

# **YMCA NEATH**

## **Annual Report**

### **2023**



**Here for young people**  
**Here for communities**  
**Here for you**

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## **1.0 Board of Management**

Chairman Mr Kevin Lewis

Treasurer Mr Martin Evans FCA CTA

Vice Chairman Mrs Joanna Jenkins MBE JP DL

Chaplain Reverend Patrick Baker

Mr Clive Ball

Mr Alun James

Dr Bryn John CStJ DL

Mrs Delyth Lewis

Cllr Alan Lockyer

## **1.1 Honorary Advisors**

Independent Examiner Mr Richard Chapple WBV Accountants

Mr Robert Williams DL, Hutchinson Thomas Solicitors

## **1.2 Staff**

Centre Manager Jessica Kennedy

Receptionist/ Trainee Wellbeing Officer Sarah Hemington

Receptionist/ LGBTQ+ Officer Sarah Elias

Evening Receptionist Sandra Cook

Evening Receptionist Saskia Allen

Cleaner Craig Bourne

## **1.3 Bankers**

Barclays Bank Plc. (Neath) Swansea Building Society

Nationwide Building Society

## 2.0 Aims and Purposes

The YMCA is a Christian Movement. At its centre are Christians, who regarding Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, desire to share their faith with others and make him known, believed, trusted, loved, served and exemplified in all human relationships. It welcomes into fellowship persons of other religious faiths and of none.

Accordingly, the Young Men's Christian Association stands for:

- A worldwide fellowship based on equal value of all persons.
- Respect and freedom for all, tolerance and understanding between people of different opinions.
- Active concern for the needs of the community.
- United effort by Christians of different traditions.

The Young Men's Christian Association aims to:

Provide a welcome to members for themselves, in a meeting place which is theirs to share, where friendships can be made and counsel sought.

Develop activities which stimulate and challenge its members in an environment that enables them to take responsibility and find a sense of achievement.

Involve all members in care and work for others.

Create opportunities for exchanging views, so that its members can improve their understanding of the world, of themselves and of one another.

## 3.0 Full Membership

The Full Membership of the Young Men's Christian Association is a fellowship of men and women over 17 years of age who have accepted the Basics of Union, are committed to the Christian way of life, desire to be disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, and seek to associate themselves with others in Christian service in and through the Association. Full Membership is open to any man or woman over 17 years of age who, by loyally accepting the challenges of Christ, is willing to take his or her part in the fellowship and service which the Association exists to promote.



## 4.0 Chairman's Report

### YMCA Neath - A Year of Change

We have seen a number of changes in management at YMCA Neath in recent times, the most significant being the promotion of our Jessica Kennedy to the position of Centre Manager. Jessica has been the one constant that has carried us through the everchanging last 11years, and her dedication and passion for YMCA Neath is to be commended. With her enthusiasm and the support of her loyal staff they have transformed our organisation into a place that is the hub of our community where everyone can feel welcome and safe.

Although small in number our staff of Sarah Elias, Sarah Hemington, Craig Bourne, Sandra Cook and Saskia Allen are all committed to our vision of a YMCA for all and their efforts has seen a transformation in how people feel and think about our amazing organisation. I would like to thank them for their tireless hard work and for always being prepared to go the extra mile. With our great team we can look forward to 2024 and what we can achieve together.

As with most charities we rely on the dedication and generosity of the many volunteers who give their time and their talents to support us for no reward other than our most grateful thanks, without them we would not be able to provide all the activities and support for our community. My congratulations to all those who have achieved honors in their chosen discipline.

The task of funding is always at the forefront of our planning as we have to raise all the money to finance our expenditure by grants, donations and numerous fund-raising events. We are most grateful to all those organisations and individuals that supports us to ensure that we are able to sustain all the good work of YMCA Neath.

Finally, I would like to thank all of my trustee colleagues Alan Lockyer, Alun James, Bryn John, Clive Ball, Delyth Lewis, Jo Jenkins, Martin Evans and Patrick Baker for their ongoing support and counsel. Sadly, Patrick Baker our Chaplin is retiring from the Board of Trustees after 11 years loyal service I thank him for his kindness and compassion and ensuring that we are mindful that the YMCA is a Christian Movement that welcomes all in fellowship.

We look forward to the challenges that 2024 may bring but with the assurance that YMCA Neath is in safe hands.

**Kevin Lewis**  
**Chairman**

## 4.1 Chaplain

Once again, during the year now ending, the staff and several volunteers have done amazing work to keep YMCA Neath viable, available, and progressing; they have deserved all the support I and other Board members could give.

When I was first appointed honorary chaplain to YMCA Neath (YMCAN) - officially, eleven years ago but in practise a little longer - the job description seemed brief and simple. (i) as a member of the Board I had to accept the kind of responsibility common to all charity trustees. (ii) I had to be available for those who wanted to share such personal or spiritual needs as members of staff felt unable to handle. But I have to make clear that although I spent forty years as a minister in Baptist churches in Wales I am not a trained counsellor, and so I can offer such help only informally, as a sympathetic friend.

Happily we were able to resume the traditional Good Friday Breakfast in 2023. I have continued spasmodically to visit the Centre on Friday afternoons for 10-15 minutes, specifically to pray for YMCAN in its various aspects. It would have been beneficial to YMCAN if others had been minded to join me but I appreciate that my own lack of regularity has made it difficult for anyone to do so. Since this is the last occasion on which I shall have the privilege of submitting a report such as this it will be for others to determine whether and how corporate prayer for YMCAN will continue.

New groups and activities have begun at the centre of late and I have been slow to get to know them. This has been due largely to a decline in my health and vigour, and this is the main reason why I have notified the Board of my intention to retire from the post of honorary chaplain.

Some groups meeting at the centre are more formal and structured and I have not normally felt free to intrude on them, but I have met some leaders briefly. I hope a successor as chaplain will soon be appointed who will be more effective than I have been in developing such relationships. When the staff are not busy - and even, perhaps, when they are! - they have continued to make me welcome in the office and to keep me up to date with events.

Acting as honorary Chaplain to YMCA Neath has made a small demand. But it has provided me with the privileged opportunity of making wonderful new friends and sharing in the unobtrusive but impressively professional governance of this much-valued organisation. I have done so in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and for his sake. I shall always feel grateful that I have had this privilege.

**Reverend Patrick John Baker**  
**Chaplain**

## 4.2 Centre Managers Report

It's been a year of growth and community support at YMCA Neath. We have witnessed our centre's evolution go from strength to strength, even amidst challenging circumstances. Our success is not solely the result of individual effort, but rather a testament to the dedication and passion of our staff Sarah Hemington, Sarah Elias, Craig Bourne, Sandra Cook, Saskia Allen and our many selfless volunteers. I would like to thank each and every one of them for sharing my vision for the YMCA and working tirelessly to make it a reality. Their commitment, hard work, and enthusiasm have been the driving force behind our accomplishments.

In these times of uncertainty, the YMCA has continued to be a beacon of support for our community. We are privileged to offer critical services such as the Baby Bank, Uniform Bank, LGBTQIA Youth and new adult groups, the Friendship Circle, Martial Arts classes, our gymnastics club, the community gym, and our collaborations with NPT Mind, Men's Marauders, Platform, and The Wallich. These initiatives have allowed us to make a meaningful impact on the lives of those we serve. We recognise the value of every person who uses our centre and we believe that the YMCA has a responsibility to support our community.

Looking ahead, we are excited to announce our plans for 2024, as we embark on a journey to start a community kitchen and garden. These projects will enable us to further enhance our support to the community and foster a sense of togetherness and self-sufficiency. We are deeply grateful for your continued support and commitment to our cause, and we look forward to the future and what we can achieve at YMCA Neath!

Lastly, I would like to thank our Chairman Kevin Lewis for his unwavering support and encouragement.

**Jessica Kennedy**  
Centre Manager





## 5.0 Fundraising

2023 has been an incredible year for fundraising. On behalf of the YMCA, I extend our gratitude to Joshua Hatton for his dedication and commitment in running the London Marathon. Joshua's efforts have raised £5,350 in support of the YMCA. This generous contribution will undoubtedly have a lasting impact on our ability to continue providing essential services and support to those in need.

Thanks to our dedicated volunteers our community shop has recently reached over £5,000 in sales. Every item, from clothing to household goods, is priced from as little as 50p, making quality essentials accessible to all.

The YMCA is truly fortunate to have the support of individuals within our community who dedicate their time and energy to fundraising for our vital services, such as the Baby Bank. These passionate advocates play a pivotal role in enabling us to extend a helping hand to those in need. We would like to thank:

- 1st Caewern Brownies
  - Ammcom Ltd (Andrew Maunder)
  - Gwyn Hall
  - Knitters and Natters, Seven Sisters
  - McDonalds, Briton Ferry
  - Morrisons
  - Neath Town Council
  - Neath Darts League
  - Neath Masons
  - Neath Rotary
  - Neath Round Table
- Neath Steam And Vintage Show and the Welsh National Tractor Road Run
  - Orchard Place English Baptist Church
  - Quilting Group
  - Rihannas Swing
  - Reel, Port Talbot
  - Rhys 'Brave the Shave'
  - St.Matthews Church Dyffryn, Neath
  - Tai Tarian
  - Tesco
  - The Big Freeze



## Grant Success

Thanks to the generous support of various foundations and community initiatives, our organisation has been able to make a significant impact in various areas.

The Hubbub Foundation, with a grant of £615, played a crucial role in our successful execution of the "Eat Your Pumpkin" campaign event. This initiative brought together members of our friendship circle to creatively decorate pumpkins while simultaneously raising awareness about food waste.

The Moondance Foundation's contribution of £1200 allowed us to enhance our offerings by expanding our uniform rail to include stationary, providing valuable resources to those in need.

Additionally, the National Lottery Community Fund's substantial grant of £6,200 has empowered us to sustain and expand our LGBTQIA+ Youth group, fostering a supportive community.

Recently, the NPT Discretionary Fund awarded us £7,000, enabling us to extend our community outreach to those grappling with the challenges of the cost of living crisis.

We have been lucky to be selected for a Keep Wales Tidy food starter pack, our volunteers are looking forward to transforming our garden and collaborating with the community kitchen in 2024.

The National Grid Electricity Distribution – Community Matters Fund has awarded us with £4,543.40 to provide our users with a warm space during the winter months plus a warm pack including hat, gloves, socks, scarf, hot water bottle, blanket and travel mug.

Furthermore, being selected for the Tesco Community vote offers the exciting prospect of winning £1,500 towards our Men's Den, reinforcing our commitment to making a positive impact at the grassroots level.



## 6.0 Annual Good Friday Breakfast

The 142nd Good Friday Breakfast was held this year on 7th April and it was really good to see the hall almost full with guests who were obviously pleased to attend in person after the Covid 19 enforced break of three years.

Revd Rhys Locke BA, QTS Cert Theology, MEP PGCTLHE, FHEA, who was scheduled to be our speaker in 2020 was the speaker this year and he delivered a thoughtful address. Jo Jenkins, our Vice Chair, gave the vote of thanks and gave a summary of the activities held over the preceding year. The entertainment was provided by Cerys Morgan and Emyr Davies John of the Class Act Theatre School accompanied by Catherine Morgan and the hymn accompanist was Mrs Mavis Murray. Master of Ceremonies was Mr Robert Williams

There is a considerable amount of work in planning the traditional Good Friday Breakfast and the YMCA Board is grateful and thank our excellent staff that make up the team who make the event so successful. The support of the people of Neath has spanned many years and has made a huge impact on all of us. It has enabled the YMCA to provide support to people of all ages and abilities via an extensive programme of community based activities, including sport, education and training in a safe environment.

Over the last 152 years raising enough funds has always been challenging for YMCA Neath and the support of the public has been fundamental. To bring this up to date we have set up a fundraising page to compliment the Good Friday Breakfast collection, to maintain the good work that keeps the YMCA at the heart of Neath.

[Crowdfunding to help YMCA Neath on JustGiving](#)

Next year's Good Friday Breakfast is planned for 29th March 2024.

**Dr Bryn John**  
**Chair Good Friday Breakfast Committee**



## 7.0 Community Use and Partnership

### Adult Learning

YMCA Neath serves as a host for a variety of classes through Adult Learning in the Community and Neath College. These classes cater to diverse interests and skill levels, providing a platform for adults to engage in lifelong learning. YMCA Neath fosters an inclusive and supportive environment where individuals can pursue their educational aspirations. By facilitating adult learning, YMCA Neath not only empowers individuals to thrive in their personal and professional lives but also contributes to the broader goal of building a more educated and resilient community.

### Community Gym

The YMCA gym has been a constant at our centre for many years. It is a space designed for people of all fitness levels to come together and work towards their health goals. With a wide range of cardio and strength training equipment, the YMCA provides a welcoming and supportive environment for individuals to improve their physical health and overall well-being. The facility encourages not only physical fitness but also mental and social wellbeing. The YMCA is a host to a number of fitness classes including Clubbercise, Over 50's fitness and Zumba.

### Cookstars

After the success of our Comic Relief funded sessions with Cookstars, they have continued to use our facility on a number of occasions. Cook Stars take care of all the preparation to make it easy for families to simply come along and enjoy the sessions. All ingredients, cooking equipment, an apron, packaging and cooking know-how is provided! Everyone takes home their lovely dish along with a recipe card to cook again at home. We hope to work more closely with Kath and the Cookstars team during 2024.

### Computer Club

The YMCA recognises the increasing importance of digital literacy in today's world, we offer a free Computer Club where attendees can access support with all things digital. Whether it's navigating online platforms, mastering essential computer skills, or seeking assistance with digital tools, our Computer Club aims to bridge the digital divide. At YMCA Neath, we firmly believe that everyone should have the opportunity to thrive in the digital age.



## Baby and Uniform Bank

YMCA Neath Baby Bank has become an essential resource for our borough Neath Port Talbot. Throughout 2023 we have seen an increase in new referrals and people returning to access these much needed baby items. We concentrate on supplying Formula milk, nappies, wipes and toiletries. This goes some way to ensure that baby's basic needs are met. It helps provide assistance to parents in this current financial climate and the cost of living crisis. Helping soften the financial burden on families.

Since YMCA Neath started this initiative, we have helped over 100 families. With the number of times the service being accessed now over 200. We expect these statistics to increase over the coming year as more people become aware of the service and self-refer. We will be working towards building relations with statutory services and other third sector organisations which will also provide a high projected increase.

We have been fortunate to receive NPT core funding to run this service. We have also been extremely grateful to benefit from generous cash donations from Orchard Place Church fundraisers. Along with Item donations from Tonna Church and kind members of the YMCA and the public.

In addition to its efforts in supporting families with baby essentials, YMCA Neath extends its commitment to community well-being by providing free period and hygiene products. Recognising the importance of menstrual hygiene and the financial challenges that some individuals may face, we strive to ensure that everyone has access to essential hygiene products.

**Sarah Hemington**  
Wellbeing Officer





# Dance Wales UK

Another busy year for Dance Wales UK. Our 17th year!!

December 2022, we had our Christmas show at Cefn Season School and every £1 out of tickets sold bought presents for children in the Mr X Appeal, we raised £500 and donated to 20 children.

Next came our annual Swansea Dance festival and our solos and duets came away with many medals. And Hannah & Emilie came away with highest scoring acro duet marks and Hannah had highest acro solo mark.

March, we saw the first Cheer competition out of 4. The Warriors looked stunning in their new uniforms, and I can't count how many trophies we came away with in total. Our soloists this year were amazing too and most are competing for princess and queen titles in Walsall next weekend! Good luck girls. Our 5-man stunt groups also were amazing and our highest-level stunt group seniors L4 achieved their final win at the last competition, bittersweet as we also said goodbye to 2 of the girls. Our senior pom team had a very successful year and are also going to Walsall next weekend to hopefully win bids to compete in America next April. Everything is crossed for you girls.



Another annual show in July at the Princess Royal Theatre called. 'Alice in Dreamland' A very colourful and entertainment night had by all.

When we returned from our summer break, we were straight into acro competitions, The St Davids Festival, our groups did amazing but didn't get placed but our solos and duets came away with many placings, Our Hannah held onto her highest acro mark for another year and got highest mark in the Hip Hop too. Well done girls. Finally last Sunday at LC2 Swansea we entered the Born to Perform competition. Martha and Lillie paced 2nd and 3rd in their acro solo age group, Charlotte and Eden also came 2nd and third in their age group, Hannah came 2nd in her acro solo age group. Lillie and Ellie acro duet won their acro duet age group followed by Amelia & Olivia in 2nd place. Kelsy and her little sister Lowri won their acro duet section and so did Hannah & Emilie. The groups blew me away at this competition Inter Reflex came away with the win and top-notch judges award. Reflex came 2nd but got awarded the wild card, they then had to perform again against 5 other wild card teams in all different styles. They came 2nd and won £100. And the photography award for smiling whist flying and being spun around. What a day, and a very proud coach.



I would like to thank all the children and Parents for their continued support, a huge thank you to our warrior committee Chair- Joanne turner, Secretary- Carrie Phillips, Treasurer Hazel Davies. And my Voluntary coaches and Junior coaches- Jessica Hughes, Hazel Davies, Hannah Davies, Erin Turner, Hannah Edwards, Renee Cooper, and Taytum Grey. And sadly, goodbye to Renne Cooper and Taytum Grey, thank you for all the years of laughter and memories. Looking forward to next year, our 18th birthday!

**Kerry Dale**





## Friendship Circle

The YMCA Friendship Circle has been running for exactly one year, it has become a very successful group and is going from strength to strength.

It started from a discussion with our local area coordinator. We highlighted a need for a safe space where people who were feeling isolated and vulnerable could come and enjoy a conversation and a cup of tea/coffee, having the opportunity to build new friendships.

A craft was introduced to alleviate the anxiety that could be possibly felt attending something new and different. It also provided a therapeutic focus for anyone who wished to partake.

We trialed a general knowledge quiz, which was met with enthusiasm and has now become a permanent feature of the group.

Along with these additions, the gentlemen also enjoy doing different activities in our sports hall, such as badminton and remote control car racing.

We have incorporated a darts board and pool table in our coffee bar where the group is held.

The group has grown and evolved a great deal over the year. We have enjoyed a visit from Animal encounters, a company that brings animals for people to see and learn about. We hope with more funding next year we will be able to offer different experiences within the group.

On average we have 25 people attending every week and it continues to increase in attendees.

The regular members wanted to arrange a Christmas meal at a local restaurant, which we are looking forward to on the 5th December. In addition to this a Christmas party is being organized for our last session of the year, 19th December where everybody wishing to, will be contributing to a buffet. We will have festive fun, music and laughter and even a few party games like pass the parcel.

It is heart-warming to be at the forefront of this wonderful initiative and I am proud to see the profound difference this valuable group has made to so many people's lives.

We have noted over last few months that a number of people attending have severe additional learning needs and are non or minimal communicative, they attend accompanied by their carers.

As the friendship circle has progressed we feel that an additional group would benefit those with these additional needs. We will be looking into this further in the coming year.

We look forward to see what another year brings.

**Sarah Hemington**  
Wellbeing Officer



## LGBTQIA+ Youth

YMCA Neath's LGBTQIA+ Youth Group proudly celebrated its first anniversary on November 1st 2023. From a first session with 3 attendees to having over 20 members with over 10 regular attendees, the group has gone from strength to strength. The group's future is more secure after recently receiving £6200 in funding from The National Lottery Community Fund. One of our group volunteers also raised funds by having a sponsored head shave. At the group's request sessions moved from monthly to fortnightly and have run without a break (Christmas holidays aside!) throughout the past year.

The group have facilitated a wide variety of craft activities such as knitting workshops, rock painting, making prom decorations and friendship bracelets etc. We have also undertaken activities such as making pizzas from scratch, mug cake making and scientific workshops and are looking forward to our Christmas party. The group themselves have a large part in the planning of activities and several of them have undertaken successful workshops. We are planning to implement more educational workshops and also encompass environmental themes such as repurposing donated textiles, growing food etc. We also hope to include sessions that focus on mindfulness and improving mental health. We now have a unit who have strong friendships but are always extremely welcoming to newcomers. Many of the group are neurodiverse and have expressed how important the group is to them both as a safe space and as a means of socialisation.

We held our very successful Alternative Prom last June and plan to hold a Winter Ball next year alongside a visit from Animal Encounters, which is fun but also educational on the theme of conservation, all paid for with our funding. We also took part in both Swansea and Neath Port Talbot Pride as a group. I was part of the NPT Pride Committee and will be undertaking the same role again. Pride NPT 2024 will be held in both Neath and Port Talbot with a full day's programme in Neath. The YMCA will be playing a part in this event but details are unavailable currently. The Youth Group is also going to be attending a Mental Health course in 2024 facilitated by Neath College. The group currently has an LGBTQIA+ Mentor – Olivia Elias and three volunteers and we are all very excited for 2024.



## LGBTQIA+ Adults

This group was formed due to demand in the centre and the first monthly meeting attracted 22 participants. We undertook surveys on the first session to determine what people preferred in terms of days, times, activities etc. We have facilitated 3 sessions so far, hosting a quiz and making Christmas decorations. Our next session is a workshop hosted by Mess up the Mess Theatre Company/Queertawe based on movement and writing. The company are involved in facilitating a year-long project that aims to encourage the LGBTQIA+ community to come together and engage creatively culminating with their production 'A Queer Christmas 2024'. The workshop at the YMCA is hosted by Cerian who is a leading cabaret/theatre performer and Cassidy who is teaching creative writing. The workshop is being held free of charge for both the centre and participants.

We have applied for funding in order to sustain this group and if we are successful we can build upon the strong foundations that have already been created. This would involve a long term planning strategy for workshops, activities and events. We would also be advertising and utilising social media far more extensively to encourage participants. This is important as LGBTQIA+ services locally are not extensive and providing a safe space where people can be themselves is a social necessity. This would then mean that we had covered the LGBTQIA+ community comprehensively as a service provider and could look outwards to diversify and provide services for other minority groups in the community, funding and staffing permitting of course.

**Sarah Elias**  
**LGBTQIA+ Officer**





## Gymnastics

The Gymnastics section has returned to more normal classes in 2023 although occasionally affected by reduced numbers in classes and coach absences due to sickness. We have taken on a large number of children from our extensive waiting list who have settled in well. Our Gymnasts are thoroughly enjoying the sessions and will be working hard in December to learn a new personal skill and will be awarded with an achievement certificate before we break up for Christmas. We are fortunate to have 2 new young coaches on our team and we look forward to our return in January 2024.

**Karen Phillips**  
**Head Gymnastics Coach**

## Maths Revision

The YMCA has been lucky to host Lynda a maths tutor who has given up her time to teach basic maths, GCSE and Algebra revision to both staff and visitors, adults and students. We would like to extend our thanks to Lynda for providing this invaluable support.

## Men's Den

The Men's Den offers a safe space where you can relax, recharge, and strengthen your mental health. Be a part of our community, create memories, and forge lasting friendships. Attendees are encouraged to take part in the activities such as darts or pool or tending to our garden. We have partnered with Lloyd Fox and the Men's Marauders to provide walk and talk sessions at the YMCA. Originally formed to unite men out walking Men's Marauders quickly realised the potential to change men's lives through walking & talking.



# Martial Arts

## Neath Judo Kwai

It's been a very busy year for promotions. The most outstanding of the year was Adam Cardy gaining his 1st Dan Black belt. To put this into perspective, this happens on average once every 8/9 years. So a fantastic achievement for the individual and the club. It is especially poignant when the Sensai is Dad!

### Other promotions

Saul Pittard 5th Kyu Yellow belt

Kai Kelly 2nd Kyu Blue belt

Huw Widlake 3rd Kyu Green and 2nd Kyu Blue belt

Elis East 3rd Kyu Green belt

Meriel Symonds-East 2nd kyu Blue belt

Brndon Jones 6th Kyu Red and 5th Kyu Yellow belt

Declan East 1st Mon Red belt

Daniel Wyles 4th Mon Yellow belt

Oliver Wyles 4th Mon Yellow belt

Osian Mainwaring Purple belt

Riley Jones 10th Mon Green belt

Corey John 4th Kyu Orange belt

Evan Davies 4th kyu Orange belt

Daniel Bamsey 4th kyu Orange belt

Cameron Love 5th Kyu Yellow belt

Thomas Toms 6yh Kyu Red belt

Evie Taylor 1st Mon Red belt

Jude Cardy Kelshaw 2nd Mon Red belt

Mia Matson 1st Mon Red belt

Lois Sherwood 6th Kyu Red belt

Cici Williams 7th Mon Orange belt

Harley Collins 1st Mon Red belt

Sarah Emanuel 2nd Mon Red belt

Finley Whitefoot 2nd Mon Red belt

Sofia Fair 2nd Mon Red belt

The club has also experienced success with members entering competitions over the length and breadth of South Wales.

They are as follows :-

Ellis Evans Gold Medal British Schools Championships [held in Cardiff. At the Dragons Academy Open in March Daniel Wyles and Oliver Wyles gained silver and gold respectively. On the 1st April Ellis Evans, Zach Kelshaw and Macsen Jenkins were awarded medals for competing in the Red and Yellow Belt Rumble at the National Sports Centre in Cardiff. At the EGH competition held at Tonyrefail Leisure Centre, Macsen Jenkins, Daniel and Oliver Wyles won silver medals in the junior sections. Our Seniors also made a showing and did exceptionally well with Huw Widlake and Daniel Bamsey gaining bronze and Lloyd Phillips and Saul Pittard gaining silver. Ellis East who had only just turned 16 also gave an excellent showing at this competition.



In May, at the Carmarthen Red Belt Rumble, Daniel Wyles came away with a bronze medal and Oliver Wyles with the gold. In October at Llanishan Dragon Academy Open, Finley Whitefoot and Macsen Jenkins both won gold.

We are by comparison to clubs in Swansea and Cardiff, to name but a few, a small club, the fact that so many of our members have gained medals against far bigger clubs is an outstanding achievement for them all. We should be proud of this as a club but also the YMCA should acknowledge the achievements made.

On the 4th of March, Neath Judo Kwai was asked to host a Welsh Masters training session, several of our members attended this and fully coped with the standard of Judo the Masters brought to the club. Not only were we delighted to host such a prestigious event but also proud of how well our members coped with the visitors.

Kata is an ancient form of Martial Art training dating back hundreds of years. Not all judo clubs are proficient in being able to do these Katas, however, in April this year Alun Morgan, Adam Cardy and Ian Cardy gained a level 1 certificate in Katame No Kata. Thereby continuing and promoting the historical tradition of this beautiful art. As a club we are currently undertaking extra training sessions regularly on Saturday afternoons to become proficient in more styles of Kata and get members qualified.

Neath Judo Kwai also prides itself that not only do we have champions, medal winners and black belts but we have welcomed into our Dojo young people with additional needs. It has been pleasing to see several Autistic individuals come to experience Judo and be welcomed by the existing members in a way that they can develop their judo and social skills amongst the club. We also have hearing impaired and dyspraxic youngsters who are thriving within the club. It is a credit to Neath Judo Kwai that it offers a friendly, safe environment for anyone wishing to partake.

I personally, as Sensai, would like to take this opportunity to publicly thank Jess, Manager of the YMCA, for all the hard work and support she shows our club which allows us to continue to thrive. At the time of writing the year is not over for us and we expect more success that I will take great pleasure in reporting next year.

**Ian Cardy**

**4th Dan Neath Judo Kwai**





# JuJutsu

It's been great to see the Club returning to full strength this year as Covid, fortunately, seems to have given us a well deserved break.

The junior section trains on a Friday between 6pm and 7pm and we continue to be impressed with the commitment and hard work of the junior students at the end of the school week. All the junior members have graded this year and did extremely well. The variety of coloured belts on the tatami increasing month on month. It is, however, an ongoing battle to get them to tie them properly!

I would like to say a special thank you to the senior members who come and help with the juniors, this is always appreciated. Also a big well done to Macsen who has competed in several Judo competitions this year and won the gold medal in the Dragon's Academy competition. Macsen has also attended various judo squad training sessions. We are all very proud of you! The senior section trains each Friday 7pm – 8.30pm and has been equally busy. We started with a traditional Christmas curry last December where members of a few of the martial arts clubs based at the YMCA got together for a social. Hopefully, this will be a continuing event each year as many members continue to cross train in different arts. In fact, this year we have seen members compete in both Judo and Tae Kwon Do to a high level. Well done to Dan, Elis and Kai on their competition success and medals. It was lovely to be part of the Coronation Celebrations at the YMCA on 8th May 2023 which included the martial arts open day. This was very well attended and it was an honour to welcome HM Lord Lieutenant Ms Fleet JP into the dojo. Thank you Meriel for representing the club.

Members of the club have also attended various seminars. In July 2023 we were invited to train with Sifu Simon Griffiths at his Black Mountain Kung Fu Club and we very much enjoyed this. August saw us spending time perfecting Judo Katas with Sensei Ian Cardy 4th dan. , this is an ongoing process for a few members of NVMA. In September, all roads led to Aberystwyth following the kind invitation of Sensei Tony Bell 7th Dan for a hard days training with members of his club and his associates from Hampshire, led by Sensei Graham Williams 5th Dan. It was also a great pleasure to be invited by Sensei Andrew Richards, 3rd Dan to attend a sell-out seminar with Sensei Iain Abernathy in October. This was particularly of interest to those members who also train in the art of Karate, and our thanks go to Andrew for the invitation. We have managed a few sessions of inter club training with Andrew's club and this has definitely benefited all who took part- and was great fun! For something a bit different in November we tried our hands at the Asian art of Silat. We had a warm welcome at the Heads of the Valley Tang Soo Do dojang who hosted a seminar with Paduka Guru Glenn Peter Lobo. Those who attended certainly enjoyed and we all came home with fingers and toes still attached!

Club coaches have also kept their qualifications up to date by attending first aid courses and safeguarding courses.

A big thanks go to our members who support the club each week and give such a good account of themselves at these other martial arts events and competitions. You are all a credit to NVMA. None of this would have been possible though without the YMCA, who have provided such excellent facilities and support throughout what has at times been a difficult year for them. Thanks to Jess and the team for their help and support. I'm sure NVMA and the Martial Arts section of the YMCA will continue to flourish and we look forward to 2024.

**Ian East – 4th Dan**

**Neath Valley Martial Arts**

# Kung Fu

Lau Gar Wales has had another good training year; our Lau Gar Tigers class has seen a number of long-term students progressing and gaining their orange belts. In the coming year it is hoped that these students will continue to grow and acquire good skills in our style. A number of new students have started and are progressing in the early grades from beginner to white and white to blue, we are now poised for a grading in December to continue their progression up the grades. The adults' class has seen a number of beginners progress up the early belts and we hope they continue to do so in the new year with their grading in the intermediate belts. While Alun was off for a few occasional lessons it was great to welcome Justyn Taylor (first degree black sash) to the class to teach in his absence.

Nationally we have had a Lau gar Family training weekend at the Lilleshall national sports centre, The focussing on The Five Animals. The event offered excellent training but also a good social gathering as the course and accommodation was held on the campus. The main summer course in Llandudno was attended by Alun and a number of students, providing an excellent training opportunity as there were a number of senior national instructors present to provide training in small groups.

A number of Lion Dances were performed by the club in Swansea and Cardiff to celebrate the Chinese New Year, weddings and engagement parties. We also ran an event teaching Kung Fu, the Lion Dance and the Dragon Dance to members of the Chinese community at the Waterfront Museum Swansea. Those who attended thoroughly enjoyed the celebration of Chinese culture. As well as the YMCA at Neath, classes have also continued this year in Pontardawe and Llandeilo.

**Alun Morgan**





## Karate

At the start of the new year, we saw most of our students return and also some new faces. The Welsh Karate Union have adopted a new electronic register to keep a record of its students and we have 21 students currently on our books. Sadly, not all turn up regularly, but we are there for them when they can make it. Neath Karate has been joining up with our other clubs in Llantwit Major, Pencoed, Bryncethin, Maesteg and Bridgend for courses and gradings as usual. We have two students who will hopefully be grading for their Black belts next year, Tom and Kai. Ellie and myself would like to give a massive thank you again for providing such a friendly and safe environment for our students to practice their Karate. Visiting other clubs, we notice that not all venues have such good flooring and equipment to help them get the best out of their time training. Again, a massive thank you to Jessica and our YMCA family for everything you do to keep this special place functioning.

**Andrew Richards and Ellie Hinder**

## Ninjutsu

2023 has been an interesting year at the Mahoutsukai Dojo. We are still struggling to overcome the students we lost through lockdown, though those that continue to train are some of the most dedicated people I have met. We have started traveling the UK again, teaching at seminars and supporting friends. We continue to be well supported by YMCA Neath and we are very grateful for all the positive support provided. We are hoping 2024 will bring in some fresh faces and help support our Dojo and the YMCA.

We are hoping to host several seminars at YMCA Neath in 2024 and use these to promote our art.

**Merlyn**



## No Limits Ladies

We are a peer led ladies friendship and craft group based at YMCA Neath. Our aim is to improve wellbeing, bring people together and reduce isolation. Our group is volunteer run by our ladies and supported with courses and various crafts. No Limits Ladies Group is a safe space for women to attend, have a coffee and a chat and meet new people.

Shaz Hughes

## NPT Mind Money and Me

We will help you to better manage your mental health when experiencing money problems. We understand the impact on our mental health which financial strain can cause. Through working with our project, you can access individual and group support to develop both your confidence and skills to manage your mental health during financial difficulty.

Look at your relationship with money, understanding how worry, uncertainty and anxiety can play a part.

Talk about taking the first step towards goals we set together. Different ways to approach these, being kind to yourself but still aiming for results.

Understanding therapeutic spending why we do it, how it can have a place in our lives positively, but also how we can look for other things which give us the same if not more benefits to our wellbeing.

Practice how we talk about money, being able to have difficult conversations can be helpful in making positive steps towards your relationship with money.

Receive links and connection through your personal navigator to local financial support.

We have recently partnered with the YMCA to offer a free drop in at the centre, come along every Thursday 2:00 - 3:00pm.

<https://nptmind.org.uk/money-and-me>



# Platform

Platform for Families NPT service can offer a range of supportive and therapeutic interventions that meet the emotional and wellbeing needs of children, young people and their parents. The service offers support for families and their children up to 25 years of age living within the Neath Port Talbot area. All support offered will be discussed and agreed with the family during an initial assessment.

Our aim is to support children, young people and parents to improve;

- § Emotional and mental wellbeing

- § Own and family resilience

- § Lifestyles and behaviours

- § Family relationships

Types of presenting issues can include;

- § Anxiety/fear/stress/anger

- § Low confidence/assertiveness

- § Attachment

- § Bullying

- § Low self-esteem/self-worth

- § Depression/low mood

- § Dealing with emotional distress

- § Difficulty with family communications

- § Strained Relationships

Emotional wellbeing and Coping with Loss Service supports;

- § Parent and child/young person with support with emotional wellbeing

- § Improving resilience and coping skills

- § Bereavement and loss

- § Individuals affected by parental separation

- § Individuals affected by parental imprisonment

Maintaining Family Relationships Service offers;

- § Help and support for parents and their children and young people with relationship difficulties.

- § Support to improve communication and discussion

- § Building problem solving and conflict resolution skills

- § Guidance and information for children who may be at risk of danger from online activities

- § Increased awareness and knowledge of how to keep their family safe whilst engaging in online communications.

Referral Criteria: Referrals can only be made via the Neath Port Talbot Single Point of Contact (SPOC) which can be contacted on; 01639 686802 or at [spoc@npt.gov.uk](mailto:spoc@npt.gov.uk) . \*Where there is current involvement with, or if waiting for a service from CAMHS or children's services we would not duplicate these services. This is also applicable in our Family Relationship service where there are CAFCASS/court proceedings or contact disputes involved, as this is an Early Intervention and Prevention service.

**Kath Ahern**



## Play Pals Wellbeing

Hi, I'm Amy! Qualified baby massage & baby yoga instructor with a background in child development. I have a passion for all things child development and bringing people together - and am a big advocate for mental health - especially postpartum! We're all in this together! Becoming a mum over a year ago had me immersed in the baby massage and baby yoga world - the benefits for my little one were mind blowing. Through attending various classes, what I realised was us mums (and dads) all have the same struggles, same worries, same daily (or nightly!) battles... some days the only people who really get it are those also going through it. to teach baby massage and baby yoga is wonderful! The power of positive touch, connection and engagement are invaluable. There is nothing in this world more precious than your baby. Let's give them the best start!

**Amy Thomas**

## Rugby Tots

Rugby Toys have held sessions at the YMCA on a Sunday morning for a number of years now. Our fun, structured play sessions take children on a journey of sporting imagination with engaging and energetic coaches supporting them every step of the way whilst teaching how to catch, pass, kick, run with the ball and play as part of a team. Our motto is simple; "make it more fun". We do this by delivering our specifically designed programme for each age group with energy, enthusiasm and excitement. This creates an atmosphere in the class that is totally unique and engaging for parents and children alike.

## Walking Football

Our walking football sessions provide an inclusive and welcoming environment for individuals of all abilities to enjoy the beautiful game. Led by our dedicated coach, Martin Ranson, these sessions offer a unique blend of camaraderie and exercise. Martin's expertise and passion for the sport create an atmosphere where everyone feels valued and supported in their journey. We are thrilled to announce that our team recently played their first match and entered the first disability-friendly walking football tournament in Cardiff. Well done all!



# Where to find us

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