



May 2023
Professional Portfolio
By Ethan Dowe-Wadham

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Reflective Commentary

I will be reflecting upon myself and my work at the Blaen-Y-Maes Drop-In centre using the Gibbs Reflective Cycle (1998), I will assess how this experience has helped me in my field of study and how my previously learned skills have supported me in this volunteering experience.

Working in a local convenience store as my everyday job allowed me to quickly adapt to my role working in the charity shop sector of the Drop-In and dealing with customers was nothing new. However, I quickly learned that the approach I should take was different to that in my standard customer assistant role. This environment was a lot friendlier and casual and therefore required a much friendly and more genuine approach. I did find myself however partaking in a lot of active listening. Many, if not all, of the people who visit the shop are in a place where they are struggling to some extent regarding hardships of life and many of them share this stories and I listen as they share their tales. Active listening is a key part of counselling and is a skill we have learned as part of the course and so to practice it “in the wild” is a valuable opportunity.

This Drop-In centre has a unique member of staff aboard, that being Moby Dick... the cat [Figure]. Moby Dick acts almost as the Drop-In mascot since he lives here, freely roaming in and out of the building and finding himself getting comfy with volunteers and visitors alike. He is a very friendly little fella and is universally loved by all as he attends to the community, showing up where he pleases. His calming and friendly demeanour is contagious and I have observed that he acts similar to an emotional support pet. Emotional support pets are becoming a more common therapeutic device for those who struggle with severe depression and anxiety. Meehan, Massavelli and Pachana (2017) found through their own research that “pet owners perceived their companion animals to be a unique source of social support, differentiating them from other human sources such as friends, family, and significant others”. This research validates the effectiveness of having an animal as an emotional support system as it can provide a type of support that perhaps other humans cannot, and Moby Dick fits perfectly into this scenario, providing unique support to those in the Drop-In who encounter and interact with him.

I personally take a lot of pride in my presentation and the way in which I dress, something that gives me a sense of joy and satisfaction as it acts as a form of self-expression in my everyday life. Looking at the difference in the clothing options between the men’s section and the women’s section is quite a stark difference, there are a lot more women’s clothes than there are men’s. I believe this is in relation to the gendered socialisation of our society. This is evident through pop culture and the media in the way that we are subtly socialised by choices made in what we consume. Madison Altman (2020) compared the appearances of men and

women in Esquire and Vogue respectively throughout 2019 that specifically broke traditional gender norms. It was recorded that 10 women appeared in a gender norm-breaking role (no makeup, baggier clothes, more masculine trousers as opposed to a dress/skirt and shorter hair) whereas only 4 men in Esquire can say the same (bright coloured/patterned clothes, large jewellery, longer hair, noticeable makeup, dresses, skirts and heels). This can be linked to how men aren't really shown many examples of experimenting with fashion as it is presented as a more feminine practice and the prevalent toxic masculinity creates a stigma around being seen as "feminine". I tried to counteract this by rearranging the men's section and creating outfits out of clothes I found on the rack. Since starting at the centre I have had numerous people, volunteers and visitors alike, compliment my fashion and thus I think I could provide an outlook that people may value. In the rearrangement however, I noticed how much of the clothes are very plain and are seemingly used in regards of manual labour and effectiveness as opposed to style, and given how small the section is given that not many men donate their clothes, did hamper my ability to do as much as I would have liked.

I was also able to witness the wide variety of support groups that are held at the Drop-In. Some examples would be religious group bible studies, women's aid groups and even a soon-to-be-started LGBTQI+ support group. These act almost as a form of group therapy for the people who attend and it can be observed that having others who relate to their struggles seems to provide solace and a sense of comfort to these people who are looking for help and advice regarding a difficult time they either have encountered or are currently experiencing. Through their research of the effectiveness of peer support groups in psychosis, Castelein et al (2008) where they found that 85% of their participants felt that their expectations had been fulfilled by the support group. It must be noted also that 74% of participants preferred the guidance of a nurse as opposed to the guidance of a peer which correlates with the support groups based in Blaen-Y-Maes as most, if not all, of these groups are led by one or more leaders, for bible studies it is led by a priest for example and for other groups they are led by someone who is at the very least, highly proficient and involved in their topic of discussion.

Reflecting on my experience as a whole, I am very thankful for the experience and proud of what I have achieved here, feeling like I have given back to a community that, as someone who grew up poor and has struggled with money through my youth, had helped me to be where I am today. In this time I also made the decision to stay with the organisation and continue to be a volunteer here for the foreseeable future. I have even been asked to be a key figure in an upcoming LGBTQI+ support group which meant the world to me that they asked me to be such a big part of this. I truly feel like a member of a team and look forward to take a small role of leadership in the near future.

References

Altman, Madison, "Clothes Make the (Wo)Man: Gender Performed Through Fashion as an Agent of Socialization" (2020). Honors Theses. 2379. Available at: <https://digitalworks.union.edu/theses/2379>. Accessed on April 27th, 2023.

Castelein, S., Bruggeman, R., Van Busschbach, J. T., Der Gaag, M. V., Stant, A. D., Knegtering, H., & Wiersma, D. (2008). '*The effectiveness of peer support groups in psychosis: A randomized controlled trial*'. Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica, 118(1), 64-72. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1600-0447.2008.01216.x>. Accessed on April 29th, 2023.

Gibbs, G. (1998) '*Learning by Doing: A Guide to Teaching and Learning Methods*'. Oxford Brooks University, Oxford.

Meehan, M. et al (2017). '*Using Attachment Theory and Social Support Theory to Examine and Measure Pets as Sources of Social Support and Attachment Figures*'. Anthrozoos, Volume 30, 2017 - Issue 2.

Evidence 1: Background Information

What we do

The Blaen-Y-Maes drop in centre is a not-for-profit community organisation based in the heart of Blaen-Y-Maes, Swansea. The Drop in Centre provides support in various ways please get in touch to find out more.

Call us:
01792 580 905

Find us:
Blaenymaes Dr, Swansea, SA55NR



Here is the "What we do" section on the Blaen-Y-Maes Drop-In Centre website that outlines the mission statement of the organisation, that being to support the community of Blaen-Y-Maes through numerous efforts.

From: Ruth Groff <ruth.groff@uwtsd.ac.uk>
Sent: 19 December 2022 13:39
To: Ethan Dowe-Wadham (2104467) <2104467@student.uwtsd.ac.uk>
Subject: Counselling Skills and Approaches Module - Placement

Dear Ethan,

I have spoken with one of the main organisers for the New Drop in Centre in Blaenymaes, [Blaen-y-maes drop in centre - Home | Facebook](#) and she is happy for you to come and support the project on Tuesdays, however, she suggest a start day to be Tuesday, 10th of December, due to their closure hours for the Holiday Period.

I hope this is good for you. Otherwise, I happy for you to keep searching for a Placement. I am on A/L, but I do check my emails from time to time.

Kind regards,
Ruth

Cofion Cynnes,
Ruth

Above is the email correspondence between my lecturer, Ruth Groff, and myself, confirming my place at Blaen-Y-Maes Drop-In Centre

Evidence 2: Reflective Logs

Student: Ethan Dowey-Wadham

Student ID: 2104467

Host Employer: Blaen-Y-Maes Drop-In Centre

Date	January 10, 2023
Tasks Completed	- Introduction to managers and volunteers - Introduction to food share and charity shop - Worked in shop - Cashed up and closed shop
Reflection	Today was my first day and it was excellent. I met with Karen and Wendy, the managers and runners of the centre, along with the other volunteers I will be working alongside. They showed me how the food share operates and the charity shop in the building next door. Given my current job as a shop assistant, they agreed that my skills would be better suited to working in the charity shop, so I was placed there. The other volunteers proceeded to show me the shop layout and then I started helping put clothes and other items up for sale. I then was shown how to close up the shop and I sat in the communal area where I spoke to the others and got to know everyone over coffee before leaving for the day. All in all, it was a good day.
Date	January 17, 2023
Tasks Completed	- Worked in shop - Cashed up and closed shop
Reflection	Today felt like my first “real” day as it were. I showed up and went straight to work, not needing any introduction. I spent most of the day talking with customers and volunteers alike, really learning about the area. It really put into perspective how a lot of the people of Blaen-Y-Maes live and how a lot of them struggle. It shows how much a centre such as this really does do a lot of good for a lot of good people who are down on their luck. It made me feel proud to help such an organisation as this. Afterwards, I sat in the communal area and again spoke to other volunteers. I appreciate their company, they’re all good people.
Date	January 24, 2023
Tasks Completed	- Worked in shop - Cashed up and closed shop

	- Met Moby Dick
Reflection	MOBY DICK. The highlight of today was meeting the shop cat/mascot, Moby Dick, lovingly referred to as Dick. Dick is a cat that lives here at the drop-in centre and is loved by everyone who stops by, which isn't surprising he is a friendly and charming little fella. He acts almost like an emotional support animal, he just strolls in and interacts with volunteers and visitors alike and his friendly nature has a contagiously calming effect on me and seemingly others too. What a lovely little boy. Other than meeting Dick, it felt fairly calm today, rather quiet.
Date	January 31, 2023
Tasks Completed	- Worked in shop - Cashed up and closed shop - Attended a women's aid meeting
Reflection	Today, after closing the shop and joining the communal area, a woman representing Woman's Aid. She spoke of how the drop-in centre could offer leaflets and other items to woman visitors who are in need of their services. The other items included a chapstick with a barcode that hid the number for women's aid and a fake coffee card that again hid the phone number. I loved being a part of this meeting, not contributing too much verbally, but I listened and I felt that despite having knowledge of the struggles of these women and having experience through my childhood, I learned a lot.
Date	February 7, 2023
Tasks Completed	- Worked in shop - Cashed up and closed shop
Reflection	This week started a bible studies support group. I was asked to join but politely declined given that I am no longer a religious man. Passing the group I could see how the people attending seemed to be really helped by this group, seemingly sharing stories related to their beliefs and discussing how it gives them a sense of hope and belonging. Even though I myself had a falling out with religion, it is beautiful to see how it really does help a lot of others and creates a system for them to support themselves and others through the guise of their God. It shows the variety and how many people are helped in different ways here, no group is left out, and everyone is offered the same opportunity for help and support.
Date	February 14, 2023

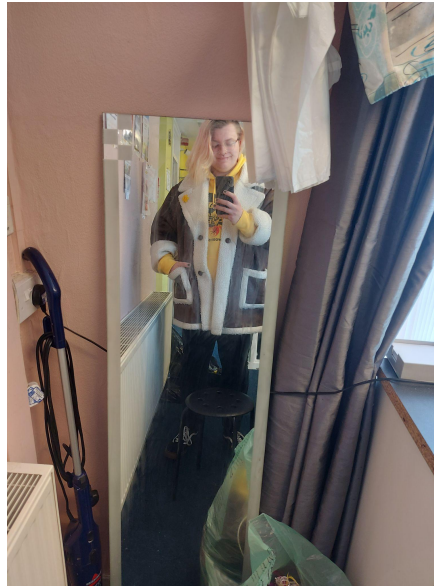
Tasks Completed	- Worked in shop - Cashed up and closed shop
Reflection	The bible studies group returned and it seems bigger than last week which is nice to see. Other than this, not much really happened. A lot of food was cooked for the volunteers and we had a small feast as it were, mainly because it was quiet and it was a way to thank volunteers for their work, it was a nice team bonding moment. But again, a quiet day.
Date	February 21, 2023
Tasks Completed	- Worked in shop - Cashed up and closed shop
Reflection	Shrove Tuesday. One of the volunteers made pancakes for all volunteers and they were very nice, I could have easily eaten a lot more than I did, but for the sake of my waistline, I stopped myself. Another quiet day other than that, however. I suppose not every week will be something to note given that I am now here every week. Sometimes the wheels will simply turn and that's not a bad thing, it creates a sense of calm and peace, I value that.
Date	February 28, 2023
Tasks Completed	- Worked in shop - Cashed up and closed shop - Recycled clothes
Reflection	For the clothes we deem cannot be sold given their deteriorating condition, we send them to be recycled, and today the men came for collection. I helped move the bags to the van for them to take away. There must have been about 20 bags of clothes completely full of clothes. Later on I had a conversation with a young mother where she discussed her difficulties looking after a child by herself being so young. I consoled with the woman that I myself was raised by a single mother so I have witnessed the struggle she is going through but I comforted her with the idea that because of my upbringing, I am ever so grateful for what my mother has done for me and that I am sure her child will one day feel the same. She thanked me for my words and we parted ways. I felt good that I could comfort someone who is struggling in an area that is close to my heart and truth be told, it made me feel better for the rest of the day. Little interactions such as this remind me why I love my chosen field of study and my goal of becoming a counsellor, if I can make one person feel better, then I feel that not only have I made a valuable use of my time that I am lucky to have, but the world becomes a slightly better place.

Date	March 7, 2023
Tasks Completed	- Worked in shop - Cashed up and closed shop - Disposed of large recycling
Reflection	After closing the shop after a busy day, earning over £60 for the shop, I offered to take the large recycling to the local tip as it was taking up a lot of space in the garden. I was accompanied by another volunteer and we disposed of mainly cardboard and wood at the local recycling centre. We then returned and I helped rearrange furnishings in the garden, moving chairs and tables to a more sociable area, away from the corners and more central. The volunteers explained the thought process behind the moving of the furniture and how putting them in more central areas will stimulate interaction with others as they are in areas that are now ingrained in the communal area of the garden and thus promoting socialisation with others. This enlightened me on how position really does effect how we interact with others, a useful skill in a field where communication is key.
Date	March 14, 2023
Tasks Completed	- Worked in shop - Cashed up and closed shop
Reflection	Today is my brother's birthday. A quiet day, with not many visitors to the shop, however, I managed to completely rearrange the men's clothes section to a more easily accessible section, pairing clothes to make outfits and colour-coordinating tops and trousers. I have found to have a love for fashion and the way I present myself as I take pride in how I dress. This however is not so common in a lot of other men as men aren't really socialised that way, or at least not until rather recently. Even in my childhood, I was never really taught about fashion and how I could present myself and experiment with what I wear and it is evident by what clothes are available here that I am not alone in this. With that in mind, I made it my mission today to try and spread my influence when it comes to style to the people here, pairing clothes together to make prefab outfits and maybe talk to others about what clothes work well with others and possible things to try. Fashion is important to me as it is a form of self-expression, it is an art form and I think it is a great way to present your personality to others before you've even spoken to them as it is the first thing someone will see. For example, I am loud, confident and eccentric by personality and my clothes describe this. I wear very "loud" patterns and I also have a wide variety of outfits ranging from a darker, blacked-out modern goth look to a loud and effeminate look wearing Cuban heels and fur coats. People don't have to dress as I do, but I think learning and embracing

	the ideals of self-expression hold numerous benefits in mental health, well-being and overall confidence.
Date	March 21, 2023
Tasks Completed	- Worked in shop - Cashed up and closed shop
Reflection	Today is my mother's birthday. I applied my seem system of the men's section to the section of unisex coats and jackets, I even found two jackets that I bought myself as they were quite good finds. I also bought a pair of black jeans that fit rather nicely. A man came in today, an older gentleman, and he was very nice and shared the story of his youth and how he has seen the world change around him. It was a very insightful perspective he gave, he appeared very wise in his words as he wasn't afraid of change as I immediately suspected he would be, which shows a predisposition I held of the older generation. I very much enjoyed this interaction and it has altered my perspective on the voices of my elders in a positive way. On the whole, a quiet yet productive day.
Date	March 28, 2023
Tasks Completed	- Worked in shop - Cashed up and closed shop
Reflection	Something really heartwarming happened to me today. I am an openly queer man, a pansexual male to be specific, and I have not hidden this fact since joining the drop-in centre. Today it was brought to my attention that the centre wants to start an LGBTQI+ support group and that they would like me to be a key figure in the process. This really made me feel like a part of this organisation, the fact that they trust me to be a key figure of this group really makes me feel valued and also being an openly queer man it makes me feel good about giving back to a community that accepted me with open arms those years ago when I came out. Growing up in a poor area similar to Blaen-Y-Maes, I am fully aware that finding support as a member of the LGBTQI+ community can be a bit difficult, at least support that isn't based on an online forum, so I am excited to start this group and I look forward to planning what we can do for these people.
Date	April 4, 2023
Tasks Completed	- Worked in shop - Cashed up and closed shop

Reflection	Today we had a visit from the easter bunny... the children were terrified, it was amusing chaos in the centre, to say the least. In fairness only a few of the children were scared but it did create quite the energy in the shop. There was also an easter bonnet decoration class in the centre and we were selling easter themed milkshake mixes in the shop. Rather busy today as it goes, had quite a few people come to the shop and spoke to a lot of them. I was also informed that next week will be the easter fair and is expected to be busy.
Date	April 18, 2023
Tasks Completed	- Worked in shop - Cashed up and closed shop - Helped in garden
Reflection	I had missed the previous week due to illness. The easter fair was also postponed to Thursday so regardless I would have missed it. It was fairly quiet today. Not too many people came to the shop and we were a few volunteers short than normal. I helped in the garden today, sewing seeds in the flower pots, in all honesty, I'm not sure what exactly I planted but I was assured I did a "cracking job". The garden is very pretty, with a lot of pastel colours and a lot of plants grown by the volunteers. I'm a city boy so I've never been much of a green thumb, but I can appreciate the effort put into this garden, and it pays off. The garden is also full of toys for the younger visitors, this is a lovely haven for visitors and volunteers alike.
Date	April 25, 2023
Tasks Completed	- Worked in shop - Cashed up and closed shop - Helped in food collection - Helped in garden
Reflection	Today was rather quiet until I was asked to help with the food collection. Since one of the managers suffered an injury, I was asked to help out with the collection and I was more than happy to oblige. When at the pick-up point, I helped others get their collection into their vehicles as there were a lot of boxes. I then helped get it all the food back to the centre and stored it all accordingly. Unfortunately, a lot of the food was "use by" and dated for tomorrow, rendering it unusable, not ideal to say the least. After this, I helped move a sheltered bench from one side of the garden to the other. It was a very Chuckle Brothers-esque situation but it ended successfully. Teamwork was vital as four of us tried to carry a large bench around a garden and our teamwork was good enough to get the job done... eventually.

Evidence 3: Proof of Work

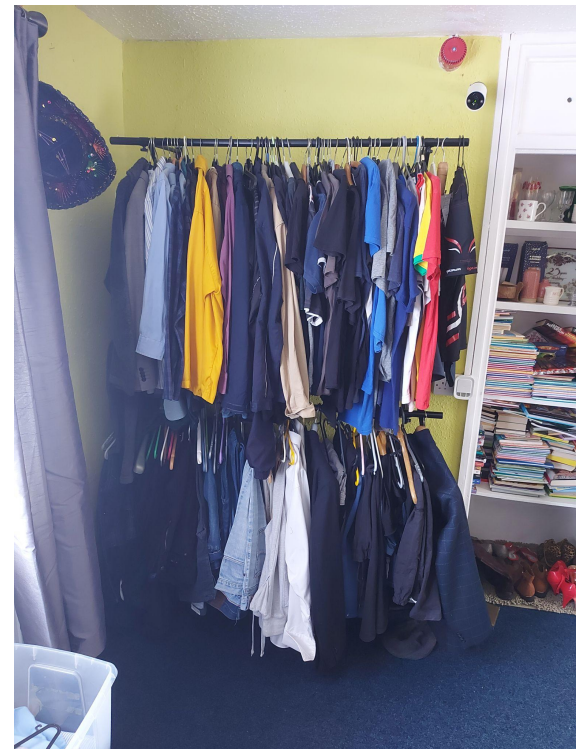


To the left are images I took of myself at the Blaen-Y-Maes Drop-In charity shop

Below is a photo of the entire men's clothes section, taking up one wall consisting of two racks that have been stacked

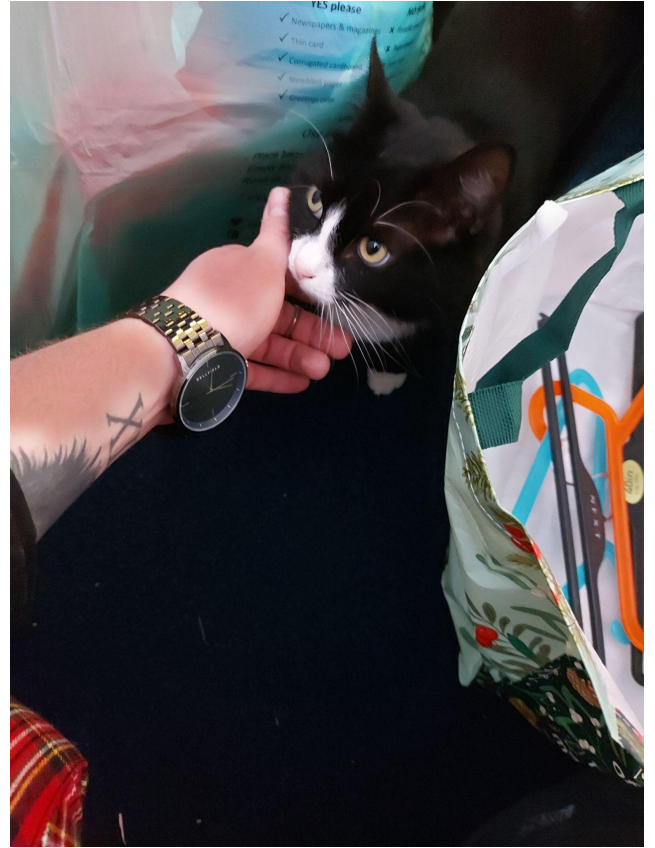


These images highlight the women's and children's clothes section of the shop and how they cover the vast majority of the space





Here is the mural on the outside wall of the main building of the Drop-In Centre



Above are pictures of the famed Blaen-Y-Maes Drop-In resident, Moby Dick... the cat.

Appendices

Placement Information Form (BSCPYCSH Programme & BSCMEHSH) Programme

Name of Student:	Ethan Francis Dowey-Wadham
Proposed Placement Setting and Address:	Blaen-Y-Maes Drop-In Centre 86-90 Blaen-Y-Maes Drive, Blaen-Y-Maes, Swansea SA5 5NR
Proposed Dates of Placement:	Tuesday, January 17th, 2023 No defined end date
Name of Contact for Venue: Please also state their position:	Karen Hughes Manager
Email Address:	blaenymaesdic@yahoo.co.uk
Telephone Number for Contact at Placement:	01792580905
Is a DBS required for you to attend this placement?	€ Yes € No If Yes, have you applied for this? € Yes applied on _____ € No
Explain how your role in this organisation/on this placement meets the criteria for the	The Blaen-Y-Maes Drop In Centre is a non-profit based in Blaen-Y-Maes, Swansea. It aims to provide support to the community through a variety of means including a food bank, food share and a charity shop containing clothes and other

assessment for the module <i>(e.g., what duties/tasks will you be undertaking that are relevant for the module assessment)</i>	miscellaneous items. The centre is also host to a number of support groups to help those who may be struggling in their life situations. All of these methods to support the community are designed to help improve the mental health and well-being of the citizens of Blaen-Y-Maes.
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ALL information must be provided. Incomplete forms will be returned to the student.

BSCPYCSH Programme Please return this form to Ruth Groff (ruth.groff@uwtsd.ac.uk) ASAP

BSCMEHSH Programme Please return this form to Ruth Groff (ruth.groff@uwtsd) by Friday October 14th

Placement Attendance Form

To be completed by the placement setting at the end of placement

Name of Student	Ethan Dowe - Wadham		
Placement Setting	Blaen y Maes Drop in		
Dates of Placement	10/01/23 -		
Name of individual completing this form. Please also state your position.	Karen Hughes		
Please could you answer the following questions about the student who attended a placement at your organisation.			
Did the student attend all ten (or equivalent) days of the placement? Yes ☒ No ☐			
How was the student's time keeping?	Good ☒	Satisfactory ☐	Poor ☐
How was the student's performance?	Good ☒	Satisfactory ☐	Poor ☐
Please provide any other information you consider may be of assistance regarding the performance of this student. Very good, excellent. Gets on with all the volunteers and customers.			
Signature:	K Hughes		Date: 25/4/23

Please return this form to Ruth Groff – Ruth.groff@uwtsd.ac.uk at the end of the students' placement experience.

Hour Log

<i>Date</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Hours</i>
10/01/23	10.00-15.00	5
17/01/23	10.00-15.00	5
24/01/23	10.00-15.00	5
31/01/23	10.00-15.00	5
07/01/23	10.00-15.00	5
14/01/23	10.00-15.00	5
21/01/23	10.00-15.00	5
28/01/23	10.00-15.00	5
07/01/23	10.00-15.00	5
14/01/23	10.00-15.00	5
21/01/23	10.00-15.00	5
28/01/23	10.00-15.00	5
04/01/23	10.00-15.00	5
11/01/23	10.00-15.00	5
25/01/23	10.00-15.00	5
<i>Total Hours</i>		75

References

Blaen-Y-Maes Drop-In Centre. Available at:

https://blaenymaesdic.wixsite.com/blaenymaesdropin/about_us. Accessed on April 24th, 2023.

Blaen-Y-Maes Drop-In Centre (image). Image available at:

<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=566627005494445&set=a.566626988827780>.