

BRIDGES CENTRE COVID-19 UPDATE

We want to keep you up to date with how we have adapted to the current pandemic and how we are continuing to support people in Monmouthshire.



BRIDGES CENTRE

A note from Aileen Atkinson - Bridges Centre's new Business Director

Whilst the building is closed, it may seem that all is quiet at Bridges; far from it – there's an enormous amount happening behind the scenes and we have lots of changes to tell you about. As well as everything else that's going on, there has been a major changing of the guard at Drybridge House. We all bade Mark Walton, Bridges' Business Director a fond farewell on 1st April as he heads into what we hope will be a very long and happy retirement. In his place, we now have Aileen Atkinson who had big plans to do many exciting things in the next few months. That is unfortunately not to be in the current circumstances but watch this space! Aileen has 9 years' experience in venue and event management so was looking forward to building on Mark's previous work and enhancing Bridges as a cultural and events hub that would perfectly compliment the wonderful work that the Bridges' projects teams do. That will have to wait for now but you can be sure that there will be an enormous community get together as soon as all of this is over. You're all invited!

Our other news is that Miranda Thomason, Bridges' Wellbeing Director has moved on to pastures new at GAVO to continue and build on her wealth of experience in the third sector. Miranda is a passionate believer in volunteering and the wellbeing of the local community. She has designed and delivered so many wonderful projects over her 9 years with Bridges including The Befriending Scheme, Volunteering for Wellbeing and the Car Scheme amongst many, many others. Miranda worked very hard in her last few weeks adapting our services to meet current needs and oversaw the teams transfer over from face to face meetings with people to telephone befriending and on-line support. This will mean that everyone who is part of our Bridges network still gets the care and support that they're used to and we can stay in touch with all of our lovely people. We are very sad to see Miranda go but she will continue to work alongside us and support our work through her new role. Good luck Miranda! As an interim measure, Aileen will stand in as Wellbeing Director so that she can support the team in an ever changing and challenging environment. Whatever happens in the coming months, please know that Bridges will always be there for you if you need it and we look forward to seeing you all very soon. Take care

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

We are already hearing how our project is helping to lift people's spirits and provide valuable social contact:

"THIS SERVICE HAS PROVED TO BE INVALUABLE TO MY FAMILY DURING SOCIAL DISTANCING FROM MY 92 YEAR OLD MUM. SHE LOOKS FORWARD TO HER WEEKLY PHONE CALL AND IT'S GREAT FOR HER TO CHAT TO SOMEONE OUTSIDE THE FAMILY. THANK YOU!"



Community Connections Befriending Scheme are continuing to support people who are experiencing feelings of loneliness throughout Monmouthshire. We know that keeping in touch with others and maintaining a connection with the outside world is so important, now more than ever. Instead of our usual face to face visits we have adapted our service and are offering telephone befriending support for people of all ages who may be feeling isolated and would appreciate a friendly chat.

**WE COVER THE WHOLE OF MONMOUTHSHIRE AND CAN BE CONTACTED BY EMAIL ON:
CONTACT@BEFRIENDINGMONMOUTHSHIRE.ORG.UK**

BRIDGES COMMUNITY CAR SCHEME

Bridges Community Car Scheme launched in Monmouth in 2015 as a volunteer-led pilot project. There proved such a need for the service, the project expanded its area to include Raglan and Usk and launched a fully county-wide service in 2018. It has built up to be a busy part of the Community Connections project and now has over 600 registered passengers and organises an average of over 140 journeys a week. The Scheme helps people who cannot access public transport because they need a little extra support to get to where they need to go, including medical appointments, shopping trips, attending social groups and exercise classes and visits to see family.

Due to the current lockdown we have had to pause operations, but are staying in touch with passengers and volunteers by phone and email instead. The one thing that we are being told over and over again, is that everyone cannot wait to get back to normal – to be going shopping with their driver or to join their craft and social groups again and see their friends. We are all missing each other so much, but know this extraordinary time will end, and when it does, we would love more drivers to join us and help members of our community get out and about. To give you a flavour of what we do and how it works, one of our drivers, Richard McCulloch from Llanover, has kindly given us an insight into what it is to be a Bridges Community Car Scheme volunteer.

Our team thoughtfully match beneficiaries with a volunteer befriender who provides a regular telephone call (the frequency can be decided by the beneficiary). In just a few weeks we have expanded the service and have gone from supporting 14 to 100 people with our friendly calls.

Our telephone calls also enable us to identify those who need extra help, for example, with practical tasks such as delivering shopping and prescriptions. We are working closely with Monmouthshire County Council to ensure that additional support is in place for those who need it.

Thanks to the generosity of local community volunteers, we still have capacity to support more people who would benefit from our service, so please do get in touch if you or someone you know would appreciate our support.



A VIEW FROM A VOLUNTEER -

Written by Richard McCulloch

"Having a purpose in life has been shown by many studies as being a key factor in a person's feelings of well-being. When I retired, though, I thought that the freedom from the daily commute and the need to earn a living would just allow me the time to do all the things I most enjoy doing much more often. I didn't miss work but something was missing.

An old friend of mine's Mum needed lifts to the shops and she had started using the Community Car Scheme. I said that I could give her a lift anyway but rather than just limit my help to just her, I offered my help to the car scheme. It was just once a week and it was nice to catch up with her and the family.

Now, I really look forward to our weekly trips to the shops. She needs help getting into and out of the car, help pushing the trolley, help reaching her yogurt from the top shelf and I also help with carrying the shopping inside. It's so much more than just a taxi service! We chat constantly during the journeys and I guess it's started becoming a befriending role as well as the driving.

It wasn't complicated to register as a volunteer driver - they complete a DBS check with you and make sure your car is insured and has a valid MOT! They once reminded me that mine was running out - very handy!

The clients pay just 45p per mile plus a small admin charge. This all goes to the charity and drivers can claim the 45p/mile fee back if they wish.

I now give lifts to two clients weekly and have done a number of other ad-hoc journeys too. Each journey is emailed out beforehand with the essential details of postcode and times etc.; it's all very easy.

Now my life seems to have got a new purpose - and yes, it does feel rewarding.

Why don't you give it a try?"

If you would like to help your community when lock-down is over by becoming a volunteer driver, please email carsheme@bridgescentre.org.uk or call 01600 228787 to register your interest. We look forward to hearing from you!



VOLUNTEERING FOR WELLBEING

Recruiting and supporting local volunteers to telephone befriended people across Monmouthshire

DOING SOMETHING USEFUL OR 'GIVING' CAN HELP US TO FEEL POSITIVE AND VALUED; THIS CAN IMPROVE OUR HEALTH AND WELLBEING. IN THESE STRANGE TIMES, ITS MORE IMPORTANT THAT WE ALL HAVE A SENSE OF VALUE.



Volunteering for Wellbeing is a Bridges Centre project working in partnership with Monmouthshire County Council.

The project aims to enable people to help others in the community by linking them with volunteering opportunities. We usually have a wealth of volunteering opportunities that we help people become involved with, from helping with our community car scheme, to getting involved with intergenerational groups or community gardens.

**COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS, WOULD LOVE TO HEAR FROM PEOPLE WANTING TO RECEIVE CALLS :
CONTACT@BEFRIENDINGMONMOUTHSHIRE.ORG.UK**

Due to the present restrictions we find ourselves under, nearly all of our opportunities have had to be suspended – however, we have been thrilled to have been able to welcome a large number of new volunteers to the team who are keen to become telephone befrienders. Their role will be to make regular friendly and encouraging phone calls to people feeling a little lonely or isolated to lift their spirits and help to reconnect them to the outside world.

Due to the large number of volunteers coming forward we now have capacity to welcome referrals for new people to receive calls from our sister project, Community Connections.



 **Volunteering
for wellbeing**

 **monmouthshire
sir fynwy**



BUILDING BRIDGES

How we have adapted our project to support young people in Monmouthshire -



Building Bridges is a project for 14-25 year olds with additional needs. Our aim is to support and encourage young people to engage in their local communities; broadening their social networks, making friends, confidence building and learning social skills. Our focus is on sustainability and supporting our young people to make connections with individuals and groups that outlive the life of our project. We do this through one-to-one and group work encompassing social, leisure and work related activities.

Whilst we are a predominantly face to face organisation, during these times, staff are constantly developing the way that we work, through preparing activities and events that are online and/or can be sent out to families and young people. It is really important to us that the young people and families continue to inspire, direct and contribute to the way that we work, in order that the young people continue to build their confidence, befriend and share skills with each other. We also continue to support our local businesses and organisations, and the people that share their skills with us on a regular basis. One of the main ways to do this has been developing and contributing to the Bridges YouTube Channel, with dance lessons and craft workshops.

So far we have sent out scrap-booking kits and sunflower seeds and have loved seeing the progress they are making. One of our young people has hosted a Facebook quiz for some of his friends on the project, which was great Thank you!!

Sammy, who was previously a young person on the project, and is now a member of the sessional staff, is creating craft workshops once a week to give us lots of inspiration and we are also running a Photography competition weekly on our Facebook group!

The young people are taking part in weekly zoom calls to meet and chat with friends, and through working in partnership with Community Connections and telephone befriending, we have trained Sammy to give weekly calls to young people who need a chat. The online chats and activities have really proved useful for those new members, who hadn't had chance to join in group activities before the lockdown, to meet and get to know new friends. We hope that this will be of huge benefit when we are finally able to get back to our face to face activities!



QUEST BUSTERS | QB

How we are supporting over 40 families across Monmouthshire to access activities

The Quest Busters project is a Lottery funded joint collaboration between Building Bridges and the MAGIC parent and carer network. It aims to provide locally based, fun and safe activities for children and young people aged between 8 and 17 years, and their families, who live in Monmouthshire.. We aim to provide activities where people don't feel judged, where young people can have positive experiences and families and carers can benefit from respite and social opportunities.



A MAGIC & BUILDING BRIDGES PROJECT

The project has made some significant changes to adapt to how it supports the young people and their families during this period. Moving to an online and phone support service for parents and providing activities, challenges and social opportunities for the young people, and their siblings, in their own homes. We have had some amazing new QB logos designed by our young people, a sunflower growing competition, online games, craft packs, sensory packs and a photography competition. Our parents have been meeting in virtual Zoom coffee mornings and have definitely embraced the competitive spirit of the sunflower competition!

We will continue to find interesting and thoughtful activities for our families to take part in throughout the coming months and will continue to support our families and young people in the best way possible. We thank our funders, The National Lottery Community Fund, Comic Relief and the Celebrate National Lottery 25 fund, for helping us provide these activities and support to the QB families.



PEOPLE FIRST MONMOUTHSHIRE

PEOPLE FIRST IS A SELF-ADVOCACY GROUP WHICH IS FOR, AND LED BY PEOPLE WITH A LEARNING DISABILITY.

Monmouthshire People First currently have groups in Abergavenny and Monmouth. We support people with a learning disability to advocate for themselves and talk about the issues that are important to them.

Members can feel confident in achieving equal rights and a positive image, to enable them to have total control of their lives and make informed choices. Our aim is to promote empowerment and inclusion to all adults with a learning disability. People First enables adults with a learning disability to influence service planning decisions, it also plays a role in training professionals to work with people who have a learning difficulty.

PEOPLE FIRST SHARES KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION WITH EACH OTHER AND THEIR COMMUNITY. IT IS A CHANCE TO BUILD CONFIDENCE, MEET NEW FRIENDS AND FEEL EMPOWERED.

Whilst we have been unable to meet on the conventional way that People First has met in the past, by meetings/social events, members have been utilising Facebook more often than previously. Regular contact has been made by members calling or texting to enable them to feel they are still able to share knowledge and information.

Members have also been able to receive a wide variety of activities some have included sunflower growing kits, bake off kits, bird feeder kits. We are hoping to explore the option of a video call if members think this would be something they would like.



**Monmouthshire
People First**



We would like to introduce our new People First Co-ordinator, Rachel Staphnill to the Bridges Projects team.

' I AM REALLY LOOKING FORWARD TO MEETING YOU ALL AND WORKING TOGETHER TO ACHIEVE EXCITING AND SUCCESSFUL THINGS FOR MONMOUTHSHIRE PEOPLE FIRST. I HOPE WE CAN MAKE OURSELVES WELL KNOWN IN THE COMMUNITY, EVEN MORE THAN THE GROUP IS NOW! '



monmouthshire
sir fynwy



Bridges Centre would like to thank the local community, all our brilliant volunteers, funders and supporters. Even during these worrying times we have shown that by pulling together as a community we can support the most vulnerable in need of support.

We hope you all stay safe and we look forward to reuniting with you all soon.