

Tenant Topics

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From crochet to bungee!

Karen Champion introduces Joyce Lilley to the opportunities of the world wide web.



Two Rivers tenants are discovering a whole new online world, thanks to an initiative launched this spring.

We are equipping 10 people with tablets and broadband connection for a year and giving them one-to-one support to show them how to use the internet and enjoy the benefits it brings.

Four of the 10 'students' are up-and-running and have been learning how to create an email account and use Two Rivers Housing's online feature 'My account', as well as find out about their personal interests and hobbies.

Joyce Lilley from Mitcheldean was one of the first to be given the tablet. She said: "I've wanted to do this for some time now, and I just needed a push to get started. I've learnt how to use a search engine and have been looking for a crochet pattern to make a baby blanket for my new great-grandchild, due in the summer.

"I've also been able to watch a video of my grandson bungee jumping in New Zealand!"

Community Engagement Advisor Karen Champion, has been providing Mrs Lilley with regular support. "More and more services are going online and it's increasingly important for people to be able to join in," she explained.

"We are helping this group to make that step – going at a pace which is comfortable to them. We are also showing them how they can use the internet for fun activities and find out about the things that interest them."

Thank thy neighbour!

If you've got a fabulous neighbour, and you'd like them to have the recognition they deserve, then you need to get your skates on!

The closing date for nominations for our first ever Good Neighbour Awards is 30 April, and we're keen to hear who has made a great difference to your life.

It might be a simple thing that makes your life that little bit easier or someone who is great at organising community events. Whatever their contribution, please let us know so that we can tell them how much they are appreciated.



Here's a reminder of the categories of unsung heroes we are looking for:

- Local Hero (individual)
- Group Hero (two or more people – a formal or informal group)
- Green Hero (eg environmental, recycling)
- Digital Hero (eg helping others with computers/smartphone problems)

The winners will win a cash prize and the person who nominated them will also receive a gift.

You will find more details and a nomination form on our website (in the 'About us' section under 'Part of our community'), or email customerservices@2rh.org.uk or call 0800 316 0897 and we'll send one to you.

A gift for Berry Hill

Giving the redundant equipment a new lease of life are, from left to right, Mo Jones (a member of the Park and Playing Fields committee), Sue Reddan, Sharon Woodroffe and Eric Reddan.



'One man's rubbish is another man's treasure' proved to be true when we donated a redundant strimmer and mower to the Berry Hill community.

The equipment was found during a recent tidy-up event at our HomePlus scheme at George Place near Coleford. It was used to keep the gardens trim there, but has lain redundant since our subsidiary company Centigen took on the grass-cutting responsibilities.

Happily, a new home was found for it just down the road at Berry Hill Park and Playing Fields, where our tenant Eric Reddan looks after the grounds. Having previously cut the grass at George Place, he was already well acquainted with the machines.

His wife Sue, a member of the park's committee said: *"The council currently cuts the grass, but they don't trim it down around the equipment. We've got swings, a tower, exercise equipment and a zip wire down there and this strimmer will help us a great deal."*

Sharon Woodroffe, our Neighbourhood Housing Assistant said: *"It was a no-brainer really and we were happy to be able to help out. I know how much time Eric and Sue, and the rest of the committee, invest in the park."*

"No doubt, this summer we'll be hearing the kit regularly being put to good use!"

One 'L' of an anniversary!

Centigen's first employee – and one of our tenants – celebrated achieving a personal goal as the business marked its second anniversary.

Kirsty Hambrey joined Centigen as a part-time cleaner when we opened our Newent office at the beginning of 2014.

At that time, the mum-of-two was working a few hours each evening, but she was given the chance to increase her hours and the extra pay also meant she could afford to take driving lessons.

Then, at the end of January, Kirsty took her test and passed!

Centigen now hopes to secure extra business that will allow Kirsty to start working full-time and get her out and about in her own van.

Gerry McFall, our Head of New Business Development, said: *"It really pleases me to see people grow and develop. I feel real pride when I see anyone within the team better themselves, but Kirsty's progress probably gives me a slightly warmer feeling as she was the first person I took on within the new business."*



Kirsty takes great delight in ripping up her 'L' plates as she prepares to take Centigen on the road.

Centigen has continued to spread its influence and has recently won several new contracts in the Bristol area, plus a three-year deal to maintain the grassed areas on behalf of Newnham Parish Council.

All profits achieved by Centigen will be gifted to Two Rivers Housing, supporting our work in providing affordable homes and amenities that benefit the wider community.



Get 'appy with us!

Managing your account couldn't be simpler with the 'My account' feature on our website – and we've made it even easier with a Two Rivers Housing app.

This provides a shortcut straight to the website, which means you can access the site with just a touch of a button!

Whether you have an iOS, Android or Windows device, you can add the app in less than a minute and visit our website again, and again and again! You will find the instructions under 'I'm looking for' on the Home page.

If you haven't yet registered with 'My account', what are you waiting for? You can pay your rent, find your Two Rivers contacts, see any past or outstanding

repairs, check and update your personal details and find out when your home is due for any improvements.

With so much information at your fingertips, you can take control whenever it's convenient for you.

SAVING TIP

Pay by Direct Debit or Standing Order and you won't have to remember to pay your rent. It'll happen automatically as long as you have enough in your account to cover it.



Watch out – there's a warden about!

Three schools have now joined our popular Junior Wardens scheme, showing just how much it's grown in the last three years.

Students from Forest View in Cinderford, Severnbanks in Lydney and St John's in Coleford are all now enthusiastically picking litter, inspecting local estates and checking the speed of passing motorists.

The scheme involves pupils in their local communities and we enjoy

great support from Forest of Dean District Council Street Wardens and Gloucestershire Police.

We have also been able to buy some of our own kit, including litter-pickers, gloves and our very own speed camera, thanks to a grant from the Police and Crime Commissioner's Fund. The camera has been used by children at Redbrook and Steam Mills in Cinderford to encourage motorists to slow down near their schools

Julie Burlow, our Community Engagement Team Leader said:

"The Junior Warden scheme is now a well established way for the children to get involved and take pride in where they live. Not only is the project fun, but it gets them out and about and they are really keen to see improvements made to their neighbourhood."

Plan now to buy later

Changes to the Right to Buy scheme could mean more tenants are eligible to buy their home. We are still awaiting details but, if you think you might be interested, start planning now.

- **Mortgage** All applications are subject to a credit check, so try to pay off any debts. This includes rent arrears, as we will need to provide a reference.
- **Bank account** If you want a mortgage you will need a bank account. Get in the habit of paying by Direct Debit now with your rent.
- **Fees** Budget approx. £1,000 for associated costs, such as legal fees and surveys.

- **Repairs and maintenance** We currently take care of this for you so make sure you can afford to pay for it in future.
- **Location** Sell your home within five years and you'll have to repay part of the discount you received, so make sure it's the right place for you.
- **Estate maintenance charges** If we run the estate where you live you will need to contribute towards costs, such as grass-cutting and footpath and road repairs.

- **Flats and maisonettes** You will need to pay an annual service charge to cover communal amenities such as cleaning, lighting and buildings insurance.

If you have any questions about buying your Two Rivers home, please contact our Home Ownership team – homeownershipteam@2rh.org.uk or call 0800 316 0897.



Two Rivers tames the jungle!



1 Before



2 During



3 After

- 1 **Before** – The sight that greets our team of workers. First of all there's rubbish, weeds and scrub to clear.
- 2 **During** – Great progress made in just half a day by (left to right), Hannah Farrugia, Maegan Willis, Brandon Godwin, Matt Howland and Liam Donegan.
- 3 **After** – A chilly, but satisfied group finish the task: Katie Fellows, Marlene Alford, Tara Newman, Andy Hutchins, Anthea Tawney and Olivia Follis.

Maegan Willis, HR Apprentice, said:
"It's been great to have a day out of the office to do something which makes a difference and benefits the community. I've really enjoyed it and I hope that the children enjoy their new garden."

A group of Two Rivers and Centigen staff have been getting their hands dirty at a Coleford playgroup, transforming a patch of land from an overgrown jungle to a smart new garden for the children to play in.

Youngsters at St John's pre-school returned from their half-term break to discover the new play area, after we provided lots of helping hands to clear the space.

A group of our apprentices got stuck in first of all and had a hard day of clearing rubbish, weeding, digging and levelling the ground, before a second group of staff took their turn and spent a day lining the area with a membrane and covering it with wood chip, donated by Travis Perkins.

We're planning to take on many more projects like this which will involve every member of staff in supporting community initiatives. Watch this space to see which local charity, project or group we go to help next.

Thanks...

Thank you to everyone who took part in our recent 'Quirky Living' survey to test the idea of trialling a new style of house-building.

Modular homes would be quicker and cheaper to build and cheaper to run, as well as less damaging to the environment, and a massive 94% of those who took part in our survey liked

the concept. Most who didn't, said they couldn't support it because they just didn't know enough about it.

This is a really encouraging response and it gives us confidence to explore the idea further, and particularly to look at the finances in greater detail.

If you would like to be kept informed of our progress, please email customerservices@2rh.org.uk or call 0800 316 0897.

A big thank you to everyone who signed to say they would change to pay their rent over 52 weeks, rather than the historical 48 week period.

We had an amazing 90% take-up of the offer, and we hope you will all find it makes your payments easier to understand and manage. The change takes effect from April.

very much

for you - for your community - not for profit

A solar race to the finish

Primary school children across the Forest built solar-powered cars to learn about renewable energy – and then raced their creations against each other to see how effective they were!

This fun way to understand more about where our energy comes from and how it can be saved, was a real hit with the students who particularly enjoyed modifying their cars to make them bigger, better and faster than the next team.

We arranged for the National Energy Action charity to deliver its Young Carbon Cutters programme in schools in Coleford, Cinderford and Lydney. The children also took part in a humorous drama session about how to save energy at home, and they were given information to take back to their families about reducing heating and energy bills.



A group of solar car designers test their models before preparing to race.



Tension mounts during the heats as the 'drivers' race to the finishing line!

"Many of our tenants struggle to make their budgets stretch, and some are forced to choose between heating and eating," explained our Customer Relationship Co-ordinator Andrew Smith.

"These sessions – which included many children who live in our homes – were an entertaining and engaging way to talk about energy efficiency, and hopefully they took some tips home to help their families save money."

Reaching for the STARs

The results are in and we are chuffed with the outcome of our annual STAR customer survey.

The overall satisfaction with the services we provide stands at 88%, which is an excellent result, but there are still some improvements to be made. The most recent survey showed that our HomePlus tenants' satisfaction level was a fantastic 98%, so a big pat on the back to everyone who contributed to that.

The results revealed improved satisfaction levels for the neighbourhood where you live, value-for-money (rent

and being able to get hold of the right person.

Those who took part must also think we're not a bad bunch, as 96% agreed staff are friendly and approachable, which we're obviously very pleased about.

There are areas where satisfaction levels dipped slightly, such as being able to deal with your query, and repairs and maintenance. We are analysing the results to see how we can make improvements in these areas.

Thank you to all those tenants who took part in the STAR survey and provided us with feedback. We aim to continually improve our performance and, with help from your comments and views, we are able to keep pushing forward and provide you with the best service we can.

SAVING TIP

Children grow out of clothes so fast, so have a rummage in the charity shops for good quality but cheaper items.

Bursary broadens horizons

Four of our tenants have been given the opportunity to improve their skills, their learning and their lives, thanks to help from our new bursary.

Their circumstances are all different, and the support provided varies to reflect that, but all four are being helped with their training and education to improve their future prospects.

The Two Rivers Housing David Garnett Bursary launched in 2015, to mark the retirement of our long-serving Board member and Chair. All our tenants – and members of their immediate family – were invited to apply for a share of the £1,000 bursary.

An interview panel found out more about the applicants and their ambitions, and four awards were made, with the offer of both financial assistance and practical support with work experience, CV and interview preparation, job searches and mentoring.

We will introduce you to all four of them in future issues of Tenant Topics, and we're starting with Audrey James.



Six years ago Audrey decided to change her career and trained as a Psychodynamic counsellor. In 2013 she founded Restore Counselling Service, based in Gloucester, and became the first counsellor of colour in her community to open a private practice.

Audrey has been researching the impact of trauma and, thanks to the bursary, is now a member of the International Society for the Study of Trauma and Dissociation.

Audrey loves that membership of the professional organisation gives her

access to a wide variety of learning materials online. This means she can view online seminars, read about best practice, stay up-to-date with techniques and grow credibility in her chosen field.

"It's like being in a live classroom," said Audrey. "In my line of work it is so important to continue learning and I will always be a perpetual student. I have already learnt so much and I absolutely love it! I am extremely grateful to the bursary for supporting me, and I know it will improve the help I can give to my clients."



Be fire-safe

Smoking presents one of the greatest fire risks at home, but did you know the fire service will provide special bedding for those in most need?

Fire-retardant duvets, pillows and covers, as well as throws to go over chairs and sofas, could be provided by Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service – and they might save a life.

If you, or someone you know, smokes at home and would like to know more about staying safe, you can book a visit from a Community Safety Advisor online via www.glosfire.gov.uk or call 0800 180 4140.



Congratulations Rose!

We were all delighted when we heard one of the Forest's most dedicated community supporters was recognised

in the New Year Honours with a British Empire Medal.

Rose Peaty works tirelessly to build the Blakeney community where she lives, and she always wants our tenants to benefit from the improvements, too. We have lent our support to many initiatives over the years, and helped secure funds that allowed her to realise her ideas.

Those successes include new play equipment, the creation of a woodland walk, a community café and the village hall refurbishment, to name just a few.

Jane Cordier, our Community Projects Co-ordinator who has worked closely with Rose, said she was "the backbone of the community".

Jane said: "Her understanding of people and love for the Forest of Dean is evident in her daily life. She is a leading light and an example to show everyone what a community can achieve."

Our Chief Executive Garry King described Rose as "an inspirational lady. We send our warmest congratulations to Rose for an honour she has most certainly earned and undoubtedly deserves."



Rose Peaty (front right) celebrates news of a grant to refurbish Blakeney village hall in 2014, with Jane Cordier (back left) and members of the village hall committee.

Top-flight TwoCan!

Our estate agency TwoCan has a new feather in its cap after being named Gloucestershire's 'Agent of the Year'.

The accolade and 'Gold' rating was earned by the team after happy customers posted five-star comments

about the service they'd received on the independent property review site raterAgent.

The team is getting steadily busier as spring unfolds. Its highly competitive and flexible pricing structure, plus its

success in achieving, on average, just under 99% of the asking price for clients, are sure to mean TwoCan boards will become a familiar sight all over the county.

All profits from TwoCan are gifted to Two Rivers Housing so, if TwoCan does well, our tenants will too.

If you recommend someone to TwoCan to sell or let their home privately, you will receive a £20 voucher as a 'thank you' when the sale or let completes. Just complete this form and ask them to hand it in when they talk to TwoCan.*



£20 voucher **twocan**

Complete the form below and hand it to someone you know who is thinking about selling or letting their property or changing agent. When the sale or let completes with TwoCan, we will send you a £20 'Love to Shop' voucher*.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone/email: _____

Name and address of friend/family member: _____

www.twocan.estate 0800 294 2860 info@twocan.estate

*Terms and conditions apply. Please call TwoCan on 0800 294 2860 for further information.



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Ruth Macdonald (left) and Denise Voyce prepare to load the car with donations from Two Rivers Housing staff and contractors.

Toys bring cheer

Staff and Two Rivers contractors joined forces to help bring smiles to the faces of local children.

When the call went out to support the Salvation Army Christmas appeal, we were swamped with donations of toys, books and other gifts from colleagues, and from staff at United Living, Keepmoat and Lakers.

Ruth Macdonald and Denise Voyce coordinated the effort and delivered the gifts to the Salvation Army's Forest of Dean branch in Broadwell.

"People were so generous and I was totally overwhelmed by the amount donated," said Ruth. "It was lovely to deliver a car full of presents to the Salvation Army and I'm so glad we were able to help make a difference."

Major Vivienne Prescott was there to receive the presents. She said: "I cannot begin to tell you the difference this makes to families who are seriously struggling to make Christmas happen for their children. I just wish everyone could see the reaction and the look on a worried mum's face when we turn up with the toys... it is priceless."

View your own statements

Did you know you can see information about your home and your account with us via our website at any time of the day or night?

This means you can find out when improvements are scheduled to your home, review your contact details, see who your Two Rivers contacts are and check your rent statement, whenever you choose.

Developments in technology give us the chance to streamline our services too, saving time and money on administration that can be spent on improving services.

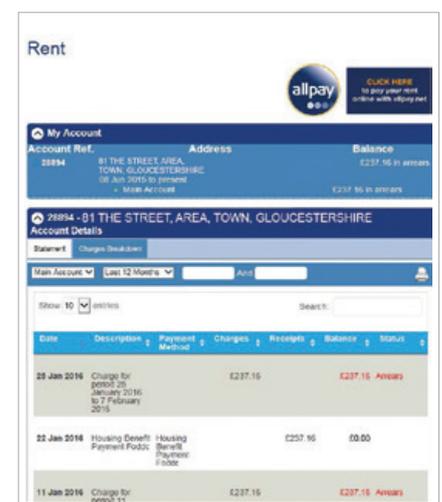
This is why we have decided it no longer makes sense to automatically send rent statements by post to every one of our tenants. The information we have

traditionally posted twice a year – with the expense of paper, envelopes, stamps and staff time – is already available in the secure and personalised 'My account' area of our website, and you can see it whenever you wish.

If you haven't already registered for 'My account', go to www.tworivershousing.org.uk and click on 'Log in to your account'. If you need any help with this our Customer Service team (0800 316 0897 or email customerservices@2rh.org.uk) will be pleased to help.

If you are in arrears or you have an alternative correspondence address recorded in our database, we will continue to post statements to you twice a year. If you don't have access to the

internet and you want us to continue posting your statements, please contact Customer Services.



Two Rivers staff learn how to become Dementia Friends.

Be a Dementia Friend

The number of people living with dementia is steadily increasing, with one person developing the disease every three minutes in the UK.

It's important for our staff to understand dementia and know how to interact with people living with the condition, so we joined forces with Forest of Dean District Council to train them as 'Dementia Friends'.

Cllr Carole Allaway-Martin, the council's Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing said: *"Dementia is everybody's business and we can all make a positive difference to people's lives. Two Rivers staff are now more*

aware of the needs of people with dementia and their families, and they have new skills to help them work effectively with vulnerable tenants and the wider community."

If you meet someone you think may have dementia:

- Allow the person to take their time.
- Put them at ease – smile and be friendly.
- Speak clearly and calmly, using short simple sentences.
- Listen carefully to what they are saying, and give them plenty of encouragement.

Many people with dementia aren't living as well as they could and 34% do not feel part of their community. By understanding the condition a little more, we can help to create a dementia-friendly community.

The council will be organising dementia awareness roadshows this summer. Find out if there's a session near you by contacting Lena Maller on **01594 812609** or email **lena.maller@fdean.gov.uk**.

To find out more about dealing with dementia, visit **www.alzheimers.org.uk**.

New homes across the patch

We are building much-needed affordable new homes across Gloucestershire, from Lydney and Ruardean to Westbury-on-Severn and Stroud.

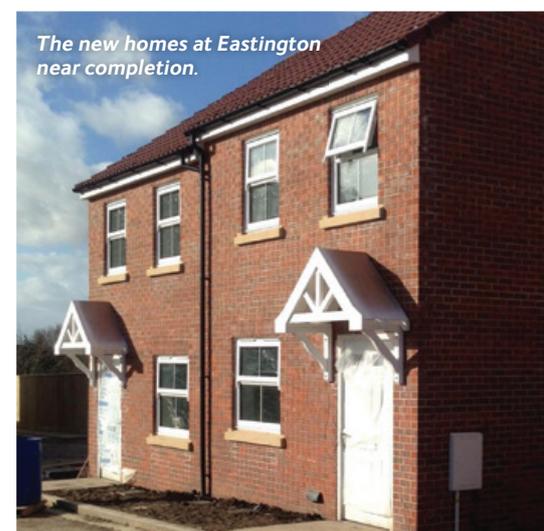
Nine new homes in Eastington, on the outskirts of Stroud, are at the stage of finishing touches and will soon be welcoming their new tenants. The houses are part of a larger development which will bring 30 homes to the area in total.

Over the past two years, the demand for one-bedroom properties has grown due to the introduction of the under-occupation charge, often referred to

as the 'bedroom tax'. We are trying to meet this demand by building smaller homes and providing tenants with the opportunity to downsize.

Work is underway at three locations across the Forest of Dean to bring 12 new one-bedroom homes to the area, with four being built on Highfield Road in Ruardean, six going up on Orchard Road in Lydney, and two on Gatwick Close in Westbury-on-Severn. This final scheme also includes two, two-bedroom homes.

These developments are expected to complete at the end of the year.



The new homes at Eastington near completion.



Bingo for Batten!

Generous bingo players are delighted to hand over a cheque for £1,000 to help a local family.

Generous residents from the Rowandean scheme and surrounding areas of Cinderford have raised £1,000 to help a local family, whose lives changed when they learned three of their children had Batten disease.

Twins Toby and Cory (12) and their sister Izzy (seven) have the rare degenerative disease which will affect

their eyesight, speech and motion as it progresses, and family, friends and well-wishers have rallied round to support them.

Dawn Kibble, the children's aunt, set up a weekly fundraising bingo event at Rowandean. In just four months the £500 target was smashed, but the tenants carried on playing and now

they've more than doubled the money for the fund – and it's still going up!

"We get residents from other HomePlus Schemes who come along to the bingo and support the event", explained Dawn. "Some of them don't even play; they just come along to donate. It's been amazing!"

Helping to heat your home

Two Rivers tenants have been learning how to get the best out of their heating at a series of roadshows held across the Forest.

They've been finding out how to use their heating controls, how to reduce their fuel bills and switch to a cheaper tariff. And some have saved hundreds of pounds by taking the advice of our experts.

Jill Davies from Cinderford, saved nearly £400 by switching to Eon from Southern Electric. She said: *"By switching my energy supplier, I'll be saving nearly a third off my fuel bill, leaving me with more spending money for my holiday!"*

Jill joined our Cinderford event to seek the advice of experts from the Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE) – an independent national charity which helps people to get the most out of their heating and lighting by changing their habits, as well as their suppliers.



Mark Tyler from the Centre for Sustainable Energy gives Jill Davies advice on how to save money while heating her home.

Andrew Smith has been leading the project for us. He said: *"If you use your heating properly you can potentially keep warm and save money. Turning off appliances at the wall and cooking with the saucepan lid on all play their part too, while switching energy tariffs and providers may save even larger sums."*

We have been working with CSE to produce a suite of home energy advice leaflets covering a range of topics, such as understanding energy bills, how to use heating controls and general money-saving tips.

You can find them all in the 'library' on our website –

www.tworivershousing.org.uk



Spring tea break

Our postbag overflowed with entries for the prize wordsearch printed in the winter issue of Tenant Topics. Thank you to everyone who sent an entry in.

A £15 gift card goes to the first correct entry drawn and the lucky winner is June Mills, of Lydney.

If you would also like the chance to win a £15 gift card in return for a bit of fun, then try your hand at spotting the differences between these two photographs.

The first is the original picture taken when local MP Mark Harper came to visit us last month to learn about our two social enterprises, Centigen and TwoCan. The other has been modified and there are six differences to spot.

Identify all six and send your completed entry to:

Communications team
Two Rivers Housing
Cleeve Mill Lane
Newent
Gloucestershire
GL18 1DS

Before **1 May 2016**.

Contact us:

Please tell us if you would like this in large print, on audio CD or in another language.

Freephone
0800 316 0897

Email
customerservices@2rh.org.uk

Join the Two Rivers community on



Registered Charity No1104723



Photo 1



Photo 2

Circle the six differences on Photo 2

Name: _____

Address: _____

Tel number/email: _____

Who's 90?

While all eyes are on the Queen's 90th birthday, we're certain she's not the only one celebrating the start of her ninth decade this year.

And we're looking out for Two Rivers Housing tenants who will also be marking this milestone birthday in 2016 as we'd like to do something special for them.

If you, or another tenant you know, will turn 90 years old at any point during this year, please will you let us know?

Email customerservices@2rh.org.uk or call 0800 316 0897.

