

TAKE NOTICE!

#5
JUNE 2024

Written by and for people who have experienced homelessness, or know what it's like to live in unsafe, unaffordable, unsuitable housing. Together we can make a real difference to the housing emergency in Wales.



It was volunteering week at the beginning of June, so this issue is all about getting involved with us.

Why Volunteer with Shelter Cymru?

by Cat, one of our Take Notice volunteers

Shelter Cymru helped 22,513 people in Wales last year, a rise of 50% over the past decade. We need your help to continue our mission and ensure everyone has a home.

Housing should be a universal right, sadly for many it's a privilege that's out of reach. Share your time, skills, knowledge and lived experience to support Shelter Cymru help as many people as possible. Volunteering enables you to give back, while gaining increased skills and knowledge, and boosting your confidence and self-esteem. You can share your own story and knowledge by joining Shelter Cymru's Lived Experience group, Take Notice. Sharing lived experience provides invaluable insight - increasing understanding of homelessness and housing instability and the damaging impact on individuals, families, and communities. By sharing your story, you empower yourself, whilst building awareness and helping others to realise they're not alone.

The saying "it doesn't discriminate" simply isn't the case. By their very nature, homelessness and housing instability actively discriminate - factors such as low incomes, zero hours contracts and long-term health conditions put people at greater risk. Job loss, relationship breakdown, health problems and no fault evictions are key drivers. The most vulnerable in society are being hit the hardest, including children, care leavers, former members of the armed forces, ex-offenders, lone parents, families, couples, and single people of all ages on low incomes.

Unsurprisingly, the cost-of-living crisis has added impetus to this harmful downward spiral. So many people are falling through the cracks and don't have the stability of 'home' - whether this means rough sleeping; sofa surfing; living in overcrowded or unsuitable housing, or in temporary accommodation.

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In Wales, 34 people lose their homes every day.

The meteoric rise of no fault evictions plays a huge part in this. Last year, across England and Wales private-rented sector landlords made 60,711 claims to evict tenants from their properties. In 2023, one in every 8 cases that Shelter Cymru helped with related to a no fault eviction.

In terms of my own reasons for volunteering with Shelter Cymru - I want to share my lived experience of housing instability, which includes going through no fault eviction whilst my daughter was studying her A-levels.

My long-term mental health was already poor, but the added, prolonged pressure of trying to secure a new home pushed my symptoms into severe decline. Unfortunately, the process was particularly isolating due to being a lone parent and living with undiagnosed neurodiversity. After 11 months of uncertainty, including being told by my local authority that the only realistic option was renting privately, I was eventually allocated a council property. The house was in a poor state, such as having an obsolete oil boiler, ceilings and walls that needed re-plastering and extensive patches of external damp and algae. The stress of trying to make it into a liveable home was huge. Although I'm lucky to have a secure tenancy, due to problems with anti-social behaviour from a neighbour and lack of support from my local authority, I am now stuck in a property where my mental health has declined to the worst it's ever been. I can't simply up sticks and leave, as this would be classed as intentional homelessness - meaning my housing instability journey is far from over.

To enable full and fair social inclusion and mobility - stable, affordable, decent housing needs to be available to EVERYONE. This is Shelter Cymru's mission, please help us make it a tangible, universal reality.

VOLUNTEER PATHWAYS PROGRAMME

Now open for applications!

Shelter Cymru's phone, email and webchat advice service, Shelter Cymru Live, is vital in enabling people to fight for homes and we're looking for people to join our cause.

You could help people to find and keep their home.

Through the Volunteer Pathways Programme, you will receive training and mentorship to gain the technical and procedural knowledge needed to contribute to the work of Shelter Cymru Live. You will gain an invaluable insight into what it's like to be a part of the organisation's advice team providing housing advice to people and, should you wish to apply for any future job opportunities, you will feel more confident in doing so.

Whilst prior knowledge of housing advice is not necessary, we will be seeking applicants who are confident to work with people in client-facing roles, and are reliable, honest and non-judgemental. As much of the role will be undertaken remotely and by email or webchat, we will ask that people have basic IT skills and be able to communicate in writing. We're also eager to recruit bilingual volunteers where possible in line with our Welsh Language Promotion Plan to enable us to deliver bilingual services, should they be required. In order to carry out the role, we will also ask that people have access to Wi-Fi, and to let us know if they require access to a computer/laptop. We will ask volunteers for a minimum time commitment of 1-2 days per week (4-8 hours) over a 12 month period.

All applications for the Pathways Programme will be considered, but we are particularly interested in hearing from:

- People with lived experience of homelessness
- Current law students or recent law graduates.

Our aim is to recruit, train, supervise and mentor up to 10 volunteers every 6 months over a 2 year period – up to 40 volunteers in total.

Please note that all successful volunteers will be required to undergo a disclosure check, through the Disclosure and Barring Service, the cost of which will be covered by Shelter Cymru. You can still be a Shelter Cymru volunteer if you have a criminal record, we will just take into account the nature of any information you disclose to us and its relevance to the position you are applying for when considering your application.

At Shelter Cymru, we are always looking for ways to show our appreciation to our volunteers and one of the methods we are exploring is Time Credits. Tempo Time Credits are helping us understand more about how their system works and how our volunteers could benefit from it.

Who are Tempo Time Credits?

Since 2020, Tempo has been building their Time Credit network across the 22 Local Authority areas of Wales. Funded by the Welsh Government, Tempo has developed Tempo Time Credits Cymru, which is the first national network of its kind in the world.

The Time Credits serve as a community currency that individuals earn for volunteering their time in various community projects and initiatives. The earned Time Credits can be redeemed for accessing services, events, or activities within the community. They are designed to encourage and reward volunteerism as well as also promoting a sense of community engagement. The programme is aligned with the Welsh Government's aims of combating loneliness and isolation, fostering community cohesion, and contributing to poverty alleviation.

Individuals receive Time Credits via Tempo's Time Credit platform, and they use the platform to find ways to redeem Time Credits in Tempo's local and national recognition network. Volunteers could choose to access a local visitor attraction, watch a live sporting event or even undertake personal development through training courses.

Shelter Cymru are signed up with Tempo Time Credits to find out more about rewarding and recognising our amazing volunteers. If you have any experience with Tempo Time Credits or any questions or comments about the system, we would love to hear from you.



In this edition of The Noticeboard, we're speaking to one of our fantastic fundraising team, Frankie Mairs. Thank you so much for sparing a bit of time for us, Frankie.

Can you tell us a bit more about your role in Shelter Cymru?

I am the Regional Community Fundraiser for North Wales, my role is to generate income for Shelter Cymru across the region. My main focus is on fundraising through community outreach and so I contribute to all income channels, including our corporate partnerships, local events, direct debits and philanthropy. My colleague, Neil, does the same role in the South and together, we do what we can to engage local people and businesses to support the charity's work.

I joined the team in 2022, prior to which there hadn't been a North Wales-based fundraiser for six years. I've very much had to start from scratch and it's taken some time to raise awareness and build relationships - which is the most important thing. We're so lucky, because we have great supporters, great staff and great donors. We face many challenges in fundraising, but as a team we get through them. There are eight of us in total, covering the whole of Wales. Each day, Shelter Cymru needs to generate £14,283.20 to fund its charitable work; we play a vital part in enabling that.



That's fab, Frankie, thank you. As you know, it was volunteer's week at the beginning of June; when we first met you told me how important volunteering was to you as a professional and also how much you value volunteers and volunteering generally, so I would like to understand a bit more about that.

Absolutely. I have always loved to volunteer - it's just good for your soul! That interest ramped up massively when I did my degree. At University I studied Events Management, Hospitality and Tourism which provided me with great networking opportunities. I volunteered for everything because I wanted to meet people and gain experience. What I found is that volunteering opens more and more opportunities. I met so many people and learned so many skills and it was all invaluable to my degree. I know you give up your time for free, but you get so much back and you don't have the pressure of a paid role. When you have volunteering on your CV, it shows potential employees that you're not afraid to get stuck in, you're not afraid to give your time and that you want to help good causes.

The angle that I take is 'do something that you enjoy'. If you are volunteering your free time, it's so important for you to get something out of it too. If something isn't working for you, ask questions, make suggestions because there might be something else that you can get involved in that would be a better fit and use your skills better. In my experience, volunteering gives you the opportunity to try out different roles and work for different organisations. That massively increases your chances of getting a role that really suits you. I used to volunteer for DASU (Domestic Abuse Safety Unit). Within two weeks of me starting there, getting to know the role and the organisation, they pointed me in the direction of a job, asked me to apply and two weeks later I was employed there. Without volunteering first, I would never have got a foot in the door. It's a brilliant way to assess if you want to go into a field without the pressure.

We've got some great examples of that happening in Shelter Cymru.....people who started volunteering with us and who have now joined the staff and are doing an amazing job! Do you have a favourite story of working with a volunteer at Shelter Cymru?

Gosh, that's a tough one. I always enjoy working with our volunteers, but one person who comes to mind is a student who was doing the Welsh Baccalaureate. He was really interested in what we do. The students must complete 15 hours of volunteering, but he got really invested and did so much more. This student had previously lived in Hong Kong, and he was brilliant at comparing what happens in Wales with what happens in Hong Kong in terms of homelessness prevention, the provisions in place and how different the whole world is when you look at homelessness. It's probably my favourite story because I learned so much from him. You never know, he might be back working with us in the future! It's important to work alongside our next generation and be open to new perspectives and new ideas. I love that part of my job.

So why do you think people should volunteer with us?

We've got lots of different opportunities across the charity. We know everybody is different and everybody wants different things from volunteering, so people definitely have options. Some placements, like Pathways, are quite structured; others like fundraising are less of a regular commitment so I think first and foremost, we've got variety. People can do 2 hours or they can do 20 - or more! Secondly, I feel that there are opportunities to progress if you want to. There are a lot of different roles in this organisation and that's really exciting. Thirdly, I think we're very good at appreciating each other and everyone that volunteers; it's a really supportive place. Although what we do is really serious and often very difficult, we do some great events, it's really good fun and it's always very interesting. I also think that volunteering is just brilliant for gaining confidence and boosting your mental health. It can give you opportunities to step outside your comfort zone in a good way and realise that you can help others and contribute. That always feels good and helps us thrive.

So, if somebody is interest in volunteering with us, how do they get in touch?

Our website is a useful starting point; it gets updated regularly with the events we're running and the other opportunities that are available. Following Shelter Cymru on social media is also good and people can email our getinvolved@sheltercymru.org.uk inbox and tell us what they're interested in doing or ask us any questions. It would be great to have more people involved. Volunteers are such a great asset in helping us to raise the funds we need to power the fight for home - it's a very rewarding and impactful thing to do.



Not long after this conversation took place, it was announced that Frankie has been recognised as a 'Rising Star' by the Chartered Institute of Fundraising! She was nominated by our Head of Fundraising, Kerys Sheppard, and is one of just 6 people across the UK to receive this accolade. She'll be attending the national Fundraising Convention in London in July to talk about her perspective of "Learning and Thriving Together" Congratulations, Frankie! We are so lucky to have you as part of the team raising funds for our Fight for Home in Wales!

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Email getinvolved@sheltercymru.org.uk if you are interested in any of the following:

9 July

Event: Quiz Night, Hickory's Wrexham

18 July onwards

The Bevan Foundation and Shelter Cymru are working together to collect the stories of people living in temporary accommodation in Wales

If you would be happy to share your experiences, please contact Lauren at laurenc@sheltercymru.org.uk

20 July

Event: Sessiwn Fawr, Dolgellau

24 and 25 July

Focus Group

Join us online to discuss ways to improve our services so we can help more people.

27 July

Event: Pride Wrexham

16 August

Bucket Collection: Asda, Rhyl

29 August

Newsletter Content Deadline

If you have ideas or content for the September edition of this newsletter, please let us know by 30 August.

30 August

Take Notice Summer Social

7 September

Bucket Collection: Asda, Rhyl

18 September

Bucket Collection: Asda, Rhyl

23 October

People & Homes Conference

Our annual conference where guest speakers start inspiring conversations.

We're so grateful to our brilliant volunteers, who help to power the fight for home and make a huge difference to the lives of people in housing need across Wales. We exist to defend the right to a safe home, but we can't do it without you.



We are working hard at Shelter Cymru to listen to and involve our clients, and others with experience of housing crisis, in all aspects of our work. We value co-production and many of our volunteers with lived experience help us design, develop and improve our services and the services of partner organisations.



Rhwydwaith
Cyd-gynhyrchu
Cymru

Co-production
Network
for Wales

Who better to help us understand more about co-production than the CEO of the Co-production network for Wales? Thank you so much, Gwendolyn.

A few weeks ago, we marked Co-production Week Wales (20-24 May), with this year's theme being "Co-production is Fundamental." We wanted to send a clear message that co-production is not a 'nice to have' for the future but an essential tool in addressing the current crises we face, such as the housing crisis. I suppose it's obvious that, as the Co-production Network for Wales, we think it's fundamental but I want to share with you why this is and why lived experience is at the very heart of it.

What is Co-Production and why is it important?

Co-production is a term frequently used by services and policymakers, but it is essential to be clear about its meaning. Co-production goes beyond traditional consultation or participation. At its core is that people who provide services (often called professionals) and people who access services (often called service users) share power and work together in equal, reciprocal, and caring relationships to develop and deliver solutions to the complex challenges we face every day.

Co-production is fundamental to the housing crisis for two key reasons. Firstly, home is a universal need but also a personal thing to us all. It will mean different things to us at different times in our lives. Listening to diverse journeys provides valuable insight as to the inequalities in our communities that are at the root causes of the housing crisis. Secondly, and leading on from this, we need a wealth of knowledge and skills to address the housing crisis. To create communities where everyone has a home, we need lived experience expertise to confront the barriers in the benefit system, knowledge of tenancy rights and understanding of what matters most to people to enable them to feel secure in their home.

Why lived experiences are central

Participating in co-production as a lived experience expert should:

- Value your strengths as participants, recognising the unique perspectives everyone brings.
- Work across silos, connecting different areas to provide a full picture.
- Prioritise what matters to those involved, leveraging frontline and lived experience expertise to identify priorities.
- Build relationships of trust and shared power, emphasising the importance of mutual respect.
- Empower people as changemakers, recognising that while organisations offer structure, it is people who drive change.

Utilising all our knowledge and experiences on an equal playing field ensures we can pool our collective resources and energy to tackle the housing crisis. Together we have a better chance of effectively coming up with solutions that meet everyone's needs and make a positive difference, both now and in the future.

The Co-production Network for Wales brings together a community of people who believe in the values of co-production and citizen involvement. We provide training, a space for shared learning, and bespoke support to improve outcomes for people across Wales by embedding co-production and citizen involvement. As an individual or team member of the network and join our regular conversation events and get discounts on training. Individual membership is free—so check it out. You can find out more on Copronet's [website](#).

GET INVOLVED WITH SHELTER CYMRU AND JOIN THE FIGHT FOR HOME

- Join Take Notice to work with local authorities to help them understand how to improve their housing services.
- Our Fundraising team organise regular events across Wales to help us raise funds and spread the word about our fight for home. Why not join us?
- We need your help to review our Shelter Cymru Advice Online webpages to make them as accessible, useful and informative as possible.
- We run regular focus groups with people who have used Shelter Cymru services to help us continually improve what we do. We are looking for participants and facilitators to help to run these sessions.
- We are recruiting Peer Researchers to speak to staff, service users and the public to better understand the barriers to housing and inform our campaign work.

To find out more, email getinvolved@sheltercymru.org.uk