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Dear Readers,



Life is busy isn't it, but particularly during the summer months.

I find myself trying to keep multiple plates spinning. I am certain I am not alone in this.

I think it's a daily struggle for each of us to find balance in this modern world, which is why we've put together a special feature

all about balance for you to enjoy. Balance can mean different things and people have different takes on it from literal balance and how good that is for our bodies, to letting go of worrying about seeking and finding balance entirely. Whichever way you look at it, our feature is designed to help you along the way or offer you an alternative perspective.

Lots more to enjoy this month, particularly our community articles as well as featured editorials from some of our local businesses. And, don't forget, if you find yourself with a moment wondering how to fill it (especially during the school holidays), turn to our events section where you'll find a whole host of local happenings.

Enjoy this month's read and the remainder of the summer!

Hannah

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Caroline Jones

BA, LTCL, ABRSM, LWCMD

Black Mountains Recorders

Experienced players enjoying a wide range of music.

Wednesdays fortnightly 2.30pm-4.30pm, Llanfoist

Individual lessons

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Craig Ddu Recorders

A lively group exploring Renaissance to Jazz having taken recorder up again just eighteen months ago!

Thursdays fortnightly 2.30pm-4.30pm, Llanfoist

New Rusty Recorders

Did you enjoy school recorders, or would you like to learn a new fulfilling skill? Join us for musical fun!

Wednesdays fortnightly 2.30pm-4.30pm, Llanfoist

Society of Recorder Players

Third Saturday of the month, Trecastle Village Hall LD3 8UP

carolinejonesrecorders@hotmail.com

Longtown Mountain Rescue Team Braces for Busy Summer in the Black Mountains



Longtown Mountain Rescue Team 999 Emergency Services Day at Caldicot Cast

As the schools break up, summer (hopefully) kicks in and visitors head to the Black Mountains, the team are eager to see what that means in terms of call outs. After a relatively steady start to the year, which has seen a mix of call outs, training and the onboarding of new recruits, activity has picked up significantly over the past 7 weeks.

To provide some context to that, from January 1st to July 19th 2024, the team has already responded to 33 incidents, a number that is quickly approaching the total of 42 call-outs for the entirety of 2023. The summer months, particularly June and July, have witnessed a significant surge in activity, with a 129% increase in call-outs compared to the same period last year.

Behind these figures lies a diverse range of incidents that

highlight the team's versatility and dedication. LMRT has come to the aid of injured walkers, assisted horse riders and mountain bikers facing unexpected difficulties. A recent spate of missing person searches in July underscores the critical role the team plays in assisting local emergency services away from typical mountainside rescues.

In addition to this, the usual thrice monthly training sessions have kept the team busy in between. July started off with an evening session at Symonds Yat that offered practical water awareness training for the bulk of the team plus an opportunity for our qualified Swift Water Rescue Technicians to hone their skills.

We had a medical focussed session that took place around the Black Darren, on the eastern side of the Hatterall Ridge, that looked at head injuries and how best to

treat three climbers with three different injuries.

The final session of the month saw 30+ team members head to Llanthony Priory for a mountaineering and navigation exercise that tested our efficient and safe movement over what is our typical terrain, as well as testing individual endurance and speed over several hours.

Beyond training and operational duties, LMRT actively engages with the community and last month saw the team taking part in the annual 999 Emergency Services Day held at Caldicot Castle. This fantastic, engaging event gives members of the public an opportunity to meet with their local emergency services teams, learn about their work and gain a deeper understanding of the associated challenges and risks.

Longtown Mountain Rescue



MAYOR CHRIS HOLLAND

Born and raised in Abergavenny, Mayor Chris Holland has dedicated over 37 years to public service as a Community Councillor, culminating in the honour of being elected Mayor. Starting as an apprentice Bricklayer at 15, he later became a Building Inspector in 1973, serving 17 years in the role. Even at 74, he continues to work three days a week inspecting local projects. Beyond his civic duties, Mayor Chris has represented Abergavenny in hockey from a young age, earning 26 caps for Wales and competing in the European Cup in Valencia in 2023. His lifelong commitment to both community service and athletics exemplifies his dedication to Abergavenny.

PROUDLY SUPPORTING

As Abergavenny Town Mayor for 2024-25, Chris is eager to embrace the challenges and opportunities the year will bring. His chosen charities for this term are Dandelion Wishes and Sight Cymru, both of which hold special significance. Dandelion Wishes provides wishes to adults who are experiencing a mental or physical impairment or have experienced a life event which is harming their quality of life, while Sight Cymru advocates for visually impaired individuals. Chris is particularly passionate about making Abergavenny a Sight Friendly Destination, inspired by his granddaughter, who has a visual impairment.



To find out more information visit the Abergavenny Town Council website via the QR code above!



A Word From Oxfam



A special thanks goes to our extraordinary volunteers. Your dedication and hard work have been the heart and soul of our shop. Many of you have given over 20 years of service, and for that, we are eternally grateful.

Closing the Abergavenny shop was an incredibly difficult decision, driven by insurmountable and ongoing building costs. I am genuinely sorry to see our doors close, but immensely thankful for the years of support and community spirit we've experienced.

With a heavy heart, I write to express Oxfam's deepest gratitude to the incredible community of Abergavenny for their unwavering support over the past 60 years. It was with profound sadness that we closed the town's beloved shop last month.

To our generous donors, thank you for filling our shelves with beautiful items. To our loyal customers, your purchases have fuelled our fight against poverty and injustice. Your support has made a world of difference.

For those who wish to continue supporting Oxfam, please visit our stores in Monmouth, Ross-on-Wye, and Hay-on-Wye.

With much appreciation and thanks,
Lawrence Lomas – Oxfam Area Manager

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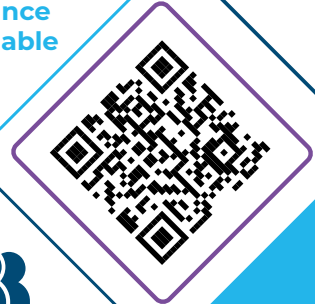
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Autistic Councillor & Autistic Mother Set Up Independent Peer Initiative for Autistic People in Abergavenny



life, and becoming a mother for the first time recently, I have benefitted from finding connections with people I can identify with. I believe that Kyle (Eldridge) and I can offer an inclusive, friendly and enjoyable social space which has been missing for autistic adults within the Abergavenny community“.

The group has been set up as part of the National Autistic Society's Peer Support Club project, which aims to support autistic adults to form and run their own social groups in Wales.

We know from our research that eight out of ten autistic adults will experience feelings of loneliness and isolation. By setting up or just attending a peer social group, you will be in a safe environment where you can be yourself and meet others with similar interests and life experience. Feedback from our existing groups show that attending a social peer support group can increase well-being, reduce feelings of isolation and increase social engagement.

The National Autistic Society has a set of resources to support individuals to set up their own peer support groups. You can find it here: <https://www.autism.org.uk/what-we-do/welsh-peer-support-groups/toolkit>. You can also contact the project team directly at peersupportwales@nas.org.uk

To join and additional queries:

- <https://www.facebook.com/groups/777847334503088>
- Kyleeldridge97@gmail.com
- Emmajayneshores@hotmail.com

“Autism doesn't come with an instruction guide. It comes with a family who will never give up.”

Kyle Jamie Eldridge

An autistic councillor and autistic mother are launching an independent peer-to-peer initiative for autistic people in Abergavenny to provide a safe space for autistic people to have fun and network together.

Councillor Kyle Jamie Eldridge, who represents Park Ward on Abergavenny's Town Council, and Emma Jayne Shores will run the Abergavenny Spectrum Social (ASS) at various venues in Abergavenny.

Councillor Kyle Jamie Eldridge

who represents Park Ward on Abergavenny's Town Council, said: “In coming out of a very dark place recently (A mental breakdown), I am ready to devote my energy and skills to giving that independent alternative to Autistic people in Abergavenny, in order for them to take their right and just place in the community as their authentic selves“.

Emma Jayne Shores who recently became a mother for the first time to a boy, said: “Having been diagnosed as autistic later on in

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Last month, Abergavenny singer-songwriter Frankie Wesson was nominated for an award at the Love Live Music Awards in Newport. The awards night put on by Newport City Radio hosted a wealth of local talent with a range of award categories including performances by up and coming musicians in South Wales.



In the final award of the night 'Best Song' sponsored by Happiful Magazine, Frankie had

tough competition from four other talented local songwriters. However, amidst the anticipation and excitement, it was Frankie who ultimately took home the award. Her heartfelt lyrics and captivating melody resonated with the judges and audience alike, earning her this well-deserved recognition.

The award winning single 'Delicate' which was released on 27th of July was recorded at AR Studios in Herefordshire.

Frankie said: "It was a huge honour to win the Best Song award, it was a great evening surrounded by lots of very talented friends old and new. The music scene here in South Wales is fantastic and something I'm really proud to be a part of. My song Delicate is something different for me musically. I wanted to create a soft, intimate and cinematic soundscape to help convey the deep emotions

in the song. I'm telling the person I love, 'I love you, I'm here for you and I'll be delicate with you while you get through this'. I'm super grateful that it resonated with the judges and hope that it resonates with listeners at home too".

You can listen to the new single Delicate on all platforms from July 27th and look out for the accompanying music video following the release. Follow Frankie Wesson on social media to keep up with her music.





Synergy, an award-winning male voice close harmony acapella choir are offering a free four week long 'Learn to Sing' course starting on Thursday 12th September between 7pm and 8:30pm at the choir's rehearsal venue, The St Michaels Centre, Abergavenny, NP7 5UD. This will be followed by three further Thursday sessions and culminating in an evening concert on Saturday 5th October.

find out which part their voice best suits. During the course singers will learn:

- Vocal warm ups
- Singing technique and exercises
- Learning two songs from Synergy's extensive repertoire to perform with Synergy in the evening Concert in October.

We can assure you that you don't need to read music or be an accomplished solo singer, its

our blend of parts that gives us our unique sound different to a traditional Male Voice Choir. Just come along, have fun and enjoy the experience without obligation. You will be made most welcome.

To register your interest just fill out the online section at www.synergysingers.co.uk/lts or contact our Chairman Grant on 07957 872996. Check out events on the website to see and hear us perform.

Synergy, led by our talented young Musical Director Owen McCarthy, are fresh from recent success winning best UK choir under 40 voices at the prestigious *Cornish International Male Voice Choir Competition* in May held at Truro Cathedral, scoring highly and coming 3rd place in the overall competition including larger choirs. This is the third occasion Synergy have won the accolade repeating success in 2011 and 2013.

Boasting only 25 singers on stage, Synergy are looking to use this success to expand and are seeking new voices to supplement the 4 parts that make up their sound: Tenors, Leads, Baritones and Basses.

This free course to males over the age of 18 offers the opportunity to sing on stage with Synergy and

Our Plot Creative Community Sessions at Peak Cymru



Peak Cymru is an arts organisation based in the Black Mountains. We work from two sites: The Old School, Crickhowell and a small reading room on Platform 2 of Abergavenny train station. Through young people's programmes (14-30 years), community collaborations and artist residencies, we explore the unique qualities of our region including the Black Mountains, the Welsh Borders and Vale of Usk.

This summer, we launched Our Plot, a community gardening group for local adults led by gardener Eileen Williams-Sweet. It's a friendly group who meet at drop-in sessions fortnightly on Thursday afternoons to tend to the vegetables and flowers they have planted in raised beds on the former playground and car park at the Old School, Crickhowell. As they work towards growing the ingredients of an autumn harvest feast, the group are also being guided by a variety of visiting creative practitioners. They have learnt to weave plant supports from willow with Wyldwood Willow, and are working with Melanie Made Mud to create ceramic plates, bowls and cups with pressed leaf designs for the community meal, as well as sessions through the summer including natural textile dying and fermenting and pickling vegetables.

Alongside this, we are running a parallel programme, Play/Ground, a series of creative workshops for 14-18 year olds to experiment with

artistic and design practices in relation to the community garden. Hosted by artist and designer Sahra Hersi, and working alongside a variety of creative practitioners, horticulturalists and ecologists, the group of young people are meeting every month to imagine and explore the different aspects of a community garden.

We look forward to sharing this growing space with as many people as possible, and to celebrate nature, creativity and collaboration in all its forms. To get in involved with either group, please email polly@peak.cymru. Both groups are free to attend, and each Young Person taking in Play/Ground is offered a bursary to support travel and expenses.

This project is supported by Powys Making a Difference Fund, The Ashley Family Foundation and Awards for All.

Polly Hunter

OUR PLOT

Do you live in or near Crickhowell?
Want to join a community gardening group?

Our Plot - Ein Darn o Dir - is a new drop-in group for adults of all ages to come together and learn new skills with gardener Eileen Williams-Sweet. Over the summer, we're planting and growing an experimental community garden, culminating in an Autumn harvest feast using ceramics and table linen made in the workshops.

Upcoming Thursday sessions, 1:30-4:30pm
Sesiynau i ddod ar ddydd Iau, 1:30-4:30yp

25th July Ceramics workshop	22nd August Natural dying workshop	October dates and community feast to be confirmed
8th August Ceramics workshop	12th September Fermentation and pickling workshop	Croeso i bawb

EMAIL: polly@peak.cymru peakcymru.org/ourplot CALL: 01873 811579

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Cooking (8yrs+)
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AUGUST EVENTS CALENDAR

4TH AUGUST
Outdoor Theatre at Abergavenny Castle
THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST
7pm, Abergavenny Castle Grounds

4TH, 9TH-11TH, 17TH-18TH AUGUST
BRECON JAZZ FESTIVAL



Organised over three weekends in August, with 6 days of music and fun as well as 20 ticketed concerts! For tickets visit www.breconjazz.org/tickets

5TH-7TH AUGUST
DANCE SUMMER CAMP
Dance Blast, Abergavenny

5TH AUGUST
ABERGAVENTNY COMMUNITY CENTRE HOLIDAY CLUB
Pottery Painting
Ages 2-12+
See advert on Page 18 for details

6TH AUGUST AND EVERY TUESDAY
CRAFTING 4 CANCER
Weekly Craft and support group
10:30am - 1:30pm, Tith Barn, Abergavenny. All welcome, free to participate

6TH & 8TH AUGUST
ABERGAVENTNY COMMUNITY CENTRE HOLIDAY CLUB
Cooking (8yrs +)
See Page 18 for details

7TH & 12TH AUGUST
ABERGAVENTNY COMMUNITY CENTRE HOLIDAY CLUB
Storytelling & Puppets (6-11 yrs)
See Page 18 for details

8TH-9TH AUGUST
AERIAL SUMMER CAMP



Dance Blast, Abergavenny
<https://www.dance-blast.org/>

8TH AUGUST
CERAMICS WORKSHOP
A creative community session at Peak Cymru, Old School Crickhowell
See Advert on Page 17 for more info

9TH AUGUST
Llanfoist Village Hall Film Night
THE HOLDOVERS (CERT 15)
A cranky history teacher at a prep school is forced to remain on campus over the holidays with a grieving cook and a troubled student who has no place to go. Doors open 7pm, film starts 7:30pm. Tickets £5 adults, £3 children. Bar available. Llanfoist Village Hall, Church Lane, Llanfoist

10TH AUGUST
ABERGAVENTNY ALLOTMENT SOCIETY SUMMER SHOW
Competition showcasing our Allotment produce with Vegetable, Fruit, Flowers, Children and Photography classes.

EVENTS
Raffle & Refreshments.
1pm-4.30pm, Abergavenny Garden Centre, Church Lane, Llanfoist

10TH AUGUST
ABERGAVENTNY CRAFT FAIR
9am-4pm, Market Hall, Abergavenny

10TH AUGUST
Monmouthshire Hardy Plant Society
David Wyndham Lewis will give a talk entitled 'Ring the Changes' on the evolution of his garden.
2.30pm, Little Mill Hall, NP4 0HE
Members £4, non-members £6

11TH AUGUST
Outdoor Theatre at Abergavenny Castle
THE ADVENTURES OF DR DOLITTLE



6pm, Abergavenny Castle Grounds

12TH, 13TH, 14TH, & 15TH AUGUST
ABERGAVENTNY COMMUNITY CENTRE HOLIDAY CLUB
Art Club (7+ yrs)
See Page 18 for details

18TH AUGUST
MONMOUTHSHIRE SHOW
A family friendly, one day Agricultural Show in the heart of the beautiful Wye Valley. Lots to see and do: Main Ring displays, Livestock, Live Music, Crafts & Shopping, Food Festival, Food Courts and so much more.
From 9am, Redbrook Road, Monmouth, NP25 4LG
Monmouthshow.co.uk

19TH AUGUST
GAVENNY GARDEN CLUB PRESENTATION
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22ND AUGUST NATURAL DYING WORKSHOP

A creative community session at Peak Cymru, Old School Crickhowell
See Advert on Page 17 for more info

31ST AUGUST

Outdoor Theatre at Abergavenny Castle
THE GONDOLIERS



7pm, Abergavenny Castle Grounds

3RD SEPTEMBER

Book-ish Event
**ALIS HAWKINS
THE SKELETON ARMY**

7.30pm, Book-ish Loft, Crickhowell
See Page 42 for prices and booking info

4TH SEPTEMBER

ABERGAVENNY OVER 50'S GROUP
We invite Nicola from Greyhound Rescue and Rehoming Centre to give an informative talk and to tell us about their efforts and fundraising for these animals.
2pm, Trinity Church Hall, Baker St, Abergavenny. All Welcome.

5TH SEPTEMBER

Book-ish Event
**BARBARA ERSKINE
THE STORY SPINNER**

2pm, Manor Hotel, Crickhowell
See Page 42 for prices and booking info

7TH SEPTEMBER ABERGAVENNY CARNIVAL



Parade starting at 12pm at Baker Street, parading through town and finishing at Bailey Park where there will be lots of free activities for children and adults to try. Along with a Fun Fair and craft stalls.

12TH SEPTEMBER

LEARN TO SING WITH SYNERGY

7pm, St Michael's Centre, Abergavenny. See page 16 for info

12TH SEPTEMBER

FERMENTATION AND PICKLING WORKSHOP

A creative community session at Peak Cymru, Old School Crickhowell
See Advert on Page 17 for more info

14TH SEPTEMBER

USK SHOW

From 9am, Usk Showgrounds, Llandenny
Uskshow.co.uk

15TH SEPTEMBER

AUTUMN DUCK RACE

1000 ducks head down the river at Swan Meadows in Abergavenny to help the dogs at Hope Rescue. The ducks will launch from the road bridge over the river, then travel downstream, navigating boulders, steep drops and pond weeds

EVENTS

before being collected by our team of Hope Rescue volunteers (don't forget your wellies guys!). Each duck costs £1 and the first across the finish line is the winner.
12pm, Swan Meadow, Abergavenny

15TH SEPTEMBER

**GOYTRE WHARF
LATE SUMMER FAIR**

10.30am, Goytre Wharf

19TH SEPTEMBER

**Book-ish Event
PETER JAMES – ONE OF US IS DEAD**

7:30pm, Blaenavon Workmen's Hall
See Page 42 for prices and booking info

21ST-22ND SEPTEMBER

ABERGAVENNY FOOD FESTIVAL



Visit www.abergavennyfoodfestival.com for info and ticketing.

SHARE YOUR EVENTS

Go to thefocus.wales/calendar

A Note about Events
All the events listed are correct at the time of publishing. We strongly recommend double checking dates and times prior to attending an event to ensure these have not changed. Focus Magazines accepts no responsibility for errors or omissions

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Put Balance in the Bin!



I'm a working parent in a neurodivergent family so transitioning from the school routine, adjusting my working schedule, juggling vacations, additional social expectations, increased shopping, feeding & housekeeping, AND feeling I ought to enjoy this time- can be a lot.

Ergo, my hot take is to throw the idea of Balance in the bin, especially if it makes you feel like you're failing again.

Try exploring some tools which help realise your desired life, by identifying how you want TO FEEL, ahead of things TO DO. Feelings of choice, agency, joy, connection, energy- these often matter more than a vague, imposed ideal.

First, lean into things as they

are. Mindfully accepting life in all its messy unfolding. Most of us are more blessed than we appreciate.

Automate all you can- bills, dentist appts, online shopping (yes you CAN eat the same meals for a month-it's fine!). Stick things on repeat so they require minimal energy from you. Similarly, outsource whatever you can afford- cleaner, dog walker, handyperson. Consider them investments in your sanity. If that's not affordable, organise a body doubling date... quite often having another person in our space can motivate us into clearing those backlogged tasks... garden clean up plus Summer BBQ?

Set a 20 minute timer for EVERYTHING. Cooking, cleaning, emails, playing with the kids, booking that weekend break. If

the thought of starting something overwhelms you, AND then you get sucked in & can't stop- set the timer.

Apply this to leisure activities too- especially if you feel guilty for 'indulging' in relaxation... permission to just do 20 minutes can be very freeing. It can also help avoid choice paralysis- that run, coffee date, library, Netflix binge, new book...? Remember that there is more time! So choose one for 20 minutes & either carry on, or switch. If you're addicted to multitasking, lean into that shamelessly! Have a podcast on while you walk, watch TV while riding your stationary bike, get the kids off their devices & tire the dog simultaneously by setting up a Crufts course.

Embody how you want to feel by choosing process over product. Let go of an idealised end result... a clean house at the end of a fun family day might be delusional. Not every task has to be completed today.

Find Balance across the whole of life you're curating, striving for flow rather than struggling for perfectly weighted scales. Consider it across a hopefully long lifetime. Sometimes work, sickness, or family dominate, often it's just the humdrum of daily do. But committing to whatever connects you most to the emotional quality of your life (for me it's Peace Over Productivity), will eventually give permission for what you really find worthwhile.

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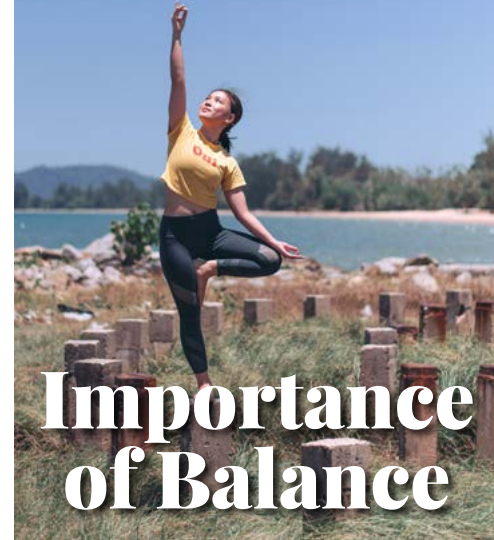
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Importance of Balance

According to the NHS, around 1 in 3 adults over the age of 65 who live at home will fall at least once per year. Maintaining balance is crucial, especially as we age and it is within our power to improve it. One of the most remembered tips from the late doctor Michael Mosley was standing on one leg whilst cleaning your teeth. It's a tiny thing, but accessible to so many of us and well worth incorporating into our daily routine if we want to help prevent unnecessary falls and associated injuries.

But it needn't stop there. Making all of our muscles stronger around the pelvis and spine, not just the legs, will give us an even better chance of preventing a fall. Having good balance means that we can control our body's position whether moving or standing still and the best overall exercise to help, from my experience, is Pilates. It will make us stronger, more flexible and ultimately more stable. Working on specific muscles to tone and strengthen them while keeping the core engaged helps us to have better control of our body and therefore our balance, and any good Pilates class will incorporate balance exercises as part of the session.

Here are some simple balance challenges you can try at home. Remember that working on your balance should always be difficult and feel like you might wobble. By challenging the body in this way, you will gain strength and endurance and slowly start to see improvements. When trying the exercises below, remember these simple tips:

- Have the back of a chair or windowsill nearby that you can easily grab hold of if you feel unsteady.

BALANCE

- If possible, try not to keep putting your foot down but rather hold onto to chair when you wobble. This will fatigue the leg more quickly and help strengthen the muscles.
 - Try not to grip onto muscles or lock the knee but allow things to be soft and move (if you are too tense you also may notice you are holding your breath!).
 - Make sure your hip joint is in line with the middle of the knee and second toe, and that your kneecap is facing forwards.
 - Keep your weight in the middle of your foot
1. Can you stand with both feet touching together and maintain your balance easily for 1 minute?
 2. Can you stand on one leg easily for at least 30 seconds?
 3. Can you stand on one leg easily for 30 seconds with your eyes closed?
 4. Can you move your trunk forwards and backwards or rotate your spine while standing on one leg for 30 seconds or more?

Try to practice daily and remember that consistency is the key to success in anything we do. Little and often, bit by bit, change starts to happen.

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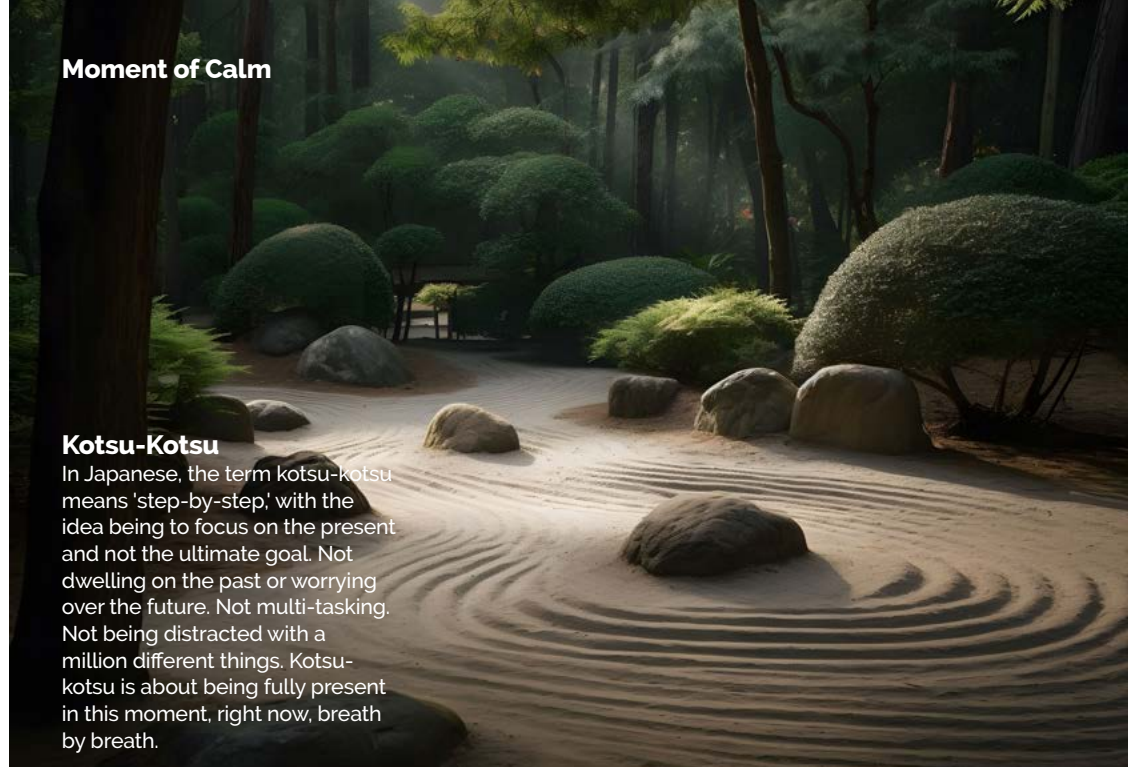
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10 Tips to Help you Achieve a Healthier Work Life Balance



Do you feel constantly overworked and burnt out? Have you neglected personal relationships and hobbies? Are you failing to prioritise self-care, like getting adequate sleep and leisure time? It might be time to consider how to strike a better work-life balance. We've put together a short, non-exhaustive list of ideas that open up the possibility of improving your work-life balance.

1. Plan ahead:

Plan ahead to combine work activities with leisure, social, or fitness activities. Try taking a call outside (if noise permits) or invite a friend over to work with you.

2. Block your time:

Designate blocks of time for different tasks, such as checking and responding to messages.

3. Embrace the way the brain works:

Our brain works best in short, focused bursts. Block out distractions so you can make the most of this time, and then stop for a break.

4. End work at a certain time:

Establishing this boundary and sticking to it is important. Set a time to end work for the day, and reinforce it by powering down work-related devices, locking your office, or scheduling something afterward.

5. Use technology to help you:

Use an app to block websites that might distract you during work and then block work tools after hours. Keep at least one device work-free if you can, so that you can disconnect completely.

6. Go out for lunch:

Even if you're working from home, go out from time to time. The change of pace this encourages is refreshing in itself and, if you tend to eat on the run or at your desk, it's a good practice in being more present.

7. Take time off:

Don't work through illness. Personal time, holidays, and bereavement leave are vital and important ways to nourish your well-being.

8. Communicate with your manager:

It's all too easy to feel like we're not doing enough. Talk to your manager about what work is a priority and, if there is too much to do, open up a discussion with them about streamlining tasks or taking on additional help in the form of more workers.

9. Find something you love outside of work:

If you have something that you're excited about doing after work, it will make it easier to disconnect from work messages or end your day at a predetermined time. Our hobbies boost our energy and vitality. When we play and feel creative, we bring our fresh selves back to work.



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August Weather Outlook

by Jonathan Powell



Following a July that offered alternating passages of warm and sunny weather, then cooler, cloudier conditions with rain, August looks set to provide a continuation of what has become summer's general theme for 2024. Again, as with July, we can expect spells of glorious sunshine and blue skies, with accompanying warm to very warm temperatures. However, with areas of high pressure unlikely to anchor down long enough to maintain these conditions, low pressure will provide cooler and wetter weather into what is expected to be another mixed month. With modeling suggesting that September may see us move at a hasten pace into autumn, August looks like offering the last chance for any seasonal warmth of note. August is expected to reflect on or around the average for both rainfall and temperature.

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New Mural Unveiled in Bailey Park

Local artist, Danielle Farrington, with her mural

The Gwent Green Grid and Abergavenny Town Council collaborated on a project to enhance an area of Bailey Park in Abergavenny with a new art installation.

Drawing on SPF (shared prosperity funding) funding in Monmouthshire, they commissioned local artist Danielle Farrington to create a mural on the 'big wall' in the park.

The project aims to highlight the rich biodiversity of our natural environment in the area.

The latest mural depicts plants and pollinators such as daisies, rosehip, orange tip butterfly and hoverfly; all found naturally growing and living in the surrounding area of the park.

Bailey Park now features some vibrant murals on walls that were previously bare around the area.

This beautiful, yet sometimes overlooked, corner of the park is a perfect spot for picnicking and enjoying the benefits of sitting in nature. It is hoped that local people will explore this area and enjoy the artwork.

This public realm improvement project has been funded by Shared Prosperity Funding through the Gwent Green Grid Partnership. The repair of the wall was funded by the Micro-Geography Fund. Gwent Green Grid worked in partnership with Abergavenny Town Council to get the project underway.

It forms part of a wider, regional project which aims to address the climate and nature emergencies by improving the quality of green spaces in urban and rural areas across Gwent and enhancing the environment's resilience for both wildlife and people.

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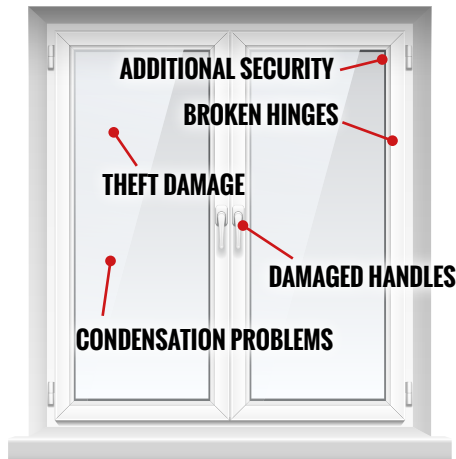


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Labels are for Jars

"Diagnosis is a trap."
~ Dr Judy Sedgeman



Since it was first written in 1952, the 'bible of mental disorders' — the natively-titled *Diagnostic & Statistical Manual (or DSM)* — has grown in size. Considerably. The first edition described just over a hundred conditions (which already seems like a lot, to me), while the *DSM-5*, from 2022, contains 298.

What are we to make of this miserable tripling? Are we all becoming more mentally unwell? Have we made such strides in our understanding of the human mind, that this ballooning of the figures represents pioneering advancements in the field of science?

No, and no.

Let's be perfectly clear: diagnoses have been made up by human minds. They don't exist in nature. This isn't to say that people don't experience distressing symptoms, and don't need help; nor is it to deny that, regrettably, we live in a society where *getting* that help often depends on being *given* a diagnosis.

No, we're just looking at the human condition here, which consists of us moving through life's circumstances, moment by moment, and the mind creating a picture of what those circumstances are, and what they mean.

Each moment's picture that's created by the mind has a feeling to it, a bit like the scenes of a film. Sometimes they're funny, sometimes they're sad and sometimes they're really scary.

Now, none of this is remotely a problem when we maintain perspective and stay in touch with the fact that our feelings are just a reflection of the pictures being created; a drama, being played out on the screen of our minds.

From this standpoint, resting in our true nature, we're watching the drama unfold, rather than being in it.

But when we *lose* that perspective and start believing the pictures and the mind's stories to be true, we assume the starring role and completely forget it's all just a passing show. We analyse, ruminate, create meaning, scare ourselves and innocently think ourselves further and further away from our true nature.

Understandably, at some point, deep inside this drama that looks so, so real, the mind pipes up to suggest that maybe there's something fundamentally wrong with us. And if we believe *that* thought too, we might seek help from a professional. They agree, consult their DSM, choose the closest label for our particular human experience, and hey presto, we have ourselves a diagnosis.

Now, diagnoses aren't *wrong* in and of themselves. They're just descriptions of groups of symptoms, that other people have experienced too. If you've been muddling along all alone for ages, and an authority figure tells you *No, these are common feelings* — look, we've given them a *name!* then just knowing that might, in itself, bring great relief.

Indeed, if a diagnosis helps you to stop thinking about yourself and the problems that the mind creates, then hurrah! Things will improve, and as you become less and less bothered by your insecurities, you may even come to the realisation that you never did 'have' a diagnosis in the first place; that you, like everyone, are perfectly whole already.

But when you *identify* with the transient cluster of thoughts and feelings the doctors have called a 'diagnosis', that's when it becomes a trap: a real, solid thing, that it looks like you're stuck with for life.

For years I believed there was something fundamentally wrong with me because I never could seem to find my place in this world, and I never stuck at things. During my deepest moments of introspection on this particular drama, I'd probably have qualified for a diagnosis.

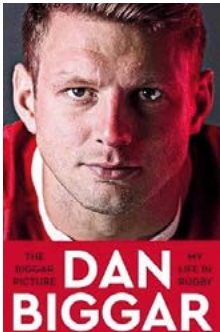
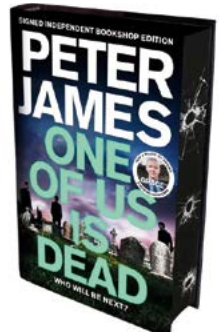
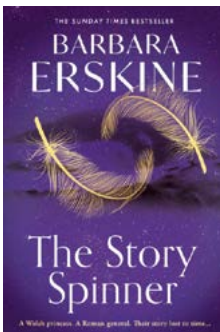
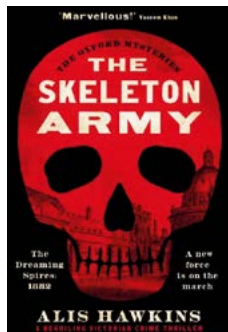
But then someone taught me all about the nature of thought and I had the insight that, *Oh, there's nothing wrong with me! We just all feel like this from time to time.* And that particular drama — along with many others — just went away.

At the very root of *all* diagnoses, there's only really *one* mental 'disorder', and that's our innocent misuse of thought, against ourselves. So why not fully embrace your diagnostic label of 'being human', stop taking your thinking so seriously and go live the beautiful life that's been waiting for you, all along.

I'm hopeful that we'll get there as a species, eventually. Who knows, the DSM-10 might have just the one entry?

Dr Giles P Croft gilespcroft.com
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If you'd like to start your day with a quick, light-hearted reminder of how your mind works and how being human is ok, then sign up to my FREE Daily Reminders newsletter here: <https://gilespcroft.com/newsletter>



{BOOK•ISH}

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Book Recommendations

This month's recommendations from the Book-ish Booksellers guides us towards achieving balance in our everyday lives

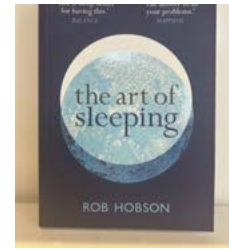


The Gentle Art of Tramping

Stephen Graham

£12.99

Know how to tramp and you know how to live... Know how to meet your fellow-wanderer, how to be passive to the beauty of nature and how to be active to its wildness and its rigour. Originally published in 1926, The Gentle Art of Tramping is a guide for anyone who has dreamed of taking to the road with nothing more than a bag full of essentials and big ideas. It gives guidance on walking, being open to discovery and being kind - advice as relevant now as it was then.



The Art of Sleeping

Rob Hobson

£8.99

We're bombarded with confusing and contradictory advice about achieving a better night's sleep. So, what's the secret? The Art of Sleeping combines the latest scientific research, expert advice, and Rob's own tricks and tips about dealing with insomnia to create a concise, practical, and engaging handbook on achieving better sleep. By exploring the three key pillars of sleep: behaviour, environment, and diet (BED), readers will find themselves equipped with techniques to aid sleep and relaxation, and to live a happier, calmer, and more successful life.



Enchantment: Reawakening Wonder in an Exhausted Age

Katherine May

£9.99

Feeling bone-tired, anxious and overwhelmed by the rolling news cycle and the pandemic age, Katherine May seeks to unravel the threads of a life wound too tightly. Could there be another way to live - one that feels more meaningful, more grounded in the places beneath our feet? One that would allow

us to feel more connected, more rested and at ease, even as seismic changes unfold on the planet? Craving a different path, May explores the restorative properties of the natural world and begins to rekindle her sense of wonder. It is a journey that takes her from sacred wells to wild moors, from cradling seas to starfalls. Through deliberate attention and ritual, she finds nourishment and a more hopeful relationship to the world around her.

Time Runs Like a River

Emma Carlisle

£12.99

Rivers can be fast-flowing or still, raging or calm, just like us. This lyrical picture book from the award-winning artist Emma Carlisle explores the concepts of time and change through the ebb and flow of a river. From the fleeting flash of a kingfisher to slow grinding of pebbles, this beautiful book encourages readers to notice the big and small things happening in nature, as well as reflecting on things which have come and gone, and those yet to be enjoyed. With themes of mindfulness and nature, the book also includes non-fiction spreads at the back of the book which can be shared with children.



The Science of Happiness

Professor Bruce Hood

£22

In The Science of Happiness, world-leading psychologist and happiness expert Bruce Hood demonstrates that the key to happiness is not self-care but connection. He presents seven simple but life-changing lessons to break negative thought patterns and re-connect with the things that really matter. Grounded in decades of studies in neuroscience and developmental psychology, this book tells a radical new story about the roots of wellbeing and the obstacles that lie in our path. With clear, practical takeaways throughout, Professor Hood demonstrates how we can all harness the findings of this science to re-wire our thinking and transform our lives.



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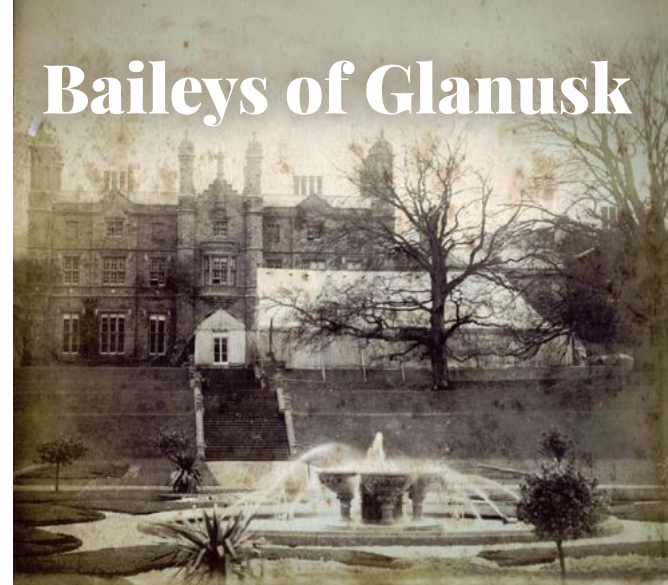


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Baileys of Glanusk



Nant-y-glo ironworks were key to Joseph Bailey's wealth but Crickhowell was where he chose to live. Helen Morgan from Abergavenny Local History Society reports.

Joseph came from Suffolk, the son of a farmer and Susannah Crawshay, but in 1810 inherited a share of Cyfarthfa ironworks from his uncle Richard Crawshay. He sold this legacy and bought, first, Nant-y-glo ironworks and then those in Beaufort.

Soon he and his brother, Crawshay, became wealthy on the backs of the thousands of men labouring in their ironworks and mines, says Eliane Wigzell, co-author of Great Houses of Crickhowell. By 1815 Joseph was able to buy the Glanusk estate. Robert Lugar who had just completed Cyfarthfa Castle designed the new mansion comprising 49 rooms including a ballroom. Glanusk Park with its lodges

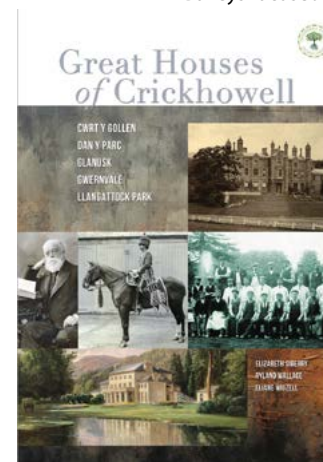
and tower bridge was, in short, an ostentatious country seat for a man with aspirations. Joseph continued to expand his property portfolio and, through his links with the Duke of Beaufort, entered parliament in 1835. By now his son Joseph junior was also entering politics, and became an MP until his untimely death in 1850. Neither was diligent. Indeed Joseph senior was described as "notable only in the faculty of silence". Instead the Baileys focused on helping Tory landowners to maintain high

bread prices to the detriment of the working class.

This left just one goal remaining for this "wealthy commoner"—social status. In 1839 he bought a mansion in Belgrave Square, London. Before long his wife had been presented at Court who, in turn, presented her daughter. They kept a good cellar and were part of the London social scene. In 1852 Joseph senior became a baronet and left estate valued at nearly £600,000, equivalent to £639 million today, when he died in 1858. His widow moved to London but his heir and grandson Joseph Russell Bailey chose to make Glanusk his home. He was more active in politics than his father and grandfather. In 1899 he became the first Lord Glanusk.

Decline and dilapidation set in following both world wars. When the third Lord Glanusk died in 1948 the title passed to his cousin but his wife and daughter inherited Glanusk Park. Without funds to restore the house, his widow decided that demolition was the only option.

Eliane Wigzell's talk at Hay Castle for Brecknock History Month on the Baileys of Glanusk - from Ironmasters to Landed Gentry on September 19th starts at 7pm. (www.haycastletrust.org). Lectures at the Borough Theatre resume on September 18th: See abergavennylocalhistorysociety.org.uk.



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PUZZLES SPOT THE DIFFERENCE



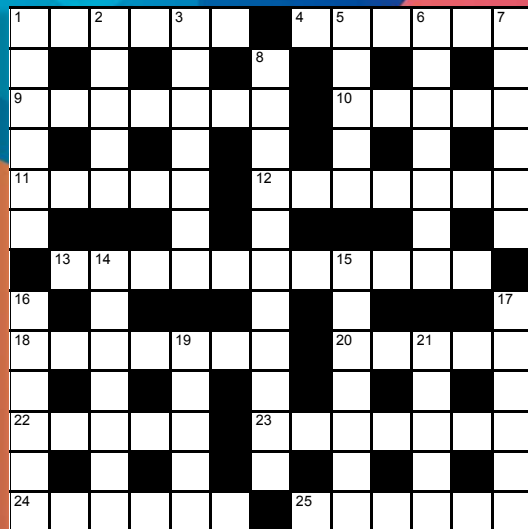
Quick Crossword

ACROSS

- 1 Deprive of food (6)
- 4 Scribble (6)
- 9 Complicated (7)
- 10 Meal of raw vegetables (5)
- 11 Additional (5)
- 12 Exactly alike (7)
- 13 Meeting (11)
- 18 Down-payment (7)
- 20 End of day (5)
- 22 Type of oil (5)
- 23 Result (7)
- 24 Process (6)
- 25 Holds firmly (6)

DOWN

- 1 Private (6)
- 2 Allow to enter (5)
- 3 Krakatoa (7)
- 5 Beginning (5)
- 6 Sea mammal (7)
- 7 Not youngest (6)
- 8 Test (11)
- 14 Young dogs (7)
- 15 Hideous beast (7)
- 16 Fools (6)
- 17 Speaks (6)
- 19 Kind of turnip (5)
- 21 Increases in size (5)



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