Previously on Life - Voiceovers
“Health is clearly a precondition for any effort to make a development”

“You cannot change social attitudes in one or two years, it takes a really long time.”

“By setting the targets of the Millennium Development goals we are creating an agenda of things to achieve. “

NARRATOR
This is the story of the valleys of South Wales. Once thriving coal-mining towns and villages the communities who live here now are steeped in poverty and sickness

Professor Kevin Morgan, Cardiff University
Today Wales has a reputation for being the sick man of Europe. We have illness problems which look like developing country problems because these are the problems of poverty, poor diet, sub-standard housing: these are the problems of development

NARRATOR
The social problems left behind by a redundant coal industry are mirrored in the landscape, which is scarred with reminders of the past.

This edition of Life investigates why communities here have become some of the most deprived and unhealthy in Western Europe, and meets a man with a mission to change them.

Cllr Lindsay Whittle, Caerphilly Borough Council
If you live in Wales there's a greater chance of you dying younger than any other part of Europe and that can't be right!

NARRATOR
Along with health promotion and wealth creation LIFE finds out how the valleys of South Wales are becoming green once again.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, Welsh coal powered large parts of the world. At a time when ships, locomotives and industry ran on coal, South Wales produced a third of total world coal exports. But the miners and their families would suffer for their contribution to the British economy.

One of the four countries in the United Kingdom, Wales today is struggling to keep up with its better off and healthier neighbours.

Professor Kevin Morgan
We shouldn't see developed countries as having triumphed over all the problems of development - these are the pockets of underdeveloped country in a developed nation.

NARRATOR
Lindsay Whittle comes from a long line of miners. Today he is leader of Caerphilly Borough Council.
In his lifetime he's witnesses the decay and dereliction that came with the closure of the collieries:

**Cllr Lindsay Whittle**
When coal was King in these valleys, at its peak the coal industry employed 40,000 men and boys now it employs none. Many of those men and boys were to lose their lives and were to lose their health. Behind me stands the winding gear: a proud and silent monument and tribute to those hard-working men and boys and the communities that they served.

**NARRATOR**
Like thousands of former miners across the valleys, Willy Miles has been breathing through an oxygen mask for almost 20 years. He's lost the use of one lung altogether, and can use only a third of the other.

**Willy Miles**
If you've got dust nobody can help you. You've got to put up with it and enjoy life as it comes.

I've had a good life, can't grumble about that.

**NARRATOR**
Willy's son Ron also used to work in the mines

**Ron Miles**
When you're talking to him and he's struggling to breathe you find that you're breathing for him.

When you think back to what he used to be and what he is now, he used to be very active. Of course he's not active now, he can't even get out of the house really unless he's carried out you know. Even to go to the toilet, he's sitting down with his mask on with his oxygen on for about twenty minutes and he can't even speak until he gets his breath back.

Obviously worse it's gonna get but it's not very nice way of living really.

**NARRATOR**
But it's not just the Welsh mine workers who suffered. Whole communities lived in the shadow of danger. In 1966 a tragedy occurred that would change the course of Welsh History.

**News Presenter**
Disaster struck suddenly this morning at the small welsh coal mining village of Aberfan. Soon after nine a mountain of slag piled high behind the village and loosened by two days of rain slumped and spilled across Aberfan. The village primary school in which 200 children had just begun their first lesson of the day was smashed and half buried under rubble.

**Cllr Lindsay Whittle**
October 21st 1966 was possibly the darkest day in Welsh history. Every town & village had a slag heap above it, and this disaster could have happened anywhere - that shock was felt.
not only by this village but by Wales and the world. It was the darkest day ever in my opinion.

Professor Kevin Morgan
Up until that point whenever the environment had come into conflict with the economy, the environment would always come off second best.

But October 1966 is the point in my view when many people in Wales first began to reassess their attitude to the environment and they realised there are enormous human costs attached to environmental indifference.

NARRATOR
The government of the day took the controversial decision to use some of the donations the public had made to clean-up other coal tips across the country.

A decision that had a profound effect on the young Lindsay Whittle. It was Aberfan that prompted him to go into politics:

Cllr Lindsay Whittle
The government in my opinion had a duty to take the tips away. This community has paid the ultimate price and to take money from the fund was nothing short of absolute robbery in my opinion and was a despicable act.

I then decided to become a political person because I felt that decisions could have been made in Wales much better than that.

NARRATOR
Over the next twenty years the mining industry went into terminal decline.

As technology changed, oil and gas started to replace coal, and pits were closed. Between 1960 and 1980 over a hundred and fifty collieries were shut down, and seventy thousand miners lost their jobs.

The 1984 miners' strike was a pivotal showdown between the UK Government and the unions, and signaled the end of an era for the coal communities of South Wales.

Andrew Davies, Minister for Economic Development and Transport
Many if not most of those towns and villages, their whole economic raison d'etre was coal-mining and once the mining industry went, so did the economic base for those communities.

The combination of industrial disease together with poverty, unemployment, has meant that we have some of the worst health indicators for the whole of Western Europe, in terms of chronic illness, disability, heart disease, lung diseases as well as high levels of mental illness depression and anxiety.

NARRATOR
Terry Jones is a former miner, now classified as long-term unemployed: in this area, one in three adults of working age are considered economically inactive.
Terry Jones
When you was working the mines, you'd go home from work, the first thing you'd do is call in to your local pub or club you know you had that up and go feeling, that everything's great... you can go in and say you can have a pint, get so and so a pint, but you know them times are good to me.

But when you can't do it and you're sat there and you're sitting back and you're thinking I can't afford to that and I can't afford to do this, it's obvious to take its toll on you.

Cllr Lindsay Whittle
With all the job losses of the sixties and seventies, many people lost the will to work and all they had to do was perhaps drink or smoke so the population has naturally is the wrong word but it has unnaturally developed an unhealthy attitude to itself.

NARRATOR
18% of people living in the South Wales Valleys report long-term sickness. This is more than double the UK average. One in four people here suffer from respiratory problems and cancer rates are among the highest in Western Europe.

Health professionals put these extraordinary statistics down to life-style and culture.

Jackie Matthews, specialist respiratory nurse
Smoking is a huge problem. The main diseases we see are chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, asthma and lung cancer. All of which have a legacy related to smoking and poor diet and poor lifestyle. It's called the valley lifestyle.

Professor Kevin Morgan
We are still the sick man of Europe, and the sick woman of Europe by the way, for reasons which are not to do with coal. Nor is it just poverty and this is also important, because there are equally poor regions in the European Union which don't have our illness figures. So it's not poverty – it's culture plus poverty, and those are the reasons for our illness figures today in my view.

NARRATOR
Drug use is also a big problem in the Valleys - Mark Saunders was addicted to heroin for ten years, and has been to prison twice.

Mark Saunders
At the moment heroin is such big culture in the valleys, it's just heroin everywhere. It's the boredom of the actual valleys there's nothing for children.

It's heroin's time at the moment, It's in fashion it's really strange, in the valleys it seems as if it's in fashion it's come from London where it was like, cocaine and heroin and it's slipped down into the valleys now.

NARRATOR
There are an estimated 10,000 drug addicts in Wales. Mark is now on a court order to attend the Make a Change group. It costs 4 to 5 thousand pounds per year per patient to fund community based treatment.
Mark Saunders
It's basically just getting things off your chest, if you've got any problems to get them off your chest instead of keeping them bottled-up inside because a lot of people relapse through issues which they just can’t talk about.

NARRATOR
It's this culture Lindsay Whittle is fighting to change. Mortality rates here in the valleys are the highest in Wales. Lindsay's passion for promoting a healthier way of life is driven by the fact that four of his school friends died before they reached fifty:

Cllr Lindsay Whittle
They died far too young. One died through HIV/AIDS related illness, another through a heart attack, one had severe mental problems, and another through substance misuse. And I find that tragic and I now regard one of my missions in life as a politician in this area, to ensure that people live as healthily and as long as possible. These young people surely deserve a good chance in life.

NARRATOR
The Young Mums' Centre in Caerphilly is a support group for teenage mothers. Today they're discussing health.

Social Worker
Do you think people are right to be worried about how things are?

Young Girl 1
If you’re meant to have cancer you’re meant to have cancer. If you're gonna get it your gonna get it no matter what you do no matter what precautions you take - if you're gonna get something you're gonna get it.

Social Worker
So what about the stuff you give children do you think that's important? From when they're tiny?

Young Girl 2
Kids should be like full of eating junk and stuff…

Young Girl 1
Kids should be like, toddlers should have chocolate face covered in chocolate and chocolate hands. That's what kids are for. Yeah it wouldn't look right with a kid with banana on their face.

NARRATOR
The UK has the highest teenage pregnancy rate in Western Europe. But in Caerphilly the rate is 64 per cent higher than the UK national average. Lisa Kemp has a two year old daughter – Kia.

Lisa Kemp
I caught for Kia when I was 15, I was 16 when I had her, I had her on boxing day. And then I started coming down here then and that helped me a lot, kept me sane.
Having Kia so young I can't get a job really because she's not in school yet and I haven't really got nobody to have her.

**NARRATOR**
The Young Mums are now being encouraged to cook healthy food for their children as part of the council's health promotion drive

**Lisa Kemp**
Down here they're promoting healthy eating and that because so many people are going down to the fish shop and McDonalds cos it's a lot easier to go down there instead of cooking something healthy so they just go to the fish shop and get some chips.

**NARRATOR**
Unhealthy diets are thought to contribute to the rising incidence of diabetes known to affect more than 93,000 people in Wales. For the first time ever Wales is seeing type 2 diabetes in children, normally only seen in people over 40.

Diabetes costs the National Health Service in Wales £55 million a year. - Specialist Nurse Sian Bodmin sees the patterns recurring.

**Sian Bodmin**
It's very much a cultural thing. The culture of illness and disease will be within a family and it's very difficult to break out of a cycle and to try and liberate yourself from that.

**NARRATOR**
Lindsay Whittle chairs a local committee called the Health Alliance and is on his way to open a new Healthy Living Centre

**Cllr Lindsay Whittle**
It's important that we educate ourselves – it's no good us drinking and smoking ourselves to death and taking no exercise we've got to take a little bit of responsibility ourselves

**NARRATOR**
Reaching the health targets set by the UN Millennium Development Goals applies as much to areas like South Wales as it does to developing countries

**Cllr Lindsay Whittle**
Well good luck to Pontlottyn Healthy Living Centre, I wish you every success and I hope you all live long happy and healthy lives -thanks very much indeed.

If you link ill health to anything you have to link it to education and full employment. But what you do need without a shadow of a doubt is an end to the poverty in the valleys, good well paid jobs will help ensure that people live longer.

**NARRATOR**
As one of the poorest regions in Europe, Wales receives substantial European Union aid in the form of structural funds. Areas deemed to be "lagging behind" qualify for Objective 1 money to promote development.
1.2 billion pounds has been pumped into West Wales and the Valleys since 2000, but there are now fears that new members of the EU will start to take priority over Wales.

Cllr Lindsay Whittle
Quite clearly, many of the Eastern European countries are abjectly poor, and they will also need European assistance, and it's clear that that's where the money will eventually go, and that's a good thing. But I think the indications are that the plug will not be pulled in Wales and it will not stop just like that. It will be a gradual withdrawal.

NARRATOR
The advent of EU funds led to a flurry of new company start-ups, followed in turn by a rash of company failures.

Terry Jones
Well there was so many factories came and went - they'd open up for maybe two years and then bang gone. You know, at the end of the day, to me that was wasted money.

That's a very harsh way to play with peoples' lives.

Professor Kevin Morgan
The most important example without a doubt in the last fifty years of a problem with a company would be LG, Lucky Goldstar as it used to be called. The Korean company which was the biggest single foreign investment project in the history of the European Union. And it came to Newport in South Wales and never ever delivered on the jobs promised.

Andrew Davies
If the company don't create the number of jobs or they close then we will actually reclaim the grant and that is exactly what I did with the Korean company LG.

I think we take a very business-like attitude that this is public money we do expect value for money and if the conditions are not fulfilled then we will reclaim all or part of that money.

NARRATOR
Another day, another speech. Lindsay is speaking at the opening of a new innovation & technology centre, built on the site of an old mining engineering works.

Cllr Lindsay Whittle
Gone is the old industry - now we will never ever forget our past, it's very very important to us, but as you can see ladies and gentlemen…

NARRATOR
The new centre has been built with EU funding, and is a joint venture between the council and the Welsh Development Agency

Cllr Lindsay Whittle
These are good high-tech high-powered clean jobs and that helps attract. No-one wants to work two miles underground.
People would much prefer now in today's modern society to have a pleasant job like this and we can keep our more talented youngsters instead of exporting them across the world.

Roger Jones, Welsh Development Agency
Good jobs which pay UK economic rates are good for Wales. The problem we have in many areas is that people don't have the confidence to go to those jobs. At the present time they have a certain amount of confidence that if they remain disabled then they're OK. If they give up their disability or choose to go for some of these jobs, they're going to find that difficult and therefore they may be thrown back again into economic problems at least they can manage where they are

NARRATOR
Former miner Terry Jones disagrees

Terry Jones
There's people out there who does genuinely want to work, but because of their health they can't.

NARRATOR
Terry is still out of work. Though he has re-trained as a railway track-man, he's having problems finding suitable work in South Wales.

Terry Jones
As you can see I've gone right through the computer system looking for a job in the vicinity but no joy, unsuccessful again, more or less.

NARRATOR
Young mum Lisa is has managed to find a job working on a mobile creche unit.

Lisa Kemp
I don't want to be on income support all the time, I don't want to be like everybody else, like all the other young mothers. I want to get out and do something with my life.

NARRATOR
Mark's heroin group is now staging drama workshops in the community to help teenagers learn about the dangers of drug abuse.

Mark Saunders
I actually do like my life now. Whereas before I was very embarrassed at being a heroin addict, my family disowned me which was understandable because it brought a great deal of shame on them. But, it's like a second chance and I am really taking hold of it now. I would never have got off it on my own. I've got a reason for living now.

NARRATOR
At Willy Miles' house, the postman has brought some long-awaited news. Under the Miner's compensation scheme, Willy has been awarded £28,000 and his solicitor Mick Antoniw has come for a visit
Mick Antoniw, Solicitor
Our recommendation to you is that you should accept that sum. Ok are you happy with that?

Willy Miles
Am I happy with it? Look, I'd be happy with a bloody hundred pound!

Mick Antoniw
I know but it's not a hundred pounds it's twenty-eight thousand and it's really for you for what you've suffered and I suppose for what your family have suffered as well over the years.

Ron Miles
He will be quite happy now to have that before he died because many of his mates they've already gone.

At least he can see what's on paper and he's got more than his mates had. So he'll be quite happy he can give the family now at least a decent holiday out of it which is better than nothing.

NARRATOR
With over half a million claims, the Miners’ scheme is the largest compensation programme in the world, costing the UK Government an estimated 8 billion pounds.

Mick Antoniw
It doesn't make up for the terrible disabilities that many of them suffered, but in some way it is at long last a recognition of what the miners have been through. What they did actually suffer for really being the engine house of the British economy for so many years.

NARRATOR
Part of the regeneration funding pouring into South Wales is now going into creating new country parks, removing the last remnants of industry and re-landscaping the valleys.

Cllr Lindsay Whittle
The slag heaps are now being either removed or landscaped to ensure that it doesn't look the grim black ugly scar on the landscape that it always has and we are greening the valleys now."

Professor Kevin Morgan
Wales has now become a world leader in land reclamation. We get visitations from all over the world particularly from Eastern Europe, Central and Eastern European countries who themselves have despoiled their own environment…

That's the future for Wales. If Wales has a viable future it's through sustainable development. Making its environment pay more economic dividends rather than degrading the environment and having to relive the costs of that through an Aberfan.
**NARRATOR**
As the valleys struggle to throw off their image as Europe's sick relation,

There are hopes that making the valleys green again will encourage the brightest of the next generation to stay in Wales.

**Andrew Davies**
The old mantra in Wales was you had to get out to get on. Wales' most valuable export for decades, like my parents back in the 1930’s, was talented young people, and for me, as a minister, one of my lodestones or my basic principles is how can we create the opportunities so that our young people can exploit their potential and develop that potential here in Wales?

**Cllr Lindsay Whittle**
I mentioned the fact that my forefathers and foremothers suffered during the period.

I mentioned the fact that my four friends who I was at school with have died very young indeed and I genuinely believe that I owe it to my forefathers, my foremothers and my four friends to in fact ensure that our future generations have a better quality of life here in our country, because this is a wonderful country to live in and it has a wonderful sense of community, wonderful people, and I hope that it will play it's part in a modern world. Stop the world, we want to get on.