



Care to Co-operate Case Study

June 2016

Every Link Counts and Link-up Care

Using co-operation to provide care and support that responds to the opinions and decisions of the disabled people accessing services



Registered Company: 7258416



Background information

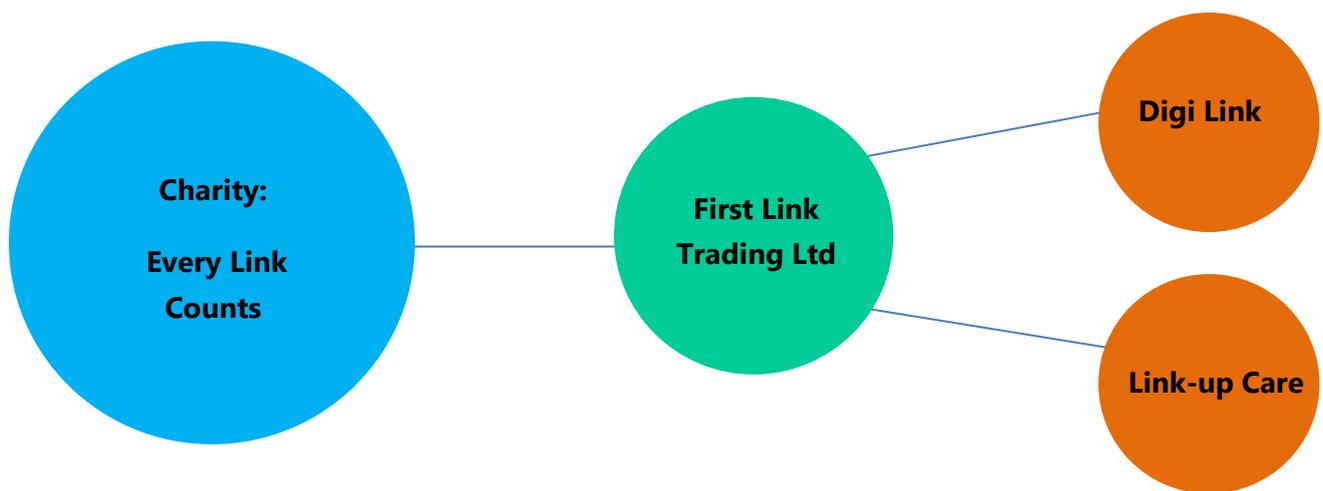
Every Link Counts is a charity that was set-up in 1992, in Bridgend, by a group of parents of people with learning disabilities. They wanted their children and others with learning disabilities to go out and about in the community and to make friends. The charity supports people to take part in training, work experience and social and leisure activities that also develop softer life skills, helping their members to live independently.

In the beginning the money for activities came from Coalfields Regeneration Trust, Big Lottery Fund and Children in Need. But money became harder to find and the charity began to rely more and more on volunteers. In 2006, Every Link Counts decided the only way they could continue was to set-up a new business - a social enterprise - that could make money.

The charity set-up a separate company in 2007 called First Link Trading Ltd. The purpose of this company is to set-up social enterprises that would help people with disabilities. Profits could then be transferred to the Every Link Counts charity so that it could continue to offer its leisure and social activities, including trips to the bowling alley, swimming and holidays as well as education and life skills development.

The first social enterprise business is called Digi Link. This is a business that makes information easier for people with disabilities to understand. It also makes films and DVDs for community groups and local businesses. It is successful because people with disabilities have developed the skills necessary to produce the films for other people with disabilities.

The second social enterprise is called Link-up Care. This is a business that provides personal assistants to support disabled people. The service is registered with the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales. The Personal Assistants are all employed by First Link Trading Ltd. They support people to do the things they want, whenever and wherever, and with who they want. The service also provides a day time meeting place for training and socialising, while at the same time offering respite for families and support for independent living.



Relevance to Care to Co-operate project and its services

Care to Co-operate brings people together who want to plan and provide better assistance and support for their family, friends and community. We help them connect with other people who want the same thing. We help them set up co-operatives. A co-operative is owned and managed by the people it provides services for – as well as their family, friends, neighbours and professional carers.

Link-up Care is a good example of a co-operative managed by the people it supports. Customers buy the support of personal assistants from Link-up Care and decide how and when their assistance is provided. All of the customers of Link-up Care are also members of the charity. The charity members meet regularly with the staff to decide how the charity is run. This means the customers of Link-up Care also have a say in how its profits are used by the charity.

Direct Payments

The customers of Link-up Care pay for their support using a Direct Payment. A Direct Payment is money that you can ask for from your local authority if you require assistance or support to live your life. You need to be assessed by a social worker to see if you can receive a direct payment. The money can be used to buy and manage your own support if you need it. Typically, if you get a Direct Payment you will need to pay for a personal assistant yourself and manage a separate bank account. Some people decide not to have a Direct Payment because they think it will be too difficult.

Link-up Care employs and trains its own Personal Assistants. This means that its customers don't need to employ Personal Assistants themselves. Customers can still choose who they have as their Personal Assistant with Link-up Care. They also meet regularly with the staff to talk about their support and make changes. This means that the customers are still in control of the support they receive.

Pooling Direct Payments

Link-up Care also help people to pool their money from a Direct Payment to come together to buy services. Doing this helps the money to go further. Link-up Care have supported a group of three friends with learning disabilities to rent a house together. Using the services of Link-up Care, the friends use their individual Direct Payments to pay for a team of personal assistants to provide 'one to few' support for them at home. Additional support from Link-up Care for the friends' independence is help in managing a shared bank account to pay all the household bills.

Other customers use a Direct Payment to pay for things that they want to do together. It also means they don't all always need to have many personal assistants with them. Sometimes they might need only one or two personal assistants to help them when they are all together during the evening and weekend. Being together also makes activities more affordable, for example, money is saved on transport because people travel together.

The impact of social enterprises and co-operatives delivering care, support and preventative services

Link-up Care has given many positive benefits to the charity, Every Link Counts. Volunteers helping on the charity's social activities have the opportunity to become employees of Link-up Care. This means good people are more likely to first volunteer and then to stay working as a loyal member of the team. Staff also study for national qualifications and this improves the quality of their support for customers.

The success of Link-up Care and Digi Link has meant that the charity is now financially secure. This means Every Link Counts can continue to offer its activities free of charge. Link-up Care is looking at ways to grow its business to assist more people. It wants to support more people to live independently by pooling their Direct Payments. It also wants to help more disabled people who are leaving school and becoming young adults to live independently.

Social Services and Well-being Act and Care to Co-operate

The Welsh Government has introduced a new law called the Social Services and Well-being Act. From April 2016, the law means that more people who request services will be offered a Direct Payment. This is because the Welsh Government wants more people who require assistance and support to be in control and have a choice about the services they access. The law also means that local authorities should work closely with co-operatives and social enterprises to provide services to people who are members of these businesses and organisations.

Care to Co-operate is funded by the Welsh Government to develop co-operatives, social enterprises and consortia of businesses to aid local authorities' implementation of new duties in the Social Services and Well-being law. Care to Co-operate will help people, their groups and organisations come together and co-operate to decide on the services they use and how they use them.

For more information on Care to Co-operate service and how it could help you contact the team via <http://wales.coop/> or telephone 0300 111 5050.

