



Newsletter

June 2021
Issue 3

Welcome from YMCA Wirral CEO Nigel Hughes

WELCOME to the YMCA Wirral Newsletter for Spring 2021.

After a somewhat challenging and tough start to the year, we look ahead with great positivity, optimism, and enthusiasm.

Back in March 2020, no-one could have ever envisaged how the Covid-19 pandemic would impact all walks of life, cultures, countries, and continents.

It's still quite astonishing when you take a moment to sit and reflect, as I'm sure many of us have done quite regularly.

We've worked hard to keep our residents and team safe. And that work has continued throughout each lockdown to ensure the safety and well-being of our YMCA Wirral family.



During recent months there has been a lot of activity at our Whetstone Lane hub in Birkenhead. One major change is the building work to transform the former controlled drinking environment area into five new bedrooms.

The work of our RSI Team (Rough Sleepers Initiative) has been incredible, supporting people into accommodation to keep them safe during the pandemic.

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Shining spotlight on changes to RSI Team

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We must congratulate Deputy Director Jackie Miles on 20 years service; highlight the tireless volunteer work of Chair Sue Nicholas; and extend a warm welcome to our new Chaplain Natalie West.

May I wish you well as together, we navigate our way through this roadmap journey.

Chair Sue honoured for 50 years volunteering with YMCA Wirral

CHAIR of YMCA Wirral Sue Nicholas has been recognised with a special award for her volunteer work with the charity.

Open to public nomination, the Wirral Awards are organised and presented by Wirral Council to celebrate outstanding achievement.

Sue received a Wirral Award 2021 for distinguished service in volunteering with YMCA Wirral spanning more than 50 years.

Unaware that she had been nominated by YMCA Wirral CEO Nigel Hughes, Sue was taken by complete surprise when she received a letter telling her the exciting news.

A modest Sue explains: "I'm very proud and humbled to receive a Wirral Award. It is quite an accolade and was a huge surprise.

"I've been volunteering with YMCA Wirral since I was a youngster. I then trained to become a youth leader, running the football teams and Duke Of Edinburgh programmes.

"It was all quite new and different for women to be so involved in these activities. I first joined the board aged 26, and I've remained committed to YMCA Wirral and the people of Birkenhead ever since."

Sue took a break from the board when raising her young family, but continued to volunteer. Rejoining the trustees in 2000, Sue was key in YMCA Wirral's new £6.2million building project which started five years later, and she has been Chair for 21 years.

Sue added: "We've built a very strong board and management team – everyone plays their part in making YMCA Wirral a success.



"I've seen so many changes over the years, and each decade sees a notable change in the people who we serve. Redeveloping our existing site was a huge challenge and will always be a real personal highlight."

The Mayor of Wirral, Councillor Tony Smith, said: "The Wirral Award is a way for the Council, on behalf of all local residents, to show its appreciation for the contribution volunteers make to local people and communities.

"Every recipient has gone above and beyond to support and improve the lives of others, and all are great examples of Wirral's long tradition of voluntary service."

Sue is also an extremely successful lecturer and horticulturist. During the Covid-19 pandemic, she has supported residents with their YMCA Wirral In Bloom flower planter project in Borough Road, Birkenhead.

To mark International Women's Day 2021, Sue was named in Horticulture Week magazine's top 100 most influential women in horticulture.

Impacts Report highlights work of YMCA Wirral during pandemic

By Nigel Hughes,
YMCA Wirral CEO

GIVEN the challenges and difficulties we have faced in the last 12 months, YMCA Wirral has produced the Impact Report 2020.

Events were extraordinary and unexpected, so the report focuses on how our remarkable team managed to rise to every challenge they faced.

They must be commended on their tireless efforts to ensure our work continued in times of uncertainty during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The biggest achievement of YMCA Wirral in recent years has been our ability to rise to unprecedented challenges, flex our resources, and mobilise to support the communities of Wirral when and where it is most needed.

Becoming Covid-19 secure was critical so staff could still take referrals and move people into accommodation.

I am extremely proud of what the team has been able to achieve. It has brought out the best in our staff, volunteers and residents, and reinforced our commitment to the organisation.

At senior management level, a huge amount of time has been taken up interpreting and implementing the Government guidance, and balancing continuity of service while managing personal anxieties of staff.

Two key changes have been expanding the remit of the RSI Team (Rough Sleepers Initiative) to become support workers for those placed in short-term accommodation; and redeveloping the CDE area (Controlled Drinking Environment) into five new triage rooms where clients can stay temporarily while their accommodation needs are assessed.

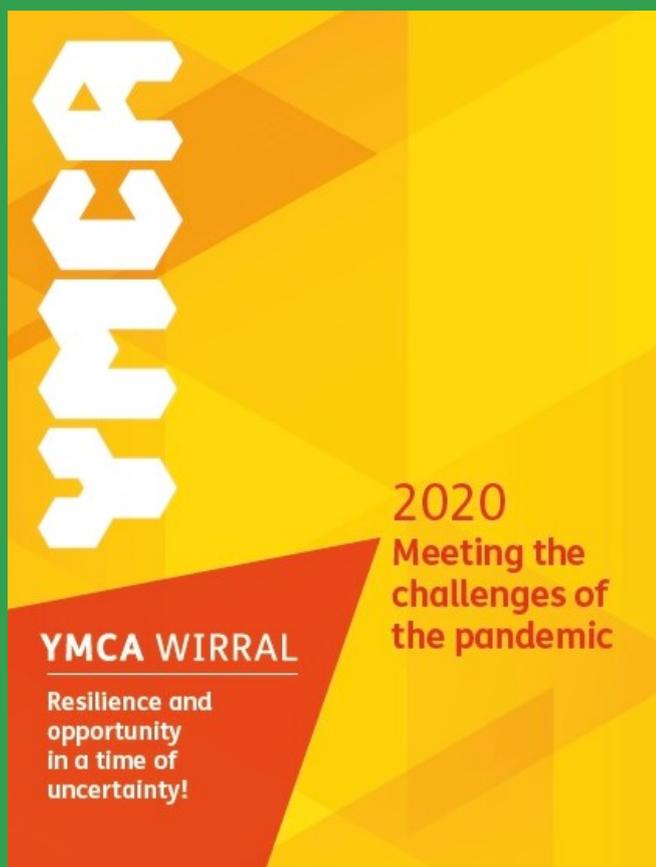
Due to the impact lockdown restrictions would have on our clients, we jumped into action and worked hard to enhance the physical spaces where our residents live.

We upgraded televisions, created additional safe spaces, and redecorated and refurbished communal areas to make them more homely, as that's where people would be spending more time.

We were also mindful to ensure that support staff spent more quality time with residents. They created socially distanced activities to encourage them out of their rooms to minimise the feeling of isolation, these included themed days and pizza nights.

We are now well placed to be a significant resource post pandemic, meeting local authority and national Government needs for help and focused support locally.

The full Impact Report 2020 can be downloaded from the YMCA Wirral website.



Rod Graham Triage Centre now open in former CDE

FIVE new triage rooms have been created at YMCA Wirral.

The en-suite rooms have been developed in the former CDE area (Controlled Drinking Environment).

They will accommodate clients temporarily while their needs are assessed, and include a wheelchair accessible room.

Due to Covid-19 Government guidelines and social distancing requirements, the CDE was no longer able to operate as a night shelter.

Identifying the ongoing need for extra support, YMCA Wirral prepared a funding bid in partnership with Wirral Council. The bid was successful and the project was funded by the Government as part of its drive to tackle homelessness.

The rooms have been dedicated in memory of former night shelter manager Rod Graham, who passed away in 2019 after a short retirement. The rooms will now be known as the Rod Graham Triage Centre. In addition to the new triage rooms, YMCA Wirral also operates 56 en-suite hostel rooms for long-term residents.

In the next newsletter we take a look at the newly opened centre.

YMCA Wirral welcomes Chaplain Natalie West



CHAPLAIN Natalie West has joined the team at YMCA Wirral.

Having joined the team in January during lockdown, Chaplain West is already settling into the role.

Born and raised in Edinburgh, she later moved to the North West and has previously held roles at Alder Hey Children's Hospital and Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service.

Chaplain Natalie West said: "I'm delighted to join the team at YMCA Wirral, and I'm really looking forward to getting to know everyone – residents, the team, and our charity partners. If you see me about then please come and say hello. My accent gives it away that I'm not from these parts – but I'm really enjoying my time living on Merseyside. My role at YMCA Wirral is to support, and be a listening ear or a helping hand when needed."

A sailing enthusiast, Natalie is a boat owner herself and is very keen to become involved with YMCA activities on the canal waterways to help promote wellbeing and mental health awareness.

Read a full interview with Chaplain Natalie West in the next newsletter.

Jackie celebrates 20-year milestone anniversary

OUR longest serving staff member Jackie Miles has celebrated her 20th anniversary with YMCA Wirral.

Jackie has been Deputy CEO for the last 10 years, and her current role also includes operations manager, finance director, and leading the RSI Team (Rough Sleepers Initiative) which she helped to set up in 2018.

To mark the milestone, Jackie was presented with a commemorative plaque, flowers and balloons, and was surprised with a large picture display showcasing her work highlights.

Mother-of-three Jackie began her YMCA Wirral career as a part-time finance assistant.

After three years she became full-time, and was promoted to financial controller. She commented: "It really doesn't feel like 20 years. I have very fond memories of our team as well as remembering those who have sadly passed away.

"I have to thank the Board of Trustees, Nigel Hughes [YMCA Wirral CEO], and all the staff team for making my 20th anniversary so special and memorable, especially in these difficult times. They went above and beyond anything I could have ever imagined. It made me quite emotional."

Looking back to when she first joined YMCA Wirral, Jackie explained: "Coming into this kind of environment was quite daunting as I knew very little about homelessness.

"I now feel really passionate about how we help to address the issue – making even just one person's life better makes it all worthwhile. I'm so glad that job opportunity came along 20 years ago."

Jackie concluded by reflecting on how the pandemic has strengthened the team.

She said: "We're a very close-knit group. Every member of staff has carried on and attended the workplace, putting aside any concerns to ensure our YMCA clients come first. Developing the staff is very important to me – I always tell the team you can achieve anything you want in life."



All change for RSI Team with added community support role

IT'S just two years since YMCA Wirral launched the Rough Sleepers Initiative (RSI) in partnership with Wirral Council.

However, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the need for support has hugely increased and their remit has now been expanded to meet the growing needs of the community.

The project was launched in 2019 under the leadership of YMCA Wirral Deputy CEO Jackie Miles, who manages the RSI community outreach team who are Alya, Heather, Jason, and Rita.

The team work with long-term/entrenched rough sleepers with complex needs. The team seek out, verify and actively engage with them, providing practical advice, support and assistance to help enable them to secure suitable accommodation and meet their immediate needs.

Engaging with clients is paramount to encourage them to move away from a street lifestyle using motivational techniques, reflective practice, and by showing empathy. This all assists in the building of self-sufficiency and resilience to improve wellbeing, quality of life, and positive relationships.





Jackie Miles, Deputy CEO of YMCA Wirral with RSI Team members Heather, Jason and Alya

The Enhanced Assertive Outreach Service, alongside Wirral Council's Supported Housing & Homelessness Team, have strengthened their existing links. They continue to work in partnership with local police, criminal justice, and community services to ensure that outreach is co-ordinated across the borough.

Together they target particular areas identified as hot spots where rough sleeping and associated activity, such as street drinking and aggressive begging, may be perceived as anti-social within the local community.

The team also work closely with Wirral Council's Housing Options Team in providing support to those placed in temporary accommodation. It is estimated that between 30 and 40 interventions will be attempted by the outreach team during a year.

Alya is an Assertive Outreach Worker with the RSI Team, she explained: "We help and support people from all walks of life who may simply find themselves in a tough situation, from individuals to families.

"They may just need that extra help to find their way through a difficult situation, which is often through no fault of their own. We ensure clients are placed into accommodation best suited to their needs."

Once a client comes into the care of YMCA Wirral, they are placed into YMCA triage temporary stay while short-term accommodation is arranged through Housing Options.

There are five new en-suite triage assessment rooms at YMCA Wirral, and 56 en-suite rooms within the residential building to house and support a resident's stay.

Some clients are unable to secure B&B accommodation so the RSI Team work with Housing Options to find temporary accommodation before a more long-term option can be found.

Alya added: "The RSI Team are advocates and support clients on their journey. We spend time with them on a day-to-day basis, check accommodation is right for them, and monitor they have all the support they need whether that's for mental health or for drug or alcohol issues. We never turn anyone away, we can always help."

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YMCA Wirral has served the local community for more than 145 years and has responded to social, economic and political changes throughout that time.

Homelessness and drug and alcohol abuse has left many people damaged. We provide a place of a safety with facilities that cater for the needs of people from all walks of life.

There have been many changes and, even though we have history and tradition, we also have a modern approach to meet the needs of our community which echoes our mission statement:

Helping to build positive futures and overcome barriers for people of all ages.

We manage a hugely successful volunteer programme, and our in-house team deliver practical advice, training and support to our clients. Our services include training courses, accommodation, and volunteering. We also have facilities available to hire including conference rooms, an ICT suite, and boating facilities.

Find out more by visting www.ymcawirral.org.uk

