

I’r Cyfryngau

Media Release

22 May 2023

**AWEN CULTURAL TRUST TACKLES DATA POVERTY**

Awen Cultural Trust is helping to tackle the data poverty crisis within Bridgend county borough, by distributing free mobile data and SIM cards to people who need them, and offering free digital skills training at its libraries.

This initiative is supported by the National Databank, which has been set up by Virgin Media 02, Good Things Foundation and other digital inclusion experts including Community Organisers, Operation Wifi, Hubbub and Nominet. They are aiming to help over 200,000 people across the UK get connected by the end of 2023.

Data poverty is the term used to describe ‘individuals, households or communities who cannot afford sufficient, private and secure mobile or broadband data to meet their essential needs’ (Nesta, 2021). A 2022 study by the Wales Centre for Public Policy into poverty and social exclusion in Wales reported that causes of data poverty include: disadvantage barriers to services; poor connectivity; low income; larger families generating high data needs; and a lack of financial and digital literacy.

Colleagues at Awen Libraries such as Sarn, which is managed in partnership with St Brides Minor Community Council and Bridgend County Borough Council, will distribute up to 50 free SIM cards with unlimited data each month to customers, no means testing required. They will also provide free one-to-one digital assistance on everything from printing, setting up email accounts and job searches, to booking appointments online, paying bills and downloading apps.

Richard Hughes, Chief Executive at Awen Cultural Trust, said:

“Our libraries play a significant role in helping to address digital inequalities and vital access to online services by improving digital literacy skills and access to technology, so I am particularly pleased to be involved in this National Databank initiative. I would encourage anyone in need of digital help to head to their local library and make use of the free SIM cards we have available. You can be assured of a warm welcome and no judgment whatsoever.”

Chair of St Bride’s Minor Community Council, Councillor Martin Williams said:

“Sarn Library is at the heart of our community, providing a range of essential services. In our increasingly digital age it is easy for those without access to the internet and other digital services to be excluded. The community council is therefore fully supportive of this initiative which will ensure access to digital services to all in St Brides Minor. The community council has partnered with Awen for many years and we look forward to continuing to strengthening our relations with Awen over the coming years.”

Councillor Rhys Goode, Cabinet Member for Wellbeing & Future Generations, said: “In partnership with Awen, we are proud to participate in breaking down the barriers that exclude pockets of our community from digital accessibility.

“Our libraries are at the forefront of this initiative, with them providing invaluable support in terms of digital advice and training, as well as digital resources.

“Working together, we can look forward to a digitally inclusive society.”

Photograph taken at Sarn Library: Helen Pridham, Libraries Operations and Innovation Manager, and Councillor Mark John, Vice-Chair, St Bride’s Minor Community Council

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