

Rita Lewis

SI Ellesmere Port & District would like to nominate Rita Lewis for her amazing work in the Community. Rita is the founder member of the Debt Advice Network in Ellesmere Port formed in 2007 and was initially operated from her own home. The Debt Advice Network came into being recognising there was a need in the local area. In 2007 The Debt Advice Network positioned itself to help, free of charge, anyone who asked regardless of status. The ethos was not to pass people from pillar to post but to deal with all issues an individual or family faced from Fuel and Food poverty. They have strived to work on the root cause of debt helping people to manage their money and budgeting. Giving advice in an attempt to give back control to anyone feeling in a spiral of hopelessness because of debt.

The natural progression for the Debt Advice Network was to look more closely at where more support could be given. In 2018 they transformed into a community shop, Rita being one of the founder members. This was the birth of the Port Grocery. The Port Grocery is a not for profit organisation and the initiative seeks to address two key issues of "Food Waste" and "Food Poverty". Normally any member of the public can go along and for a fee of £5 per week they could collect approx. £20 worth of Grocery from the shop. All in date food comes from local supermarkets and businesses destined for landfill. They have applied for and have received Grants from local business and other authorities. One great supporter of the cause is Steve Morgan of Red Row the building firm.

During the Covid 19 pandemic crisis they have turned the model round from people coming to the shop every day to a home delivery service. They are delivering about 170 food boxes five days a week, reaching around 2000 people each week.

They are collecting Pizzas from Pizza Hut twice a week who are donating Pizzas for them to deliver to NHS and frontline services staff as well as mental health and end of life teams.

Rita and her team are running a caring line and ring approx. 300 vulnerable people every week just to see how they are. They run a Facebook page The Port Grocery CIC, one of our other members Heather Duggan reads daily bedtime stories for the children on here.

Just prior to the lockdown, The Port Grocery, with the help of S.I. Ellesmere Port, set up an LGBT group to offer support to this very marginal group. A ZOOM and call line has been used to keep this group together and in touch during this unprecedented time. Rita and her co-founder are such amazing human beings and full of energy working many hours on the projects, and with the help of their staff and army of Volunteers are giving a wonderful service to the local area. Normally they provide a free meal at what they call the Wednesday and Friday Welcome open to all.

