

The Outdoor Partnership NEWSLETTER



Volunteer Ambassadors

A new and exciting project has begun in Wales.

Thanks to funding support from WCVA (Welsh Council for Volunteering Action) we have been able to recruit Volunteer Ambassadors to join our team from all areas across Wales.

Our Volunteers Ambassadors come from a range of backgrounds and with a whole host of extra skills! But mainly, they are just like the rest of the team; they love the outdoors and want to help others enjoy it too!

The Ambassadors will be working on various projects and helping us in our everyday work, bringing their own unique skills and passion to the team, and we will be supporting and working alongside them in their own personal goals, be it gaining that qualification they have been aiming for or trying a whole new activity.

We've already had Ambassadors out and about supporting our events, from helping on an inclusive session on Pen y Fan, to providing photography tips on a wellbeing walk. And with loads more to come, keep your eyes peeled to see what some of them get up to next.

You can learn more about our Volunteer Ambassadors on our website, and if you think you've got some skills we can put to use, have a look at our Volunteering page to check out if you could become an Ambassador as well!



News from our Regions

Mid & South Wales

We start this latest newsletter with an inspirational story from Sioned, of a far from ordinary ascent of Pen-y-Fan recently.

"Every adventurous parent living in South Wales has probably had the inclination at some point to take their child up Pen-y-Fan. But for Colin, the ultimate definition of an 'adventurous parent', taking his daughter Cerys up Pen-y-Fan would need some more planning and a lot more people power than most trips. And, as anyone who knows Colin will know, when he hears "she can't do this" he says "why not?" That is why, together, they have completed triathlons, 50 parkruns, been skiing, canoeing, biking and climbing (also over 50 times).

"And recently, the dream we first discussed over 2 years ago finally became a reality. Thanks to the planning and leadership of Manzoku Climbing and Mountaineering, the exceptional Mountain Trike MT-push, the incredible team of volunteers including Simon Chaplin, Brett Mahoney, Sioned Thomas, Adam Johnstone, and all those others, (you know who you are!) and the National Trust warden who stayed on late and kept the gate unlocked to let us out. Thanks to all of that, and Colin's unwavering belief that we would get to the top, we did it! In the clag and an extremely rapid time of 72 minutes we reached the summit of Pen-y-Fan. I can report that Cerys was cool, calm and collected as ever, despite some dubious steering, and nothing but 'happy noises' (Colin's words) could be heard from our intrepid mountaineer. I, like Colin, am delighted and grateful that we pulled it off and showed the power of positive collective action, and snacks."

There's also news of Adventure Therapy Powys, funded by the Social Value Forum Fund, and administered by PAVO. The programme kicked off with caving led by Crosfield Outdoors in Eglwys Faen. With a great turnout of 12 young people and their support workers, everyone got stuck in and supported each other as they learnt about the cave formation, found some fossils and explored the cave system, challenging themselves with some tight squeezes along the way. There was great feedback from the session, and they are looking forward to the next activities – caving, paddleboarding and gorge walking coming up soon!

In another programme, the Sport Powys funded Adventure Therapy Programme kicked off with some gorge walking, which received some amazing engagement and feedback from the intrepid gorge walkers, and a great turnout from Brecon Integrated Sports Association. Thanks again to Crosfield Outdoors for running this session. Up next will be paddleboarding and dragon boats!



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Gwynedd

For two weeks during June this year, 300 children from years 5 and 6 were given the opportunity to attend Swim Safe sessions. The Outdoor Partnership worked in partnership with Byw'n Iach, Plas Menai and the Urdd to provide six days of activities at Plas Menai, Plas Helyg, and on Llyn Tegid. Despite the low water temperatures at each location we were fortunate with the weather with sunny days and quiet seas which enabled the smooth running of the sessions.

Swim Safe is a scheme led by Swim Wales and the RNLI. The aim of the scheme is to educate children in floating techniques, self rescue, and dangers associated with open water swimming. The children were given the unique opportunity to experience being in open water under the supervision of teachers and experienced open water instructors. To start, the group were welcomed and were introduced to the activity. Having changed, they were able to practice on land before venturing into the water where they learned techniques to prevent drowning. It was quite a shock for some at the start of the session as they plunged into the cold water, but they soon became used to the temperature and they loved splashing and playing games.

We have already committed to run the scheme again next year, and hope that we will be able to extend the provision once again in order to offer the service in all areas of Gwynedd.

In other news, the 6 week Ardudwy Young Paddlers ran each Saturday during June and July. 12 children from the area were given the opportunity to experiment in different boats and they succeeded in earning their Start Award and Discover Award. Very well done to them!

Finally, those volunteers who were on the Wellness Walks scheme have passed their Lowland Leader Award assessment and have started leading wellness walks around Gwynedd. The walks are published on the Wellness Walks website and will be shared on The Outdoor Partnership and Byw'n Iach social media pages.

Gwent Region

It's also been a busy period over in Gwent.

Over the last couple of months, they've launched Adventure Therapy programmes in partnership with the Gwent Wellbeing College that provides service users from multiple organisations across Gwent with access to adventure activities. With everything from mountain walks in the Black Mountains, to paddleboarding at Llandegfedd and caving expeditions, it's been a fantastic, adventurous start to the summer.

A new partnership with Torfaen Works has led to further development of their outdoor employability programme, seeing the addition of caving, climbing and paddling activities as well as a monthly mountain hiking group.

Young people haven't missed out either with lots of opportunities for young carers to access outdoor activities as respite across all 5 local authority areas in partnership with Caerphilly Adventures, MonLife Outdoor Adventures and Crosfield Outdoors.

And to top it off, they popped over the Gwent border to the Eisteddfod in Pontypridd to celebrate all things Cymraeg and inform the new First Minister on their work supporting people to access outdoor activities.

Haf Hapus!

News from our Regions

Ayrshire

In Ayrshire, Summer was a very busy period with multiple programmes running. They had a Gold DofE Sailing Programme, the LEAP Pathways to Employment programme and two local authority Health and Wellbeing programmes running simultaneously over the past three months.

The Outdoor Partnership, Ayrshire were very happy to receive funding from Hillhouse Quarry group and The Duke of Edinburgh's Award to deliver a 5-day adventure sailing Gold DofE Residential for pan Ayrshire DofE pupils. The June voyage started at Inverkip marina in Ayrshire and sailed for five days up the west coast of Scotland via the Crina Canal to the fantastic "Gateway to the Isles" town of Oban. Young people explored the firth of Forth, Inner Hebrides, Isle of Jura and Mull before departing at Oban. Pupils experienced sailing on "Taiping", a sixty ft trans-Atlantic yacht, and received instruction in navigation, sail training, helming and teamwork. The yacht sailed in areas of natural beauty and young people were amazed seeing Scotland's magnificent marine life with bottle nose dolphins, basking sharks, whales and puffins.

Many thanks also to Ocean Sailing Scotland for a very generous charter discount along with the other funders which enables the young students to experience this great opportunity. They have already booked the yacht for next year.

In June, they were fortunate to receive "Multiply" funding to create a Pathways to Employment course for local Ayrshire unemployed people. The course was called LEAP (Learning, Adventure, Education Programme) and offered people the opportunity, over 12 weeks, to gain outdoor adventure experience and gain qualifications in First Aid, Hill Skills and Canoeing. Over the three-month course candidates were abseiling, caving, climbing, SUP paddling, hill walking, cycling and canoeing. This helped in building confidence, experience, and literacy and numeracy skills.



The Outdoor Partnership NEWSLETTER



NORTHERN IRELAND (SOUTH EAST) REGION

The region welcomed a new Outdoor Activity Development Officer for NI South East – Victoria Kelly. And, according to Victoria herself, “Since starting my role at the end of April I have been meeting with various organisations, Clubs and Councils throughout my Region – Northern Ireland South East to plan how we can work together on future projects.”

TOP Northern Ireland (South East) are also running some Inclusive Hikes in partnership with Mountaineering Ireland and Mourne Heritage Trust in August 2024, for people with limited mobility and wheelchair users.

A stakeholder group meeting was held in June for the Northern Ireland South East Region, with this being the first one in a while. It was well attended and it was great to welcome some new faces to the meeting. Victoria attended Inclusive Beach Days run by the Mae Murray Foundation which help more people to access our beaches and take part in various activities. Mountaineering Ireland have been running a number of Inclusive Climbing sessions which, again, were attended by Victoria.

And, finally, from TOP Northern Ireland, we have the ‘Tale Trails Story Map of Murlough National Nature Reserve’. The Outdoor Partnership Northern Ireland is delighted to have produced the first Tale Trails map in Northern Ireland, in partnership with the National Trust. Tale Trails are beautifully created story maps by Anja Phoenix which feature local family walks where you can spot lots of different things along the way. It’s a great way to get out and discover more about the beautiful coasts of Northern Ireland. This project links with story maps which have been produced with Tale Trails and The Outdoor Partnership in Cumbria, creating a link to Northern Ireland over the Irish Sea. The maps are FREE and can be picked up from the main National Trust car park at Murlough National Nature Reserve in Newcastle, Co Down, or you can download a copy of the map and story for FREE by visiting the TOP Northern Ireland website and have an adventure today!



News from our Regions

NORTHERN IRELAND (SPERRINS) REGION

We start the news from The Sperrins Region with all things paddling! They have been working closely with Erne Paddlers who are a paddling club based in Fermanagh and Omagh, with members all over the district council area. Predominantly, the club operates around the waters of Lough Erne and are trying to expand their delivery into new waters. This summer, TOP delivered a kayaking skills course at the Gortin Lakes, a recreational Family Paddle along the Strule River, and they are currently delivering an inclusive paddle program at Omagh Leisure Complex with Omagh Special Olympics club.

It is great to see the club delivering these sessions in the Sperrins Region and to see a good uptake and interest with local participants. The Inclusive Pool sessions are the first inclusive Kayaking Sessions that have been delivered within the OLC site and it is great to see the kayaks back in the Pool! Thanks to Fermanagh and Omagh District council for supporting these initiatives and to Erne Paddlers for supporting the delivery, helping to expand the club and making it as inclusive as possible. We look forward to supporting Erne Paddlers further and hope to deliver some additional coach education to new paddlers and club members.

Away from the water, there were Hill Skills and more with Mountaineering Ireland. TOP Sperrins are delighted to have continued support from Mountaineering Ireland in the Sperrins where, in partnership, they have delivered additional Hill Skills training days, and Inclusive Walks. The Hill Skills course is a one-day course aimed at engaging with your everyday hill walker, equipping them with the necessary hill skills needed for map reading and navigation, first aid, equipment advice and general good practices to follow when out on the hills.

In June, they delivered a Hill Skills course at Bannagher Dam in the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough council area, and are planning an additional Hill Skills training day in the autumn.

This summer, they planned an Inclusive Hike Series in partnership with Mountaineering Ireland. The hikes provided participants with the opportunity to access new outdoor spaces with the required support needed making the outdoors more accessible for all.

Their delivery partners for these sessions were Far and Wild Adventure Providers who provided two educational and engaging walks at Davagh Forest Park and the Gortin Glens Forest Park. TOP Sperrins were delighted to see such a great mix of participants and abilities on their walks. Thank you to Mountaineering Ireland for supporting these projects.



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Central South Wales

The Outdoor Partnership Central South Wales has been involved with the 'BIG CAMP OUT' working with the staff from Early Intervention in Psychosis from local health boards in Central South Wales. They worked with Cardiff and The Vale UHB who went camping with a group and then enjoyed a surf session with inclusive surf provider Karma Seas in Coney, Bridgend. The weather held out and they even managed to get some sleep and the surf was ready for the enthusiastic group the next day. They also worked with Cwm Taff Morgannwg Health Board staff who work with EIP, they took a group surfing, but didn't do the camp out! Again they had a great time with the same provider. It's been long time proven that spending time in green and blue spaces is good for mental wellbeing, so time in the sea is the natural therapy to help these folks on the way to recovery.

In other news, TOP Central South Wales received a most kind gift from a local family. Here's the story from Leila: "A short while ago we had a surprising email from a generous family who had a very expensive terrain hopper that had been their mother's, and was sitting in storage and not being used. They had decided as a family that they preferred to donate this and give it plenty of use, rather than sell it. They got in touch and my imagination was set wild with ideas of how we could utilise this vehicle, albeit also trying to not get over excited if it didn't all work out.

"Roll on a few weeks, and Joe from outdoor centre Rock UK in Merthyr and myself travelled up to collect it. It was stored in a tranquil haven, a remote farm, where the family who are truly passionate about nature and the outdoors kindly walked us through how to use this beast of an all terrain electric wheelchair. They then took me on a walk around the farm, whilst I tried out the terrain hopper. It was more than epic, it glided with ease over a slippery, difficult track, while everyone walking had to be extremely careful where they put their feet. So watch this space, we hope to be ready to use this beast by September!"



News from our Regions

Plymouth

Plymouth Mayflower Specials, The Outdoor Partnership Plymouth and the Mount Batten Watersports and Activity Centre have recently worked together to deliver a series of kayaking taster sessions for adults with special educational needs or disabilities. The teamwork between these organisations was most impressive, with the sessions scheduled to take place around the hottest days of the year.

There were two superb introductory kayaking taster sessions, enjoying the beautiful weather whilst focusing on fundamental kayaking skills and short journeys, with everyone coming away smiling!

These activities were made possible thanks to the support from Sport England. If you wish to find out more about the great work that Mayflower Specials do, and to find out about further sessions, please see <https://www.mayflowerspecials.org>

