

a better place to live and work



Valleys Voice

www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

Summer 2007

The Community Newspaper of Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

SPEAK UP - SPEAK OUT!



Blaenau Gwent has launched a new Corporate Children's Complaints Service, a "One-stop Shop" for children's complaints and representations about services that affect them.

The service has been set up in response to the recommendations of the Children's Commissioner, which outlined that children and young people should have their own facilities for making complaints. Officers from across the Council, and a member of Blaenau Gwent's "Talk it Up" Youth Forum worked together to set up the new service.

A system of 'Service Buddies' has been put in place to allow children and young people between the ages of five and eighteen to make complaints, compliments and recommendations to the Council via a freephone number, text, email - or in person. A Service Buddy will log the complaint,

and ensure that it is investigated, and a response provided. Ideas for improvement, or other representations, will be noted by the appropriate division within the Council.

An advocacy service will also be provided to enable children with particular needs to have their voices heard. This will include young people aged 16-18 with housing issues; permanently excluded school pupils; pupils on home tuition; pupils in residential homes outside Blaenau Gwent; pupils of black and minority ethnic groups; children of migrant workers and asylum seekers; and travellers.

Young people from Tredegar Youth Caf  came up with the idea of 'Service Buddies', and they have designed posters and leaflets to promote the project.

Councillor Nigel Daniels, Blaenau Gwent's Executive Member for Governance, said: "It is one of the Council's strategic aims to shape and deliver services that meet the needs of all

our customers, and to be accountable to them.

"Young people are as important to us as any other section of the community, and we need to make sure that they are listened to. The Corporate Complaints Service is there to allow young people to tell us where we can improve, and how they would like to see things change - we want them to know that we will go out of our way to find out what they think, and that their ideas and opinions are valued."

Children's complaints contact details are:

Service Buddy
Complaints Dept, Civic Centre
Ebbw Vale, NP23 6XB

Tel: 08000 121 123

Text: 07786 202915

e-mail: help@servicebuddy.co.uk

Bedwellty House And Park To Be Restored To Former Glory



One of Wales' most historic sites, Bedwellty House and Park, Tredegar, has been earmarked £3,599,396 from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The project will see Bedwellty House and Park restored to its former glory for community use.

Bedwellty House is a Grade II listed building that was home to Lord Tredegar, whose Iron and Coal Works were the principal local employer for much of the nineteenth century

A further £253,102 development grant has been awarded, which is known as a 'stage one pass', which will help Blaenau Gwent Council and partners progress the plans, in order to secure the £3.5 million funding.

Proposals include the restoration of the house and its conversion into a multi-use facility. This will include offices, workshops and educational space, as well as a caf  to encourage the local community to use the house for group meetings, social events and lectures. Within the house there will

be exhibitions and interpretation panels to help bring the history of the site alive for visitors. Plans also include a restoration and enhancement of the Grade II parkland.

Cllr Steve Thomas, Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing - Healthy Living, said:

"The refurbishment of Bedwellty House and Park will give Blaenau Gwent an outstanding community facility as well as a beautiful historical asset. This funding will allow the building and grounds to achieve their full potential as a living and vibrant heritage site."

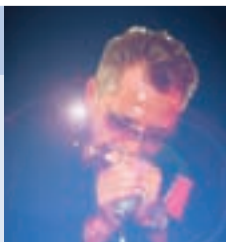
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Bikes Seized In Operation



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Abertillery Blues Festival 2007



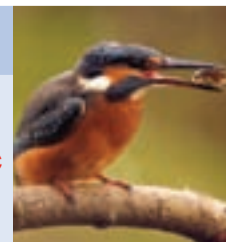
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Home Information Packs



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SNAP! Photographic Competition



Abertillery

Blaina & Nantyglo

Brynmawr

Ebbw Vale

Tredegar





BLAENAU GWENT BOX OFFICE - 01495 350360 or visit us at: www.blaenau-gwentvenues.com

Beaufort Theatre and Ballroom

Thursday 7th – Saturday 9th, 7pm

Blaenau Gwent Young Stars

Senior Review - previously advertised as 'Smike'

Tickets: £6.50 Adult, £5.50 Concession, £22 Family – call 01495 312289/305451

Saturday 16th June, 4pm

Tredegar School of Dance Dazzle 'Em

Tickets: £5.50 Adult, £4.00 – call 01443 699181

Friday 22nd June, 7:30pm

Blaenau Gwent's Annual Dance Showcase

Tickets: £5 Adult, £3 Concessions, £14 Family

Thursday 28th – Saturday 30th June

Kids R Us Variety Spectacular

Time tbc Tickets: £4

Saturday 1st – Sunday 2nd September

Beaufort Male Voice Choir

Tickets: Price tbc

Exhibitions At The Met

4th – 15th June, 10am – 4pm

Environmental Artwork by BTCV

Free

16th – 29th June, 10am – 4pm

Local Poetry

Free

23rd July – 31st August, 10am – 4pm

The Slave Trade

Free

Met, Abertillery

Saturday 16th – Sunday 17th June, 10am – 4pm

Forgotten Skills & Crafts

Suitable for all ages
£3.00

29th June, 1:30pm – 3:30pm

Tea Dances

£3.00

Summer School - Monday 13th July – Friday 3rd August

Dance Summer School

Suitable for 9 – 13 & 14 – 25 year olds
£25 16+, £20 Under 16's

Friday 3rd August

Dance Summer School Showcase Performance

Tickets: £4 Adult, £3 Concession, £12 Family Ticket

27th July, 1:30pm – 3:30pm

Tea Dances

£3.00

Saturday 28th July, 10:30am – 12:30pm & 1:30pm – 3:30pm

The Story of Slavery

Suitable for all ages
£3.00

Monday 13th – Saturday 17th August, 10am – 4pm

Art in the Natural Environment

Suitable for all ages
£3.00

Cinema

From May 25th

Pirates of the Caribbean – At World's End

From June 29th

Shrek the Third

From July 13th

Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix

August onwards- Ocean's 13

Transformers

The Simpsons Movie

Fantastic Four – Rise of the Silver Surfer

Bryn Bach Park

9th June

BTA Pro Grand Prix Triathlon

10th June

Hospice of the Valleys – It's a Knock Out

29th July

Welsh Triathlon

12th August

BMX National Event

13th – 27th August

Tredegar Art Society Exhibition

18th August

Superstar Event

26th August

Junior Tour of Wales Cycle Race

Other Events In Blaenau Gwent

18th – 22nd June

Brynmawr Mid Somer Fayre In the steps of the Ironmasters

In June, throughout Blaenau Gwent

22nd June

Aberfest Abertillery

23rd June

Gŵyl Plant Folk Dancing Abertillery Town Centre

24th June

Abertillery 10km Run

Starts at Abertillery Sport Centre

Thursday 12th – Saturday 14th July

Abertillery Blues Festival

Abertillery Park

Tickets start from £5 to £40

21st July

Cwm Carnival

Cwm Welfare

21st July – 2nd September

Under 16's Free Swim

At all Blaenau Gwent Sports Centre

23rd July – 25th August

Summer Playscheme

Throughout Blaenau Gwent

28th July

The Horse & Dog Show

Cwm Welfare

8th – 30th September (every weekend)

European Heritage Days

Events held throughout Blaenau Gwent

Calling All Genealogists - Requests For Family History Searches

Did you know that the Sundry Accounts Section of Blaenau Gwent Council holds the records for all seven cemeteries within the borough: Blaina, Brynithel, Brynmawr, Cefn Golau, Cwm, Dukestown and Ebbw Vale?

They are able to undertake family searches on behalf of members of the public. Requests for searches can be made in writing, via e-mail or over the telephone.

To enable an accurate search to be carried out it is essential to supply full names and approximate dates of death. Any other information that can be supplied would be appreciated as this can assist in the accuracy of the search.

Please note that there is a £10 administration charge for each request; please include your payment with the request (a request may include more than 1 person).

For more information please contact:

Sundry Accounts Section
Blaenau Gwent CBC, Municipal Offices,
Civic Centre, Ebbw Vale, Gwent, NP23 6XB

Telephone: (01495) 355204

Email: familyhistory@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk



DOORSTEP CRIME

Anyone can be targeted by doorstep crime, but older and more vulnerable people are more at risk of becoming victims of bogus cold calling or rogue doorstep sellers. According to national profiles, the typical victim of doorstep crime is 81 years old, female and living alone.

Criminals posing as cold-callers tend to target homes with visible clues such as wheelchair access ramps or hand rails and have even been known to trawl obituaries columns to identify the recently bereaved. There have also been isolated cases where meals on wheels vans have been followed in an attempt to identify vulnerable victims. In extreme cases people have lost their life savings or have had to move into residential care as a result of being repeatedly targeted.

Blaenau Gwent Trading Standards are working together with Gwent Police to combat doorstep crime. As part of this initiative officers have arranged briefing sessions for

professionals, carers and volunteers who work directly with older people. Presentations have already been given to meals on wheels drivers and Care and Repair staff highlighting how people are targeted, and the methods used by these criminals in order to trick their way into homes to steal or to charge extortionate prices for shoddy work.

There are also joint presentations planned for vulnerable people via Age Concern. The aim is to empower older people and enable them to deal effectively with doorstep cold callers; to encourage self confidence and enable people to stay in control when dealing with unexpected callers. It is hoped that by engaging with these front line staff they can become the "eyes and ears" of the enforcement agencies.

Trading Standards would encourage any organisation involved in community activities, or any Blaenau Gwent resident looking for information on how to protect themselves or their community against this sort of crime, to

contact us for advice:

**Blaenau Gwent
Trading Standards
Service**

**Brynmawr District Office
Beaufort Street, Brynmawr
Gwent, NP23 4AG**

Tel: 01495 356138

Fax: 01495 355245

**e-mail: trading.standards@
blaenau-gwent.gov.uk**

**Our message is clear every time -
SAY NO TO DOORSTEP CALLERS**



ACCESS FOR ALL CONFERENCE ABERTILLERY LEISURE CENTRE



In late February, the Council, in partnership with the Local Health Board, held a groundbreaking 'Access for All' conference at Abertillery Sports Centre. The purpose of the conference was to begin the process of increasing involvement of disabled people in the functioning of the Council, as prescribed by the Disability Discrimination Act 2005. Disabled members of the public and staff of the Council and Local Health Board were invited to discuss the barriers they as disabled people have in accessing services and buildings.

In all nearly 100 people attended the event (which was facilitated by the Disability Advice Project from Pontypool) and they have given invaluable personal feedback on the barriers that they face in accessing Council and Local Health Board services.

The next stage is to analyse the feedback and to decide on how best to take the process forward.

The Council are very pleased at the feedback received on the event, would like to thank those who attended for their positive involvement, and would be delighted to hear from those people who would be willing to get further involved.

If you are interested in getting further involved please ring the following people to discuss further:

Alan Burkitt

Blaenau Gwent Equalities Officer

01495 355108

Claire Sullivan

Blaenau Gwent Local Health Board
Equalities Co ordinator

01495 325441

Bikes Seized In Operation

Off-road motorbikes have been seized in a joint operation between Safer Blaenau Gwent, Gwent Police and the Forestry Commission to crack down on illegal off-road vehicles.

The four bikes were seized by officers as part of the operation, and six individuals were reported to the police. A further 62 people were issued with Warning Notices after being caught illegally riding on land, during a series of operations that have taken place this year.

Gwent Police are now using their own off-road bikes to combat the problem. Once offenders have been caught, a warning will be issued which is valid for 12 months. If they are caught for a second time in that period their bikes will be confiscated, and the owner will be charged a recovery fee of over £100 to get them back. An additional fee of £12 is charged for every day they are kept in store, for up to 21 days, after which they will not be returned to the owner.

Safer Blaenau Gwent's Off-Road Vehicle Group is working to find long-term solutions to the problem of illegal off-road motorcycling. These include education initiatives and the identification of legal sites across Wales for off-road bikers to practice their sport legally and safely, but also, where appropriate, enforcement initiatives like this one.

Councillor Steve Thomas, Chair of the Community Safety Partnership, said: "The problem of illegal off-road motorcycling is caused by a small minority of anti-social users of off-road vehicles and affects many parts of the County Borough. They make parks, playing fields, common land, woodlands and other green spaces 'no-go' areas for residents and visitors. This sort of behaviour will not be tolerated and we will continue with these sorts of operations to help alleviate the problem."



ABERTILLERY BLUES FESTIVAL 2007

The Abertillery Blues Festival is back for a third year, and will be held over three days from Thursday 12 July to Saturday 14 July.

Held under a marquee in the picturesque setting of Abertillery Park, this year's festival sees a separate Welsh Blues, British Blues and an International Blues Night.

The Abertillery Blues Festival has grown in popularity over the last three years to become one of the biggest blues events in Wales.

The Welsh Blues Night on Thursday 12th July will be held at the Met, Abertillery, and will feature a selection of local and regional bands including Jim Diamond and Snake Davies.

The Friday night event will see some of the

best in British Blues take to the Abertillery Park stage, which will include the Revelators, The Yardbirds, The Animals and the Blues Band. The Friday night event kicks off at 7pm.

The Saturday night International Blues event sees a great line up of blues artists including, Stone Fox, Dave Acari, Taste, Paul Lamb and the Kingsnakes, Michael Roach Band and Grammy Award Winner, John Hammond (USA).

As well as a great selection of blues, music fans will be able to relax and enjoy the beautiful Welsh countryside and enjoy traditional Welsh beer - once again from the Rhymney Brewery Bar.

Tickets are on sale now, priced at:

	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Three Nights
Standard	£5	£15	£30	£40
Blues Club Members	£5	£12	£24	£30

For further information, please contact the Box Office on 01495 355800 or visit www.blaenau-gwentvenues.com



Change a life... FOSTER!



Blaenau Gwent
County Borough Council

Could you offer a home to a teenager?

We need foster carers who can offer a safe, stable home to young people within their own community.

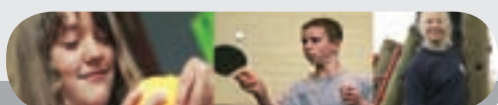
Teenagers can be difficult and demanding at times, and they need families who will stick with them through both the good and the bad times.

Foster carers can make a fantastic difference in a child's life, and for the right person this is a very rewarding experience.

We will provide lots of support and training, and pay you a weekly allowance.

If you think you've got what it takes to make a difference to a child's life, please get in touch with the Fostering Team.

fostering@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk
or **01495 356101**



BLAENAU GWENT LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

When the Council formally adopted its Unitary Development Plan (UDP) last year, it became one of only seven Authorities in Wales to do so. However, changes in Government legislation now mean that the UDP must be replaced with a Local Development Plan (LDP) within the next four years.

The LDP will set out what kind of development can take place in the County Borough and will contain the policies that will be used to determine planning applications in the future. These policies will decide which areas of land can be used for housing, employment, retail, leisure, recreation and tourism, transport and open space.

The plan has the potential to directly affect the lives of every resident in the County Borough as well as having major implications for landowners.

The first stage in plan preparation has seen the Council prepare a Delivery Agreement which sets out how and when YOU can be involved in the process. A copy of the Delivery Agreement can be viewed at all public libraries and outreach venues across the County Borough or from the planning policy pages of the Council website www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk.

The next stage in the LDP process involves asking developers, landowners and the community to nominate sites for potential allocation in the Plan. This could be for any land use, including: residential; employment; retail; public open space; transport; minerals; waste; community facilities; leisure; recreation and tourism.

Whilst there is no guarantee that sites suggested at this stage will be taken forward, their submission will enable the Council

to assess the suitability and availability of sites when formulating a strategy for future development across the County Borough.

To nominate a site for consideration, a plan of the site and an assessment form must be submitted. The form asks general questions about the site and its characteristics to aid its future assessment. Copies of the form are available from the Planning Policy Team, Business Resource Centre, Tafarnaubach Industrial Estate, Tredegar, NP22 3AA during normal office hours, at all local libraries and outreach venues or from the planning policy pages of www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk.

The deadline for the submission of sites for inclusion in the LDP process is Friday 29th June 2007. Planning officers are available to assist with completing forms.

For more information, contact the Planning Policy Team on:
(01495) 354740/355538/355544 or
e-mail: planningpolicy@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk.



HOME INFORMATION PACKS – ARE YOU READY?

Buying and selling a home can be a stressful and costly experience, prone to delay and failure. The Government estimates that £350 million is currently wasted on failed transactions – and under the current system much of the important information (e.g. structural quality of the building) only becomes clear after an offer on the property has been made. Delays in the system also mean a buyer can be “gazumped” - where another buyer sneaks in and makes a higher offer that the seller accepts.

But big changes are on the way, as the Government shifts responsibility squarely to the seller. From 1 June 2007, most homeowners will have to provide a Home Information Pack (HIP), to be made available to buyers, before putting their home up for sale. Properties which are already on the market before 1st June, will not need a HIP until 31st March 2008.

The pack will provide key information for buyers and sellers at the very start of the process and will include:

- A sale statement describing the property.
- Forms which the seller can use to give more details about the property, including fixtures and fittings.
- Copies of the deeds or documents from the Land Registry, proving the seller's ownership.
- Replies to standard searches.
- Warranties/guarantees for any building work carried out on the property.
- An energy performance certificate.

A home condition report can also be included on a voluntary basis, but this may become compulsory at a later date.

The cost of HIP's is estimated to be anything between £200 and £1200 per property. Failure

to provide a pack, or providing an incomplete pack, can attract a fine of £200. Trading Standards have been given responsibility for enforcing the legislation relating to HIP's, and expect lots of enquiries on the issue.



For more information

contact Blaenau Gwent

Trading Standards Section on **01495 356138** or

email trading.standards@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

Government and independent advice can be found at:

www.homeinformationpack.gov.uk or www.communities.gov.uk

Environmental Awards 2007



The Environmental Award winners at the 2006 award ceremony.

Blaenau Gwent will be hosting its second annual Environmental Award Ceremony this year and we want your nominations!

You can nominate anyone who you think deserves to be recognised for their efforts or even nominate yourself.

This is an opportunity for the Council to recognise the hard work of individuals, groups,

businesses, schools and organisations in Blaenau Gwent that help to improve and enhance the local environment. There are a lot of people who do this in their locality and the awards will help us to celebrate and congratulate their achievements, as well as encouraging other people to help to take responsibility for the environment.

To enter please contact:

Deanne Griffiths

Tel: 01495 355364

e-mail: deanne.griffiths@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

There will be a number of categories to involve local businesses, schools, community groups and individuals.

The Business Award Given to a Blaenau Gwent business demonstrating best practice in sustainability and environmental improvement.

The Environmental Innovation Award Given to an individual, group or business that has produced an innovative sustainability project (recycling or reuse of materials, energy conservation).

Environmental Initiative Award For a group or business that has improved the surrounding environment. This could involve cleaning up a local eyesore or schemes to protect and enhance wildlife and plant life in the area.

Most Improved Cleanliness Award Awarded to the individual, group or business whose activities have resulted in the most improvement in cleanliness over the last year.

Citizen Award Awarded to one individual who has made a real difference to the local environment.

Pre-school Award For pre-schools, nurseries and toddler groups that for example have created a garden or wildlife area, or have made a collage or model out of junk.

Primary/Secondary School Award Schools are eligible to enter these categories and any type of environmental project will be considered, however preference will be given to those projects looking at the local environment. It does not have to follow the national curriculum (it could be something done by an after school club).

Community Award For a group that has been involved in an environmental project, such as carrying out litter picks at a local beauty spot, removing graffiti or creating a wildlife area.

Carbon Reduction Award This is a new category to fit in with the worldwide concerns about global warming, and will be awarded to the entrant actively employing carbon reduction techniques.

Winners will receive individually designed 100% recycled glass awards, and a number of categories will also receive a cash or voucher prize. The awards ceremony will be held at the Metropole Theatre in Abertillery on 9th October, and the celebrity guest is Welsh Safari's Iolo Williams.

Anyone living or working in Blaenau Gwent can enter the awards, or you can enter someone you know. All nominations must be submitted by 24 August (except school nominations which must be submitted by 15 June).



Committed to the Engagement of Young People

Blaenau Gwent Local Health Board is committed to effectively communicating with patients and the public. Involvement of young people has been a particular priority, as traditionally young people have not been effectively engaged in the work of NHS organisations.

'Health Warning' – A Magazine for Young People: Blaenau Gwent's Healthier Future Strategy seeks to ensure that young people have access to information about health issues and living healthier lifestyles. Young people have developed and published 'Health Warning', a magazine produced by young people for young people. Topics covered have included bullying, smoking, sexual health and healthy eating. The magazine has been very well received and two editions have been published, with a third edition in production. The magazine promotes healthy lifestyles and seeks to empower young people to manage their own health and well-being.

LHB Co-opted Youth Member: The LHB works closely with the Blaenau Gwent Youth Forum. A Forum representative has been co-opted by the LHB Board as a Youth Member. The LHB's Youth Member is active in the business of the LHB and participates in conferences and workshops and facilitates discussions with young people about how future facilities and services should be designed and provided in Blaenau Gwent.

Engagement of Young People: Young people have advised the LHB on engagement methods and leaflets, ensuring they are developed in a reader friendly style for young people. Young people have led interactive voting sessions with their peers during Youth Work week. They have played lead roles in fronting a Young People's stand at conferences and speaking to the First Minister about ways in which young people are engaged in decision-making and participate in Blaenau Gwent.



Officers from Blaenau Gwent LHB attended a Participation Day in March, where the Chairman of the LHB signed up to the Charter of Participation, in order to demonstrate the LHB's commitment to the participation of children and young people in health care service delivery.



**Bwrdd Iechyd Lleol
Local Health Board
Blaenau Gwent**

Youth Co-opted Board Member is finalist at Leading Wales Awards 2007



Adelle Williams, one of three finalists in the Youth Leader Category.

Blaenau Gwent LHB's Youth Co-opted Board member was named a finalist at the Leading Wales Awards 2007 that recognise and celebrate inspirational leaders across Wales. The prestigious ceremony was held at Cardiff's Hilton Hotel.

Adelle Williams was one of three finalists in the Young Leader category. Adelle has been co-opted onto the Local Health Board to provide views from the perspectives of young people. She regularly attends LHB meetings and also provides advice on methods of successfully engaging with young people. Adelle is a key player in an editorial team which has developed 'Health Warning', a young people's magazine, produced by young people for young people. She takes her health and wellbeing very seriously and is devoted to the production of the magazine. Adelle has also written articles for the magazine.

The Leading Wales Awards recognise great leadership at all levels across the public, private and voluntary sectors in Wales, celebrating individuals whose excellent leadership skills have made a strong impact and resulted in positive change within their organisations.

"Wales has outstanding leaders in all walks of life and these awards celebrate the people who, thanks to their superb leadership skills, have made a real difference in their organisation," said Barbara Chidgey, spokesperson for the Leading Wales Awards, the consortium of public and private sector organisations that developed and organise the awards.

"As always, the calibre of entries has been extremely high with nominations put forward from right across Wales. Our finalists have all made an impact with their leadership and we are delighted to be able to recognise that with these awards."



PROPOSED NEW SERVICE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

NEWS IN BRIEF



Work has started on developing a range of services to support families who are

caring for children with disabilities.

Through an innovative partnership between Social Services, Barnardo's, Housing, Education, Health and parents, a project in Tredgar will be developed to offer respite care with specially trained foster parents for up to two children at any one time.

Although planning is at an early stage, United Welsh Housing Association has been awarded the contract to develop a house that will be specially adapted, have wheelchair access and a safe play area. Consultation on the design of the building is well underway with an organisation called Disabilities Advice Project.

While the house is being built, the project team

will concentrate on securing ongoing revenue funding, and recruiting and vetting potential foster parents. There are similar projects elsewhere in the country and the project here will link with them to design and deliver a quality facility and service to children, young people and their families.

Comments are welcome from parents, children and young people, particularly those who are unable to access respite care provided by foster parents.

To find out more please contact either Ruth Sinfield, Service Manager – Children's Services (01495) 355774 or Yvonne Rodgers, Assistant Director – Barnardo's (029) 2049 3387.

Competition Winner



The winner of the prize draw for respondents to last edition's Valleys Voice survey was Mr David Warren, of Ebbw Vale.

Mr Warren won £100 in shopping vouchers for the store of his choice.

Thank you to all of you who took part in the survey – the findings from it will help us to develop Valleys Voice so that it gives you more of the things you find useful or interesting, in the most appropriate way.

'Making It Happen For Carers'

- Carers Week 11 - 17 June 2007

This year, the 13th Annual Carers Week seeks to highlight the true impact being a carer can have on people's lives, from missing out on a promotion at work, to watching relationships suffer. The effect of caring can be incredibly tough, but of course it can also be a richly rewarding experience, and this is what keeps carers going from day to day.

Over 3 in 5 people in the UK – from all walks of life and backgrounds – will become carers at some time in their lives, looking after someone who is ill, frail or disabled.

On 11 June 2007, the start of Carers Week,

Blaenau Gwent Carers formally launches its new strategy 'Making it Happen for Carers'.

Councillor Jim McIlwee, Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing – Social Care, said: "Importantly, local carers have been involved in the development of the strategy, which aims to offer a range of appropriate support services to improve the lives of carers living within Blaenau Gwent.

"The strategy aims to respond to key priorities identified by carers themselves – which includes regular ongoing involvement in the ways that information and support services are provided over the next three years."



Copies of the finalised strategy and details of the strategy launch can be obtained from Social Services on (01495) 354630.

Estyn Launch

The new Willowtown Primary School was specially chosen by Estyn, the education and training inspectorate for Wales, for the launch of their new publication 'Transforming Schools'.



The Chief Inspector, Susan Lewis, talked about how schools in Wales will need to change to meet the challenges of the 21st Century, before taking a tour of the new building and viewing children's work.

SNAP! Photographic Competition

Think you can snap a better photo than last year's winning entries? Then why not enter this year's 'SNAP!', the Biodiversity of Blaenau Gwent Photographic Competition, that runs from June to October?

The competition is open to everyone, of all ages and all abilities; therefore you do not need to be an expert! There are 3 main age categories: 11 Years and under, 12-17 Years, and 18 Years and Over. There is also a separate category this year for applicants who wish to compete for their photo to be used for the Council Chief Executive's official Christmas Card. Prizes include camera equipment and vouchers and will be presented at a prestigious award ceremony in November.

All you need to do is get outdoors and explore your local area, nature reserve or even your own back garden and get snapping. Local wildlife sites and nature reserves are good places to start looking for wildlife – these could include old churchyards/cemeteries, ponds, woodlands, wildflower meadows and even your own backyard.

Application forms will be available at most libraries and the closing date for the competition is Friday 19 October 2007.

For further information or a

SNAP! application form, please contact the Biodiversity Project Officer Deborah Beeson on tel. 01495 355702.



SNAP Competition winners 2006.

Rail Visits to Schools

Partners in the project to restore the Ebbw Valley Rail Link, led by Blaenau Gwent Council, have been visiting schools in Blaenau Gwent to talk to pupils about the scheme and answer their questions.

Representatives from Capita Symonds, the project managers, have recently visited Llanhilleth and Waunlwyd schools, near the sites of stations on the line, while Network Rail have been giving safety talks to other schools along the length of the route.



HEART OF THE VALLEYS INTEGRATED CHILDREN'S CENTRE

Spring saw the official launch of the Heart of the Valleys Integrated Children's Centre in Blaina by Jane Davidson, Welsh Assembly Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning.

The Minister took a tour of the facility, which included a performance by Busy Bees playgroup, and literally left her mark on a ceramic mural which will hang in the recently-

completed outdoor play space.

The play space provides children and young people with the opportunity to safely explore and develop. Features include water play, secret garden, climbing wall and beach area.

The centre is open to all families and young people in the Blaenau Gwent area. Open daily, the centre offers a range of activities for families including Sure Start Baby Club, Language and Play, Open Access Play, Pre-School Playgroup, Play Library with weekly play sessions, parenting programmes and Genesis Wales training and development courses.

The Children's and Youth Information Service offer a one-stop-shop based at

Welsh Assembly Minister Jane Davidson with Connor at Blaina's Children's Centre.



the centre. Staff are on hand to provide instant information on a wide range of activities and services relating to families and young people.

Councillor Gill Clark, Blaenau Gwent Council's Executive Member for Helping People into Work, said: "Our vision for the centre is to bring together a range of multi-agency services under one roof and ultimately to improve the health and well-being of families in the area."

"The centre is already offering a wide range of high quality opportunities to the children and families of Blaenau Gwent including a pre-

school playgroup, input from the Sure Start team, parenting courses, training opportunities and music therapy. A highly successful open access play scheme has recently been developed and the centre is being used by a wide range of partners."

For further information please contact:

HEART OF THE VALLEYS
Integrated Children's Centre
 High Street
 Blaina
 NP13 3BN
FREEPHONE 08000 32 33 39



Outdoor play space.



Ceramic wall.

Calling all Dads

Are you a Dad with children under 4 years?

Why not come along to our Language and Play sessions at Heart Of The Valleys Children's Leisure Centre every Saturday 9.45am – 11.45am?

Language and Play is a **FREE** programme and each week there will be different activities for you and your child to enjoy, these include:

Stories • Junk Modelling • Making play dough
 Painting • Messy play

For more information contact CIS on: Free phone **08000 32 33 39**

Talk with me, play with me, sing with me, read with me... then I'll know what it's all about!



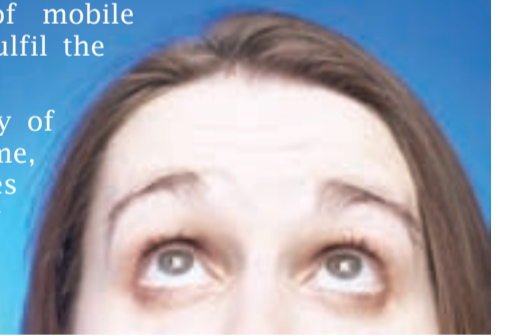
The Kick Start grant is a joint initiative by UK Steel Enterprise and Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council to provide financial assistance for business start up projects.

This scheme is open to individuals/groups of individuals wishing to pursue business start up opportunities within the Blaenau Gwent area. All viable business start up projects will be considered (with exception of mobile businesses) from applicants who fulfil the eligibility criteria.

For further information and a copy of the guidelines relating to this scheme, please contact the Business Services Team at Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council on:

01495 355700

Have an idea?



Wales Biodiversity Week

Wales Biodiversity Week (9-17 June) kicks off this year in Blaenau Gwent with a nature walk around Blaen y Cwm (Garnlydan) Reservoir, with local bird expert Chris Hatch, on Sunday 10 June 2007 10am-12noon. Meet at the car-park after the nursing home on the Garnlydan to Llangynidr Road (grid reference SO168127). Enjoy a moderate 2 hour walk around this fantastic site looking for wheatears, whinchats, stonechats, wildfowl and waders such as snipe and lapwing. There may also be an opportunity to glimpse birds of prey such as buzzard and red kite if you're lucky.

This will be followed by 'An Evening with Owls' on 13 June 2007 between 7.30pm

and 9pm in the main hall of the Abertillery Learning Action Centre (on the Abertillery Comprehensive School site). This will be led by Dave Cooksey from the Welsh Owl and Wildlife Sanctuary who will tell you more about our native owls such as the beautiful barn owl and tawny owl, their behaviour, how to recognise different calls, their prey and the types of habitats they live. Later, there will be an opportunity to get closer to live owls.

Both events are completely free. Children under the age of 16 must be accompanied by an adult. For the walk, please make sure you are suitably dressed for the weather and the activity.

For further information about the events please contact Deb Beeson, the Biodiversity Project Officer on tel: 01495 355702.

