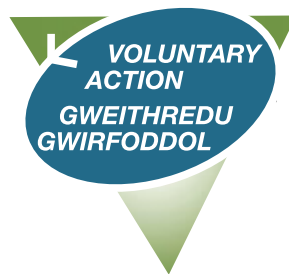


# INFORM

June 2021



Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil • *Gweithredu Gwirfoddol Merthyr Tudful*



A time to say thanks:

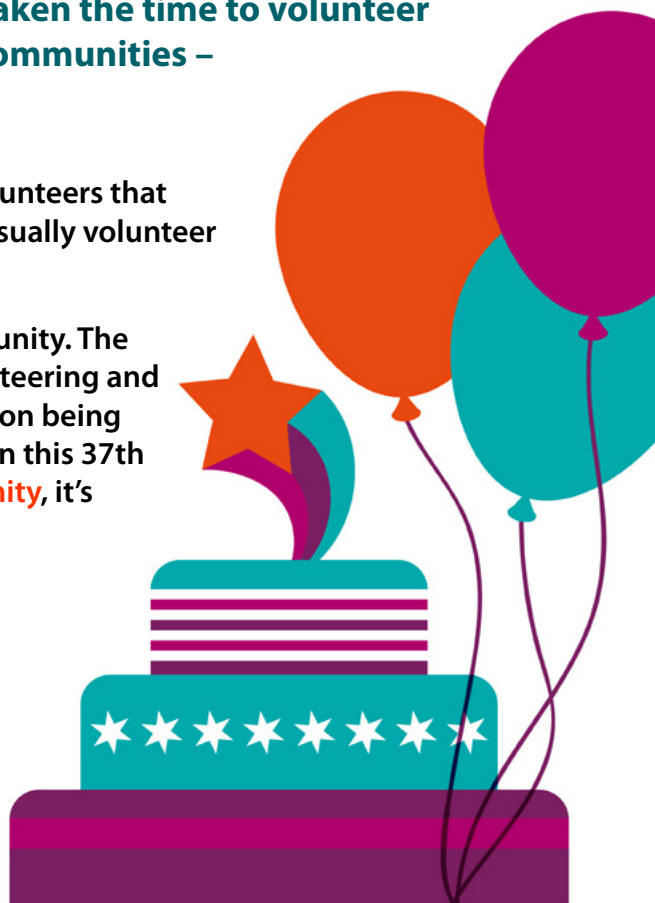
## It's Volunteers' Week 2021!

**Volunteers' Week takes place between 1-7 June every year and is a time to recognise and thank volunteers. During an exceptionally difficult year, people from all walks of life around the UK have taken the time to volunteer and made a huge difference to people and their communities – just as they do every year.**

We'd like to encourage you to take the time to recognise volunteers that helped during the last 12 months and to thank those who usually volunteer but have not been able to because of the pandemic.

Volunteers are always active at the heart of every UK community. The coronavirus pandemic has rightly raised the profile of volunteering and more people than ever are aware of the immense contribution being made every single day by the UK's volunteers. That is why, on this 37th annual **#VolunteersWeek** and during the **#MonthofCommunity**, it's time to say: thank you volunteers!

To mark Volunteers' Week 2021, this edition of Inform celebrates the achievements of just some of Merthyr Tydfil's wonderful volunteers.





# A time to say thanks

**Welcome** to the June edition of Inform in 2021. Our aim is to provide our members with up to date news and information and we welcome contributions and feedback from all readers of this newsletter.



## Citizens Advice Merthyr Tydfil



Over the last year Citizens Advice Merthyr Tydfil has built up a fantastic remote team of volunteers from across Merthyr Tydfil and South/West Wales. Most of our team are made up of students completing law and public services degrees, but also our long serving volunteers who have been with us for years. Our team loves making a positive impact on our local community and our clients. All volunteers have supported clients from not only Merthyr, but all over Wales during a very difficult year.

We appreciate our volunteers so much and want to join other organisations in thanking them for the amazing work that they do. We wouldn't have been able to manage throughout the Pandemic without them. Volunteers are and will continue to be a huge part of our community!

## Blind Veterans UK

Blind Veterans UK have successfully introduced the National Support Service in response to the COVID-19 Crisis. Telephone support, including remote social groups have been delivered to blind veterans by volunteers throughout the community and the UK.



Linking blind veterans up with volunteer befrienders and other blind veterans has assisted to reduce social isolation, keeping our veterans connected with each other during the difficult times and provide additional support to those who need it.

We are using remote means to help us comply with social distancing guidance. This may be through bringing veterans together in small telephone or online groups for chats, entertainment or to pursue hobbies; or by providing training and equipment so that they can get on with the things they want to do, such as developing IT skills, keeping fit or taking up a new interest.

If you have served UK Armed Forces, including National Service or the Reserves. Served during WWII in the Merchant Navy, or in Polish/Indian forces under British command and are registered blind or partially sighted then please get in contact for free support 0800 389 7979

If you would like to volunteer please see our website for our local opportunities:

**[www.blindveterans.org.uk](http://www.blindveterans.org.uk)**





## South East Wales Rivers Trust

South East Wales Rivers Trust would like to congratulate all our volunteers who have successfully completed our Level 1 River Restoration qualification during the past year. We would however particularly like to congratulate Matthew Sutton from Trefechan who has continued to volunteer for the trust carrying out river clean-ups.

We would also like to congratulate our volunteer Fiona Groves, who having successfully completed the course has secured full-time employment with The Wye & Usk Foundation. We would like to welcome Fiona to the Rivers Trust family.

If you would like to volunteer or take part in the next course, please get in touch.

[Gareth.Edge@sewrt.org](mailto:Gareth.Edge@sewrt.org)

 [@ARiverforall](https://twitter.com/ARiverforall)

 [@ariverforall](https://www.facebook.com/ariverforall)



*Fiona learning to kick sample on the river Cynon.*



*Matthew learning to kick sample on the river Cynon.*





### Daniel tidies up Merthyr Tydfil

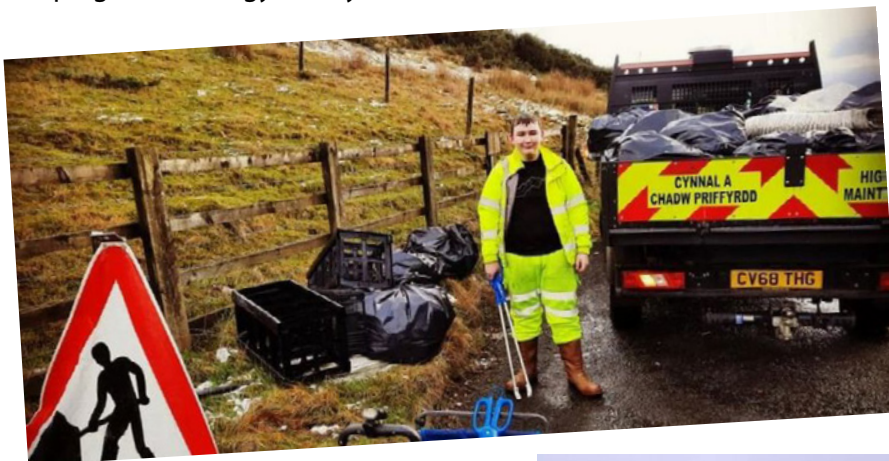
At 16 most teenagers have other things on their mind, but 16 year old Daniel Williams is currently working with Keep Wales Tidy, Fire Service, National Resources Wales and the Regeneration Department for Merthyr Tydfil CBC along with stakeholders and the Ranger of the Gelligaer Common, and Caerphilly Council Fly Tipping Department. His aim is pulling all these bodies together to work together to fight fly tipping and littering in our countryside.

Daniel has also recently received an award from the High Sheriff for his services to the community. His latest project is to raise enough money so that CCTV cameras can be purchased and placed in the hot spots on the Gelligaer Common that are regularly fly tipped, so that the farmers and other stakeholders like the Ranger for example will be able to download an app to their phones and see the footage of fly tippers in action so that they can be prosecuted. Daniel has always been interested in the environment and has helped the wardens on Parc Taff Bargoed when he was as young as 8 years old planting trees and hedgerows on the Park and helping with ecology surveys etc.

Before



After



### News from our Osteoporosis Support Group

**We owe the success of our group, over the past 13 years, to the tireless commitment of its volunteers. Those loyal Committee members, members and friends who are a constant inspiration to me as Chair. Also to VAMT for their information and continued support, even though they have been working in unfamiliar territory.**

These have indeed been strange and trying times, for all and have tested our resilience mentally, socially, and physically.

However, to quote Martin Luther King Jnr... "It's only in the darkness we can see the stars." Our Committee are ALL stars!

As these have been exceptional times, I feel I must really give a special word of thanks to Mrs Eira Fforest, (Vice Chair) who has been busy texting, ringing, and generally in contact with so many, prompting me if she has heard of anyone who would appreciate a call. Mrs Mary Adlam, (Treasurer) who despite Covid has had to keep the books in order, and a has been constant support, keeping the wheels turning.

Mrs Ann Gibbs, (Secretary), who hasn't been well, but has been a founder member of the group with Mary since its inception 13 years ago. To the other Committee members for their contact, encouragement, and sense of humour at a time that has been difficult for me personally - there are no problems, only challenges!

We will be back, I promise, as soon as it is safe, with a programme for next year that will be of interest to those with other chronic conditions, as well as Osteoporosis, so all are welcome.

Whilst we are glad of technology, we haven't as a group ventured into the "Zoom" circle yet, but have diligently kept in touch by phone, letters, Facebook, texts and messages to name a few. I've disseminated any news from my letters to friends, and we have kept in touch with as many as we can, especially anyone who has been bereaved or sick since we last met.

My mantra as Chair has always been, "Volunteers are not paid - not because they are worthless, but because they are priceless." We will be back when it is safe to do so!



*Presenting a cheque to Royal Osteoporosis Society - left to right - Denise, Eira, Lolita, Mary, Judith, Linda, ROS Area Manager and Linda. We also sent a cheque - in lockdown - to support the Helpline.*



**Thank you all, we are all cogs in the wheel that helps our group move smoothly and re-open with renewed vigour. Diolch yn fawr.**

Judith Smallwood, Chair



## Gellideg Foundation Group - A Year of Volunteering and now we have the Merthyr Tydfil Community Food Pantry!

When Boris Johnson announced on 23rd March last year that we all had to stay at home, we stopped all our Gellideg Foundation Group group meetings, tea dances and luncheon club, youth programmes and toddler groups, wellbeing groups and nursery. But just as one chapter closed so another opened; we are always here to help the community.

Suddenly all the people who used to come to our wellbeing classes were being asked to shield. Neighbours who used to help neighbours needed to stay at home to protect themselves and to protect others. Families were separated and unable to support each other. People were also finding their jobs cut at short notice and incomes slashed. People needed access to food and meals, to have welfare support, phone calls to prevent isolation, prescriptions collected and letters posted.

We stepped in and repurposed all our services. But we couldn't do this alone – so many people stepped forward to help each other. The statistics are staggering - over 85 adults volunteered 33625 hours over the year.

We advertised on Facebook and by word of mouth for help and people gave their time willingly. Volunteers came through VAMT and through The British Red Cross and from partners like MTHA. And people just turned up and asked if they could help – you were amazing!

Cyfarthfa Catering stopped making lunches in the Merthyr Valleys Homes canteen and we started supplying hot meals daily to vulnerable people across the borough. Starting in Cyfarthfa ward, expanding to Abercarnid and Vaynor we were soon supplying Eat Well 4 Less meals to residents across the borough. While shielding was in place until August 2020 we supplied over 100 meals a day, through the various lockdown phases this has fluctuated and settled at 30. Finding vulnerable people, taking referrals for support, preparing large amounts of quality meals daily from scratch and delivering it to residents' doors takes some resources! None of this could be achieved without the incredible and selfless help of the amazing volunteers who gave their time day in and day out to help others. Today, from Monday to Friday, every day volunteers deliver meals to residents across the borough.

As well as meals we started distributing grocery, toiletry and fruit and vegetable bags weekly to households across the borough. At its peak we delivered to 200 households a week; now we deliver to 160 households every week. Food is collected from Cardiff, sorted and packaged and delivered to residents' doors. Three days a week volunteers spend all day organizing and sorting the pantry, making sure that households who are under pressure are able to access nutritious food and quality hygiene items. All this hard work has culminated in the formation of the Merthyr Tydfil Community Food Pantry. When we open the Wellbeing Centre the pantry will be based there – for the moment we are delivering until the vaccination process is complete.

51 young people from Gellideg, Twyncarmal and Trefechan have also volunteered their time over the pandemic to help others. As well as writing letters to older isolated residents, they have assembled and delivered activity packs to people living on their own, and prepared Christmas hampers to bring some cheer. Young artists also painted a fabulous canvas of individual key workers and donated it to Green Hill Manor Care Home to bring some colour to the lives of residents there.

**Thank you to everyone who has helped! We have been inundated with letters of gratitude and we want to pass on our huge thanks to all you amazing people who together make Merthyr Tydfil really special.**







## News from the Rotary Club of Merthyr Tydfil

Members of our Club have continued to meet and serve the community to the best of their ability during these hard times since the start of the lockdown period due to the pandemic.

The meetings have been on Zoom every week and have helped the members to keep in touch. Those unable to join the meetings have been kept informed by phone and email.

Obviously, it has been a difficult period to continue with our service activities or to raise much needed funds for them. But the members have not let this deter them and have continued to serve the community locally and internationally.

The gardens at the Macmillan Cancer Care unit in Prince Charles Hospital and at the Cancer Aid Merthyr Tydfil centre in Dowlais have continued to receive the attention of our dedicated gardening members and are again looking spruce and tidy.



The local Food Bank has continued to receive the full support of our members during this period. Over £2000 has been donated by members and friends and this has been used to buy much needed food items and deliver them to the Food Bank.

Our Club joined a Rotary Club in Bangalore, South India for a humanitarian project. With help from the Rotary Foundation of Rotary International a sum of over £45,000 was raised. In January 2020 a week long camp was held in Bangalore and over 2000 people with disabilities were provided, free of cost, with artificial limbs, crutches, callipers and wheelchairs.

More recently, in response to the terrible situation with COVID-19 in India, our Club donated £470 to a Rotary Club in Bangalore to buy much needed equipment.



### The Parent Network

The Parent Network would like to celebrate and thank all their volunteers, including Anna Stypka, a Polish parent who has volunteered through the Parent Network and worked tirelessly making poppies from pop bottles, sewing poppies and generally getting involved in the celebration of the centenary of the British Royal Legion.

For Volunteers' Week and "a time to say thank you" they would like to put a message out to everyone that has done their own little bit within the groups. Everyone has volunteered their own time whether it be in their own homes completing crafts, taking part in the making of the poppies and supporting one another. Each individual that is part of this group has volunteered to still be a part of the group at a difficult time, supporting each other and helping where they can. A big shouted "Thank You" to:

- Beth Weed
- Amanda Weed
- Zena Pritchard
- Christine Greer
- Lorraine Copper
- Susan Davis
- Amy Marie
- Anna Stypka
- Caly Cross

This group has supported each other brilliantly, Beth also holds down a job in Tesco while still helping others & Caly has blossomed greatly, she has gone onto push herself throughout this pandemic to set up a registered charity helping others within the Merthyr Tydfil community creating the up and coming group Loaves and Fishes. This is a BRILLIANT outcome which proves how volunteering can help so many people and have so many benefits for yourself and others around you. It gives you new-found strength and belief within yourself and gives hope to others, it opens thousands of opportunities.



Anna Stypka



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Thank you to all our volunteers out there, keep reaching for the stars.

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## Volunteer Stories from Stephens and George Charitable Trust

### Huw Lewis

I am a retired police officer with over 30 yrs experience in serving the communities of South Wales in particular Merthyr and Rhondda Cynon Taff and now work part time.

I have been very fortunate with my career and life in general and have had this urge to give something back to those communities to people who need support.

Initially I spent 3 months assisting in the homeless shelter in Merthyr Tydfil and found this incredibly humbling realising that the simple things that I take for granted in everyday life other people don't have. For example they worry on a daily basis how they will get through the next 24 hours, what the weather will be like that evening, will they have a roof over their head and a bed to sleep in and where their next meal is coming from.

When Covid 19 hit our country in March 2020, I could see the NHS working so hard and other public sector services and I felt guilty that I wasn't helping in some way.

I decided that I would become a volunteer with Stephens and George Charitable Trust based at Dowlais Community Centre.

I have been a volunteer there for the past year and have carried out a number of roles which have included preparing and delivering food parcels and carrying out home shops for our most vulnerable people in the community. This has also including carrying out shopping and obtaining medication for families who had been diagnosed with Covid 19 and supporting vulnerable families especially children whose lives had dramatically changed due to not being able to do the normal things in life like seeing their friends and kicking a football in a field.

I have thoroughly enjoyed this and have met some wonderful people during this time who have really appreciated the support that you have given them.

Volunteering has been the most rewarding thing that I have ever done, you feel a sense of purpose and that you are making a difference in the community, and you feel a sense of personal satisfaction.

It makes me realise how lucky and fortunate I am compared to others who are struggling through these unprecedented times.

All this experience has given me a new perspective on how I will live the rest of my life and appreciate the simple things in life and the simple message of be kind to people, as only one chance we get at life, and it is not a dress rehearsal.

**I would recommend volunteering to anyone, trust me it will change your life for the better and you will meet some wonderful people along the way.**



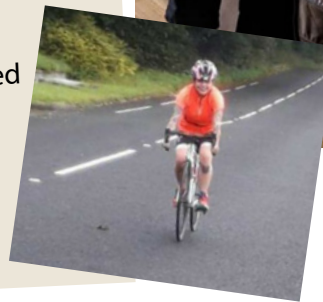
**Paige Davies** has volunteered at the Stephens and George Charitable Trust for over 2 years.

She is a qualified gym instructor and has supported the Charity health and well-being project by volunteering hours supporting additional need classes run out of the Dowlais Community Centre.

Paige since being at the Charity fulfilled her dream to be a triathlete and a marathon runner with the support of the Charity Co-ordinator. On July 9th she is doing an Ultra Marathon.

She has gained experience in the field that she loves and excels and inspires others with her enthusiasm and drive. In 2019 Paige was awarded Disability Volunteer of the Year.

**“Volunteering raises yourself worth and confidence and experience and is great for your CV” - Paige**



**Emma Leonard** came to Stephens and George Charitable Trust as a volunteer through an open day at VAMT.

Emma had few qualifications at the start of her volunteering experience.

She started as a book shop assistant and went on to Volunteer in the After-School clubs. Emma enjoyed the play work and youth work - this was where her passion was. The Charity supported Emma to qualify as a level 3 play worker and youth worker and as Safeguarding Officer.

She now has a portfolio of qualifications from food and hygiene to health and safety and is a STAFF MEMBER of the Stephens and George Trust.

**“I recommend anybody to volunteer, it resulted in me gaining Full Time Employment and doing a job that I love” Emma**



**Huw Williams**, a renowned historian from Dowlais has been a Trustee at the Stephens and George Charitable Trust since 2013. Huw has supported the Charity attending the Erasmus Exchange project and visiting Romania and the Czech Republic representing Wales in community development programmes.

Throughout the pandemic Huw live streamed via Facebook to enthuse the community about the history of Merthyr Tydfil - reaching out to people of all ages in the community.

**“Volunteering at the Trust at the Dowlais Community Centre has been a great honour. I am privileged to be attending the Charity Awards as a representative of the board next month where the charity has been nominated for Best Training and Education project in the UK” Huw**



**Bill Mc Arthur** has volunteered with the Stephens and George Charitable Trust since 2012.

He started as a Reading Support Volunteer and then volunteered at the Annual Spread the Word Festival, the largest Children's Festival in the UK celebrating World Book Day, leading the parade and supporting authors and events.

Bill has been Santa's Helper for 9 years and has delivered presents to 1000s of children across Merthyr Tydfil.

**“Volunteering at the Stephens and George Charitable Trust has been a fantastic experience. Reading to children and watching them learn and develop their reading ability and skills, raising their life chances, is an experience I will never forget. I highly recommend volunteering at the Charity and supporting young people across the borough”. Bill**



There are lots of volunteering opportunities at the Charity give the centre a call on **01685 375331 / 377688** and gain new experiences and qualifications - plus supporting your community.



### Lark in the Park

Two of Lark in the Park regular star volunteers are Chris Jones and Anthony Evans from Treharris. They have been volunteering for 5 years, firstly through Venture Out, which has led them to seasonally working at Cyfarthfa Park on the allotments. It is nearly 2 years since we had the good fortune to get a loan of Chris and Anthony for the Winter seasons at Treharris Park. They always turn up 'rain or shine, sleet or snow' as Anthony says. We chatted for this article about all the benefits of volunteering and being in nature. It is about purpose and belonging, being part of something and seeing it grow, develop and evolve. It's good for our mental health, being outside and the physical exercise, we all feel really uplifted after a session in the park.

It brings us camaraderie, laughs and chats, we have the chance to share a some of life's ups and downs. Tom Bramley and Gill Hampson from the Parks and Countryside Team for Merthyr Tydfil Council help guide, action and co-ordinate the work.

Tom said: 'From the park's point of view it shows how people feel and that they care as well, which is good. It is positive for the environment, positive for the volunteers and positive for the park.'

We can contribute as much or as little as we like, the Lark In The Park Group welcomes any occasional activity. Most of all we want to encourage people just 'being' in the park. We meet again on Thursdays 10.30am-1:00pm, we are adapting to current Covid conditions. So just pop along for a welcome chat and we are organising spaces, activities and numbers for us to work safely together.

Lark in the Park can be contacted via e-mail at [larkintheparktreharris@gmail.com](mailto:larkintheparktreharris@gmail.com) if you would like to book a slot or time to visit. We most enjoy the cuppa break, nothing like a brew outside to feel all is well in the world. We would like to thank all the volunteers and contributors over the last two and a half years who are helping develop a natural legacy for the future generations of Merthyr Tydfil.





## New Meithrin for Gurnos, thanks to Volunteers

Mudiad Meithrin is a voluntary organisation and is the main provider of Welsh-medium early years care and education in the voluntary sector. Our aim is to give every young child in Wales the opportunity to benefit from early years care and education experiences through the medium of Welsh.



Set Up and Succeed (SAS) is a specific project managed by Mudiad Meithrin in response to #Cymraeg2050 - a million Welsh speakers, the new Welsh Language Strategy announced by Welsh Government in July 2017. The aim of the project is to establish 40 new Cylchoedd Meithrin (with a Cylch Ti a Fi attached) by 2021 in specific areas of Wales where there is no local Cylch Meithrin, or where demand exceeds the current provision.

Through this project 37 new voluntary management committees have been formed. On 12th May we held a Public Meeting in Merthyr as we were hoping to establish a Cylch Meithrin in the Gurnos. In order to do this we needed a voluntary management committee in place as soon as possible. Without a committee of volunteers we would have not been able to move forward with the new Cylch Meithrin which we hoped would open in September this year.

10 people volunteered and are now the founding members of Cylch Meithrin Y Gyrnos. These wonderful volunteers will now be supported by specialist Mudiad Meithrin staff to register the setting, employ staff and open the doors of the new Cylch Meithrin to the children of the Gurnos. Attending Cylch Meithrin will open up the path of Welsh medium education and bilingualism for so many more children in Merthyr now and we would like to express our sincere thanks to our volunteers.

## Want to make a Difference in your Community?

Local Cylchoedd Meithrin (Welsh-medium playgroups) are looking for volunteers! You don't have to be able to speak Welsh to get involved.

### Why volunteer?

- Make a difference to others in your community
- Enhance your CV – volunteering can lead to employment or a change of career
- Use your professional skills to benefit others
- Support the Welsh language and Welsh-medium education
- Develop new skills and knowledge
- Be part of a team
- Develop your self confidence

There are over 450 Cylchoedd Meithrin throughout Wales and they are run by local voluntary management committees. Training and support for volunteers is provided by Mudiad Meithrin – the umbrella organisation for Cylchoedd Meithrin (Welsh-medium playgroups). Cylchoedd Meithrin provide Welsh-medium education and childcare for children aged 2-5years old.

**Interested?**

Contact: **Kim Lewis-Davies**

Phone: **07462946181** E-mail: **kim.davies@meithrin.cymru**

**#Cymraeg2050** [www.meithrin.cymru/for-committees](http://www.meithrin.cymru/for-committees)

## Eisiau Gwneud Gwahaniaeth yn eich Cymuned?

Mae Cylchoedd Meithrin yn eich ardal yn edrych am wirfoddolwyr!

### Pam Gwirfoddoli?

- Gwneud gwahaniaeth i fywydau pobl eraill yn y gymuned
- Enhance your CV – gall gwirfoddoli arwain at gyfleoedd gwaith neu newid gyrfa
- Use your professional skills to benefit others
- Cefnogi'r iaith ac addysg Gymraeg
- Datblygu sgiliau newydd a gwyrbodaeth
- Defnyddio'ch sgiliau proffesiynol er lles eraill
- Bod yn rhan o dîm
- Magu hunan hyder

Mae dros 450 o Gylchoedd Meithrin ar draws Cymru ac maent yn cael eu rheoli gan bwyllgorau rheoli gwirfoddol yn y gymuned. Mae hyfforddiant a chefnogaeth i wirfoddolwyr ar y pwyllgor ar gael gan Mudiad Meithrin (y mudiad ymbarél i Gylchoedd Meithrin). Mae Cylchoedd Meithrin yn darparu gofal ac addysg i blant bach 2-5 oed.

**Diddordeb?**

Cysylltwch gyda **Kim Lewis-Davies**

Ffôn: **07462 946181** E-bost: **kim.davies@meithrin.cymru**

**#MeithrinMiliwn** [www.meithrin.cymru/i-bwyllgorau](http://www.meithrin.cymru/i-bwyllgorau)

# INFORM



Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil • *Gweithredu Gwirfoddol Merthyr Tudful*

## That's all from VAMT for now.

Tell us what you think of this way of keeping you up to date with what others are doing. Don't forget, if your organisation is not a member, why not join us and keep up to date with all the latest news, funding opportunities, and other opportunities that are out there.

## Why not subscribe to our blog??

<http://vamtnetworknews.blogspot.com/>

## YOU CAN BE PART OF THIS MAGAZINE TOO!

If you would like to include an article, news item or Focus on your group in the next edition, contact VAMT enquiries for more information: [enquiries@vamt.net](mailto:enquiries@vamt.net).

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[www.vamt.net](http://www.vamt.net)



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/Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil

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**Karen Vowles**  
Loneliness and Isolation Development  
Officer

**Bravon Mushiringani**  
BAME Engagement Officer

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**Paul Gray**

**Kayleigh Nor-val**

**Michelle Jones**

**Nicola Mahoney**

**Mark Ward**

**Michael Ronan**

**Brian Lewis** (co-opted)

**Suzanne Davies** (co-opted)

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The views expressed in this edition of Inform are not necessarily those of Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil.

Croesawir erthyglau nail ai'n ddwyieithog neu'n uniaith Gymraeg.



Cefnogi Trydydd  
Sector **Cymru**  
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