

Media Release

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Lasting memories for Jewish community in south Wales thanks to HLF

Diana Soffa has always been interested in hearing people's fascinating tales at the synagogue she's attended since she was five years old, but little did Diana know back then that with support from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) she would help capture life stories like these to formally document the memories of the Jewish community in south Wales.

As one of five people sharing their experience in HLF's new *Heritage Matters in Wales* magazine, Diana is encouraging others to put their free time to good use to develop new skills while gaining an understanding of their local heritage.

60 year-old Diana from Cardiff, who's been a member of the Cardiff Reform Synagogue (CRS) for more than fifty years, wanted the stories she'd heard to survive and to mark the organisation's 60th anniversary, Diana and her fellow volunteers decided to create an oral history archive to save the stories before it was too late.

CRS received a grant of £33,600 from HLF to fund the project which provided volunteers with specialised training in oral history, archiving, interviewing and digital technology skills.

The volunteers will conduct interviews with 50 members of the Jewish community to create a high-quality audio archive and online educational materials, as well as organising a touring exhibition later this year.

Diana said: "We're not all youngsters, so learning to use the recording equipment and technology was quite a challenge! But the experience has given me such personal satisfaction, developing new skills and gaining confidence, I'd definitely encourage others with spare time on their hands to volunteer as part of a project like this."

The history of the Jewish community in south Wales dates back more than 200 years but hadn't been documented. Already 45 members of the community have been photographed and

interviewed for the project, from people who were born and bred in Wales to those who moved here in the 1930s.

Diana's most memorable experience from the project so far is getting to know other members of the community, which totals 250 across Cardiff. She said, "I have been overwhelmed by the brave and courageous stories that I've heard. Each family has had their own problems and challenges, but they've overcome them in different ways.

"It's a shame that we couldn't have started the project ten years ago, as we have lost members since then, but people were very weary of sharing their stories. Now that they have lived longer than their parents, some feel a sense of relief and an obligation to tell their family's story. And for many of our members, they realise that this could be the last opportunity for them to do so.

"It feels so rewarding to have captured a 60 year snapshot of what life was like for such a diverse community. Most importantly, these stories will be digitally archived to ensure that they're not forgotten and so young people in the community can relive these courageous tales in the future."

Jennifer Stewart, Head of HLF in Wales, said: "Projects like these give people the opportunity to develop new skills and grow in confidence while exploring their community's history.

"People are at the heart of HLF projects and it is thanks to volunteers like Diana that Wales' diverse heritage is able to be safeguarded for future generations to explore. The *Heritage Matters* magazine was created to celebrate these fantastic people behind the projects and will hopefully encourage others to volunteer and make a real difference in their communities."

To find out more about heritage projects funded by the HLF or to request copies of *Heritage Matters*, visit www.hlf.org.uk/wales

You can also keep up to date with Heritage Lottery Fund Wales on Facebook.

- ENDS -

For further information please contact Helen Newton and Kate Sullivan at Equinox Communications on 02920 764100 or hlf@equinoxcommunications.co.uk

Note to editors

Captions:

Image 1: Diana Soffa is helping to piece together the memories of the Jewish community in south Wales

Image 2: An archive photo of a Jewish tobacco shop owner in Berlin, c. 1934. Image donated by Rudi Montrose, who was interviewed as part of the project.

Image 3: An archive photo of the Montrose wedding, Berlin 1923

Volunteering/skills/training facts –

- More than £86.3m has been awarded to over 1,484 projects in Wales that involve volunteers. More than 98% of grants awarded in the last year have created volunteering opportunities
- Volunteering is a cornerstone of HLF projects. Our research indicates that, on average, 13 volunteers are involved in every project, providing nearly 450 hours of volunteering time per project ¹ – that's a total of 667,800 volunteering hours across Wales!
- HLF has awarded £49.3m to 179 projects in Wales that have included sessions for learners of all ages.
- Over 60 projects in Wales have offered participants the chance to learn new skills such as blacksmithing, textile and paper conservation, traditional building skills and dry stone walling
- 64 new work-based training opportunities have been created in Wales through our Training Bursary programme which aims to address specific skills shortages in the heritage sector

¹ Ipsos MORI, 2009, *ibid.*