

October 2021

Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil • *Gweithredu Gwirfoddol Merthyr Tudful*

Anti-Poverty Initiatives in Merthyr Tydfil

Life has changed very much for many of us since the start of the pandemic in March 2020. While it has had a devastating impact on family life, relationships and mental health, it has also impacted on our economy. With furlough having come to an end, together with the additional uplift to Universal Credit, plus rising energy and food prices, more and more families and individuals face an austere winter ahead. This edition of Inform focuses on the initiatives which have developed in Merthyr Tydfil during the pandemic aimed at helping those who can least afford it.



Welcome to the October 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.

Feeding Merthyr Tydfil – The Food Prosperity Network

Merthyr Tydfil Food Prosperity Network was established in 2018, following an approach by Oxfam Cymru, as a partnership approach to tackling food inequality, accessibility and affordability. It comprises third sector and statutory organisations working across Merthyr Tydfil with the aim of individually and collaboratively addressing and mitigating the impact of food poverty within the brough.

Originally, it delivered a range of co-ordinated messages put out on social media and other networks around the availability of support for example, Merthyr Valleys Homes' food hampers and school holiday activities, MTHA's Fit and Fed programme, Healthy Start vouchers, free school meals for children not already registered and the availability of the School Uniform Grant.

Take up of these services significantly increased as a result. In January 2020, the Welsh Local Government Association made funding available to Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council to distribute in small grants to fund initiatives which tackled food inequality and bids were submitted amongst others by the three housing associations in Merthyr Tydfil for a network of community Fridges.

When Covid struck, the establishment of the Food Prosperity Network proved invaluable. So many community organisations repurposed themselves, becoming a key source of food for those who were in difficulty, whether shielding or in financial crisis. While this has changed and evolved over the last months, new initiatives continue to develop. The network itself has become a part of the Feeding Britain network, the only area in Wales to do so. Andrew Forsey from Feeding Britain said "Feeding Britain had the privilege of welcoming Merthyr Tydfil to our movement this year, as our first regional partnership in Wales.

"The Feeding Merthyr Tydfil programme has already begun to stitch together a robust safety net, consisting of new projects to support families and individuals on low incomes, including a fuel bank and a cluster of pantries offering affordable food at the heart of the communities we serve.

We look forward to adding to this programme in the months ahead and sharing this good practice throughout Feeding Britain's 35 regional partnerships, so we can tackle head on the issues that put people at risk of going hungry or having to rely on food banks. I look forward to our visit to Merthyr Tydfil in November"

Partnership Working for the future

In July 2021 Welsh Government announced £2m to address food sufficiency issues. Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, Merthyr Valleys Homes and Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil submitted a bid on behalf of the Network and £100,000 was awarded.

A range of capital and revenue allocations will be shared with community organisations and a pilot within a small number of schools and pre-school groups to engage children, young people, parents / carers, families and older people in a range of cooking and community growing activities and sessions.

An additional element of the bid is to undertake a piece of work to ensure food sufficiency work in the Borough is sustainable.

The aim of this funding is to:

- support community food organisations in the here and now to meet the needs of households living in food poverty.
- support communities to invest in initiatives that help tackle the root causes of food poverty and food insecurity and develop healthy, sustainable solutions which involve and engage our communities
- support an increased number of people facing food poverty by strengthening existing community food initiatives.

Councillor Chris Davies said: *"The Council is delighted to receive this funding from Welsh Government to work with a number of partners to continue some of the great work started during the pandemic period and enable organisations across the borough to work with & support communities to increase their skills and knowledge in areas such as cooking on a budget for families along with developing a range of exciting growing initiatives. It is about winning over hearts and minds towards more sustainable solutions to tackling the food insecurity challenge facing our communities"*

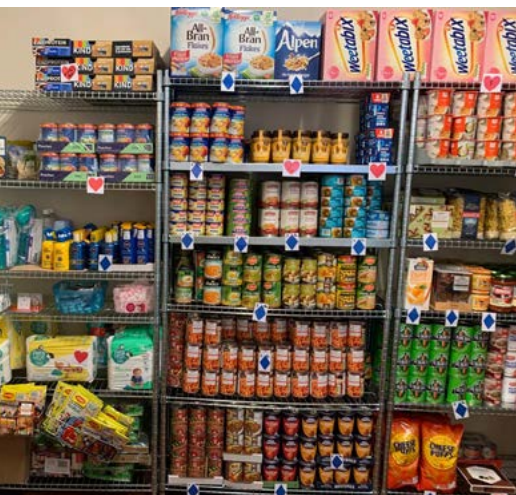


Hope Pantry

Research from Your Local Pantry, headed by Church Action on Poverty, has highlighted that the number of families seeking emergency food in the UK has increased by almost one third in the past 12 months, with some areas of the UK seeing as many as one in four people struggling to access food.

Food pantries are a growing way to address this issue, as a sustainable long term solution for those struggling with food insecurity, with customers able to shop without having to prove their level of need, and with no limit of time that people can use the pantry.

Hope Pantry Merthyr was set up in May 2021 as a response to food poverty in Merthyr Tydfil. Food pantries are designed to offer a membership model, whereby members pay £3.50 per week and in return are able to buy fresh, frozen, chilled and ambient foods that would cost at least £15. Our food is fresh, supermarket quality, sourced from Fareshare Cymru, and would have otherwise gone to waste. In addition, we always have a variety of fresh fruit and vegetables which are free to members. We link with Pet Food Bank based in Cardiff and are able to offer cat and dog food as part of the weekly allowance.



Hope Pantry is part of the Your Local Pantry national franchise, and we open on a Tuesday morning and a Friday afternoon. We are set up like a shop, and members tell us they enjoy coming to shop in Pantry, and value the choice of food on offer.

Members tell us that thanks to the savings they have made on their food shopping they've been able to begin paying off debts and household bills, something that they would otherwise be struggling with. We currently have 161 pantry members and are continuing to grow every week.



What is Hope Pantry?

Pantry is a membership scheme where you pay a weekly donation of £3.50 and receive at least 10 items that would normally cost £10 or more. It's located at Hope Church Merthyr on High Street next to the Redhouse. Please use the side door on Newcastle Street to access.



Who is Pantry for?

People who need to bring down their food shopping bills, and access good food, whilst freeing up more money for other essentials and enabling tight budgets to stretch a little further. It means that people can stay afloat in tough times, rather than being swept into debt.

How do I join Pantry?

Go to hopemerthyr.org.uk/helpathope or call 07790801686

What kind of food is there?

You will be able to choose from a selection of fresh, chilled, frozen and ambient food. From ready meals and fresh meat to tins and fresh fruit, each week there are different items to choose from. You will be able to choose at least 4 high price items and at least 5 lower priced items.

What else do I need to know?

- There are two Pantry days at Hope Pantry, a Tuesday from 9:30 to 11am and a Friday from 4 to 6pm.
- Please bring your own bags including a COOL BAG as we are trying to reduce and reuse as much as possible and you will not be able to receive chilled or frozen goods without a cool bag
- Sometimes our food has short use by dates, so always pay attention to those when you are unpacking your shopping.



High Street
Merthyr Tydfil, CF47 8UG
hopemerthyr.org.uk/helpathope
07790801686

Hope Pantry has two coordinators – Heidi and Lisa. We couldn't run without the support of our amazing volunteers, who work alongside Heidi & Lisa. Pantry is run for the community, by the community, and we encourage members to volunteer with us, providing opportunities for building on confidence, knowledge and skills in many areas.

If you'd like to know more about Hope Pantry please drop us a message or give us a call.

 Hope Pantry Merthyr

email:
hopepantry@hopemerthyr.org.uk

Tel: 07790 801686.

Taff Bargoed Food Bank

Taff Bargoed Foodbank is also part of the Trussell Trust network, operated by the Parish of Treharris, Trelewis, Bedlinog & Llanfabon.

Set up at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic with grant funding from various sources, to date we have supported over 1,584 with emergency food parcels on a referral basis from local support agencies and community professionals. We are currently able to offer delivery to all CF46 postcode areas if we have volunteers available, otherwise a collection service is always available. Our main distribution centre is based in Nelson, and we are planning on opening a new foodbank drop-off and collection point in Treharris, subject to grant funding.

What else are we doing?

Community Food Co-op

For a number of years, we have operated a community food co-operative which provides access to quality, fresh, local and affordable fruit and vegetables. Orders are taken a week in advance for bags of seasonal produce and collected the following week. Each bag costs £4.50 or a 'Healthy Start' Voucher. Refreshments are usually available, where donations are welcome but not necessary. Since the pandemic this activity has been suspended, however we are hoping to resume this activity in the near future, subject to the easing of restrictions.

Community Food Larder

Alongside our foodbank activity we operate a very popular community food larder out of our centre in Nelson. Anyone is welcome, no questions are asked, no referral is needed and there are no membership costs. We have a team of volunteers who collect surplus food from various supermarkets including Tesco, Co-op, Aldi, Greggs and Sainsburys. These items are then redistributed through the larder into the local community and also reduce food waste. Currently this activity runs Monday-Friday 9.30am-11.30am out of our hub in Nelson, and on the weekends from the porch at St John's Church. Subject to grant funding we are planning on resuming a further larder activity at our new food-hub in Treharris.



Hey Girls

We are committed to tackling period poverty through our partnership with our friends at Hey Girls. A selection of free sanitary items are available at all activities we operate.

Vodafone Buyone, Getone

We are committed to tackling digital and connection poverty through our partnership with Vodafone and the Trussell Trust. We provide a free Vodafone sim-card for 6 months of 20GB data, unlimited calls, and unlimited texts. To receive a sim-card we ask that clients are referred from a community professional or support agency who assesses the need on an individual basis. The client will need an unlocked handset or one that is already on the Vodafone network to use the sim-card provided.

We are making a difference working with:

FareShare Cymru. Neighbourly, Tesco, Sainsbury's, Co-op Food. Greggs, Trussell Trust, Vodafone, Bankuet, Bankthefood, Tempo Time Share Credits, Invest my Community Hengoed, Tin on the Wall, Local Schools, Taff Rhymney Ministry Area, Local Churches and Chapels and Mothers' Union.

Taff Bargoed Foodbank
High Street, Nelson, CF46 6HA

(t) 01443 450 832

(e) info@taffbargoed.foodbank.org.uk

(w) [@taffbargoed.foodbank.org.uk](https://www.taffbargoed.foodbank.org.uk)

(w) [@parishofttbl.com](https://www.parishofttbl.com)



**Merthyr
Cynon
Foodbank**

Merthyr Cynon Foodbank provides emergency food for people in crisis in Merthyr Tydfil and Cynon Valley (Aberdare and Mountain Ash). We have 9 distribution centres although 3 are temporarily closed at the moment.

We fed 7,192 people in crisis in the last financial year and so far over 2,900 have been fed this year.

Merthyr Cynon Foodbank is part of the Trussell Trust's UK-wide foodbank network.

All clients are referred to us by frontline care professionals. Every food item is donated by individuals, churches, organisations and schools. We were overwhelmed by the generosity of the public during the pandemic.

We have 3 PCPs (Permanent Collection Points) in 3 supermarkets (Tesco Extra in Merthyr, Tesco Superstore in Aberdare and Asda Dowlais Top) where shoppers donate weekly. So far many local schools and churches are sending their Harvest Donations. In November we will have our annual 3-day Tesco Collection in Merthyr and Aberdare. The public support is always overwhelming during this event!

We are very grateful to our communities, donors and volunteers who are very generous and supportive.

The UK government's decision to go ahead with the £20 a week cut to Universal Credit will have a huge impact on more than 6 million families and our food banks. The Chancellor should choose to protect people and keep the lifeline! Our fight continues. . . we believe that together we can stop hunger in the UK and the need for food banks! Merthyr Cynon Foodbank is located at the Christian Centre in Gurnos.

Fuel Bank at Citizens Advice Merthyr Tydfil



Citizens Advice Merthyr Tydfil is a registered charity who offer free, independent, confidential and impartial advice, and campaign on issues affecting peoples' lives. Our goal is to help everyone find a way forward, no matter who you are, what your situation is or what problems you may face. We value diversity, promote equality and challenge discrimination wherever we see it.

Through partnership working, we recently started running a project with Feeding Britain and the Fuel Bank Foundation to issue fuel vouchers. This is a fantastic partnership assisted by VAMT, and a brilliant resource for those in Merthyr Tydfil who are struggling. With the pandemic still affecting people's lives, cuts to Universal Credit and the increasing costs of energy bills, this is needed now more than ever. Our team of advisers are on hand to fully explore our clients' circumstances and to ensure the appropriate assistance is always offered.

For more information on our services and how to get in touch with us, please visit our website - www.citizensadvicecmtydfil.org.uk.

Fit and Fed Merthyr Tydfil

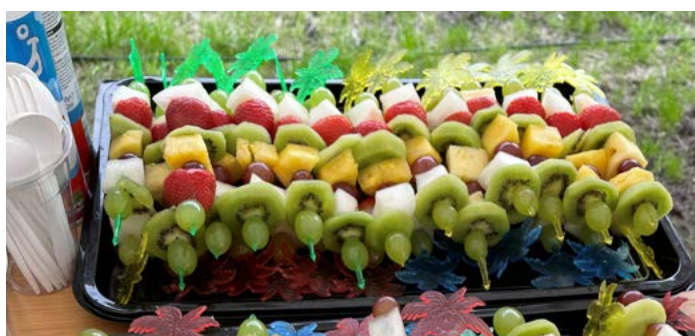
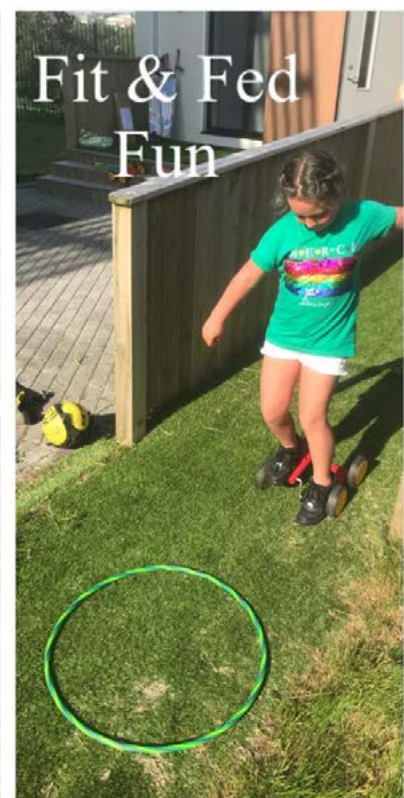
Fit and Fed is a school holiday program that looks to enrich the lives of the young people of Merthyr Tydfil. As well as providing free access to sports and cultural activities, the project provides a nutritious meal and snacks to fuel the children and young people for the day ahead. The project further helps young people to develop their confidence and skills through providing accredited training around sport and food, so that they can help deliver the project to their peers.

Currently, the project works with eight partners across the youth sector within Merthyr Tydfil. Since starting the project in the summer of 2018, the project has engaged with over 900 different children and young people and has provided over 2500 meals.

This summer, the project ran a beach sports festival at Aberavon Beach. Dallaglio RugbyWorks and Welsh Triathlon were invited to the day, where they provided taster sessions for the 110 young people who were there. The highlight of the day was the surfing lessons provided by Surf School Wales, where most young people learnt to ride the waves. As part of a community partnership with Tesco Merthyr Tydfil, they provided a range of fruit for healthy snacks and kept the group hydrated with donations of water.

The vision of Fit and Fed Merthyr Tydfil going forward is to expand the project to up to 14 sites across the borough. With an ambitious bid being proposed to the Big Lottery Fund, we hope to gain funding that not only extends the provision to 14 sites, but also provides a range of development opportunities for young volunteers.

Fit and Fed Merthyr Tydfil has also been shortlisted by Tesco's Merthyr Tydfil as one of their local projects to support. Between the 1st of October 2021 and the 1st of December 2021, you can vote for the project using the blue coins in store. If successful, the funding will contribute to the delivery of Fit and Fed across the borough.





Ty Pantri

Ty Pantri is Merthyr Tydfil Housing Association's project that is committed to reducing food poverty locally. The pandemic highlighted a much-needed approach to ensure that affordable fresh produce is delivered to the community, alongside ambient foods, that will help stock the family cupboards. Therefore, Ty Pantri has combined the principles of a traditional food coop, alongside a FareShare pantry model.

Covid-19 presented many challenges for the community of Merthyr Tydfil. Being able to access affordable fresh and ambient food was one of these. With a select few supermarkets offering delivery many of which set minimum order amounts, many were left many stranded with food choices. Ty Pantri understood the fears of accessing supermarkets, the fear of using public transport, and the costs that are attributed to a supermarket delivery. As a result, we have built in a delivery service to Ty Patri. The success of this has resulted in 125 regular customers who access the fresh and ambient produce. Ty Pantri commits to supporting young families. Those who are in receipt of Healthy Start Vouchers can use these to purchase fresh fruit and vegetables and have these delivered to their doorstep.

Ty Pantri continues to develop and enhance its service. Being committed to reducing food poverty, the service also looks to educate its customer base. We have developed "how to" videos that are uploaded to YouTube so that customers can learn to cook step-by-step meals that can be made from Ty Pantri produce.

For further information contact Bethan Thomas
b.thomas@mtha.org.uk



Cupboard Essentials Box

ALL FOR JUST £5 AND DELIVERED TO YOUR DOOR



A LIMITED NUMBER OF BAGS ARE AVAILABLE AND WILL OPERATE ON A FIRST COME FIRST SERVED BASIS - ONE BAG PER CUSTOMER

To Place an Order Call

01685 352 800 Option 0

Order by 3pm on a Wednesday for a Thursday Delivery



A typical package will include the following:

- 80 Teabags
- 1 Jar of Coffee
- 1 Carton of Milk
- 1 Box of Cereal
- 2 Tins of Beans
- 2 Tins of Spaghetti
- 1 Tin of Chickpeas
- 1 Tin of Minced Beef in Onion Gravy
- 1 Jar of Chilli Con Carne Sauce
- 1 Tub of Mustard
- 1 Can of Peas
- 2 Tins of Cream Tomato and Basil Soup
- 1 Carton of Pasta
- 1 Pack of Spaghetti Pasta
- 1 Large Tin of Chopped Pork
- 2 Small Tins of Chopped Pork
- 6 Tins of Tuna in Brine
- 2 Tins of Sardines in Brine
- 2 Cartons of Blueberry and Blackcurrant Jelly
- 5 Small Packs of Mini Randoms
- 6 Packs of Pom-Bear Crisps



Sunday Dinner Box £4

JUST £4 WITH DELIVERY TO YOUR DOOR - PERFECT FOR FAMILY SUNDAY ROASTS



Oriental Cuisine Box £4

JUST £4 WITH DELIVERY TO YOUR DOOR - PERFECT FOR MAKING A CURRY, STIRFRY, CHILLIE OR BOLOGNESE



Fruit Box £4

JUST £4 WITH DELIVERY TO YOUR DOOR - PERFECT FOR HEALTHY SNACKS OR LUNCHBOX FILLERS



Super Salad Box £4

JUST £4 WITH DELIVERY TO YOUR DOOR - PERFECT FOR HEALTHY SALADS FOR THE WEEK



Stew Box £2.50

JUST £2.50 WITH DELIVERY TO YOUR DOOR - PERFECT FOR THE COLD WINTER MONTHS



Free Range Eggs

£2 A DOZEN OR £1 FOR HALF



01685 352800 Option 0

ORDER BY 3PM WEDNESDAY FOR THURSDAY DELIVERY AFTER 12PM



Gellideg Foundation Group

The Gellideg Foundation Group is operating the Merthyr Tydfil Community Food Pantry from the Wellbeing Centre. It operates like a shop, members come and select their produce from us, including fruit and veg and free items.



Twice a week we collect food from Fare Share



This is taken to the centre, stored in cupboards and a selection is on display in the small pantry shop



Members come on Tuesday mornings and Thursday afternoons to select their items. We have 80 members and a growing reserve list. A bag of produce costs £3.50

The pantry has groceries and toiletries, fruit and veg are free. We are also opening a new non-members day on a Friday to increase access to the pantry.

Some products are not as popular as others, so we cook these in our kitchen and offer them to pantry members as soups or muffins, crumbles or casseroles instead.



Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Tenancy Hardship Fund

Welsh Government have introduced a Tenancy Hardship Grant that is designed to support people who have fallen behind on their rent by more than eight weeks between 1st March 2020 and 30th June 2021 because of the coronavirus pandemic. The grant is designed to help people stay in their homes and prevent them losing their tenancies.

The grant will be administered by the local authority and will be open to tenants who are not in receipt of housing-related benefits.



Eligibility

To apply for a Tenancy Hardship Grant, you must have had financial hardship due to the Covid-19 pandemic that meant that you have not been able to pay your rent.

You will:

- Have built up 8 weeks or more of rent arrears between 1 March 2020 and 30 June 2021
- Have struggled to pay your rent or rent arrears due to Covid-19
- Live in and hold a tenancy for a private sector property in Wales
- Not have been getting housing benefit or housing cost payments through Universal Credit when you built up your rent arrears
- Not have been able to fully pay your rent during the period when you went into arrears because of Covid-19.

How to apply

If you think you are eligible for the scheme then please fill out the application online by using the below webpage:

<https://www.merthyr.gov.uk/do-it-online/request-or-apply/tenancy-hardship-grant-thg-application-form/>

If you are experiencing issues with the online application process please contact **01685 725000** or email **HousingGateway@merthyr.gov.uk**

Merthyr Tydfil Borough Credit Union



Are you worrying about money?

At Merthyr Tydfil Credit Union we're working hard to make sure no one in our community becomes a victim of unethical lenders. That's why we offer everyone the chance to save and borrow with us!

So, whether you need money for Christmas or an emergency bill, we're here to help!

5 Reasons to join our Credit Union:

1. We're **FREE** to join!
2. All of our Savings are covered by **FREE** life insurance! (T&C's Apply)
3. Our repayments are always affordable.
4. We're not like a bank; we're run for members by members.
5. Your money stays local and helps your community.

Don't forget we're also here if you want to start saving money. A small amount set aside every week can make a massive difference and you'll be surprised how fast your savings will grow. You can pay into your savings in different ways too, such as through our payroll deduction scheme, cash in the office or even through an online banking transfer.

Whatever you may be saving for our secure accounts are easy to open and accessible.

So, if you are interested in having a loan with us or just want to kick start your savings visit:

www.mtbcu.org.uk to get yourself started or visit our office at 139 High Street, Merthyr Tydfil, CF47 8DN.

Spread the cost of Christmas!

Are you looking to spread the cost of Christmas this year?
We can help!

| Borrow | Repay |
|---------------|---|
| £500 | £12 a week for 53 weeks <small>Paying a total of £98.36 interest (42.6% APR)</small> |
| £1,000 | £23 a week for 53 weeks <small>Paying a total of £193.13 interest (42.6% APR)</small> |

We're **FREE** to join and it's easy to apply for a loan simply visit:
www.mtbcu.org.uk
or call into our office!



Matthew Beck joins Reconnect 50+ Project



Due to obtaining a successful 6-month Kickstart opportunity with the support from WCVA, Matthew will be offering IT assistance to Reconnect clients who want to learn how to surf the Net and use a tablet to communicate with relatives abroad-or just to learn the basics - Beginners most welcome. Matthew will take a step-by-step gentle approach and will be providing IT support during our Reconnect Activity groups in Merthyr Tydfil and RCT (Places limited and must be pre-booked).

**KICKSTART
SCHEME**

For more information and to request attendance at our activity groups ring

Project Manager: Helen McShea 07498 187810,

Project Support officer: Chloe Rees 07495 549891 or

Community project support assistant (IT) Matthew Beck on 07852 985536



DO YOU KNOW ANYONE WHO IS 50+ and LONELY & ISOLATED? Encourage them to join us.

We have places available at our weekly Reconnect Meetings (Covid safeguards in place), meet some new people, come for a chat, cup of tea, and join in some tabletop activities.

- **Monday's** Merthyr Town, The Hub- Hope Church basement-starts 10.15-11.45
- **Tuesday's** Calon Las Community Hub, Gurnos (Gurnos Shops) Starts 10.15-11.45
- **Wednesday's** Dowlais Elim Family Church (Near lady Charlotte) starts 10.15-11.45

Please ring **Chloe on 07495549891** to pre-book and reserve your place



Merthyr cardboard reuse initiative gains Tesco support

ELITE Paper Solutions, an environmental social enterprise in Merthyr Tydfil, has gained support from Tesco Extra (Merthyr) with their new cardboard re-use initiative 'ECO Animal Bedding'.

The initiative began in February of this year, and involves collection of used, good quality corrugated cardboard, which is then finely shredded and bagged for reuse. This produces a low dust, highly absorbent product which not only reduces potential landfill but provides an environmentally friendly bedding for a range of animals and pets. A huge benefit of this new product is that it helps animals that suffer respiratory problems such as COPD, due to the low dust content.

ECO Animal Bedding is fully biodegradable which breaks down much quicker than traditional animal bedding, once mucked out it can then be used as an effective mulch. In addition to this, the high absorbency provides a cleaner, more comfortable environment for your animals.

Before engaging with ELITE Paper Solutions (EPS), waste cardboard from Tesco Extra (Merthyr) was sent from their store back to distribution centres in Avonmouth, Magor and Daventry, which equates to at least a 120 mile round trip. By switching to ELITE Paper Solutions, Tesco Extra have effectively reduced their carbon footprint, at one store, by approximately 10 tonnes of CO₂e per annum, in terms of waste cardboard alone.

Natalie Morgan from Tesco Extra (Merthyr) said:

"As a company that prides itself on its CSR values, it's highly important that waste material are disposed of in the correct manner. As ELITE Paper Solutions are local to us, we have the reassurance that the service provider isn't travelling considerable distances to collect the waste, which helps reduce our carbon footprint."

ELITE's main charity 'ELITE Supported Employment Agency Ltd' has been assisting disabled people to obtain and maintain paid employment opportunities, within the community, via one to one support since 1994.

ELITE Paper Solutions, a not for profit Social Enterprise was launched in 2015. The nature of the business ensures that there is a job that will meet every need, irrespective of the person's disability, making it a fully inclusive workplace. The staff are of varying age, ability and equality of opportunity is a strong ethical focus. This new product will create jobs, volunteering and training opportunities, providing added benefits.

To further aid ECO Animal Bedding, ELITE Paper Solutions has been awarded grant funding from 'WRAP Cymru', which aims to support re-use, refurbishment, and re-manufacturing activities in Wales.

The funding will support ELITE Paper Solutions source and purchase new machinery, in particular a compact baler which will aid production enabling growth as the business evolves over time and saving thousands of tonnes of cardboard going to landfill.



Bishop Hedley pupils in open air projects

The return of school saw renewed interest in outdoor activities. About 52 pupils from year-11 classes attended open-air lessons and fieldwork at Nant Llwynog Park. This was a party from Bishop Hedley Catholic High School in Merthyr Tydfil, led by Head of Geography, Alex Turley.

After an introduction from the Park Friends Chairman, Edward Dawson, the troupe was split into several smaller groups. Some looked for autumnal fungi while others started litter picking. Some had a great September day observing while others worked on scrub clearance, removing saplings of Alder and Willow that are encroaching onto the grasslands. The boys and girls did a great job in opening up a large area, though there is more still to be done.

One group went off to survey the ant hills to the north. These are the visible bumps in the grass made by the Yellow Meadow ant, and many can be about 100 years old. Jim Davies led the group and gave them a talk on how these common creatures can affect the landscape. They were also amazed to find that Jim had led expeditions to Africa and South America, leading to a new species of bat being named after him. This privilege is rarer than winning the Nobel Prize!

Nant Llwynog is an old colliery site which has been expertly smoothed out and landscaped by Tom Bramley. It is good place to study nature and identify species or just to relax in and absorb the atmosphere. The wide range of wildlife present makes it worthwhile checking the plant list, which numbers over 250 kinds.



The guides were Ai-Lin Kee, expert leader, Jim Davies, local naturalist and Mark Davies from Keep Wales Tidy. The pupils had a great time; many never have visited such a site, and thought the guides were 'out of Jumanji'.



Treharris Park

The Taff Bargoed Development Trust has donated the sculpture of a dragon at Treharris Park. The sculpture is located near to the bandstand and will now help to attract additional users to the Park and help increase activity in the process.

The dragon adds to the other sculptures present that has created such an attractive experience for people to enjoy. A totem pole sculpture will also be carved shortly to further expand the Park's attraction.



Friends of Thomastown Park

A group of community members has set up a "Friends of Thomastown Park" group. They have successfully constituted the group and are working closely with VAMT for advice and funding as well as local councillors.

The aim is to make the park an enjoyable family environment that is safe and clean. Volunteers are working with Keep Wales Tidy and are in the process of holding weekly litter pick sessions.

Events for family enjoyment is another area with a spooky Halloween walk in the park, in fancy dress and a photo opportunity to have pictures taken around a pumpkin patch.

For further information contact **Diane Newman Jenkins on 07747522724**





Tele friends from Tenovus

Our Tenovus Cancer Care Tele-friend befriending service was set up at the start of the pandemic for anyone affected by cancer. We knew from the start that human connections were more important than ever to our cancer community's overall health and wellbeing. And, our wonderful volunteers stepped up to help when people needed us most.

Our Tele-friend volunteers are trained and offer weekly calls in Welsh or English. They're matched to a service user and chat about the everyday things and common interests like cooking, gardening, sports or what boxset they've recently watched. It's really lifted people's spirits and made an impact during, and beyond the pandemic.

Volunteering's a great way of socially connecting with other people. So, our Tele-friends also checked in with our retail volunteers when our 59 shops closed their doors in lockdowns, so nobody was cut off from us completely despite everything we were all going through.

We find that our Tele-friend volunteers benefit from the service as much as their match. One of them told us that:

Telefriends is a simple and easy way of communicating. It's a nice feeling doing something for someone else and if I can make a difference to someone's day then it's all worthwhile and I hope if I was in a similar situation someone would be there for me.

I love talking to and meeting new people and it's always nice to hear another voice and chat and everyone should have the opportunity to be able to experience that.

I am aware there are people out there that Tenovus Cancer Care supports who may feel lonely and isolated. From experience, looking forward to hearing a friendly voice and having a chat to someone can make a huge difference to your day, your wellbeing and give you a boost.

You can find out more about our Tele-friends befriending service and other ways we support cancer patients and their loved ones by visiting our website www.tenovuscancercare.org.uk



An Update from Stephens and George

Holiday Clubs

At Stephens and George Charitable Trust we were thrilled to welcome back young people over the Summer of Fun. #nophonesorcomputers

The young people participated in activities throughout the six weeks, ranging from author workshops, sports, arts and crafts, trips, slime factory fun, online safety, cooking, foraging, environmental workshops.

During the October half term we will be hosting a Spooktacular Halloween Discovery Club with ghoulishly good and frighteningly fun activities from the 26th to the 28th October. A parent and toddler (0 to 5 years) Halloween celebration on the 29th October and a Spooky Walk on the 29th October.

Gardens

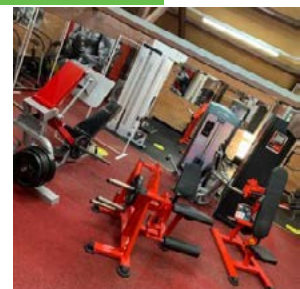
The development of the five acres of land in which Dowlais Community Centre is set has continued throughout the summer and autumn. We are one of the first organisations in the country to benefit from this year's Local Places for Nature development scheme. Stephens and George Charitable Trust will be creating an enhanced wildlife community garden at Dowlais Community Centre. All the plants, tools and materials are being provided for free by Keep Wales Tidy.



Helen Hughes, Charity Coordinator said: *The community gardens at Dowlais Community Centre are a fantastic resource for the local community, we are delighted to have been awarded this package to continue to enhance the gardens for local people and future generations. The Green Flag award winning gardens are a jewel for the community to enjoy.*

Gym and Hall

Here at Dowlais Community Centre we have been very active during the past months upgrading our Gym & Hall facilities. We have added new equipment to our gym such as a new bench press station & 2 new assault bikes, these are proving to be very popular. We are currently home to 100+ members and increasing by the week.



Our main Centre Hall is home to a wide range of clubs and groups including Karate (who have been with us for 30 years) also Taekwondo, Football, Dance, Dog Training, Zumba & our newest members are Merthyr Roller Derby. Our hall is hired out for all kinds of clubs, groups & events so there is something for everyone. We have recently totally refurbished our toilet & shower facilities, we also added new divider curtains to our Hall and new tumble mats for our classes to use.

Volunteers

In partnership with EE we hosted a volunteer day at the Trust, where a team of EE staff gave up their time to volunteer on our projects. The volunteers spent the day planting new autumnal flowers to enhance the surroundings for the community. They assisted us in placing our new wildlife homes around the gardens, for birds, bats, bee, insects and hedgehogs. Alongside these activities the EE volunteers kick started our forthcoming Christmas project, helping us to create packs for this festive program.

Volunteers contribute greatly to supporting the community by volunteering their time to help charities such as ours. Without their help, time and skills, projects for the community would not be possible. The trust has many volunteer opportunities for people to develop skills, meet new people, help others and participate in community wellbeing. Opportunities at the Trust include admin, play and youth work, café assistant, gym assistant, reception, cleaning, gardening, book shop and book scanning.



News from The Parent Network

The Parent Network is working alongside Families First to bring community engagement to all.

First few weeks back after summer break, but we are busy with new parents joining in our groups. We have Crochet groups in Soar and at the Fabric Elf, cooking with our Cup Cake group and Craft Club as well as sewing in Calon Las.

We have also been working on a Random Acts of Kindness project throughout the summer. One of our ladies has been making premature baby hats for Prince Charles Hospital. We have also been busy leaving crochet flowers and worry worms for members of the public to find. We hope they smile at our little gifts and take them home or regift them.

Further information from Diane Newman Jenkins
dianenewmanjenkins@yahoo.co.uk



INFORM



Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil • *Gweithredu Gwirfoddol Merthyr Tudful*

Pastures New for Carol

October saw the end of another era for VAMT when Carol Hindley, Administration and Finance Manager, left the organisation for an exciting new job opportunity with Pontypridd Town Council. Carol spent a total of 32 years working for VAMT, starting as an Administration Assistant with Mid Glamorgan Association of Voluntary Organisations, assisting Ian Davy, VAMT's former Chief Officer establish the first office base in Merthyr Tydfil and became Admin and Finance Manager when VAMT was established.

We wish her well in her new career.



New Staff Member

Tim Carter started as the Local Implementation Lead (LIL) for VAMT on 4th October. This role is part of the Lloyds Bank Foundation Development Team's work in the six communities across England and Wales; it's exciting for VAMT that Merthyr Tydfil is the only one of the six communities in Wales!

The overall purpose of Lloyds Bank Foundation Development Team is to develop and deliver their asset based 'system change' work with charities and a wide range of partners in Merthyr Tydfil. The focus of the work in Merthyr Tydfil is on improving mental health services for Children and Young People.

As Tim is very new in post (at the time of going to print), he is spending time familiarising himself with the current services in Merthyr Tydfil. If you'd like to connect with him, either email tim.carter@vamt.net or ring 07392920359. We'll keep you informed in future issues of Inform!



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.

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Lesley Hodgson
Community Co-ordinator –
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Karen Vowles
Loneliness and Isolation
Development Officer

Bravon Mushiringani
BAME Engagement Officer

Tim Carter
Local Implementation Lead

VAMT's Board

Anne Roberts

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.