

In August 2013, Merthyr Tydfil Public Libraries bucked the trend of many authorities and opened a new branch Library. No extra funding was received to do this and painting and decorating was done by eager members of staff, handy with a paintbrush and under strict instructions to stop getting it all over the floor!

Aberfan and Merthyr Vale Community Library opened its doors on 4th August, sharing the building of the Aberfan and Merthyr Vale Community Centre. The painting staff would have loved to have been present, however after erecting the shelving, were at home with heat pads and Ibuprofen, nursing their bad backs.

Enter Carron Williams, the star of the show. A call to arms had gone out to all staff via email to find the face of Aberfan Library. Carron had enthusiastically answered this call. As a library assistant in a branch library she knew the challenges and joys that branch work can bring and was looking forward to a new adventure.

The new Library was opened within a month of inception of the idea and marketing of the service did take a bit of a back seat while we rushed to get the painting done, shelving out of storage and erected and the shelves stocked up.

Carron's loyalty to her old branch soon waned as she surreptitiously started reallocating her favourite authors and other stock to the new Library. Her visits to other branches which had before been social in nature now took on a different meaning as librarians started to hide their 'good stuff' when she entered the building.

A fine summer morning dawned on opening day and Carron was light of foot and raring to go. The local councillors had kindly put the word out, a piece was written for the Merthyr Express and Carron sat back waiting for the influx of excited new borrowers.

At 10.00am that morning my telephone rang, I picked it up with a cheery 'Hello' as usual. Oh what a mistake that was. 'Its like a morgue down here!' screeched Carron 'We have to get some people through the doors or I'll be bored to death'. This was the start of Carron's marketing campaign.

For the next four weeks, Carron became one of the most prolific sights of Aberfan village. No one was safe, as like the child catcher from Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, Carron went to all areas of Aberfan selling the library and dragging people kicking and screaming into the new Library. Each morning saw Carron take a new and inventive route to work, often getting off the bus more than a mile from her stop in order to leaflet drop local houses.

New friends amongst the Leisure Centre staff allowed her to identify and target new victims each week. Organised classes were started late so she could appear, new membership forms and pens in hand.

Children who frequented the pool for their free swimming fun were her next target, a packet of biscuits and a friendly smile as they popped their heads around the door drew them in. However, in her lunch breaks she was also found chatting to many a parent while they waited in the gallery to collect their children to encourage them to visit.

Picking up a couple of newspapers (out of her own money which she has done every day for the last few months and will continue to do), brought her into contact with even more people, ready to pass the time of day while waiting for loved ones using other facilities in the centre. Many of these people professed not to be readers but she brought them round. A few even tried to exit the building without joining and taking a book! Using knowledge gained over her 6 years in the library service, she found something for each and every one of them and they continue to pick her brains for new authors to try and books to read.

Children in particular became regular visitors, sometimes only popping in for a quick chat with their favourite librarian, but always leaving with a positive and fun view of the library service, and many joined just to take part in the Summer Reading Scheme, with over 30 finishing during August.

Roald Dahl Day was a resounding success with children taking part in creating a huge collage. The newly formed Knit and Natter club has taken off, story and rhyme is going from strength to strength and when the school reopened in September, Carron was found squatting on the doorstep each lunch time until they started visiting every Friday! In December a worried teacher rang up to say they had lots of books at school but they weren't going to be able to visit as a class. During her lunch time she nipped across to the school with a couple of carrier bags and carried them back herself.

On a particularly wet morning, when she was leaflet dropping at a neighbouring village about a mile and a half away, she was so wet when she got in that Leisure Centre staff loaned her some spare uniform and tumble dried her clothes for her!

To date Carron has attracted 95 brand new members, issued over 3000 books, had 2739 visitors, set up Story and Rhyme, Work Clubs, Knit and Natter and forged links with many partners who help her deliver some of the sessions.

Carron is an amazing member of staff, throwing herself into making Aberfan Community Library a success. So many people have commented on her pleasant manner and knowledge. She goes above and beyond the call of duty using her days off to visit the other libraries to pick up reservations, collect photocopying and other bits 'n' bobs for her next day at work. Not long ago, Carron had cancer and after major surgery and chemotherapy came back stronger than ever. So not only has she done an amazing job of marketing 'her' library, she is an inspiration to us all.



