot share a room!*

*I am losing £44 per week. It's very difficult to live on £71 per week*

3.13. An important issue that emerged in discussion was the impact of delays processing benefit claims. Two of the four women in the focus group had experienced significant delays receiving benefits to which they were entitled. One had worked for the same employer for nine and a half years but did not work enough hours to receive statutory sick pay. It took many weeks for her to receive Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), during which time she had had to rely on family and friends. The other woman and her family had waited for more than four weeks, over Christmas, while her partner's claim for ESA was assessed. During this time the only family income was £146 a month child benefit. In addition, one of the women had supported a relative who had also been affected by delays to a benefit claim, stretching her own already tight finances even further.

3.14. There is evidence to suggest that delays processing benefit claims are rising – the Trussell Trust reports that 30% of referrals to its food banks are for this reason, while Citizen's Advice Cymru found that benefit delays were one of the two main reasons clients needed emergency food. MacMillan Cancer Support has said that

that hundreds of terminally-ill people are affected by delays of weeks and months processing benefit claims.

- 3.15. None of the women in the focus group said that they had had their benefit entitlement checked, although some said that the general support they had received from a local voluntary sector organisation had included benefits advice. One commented that there may be help they could receive that they didn't know about, as she had always worked in the past.

### When the safety net fails

- 3.16. Although social security benefits and other provisions of the welfare state are meant to provide a 'safety net', three of the women in the focus group had, at various times in their lives, faced periods of severe hardship when the safety net had simply failed. Two had been without a home or an income following the break-up of abusive relationships. They had to cope not only with the emotional difficulties of leaving an abusive relationship, but the practicalities of managing alone, sometimes with a substantial fall in income:

*When you've been with someone for so long ... where do you start when you've never had to look for money?*

*I didn't know what to do ... I didn't know how to live on my own, I didn't have nobody to show me*

*I was living with my husband and the difference – from [that] to having £71 a week – my god what a difference!*

- 3.17. Whether the lack of income was from relationship breakdown or benefit delays, friends and family provided key short-term support to the women - they offered sofas to sleep on, provided emergency food and Christmas gifts, and lent money for household essentials such as carpets. The participants were aware of the local food bank but only one focus group participant had used it – even then she had received 3-days' worth of food for a lone parent family for a family of four without an income for four weeks.
- 3.18. None of the women mentioned the Discretionary Assistance Fund or its predecessor Social Fund, which might have helped them.

## Housing

- 3.19. An issue of major concern in the focus group was housing. Two of the women in the focus group had moved into social housing recently, which they had found to be in poor condition. One said her house was damp and draughty, with widespread mould, and windows and kitchen in a bad state. She said that her landlord had given her £100 vouchers towards redecoration but that it was not sufficient for the scale of the problems. Her home was due to be refurbished in about 18 months' time but in the meantime she and her children had to live in with cold and mould. The other woman said that she had been unable to move into her accommodation immediately because of its condition. She had to stay with a relative while she re-decorated – even then she has continuing problems with leaks from the flat above.
- 3.20. A cold home in poor repair when incomes are low is a large, additional burden that the women had neither the resources nor the skills to remedy. It is well known that poor housing contributes to ill-health such as asthma and other chest conditions, making life even more difficult.

## Cost of living

- 3.21. Women in Ystradgynlais and district are clearly feeling the rising cost of living very keenly. Nearly half of women in the survey (47%) disagreed that they had enough money to manage, and more than half (58%) said that they worried about money all the time. Nearly 6 out of ten (59%) disagreed that they had money put by for emergencies. These are very stark and worrying levels of difficulty coping by women and their families during austerity.
- 3.22. Older women and women living in childless couples were the only groups of people who did not appear to be under pressure. Indeed amongst lone parents and couples with children almost all respondents reported lack of money and worrying all the time.
- 3.23. For some women, the pressures were very considerable. A third of all women in the survey said that they sometimes skipped a meal to save money. Women living alone or lone parents were much more likely to say this than women in couples whether or not they had children. One woman in the focus group told us:

*The kids would eat before me and my partner would, every time, and we'd have what was left ...*



- 3.24. Even if women did not miss meals, they still found it difficult to afford to eat well. Three of the women in the focus group described their experiences:

*Well, I don't shop very often, I'm always up at my mother's for food – I think if I had to shop, I mean really, a proper shop, I'd never do it, never have enough money to live*

*My auntie's helped me out ... she'll get me a shop once a month ... and a friend of mine will get me fruit, otherwise I wouldn't have any fruit*

*I was lucky ... the [children] have been brought up on organic, we could afford it, ... but now, it's value quite a lot of the time. And it's killing me quietly, I've always gone for the best for them and now it's like, I look and think no I can't have McVitie's biscuits it's Tesco Value.*

- 3.25. Keeping their home warm was also a concern. More than half the women in the survey said that their home was sometimes cold in order to save money, with the majority of single women, lone parents and couples with children all saying this. Three of the four women in the focus group were on pre-payment gas and electricity meters, and found managing their heating bills a struggle:

*It is hard trying to run a house, trying to make sure the gas and electric lasts all week, to make it until the next time you get money. It's basically impossible.*

*I'm on oil - either the tank is getting bigger and I haven't noticed or ... ! It's a bigish tank and it's costing me £1,100 to fill*

- 3.26. Managing on a very modest income is inevitably challenging. It was clear that every penny counted for the women in the focus group. Even the tiniest unexpected expense could disrupt their budgeting, as one woman described when she received an incorrect TV license bill – it wasn't just the prospect of owing £34.50 (which she did not), it was the expense of ringing up the TV Licencing Authority:

*The next thing I knew I had a bill saying I owed them £34.50! I didn't even owe that in total! So phoned them up – I couldn't really afford the phone call – and I said listen, what are you playing at, what's going on? I nearly had a heart attack!*

- 3.27. The women had found the support, including help with budgeting on a low income, of a local mental health charity to be absolutely invaluable. Even then, one of the

four women in the focus group had resorted to door-step lenders:

*I had four loans off one bloke – that was last Christmas that was and I'm still paying it. ... They come and knock on the door, here's £100 vouchers, sign this, and I've got to pay £110 back. And then you have £100 and you've got to pay £175 back. ...*

- 3.28. The women in our survey were generally aware that the local credit union offered more affordable lending and did not require members to have saved first, but they did not know the details of its services. Nor is the credit union immediate or pro-active like door-step lenders. As one of the focus group commented:

*If you need the money, you do do it*

- 3.29. Welfare reform is, without question, hitting women very hard. The 'bedroom tax' and changes to Employment and Support Allowance are the most common changes with some losing a relatively large proportion of their income as a result.

## Conclusions

- 3.30. The consequences are all too clear – the majority of women in the Ystradgynlais area worry about money every day and have nothing put by for emergencies; the majority sometimes has a cold home and a third sometimes miss a meal.
- 3.31. This is bad enough, but even more alarming is the apparent failure of the safety net. The delays processing benefits and problems in housing supply are leaving a minority of women with no means of meeting the most basic requirements of food, warmth and shelter. That this occurs when they are typically at their most vulnerable, such as when they leave an abusive relationship or are ill, is even worse.
- 3.32. The findings of this report are a very serious challenge to service providers in the statutory and voluntary sectors in the Ystradgynlais area. Demand for services is, inevitably, rising precisely at a time when public funding is being cut. It is worth noting that some of the services that women are most likely to turn to, such as Citizen's Advice or charities that support people with mental health conditions, are under threat while others, such as the local food bank, are under pressure to fill a gap they weren't designed for.
- 3.33. Underlying the immediate difficulties is a deeper, long-term problem of creating sustainable, good quality employment either in the Ystradgynlais area or easily accessible from it. Ystradgynlais and surrounding communities are by no means

unique in facing this problem. While local organisations can help with small-scale job creation, the solution also requires a major focus on improving the economy and public transport in the area by Welsh Government and local authorities.

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# Bevan

## FOUNDATION

### CHANGING WALES

The Bevan Foundation is an independent think-tank which strives for social justice in Wales.

We believe the root causes of inequality and injustice need to be addressed, and so we:

- Carry out inquiries and research into social and economic problems facing people and communities.
- Encourage exchange of ideas and discussion about solutions.
- Persuade the government, public bodies and the private sector to take action.

We are funded by membership subscriptions and donations, by grants from charitable trusts and foundations, and by commissions from a wide range of funders and clients.

To find out more about what we do and how you can help to achieve a fair Wales:

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