



News and views from Ability Housing Association

Window

Welcome to your summer edition of Window

I hope all Ability customers are having a good summer. Whether you are interested in sport, gardening or travel, summer is often the busiest time of year for having fun.

It's a busy time for Ability too. As always, we are busy listening to customers, improving services, building new homes and improving our existing homes. You can read about some of those activities in this edition of Window.

We are also busy planning for the future. I believe that what makes Ability different is being positive. My hope is that you always get a positive response from Ability. Our staff are encouraged to think first about what they can do to help you and to then take personal responsibility for taking the necessary action.



Ability
POSITIVE +

I'd like to hear more about your experiences of Ability staff being **AbilityPOSITIVE**, so that the staff member can be praised and rewarded. If your experience has not been positive, then I'd like to hear about that too, so that we can make things better for you.

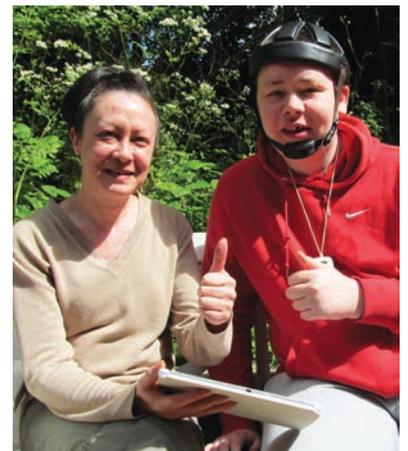
David Williams

We call this way of working "**AbilityPOSITIVE**". Our future success depends upon our customers choosing Ability and we think customers are more likely to choose Ability if all of our staff think and act positively.



David at the staff conference where he launched AbilityPOSITIVE+

Q-Team visits



The Q-Team have completed 3 very successful service visits so far in 2014. They have made lots of recommendations for improvement and found excellent examples of our staff providing a great service.

[More on this story inside...](#)

Q-Team visits

CONTINUED

The Q-Team is a team of trained customers who visit our services and enable our customers to talk about where they live and their support. They meet with customers 1:1 or in a group either at the service or out for lunch. The team has made many recommendations including one for customers to be supported to go on holiday and another for a shared customer computer to be used for bidding etc.

This was a very positive visit with feedback that had greater importance and impact than any previous audit visits. We have begun in earnest the tasks to meet some of the recommendations made by the Q-Team, myself and the Team Leader.

Lucy Bridger, Support Services Manager



Thumbs up for the Q-Team

'It is good having the Q-Team; it feels like we can all share ideas so we are all improving.'

Customer from our service in Woking

Care Quality Commission

We currently have six locations registered with the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

All our registered services have been inspected and deemed "fully compliant" by CQC. This means that each of these services have been visited by somebody who works for the commission who has found that we are delivering high quality services.

The reports we received following these visits are full of compliments about our services and how satisfied our customers are.

'You provide a great service here and it's plain to see the customers who clearly have very complex needs are well cared for and are safe within their environment.'

yourAbility UPDATE

Our **yourAbility** services continue to grow and we now provide support to over 40 people who want to live more independently.

If you have any friends who might like to choose us as their care and support provider please don't hesitate to get in touch by:

Email: careandsupport@ability-housing.co.uk

Phone: 0118 9027162

Shane, a yourAbility customer tells us his story...

My name is Shane and I am a **yourAbility** customer in Reading. I came to Ability in 2010 when I was quite unwell and at risk of losing my flat. I like getting support from **yourAbility**; I haven't got anyone else and I trust them. I have built really good relationships with my keyworkers; they let me change my support depending on what I want and need. I now feel more independent, more stable and get out more. I know they can help me in loads of different areas, even when I am making decisions which aren't good for me they don't stop me, they just talk to me and support me so I can make a choice with all the right information.



10 year celebration at Loddon Court

Tenants at Ability's supported living development in Wokingham held a garden party in July to celebrate 10 years of living independently. The staff and the tenants did a magnificent job in organising the event. The weather was glorious, the food was delicious, the garden looked gorgeous and everyone had a great afternoon. The tenants are all very happy with their homes in Loddon Court; this is what some of them said;



"I have lived here since 2004, I have enjoyed my independence here, I like cooking for myself. I enjoy the activities, my favourite has been the Butlins' Holiday. One day I hope to move to my own house in the community".

Paul Thomson

"This is a nice place to live. I've got good friends here. All the staff are friendly. Everything is lovely"

Stuart Bonnett

"It's nice living here, close to Reading. I get on well with the staff and I help with outings. The best thing is I have my freedom."

Mark Lumsden



Celebrating homes in Hastings

Ability's new development of 10 supported living flats was officially opened by the Mayor of Hastings on 20th March.

The new tenants had previously lived in residential care and other supported housing. They are now living independently with support and were pleased to show invited guests around their new homes.

One customer said; *'I love my new home; I am very happy here.'*



Celebration BBQ at Balfour Drive

In June tenants and guests gathered for a barbeque to celebrate the new kitchens at Balfour Drive in Liss. Each new kitchen was specifically tailored to suit the needs of the tenant.

One tenant said; 'I love to use my kitchen now.' whilst another said 'Nothing was too much trouble.'

Joan Williams, Housing Services Officer said *'The kitchen work was excellent; all tenants spoke very highly of the team of workmen from Richardson, praising them not only for the quality of work, but for all the consideration, politeness and respect shown to them.'*

After the event David Williams said *'There was a wonderful sense of community at the estate and tenants were delighted with their new kitchens. I have to say they are very impressive. Richardson has done us proud and tenants were quick to praise the team that did the kitchen work.'*



"I love the fact my kitchen was personalised to suit my needs for example the set of movable drawers and pull out drawer worktop; very modern"

Peter, tenant

Improvement fund update

Last year we invited you to make suggestions for improvements to Ability homes and their surroundings and set up a £25,000 fund for projects. This has been such a success that we are now running a second round of improvement fund suggestions.

To give you an idea of the sort of suggestions that might be suitable, here are some examples of projects which were approved.

One suggestion came from our service in Woking which was to update the garden furniture which has given new life and use to the outside area. One customer said the furniture is 'a real improvement. I'm glad the benches are fixed and updated, it's great to have somewhere nice to sit outside.'

The customers in Woking also requested a 'calm room' and work on this is well underway. The room will be a facility for customers to use for activities and meetings such as key-working sessions, CV workshops or any other meetings. This room is a valuable resource giving customers privacy without needing to be in their bedrooms and they are excited for the next steps - choosing pictures and decoration!



The calm room

Another suggestion came from customers at our service in Surbiton who are wheelchair users. They have a large garden but were unable to access it fully because there was only a

thin strip of paving. The patio has now been extended enabling them to enjoy the garden and a recent barbeque held outside in the sunshine! There is still more work to come; we are also adding a sensory garden area to give the customers further opportunity to enjoy their garden.

Other approved projects include, new sensor lights in Bournemouth and Poole, a herb garden in the communal area in Bournemouth and an improved disabled parking space.



Fiddlers Green, Surbiton

These are just a few examples and we would especially like to hear of more fresh, new ideas! Please remember your idea must:

- be for the benefit of customers
- have some lasting value (so not a party or day trip etc.)
- cost between £100 and £2500 in total
- not need expensive ongoing maintenance.

If you have any suggestions please complete the enclosed form and send it to Maddy Cox at:

The Coach House, Gresham Road, Staines, TW18 2AE

Or if you prefer, you could talk to another member of the staff team to discuss your idea. Please let Maddy have your ideas by 3rd October 2014.



Jan Lonsdale

I joined Ability in February this year as Head of Organisational Development and have had the pleasure of meeting some of you at the Customer Panel and training. The aim of my role is to create and put in place a plan that helps Ability to develop and grow, making sure we continue to provide the best possible service.

The plan will bring together all of the good things Ability is already doing for example training, staff development and Q-team visits and make sure they connect with our vision, values and objectives.

I have worked in health, social care and housing for over 30 years and believe that the key to an organisation's success is how each staff member thinks and behaves towards their customers. We want to be the first choice for everybody, not only for our customers but for our staff as well; in order to do this we need a fresh approach.

AbilityPOSITIVE+ is this fresh approach. It's about Ability staff having the right attitude and positive behaviours at all times, as well as the required knowledge and skills to take us forward.

To set us off in the right direction we have created six Signposts. Working together these will help us to:-

- define the **AbilityPOSITIVE+** behaviours of our staff create a set of **POSITIVE+** behaviours that you have told us are important
- recruit staff on the basis of their great attitude and provide the appropriate training so they can support you
- engage with customers, partners and stakeholders to make sure we are all working together for our future
- develop ways to measure the quality of the service we provide
- provide a great place to work and be known as one of the best companies to work for.

We launched **AbilityPOSITIVE+** at our conference in April at the Royal Festival Hall in London. Staff had an energetic and packed day looking at different parts of our company, from our new website to Q-Team visits, to enable them to understand the behaviours that make **AbilityPOSITIVE+** and to show how all Ability staff can make a positive contribution to the development and success of Ability. From the photos below you'll see what an exciting day we enjoyed...

New Faces



Tim Handcock

I've been at Ability since February this year as Assistant Director of Housing. I've worked for many different housing associations over a number of years and Ability is one of the most exciting organisations I've been with.

I'm here to help change the way we work to give our customers a much better service. I look forward to meeting as many of our customers as I can over the coming months and getting your views on where we are doing well and on where we can improve things.



Gina Rocque - Drayton

I joined Ability as Support Services Manager for South West London in April 2014. I was attracted to Ability by their values and customer focus. This was immediately obvious as there was a Customer Panel member on

my interview panel and it was great to see customers involved from the offset.

I have settled into Ability really quickly. My team has made me feel very welcome and I feel privileged to work with such friendly and enthusiastic colleagues. The majority of my time is spent visiting the services in Merton and Croydon. I feel that being visible to my teams and customers is key to building positive working relationships. The most rewarding part of my job is seeing customers in their own homes developing the skills to live independently.



My support worker is great and makes me happy - Caroline



I live in Reading in a very nice bungalow. I have an Ability support worker called Maria who I see once a week. Recently my support time was reduced to just 1 hour a week but that's not really enough for me; Maria is helping me to be reassessed to see if I can get the hours I need.

I usually meet Maria in town as I can come in by myself on the bus. Maria helps me with all my paperwork like bills and benefits and also with organising any repairs to my house and with shopping and organising my day-to-day life. I bring my letters with me when we meet and Maria supports me to make any phone calls if I need to.

Everyone says I'm very sociable and I do like to keep busy so I have activities arranged for most days. For example, every Monday I go to a Mencap group where we have lunch and sometimes an organised walk or picnic. On Tuesday I do gardening with Mencap and on Wednesdays I often go shopping with a friend. I was born in Reading so I have lots of family nearby which is great. My mum lives just around the corner from me and I have a sister nearby too. She has 3 grown-up children so I have lots of nieces and nephews that I love to see. I really like animals and I'd love to have a little dog so that's what I'm planning for next!

'I'm really pleased that I have Maria as my support worker. She's great and makes me happy'



A night to remember

A story by Costas

Iain lives at one of our services in Reading. For his birthday he wanted to see Jo O'Meara (from S-Club7) so we worked with him to make the arrangements, he was excited and couldn't wait to see his idol up close.



When we got there the place was packed! I spoke to the assistant manager and asked him if he could get Jo to sign the birthday card that Iain had bought with him. We then got our drinks and sat down. When he received his autographed card he couldn't hide his excitement. *'I'm happy'* he whispered.

When Jo came on stage Iain stood, enjoying his glass of lemonade and humming the lyrics of the songs. But the best was yet to come for his special day. The lights went off and Jo made another appearance, this time to greet Iain! Everyone there clapped for him and sang *'Happy birthday'*.

His eyes widened in surprise. Jo signed his S Club 7 t-shirt and he could barely believe his eyes as he whispered *'I am never going to wash it.'* His reply caused good-natured laughter among the audience whilst Iain and Jo engaged in a casual conversation.

I asked Iain if there was one last thing he wanted to say to Jo and to everyone at the pub for making his birthday night so special. He signed with his hand and pointed at his heart. *'Thank you, thank you!'* he whispered.



Cup of tea and a newspaper



Steven is a customer at one of Ability's services in Hillingdon. He used to live in a residential service where he had his own bedroom but shared all other facilities. This reduced his ability to make everyday decisions such as when to get up, choose what to watch on TV or sit with a cup of tea and read the newspaper.

This all changed in 2008 when our Hillingdon service first opened and he moved in. He now has his own self contained flat, filled with pictures from his safari trip and memorabilia from his favourite football team, Chelsea. Steven has worked with the Ability team to develop his independence and is supported to make choices for both

day to day life and his future. Steven enjoys the freedom to have a cup of tea and read his newspaper when he wants.

So far his proudest achievement is completing a recent course in developing and maintaining new daily living skills and he now has a QCF certificate in 'Skills for independent living'. Steven and the whole Ability team are very proud of his hard work and achievements and know there are many more to come!

Steven said: *'I like reading my newspaper and doing puzzles. I am very happy where I live; I like my flat and staff. I got a certificate in independent living and I carry it with me in my walker.'*

Eva meets Nigel

'My support worker was just fantastic. He was a calm presence that was always there when I needed it.'



I was born in Malaysia but grew up in the East Midlands. My first job was in hairdressing but then I became a croupier in casinos. It was hard work but very sociable so I had a fun time partying and enjoying life. After a few years I moved to Reading to work in a casino there but this type of job makes it difficult to have friends or a social life outside work. I was struggling to cope both physically and mentally and I became ill with depression.

This is when my life started to unravel. I lost my job because I couldn't work and then my landlord evicted me. This increased my anxiety and I felt that I couldn't cope with everyday life. I managed to get some temporary housing through the council and then was referred to Ability.

I came to Ability in 2012 and started to get my life sorted out. I had an excellent Ability support worker who helped me to rebuild my confidence as well as giving me practical help with things like managing my finances, looking after my health and food shopping. I am quite an independent person so I wanted my own place, I now have a small flat, just outside the town centre and I am gradually rebuilding my life.

I was grateful to Ability for supporting me and really wanted to give something back so I volunteered for the Q-Team – Ability customers who go into other services to do peer audits. I really enjoy doing this and have improved my confidence and skills. I feel so much more capable now and am moving forward all the time.

Dee Moves on

Provided by Monique Swaby
Housing Support Worker, Mitcham



Dee came to Ability's service in Mitcham in 2012. She had previously lived in the Crystal Palace area and wasn't keen to move. However, having visited our service, she decided she liked the area and loved her flat as it is peaceful, on the ground floor and opens out onto a pleasant garden.

Dee attended Newcastle University where she studied Classics and then went on to become a social worker, but later became unwell.

Since arriving at Ability, Dee has made amazing progress, she runs a regular Thursday meeting at an AA group to help others with similar issues and has really taken back control of her life.

Dee likes to keep busy and fill her days. She currently volunteers at Morden Library every Saturday, greeting and helping those who visit the library. Dee has many talents including cross-stitch and has kindly used her skills to make Christmas and Easter cards for the staff in Mitcham. She is also learning to speak French, has successfully completed Key Stages 1 and 2, and is about to start Stage 3.

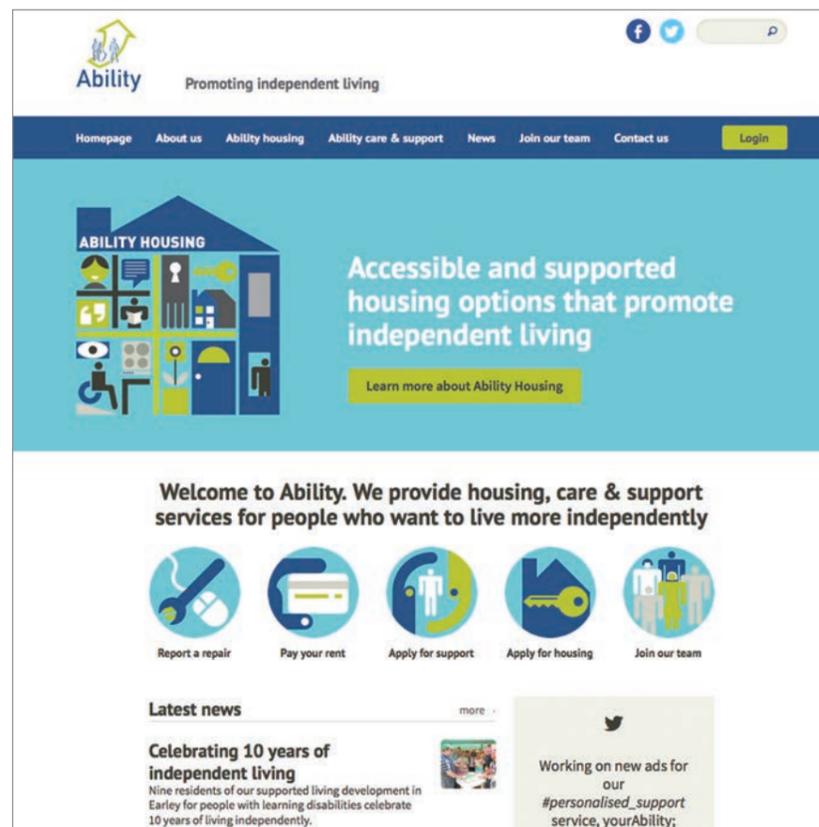
Dee is now ready to move on and is looking forward to a bright future in her new flat in Morden. She is hoping to get a job in customer support and we all wish her the very best for the future.

New website

Ability will soon have a brand new website which we hope you will like. We've tried to make it easier to use and we also think it has a fresher, more modern look. All the information about our services has been updated and we've included some new sections such as 'Customer Stories' and 'Get involved' where you can find out about the different ways you can get involved with Ability like joining the Customer Panel or the Q-Team.

There are some brand new features as well. For example, if you are an Ability tenant you will be able to login to do things like check your details are correct, see your rent payment records and even log a repair using our new pictorial reporting system.

We will soon be sending out information to all Ability tenants explaining how you can do this. We are also training our support staff and housing officers so they will be able to help you with this.



The address for the new website: www.ability-housing.co.uk

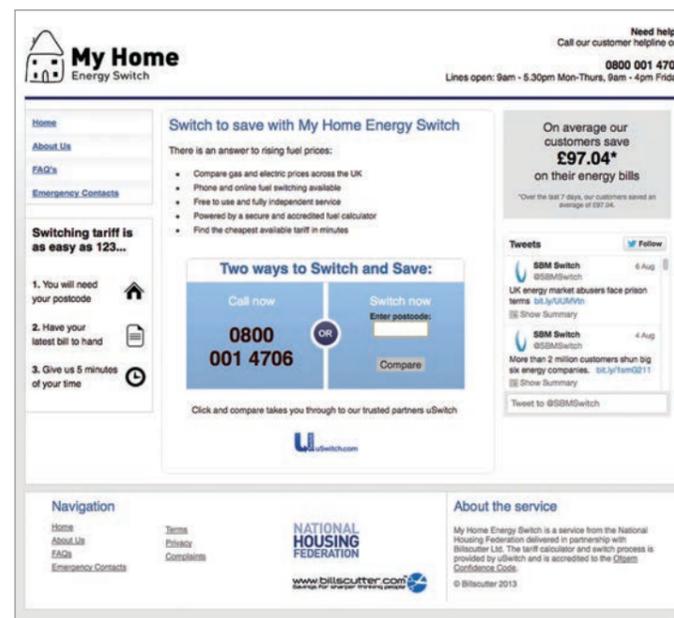
Save money on your energy bills

My Home Energy Switch is an energy supply service from the National Housing Federation to help tenants reduce their energy bills. This service is completely free and impartial and on average customers save £72.84 on their energy bills.

How does it work?

All you need to do is call 0800 0014 706 or go to www.myhomeenergyswitch.org.uk with your postcode and a current energy bill. The My Home Energy Switch team will do the rest. If you would like support to do this please talk to your Support Worker or Housing Services Officer.

You could save money by switching your gas and electricity using My Home Energy Switch.



www.myhomeenergyswitch.org.uk

Visit Ability on Facebook and win a prize!

Ability has a Facebook page with all the latest news about things that are happening in Ability like opening events, customer stories and activities, Customer Panel updates, Q-Team visits, new developments and lots more! We also have plenty of photos for you to see. We'd really like more of you to get involved with us on Facebook so we are offering 3 of you the chance to win a £10 Marks and Spencer voucher. To take part you need to have a Facebook account or to set one up – you can do this by going to Facebook (www.facebook.com) and following the instructions.

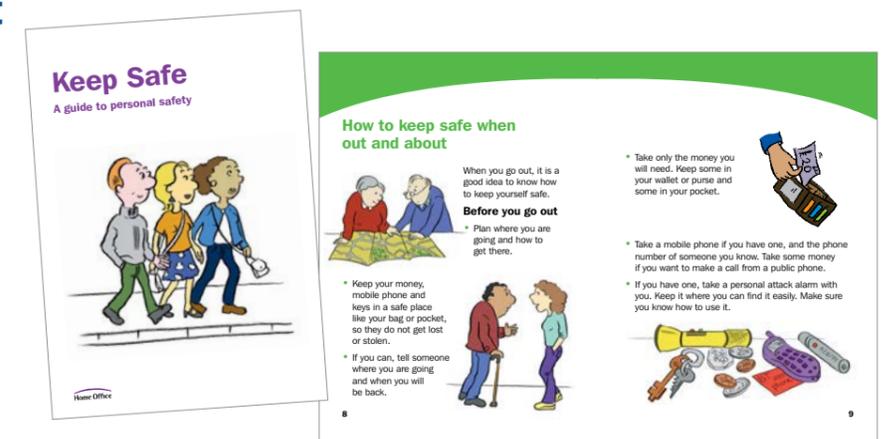
When you are logged in to Facebook, you just need to type in our name – Ability Housing Association. Then, when the Ability page opens you can either 'like' us by clicking the 'Like' button near the top of the page (just under the main photo) or leave us a comment in the space where it says 'Write something..' or even better, do both!

You have until 15th September to take part. After that date we will collect the names of everyone who has liked us or added a comment added and put them in a hat. The first 3 names drawn out of the hat on Wednesday 17th September will win a £10 voucher. We will contact the winners through Facebook by Friday 19th September so keep following us!



Staying safe going out

You can get information about keeping yourself and your home safe in this useful booklet available from your local police station. If you would like a copy please talk to your Support Worker or Housing Services Officer.



Customer Panel update

The Customer Panel provides an opportunity for Ability customers to meet with staff, review aspects of our service and make sure we are keeping customers at the centre of our decision making. The Care and Support Sub Panel has been looking at the Support Planning Procedure and they think it's really important for all customers to be able to choose what their support plan looks like. For example, your support plan could be Easy Read, on different colour paper, include photos or anything you would like. Members of the Panel are now starting to do training sessions with staff to talk about all the different ways support plans can be written.



Members of the Care and Support Panel discuss topics

Tim Handcock on the service development plan concentrating on satisfactions surveys, risk management and repairs ensuring customers feel valued and have confidence in the service we provide.



James has been with Ability for 2 ½ years. He first came to one of our 24 hour services and has now moved on to one of our self-contained flats in Staines.

'I really enjoy going to the Panel, talking with staff from different parts of Ability and getting to know them. The staff really listen to what you say and care about making improvements, I get to give my opinions and work with Ability as a joint team to make sure we are always looking at what we are doing and seeing how we can do it better.'



The Housing Sub Panel have been reviewing repairs performance and improving the Pet's Policy ensuring that all aspects of our customers housing, needs and support are taken into consideration. They are also working with



Angie has been an Ability tenant for 3 years. She came to us when she could no longer manage the stairs in their house and is now living in an Ability bungalow.

'Thanks to Ability our lives have been transformed since moving to our bungalow. I was asked if I would join the Customer Panel and felt this would be a good way of giving something back to Ability. I am really impressed with the teamwork shown by the staff and hope I will be able to make some valuable contributions especially as my working background was supporting young adults with physical and learning difficulties.'

Meet the Q-Team



Carron



Nigel



Foster



Liam

1 What is your favourite thing about being on the Q-team?

Carron – I love seeing all the different services, speaking to the customers and talking to them about their lives. It is a challenge for me but it has really built my confidence.

Nigel – Getting out and engaging with the customers – that's the best thing!

Foster – The Q-team helps support people as it gives them the chance to talk to other customers. Maddy, the Customer Engagement Co-ordinator, does a really good job of organising the visits.

2 What has been your biggest challenge on the Q-Team? How did you overcome it?

Carron – Going to the service in Hillingdon because some struggled to communicate but all the preparation really helped me feel comfortable. We had training about different ways to communicate which was really good and had a Samsung tablet with pictures and questions which customers could press if they couldn't talk very clearly – that really helped.

Nigel – Understanding different disabilities and needs of the customers, it is really important to know a bit about the service and customers before you go, every service is so different.

Liam – I sometimes struggle with getting places and access due to my wheelchair but I have done 1 visit and I look forward to doing more. It is also so important to have staff on board and enthusiastic.

3 How did you feel on your first visit?

Carron – I was a bit nervous but that went as the visit went on, I felt most comfortable in the pub in a group with the customers as everyone was really relaxed and it helped them to open up.

Q&A

Liam – I was a bit nervous as not only was it my first visit but it was the first time Ability had done a visit so I wasn't sure what to expect! I really enjoyed it though and liked chatting to the customers.

Foster – On my first visit I felt a bit shaky but it disappeared. I said to myself 'I can do this'.

4 Why do you think it is important to have a Q-Team?

Nigel – To make sure we are keeping a high standard and customer needs are met. Our customers are the most important thing, little things can come out that they wouldn't think to tell staff – it helps create the big picture of the support they want.

Foster – The Q-Team is really important so customers know they are not alone and can talk to people who understand. It helps customers to be more independent and think about what's important in their lives.

5 What advice would you give to a service / customers being visited?

Carron – To customers I would say don't be worried or nervous, it's not an interview, there is no right or wrong – they can be really fun so enjoy talking to us! I would say the same to staff but also that it is so important they help customers to understand why we are coming before we come; they can help customers not be nervous.

Liam – Don't be afraid to talk to us, we want you to feel comfortable/ if you have any questions then just ask.



Best Companies 2014



Ability has retained its place in the Sunday Times Top 100 Not-For-Profit Companies to Work For. This is the third year running Ability has been in the Top 100. Here is what Best Companies said:

'Seeing a person's talents before their disabilities is a point of pride at this Staines-based small housing association. Employees point to its strong social conscience and believe they can make a valuable contribution to its success.'

We will take part in Best Companies again this year as we believe the feedback from our colleagues is key to helping us continue to grow and develop and be the first choice for our customers and staff.

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



E-mail
window@ability-housing.co.uk



Telephone
01784 490910



Letter
Ability
The Coach House
Gresham Road
Staines
Middlesex
TW18 2AE

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