



Making kindness visible: Women's Swap Shop Swansea

A case study in community action to “Reduce, Reuse and Recycle” during the COVID-19 pandemic



What do you do in lockdown when the rubbish tips and charity shops are closed and you are trying to have a clear out? Or need new clothes for you or your kids but the shops are shut? Amina Abu-Shahba from Swansea was thinking about this in May 2020 and proactively set up a Facebook group. One year and 4.6k members later, this group has been the catalyst in allowing 20,000 items to be swapped and reused. This is not only a group to donate unwanted items, but a community. As a member of the group, it has been seen that new connections, support and generosity underpin the groups success.

The group ethos has helped many members from local social and support workers using the site to help families in need of essential items when they must be re-housed, to people providing wedding related items for a couple with a serious illness who needed to get married quickly. The outpouring of offers when one of these posts is put up is heart-warming. Shoes, bedding and toys have been provided for homeless children. No item is too big or small to swap, and items include clothes, furniture, plants, toys, books etc. This is a small step towards a more cyclical economy, and the benefits are seen on an individual, organisational and community basis. People have made new friends and connections in the community and seeing so much generosity visible in the local area makes people feel good.

Sites that support recycling are not new, however evolution of online social media groups has allowed a more efficient exchange process. The responsive and dedicated team of admins have created a sense of community and provided a basis for kindness at the community level. The group's rules are simple and have been developed to ensure safety and preservation of group ethos: giving.

Along with saving a huge amount of items from going into landfill, Women's Swap Shop Swansea has made kindness possible and visible in the hardest of times.

Acknowledgements

Thanks, and appreciation to Amina Abu-Shahba for speaking to the team, for setting up the group, and also to the Admins who keep the group running.

Nerys Edmonds

In 2020 the [Mental Health Foundation](#) focused its Mental Health Awareness Week on Kindness. Their message was:

“Kindness strengthens relationships, develops community and deepens solidarity. It is a cornerstone of our individual and collective mental health. Wisdom from every culture across history recognises that kindness is something that all human beings need to experience and practise to be fully alive”.

Key facts:

Private Facebook group

Created May 2020

4,600 members

In May 2021, there were 14,000 posts on the site in the last 28 days

2 spin off groups created in Neath and Llanelli

20,000 swaps and counting...