Ceredigion volunteer gains new business and fresh outlook on life from heritage project

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For almost twenty years, David battled an addiction to alcohol and cannabis, but five years ago, he was keen to put his life back on track and with the support of his family he managed to get a six month placement at Rhoserchan Rehabilitation Centre near Aberystwyth. It was here that David found out about the chance to volunteer on the Llandre Heritage Project.

As David says: “I had suffered years of alcohol and drug dependency, and was in rehabilitation when I heard about the project. Having struggled with confidence issues, I saw this as my chance to try something new and got involved through a volunteering placement scheme whilst in rehabilitation. I haven’t looked back – it’s changed my life”, said David.

The Llandre Heritage Project was funded by a £49,000 HLF grant to train volunteers in the traditional skills needed to repair an ancient churchyard. Work included restoring the gates and a mausoleum, rebuilding the boundary wall, constructing an information kiosk and installing information panels.

Having spent 20 years working as a sheet-metal worker in Newport, David has expertise in metalwork, and welding which were quickly put to good use. His skills have been invaluable to the Llandre Heritage Project, as he has made repairs to the cemetery gates and a mausoleum roof. He said: “I feel privileged to have been able to give something back to people who had put their trust in me when I was at my lowest.”

David has regained his skills that have lay unused for years, as well as learning new skills in tree surgery but most importantly for him, he’s got his confidence back. David said: “In the past, I would have shied away when meeting new people. But now, I’ve got the confidence to talk to anyone, which has been really important over the past few months as I have started up my own business and met with new customers.” David’s business is growing steadily with the use of his new skills in tree surgery, which are in demand in the area. “I still make time to go to the project, and have the responsibility to train new volunteers, and show them the ropes. I’d recommend getting involved in projects like this to anyone.”

Jennifer Stewart, Head of HLF in Wales, said: “Projects like these give local people the opportunity to develop new skills while exploring the history their history their towns have to share. Whether it’s a young person gaining experience or an adult gaining the skills to get back into work, volunteering is invaluable and can be lots of fun.

“People are at the heart of the HLF projects, which is why we’ve produced the Heritage Matters magazine, to give the people behind the projects a voice to share their stories and encourage others to get involved in local projects.”