

## Using the environment to develop confidence and capacity within a disparate rural ethnic community

### Linking life concerns to developing skills

Black Environment Network (BEN) has worked with the Chinese community from their initial concerns to help the older members consider ways to stay healthy. From this starting point, BEN supported the Wai Kwun Chinese Women's Society to recognise the links between accessing the environment and wellbeing, and the need for the group to gain skills to work with mainstream organisations to achieve its own goals.

### Making it happen

Over several years with regular support from BEN, the Society has introduced its members to a range of new experiences that have enriched their lives and transformed their expectations of the future. The work began with a partnership being established between Wai Kwun and local health related departments and organisations. This commitment enabled a long term view.

### Understanding the longer view

The Chinese community has many members working long hours in catering. The group originally had no greater ambition than to provide a focus for social activities within a rural context. As a result of the opportunities offered through BEN and the linked support from local authorities and environmental mainstream organisations, the interest and the understanding of their own potential has grown. The need for learning began to be clearly seen and energy was put into a range of fundamental developments.

Volunteers from the group were purposefully identified and trained in a range of skills to ensure a strong core of members who can help with activities. Through their predominant interest in improving health and wellbeing they have arranged walks in beautiful countryside sites, and practised cultural and sporting activities in leisure centres. Many members now know of local sites and how to access them and they are comfortable with site and organisational personnel, who help them plan a day's activities and establish what is needed - waterproofs, binoculars etc.

Being part of a growing local network has provided a mainstream context for the group and its activities. They are now visible and known, and the confidence to express their needs and desires has grown as a result. They





have regular representation in several areas of local government now.

Through the work they have done with BEN, this group understands the process of designing a small project, budgeting and fundraising for it. They continue to access knowledge and skills to develop their own community group.

### The Future

The society is set to continue to work for the improved health and wellbeing of its members, pursuing a range of new interests including:

- Green Gym and conservation volunteering opportunities
- Walk leader training for the good weather, and dancing classes for health when it is colder
- Training for community health roles to benefit the Chinese community and working with the LHB on other initiatives
- Improving written English for fundraising, letters and report writing
- Improving computer skills within the group to combat isolation and do Society business



### FACTFILE

- **Funders:**  
North Wales Wildlife Trust (NWWT)  
Gwynedd Local Health Board  
Wales Equality and Diversity in Health and Social Care Research and Support Service (WEDHS)  
Gwynedd Council
- **Partners:**  
Wai Kwun Chinese Women's Society  
NWWT  
CCW at Gors Goch NNR  
Coleg Menai (ESOL & IT training)  
Bolton Chinese Community Centre (donated Chinese lion)
- **Target:**  
Chinese Community in North Wales
- **Numbers:**  
Approx 90 participants
- **Key Points:**
  - By purposefully supporting this emerging group over time, BEN has enabled the members to gain the confidence and capacity to identify what they wish to do and plan for it
  - Linking environmental activities with life concerns creates impetus for action and new opportunities that deliver social and environmental aims

**BEN**

For further information please contact:  
BEN UK Office: 60 High Street, Llanberis, Wales, LL55 4EU Tel/Fax: 01286 870715  
Email: ukoffice@ben-network.org.uk Website: www.ben-network.org.uk