

Cardiff Rivers Group Making a DIFFerence since 2009

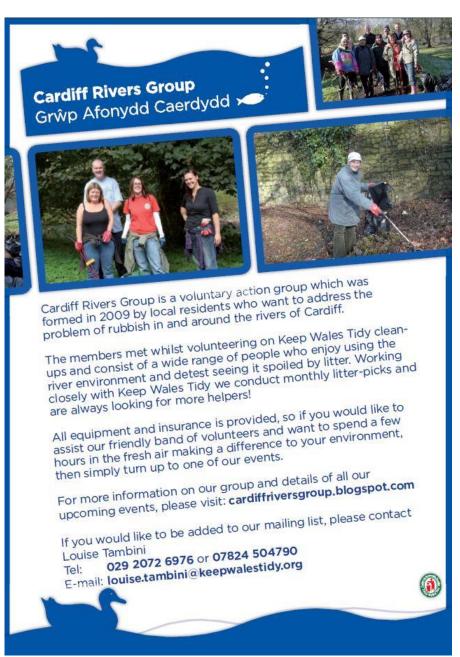
The journey so far...

What is the history of Cardiff Rivers Group?

The Group began its life with around six volunteers back in 2009. It was formed as a result of Keep Wales Tidy organised events around the River Taff as part of the Tidy Towns initiative. Four of the original line up of six are still involved; Louise Tambini, Dave King, Dafydd Meurig who are all committee members and Cath Leggett who still actively volunteers for us.

The group was primarily formed to tackle the build-up of rubbish and litter in and around the Taff running from the Cardiff boundary down to Cardiff Bay. This was chosen initially because of the amount of rubbish that needed removing but also because it is such an important river and amenity running through the centre of the capital city of Wales, with the Taff Trail running alongside it and includes Bute Park. The Taff is an icon for Cardiff and there was a danger of being an eyesore

Now, we are blessed with having a broad based, multi-skilled committee who are very engaged in the cause. With a large volunteer base and strong leadership from the committee, the Group's future is bright and secure.



Where does the group operate?

Cardiff Rivers Group (CRG) mainly work in Cardiff and occasionally reach out to other areas in South Wales in need of our help. We like to think of our home turf as being the iconic River Taff as it is the largest and most visual river to residents and visitors to Cardiff.

The list below is not exhaustive but demonstrates the range and diversity of the locations that we tackle:-

- The Taff, Rhymney and Ely rivers,
- Wild gardens at Roath Park Lake,
- Bute park feeder,
- · Cardiff Castle moat,
- Cardiff Bay,
- The Wharf,
- Faendre Reen, St Mellons
- Llanrumney,
- Rover Way,
- Forest Farm,
- The docks feeder into the Wharf and surrounding housing areas.

Outside Cardiff, here are a few examples of the other locations we visited beyond the Cardiff boundaries. We'll go anywhere within reason!

- Merthyr Mawr
- Ogmore
- Sirhowy Valley near Cwmcarn
- Bedwas, Caerphilly
- Draethen
- Porthkerry Country Park

Basically, if there is water and rubbish of any size, shape or quantity, rest assured, we are there!!!

How often do are events run?

Nowadays, we run our core River clean events 3 weekly throughout the year in a wide variety of locations. Using different locations means that the whole areas are improved rather than focusing on specific hot spots.

On the 31st of January 2015, we achieved a major milestone by completing our 100th event at the Dr Who centre in Cardiff.

On the 16th of November 2016, we had completed 136 official events and a large number of un-official smaller events where a large workforce would not be appropriate.

In the summer, we sometimes run evening events to target specific problem areas.

What types of work do the Cardiff Rivers Group get involved with?

The majority of our work involves tackling litter and waste, we also regularly remove Himalayan Balsam from green spaces, cutting back overgrown vegetation from riverside footpaths to improve access, remove blockages from watercourses to prevent flooding and more recently, reed management.

Leveraging our strong relationship with Keep Wales Tidy, we have been able to support a number of special events such as:-

- Cleaning the streets of the Olympic torch route,
- Iolo's Great Welsh Parks (Bute Park) TV programme (screened on 06/01/2013)
- Cleaning up after the Cardiff Blues Rugby game and Varsity games.
- Supporting the clean-up after the Cardiff Mardi Gras.
- Coast Path Clean up Weekend
- KWT events in Newport, Bridgend and Blaenau Gwent
- Supporting litter picks immediately before and after Test matches held in the SSE Stadium, Cardiff.
- Participated in a specific litter pick to survey and understand drink related litter.



Some of the drinks related rubbish collected on the 12th September 2015.

Cardiff Parks Department are one of our closest allies. After our events, they remove all the litter we've collected as soon as they are able, sometimes they remove the rubbish during our events! Over the years, a strong, trusted relationship has been built and whenever they have a big demand for help with a litter hot spot or have some larger jobs beyond their workforce, they call us in to help out.



The picture shows our volunteers returning from emptying the boat borrowed from Cardiff Parks to transport litter from an inaccessible part of the River Taff to the other side of the river.

The Parks Department occasionally lend out their equipment in order to ease the workload. In Trenchard Drive, Llanishen, our most challenging event to date, they lent us the "Groundhog", a 6 wheel vehicle for transporting the rubbish collected to a centralised point. That day we collected a staggering 8 tipper loads of rubbish. There was so much that it took the Parks Department 2 days to pick it all up.

Chris Hackett, committee member for the Cardiff Rivers Group commented on Facebook, "My favourite moment was finding the door from No.13 which had been chucked in the stream, and turning round to see the new uPVC door on No.13!!!".



Councillor <u>Phil Bale</u>, Labour Leader of Economic Development & Partnerships, whose ward is Llanishen, having a "selfie" with some of the rubbish collected during the Trenchard Drive clean up on the 20th February 2016. Phil really got stuck in in atrocious weather and earned our votes!!! Cardiff Parks Groundhog can be seen lurking in the background.

We have also launched a new "Masked Avenger" service to remove eyesores form beauty spots e.g. a highly visible trolley from the Blackweir bridge. This service has also been extended to areas others won't touch. For example, in September 2016, the bridge at Draethen was blocked by many fallen trees. It was too big and deep for Natural Resource Wales and Caerphilly council to tackle. After 4 visits by a few Masked Avengers, enough impact was made to force the local contractor into action who then cleared the rest to ensure they got paid for the work!

About Cardiff Rivers Group

Our aim is simple: to visibly improve cleanliness of the rivers in and around Cardiff. This means that people living in Cardiff, and visitors, can appreciate the beauty that these unique rivers and waterways bring to our city.

The core work of our group involves:-

- Litter picks,
- Removal of rubbish from rivers, streams, ponds and other water courses,
- Habitat management, such as reducing invasive species like Himalayan Balsam,
- Access and amenity improvements,
- Lobbying relevant bodies to improve the quality of the environment within South Wales,
- Clear blockages and improve water flow.



The picture shows the banks of Hamadryad Park before and after a CRG litter pick

There are currently over 350 volunteers who subscribe to our emails. During events, others turn up to help who are not registered with us e.g. the Llanrumney first volunteers.

The local community and social inclusion is a key part of the group's ethos. The group is very inclusive and no one is excluded regardless of age, sex, race, ability or background. Our oldest volunteer is in her 70s.

Our core events are attended by between 15 and 30 volunteers.

Special events e.g. the 'Great Taff Tidy' tend to attract more.

Partnerships

Cardiff Rivers Group could not operate effectively without its partnerships. There is a healthy, growing list of organisations that want to help us and provide their support.

- **Associated British Ports:** CRG have completed a number of events at their request. Provided funding and a container for us.
- Aviva Trains: Have provided funding.
- BT: Have provided funding and CRG has run two events for their staff.

- Bute Park & Castle Restoration Project Team
- Cardiff Autocare, Grangetown: Provide servicing and repairs for the truck also give their scrap metal to us.
- Cardiff Bay Harbour Authority: Given us permission to work on their site(s)
- Cardiff Council: Provided funding.
- Cardiff Cycle Workshop: Accept any cycles recovered at events.
- Cardiff Metals:
- Cardiff Parks Services: Support the vast majority of our events by picking up the rubbish collected on the same day or shortly afterwards. CRG have completed a number of events at their request. Allowed us to house our 2nd container at their Wedal Road site.
- Cardiff Trail Scrubs: Joined us on CRG events
- Chapter in Canton: Given their scrap metal to us.
- **Dragons Signs:** Suppliers of the livery for the truck
- Environment Agency Wales:
- European Metal Recycling: Receive our scrap metal and pay us for it.
- **Friends of Bute Park:** CRG have completed a number of events at their request. Joined us on CRG events.
- Friends of Hailey Park: CRG have completed a number of events at their request.
- Glam Boaters (canoe and kayak club):
- HSBC:
- Intellectual Property Office: Given their scrap metal to us.
- Keep Cardiff Tidy
- **Keep Wales Tidy:** Provided funding, guidance on event locations, provided clothing in the early days.
- Llandaff Rowing Club: Provided us a venue for the AGM. Several events have been based at the club.
- Llanrumney Community First: Joined us on CRG events.
- McDonalds: Provided refreshments at nearby events.
- Park Plaza hotel: Provided refreshments at a specific events.
- Pontcanna Allotment Society: Allowed us to house our 1st container at their site.
- PCSO's: Joined us on CRG events.
- Ranger Service Planning Dept Botanist:
- Riverside Community Garden:
- South Wales Police: Joined us on CRG events.
- Sustrans: Joined us on CRG events.
- Urpadonline
- WPP Property Management:
- Young Offender Team:

What changes has the community seen as a result of your project or actions?

There is a visible difference in the cleanliness of the rivers for all to see.

The Taff has been recognised as being one of the most improved waterways in the UK in terms of water quality. We cannot take all the credit for this on our own but there can be no doubt that efforts by groups such as ourselves in Cardiff, and others along the course of the river, have significantly contributed to the improvement. Regular users of the Taff trail have commented on the difference we've made to this popular cycling area.

Feedback we receive from our volunteers is always positive. They welcome the chance to make a real positive contribution and to visit areas across Cardiff that even those that have lived here all their lives

didn't know existed. This in turn has led to a greater appreciation of the broad diversity of wildlife and habitat on our doorstep and the need to conserve what we have. By pointing out various birds, mammals, flora that we see, we also have seen an increase in interest in these areas with volunteers telling us they have returned to sites with others to walk around and appreciate what is there.

During events, we talk to any passers-by that show an interest in our work and give out business cards to raise the profile of the group and encourage more volunteers.

Our presence at events discourages and helps to reduce littering.

As a result of this raised awareness, the number of volunteers continues to rise as does the number of organisations who want to be associated with our cause.

After a clean-up, a next day improvement has been seen in the local wildlife e.g. in the heart of Cardiff, Brigantine Place, the day after a clean-up, a family of ducks, a yellow wagtail and a kingfisher were spotted in a 5 minute period.

Bridging the generation gap

We have had some success in attracting young people involved in the Group. Some older children have joined us as part of their Duke of Edinburgh award or as part of their Welsh Baccalaureate study. Others have accompanied their parents/grand-parents and litter pick as a family. When we do work near park areas, we are often approached by small gangs of children eager to help out. Children are welcome to help out provided they are with a parent or guardian.

One of our committee members was approached by a 5 year old girl who had spotted a particularly bad area. Her clean-up suggestion was adopted and was arranged on the 11th of November 2012. She attended the clean-up with her Nan. As a result, she appeared in South Wales Echo a few days later. The following day after publication, the article was read out in assembly to the whole of Coed Glas school. This is a great example of how we have started to influence the younger generations.



Award winning

We have been fortunate in winning a number of awards since our inception.

Our top prize was being awarded the <u>Queens Award for Voluntary Service</u>, the MBE of volunteering. Two of the CRG Committee were invited to a Royal Garden party at Buckingham Palace.

CARDIFF RIVERS GROUP

ith no permanent staff, Cardiff Rivers Group is wholly reliant on the dedication of its 325 volunteers. The members, aged from seven to 72, are out in force every three weeks clearing up Cardiff's waterways.

The volunteers come from all walks of life, and dedicate countless hours to transforming the riverine environment for the benefit of communities and wildlife. "We'll clean anything as long as there's water there," says the charity's secretary, Nigel Barry. In the past five years they have undertaken more than 100 projects involving about 4,000 hours of work, collecting 2,400 bags, 24 tons of general rubbish, 128 supermarket trollies, 160 tyres, 120 traffic cones and six tons of scrap metal, which has been recycled to raise funds.

Mr Barry has been involved with the group for about five years. Speaking at a Buckingham Palace garden party, along with Chris Hackett, the entertainment secretary, he said they were delighted to



be representing the group.
"The filth and detritus in the River Taff flows through the heart of Cardiff. It really did degrade the city centre because it's a main thoroughfare, so we spent a lot of our time fishing out shopping trolleys and tyres.

"The hardcore volunteers couldn't do the group without the mass - you can make a difference to the appearance of things. We're very proud of everybody who's ever bent down to pick up some litter on behalf of Cardiff Rivers Group."

As well as the environmental benefit, Cardiff Rivers has provided social benefits for volunteers. One member was unemployed when he came out of hospital after having chemotherapy. He joined the group and sold the metal he cleared from the river to fund his driving lessons. Now he has a job with a supermarket and still volunteers. "There's no stopping him", said Mr Barry.

The Queen's Award is the latest recognition for the group in the past five years, along with the Tidy Wales and BT People awards. For their 100th event, members cleaned up the area around Cardiff's Doctor Who centre. Such is their standing that they have even been tasked with looking after Cardiff Castle's moat.

An extract from the Daily Telegraph article featuring the Cardiff Rivers Group receiving a QAVS award which was published on the 2^{nd} of June 2015.

Other notable awards include the following:-

KWT awards 2014 River improvement winners

KWT awards 2012 River improvement winners

KWT awards 2012 overall winners

How have group members benefited personally from being involved with this project?

As there are a range of social backgrounds represented within the group. Being part of a group such as ours has provided individuals with new opportunities, and for those seeking work it has enabled them to boost their self-esteem and confidence, provides them with a wider range of skills and a sense of pride in our achievements. We advise, encourage and motivate our volunteers by sending them an email to get them involved with the fortnightly event (texts for those without email).

Friendship – meeting like-minded people who want to make a difference. Often difficult to know where to start when you wish to clean up an area but doing it with friends makes it so much easier. We like to to encourage the social side of the group by organising regular social events. These include home brew beer competition, Christmas parties where Xmas jumpers are compulsory, a

canoe and camping trip on the River Wye and we've held a post event BBQ. We even managed to turn our AGM into a great night out which include the TAFFTA's award ceremony (sounds like BAFTA's). We have participated in with the World Alternative Games in mid-Wales and had great fun taking part in some very 'different' activities!



The picture shows the first outing of the latest line of merchandise and the tradition of enjoying a well-deserved pint after an event.

Committee work – giving people experience of working as a team and having responsibility allows them to demonstrate different skills to potential employers or Universities. We actively encourage younger volunteers to get involved in the organising and managing of events so that they can gain from this valuable experience in a safe environment. The committee meets monthly in the pub, and all members are welcome to come along for a chat.

Mentoring/advice/experience – Mentoring of individuals takes place without anyone formally putting it in place. We have a very wide range of volunteers with a diverse range of skills and knowledge. There are those just starting out, those looking to get back on track and those coming to the end of their current careers, our volunteers have helped each other to tackle some of the issues that each of these career changes bring. We have volunteers with considerable business experience who are able to help in an informal and constructive way.

In retirement – it is often difficult moving from a fulltime career or a situation where you have to stop doing an activity. CRG provides a viable alternative for many and a route into the vast array of opportunities that the voluntary sector can offer. We have seen many volunteers get involved with other initiatives in and around Cardiff as a result of joining the CRG.

Exercise – our events generally last 2 hours. Volunteers can be as active as they wish within that time. Some will be in waders, spending their time hauling large pieces of rubbish out of the river whilst others, prefer to be walking along paths litter picking. All volunteers benefit from being outdoors in the fresh air and doing something that increases their heart rate. Calories burnt during their physical efforts can contribute towards weight loss programmes. Some volunteers have used the events for fitness training.

Health – physical exercise is one important health benefit. Exercise can help to address mental health issues which can manifest themselves in many guises; depression, social exclusion, sense of worthlessness etc. Our approach of everyone being equal and respecting each other for "who they are", rather than "what they do" is key to building the self-esteem, for those that need it. We know from our experience that volunteering with CRG helps to improve general health and wellbeing.

Employment – As part of their involvement, the CVs of our volunteers have been enhanced by the work they have done for the Cardiff Rivers Group demonstrating that they care about the community and more widely, care for the environment. We have directly assisted two of our volunteers in securing regular employment. Some of our volunteers have gone on to start their own enterprises..

Raft building – in 2013, we designed and built a raft and entered the Taff raft race. This gave us all something completely different to get involved in during the nights and at weekends when we weren't litter picking. Even though we ended up with a 450kg raft which came last, this was a really fun thing to do and to be involved in with other members of the group. We even made a substantial amount of money for charity. After the race, the raft was cut up and recycled e.g. one of the barrels is the Barbeque at Pipes micro-brewery, Pontcanna. The whole raft building project was a great example for the volunteers to be able to flex their skills in other areas.



As the race starts, the CRG raft is in last place. Our position didn't improve \varnothing

Stories – Some members have written a number of 'stories' which are accessible from our website which highlight the impact this work has on their lives.

Widening horizons - Some group members have benefited personally by learning more about the environment and partners we work with. For instance, some members visited Lamby Way to see Cardiff City Council's waste processes first hand. Others have been on a river trip with Cardiff Harbour Authority to help to foster partnerships and increase their knowledge of partners' activities.

Overall, our volunteers get involved for a number of different reasons and that is the beauty of coming out with the CRG – it can be whatever you want it to be.

Recycling

We recycle and reuse everything that we can and regularly see group members leaving events with some sort of 'treasure'! It's often that we come away with something that can be put to good use.

We raise funds for the group through selling scrap metal, pallets, electric motors and plastic barrels. However, for vital resources that we need to sustain our group, we depend very much on the generosity of donations from our partners and supporting organisations. Their contributions are very much appreciated and we are very fortunate for their continued support.

Bicycles recovered that are in good condition are recycled via the Cardiff Cycle Workshop. This group educates and trains disadvantaged teenagers in bicycle mechanics. The bikes are fully reconditioned, made safe for the road and either reused in local community projects or made available for affordable cycling to those who would not normally be in a position to own a bike.

All the aluminium cans collected from varsity day were all recycled.

We have been able to reuse some of the items collected to benefit our group or other closely associated groups for example where our volunteers also participate in other groups e.g.

- Using a snow board as a shelf,
- Plastic piping and guttering used for drainage in allotments and harvesting rainwater,
- Tools found such as Secateurs, a trowel, a spade and a screwdriver,
- A metal gas bottle has been used to make a stove,
- Stainless steel spikes found that are used for marking out,
- Braided metal wire has been used for tying things up and holding compost bins together,
- Old hinges for reinforcing,
- Timber for shelving, fence post and tree stakes,
- Scaffold netting that we use to cover seedlings.

Other items reused are wire mesh, various lengths of rope and straps, a bird feeder, a wheel barrow wheel, bricks, buckets, footballs and security fencing bases.

How much Waste has been collected?

Since 2009 (up to the 16/11/2016), we have undertaken 136 events which included over 5,594 hours of voluntary work, collected 3,406 bags of rubbish along with over 22 tonnes of loose rubbish, 168 trolleys, 207 tyres, 159 Traffic cones, 69 bicycles, 15 motorbikes and 7 tonnes of scrap that we have sold to raise funds.

What was the most unusual thing you have found?

We've found a variety of weird and wonderful unexpected items in the rivers. A few memorable ones include a full size rubber cricket pitch, a blow-up sheep, a safe (without the loot), a silver Vase, a quad bike, sex aids and underwear! One of our volunteers found a sawn-off shotgun in the River Taff. We also found a Calf hutch (a plastic home for a young calf!) and later sold it!

In the Media

Within the Cardiff area, we have raised awareness of the Cardiff Rivers Group to the general public by using a variety of media. Our 3 weekly event regularly features in the South Wales Echo and other local publications. We also use social media such as Facebook, Flickr, YouTube and Blogs to raise awareness.

Here are the links:-

Website and blog Introductory video Events photographs Facebook Twitter

Here are some examples where the Cardiff Rivers Group regularly appear in the Media.

- In 2013, the South Wales Echo published 27 articles about us and continued at a similar rate in 2014 and 2015
- On the 6th of January 2013, we were featured on the BBC TV programme, "Iolo' s Great Welsh Parks" (Bute Park episode).
- We have been featured many times in the Guardian Online
- In June 2014, the media contacted us for comments on the news item that the water
- cleanliness in Wales has improved and is the best it's been for 20 years. This news item was featured in the local press and was then aired on the BBC Wales news.
- We were invited on BBC Radio Wales and are regularly on Radio Cardiff
- We received public thanks in the press from Wales and West housing for helping with a clean up of their worse site in St Mellons, Cardiff.
- We have been featured on the Cardiff Harbour Authority Web site.
- We have an active social media presence with many Twitter followers who regularly re-tweet our live updates
- The group has been mentioned in newsletters by fellow groups e.g. Friends of Hailey Park.
- Our Facebook page is updated several times a week with pictures, stories of interest to our volunteers as well as advertising our events.
- We have a website www.cardiffriversgroup.co.uk which contains a blog and links to all the various social media.
- We have featured in the Daily Telegraph twice (15/02/2014 and 02/06/2015).
- We have a repository of event photographs on Flickr and are investigating newer methods of sharing using Instagram.

This breadth of PR has been instrumental in helping us publicise our work and gain new volunteers. It is also a great way to thank volunteers and partners publicly and help us spread the message that volunteering can be fun and extremely rewarding. We still get new members joining every month!

Branding

We have made a big effort to promote ourselves whilst on-site by wearing our own branded clothing. We have a good range of merchandise. Volunteers buy their own items and wear them with pride and to show all passers-by that we are volunteers.

Following a fiercely fought competition, our slogan is to "Make a DIFFerence since 2009" which adorns the front of our latest merchandise range of tee-shirts.

We also spent some of our hard earned cash on "pimping up" the truck. It now has the Cardiff Rivers Group logo on either side and is polished off with a Keep Wales Tidy spare wheel cover. Parking the truck at our event always causes a stir with passers-by and let's be fair, it'll never be stolen..!

How do people get involved?

The first port of call is our website: http://cardiffriversgroup.co.uk. From the home page, anyone interested can subscribe to our emails which notify the members of the events, usually with a weeks' notice. Alternatively, if you are a fan of Facebook, by "Liking" our page, and new items will appear in your newsfeed. Twitter is another form of social media used regularly, especially during events to link to people interested in what we do.

What are the long term goals for this project?

Our mission statement: "to clean up our waterways in Cardiff and engage the public in participating in the rivers clean-up work".

Our long term goals include:-

- To be financially independent and sustainable,
- Improve collaboration with our partners and organisations wishing to partner with us,
- Increase the volumes of rubbish and litter being recycled
- Educate the youngsters to prevent future generations from generating litter,
- In our small way we want to give back to the Community and do our absolute best to ensure that Cardiff is able to contribute to the natural beauty of Wales.
- To encourage and promote volunteering across Cardiff including community involvement.

Note that the aims of our group (according to our constitution) are as follows;

To improve the quality of the environment in South Wales, predominantly Cardiff, by undertaking environmental and conservation events, including, but not limited to:

- a. Litter picks
- b. Removal of rubbish from rivers, streams, ponds and other water courses
- c. Habitat management via the use of hand tools
- d. Access and amenity improvements
- e. Lobbying of relevant bodies to improve the quality of the environment within South Wales

In summary, to make a difference and have fun..!



A litter pick in Santa costumes. Photo taken at the rear of the New Theatre in the heart of Cardiff city centre on the $15^{\rm th}$ December, 2013