

The benefits of Volunteering with Cardiff Rivers Group (CRG)

I returned to Cardiff after 16 years in London at the end of 2008. It was lovely to be closer to my family and a few friends and, because I was settling into a new home, life was fairly busy at first. However, as soon as I'd finished 'doing the house' I suddenly realised I didn't like retirement. I missed working and all my London friends and neighbours.

An agency in Cardiff found me a job for a few months in Glamorgan University, where I made some great new friends, but work soon dried up and I was just hanging around at home waiting for a phone call about jobs.

I realised how miserable and lonely I was and, even worse, I dreaded leaving the house. So I forced myself to get out. One Saturday afternoon in 2011, whilst on a cycle around Pontcanna and Bute Park, I came across volunteers from CRG who were busy cleaning the river Taff. I stopped for a chat with some very friendly volunteers who invited to join the group. So, I handed over my email address and was added to the group database. I started to get information about upcoming events and buoyed by their enthusiasm I decided it was time to get stuck in.

My first 'outing' with the group was really great. It had all been so easy - no huge commitment - just turn up when you can; and in return you meet lovely, welcoming, interesting people and are given an excuse to get muddy and mucky. Louise Tambini introduced me to two experts, Alma and Sue, who were brilliant and we had a good laugh. At the end of the clean up when I saw how much we'd collected, and especially the dangerous, rusty stuff the guys in the river had pulled out, it was like a big reward for having had a great time.



From left to right: Alma, Lynne and Sue

Since then, I have volunteered for loads of new activities with both CRG and KWT. These have included travelling all over Cardiff to events, attending AGM's, fun social events and award ceremonies, cleaning a brook dressed up as Santa, touring the site in Lamby Way to learn about recycling, spending time in the KWT office helping with mail-outs and database work, learning all about invasive species and how to remove Himalayan Balsam, doing radio interviews and even featuring in a BBC programme about Bute Park with Iolo Williams (in my waders)!

I discovered that volunteering was a fun, worthwhile activity that has helped me build my confidence, made me feel a lot happier, meet some fantastic people, build my skills and knowledge and lead to other great opportunities. None more so than in late 2012 when Louise introduced me to a friend who was offering a few weeks part-time work in his small marketing firm in Whitchurch. Just over a year later, I still work for LWT Marketing and it's been wonderful. The owner and his assistant are a joy to work for and I love being at work again!



Lynne (far right) and her fellow santas

I had no idea that volunteering would lead to such huge improvements in my quality of life and I continue to do so regularly. In a couple of hours I'm off to Pentwyn for a clean-up with CRG – deeply grateful that Dave and his purple van are giving me a lift as I'm useless at finding my way round the outer reaches of Cardiff despite good maps and instructions. Got my cleaning togs ready last night and I'm really looking forward to seeing everyone - it's sunny(ish) and it's going to be GREAT.

Lynne Williams (March 2014)