



Awards Booklet





Cymdeithas Mudiadau Gwirfoddol Gwent





Welcome

A huge welcome to the Monmouthshire Volunteer Awards 2023!

Monmouthshire Housing Association (MHA) and Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisation's (GAVO) are delighted to bring you the first joint Monmouthshire Volunteer Awards (MVA).

Two really has become one; MHA's, 'Making a Difference Awards' and Gavo's, 'Volunteer Awards' have been renamed and rebranded the Monmouthshire Volunteer Awards. Partnerships and volunteering are key to the success of many thriving community projects, with the same inspirational nominees often being put forward for both organisation's award ceremonies, so it made perfect sense to combine Monmouthshire's community Oscars!

Pooling our resources and sharing our expertise to promote the success of Monmouthshire enables us to host what promises to be a highly enjoyable, thought-provoking evening recognising the fantastic people, communities, and selfless work that makes Monmouthshire such a special part of Wales where we feel proud to work and live.

MVA recognises those in our communities who have made huge achievements in their personal lives or within the community in which they work or live. Our judging panel said, the quality of nominations was so inspiring, they were left in awe by all the hard work that goes on within Monmouthshire and the wider community in general.

Don't forget, there's a photo booth here tonight! Make sure you visit it, so you can take away a memento of the evening. Also, keep your raffle ticket safe, as there will be a prize draw at the end of the evening!

We hope you enjoy what promises to be an inspirational evening, just don't forget your tissues!

John Keegan, CEO Monmouthshire Housing Association said...

"Good evening, what a pleasure it is to be writing this as we get ready for the very first joint Monmouthshire Volunteer Awards between MHA and GAVO.

MHA understands the importance of recognising the work of all the unsung heroes who are the glue that holds communities together.

We know at MHA that individuals and communities have been under extreme pressure in the last 12 months with the cost-of-living crisis but through all the challenges we have seen professional organisations, individuals and communities come together to embrace and protect some of the most vulnerable in society. Without the volunteers that this event seeks to recognise, Monmouthshire would be a much poorer place. So, I would like to say thank you to everybody here this evening for all their volunteering. I am sure you will have a fantastic evening and it is so special that this event is being jointly hosted by two organisations who are fundamental to the wellbeing of all those who work and live in Monmouthshire."



Stephen Tiley, CEO of Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations said...

"Welcome to the 1st Joint Volunteering Awards: Celebrating community heroes

In the midst of an ever-evolving world, where challenges and uncertainties seem to be our constant companions, we find solace, inspiration, and hope in the extraordinary spirit of volunteerism. It is with immense pride and gratitude that we welcome you to the inaugural Joint Volunteering Awards, a collaborative endeavour between the Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations (GAVO) and Monmouthshire Housing Association (MHA).

Communities across Monmouthshire and further afield through Gwent continue to navigate the complexities of a post-pandemic world. The resilience, compassion, and unwavering dedication of volunteers have illuminated our path through these uncertain times. Volunteers have emerged as the true heroes, selflessly extending a helping hand, providing comfort, and fostering unity in our communities.

The Awards evening is an opportunity to gather not only to recognise and honour the exceptional contributions of volunteers but also to celebrate the essence of human kindness that binds us all. The GAVO and MHA Joint Volunteering Awards shine a spotlight on those who have selflessly dedicated their time, expertise, and heart to make a profound impact on the lives of others.

As we come together to acknowledge the outstanding efforts of these community heroes, let us be reminded that even in the face of adversity, the human spirit remains indomitable. Through these awards, we pay tribute to the invaluable role that volunteers play in weaving the fabric of a stronger, more compassionate society.

Welcome to a night of appreciation, inspiration, and gratitude, as we honour those who embody the true spirit of volunteerism. Thank you for joining us in celebrating the remarkable achievements of our community heroes at the 1st Joint Volunteering Awards."

Programme

6:15pm: Welcome our hosts: Isla Arendell, Zoë Perry and Rachel Knight

6:30pm: The Sunshine Singers Choir

6:40pm: Introductions: Chief Executive Officers of MHA and GAVO

Community Champion Award: Presented by Ryan Coleman, Monmouthshire County Council

Best Group or Initiative Award: Presented by Rachel Knight, Monmouthshire Housing Association

Inspirational Young Person Award: Presented by Dylan Allman, Previous Winner and Hedgehog Aware

Trustee and Director Award: Presented by Chris Irving, Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations

Environmental Award: Presented by Lucinda Boyland, Monmouthshire County Council

Most Inspirational Journey Award: Presented by Rob Carey, Monmouthshire Housing Association

7:45pm: Dinner (Guests will be called by table)

Health and Wellbeing Award: Presented by Alison Palmer, Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations

Outstanding Contribution to MHA Award: Presented by Michele Morgan, Monmouthshire Housing Association

Community Inclusivity Award: Presented by Emma Bryn, Monmouthshire County Councillor

Volunteer of the Year Award: Presented by Jo Webb, GAVO

High Sherriff Award: The High Sheriff of Gwent Professor Simon J Gibson CBE DL

Community Champion Award Finalists

Bonnie Russell

Bonnie is often the project leader or instigator of the many activities happening in the village of Llanellen, near Abergavenny. For many years she has been the Secretary of the busy Village Hall, bringing exceptional clerical and organisational skills and she is involved in every facet of community life within the village. She has also served the Women's institute for many years as an excellent secretary and is the driving force behind the Llanfoist OAP Hall from its inception in the nearby village of her birth.

Bonnie's nominator passionately said, "If she does not organise it or do it in our village.....IT JUST DOESN'T HAPPEN!!!"

The TogetherWORKS Volunteers

Liz Gardiner, Janet Brace and Helen Lane are all volunteers involved in different activities at the TogetherWorks community hub in Caldicot. Their dedication and commitment mean that many local people can benefit from a diverse range of projects in the building. All three of them are selfless and they are the true embodiment of what a community champion should be. The group are valued and respected by their peers and their contribution to the community should not go unnoticed.

Best Group or Initiative Award Finalists

iConnect Volunteers

iConnect volunteers support the iConnect digital inclusion project operating across the county. The group consists of 10 volunteers, all digital champions, offering a plethora of digital support to their community. The group selflessly give up their own time every week to attend drop-ins and Digi-Caffs using their expertise to offer support ranging from getting online, to accessing services, seeking health and well-being advice, staying connected with loved ones, applying for jobs, as well as sourcing devices and affordable wi-fi.

One of the volunteers, from Ukraine, is supporting Ukrainian refugees with the project as a digital champion and translator, ensuring they are receiving the same assistance from the project as others who speak English.

Gateway Community Café

Gateway Community Café has been running for over 10 years, offering support to disadvantaged and vulnerable people in Abergavenny. The café is open 3 days every week, offering free cooked meals, refreshments, a friendly space for people to meet, a listening ear, advocacy, free shower and laundry facilities to the homeless.

The Gateway Community Café also offers opportunities for people to gain work experience, build confidence and interpersonal skills and get training, some of which are certified.

In addition to this, every Christmas it supports over 1,500 people by distributing various hampers of meals, food, gifts and toys. Before covid, a night shelter ran every year over the winter period, serving several homeless people. The Gateway Community Café serves as a lifeline for many.

Inspirational Young Person Award Finalists

Amelia Lexi Jones

Amelia-Lexi is always helping others in her spare time, she is passionate about the environment and regularly organises litter picks to keep her local community clean and tidy. She has gone above and beyond in so many ways and is always encouraging residents to think about the negative impacts of littering. Amelia-Lexi is also always helping her mum to volunteer, by being ready to help with setting up and cleaning up activities. She even helped her mum deliver Christmas presents to the children in Caldicot who were in need.

Noah Herniman

Noah is a truly inspirational young man who has done so much to raise money for others despite going through difficulties and challenges himself. He is a tireless fundraiser, raising over £35,000 to purchase a caravan, named Noah's Retreat, for families with a severely ill child. This is just one example of Noah's many fundraising successes, and he was named 'Young Fundraiser of the Year' in Wales in 2022. Noah is a truly remarkable and selfless young man.

Trustee and Director Award Finalists

Penny Simcock

Penny has been integral in the shaping and securing of the Melville Centre for the Arts in Abergavenny. Penny's devotion and passion for the Centre has resulted in an accessible, affordable, and open space dedicated to the arts in all its forms for the community. Whether it be opening the doors at 8am in the morning, closing them at 11pm at night, running a bar, café or large-scale event, Penny is always there. She is the first to offer a cup of tea, run to the shop for biscuits as well as creating policies, administering accounts, completing funding applications and negotiating the management of the site.

Described by her nominator as "Selfless and humble, you will not forget Penny. There are hundreds of people who have been helped, advised and cared for by her".

Sue Kingdom & Tim Ryan

Sue first got involved with the Severn Princess Ferry in 2017 and has been the driving force behind what the project has become today. Sue became a trustee in 2020 and since that time has significantly raised the profile of the project. Her work led to the ferry being recognised on the historic ships register. Sue has worked relentlessly in raising the profile of the project and as a result has attracted wide media coverage including being on Vanished Wales on ITV in addition to other programmes and featured in a multitude of press articles.

Sue has been instrumental in networking with the local partners and the community and has raised significant funds for the restoration. Sue's positivity and motivation is infectious and what she and the team have achieved with the Severn Princess ferry has been truly remarkable.

Tim has been involved in the return and restoration of the Severn Princess ferry since 1999. Tim was contacted after the ferry was found washed up in Ireland. He was the driving force in raising the funds and the motivation in ensuring that it was returned to Chepstow where it has been going through a process of loving restoration ever since. It was eventually bought for a guinea and is now an iconic maritime heritage project in its own right.

Throughout this period Tim has worked tirelessly in ensuring that the ferry is now a significant local landmark that engages and attracts countless visitors and volunteers. None of this would have happened without Tim's vision, energy and commitment – what the team have achieved with the Severn Princess ferry has been truly remarkable.

Environmental Award Finalists

The Transition Monmouth Community Fridge

The Transition Monmouth Community Fridge is a simply incredible example of teamwork, insight, clear minded commitment to a sustainable goal and management of a complex, regulation-bound project by a group of committed volunteers.

The community fridge has saved tonnes of food from going to waste, which would otherwise have been disposed of by local supermarkets. The project has also contributed to food security for local residents; helping to ensure that vulnerable households have access to food in a non-stigmatising manner.

The group involved have displayed clear commitment throughout the lifespan of the project, which relies heavily on volunteers to collect food each day, sort and store them and then facilitate distribution to customers.

A significant challenge to Transition has been the increase in energy prices; a particular problem given the heavy reliance on fridges and freezers for this project. Despite this, Transition have continued to manage this vital community service at the same time as actively seeking further opportunities to benefit the local community.

Repair Café Abergavenny

The Repair Cafe in Abergavenny aims to mend as many household items as possible, thereby reducing household waste. If the volunteers can't fix it, they help visitors find replacement parts for the item which they can then bring back to the Repair Cafe to be installed. At every session the volunteers set up the tables and cheerfully set about repairing the items coming in. In addition to their work at repair events, they were a huge support to their manager Fiona, when she was learning about her new role. Fiona said "Their enthusiasm has been infectious, and their encouragement of new volunteers to take part has been exceptional."

Without the support of the volunteers of the Repair Café, it would not have been possible to continue the legacy of the late founder Mary Ann Swanson.

Most Inspirational Journey Award Finalists

Fran Kenny

Over the past three years, Fran has worked tirelessly for Ty Price Reachout Group with great determination to champion the needs of those struggling with significant trauma and drug & alcohol addiction.

Fran has enabled the group to become a family network where help can be available day and night, and has partnered with Gwent Police, Monmouthshire County Council and local mental health support networks to make a real difference to the lives of all involved. This includes not only those who come for help, but also the volunteers she works with and the community, breaking down barriers of stigma and mistrust to enable all to feel accepted.

Fran's work is well known, but what most people see is the tip of the iceberg. She has gone above and beyond to stay in contact with people at their most vulnerable, including accompanying them to meetings for housing, probation, counselling, and drug rehabilitation. She has answered calls late at night and early in the morning to provide practical reassurance and help with people who are in danger or at risk.

Fran is truly inspirational, and her journey has been incredible.

Matthew Alderson

Matt selflessly gives up his little spare time to coach the local girls' football team, all whilst juggling working full time, having a young family and training for marathons and duathlons. Matt devotes a weekday evening and every weekend to training, helping the team build their confidence, get fit and make friends. His journey has seen him recruit girls from the local area and the number of members keep growing every year. Matt's inclusive approach shines through, he always includes all abilities ensuring every team member is valued. He chooses to spend his little spare time, helping other people...for free!

Matt is very inspirational; the consensus would be from all who know him; they are very lucky to have him.

Health and Wellbeing Award Finalists

Spiro Tanti & Richard Langford-Johnson

Spiro Tanti and Richard Langford-Johnson were nominated for their dedication and commitment to the new Cycling Without Age Project. The project enables people with mobility problems or disabilities to go out for a bike ride, feel the wind in their hair and the sun on their face.

Spiro and Richard take out residents from Foxhunters Community Care Home in Abergavenny on a weekly basis. Their nominator says "They are kind, caring and reassuring. They pick up the residents and staff every Wednesday morning and take them out on the Trishaw Bike for fun, friendship and to keep active. Alongside the regular Foxhunters journeys, Spiro and Richard also assist with promotional events, taking people out for a bike ride around Abergavenny to promote the project in the wider community".

Spiro and Richard go above and beyond to make sure that their passengers get out in the fresh air, have an enjoyable experience, improve their wellbeing and are kept safe at all times.

Jem Jenkins-Jones

Jem Jenkins-Jones is a selfless member of the community who has organised countless events such as the 'Wyesham Jubilee Big Lunch', 'Coronation Big Lunch' and a Wellbeing event in Monmouth Shire Hall, where 16 wellbeing organisations attended, along with over 150 visitors.

Jem has recently been voted into the volunteer position of Wellbeing Officer in Monmouth Town Council and has big plans! If this wasn't enough, Jem volunteers for Benthgy, ACE Monmouth and has just signed up to support Monmouthshire Museums to make reminiscent boxes to take into care homes and other organisations.

One of Jem's nominators said "Jem is a wonderfully kind, caring and compassionate person who will do anything she can to help others, despite having a very busy family life. She does so much for the community."

Outstanding Contribution to MHA Award Finalists

Laura Cousins

Laura has been an avid volunteer at MHA for the past 2 years, she is always the first to lend a hand at any event. During the last 12 months, Laura has stepped up her commitment by joining MHA's 'Community Voice' group and is an extremely valued member.

Laura is committed to helping MHA shape its services and delivery, not just for herself but, for her fellow tenants, making sure their voices are heard. In addition to this, Laura has contributed to several projects run by the Engagement Team. However, this summer she took responsibility of organising and running the child-oriented cooking project called 'Monmouthshire MasterChef Minis'. Laura has gone from strength to strength during this project, illustrating her level of dedication and ability in the way she helped organise the project.

Laura is an unsung hero, attributing to many positive outcomes for her community.

Alistair Clarke

Alistair is an active member of MHA's Community Voice group and an iConnect Volunteer for the iConnect digital inclusion project. Over the last two years, he has made an incredible impact helping MHA improve and revise its services and service delivery.

Alistair selflessly gives up several hours a week as an iConnect volunteer, kindly supporting and improving digital skills to leave people feeling confident by being more digitally aware. Alistair's selfless work does not stop at his digital support, he is always willing to help with setting up, making teas and coffees.

Alistair always goes above and beyond, and he is passionate about equality, diversity and inclusion, aligning perfectly with his voluntary roles. Sometimes Alistair's health conditions can be a barrier to his involvement, but his positive attitude always ensures that any barriers are overcome.

Community Inclusivity Award Finalists

Dance Time 4 All

Dance Time 4 All is a volunteer led intergenerational activity held at Bridges Community Centre every Thursday.

The group is run by a team of volunteers dedicated to bringing together local people of all ages and abilities to ensure everyone feels involved and included. Many guests attend to enjoy an hour of dancing and singing along to familiar songs, whilst others just enjoy the company and watching the others dance. This is followed by half an hour for tea, cake and chat. It's a cheerful, busy afternoon and important to a lot of people.

The attendees are all from the local community and is inclusive for all.

The groups' nominator said "Dancetime4All is one of the most inclusive groups that could be wished for. Everyone is welcome regardless of age or ability and everyone supports everyone else. A wheelchair or disability does not restrict anyone's access to the dancing and whether it's a waltz or the hokey cokey, there's music to suit everyone!

New volunteers to the group receive the same warm welcome and for many, it's a chance to feel appreciated, needed and part of a truly friendly community of people."

Volunteer of the Year Finalists

Ginny Baldwin

Virginia 'Ginny' Baldwin has been an exceptional driving force in supporting Ukrainian Refugees within Monmouthshire. Working closely with the MCC Ukrainian Refugee Support Team at the Ty Magor Welcome Centre and other volunteer networks she has galvanized community spirit and rallied around providing unwavering support during people's time of need. Ginny has been a mainstay for rallying other volunteers and community members around in support of Ukrainian Refugees housed at Ty Magor hotel. Her selflessness and dedication to be present to support others throughout the day, evening, and on weekends is testament to her character. Her tireless efforts in providing essential resources, emotional support, and guidance to those who have been displaced have made an immeasurable difference in the lives of these individuals. Her selflessness, empathy and commitment to making a positive impact truly exemplifies the spirit of humanitarianism. When situations presented themselves and families were due to move out from the hotel into their own accommodation, she has tapped into her personal networks, friends and neighbours to bring together essential household items to allow a family to relocate into long-term accommodation regardless of their financial situation (many families had little to no money and through donations Ginny has been able to furnish whole houses).

Ginny has shown outstanding leadership and compassion, embodying the values that inspire us all to lend a helping hand

Pam Wheatley

Pam Wheatley inspiring founder of 'Wyesham Warren' Community Group, a food club set up to help local families struggling with increasing food bills, has worked tirelessly to bring the idea to life. Overcoming many personal challenges, her achievements are testament to her dedication. Pam's voluntary work has resulted in a food pantry enabling 50 families to access £15 - £20 worth of groceries for just £3.50 per week. Pam and her group of volunteers aim to stretch peoples' finances to better cope with increasing prices. Through her selfless voluntary work to support her local community people through the rising cost-of-living; Pam embodies a true community champion.

Pam's dedication, perseverance, and ability to keep going in the face of huge challenges is incredible and her selfless way of working means that she is a magnet for anybody who wants to make their community a better place to live.

We would like to express our gratitude to iConnect for kindly loaning the iPads for this evening's event!





Monmouthshire Housing
Tai Sir Fynwy

- ☎ **0345 677 2277**
- ✉ **customerservices@monmouthshirehousing.co.uk**
- 🌐 **www.monmouthshirehousing.co.uk**
- ✉ **Monmouthshire Housing Association**
Nant-Y-Pia House, Mamhilad Technology Park
Mamhilad, Monmouthshire, NP4 0JJ
- 📘 **facebook.com/Monmouthshire.Housing**
- ✂ **x.com/mon_housing**



- ☎ **0800 470 1378**
- ✉ **monmouthshire@gavo.org.uk**
- 🌐 **www.gavo.org.uk**
- ✉ **Room 4A Sessions House, Maryport Street,**
Usk, NP15 1AD
- 📘 **@GAVO-Monmouthshire**
- ✂ **GVolunteering**