



NEWS *from Wales Community Rehabilitation Company*

Issue 3 April 2015

Cwmni Asefyddu Cymunedol
**Cymru
Wales**
Community Rehabilitation Company



Probation services which reduce reoffending and make the people of Wales safer

EXTRA HELP FOR ALL AS THEY LEAVE CUSTODY

‘Through the Gate’ services to provide probation support with housing, finance and jobseeking

May 1st sees an important change in the way prisoners are supported as they leave custody and try to resettle successfully in the community.

For the first time every prisoner will benefit from ‘Through the Gate’ resettlement services which will start while they are still in custody and continue in the community. The aim is to reduce reoffending by providing each prisoner with a tailor-made package of support.

That package might include help finding accommodation and re-engaging with family and friends, financial advice, drug and alcohol education, anger management classes, training opportunities and mentoring. Prisoners serving less than 12 months have not received any such help until now.

Wales Community Rehabilitation Company's new owners, Working Links, have commissioned St Giles Trust to facilitate the services at HMP Cardiff, HMP Prescoed, HMP Stoke Heath and HMP Swansea.

Safer Wales have been commissioned to provide this service at HMP Eastwood Park while Wales CRC will be delivering the service directly in HMP Parc.

A universal screening of need for all prisoners will be completed by prison staff within 72 hours of arrival in prison. This will be followed by the creation of an individual



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Message from the Chief Executive



As you will have seen from the front page of this newsletter, 1st May sees an important milestone in probation history with the introduction of Through the Gate services to help offenders resettlement into the community and reduce reoffending.

For the first time there will be tailor-made support packages for all prisoners, including those with short-term sentences of less than 12 months, to help prepare them for release.

We look forward to working with our partners St Giles Trust, Safer Wales, the National Probation Service and our prison colleagues to make this new initiative a success and ensure offenders have the best possible chance for beginning a crime free life.

It is also a good time to look back at what we have achieved since Wales Community Rehabilitation Company was established 10 months ago. A vital part of the work we do is providing accredited programmes, a wide range of interventions designed to make offenders change the attitudes and behaviour which have led them into offending

in the past.

These programmes address general offending, substance abuse and domestic violence and I am pleased to confirm that we are on course to exceed our targets with an expected 746 programmes being completed against a target of 651. Our thinking skills programme saw the greatest number of offenders (360), followed by our domestic violence programme (173). Also during the last 10 months 480 Essential Skills awards were earned by individuals on community orders and prison licences. These awards make a tremendous difference to their future aspirations and for the majority this is their first experience of success in education.

Within this newsletter you will find a report which will tell you more about one of our programmes – for Drink Impaired Drivers – which will give you an insight into the impact they can have.

Finally, I can reveal that 402,344 hours of unpaid work worth more than £2.6m were completed by those on Community Payback since 1st June, a massive boost for the charities and other worthy organisations that benefitted and you can read about some of those projects in the coming pages.

Liz Rijnenberg
Chief Executive
Wales Community Rehabilitation Company

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resettlement plan completed by CRC resettlement advisors.

The resettlement plan will be shared with the relevant Offender Manager from Wales CRC for low to medium risk offenders and from the National Probation Service for those considered high risk.

During their time in custody all prisoners will undertake employment/tasks as normal within the prison regime but the resettlement plan may be used to inform the prisons what these tasks should be.

CRCs will be contractually obliged to deliver certain services from 12 weeks prior to release. These include advice on accommodation, employment,

finance and benefit, preventing domestic violence and special support for female sex workers. There is also the opportunity to provide additional elements based on need which could include accessing healthcare or building family relationships and other support networks in the community.

The prison-based Resettlement Officer will offer these based on need but it is down to the offender to attend.

The Housing Act has removed priority need from all prisoners but Offender Managers will play a crucial role in the new housing arrangements.

One week before release, the Resettlement Officer, Offender

Supervisor if one is involved, offender and Offender Manager will all be invited to a pre-release meeting where the plan will be reviewed and any further needs upon release will be identified. The Offender Manager will continue to meet the offender in the community and support them through their resettlement period. The changes are a key part of the Government's Transforming Rehabilitation reforms.

CONTACT US

We hope you find this newsletter useful. If you would like to contact us with any comments please email walescrc.info@wales.probation.gsi.gov.uk

Community Payback

Community Payback helps to save Cardiff Riding School



CP Supervisor Adrian Cowley with an offender. Inset CP Supervisor Andy Morgan with the rotten doors which were replaced by Wales CRC's Cardiff workshop

Watch the video on our website
www.walescrc.co.uk

YouTube

CARDIFF Riding School which was threatened with closure due to council cutbacks can now look forward to a more secure future – thanks to groups of offenders.

The teams are carrying out unpaid work with the Wales Community Rehabilitation Company as part of their community sentences and have provided the manpower to rebuild one and a half miles of fences to keep the riding school's horses safe.

They have also built large replacement doors for the indoor riding school, saving the school an overall total of £42,000 on an original £50,000 bill which threatened to spell the end for the school in Pontcanna Fields.

The school has taught generations of children and adults to ride over 45 years and has an active Riding for the Disabled group. But the staff were warned it would close as Cardiff Council tried to make savings.

The news sparked a high

profile campaign to save the riding school, including the setting up of a Friends' support group. But thanks to Wales CRC stepping in to help, the school can look forward to a more settled future.

Gloria Garrington, assistant manager at the stables, said: "Wales CRC offered to help when we found out we were going to be closed. Previously we had a lot of quotes for mending the fencing and faced a massive bill of £50,000 from an outside contractor, now we've only had to pay for the raw materials. "The work that has been done has made the school much more secure and kept money in our budget which we can use for the horses. It's been a super job."

Adrian Cowley, Community Payback supervisor with Wales CRC, said the offenders had replaced rotting timber and built new fencing.

"It's vital because the horses could escape otherwise.



There's a carriageway and a river at the side and the horses could be put in great danger. The offenders have also benefitted by learning new woodworking skills," he said.

402,344

hours of unpaid work worth more than £2.6million was completed by those on Community Payback in the last 12 months.

Pathfinder shows Katy the way

A young woman who resorted to shoplifting to fund her drug addiction has turned her life around with the help of a pilot initiative to reduce offending and reoffending by women in Wales.

Katy Benson, 27, (pictured) spent most of her teens and adult life struggling with mental health issues and turned to drugs as a way to cope with her feelings of despair. With her life spiralling out of control, Katy resorted to shoplifting to fund her substance misuse.

Katy was thrown a lifeline in July 2014 when she was sentenced to a Community Order and transferred to the Women's Pathfinder, an Integrated Offender Management (IOM)

Cymru pilot initiative which focuses on the specific needs of women within the criminal justice system. She is one of 150 women diverted away from crime since the

More than 150 vulnerable women diverted away from crime with the help of a pioneering project in Cardiff

Pathfinder scheme was piloted in Cardiff eight months ago.

The Pathfinder project, sponsored by the National Offender Management Service in Wales and managed by Wendy Hyett of Wales Community Rehabilitation Company, brings together the four Welsh police forces, probation services and partner agencies to innovate and deliver a holistic approach to women offenders.

One of the key developments is the Diversion Scheme, which aims to divert lower risk women away from the criminal justice system and into voluntary community support and interventions to tackle the root causes of their offending behaviour.

The women are given a range of services including housing support, debt advice, mental health services, domestic abuse support and substance misuse interventions to help turn their lives around.

As a result of the success, the Pathfinder Team in collaboration with the four Police and Crime Commissioners in Wales secured nearly £500,000 from the Home Office's Police Innovation Fund to develop four additional pilot sites across Wales in Newport (Gwent), Merthyr Tydfil (South Wales), St Asaph (North Wales) and Haverfordwest (Dyfed-Powys).

I learnt that it was not enough to simply take drugs out of my life – I needed to fill that void with healthy friendships, hobbies, activities

The scheme was officially launched at Cardiff City Hall on Monday, 9th March when Katy joined AM Leighton Andrews, Ian Barrow, Deputy Director of The National Offender Management Service in Wales, Liz Rijnenberg, Chief Executive of Wales CRC, Megan Jenkins, Stakeholder Advisor for Wales CRC, Paul Harris, Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent and Sophie Howe, Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner for South Wales.

There she spoke about the scheme's importance and innovation in its work with women.

Ian Barrow, Deputy Director, NOMS in Wales, told the launch guests: "Women make up 19 per cent of the total arrested in Wales but 26 per cent of those sentenced. They are more likely to be victims of physical and domestic abuse and suffer depression and self harm in custody. They are also the primary carers for children.

"The Women's Pathfinder has a real opportunity to contribute to the development of criminal and social justice policies and strategy in Wales and deliver the Wales Reducing Reoffending Strategy in relation to female offenders."

Katy said the Women's Pathfinder provided her with opportunity to access holistic and appropriate support services and interventions to address the underlying issues of her offending behaviour.

"Through the support of the Pathfinder I learnt that it was not enough to simply take drugs out of my life – I needed to fill that void with healthy friendships, hobbies, activities. I needed to create a full, rich life for myself; to ensure that it had purpose and meaning."

As a result of help from the Women's Pathfinder, Katy is now working with Recovery Cymru, the charity which helped her on her own path to a better life.

Pathfinder nominated for probation "Oscars"

Wendy Hyett, Manager of the Women's Pathfinder project, is one of four staff from Wales Community Rehabilitation Company nominated in the Probation Awards 2015, the "Oscars" of the probation service.

Our staff have made the finals in four of the eight categories, more than any other probation provider in the UK.

From piloting innovative family partnership projects which support and safeguard families in crisis, to managing pioneering schemes to divert women away from the criminal justice system, the work of Wales CRC staff represents the best practice in the UK's probation services.

Now in its seventh year the awards are organised by the National Offender Management Service which oversees prisons and probation services. They recognise excellence in the work of probation staff and volunteers. They are open to the thousands of staff working in the National Probation Service and the 21 Community Rehabilitation Companies in the UK.

Our four finalists are:

- Diversity and Equality: Wendy Hyett, Project Manager of IOM Cymru's Women's Pathfinder Project.
- Interventions: Sian Waters, a Probation

Services Officer in Llanelli, whose motivational work with offenders includes supporting and helping them to create their own DVD, organising an It's A Knock-Out style contest for staff and offenders and the development of the Aile Gyfle (Second Chance) social enterprise where offenders can be trained while making craft items to sell in a charity shop.

- Offender Management: Swansea Probation Services Officer Suzanne Edwards, for her work with offenders with complex physical and mental health issues including an offender who was paralysed in an assault and needed special care in a spinal injury unit.
- Working in Partnership: Gwent Probation Officer Lindsey Pudge, who has been working with Barnardo's Cymru's Community Support for Offenders (CSOF) pilot project, where she provided the missing link between offenders and families by sharing important probation information to safeguard children and support parents in prison. Her work is helping to shape Barnardo's future policies.

The winners will be announced at the annual awards ceremony on Wednesday 24th June 2015.

Liz Rijnenberg, Chief Executive of Wales CRC, said: "This is a great achievement. It reflects all the hard work our staff carry out to reduce reoffending and make Wales a safer place."





Two unemployed Cardiff offenders have increased their chances of getting jobs after graduating from the School of Hard Knocks.

Caine Herbert, 25, and Gareth Bridle, 37, were among 24 unemployed men to make it through the eight-week training programme run by a social inclusion charity and filmed by Sky TV for the series the School of Hard Knocks.

Caine and Gareth, who are both on 12 month supervision orders with Wales CRC's Cardiff and Vale Local Delivery Unit, signed up to the programme at the start of February. Caine had not worked for six months after suffering mental health problems while Gareth had been out of work for 18 months and was caring for his sick girlfriend.

During the training, Caine and Gareth were put through their paces by Welsh rugby legend Scott Quinnell and World Cup winner, Will Greenwood. By learning how to play rugby union and work as a team, they were able to improve their fitness levels, social development and life skills with the end goal of getting a job.

The course culminated in a jobs fair at the Millennium Stadium on Monday, 23rd March, with 17 potential employers including Army Recruitment, Rhondda Cynon Taf Homes, Office Angels, O2, Timpsons, Principality Building Society and Watkins

and Gunn solicitors.

Caine, pictured below with referee Nigel Owens, said: "Learning how to play rugby has been great and my level of fitness has been amazing. Everything is good and I'm going to join my local rugby club."

Rugby star and presenter Scott Quinnell added: "Caine is one of the most improved guys we



have had on the programme. He went off to Army recruitment training and came back a changed man. The next step is for him to get a job. He can do whatever he wants in future."

Gareth, who was sentenced to 70 hours Community Payback and given a 12 month probation order after he sold a mobile phone he had found in the street, said:

"It's been an amazing experience. I have developed new friendships. I feel part of something special and it's refreshing not feeling like an outsider or a 'joke'."

On the final day of the course the boys put their rugby skills to the test when they challenged Cardiff Harlequins to a match at Cardiff Arms Park. They won by an impressive 27-12.

The series is due to be screened by Sky 1. and Sky Sports in September.



Staff mark Working Links' 15th birthday by volunteering in the community

Wales CRC's new owners Working Links are celebrating their 15th anniversary this year.

To mark the event staff from both companies teamed up to make a difference to charities in their local communities. Staff have also been given an extra day off to celebrate their own birthdays.

Across Wales, from Colwyn Bay to Cardiff, workers stepped away from their desks and picked up a variety of tools such as paint brushes, grass cutters and screwdrivers to lend a helping hand to charities close to their hearts.

In Merthyr Tydfil Chief Executive Liz Rijnenberg, Working Links' Director in Wales Deri ap Hywel and six colleagues spent a morning gardening, litter picking and painting at TEDS Pre-School early days support group based at Troedyrhiw Boys and Girls Club. In Bridgend, volunteers raised nearly £500 for Y Bont School by packing bags at Sainsburys supermarket and in Colwyn Bay they helped out with the gardening at Ty Hapus Community Resource Centre.

Following all their hard work, the volunteers joined their colleagues at their offices in Wrexham; Colwyn Bay; Cardiff; Swansea; Llanelli; Merthyr; Blaenau Gwent; Pontypridd; Bridgend and Caerphilly, for a birthday party to celebrate the formation of Working Links on 1st April 2000.

The company, which was awarded the contract to run three community rehabilitation companies Wales; Dorset, Devon and Cornwall and Bristol, Gloucestershire, Somerset and Wiltshire on 1st February as part of the government's Transforming Rehabilitation programme, was originally set up to deliver specialist and tailored services for people with varying and often complex needs.

They are a prime contractor delivering key government employment and training programmes across the UK and their work enables service users to create better futures for themselves and their communities.

Working Links is a unique public, private and



Pictured volunteering in Merthyr are from left: Kylie Thomas, Ryan Hill, Don Wilson and Sharon O'Connor from Working Links with their Director in Wales Deri ap Hywel and Liz Rijnenberg, Chief Executive of Wales CRC

voluntary company, involving the government's Shareholder Executive, Manpower, Capgemini and Mission Australia. It also works in partnership with Innovation Wessex - a mutual community interest company made up of former probation trust workers - to deliver the CRC's core aims to protect communities and reduce reoffending.

Liz Rijnenberg said: "Volunteering was a wonderful opportunity to meet all our colleagues from Working Links and make a difference to community organisations and other charities. Local resources and local authorities are so strapped for cash, it's hard for projects like these to manage."

Working Links Chief Executive Phil Andrew said: "During the past 15 years Working Links has been changing lives through targeted employment support, training, rehabilitation and partnership working and the experience has provided the platform for today's business, delivering probation services, working with overseas governments and delivering a multitude of social need interventions for people with complex needs at home in Britain.

"We are working hard to ensure our business is ready for whatever the future brings us. We're committed to making Working Links an even better place to work. But most importantly, we're still committed to our customers and helping as many people as possible move towards a brighter future."

A sobering experience for drivers who drink

"I shouldn't be on probation" and "I'm not a criminal," are frequent comments when offenders first join the Drink Impaired Drivers programme.

Doctors, nurses, teachers, solicitors, builders, electricians, shop workers and the unemployed have all been through the programme run by Wales CRC. Each year an average of 100 people successfully complete it, having been ordered by the courts to take part after committing their second drink driving related offence.

Delivered in group sessions, the DID programme is one of the many interventions which Wales CRC run to tackle the root causes of offending behaviour patterns. It makes drivers taking part consider the long-term effects of driving while over the limit, such as losing their licence and even their job.

Generally run in the evenings, the DID courses equip drink drivers with the knowledge to address their repeated drink driving. Over a period of 14 weeks drivers learn how to calculate units of alcohol in drinks and they begin to understand the consequences of their actions, the emotions affecting their decisions and the triggers that set them off. Through a series of practical demonstrations they come to understand how a split-second reaction needed to avoid an accident can be dramatically impaired by alcohol.

"One of the biggest factors with people who are convicted of drink driving offences is a lack of knowledge of the units of alcohol and how long they remain in the body," says Niki Rees, the Accredited Programme Facilitator responsible for delivering the course in Cardiff and the Vale.

"A lot of the behaviour is down to a lack of knowledge and belief in common myths such as a copper coin in the roof of the mouth gives a negative reading on the breathalyser or that driving along country roads is safer than towns. We are expected to know all about the units of alcohol in drink, but unless we are taught these things how can we be expected to know? It's



something that should be taught in school or as part of the driving test."

As Niki explains the DID course brings in the widest variety of people. "On one course I taught a 74-year-old man who had been doing it all his life and got away with it. On another I had a retired professional, who was caring for her elderly mother and was so embarrassed to be convicted of drink driving she didn't tell a soul.

"People's attitudes can be shocking. One driver was well over the limit and was picking his children up from school when he crashed the car. His

attitude was, 'it was only down the road.'

Another common scenario involves people who are drinking at home and run out of alcohol, then drive to the garage to buy more.

"By getting the offenders to explore their emotions and draw a storyboard with eight scenes leading up to their arrest makes them really start thinking about their actions and have a contingency plan for the future.

"In the end most people are quite ashamed by what they have done and leave with more knowledge and skills to avoid offending in the future."

One driver was well over the limit and was picking his children up from school when he crashed the car. His attitude was, 'it was only down the road'

Alcohol facts

- The daily recommended alcohol limits are 3-4 units for men and 2-3 for women.
- Four pints of average 4% strength beer takes 13 hours to leave your system. So if you finish drinking at 11pm you should not drive until 12 noon. Three large (250ml) glasses of wine take 11 hours to leave the body.
- In England and Wales, the alcohol limit for drivers is 80 mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood, 35 mg per 100 ml of breath or 107 mg per 100 ml of urine.
- The maximum penalty for drink driving is six months in prison, an unlimited fine and a driving ban of at least one year (three years if convicted twice in 10 years).

"If I could turn back the clock, knowing what I learnt on the DIDs course, I would never have got in the van. It was a daft thing to do."



Father-of-three Jonathan Roberts' trip to the pub with his mates after work ended in a three-year-driving ban and a lucky escape from injury.

"I had just gone for a few drinks with my friends straight after work and parked up my work van," the 37-year-old electrician explains.

But a call from his ex-girlfriend to say his one-year-old son had suffered serious burns and was being taken to hospital

sent Jonathan rushing to his van. He had driven a few miles through the Cardiff suburbs when he lost control of his employer's vehicle and collided with a tree.

He suffered minor injuries. When police attended the accident he was found to be over the legal driving limit.

Last May he was banned from driving for three years by magistrates and ordered to attend a 12-week Drink

Impaired Drivers course.

"The course really helped me to understand my actions and my drinking. I would say I am a casual drinker, but when I worked it out I was drinking my weekly recommended allowance in one day. The course really helped me to learn about effective planning and the alternatives to drink driving.

"At the time of my accident I had tunnel vision, I just wanted to get to my boy. I

was lucky I didn't hurt myself or another driver. I nearly lost my job and I've had to pay my boss back for writing off his van. I also have the inconvenience of having to get my friends and family to drive me around.

"If I could turn back the clock, knowing what I learnt on the DIDs course, I would have gone outside and ordered a taxi. I would never have got in the van. It was a daft thing to do."

Meet our new trainee probation officers

In February Wales CRC recruited 10 new trainee probation officers across Wales. Some of the new recruits tell us why they joined.



Tracey Betts, mother of four based in Pontypool.

"I want to have a positive impact and influence on people's lives."

"Before I joined probation I was teaching basic skills literacy to offenders in Usk and Prescoed Prison. I could see how much confidence prisoners gained from learning to read and write. I didn't do that well at school. But after my children grew up I was encouraged to go back to into education and qualify as a teacher. Going back to education boosted my confidence and I hope my experience will help others."

David O'Driscoll was a volunteer with the Youth Offending Service. He joined Wales CRC as an administrator in the Westgate Street office, Cardiff before becoming a trainee probation officer.



"When I was younger I had a very colourful life for a few years. I had done well in school but I rebelled. I had a couple of run-ins with the police and spent a few nights in the cells for drinking and driving offences. I was homeless and sleeping on friends' sofas. It was just lucky happenstance that my bad behaviour didn't escalate as I had a good group of friends. I went to university and graduated in Criminology and started working for a trade union. At the same time I was doing voluntary work with the Youth Offending Service as a mentor. I can understand how people can get on a downward slope. As a mentor with the young offenders I can see the difference a good mentor can make. I turned my life around, I would like the opportunity to do the same for others using my experience as a role model."

NORTH WALES



Home Secretary witnesses Community Payback in action

Home Secretary Theresa May witnessed the positive benefits of Community Payback when she visited offenders helping a community grow their own produce in Rhyl.

CP in North Wales is working with directors of the Botanical Garden Enterprises to create community gardens at the former Denbighshire County Council depot in Rhyl.

The scheme will give local vulnerable people the opportunity to work, train and volunteer while growing plants and produce to sell to the local community.

The Home Secretary spent an hour watching as a group of six offenders, managed by CP Supervisor Martin Trigg, prepared polytunnels and dug vegetable beds.

She met North Wales Local Delivery Unit head, Judith Magaw, CP Development Manager Graham Thomas, CP Team Manager Richard Purton and Vale of Clwyd Conservative candidate James Davies and discussed the impact of unpaid work on the local community and how it helps to reduce re-offending.

"It has positive benefits for the local community, and people can see the individuals on the payback scheme are putting something back into the local community," said the Home Secretary.

"But at the same time they themselves are learning some skills which hopefully will suit them well in terms of taking them forward so they don't re-offend," she added.

Art 'saves lives' offender's mum tells Koestler Trust exhibition guests

A mother made a powerful speech about how taking up sculpture in prison had helped save her son's life when she spoke at the launch of a national exhibition of artwork staged by the Koestler Trust.

The exhibition at the Wales Millennium Centre

in Cardiff Bay was a showcase for work by prisoners, offenders on probation and patients in secure hospitals and this year the pieces for the show were chosen by a group of women offenders, some of whom are managed on Community Payback by

Wales CRC.

"When my son went inside...I thought he would not cope and feared he would take his own life," said the mother. "I'll never forget the day he rang to say his work had been selected for an exhibition. He was so excited. It was a turning

point. Now he wants to be a sculptor," she said.

Pictured at the exhibition are Ian Rogers, CP supervisor, Julie Morgan AM, former member of the Government's Justice Select Committee and David Bidgood, CP officer for Gwent.



GWENT

Spotlight

News from around Wales

CAMERA ACTION!

DYFED POWYS

Service users write, act and direct their own DVD

It didn't have quite as many designer frocks as the Oscars but the launch of an inspiring film made by service users certainly had an impact on its audience.

The Journey was created, filmed and edited by service users with the aim of telling their story about their experiences of probation. DVDs of the film will be distributed around Wales for use in staff training and with service user groups.

It was a project headed by Doris Adlam, National Probation Service (NPS) deputy Local Delivery Unit head for North Wales and Megan Jenkins, CRC service user co-ordinator. It was begun by Wales Probation Trust and continued as a joint venture between

Wales CRC and the NPS. It was filmed in and around Llanelli Probation Office with the help of North Wales-based TAPE Community Music and Film.

Making the film had a huge impact on service users like Tara. Speaking at one of three Wales-wide launches at Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff, she said: "I never thought I would have anything to do with making a film but it's been brilliant. We worked as a team to make it as real as possible so there was no script, the people in the film just spoke off the cuff."

"Hopefully we've achieved what we set out to do and it proves you can mess up on life but still come back and achieve something"



Wonderland for World Book Day

SOUTH WALES

School children in Merthyr Tydfil were able to follow the adventures of Alice in Wonderland thanks to the artistic efforts of local offenders.

Offenders worked with literacy charity the Stephens and George Centenary Trust to make World Book Day magical for hundreds of local pupils.

At Wales CRC's Community Payback workshops in Lewis Street, Canton, Cardiff, offenders used their painting and woodwork skills to create colourful scenes and characters from Lewis Carroll's much-loved children's novel.

They made dozens of giant playing cards and larger-than-life stand-up wooden characters of Alice, the Cheshire Cat, the Queen of Hearts and her guards.

Their work was transported to Merthyr High Street and set up around the Lucy Fountain, for the Spread the Word community festival held to mark World Book Day on Thursday, 5th March.

Clive sets sail to help veterans

Probation worker Clive Thomas sets sail around Wales on his 32 ft yacht on 10th May to raise awareness and funds for the veterans' charity Change Step.

Clive is a former Paratrooper and jungle warfare instructor and having served more than 30 years in the Army himself, he is very aware of the issues facing veterans when they leave the Forces.

He is now a Community Payback Officer working with offenders carrying out unpaid work in the community as part of their sentences, and is one of Wales CRC's specialists working with veterans. As part of his work Clive has introduced a number of ex-servicemen to the charity which provides practical help and social opportunities for those struggling with the return to life on Civvy Street.



Clive Thomas who is sailing around the coast of Wales to publicise the work of veterans' charity Change Step

His journey around Wales begins in Swansea Marina when he steps aboard his yacht with Change Step mentor Sandy Shaw for a five day trip to Colwyn, North Wales.

They will be picking up changing crews of four at each marina stop along the way, including a number of veterans.

After a weekend to rest up it will be back to the tiller for the return journey with the whole trip expected to take 12 days.

Clive is an experienced sailor having sailed as far as the Mediterranean and Canaries.

The expedition has the support of Forces sweetheart, singer Kirsten Orsborn who met Clive and representatives of Change Step to wish them good luck.

To donate to Clive's challenge, please visit the Change Step website www.changestepwales.co.uk

MEET THE STAFF

Name: Stephen O'Sullivan

Job: Probation Services Officer

Special interest: Working with veterans in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan.



Stephen joined probation after serving nine years with the First Queen's Dragoon Guards so understands how easily an ex-soldier can go from 'hero to zero.'

"With Post Traumatic Stress Disorder becoming more prevalent among men and women leaving the armed services, I believe my training and mindset has given me better skills for understanding offenders," explains Stephen. He joined the probation service 24 years ago as a Community Payback Supervisor. He now works as a Probation Services Officer based at Westgate Street, Cardiff, with a caseload of more than 60 offenders.

"I joined the Dragoons at the age of 16 and when I left in 1982, I had served for nine years and carried out several tours of duty in Northern Ireland, so I understand the military mindset. As a Dragoon I understand how ex-armed services are not always understood by 'civilians.'

"I see my role as one of signposting - working with partner agencies and being aware of the people and agencies who can help offenders and their families. I work closely with colleagues in offender management, offering to speak to offenders who have come out of the armed forces, and get them the support they need."

He works closely with Dr Neil Kitchener, Principal Clinician for Veterans within NHS Wales who helps veterans with mental health problems and the Veterans Association at Maindy Barracks, Cardiff. He also works with SSAFA, the Forces' charity for families, the Royal British Legion, Change Step and other support agencies and charities.

"By the time we see ex-service people they are at rock bottom. Once we can get them to open up, veterans do tend to turn around quite quickly."

We managed **8,170**
offenders across Wales in one month.
February 2015