

EASY READ
VERSION

Summer 2013 issue ten

Window

news and views from Ability Housing Association

Welcome to your

Summer edition of Window



Ability
HOUSING ASSOCIATION



I have been invited to go to a conference in Brazil. I will be talking about Ability's work and how we help our customers to live independently.



While I am there I will be talking about the opening of a new organisation that aims to help people in Brazil with learning disabilities to be included in society.

It is wonderful to think that they want to use Ability as an example of how to improve the lives of people in Brazil who want to live more independently.



Thanks must go to customers and staff who have worked hard to make independent living possible for so many.

You can read some of our success stories in this edition of Window.

Well done everybody and thank you!

David Williams
Chief Executive



New homes in Wimbledon



We have just opened Concord House. It provides 8 flats for customers with Learning Disabilities.

David said “Ability is proud to have played a key role in providing these new homes; this marks the beginning of a journey of personal development for our new tenants”.

How we operate



Ability has two operating parts - **Ability Care & Support** and **Ability Housing**.

Here we take a quick look at what they do and who is in charge of each part.



Ability Care & Support

This division runs all our care and support services.

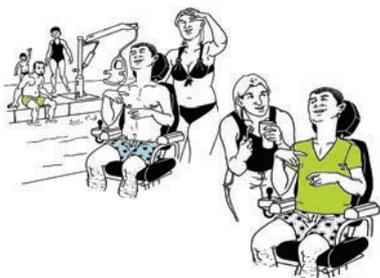
It has around 140 staff and currently provides services to about 1000 people across London and the southeast.

Customers can now buy a **yourAbility** service from us using their personal budget.

yourAbility is our flexible support package that allows personal budget holders to choose from a number of options which can include:

- support to access employment or education
- support with making sure you are getting the right benefits





- supporting you to stay fit and healthy
- support with daily living skills

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I am **David Fox** and I am the Assistant Director of Ability Care & Support.

I have worked for Ability for over 13 years and I am finding it as exciting as the day I started.

I do my best to get out to the services as much as I can to listen to the views of customers and staff.



Clive, a new *yourAbility* customer, tells us his story



Clive with his support worker Suzanne

I think my support workers Sue and Robert are excellent people. They are helping me to get my life back on track since my mum died.

They have helped me to pick up my hobbies again and become friends with my African grey parrot George.

I have also taught them some things about my model cars and aircraft.

I had found it hard to manage and cope in my home and things were out of hand.

They are supporting me to keep my home that I grew up in.

It makes me feel happy that I have them standing by my side.





Ability Housing

Ability Housing was set up in October 2012. It is made up of the Housing Services Team, Development Team and Maintenance Team.

Ability Housing looks after 645 properties at the moment.

This division is responsible for all our landlord services which include:

- day to day repairs
- all planned maintenance such as external decorating, replacement of things including heating, kitchens and bathrooms
- rent and service charge reviews and getting rent arrears
- dealing with housing benefit changes and rent payments
- all tenancy management matters, such as dealing with any nuisance and managing all the estate services.
- developing new homes

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Ability Housing is a relatively small team of 11 people.

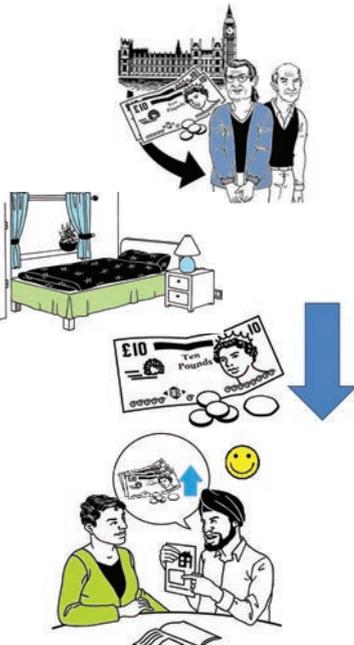
Assistant Director, Isobel Chalcraft oversees the housing and maintenance services.

I'm **Isobel Chalcraft**. I have worked at Ability since February 2006.

I really like working for Ability. With quite a small team and a large area to cover my day is never dull.

We enjoy talking to and getting to know our customers.

Welfare reform update



The government introduced some reforms in April 2013. For our tenants the biggest impact has been the “bedroom tax”.

Some of our tenants have got less benefit because they have a spare bed room.

We have worked with tenants and have been able to get some of them their full benefit back.

For example if the property has been adapted for them.

If you are worried or confused about bedroom tax or any change in your housing benefit, then please talk to us.

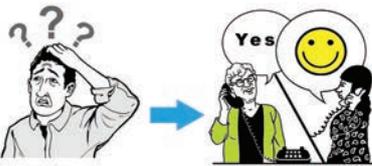
Contact your Housing Services Officer or phone the housing team on 01784 495638 and we will do our best to help you.

For some tenants there will be a change from Disabled Living Allowance to Personal Independent Payments.

If you are worried about this you should talk to someone at your local social services.

You can see the changes in welfare benefits on our website.

- Go to www.ability-housing.co.uk
- Click on the customer zone
- Then click **welfare reforms**.



Ability Home Standard



All our homes meet the **Decent Homes Standard**.

The **Decent Homes Standard** is what the government thinks is the acceptable condition that your house is allowed to be in.

We want to reach a higher standard called the **Ability Home Standard**. We want to reach this by 2015.

The **Ability Home Standard** has 4 main parts which customers said were important to them. They are:

- Security in their homes
- Health and safety in their homes
- Cost of fuel bills
- **Adaptations**

Adaptations are things we change or add in your house if you have a disability to help you to do things. For example to help you to shower.

Last year we spent £20,000 on these areas.

This year we have £150,000 to spend on these areas.

We will let you know in the next yearly report what we have achieved this year in these areas.



Keeping safe at home



Your home should be a safe place.

If someone calls at the door who you do not know you should:

Keep your front door and back door locked.

Look through your window or spy-hole to see who is at the front door.

Before you open the door put your chain across.

If you do not have a chain, ask the person to pass their **ID** card through the letter box.

An **ID card** is a card with the person's picture, name and name of company on it.



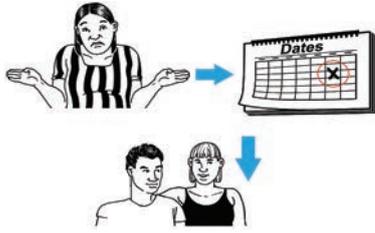
Keep the chain on the door. Check the ID card.

Call the company the person comes from. Find the number in the phone book or on the computer.

Do not use the number on the ID card.

Story continues on next page....

Keeping safe at home



If you are still not sure then ask them to make an appointment and come back when you have a friend or family member with you.



Do not sign any forms or give money to people you do not know.



Dial 999 and ask for the police if you feel afraid or threatened by the person at your door.

If you are not sure, keep them out!

My thanks to Ability staff for their support



My name is Stephanie and I am 53 years old. I was diagnosed with Down's syndrome when I was very young.

I used to live in a hostel but when I got married in 2004, I moved to one of Ability's supported living services in Slough.

My husband and I were very happy and enjoyed life to the full.

We used to go to Slough and Windsor on our own every weekend.

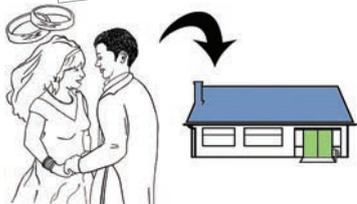
Sadly, my husband died last year. I enjoy being independent and so I did not want to rely on staff to go out.

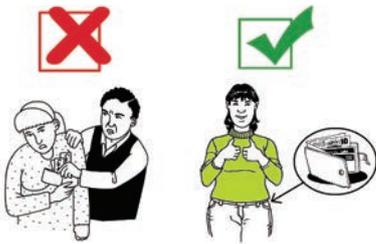
I told staff how I wanted to carry on living my life, and they supported me to do so.

They bought me a mobile phone that was easy to use and taught me how to use it.

This meant I could call the office while I was out to let them know how I was.

It also meant that staff could call me if they had not heard from me.





At first, I began to go out on a Saturday for a short time. This was after staff had spoken to me about how to stay safe.

For example, making sure I stayed in areas I knew and keeping my money and belongings safe and out of view.

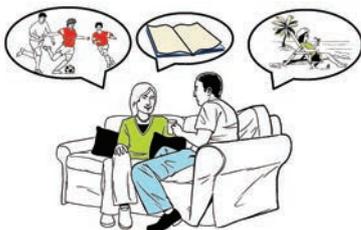


I am now more confident going out on my own each week.

I used to call staff to arrange a taxi home but now I do it on my own.



I am also able to budget my money and order things I need to buy from WH Smith or Argos even when they are not in the store.



I have also kept up my friendship with our Church Vicar.

Every Sunday we have a cup of tea and cake and talk about Arsenal, magazines and holidays.



All in all, I have been able to continue enjoying my life independently.

A little summary of a big success

(from Pablo a Support Worker in Slough)



Robert with Pablo, his Support Worker



Robert had an accident and got a brain injury which affected his memory, movement and thinking.

Robert came to Ability's service in Slough. We worked with Robert to help him to become confident and work towards being independent again.

We asked Robert what his dream job would be and he said "I am very interested in photography".

I had worked as a photographer so knew I could help.

We started by taking a few trips to Heathrow Airport as Robert likes taking pictures of planes.

Robert started to get his confidence back and was soon going out on his own to take photos.

Next we talked about Robert finding a job which he wanted to do.

Robert started volunteering one day a week in a photographic studio.

At first an Ability staff member went with him but after a while Robert felt confident enough to go on his own.

Robert said: "Staff in Ability, sat down and talked to me and found out what my interests were and together we worked hard.

The staff members at Ability were able to see through the negatives and find all my positives".

Eva meets Jason



Jason is a customer at one of Ability's services in Surrey.

When he was younger he started taking drugs. He would commit crimes to get the money to pay for them. He lost his job and went to prison.

He had got a mental health problem; he would hear voices and see things that were not there.

He became very ill and ended up in hospital; he was given medication to help him feel better. He was doing well until he started taking drugs again.

He became unwell again and went to France. He had to go to a hospital in France for 2 years and then they moved him back to Surrey.

An Ability staff member saw him in the hospital in Surrey and helped him to come back and live at one of our services.

That was 3 years ago and Jason is now much better. He can look after himself again and eat healthily.

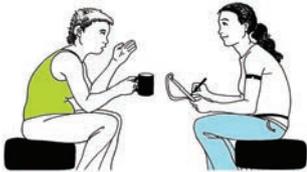
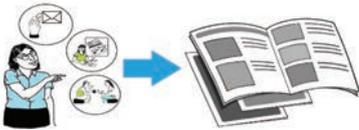
He has also done a course to learn about drug and alcohol **addiction**.

Addiction is when your brain tells you that you need something like drugs or alcohol, that is bad for you.

Jason is now ready to move on to more independent living. He said: *'Ability is fantastic. The staff really care about you and each customer. They are always happy to listen and to help.'*



Changes to our Complaints Procedure



We want to make sure it is easy for you to tell us when things go wrong.

Maddy Cox is the complaints coordinator at Ability and she has been looking to see if we can make it simpler for you to tell us if you are unhappy with our service.

Customers and staff told us the process was too long.

We have asked local staff to talk to their customers about their complaint and try to sort it.

To show the different ways you can tell us if you have a problem we have made a new complaints leaflet.

The main ways you can tell us if you have a problem are by talking to your Support Worker or Housing Services Officer.

We are going to show the new leaflet to the Customer Panel and some other customers on our feedback database to make sure it is clear, easy to understand and has all the right information.

If you would like to give feedback on any changes we are making then please contact:

Maddy Cox at: madeleinec@ability-housing.co.uk or call her on: 01784 495634.

Customer Panel Update

The Q-Kit - Customers asking Questions, Checking Quality



Our Customer Panel wanted to develop a **peer auditing** tool.

Peer auditing is when customers go to services and talk to other customers about their experiences and how they feel about the service we give them.



We decided to use the Q-Kit which was made by **Southdown Housing**. The Q-Kit has lots of questions, for example about your home, your support, being listened to and your food.



The best thing about the Q-Kit is that it gives customers the chance to talk to other customers about their views.



Liam Toner, one of our Customer Panel members, did the pilot with 2 customers Robert and Ken, in Slough.

Liam and Robert



It went very well and showed us ways we can make it better next time. It also gave very encouraging feedback to the support staff.



One question the customers were asked was whether they liked where they lived.

Both answered “yes” Robert also said, “*I get along with the staff; they understand me and my condition*”.

They say “*you can always come and ask us*”.



Story continues on next page....

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The Q-Kit - Customers asking Questions, Checking Quality



Robert and Ken said they would like to show staff who are applying for a job around the services and help to write interview questions.



Liam and Ken

Ken said, *“I like talking to another customer on my level. I would like the Q-Team to come to my house next time.”*



The next step is to get more customers for our Q-Team. They will have training and then visit other services to talk to customers. If you would like to be involved then please contact Maddy Cox:



Email: madeleinec@ability-housing.co.uk
or call her on: **01784 495634**.

Do you have any suggestions to help improve your homes? If so, your Customer Panel would like to hear from you!



We were given a legacy donation.

A legacy donation is a gift of money someone has left in their will.

This means we have a small amount of money to make improvements to Ability homes and their surroundings.

The Customer Panel are looking for ideas to help them decide how the money can be used.

Your idea must:

- be for the good of customers
- last for a long time (so not a party or day trip)
- cost between £100 and £2500

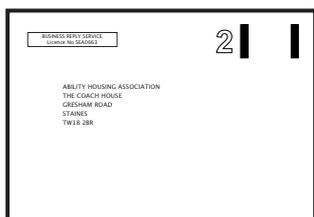
For example, garden furniture for one of our services or a vegetable patch.

If you have any great suggestions, please complete the form and send it to Maddy Cox.

The address is already on the card and you do not need a stamp.

Or you could talk to you key worker or Housing Services Officer about your idea.

The Customer Panel will be meeting in October to look at your suggestions so please let Maddy have your ideas by 23rd September 2013.





Maddy meets Liam

Liam has lived in an Ability flat for the last 13 years.



He is a member of our Customer Panel and is helping to set up customer engagement tools like the Q-Kit. I met with Liam to find out more about him.



Liam was born with **Cerebral Palsy**.

Cerebral Palsy is when a person's brain doesn't work properly and it can mean they have problems moving their body. They may need to use a wheelchair.



One of his favourite things about the flat is that it is close to the town centre and some pubs. This is great for Liam who enjoys meeting up with friends.



He supports Tottenham Hotspur football team. He goes to their matches as often as he can.



Liam did a 3 year course in IT and has got an NVQ in Computing. He works at Slough Borough Council helping people with disabilities to find jobs.

Liam thinks that it is important for customers to be able to be included in how Ability is run. He said,

"I feel the Customer Panel is beginning to make real changes. I enjoy meeting regularly and building relationships with staff and customers from different areas."



Best Companies 2013 and IIP review



3 years in a row Ability was listed as one of the Sunday Times 100 Best Not-for-Profit Organisations to Work for.

This is a survey which our staff fill out. It asks questions about how they feel about their team and their managers and more.



The survey is a chance for our staff to tell us what they would like to be changed so that we can make Ability a great place to work.



This is important because we want our staff to be happy and we want them to be giving you the best support and service that they can.

We have also had a visit from **Investors In People**.



Investors In People are a company who come and make sure we are always improving our services for customers by how we manage and train our staff.

They said we are still doing a good job so they have given us the Investors In People award again.



Investors In People said that: *'staff are committed to giving you an excellent service and work hard to give you choice and help you to become independent'*.

We are going to carry on working hard to live up to this very good feedback.



Maddy meets Carron

Carron is an Ability tenant and Care & Support customer. She is also a member of Ability's Customer Panel. Carron and I had lunch together so I could find out more about her.



Carron loves her Ability flat because it makes her feel safe and independent. She has been in her flat for 6 years.



Carron sometimes gets **depression**.

Depression is when a person feels low and unhappy and doesn't feel able to do anything.



When she lived at home her mum used to do everything for her.



Now she is supported with

- reading forms
- swimming
- shopping

She can now do many of these things on her own.



Carron especially enjoys cooking new healthy recipes with her key worker.



Carron is a first aider and has been volunteering with St John's Ambulance for 5 years.

Carron enjoys doing this because she loves looking after people and this has helped to take her mind off her own problems and in getting her over her periods of depression.



Carron said, "When I got my new flat I was so excited, nervous but excited. I love everything about Ability.

The staff listen when I have a problem and do what they can to help me.

I enjoy being more involved in the Customer Panel and with doing interviews. I like telling other people's views if they cannot say it themselves."

Find the Healthy Food

- apple
- chicken
- jelly
- salmon
- broccoli
- cucumber
- rice
- sandwich
- cheese
- egg
- salad
- tomato

b	h	w	z	r	o	h	s	n	c
x	r	a	c	t	i	a	s	o	u
r	d	o	a	h	n	c	g	m	c
l	t	m	c	d	e	j	e	l	u
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y	c	w	a	p	p	l	e	e	e
h	s	a	l	a	d	y	i	g	r
c	h	i	c	k	e	n	p	g	d
p	s	f	k	a	y	u	h	e	p

Spot the difference



Answer on back page

Tell us your story



This is your newsletter and we'd like to hear from you. You can contact us by:



E-mail

[window@ability-housing.co.uk](mailto>window@ability-housing.co.uk)



Telephone

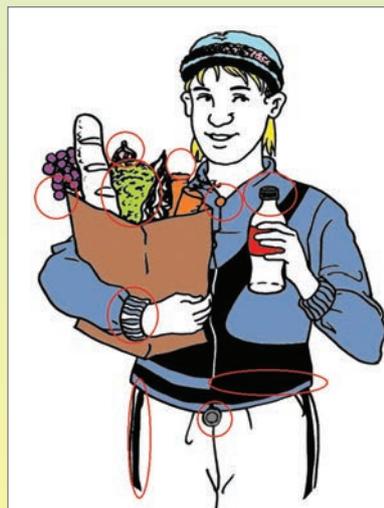
01784 490910



Letter

Ability Housing Association
The Coach House
Gresham Road
Staines
Middlesex TW18 2AE

**Spot the
difference answer**



Don't forget to check our website for the latest news and events: www.ability-housing.co.uk