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the grapevine

Opportunity Housing Trust 20 years of changing lives

Spotlight on four support development workers



Adele Pemberton



John Gossett



Dave Williams



Deborah McKenzie

Adele Pemberton

Support Development Worker in Bridgend

The best thing about my job is... Knowing that I am supporting people and helping them lead a fulfilled life is really rewarding.

My most embarrassing moment... That's really hard, I can think of one, but I don't think I can say it!

My favourite film... I love any film that's romantic but it has to be *Gone with the Wind*.

My favourite song... It's the Hill's are Alive from the Sound of Music. It's such an uplifting song.

Top tips for doing the job well... It's so important to have a good sense of humour in this job and being a good listener as well.

My dream holiday... It would have to be Barbados, just the thought of the beaches and the warm weather makes me want to go now!

John Gossett

Support Development Worker in Penarth

The best thing about my job is... I don't actually think about this as my job. Everyday it seems like I'm just helping a friend, I think I'm really lucky because not many people can say that about their job.

My most embarrassing moment... I used to work at the Welsh National Opera and went on a night out with the chap that made all the wigs for them. We saw another man sitting at the table next to us and after one too many drinks told him he had a nice wig... It was a toupe and fell off his head there and then!

My favourite film... It's a Japanese film called *Onibaba* which is an old black and white film.

My favourite song... I like classical music. At the moment I am listening to *Blackberry Winter* by Alec Wilder.

Top tips for doing the job well... The more you put into

this job, the more you'll get out of it.

My dream holiday... I would love to go to Rome as I'm fascinated by the culture.

Dave Williams

Support Development Worker in Grangetown

The best thing about my job is... Interacting with the people that I support is very rewarding. I've been in this profession for nine years, so get to see people progress as well.

My most embarrassing moment... Going into work on my day off (more than once) is pretty embarrassing!

My favourite film... *Misery*, starring Cathy Burke.

My favourite song... 'Im Mandy fly me' by 10cc

Top tips for doing the job well... Building up trust is so important. If you can do that then your half way there.

My dream holiday... I've travelled a lot and I would love to go to the Antarctic, because I've never been there before.

Deborah McKenzie

Support Development Worker in Rumney

The best thing about my job is... I feel valued everyday that I go into work and by the end of the day I really feel that I have achieved something. I think that makes me very lucky.

My most embarrassing moment... I was caught in my pink fluffy pyjamas by a service user, he still reminds me about it!

My favourite film... Any of the James Bond films.

My favourite song... I love music so I can't think of just one. I do like everything that Whitney Houston has done though.

Top tips for doing the job well... Always be yourself and be honest.

My dream holiday... It would have to be Barbados, as I have a lot of family who live there.



Steve Cox Chief Executive

Welcome to The Grapevine - Opportunity Housing Trust's new look quarterly newsletter.

This year, as many of you will already know, Opportunity Housing Trust is celebrating its 20th anniversary.

There is no doubt in my mind that this is a landmark worth celebrating and so we're launching a series of initiatives for service users and staff to do just this – and they're all detailed here in the centre pages of this newsletter.

With such a busy year ahead, we wanted to make sure that everyone is kept as up to date as possible about what's planned and this is one of the reasons for the new look newsletter.

We've called the newsletter 'The Grapevine' because you recently told us that the best way to find out anything at OHT was through the grapevine, so here it is, in a written format. We'll be publishing it quarterly with the help of Vibe – a Cardiff based PR consultancy - which has come on board to help us raise the profile of OHT during our anniversary year.

If you would like to contribute any pictures or stories to future editions of Grapevine please contact either Paula Abbandonato or Shazia Awan at Vibe. Telephone 02920 394001 or email paula@vibemail.co.uk, shazia@vibemail.co.uk

Let's look forward to a busy and successful year.



Let's Celebrate 20 Years of Changing Lives

In 1985, Opportunity Housing Trust was born out of the All Wales Strategy for the Development of Services for Mentally Handicapped People.

Twenty years later, we work with partners all over South East Wales to continue to support the lives of those with learning disabilities.

Having grown from a small set up with just three service users and one member of staff, to a team of 1,000 employees supporting around 240 service users, we've achieved a lot and plan to mark it in style.

One of the first stages in the process has been to reproduce our marketing literature with a new strapline which this year reads 'Opportunity Housing Trust – 20 years of changing lives'. This literature, along with a new look

website, will be used as key information points for those wishing to find out more about the organisation.

In addition, we've put together a calendar of activity to mark the anniversary. Turn to the centre pages to find out more.

Chief executive, Steve Cox said: "For two decades, Opportunity Housing Trust has supported many service users across our five local authority areas.

It's high time that this huge achievement was recognised and celebrated."



Our Athletes in Training

A number of our support staff are supporting three service users in their bid to represent Wales at the Special Olympics in Glasgow, in July.

George Alexander from Grangetown will be competing in the green bowling event while Martin Heffron from Canton will be competing in the 10 pin bowling event and Keith Bick from Canton will also be taking part in the 10 pin bowling event.

Support staff from OHT will be accompanying members of the team to Glasgow for the nine-day event which is the biggest sporting fixture scheduled for the UK this year. It will attract more than 2,500 athletes with learning disabilities and 1,000 coaches.

Support development worker, Dhola Okhiria, said: "The guys are putting a huge amount of time and effort into preparing for the games. They deserve to do really well."

My Story by Chris Wyson



More and more people entering the care sector are coming from totally unrelated backgrounds, and we've seen it firsthand here at OHT.

Support worker, Chris Wyson left his engineering job of 26 years for a new career which he describes as his 'calling'. Here Chris tells us his story:

"Seeing Mark come on in the 18 months I've been with him is the best job satisfaction I've ever known. He's become a real member of the community and they've embraced him as one of their own. There's something special about being a part of something like that which I don't think you can achieve in engineering or any other sector other than care for that matter."

"Seeing Mark come on in the 18 months I've been with him is the best job satisfaction I've ever known"

"I'd worked at a local engineering firm near Blackwood for 26 years and I was very happy there. Approaching 50 years old at the time, I wasn't really thinking of, let alone looking for, a new career.

"Then one morning, the local free paper just dropped through the door and I flicked through it. Somewhere towards the back, there was an advert with the word 'autism' in large lettering. As my son has autism, it captured by attention straightaway.

"It might sound odd but as I read through the job description I knew it was for me. There and then I decided to leave engineering and join the care sector. I've been in the job 18 months now, and I haven't looked back.

"I'm a support worker in Cwmfelinfach working with a team to support Mark, from Caerphilly, who celebrated his 21st birthday in May. Working with Mark has inspired me, and to be honest, I don't really consider it as work as such.

"Obviously I'll be there for my allotted hours but you'll often find me and the rest of the team 'working' over and above the official shift. Recently, Mark has taken on an allotment and I spend a lot of time there too.



Conference Adopts 20 years theme

This year's conference is billed for Sunday 3 July and will take place at The Quality Hotel in Cardiff.

In line with our 20th year of celebration, the conference will feature 20 days in 20 lives focusing on the stories of our own service users.

Other spin offs on the theme will include 20 years of achievements; 20 years of holidays; 20 years of awards; and 20 years of pets.

Tennant participation co-ordinator, Deb Gould, is already planning the big day. She said: "The conference is a key



Deb Gould



The Quality Hotel in Cardiff

date in the year, and it's important that as many service users as possible get a lot out of it. We've developed the 20 theme in line with their wishes and everyone's really looking forward to the event."

A number of partners are being invited to exhibit at the conference and plans are in place for a big party which will follow the official business of the day.

Deb added: "There's some surprises in store, but one thing we can let you all into already, is that it's going to be a day to remember."

OHT Lobbies for Better Pay £££££

In a bid to raise the profile of the financial pressures faced by care providers in the not-for-profit sector, Opportunity Housing Trust has joined forces with a number of others to conduct a survey on wages.

The survey – which will involve every local authority area in Wales – will ask for information from employers about their pay, terms and conditions.

It is likely to show that the sector has fallen behind in this area due to the increasingly poor level of funding it is now attracting.

Steve Cox explains: "Pay has been an issue for a number of years now and it's high time that the powers that be accept the difficulties being faced by both the provider organisations and their employees. By grouping together, and providing official research through the pay survey, we can draw attention to this issue and lobby for better funding."

Other partners in the survey are Cartrefi Cymru, Perthyn, Ategi, Drive, Innovative Trust, West Glamorgan Housing Association and Reach. The survey was carried out in May and will be administered by ACAS. The results will be published in the summer.

20 Years and Celebrating in Style

It's party time! Prizes Galore

You know the saying all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy? Well not at Opportunity Housing Trust! This year we've planned two big employee parties so that we can all celebrate 20 years of changing lives.

The parties will take place at Llandaff RFC on the 15th July and the 20th August.

We've decided that two's better than one on this occasion so that we can make sure as many people as possible get the chance to attend. We hope that whatever your shift pattern, you'll be able to make at least one of the events.

We're planning live music, food, drink – and much to be merry about. Enjoy!

To book your place call Donna on 029 2020 751 122 or email donnaj@oht.org.uk

Read All About It!

Week in week out, there's so much good work done at OHT that it's sometimes difficult to tell it all. That's why OHT has brought on board PR consultancy Vibe to do the talking for us. We'll be working with them until the end of 2005 in order to get the OHT name out there.

We'll be speaking to Vibe on a regular basis to let them know what's going on at OHT – and we'd like you to do the same.

If you've got any ideas for a story for the local press, let them know. If you just want to bounce an idea off them, that's fine too. The more people that use Vibe's resources, the more publicity we'll be able to generate.

Contact **Paula or Shazia** on 029 2039 4001; email paula@vibemail.co.uk or shazia@vibemail.co.uk

In line with the 20 years theme, we've also come up with a monthly prize draw for employees. Everyone who works at OHT will automatically be entered into the draw, which will take place using the payslips on the 20th of every month.

The prizes are as follows:

- May** Gym membership to Fitness First for three months, sponsored by Vibe
- June** Summer picnic hamper set with champagne and strawberries, sponsored by Thomas Carroll
- July** A garden patio table and chairs set, sponsored by Haines Watts
- August** A barbecue set, sponsored by Riley's
- September** An adult education course of your choice whether hobby or academic and books to support sponsored by Bistech
- October** A ghost tour at Llancaiach Fawr for two and an overnight stay at the haunted Llechwen Hall hotel sponsored by Allens.
- November** A bumper Christmas prize!

And, just to add a bit more fun, each month we'll also be giving away 19 runners up prizes of a bottle of wine.

Our first winner this month is Lynda French Support Worker at Glynn Eiddew who has walked away with the gym membership, courtesy of Vibe. We'd like to thank all our suppliers for their generosity in supporting the promotion.

DATES FOR THE DIARY

20th Anniversary Events:

- Service Users Conference – Sunday 3 July, Quality Hotel, Cardiff
- Employee Party 1 – Friday 15 July
- Employee Party 2 – Saturday 20 August
- 20th anniversary celebration – Monday 28 November, All Nations Centre, Cardiff

Unison Branch Meetings:

- 14th July
- 19th Aug
- 26th Sept
- 21st Oct - 10.30am for reps and officers and 12 o'clock for members

OHT Oscars



L-R Lisa Nihan, Caroline Curle, Jen Lopez, Michelle Adridge

It's high time the OHT team were officially acknowledged for the work that they do, and that's why we're launching an annual awards programme which will see the champions of our workforce acknowledged properly for their contribution to the OHT success story.

The official awards ceremony will take place as part of the official 20th anniversary celebration in November in the company of Welsh Assembly Government First Minister, Rhodri Morgan.

The awards ceremony will be two-fold with categories for both employees and service users. The categories are as follows:

For Service Users:

- Sporting Achievement Award
- Educational Achievement Award
- Community Contribution Award

For Staff

For staff there will be 12 patch champion awards from which a 'Champion's Champion' will be chosen. Nominations for the patch champion can be based on the following criteria: Educational achievement and qualifications gained; team player who promotes team spirit; understanding and promotion of OHT values; and commitment to the job.

Please enter your colleagues who you really feel go beyond the call of duty in any (or all!) of the above. Nomination forms are available from the HR department. Winners in each category will receive a gift and certificate which will be presented at the anniversary event in November.

Time to Celebrate – the official 20th anniversary event

The official anniversary will take place on Monday 28 November at the All Nations Centre in Cardiff – and we promise it'll be a day to remember.

As a fitting climax to a year of celebrations, we'll be rolling out the red carpet for the occasion, literally! As well as being the vehicle for our awards ceremony, the event will be a showcase for everything OHT represents.

With key guests including Welsh Assembly Government Minister, Rhodri Morgan, we'll be premiering 'Days in the life of OHT' – a specially commissioned short film about our work.

Multimedia specialists, Widelode, of Cardiff Bay will spend the summer and autumn shooting the film with star appearances from employees, service users and their friends and relatives. So if you see a man with a camera, look your best and smile nicely!



Rhodri Morgan

Steve Cox said: "We want this film to capture all that is important about OHT. It's something very new for us which will show how far we've come in 20 years, and how we are preparing for our future."

Cycling fundraiser

A team of volunteers from OHT will be donning the lycra in June in a bid to boost funds for local cycling charity Pedal Power.

The group: Michelle Aldridge, Stephen Cox, Mandy Evans, Tracy Gibson, Vance Withers, Huw Thomas, John Stock and Karen Christie have all promised to put their best cycling feet forward to help the new charity in its bid to raise £600,000.

Sybil Williams, project co-ordinator, for Pedal Power said: "The event will take place during National Bike Week, and we're encouraging as many people as possible to get involved."

The OHT team will cycle the 52 mile trip along the Taff Trail between Cardiff and Brecon. Through their contribution, it is hoped that even more people with learning difficulties have the chance to cycle.

Sybil added: "The physical and psychological benefits of cycling are immense and as far as we're concerned the more people we can give the chance to do it, the better."

Mandy Evans is one of the OHT volunteer cyclists. She said: "I think it's going to be hard work but great fun. It's important that we do our bit to support these sorts of initiatives which are of benefit to service users."

If anyone would like to sponsor the team, please call Mandy on 029 20 751122.



A La France

Our Chief Executive Steve Cox is already in training for the Pedal Power fundraiser – and just to add a few more pounds to the kitty, he's decided to do the Tour de France too!

Steve will be joining several thousand keen cyclists from around the world on 11 July as they embark on a gruelling eight-hour hike from Mourenx to Pau through the Pyrennees.

Known as L'Etape (the stage) the ride is the one part of the official Tour De France route which is open to the general public.

For Steve, this is the second time he has been lucky enough to be selected to ride L'Etape. He said: "It's a huge challenge but for any keen cyclist it's the best opportunity to experience what the real professionals do."

Steve's course will take him over mountainous terrains where he'll have to scale heights nearly 10 times the size of Caerphilly Mountain. In the past sporting celebrities including Grand Prix Alain Prost and Richard Krajicek have also ridden the trail.

When asked what he hoped to achieve at L'Etape, he answered: "First of all I'd like to finish in the time limit and raise some money for Pedal Power. I'd also love to get a medal for a good time – anything else will be a bonus."



family focus

Feedback is a funny word – sometimes you like it while other times you might dread it. Here two relatives of service users talk openly about their experience of OHT.

Name: Phyllis Smith - From: Cardiff

Phyllis Smith's son, Mark is 39 and has Cerebral Palsy. After caring for him at home for the past 38 years, Mark has now moved out and is living in Cardiff with support from Opportunity Housing Trust.

Before, Mark moved out 12 months ago, Mrs Smith cared for him at home with her husband Frederick and support in the home. However, it became clear that Mark needed to be given the chance to live his life independently.

Mrs Smith, 74, said, "Even though we knew we had to do this it was a very hard decision to make, I really didn't think anyone else would be able to care for him as well as I could. But I am the first to admit I was wrong. Really this should have happened a long time ago.

"Mark now has so much freedom and independence, Opportunity Housing Trust helps him to do so much more than I ever could. He goes to a day centre and does craft as well as learning about computers. We bought him his own computer and all of the people he lives with use it too.

"I know now that I was babying him and now that he is living his own life he is less frustrated, although if we ask too many questions he puts his finger to his nose telling us not to be nosey! I recently wrote him a beautiful letter telling him how wonderfully proud of him I am. He was so pleased because he cast his vote at the recent election for the first time."

Mark's sister Annette Gallagher said, "Mark should have moved out years ago but it was difficult for mum. But now that we can see how well he is cared for and how much more independent he is able to be we are thrilled. It was extremely difficult in the beginning, and mum really worried but we have no regrets now because it is obviously the right thing for Mark."



Annette Gallagher and Phyllis Smith



Name: Pam Bannister - From: Cardiff

Her Story: Pam Bannister from Thornhill in Cardiff has been associated with Opportunity Housing Trust for nearly 10 years since her sons started supported living in the community.

Brothers Philip, 40, and Robin, 37, have learning disabilities, but are able to do many day-to-day tasks themselves. Before moving into their own homes they were in Ely hospital, where they were known as the Bannister Boys because they were such characters.

However ten years ago, with the closure of Ely Hospital, Robin and Philip moved into their own homes and are now leading full lives in the community, so much so that Philip has recently had to take up less strenuous activity after breaking his leg whilst out on a rambling expedition.

Robin is a keen swimmer and swims every week as well as holidaying at Centre Parcs.

Pam, 64, said, "The boys lives are so full, much fuller than mine because the staff at Opportunity Housing Trust have the resources to help them enjoy a range of activities.

"At first I had my reservations, you always worry about change like this and also the boys were to live separately as the OHT staff thought that would be best for both of them."

"But 10 years on my fears have proved unfounded, the staff are lovely, supportive and understanding, not just of the boys but of me too, they keep me fully informed and I feel that it is more of a partnership, where I am very much involved."

Pam, who has two other adult children, visits the boys regularly, however she laughs that Robin is quick to fetch her bag and show her the door if she outstays her welcome.

She added, "With Opportunity Housing Trust, I feel secure in knowing that the boys' lives won't change even if something happens to me. My sister had Down's Syndrome and it meant that I had to make very difficult decisions regarding her care."

Pam is now a trustee at Opportunity Housing Trust, charged with attending planning meetings and with visiting the various houses to learn more and to make sure that they are running properly

She concludes, "Its my way of giving something back. The work of OHT is essential and I hope that in its 20th anniversary year the organisation will receive more recognition for its wonderful work."