Seren launch their new company for older people

Derwen, a unique new housing company dedicated to providing homes and services for older people across Wales, was recently launched by Seren Group at the Newport Riverfront. The launch had a fantastic turnout with a mixture of Derwen staff, board members, residents, AMs, MPs, Councillors, business partners and industry professionals coming together to hear the exciting plans for the specialist older people’s housing company. Speaking at the event, Dame Rosemary Butler AM said: “I’m delighted to attend the launch of Derwen and support a company that is dedicated to providing and responding to the specific needs of older people living independently in their own homes. Housing plays an integral part in the daily lives of older people across my constituency and further afield, and I look forward to following Derwen’s progress as it continues to provide facilities that will enhance both quality of life and independence.” Derwen has been formed by the merging into Seren Group of Newport Housing Trust, the organisation responsible for redeveloping the iconic prefabricated bungalow estates across Newport, and the transfer-in of Charter Housing Association’s dedicated older people’s housing, residents and staff. Another important addition to Derwen is the Newport Care & Repair Agency. Derwen Corporate Director Scott Sanders said: “Older people have been and will continue to be at the heart of Derwen. We believe older people both deserve and need the very best housing, designed around their individual needs and supporting them to live independently. It is equally important to ensure that the homes designed are always looking to the future, creating environments that inspire healthy active lives as well as making people feel comfortable, safe and secure”. From the outset, Derwen can already offer a wide range of services designed to make it easier for people to live a healthy, independent life within their community and have a wealth of experience in providing homes and services for older people, ranging from independent bungalows and apartments with flexible support through to homes with extra care. Derwen is also developing low density clusters of homes for people with early onset dementia. Alison Phillips, Deputy Older People’s Commissioner for Wales, said: “Seren Group has a fantastic record of working directly with older people to develop innovative services and I have no doubt that Derwen will build upon this, with older people’s voices at the heart of its work, to provide the very best housing for older people and make a real and positive difference to their lives.”
RCT Homes enterprise receives ministerial visit

Housing and Regeneration Minister Carl Sargeant recently visited Grow Enterprise Wales (GrEW) to see one of the success stories of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS). Mr Sargeant visited GrEW social enterprise, set up by RCT Homes in 2010, and spoke to local people who had benefited from jobs created by the improvement programme. RCT Homes was one of the first HAs in Wales to achieve this standard. The work on WHQS properties benefits the community through creating employment and training opportunities. GrEW provides work-based education and training for local unemployed people - 230 work placements have been completed during 2013/14. Work on the WHQS programme for RCT Homes is complete and GrEW has developed a long term sustainable programme for developing employability skills. Mr Sargeant said: “It was great to see what RCT Homes have achieved through their WHQS programme and better still that a scheme such as GrEW has flourished as a result. It was fantastic to meet some of the many people to have benefited from the scheme, which is a great example of the important role that housing associations play, not only in terms of providing good quality, affordable homes but also in terms of providing support and opportunities for the local community.”

New programme aims to lift long-term unemployed into work or training

Cardiff Community Housing Association (CCHA) has successfully bid to host a project in partnership with Welsh Government and Cardiff Council which aims to provide training and employment opportunities for up to 5,000 households where no-one is in work. The ‘Lift’ Programme will help people who are long-term unemployed into work. Support will include advice on household budgeting, debt advice, training and education, preparing for and attending interviews, skills and confidence building and finding work placements. The programme covers six areas of Cardiff and will be delivered by Natalie Pillinger, Senior Mentor and Susan Stevenson, Mentor. Natalie and Susan both have lots of experience working with unemployed people in achieving successful results. Natalie said: “We are delighted to have this opportunity to work in the community providing one to one support for people and families and lifting them out of poverty for a brighter future.” Each person taking part will have personal development plans to monitor their progress and adapt the help they are getting if needed. The scheme is not aimed at those who are temporarily out of work, but will focus on those who face the greatest barriers to becoming employed and may have spent more than six months out of work or training. It will also support those who are at risk of becoming long-term unemployed, such as being a young single parent household; being a household in which the adults have few or no formal qualifications; people with weak employment records and individuals with disabilities. The team will work in collaboration with a range of organisations including other Housing Associations, Communities First East, Job Centre Plus and the Third Sector to identify opportunities for placements, work experience and ultimately employment. In addition to East Cardiff, Lift will be piloted in seven of the Welsh Government’s Communities First clusters which cover the most disadvantaged areas in the country.

Cynon Taf Community Housing Group (CTCHG) welcomes Money Matters Team

CTCHG has received £249,000 from Big Lottery Wales to fund a Financial Inclusion Team. The 3 year funding will support 350 tenants, residents and families within Rhondda Cynon Taf to help manage debt and improve financial literacy. Stephanie Davies has been employed as Lead Financial Inclusion Officer, Rachel Rowberry as Financial Inclusion Officer and Celestina John as Administrative Assistant. The Money Matters Team provide support and guidance to tenants on money and financial topics such as welfare reform, benefit checks, reducing energy bills, budgeting and managing finances.
NCH keeps Newport clean!

Newport City Homes (NCH) recently helped communities with a series of clean-up/litter pick days. First, NCH held a Somerton Special Collection day where residents could pay a reduced price to have unwanted household items taken away. The day was held in partnership with Newport City Council, Wastesavers, Keep Wales Tidy and Melin Homes. More than three tonnes of rubbish was disposed and half a tonne was recycled. NCH then returned to Somerton to do a litter pick with Somerton Primary School's children and collected 18 bags of rubbish. Next, NCH held a clean-up in Malpas with Malpas Court Primary School's children. Finally, NCH went to Duffryn for a clean-up with Newport City Council, Keep Wales Tidy, Asda Duffryn, Duffryn Community Link, The National Trust, ITEC and the children of Duffryn Junior School and local residents.

V2C contractor delivers community involvement project

V2C development contractor, Wates Living Space, recently delivered an exciting community improvement project in the seaside town of Porthcawl. Supporting the Wilderness Allotment Association, the outcome was to allow disabled residents access to a plot where they can grow a selection of organic fruits and vegetables. The project included partners Wates Living Space, A Plant, Travis Perkins and The Construction Training Centre. The allotment committee expressed their “immense gratitude for the generous and invaluable work undertaken”. The Bridgend County Allotment Association recommended the site, where a Community Day was arranged with all partnering organisations, led by V2C and Wates Living Space. A large team, including disadvantaged Construction Training Centre learners, undertook various tasks including site clearance, laying paving slabs, erection of a perimeter screen and renovation of raised beds. This summer will see the planting beds bear an array of fruits and vegetables. A summer time launch, planned by the allotment association and supported by V2C, will see all partners reunited to enjoy the ‘fruits’ of their labour. Dave Rowe, Chariman of the Wilderness Allotment Association said, “Wates project-managed everything without fuss and with enthusiasm. It was refreshing to note that all grades of staff joined in with gusto and it was not obvious who was an administrator or a tradesperson or a senior manager”. He went on to say, “By completing the disabled allotment plot, the partners have widened participation and inclusivity within the community. The quality of the workmanship and the good-humoured manner in which it was executed is a model of good practice in public-private partnership targeted at community development”.

Community plant poppies to commemorate WW1

Residents from Yr Angorfa, Conwy Marina, took part in a Community Poppy Planting Event to commemorate the start of World War 1. The event was arranged by Clwyd Alyn HA who provided poppy seeds and plants, with the support of Ground Control who prepared the flower beds in advance and officers from Keep Wales Tidy and the Conwy BIG Community Voice Project. Clwyd Alyn Housing Officer Laura Stephens said: “It was brilliant to see residents of all ages coming out to join us. The children also did a sterling job of collecting litter from around the area too.” Community Development Officer Louise Blackwell said, “We hope that these two flower beds will develop into a beautiful area of biodiversity over the coming years, and will serve as a tribute to those brave men and women who fought in the war.” The children who participated were also given a fact sheet with details about the First World War including the number of soldiers who died or were wounded, as well as those taken prisoner or who were reported missing.
School children promote green message

Powering Up Communities First (PUCF) has reached another milestone with help from the pupils of Blaenavon Heritage VC Primary School. The children joined the team to welcome PUCF’s 200th Junior Green Energy Champion at an assembly hosted by the Eco-Council. Since the project began in January 2013, they have recruited an army of 100 Community Green Energy Champions and now have 200 Junior Green Energy Champions who have volunteered to spread the green message to family and friends. The (PUCF) is hosted by Melin Homes in partnership with Torfaen CBC, Bron Afon Community Housing and Communities First. With guidance from teacher Nikki Westwood, pupils from the school's Eco Council performed a song inspired by the energy-saving knowledge they’ve gained working with PUCF. The children re-wrote the words to ‘You are the one that I want’ and performed it to 560 school pupils. Students from the Eco Council were presented with their PUCF certificates by Blaenavon Mayor Gareth Davies.

Building Society supports North Wales Housing

Principality Building Society is helping service users at a Bangor homeless hostel to dress to impress. Wales’ largest building society donated a number of uniforms which can be used by residents when they attend job interviews. The Society is also helping the hostel with its ongoing gardening project, which all residents participate in, by donating equipment and plants. Principality and Pendinas are both involved in Business in the Community’s ‘Seeing is Believing’ initiative that offers a range of support types to local community groups and charities. Pendinas, a North Wales Housing managed scheme, has been working with a number of local businesses (alongside St Mary’s hostel in Bangor) that have all shown their commitment and support through a range of innovative and practical initiatives.

Beauty That Works

Sixteen young people involved in a work-based training programme have been using their skills to raise money for charity. Beauty That Works, run by Bron Afon Community Housing and funded by the Council’s ‘Lift’ project, gives young people the chance to gain qualifications and practical experience to help them find jobs in the beauty business. Participants recently offered Bron Afon staff the chance to have manicures, hand massages and facials to raise money for a trip to Belarus being planned by the Go Girls, a young women’s group who are supporting the ‘Leaves Of Hope’ charity which works with orphaned children and young people. Bianca John, Bron Afon’s community volunteer coordinator, said: “Over two days, we completed 56 manicures and 34 facials and raised a fantastic £583.22. Thanks to everyone’s support, the money will help the Go Girls’ visit to Belarus later this year to help Leaves Of Hope renovate an orphanage.”

NPT Homes organises community bike ride

NPT Homes’ Estate Rangers Grant Williams and Shane Jones recently led a bike ride for young people living in Port Talbot. The bike ride was part of an ongoing project to provide activities to young people in the Afan Valley in a bid to reduce anti-social behaviour. The Estate Rangers worked in partnership with South Wales Police, Mid and West Wales Fire Service, Communities First Afan Cluster, NPTCBC Youth Service and the Safer Neath Port Talbot Partnership. As a qualified cycle leader, Grant was responsible for leading the ride while Shane, along with Senior Estate Ranger Gareth Jones, carried out safety checks and minor repairs before the riders set off. The bike ride started at Cymmer Fire Station and headed down the SUSTRANS cycle path to Pontrhydyfen. They then cycled to Afan Forest Park where they tried out the bike trails before returning to Cymmer Fire Station. Estate Ranger Grant Williams said: “The cycle ride was a great opportunity for us to engage with youngsters in the upper Afan Valley and for them to get to know us and what NPT Homes is all about.”