

# LIBRARY OF HOPE: MERTHYR TYDFIL



## CONTEXT

Merthyr Tydfil is a proud South Wales town on the edge of the Brecon Beacons, 23 miles north of Cardiff. It has a strong local identity but, like many towns in England and Wales, is at the sharp end of industrial decline and economic inequality. There are a number of Portuguese and Polish workers employed in the local meat packing plant, and in 2016 Harriet, a HOPE not hate local organiser, found that many of these workers were struggling to feel like part of the community and find their voice in the town.

2016 was also the year that Labour MP Jo Cox was murdered by a far-right extremist during the EU referendum campaign – during a summer that saw hate crime rise by 40% across Wales. In memory of Jo, and to send a message of hope and inclusion in the town, Merthyr Tydfil came together to hold a community football match.

Community resilience is often undermined by how hard it can be for new arrivals to establish themselves, particularly given the decline in public spaces like pubs, libraries and community centres. Football is both universal and a very visible method of civic participation, and can provide a valuable gateway to a community.

[Football clubs](#) - whether grassroots teams themselves or communities around professional clubs - have become increasingly important formers of local identity. While football isn't a replacement for other parts of public life, and has its own

history of inequality and exclusion to reckon with, it can be a way to reach parts of the community that might otherwise be hard to reach. Football, and other team sports, can also provide shared spaces, support networks and formal identities in communities that are struggling with all three.

## HOW TO RUN A COMMUNITY FOOTBALL GAME

### 1 - DECIDE YOUR OBJECTIVES

Who do you want at your event? What do you want them to get from it? Deciding your audience and aims early will help you figure out who to get on board and how to make your event accessible.



To bring people together after a divisive EU vote, HOPE not hate put together a team of Polish and Portuguese players for a friendly against Quar Park Rangers, a team from Merthyr's local football league.

### 2 - FORMING YOUR PLANNING TEAM

Building a group of volunteers invested in your community is often easier than you think. Start with friends and family, then contact local community centres, sports clubs and your council (and anyone else you can think of) to find your team.



A lot of work goes into community organising, so make sure not to overload yourself and to delegate some of the following steps!

### 3 - FORM YOUR TEAMS

Decide how big you want your teams to be and start recruiting – teams usually number anywhere from 5 to 11 players (with some substitutes), and you can choose to host one big game or a small tournament.



Ask some local football teams to help with players and kits – either a big partnership with your town's professional team(s), or bringing a few teams from the local grassroots league together. You can also reach out to local community organisations or your Local Authority, who'll be able to help you make the event accessible and reach out to all corners of the community.

Make sure to find a referee and some stewards for the day itself!

#### 4 - FIND YOUR VENUE

Ask your local club if they're able to donate use of their pitch on a quiet day, or contact your Local Authority or grassroots league about free playing space. They'll also be able to guide you through any insurance or risk assessment needs.



Remember to check that your venue is appropriate to the people you want there - is it accessible? Is there parking? Access to toilets and bins?

#### 5 - SPREAD THE WORD

Use free online design software like [Canva](#) or [Edit](#) to create a poster for your event (or delegate it to one of your team - maybe ask your local Sixth Form or university for design student volunteers). Once you've got a date, time and poster, get advertising!



Using social media, contacting the local press and radio, and seeking support from local businesses or the Local Authority can all help get your event in front of as many people as possible. If you haven't already, approach local organisations to help you reach marginalised groups in your community. Can you get a notice translated? Or put up posters in workplaces with a lot of migrant workers?

#### 6 - RISK ASSESSMENTS

Risk assessments are usually much more straightforward than they sound.



List any health and safety risks that your event might throw up and what you can do to mitigate those. Think of the potential severity of the risk and the likelihood of it occurring, ranking both from 1-5. Multiply the two sets of numbers, and any of your results are greater than 10 reconsider the plan for your event. More detailed risk assessment templates can be found on the government's [website](#).

#### 7 - THE DAY AND BEYOND

Have fun! Make sure to get plenty of photos to share, and think about how to maintain this momentum - you've put together a team of passionate local people and created your own foothold in public life, what do you want to do with it next?



Grassroots football is run by the biggest network of volunteers in the country, and the collective identity and energy that sport can create has a lot of potential for community organising and resilience-forming - can you keep your games going by [forming a permanent team](#)? Can you expand out into the rest of the community?