

CHARITY CHAMPIONS

Hospice support group still



SPECIAL: Enjoying a garden party at Llanover Hall



POPULAR: All dressed up for one of the old time musical evenings staged by the Risca Support Group

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A group set up to help support a Gwent hospice at its creation is celebrating more than 40 years of continuous fundraising.

The Risca Support Group - the first to be established when St David's Hospice Care was being established in Newport by nurse tutor Heulwen Egerton in 1979 - is still going strong.

The group, which these days meets at the Philanthropic pub in Pontywaun, has raised many thousands of pounds for the hospice over the years and has plans to raise even more in future.

Chris Browning, who has been with the group for 41 years, says members meet up once a month to plan their fundraising events and for a catch up.

"It is been a great deal of fun over the years arranging events of all sorts from raffles to concerts and everything in between. Everyone pitches in and contributes what they can from crafting to organising to spreading the word.

"We arrange three of four events every year. We have a spring fair, Christmas fair, arrange stalls and fund raise in all sorts of ways to support the hospice, which after all, means so much to each and every one of us.

"The support group was initially started in Newport by nurses who wanted to raise awareness of the hospice and to raise funds to help it in the early days. It was a bit easier to raise money in those days as, although people had less cash to spare, there didn't seem to be quite so many charities for people to support.

"That being said people in Gwent remain very generous and

as the hospice is better known these days and so many know of the wonderful services that they provide through the community, many through personal experience, it's a little easier.

"So although there are many more competing charities and good causes, locally, nationally and globally, these days St David's Hospice Care, with its local appeal and profile, is something local people feel they can and want to support."

Chris said members of the Risca Support Group not only arrange the events but do their best to support other events staged by the hospice.

"I've taken part in three Severn Bridge walks and I have a terrible fear of heights. I was almost clinging onto the inside railings all the way around with my late daughter but it was great fun and worthwhile."

Colleague Jan Price, who has been with the support group for 40 years, said she joined as she "wanted to give something back" to the hospice which had been of such wonderful support to her and her family over the years.

Jan said: "We all just club together and come up with ideas to raise funds then get on and put events on. We've raised thousands and thousands of pounds over the years. It's difficult to put an exact figure on precisely how much we've raised but we're just happy to know that we've made a difference in all sorts of ways."

Jan said it can be hard work but the rewards are endless.

"Arranging fairs and selling goods which members and supporters have made is great fun.

We also enjoy events we've staged such as an extremely successful run of three years in a row staging an old time musical theatre event at Crosskeys College with the Standard Pirelli musical group.

"The evenings were such a success that we had to turn people away as we only had space for 500. One event raised £1,000 which in today's money is probably four or five times that amount.

"We also arranged coach trips to places such as Bath which were also very well received.

"Another highlight was when the Lord Lieutenant of Gwent invited the support group to a garden party at Llanover Court. The members were treated like royalty.

"The band of the Royal Welsh Guards played and at the end we pitched in and did the dishes - and I was still wearing my hat!

"First and foremost we enjoy what we do, we have a lot of fun and form lifelong friendships along the way. Oh and we also raise a lot of money for the hospice which is the main thing.

"We're always ready to welcome new members.

"We have been up to 30 members strong but these days we hover around the 14 member mark. Current members range in age from about 40 to our eldest who is 92.

"We like to think we're flexible and that people don't have to adhere to a rigid attendance each and every month if they find it tricky to fit into their busy schedule.

"And to anyone thinking of starting their own support group I'd say go for it. If they want to

CHARITY CHAMPIONS

going strong after 40 years



SUPPORTERS: Members of the Risca Support Group on a visit to Newport-based St David's Hospice Care



SMILES: Washing the dishes after the garden party at Llanover Hall



REMINISCING: Chris Browning (left) and Jan Price(right) with Abigail Hughes, of St David's Hospice Care in the Garden at St David's Hospice Care, Malpas, Newport, Picture: DBPR

have an idea of how things are done they are more than welcome to attend one of our meetings."

Jan said they have a 'Chinese' auction - a lucky dip type fundraiser - planned for the autumn and are making final arrangements for a music night at Crosskeys Rugby Club featuring local band Alive & Kicking.

Abigail Hughes, of St David's Hospice Care, meeting members of the support group for the first time, said: "The Risca Support Group are marvellous examples of what people can achieve working as a team for a common cause.

"The members have raised many thousands of pounds for

the hospice over so many years, have had great fun along the way, are still going strong and have loads of fund raising ideas for the future, which is really awesome.

"Hospice support groups such as the one in Risca are hugely important in raising funds for us and we simply can't thank them enough for all that they do."

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