

CORONAVIRUS

Community's spirit shining

AS we enter the last month of the year, it's clear 2020 has been challenging for all of us.

Communities across Wales have faced the threat of coronavirus and experienced something many thought we never would in our lifetime.

Swansea author David Jones has published a

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book looking at how one Swansea community faced up to the pandemic during lockdown.

The people of Cwmbwrla came together to meet the challenge in different ways, each of them

a source of pride.

The book, called *Circling the Square*; Cwmbwrla, Coronavirus and Community, tells their stories.

It delves into the personal histories and family histories of local residents, reflects on the places that have become invaluable community hubs and

honours the people who stepped up and supported their neighbours during this year's coronavirus crisis.

David said: "The idea behind the book is simple; history isn't made exclusively by the famous and the powerful.

"In their own ways, the people whose daily acts of

kindness and quiet courage improve the lives of those around them are making history too.

"The pandemic had a notable effect on many small businesses in the area, forcing their prolonged closure and jeopardising their futures.

"People who were compelled to socially isolate found it difficult to cope with the lack of human contact and many families found themselves in an awkward financial position.

"Luckily our community leaders have worked tirelessly to address these problems, led by Emma Shears, a local area coordinator who has done a remarkable job of bringing people together to support those in need.

"When you spend time talking to people - and more importantly listening to them - their stories emerge." He added: "People were happy to be interviewed for the book but many of them initially protested that 'I haven't really got anything to tell you' or 'I'm not really doing anything to help'.

"It didn't take long to realise that they were being far too modest."

Talking about their family histories made it clear to David that Cwmbwrla is a place where children are proud of their parents and parents are proud of their children. And that, he said, was certainly something worth celebrating.

A chapter within the book called *Finding Our Way Home* tells the story of a remarkable group of women who started up an emergency food resource as the nationwide lockdown came into effect at the end of March.

They realised that many local families would struggle to put meals on the table in 2020 and set about building up a supply that could be shared with those who needed it.

Initially the supply came from the volunteers, led by residents Amina Jamal and Adella Pritchard. When the call went out for additional donations, the generosity of local people brought renewed stocks.

In time that generosity was supplemented by official funding, and Cwmbwrla found this pop-up foodbank of sorts became a crucial hub to help each other weather the Covid-19 storm.

Approximately 30 households were supported with food parcels each week over the initial



The community of Cwmbwrla in Swansea.
Image: Google Maps

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- Swansea author David Jones



Kevin, Andrea Delgado and family.



Emma Shears, Cwmbwrla local area coordinator.



six months that the food resource was in operation.

An average of 232 bags of good quality, nutritious food were distributed in each weekly parcel, benefiting a total of 116 people.

It was, quite simply, a lifeline for those with diminished incomes who were confined to home.

The need still exists, so

the food resource is still active and people are taking care of each other as we approach Christmas.

David said: "The individuals who've stepped up in 2020 aren't wealthy people. They are working women and men with their own problems to solve and their own families to support, but they've



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and keeping them healthy and she's still doing it now.

"Lisa's husband, Dai, and her entire family have joined her in becoming true community champions. If you ask Lisa she'll tell you she isn't doing anything special.

"She's doing something very special, and she's just one of the Covid-19 heroes whose unselfishness is making other people's lives better in Cwmbwrla."

The chapter, A Two Way Street, introduces readers to Kevin Delgado, who arrived in Swansea with his family in January.

Kevin left his native El Salvador to seek asylum in the UK and he's shown as a perfect example of how immigrants can integrate into their local community, quickly becoming popular and valued.

David said: "We got an early indication of Kevin's community spirit when he saw a BBC Wales report about a programme offering help to new arrivals in the country."

Kevin immediately put his name forward, not to receive help but to give it. He believed his good English and fluent Spanish could help others struggling to communicate.

David said: "He was pleasantly surprised to learn that the programme was there for his benefit, and that support was readily available to help his family settle in as comfortably as possible.

"It was a reminder that in Swansea, his own kindness would be reciprocated."

The Delgado family's 2020 experience has shown Swansea's true face as a place of welcome and inclusion. The people of Cwmbwrla have opened their arms to Kevin, his wife Andrea and their children Emily, Andres and Emma, and rightly so.

The pandemic has had an effect on local traders and in the community's own small way it is trying to help with that.

David said: "As well as featuring local businesses in the book we're also selling copies at local outlets at a discounted rate.

"The book retails at £5.95 a copy and if you buy one from a local cafe, shop or pub and make an additional purchase of any kind, it costs £5.

"We've benefited from the support of community leaders including Swansea East MP Carolyn Harris and councillors Peter Black, Chris Holley and Graham Thomas.

"Local author David

Brayley contributed an article and Brynhyfryd-born musician Mal Pope wrote the foreword.

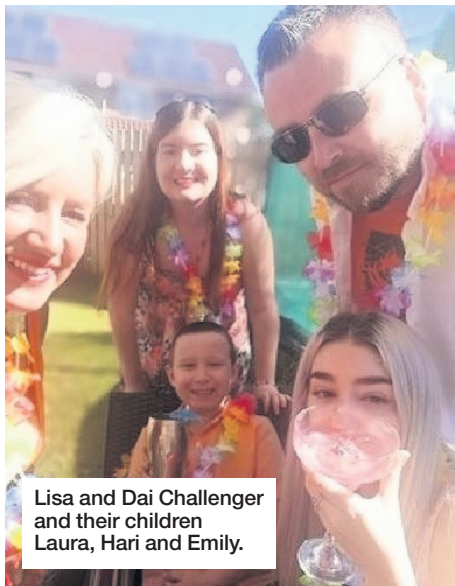
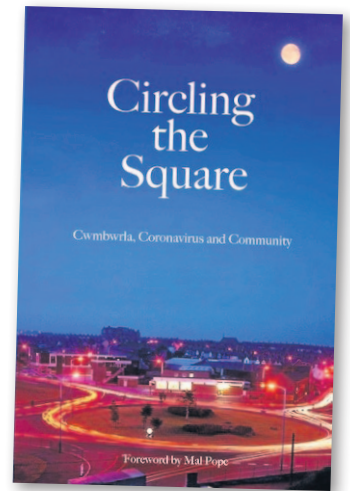
"What they all have in common is a shared pride in this part of Swansea and the eagerness of its people to stand up and be counted when it matters."

Royalties will be reinvested in the community,

with all revenue going to Cwmbwrla Community Events, a nonprofit group that funds entertainment and sports activity for children and adults.

■ **Circling the Square: Cwmbwrla, Coronavirus and Community is available in paperback (£5.95) and ebook (£2.95) from Amazon and also at**

a discounted rate from selected local outlets across Swansea: Kath Korner Kafe, 87 Robert Street, Colin's Cards, 12 Elgin Street, Haystack Cafe, 1 Brynhyfryd Square, Coffee and Crumbs, 133 Eaton Road, The Gate House Hotel, 360 Carmarthen Road.



Lisa and Dai Challenger and their children Laura, Hari and Emily.



Amina Jamal and Seren Aldron at the emergency food resource.

made a choice to give their time, effort and resources.

"They've cooked for their neighbours, shopped for them, collected their medication, and sometimes they just picked up the phone and talked to them." The chapter Come Dine With Lisa tells the story of Lisa Challenger, as David explains: "Lisa told

me it broke her heart to see neighbours, many of them older and vulnerable, not having cooking facilities and never sitting down to a good hot meal.

"Her response was to cook hundreds of roast dinners, all at her own expense, giving people something to look forward to, giving them sustenance



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