

CLYDESIDER

OUR COMMUNITY'S POSITIVE PRESS

ISSUE 23 Spring 2023

FREE



Wouldn't Change a Thing

INSIDE: MENTORING MATTERS...A DAY IN MY LIFE...WALKING WITH NATURE...

POETRY COMPETITION WINNER

The Awen Does Not Answer

By Sarah Mills

I do not have a saintly heart
Pierced with a golden shaft
But somewhere someone or something
Gifts to me my unlearned craft.

Is it the muses of the mount?
The hymns accompanied by the lyre?
Or simply the colours in a cloud
Or the ocean with its restless gyre?

And I wonder why I am so drawn
To this vision and feeling, image and idea
Like a ruby-throated hummingbird
Drinking nectar from the ipomoea.

But perhaps we should not ask such things
For the beauty in what this being brings
Is precious beyond the air I breathe,
A shining sword I cannot sheathe.

WELCOME

It's hard to believe we celebrated our official seventh birthday at the start of March!

And as we make plans for another year of positive solution-focused news it is inspiring to look back and see how far our little organisation has come.

The one thing which has been a constant from the start is the involvement of local volunteers.

They have helped shape and develop both the magazine and the organisation into a true community space.

And this year they not only chose our theme – Access for All – they also put a lot of time and effort into planning stories and topics for us to cover.

I'm so proud of the result.

This issue is packed with some really powerful human interest articles and personal experience pieces. They highlight a range of challenges and realities which many of us have little knowledge of.

Our contributors also share solutions and ideas to help improve access for all.

Some focus on removing physical barriers, while others challenge stigma and mindsets. Some are happening right here on our doorstep, others are ideas from around the world.

Our volunteers were also keen to see our Claim What's Yours campaign continue as financial struggles present serious barriers for too many people.

So, we widened it to a Cost of Living campaign and will continue to share information and highlight the support available across West Dunbartonshire throughout 2023.

We would also love to hear from you – our readers.

So on page 14 you'll find a short survey to complete and if you want to help make sure we're here for another seven years please consider signing up for our Clydesider membership from just £3 per month – full details on page 15.

Enjoy!
Amanda Eleftheriades-Sherry

Clydesider Editor



ABOUT CLYDESIDER

Clydesider Creative Ltd is a not-for-profit community media social enterprise based in West Dunbartonshire.

The Clydesider community magazine, website and social media promote the positives our area has to offer in terms of people, place, scenery, and history and showcase the creative talents, ideas, and experiences of local people.

Follow us on Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and Instagram. If you would like to get involved and contribute to Clydesider please email theclydesider@gmail.com

CLYDESIDER CREDITS

A big thank you to our fantastic team of volunteers you are all a true joy to work with. We would also like to thank our advertisers, members and funders. Your support helps us shine a light on the inspirational stories and creative talents in our communities. An additional vote of thanks goes out to all the community groups and organisations helping with the distribution, making sure the magazine reaches those least likely to read our stories online.

Clydesider Creative Mission Statement

Inspiring change by sharing positive stories and solutions, creating opportunities for individuals and organisations to build connections so together we can challenge the negativity and stigma too often associated with our community.



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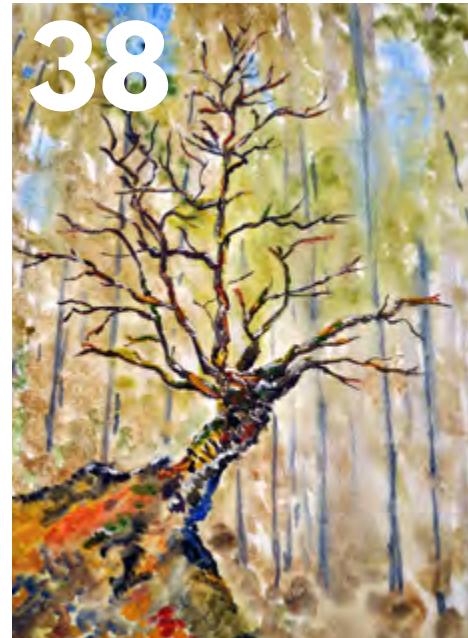
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Cover Photo by Gail Russell



New Alternatives

A local charity supporting people in recovery is looking for new volunteer Board members.

Alternatives' deputy manager, Anne Dyer, explained they're not looking for particular skills or experience, but for people passionate about the community.

She said: "Our Board members come from all walks of life and together their knowledge and expertise helps us grow and develop."

As well as the recovery bases in Dumbarton and Clydebank, Alternatives runs the Safe as Houses residential service in Drumry and a range of community-based recovery social enterprises across West Dunbartonshire.

Anne explained: "We helped establish Skylark IX Recovery Project which provides opportunities in woodworking, boatbuilding, creative arts and much more, both for people attending the service and for the wider community.

"We also have the Sweet Success Café in the Concord Centre and have plans for other community cafes. Here our people learn home-baking, do barista training and learn how to serve the public.

"Up at Knowetop we have allotments and growing spaces and the fresh produce for our cafes will be grown here.

"These social enterprises are for our people but also to benefit the wider community."

Board member George Elliot knows from personal experience how successful Alternatives' community-based recovery approach can be.

When he first tried to come off drugs he had to move to Bournemouth to get a residential rehab place.



He said: "I was in and out of recovery for years. In 2011 I came back here and met staff from Alternatives, they invited me in here.

"The ones on the programme then were a lot younger than me; I thought it wasn't for me, but I decided to pop back for a day and that became every day for 18 months."

After completing their 18 months recovery programme George was employed to set up a peer support team for the charity which is now a core part of the organisation.

He retired at the start of the pandemic but wanted to stay involved so was delighted when invited to join the Board.

Anne said: "George will come out with little gold nuggets of advice because he sees things from a different perspective and knows how our service works from the inside."

Kate Hamill also joined Alternatives' Board when she retired from working with local recovery services.

She said: "I wanted to give something back but without the pressure of work.

"I like Alternatives' ethos, how they work with people from absolute chaos when they have nothing and no-one in their lives through to stability and then moving back into society.

"They are very encouraging and support people to move on, the social enterprises are a great route for this."

**TO FIND OUT
ABOUT JOINING
ALTERNATIVES' BOARD
EMAIL
DONNIE@ALTERNATIVESWD.ORG
OR CALL
01389 734500**

COMMUNITY NEWS ROUND UP

STORYTELLING SESSIONS

Local storytellers will be sharing anecdotes, adventures and yarns in Alexandria this Spring and Summer.

The monthly storytelling events kick off in April with local writer Paul Murdoch telling tales of travel from Balloch to Bali.

The sessions will be hosted by local author Mary Irvine and will take place on the first Friday of the month in Green Trees' community room at 4 Church Street in Alexandria.

Mary said: "The original idea came from Jo, of Green Tree Remedies, who 'floated' the idea with me. The aim is to provide an opportunity for social, enjoyable and informative events.

"The room will be free - thanks to Jo so there's no charge for attending.

"However spaces are limited so please let us know if you are coming – there's no need to book all sessions in advance.

"Each session is complete so no need to commit to attending all sessions. Tea/coffee will be available, there's no charge but a small donation to cover costs will be appreciated."

Mary has five local authors or orators confirmed from April through to August with an idea for the sixth event in September.

Check out our What's On section on page 46 for details of each storytelling session or to book your seat call Jo on 07562333731 or Mary on 01389 729279.

FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICE

Support is available for families affected by a loved ones' substance use or who have lost a family member to drugs or alcohol.

Alternatives, a community recovery service with bases in Dumbarton and Clydebank, is now offering a range of support for family members.

These include local peer support groups, 1-1 support, selfcare and well-being activities as well as bereavement counselling and specialist CRAFT approach training.

For more information call 0141 951 2420 or email Glynis@Alternatives.org



KINSHIP CARERS DROP-IN

West Dunbartonshire Kinship Carers were delighted to launch their new base during Kinship Week from March 13.

The hub is on the ground floor of Erskine House in North Avenue, Clydebank and is currently open on Wednesdays and Thursdays from 10am – 2pm. Further days/times to be confirmed.

They provide a drop-in service for kinship carers living in West Dunbartonshire with free tea, coffee, support, advice and a friendly welcome on offer to all.

They also meet in Napier Hall in Old Kilpatrick bi-weekly on a Monday.

For more information call 0141 237 5960 or 07490720123.

COMMUNITY SURGERIES

The Council's Communities team is holding surgeries in community venues across West Dunbartonshire.

They will be in the following locations each month:-

- **Dalmuir Barclay Church** on the last Wednesday of every month from 11am to 2pm.
- **The Vale of Leven Trust**, Mitchell Way, Alexandria on the last Monday of the month from 11 am.
- **The Phoenix Centre**, Castlehill on last Thursday of the month from 11.30am – 2pm.
- **Centre 81**, Whitecrook on the last Wednesday of the month from 12 noon.

Also warm hubs and community organisations can request a session in their space by emailing YourCommunity@west-dunbarton.gov.uk for more information.



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Wouldn't Change A Thing

Words by Angela Clark & Photos by Gail Russell



Alexandria siblings Mikey and Missy Logan are challenging the stigma associated with Down syndrome as ambassadors for national charity Wouldn't Change A Thing (WCAT).

The pair were chosen to represent the charity for the second year in a row and their mum Christina is delighted at the news.

She said: "We are really proud to be chosen as ambassadors again.

"We want to end the stigma of how the world views children with Down syndrome. So we will be out and about talking to people, telling them about all the different things our children can do.

"It's a great charity. They've got an Instagram page and do YouTube videos where people can see what our children are up to. Letting people see they

are having the best time and living life just like any other child."

In 2018, 50 mums and their children created a YouTube video for World Down Syndrome Day. Filmed in their cars they lip-synced to Christina Perri's song 'A Thousand Years.'

The heart-warming video went viral and to date, has received over 500 million views worldwide.

And from this success Wouldn't Change A Thing was set up to help eliminate the stigma faced by children with Down syndrome.

After seeing the video online Christina wanted to get involved and help raise awareness as two of her children were born with Down syndrome.

Last year Mikey 12 and

Missy 11 were chosen to be ambassadors for the charity and they were over the moon when they were selected again for 2023.

Attitudes towards people with Down syndrome have come a long way since the 1970s when babies and children were placed in institutions and shut away from the world.

However, abortion is still an option pushed by many professionals.



Christina explained: "The pressure from doctors to abort is unbelievable, especially for first-time parents who find out they're having a baby with Down syndrome.

"If those parents could come and speak to people who have children with Down syndrome, they would get a balanced view before making this decision.

"That is what Wouldn't Change A Thing is trying to educate people about, they want to eliminate negative perceptions and show people there's no reason to be scared."

Christina wasn't put off or scared when she adopted both Missy and Mikey.

She fell instantly in love with them and treated them the same as her other kids.

Sadly, she has heard some horror stories from other parents about the treatment they have received from others. But in the area she lives there have been only positive responses.

"There's not a lot of negativity in Alexandria where I live. I can't speak for other areas, but I've not really come across much negativity.

"Once when Mikey was a tiny baby, somebody came up and looked at him and said, 'oh he's got Down syndrome, I'm really, really sorry'. I was like, 'no, there's nothing to be sorry about', but apart from that, people are genuinely lovely," she added.

Like any parent, Christina wants the best for her children, to see them enjoy life and flourish, and not face barriers because they have different needs.

She highlighted the many children with Down syndrome

who have become successful actors, actresses, models and live wonderful lives.

And added: "The hope is our children are in the mainstream. We want them to be seen, not hidden away.

"The opportunities for our children have come a long way. There are quite a few really good actors with Down syndrome.

"The boy on Call the Midwife and Tommy Jessup, he was in Coming Down the Mountain, a TV drama. I know someone with Down syndrome who drives. The sky's the limit!"

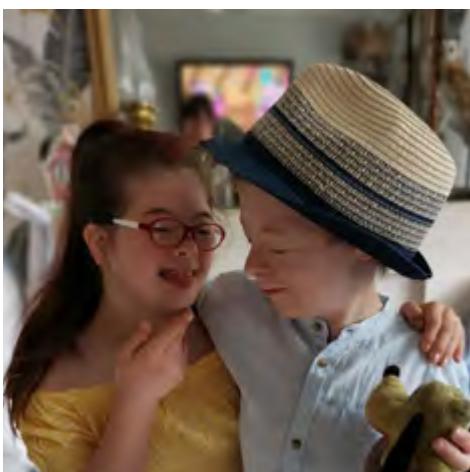
In terms of their ability to live independently Mikey has different more complex needs and will need care for the rest of his life. Missy however will eventually go on and live her own life.

Christina said: "I've no doubt with support Missy will be able to live on her own. Mikey won't but she will. Hopefully she meets somebody nice and gets married, that's what I'm hoping for in the future.

"Obviously she won't have children as much as she keeps telling me she's having a baby. Women with Down syndrome can have children, but I don't think it's a good idea. I'm hoping she moves out and gets a job, lives her life.

"And Mikey will be with me forever."

To learn more about children with the extra chromosome known as Down syndrome, visit www.wouldntchangeathing.org/ and you can follow Mikey and Missy's adventures on Instagram and show your support at @michaelnoahl.





Mentoring Matters

Words by Angela Clark & Photos by Harvey Smart

A Dumbarton man is using his troubled past to help young people make positive choices about their future.

Matthew Murie is a volunteer with Y Sort It's Intandem Mentoring scheme, which helps support young vulnerable people struggling to deal with difficult and challenging situations in their lives.

Matthew said: "Working with kids was always something I thought I would be good at. Because of my past experiences I knew I could make a difference. So I put in for the mentoring with Y Sort It and once they got to know me I started volunteering."

Matthew is now waiting to get placed with a young person through the Intandem Mentoring and is currently volunteering at Bonhill Youth Club and Street Bikes.

Growing up he didn't have a male role model in his life as his father was an alcoholic unable to mentor his son as he was fighting his own demons.

Matthew said: "My dad being an alcoholic meant I had free reign to go out at night and do what I wanted with the people I hung out with.

"My mum was amazing but I think I was just easily led and alcohol had become normalised in my life. I wanted to do what my pals were doing."

Matthew's drinking got bad when he joined the army. When he left it got worse and he progressed to hard drugs including cocaine and heroin.

Although he continued to work through his addiction he was never able to stay in one job for any length of time.

Matthew said: "I always worked to do what I needed to do and I was in well respected jobs.

"I would get periods of not doing harder drugs, being about different people, going to festivals but still drinking and taking cocaine.

"I believed I was clean because I wasn't taking heroin, but I didn't know my substance abuse was breaking my family.



"I could see them crying. It was one of my proudest moments I've had in 20 years. Now they are just watching me grow again."

Matthew wants to spend his life working with kids and hopes to eventually seek employment doing something he loves.

The mentoring opportunity has given him the chance to build positive relationships with the young people.

In giving them a bit of his time and being a positive role model he is hoping to guide them towards the path he missed in his youth.

To find out more about the mentoring scheme or volunteering with Y Sort It contact Lyndsey on 0141 941 3308 or email: lyndsey@ysortit.com.

"I was oblivious to it, I was selfish. It was all about me and I didn't care."

Since going into treatment in 2021 Matthew has turned his life around and wants to give back to the local community and help others.

As well as volunteering with the young people at Y Sort It he attends a number of groups for his own well-being including drama group 'Recovering Voices' where he has already been involved in stage productions.

He added: "I got involved in the drama group through my treatment centre. It helped to build my confidence.

"Because of the stuff I was doing I had lost my ability to function normally. Being part of the group built me up.

"We did a performance in Oran Mor and I did a few sketches. They were really funny and my family came to see me at the show.

"At the end I got to say a few words on stage and told the audience my family have had nothing to be proud of me. This was the first time they had something to be proud of in a very long time.

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Value in Volunteering

Positive Role Models Needed

Words by Angela Clark & Photo by Caroline Finn

gives us a chance to get to know them and their interests.

"And when we meet the young people we do the same. We go out and meet the families, we get to know them, find out what the young person's interests are and if they want to be involved that's how we match and decide who is the best mentor for them."

Volunteers come from a range of backgrounds and have a wealth of experience. All want to give back to the community and help children whilst some are keen to increase their skills and chances of employment working with young people.

Lyndsey said: "We have had volunteers who are now employed with us. If you want to work with kids it's a great stepping stone."

"Our volunteers say it's very rewarding watching the kids grow and feel they are making a difference in their lives."

The organisation asks volunteers to commit to a minimum of a year to ensure the young person has a consistent role model in their lives.

Without this commitment it wouldn't be possible to successfully support as many children as the organisation does.

Lyndsey said: "If they complete the year and they want to continue they can stay longer. We have had two matches which just recently came to an end, they were matched for about four years."

"The volunteers have been with them from the start and stayed on that journey with them providing consistent support throughout the years."

The experience volunteers gain from working with a young person can often have a positive impact on their own lives as well.

It can improve their confidence and skills and give them experience beneficial for future employment opportunities.

Lyndsey added: "The benefits for mentors vary. Some are looking for work experience, some are studying and looking for experience in relation to the course they are on.

"We have retired people with their own life experiences and they want to give back to others because they had role models in their lives that changed the path they were on."

The age of the children being supported ranges from 8-14-years-old.

**IF YOU THINK YOU COULD
GIVE YOUR TIME TO HELP
CHILDREN WHO MAY NOT
HAVE THE SUPPORT AND
ENCOURAGEMENT THEY NEED
EMAIL LYNDSEY@YSORTIT.COM
OR CALL 0141 941 3308.**

A positive role model in a person's life can lift them up, help them believe in themselves and support them to achieve things they may have never even dreamed about.

This is especially the case for young people who may be struggling to meet academic demands in school, or build positive relationships with others. They might not even have someone to talk to and listen to them.

Y Sort It is one of several organisations offering youth mentoring support to young people in West Dunbartonshire.

Through their Intandem project the local youth charity recruits volunteers and matches them with young people.

The mentors meet regularly with their mentee to offer support and help them through difficulties they are experiencing in their lives.

Intandem Mentoring Coordinator, Lyndsey Coleman, said: "Through our mentoring training with the volunteers it

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Here to help...

In the past year I've provided advice and support to more than 2,000 constituents living in West Dunbartonshire.

As your MP I hold weekly advice surgeries across Clydebank, Dumbarton and the Vale. I also offer virtual surgeries via phone or video call. Appointments can be booked via my website: www.martindocherty.scot

If you'd like to get in touch please email me on martin.docherty.mp@parliament.uk, or call my local constituency office on 0141 952 2988.

Thanks, Martin



**Martin Docherty-Hughes
MP for West Dunbartonshire**

CLYDESIDER

READER SURVEY

Please help us learn and develop our work by taking a few minutes!

How often do you read the magazine?

MOST ISSUES

OCCASIONALLY

I'M A FIRST TIMER

On average how many people read your copy of the magazine?

1

2

3

4

5+

How often do you read the content on our website -www.clydesider.org?

MOST STORIES

OCCASIONALLY

RARELY

NEVER

What do you like about the magazine?

Which of our social media platforms do you follow?

FACEBOOK

TWITTER

INSTAGRAM

TWITTER

NONE

What social media content do you like/find useful? (Draw a circle round your selection)

Links to our stories - Short local history/naturevideos - Competition posts

Posts about our community activities/workshops - Local information posts

Poems/photo slideshows - None of the above

Have you heard of our Clydesider membership scheme?

YES

NO

If not you can find out more at www.ko-fi.com/clydesider

What could we do better?

Has something you read in the magazine or on our social media prompted you to take action?(E.g join a group/access support/contact a politician/enter a competition)

Please could you give us a few details.

Is there anything else you would like to see the Clydesider team doing in the local community?

BECOME A CLYDESIDER MEMBER

We need your help to keep Clydesider magazine free for all to enjoy.

We've been publishing the positive news magazine since 2016 and distributing it free across West Dunbartonshire.

But like everyone else we're facing spiralling price rises.

Our paper costs have almost doubled since we started.

We are also sharing a lot more content on our social media spaces to try and reach a wider audience.

So, if you are a regular reader and can afford a few pounds a month please consider becoming a Clydesider member.

Our membership tiers start at just £3 per month – you can sign up online at <https://ko-fi.com/clydesider/tiers> or if you prefer to pay by cheque just cut out the coupon opposite.

In return you will receive a copy of each issue posted directly to your door.

We will also send you some Clydesider merchandise with your first issue plus you will have our eternal gratitude!

If you don't want to sign up for membership quite yet you can make a one-off donation at <https://ko-fi.com/clydesider>

And all Clydesider volunteers have free membership, as the magazine wouldn't exist without their time and hard work. So if you want to become a volunteer member email Jenny@clydesider.org for details.

CLYDESIDER MEMBERSHIP



ko-fi.com/clydesider/

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- » Clydesider goodies
- » Invite to all our events
- » A Clydesider Vote

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per month
or £50 a year

- » All of the perks above plus a Clydesider tote bag

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- » All the perks of Friendship Membership plus the gift of Clydesider Supporter Membership. You can choose to nominate someone or we will share your gift.

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per month
or £90 a year

Thank you, your community spirit helps keep Clydesider free for all to enjoy.

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Supporting: £3pm or £30pa

Friendship: £5pm or £50pa

Community: £9pm or £90pa

Please send form and payment to Clydesider Creative, 48a Erskine View, Old Kilpatrick G60 5JG



COST OF LIVING SUPPORT

Soaring fuel and food bills are leaving more and more individuals and families struggling to make ends meet.

And as many people are trying to find support for the first time we decided to continue our 'Claim What's Yours campaign' through 2023 and combine it with useful information about cost of living support and resources.

Below is a list of Warm Spaces where you can pop in for a free cuppa, warmth, and some company.

WARM SPACES

Clydebank

St Andrew's Church,
Kilbowie Road - Wednesdays
10am - 2pm. Free food/hot
drinks

Awestruck Art Gallery,
Clydebank Shopping Centre.
Thurs & Fri 12 - 4pm soup,
sandwiches and a Reiki
session

Dalmuir

Dalmuir Barclay Church
Indoor Bowls & drop-in café
on Mon 11am-2pm; Drop-in
Cafe & Community Pantry on
Wed & Fri 11am - 2pm plus
Thurs 6.30pm-8pm

The Big Disability Group
Hub - open 9am - 5pm Mon
to Thurs and 9am - 3pm on a
Friday. Warm space, free tea
& biscuits. Advisors available.

Old Kilpatrick

OKFP Chatty Cafe will be
serving food 12 - 4pm Mon
to Fri

OKFP Community

Food Pantry is open for
emergency food Mon to Fri

Dumbarton

The Big Scran at Ben View
Resource Centre is a free
hot meal open to anyone
in the community, every
Thursday 5pm - 7pm

Warm & Toastie sessions
- breakfast, hot drink, wifi,
toys for toddlers, Mondays
9.15am - 11.15am at Ben

View Resource Centre

Food for Thought - free
lunch in St Augustine's
Church Hall, Wednesdays
11.30am - 2pm

Myre Community Hub - free
breakfast in St Peters Chapel
House, Howatshaws Road,
Bellsmyre, Tues & Fri 8.45am
- 10am

Soup Club, St Augustine's
Church Hall - Fridays
11.30am - 2pm

St Patrick's Church Hall,
warm hub every Mon/Tue/
Wed 11am - 4pm

Phoenix Community Cafe
- Tuesdays - Fri free lunches
12 - 2pm; plus adult social
every Wednesday afternoon

Soup Spot, Lennox
Evangelical Church 12 -
1.30pm every Tuesday until
June

Vale of Leven
Dalmonach Community
Centre - every Wednesday
12-4pm a cuppa, biscuit and
heat

Renton Football Club -
Every Thursday Tontine
Pavilion 12 - 4pm tea/coffee,
food pantry, wifi & chat

Balloch

Doghouse Pub - free tea,
coffee and biscuits for locals

Nae Mair Talkin

**You keep talkin
about us
in jaggy words
we don't
understand.
We keep dyin
while you keep
talkin.**

**Stop talkin
and listen.
Then dae what
we ask.**

**Stop talkin
as if you knew
better.
It's us that keeps
payin
wi oor loved
wans
and wur lives.**

**By Leanne
McBride & Peter
Cawston**



BENEFIT SPOTLIGHT

Scottish Welfare Fund

BY AMANDA ELEFTHERIADES

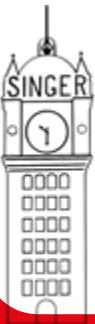
This issue we're taking a look at the Scottish Welfare Fund which provides two grants direct from our local authority – West Dunbartonshire Council.

Who is it for?

Anyone aged 16 or older who is on a low income, OR getting certain benefits, can apply for a grant from the Scottish Welfare Fund.

There are different grants you can apply for depending on your circumstances. You do not need to pay these grants back.

Crisis Grants



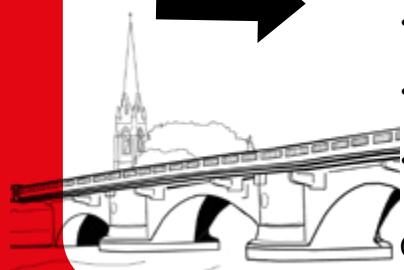
These are available if you have a disaster or emergency and need help to keep yourself or your family safe from harm.

Crisis grants maybe available if you:-

- have a fire or flood at home
- are visiting a sick child in hospital
- move away from an abusive partner
- have lost all your money or been a victim of theft or fraud
- are a grandparent taking on caring responsibilities and waiting for benefits to be transferred across.

Crisis grants should be processed within two days. These are one-off payments and cannot support your income long term.

Community Care Grants



Community Care grants maybe available if you:

- are about to leave care to live on your own in the community
- face going into care because you don't have what you need to continue living at home
- require help because you are struggling to provide a safe and secure home for yourself or your family
- need help to get essential household items like a cooker or washing machine and don't have the money to buy them
- you're caring for someone who has been released from prison or a young offenders' institute

Community Care grants should be processed within 21 days.

How Do I Apply?

Complete the online application form at <https://www.west-dunbarton.gov.uk/welfarefund>

Alternatively you can apply over the phone on 01389 737640.

Phone lines are open from 9am – 4.30pm Monday to Thursday and 9am to 3:30pm on a Friday.

Anything Else I Should Know?

Crisis grants will be paid via a Paypoint.

If you have savings of over £700, or £1,200 if you get a pension, you'll be less likely to get a Community Care Grant. West Dunbartonshire Council will decide.

To check what benefits you are entitled to visit www.entitledto.co.uk/help or <https://benefits-calculator.turn2us.org.uk/> or for help applying for benefits check out the list of support services on the next page.

HEALTHY FOOD MILLIONS GOING UNCLAIMED

BY AMANDA ELEFTHERIADES

Are you one of thousands of households missing out on millions of pounds?

Families who received a prepaid card to help with the cost of healthy food are being urged to check their balance.

Best Start Foods helps with the cost of buying healthy food and milk during pregnancy or if you have a child under the age of three.

The payment is delivered via a prepaid card and is topped up with up to £36 for each eligible child every four weeks.

Since launching in 2019, more than 7,000 of the issued cards have never been activated and over 3,000 have been activated but never used.

This means some cardholders have not spent their payment and may have built up large balances.

In total, up to £2.3 million has yet to be spent.

A spokesperson for Social Security Scotland said: "Given the current cost of living crisis, we are keen to ensure people check their cards and use their balances."

Social Security Scotland has already written to some people urging them to look for their cards and check their balances.

This can be done online, at a cash machine by entering your 4-digit PIN or by calling the card issuer Allpay.

Allpay is also writing to card holders to inform them of their unspent balances.



BENEFITS SUPPORT

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU - Freephone 0800 484 0136 (Mon-Thu 8:30am - 4:30pm, Fri 8:30am-3pm)
www.wdcab.co.uk

WORKING4U MONEY - West Dunbartonshire Council's money advice service providing support with benefits, debt and money issues. Call 01389 776929 or email wrmas@west-dunbarton.gov.uk

HOME ENERGY SCOTLAND - help, advice and financial support to reduce heating bills 0808 8082282
www.homeenergyscotland.org

CHILD POVERTY ACTION GROUP - information about benefits in Scotland:
www.cpag.org.uk/scotland/welfare-rights/scottish-benefits

ENTITLED TO - free online benefits calculator blog: www.entitledto.co.uk plus www.entitledto.co.uk/help/coronavirus_help (benefits and coronavirus)

MONEY & DEBT ADVICE

ADVICE DIRECT SCOTLAND - provide free, independent advice via phone, SMS, web chat, email, online and through social media www.advisedirect.scot

CHRISTIANS AGAINST POVERTY - provide free debt help. Locally work in partnership with West Dunbartonshire Debt Centre to offer a home visiting service for people experiencing unmanageable debt.

The service is free and available to people of any faith or none. Martin Lewis of the Money Show is one of CAP's patrons.

To access support call their Helpline on 0800 328 0006 (Mon-Thu 9:30am-5pm, Fri 9:30am-3:30pm) or visit www.capuk.org

NATIONAL DEBT LINE - charity giving free and independent debt advice over the phone and online. Call free on 0808 808 4000, Monday to Friday 9am - 8pm and Saturday 9:30 am - 1pm or to Webchat with an advisor visit www.nationaldebtline.org

STEPCHANGE - a debt charity providing free, confidential and expert debt advice and money guidance. They also campaign to reduce the risk of problem debt. To find out more visit www.stepchange.org



SPONSORED EDITORIAL

THE HEART OF THE COMMUNITY

From Fish Supper Fridays to Country & Western nights there's always something happening at the OKFP Community Hub and Chatty Cafe.

The emergency food aid charity hosts regular events to help bring the community together and reduce isolation.

Maureen Cummings, OKFP director, explained: "We have a Fish Supper Friday every other month and then a community event in between.

"In January we partnered with Police Scotland for our Fish Supper night and had 12 young volunteers who came along to look after our guests.

"Then we had a Palentine's Night in February as lots of our volunteers live alone and Valentine's week can be quite isolating. This was an opportunity to celebrate it with their pals."

With a buffet, movie screening, music and dancing, the evening was hailed a big success by all involved.

April's community event is a Patsy Cline and Dolly Parton tribute night on April 28. Tickets priced £10 are available by calling 07916310806.

Maureen added: "All our community nights this year have sold out with

40 people at every event, we're even taking bookings in advance for the Fish Supper Fridays."

The charity is keen to work with local groups and organisations to build partnerships which benefit people from all walks of life.

As a result of their work with Police Scotland the OKFP Hub is now a Keep Safe space registered on Police Scotland's website.

This means anyone who is vulnerable, unwell or at risk, know they will find a safe and supported space with someone to talk to at the OKFP Hub.

They have also hosted visits from three local primary schools with over 100 pupils given a guided tour of the community space.

This has inspired plans which could see school eco-pantries established to challenge stigma often associated with poverty.

To support Ukrainian families now living in West Dunbartonshire, OKFP organised an Ukrainian Day with food donated by Domino's Pizza, McDonalds and Greedy G's in Clydebank.

Maureen said: "This gave the families a chance to get to know each other and the children were able to speak to



other kids in their own language.

"We screened walking tours around several Ukrainian towns and the women made camouflage nets from old sheets to send home.

"We put out an appeal for toiletries and received 125kg of items, and the women raised funds to send them to Ukraine.

"It was a truly inspiring event and we all learned from each other."

You can follow OKFP on Facebook to keep up to date with all the goings on at the Hub or click the QR code to download



AVAILABLE ON THE
App Store



GET IT ON
Google Play

their new app to your phone. Here you can find all their latest events, donate directly to the charity or purchase items from their Amazon Wishlist.

Donations of food/toiletries can also be dropped at the OKFP Hub, Unit 5 Station Road Industrial Estate G60 5LP Monday to Friday 12 - 4pm or online at www.okfp.org.uk

Maureen added: "However you want to get involved we would love you to be part of our OKFP community."





Personal Experience

A Day in My Life by Steven Hastings Photos by Katie Kennedy

I didn't climb a mountain today, but I did get out of bed.

My name is Steven and I turned 40 in 2022.

I have a condition called Osteogenesis Imperfecta (OI), or Brittle Bones and I use a Powered Wheelchair.

I need help every morning to get dressed and then I wiggle backwards from my bed into my wheelchair.

I live with my parents in a house with an upstairs, but my bedroom is a downstairs extension.

There is a ramp at the front door of the house and a ramp leading to a patio into my bedroom.

I can't drive but I have a Motability car with a ramp that I drive my wheelchair into, and I go out in my car most days.

I like going to cafes, shops and garden centres.

I am a volunteer with the Clydesider and we meet every two weeks at the Work Connect Building in Levengrove Park which is all on the level.

I have received a lot of help from Stepping Stones, a mental health charity based in Clydebank. I attend one of their groups on a Thursday in Saint Augustine's Church in Dumbarton which also has good access.

Most places I go to are accessible although there have been times when this is not the case.

I once tried a venue out for an event and, with help, I used a portable ramp to go into the building.

But it was so steep I couldn't face doing it again, so I was unable to attend the event.

Sometimes you can phone ahead, and they say there is disabled access but then you find it's not suitable.

Even a very small step can stop me getting into shops or cafés.

I once had a powered wheelchair which turned out not to be very good

at going down small steps as it would get caught.

I went to a chip shop for dinner, with help I got over the very small step to go in but after dinner when I was leaving, I got stuck so was half-way in and half-way out the door.

As he could see I was stuck the manger let me use another door which was flatter.

I think it would be helpful if the government gave businesses a grant to improve their disabled access.

I like Lego and I remember seeing an article and video in 2020 about a lady in Germany who built ramps out of Lego and put them at shop doorways to help wheelchair users and also highlight wheelchair access issues to the public.



The Lego bricks were glued into place but as it was only manual wheelchair users using them, I'm not sure if they could take the weight of a powered wheelchair.

The ramps are only for small steps but are now all over the town of Hanau in Germany to highlight wheelchair access issues.

If people park their car too far on to a pavement, I usually can't get my wheelchair past and must go on the road which can be dangerous.

When crossing a road, I need a flat kerb on either side. When they are high, I again need to go on the road.

I haven't seen this for a long time, but I have been in disabled toilets where you can't move for stuff.

In one there was a large TV in a box and in a disabled

toilet in a restaurant there were a couple of shelves full of stock like cans of juice and things in plastic bags.

Luckily, I was okay but I was concerned something might fall and injure me.

Things seemed to improve slightly after the Disability Discrimination Act was passed in 2004.

Then new buildings were to have one accessible entrance and older buildings were made accessible where possible.

When I was a child, I couldn't go into my local newsagents in my powered wheelchair but sometime after October 2004 a ramp was put in.

On the whole, I can get about most places but there is still a lot to be done to make everywhere truly accessible for all.



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Dancers Got Talent

WORDS BY ANGELA CLARK & PHOTOS BY CAROLINE FINN

In a world designed by and for able-bodied people, those with a different range of abilities often miss out.

Now a local dance school is trying to create a dance space for all.

April's Street Feet studio in Dalmuir runs a wide range of dance classes from Hip Hop to Ballet.

And for the past year April Stuart Macrae has run a weekly class for adults with additional support needs.

April explained: "One of my friends who works in Social Care said there wasn't really anything out there for adults with disabilities.

"She saw all the

opportunities my kids were getting - they do big competitions and shows - and said her clients would absolutely love it.

"So she brought them along to the studio and I ran classes for the first few weeks and they were really enjoying it.

"I decided to run the classes and make it an open class for anybody with any kind of additional needs."

April was overwhelmed by the response she got after posting on local Facebook page, Call Yerself A Bankie.

It confirmed there was definitely a demand for dance classes for people with additional needs.

April continued: "People think if you have a disability then you can't dance. That's not true there are many disabled dancers and they do just as well as everyone else.

"They put more heart and soul into it than the kids who are training all the time because it does mean so much to them.

"And these classes give them the chance to do a dance show and enter competitions like any other kid."

Last December her additional needs group, the Unity Dance Crew, performed their first show at Glasgow's Barrowlands and in February they danced their way into the hearts of everyone at the Full Out Championships in Clydebank Leisure Centre.

April said: "The energy the group gave at both events was amazing. When they came on stage the place was in uproar.

"They lit up the whole place. People were saying it was a nice touch to have the group dancing in the Full Out Championships where 12 schools compete.

"It was a humbling experience and so special.

"They did their team dance and got medals and trophies. One of the dancers told me they'd





never had a trophy or medal before, it meant so much to them."

The group has also helped April get back on her feet after struggling with her own mental health during the pandemic.

She said: "Sometimes I still have a wobble with my mental health but come Wednesday when I have my additional needs class, I know as soon as I go into the class I will feel better.

"When we went into lockdown in the March I had taken on the full rent for the building; that still had to be paid.

"I fell pregnant with my second child so I had no work and no money plus my older boy was sick and spent two years of his life in hospital. On top of that I put on five stones in weight.

"We think people with additional needs need us but that's not always true, sometimes it's the other way about."

April aims to add extra classes for adults with disabilities and introduce new classes for school age children.

She is also trying to secure

funding to install a lift in the building so people with mobility challenges who want to dance can join her classes.

She said: "Our problem right now is trying to put on these classes for disabled students as we don't have a lift so we are looking to see how we can make that possible.

"Everyone is welcome in this studio.

"One of the parents who joined my school was rejected by three dance schools because her son was autistic.

"I have six kids with autism in my classes. 100% they should be included. They are kids, they are human beings just because they have different needs they shouldn't be excluded."

The studio enrolls and teaches all ages and abilities and also runs a boys-only dance class taught by a male dancer to try and challenge the stigma which often stops boys from learning how to dance.

April wants everyone to have the same opportunities and play her part in championing diversity and ending discrimination.

For information on all classes available contact April on 07392819293 or email Danceapril34@hotmail.com

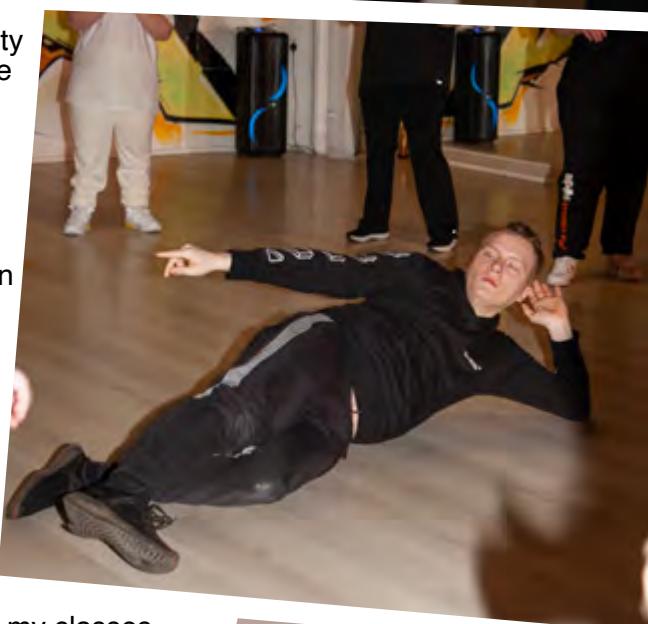


Photo Competition - Community



WINNING ENTRY
by Ian Barr

Thank you to everyone who entered the competition.

Keep an eye on our social media for a slideshow of all entries.

The theme for our Issue 24 photo competition is Close-up, see page 41 for details on how to enter.

RUNNER UP
by Lynn Cuthbert





RUNNER UP by Iain McLaren

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**Congratulations to the winner
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As part of this year's focus on equalities and access for all we will be exploring experiences across the gender spectrum. In this issue Jamielee Boyle shares her personal experience of transition with Amanda Eleftheriades.

Right to Respect

"When it comes to gender, I feel we're at a time where everything is accepted."

"I was 'she' and 'her' from when I was about 18/19 years old, but I was getting misgendered until I was about 25," Jamielee explained.

"I moved away from my hometown of Clydebank because it was easier to start again. But really, I was just running from the people I grew up with in case they did misgender me."

"Now I see them, and have seen them for years on and off, and they get it right."

Jamielee always felt female and, in her teens, plucked up the courage to share this with her friends.

"I was 14 or 15, a young adult, but I still knew, I always knew."

"I just went to a doctor who told me I couldn't do anything until I was 21, that was wrong, but I just believed him."

"When I turned 18 I met a bunch of people who told me to make an appointment at the Sandyford."

"I went for counselling, they made you do everything to make sure you were ready for this."

However, it still took two years from being told she would get the life-changing surgery until the operation went ahead.

"It was like a game back then, to see how hard you would fight for it. It wasn't something that was done easily."

"It is a rough process. But nothing good comes easy."

"I was about 23 or 24 when I had my operation, so I was a fully grown adult."

"By then I knew who I was. I had travelled a bit, stayed two or three months here and there and done my part to find myself."

Even after her full transition Jamielee faced occasions when her identity was questioned, including being outed by a colleague at a former workplace.

But what she anticipated being traumatic instead showed how accepting most of her team-mates were.

"I took it really bad. I thought it was going to be terrible, but nothing changed."

"Nobody's reaction changed. I was scared to go out and have lunch, and that was with 800 people in a call centre, but they had got to know me."

"Probably some of them had an opinion but, other than the usual of one guy saying 'you're really pretty for a guy' on a night out and thinking that was a compliment, that was it."

Surrounded by supportive family and friends Jamielee has lived proudly and comfortably

as a woman for the past 15 years.

But with trans rights making headline news she feels her identity is once again coming under scrutiny.

And she is concerned the use of the gender neutral pronoun of 'they' could jeopardise her female pronoun.

"It's not easy to completely change your whole life.

"I've been friends with very macho men who accepted me as a female. But now I feel I'm not allowed to be a woman.

"I understand some people don't want to be called anything, which is fine. I respect that, I'm not going to call you something you feel uncomfortable with.

"But I'm quite comfortable being a female.

"I'm very comfortable being somebody's daughter, someone's sister, somebody's granddaughter.

"If I was ever called they/them, I would be super offended and really hurt.

"It took a long time for people to recognise me as who I am. I went through the hard stages to be called 'she' and 'her'.

"I fought too hard for my title; it is staying."

For young people exploring their identity she urged them to take their time, surround themselves with supportive friends and access support.

"If you are ever going through anything like that as a child, it will be a struggle. But it's not a rush, take your time.

"See if you have no clue who you are, pack a bag, go travelling, go see the world, go find out who you are.

"That's how you find yourself and know what you want. From the minute I knew who I was, I loved my life.

"Don't ever be ashamed of who you are. Be proud of who you are. Find out who you are.

"There's support out there. We're very lucky, we've got therapy, we've got the NHS."

Jamielee is passionate about women's rights and worried the recent controversy over where to house a convicted rapist who identified as female will cause a backlash against

transitioned women.

And as a survivor of sexual assault herself Jamielee wants to protect female-only spaces.

"I was in a bar and had to ask my mum to accompany me to the toilet because it was a male and female toilet. I'm not wanting to share that space with a man.

"What about all the women who fought for women's rights? Are we going to dismiss history and remove women? I don't think that's fair.

"If you're non-binary, I'll support you in that. But, please support me being a female."

She would like to see people across the gender spectrum take time to understand where each other are coming from rather than take offense where often none is intended.

Jamielee added: "It just feels like people have become super sensitive, and almost look to find fault with each other.

"My gran is 80 years-old, she's had gay pals all her life, she's never ever been close-minded. Even my Italian granny who is holier than thou, accepted me for who I was.

"That's not the case for everybody. I know that and understand that. So go out and meet good people, have good friends.

"I've had amazing friends. I was lucky but I was also a nice and open person.

"Don't be a closed a***e who finds offence in everything. There are going to be things in life you'll need to shrug off or work through, but unfortunately that's universal.

"Things happen and people can be cruel, but people are lovely.

"There are really, really nice people who will have your back.

"Most people feel they can't ask questions or vocalise concerns because they don't want to offend others.

"What does that tell you? That most people don't want to offend!

"I respect everyone's opinion about their self and their journey in life and I'm not trying to be offensive, I'm just trying to save myself."

"But if I respect you, you need to respect me."

Saving Dumbarton's Station Heritage

BY JEREMY WATSON

Dumbarton Central Station was built in the heyday of rail travel when stations were built to reflect this with grandeur and ample passenger facilities.

These days most stations are little more than arrival and departure points.

But some, such as Dumbarton Central Station, do retain remnants of that era of grandeur.

Dumbarton Stations Improvement Trust (DSIT) was established to improve local stations left to decay as rail travel lost its appeal.

Many people may remember the grand stairs, ornately panelled ticket office and customer facilities in the lower level.

They are still there although deteriorating badly after the ground floor was abandoned decades ago.

And at the upper platform level the ornate buildings remain.

DSIT believe the station relates directly to the image of the area, as the gateway to Dumbarton, Loch Lomond and the West Highlands beyond.

It forms a vital part of the designated Dumbarton Town Centre Conservation Area and is the key to connecting pedestrian and cycle routes to the town centre.

Cosmetic repairs have been done over the years, but never strategic conservation processes, and structural integrity is of great concern to DSIT.

With funding from West Dunbartonshire Council, DSIT commissioned a two-volume Conservation Management Plan for the station.

This was carried out by a group of architectural, conservation and engineering specialists. The lead architect's formal report can be found on West Dunbartonshire Council's website.

Preserving the station's status is complex and challenging and DSIT are looking for more members to help liaise with

Network Rail, West Dunbartonshire Council and other key people and bodies.

If you are interested in promoting Dumbarton or are interested in railway heritage and historic buildings or even the future of railways in this area, perhaps accessibility challenges at our stations, DSIT would love to hear from you.

Contact the group via the Comments page on Explore West Dunbartonshire www.spanglefish.com/explorewestdunbartonshire/feedback.asp

You can find more information on Dumbarton Central Station on the same website - www.spanglefish.com/explorewestdunbartonshire/



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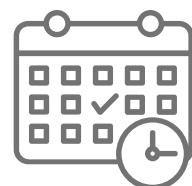
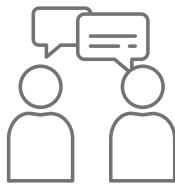
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Katie at Clear Your Mind

Katie started her career in welfare rights in 1999 and has worked in local housing for 15 years. She is passionate about helping people. During her career in welfare, Katie qualified as a counsellor and has been practising in private practice for the last six years, and offers her clients the help they need. Her motto is: get help, get happy.

Katie McGhee Ad Prof Dip PC, MNCS (Accred)

Phone: 07707 019 275

Email: clearyourmind@virginmedia.com



Walking with Nature

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY JAMES DUNCAN

As the winter season is nearing its end, spring will soon be upon us and it's the best time of year to listen to the birdsong that fills the air.

Nature has great health benefits for us all because it can reduce your feelings of stress or anger and improve your physical health.

Being in nature also helps you be more active.

The new walkway at Dumbarton Harbour - along the quayside to Dumbarton Bridge, across to Posties Park and then down to Sandpoint Marina provides a gentle walk or cycle and it's wheelchair friendly.

You can enjoy some beautiful views, looking over to Dumbarton Rock and Castle.

By taking your time along the quayside you will see the abundant wildlife the area has to offer.

It is best viewed on an incoming tide where the River Leven, the second fastest flowing river in Scotland, joins the River Clyde at the Rock.

Our walk begins at the harbour, where we can look out for the following birds on the river...

The Common Goldeneye is a winter visitor to the area and the male performs a complex series of courtship displays, including the bending of his head right back to touch his rump, thrusting forward, and kicking up water with his feet!

Little Grebe (aka Dabchick) and Mute Swans are plentiful along the entire river, and Common Seals have been noted on Loch Lomond having made their way up from the Clyde.

Otters and Kingfishers are a delight to see but unfortunately, more often than not, all you see is a flash of blue as the Kingfisher flies along the river.



Cormorants are often seen hanging out to dry on a boat buoy or tree branch. Grey Herons can be spotted anywhere, and so can the crows like the Magpie, Carrion Crow, Rook and Jackdaw. Not forgetting the numerous gulls who make their habitat along the river, including some of our rarer visitors like the Icelandic and Mediterranean gulls.

Our walk now continues from the harbour along the quayside, over Dumbarton Bridge and across to Posties Park, where you may be rewarded with sightings of Dipper, Goosander, Wren, Robin, Song Thrush, Blackbird, Treecreeper and Grey or Pied Wagtails

The riverside is also a great place to watch out for the buddleia plant, appropriately known as the 'butterfly bush' - irresistible to butterflies such as the Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell and Red Admiral.

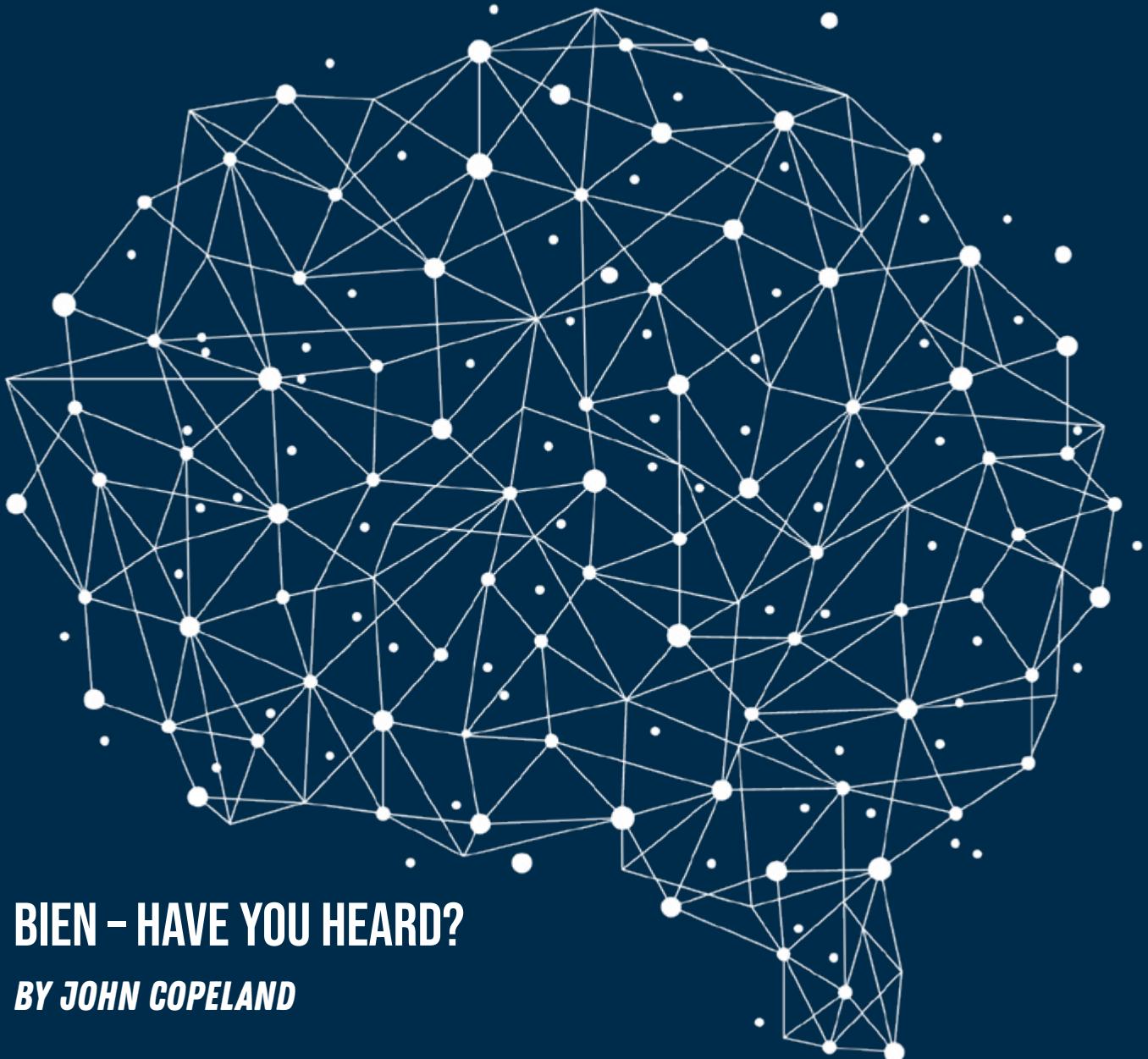
The area around Sandpoint Marina, looking across to Dumbarton Rock, is very good for the occasional wintering Red-throated Diver, Curlew, Teal, Little Egret, Shelduck, Red-breasted Merganser, Oystercatcher and Pintail, and it's an important roosting site for Redshanks.

A pair of binoculars and a camera are handy to have with you to observe and record the wildlife along the river, but remember you can also just use your ears and listen to the sounds around you.

Above all, enjoy what the natural world in this area has to offer!

Photos: Page 30 - Kingfisher at Dumbarton Harbour. Page 31 top to bottom - Dumbarton Rock, Otter at River Leven, Cormorant in River Leven, Pintail at Dumbarton Quay





BIEN – HAVE YOU HEARD?

BY JOHN COPELAND

Open to anyone who has an acquired Brain Injury, BIEN is the Brain Injury Experience Network, and it's right here in West Dunbartonshire.

It was formed in 2007 and even now, so many years later, it is still going strong!

BIEN holds meetings once a month in the Concord Centre, Dumbarton, and is open to anyone with Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) in the West Dunbartonshire area.

BIEN members congregate to talk about things they could do together, places they can go together, and anything else that might be collectively enjoyed.

From time to time, opportunities for providing free training to organisations about the effects of acquired brain injury also come up, and some members of BIEN do this too.

The BIEN group are savvy with Scottish

culture – Culzean Castle, Scone Palace, Blair Drummond Safari Park, Stirling Castle, Inveraray Jail (!) among others, are places they've visited, and plans are always in the pipeline for other places and events to visit.

One of the reasons BIEN exists is to bring people with acquired brain injury out of isolation.

It's no fun trying to find normality in recovery from a brain injury.

For many, recovery is an ongoing process for a lifetime, and it's not always easy to have a normal kind of lifestyle.

An acquired brain injury never leaves you.

Life becomes all about coping with things, remembering things, trying to etch a way of life that can be all it can be with a brain injury.

It's about confronting and pushing past changes which, with brain injury, can become mighty ominous and near unacceptable, though quite normal to most other people.

Living with an acquired brain injury also involves setting up new life patterns, adopting strategies and pathways for recovery and just damn living with it.

Anyone who has an acquired brain injury is welcome at BIEN.

BIEN members host different levels and causes of acquired brain injury. You might find you are speaking to a lucid and clear person in BIEN, but behind that is a brain injury which rules their life and almost every plan they have.

If you didn't know it, you might think the person in front of you is completely normal, or can't walk or talk because maybe they were born that way or had a physical accident that has made them disabled.

That's not the case in BIEN. Brain injury takes many forms, and manifests in many different ways.

That's what makes BIEN special.

If you've got an acquired brain injury of any kind, no matter how it reveals itself, you can be a member, and start enjoying things like fishing, going on trips, getting together for tea or coffee, entering art competitions, all sorts of things right here in the West of Scotland!

The Brain Injury Experience Network meet the third Wednesday of every month at the Concord Centre, Dumbarton.

BIEN is affiliated with the West Dunbartonshire ABI Team, who have helped BIEN facilitate meetings and provide access to some great help, like transport for trips, etc.

If you want more details, contact: John 07999441376 or theelectricwriter@hotmail.com

RELIABLE RESOURCES

LOCAL HELPLINE NUMBERS AND INFORMATION SOURCES

Food For Thought - 01389 743908 emergency food aid referral line.

West Dunbartonshire Community Foodshare 01389 764135 - free phone

08003457050 emergency food aid delivery

Old Kilpatrick Food Parcels - 07368496836

Dumbarton District Women's Aid - 01389 751036

WDC 'No Homes for Domestic Abuse' - 01389 738510

Clydebank Women's Aid - 0141 952 8118

Dumbarton Area Council on Alcohol (DACA) - 01389 731456 or 0141 952 0881

WD Citizens Advice Bureau - information on benefits, welfare rights, employment rights and general well-being
Freephone - 0800 4840136

Clydebank Community Addiction Team - 0141 562 2311

Glasgow and Clyde Rape Crisis -

Support line 08088 00 00 14

Mobile Number 07743807844

WD Housing & Homeless - 01389 738282

or Freephone 0800 197 1004 (option 5)

Dumbarton Joint Hospital - 01389 812018

Overdose Response Team - Dumbarton Joint Hospital 7 days a week – 10am to 10pm. Anyone can make a referral on FREEPHONE 08088 00811

Stepping Stones - 0141 941 2929 - mental health charity providing telephone support

Big Disability Group - 0141 237 4560 thebigdisabilitygroup@gmail.com and on Facebook - support and information to people living with disabilities

WDC Additional Support - text 'help' to 07800 002582 or visit www.westdunbarton.gov.uk/coronavirus/additional-support



BEAVERS RETURN

by Harvey Smart

Photos by Katie Kennedy & courtesy of the Beaver Trust

Loch Lomond has once again become home to a species which has been absent from the area for nearly 400 years.

Early this year a family of beavers was introduced into the Aber Burn, a water way in Gartocharn.

Although they may seem exotic to us now, beavers used to be native to Scotland until hunted to extinction for their fur, meat and 'castoreum', a gland secretion once used in perfumes, medicines and, oddly enough, as food flavouring.

This will be the third translocation of beavers to a new area since they were first re-introduced to Scotland in 2009.

Recent population surveys estimate their numbers have grown to over a thousand since then.

The RSPB, which is leading the rehoming effort on the Loch, expects the new residents to have a significant positive impact on their environment.

However, they can create friction when

living alongside their human neighbours, as was the case with this particular furry family which has been relocated from Tayside, where the alternative was either for them to move to England and out of the Scottish population, or to be shot and killed for encroaching on agricultural land.

Jay Cowen, a residential volunteer at RSPB Scotland Loch Lomond nature reserve in Gartocharn, explained why beavers' dam building behaviour can benefit our local landscape.

"There's been some conflict on farmland where their activities can cause crops and land to be flooded. They're much better suited to somewhere like here, where we are trying to restore wetlands.

"Beavers create wetland areas to hold back water, which leads to better water quality and conditions for invertebrates, these in turn support wetland species such as wading birds and ducks."

Jay is one of 12,000 RSPB volunteers, without whom projects such as this would not be possible.

And there's plenty to do - whether working in one of their hubs, directing and informing the public, or getting out on the reserves and getting your hands dirty.

"The practical side, my favourite of course, we go out as a big group of volunteers and do whatever needs doing, whether that's picking up litter, managing hedgerows or





helping maintain fencing,” Jay said.

“Recently the volunteers have been helping to prevent Oak woodland, a vital habitat of which there is not a lot left, from being overrun by faster growing Beech trees.”

There are also residential volunteering opportunities with RSPB, which involves working full time on the reserve, accommodation provided.

It’s an excellent way for people like Jay, a recent graduate of Aberystwyth University with a degree in Zoology, to prove themselves before entering the job market.

“I’d been looking for residential volunteering opportunities to get more experience before trying to find a paid job. Loch Lomond offers some really great habitats, it seemed a really solid place to see so many things I’d never seen before,” Jay added.

But even despite all the efforts of volunteers and staff working hard to help the beavers settle into their new home, they’re still facing challenges.

In February, barely a month after their translocation, the RSPB announced that two of the young beavers (called kits), had been killed by an otter.

This is a blow to the project, but hopefully it won’t be long before their numbers are replenished, as beavers typically breed once a year, producing three to four kits at a time.

When mature these beavers will then leave home, drawn to the sound of running water on which to build their own lodges and start the cycle again!

Although they have the potential to cause issues, when properly managed, these animals can create a massive positive ripple effect in an ecosystem, creating vital habitats once integral to our landscape that we have been sorely lacking for centuries.

If you want to see RSPB Loch Lomond’s new residents, unfortunately your chances are slim, as they are usually only active at night.

However, if you visit the reserve you will learn plenty about them from the trivia boards dotted along the trail. You might even see signs of the beavers, including bits of chewed wood and bark, unmistakable when you know what to look for!

There are also plenty of other interesting creatures to see, including red squirrels, all manner of smaller birds, geese, woodpeckers and occasionally even an eagle or osprey!

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APPROVED

The First Sign of Spring

Words & Photos by James Duncan

After the long dark days of winter it is wonderful to see one of the first signs of spring appearing in our parks and gardens - the snowdrop.

Its scientific name is *Gallanthus*.

This means 'milk flower' and the common snowdrop we normally see with one flower per stem is *Galanthus nivalis* which translates as 'milk flower of the snow'.

Flowering between January and March they are surprisingly resilient for something that looks so delicate.

They emerge through frozen soil from January and are in bloom until late-February and sometimes into March.

Another favourite spring flower is the crocus.

They present as yellow and purple, lilac and orange, a burst of colour among the dead leaves and plant debris, not forgetting those golden stamens!

This year has seen a terrific show of both snowdrops and crocuses.



LET'S GROW WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE

by Rose Harvie

Hello, fellow gardeners! I hope you have all had a good Christmas and Hogmanay, and got any gardening presents that you asked for... useful tools, gardening books, new wellies, etc.

Now is the time to plan what you want to grow. This depends on the space, time, and tools available. Maybe you have an allotment, perhaps shared with a friend, or you are a member of a community garden, but even with just a small space for a few pots or tubs, you should be able to grow a variety of flowers, fruit, and veggies.

If you are concentrating on veggies, plan your rotation as suggested – potatoes, peas and beans, brassicas (e.g. cabbages) and roots, and others. By now your tatties should be sitting in their egg boxes, shoots upwards, so label them 1st and 2nd earlies and main crop.

Your garlic should now have small bright green shoots, so if you keep the weeds down, you should have nice garlic bulbs in July.

By the end of March, or earlier with a heated greenhouse, you can start sowing salads, tomatoes, and cucumbers. In addition to using peat-free compost, you can also help nature and your pocket by sharing seeds with gardening neighbours and upcycling your old, lidded plastic containers into seed trays (don't forget the drainage holes).

Electric propagators can be useful and last many years if you can get one. When your seeds start germinating, and you can handle them, move them carefully into bigger seed trays, and eventually into their beds or boxes outside.

When April comes you can plant your tatties. Make holes about 5cm deep, add a little organic fertiliser, and plant them about 30cm apart, in rows at least 30-40 cm apart. Cover with the soil once the shoots are about 10cm high. You can plant onions and shallots at the same time; just push bulbs into the soil about 10cm apart. Potatoes and onions also do well in large pots.

April is also the time to sow early peas, in long rows, up cane 'wigwams' or in 'twiggy' branches. Mix with sweet peas for the flowers. Broad beans, carrots, beetroot, and parsnips can all now be sown outside. Runner beans, sweetcorn and courgettes are best started inside and planted out when the greatest risk of frost has passed.

Sow your winter brassicas, celery, and leeks in seed trays, ready for 'pricking out' into large trays later in the summer before planting into their permanent winter beds. A wide range of salads - lettuce, radishes, spring onion, parsley, can be sown directly, outside.

Don't forget to compost your fruit and vegetable waste, together with grass cuttings, layer with horse manure and seaweed if you can get it. If you don't already have a compost system, investigate making a New Zealand Box, from upcycled materials.

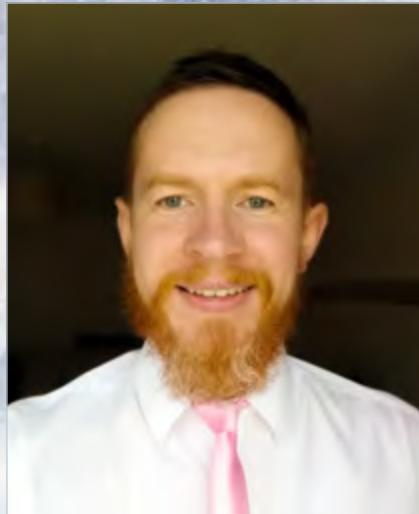
Finally, why not start a comfrey bed? Russian comfrey grows as a permanent plant, covered with purple flowers to attract bees, and provide masses of thick leaves for your compost.

Advice available from Rose on 01389 762816 or rharvie17@gmail.com

Creative Q & A

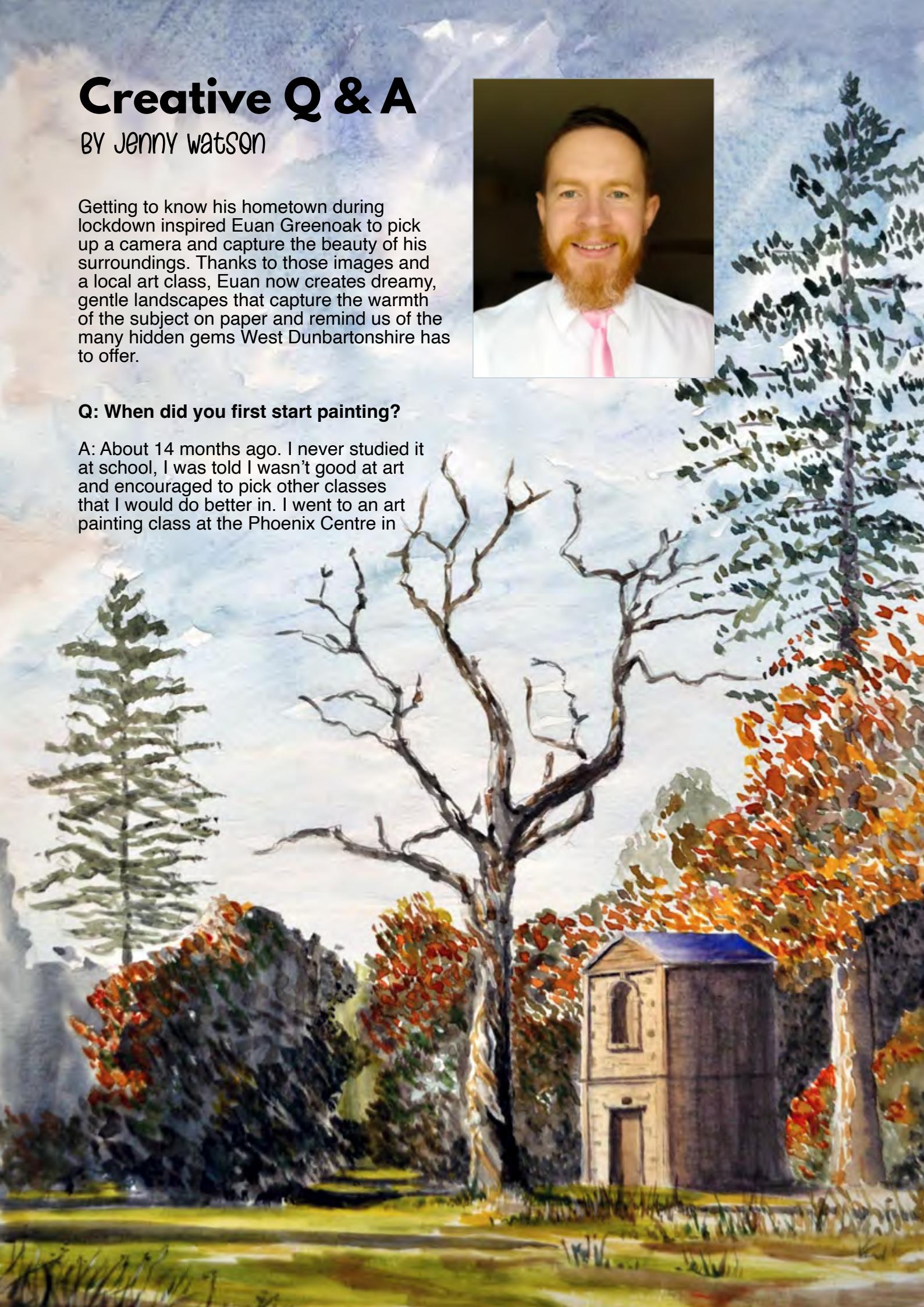
BY JENNY WATSON

Getting to know his hometown during lockdown inspired Euan Greenoak to pick up a camera and capture the beauty of his surroundings. Thanks to those images and a local art class, Euan now creates dreamy, gentle landscapes that capture the warmth of the subject on paper and remind us of the many hidden gems West Dunbartonshire has to offer.



Q: When did you first start painting?

A: About 14 months ago. I never studied it at school, I was told I wasn't good at art and encouraged to pick other classes that I would do better in. I went to an art painting class at the Phoenix Centre in



Dumbarton and I really enjoyed it. After that my wife gifted me an artist kit for Christmas and I have created a piece nearly every week since.

Q: What is your favourite medium?

A: Watercolours. I tried acrylics first because that is what we used in the art class. The kit my wife got me has lots of different materials so I tried watercolours next and I just really enjoyed them. They are subtle. You get a softer, lighter effect and I really like that. I may move on to something else in the future but I am enjoying watercolours just now.

Q: Who or what inspires your work?

A: Local people. The 'Art for Everyone Dumbarton' Facebook page is fantastic - you see people on there every day creating for themselves. Not for a job, it's for their own enjoyment and that inspires me. It has a great community aspect to it and is a good space to talk to like-minded people that encourage and support you.

Q: What are your future plans for your art?

A: Keep painting and learning. I participated in a local art show in August 2022 and that was fun so hopefully I'll get to do that again. I would like to paint more local landmarks. I have lived here for seven years but it wasn't until lockdown, when all we could do was go for walks locally, that I started to learn more about the area.

Q: If you could paint anywhere in the world, where would you choose?

A: I don't think I would choose anywhere else but right here, right now. I think it's important to have a connection to the place you are painting and I feel I have that here. Maybe we could have better weather though!

Q: Where can we view your work?

A: I share my work on the 'Art for Everyone Dumbarton' Facebook page and I've just recently set up my own one called Euan Greenoak Art.



JOIN OUR BOARD

Do you have time?

Passionate about our local community?

Have ideas that can make a difference?

Are you someone who shares these principles?



If your answer is YES

Why not join our Board today!

admin@dpha.org.uk



PHOTO BY KATIE KENNEDY

Killer Skies

Banging, crowded men built in tears and sweat.

Working from poverty not knowing they might die.

Heartbroken women, waiting for their husbands to come home.

Children fatherless,

Never forgotten.

Dust, steel,

Lungs destroyed, minds numbed.

Later, at home after the bell,

Silent murder of Clydebank men.

By Rosalie Keeley
Age 9

LUNA

Beautiful. She was so beautiful:
Hair soft as silk, black as the night
Streaked by the milky way.
Eyes like sun lit amber, inviting you to stay;
A tail like party bunting, wagging as she walked.

Yes, she was beautiful - everyone told me so:
"That's a crackin dug Mrs" said schoolkids as they passed.
"Y've a rare wee beauty there" said the men along the quay.
They'd put down their bottles and reach out for a pat.
"Ah hud a Saluki once, man it could run,
Faster than a whippet once it was on the hunt."
"Hello there my beauty, will you talk to me?"
An elegant gent knelt, bowed his head to hers.

Yes, she was beautiful - inside as well as out.
When my legs began to fail and fold
She didn't have to be told
She'd choose a new route for me
Close to a wall, along a fence, or on a grassy verge
Where she knew I'd be safer if I fell.

She was indeed beautiful.
A heart of pure spun gold
That hid a dark past of beatings and worse, I was told.
She was timorous of hands reaching out,
Head turning, braced to take a blow.
She'd snap at sudden movement,
Then regret would shade her eyes
She knew pain, her sorrow was no disguise.
It burns to know she was hurt, with no-one there to care.

She was so beautiful, not perfect,
Yet just right for me.
She filled the gap,
That gaping chasm only the unloved know.
Did I ever tell her so?
Now she's gone. I've killed my dearest friend
To save her from more pain
So we're both alone again.

I pray she's running free, the wind combing through her hair.
Even more I pray, when I reach my end,
She'll be there, happy to walk with me once more.

By Laura Giannini



Photography Tips & Techniques

By Harvey Smart



The theme of this issue's photography competition is 'Close-up', so here are a few tips on how to get great pictures when you're shooting up close or 'macro,' as photographers call it.

The best way to get macro shots is on a DSLR with a specialised lens, but most smartphones nowadays have an in-built macro setting and can easily produce some really great close-up shots to rival those of a DSLR.

Have a play around with whatever device you have to see how close you can get to a subject while still being able to focus.

When looking for interesting things to photograph close up, lots of people go straight to insects, but these can be hard to find and shoot, as they rarely make willing subjects.

But some of the most fascinating things from a close up perspective are things you see every day.

Look at everyday things like the texture of a leaf, the paw of a pet, the pattern of a flower, or the intricate details of a piece of jewellery. This is one I took of a dandelion.

Make sure to play with different angles and perspectives to reveal something new and interesting in your photos, while taking your time to get the lighting and focus right.

Finally, don't forget to experiment and have fun! Close-up photography can be a great way to explore and appreciate the small details in the world around us.

Good luck!

CLYDESIDER PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION

Sponsored by JESSOPS

Theme: Close-up

Prize: £25 + A3 canvas print and A4 canvases for 2 runners-up

Closing date: May 12

Email entries to:
clydesidercomp@gmail.com

Clydesider POETRY Competition

Theme: Belonging

Prize: £25

Closing date: May 12

Email entries to:

clydesidercomp@gmail.com

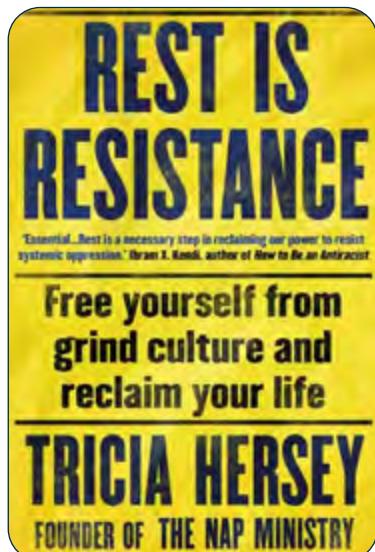
Rules: One entry per person for each competition, entrants must live, work or be part of a group in West Dunbartonshire; all entries must be your own, by entering you give Clydesider permission to publish your work in print or online - this in no way infringes your copyright.

READER RECOMMENDATIONS

REST IS RESISTANCE BY TRICIA HERSEY

REVIEW BY TIBBS WEIR

"You are worthy of rest. We don't have to earn rest. Rest is not a luxury, a privilege, or a bonus we must wait for."



If you are someone who, like many of us, struggles to spend time resting without a sense of guilt then I particularly recommend the new bestselling book '*Rest Is Resistance*' for you.

The author, Tricia Hersey, movingly shares her life stories, and how they made her realise the importance of rest and practicing regular restfulness in her life.

In fact, she recommends you read the book whilst resting - I would also

suggest reading it in small bursts, to help form a habit of regular restfulness.

But the book goes beyond freeing up the mind, to allow you to take the rest you deserve.

In a world that celebrates working people to exhaustion, and a system that treats people as expendable, making regular time to rest is an act of defiance.

Hershey explains how she took group action to

push back against capitalism and racism through rest.

Sounds like a pipe dream?

Not for Hershey. She set about creating a culture of restfulness as a way of caring for her community - by creating an organisation called the Nap Ministry, which gathered people to take naps together.

Now, I can't imagine something less restful than being in some church hall full of people all snoring away - but when Tricia talked about the impact on her community, I couldn't help but feel moved. Imagine if you lived in a society of people who felt well rested and allowed you to be the same!

The idea could not be more urgent.

Workers are being threatened with sanctions for daring to push back against being so overworked and underpaid; the retirement age is already higher than the average life expectancy for West Dunbartonshire; inflation and recession are pushing many to juggle two or more jobs; the Covid pandemic continues to take its toll on our mental and physical health.

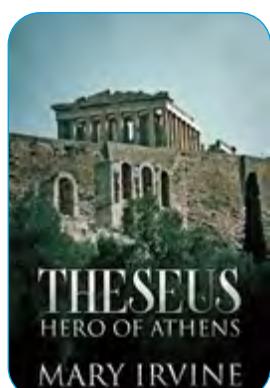
So, find yourself your comfiest chair, bed, or - hell, the floor if you have to - and relax.

Whether or not it will make the world a better place, it'll definitely make you a happier person - and that's a great place to start.

• •

THESEUS, HERO OF ATHENS BY MARY IRVINE

REVIEW BY ANN MACKINNON



Mary Irvine has taken the character of Theseus from Greek myth and reimagined his life in this historical novel, the title of which, *Theseus Hero of Athens* sums up that character.

We follow his progress from birth to death and explore his relationships and his adventures. We are introduced to his adversaries and his allies.

What comes across in this book is a strong sense of the man/god as someone who sets out to prove himself and, although he protests he does not have to do so, he is constantly and relentlessly accepting challenges, in many of which he deals brutally with his enemies.

Perhaps his most famous deed is his encounter with the Minotaur which is reworked to show a more compassionate side of his character.

His relationships with women are probably true of their time but he sometimes comes over as callous in his dealings with them.

As the book progresses, we come to have a grudging admiration for this most vicious of characters as he struggles to become the hero of Athens.

The book has a strong sense of place and Mary Irvine conjures up Greece for us by using all the senses and mapping out his journeys so we can picture his progress.

The book deals with the themes of loss and identity and puts flesh on the bones of the original myth of Theseus.



POETIC DREAMS BY AMANDA ELEFTHERIADES



Many of us lie awake at night, watching the hours tick by but unable to switch off an overactive mind.

In the morning we get up more tired than when we went to bed, frustrated at the waste of time and energy.

Mental health challenges and a family tragedy left John McMahon struggling with

anxiety and sleepless nights.

Last summer he decided to put his extra waking hours to good use and create a poetry collection which he hopes will help others through life's challenges.

And so 'Notes of an Insomniac' was born.

The 86-page book is divided into three sections – Anxious Heart, State of the World and Why Do I Love You?

Together they are a powerful testimony to John's personal experiences of growing up in the hard,

sometimes harsh, working class streets of Paisley; to the anxieties and stresses facing all of us in many different ways and also to the beauty of love, in its many shapes and forms.

John explained how he discovered his passion for the written word. "I started writing when I was 16, this was before I was diagnosed with any mental health condition.

"I left school without any qualifications, and it was at a local writing group that my love of poetry started.

"I used to write a lot of happy and uplifting stuff but my uncle was kicked to death in the street in front of me and after that my poetry became much darker.

"The poem 'Anxious Heart' is about my bi-polar ups and downs. I called that first section Anxious Heart because anxiety runs through most mental health conditions."

John finds his writing helps calm his overactive mind and anxious heart and he hopes others reading his book will find some peace in his words.

He added: "It is definitely therapeutic, almost cathartic, for me. I know I'm not going to sell thousands of copies but I hope that I can touch people in a way that makes sense and helps them through tough times."

The book is dedicated to his wife Laura, who he

describes as his 'rock' and his daughter Mirren, described as a 'big bright shining star in my life'.

The foreword to '*Notes of an Insomniac*' is written by Morag Smith, the poet who facilitated that very first writing group John joined in Paisley Library.

She described the collection as being "luminous with simple joys but also dives into darkness and turbulence of the world today."

John moved to Dumbarton 15 years ago and is now a member of the weekly writing group in the Phoenix Centre in Castlehill where he continues to draw inspiration and share ideas with other

creative minds.

He added: "I'm a better writer for being a member of the Phoenix Writers group. Oli Higham who runs the group has been such an amazing impact on my writing, as have others in the group.

"And my friend Christine Robertson has been a great creative support and helped me put this book together and get it published via Amazon."

Notes of an Insomniac is available to purchase on Amazon at https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B0BS8HJMXP?psc=1&ref=ppx_yo2ov_dt_b_product_details

John McMahon has kindly allowed Clydesider to share a selection of poems published in '*Notes of an Insomniac*'.

Bust Baws

There wis this persistent
Sticky up bit a grass oan the fitbaw pitch
We caud it the wee spiky bit
Many a kerfuffle it caused
oan a Saturday mornin
Those in the know tried everything
Tae get the wee spiky bit doon
Even efter we burst a thousand baws
the boyz an I continued taw play there
Gluttons fir punishment a guess
I can't get oot ma room fir a thousan'
burst baws
an the fear that thon wee spiky bit is
coming.

Why Do I Love You?

Is it because there
Is still a twinkle in your eyes
after all these years?
Why do I love you?
Is it because your smile is wise?
there's honesty in your tears?
Why do I love you?
Is it because you still listen with meaning?
You still talk me down from
the walls with meaning
Why do I love you?
Is it because you still see
something in me?
I love you because you're not
A copy of anything.

The Good Days

It's a good day.
Somewhere between nowhere and
promise.
In these happy times
I talk with confidence, walk in brisk
measures.
When I get the good days
I want to hug them tight to my heart
In the darkness
is a small glimpse of light
I live for it!

Black

The swirling descent into darkness
There's a reason why the Grim Reaper
dresses in darker shade
Some parade themselves in gothic attire
Fakes, my blackness doesn't wear big, black
combat boots
It takes root at the centre
Along with spiders
And yesterday's broken promises

CLYDE & BAXTER

By Steven Hastings



Clyde offers to help his new friend by checking for traffic while he goes round the road.

Clyde had never thought before about wheelchair users being unable to get past cars.

Then Clyde & Baxter and their new friend Eddie went for a walk round their local park.

ACCESS WORDSEARCH

**All the words in the grid are related to the theme of access.
The words can be found going Left, Right, Up, Down & Diagonally.**

C	T	A	B	L	O	H	E	F	I	L	G	N	I	S
E	R	S	A	I	L	S	D	W	O	R	C	B	T	P
K	I	A	R	F	O	X	T	E	R	A	P	A	U	M
X	H	J	S	T	N	M	O	N	E	Y	I	Q	S	A
E	M	P	L	S	U	V	E	N	T	R	W	U	U	R
M	O	N	D	E	I	S	I	H	S	C	H	I	P	Y
P	A	S	S	N	P	S	R	T	I	R	A	L	P	O
L	I	F	E	D	W	I	T	S	D	O	T	T	O	U
O	E	X	Y	P	O	E	T	A	O	W	E	V	R	M
Y	R	O	T	S	I	H	C	Y	N	D	A	M	T	E
M	A	Z	A	P	B	O	A	T	K	C	X	R	K	S
E	B	U	R	P	A	S	T	X	O	F	E	L	Z	R
N	I	N	C	L	U	S	I	O	N	C	S	U	B	E
T	R	A	H	I	Q	U	O	D	T	E	G	B	U	I
M	O	N	P	A	C	K	F	G	C	B	D	O	G	R
O	U	T	D	O	O	R	B	A	R	S	H	P	A	R
R	A	M	S	T	U	M	P	P	L	X	O	F	G	A
S	K	R	A	P	A	S	G	N	I	D	L	I	U	B

Assistance
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Crowds
Employment
History
Inclusion
Lifts
Money
Outdoor/Spaces
Parks
Ramps
Stairs
Support

WHAT'S ON IN WD

SUNDAYS 2 - 4PM

Knit & Crochet Group at CATRA, Alexandria

MONDAYS FORTNIGHTLY

Busy Hands Craft group, open to everyone, come along and learn to knit, crochet and sew. Group runs from 2pm every fortnight at Kilbowie St Andrew's Tower Centre, 22 Melfort Avenue, Clydebank, G81 2HX.

TUESDAYS 6PM – 8PM

Flourishing Faifley's Walking Group. Enjoy a safe friendly walk, meet new people, get fit and have a positive effect on your mental health. Suitable for all fitness levels but not for children of nursery or primary school age. Prams welcome.

The group leave from Flourishing Faifley's Secret Garden on Middleward Street and head back to the community shed for a warm drink, biscuit and a blether after the walk.

3 APRIL

Balloch Open Mic Night. Headliner is Alan Gaw. It is Alan's first as headliner at Balloch. Held in Balloch House Hotel, Balloch starting at 7pm. Anyone wanting to read their own work should arrive early and get a five minute slot. All welcome.

4 APRIL

Guild Coffee Afternoon with entertainment by the Mandolin band. St Andrew's Parish Church, 22 Melfort Avenue, Clydebank G81 2HX.

4 APRIL

Paul Murdoch's Balloch to Bali Free storytelling session from 10.30am - 11.30am at Green Tree Remedies, 4 Church St., Alexandria, G83 0NP

8 APRIL

The Life Aquatic Exhibition at Maid of the Loch, Balloch. Running until October 2023

10 APRIL

Clifftop Projects presents Tragic Carpet's Seven Ravens. The show gives a new twist to the Grimm Brothers' story of seven ravens. Performer, Freda will lead workshops from 2 - 3pm for 6 - 8 year olds and from 3.30pm - 4.30pm for 9 - 11 year olds. Both workshops at The Phoenix, 17a Quarry Knowe, Dumbarton, G82 5AF. **Free**

11 APRIL

Clifftop Projects & Tragic Carpets present Seven Ravens at 3pm at Concord Community Centre, Dumbarton. **Free**

11 APRIL

Clifftop Projects presents Tragic Carpet's Suitcase Stories, for ages 3 - 5 and their grown ups. Two performances at The Phoenix, 17a Quarry Knowe, Dumbarton G82 5AF at 10am and 11am. The whole show is performed out of a suitcase and will be great fun for both kids and adults! **Free**

28 APRIL

OKFP is hosting a Patsy Cline and Dolly Parton tribute night. Tickets priced £10 are available by calling 07916310806.

2 MAY

Ian Miller Free storytelling session from 10.30am - 11.30am at Green Tree Remedies, 4 Church St., Alexandria, G83 0NP

2 MAY

Big Disability Open Day, 10am - 3pm, Dalmuir C.E Centre, Duntocher Rd, Clydebank G81 4RQ

5 JUNE

Elspeth Crocket - The Dumbarton Dentist - Mary, Queen of Scots Free storytelling session from 10.30am - 11.30am at Green Tree Remedies, 4 Church St., Alexandria, G83 0NP

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