

bigtimes

Summer 2007



How your Lottery money is transforming people's lives



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Stopping the bottle

Plain sailing

Health of MIND

Bigtimes Wales

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New Wales committee pictured from left to right: Janet Reed OBE, Graham Benfield OBE, Huw Vaughan Thomas, Mike Theodoulou, Barabara Wilding CBE and Tom Davies



Yn dyfarnu arian

Y Loteri Genedlaethol

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In this issue...

Welcome to the Summer edition of Big Times Wales where you can find out more about how your Lottery money is transforming people's lives in Wales. The Big Lottery Fund is having a major impact on communities throughout Wales, and earlier this year we announced the names of the people who will sit on our new Wales committee, who will decide which projects should be funded. The new Committee (pictured left) is gearing up to decide how more than £116 million in Lottery funding will be spent on improving the lives of thousands of people in communities throughout Wales. Five individuals from across the country have joined Huw Vaughan Thomas who was appointed as Chair of the Wales Committee at the end of last year.

In this edition of Big Times we visit Gareth Meadows gaining independence at the Hearts and Minds Pedal Power project and Barry Abbott speaks candidly of his journey to overcome alcohol addiction.

We also hear how Jane Williams came to terms with mental illness and transformed her suffering into helping others in rural North Wales. Helen Jones tells us how a horrific attack changed her life overnight and how she has built a new future for herself thanks to a Lottery funded project. And finally Sian Richardson has turned her life around from being homeless to gaining stability thanks to a new job and a home of her own.

All these stories show how Lottery money has helped change people's lives in Wales.



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Pedal POWER

A special centre based in Wrexham is providing opportunities for children and adults with disabilities and learning difficulties to improve their health and fitness through cycling.

Born with a rare and incurable disorder, Gareth Meadows is completely dependent on the care of others.

Gareth, from Wrexham, has Angelman Syndrome (AS), a debilitating condition that causes developmental delay and neurological problems.

The condition has left him with scoliosis, which is a curvature of the spine and means that he constantly leans to one side and has limited movement. He

Gareth's muscle tone and co-ordination have both improved since he started cycling - and his Dad is also reaping the benefits

has a metal rod inserted into his back to support his posture and occasionally has to use a wheelchair to get around. He also has speech problems, learning difficulties and balance problems.

For day-to-day care such as feeding, washing and changing clothes, the 27 year old needs help with everything. For a few days a week, however, Gareth feels the wind on his face and has the freedom to roam around a park on a bicycle - something his family never imagined possible.

He is one of the many people with disabilities or with chronic heart conditions reaping the benefits of the Hearts and Minds Pedal Power Project, based at the Alyn Waters Country Park, Wrexham. Groundwork Wrexham and Flintshire received over £95,000 from the Big Lottery Fund to build a specialist cycling facility on the site of a former rubbish tip.

Cycling is a low impact form of exercise and the project allows users to improve their health, fitness and self esteem. Pedal Power uses specially built three-wheeled bikes around a traffic free mile long circuit in the park. Physiotherapists monitor each person's exercise. The project has been so successful, Pedal Power now has more than 400 members.

It certainly has been a blessing for Gareth and the family. This is one of the only times he can feel a sense of control over himself. They have seen a great improvement in his physical condition and he loves

The two-person cycle is used to teach new members and to help those who need some additional assistance

“He pedals and steers well but unfortunately, he has no concept of brakes whatsoever”

having the freedom to ride around the track on his bike.

“Life with Gareth is difficult and he needs help with everything,” said his father, Mike, who cycles round the track with him.

“He rides a specially adapted trike, which is good for his balance and his posture. He leans to one side a lot, but he can sit up straight on the bike now because his muscles have got stronger.

He pedals and steers well but unfortunately he has no concept of brakes whatsoever,” laughed Mike.

With a café, shop, adventure playground, woodland, grassland and riverside walks, the centre is a good place for the whole family to have a break from their usual caring responsibilities and allows them to have fun with Gareth.

Project co-ordinator, Andy Clarke, has seen positive changes in all of the members, since they joined.

“Mentally, they have more confidence and they are a lot more outgoing,” he said.

“Physically, I have seen people develop from just sitting on the bike and then moving on to pedal and steer. Their muscles waste away if they don’t use them, so this is an ideal way to improve

and maintain their strength and fitness levels. It gives them the confidence that they can actually do something. What may seem like something simple for you and me is a mammoth challenge for these guys to overcome. It truly is a massive achievement.”

For more details about the project, phone Anna Pollard at Groundwork Wrexham and Flintshire on: 01978 757524.



About Angelman Syndrome

Angelman syndrome is a genetic disorder that causes developmental delay and neurological problems. The physician Harry Angelman first described the syndrome in 1965. Infants with Angelman syndrome appear normal at birth, but often have feeding problems in the first months of life and exhibit noticeable developmental delays by six to 12 months. There is no specific therapy for Angelman syndrome. Medical therapy for seizures is usually necessary. Physical and occupational therapies, communication therapy, and behavioural therapies are important in allowing individuals with Angelman syndrome to reach their maximum developmental potential. Source: (National institute of neurological disorders and strokes website www.ninds.nih.gov)

About the Voluntary Community Sector programme (VCS)

- The project received £95,128 under VCS, which closed in 2005.
- VCS was established in 1995 to support projects that made a difference to the lives of disadvantaged people in communities throughout Wales.
- Running for almost a decade, the programme awarded a staggering 188 million pounds in more than 5,200 grants to voluntary and community organisations.

About People and Places

While the VCS programme has closed, organisations can still apply for funding under the £66 million People and Places programme, which aims to bring people together to make their communities stronger and to improve rural and urban environments.

Stopping the bottle

Barry Abbott didn't think there was a world beyond alcohol. Although he was a successful salesman for an electronics firm, he couldn't see that a dependency on alcohol was leading to the destruction of many elements within his life - including his marriage of 23 years.

"As an alcoholic, I would hide from the facts. Work colleagues

would smell the alcohol on me and talk behind my back. I just chose to ignore them and thought nothing of it. I got to a point where I thought I could handle it but over the years the slow and painful descent was inevitable," he said.

Barry would regularly kick-start the day with half a litre of cider, before moving onto another

two litres by the end of the day. Eventually, Barry sought medical treatment from Whitchurch Hospital and then alcohol rehabilitation at Brynawel House. On leaving Brynawel House, Barry felt alone and abandoned. Barry had faced his demons but realised he still needed to regain his self-esteem and confidence.

"I had sought refuge but I knew



Barry's rapport with the teenagers helps him connect with them when he talks to youngsters in local schools

The road to recovery is a long one for Barry but FADS have helped him take small steps in his rehabilitation

if I carried on with the same process, I probably would've done myself even more damage. I needed to regain my purpose in life," he said.

With this in mind, Barry reached out for help within his local community and found the Family Awareness Drugs Society (FADS).

FADS was set up in 2002 by residents within the small town of Penywaun in Rhondda Cynon Taf. The advice centre was inspired by a local resident, who has first-hand experience of drug addiction within her family and the anguish it causes.

"If it wasn't for FADS, I really wouldn't like to think where I'd be today. It's been hard but incredibly worthwhile"

She also found it difficult to access local facilities for advice on drink and drugs. By setting up FADS, She has brought together parents within the local community who have been affected by alcohol or substance misuse. In return, members of FADS have raised awareness of alcohol and substance misuse through various projects. A grant from the Big Lottery Fund has helped them expand their team by hiring a new full time co-ordinator



in Penywaun and also provided further training and travel for staff and volunteers to deliver vital information and support to those who need it most.

Barry was impressed by FADS straightforward approach to tackling the subject of alcohol and substance misuse, "I was surprised at how direct the advice was. By using this method, it really made me open up and then start to wonder what I could do to maybe help others."

Barry started to work voluntarily for FADS on a daily basis which rebuilt his self-esteem but also gave him the opportunity to speak to individuals about the choices they make in life. Through FADS, Barry spearheads the "Sober and Safe" alcohol awareness campaign in Wales that visits schools and warns youngsters about the dangers of binge-drinking.

Barry recalled the first time he spoke in front of a large group of teenagers: "I remember being absolutely petrified! But, I knew it was important to tell my story from the heart. My story wasn't designed to shock anyone but

I needed to give kids a real life experience. That way, we received an immediate response from most," he said.

For Barry, there is still a great deal of work he has planned with FADS, "Talking about the problem is fundamental. It's a long and gruelling process but it's vital to let people know there is support there in place - that people can seek help. The more people we're able to reach the better," he said.

Looking back on the incredible change in his life, Barry had mixed emotions about where he is today, "There are still times when I think to myself 'why bother?' That may sound incredibly negative but when you've been through such a gruelling ordeal you get to a point where you want to just give up."

Barry, though, is clearly indebted to FADS and has played an integral part in its continued growth, "If it wasn't for FADS, I really wouldn't like to think where I'd be today. It's been hard but incredibly worthwhile - it gives me purpose and keeps me determined in the work I'm doing. For that, I'm incredibly thankful."

Plain sailing



Sian enjoys watching the yachts in Swansea marina and hopes her foot will quickly recover so that she can take up sailing once more

A smiling Sian opens the door to her lovely, spacious flat. The 23-year-old may be on crutches today, but a broken foot from playing football in a women's team is a far cry from the problems she encountered finding herself homeless in Swansea at 19. Thankfully Cyrenians Cymru Cyf found her a hostel and a wealth of opportunities that allowed her to turn her life around.

"I had been staying at different people's places, on the floor or whatever, but then I found that I had nowhere else to go. I had used up all my favours and there was too much conflict for me to be able to go home to my family in North Wales. I went along to all the housing options but I was told I was not a priority case. I was crying and upset. I didn't understand how, as a young female with nowhere to sleep, they couldn't find some way to help me."

A few days later Sian found out about the Lottery funded Cyrenians Cymru Cyf project. One of her friends was playing football with the project and encouraged her to go along. She went to their drop-in centre for 16-25 year olds the next morning. By the afternoon she had been given a place in their hostel.

"The staff were really helpful. They did keep tabs on me and sometimes I'd find that quite annoying! Yet it was also really nice to have someone looking out for me, especially because I didn't have any family or friends around to do that."

Those living in the hostel were

encouraged to go to the drop-in centre, meet other people and find out about all the opportunities that Cyrenians and its partner organisations offered them.

"They provided so much more than just a bed," said Sian. I had a support worker who met up with me a few times a week to check

"It was a real achievement to know that I could go out and help other people"

I was doing the right things to get myself back on track. They really opened my eyes to options – like sailing and the Prince's Trust courses – which I'd never have thought were possible for the homeless to be able to do."

Sailing boosted Sian's confidence. She loves her sports, from surfing to football and Cyrenians organised a two-day introduction course for the centre with the Rainbow Sailing School in Swansea Bay. From there she was offered the chance to deliver yachts as far as Spain, Italy and Croatia. Cyrenians kitted her out with the right gear and she was off!

"It was absolutely fantastic," Sian said. "To feel that freedom and be able to get away from my troubles for a few weeks. I'd hardly ever been on holiday before the trips and I saw more places than I ever have in my lifetime."

In a bid to learn some skills to

help Sian find employment she was encouraged to go on a 12 week Prince's Trust course in which she helped paint a school for children with learning disabilities and fundraise to send them on a trip to Bristol Zoo. Sian said: "It was a real achievement to know that I could go out and help other people even though I was homeless and didn't have any money myself. It helped me to keep going and not get too down about my situation." It was this attitude that won her the Young Achiever Award from the Prince's Trust Cymru in 2005.

Sian took on a variety of other volunteering work, learning new life skills and proving herself. This was recognised when one of the women she was working with put her forward for a job as a Community Development Trainee with the Swansea Council for Voluntary Service (SCVS). Cyrenians moved fast to help Sian to get her own flat so that she could accept the position.

Two years on, now working as a youth worker with Swansea Council, Sian has really made it her own home. She gestures around the space, "This is what I have got from nothing. I have completely turned my life around.

"Homelessness can happen to the best and the worst of people, yet getting back on your feet is achievable.

"At the beginning it felt like there was no way out of this hole, but I got the right support and, thanks to Cyrenians, I got there."

Helen's life changed forever when she was brutally attacked in her own home. Thanks to Victim Support she is now re-building her life and is determined to enjoy happiness once again.

By the time she had reached her thirties, Helen Jones had tasted more than a fair share of life's bitter trials.

Not only had she dealt with a divorce from the father of her two children, but she was later to be widowed when she lost her beloved second husband to cancer. Then at the young age of 35 she was registered disabled due to the crippling affects of arthritis in both her knees, leaving her unable to walk unaided.

But despite all of this, Helen's plucky nature kept her battling on and just over four years ago, she began her one-woman campaign to raise thousands of pounds for charity by riding her specially adapted hand cycle which she had fitted on to her wheelchair.

Little did she know then that her fund raising efforts would be cut dramatically short and that in a chilling twist of fate, she herself would be at the receiving end of a charity that would eventually



A road to recovery

help her re-build her life.

An horrific attack changed Helen's life overnight. A new boyfriend whom she had grown to love and trust and who had moved in to help care for her, tried to take her life by attacking her in the darkness of her own home as her son slept upstairs.

Despite her disabilities, Helen

fought her attacker with all her strength. She only realised half way through the horrific ordeal that her attacker had a knife and that she had been stabbed all over her body.

"The only way I could stop him from stabbing me was to tell him that I was dying and that he'd killed me," said Helen.

Helen's specially adapted hand cycle which fits on to her wheelchair meant she could take part in a sponsored cycle ride to raise money for charity

"When my son came in to the room to see what was happening, he even lunged at him with the knife – to realise he had no regard for our lives has been very painful," she added.

She had been stabbed eight times and had multiple knife wounds to her hands, a damaged voice box and a collapsed lung as well as many other injuries. She was left fighting for her life in hospital for more than five weeks and had to be fed through a tube for three months because of throat injuries. She eventually returned home, but despite knowing her attacker had been caught and was being held by police, the emotional wounds were not healing.

"My physical scars were slowly healing each day, but I was living my life in a constant state of anxiety and fear that my attacker would come to get me once again.

"Being back at the home where the attack had happened was unbearable at times and I just could not bear to be left alone in the house."

The eventual turning point in her recovery came after she got in touch with North Wales Victim Support, which following a Big Lottery Fund grant is providing an outreach service for victims of crime in rural areas of Denbighshire.

"I'd received a letter from Victim Support but had no idea what they were about so when I got a second letter I rang them and started chatting about what they

"Thanks to Carol I have been able to get my life back on track"

could do to help me.

"A Victim Support Officer came to visit me at the house and we struck up a relationship – little did I know then that Carol would play a vital role in my recovery by helping me both emotionally and practically.

"It was Carol who managed to find us a new home as well as help and support for my son."

Not only did Carol become a good friend, but she managed to find Helen and her son a new home. She also enabled Helen to cope with the administrative side of the situation by dealing with letters and the court case. She eventually helped Helen to talk to the Criminal Justice Board who were able to get a guilty verdict on an attempted murder charge without going to court.

"She has since helped me to put a stop to any unwelcome attempts by the attacker to contact me from prison. Thanks to Carol I have been able to get my life back on track – she's sat with me, talked with me, even cried with me – it's been a tough road but I'm moving forward," she said.

Helen's fundraising days now seem way back in the distant past, but she might well be tempted to get back on her bike in the future in aid of Victim Support.

In the meantime however, Helen has far more important matters to deal with, such as her forthcoming wedding to fiancé Mick.

Helen and Mick became good friends several years ago, but after Helen's terrible experience their friendship blossomed in to romance. His constant help and support has helped smooth the way slightly as Helen follows the rocky road to recovery and they both hope that walking down the aisle together in July will be the beginning of a new and happier chapter in their lives.

Don't be a victim

Victim Support is the national charity which helps people affected by crime. They provide free and confidential support to help you deal with your experience, whether or not you report the crime.

If you are a victim of crime, their local Victim Support branches can give you and your family and friends information and support. And if you are going to court their Witness Service can help you before, during and after the trial.

For help and advice you can phone the Victim Supportline on 0845 30 30 900.

For more information visit www.victimsupport.org.uk

Health of MIND



Jane Williams' horse Dolly is her therapy and the unconditional love that animals provide has been a solace to her

A Big Lottery Fund award is enabling an organisation that helps people with mental health problems to offer more advice and support and reach more people living in isolated and rural areas of Denbigh, north Wales.

For those who have experienced it, depression is a devastating illness that consumes a person like a dark cloud that cannot be lifted.

Just ask 56-year-old Jane Williams from Denbigh, north Wales. When her first marriage broke up she lost all sense of her own worth and value, ended up seeing a psychiatrist, who prescribed her anti-depressants.

"Depression feels like a poison that seeps through a person's whole body," she said.

"It can happen to anyone at any time and suddenly, you just feel that you're not coping anymore. At my lowest point, I felt isolated, lonely and absolutely worthless. I blamed

everything on myself, including the collapse of my marriage.”

“It takes time for someone to realise that they’re depressed and it took 12 months for me to get my life together again. People are scared of mental health problems because they can’t see them. It’s not something there is a simple treatment for, like a broken leg.”

From an early age, Jane has always had an awareness of mental health problems. Her grandmother died in a mental institution and her mother developed depression as a young woman.

“My mother’s mood was either up or down and it wasn’t easy growing up in that environment, especially in those days,” Jane recalled.

“When you grow up around it, you tend to accept it. There was less understanding about mental health issues in those days and much more stigma attached.

The treatment you received was also very different. It was a time when medicine and the support for sufferers had not made the advancements that we enjoy today. I wouldn’t say it’s hereditary but like heart disease, I think some families are definitely more susceptible to mental health problems.”

Jane is just one of many people who have found solace and support in the form of Vale of Clwyd MIND’s Rural Outreach Service in Denbighshire. Established in 2000 the Rural Outreach Service seeks to address mental health issues in the rural community. They recently received £222,525 from the Big

Further information

Some facts about mental health

One-in-four adults in Wales will have mental health problems at some time in their lives and one in 10 children will need professional help for a mental health disorder. One in 20 people over 65 are also affected by dementia. People with mental health problems are some of the most disadvantaged people in society and often experience multiple deprivation. Many are isolated and have low self-esteem and low aspirations. Their condition is made worse by the stigma, lack of understanding and discrimination they face daily.

About Mental Health Matters (MHM)

Under our Mental Health Matters programme we are making £15 million available to support projects across Wales. Mental Health Matters will support people with serious mental health problems to live fulfilling lives in their communities and reduce incidence of relapse or crises. As well as supporting projects that raise awareness of mental illnesses, the programme will help improve access to appropriate support for those at greatest risk of serious mental health problems or suicide. For more information about the Mental Health Matters programme and how your group can apply for funding, visit the Big Lottery Fund website www.biglotteryfund.org.uk and use the Wales specific search facility.

About Vale of Clwyd MIND

For further information about Vale of Clwyd Mind and its Rural Outreach Service, log on to www.valeofclwydmind.org.uk

Lottery Fund to develop the Rural Outreach Service.

Part of the grant was used to purchase a custom-built mobile rural outreach vehicle. DORIS (Denbighshire Outreach Rural Information Service) has now become a familiar sight in rural communities, summer shows and farmers livestock markets offering opportunities for “hard to reach” groups to get information about mental health issues and how to find support. Trained staff on board can lend a “listening ear” to

people who just need someone to share their problems with, or can signpost people on to the most appropriate source of support.

“DORIS has been fantastic and when you see her, you know you’ve got friendly staff onboard and someone you can turn to for advice and support,” Jane said.

“For isolated people in rural areas, she’s a blessing. If it’s general information, a chat or even an Indian head massage you want, you can get advice about anything and everything from DORIS. The Rural

Jane's household includes, horses, dogs and a parrot - everyone in the family loves animals

Outreach service has grown over the last few years and we need it."

In addition to DORIS, Vale of Clwyd MIND also offers a range of other therapies and courses to help people who have been through similar experiences to Jane.

From St Asaph to Llangollen, people have access to a wide range of therapies on offer from qualified and experienced therapists and take part in relaxing activities such as Reflexology, Tai Chi, Yoga or Pilates.

"I really needed support when my first marriage collapsed," said Jane.

"The support I received from MIND made me feel like a valued person again and the holistic therapy they offer is fantastic.

"Depression feels like a poison that seeps through a person's whole body"

They build up your confidence and it's refreshing knowing there's someone there who understands. The organisation thinks laterally and is open minded about the way it approaches mental health. It offers practical things you don't get anywhere else. You would walk seven miles to get to one of their sessions if you had to. It's just the whole friendship and networking aspect. They always organise social events and encourage people to integrate into the community."



The organisation also runs a café, which tries to get people with mental health problems back into employment and show them that they can still play a role in the community.

"Some people are afraid they will never find work again because of their condition," said Jane. "MIND has turned that notion on its head by putting people back on the employment ladder."

Once a beneficiary of mental health services, Jane now devotes her own life to helping people who have suffered similar problems. She re-married 10 years ago and as well as caring for her husband, Heddwyn, 53, who suffers with

schizophrenia, she is also employed as a full-time carer for two other people who suffer with the illness.

"It's not easy to deal with, but with good medication, support and everyone working as a team, we're having a good life," she said.

"I think our society still has old-fashioned and ignorant ideas about mental health, but the situation is gradually improving.

"Years ago, if you had mental problems, people would look at you as if to say it's your own fault. Attitudes towards mental health must change if we want to move forward. If people are better educated about mental health, it will get rid of the stigma attached."