

Annual Report

2020-21



MISSION STATEMENT

To increase the extent, quality and impact of voluntary action in the County Borough of Merthyr Tydfil by supporting, representing and assisting Third Sector organisations and volunteering.

Effecting change by enhancing well-being of individuals, organisations and communities.

VISION

- To be the centre of excellence in Merthyr Tydfil for the provision of services to organisations and individuals involved with the Third Sector and volunteering.
- To create a healthy community by helping to develop organisations to meet their needs, maximising volunteering opportunities and sharing our mission with all stakeholders.



**VOLUNTARY ACTION
MERTHYR TYDFIL
GWEITHREDU GWIRFODDOL
MERTHYR TUDFUL**



www.vamt.net



Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil
Volunteer Centre Merthyr Tydfil



@VAMTtweets
@VAMTvolunteer
@CwmTafCC

Voluntary Action Centre, 89-90 Pontmorlais,
High Street, Merthyr Tydfil CF47 8UH
Tel: 01685 353900 • enquiries@vamt.net

Charity Registration Number 1118403
Company Registration Number 6058360



Gwirfoddoli Cymru
Volunteering Wales



Cefnogi Trydydd
Sector **Cymru**
Third Sector
Support **Wales**



FOREWORD BY THE CHAIR AND CHIEF OFFICER

We have pleasure in introducing the twenty-fourth Annual Report of Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil for the year 2020-2021 which has been extraordinary in terms of both challenge and achievement.

No one would have predicted a whole reporting period within the context of a pandemic, where staff worked largely from their homes and “Teams” calls became the norm. However, in this time of lockdowns and restrictions there was an evident rich and strong sense of community within the County Borough, where individuals, groups and organisations came together, between and across sectors, in support of their beneficiaries, neighbours and each other.

Our main delivery focus continued across four core pillars, volunteering; sustainable funding; good governance and engagement and influencing and our achievements in these areas is demonstrated in the following report. We continued to deliver regional projects funded via Integrated Care Funding and administered a significant number of grant schemes across both the local and regional area. These schemes enabled the sector to respond flexibly and confidently to community needs, especially in respect of wellbeing, isolation and winter pressures.

We would like to commend VAMT staff for their hard work and dedication throughout the year during a time of great challenge and significant organisational change. Our Board and Staff remain committed to driving the organisation forward, to supporting our members and partners and to embracing new collaborative opportunities in the year ahead.

We would like to thank Wales Council for Voluntary Action for their support throughout the year, and for the continued support of our funders; Welsh Government; Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council and Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board.



Paul Gray, Chair



Sharon Richards, Chief Officer

FACTS AND FIGURES

What follows is a comparison across the previous two reporting periods:

Key Performance Indicators	2019-20	2020-21
Total number of instances of advice / support) to organisations / stakeholders	1792	1415
Number of volunteers placed / supported	223	212
Number of Third Sector organisations provided with direct advice/support	177	202
Number of Third Sector organisations referred to specialist support	4	3
Amount of funding received by Third Sector organisations following support (from VAMT)	£234,664	£620,551
Amount of funding provided through grants schemes administered by VAMT*	£483,797	£534,958
Number of attendees at forums and events organised by VAMT	565	851
Number of participants at training courses provided	122	70
Total membership	280	281

Recorded for the first time in 2020-21, the third sector locally also received **£515,763** of funding via Wales Council for Voluntary Action.

*In 2019-20 there were **88 awards** across **6 grant schemes**

In 2020-21 there were **167 awards** across **12 grant schemes**

HIGHLIGHTS

Aim 1 - Enable third sector organisations to deliver services, improve in all aspects of their work and become resilient

- With Covid-19 response priorities taking precedence, the VAMT magazine Inform was published once in the year in an electronic format. The special edition newsletter



was issued in November and gave opportunity to reflect on the amazing response of local communities, voluntary groups and volunteers who had provided support throughout the pandemic. The edition received positive feedback – *“Excellent edition, many thanks for this”; “Much prefer this new format”* (small local organisations).

- In addition to the Inform newsletter 23 electronic briefings were circulated to members and other contacts throughout the year. These included information on funding, Welsh Government guidance relating to Covid, as well as local information. Feedback on these was positive *"many thanks for your invaluable updates on the support available from the sector and also funding opportunities etc. We are sharing these with our contacts. Carry on the good work"* (Local Councillor).

Social Media

- Users of the **VAMT News** blog increased from 1848 to 2138 during the year. There were 198 posts made (66% increase on the previous year) and 4387 page views (60% increase on the previous year).
- VAMT Twitter account has 1,997 followers. In the year there were 55,275 tweet impressions (reach), 130 new followers and 522 mentions.
- VAMT Facebook has 535 followers, 524 page likes and there were 438 posts during the year.

- Reconfiguration of the VAMT website meant disruption to the site throughout April, but data captured for the remainder of the year shows 2,138 users visited the site; 2,896 sessions and 4,387 page views.

- Key **Research** was undertaken by the Bevan Foundation during the year:

- ◆ An initial report funded by a Voluntary Services Emergency Fund small grant administered by VAMT which aimed to capture, build on and share community responses to Covid-19 that are working well across the borough. This will help community organisations to meet local needs and to identify and fill any gaps in provision. Enabling and supporting groups to learn and grow will help to maintain or increase voluntary services for vulnerable individuals and communities as the pandemic continues and into recovery.
- ◆ A second report, commissioned by VAMT, aimed to capture what third sector organisations felt that they would need to build services again following the pandemic, and what additional support they felt VAMT would need to provide.
- ◆ A subsequent report, funded via an ICF Small Grant administered by VAMT, sought to examine social isolation and loneliness and the impact of shielding within Merthyr Tydfil. Findings from this report led to:
- ◆ A review of befriending services which was funded as part of the Merthyr Tydfil partnership application to the Welsh Government Covid Recovery Grant for Volunteering.

Intelligence gathered from the above has been used throughout the year to inform VAMT and also relevant partnerships such as the local Covid Steering Group, Public Services Board and Regional Partnership Board.

- Contact was maintained and developed through the year with **the Lloyds Bank Foundation**. Support given included practical training, bringing partners from the 6 areas together to discuss common issues and identify other ways of working.



Two workshops were held virtually to bring key stakeholders and other organisations together and to start discussing priorities. A programme of Organisational Resilience was developed with VAMT input and piloted in Merthyr Tydfil with 9 organisations attending.

A short film was produced showcasing the voluntary sector response to the pandemic which was used by LBF to promote the sector's work. When the Foundation's open grants round was relaunched, two grants of £50,000 were awarded to two local organisations.

- **Governance support** has been provided to a range of different organisations including: Stephens and George Charitable Trust, Twyn Community Hub, Merthyr Eyelights.
- Extensive support provided to one organisation with regard to governance issues directly caused by Covid
- Supporting a faith group wishing to establish a place of worship in the Borough
- Two groups being supported to develop Constitutions
- Two groups receiving significant support around CIO registration
- General queries on employment (new recruitment post Covid); how best to carry out community consultation during lockdown and subsequently with social distancing measures; and accessing DBS checks
- 13 people attended an introductory training session with regards to Lloyds

Bank Foundation Organisational Resilience Programme which provides access to specialist consultants. The roll out took place in Q4 with 9 organisations benefitting from 4 sessions, with an additional session held specifically for funders to introduce the concept.

- Brokering to specialist support services:
 - ◆ One group referred to Cadw and to MTCBC's Heritage Officer for support and adaptations to a listed building
 - ◆ 5 groups able to access "developing strategy" workshops with Lloyds Bank Foundation
 - ◆ One charity supported to develop a Covid recovery plan via Lloyds Banking Group's employee volunteering programme. This led to the Charity Co-ordinator taking part in one of two case studies which formed part of a promotional video for the Banking Group's Employee Volunteering programme during Small Charities Week disseminated to 65,000 Lloyds Banking Group employees.

Funding opportunities promoted on the VAMT blog and social media platforms included the Moondance Foundation, LBF, and a myriad of smaller emergency schemes which sprang up to assist in the response including Western Power, Co-op amongst others.

- **Funding support** has been provided to 58 different organisations including: Trinity Child and Family Centre, Gellideg Foundation Group, Good Friends, Help@Hope and others involved in the emergency response.
- **Grant administration** - VAMT administered a total of 167 grant awards throughout the year across a variety of funding streams (some also featured in section 5.3 below):
 - ◆ **Winter Planning** - Funding allocated via the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Winter Planning Programme to help alleviate pressure points within the voluntary sector during

the winter period. Two rounds of funding available:

- ◆ Round 1 - £31,189 awarded to 6 organisations, including Citizens Advice who purchased laptops to ensure continued service delivery whilst home working; The Parent Network who purchased sewing machines to provide classes and engage new learners/ combat isolation and Twyn Community Hub who were able to provide 30 meals on wheels at reduced rates for a period of 6 weeks.
- ◆ Round 2 - £26,379 awarded to 6 organisations, including Gellideg Foundation Group who were able to purchase microwave ovens for community meal preparation and delivering community cooking courses; Safer Merthyr Tydfil Reconnect 50+ project to purchase first aid equipment for their walking group and raised beds and tools for an allotment at Ynysfach – all needed to support clients presenting with mental health issues; and Help@ Hope who purchased a laptop to support their administration of their Food Pantry.
- **Friend In Need Grant:** The aim of the funding was to support the third sector to continue to offer befriending services to those who would benefit from them, increase befriending capacity and recruit and train befriending volunteers. This opportunity enabled the purchase of 22 mobile phones and 9 tablets which were used by volunteers within Befriending organisations locally to maintain regular contact with their beneficiaries.
- VAMT continued to administer the ICF funded **Community Capacity Grant Scheme** for 2020-21. A multiagency panel was convened and a total of 15 grants were awarded across the Cwm Taf region. All attended a Welcome Meeting to share their project intentions, to receive advice and information on monitoring and evaluation, volunteering and financial responsibilities.
- VAMT also continued with the administration of the ICF **Dementia Community Capacity Grant Scheme** which introduced 8 projects for the Cwm Taf region.
- In keeping with previous years VAMT administered ICF funding to retain **Befriending Services** within the Cwm Taf region. The providers are Royal Voluntary Service (Good Neighbour Scheme); Volunteering Matters (Welcome Friends Project); Valleys Kids (Keeping Connected with your Community) and Age Connects Morgannwg (Reaching Out Project). The services were heavily relied upon throughout the year and each project repurposed their traditional offer of support and incorporated a range of alternative methods of engagement, such as telephone befriending; digital engagement; door step visits, to meet the needs of individuals, and to comply with the changing legislative requirements of Covid. A befriending network for the Cwm Taf region will continue when restrictions are lifted and will be supported by the Tackling Loneliness & Isolation Development Officer.
- Continued to provide day to day **financial support** to Merthyr Tydfil Institute for the Blind and Safer Merthyr Tydfil on a formal contractual basis and payroll for Cylch Meithrin Pentrebach.
- **Financial accounting** support was also provided to organisations on an ad hoc basis, these included Pontsticill Community Group and Heartbeat '95.

Aim 2 - Strengthen representation and influence of third sector organisations

- In light of the Covid restrictions on gatherings the **Health and Wellbeing Forum** meetings were held virtually. 5 meetings were held throughout the year with a total of 148 participants. The June meeting was specifically set to understand how services had changed or adapted as a result of the pandemic and to understand the impact upon organisations. Presentations throughout the other meetings included DWP Kickstart; Red Cross Hardship Fund; Integrated Locality Groups within the Health Board footprint; a supportive project by Cwm Taf Morgannwg MIND focussing on suicide as well as the role and importance of the third sector within Regional Partnership Board developments.
- It was noted that meetings held virtually enabled some individuals with Wales-wide roles to participate, who would otherwise be unable to engage.
- The **Environment and Green Spaces Network** field trip in October was postponed. A meeting was held in February had 4 speakers and 21 members in attendance. Feedback was very positive: *"That was great Thank You! Gave me some ideas, inspiration, connections and hope!" (Lark in the Park)*

"It was an excellent morning and the atmosphere felt very positive (Friends of Parc Nant Llwynog)"

"The enthusiasm of groups for what they do showed so clearly. Hopefully they will be willing to come together and continue this joined up approach."
- VAMT are engaged in the following **local partnerships**; some of which were disrupted by the pandemic:
 - ◆ Tackling Poverty Strategic Group.
 - ◆ Town Centre Partnership
 - ◆ Youth Support Services Partnership
 - ◆ Early Help Hub
 - ◆ Merthyr Tydfil IAA / Dewis Group
 - ◆ Merthyr Tydfil GP Cluster
 - ◆ Gurnos Community Zone Implementation Group
 - ◆ Merthyr Funders Forum which is made up of principal funders in the Borough. It includes National Lottery Community Fund, Lloyds Bank Foundation, Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner, Merthyr Valleys Homes, Invest Local Ynysowen and MTCBC.
- VAMT represented and facilitated discussions in **regional partnerships** throughout the Cwm Taf, and Cwm Taf Morgannwg areas, some of which were disrupted by the pandemic:
 - ◆ **Public Service Board (PSB)** where VAMT has a lead role for the priority around **"tackling loneliness and isolation"**
 - ◆ Transformation Leadership Partnership Board
 - ◆ Regional Partnership Board and its structure of (a) Adults' Services Board and (b) Children's Services Board
 - ◆ Social Prescribing Group
 - ◆ Protect Workstream.
 - ◆ Community Zones Strategic Group
 - ◆ Community Safety Partnership
 - ◆ Safeguarding Board
 - ◆ Together for Mental Health Partnership Board (T4MHPB)
 - ◆ Dementia Action Steering Group
 - ◆ Carers Strategic Partnership Board
 - ◆ University Health Board Stakeholder Reference Group – VAMT maintained the role of Chair of the Group
 - ◆ Cwm Taf Local Action Group
- The following meetings were stood down during the pandemic, although information continued to be shared with the membership
 - ◆ Merthyr Tydfil **50+ Forum**
 - ◆ The **Cwm Taf Dementia Care Providers Forum**
 - ◆ The **Cwm Taf Morgannwg Carers Providers Forum**

Aim 3 - Enhance volunteering and wellbeing through participation and community action

- 212 potential **volunteers** were supported with at least 114 being placed into opportunities.
- Weekly **outreach** at the local Job Centre and Merthyr Tydfil College was suspended, although the Volunteering Officer maintained contact throughout.
- **Good practice in volunteering** - assistance given to 9 organisations and the offer of ongoing support to develop policies. A further 4 organisations were referred onwards for specialist support.
- Promoted the **Volunteering Wales website** which saw 35 people from the local area register an interest in volunteering
- 8 organisations attended the Cwm Taf **Volunteer Managers' Forum**
- VAMT administered a **Youth Led Grants** programme in partnership with Safer Merthyr Tydfil and the Merthyr Tydfil Borough Wide Youth Forum (MTBWYF). A grant panel was convened and awarded a total of £5450 to 5 organisations; namely: Pen y Dre High School; Twyn Community Hub; Treharris Boys & Girls Club; Cyfarthfa High School and MTBWYF.
- Although outreach sessions at both Merthyr Tydfil College and the Job Centre were unable to take place because of restrictions, close links were maintained with staff in both settings throughout the year, with a view to reinstating sessions as soon as practicably possible.
- Towards the end of Q3 there was an increase in organisations needing volunteers, some to help pack food parcels and support food delivery programmes, others looking for Peer Mentors and Telephone Befrienders.

Sara Grinnell, Independent Professional Advocate, Cwm Taf Morgannwg Advocacy Service said *"The Volunteer Centre has been a huge support to me and my project. I am still relatively new to the role and the Volunteering*

Officer has made me feel welcome during networking meetings and has been a fantastic support when it comes to referring Volunteers. Nearly everyone she has referred has gone on to volunteer with the project. It has been especially difficult to recruit during COVID but again the Volunteer Centre has been brilliant and supported the project by talking to potential volunteers about us, featuring us in the newsletter and keeping me up to date with any information"

- **Volunteers Week** was promoted via social media, and organisations took opportunity to thank their volunteers by posting videos/ photographs on social media platforms. These were posted on a dedicated page on the VAMT website:



- As part of VAMT's **Employee Volunteering** policy staff were involved in supporting:

- ◆ Merthyr Tydfil's **Children's Reading Festival** – helping pack 7200 books into individualised packs which were distributed to children and young people

"Their time and assistance in this mammoth task was invaluable to the project and we thank them for all their help".

- ◆ **Stephen's & George Charitable Trust** to pack 3000 red bags for children across Merthyr Tydfil who were in receipt of free school meals. The packs included a colouring book, crayons and a selection

box and were delivered in the lead up to Christmas

"...your help with the Christmas bags, sorting of donations made, the Secret Santa parcels and so much more in the build up to Christmas was outstanding and we would not have progressed as we did without it..."
Philippa Hunt, Entitlement Officer



- ◆ **Merthyr Cynon Foodbank** with the distribution of food via their main Hub in the Gurnos.

Cleide Correia, Merthyr Cynon Foodbank Project Manager said "... I'd like to say a big thank you to VAMT staff for your kindness in volunteering with us ... Your help is greatly appreciated and you made a big difference to local people in crisis in our community this Christmas! ...your help in sorting out the donations for our Christmas hampers at the main hub in Gurnos Christian Centre was invaluable! ...Volunteers are the lifeblood of our charity and we are really grateful for your ongoing support".

- ◆ VAMT staff engaged in the distribution of books as part of World Book Day and helped with the distribution of 1000s of books across the borough. The books were hung from trees, benches, and railings to celebrate the day and were free of charge.

- The Volunteer Centre also supported the We Love Reading Merthyr Tydfil Christmas Festival, 22 schools were involved with this project allowing children to have fun creating Christmas artwork that was to be displayed in windows of various shops and business in the local area. The Volunteer Centre used their window to display just a small selection of the creative artwork designed by the children.



- VAMT and Interlink continue to employ a team of four **Community Coordinators** to support older people to access community services in order to maintain their independence and enhance well-being. This involves continuing to identify and raise awareness of all the support available within the community, from clubs and societies to social care, to service users, carers, patients and public service partners. VAMT employs the Merthyr Tydfil locality coordinator.

- ◆ Alongside the support provided to those shielding, the Coordinator continued to receive additional referrals from third sector, statutory organisations, and individuals. During Q1 a total of 153 referrals were received, which equates to **around 60% increase on normal activity levels**. A further 160 referrals were received throughout the remainder of the year.

- ◆ The Coordinator maintained regular contact with local organisations with regards to their availability to support individuals, in order that any referrals made could be actioned without delay. During Q1 a total of 84 referrals were made to third sector organisations and community groups, with a further 109 referrals being made throughout the remainder of the year. These included support for food parcels; shopping; benefit checks; prescription collection and telephone befriending.





- ◆ The Coordinator attended regular regional **“Protect Workstream”** meetings set up in support of the Test, Trace & Protect programme, and provided information on local intelligence. Meetings were weekly initially, tapering to fortnightly by the end of the year.
- ◆ 12 monthly bulletins were produced and sent via email to over 800 recipients. Due to Covid-19 and localised lockdowns, the bulletin was reviewed and re-developed focusing instead on online activities and support. Information was also shared via Social Media
- **Calon Las Community Hub – VAMT** entered into a new Service Agreement via Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council for the provision of a Community Zone Information & Development Officer, who:
 - ◆ Provided direct support for community members with queries such as utility bills/direct debits; warm homes discount scheme; British Gas pre-payment card issues; Covid-19 tests; services such as Samaritans.
 - ◆ Developed social media presence and used Calon Las Facebook Page as a means of disseminating information throughout the community; 495 followers.
- ◆ Supported Calon Las Cupcakes Baking Group, St Aloysius Senior Citizens Group and Calon Las Coffee Morning Group to apply for CTM MIND Side by Side Peer Support grants – all 3 were successful and received **£250** each towards their activities.
- ◆ Worked in Partnership with Merthyr Valleys Homes to apply for ICF grant funding to provide Wellbeing/ Activity Packs to elderly people within the community during Covid 19 – £500 awarded. A total of 106 Wellbeing/Activity packs sourced, prepared and delivered. A further £500 was awarded to provide 106 Wellbeing/ Activity Packs to young people within the community.
- ◆ Awarded £200 from Greggs which supported holiday hunger/play-related initiatives
- ◆ Supported “We Love Merthyr Children’s Reading Festival” by delivering 70 packs comprising of 3 books per pack to families within the Gurnos area
- Worked in partnership with MVH Youth Project and The Parent Network on Christmas-related initiatives including an artwork competition - Feedback from Competition winners: *“The kids are so happy, thank you”*; *“So lovely, Louise is over the moon”*; *“The art set is a God send, she’s drawing night and day”*.

- ◆ Maintained contact with groups and organisations interested in utilising Calon Las as a venue for meetings/outreach services; fielding enquiries and providing information and advice as appropriate to needs.



- The **Tackling Loneliness and Isolation Project** continued to be funded via ICF.
- Planned developments were curtailed by the ongoing restrictions due to the pandemic. However, the Development Officer:
 - ◆ Volunteered for local community groups in RCT, picking up and delivering prescriptions to individuals who were shielding or without support family/friends.
 - ◆ Worked with Wales & West Housing and trialled a project for residents at Ty Dewi Sheltered Housing Complex. Provided 15 mindfulness and wellbeing packs to support residents unable to go out during lockdown.
 - ◆ Provided an introduction to indoor curling session for Dowlais Men's Sheds. Referred 4 individuals to the group who maintained an outside space with planting and raised beds areas during the lockdown.



- ◆ Supported a pumpkin carving and pumpkin soup project which was set up with members of the Invest Local Ynysowen Steering Group. Over 150 pumpkins given out to community members from Aberfan, Merthyr Vale and Mount Pleasant.
- ◆ Researched online healthy eating recipes and smoothies recipes which were shared with Invest Local Ynysowen in preparation for a "Come Dine with Us" event.
- ◆ Collaborated with Health Board colleagues and acquired pin badges displaying the "distance aware symbol", designed to be worn by anyone who had been shielding as they reintegrate into community life. Over 1000 badges sourced and redistributed to third sector organisations (eg, Red Cross, Age Connects Morgannwg and Friends of Treorchy Community), and community members directly



- ◆ Referred 3 community members to the Community Coordinator for specific support services including mental health, budgeting and shopping support.
- ◆ Consulted with partners on the potential to provide residents with wellbeing and mindfulness packs. Following agreement the Development Officer sourced the pack contents; prepared the packs and distributed 250 of them throughout the communities of Rhondda Cynon Taf.

SUMMARY OF VAMT RESPONSE TO COVID

- VAMT staff continued to work from home throughout the year and repurposed their work plans to facilitate a Covid-19 response to meet the needs of the local community, members and partners.
- VAMT participated in and co-facilitated the following groups:
 - ◆ a **Covid Voluntary/Community Operational Group**. The meeting was chaired by MTCBC and involved larger community support groups who came together on 8 occasions (total 63 attendees) to discuss practical issues relating to service delivery during the pandemic.
 - ◆ a **Covid Voluntary / Community Strategic Group** was established which met 11 times (total 88 attendees) and involved the 3 Registered Social Landlords locally.

The above groups then merged to form the:

- ◆ **Third Sector/MTCBC Covid Response Steering Group** which went on to meet 24 times throughout the year (total 226 attendees) and to ensure that the Borough had a cohesive support network for delivering a range of services and support to local residents.

- A **help and support services spreadsheet**, set up in March 2020 continued to be maintained. It detailed offers of help and support from third sector and local organisations and was made available via the VAMT website. This continued to develop with 88 different offers of help and support, from shopping and prescription collections, food distribution, telephone support – even dog walking. This was used extensively by all agencies across the borough to find third sector support for their clients, tenants and general enquirers.
- VAMT developed a model of assistance for Local Authority colleagues responsible for supporting individuals identified by Welsh Government as needing to shield during the pandemic. A process was implemented whereby the local authority undertook an initial conversation with individuals to establish their needs around the Welsh Government emergency food box. If the individual had any other support needs, then MTCBC passed the details on to the **Community Coordinator** at VAMT who was able to facilitate third sector responses without delay.





- ◆ Contact was made with every individual who needed immediate support for either shopping / prescription collections / food parcels or telephone befriending.

"As Covid-19 hit the community of Merthyr Tydfil, the Stephen's and George Charitable Trust were contacted by the Community Coordinator. Every day we would receive an email containing a concise list of clients contact details that required a food parcel as they were shielding. The list was always accurate and detailed. The community members knew we were going to call to support them...Together we impacted upon households across Merthyr Tydfil and this work started the catalyst of support and local councillors got involved to deliver parcels to the people who were shielding in their areas" – Helen Hughes (Stephens and George Charitable Trust)

- In order to support community members to self-isolate safely, a helpline was established as part of the Protect Workstream. A referral route was agreed and any residents from Merthyr Tydfil who required support were referred to the Community Coordinator.
- During the second lockdown, additional funding was provided via the Protect Workstream to offer **enhanced food parcels** to residents who had tested positive for Covid-19 or who had been contacted by TTP and advised to self-isolate. This elevated offer of support was to enable individuals / families to safely self-isolate. 31 families consisting of 107 individuals were supported with enhanced food parcels that provided them with 10 days' worth of food.

A range of new funding opportunities relating to Covid became available during the year and as a result VAMT administered many more schemes than in previous years, as a result:

- **Covid 19 Small Grants** of up to £500 were made available from ICF funding to support any new or existing formal/informal community group or organisation operating in Merthyr Tydfil/RCT. The grants were to support efforts and responses around Covid 19. VAMT administered on behalf of the region, ensuring monitoring and evaluation was undertaken.

- ◆ **51 grant awards** were made across the Cwm Taf region. Feedback included:

"I would like to thank staff at both Cylch Meithrin Aberdar & Cylch Meithrin Seren Fach for all of their support during these difficult few weeks. Both of my children have thoroughly enjoyed attending & all of the amazing activities they have been involved in, I cant thank you enough".

"In partnership with the Foodbank it has been clear that our roles within the community have become vital to so many in need from all backgrounds. Whilst this crisis has created so much misery, delivering much needed food parcels to the community has helped develop community spirit between all those involved. We thank you for helping us to provide this service".

*"Thank you for the grant it enabled us to purchase **resources** at a difficult time both operationally and financially, it was very much appreciated".*



"The funding supported us at a critical time as our charity income had stopped completely. It really made a difference, even though it was a small amount, it made a huge difference. Without it we are not sure we would have gone on to gain other grants and be able to support all the families we have done over the past 14 weeks. The process was simple and with a very quick turnaround of funds, which we are grateful for".

- The **Comic Relief Emergency Fund** – for maintaining or increasing voluntary services for vulnerable individuals and communities affected by the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.

- ◆ VAMT administered £26,591 and 14 organisations received funding, including Vaynor Community Group; Gurnos Mens Project and Central Beacons Mountain Rescue

- **Covid 19 Transformation Funding** – VAMT was asked to administer this funding made available via the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Transformation Programme Board. It focussed on supporting vulnerable individuals and communities affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and covered small capital or revenue expenditure.

- ◆ VAMT allocated £15,000 to 11 organisations including Llamau; People First and Treharris Phoenix RFC.

- **Voluntary Sector Emergency Fund (VSEF)**
The purpose of the Voluntary Services Emergency Fund (VSEF) was to enable those providing vital support to groups affected by Covid-19, such as: people in isolation, the elderly, carers, people struggling to access food etc so that they can be supported during this time.

- ◆ Two tranches of money received with the full allocation of £49997 issued.
- ◆ 24 grant awards made, including Bevan Foundation; Llamau and Homestart.

- **Self Isolation Grants**

With Public Health Prevention Funding, a small grants scheme was established in order for third-sector organisations to provide support to those people identified as requiring to self-isolate, across Merthyr Tydfil. It is expected that small grants will be utilised for food, household and/or hygiene products, activity packs which may help alleviate isolation, etc. and will be tailored to individual circumstances. The grants will also allow organisations to increase their own capacity to undertake the necessary preparation by allowing for additional expenses incurred due to increased volunteer requirements or staff time.

- ◆ VAMT administered £36,000 to 14 organisations, including Quakers Yard Community Association; Treharris Boys & Girls Club and SNAP Cymru

- **Self Isolation Support Grants** from Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council

As part of the Protect element of TTP (Test, Trace, Protect) to encourage safe behaviours around self-isolating, this funding was made available to cover the cost of food parcels with up to 10 days' worth of food. This funding was specifically for people who had been advised to self-isolate due to either a positive Covid-19 test result or as a contact of a positive case.

- ◆ 32 families with 109 family members were supported with the delivery of food parcels and essential items by Gellideg Foundation Group, Twyn Action Group and Stephens & George Charitable Trust.



- **Coronavirus Recovery Grant for Volunteering:** Funding via Welsh Government. VAMT submitted an application in partnership with Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council; Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Commissioning Unit; Cwm Taf Public Service Board and Tydfil Training Consortium. The proposal was to introduce a collaborative programme of support across Merthyr Tydfil which focusses on sustainability, standardisation and safeguarding. The application was successful and brought forward in excess of £111,000 to the Borough. VAMT administered the funding which supported 22 organisations, and their volunteers, throughout the Borough, including Merthyr Performance Company; Pontsticill Community Association and Merthyr Cynon Foodbank.
- The Volunteering Officer worked closely with a number of organisations throughout the year, almost all of whom actively recruited volunteers during the pandemic. The support included providing advice and information on ensuring safe practices for volunteers supporting services during Covid.
 - ◆ Helen McShea, Reconnect Project Coordinator said " *...we are grateful for all the help from the Volunteering Officer at VAMT, who we have built a strong working partnership with for the support to our project, the experience in sending the appropriate volunteers to us has helped us immensely to maintain a core of volunteers and keep the project functioning The pandemic has affected all of us including staff and volunteers so the Volunteer Centre's determined focus to continue to support us has been invaluable*".
- The pandemic highlighted the significant level of food poverty and the requirements of food distribution locally. With more groups engaging in the Merthyr Tydfil Food Poverty Network it rebadged itself as the **Merthyr Tydfil Food Prosperity Network** to avoid negative connotations. The Network met on 3 occasions to progress developments around food pantry/ community fridge collaborations. In Q4 VAMT were approached by Feeding Britain who expressed interest in the food initiatives in Merthyr Tydfil, and in working with them under the Feeding Britain umbrella – the first such collaboration in Wales.
- VAMT and Interlink organised an event in November 2020 to discuss and explore any learning from Covid 19 in relation to **tackling loneliness and isolation**, and to see how this might be used to influence new developments. 39 people attended the session which included presentation from Bevan Foundation regarding their research within the Borough. Information was subsequently presented to the Public Services Board where VAMT has the co-lead for the priority around Tackling Loneliness & Isolation.
- Towards the end of the year VAMT were approached by Cwm Taf Morgannwg Public Health Team to host a new role to support the local Black Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) community. The key aim of the role is to influence Covid-19 safe behaviours in local BAME communities by ensuring the messaging is appropriate and culturally sensitive, encouraging adherence to guidance and encouraging uptake of testing and vaccinations. This 8 month opportunity is to be replicated across both Interlink and BAVO for consistency across the health board region.

PLANS FOR FUTURE PERIODS

Priorities include:

- Supporting the emergency Covid response and supporting organisations in the transition and recovery period
- Increasing organisational development support for local organisations
- Providing information, advice and support to people wishing to volunteer
- Continuing to represent the sector at all levels of public partnerships
- Actively supporting the consultation/engagement process to establish ongoing needs which influence the ongoing implementation of the Social Services and Well Being Act. Particular emphasis will be placed on the reliance on community support and the need for its continued development and investment
- Continued collaboration with Interlink RCT and BAVO (Bridgend Association of Voluntary Organisations) concerning regional partnerships and joint service delivery on the new Cwm Taf Morgannwg regional footprint
- Actively supporting the consultation/engagement process to inform an updated Cwm Taf Well Being Plan. Particular emphasis will be placed on initiatives to tackle loneliness and isolation and developments of volunteering
- Fully engaging in Integrated Care Fund projects including the Community Coordinators, third sector grants schemes and others, and in any reviews which relate to the funding of these projects
- Supporting the Calon Las Community Hub (Gurnos)
- Continue to collaborate with MTCBC colleagues on a range of projects including revising the local Compact Agreement
- Secure the Voluntary Action Centre premises for the longer term
- Introduce a BAME Engagement Officer to support community members

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES

(Including Income and Expenditure Account and Statement of Total Recognised Gains and Losses)

YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2021

	2021			(As restated) 2020
	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Total	Total
	£	£	£	£
Income and Endowments from:				
Charitable activities	316,158	816,489	1,132,647	1,067,587
Other trading activities	75,054	-	75,054	73,709
Investment income	2,484	-	2,484	1,104
Other income	2,661	-	2,661	6,127
Total income	396,357	816,489	1,212,846	1,148,527
Expenditure on:				
Charitable activities	(325,424)	(629,242)	(954,666)	(1,075,442)
Total Expenditure	(325,424)	(629,242)	(954,666)	(1,075,442)
Gains/losses on investment assets	13,780	-	13,780	(8,373)
Net income	84,713	187,247	271,960	64,712
Transfers between funds	69,587	(69,587)	-	-
Net movement in funds	154,300	117,660	271,960	64,712
Reconciliation of funds				
Total funds brought forward	446,512	86,975	533,487	468,775
Total funds carried forward	600,812	204,635	805,447	533,487

All of the charity's activities derive from continuing operations during the above two periods.

BALANCE SHEET

AS AT 31 MARCH 2021

	2021	(As restated) 2020
	£	£
Fixed Assets		
Tangible fixed assets	86,269	123,838
Investments	80,407	66,627
	166,676	190,465
Current Assets		
Debtors	122,931	192,685
Cash at bank and in hand	565,835	339,144
	688,766	531,829
Creditors:		
Amounts falling due within one year	(49,995)	(188,807)
Net Current Assets	638,771	343,022
Net Assets	805,447	533,487
Funds of the Charity:		
Restricted income funds		
Restricted funds	204,635	86,975
Unrestricted income funds		
Unrestricted funds	600,812	446,512
Total Funds	805,447	533,487

BOARD AND STAFF MEMBERS

Board Members

Anne Roberts Chair (until 30.11.20)

Edward Dawson Chair (from 30.11.20)

Paul Gray Treasurer

Helen Thomas (until Sept 2020)

Kayleigh Nor-Val

Nicola Mahoney

Mark Ward

Michelle Jones

Michael Ronan

Brian Lewis (co-opted)

Suzanne Davies (co-opted)

Staff Members

Carol Hindley Administration & Finance Manager

Claire Williams Community Coordinator

Deanne Rebane Community Coordinator

Frances Barry Volunteering Officer

Hilary Edwards Senior Development Officer

Ian Davy Chief Officer (until 30.09.20)

Laura Johnson Administration & Finance Officer

Ryan Bevan Tackling Loneliness & Isolation Development Officer

Sharon Richards Health & Wellbeing Manager (until 30.09.20) Chief Officer (from 01.10.20)

Susan Jones Community Information & Development Officer (Calon Las)