

# INFORM



November / December 2020

Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil • *Gweithredu Gwirfoddol Merthyr Tudful*

As an extraordinary year draws to a close, why not remember 2020 for the good things that happened in Merthyr Tydfil . . . the amazing response of our local communities, voluntary groups and volunteers who did so much to help others around them – and keep on doing it, day after day. A massive “THANK YOU” to everyone from Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil.



**Welcome** to the November/December edition of Inform in 2020. 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.



## Changes at Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil

**While 2020 has been an unprecedented year for us all, it's seen a significant change at VAMT with the retirement of Ian Davy as Chief Officer, after 31 years spent working with the third sector in the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough.**

Ian retired in September (following 4 virtual "leaving parties"! ) and we wish him the very best for a long and happy retirement.

Ian was replaced on 1 October by Sharon Richards, formerly Health and Wellbeing Manager at VAMT. More from Sharon below...



As incoming Chief Officer I just want to pledge our ongoing support to you, our members and stakeholders, during these extraordinary times. This year has been difficult for so many organisations, groups and individuals in so many ways, yet we have witnessed the greatest sense of community spirit in people pulling together to help and support each other. I have no doubt that if we keep our resolve that we can get through the winter period and look forward to a brighter New Year.

Ordinarily at this time of year VAMT would be holding its Annual General Meeting, however in the current circumstances, we have decided to cancel the meeting for this year. We will however, still publish our Annual Report and that will be available over the coming weeks.

VAMT staff continue to work from home at present, but rest assured, it is business as usual. You can still contact us via the usual telephone numbers or emails, and we want to hear from you in terms of any support needs, any new developments, or if you just want to let us know how things are for you. We are particularly interested in your views on this new-style newsletter too, so please get in touch.

In the meantime I hope you, your families and colleagues keep safe and well.

Sharon

2020 has seen an incredible increase in interest in volunteering to support others through the pandemic. VAMT's Volunteer Centre was at the heart of volunteering in Merthyr Tydfil over the last months. The Volunteer Centre is still here and helping groups recruit volunteers through the continuing strange times. The following are just some of the opportunities available. If you would like more information on any of them, or are seeking to recruit volunteers then please contact **Frances Barry** on **01685 353901** or by email at **frances.barry@vamt.net**

**Stephens and George Charitable Trust** are looking for volunteers to help out with their gardening project, they are looking for volunteer drivers to help deliver food parcels and they also need someone with some office experience to help out with general administration duties.



**Welcome Friends** are looking for telephone befrienders.

**Twyn Community Hub – Eco project** are looking for volunteers to help out with their Eco Project, ideal if you like gardening

**Gellideg Foundation Group** are looking for volunteer drivers as they are still providing care bags and meals to residents in the community.

**Safer Merthyr Tydfil's Reconnect Project** is looking for telephone befrienders to offer telephone support with a weekly chat to those who are aged 50+ alone and isolated.

**Citizens Advice Merthyr Tydfil** are looking for volunteers who can help deliver remote advice. They can help build your skills and train you to give advice via various remote channels. You must be over 18 and enjoy helping people

**Charity Shops** in Merthyr Tydfil are also looking for volunteers.

**TGP Cymru** is pleased to offer this exciting volunteering opportunity.



"Are you interested in giving some of your time as a volunteer to work with looked after children or young people who have no or little contact with their birth families? As an Independent Visitor you will be teamed up with a particular young person, who you will befriend and visit on a regular basis. You will receive training, support and expenses for travel and activities. You must be 18 or over, reliable and able to communicate well with young people."



### Both Parents Matter need Helpline Support Volunteers

Are you looking to support others? Have 4 hours per week to spare? Are you a good listener with empathy towards separated parents? Are you able to record information and volunteer from home?

Full training and induction is provided, together with on-going support.

Contact **volunteering@fnf-bpm.org.uk** or visit **<https://bpmuk.org/>**

## Homestart Merthyr Tydfil and RCT



As we celebrate another successful year at Home-Start Cymru, we need to say a huge thank you to our volunteers who are at the heart of what we do. Often when a family asks us for help, it is a volunteer who makes a difference and we recognise that volunteer support is priceless.

Are you looking for a new challenge in 2020? If you are looking to gain experience supporting families and children, then volunteering with Home-Start Cymru could be for you. (Due to the pandemic it is remote support. However, this will be reviewed regularly in line with Covid19 regulations).

At Home-Start Cymru we offer emotional and practical support within the home and this enables the families we support to build up a trusting relationship and friendship with the volunteer.

### Why volunteer?

Our volunteers give their time and support for many reasons:

- To make a difference to those families who are facing difficulties.
- To give something back to their local communities.
- To share their parenting experience/similar experience.

Alongside making a difference to those families who are facing difficulties, volunteers may also benefit from:

- Increased self confidence
- Gaining experience in this area, preparing them to return to work, or preparing for a career change
- Improved health and general well-being

If you feel you are able to make a difference and would like details of our next preparation course then contact Home-Start Cymru on **01443 406664** or e-mail us at **adminrctmerthyr@homestartcymru.org.uk**.



## We Are All in This Together

The Reconnect Project tackles loneliness and isolation- clearly this pandemic has highlighted the serious need for social interaction. Reconnect is adding a new dimension by "reconnecting" the younger generation with the older generation with activities to help and learn from one another.

Minimum age for volunteers is 18 years, we have a variety of volunteering opportunities including telephone support, activities lead, group support and one to one mentor.



Please enquire – your community needs you.

## Return to Hope

Reconnect Activity Taster Sessions returns to Hope Church on the 7th & 14th December starting at 10.30-11.45. We are Covid Secure and have safety measures in place.

Places are limited and by appointment only so you must prebook yours by phoning **Chloe** on **07495549891**

Activities include: Back to Baking with Julie, craft activity packs and a group quiz. A letter will be sent to confirm your place with guidelines for attendance.







## News from Merthyr Tydfil Anglers Association

Penywern Top Pond in Dowlais was drained in 2010 in order for the release valve to be replaced. Since that time the Angling Association has been working to improve the area for local residents as well as anglers.

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The site has won the Green Flag award for the last five years...

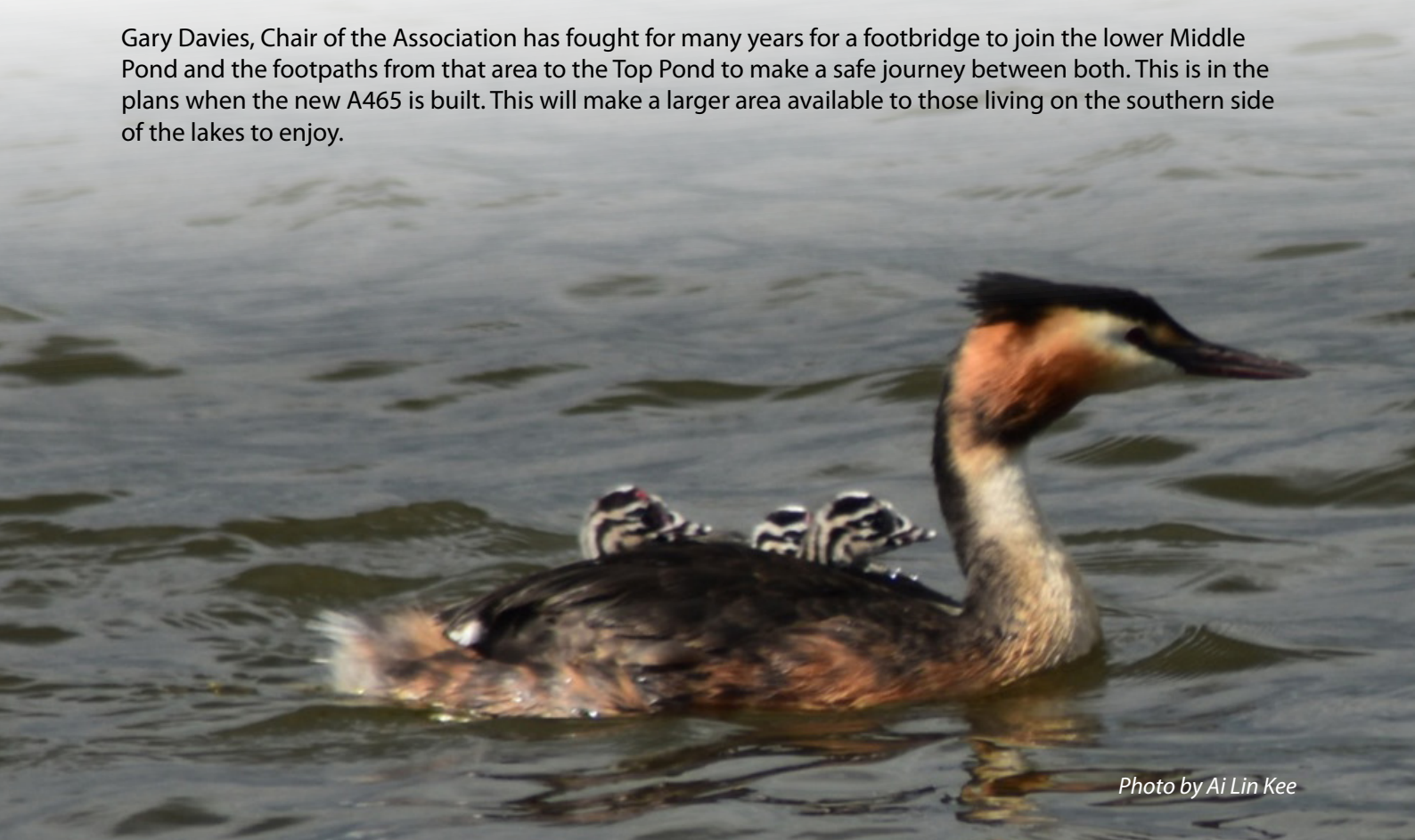
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The site has won the Green Flag award for the last five years for their efforts in improving the area. The National Cycle Track runs along the northern edge of the lake and it is well used by both cyclists and walkers. The local people find it especially attractive to walk their dogs as well as to feel the bracing air that tends to be a feature of the area due to its height.

Grants have been used to improve the footpaths and general appearance as well as to plant more trees and bushes. Working with the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Biodiversity team, the Association have planted the inlet end of the lake with a variety of plants that have made the area a haven for breeding fish as well as for the birds that are to be found on the lake.

For many years Ducks, Moorhen, Great Crested Grebe and recently Canada Geese have made a home there. Swans occasionally put in an appearance. Most of the birds have bred on the lake with some surviving the local seagull population. This year however for the first time the Grebe built a raft to nest on and produced three chicks.

Gary Davies, Chair of the Association has fought for many years for a footbridge to join the lower Middle Pond and the footpaths from that area to the Top Pond to make a safe journey between both. This is in the plans when the new A465 is built. This will make a larger area available to those living on the southern side of the lakes to enjoy.

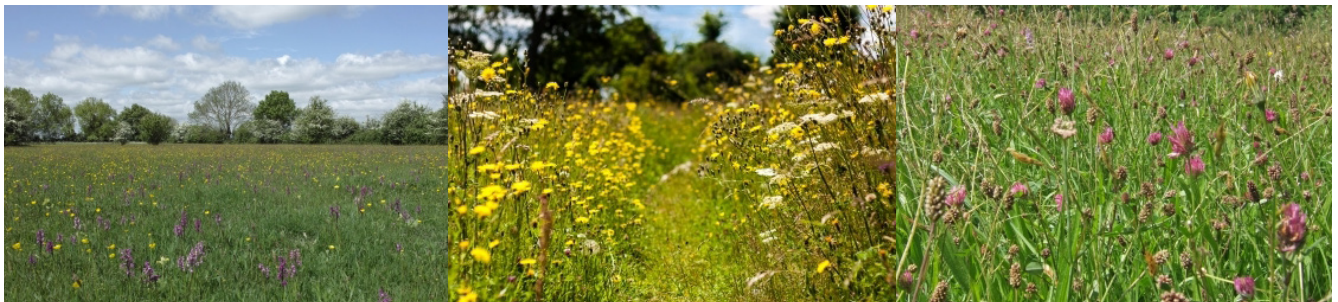


*Photo by Ai Lin Kee*



## Conserving Grasslands at Nant Llwynog Park in Bedlinog

Conserving and restoring flower-rich grasslands is important. We may call them 'hay meadows' as they are not regularly grazed but allowed to grow to produce hay. Their roots go back to the Iron Age when people began to settle, cultivate plants and rear animals. Sadly, in half a century over 97 per cent have been lost. Something needs to be done to conserve and protect them.



In September 2020 Elsa Wood and Stephanie Tyler of Monmouthshire Meadows Group visited Nant Llwynog Park at Bedlinog, and they were shown around the various habitats, especially the grassland areas, by Friends of Nant Llwynog Park.

The park has a wonderful mosaic of habitats from native woodland, planted areas of woodland, scrub, valley grassland, grassland on the valley sides with ant mounds, damp grassland and ponds and marshy areas. The Rugby field within the site is now long disused but is a large area of species-rich dry and damp grassland.

Some of the grassland on the valley sides has been invaded by Hawthorns and will eventually disappear under scrub unless the bushes are cut and removed. Likewise some damp grassland towards the top of the valley is being invaded by Alder seedlings and saplings. Without management the whole park would eventually become woodland with the resulting loss of many grassland plant species of importance. The grassland habitats are very diverse

and complement the woodland areas and the aim should be to retain open grassland rather than plant on it or let bushes and trees develop on it.

Nant Llwynog Park is a marvellous place, with many habitats and species-rich grassland. These meadows should be protected and restored for future generations to enjoy. As this report suggests, it should not be too difficult to provide a generous regime that allows a species-rich flower meadow system to flourish. You simply close up the field from stock in the spring and let grass and flowers grow for the hay crop, but then when grass has re-grown a bit let in stock to graze in the autumn or winter.

Careful treatment and holding back the encroaching saplings is all that is needed. This combined with some strimming is sufficient to perpetuate an enhanced regime. The benefits are immense; meadows are appreciated for their ecology and aesthetic beauty. They provide habitats that will encourage people to appreciate the wonder of nature.

## Two New Food Initiatives for Merthyr Tydfil



**Merthyr  
Housing**  
*Where People  
Come First*

**Tai  
Merthyr**  
*Lle Daw Pobl  
yn Gyntaf*



**Merthyr Tydfil Housing Association** have started a new initiative called **Ty Pantri** to enable all members of the community to be able to access healthy affordable food during the Covid 19 pandemic. We deliver fresh produce directly to your door so that you can keep yourself and your family safe during these uncertain time. There are 5 options for you to choose from as well as a dozen or half dozen eggs.

If you would prefer not to have to deal with handing money or getting too close to our staff or volunteers then we have an option for you to pay via PayPal then the food can just be dropped on your doorstep and we will walk away to a safe distance until you answer the door (we will not leave food on doorsteps if you are not there!) We want to be clear, ANYONE IN MERTHYR TYDFIL is able to purchase the food boxes from us as we want to keep everyone in our community safe.

If you have any more questions or want to order either ring us on **01685 352800, option 0** or visit <https://www.mtha.org.uk/shop/> for more details of what you can purchase. Stay safe everyone, from all at Merthyr Tydfil Housing Association.

**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

*Open to all those living in Merthyr Tydfil CBC*

**01685 352800  
Option 0**  
ORDER BY 3PM  
WEDNESDAY FOR  
THURSDAY DELIVERY  
AFTER 12PM

HEALTHY CHOICE £2.10

PayPal

## Gellideg Foundation Group launch Merthyr Tydfil Community Pantry



For just £3 you can receive a bag of groceries and fridge items delivered to your door.

Become a member of the Community Pantry for Merthyr Tydfil and you will be part of a network of supportive people helping each other in these difficult times.

All you have to do is pay a £1 membership fee which is deducted from the price of your first bag. As it is not possible to choose the contents of the bag at this time, we are offering these to you at a reduced rate of just £3.

### Membership is open to all!

One bag per household per week but larger families are eligible for 2 bags. Ring **07783313497** or **07394905533** or **(01685) 383929**. Over the weeks we will be offering toiletry bags and Christmas hampers – watch this space !

## FareShare Cymru update

**FareShare Cymru works to redistribute surplus food from suppliers and get it to charities and community organisations across South Wales, who use it to help people in need. We are partnered with many not-for-profit organisations ranging from homeless hostels to community cafes. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected each and every community and this has meant demand for our service increased dramatically. So far this year we redistributed 640 tonnes of surplus food which have helped provide 1.52 million meals to people in need!**

The need in Merthyr Tydfil has been no exception. Since March we have taken on an additional 5 members, bringing the number of organisations that we work with in the area up to ten. In Merthyr alone 51 tonnes of food have been redistributed to make 121,871 meals. We want to say a huge congratulations to our Merthyr members for what they have done to help out their local communities.

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"FareShare Cymru support over the time of the pandemic has helped our charity feed thousands of vulnerable people throughout the Borough of Merthyr Tydfil. We have continued feeding the needy since March until the present day. Thanks to all at FareShare."  
- Dowlais Engine House

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"FareShare has been a lifesaver for us. We have been able to provide food parcels much longer than we would have imagined due to the {FareShare Cymru} membership scheme and FareShare Go. Every week the FareShare team goes above and beyond to try and meet our requests, so we can provide food parcels with a variety of food for families needing a little help during this difficult time."  
- Hope Church Merthyr

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**If you are a not-for-profit organisation in or around Merthyr Tydfil and you could use weekly deliveries of high-quality surplus food then feel free to get in touch about collecting from our Local Collection Point!**

Contact us on **02920 362111/**  
**enquiries@fareshare.cymru**



## Reflections on working with the community of Treharris



The Bevan Foundation last wrote an article for Inform magazine in February which introduced our project that aims to understand more about the best ways to grow the local everyday economy in Treharris. That's the essential goods and services vital to daily lives – housing, schooling, food etc. So this is a good opportunity to update readers on what has happened since lockdown.

Over summer we had a series of conversations with some Treharris businesses to understand more about who they are and how they have been affected by the pandemic. We found that most local businesses are small operations classed as “micro-businesses” as they employ less than ten people. At the time, around one in five had switched to remote working and around a half were still trading.

We published a report on what we found in Treharris and in the two other communities in which we work. It emphasised just how important the businesses are to the local economy, especially during a lockdown. Those that could stay trading delivered goods to those shielding and looked after the children of key workers. Many also offered their services as volunteers to help those most in need. These services will be vital as we go into winter. Encouragingly, three quarters of the businesses we spoke to said Treharris was a good place to do business.

Another strand of our work looks at household spending patterns, based on some number

crunching and conversations with Treharris residents. The response rate has been fantastic. It has shown people have supported more local businesses or become aware of what is on their doorstep during the lockdown period. The most common purchases were on food and drink. Improving choice of services was a common theme – some told us they would like to see a regular local market. Many wanted to see Treharris park improved and build more on tourism opportunities to tap into tourist spending.

The last few months have been tough for everyone, but we've been encouraged to see businesses and residents invested in the future of Treharris and some excellent conversations about where next for Treharris. We are also delving into the history of Treharris, including the history of Fox Street and local shops. If you want to know more or have something you would like to share, please get in touch with **Lloyd Jones** on **07827 458206** or **[lloyd.jones@bevanfoundation.org](mailto:lloyd.jones@bevanfoundation.org)**



## BITC can help you connect with support from local businesses

At the beginning of the crisis, we established the National Business Response Network (NBRN), connecting business support to community need in the COVID-19 crisis. Over the past 8 months, the NBRN has helped match thousands of requests for support from charities and community organisations, with offers of help from businesses.

The National Business Response Network is a service that connects directly with charity and voluntary sector partners. Requests for support from charities and community organisations are matched with offers of support from our members and the wider business community, on a daily basis, through our Matching Platform.

Our Network Partners – not-for-profit organisations – are supporting our response to COVID-19. We collaborate closely with them to reach the needs of communities across the UK. In Wales we are working with many organisations, including the WCVA and FareShare Cymru.

If you have a need that could be met with business support, please enter details onto **[www.businessresponsecovid.org.uk](http://www.businessresponsecovid.org.uk)** or contact **[localresiliencesupport@bitc.org.uk](mailto:localresiliencesupport@bitc.org.uk)**.

## Arty Parky Goes Virtual



This year's Covid restrictions meant that community arts organisation Head4Arts couldn't hold its usual Arty Parky events this year, where people gather together during half term to make giant land drawings in local parks, using fallen leaves, sticks, seed cases and other natural materials. Instead, there was a call out for people to have a go making their own designs in their back gardens, and then send photographs of their work so that the Head4Arts' artistic team could create a virtual version of the event online.



Over 400 people took up the challenge, and the resulting images (put together by artists Kate Raggett and Natasha James) were inspired by the four parks where the events normally take place. These will be displayed in interactive versions on Head4Arts' website and social media from mid-November.

Creative Director Kate Strudwick said:

"We always look forward to our annual autumn Arty Parky events, we just had to find a new way of creating collaborative artworks this time. There's been a tremendous response from the public and it has been really exciting to see the amazing land art drawings they have made.

Ironically, the weather over half term was so bad that the normal event would probably have had to be cancelled anyway, so this year's virtual event has managed to capture the Arty Parky spirit without everything being washed away!"

The artworks can be viewed on the Head4Arts website: <http://head4arts.org.uk/arty-parky/>

(Design inspired by Cyfarthfa Park)

For more information contact: [info@head4arts.org.uk](mailto:info@head4arts.org.uk)



### An Update from the Parent Network

The Parent Network, Merthyr had some accomplished classes running, with regular attendees in Calon Las at Gurnos, Troedyrhiw, and Gellideg, to name a few. We were also involved in the "Eco garden project", at Twyn Community Hub, caring for the chickens and gardens, with a craft coffee morning running weekly. The Network use the classes as an engagement tool to help support parents, signposting them to professionals or for them to have a voice in decisions that affect them and their families.

Due to Coronavirus, like everywhere else, all face to face communication was cancelled. We have managed to keep most of our Parents engaged and have some new parents too.

This has been done virtually using Zoom, Teams, text messages, even Facebook. This has allowed the Network to keep inspiring parents and they can keep achieving and ensuring the communities mental health is being cared for through association.

One of the most enjoyable examples is a "Bitch and Bake" online class which has a relaxed atmosphere. We chat, bake, drink coffee, don't take it too seriously, just 2 hours away from tv, husbands, etc.

Sewing lessons began before lockdown which have now been moved online to Zoom. The parents have gone from never sewing and stating "I can't sew", to making a pin cushion, Covid mask, tote bags to a Christmas Quilt. Amazing work throughout.

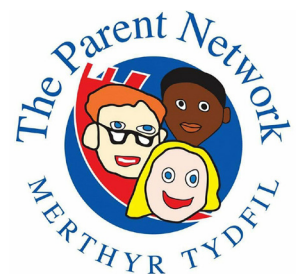
The Network are also working in partnership with Adult Learners Wales and the Textile tutor Maria Parry Jones.

For more information on the Parent Network Merthyr, to get involved or volunteer don't hesitate to contact

**Diane Newman-Jenkins**

Mob **07747522724**

Email **DianeNJMerthyr@parentcaer.org.uk**





# 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 could 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).

The closing date for articles for the next edition (February 2021) is 25 January 2021.

## Merthyr Tydfil Voluntary Action Centre

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Merthyr Tydfil CF47 8UH

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



@VAMTtweets  
@VAMTvolunteer



/Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil

## Office Staff

**Sharon Richards**  
Chief Officer

**Hilary Edwards**  
Development Officer

**Carol Hindley**  
Admin & Finance Manager

**Laura Johnson**  
Admin and Finance Officer

**Claire Williams**  
Community Co-ordinator Merthyr Tydfil

**Frances Barry**  
Volunteering Officer

**Susan Jones**  
Community Zone Development Officer

## VAMT's Board

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**Edward Dawson** Vice Chair  
**Paul Gray** Treasurer  
**Kayleigh Nor-val**  
**Michelle Jones**  
**Nicola Mahoney**  
**Mark Ward**  
**Michael Ronan**  
**Brian Lewis** (co-opted)  
**Suzanne Davies** (co-opted)

**VAMT staff and Trustees were saddened by the death of Helen Thomas a short while ago. Our thoughts are with Ian and their family at this sad time.**

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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**  
Third Sector  
Support **Wales**