

Spring 2008

Devon *Link*

Large Print

The regular magazine for people with physical and sensory disabilities in Devon

No limits

**Welcome to the
world of off road
wheelchairs!**

– see page 24.

**Published by Devon County Council
and Torbay Council**

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Spring into action

Once the clocks go forward we all start to feel the benefit of lighter evenings.

Longer days mean more time to pursue outdoor hobbies like gardening, evening beach walks or even more adventurous activities. If the latter appeals to you, turn to page 24 to read about the new craze in off road wheelchairs.

If you'd love to take up a new hobby, but worry that your disability might hold you back, take further inspiration from Philippa Armstrong, champion dog agility handler on page 32.

Spring weather is unpredictable, and the internet is a great way to pass the time on rainy days. If you want to get online but don't know how, avoid being a technophobe by reading our feature on page 37.

Other highlights include an informative look at Disability Living Allowance on page 27, and a theatre review of The Flower Girls on page 47.

Finally, congratulations to Mr Ron Thomas from Tavistock, winner of the binoculars competition last issue – they're on the way!

Best wishes, Sarah

Don't let new bus scheme pass you by!

If you have a disability and travel by bus, you may be already aware of the new England-wide concessionary bus pass introduced on 1 April.

The scheme replaces previous concessionary passes operated by local authorities. The main advantage of the new pass is that holders are entitled to concessionary 'off-peak' bus travel anywhere in England, rather than being limited to their local area.

But depending on where you live, you may or may not be entitled to other benefits – such as free bus travel for carers – which are subsidised by your local council.

Are you eligible?

If you are aged 60 or over or are 'eligible disabled' you are entitled to concessionary bus travel.

What does 'eligible disabled' mean?

You are eligible disabled if you:

- are blind or partially sighted
- are profoundly or severely deaf
- are without speech
- have a disability, or have suffered an injury, which

has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on your ability to walk

- **do not have arms or have long-term loss of the use of both arms**
- **have a learning disability, or**
- **would have an application to drive a motor vehicle refused on grounds other than persistent misuse of drugs or alcohol.**

What does the new pass entitle you to?

Previous local schemes entitled holders to a statutory minimum concession of free local bus travel in their local area from 9.30 am to 11.00 pm Monday to Friday and at any time during weekends and public holidays - and this will continue under the new scheme.

However, holders of the new pass will also get free local bus travel in all other areas of England during these off-peak times.

Local councils may offer extra benefits to their residents as part of their concessionary scheme – for example, free travel for carers travelling with a disabled person or free bus travel before 9.30 am Monday to Friday. Check with your district council for more information.

Do remember that additional benefits are subsidised by the local council and will normally only be available to

that region's own residents. So if you visit an area that offers additional services, you probably won't be entitled to them – make sure you check first.

For more information about your area:

Exeter City, Mid Devon, North Devon, South Hams, Teignbridge, Torridge or West Devon:

www.devon.gov.uk/nationalbuspass

Tel. 01392 383688.

East Devon:

www.eastdevon.gov.uk/bus_passes

Tel. 01395 571500.

Torbay:

www.torbay.gov.uk/concessionaryfares

Tel. 01803 207766News from Torbay

News from West Devon

Spring at Rosemoor

The Royal Horticultural Garden at Rosemoor near Torrington is one of my favourite gardens; no matter what time of year there's always something interesting to see. I find that nearly all of the garden is accessible on my scooter and that routes avoiding difficult areas are well sign posted. There is blue badge parking as well as an accessible restaurant, shop and toilet. Wheelchairs are available for use and due to a new Leisuremobility scheme, scooters can be hired on thursdays (must be booked in advance). For more information phone 01805 624067 or visit www.rhs.org.uk/rosemoor

Tavistock Youth Cafe Plus

Local parents of children and teenagers with special needs have started a new group on Mondays from 5-8pm at the Youth Cafe in Pixon Lane. There are computers, Play Station games, TV, a pool table and snack bar. The cafe, for youngsters aged 5-19 together with their parents or carers, is proving to be a great success and welcomes new members and volunteers. For details ring Cathy Sharp on 078771 96835 or Allan Lewis on 01822 614335.

New accessible trails in the Tamar Valley

New trails through the woodland slopes above the Tamar, that link old mine sites are due to open this spring. The Tamar Valley Mining Heritage Project intend to set up a group to test the trails before the official opening; problems identified by this group should lead to improvements with the aim of making the trails accessible. Jemma Sharman from the Mining Project welcomes Devon Link readers interested in joining this group, she can be contacted on 01579 35168. Those taking part may even find themselves featured in a podcast that will be available on the project website!

Pat Mayston

devonlink@mayston.eclipse.co.uk

News from North Devon

Pioneering exhibition raises £25,000

A moving exhibition of artwork by sick and disabled children has raised £25,000 for children's hospices at a charity auction. The exhibition, titled 'This is Me: The Art of Children' included pieces by children receiving respite care at Barnstaple's Little Bridge House. The project was set up by the Association of Children's Hospices to

showcase pictures by children from all over the country.

Jackie Oldham

e-mail: jackie.devonlink@btinternet.com

News from Mid Devon

Young carers plans

The Kids Who Care group in Tiverton have received £1,000 from Devon County Council, which will allow young carers to enjoy monthly outings, youth evenings and other activities. It's hoped a visit to Crealy Adventure Park can be organised. The group gives them a well-deserved break from their responsibilities. For more information ring Helen Isaac on 01392 384108 or email helen.isaac@devon.gov.uk

DIY traffic wardens

Due to a temporary lack of official traffic wardens in Crediton, volunteers are taking action against drivers illegally using disabled parking areas, and pavements, by placing notices on their windscreens. Local Crediton policeman Sgt Gareth Twigg welcomed the scheme.

Long awaited access guide

The Crediton and District Access Guide, funded by the National Lottery and last updated 10 years ago, has been 17 months in the making. This invaluable book includes access information about premises such as churches and toilets. It is available from doctor's surgeries, hospitals and libraries in the EX17 postcode area. The 140 page guide can also be obtained from Mrs Pope on 01363 773557.

Patricia Clow

patricia.devonlink@yahoo.com

Diana joins Devon Link

This issue we welcome Diana Frost as our new correspondent for Torbay and Teignbridge.

Diana, who lives in Dawlish and is originally from Exeter, has been married for 35 years and has three grown-up sons, as well as four grandchildren.

Her working life has mainly centred on caring for other people, especially children. Previous jobs include lollipop lady, playgroup supervisor and childminder!

While working as a care assistant 14 years ago Diana fell and broke her leg whilst leaving work. The accident resulted in having metal plates and pins placed into her leg and ankle.

As well as difficulty walking, the accident led to other long-term implications – including chronic asthma, Raynaud's and arthritis.

Diana enjoys swimming, going as often as four times a week – and finds the regular exercise helps her respiratory condition and joints.

Her other interests include skittles and reading.

“I love to read and will quite happily take myself off upstairs for hours with a good book,” Diana says.

“I'm currently reading a book by Joan Jonker. My favourite books are real-life stories and autobiographies.”

Diana hopes that by joining the Devon Link team she will be able to give something back to other disabled people.

Read Diana's Torbay news column on this page and Teignbridge news on page 19. If you have any news from either of these areas, Diana would love to know! Email diana.devonlink@btinternet.com

News from Torbay

Grant kick starts fitness club

A lottery grant has helped to set up a fitness club for disabled people in Brixham. Residents of the Dragon's Tail flats in Douglas Avenue have run fitness classes for some time and wanted to extend them for other disabled people in the town. The new classes are held at Central Church Hall in Fore Street on Wednesdays, where an instructor is available to show people weight and circuit training. The classes cost £2 per session with the first session free.

Care home benefits from government funding

Torquay care home Falkland Lodge has been able to create a new sensory garden thanks to financial help from the Department of Health. The sensory garden has wheelchair access and a barbecue area, and residents

are able to access herbs and spices for cooking. Falkland Lodge is one of 29 successful Torbay homes to receive grants from the government's 'Dignity in Care' campaign.

Sailors plan royal launch

Torbay Disabled Sailing Association is to invite Princess Anne to launch its third sailing boat, hopefully in September. The group is able to buy or build a new boat after winning £80,000 in the Big Lottery People's Millions last year. A team of disabled members have visited several boats, including some at the London Boat Show, to research suitability and access for people with disabilities. The boat will join the association's other accessible vessels Moonshine and Sainte Foy. For more information contact Dave Musgrove on 01803 408886 or email davidmusgrove@blueyonder.co.uk

Diana Frost

diana.devonlink@btinternet.com

Robin cheers on Liverpool

FOR ROBIN DAVIS, a visit to Anfield football ground to see his beloved team Liverpool was a dream come true.

The trip was made possible thanks to Eddie Pike from the Acorn Centre in Exeter, local charity Dream-A-Way, and Exeter Multiple Sclerosis Centre.

Robin, who has MS and is a wheelchair user, has been a Liverpool fan for 43 years.

When Eddie found out about Robin's devotion he applied to Liverpool FC for tickets on his behalf. The success of getting tickets was then followed by more good news when Dream-A-Way kindly offered to pay for them. The charity supports people with physical and learning disabilities in the South West by funding holidays and days trips.

Exeter Multiple Sclerosis Centre, where Robin attends for weekly physiotherapy, also provided a wheelchair-friendly minibus for Robin's trip to Liverpool.

Robin had a fantastic time watching his team draw 1-1 against fellow premiership stars Chelsea.

News from East Devon

Good news for dialysis users

Building work has started at Honiton Hospital on a satellite kidney dialysis unit. Between eight and twelve treatment stations are due to open in August, and will mean local patients will no longer have to travel to Exeter and beyond for dialysis. The haemodialysis unit will cost around £1.5m and support around thirty patients at a time, who often need treatment three times a week.

Fundraisers swim channel!

Audrey Wolstenholme and Sue Hunter raised £400 for the charity ASPIRE by swimming 22 miles in Honiton Swimming Pool – the equivalent distance of the English Channel. ASPIRE supports people with spinal injuries. For more information ring 0208 954 5759 or email: fundraising@aspire.org.uk

Christmas gifts for troops

Disabled volunteer Peter Bond, from Lypstone, organised 140 Christmas boxes to be sent to troops on over-seas duties during the Christmas period. Contents included high factor suntan lotion, chocolates biscuits, nuts and warm socks! He plans to do the same again this year with help from a network of volunteers. For

more information ring 01392 225722 or email peterbond@btinternet.com

Patricia Clow

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News from South Hams

Garden sharing in Totnes

Many people in and around Totnes have gardens that for various reasons they are unable to keep tidy or even use themselves. Transition Town Totnes and South Devon Community Supported Farming have developed a scheme to put enthusiastic gardeners in touch with local people who would like to share some of their garden to grow produce. If you would like more information please contact Lou on 01803 867358.

Dartington to Totnes

As a regular visitor to Totnes I have discovered a very enjoyable level accessible walk which starts at the Cider Press Centre and takes you to the Town Centre giving lovely glimpses of the River Dart and surrounding countryside. There is parking for blue badge holders at the shops and restaurants at the Cider Press Centre. From here follow the "Access for All" footpath, crossing the bottom of Dartington Hall Drive to take another

footpath which skirts the river and the railway station to eventually finish in the town. A taped guide is available at the Totnes Information Centre. Details of this walk can also be found on www.southdevonaonb.org.uk

Pat Mayston

e-mail: pat@mayston.eclipse.co.uk

News from Teignbridge

Supermarket gets strict over disabled parking

Asda in Newton Abbot is helping to combat a growing parking problem for disabled people and families using the store, by fining motorists illicitly using disabled or parent-and-child parking bays. Profits from the fines are split between Motability – the car scheme for disabled people, and Tommy's baby charity – which funds research into the prevention of premature birth, stillbirth and miscarriage.

Delight as planning plea is finally approved

A Dawlish family has been granted planning permission to build a much-needed extension. Jeff and Joanne Lloyd had applied to Teignbridge Council to extend their property to help them to care for their children Amy and Scott. Both have a rare condition called Sanfilippo Syndrome, which has left them blind, deaf, unable to walk and with speech difficulties. Despite being refused permission by planning officers, Councillor Shirley Maddicott and others ensured that common sense prevailed in getting the application passed.

Diana Frost

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News from Exeter

Music therapy for youngsters

Local children with cerebral palsy can get with their development at a new music-based education class. Erzsebet Gordon, who runs sessions at the Scout Hut by St Michael's Primary in Heavitree, uses her experience as a conductor to help the youngsters. The sessions currently cost £20, but Erzsebet hopes to set up a charity to get funding. For information ring 01392 819646 or visit www.pathforthedisabled.co.uk.

Great West Run plea

Exeter Community Transport Association (ECTA) is appealing for runners to take part in Exeter's Great West Run in May on its behalf. As well as runners, ECTA needs volunteers to help people do the route in their wheelchairs. The wheelchair users each require teams of no less than four people to push them round the route and volunteers must be fit and strong. For more information ring Deborah on 01392 494001 or email deborah@exetercta.co.uk

Braille maps help shoppers

Braille maps are planned for Exeter's Princesshay shopping centre following successful trials. The maps are designed to help blind and partially-sighted people navigate the shopping centre. An audio guide is also available from Exeter Tourist Information Centre.

Jackie Oldham
jackie.devonlink@btinternet.com

Devon Link recognised at awards ceremony

The partnership between Devon Link magazine and Living Options Devon was nominated for an Equality Best Practice Award at a special ceremony hosted by Devon County Council on 24 January.

Devon Link was one of only eight nominations in the category, which also included the Disability Information Service website. These initiatives, chosen from 48 areas of good practice in total, had all been identified as leading the way at delivering equality of services to Devon residents.

The annual Customer Service Awards, held at County Hall, are now in their third year. However, this was the first time the ceremony had included an equalities award.

In partnership with Living Options, Devon Link employs and manages a team of four local correspondents, all of whom either have a disability or care for someone who has. This not only offers an employment opportunity and training for staff with disabilities, but provides a crucial link and voice for disabled people in Devon.

Devon County Council Chairman Brenda Taylor presented a runner-up certificate to members of the Devon Link team, including Editor Sarah Avery and Editorial Assistant Mairi Hamilton, as well as

Correspondent for Mid & East Devon, Patricia Clow and Team Co-ordinator Helen Smith from Living Options.

Devon County Council staff had been given the opportunity to vote online for a winner in the weeks running up to the ceremony. The winning initiative was the Apprenticeship Programme – which provides young people with the opportunity to develop skills, gain qualifications and secure permanent employment.

No Limits

This issue Philippa Greenslade tells us why so-called all-terrain wheelchairs really do mean 'ALL' terrain.

The new breed of 'off road' wheelchairs promise to take you over sand, mud and gravel, enabling you to participate in all of your chosen outdoor pursuits.

The Trac About IRV 2000 powered wheelchair spreads its weight on unique powered tracks over mud, sand and even snow. It is used by anglers, trekkers and rambles giving access to 'all' areas. With a price tag of £8000 it might stay on your wish list, but if you fancy a test drive the Independent Living Centre (ILC) hopes to have one available at our open day in June.

The Tramper is another all terrain vehicle that could easily be driven over fields, footpaths and gravel. It has the more conventional look of a mobility scooter with added suspension to cushion you from rough terrain. You can even attach a trailer for carrying equipment.

For those of you more inclined towards the beach than the hills, the Landeez all terrain wheelchair could be ideal for a trip to the seaside. Its soft PVC low pressure pneumatic tyres are designed to carry you over sand,

gravel and mud. The Landeez has a weight capacity of 325lbs and can be propelled by an attendant or the user with a self propelling hand cycle system.

www.caravanable.co.uk lists UK beaches where you can hire the Landeez. Community transport schemes in Barnstaple and Teignbridge hire out Landeez wheelchairs for a refundable deposit and hire charge.

If you would rather self propel then you may prefer the all-terrain Tremor from Colours with its Fatso wheels with hand rim, to take you along the shore and into the shallows. The UK supplier, based in Kent, also sell or hire the Fatso wheels which fit onto most self-propelling wheelchairs with detachable 24” wheels. However, some spindles may not be suitable for the wheels and standard brakes may not function while using them. The wheels cost £800 per pair, or £120 per week to hire (plus refundable deposit).

Chris Swift is the driving force behind UK company Molten Rock who produce the even more adventurous BOMA Off Road Wheelchair. With four wheel drive and all-round adjustable independent suspension, the BOMA can be adapted for use without hand function. Chris is hoping to bring one down to the ILC open day on 18 June, where he will be happy to show you it’s unique features.

Feature

Independent Living Centre

All Terrain Wheelchairs and Car Adaptations open day

18 June, 10-1pm FREE

For more information contact:

Independent Living Centre

Isca House

Haven Road

Exeter EX2 8DS

Tel. 01392 687276

ilc-exeter@devon.gov.uk

Trac About IRV 2000

www.cotswoldmobility.co.uk

Tel. 01608 658899

Tramper www.tramper.co.uk

Tel. 08456 588 699

Landeez

Tel. 0121 568 7326

Colours 'Tremor' www.kentmobility.co.uk

Tel. 01732 770251

Boma Off Road Wheelchair

www.moltenrock.co.uk

Tel. 07773 278768

Disability Living Allowance

Disability Living Allowance (DLA) is a benefit that many people either do not know about or do not think that they can claim. This issue Sheena Trethowan attempts to dispel the myths and give you tips on how to make a successful claim.

Disability Allowance (DLA) is paid to help you access things that will help you cope with your disability.

DLA is made up of two components: mobility and care. The mobility component, if paid at the higher rate, can be used via the 'Motability' scheme to lease a car using part or all of it. Either component can be paid on its own; you do not have to qualify for both to be eligible.

There are several myths about DLA, which will not affect your claim despite what you may have been told:

You are working:

The mobility component of DLA can actually be used to

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help disabled people to stay in work as it may help to pay for transport costs or a car, with or without adaptations (Access to Work, through Jobcentre Plus, may also be able to help with this). However, if you are claiming DLA for, say, a badly damaged back and work in a job that involves a lot of bending and lifting, your eligibility for the award may be reviewed.

Your partner works:

DLA is not means tested so it is not affected if your partner works.

You have savings:

As above, DLA is not means tested so even if you win the lottery it won't matter!

You are in receipt of other benefits:

DLA is paid on top of any other benefits and will not be taken into account when other benefits are calculated. In fact, an award of DLA can often lead to increased entitlement to Means-Tested Benefits and Tax Credits for people on low incomes.

You have not paid any National Insurance Contributions:

DLA is not a contributory benefit so someone who has never worked or paid National Insurance contributions, or who has not worked for several years can still be eligible to claim it.

You have been told by a health/care worker that you will not be eligible:

DLA is a self assessment benefit, so although you will

need to provide contact details for your doctor or consultant on the claim form, the decision to award benefit is made by the Department for Work & Pensions.

You do not consider yourself to be ‘disabled’:

Long term health conditions, which impact on your day to day life are considered in DLA applications even if you have not been diagnosed with a specific disability or illness.

You have been turned down before:

You may be able to put forward a stronger case a second time as many people feel embarrassed at applying and ‘play down’ their condition in their first application. Your condition and your needs may have changed since you last applied. It is important to get advice from your local Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB) or other advice agency if you are submitting a second claim.

You live alone and do not have any care:

DLA is for the care that you need, whether or not you have someone to help you.

You don’t want any care put in place:

You do not have to use the money to pay for care. It can be used towards paying someone to do your housework or gardening, if it makes your life easier.

Someone you live with cares for you:

It is also not about what care you already receive, it is about the care that you need because of your condition or disability.

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When you reach the age of 65, DLA will stop:

If DLA is being paid before your 65th birthday, it will continue. If you are over 65 when you apply, then the benefit that you may be eligible for is called Attendance Allowance and consists of a care component only. For more information contact Care Direct on 0845 1551 007 or your local CAB.

Tips for completing the form

- **Provide as much information as possible – the form leaves little extra space to explain how your condition affects you. Use additional sheets if necessary.**
- **Detail your problems – describe how they affect your daily life. Don't forget to include the things that you can't do because of your condition. Be truthful but don't play down your condition.**
- **Make it clear that the problems you have are due to your condition or disability, not because you prefer not to do them. Don't say 'but I cope by...'**
- **Give examples – this gives the person deciding whether you are eligible for the benefit a better idea of daily tasks that cause you problems.**
- **Say how someone could help – you just need to show that you 'reasonably require' help in order to qualify. Give examples of how an activity would be made easier if someone were there to help.**

- **Don't worry about your handwriting, grammar, how many additional sheets you use or staying inside the boxes. Remember that if you use additional sheets, put your name and National Insurance number on the top and staple or clip the pages to the form.**

For more information and advice about DLA contact:

Disability Information Service

Tel. 0845 155 1005

Textphone: 0845 155 1020

disabilityinfo@devon.gov.uk

If you live in Torbay, contact:

Torbay Disability Information Service

Tel. 01803 552175

Fax: 01803 556060

disabilityinformation@torbay.gov.uk

Philippa teaches a new dog old tricks!

Four years ago, we featured local dog agility handler Philippa Armstrong and her Border Collie star Zippy. We thought it was about time we caught up with Philippa, Zippy and the latest addition to their team – Binky!

It's easy to understand why achieving success in the field of dog agility relies on a great human-canine partnership. Handlers strive to find a dog that can meet the physical as well as the mental demands of this intense sport, where results are achieved by a combination of timing and teamwork.

So it's no mean feat that Totnes-based handler Philippa Armstrong is achieving success with not just one, but two dogs.

What makes Philippa's achievements even more impressive is that due to her disability, she has had to break away from the traditional methods of dog handling.

When Devon Link last featured Philippa in winter 2004, worsening Rheumatoid Arthritis had resulted in her decision to start handling Zippy from her wheelchair.

Having previously trained Zippy on foot, Philippa faced the challenge of changing her own body language and verbal commands, as well as getting Zippy to adapt to a new method of handling.

The partnership between Philippa and Zippy went from strength to strength – and they went on to compete in and win a number of competitions across the UK. In 2005 Philippa was the first wheelchair athlete to compete in a National Dog Final – and is still the only handler in the UK to have done this.

However, Philippa reached a point where she felt she would have to put in many more hours of training to progress further in the sport with her wheelchair. She was also unable to get the wheelchair in and out of her vehicle independently – which was frustrating as she often travelled by herself to competitions.

But rather than give up on the sport she loved, Philippa channelled her energy into developing an innovative new handling method.

“When I first started in agility I always believed that if a shepherd can handle his or her dog from the other side of a valley, then there must be a way to work an agility dog from the middle of the ring,” she says.

“However, I was new to the sport, and tried to do what everybody else was doing, i.e. running with their dog – but at an overstretched and unsuccessful walk.”

So, after several successful years using her wheelchair, Philippa decided to go back to working her dogs on foot – but this time from a stationary position in the middle of the agility course. The usual technique is for a handler to run alongside the dog.

“More experienced, I took the massive decision to take two years out to retrain my dogs and to work at a distance the way I had always believed possible.”

“Many said it couldn’t be done. It is definitely work in progress, but it is possible, as our results last year testify.”

Now Philippa has a second dog, Binky, who is determined to chase Zippy’s heels.

The three year old Collie excelled during her first foray onto the agility circuit in 2007 by winning her first ever competition. Philippa was both astonished and delighted with the win.

“I wasn’t expecting such things from Binky yet. I’m looking forward to continuing her training ready for competitions in 2008 – I think ultimately she will be the faster dog.”

Binky recently won her second competition – by a noteworthy six second margin!

However, not wishing to be outdone by the new dog on the block, Zippy herself just seems to get better with age and experience.

2007 saw Zippy achieve better results than she had for the previous three years combined, including two wins and a second and third place. From June onwards she only dropped below the top 10% in the UK once.

This is a fantastic achievement when you consider that Philippa and Zippy compete in classes of up to 300 dogs at a time – with non disabled handlers.

With Binky a rising star and Zippy at the peak of her abilities, what would Philippa like to achieve in 2008 and beyond?

“Realistically, I would like to carry on where I left off in 2007 with Zippy. I couldn’t be more pleased with her. She has been a stalwart through all the changes, she always tries her socks off and does exactly what she’s told, which has been fundamental in helping me develop the new system of handling. To stay in the top 10 per cent with the occasional win would be fantastic.

“I’ve just found out she is eligible to enter the prestigious Kennel Club Novice Cup at the International Agility Festival this summer so I’m really chuffed!

“Binky, I hope will become as successful as Zippy. I see no reason why she shouldn’t. I’m currently working with two excellent trainers and both dogs are learning new

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skills all the time, Binky particularly at a phenomenal rate.

“I’m also planning to get a new puppy in 2008, who all being well would be ready to compete when I start to wind down Zippy’s workload.

“Other than that, my ultimate dream is to compete at the Royal International Horse Show at Olympia. It is unlikely to be this year, Zippy is more comfortable competing outdoors and Binky isn’t quite ready – yet. However, she may well be by 2009!”

Philippa has spent over four years shoehorning both dogs, equipment, and a wheelchair into her ancient car to travel, train and compete all over the country.

A suitable van would make life much easier for the trio. Unfortunately agility is ineligible for sports funding, so any offers of help would be gratefully received. You can contact Philippa on 01803 867074 or email philippa.armstrong@lineone.net

In 2005, Philippa co-founded the Disabled Handlers Association – with the aim to support fellow disabled agility handlers.

The association offers 'Best Overall Disabled Handler' trophies at various major agility shows and has a Disabled Handlers Annual League.

For further information about the association visit www.disabledhandlersassociation.com

The digital divide deepens

Did you know that 39 per cent of adults living in the UK are still not online? One in twelve households don't have access to a computer, mobile phone or digital TV.

Those who are out of work, in poor health, live in social housing, live alone, or have a low level of qualification are being set at a further disadvantage by digital exclusion. A full 75 per cent of people counted as socially excluded are also digitally excluded. That means they're missing out on the opportunities, choices, savings and services computers and the internet provide, and that other people consider a normal and integral part of their everyday lives.

The news comes in a new research report from UK online centres and researchers FreshMinds. The research 'Understanding Digital Inclusion' identifies that those still stuck on the wrong side of the digital divide are more deeply excluded and harder-to-reach than ever before.

UK online centres were set up by the government eight years ago to provide public access to computers. UK online centres can be found on high streets, in libraries, internet cafés, mobile buses and community centres and provide millions of people with free or low cost access to computers and the internet, plus help and advice on using them.

As one disabled user explained: “When I started out at my UK online centre, I was confined to a wheelchair, and in a lot of pain. To be honest I didn’t think computers could be of any use to me. I couldn’t have been more wrong!”

“Although my legs are still disabled, my brain isn’t – and that’s thanks to my centre. It’s stopped me from being depressed, made me want to learn more and given me a reason to get out of bed in the morning. It’s also made me feel useful again, because now I’m helping other people make the same journey.”

There are lots of reasons for using the internet and getting online. Here are just a few:

Convenience

Unlike shops and banks, the internet is never closed. So you can get whatever you need when it suits you.

Saving money

Online, you can compare prices and get the best deals on everything from gas and electricity to new cars and holidays. Plus lots of companies offer extra discounts if you buy online.

Communication

Email makes it easier to stay in touch with friends and relatives, wherever they are in the world. There are also lots of different websites that can help you make new friends - or catch up with old ones if you want.

Information

There are literally billions of websites out there. So whether you're helping the kids with their homework, renewing your car tax, booking a holiday, researching your hobby, looking for a new job, or just finding out cinema times and football results, you'll find all the information you need.

What's next?

- 1. Call free on 0800 77 1234 to find out the address and phone number of your nearest UK online centre, or use the easy online search facility at www.ukonlinecentres.com.**
- 2. Phone your UK online centre. They'll tell you the times the centre is open and how to get there.**
- 3. Visit your UK online centre to find friendly people who will help you get started with computers and the internet. Why not give it go?**

Feature

To help get you get started we've listed some well known and useful websites you might like to try. (please note Devon Link is not responsible for the content of these sites and no endorsement is implied).

www.myguide.gov.uk

– a simple introduction to the internet.

www.direct.gov.uk

– a one stop shop for public services information.

www.nhs.uk

– health-related information

www.uswitch.com

– for price comparisons.

Independence day

‘Healthy and active independent living’ was the message promoted at an event organised by the Devon Disability Forum in January.

The Active Independent Living event held at Plymouth Pavilions brought together over 75 exhibitors from disability-related organisations and other voluntary, commercial and public sector agencies.

The aim was to promote healthy and active independent living for disabled people as well as their families and carers.

The event was organised by the Devon Disability Forum (DDF), which is led by Living Options Devon, the county’s leading user-led disability charity.

Visitors got the chance to attend workshops with interesting titles such as: Seated Pilates, Active for Life, and How to get the most out of your hearing aid. Assistance Dogs could be seen in action and there was the opportunity to meet and talk to James Lake the disabled sculptor.

Feature

In addition, there were interactive performances from the Beacon Wheelchair Dancers and a chance to try mobility ice skating free of charge, courtesy of Plymouth Pavilions.

Emma Treby from Living Options said: “We really wanted to make this the most comprehensive gathering of voluntary, public and private sector organisations working in the field of physical and sensory disabilities that the county has ever seen.

“The aim of the event was to provide information and workshops for individuals to see how they can become healthier and more active in society.

“People with disabilities face many barriers in everyday life and these include access to and inclusion in positive activities to improve health and well-being.”

Organisers of the Active Independent Living event made sure that all activities were accessible by providing communication support (British Sign Language interpreters, electronic note takers and sighted guides). The venue itself was fully accessible and all workshop leaders received guidance and training on accessibility.

The DDF was launched in June 2006, following research by Living Options Devon to see how people with physical and sensory disabilities could be better served in Devon.

Living Options Devon developed and leads the DDF, and is supported by a steering group of disability organisations from around Devon.

The purpose of the forum is to provide an opportunity for organisations to share information, work in partnership and reach out to individuals living with physical and sensory disabilities through regular events. Events are always focused on information and action rather than just being ‘talking shops’.

The DDF is now going from strength to strength in its third year of existence.

To find out more about the DDF contact Rachael Diffey at Living Options Devon.

**Ring 01392 459222 or email
rachael.diffey@livingoptions.org**

Now you can send your letters free!

Just use this address:

Devon Link, Freepost NAT 21298, Exeter, EX2 4BR

or email: devonlink@devon.gov.uk

One letter will receive a £25 Marks & Spencer voucher.

Lost in translation

A funny thing happened on the way home from our recent hearing support group, where we had been discussing basic signing, including greetings. While waiting at a pelican crossing, a car stopped to let me cross. Instead of mouthing the words 'thank you' I did the sign for it instead. The response? The driver blew me a kiss! Well I suppose there is a similarity!

Patricia Clow, Honiton

Praise for Ring & Ride

I find your magazine informative and a pleasure to read so thought I'd write in. I'd like to say how much difference the Ring & Ride service has made to my life. I get picked up at my door and dropped back for trips into town or to local supermarkets. Our wonderful driver helps carry the shopping to the door, and is always smiling and has such patience. Going out with the same group of people every week and the outings in the summer are so enjoyable. Thank you Exeter Community Transport.

Mrs P Brosnan, Exeter

Nature's wonders (£25 winner)

Have you seen the sky at dawn?

Streaked by an artist's brush in swathes of pink and gold.

In the distance the sun dances on the rippling cobalt sea.

Cotton wool clouds of many shapes drift across one view,

Cobwebs filled with sparkling dew-drops swinging in the breeze.

Early birds seek the worms and seeds,

Flowers turn their faces to the sun.

Bright petals brought to life,

their delicate perfumes wafting on the breeze.

Amid the drowsy hum of bees and flies,

Trees and bushes in full leaf, stir with an unseen hand.

Let us recognise these glorious works,

All perfected by our Lord.

Margaret White, Exeter

The Flower Girls

The Drum, Theatre Royal, Plymouth

This moving but often humorous play is about a group of disabled women living in a North London residential home, who make a living by producing silk flowers in the sheltered workshop attached to the home. The action of the play seesaws between WWII and the 1960s and tells the interwoven stories of the six women.

Although fictional the characters are based on testimonies of former residents from the Crippleage (not a name we would use these days) residential home, which actually existed between 1932 and 2000.

The Flower Girls is produced by one of the country's leading disabled-led theatre companies, Graeae, and vividly conveys the lives of the women – the strength of their friendships, the difficulties all of them had overcome, and most of all the dreadful waste of human potential.

The fantastic women who were the real-life Flower Girls have largely been forgotten. Both Richard Cameron who wrote the play and Graeae should be congratulated on a fantastic production, which should be brought to a much wider audience.

Graeae uses the skills of actors, writers and directors with physical and sensory impairments. Their productions are built round the creative use of sign

language and audio description. The company regularly brings productions to Plymouth. For more information visit www.graeae.org

***i*information**

***i* Local information services**

Devon's Disability Information Service provides information and impartial advice for people with disabilities, their carers and their families. Open from 8am-8pm Monday to Friday, 9am - 1pm Saturdays. Tel. 0845 1551 005. Email: disabilityinfo@devon.gov.uk Minicom: 0845 1551 020. SMS: 07773 333231.

The Torbay Disability Information Service welcomes enquiries by telephone, fax, minicom, by post or in person. Open Monday to Friday from 10am - 1pm and Monday to Thursday from 1.30pm - 4.30pm. Based at The Chadwell Annexe, Torquay Road, Preston, Paignton TQ3 2DW. Tel. 01803 552175 Minicom: 01803 523981 Fax: 01803 556060 Email: disabilityinformation@torbay.gov.uk

DISCplus provides information for the parents and carers of children with special needs. Tel. 0800 056 3666 Email: discplus@devon.gov.uk www.devon.gov.uk/discplus

Local groups

East Devon Special Needs Action Group is a free information service for people with physical and sensory disabilities, carers and professionals. Information includes education, employment, support groups, charities, benefits, recreation, access, transport and mobility. Contact the group, by writing to: East Devon SNAG, St Clares, Fore Street, Seaton EX12 2AN or call:

Seaton	Tel: 01297 24498 on Mondays
Axminster	Tel: 01297 34684 on Tuesdays
Exmouth	Tel: 01395 265787 on Wednesdays
Sidmouth	Tel: 01404 813916 on Wednesdays
Ottery St Mary	Tel: 01404 813916 on Thursdays
Honiton	Tel: 01404 46113 on Fridays

Living Options Devon Outreach Project runs disability forums for people with physical or sensory disabilities. Regular meetings are held across Devon, and are a way for people to comment on the services they use and become actively involved in improving those services. Representatives from the forums have access to service providers and pass on views from members. Service providers are also invited to our meetings occasionally to hear feedback and take questions. All meetings are held in accessible venues and communication support is provided to ensure that everyone can participate fully. Travel costs are also paid. For more information contact

**Living Options Devon, Isca House, Haven Road, Exeter,
EX2 8DS Tel. 01392 459222. Fax: 01392 423427.**

Email: info@livingoptions.org

The Deaf Equal Action Forum is a group of people who have similar experiences and understand each other. It's where Deaf people can share their experiences and support each other. It looks at the barriers that Deaf people face and thinks about how Deaf people could better access services. It's also a place to meet service providers face to face and improve services together. The group is part of the Deaf community. How can DEAF work for you? Can you understand your Doctor? Are you unhappy in the cinema or theatre because there are no interpreters or subtitles? Have you had problems with the Police, hospital, education, transport, events or anything else because of communication or other issues? If so, join us! Contact Living Options Devon, Isca House, Haven Road, Exeter EX2 8DS Fax: 01392 01392 423427, SMS: 07958 517919 e-mail: info@livingoptions.org

Information

New Epilepsy Social Group – members of the Exeter branch of the Epilepsy Action Trust hope to develop the social side of their support group, which meets every month. The branch has recently appointed one of their existing members – Tina Sandford – as the branch’s social group organiser. Tina hopes to generate more interest in the group by making the evenings more relaxed and informal. She would also like to see more young people benefit from the group as well as friends and family of those with epilepsy.

Members of the group meet on the second Wednesday of every month, at the Palace Gate Centre in South Street, Exeter, to provide information and support to those with epilepsy. Speakers are often invited to the meetings, and members are actively involved in fundraising and raising awareness of epilepsy. Anyone is welcome to drop by to the meetings from 7.30pm onwards for a coffee and a chat. Alternatively, to find out more contact you can contact the group on 01392 272771 or email Tina at sandfordh@aol.com

Employment

Disability Employment Advisers and Incapacity Benefit Specialists offer assistance for disabled people looking for, or seeking to maintain, employment. Devon's contacts are:

Exeter	01392 473929
Plymouth	01752 616154
North Devon	01271 392115
South Devon: Torquay	01803 356065
Paignton	01803 354239
Newton Abbot	01626 236327

For Access to Work assistance in your employment (equipment, help with taxi fares and other support) contact Colin Reeves or Karen Battye on 01803 354318. For Pension enquiries contact the Pensions Service for Devon, Tel. 0845 6060265.

Plus provides employment, training and equipment services for people with disabilities and long term health issues. We do this by offering disabled people a range of training and recruitment services, and through direct employment in our own manufacturing and mobility equipment businesses. Our employment services include training, personal development, work experience, job-matching, job-search, in-work support and rehabilitation. Our equipment services offer a one stop shop including assessment, purchase, hire, servicing

Information

and aftercare of disability equipment by fully trained staff, many of whom have a disability themselves. Pluss is the largest provider of disability service with 26 sites across South West England. We have been in business for over 35 years and are owned by Devon County, Plymouth City, Torbay and Somerset County Councils. To find out more about your local service, please call us on 0800 91 777 92, email pluss@pluss.org.uk or visit www.pluss.org.uk

Services

Go Cabs taxi service, based in Torbay, offer taxis with disabled access and space for other passengers to travel at the same time. Drivers are CRB checked. Tel. 01803 606060. Website: www.gocabs.net

Pharmacy to your phone – New NHS text service. Text 64746 followed by the service you require (eg. chemist or GP) and info about the nearest will be sent to your mobile with map/tel no.

Devon Link on tape spare regular copy available (also Spring 08 issue) jackie.devonlink@btinternet.com

Events

Open mornings on wednesdays at the Independent Living Centre (ILC) in Exeter

23 April – Children’s mobility and seating equipment

21 May – Walking equipment and manual wheelchairs

18 June – Car adaptations, powered wheelchairs and scooters.

New premises Isca House, Haven Road, Exeter
EX2 8DS. Tel. 01392 687276 Fax: 01392 423427.

Events are free and open to all. Call us for a map and directions. Isca House has ample parking and level access. Tea, coffee and biccies provided!

Get involved

The Wheelyboat Trust hopes to place one of their wheelchair accessible boats on the Grand Western Canal in Tiverton. However, the canal manager needs to find out if there will be enough demand for the boat to justify the plans. If any Devon Link readers feel that such a resource would be of value to them, please contact Rex Harpham, South West Co-ordinator of The Wheelyboat Trust, or Mark Baker, Grand Western Canal Manager. All boats have a drop down bow ramp for wheelchair access

Information

and are suitable for anyone with a disability, not just wheelchair users. Contact Rex Harpham on 01822 615953 or Mark Baker on 01884 254072.

Share Music South-West aims to provide opportunities and encouragement to people with disabilities in the South West to take part in a wide variety of musical activities such as theatre, dance and visual arts. Share Music is running a one-day, non-residential workshop at West Buckland School (situated between Barnstaple and South Molton) on Monday 28 April. Open to anyone with a disability aged between 17 and 50. Being able to play an instrument is useful, but musical skill is not required to participate in, and enjoy the workshop. Carers and relatives are welcome. Cost £25 per person. For more information and a booking form ring 01598 740141.

Dartmoor for All works in partnership with the National Park Authority and landowners to improve access on the moors for disabled people. They produce the excellent guide 'Easy Going Dartmoor' and members regularly monitor the condition and accessibility of paths and trails. New members are always welcome. For more info ring Gill Kirkman on 01626 830621 or email gillkirkman@aol.com

Classified advertisements

Aids & Equipment

Huntleigh Healthcare Nimbus 3 air mattress and electric profiling bed as used in hospitals - but with wooden bed ends. £1,000 or near offer. Buyer collects.

Tel. 01805 601584.

Craftmatic single bed Independent head and foot lift with massage control. Almost new. Very good condition.

Buyer collects. £700 ono. Tel. 01803 329198 after 6pm.

Wheelchairs & Scooters

Rascal disability scooter Good condition. Will need batteries recharging or renewing. Free to a genuine person. Space needed. Tel. 01392 860857 (Silverton, Exeter)

Ibis electric wheelchair Indoor / outdoor. Seat tilt facility. With charger and manual. Warranty unused. As new condition. Costs over £5,000. Selling for £1,500.

Tel. 01803 613721.

Vessa 2000 wheelchair Indoor / outdoor. Battery powered. All chromed frame. Recent overhaul. New castor wheels. Batteries in good order. Extra padding on seat and back. Best reasonable offer to £350. Tel. 01805 622232.

Little Gem 3 wheel scooter Hardly used. Fully portable – will fit in boot of small car. £400 ono. Tel. 01392 495265.

Classifieds

Invacare 10 – four wheel scooter Excellent condition with lights, indicators, horn and basket. Battery maintained and kept indoors. Sturdy machine. £500 ono.

Tel. 01364 642002.

Vehicles

Wheelchair accessible vehicle £975. Access from the rear via a ramp, securing straps for wheelchair user and chair. MOT until November 2008, taxed disabled class at present. Tel. 01822 615034 10am-10pm.

House exchange

Exchange wanted for one bedroom flat in Newton Abbot for a ground floor flat in Totnes (housing trust run).

Tel. 01803 201332.

Holidays

Accessible Holiday home in Woolacombe, N Devon Attractive site. Ramp accessible. Full use of facilities including indoor swimming pool and licensed club house. Sleeps four. Grab rails. Wheel-in shower.

Contact Woolacombe & District Lions. Tel. 01291 883677.

Email: ray@everest21.orangehome.co.uk

About *Devon Link*

Devon Link is published by Devon County Council Adult & Community Services Directorate and Torbay Council Social Services, working with Living Options Devon. The contents of the magazine are determined by the editor and an independent team of correspondents (as well as consultation with readers) to ensure the independence of the magazine.

Devon Link – Spring 2008

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Printer: Devon Design & Print

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ISSN 0266-5964

Devon *Link* Spring 2008
