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June 2024

THIS MONTH

A CLIMATE OF CHANGE

Climate rights are human rights



BY THE BOOK

It's goodbye and thank you
to Sarah Williams



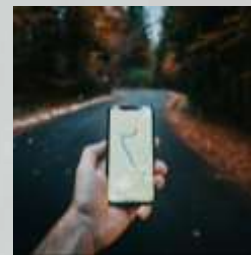
A HUNDRED LIVES

What does it mean to be a nurse?



FROM A TO B

When it comes to subsidised travel,
we just want things to make sense



A LITTLE HELP FROM OUR FRIENDS

Why FOYD deserves our support



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A World of Possibilities

Oriel Science can open it up for you



Oriel Science, the Swansea University education initiative that's sharing the pleasure of learning and discovery with the next generation of science leaders, will continue to stimulate young minds throughout 2024 and beyond. Exhibits will be open as follows in the coming weeks:

Saturday June 15 th - Sunday June 16 th	10am - 4pm
Saturday June 22 nd - Sunday June 23 rd	10am - 4pm
Saturday June 29 th - Sunday June 30 th	10am - 4pm
Saturday July 6 th - Sunday July 7 th	10am - 4pm
Saturday July 13 th - Sunday July 14 th	10am - 4pm

Oriel Science 21 Castle St, Swansea SA1 5AE

<https://www.orielscience.co.uk/>



A Climate of Change

Climate rights are human rights



The **European Court of Human Rights** binds the 46 member states of the Council of Europe to respect the rights of its people, and the UK was a founding member. The court has now ruled that people have a right to safety from climate disaster, and that right is an essential element of their right to life.

In a nutshell, the ruling gives almost 700 million people living in Council of Europe member states the right to take legal action against their governments when they can demonstrate that their climate rights are being violated.

It doesn't encourage spurious legal action; you still have to prove your case, and that will take precision and diligence. But it does indicate that communities have a legal right to hold their governments to account on this crucial issue.

We've heard a range of responses. Some public figures have suggested we should cut our ties with the European Court of Human Rights to enable us to dodge its rulings.

Really?

Simpsons fans may recall the season six episode, **Bart's Comet**, in which Bart discovers an approaching comet that threatens to destroy Springfield. It doesn't, of course, and the episode ends with the townsfolk heading for the observatory to burn it down and stop such a crisis from arising again.

“If we can’t see it, it can’t hurt us” is an excusable strategy for a cartoon character, or a child hiding from ghosts under the blankets. People facing an existential threat to their planet should try harder and aim higher.

In 2024 the People’s Library has seen positive community action on climate change from people of all ages and backgrounds. We’re inspired by the clear-sighted activism of [Adella Pritchard and Simon Walkling](#) of Christ Well URC. We’re inspired by the enthusiasm and commitment of [Will Jones and Craig Roberts](#) and their friends at [Community Lives Consortium](#). We’re inspired by a collective determination to do the right thing and follow constructive conversation with meaningful action.

Now we’re inspired by this legal turning point. It sets a new agenda for climate litigation, widening the scope for the action we can take and the arguments we can use.

The ECHR judgment went into detail on the steps governments must take to meet their environmental obligations. They must now set a firm deadline to reach climate neutrality, set out a coherent plan for meeting that goal and provide evidence that they’re staying on track.

Many climate change naysayers have been elected to public office, making them public servants. That title should mean something, and as members of the public we’re entitled to ask how well they’re serving us. If your approach to climate change opens you up to legal action from the people you’re supposed to be serving, maybe the European Court isn’t the problem? Maybe you should think about taking all that energy you’re using to find ways of dodging its unbiased rulings and try channelling it into finding ways of complying with them? It’s just a suggestion.

The next meeting of Project Green Light will include a Q&A about the implications of the European Court ruling, and we’ll discuss meaningful action our communities can take.

It's official; climate rights are human rights, and the People’s Library is ready to claim ours. Are you?

BY THE BOOK



The moment we open a book, we begin a journey that can last as long and extend as far as we choose. A story we read as a ten-year-old can be re-read at twenty, forty, sixty or eighty and mean something new each time. Books are a gift that keep on giving, and libraries are their home.

The best libraries establish themselves as community centres, engaging all sections of the community. They can be champions of education and inclusion. They can foster a love of literature and of creativity.

That's easier said than done. It takes endless empathy and dedication, a love of the written word, a gift for communication and the patience of a saint.

It takes Sarah Williams.

When Sarah worked her final day at [Brynhyfryd Library](#) it brought the curtain down on a career of sustained commitment and excellence that's enriched countless lives.

Everyone's going to miss her, everyone's wishing her the happy retirement she's earned. We'd like to share some of the many comments that were passed on to the People's Library in the weeks leading up to Sarah's retirement.

“In the years when Cae Rowland Community Garden was entering In Bloom, Sarah was a driving force behind the library getting involved. The Men’s Shed members built raised beds on the library grounds to the side of the building and Sarah was able to get different community members involved in tending the beds. Just one example of her wonderful contribution to the community.”

“Thank you for the book club and the knitting groups on Monday and Wednesday mornings. Thank you for never being too busy to help when I pop in asking for a book and can’t always remember the title. Have a wonderful retirement, Sarah.”

“All the best to you Sarah, thank you for always offering a warm welcome and good advice. I don’t know where you found the energy and imagination to do so many things so well, but I’m thankful that you did.”

“I’m very grateful for the support Sarah has given to different events that have taken place at Christ Well Church and the support she has given to newly arrived asylum seekers in the area. I hope her successor is equally community- minded. I will miss her very much.”

“So many people have benefited from Sarah’s community initiatives, and her reading groups have helped people of all ages find their voices and their love of literature. She is one in a million.”

“The workshops Sarah’s delivered, offering free access to Ancestry and Find My Past, have opened the door to family history for so many people. By giving visitors free digital access to newspapers and magazines, and training them on the library’s tablets, she’s helped ensure people don’t get left behind, even if they don’t have online access at home.”

“Sarah has done more than anyone else to help my children fall in love with reading. More than their teachers, more even than me. She’s given them something that will stay with them all their lives.”

“Sarah has been the welcoming face of Brynhyfryd Library for as long as I can remember. She is kind and knowledgeable, she has always been positive and open to new ideas for groups for the community, and her Rhyme Time for the little ones was always superb. We all wish her a fabulous retirement but will miss her dearly.”

“Events at Brynhyfryd Library are joyful and universally popular because Sarah is joyful and universally popular. Book readings and history talks are brought to life because of the wonderful warmth and sense of curiosity she’s created.”

“Sarah has been a major force for good in this community, going far above and beyond what is required of her in her role., From reading to the children at functions, to helping out at other community events she has been a willing volunteer for all seasons. She has led from the front in turning Brynhyfryd Library into a community hub and will be greatly missed. I wish her well for a long, relaxing and enjoyable retirement. She deserves it.”

Sarah Williams has redefined what can be achieved in a community role. She’s done it with generosity and self-effacing charm, and she’s done it while always remembering what libraries were created for. She’s nurtured a love of reading, learning and communicating among people of all ages.

In the best possible sense, she’s done it by the book.

Thank you, Sarah.

Thank you for everything.

FROM A TO B



Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 sparked forced relocations on a scale unseen in Europe since World War Two. Within weeks, over five million refugees had left the country. A small fraction of them came to Britain, with approximately 7,500 eventually finding their way to Wales.

In March 2022 the Welsh Government responded by creating the Welcome Ticket, offering free travel on public transport, initially to Ukrainian refugees, then to Afghan refugees, then extended more widely to refugees of all nationalities.

People with limited control over their own lives and vanishingly low spending power have been able to travel to medical and job-related appointments, voluntary activities, courses of study and social events. The impact on integration has been hugely positive. Those seeking refuge have been empowered to become community leaders.

In April 2024, the Welcome Ticket scheme was suspended. At the time of writing, the stated intention of the Welsh government was to review and revise the scheme, and bring back a sustainable version in a “new phase” later in the year.

In 2010, Swansea became the first city in Wales to be declared a City of Sanctuary, and only the second in the UK. Many people in Wales speak of wanting to make it a country of sanctuary. What, in practice, does that actually mean?

The Welcome Ticket has been suspended. When you suspend something that carries the name “welcome”, you are by definition telling people that they are less welcome today than they were yesterday. If the sole obligation of a city or nation of sanctuary is to open the door to those in need of refuge, then we can meet it without offering much in the way of comfort, convenience or kinship once they get inside. If we aim that low, though, we’re selling more than one group of people short.

The People’s Library manages community projects in support of vulnerable people from all backgrounds. Some of our most rewarding work has been done for the benefit of elderly people living in residential care homes. Our experience of refugees – and of asylum seekers, who have never been included in the Welsh government’s Welcome Ticket scheme – is that they want to help others, they see it as part and parcel of being good citizens, and they’re happy to do it as volunteers. When we take away their ability to travel to project locations, it’s not only the asylum seekers and refugees we’re hurting. It’s the people whose lives they want to enrich.

To take just one example, a family of refugees we work with told us they wanted to help with projects at homes for elderly people suffering from dementia. Together we created projects that brought back happy memories for these older people. Because the family were able to travel with me to the care homes, they were able to play a full part in the project.

They were able to interact with care home residents, and the knock-on effects of that interaction were wide-ranging. Some of these elderly people had relatives who, to be blunt, didn't like immigrants. They didn't like immigrants because they hadn't met any, so their perception of them was shaped by hearsay, dubious media coverage and good old-fashioned prejudice. But when they saw a family of refugees making someone they loved happy, they began to realise just how foolish their prejudice was, and that prejudice began to fade away.

This isn't rocket-science; it's common sense. When we give asylum seekers and refugees the means to travel from A to B, interact with community members whose experience of different nationalities and cultures may be limited, and open their eyes to the benefits of integration, we create the most powerful weapons in the fight against divisiveness.

Having seen the social and cultural upsides of this approach, we find it particularly frustrating to see the rug pulled from underneath people seeking to do good. The best-case scenario seems to be the Welcome Ticket scheme's reintroduction at some point in the summer of 2024, streamlined and subject to a means test. Leaving aside the rights and wrongs of means-testing a service that everyone has a reasonable claim to, including the asylum seekers who've never been given access to it, if you have a leaky tap, you don't solve the problem by shutting off the water supply for three months. Yes, you may consider it a priority to fix what you believe to be an unnecessary leak, but is that really less urgent than the everyday need for people to have a drink of water? We believe anything that's wrong with the Welcome Ticket scheme could be more productively addressed with the scheme still active. You don't fully appreciate what the problems of a project are when you set it to one side and detach yourself from those problems. You learn as you go along. You make improvements and adjustments as you go along. By shutting the scheme down, we only neglect an urgent current need.

Ukraine has been fighting for the right to retain its national identity and exist in an independent form since the first day of Russia's invasion. Two years on, that fight is no less meaningful, and no closer to being resolved. The refugees and asylum seekers who have come to this country, from Ukraine, Afghanistan or anywhere else, are also engaged in an ongoing fight to retain their identity and be recognised as independent citizens, not dismissed as faceless and unwelcome burdens on the state. If we support them in that fight, the wider social and economic impact will be positive. Immigrants are net contributors to the UK economy, and always have been. Entrepreneurship is the lifeblood of any economy, and it's a stone-cold fact that while less than 15% of UK residents are foreign-born, [39% of the country's fastest-growing startup companies have at least one immigrant co-founder](#). It's not an exaggeration to say that the future success of British business depends in large part on the welcome we offer to people of talent and resilience who were born outside our borders.

We don't expect everyone to monitor national entrepreneurship statistics, but it doesn't do any harm to take a passing interest in issues that directly affect our lives. Last year, when speaking at an event in London, I was faced with a splutteringly angry voter who told me how much better off this country would be if we'd never let in any immigrants. I asked what he did for a living and he announced, proudly, that he worked in logistics at Marks and Spencer. I told him that one of the company's co-founders, Michael Marks, was of Eastern European Jewish origins and had come to this country from Slomin, a town in Belarus almost within earshot of the current carnage in Ukraine. His red face flushed a shade darker and he turned and walked away. As he had every right to do, of course. That's the great thing about living in an evolved democracy. People can move around freely.

Can't they?

Being part of a community means we should be free to explore it. In 2023 I had a disheartening conversation with a Swansea-based asylum seeker who, since moving to the city 18 months before, had never seen the waves break on a Gower beach. She had no money – none – and as an asylum-seeker she had no access to the Welcome Ticket. These areas of natural beauty are spoken of with awe all over the world, but to a person living just a few miles away they'd been as inaccessible as the dark side of the Moon. People who oppose immigration often complain that people who come here from overseas don't really love this country the way they should. At the People's Library we haven't found that to be true, and in many cases we're astonished by the capacity of asylum seekers and refugees to love a country while being given such restricted access to it. When we ask a person to love a city that's famous for its coast without giving them the means to visit it, we're asking them to love a black and white photograph, knowing very well that other people have access to full colour.

Leaving aside the aesthetics of a coastline, when asylum seekers gain refugee status, they gain permission to work in the UK. The People's Library offers decades of recruitment experience, and at the most fundamental level, we find that the process asks four questions of the applicant.

Can they do the job?
Can they get to the job?
Will they take the job?
Will they stay in the job?

Our experience of refugees is that they can answer an enthusiastic yes to three of those four questions. If they can't physically get to their place of work, though – and support with that task is crucial in the early days before they start to receive a salary – then those three enthusiastic “yes” answers might count for nothing.

We also believe it's worth reminding ourselves of the standards our political leaders set for new arrivals in this country. The Welsh government's Migrant Integration Framework Document gives us a list of its key indicators of integration. The document was published in December 2023. It appears on the government website. It poses questions around how well people are fitting into Welsh communities, and tells us one of the key indicators is the percentage of migrants using advisory services. I agree it's absolutely right to include that benchmark. We need to know if people are sufficiently engaged in the community to reach out and ask for support on important issues.

So the Welsh government's own guidelines tell us they see it as incumbent on asylum seekers and refugees to actively seek advice on financial, housing, welfare, benefits and employment issues. And the refugees and asylum seekers the People's Library supports want very much to do precisely that. But what if they can't physically get to the offices where advice is being given? Our experience is that it can be a real struggle for them.

Is it reasonable to argue that by denying refugees and asylum seekers the means to travel to these advice centres, the Welsh Government is actively preventing them from seeking advice that it's explicitly stated they should be seeking? Is the Welsh Government actively preventing these people from meeting one of its own key standards of integration?

Is it reasonable to argue that political leaders are setting migrants up to fail? I wonder if they realise they're doing it? If they don't, I wonder if they'd be open to a conversation with people who aren't politically motivated and simply want to speak for their communities. The People's Library isn't politically motivated. We just like things to make sense.

It makes sense to us for people to be given the opportunity to make a contribution.

It makes sense to us for people to have the means to integrate in the way their government is explicitly telling them they should.

It makes sense to us for people to be able to travel from A to B.

A HUNDRED LIVES

*Save one life, you're a hero.
Save a hundred lives, you're a nurse.*

For many of us, that anonymous quote sums up the contribution nurses make to our society. It's no secret that these exceptional professionals are paid less than they deserve.



It's not easy to put a price on the compassion and commitment that saw so many nurses risk their own health during the COVID-19 pandemic, let alone the skill that saved and enriched so many lives. But if we are going to put a price on it, let's set the bar high.

Wales's new First Minister, Vaughan Gething, was Minister for Health and Social Services from 2016 to 2021 so he should be aware of the value of nurses, and the conditions they work in.

2023 figures indicate that there are almost 3,000 vacancies for registered nurses in Wales. The shortfall is largely being made up by the existing workforce. Every week, NHS Wales nurses work approximately 70,000 hours over and above their normal schedule. In other words, Welsh nurses are being asked to do one of the most challenging jobs in the world, and additionally shoulder a burden equal to the full-time contribution of another 2,000 people. No one seriously believes that's sustainable.

So what are we going to do about it?

The Royal College of Nursing is prioritising three action points.

- The Welsh government made a pay offer to nurses for 2023-24 that was accepted. Now nurses would like the deal to be honoured.
- The NHS plans to bolster its workforce with an influx of registered nursing associates. These roles were conceived as a bridge between care workers and registered nurses, and the Royal College is eager for them to be introduced in a way that adds value for patients and gives nurses a more manageable workload.
- With so many people depending on the skill and professionalism of nurses, the RCN is seeking a commitment to training and development.

From where we're standing, these seem like reasonable requests. Allowing experienced professionals to grow discontented through overwork, low pay and sheer frustration, leave the NHS and be replaced by untrained, unqualified people is a dangerous way to manage a healthcare workforce.

When our nurses and the people who speak for them say they don't want it to happen, they're acting in our interests as much as their own.

We can't expect our nurses to keep giving everything without offering them something in return.

We can't expect them to keep running on empty.

When someone saves a hundred lives, we think they're entitled to a say in how they manage their own.

WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM OUR FRIENDS

An estimated 16 million people in the UK have some form of disability. That's 24% of the total population. For young people navigating the early stages of their journey through life, a disability adds challenges. The resilience and personality Wales's young disabled people show in rising to these challenges inspires us. So do the charities that support them.



Friends of the Young Disabled was established in 1985 and in the four decades since, it's been a beacon of support for young people in the Swansea area. Those of us who lived through the 1980s have good and not so good memories of those times. It's fair to say that the attitude to disability in Britain was less enlightened and more patronising. When Friends of the Young Disabled first opened its doors, it quickly established itself as a place where young people would not only be supported, but also respected.

That spirit of respect and empowerment has never waned. Today, the charity's headquarters is equipped with an IT suite, an art room, a training kitchen and meeting rooms with a range of skill-building opportunities. It also has a play room, a music therapy room, a sensory room, a pool room and an attractive garden offering ample opportunities for fun and relaxation. It's a place where skills, confidence and friendships are nurtured. It's a force for good.

It's also an organisation that deserves our support, in as many ways as we can offer it. To learn more about making a donation or offering your services as a volunteer, visit the FOYD Facebook page or call or message 07979 415354.

[Friends of the Young Disabled](#)

The Gordon Moore Centre, 300 Carmarthen Road, SA5 8NJ

GET CONNECTED

To learn more about People's Library projects, publications and exhibitions, or to join our campaigns in support of environmental initiatives, healthcare workers, asylum seekers and refugees:

Contact us by email or visit our website:

hello@peopleslibrary.co.uk

<https://www.peopleslibrary.co.uk/>

To book a visit to **Oriel Science**, check out their website:

<https://www.orielscience.co.uk/>

To share your memories of the positive community impact of Sarah Williams, email Tracey McNulty, Swansea Council's Head of Cultural Services:

Tracey.McNulty@swansea.gov.uk

To learn more about Friends of the Young Disabled and support their work, visit their Facebook Page:

<https://www.facebook.com/foydswansea>

Thanks for reading, and best wishes for the summer