# Time: a new approach

*"The purpose of getting power is to be able to give it away"* - Nye Bevan

'...*by the strength of our common endeavour we achieve more than we achieve alone*' - Clause IV

## Introduction

In this paper the intention is to introduce a policy idea of time banking and present a number of policy options available to Welsh Labour which will have radical implications on the approach to policy development. The first sections of this paper will explore and explain the idea of time banking before discussing some specific policy proposals to be considered by Welsh Labour. Following on from these proposals a case is made for Labour to take up the idea of time banking because of their shared foundations: mutuality, reciprocity and collective activity and provision.

## Time Banking

Time banking was designed by American Civil Rights Lawyer Edgar Cahn. He presented the idea of **time credits** as an alternative community-based, currency as part of an argument for rethinking the interactions within communities. Time credits work as an *additional* reward for voluntary activity – along with the psychological and social benefits volunteers perceive. Thus volunteering through a time bank is rewarded with **one time credit for each Hour of volunteering**; consequently establishing a 1:1 ratio between Time Dollars and Hours.

Thus time credits reflect equality, regardless of tasks completed or level of skills required: every volunteer operated on a level playing field. However earning time credits is only part of the activity. Time credits also contain a "purchasing power" so that they can operate as an alternative currency. Maintaining a focus on the community and spirit of volunteering, Cahn established time credits as a means of accessing services and activities from one's neighbours. Consequently establishing a cycle through which time credits are awarded and spent through voluntary activity.

For example, Owain earns time credits by taking part in a community litter pick every Saturday for two hours, earning two time credits. He then spends one of these time credits each week to have a piano lesson from Gwenda, the old lady who lives down the road from him. By giving piano lessons Gwenda earns 3 time credits a week teaching three different young people. As she is housebound this gives her a chance to contact people from the community but also earns her time credits, one of which she uses to have Karl collect her groceries each week (thus Karl earns one time credit), whilst using the other two time credits to have other neighbours visit her for an hour each for a chat and cup of tea at different times in the week.

In this way time credits develop a network of connections between community members. This networking has been linked with the idea of "bridging" social capital. This is the idea that "weak ties" are reinforced within the community, but "weak" in the sense that it refers to a form of social capital where links are made between different groups of people within a community; as opposed to "strong" ties which refer to insular connections between homogenous groups, which exclude others who don't fit into this group (i.e. family).

Thus the form of social capital that time banks seek to support is of a universal nature and can cut across social divisions and help to establish the creation of strong communities.

## UK History of Time Banking

The idea of time banking was taken up in the UK in 1998 and initially developed in Gloucester-based organisation: Fair Shares. From this initial experiment, time banking has gradually expanded across the

UK and today the number of active time banks stands at 109, with a further 48 in development. This expansion has benefited from the work of national trade organisations such as TimeBanking UK (TBUK), the Welsh Institute of Community Currencies (WICC), SPICE (a social enterprise which seeks to help public services develop time banking practice) and the New Economics Foundation (NEF).

Over the years three different models of time banking have developed and are discussed by NEF in their recent publication *The New Wealth of Time.*

Person-to-Person (P2P): these time banks operate along the original idea suggested by Cahn and are dependent on members of a community voluntarily providing services direct to other members of the community, as in the example above.

Person-to-Agency (P2A): this is the second time bank model which has been developed here in Wales. This approach aims to change the design and delivery of public and community services. Unlike the P2P approach where time credits are exchanged between people, here time credits are distributed and collected by an agency. For example a development trust using time banking would reward volunteers with time credits for taking part in a clean up of a local waterway, and these individuals could then use the time credits to access the BINGO event organised by development trust.

Agency-to-Agency (A2A): this is the final model, set-up to allow community agencies to share their resources with other agencies. For example organisation "A" needs to use a mini-bus to transport some children to a football match, organisation "B" has a mini-bus which organisation A could use. Here time credit offer an opportunity for organisation A to use the mini-bus in exchange for time credits which organisation B may use at a later date to access resources they require.

Each form of time bank requires a time broker, someone who oversees the development of the initiative, grows the membership, provides and collects time credits, increases the activities through which people can earn and spend their time credits and conducts the day-to-day activities involved in running the organisation.

## Co-Production

Co-production is defined as a form of service delivery which allows professional service providers, service users and their communities to work together to design, plan, secure and deliver local services. In developing the idea of time banks, Cahn built up a theory of co-production to provide guiding principles and justification for time banking practice.

The core principles set out by Cahn are: i) treating people as assets; ii) redefining work; iii) reciprocity and iv) social capital. As the idea of social capital has already been touched upon above, the focus here is on the other principles.

*Treating people as assets* refers to a need to stop defining people by their needs only. In doing so public services and community redevelopment agencies ignore what people and communities can both do and contribute to other people and the community as a whole. A narrow needs-based definition prevents people actively engaging in solutions; they have to be the passive recipient of services; treated as non-productive and essentially worthless. Time banking challenges this because it asks service users what they can do, what they can contribute, and then turns their abilities into a benefit for the community.

By treating people as an asset they are not only involved in designing and creating a service, but are also a valuable part of service delivery.

*Redefining work* is the second core concept of co-production, which underpins time banking. Here Cahn seeks to ensure recognition of activities not considered work by the market economy, to ensure that they receive the attention and reward that they are due. His focus is specifically drawn here to the work of, mainly, women in raising families. Cahn is critical of market economies devaluation of this form of work using the example of a circle of mothers sat together, each with their own child on their lap. What they are doing isn't considered work, but if each mother passed her child to the woman on the left, then each of them is now engaged in work because they are looking after someone else's child. Cahn argues that this is the wrong attitude to take and presents co-production, and time banking, as an alternative form of thinking.

By redefining work, co-production allows for a wider range of activities and contributions to be equally valued and rewarded.

Finally *reciprocity* is a familiar idea within policy discussion. It rests upon the idea that exchanges between people are two-way and engender a sense of obligation. This is usually discussed in relation to a "gift" and was brought into mainstream policy discussion by Richard Titmuss in relation to blood donations. In donating blood the donor enters a reciprocal relationship with the person who receives the donation. The donor doesn't require blood when donating, s/he requires nothing in return for their donation, but an obligation is created whereby if the donor is ever in need s/he has access to a donation.

Reciprocity is an essential aspect of time banking because it provides two way interactions between the individual and the community and creates a sense of social obligation between community members.

### Time Bank-based Policy Initiatives

With the basic ideas and approach of time banking outlined it is possible to move on to outline potential policy developments which utilise time banking practice. There is not space here to conduct a full examination of each policy or the ideological differences that time bank would encourage in policy direction. What shall be achieved will be a brief outline of the proposals with some discussion as to how they can be achieved.

**Community Regeneration:** Wales already has a global model of best practice tucked away in the Garw valley. Here a local Development Trust has set up a **Time Centre** in partnership with WICC to provide a Person-to-Agency time centre. The aims of the Time Centre are to reinvest in the community and its residents. This is achieved through the provision of a Learning Network where local people can spend time credits to learn Welsh, access I.T. courses and a range of other courses from First Aid to Woodcraft. Some of these courses actually earn participants time credits because they are considered skills which will benefit the community, such as First Aid.

Time credits can also be used to access a range of social events put on by the Development Trust from BINGO to a cabaret night. Local people earn their time credits in a range of ways, from participating in clean up projects to getting involved with projects designed by the Development Trust, for example the creation of a local park.

The Time Centre is gradually rebuilding the community and is delivering the core principles of co-production, especially by generating reciprocal relations and fostering social capital. As such the first recommendation of this paper is **to build time bank practice into community regeneration.**

This could be achieved either through direct funding by the Assembly Government in establishing time brokers in Communities First areas before expanding the practice across all communities in Wales. Alternatively funded time bank teams attached to each local authority provides another means by which time banking could be developed in Welsh communities.

**Youth Justice:** Youth justice is one area where the benefits of time banking can be most powerfully felt. The New Labour agenda towards youth justice, particularly with regards anti-social behaviour, is regressive. Older people's, and the wider communities fear of young people is a well documented phenomenon and is nothing new; however a youth justice practice which simply punishes young people for minor transgressions doesn't solve this problem, or tackle the causes of youth criminality.

Time banking offers a new way of preventative work and intervention which establishes trust, social capital and reciprocal relationships between young people and their communities, thus over coming the causes of fear and distrust often targeted at young people.

Again we can draw on existing practice in Wales in developing this policy. Some youth services in the South Wales Valleys have changed how they operate. Rather than act in a way which offers young people the activities designed to prevent criminal behaviour, young people now have to earn time credits in order to access these activities. Previously youth services would try to prevent re-offending by offering activities and events to offenders to occupy them and dissuade them from future offending. Time banking changes this because it encourages young people to develop reciprocal relationships with their community to earn time credits so that they can access the rewards and activities they were previously given. Welsh Labour in government should seek to **reform the practice of youth services in Wales along time bank principles.**

This can be achieved through the presentation of guidelines and supporting the work of WICC to expand this practice across Wales.

**Computers for School:** Utilising a scheme developed by Cahn, the third policy recommendation of this paper is that Labour considers **developing a peer tutor time bank scheme**.

Such a scheme would allow young people to act as mentors for young children to help them develop their reading, writing and maths skills. In return for their time young people are award time credits which can be used to "purchase" recycled computers they can use in their own school work. This scheme has been developed in America as part of their youth justice approach to tackling truanting and anti-social behaviour.

Here however, as with the youth service, a more universal approach may provide greater benefits. Rather than limit both of these interventions to disadvantaged or troublesome young people, they should be open and available to all, thus ensuring that social capital is established across all young people, not just those excluded individuals.

This initiative could be achieved thorough funding to support local authorities to collect and repair disused computers for distribution to participants.

**Expert Patient Time Banks:** The expert patient scheme is an established tool in community health policy. It seeks to engage people with specific, chronic illnesses to help educate and train others to manage their health problems.

A Labour government could **develop an expert patient time bank** to provide a number of benefits to participants. Time banking would help expand the membership of the groups by reaching out to those currently excluded from the scheme. Participation would also earn members time credits which could be used in conjunction with the community development time bank idea outlined above, but could also form part of the health intervention.

Rather than just using time credits to access rewards and activities as outlined above, a partnership with Local Authority leisure centres would allow participants to use their time credits to access the health and fitness facilitates which could further improve their health. For example a group of patients of a

respiratory illness group could use time credits to access a gym and thus take part in vital pulmonary rehabilitation exercise that many fear to do because of the nature of their illness.

**Housing and Time Banks**: housing is a vital policy area. It is not just important to have shelter for yourself and your family but to have the ability to live independently within your own home. For some groups of people this is not possible and the Assembly Government is currently reviewing its Supporting People Grant and Supporting People Revenue Grant. These are schemes which aim to assist people in living independently and maintaining their tenancy; as such support varies depending on individual need. Funding could support payment of bills, developing cooking and cleaning skills or accessing advocacy and support.

Time banking can assist here by providing an alternative currency to provide support. Operating a time bank which offers cooking courses, cleaning services or home repair from your neighbours not only ensures that these highly vulnerable people are included in their local communities, but also that they are not only recipients of assistance, but have the opportunity to provide their own skills and abilities to their neighbours.

This scheme could operate in a similar fashion to the community regeneration idea outlined above but focuses more on sharing skills relevant to housing maintenance and sustaining independence and could expand to include shopping for and visiting housebound neighbours. As such the final policy recommendation is for **time bank initiatives to be developed as part of the Supporting People Grants.**

## Conclusion

Time banking offers Welsh Labour an opportunity to develop a new direction in how it delivers policy. The time banking approach draws upon mutuality, collective action, equality and social justice: key foundation stones of the Labour Party. Time banking also offers a practical means of developing social capital and reciprocity within Welsh communities, whilst also giving people increased power over their local services and communities. Time banking and co-production develop policy along the ideas expressed in the quotes at the beginning of this paper, because it increases power held and experienced by local people and encourages communities, pupils and patients to work together to achieve the greatest outcomes, which are only gained through collective endeavours.

However a warning most be attached to these ideas. Time banking cannot be simply considered as a means of cutting expenditure or "rolling back" the state. David Boyle of NEF argues that viewing time banks as a means of cutting expenditure results in the loss of the key aspect of co-production; whilst perceiving time banking as a means to remove the state from local service provision, as the Tories could argue, fails to appreciate that partnership with the state can achieve stable time banking systems. Already in Wales some time banks have had to close their doors through a loss of funding. A partnership with the state, which provides financial support but also a wider range of support in terms of training and disseminating best practice, can develop a sustainable time bank movement in Wales.

Time banking resonates with Labour's core values and aims and for that reason I suggest the following policy ideas to help reform service delivery, develop communities based on reciprocity and equality and to regenerate the level of trust and social capital which has been eroded from communities since the 1980s:

**Building time bank practice into community regeneration**
**Reform the practice of youth services in Wales along time bank principles**
**Develop a peer tutor time bank scheme**
**Develop an expert patient time bank**
**Develop time bank interventions as part of the Supporting People Grants**