

# Canolfan in the Community

The Newsletter of Canolfan y Fron

August 2020

Hello. Welcome to our new format newsletter, which has a new title that better sums up what Canolfan Y Fron is all about. This is because you, the members of our community, have asked for this.

This year has been difficult for everyone, and if we've kept quiet about how Covid 19 has hit the Canolfan it is because we've been very busy concentrating on keeping our community's social enterprise afloat. The majority of our income comes from the Llety and the Caffi and most of this comes between April and October. Lock-down reduced that income to zero. This has meant taking very difficult and heart wrenching decisions.

Now we know where we are and the big challenges the Canolfan faces, so is time to let everyone know the facts – good and bad – so you can all make up your own minds.

## 1. REDUNDANCIES

With little income coming in the Canolfan could not fund the wage bill so 2 of our 4 posts with allocated weekly hours were furloughed in March. This meant they were laid off from the Canolfan but the UK government funded 80% of their pay. We hoped that lock-down would be short so we could salvage part of the summer and bring them back. By July it became clear that CYF could not make enough money to support the 2 positions going forward before the season ends in mid-October. With great reluctance the Board took the decision to abolish both positions, making the postholders redundant. We sincerely thank them for their contribution and wish them well in future endeavours.

When life returns to something nearer to normal the Canolfan should become busy again and it is our intention to recruit as soon as the financial position permits. Covid-19 has triggered major permanent changes, so the job descriptions will be different, but everybody, including those made redundant, will be very welcome to apply.

## 2. CURRENT STAFFING

We have four part time members of staff:

Christine Humphreys in the Siop who works 24 hours a week

Pauline Williams who cleans the Canolfan as required

Anibal Sousa who did the Fish and Chips and fills in as required

Jim Embrey who works 12 hours a week doing special projects such as grant applications, and marketing.

Christine, Anibal and Jim also do many hours of volunteering in addition to their paid work.

## 3. THE BOARD

The Board currently consists of 7 members. Some of the of the elected members have agreed to lead on the areas of work shown. The Board Members are (alphabetic order):

Sandy Barthorpe (Treasurer)	Gwenda Roberts
Mike Elsdon (Llety, Marketing, Web Site)	John Rowlands {co-opted} (Building Maintenance)
Anwen Harman	Steven Whitten {co-opted} (IT Support)
Mandy Hindle (Chair, Volunteering)	

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, members of the board have put in a considerable amount of effort to help keep the Canolfan going.

There will be an extraordinary meeting of the Company on Wednesday 19th August to elect new members onto the Board and elect a new Chair of the Company.

#### 4. THE SIOP

Christine has done a superb job in the Siop from the moment lock-down began.

She is happy to order stuff in at any time. One customer gets Starbucks coffee pods every week and another gets special baby formula. Anyone tried ordering a Rolls Royce yet? The weekly order comes in on Wednesday so orders must be placed by Monday.

Business increased threefold during the lockdown, although it has since come down a little. There are many new customers, not just from Y Fron, but also from Carmel and Rhosgadfan. **WE WANT TO THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT AND CUSTOM – WITHOUT IT THERE WOULD BE NO SIOP.**

The Siop is Covid compliant with Covid shields installed, staff and volunteers wearing masks and gloves and social distancing in place.

You can get sandwiches and other cold fayre in the shop and eat al fresco at the four new outside tables.

To reduce Covid risk, many people paid by card but we had a huge shock when we incurred £500 in additional bank charges for this in just 2 months. To manage this, we have had to institute a £5 minimum purchase on card transactions, which we know has been difficult for some customers. We have re-negotiated the charges with the bank and are monitoring them to see the effects. If it works as we hope, then we will review the £5 minimum. Meanwhile, if you are shopping regularly, we can provide a credit account which you can pay weekly on your card and thus get above the minimum.

The Siop is open 52 hours a week so 28 hours of that time it is staffed by unpaid volunteers. We really thank them for their contribution to our community. However, there have been times when the shop had to close because no volunteer was available. We urgently need more members of the community to volunteer, so if you want to release your inner 'Arkwright' contact Mandy Hindle on 07774 180295.

Looking ahead, many of you have asked, and signed a petition, supporting the Canolfan selling alcohol in the Siop and with meals in the Caffi. A decision about applying for this is under active consideration by the Board.

#### 5. THE PUBLIC ROOMS AND COMMUNITY EVENTS

The public rooms re-opened with social distancing on Monday 20<sup>th</sup>. The first event was a very successful monthly BINGO at 7pm on Wednesday 5th August. If anyone wishes to rent the rooms for a public or private event, please call in or phone 01286 880882

## 6. THE LLETY

When Mike Elsdon joined the Board, he brought his expertise in running his own self-catering cottage with him. In March he conducted a review of the Llety pricing, changing it from a per-person basis to a seasonal per-room basis. This means rooms will cost more in the high summer season and will be cheaper in the off-season. It should increase the contribution from the Llety to the Canolfan and the prices are in line with competitors across North West Wales. The Llety is sold through Booking.com, AirBnb, Expedia, Hotels.com and Trivago.

There are discounts available for bookings made by residents for their friends. These must be booked direct – not through a website – and the discount will depend on the time of the year. Either drop into the Canolfan or email [enquiries@canolfanyfron.org](mailto:enquiries@canolfanyfron.org) to make an enquiry.

Mike and Jim also led on preparing the Llety for re-opening with new Covid 19 procedures, including risk assessments, purchasing of new anti-viral provisions, the training of Directors and staff in new procedures, and preparation of new written guidance for staff and all guests.

Our first guests returned on the 16th July, and the first weekend in August we had the pleasure of welcoming Kerry and Jason (and their 5 boys), from Essex, who had a creative Snowdonia re-think when their original wedding plans were savaged by Covid: they got hitched in the Caernarfon Registry Office on Saturday morning and climbed Snowdon in the afternoon. They said it was ‘perfect,’ partly because of a catered takeaway from Bwyd Blasus Yashka, a cake from Melys Cheesecakes and cider from Pant Du Vineyard and Orchard.

## 7. THE CAFFI

The Caffi has been the one part of Canolfan that has not performed as well as had been hoped. When it closed, we saw it as an opportunity to make changes to improve things. Accordingly, we approached the Lottery about using some of our ‘specialist support’ funding to get a consultant in to review the kitchen policies and procedures, to re-design the ‘look and feel’ of the Caffi, and to come up with a simple new menu allowing us to re-open a brand new Caffi when we can.

In the meantime, you asked us to bring back our very popular ‘fish and chip’ Fridays as a takeaway only service. We did this and it ran very successfully for 6 weeks.

The Lottery approved our request and Yashka Jureczko was recruited as consultant. She ran the hugely successful café at Caban, a social enterprise similar to our own, and now has her own place Bwyd Blasus Yashka. Stop by her takeaway in Caernarfon and taste some of the wonderful food she has on offer. You won’t regret it.

One of her recommendations is that the kitchen be re-designed, so sadly, we had to close the Fish and Chip Fridays to do this work. Another priority is the concreting of a path along the south side of the building, where the slate chippings are now, to make access to the Caffi easier.

We aim, if possible, to re-open the Caffi before the season ends, even if only on a very limited basis, so watch this space.

## 8. THE CANOLFAN RECOVERY PLAN

There are rumours that the Canolfan has had loads of money from the Lottery. The truth is that the Lottery grant-funded the Canolfan with £147,000 to support the business over the first 5 years until it could support itself through the income it earned. The money was an unallocated general fund to pay for salaries, utilities, marketing, evaluation of the project and all the other costs a start-up business incurs. Most of the Lottery grant had been spent before the current Board took office. From the beginning, the main objective of the new Board is to increase revenues to enable the Canolfan to stand on its own feet. Unfortunately, Covid 19 has put paid to that. Nothing can change history, so everyone currently involved in Canolfan Y Fron is looking forward, not back.

The original business plan for the Canolfan was based on bringing new money into Y Fron and area by attracting guests to the Llety and by bringing guests and day visitors to the Caffi and Siop. In the summer of 2019, we proved that this works. Between the two of them they earned over £70,000 in income in their first year of trading.

We estimate that CyF has lost between £50,000 and £90,000 of revenue due to the lockdown closure and the limited reopening of the Llety. Losses will continue to grow daily until it is possible to get back to normal (or near normal).

The community Siop is now covering its costs as well as making a small contribution to the Canolfan, but it is not going to provide the profits needed to sustain the Canolfan, nor would the Community want this.

When Covid hit, in addition to cutting costs, we also applied for all the emergency Covid 19 grant funding we could and to date have received £26,000, which may be all the Canolfan has to live on until things revive, possibly as far away as next Spring.

Until then, if it is going to survive, the Canolfan needs more volunteers as we will not be able to afford staff. All of our volunteers tell us that they enjoy their contribution, that it is loads of fun, and makes their lives much more fulfilling. We need folks to join the Canolfan 'family' by:

- a. helping in the Siop,
- b. doing translation work,
- c. helping in the Caffi when it re-opens, both in food prep and serving
- d. helping with preparing the rooms in the Llety
- e. help in managing the reservations in the Llety (which would suit someone with computer skills working from home)

So, it really is over to you, the community of Y Fron and Carmel, Rhosgadfan, Rhostryfan and beyond. If Canolfan Y Fron is going to beat Covid 19, we need your support and help. Volunteering at the Canolfan is a great opportunity to learn about how a business operates, and to become part of the community 'family' that runs it. Anyone interested in volunteering should contact Mandy Hindle on 07774 180295.

The plans that the Board have put together for the future of the Canolfan will be on display at the Canolfan on the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> August and everyone will be welcome to see what is planned and to provide feedback.