

InTouch

The voice of learning disability in South West Herts

Winter 2012



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Photo: Stuart Bendig Photography

A Happy New Year to all our readers!

We start the year with our excellent Investors in People review. It is a real boost to receive such positive feedback about the quality of Watford Mencap's services and support.

"This is a competent workforce who are extremely committed to the organisation and who derive immense job satisfaction from the work they do. The charity's strengths continue to be equality of opportunity and the involvement and empowerment of employees and service users alike," states the report.

Heartfelt thanks go to all our staff and volunteers, whose ongoing commitment and support made a real impact on our assessor.

Despite reductions in our funding, we are striving to ensure that our personalised services continue whilst we reduce costs. New funding from the Department of Health, income from our two charity shops and the support of the local community all help to ensure that our Advice and Advocacy Service can support the increasing numbers of families facing cuts to services, benefits and support.

Many thanks also to the Topping family who share their personal experiences with us in this edition of In Touch. We are keen to hear from other families who may have similar experiences to share, or who may need our support in these challenging times.

Best wishes



Jane Pattinson



EastEnders star helps raise £2,000



Actor Elliot Rosen was a great success with the audience at Watford Mencap's Big Breakfast at Moor Park.

Rosen, 33, who has Down's Syndrome, told guests that he especially liked working as Alfie Moon's son in EastEnders, and joked that actor Shane Ritchie spent most of his time trying to be funny!

Organised with Watford Chamber of Commerce, the breakfast was sponsored by international payments provider VocaLink.

Mark Chapman, Director of Commercial Marketing and Chairman of CSR at VocaLink said: "We are committed to supporting the fantastic work of Watford Mencap and encourage other businesses to understand the mutual benefits of supporting their local community."

Watford Mencap's Chair Don Eungblut thanked guests, who helped raise £2,000 at the event. He said: "Every £45 we raise allows another child to spend an evening at our AfterSchool Club."

Elliot is pictured visiting our AfterSchool Club at our children's centre in Watford.

Key Point

- EastEnders actor Elliot Rosen was guest of honour at Watford Mencap's Big Breakfast event

www.watfordmencap.org.uk

Fantastic Investors in People report

Watford Mencap was extremely happy with its most recent Investors in People (IIP) report.

Back in October IIP visited Watford Mencap and interviewed many of its staff, volunteers and trustees.

Investors in People is a flexible, tailored and easy-to-use people management standard. It helps businesses to achieve objectives by developing and harnessing the skills of people.

The report described Watford Mencap as 'well structured, with a supervisory process which regularly facilitates and supports generally very good communication throughout. The charity's strengths continue to be the cultural elements of the Standard, specifically equality of opportunity and the involvement and empowerment of employees and service users alike.'

The report went on to say 'there was very good evidence of effective team-working and generally approachable managers who take the development of their employees as seriously as the support provided to their service users. This is a competent workforce who are extremely committed to the

organisation and who derive immense job satisfaction from the work they do.'

The report also drew attention to recent improvements in the organisation, including the recruitment process which now focuses more on competency as opposed to experience. This has reportedly resulted in a better calibre of employee and greater diversity of skill set and knowledge.



Key Points

- Watford Mencap was commended for the way in which it develops the skills of its people during an Investors in People visit
- The Investors in People report described Watford Mencap as 'well structured' and said there was 'very good evidence of effective teamwork and approachable managers'
- Recruitment processes have improved so that a better calibre of employees are recruited

£50,000 boost for people with learning disabilities

Watford Mencap has won nearly £50,000 from the Department of Health's Health and Social Care Volunteering Fund, with the support of the Community Learning Disability Teams of Watford, Three Rivers and Hertsmere.

The money will be provided over the next 2½ years so that a team of volunteers can be trained to give advice to people with a learning disability, supporting them to find what they need in health and social care.

Watford Mencap's Learning and Leisure Manager, Ruth Murray, said: "This will make a real difference in helping us to reach new people. Thousands of people with a learning disability in our area have little or no support."



Key Points

- The Department of Health has provided Watford Mencap with nearly £50,000
- The money will help to train volunteers to give advice to people with a learning disability

Funding cuts are badly affecting the vulnerable

A young woman with Down's Syndrome has had her income more than halved because of cuts in government funding.

Amanda Topping, 35, has lived in supported accommodation in Abbots Langley for the past 10 years and enjoys an active life using Watford Mencap's Leisure and Learning sports and fitness sessions, the local Gateway Club and a drama club.

But changes in the way that Hertfordshire County Council charges people for services means that Amanda's quality of life is likely to get worse. Her weekly charges have increased by more than £42 and she has been landed with a back-dated bill for £1,469.

Amanda and her parents, Janet and Allan Topping, have been told that the allowance given to Amanda for disability related expenses has been reduced because some of Amanda's activities are 'lifestyle choices.'

However, the Toppings say that activities such as the fitness sessions are essential for helping Amanda control her weight as she has an under-active thyroid. Plus, Amanda cannot drive so has to spend money on transport so she can buy food to eat and attend everyday appointments such as the dentist or doctor.

Mrs Topping said: "Amanda is being picked on and her money is being plundered. We have tried to explain to the county council how this is going to badly affect Amanda, but no-one at the council seems able to help."

Mr and Mrs Topping, who live in Watford, are trying to help their daughter financially but both are retired and admit that they do not have extra cash to provide continued support.

They feel their only help has come from Watford Mencap. Mrs Topping said: "Watford Mencap has helped us right from the start. They are really supportive. They have given us all the information we need to fight the county council and they've helped us write letters."

"Everything is a fight. All we want is for Amanda's disability related expenditure to be assessed properly and for her to have enough money to live on. If she has to live on the small amount she has been given then she will really suffer. We hear that the weak and vulnerable people in society are being protected – but they are not. Certainly not in Amanda's case."

A HCC spokesman said these are Government cuts to services for people with learning disabilities and there is little that the county can do to intervene.

The Toppings are now considering taking their case to the Local Government Ombudsman.

If you are struggling with the cuts, please contact Watford Mencap's Advice and Advocacy Service on 01923 713620.



Photo: Richard Owen

Janet and Allan Topping with their daughter Amanda

Key Points

- Amanda Topping and her parents explain how Government cuts in funding for people with learning disabilities are badly affecting them
- Amanda has had her weekly income drastically cut and been given a big bill of back-dated money to pay

New development for people with learning disability

A care home which was forced to close due to subsidence has led to Watford Mencap's investing its reserves in a new development at Whitfield Way, Rickmansworth.

Homeoaks in South Oxhey is to be demolished but 3 of its former residents, Susan Tavener, Jacqueline Chaplin and Rosemary Culbert are now living happily in Whitfield Way. They have been joined by a 4th tenant, Sandra Bell.

Funding came from the legacy of Mrs Betty Lydon, whose son Kevin lived in Homeoaks. There has also been a lot of support from local business, including John Lewis which provided the kitchen. Other help came from Rumball Sedgwick, VocaLink, YourCash and Camelot volunteers, RPL builders and Rance Landscapes, as well as Three Rivers District Council and Hertfordshire County Council.

Project manager Lorrain Barratt said: "Many people with learning disabilities struggle to find a home of their own. Watford Mencap has financed Whitfield Way to provide affordable and accessible housing."

Ross Smith and Jon Jupp from the Camelot Creative Team worked hard to transform the garden at Whitfield Way

New Year, New You!

Eaten too many mince pies at Christmas? Want to get fit in 2012? Inspired by the Olympics?

Start the New Year training for the Watford 10k race, which takes place in Cassiobury Park on Bank Holiday Monday 7 May 2012.

The Watford 10k is currently in its 15th year and is managed by the Watford Round Table.

2011 saw another great race, raising over £8,000 for Watford Mencap's AfterSchool Club. 2012 is going to be bigger and better. As well as raising much-needed funds for the children with a learning disability, it also raises money for other local charities.

Key Points

- 4 people with learning disabilities have been re-housed in Whitfield Way, Rickmansworth
- 3 of these people lived at Homeoaks which is being demolished because it showed signs of subsidence
- The new home was funded through the legacy of Betty Lydon whose son Kevin lived in Homeoaks. Local businesses also gave their support



The race, which is once again sponsored by Camelot, will officially be launched on 24 February when radio station Vibe 107.6 will visit Watford Mencap Children's Centre. Make sure you book early to get your place on www.watford10k.org.uk

Key Points

- The Watford 10k race will be held on Monday 7 May at Cassiobury Park
- The race will be launched on 24 February
- The Watford 10k raises money for local charities including Watford Mencap

Diamond Jubilee Round-Up 2011

Watford Mencap celebrated its 60th anniversary with a year of incredible events

Our Diamond Jubilee events raised an outstanding £43,568 – enough to keep Watford Mencap's Afterschool Club going for 6 months. We would like to thank everyone who was involved in these events. It would not have been possible without your support.



Photos: Stuart Bendig and Sussex Sport Photography

- A** The annual Pancake Race through Rickmansworth High Street proved eggciting for all involved!
- B** The Mayor of Hertsmere Councillor Peter Knell joined walkers for our Diamond Dogs walk
- C** An art exhibition proved popular during our Jubilee Year
- D** Congratulations to the winners of the NatWest charity golf day
- E** The Watford 10k race is enjoyed by thousands every year
- F** Learning Disability Week focused on the campaign to put an end to learning disability hate crime
- G** Disco-goers dressed as characters from the musical Grease for a special dance at Watford Grammar School for Boys
- H** Cinema-goers enjoyed a singalong to Mamma Mia at the Watersmeet Theatre in Rickmansworth

29 January: Diamond Jubilee Ball - £18,000
The year started with a bang at the Diamond Jubilee Ball – raising £18,000

8 March: Pancake Race - £850
On your marks, get set, flip – this great community event raised £850

All of April: Off the Wall Art Exhibition - £1,466
Run by volunteers and local artists, this fantastic art exhibition raised £1,466

2 May: Watford 10k - £8,000
The 2011 race was the biggest yet - raising an outstanding £8,000

14 May: Summer Time Dance - £853
Learning and Leisure members filled the dance floor – raising £853

22 May: Diamond Dogs - £60
Dogs and their owners dressed in 'bling' for this fun walk

3 June: Watford Observer Golf Day - £4,380
A super day out for golfing enthusiasts

9 June: NatWest Golf Day - £3,000
More fun for golfers!

20 -24 June: Learning Disability Week - £2,018
Putting a stop to Hate Crime raised £2,018

29 September: Tree Planting – not a Fundraiser
A Japanese cherry tree was planted to celebrate our 60 years in South West Herts

7 October: AGM - £574
Our 60th birthday was celebrated in 1950's style raising £574

3 November: Mamma Mia - £2,367
ABBA fans had the chance to sing along to their favourite hits at the exclusive screening of Mamma Mia at the Watersmeet Theatre in Rickmansworth

6 December: The Big Breakfast - £2,000
Guest Speakers Elliot Rosen and Gerry Hunt helped Watford Mencap raise £2,000

Total: £43,568

Stuart's new home gives him independence

Watford Mencap client Stuart Cowie has moved into a new flat in Rickmansworth.

Stuart, 22, approached Watford Mencap's Development Department in March 2011 to find out how he could get a home of his own instead of living with his mother.

Development Manager Kathryn White explained the different options that were available to Stuart and discussed the pros and cons about living on his own and with other people.

Kathryn worked with Three Rivers District Council Housing Department to get Stuart on the council social housing list. Three Rivers District Council then bid on his behalf to Herts Choice Homes, which is a choice based lettings scheme for council and housing association homes.

Stuart had the option to take the flat or reject it. He chose to take it and a month later he moved in.

Watford Mencap also helped Stuart with his care package, so he had all the support he needed when he moved into the flat. Our Community Support team helped Stuart get settled into his new home and supported him with cooking, cleaning, shopping and anything else he wanted to do.

The development team also provided the landlord with specialist learning disability advice and has regular reviews with Stuart's social worker.

Stuart's support package is being reduced as he becomes more independent and confident to do things on his own.

If you would like Watford Mencap to support you in getting a new home contact our new Housing Officer Michelle Ewing on 01923 713643 or email mewing@watfordmencap.org.uk



Stuart enjoys a more independent life now that he has his own flat

Key Points

- Stuart Cowie is enjoying greater independence since moving into a new flat
- Watford Mencap worked with Three Rivers District Council to find Stuart a suitable flat in Rickmansworth
- Stuart has been given all the support he needs to make sure he is settled and comfortable in his new home

Les Anderson and Peter Richards

It is with great sadness that we mark the passing of Les Anderson and Peter Richards. Les, whose brother Charles was one of the first residents of our Haydon Road house, was a dedicated fundraiser for Watford Mencap. He was particularly renowned for shaking tins on Flag Days and would not stop until he had filled 2 or 3 tins. In 1992 he did a sponsored swim for the society raising almost £2000.

Peter, a retired bank manager, was Chairman of our Homes Management

Committee during a period which saw many changes in the provision of residential care. Naturally cautious, he would question in detail any proposals to expand our services or purchase new homes, showing concern that we might overstretch our resources. He was a very caring man and when discussing moves towards independent living he was determined that standards of care and wellbeing should be maintained.

We shall miss them both.

Mothercare's £2,500 gift for Children's Centre

The Mothercare Group Foundation has once again supported Watford Mencap's AfterSchool Club by awarding them a £2,500 grant.

They have been very supportive to the Children's Centre over the years and this money will go towards funding a play worker for a whole term.

Simone Spencer-Ahmed, from the Mothercare Group Foundation, said: "The trustees of the Mothercare Group Foundation are delighted to be supporting Watford Mencap's AfterSchool Club which is a highly valued local service for children and young people with a learning disability."

"It provides a safe and reassuring environment in which they can socialise, play games, develop new skills, or simply relax - at the same time providing much-needed respite for families."



Simone Spencer-Ahmed presents the £2,500 cheque from Mothercare to Watford Mencap's AfterSchool Club team

Key Point

- The Mothercare Group Foundation has awarded a £2,500 grant to Watford Mencap's AfterSchool Club

Watford Mencap's first e-newsletter

Watford Mencap has now launched its first ever e-newsletter. It will be sent out every month and, eventually, every two weeks. If you would like to receive Watford Mencap's e-newsletter either sign up via our website www.watfordmencap.org.uk or email Veronica on development@watfordmencap.org.uk

Dancing queens!

ABBA fans had the chance to sing along to their favourite hits at the exclusive screening of Mamma Mia at the Watersmeet Theatre in Rickmansworth.

The event raised £2,367 for Watford Mencap's Learning and Leisure project which supports adults with a learning disability. A big thank you to Alf Loose and the Friends of Watersmeet Film Society who helped on the night.

Speak up if you want a speaker!

Do you want a speaker for your group? Watford Mencap's volunteer Ambassador, Janice Jones, is happy to come and speak, show films and answer questions. Contact her on 01923 713622 or jjones@watfordmencap.org.uk

Raising awareness

The Learning Disability Partnership Board's annual event called 'This is Me' will be held at the Jim McDonald Centre, McDonald Court, High View, Hatfield, on Saturday 25 February from 10am to 1.30pm. Organised with Carers in Hertfordshire, this event will also raise awareness about learning disabilities. If you would like to book a place (lunch is included), please contact Laura Brannon on 01438 843271 or email laura.brannon@hertsgov.uk

A wizard £2,500 from Warner Bros

A big thank you to Warner Bros, who are about to open their Harry Potter attraction at the Leavesden Studios, for donating £2,500 to Watford Mencap.

A Big Thank you

Aldenham Golf and Country Club
Baker Tilly
Valerie Burdett
Bushey Festival
Camelot
CBJ Digital
The Childwick Trust
Click Productions
Department of Health: Health and Social Care Volunteering Fund
Don Eungblut
Friends of Watersmeet Film Society
Half Way House
Richard Harrington MP
Help a Capital Child
Herts County Council
HoB the Hairdressers
Donations in memory of the late Ronald Hutton
John Lewis Watford
Dr and Mrs Khan
Rose and Stuart Kreloff
The Lawton Trust
Leggatts Afternoon Townswomen's Guild
The Load of Hay
Lulu Marshall
Merchant Taylors' School
Moor Park Golf Club
CL Moore and MA Rogers
Mothercare Group Foundation

Office Angels
Parmiter's School
Peter Harrison Foundation
Rance Landscapes
Radlett Round Table
RPL Builders
Rumball Sedgwick
Sandy Lodge Golf Club
Saracens
Sewell & Gardner
The Soulmates
Three Rivers District Council Community Grant
TJX Europe
VocaLink
Vibe 107.6
Warner Bros Leavesden Studios
Watford Borough Council Mayor's Community Fund
Watford Chamber of Commerce
Watford Grammar School for Boys
Watford Grammar School for Girls
Watford Palace Theatre
Watford Round Table
West Herts College
Ian Wilson
YourCash
Yorke Mead Primary School

Special thanks

to Stuart Bendig for taking many of the photos for In Touch.

www.stuartbendigphotography.com
or 01923 499232 or 07951 111874

Diamond artwork to be unveiled

A piece of artwork which portrays Watford Mencap's past, present and future is to be unveiled to mark the end of our Diamond Jubilee year.

Learning and Leisure members have spent the past year working with Watford Grammar School for Girls to plan and create a triptych, which is in the shape of three diamonds.

Learning and Leisure project members have had a strong bond with the girls' school since 2005. Adults with learning disabilities have been offered numerous art and craft sessions at the school and have also had use of their IT facilities for computer classes over the years.

The school's Specialist Status Manager Holly Delfen and artist in residence Siân Fenwick helped create the artwork which will feature at Watford Mencap's head office in Rickmansworth.



Watford Grammar School for Girls artist in residence Siân Fenwick creates the diamond artwork with help from Adrian O'Brien of Watford Mencap's Learning and Leisure group

Key Point

- Watford Grammar School for Girls and Watford Mencap's Learning and Leisure project members have produced a diamond-themed piece of art to mark the 60th anniversary of Watford Mencap

Raising Your Game wins award

Congratulations to Mencap's Lottery-funded Raising Your Game project which has won a 2011 Young Partners' Award.

Raising Your Game is a 5-year project, run in partnership with Watford Mencap, for young people with a learning disability or communication difficulty, including those who have offended or may offend.

The Young Partners' Awards are run by the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS). Raising Your Game won a national award recognising good practice in involving young people in decision making.

Mark Perks, Raising Your Game's programme manager, said: "For all the young people

and staff involved, this award recognises the hard work of the past 2 years."

Key Points

- The Raising Your Game project has won an award which recognises good practice in involving young people in decision making
- Raising Your Game is a 5-year project run in partnership with Watford Mencap. It is aimed at supporting people with a learning disability, including those who have offended or may offend

A diamond day at Cheslyn

A Japanese flowering cherry tree has been planted at Cheslyn Gardens to commemorate Watford Mencap's Diamond Jubilee.

It was donated by Watford Borough Council and on hand to perform the ceremony were Watford Mayor Dorothy Thornhill, Mariah Spenceley (5) and Sylvia Hatch (pictured).

Sylvia's father, Charles, was a founder member of Watford Mencap, while Mariah attends Watford Mencap's Afterschool Club. Mariah is already quite a celebrity within Watford Mencap as she features in a film about the organisation's work. It can be viewed at <http://www.watfordmencap.org.uk/home/children>.

The Mayor said: "It is fitting that you have chosen something that will last and endure, just like Watford Mencap. In recent years you have really upped your game and are now one of Watford's best charities."

Funding Manager for Watford Mencap, Veronica Chamberlain, thanked the Mayor. She said: "We have enjoyed tremendous support from the Council and, in particular, the Mayor's Community Fund."

She also thanked Parks Development Manager Dave Jenkins and his staff for the preparatory work in getting the garden ready to give the tree its new home.

Key Points

- The Mayor of Watford Dorothy Thornhill was joined by two very special guests to plant a Japanese cherry tree at Cheslyn Gardens
- Mariah Spenceley, 5, and Sylvia Hatch helped plant the tree to mark Watford Mencap's 60th anniversary



Photo: Stuart Bendig Photography

Talent Corner

Gurpreet's winning Christmas card design

The finger painting skills of an 8-year-old Bushey girl graced thousands of greetings cards this Christmas.

Profoundly disabled Gurpreet Juttla was a winner in a national Mencap competition with her 'Now bring us some Figgy Pudding' design. The cards were sold through the John Lewis Partnership to raise money for Mencap.



Gurpreet has been a patient at Great Ormond Street Hospital in London since she was born and has undergone a series of life-saving operations including open heart surgery.

Despite her disability, her infectious smile and bubbly personality have made her a hit with everyone. That includes her Learning Support Assistant at Meadow Wood School, Lorraine Smith, who helped Gurpreet develop her finger painting talents.

The judges included Mencap ambassador and star of the BBC's Gavin and Stacey, Mathew Horne.



Ask Ruth

Dear Watford Mencap

I have a learning disability and I live on my own. I have seen an advert on the television saying my television will be changing and I will not be able to watch it any more. I am not sure what this means and I am very worried about it.

They are changing the way the signal is being sent to your television through your aerial. From April 2012 it will be a digital signal which means people will be able to watch more channels. If you have a new television then you will probably be fine, but if you have 5 channels or fewer on any TV in your home, you will need to buy something so it can receive the digital channels.

There is a Help Scheme run by the BBC for some people, particularly those aged over 75 or who get Disability Living Allowance, to help with everything needed to switch one TV to digital. You may have to pay, but it is free if you get some 'means tested' benefits.

More information can be found at www.helpscheme.co.uk or you can call 0800 40 85 900.

If you would like more help please contact the Advice & Advocacy Service on 01923 713620 or email advice@watfordmencap.org.uk

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