

South Wales wellbeing garden wins National Lottery award

09/12/2021



Jumping for joy at the Green Valley Conservation and Heritage Project

A project which uses gardening and nature to improve people's employability and wellbeing has been named the 2021 National Lottery Wales Project of the Year.

The [Green Valley Conservation and Heritage project](#), led by Green Valley Wellbeing Group, provides outdoor activities and accredited training programmes for young people, many of whom are excluded from the mainstream. The organisation also works with people of all ages experiencing mental health issues.

The project has forged links with community groups, autistic support networks, job centres and schools, and accepts social prescription referrals from GP surgeries. The emphasis is on connecting with nature and harnessing the benefits of nature to improve wellbeing and employability.

It's a fantastic place for young people and people from all walks of life to grow.

Elan, 15-year-old participant

A transformed site

Three years ago, the project's site, [Cynon Valley Organic Adventures](#), was a derelict wasteland. Today, thanks to £20,000 of National Lottery funding and the outstanding efforts of many of the project's volunteers, it has been transformed into a community garden and wellbeing wonder.

The community enterprise now has allotment spaces to grow food for their foodbank, a café, a summer school and a green gym.



Elan Gwen in the garden

“It’s given me hope for the future”

Fifteen-year-old Elan Gwen from Pontypridd left a formal school environment at 14 due to problems with anxiety. She began attending the project once a week and is now with them three days a week, helping out at the site and undertaking several qualifications, including an entrepreneurial course.

Elan said: “The learning environment at Cynon Valley Organic Adventures is much more suited to my needs...I feel very comfortable here and I don’t feel pressured or judged. Everyone fits in and I’m just a lot happier as a person and my mental health is so much better.

“It’s given me a lot of hope for the future. I know a lot of people who have come here with various problems and didn’t have a lot of confidence, but they’ve come here, and they’ve grown into different people. It’s a fantastic place for young people and people from all walks of life to grow.”

Janis Werrett, the director and founder of Cynon Valley Organic Adventures, said: “We are thrilled that our project has won this award and received this wonderful recognition. It’s all the more pleasing that the public voted for us.

“None of this would have been possible without the support of National Lottery funding and the help of our dedicated volunteers who have worked tirelessly to restore and protect this valuable resource for their community.”



Growing leeks

The National Lottery Awards

Each year, the [National Lottery Awards](#) celebrate the inspirational people and projects who do extraordinary things with the help of National Lottery funding.

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Michaela Strachan with the winners. Credit: Alex Wilkinson.

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