

Angling for a new job after redundancy...

How, with the help of our union's training organisation Communitas, members around the country, including at Corus' Llanwern plant, are surviving and even thriving after redundancy.

Redundancy – you never know if it might happen to you. It's not just the loss of a job and family income but it can also lead to loss of self-esteem. The good news is that our union has specialist teams from Community's own training organisation Communitas ready to come to your aid.

The latest hotspot is the Corus Llanwern steel plant in Newport, South Wales, where 240 jobs have gone as part of the firm's streamlining. The redundancies are voluntary but no less difficult for the families concerned.

'We moved our team of advisors into the works some eight weeks ago and gave presentations to groups of workers before offering each of them personal counselling and advice sessions,' says Lyndon Peach, Chief Executive of Communitas.

A great deal of help and guidance is available and many of those made redundant found the one-to-one sessions invaluable. 'This redundancy is different as it is purely voluntary but when there are hard redundancies, it is more complex.'

At Llanwern the Communitas team was able to help people search for new careers, write their CVs and prepare for interviews. 'We were also able to offer retraining. Often a worker needs to acquire different skills so they can bid for different kinds of work,' Lyndon adds. 'We've retrained people all over the country for jobs ranging from child-minding to teaching, from computer programming to floristry. In Llanwern the age profile of those volunteering for redundancy was such that many simply wanted to retire but after a while some people can tire of their 'pipe and slippers' and come back to us to help them set out on a new career. Sometimes it's their partners who suggest they get out from under their feet and do something useful! The point is that we are always available even weeks or months later. It just needs a phone call.'

'While all this has been going on we've been talking to John Griffiths, Minister for Skills in the Welsh Assembly and he contributed resources from the Assembly's ReAct programme which offer support to workers in Wales either facing or threatened by redundancy through plant closure, industrial change or other difficulties. ReAct has paid, in fact, for all the training that people wanted to do,' Lyndon says.

When younger people want to be retrained the Communitas team helps them decide what they would like to do, what their aspirations are. 'We look at positioning them so that they can be able to compete in the local labour market.'

During the last five years Communitas has helped about 10,000 unemployed Community members into work. 'So every Community member knows that if they do face losing their job then we will be in there to help them in so many ways,' Lyndon declares. 'It's the security that all Community members can experience and many members have told us that it is a real benefit and a blessing to them and their families.'

No other union in the UK offers its members such a comprehensive package of help. It is one of the many advantages of Community union membership.

Admiration for what Community and its training arm Communitas are doing in Llanwern comes not only from the Welsh Assembly but from employer Corus. It also contributed funds towards the cost of the work being undertaken. 'We were delighted about this very encouraging move by Corus,' Lyndon adds. 'We've worked together well and now Corus want us to upskill many of the workers at Llanwern so they have transferable skills and can take better jobs in the works if there are vacancies. This is an ambitious scheme and it's great to be working with Corus on it. The Welsh Assembly is enthusiastic, too, and will once again contribute funds. If this new project works at Llanwern then Corus and Community would like to see it rolled out in other Corus plants across the country.'

At Llanwern some of the 240 people who lost their jobs were actually redeployed in the works. Others who left have been helped by Communitas to secure a wide range of jobs. One of these was Andrew Baines (pictured right), who was a crane driver and has become an angling coach. A keen angler for 30 years, he'd thought for a long time about teaching. 'Communitas pointed me in the right direction and encouraged me to complete a course,' he says. 'Now I'm qualified to teach not only adults but children and I'm looking forward to the future.' He is currently joining the Professional Anglers' Association and says he is so grateful for the union's help.

Communitas is not only doing fantastic work all over the country in upskilling and reskilling members but now has a network of union learning reps who encourage Community members to study a wide range of interests – from learning a foreign language to cookery, from information technology to labour relations.

'All this work means that Community members have wonderful opportunities to live better, richer lives and to get on in their careers,' Lyndon Peach declares.

