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Group

Around the Houses

October 2013

'Around the Houses' is published monthly to showcase the excellent work members are doing in a wide variety of different areas. If you have any stories you'd like to include in the next edition, please send them to bethan-samuel@chcymru.org.uk.

Groundbreaking Loftus Garden Village launched

The rain let up long enough for a corner of the former Royal Ordnance Factory site in Newport to step back in time to the 1940s, as Newport's first garden village was recently launched by the Seren Group. The innovatively designed Loftus Garden Village will comprise 250 spacious 'arts and craft' style affordable homes with back and front gardens. Set amidst landscaped trees and scenic walks, its residents can expect to enjoy the advantages of a healthier way of life. Giving a flavour of what will be a revolutionary housing development, as well as celebrating its historic past, Loftus Garden Village was launched over two days with partners, the local community and school children, who came together to hear about the plans for the Garden Village, play with wartime exhibits and celebrate the story of local heroine Ruby Loftus, after whom the village has been named. The homes will be available for social and private rent, shared ownership and to buy outright. Coupled with the potential for co-operative housing, it is hoped this mix of tenures will create a balanced community that enhances the surrounding area which currently lies empty and overgrown. Visit www.loftusgardenvillage.co.uk, follow [LoftusVillage](#) on Twitter and 'like' [LoftusGardenVillage](#) on Facebook for the latest information.



Community spirit triumphs at MAD Awards

Residents across Wales have been recognised for their community spirit at Wales & West Housing's Making A Difference Awards. 150 people attended the ceremony in Cardiff earlier this month. Winners for 7 categories were announced: Good Neighbour, Fresh Start, Eco Champion, Green Fingers (Older Persons), Green Fingers (General Needs), Community Project and Local Hero. Kathy Smart, Chair of the Board of WWH, and Anne Hinchey, Chief Executive, also awarded two Special Inspiration Awards. Jemma Bere won the first Special Inspiration Award, thanks to her efforts to keep her family together after the death of her mother in a car crash. Jemma campaigned to bring home her younger siblings from a Spanish orphanage, and has brought them up for the past five years. Michael and Carol Down also won a Special Inspiration Award, thanks to the courage they have shown after Michael, 63, was involved in a horrific accident at the steelworks where he worked in Port Talbot. Anne Hinchey said: 'Now in their 6th year, the MAD Awards are our way of recognising the strength, selflessness and community spirit of our residents and to hear their stories is always both humbling and inspiring. We are also very grateful indeed for the continued generosity of our contractor partners who sponsor this event. Without their marvellous support we would not be able to stage this event.' For a full list of winners, please visit www.wwha.co.uk

CanDo Lettings sleep out to support the homeless

Staff members from CanDo Lettings are taking part in an event to raise money for Llamau, a homelessness charity for the most vulnerable young people in Wales. On 7 November, the 'CanDo Crew' will join over 100 people at the Wales International Sports Stadium, where they will endure a night of discomfort as they try to sleep on cardboard boxes on a cold, hard floor during the winter. Assistant Manager Sarah Liney said: 'As a company we strive to try and prevent homelessness in Cardiff and the Vale by working with private landlords in order to provide properties to those in housing need. Taking part in Sleep Out 2013 will by no means replicate the reality of what it's like to spend a night without a roof over your head, but we hope that the money we raise will go some way towards helping those young, vulnerable people who have no choice but to live in these circumstances.' The 'CanDo Crew' hope to raise £3,000 for Llamau and have kicked off the fundraising by organising an office tuck shop and Breakfast Day, with all the profits going towards their fundraising efforts for Llamau. If you would like to sponsor the team, you can do so here:

www.justgiving.com/TheCanDoCrew



Over 330 people attend local jobs fair

An employment and skills fair held in Abergavenny attracted over 330 people. Monmouthshire Housing Association, in partnership with Job Centre Plus, led on the event which aimed to get local employers and skills providers together to provide advice and opportunities to people looking for work. The fair not only provided details of local job opportunities but offered a CV clinic to help jobseekers to improve their CVs. John Keegan, Chief Executive, said: 'MHA has been working closely with our tenants to help get them work ready and encourage them to find work and volunteering opportunities. This fair was the next step in widening the approach to the local community and as successful as it was in terms of numbers, it was heartening to see so many people attending the fair and the positive atmosphere on the day.'



Beverley is number one

A student has become the first to benefit from a special fund set up by Tai Calon Community Housing. Beverley Lucas, who is a tenant of Tai Calon, wanted help with her Welsh studies. She applied to its Tenant Bursary Scheme and was awarded a tablet computer. Beverley is deaf and the tablet makes it easier for her to keep up with what is said in class and to complete her course work. She currently has a desktop PC, but the tablet will now give her greater flexibility. 'I now have reliable, portable computer equipment which gives me access to visual aids in the classroom, additional online learning resources and applications that will help me to revise for my exams. I am also able to have contact with my tutor and fellow students as my hearing problems can make use of the telephone difficult,' said Beverley. Her aim is to become fluent in Welsh and Beverley is now in her fourth year at the Learning Action Centre in Ebbw Vale. 'They say it takes seven years to become fluent in Welsh. I have already obtained the Mynediad (entry level) qualification and am planning to sit my Sylfaen (foundation) exam next summer. I would then sit the Canolradd (intermediate) after year six and Uwch (advanced) after year seven,' she added. The Tai Calon Tenant Bursary scheme is open to tenants, their partners and children. They can apply for up to £250 to support them in starting or completing a certified training or learning scheme/course. Ross Watts, Head of Communities at Tai Calon added: 'We are delighted that we have been able to help Beverley with her studies. Sometimes, a helping hand like the one we have given to Beverley can make all the difference.'

Adela Rogers nominated for Leading Female Mentor

Anticipation is building ahead of the Women in Housing Awards on 6 November as Newport City Homes' Adela Rogers has reached the shortlist for the Leading Female Mentor. The awards, held this year at the Hilton Metropole in Manchester, recognise the achievements of women in the housing sector. The Leading Female Mentor award rewards an individual who offers guidance and inspiration to colleagues on career, professional or life issues and is willing to share their experience and knowledge with others. We wish Adela all the best!



United Welsh tenants happier than ever with their homes

An independent survey has shown that people who live in United Welsh properties have never been happier with their homes. In United Welsh's first major survey of tenant satisfaction since 2010, nearly 4,600 residents were asked how they felt about United Welsh and the services it provides. More than 1,700 replied. The survey showed that 86% of respondents were happy with the overall services provided by United Welsh – an all-time high, and 11% up on the previous survey. Tenants were also happier with the state of their properties, the value for money their rent represented, and the customer service they received. The introduction of Celtic Horizons, United Welsh's wholly owned maintenance company, has helped increase satisfaction in the quality of repairs – up 7% since 2010. Tony Whittaker, Chief Executive, said: 'We have invested more than £16m in improvements to our properties in the past 3 years to ensure our homes remain modern, comfortable and secure. We listened to what our customers were telling us and put in significant work to improve the service we give to our tenants, which led us to achieving and maintaining the prestigious Customer Service Excellence Award since 2011. I'm delighted that the hard work of our people has paid off and that our tenants are reaping the rewards.'

Mid-Wales Housing announces major changes for the future

Mid-Wales Housing Association has announced a wholesale reorganisation of its staffing structure and will be completely changing how it provides services to its tenants and residents over the next year. Shane Perkins, Chief Executive, announced the changes to staff last week and explained that the changes were in response to both economic pressures and the demands of its customers. Tenants have recently been asking the Association to improve how it deals with anti-social behaviour on its estates and to make improvements to its repair service. At the same time, the UK government's changes to the welfare benefit system are placing the responsibility for the payment of rent directly on all its tenants, making income collection more staff intensive in future. Mr. Perkins explained: 'Most of our tenants pay their rent regularly and responsibly, but forthcoming changes to the benefit system mean that some of our most disadvantaged tenants will increasingly find it difficult to make ends meet. We have an obligation to provide greater support to those tenants, whilst ensuring a sound income stream so we can continue to meet the needs of our tenants.' The changes planned include the creation of a team of community housing officers to focus on anti-social behaviour and other estate problems, a separate income management team including a welfare benefits advisor, a 'Director of New Business and Procurement' and a dedicated grants officer whose job will be to find additional sources of funding for projects to assist and improve the lives of tenants and residents. In addition to some new jobs which will be advertised in the near future, the Association also has plans to appoint a number of apprentices and trainees during 2014. Mr Perkins added: 'This is, of course, a very difficult time for all staff as we implement, in some cases, a major change to the way they work. But we must remember that first and foremost we are here to provide a service to our tenants and residents and providing what they want and need is clearly paramount to the company's future.'

Young people's training partnership goes from strength to strength

The efforts of two charities to increase opportunities for young people to develop new skills are paying off. Shelter Cymru and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Wales have been working with young people in housing associations, using the life skills element of Shelter Cymru's Housemate resource to support young people through the Skill section of their DofE Award. The aim is to provide them with valuable experiences as well as the essential life skills to live independently. Six HAs have shown interest in delivering the programme, and Shelter Cymru's Education Officer is working with Newydd Housing and North Wales Housing Association on their in-house 12 week life skills programme. Rebecca Evans, Education Officer at Shelter Cymru, said: 'These are exciting and positive times as we see two national organisations working together to provide more opportunities for young people while ensuring they have the basic knowledge to lead an independent life.' David Williams of the DofE Award said: 'The last six months have seen our partnership go from strength to strength. Working together we have been able to provide young people with the tools they need to support themselves not only in their own tenancy but also through a wider DofE programme provide an opportunity to reach their own potential.'



New Chief Executive for Cynon Taf Community Housing Group

Cynon Taf Community Housing Group has formally acknowledged the retirement of Antonia Forte as its Chief Executive at the end of 2013. The Group's Chair, Julie Haigh said: 'Antonia has led Cynon Taf through a period of considerable change and consolidation... We celebrate her commitment and enthusiasm, whilst wishing her a very fruitful and well deserved retirement'. The Group is delighted to announce that Michelle Reid, currently the Chief Executive of TPAS England, will be taking up the post of Chief Executive of CTCHG mid-January.

NPT Homes' £220m investment programme makes a difference

NPT Homes embarked on a six year improvement programme in 2011 to bring its properties up to the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) by 2017. The programme of works has passed the two year mark and a considerable amount of work has already been carried out across various areas of the Borough. NPT Homes and its contractors Jistcourt, Mears, Mi-Space and Warmplan have not only fitted 2,957 kitchens and 2,676 bathrooms, but have also rewired 1,776 properties, fitted 1,190 windows and doors, roofed 765 properties and installed 2,957 heating systems. Andrew Carey Head of Investment and Regeneration said: 'The past two years have been really positive across the Borough with 97% of tenants classing the improvements they have received as being very good or good. As part of the project, NPT Homes and its contractors have also created an estimated 150 jobs, apprentices and training placements. The vast majority of these have involved local people who were previously unemployed. We are able to confirm that for every £1 spent on the programme, another £1.99 has been created in the community. We are on track to bring our properties up to WHQS by 2017 and are looking forward to introducing the next phase in the improvement programme.'

Don't be scared, be prepared!

CHC has produced a new Your Benefits are Changing advert for Halloween which we're promoting on social media sites in order to reach as many people as possible. The adverts are urging people to phone or text the YBAC helpline or find information on the website. If you would like JPG copies of the adverts, please contact

bethan-samuel@chcymru.org.uk

