Welcome to this Autumn copy of our Newsletter which follows a lazy Summer.
Many thanks to all who sent Get Well wishes to Zoe (WAP Development Worker) I am happy to report that she rejoined ‘the ranks’ in August and is busy catching up with everything.

**Review of Day Services**
Please note there are a number of features in this copy which relate to Day Centres, Services and Individual Budgets – under a heading of Putting People First.

WAP has been asked to have involvement in the WBC consultation about Day Service Development. It is important to WAP that people’s needs are heard and reflected fairly. Therefore, we hope to attend meetings to ensure that fair processes are followed and an impartial channel for communications is offered.

**Community Health & Wellbeing Group**
This has been rekindled and I have been involved in meetings since the summer. This group is now chaired by Bev Sales (PCT) and is a multidisciplinary group which is concerned with all aspects of health and social care and not least the development of integrated services.

**WAP Plans** – We are still in the process of making plans and priorities for the forthcoming year (or three). We are actively seeking support from all partnership organisations to develop a plan which best meets your needs. It is now crucial that you tell us what is important to you so that our plan fully reflects your needs.

**Website**
We are developing a website for communication. Please let us know what you would like to see on it …. Tell us what is important to you, so that what we do reflects your needs.

**WAP** would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your support over the last year. We wish you well over the festive season and in the coming New Year.

Steven Bowers, Chairman
Putting People First

What’s been happening with Putting People First in Wokingham Borough lately?
(Update from Wokingham Borough Council)

There are now 312 people in the Wokingham Borough receiving a direct payment and/or a personal budget from Wokingham Borough Council (WBC). Like all other local authorities, WBC is working to national government targets, and this will increase as the new system gathers pace.

There have already been some success stories, some of which feature on the Take Control of Your Life DVD produced by WBC, while others have been published in the local press for all to read about.

However, Putting People First (PPF) is not all about personal budgets; it’s also about prevention services, and other ways in which people’s quality of life can be improved, even if they are not eligible for their own personal budget. WBC are currently busy working on a new signposting service, (to supersede the old Link-Up database) which will allow people to either ring the Council to ask for advice about where they can find particular services, events, leisure activities and much more, or they can go online and search for themselves through the website.

The new service is expected to go live by the end of 2009; with special events to follow soon after, in order to inform people about the new facility. If you would like to help us develop this by giving us your opinion, please contact Signposting Officer Julie Quarrell at: julie.quarrell@wokingham.gov.uk.

PPF Events

Two PPF events have taken place during October; both in Lower Earley. The first was a PPF event especially for the borough’s hearing-impaired, held at the Crescent Centre on Wednesday October 7. The aim of the afternoon was to give attendees a chance to properly find out about what PPF is, and an opportunity to ask questions. Run with help from the Deaf Services Team, it is hoped that the event did help to get the PPF message across to all of the different audiences that WBC need to communicate with about PPF.

There was also a coffee morning with the MS Society on Monday October 19 at the Salvation Army Hall, Chalfont Close, where people could find out more about what PPF is all about, on a more informal basis. The last coffee morning was held at Growing Places in August, with great success.
Disabled Parents Network

DPN is a national user led organisation that aims to educate and increase society’s acceptance of disability in parenthood and provides support and information to disabled people who are parents, parents-to-be and those working alongside them.

Our vision is of a society which accepts disability and parenthood and provides the opportunities and support to enable disabled people to have and to bring up their children on an equal basis with non-disabled parents.

2009 will see the organisation’s tenth anniversary as the UK’s only national organisation offering peer support to disabled parents.

This unique aspect of our work is absolutely vital as disabled parents usually experience extreme isolation. Whilst they may have access to support from other parenting organisations or disability specific organisations, many individuals who discover Disabled Parents Network comment how liberating it is to speak to another disabled parent who understands many of the issues.

New Development

The last twelve months have witnessed tremendous developments in DPN’s Support Service, due mainly to a very generous grant of just under £500k from the National Lottery.

The grant, over three years will enable DPN to employ five members of staff. Prior to funding being available, the telephone helpline was operated for a mere two hours per day by disabled parent volunteers working from home.

Whilst the volunteers provided a sterling service, the pressures of being both disabled and a parent often resulted in volunteers being unable to fulfil their volunteering obligations.

Now, two part-time Support Workers operate the helpline five days a week from 10am – 4pm as well as responding to email enquiries and messages posted onto our website discussion forum.

A Support Service Development Worker oversees the operation of the support service, manages the Support Workers and publicises the service to organisations and service providers.

Continued/.....
Funding for the Support Service has enabled Disabled Parents Network to employ a Family Advocate – to work with disabled parents and their families to identify what additional support is required that the Support Workers alone cannot provide or signpost to.

This one full-time post based in Cheshire, and expected to deal with enquiries throughout the UK certainly has an onerous task on her hands!

We are confident, however, that this first Family Advocate will be the first of many. Soon we will be in a position to demonstrate the very huge difference the Advocate’s involvement can make to disabled parents, their children and family life.

I am certain that as Disabled Parents Network continues to evolve, the organisation will succeed in attracting further interest from various funding sources to be able to employ further Family Advocates working to specific geographical areas throughout the UK. It’s a very exciting time!

Support Service & Enquiries 0300 3300 639
information@disabledparentsnetwork.org.uk
http://disabledparentsnetwork.org.uk

Registered Office 81 Melton Road, West Bridgford, Nottingham NG2 6EN
Registered Charity No. 1087662

Day Services Development

Wokingham Ability Partnership (WAP) have worked hard to ‘get to know’ people at Westmead and develop good relationships. Our meetings are held regularly at the Centre. We have undertaken an audit of this services for WBC which helped us to get a ‘real sense’ of its value. We have now asked to have involvement in the Day Services Consultation steering group. This will look at the bigger picture of day services opportunities. The future of Westmead will be a big issue for the steering group and also for WAP given the great support we now receive from everyone there.
WAAG goes to the movies

Well not quite. We are, however, trying to do something that is worth shouting about.

One of the questions we met early on in our visits to retailers to assess their access was “How can I train my staff in access related matters”. Many of the small retailers could not afford to send their staff on expensive training courses to learn about DDA requirements, much of which might not affect them.

We have struggled with this question and the recent booklet we have issued “A Guide to Serving the Disabled Community” was a step in this direction. We are now planning to take the next step, which will be a giant leap for WAAG. We plan to create a series of DVD’s dealing with access issues and have already begun discussion with someone who is well qualified to produce these DVD’s for us.

It is planned for the first DVD to cover access issues and subsequent DVD’s will deal with the broad aspects of the needs of the disabled community as covered in the booklet.

WAAG is proud of the Wokingham part of its name and want to work with retailers and the community in making our town an ideal place to visit and do business, and not only just for the disabled community.

This is a national card that can be used to verify that the holder is entitled to one free ticket for a person accompanying them to the cinema. To apply for the card, you will need to meet one or more of the following criteria:-

a) Be in receipt of the disability living allowance or attendance allowance.

b) Be a registered blind person.

The card is valid for 1 year from the date of issue.

Application forms are available from cinemas across the UK supporting this card or you can visit the CEA at www.ceacard.co.uk and download an application form. The card costs £5.50 and is valid for a year, and can be used at any participating cinema - a list of which is also available on the website.
The future of Westmead (a day centre for physically disabled adults in the Wokingham borough) is unsure due partly to the introduction of personal budgets. The council feel that clients can get their activity needs met in the community.

Activities at Westmead include....

Art, Pottery, Soft Craft, Cookery, Computers and much more besides.

All areas are wheelchair friendly and easily accessible including the toilet facilities and rest room. It is also a place for social interaction, which many clients have limited access to.

It has been on the agenda for many years to replace the building. If there had been sufficient forward thinking, why didn't they sell the land at Westmead and use the money to attach another “Westmead type facility” to the new Addington school in Woodley, where the facilities could be shared, thereby reducing costs.

At a meeting on 18th August with David Lee, he said “that if Westmead closed the clients would not be left with nowhere to go”.

The problem isn't about having somewhere to go - it's about the SOMEWHERE being suitable for all types of physical disabilities and needs. Westmead is a unique facility - rather than getting rid of it why not make it a flag ship to other councils.

Westmead has featured in local press articles and views reflected:-

“Users of disabled day centre speak out at meeting on closure”

At a recent meeting held at Westmead Centre people had the chance to hear some of the proposed changes about the future of disabled facilities within the Wokingham Borough area. The proposal is to offer more people day services through the Putting People First scheme. This could provide adults with disabilities their own personal budget to spend on care as they choose.

At the meeting it was also the chance for those who do not want the centre to close to have a say on the proposed changes which could affect social care.

A steering group will come up with proposals for future services funded by the Council and personal budgets held by individuals. Further info and contacts will follow.
A Guide to Serving our Disabled Community

Wokingham Town Centre, along with the Borough’s other retail centres, can claim a nationwide first following the launch of a guide offering tips and advice on serving customers with a disability or impairment.

The guide has been developed on the back of some successful workshops attended by Wokingham retailers and members of the Wokingham Area Access Group (WAAG) earlier this year.

The guide is being distributed to all retailers across Wokingham Borough. It gives, in a very simple and easy to read style, advice and tips on how to give appropriate service to customers with a speech, hearing, sight or mobility impairment or a learning difficulty. The key messages are:

♦ Appropriate service, not special service.
♦ Be patient, be understanding.
♦ Treat the customer with respect.
♦ Customers with a disability are the same as every other customer. Their purchases help keep your shop in business.
♦ Where appropriate consider how your shop layout impacts upon customers with a disability.
♦ Good service is satisfying for the customer and the sales assistant, just enjoy it.

Dave Gaskin, Chair of WAAG, said “We think this is a first for Wokingham. Nowhere else in the country are retailers and disability groups being so pro-active together in promoting the mutual benefits of appropriate service for both retailers and disabled customers. We want to build on this relationship as we believe this can only be good for our members and the shops.”

John Piasecki, Hudson Bay Clothing Co, who compiled the guide added “It was apparent from the workshops that although service from the Town Centre shops was already pretty good, there was an opportunity to build on best practice. Sales staff need knowledge and awareness if they are to deal confidently with all of their customers. We trust that this leaflet will provide that guidance.”

Mark Ashwell, Trademark Windows and Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce, who provided the financial backing for this initiative said “On behalf of the Chamber of Commerce and TradeMark Windows I fully support this exciting development. It is important for Wokingham’s retailers to be pro-active in giving the best service in these difficult times.”

If you want more information about this guide please contact the Wokingham Times, who are supporting WAAG and the retailers with this innovative project. (Pass on any contacts to me)

John Piasecki
Hudson Bay - 0118 979 3144
New Business Opportunities

WBC has recently set up a project to support micro-enterprises (businesses employing five people or less), which can provide care and support services to the local community, through offering start-up grants of up to £2k.

By supporting these new providers, WBC hopes to bring more variety and choice into the care services market, so that people can buy more personalised or niche services with their personal budgets.

If you are interested in finding out more about the micro-enterprise grant, please contact Social Enterprise Manager Steve George via email at: steve.george@wokingham.gov.uk or call: 07786 534 922.

WBC would welcome applications from service users and carers who are interested in setting up new services.

For more information about anything else in this article, or to request a free DVD about personal budgets, please contact Communication and Information Officer Fi Shailes, on (0118) 974 6777 or email: putting-people-first@wokingham.gov.uk
Wokingham Borough Council will be funding Reading Deaf Centre for the next 3 years. West Berkshire Borough Council has agreed also to fund Reading Deaf Centre for a period of 1 year. The funding will be used to support the Information Officer's role at Reading Deaf Centre, providing a service to people who are profoundly Deaf/HOH.

Reading Borough Council has been funding this service for the past 20 years, as they recognized the importance this service provides to the Deaf Community. This service promotes interests of Deaf/Hearing Impaired & Deaf Blind people of all ages and culture backgrounds to people who live in and around the Reading area.

Reading Deaf Centre provides and maintains a centre, which is a meeting place with facilities, providing a place where the isolation of deafness can be reduced.

We help the Deaf become aware of what is going on outside by assembling information, notice boards, pamphlets and providing guidance and advice.

The Information Officer has been appointed to assist in keeping deaf people informed of various changes to policies, e.g. Up-to-date Government issues such as DLA, Housing, Incapacity benefits etc., help complete forms for driving licences, passport, bus/train passes. Telephone on their behalf to various companies, book interpreters, holidays, organise car tax, car insurance - whether it is finding the best quote, or sorting out an accident claim. Provide access to the Internet for deaf people at the centre, via the Information Officer.

This service is available to people who call into the centre personally, or by voice/fax/minicom/telephone and e-mails, putting them in touch with the appropriate bodies, i.e. Sensory Needs Service and other Service Providers. Our Service is increasing every year, which shows there is a great demand for this particular specialised service.

Reading Deaf Executive Committee (Trustees) of Reading Deaf Centre would like to take this opportunity in thanking Reading Borough Council and Wokingham Ability Partnership for their continued support. Also we welcome West Berkshire and Wokingham Borough Councils who have recognised the need for this service, giving support and help to people with this particular disability.

KAREN WALL
INFORMATION & COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER FOR THE DEAF
## Dates for your diary - 2010

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<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Quarterly Meetings to be held at CResCent Centre Warbler Drive Lower Earley</th>
<th>Committee Meetings to be held at Westmead, Rances Lane Wokingham</th>
<th>Communication Group to be held at Westmead, Rances Lane Wokingham</th>
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<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>27th @ 10-12am</td>
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Articles for the next newsletter need to be submitted by Friday Jan 10th 2010. You and your views are essential and we would love to hear from you, so please submit anything that you think would be of interest, it may be of benefit to others. You can email us, write to us, phone or send a carrier pigeon!
Useful Contacts

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Wokingham Area Access Group (WAAG)

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Reading Deaf Centre

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