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the grapevine

Opportunity Housing Trust 20 years of changing lives

In every edition of The Grapevine we talk to four members of OHT. This time it's the turn of four people from our Llanishen Office.



Angela Smyth



Donna Jones



Vicki Williams



Sarah Newton

Angela Smyth

The best thing about my job is... There is such a variety of tasks working in HR that there's never a dull moment.

If you were an animal what would you be (and why)?

Elephants are fantastic, I love the fact that they are so family orientated and caring for each other, so I guess I'd like to be in an elephant family.

My favourite meal is... I don't know about meal, but I love Cantonese food and recommend The Riverside Cantonese, my favourite.

If you could have two famous people to dinner, who would they be?... Hmmm well I'd definitely like to invite David Attenborough and one of the Apollo astronauts, imagine the conversation (between the two of them) and I could sit, eat and ask all those unanswered questions...

How would you spend your ideal weekend? With family and friends, somewhere coastal - West Wales or Cornwall - enjoying walks on the beach, food, wine, lots of laughing and no TV.

Top tips for doing the job well... Having an understanding of other peoples' roles helps put your job into perspective.

Donna Jones

The best thing about my job is... The different characters that I get to work with

If you were an animal what would you be (and why)? I would be a kangaroo so I could bounce all day. Also it's the only way I am going to get to Australia any time soon.

My favourite meal is... curry, curry, oh and more curry.

If you could have two famous people to dinner, who would they be?... Brad Pitt for his intelligence and sparking conversation (ok so I'm lying) and the Welsh Rugby Coach who would be so impressed with my culinary skills he would give me

tickets to all the Six Nations games.

How would you spend your ideal weekend? In a plush hotel, waited on hand and foot with an extensive wine menu and a hot Jacuzzi!

Top tips for doing the job well... Being organised, helpful and informative and always trying to smile

Vicki Williams

The best thing about my job is... being part of a great team of people who work to achieve something I believe in.

If you were an animal what would you be (and why)? A cat, because they spend all day being fed and pampered and all night out on the tiles.

My favourite meal is... pasta

If you could have two famous people to dinner, who would they be?... God & Tommy Cooper

How would you spend your ideal weekend? In Stockholm in the winter.

Top tips for doing the job well... Always expect the unexpected!!

Sarah Newton

The best thing about my job is... Finding, spending and saving money.

If you were an animal what would you be (and why)? George Clooney's pot-bellied pig!

My favourite meal is... anything Indian or Italian

If you could have two famous people to dinner, who would they be? Nelson Mandela and Eddie Izzard

How would you spend your ideal weekend? In good company with good music, food and wine!!

Top tips for doing the job well... always carry a calculator!



Steve Cox, Chief Executive

We've received a lot of feedback from across the board at OHT about 'Grapevine'.

It seems the new look newsletter has gone down pretty well, with many of you saying that you like the improved format. We've had some suggestions through about topics to cover including a regular pay update. Others have mentioned that we focus on particular topics of interest in a more detailed way and we've taken that on board too. The first item we're looking at in detail is advocacy which you'll find on page 7.

I hope you enjoy this issue. If you've got any suggestions for future items please contact Paula Abbandonato at Vibe on Cardiff 029 2039 4001 or email paula@vibemail.co.uk alternatively contact anyone from DMT at Llanishen.



One sector – one workforce – one pay scale

This summer OHT – along with a number of other learning disability organisations – has got together with UNISON and ACAS to put the issue of pay top of the agenda.

For a number of years, our ability to afford annual increases in salary for all staff has been severely restricted and it is no secret that this is largely due to the poor increase in our funding from local authorities.

When we calculate whether we can afford a rise in wages, we have to take into account all our costs such as rent for offices, cost of training, sick pay, and insurances. Unfortunately, the increasing

costs of these necessities are not matched by increasing funding from the public sector.

We are all too aware that over the years this has had a negative impact on salaries meaning that we've been unable to keep up with the equivalent pay scales in local authorities even though we're keeping up with other providers like ourselves.

Despite the Welsh Assembly Government and Care Council for Wales claim of 'one sector, one workforce' there still appears to be too big a discrepancy in pay.

By working together with our colleagues in UNISON and ACAS, we will be lobbying for change.

The first step has been a survey on terms and conditions for employees. The data has been collected and the results will be published shortly. The next step will be for us to use these findings to help the campaigning process.

It would be optimistic to think things will change over night, but, as they say, there's strength in numbers. We are quite clear this is an important first step to future discussions and negotiations with our funders.

Just like we know you're committed to quality, we're committed to rewarding OHT employees for the work that you do. Our challenge is to pay realistic salaries while at the same time balancing our outgoings against our income.

inside this issue **changing rooms meets respite care** lights, camera, action **a win win situation** conference is a hit party, party, party **autism awareness week proves a hit** crb disclosures – work in progress **all about advocacy**

Changing Rooms meets respite care



Our two houses dedicated to respite care will be getting a makeover this autumn.

Starting in October, the investment in the Birchgrove and Roath properties - which currently offer respite care to around 90 families – will result in a complete new look which it is hoped will make the service even more appealing.

For the respite team, the refurbishment is proving really exciting.

Sue Ashcroft explains: “There are two elements to the changes which will take place at the properties. The first is structural to adhere to CSIW regulations, and the second is cosmetic bringing both houses more up to

date in terms of décor.”

Sue added: “Ultimately those using this service are enjoying a mini holiday away from where they normally live. We want people to walk in to the houses, and think wow!”

Once the refurbishments are complete, the respite team are planning coffee mornings to introduce people to the new look houses. They’re also planning new literature and a Respite Awareness Week in the new year to help promote the service.

Thanks already to Barclays Bank and Desire Bathrooms and Spas in Cardiff Bay who have already both committed their financial support of the project.

Lights, camera, action....

Filming has begun at Tydfil Place for the OHT film which will be premiered at our official 20th anniversary event in November.

The team are hugely indebted to Muriel, Martin, Matthew – and their families – who have agreed to take part in the feature which is a first for OHT.

Nicola Williams, who has been instrumental in pulling the filming project together, is delighted to see it take shape. She said: “We’ve had preliminary meetings with the film crew and the tenants at

Tydfil Place which went well. Now the crew are spending time with each of the individuals to film them as they go about their daily lives whether it’s playing sport and doing chores or meeting friends and relatives and socialising.

It is hoped that after its initial premier in November, the 15 minute piece will help OHT breakdown misconceptions that exist about community care as we use it for both educational and promotional purposes.

A win win situation

The monthly 20 promotion – a prize draw in which one member of staff wins a prize every month - has proved very popular and the list of winners continues to grow. Here’s how it’s looking so far...

- May Lynda French won a gym membership Living Well for three months, sponsored by Vibe
- June Megan Roberts won a summer picnic hamper set with champagne and strawberries, sponsored by Thomas Carroll
- July Jonathan Clode won a garden patio table and chairs set, sponsored by Haines Watts

- August Rhodri Anderson won a barbecue set, sponsored by Riley’s
- September Julia Bounds won an adult education course of her choice sponsored by Bistech
- Each month 19 other people won a bottle of wine.
- And in the pipeline...
 - 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!



Steve Cox, chief executive of Opportunity Housing Trust, said: **“We were delighted with the turnout and feedback from those who attended the event.”**

Conference is a hit

More than 200 people gathered in the summer for the Service Users Conference which took place at The Quality Hotel in Cardiff and brought together people from across the region who are supported by the 1,000 strong OHT team.

Service users were given the chance to make their views known about the work of OHT and offer suggestions on how it could continue to improve its service. Two workshops were held looking at

“Compliments and Complaints” and “Rights and Responsibilities”.

People also had the opportunity to experience Indian head massages, reflexology, music therapy and an evening of music, food and drink. There was also the opportunity to look back at the last 20 years of OHT through books, stands and pictorial displays.

The next TAG Newsletter will be in the form of a DVD reporting on the conference.

PARTY! PARTY! PARTY!

The 20th anniversary year has been celebrated in style by everyone involved with OHT. Here are some of the highlights so far...

The two staff parties went down a storm. On separate dates in June and August a marquee was erected in the grounds of Llandaff Rugby Club in Cardiff.

The weather was kind to us on both occasions and more than 300 people from across all the OHT offices partied until the late hours.

Donna Jones, office manager at Llanishen, who helped organise the two events was thrilled with them both. She said:

"It was great to see everyone let their hair down. I think we certainly proved that we can work hard and play hard."



(L - R) Nicola Williams, Martin Bale, Beth Radford, Richard Crofts, Joanne McGee, Peter Smith and Lianne Davies



(Left L-R) Maria Said, Diane Hicks, Jeanette Whitty, Tracey Gibson, Pauline Baker and Michelle Cleaver chose to arrive in style...
Dancing the night away



(L - R) Denise James and Band



(L - R) Sue Butcher and Anna Markall



(L - R) Karen Rowley and Jo Lawson



(Left L - R) Kim Powell, Jean Griffiths, Lisa Williams, Nerys Waltors, Gill Taylor and Kim Ayoub



Keith Jones and Kim Powell

(Below L - R) Rhian Baily, Helen Guard, Nina Degatano, Julia bounds and Samantha Jaaenes



Staff from Cwmfelinfach



(L - R) Janet Doyle, Debbie Lawrence, Cerriann Regan

All about... Advocacy

At your request we'll be publishing a feature in every edition of The Grapevine on a topic which is an important part of what we're about at OHT.

Called the 'All About...' column, the first feature centres on advocacy. While for many, advocacy is part of either their lives or their working day, many others are not so familiar with the service.

So what is advocacy? In a nutshell, advocacy has two main themes:

Safeguarding individuals who are in situations where they find themselves vulnerable

Speaking up for and with people who are not being heard, helping them to express their own views and make their own decisions.

Here we talk to two advocates who tell us their story...



Above (L-R) Huw Morgan (Autism Cymru), Helen Kerrell (OHT), Dave Allen (Bro Morgannwg)

Autism Awareness Week proves a hit

OHT's autism team pulled off a fantastic week of events in September under the banner Autism Awareness Week.

The programme which attracted key speakers including Hugh Morgan from Autism Cymru and Professor Dave Allen from Bro Morgannwg Health Trust proved so popular that it sold out well in advance.

For our Head of Autism, Helen Kerrell, who is based in Cardiff's Fair oak office, the event – which was the first of its kind - was worth the weeks of planning.

She said: "OHT's autism service has come a long way in a short space of time. More than 25% of our service users fall within the autistic spectrum disorder.

The aim of the week was to showcase the work of our service to help people understand what we do and how we can all work together."

The four day event staged a series of seminars:

- An introduction to autism
- Reducing challenging behaviour
- Developing visual schedules
- An introduction to the theory of autism
- Effective Communication
- Introduction to sensory problems

There was also an exhibition during the week which involved the National Autism Association, British Institute of Learning Disabilities, Autism Cymru and Jessica Kingsley Publications.



Jeff and Robert

It was a love of all things rail that brought advocate Jeff and service user Robert together.

Jeff is the chairman of Rhondda Model Railway Club. Out of the blue, Jeff took a call one day from a member of OHT asking if the club would help Robert build a model railway at his home.

Jeff happily agreed and that's where the relationship started. He said: "Robert is a huge fan of model railways and so it was a pleasure to go and help. We've built clockwork sets and electric sets in his

bedroom and he gets a lot of pleasure out of them."

From there, the relationship has gone from strength to strength. Robert has become a member of the Rhondda Model Railway Club and Jeff frequently lets him know of special events including 'Swap Me' fares which Robert is particularly keen on.

Jeff added: "We've bought Robert an official club member shirt with his name and logo on which means he can get in to these events for free now."

For Jeff, the advocacy role suits his lifestyle well. As a rule he sees Robert weekly, usually after church on a Sunday.



Jeff (L) and Robert (R)

He said: "My background in the care sector meant I understood the role of an advocate before I met Robert. I'm someone – outside his care team and family – who is thinking of him and will speak up for him. I've never yet needed to, but should the occasion arise, I'd be more than happy to do so.

He added: "If I didn't do it, I'd miss the role and I'd miss him. I have every intention of being an advocate for him for as long as I'm able.

And Robert agrees. He said: "It's nice to have Jeff as my friend."

CRB Disclosures – work in progress

You will know that anyone planning to work in the care sector is required to hold a current CRB check before they can be employed.

The human resources department, assisted by our administrative officers in each base, have undertaken a major task in ensuring that all our current staff have completed the necessary forms.

With a great deal of hard work and persistence, we have finally completed this project, but in the same way as painting the Severn Bridge, we now need to start all over again!

All staff will be required to re-apply for an enhanced disclosure check every three years. This means that staff who obtained a check during 2002 will need to repeat this process, and may have already received a form so that a further check can be obtained.

It's also important to remember that staff are required to inform human resources immediately of any arrest or police investigation, and the outcome of any criminal proceedings.

This requirement will be confirmed in writing later this autumn, and will allow us to undertake a risk assessment based on each individual set of circumstances.

If you have any queries regarding CRB checks please contact Jane Breeze in the human resources department on **029 2075 1122**.



Jane Breeze



Mary Mort (L) and Olwyn Cronin (R)

Olwyn and Mary

Olwyn and Mary's friendship goes back years to the days when Olwyn worked in Ely Hospital where Mary lived.

Her job in those days was in the clothing store where she helped with resident's

wardrobes. It was through that role that she was introduced to Mary.

Olwyn explains: "From the beginning there was a bond between me and Mary. She would always respond to me. I felt we had something in common."

When the hospital closed and Mary relocated to Barry, Olwyn was keen to keep the friendship alive. As a result, she took on the role of advocate for Mary and has been visiting her weekly for more than 10 years.

Olwyn said: "I visit Mary every Saturday and we choose what to do depending on the weather. In the summer, we'll often take a walk along the seafront at Barry Island. In the winter, we go shopping. Mary's a huge fan of chocolate cakes and likes nothing more than going to the local supermarket to choose one for tea!"

For Olwyn, the weekend visits to Barry from her Cardiff home are something to look forward to. Now in her late 70s she no longer drives, but is collected by OHT staff who take her to and from Mary's house.

When asked why she enjoys her advocacy role so much, Olwyn answers: "I get a lot of satisfaction from it. Mary likes company and it's important for me to know that someone is visiting her and taking an interest in her well-being."

And it's not just on a Saturday that Olwyn is thinking of Mary. She's there for her at the important times of the year such as her birthday and Christmas. Whenever she goes on holiday, Olwyn always remembers to bring her a little something back in her suitcase.

"It's nice to know that you're there for someone if they need you," she says.