

Plogging in Merthyr Tydfil



On Tuesday 6th August 2019 Cymryd Rhan launched a new initiative within Merthyr Tydfil County Borough called “Plogging” in efforts to support cleaner streets and more places to play for children. Afterschool and Holiday clubs for school age children who had shown an interest in the scheme prior to launch day had received between 15 and 20 kits depending on individual setting requirements. Each kit included high visibility jackets, child size rigger gloves and a litter picker.

Plogging involves going for a jog or walk and picking up litter at the same time. It is a multi-disciplinary form of exercise for young people but also benefits the environment.

This initiative will support and educate a cleaner, safer Borough and actively support the obesity agenda. Within Merthyr Tydfil 16.6% of children are obese; this is higher than the Welsh average of 11.8%. This is a high priority as its having a detrimental effect on young people’s health and wellbeing. Regular physical activity helps growth and development throughout childhood, reduces the risk of chronic disease, and is associated with improved mental health and wellbeing.

The morning started off wet but this didn’t deter the children and staff from Little Lambs Nursery in Pentrebach who turned out with 15 children and 5 staff members to carry out plogging around the park and green in Pentrebach. The children were all very excited and kitted out ready to go. Staff were on hand with bin bags to collect and dispose of the rubbish quickly and effectively. The children were aged from 3 – 9 years old. One little boy was happy to talk about the importance of picking up litter as he was on his school eco committee. Another little girl told us whilst recently on holiday at the beach every day before they played they had a competition on who could collect 5 pieces of litter first. The children ran around the green collecting as much litter as they could, bringing it back to the staff with the bag. The staff asked the children what they had found and why we were collecting the litter “Incase animals eat it” one child replied, “To make it clean and safe to play” another child said. During the hour session, 2 full bin bags of rubbish were collected from the area ranging in things from glass bottles and cans, through to kitchen wall tiles and mostly sweet wrappers and crisp packets.

From Pentrebach we then moved onto Stephen and George. 11 children of mix abilities and age along with 2 members of staff took part. The children carried out the plogging in the community garden next to the building. One child wanting to take part in the session was in a wheelchair and was delighted that she was able to take part in the activity, the same as everyone else. The children all spread out around the garden looking for as much litter as they could find. There wasn’t as much litter here as in the previous location but the children still enjoyed the activity and asked when they could do it again. When we explained the kits were the settings to keep they were delighted and asked the leader if they could carry it out again later in the week at a different location. The children during the session collected



half a bin bag of rubbish - this was mainly sweet wrappers, drink bottles and cans and the odd piece of clothing. The children supported each other and encouraged each other throughout the session with one little girl shouting "come on guys let's make this place clean". One child told us how it wasn't nice to drop litter and that if people had put it in the bin then we wouldn't be needing to pick it back up". When the children were asked about people dropping litter they told us it was adults who drop litter and one child went on to say they had told their big sister not to drop the can on the floor in the street that they should put it in the bin or an animal might get stuck inside it.



Our third visit of the day was to Kidz Den in Treharris. When we arrived at the setting 15 children and 3 members of staff were present. The children were aged from 3 – 12 years. All the kits were laid out on the table and each child was shouted one at a time and came forward to collect their kits to put on. Children were then put into pairs and given a plastic carrier bag, 1 between 2. We left the building and went on a brisk walk around Treharris. It was bin collection day but the children were still able to find lots of rubbish on the

pavements, mostly wrappers. We made our way down to the park where the children did some further plogging. One child then asked the leader could we go up the lane next to the park as there is always lots of litter up there. The leader went to check it was safe first then we all went plogging up the lane. The lane was slightly over grown but full of rubbish. The children loved it and soon filled their carrier bags. Children were asking for further bags to put it all in. They were finding a variety of rubbish from the normal plastic bottles and cans, to carpet cuttings, old car wheels, oil cans and clothing. The children all filled their plastic bags along with a further 2 bin bags full. The children were passionate about collecting the rubbish and were again asking when they could do it again. The leader explained that they could be doing this on the way home from school or on the way to clubs and drop offs and that they would look to regularly include plogging into their session plans.



The last visit of the day was to Trinity Children's and Family Centre in Aberfan to meet the children and staff in the Holiday Club. 11 children along with 3 members of staff were all equipped ready to go when we arrived. The children were so excited the manager had shared with the wider community and parents before the

session what they were going to be doing and how it would benefit the children and had heard lots of positive responses. 2 children attending the session were supported by one to ones and were keen to take part. We first made our way to the park. The children loved being outside and able to run around but also listened carefully to the lead playworker. At the park there was only a small amount of rubbish and the children were a bit disheartened so we decided to go further afield. We took the footpath up the hill and behind the nursery. The children were running ahead shouting "look at all this litter there's loads". The bank to the side of the footpath was full with cans, bottles and wrappers. One child even pulled out a hose pipe, more items of clothing, a microwave oven and various other household items that had all been dumped. "Look at all this rubbish" a child said. We collected 2 full bin bags from the small space behind the nursery and the nursery have planned a further 2 sessions for later in the week to go back and collect the rest.

Following on from our plogging day we received the following feedback from Trinity Childcare and Family Centre Aberfan.

"Since the plogging event with yourselves we have been out twice more. Children and staff enjoyed themselves and gathered another two black bags full of rubbish. It's a fun way of encouraging children to be aware of their environment and we shared information and photographs with parents through our social media sites."

"We intend to carry out more plogging events with our preschool children, inviting the parents along with us. We are situated in a lovely area surrounded by fields, river and a park which often become filled with litter, our aim will be to focus on these areas."

"I would definitely recommend the activities to others, it was a great way of raising an awareness of the importance of keeping our environment clean, promoting outdoor activities especially using the 'tools' and wearing 'special tops' and it was fun!"



The children were also asked; how can we help to keep the environment clean? “By not throwing rubbish on public places”. What can we do with our rubbish? “Throw it in the bin, recycle certain items like toys, plastic, cardboard and wood”. What are the benefits of Plogging? “Keeping areas tidy, saving our animals from being hurt and killed, make area’s safe places and better for the environment”.

Little Lambs in Pentrebach now regularly have a plogging session added to their weekly plans. They regularly go out for an hour at a time and collect between 1 to 2 black bags of litter from the Pentrebach area. Parents of the setting had commented how much the children have learnt from the sessions with one parent saying the child regularly likes to now collect litter when on family days out especially at the beach.

“My son really enjoyed plogging, he is much more aware of the environment and shares awareness amongst his peers in school” (mum of 4 year old son who took part)

Kidz Den commented they carried out a number of additional plogging sessions during the summer holidays. The children have also been asking if they can do it on the way home from school. The children have noticed the greener spaces in Treharris a lot cleaner since they have started plogging. The staff at the settings have said the children really enjoy the sessions. It’s nice to get out and about doing something positive for the community and the environment.

For more information on Plogging please contact Jenna Hughes on 01597828050 or email Jenna.hughes@cymryd-rhan.org.

