

window

Summer 2011 issue eight

news and views from Ability Housing Association

Welcome to your Summer edition of Window



Ability
HOUSING ASSOCIATION

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



Telephone

0844 257 8118



Letter

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

This is a really exciting year for Ability. Here are some of the things we are doing that you can read about in this issue:

- We have been building lots of new homes
- We have opened our new Customer Service Centre
- We have a new repairs contractor
- We have set up a new Customer Panel
- We are getting ready to provide care and support services in more personalised ways
- We are planning for the future by writing a new business plan.

All of these things put you, our customers, at the heart of what we do. We've been listening to what you have to say and that is helping us to make better decisions about how we do things.

We hope that you will like what we are doing. We hope that you will notice improvements. Please keep the feedback coming... it really does make a difference.

Best wishes,
David Williams, Chief Executive

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Opening at **New Milton**

Tenants at Cedar Place, New Milton gathered with their families and invited guests to celebrate the official opening of their new homes.

Councillor Janette Duke, Chair of New Milton Town Council opened the event with a brief speech saying that Ability and its tenants were “very much a part of the local community” and commented on the appealing design and spacious layout of the new homes.

She then cut the ribbon along with tenant Simon Price and David Williams, Ability Chief Executive.

Roger, one of the new tenants also made a speech and said:

“I am delighted to have been offered a brand new flat, such a beautiful place, built to such a high standard. We are lucky that it is just around the corner from the shops in the high street and just down the road from the railway station.

We are very grateful for all of the help and support from Gill, Jessica and Deborah of Ability Housing, who have helped us with forms, setting up utilities and cooking meals.

Once again thanks to everyone who has made this possible.”

Cedar Place has 12 self-contained flats and provides supported living for people with learning difficulties and mental health issues.



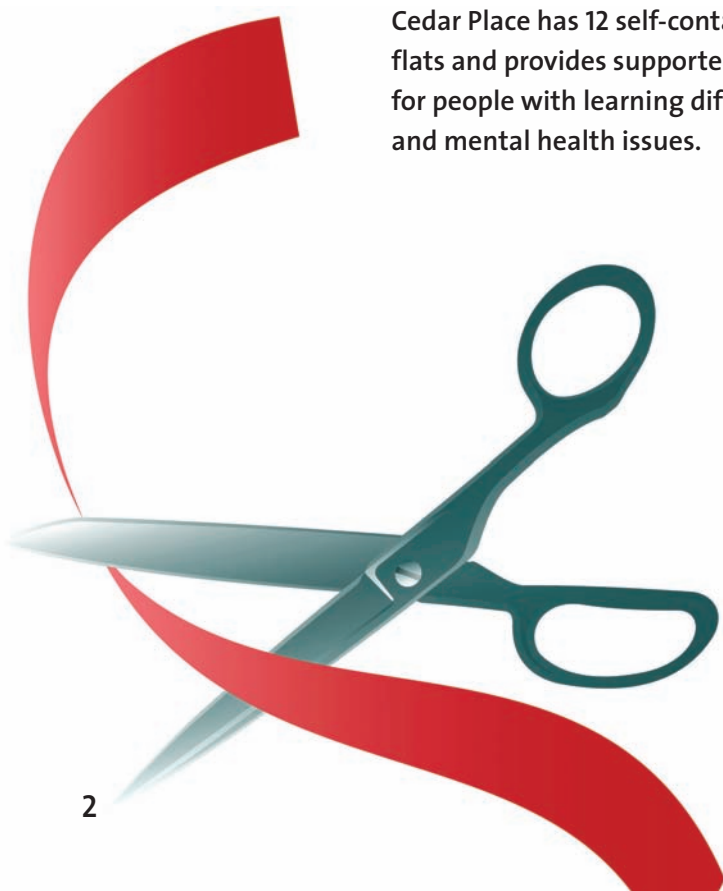
This is what some of the other tenants said about moving into **Cedar Place**

MICHAEL *“It has helped me to realise that it is harder to live on my own, but has taught me responsibility and independence, and I like the fact that it is close to the town and train station.”*

ROBINHO *“I am now more independent and feel more comfortable doing things on my own like shopping, meeting new people, good social circle and good transport”*

HAZEL *“I enjoy living at Cedar Place and living on my own and learning to do things with my support worker. I also like that I have made new friends.”*

COLIN *“Good start for living away from home, convenient for my work and good for transport”*



The dream becomes a reality at Castle Mews

The dream of living independently became a reality for the young tenants of Castle Mews when they moved into their brand new, specially adapted Ability flats at the end of 2010.

Castle Mews is the first housing scheme of its kind to be built in Hertfordshire with the specific aim of meeting the needs of young people with physical and sensory impairments.

All of the ground floor flats are wheelchair accessible and include height adjustable kitchen sink units and wheelchair accessible kitchens.

To celebrate its completion, an official opening was held in June for the tenants, their families and invited guests including Cllr Aislinn Lee, the Mayor of St Albans City and District.

Andrew Bird, one of the new tenants at Castle Mews made a speech and cut the ribbon along with Cllr Lee, to mark the event.

Equalities Minister Lynne Featherstone, who recently visited Castle Mews called the scheme *'phenomenal'* and said, *"I can honestly say that I have never seen a better-designed facility anywhere in the country."*



Developments in Hastings



As well as Osborne House, Ability has just completed 2 further developments in Hastings. Together these two properties will provide 15 new self-contained one bedroom flats for people with learning disabilities.

Pearly Blessing at Osborne House

Earlier this year, pearly kings and queens from Peckham visited Osborne House to give the new development their 'pearly blessing'.

Osborne House in Hastings is being redeveloped to provide new self-contained flats for eleven people with learning disabilities who currently live at an existing home on the site. The tenants, who are all originally from the London Borough of Sutton, include the sister of George Major, the Pearly King of Peckham.

George, who has been a Pearly King for over 50 years, made a brief speech before unveiling a plaque to commemorate the day.

David Williams, Ability Chief Executive, said

"We know from past experience the enormous benefits that a new purpose built home can bring to the quality of life and independence of disabled people. This really is something worth celebrating and we are delighted to have the Pearly King here to give his blessing to these fine new homes."





Customer Service Centre & Repairs Service

Ability's new Customer Service Centre opened on 11th April. So far, the team have answered over 1000 calls from you, our customers. Your feedback has been very favourable so we're pleased that you like the new service.

But we want to keep on improving. We are totally committed to providing a first class service....so tell us how we are doing!

You can give us feedback by telephoning Nichole Waller our Quality & Improvement Manager on **07971 154636** or you can e-mail Nichole at **nicholew@ability-housing.co.uk** .

Julie, Jackie, Aeysha and Sarah are here to offer you a single point of contact. They handle all incoming customer calls including repairs reporting, complaints and feedback.

A key feature of the new service centre is the use of information technology to help us keep track of your issues and record your feedback. Staff have been specially trained and we expect our customers to notice a real improvement in how their calls are handled.

Locally based Housing Service Officers and Housing Support Workers will still be on hand to provide all the services they have provided previously.

As a reminder:

The Customer Service Centre number is 0844 257 8118

Opening hours are Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm.

Calls cost 4.25p per minute from a BT landline. This is the local call rate.

NEWS & VIEWS

A poem by Lynn Whitchelo, one of Ability's customers in Reading

A is for achieve

B is for belief in yourself

I is for imagination

L is for living and

I is for improving and reading

T toward your dream

*Y is for yourself to care
for and cherish*

Service Offers

This is a brief reminder about the service offers that we published and sent out to all Ability customers in March 2011.

The details are available on the Ability website. The service offers cover the following areas:

- Home
- Tenancy
- Neighbourhood and Community
- Support
- Value for Money, and
- Customer involvement and empowerment.

The service offers are promises that we have made to our customers about improvements we are making in response to your feedback. They cover the year from April 2011 to March 2012. We will be producing an annual report for all our customers in December when we will be looking at performance over the last year. We will include an update on each of the service offers in that report.

Marathon Man!

Tenants in Talbot Village, Poole, have an accomplished marathon runner in their number. He is Stewart Cull, who has been taking part in running events for several years. In 2010 Stewart ran the London Marathon in 6 hours, 3 minutes and later in the year he took part in the Sydney Marathon. This year he ran the London Marathon again, this time taking 5 hours 22 minutes, knocking 41 minutes off his 2010 time.

Stewart has a communication impairment and uses British Sign Language. Through sponsorship, he has raised over £1,550 for the charity, Sonus which works with deaf people.



Window Quiz

Enter the Window quiz for a chance to win a £25 shopping voucher.

1. How many holes are there in a 10 pin bowling ball?
2. What is a baby seal called?
3. What is the name of Fred Flintstone's daughter?
4. How many wings does a bee have?
5. How many arms does a starfish usually have?
6. In which country is the Louvre Museum?
7. What type of sandwiches were Paddington Bear's favourite?
8. What is the name given to a group of lions?
9. What was the name of the cow in the Magic Roundabout?
10. Which is the tallest mountain in the world?

If you can answer these 10 questions, then put your answers on a postcard or letter.

Make sure you add your name, address and telephone number then post the card or letter to:

Window Quiz, Ability Housing Association, The Coach House, Gresham Road, Staines TW18 2AE

Entries must be received by 30 September.

The first correct entry drawn out of a hat on 3 October will win the £25 voucher.



WHAT ELSE IS HAPPENING?



Easy Read Project

We are working hard to make it easy!



You told us our written information needs to be easier to understand. A team of Ability staff, including 2 customers, have been working

together to do this.

So far we have trained all of the staff who work in our learning disability services to use easy words and pictures. We have also written the first draft of an easy read support plan. A big thank you to the 20 of you who gave us your feedback on this!

We are now looking for customers who use our learning disability services to work with us to make more of our information easy to read.

You would need to come to a team meeting 3 or 4 times a year. Full training, support, travel costs and refreshments will be provided.

If you are interested in finding out more please call Lizzie Gardiner on 0796 8823956 or email: lizzieg@ability-housing.co.uk

Goodbye to Lay

After 25 years Ability's supported housing service in Wimbledon is preparing to close its doors and move to brand new purpose built premises. Three of the tenants tell us their stories:



Michael has bought his own flat and is about to move in.



I have never had my own flat before so this is a totally new experience. When I first got those keys in my

hand I felt like a new person. Layton House had its moments! Overall it has been worthwhile and the support I had has been good. I have learnt to do the things I need to do, like getting up, going shopping and basically keeping myself occupied.

I can't wait to be in my new flat. The first thing I will do is open all of the windows and get some fresh air in. Then I will unpack, make myself a nice cup of coffee and relax.



CUSTOMER PANEL

This was set up in November 2010 and includes eight Ability customers. Its aim is to help Ability make improvements to the homes and services we provide.

The first job our Customer Panel worked on was our Service Offers. The panel gave us feedback and helped to shape the Service Offers that were sent to our customers earlier this year.

Next we looked at the Business Plan. David Williams talked to the panel about the Business Plan and the things we would like to do to help Ability be the first choice provider of housing and support.

The panel members gave us some really good feedback which is helping David and the Ability Board to finish the Business Plan.

We will be working next on the annual report which Ability customers receive every December.

Some of the Customer Panel members will also be looking at the performance of our repairs service, while others are working on producing more information in easy read.

We really need your involvement at a local level as well. If you would like to know more please get in touch with Nichole Waller, details below.

Phone: 07971 154636

Email: nicholew@ability-housing.co.uk

Letter: Nichole Waller, Quality & Improvement Manager, The Coach House, Gresham Road, Staines, Middlesex, TW18 2AE

ton House



Clare is moving to one of Ability's move-on flats in Merton.

“ I used to live in a studio flat but I felt scared being on my own there and really wanted to be

around other people so my parents helped me to find Layton House. At first I kept getting lost, there are so many corridors and they all look the same!

The support I've had has been good; the staff have given me a shove in the right direction and helped me to see that having an active lifestyle is really important. I do so much more than I used to. I like to be creative and I've done lots of courses such as dress making and jewellery design. I'm also a member of my local gym. My confidence has definitely grown since I first moved in and I've got more friends.

I'm excited to be offered a flat and grateful to Ability for giving me this opportunity. It feels like a new beginning. I know I'll have to make an effort to get out of the flat as I won't see people around like I do here, but I feel confident I can do it. I'm ready to get out into the world! ”



Foster is preparing to move to his own flat at Ability's brand new service.

“ I have a strong faith in God and I thank him for Layton House and the staff here. When I first came

to have a look around I didn't want to stay; it looked like the building was falling down! But the staff and other tenants were really friendly and I got a good feeling about the place.

I've been here for 6 months and I really like it. The staff help me with stuff like managing my money. They prompt me to pay my rent on time and encourage me to do voluntary work. I volunteer at a charity called Fanon where I work on the front desk answering the phones; directing calls and taking messages.

I'm really excited to be moving into my own flat. I only have a room here and have to share a kitchen and bathroom so it will be like a palace for me. I'll be over the moon when I get there! ”

Ability's new Business Plan



Every few years Ability produces a new business plan. A business plan sets out how an organisation plans to carry out its activities, grow and develop. A new plan is needed from time to time because the world in which we live and operate changes.

Ability wants to build more new homes for people who want to live more independently. We also want to improve our existing homes to meet the standards customers have told us they want to see. The new business plan will set out how we plan to do those things and how we will find the money that is needed.

We are also setting out some ideas for how we can make our care and support services more personalised. We think that more people might want to use our care and support services if they become more flexible and more affordable.

We've been talking to customer representatives on our Customer Panel to see which of our ideas they like the most and to ask them how we can do things even better. We've also been talking to our staff to find out what they think.

The new business plan will go to the Ability Board for their final approval at the end of September. After that, we'll be able to let you know all of our plans. We are all very excited about involving our customers as we get busy delivering all our plans over the next few years.

David Williams
Chief Executive

Support Report: The Sunrise Club

The Sunrise Club is a day centre in Slough run by Ability for people with mental health issues. With a membership of over 60 people, it's a popular meeting place with around 20 people using it on any one day. The two staff, Laura and Rosa, are on hand to provide support, help organise activities or talk over any issues with the members.

As well as the regular activities which include yoga, keep fit, cookery lessons, gardening and sewing, the Club also organises outings to the theatre, visits to London and most recently, a trip to Paris in October.

Many of the members have been coming to the Club for several years and use it as a place to meet and chat, where they can relax and talk over any issues with other people who understand how they're feeling.

Some of the members' comments about the club:

“ I've been coming for over 2 years. I enjoy the social side and come just to mix

Many of us live alone and the members support each other

We all understand each other

I come 3 or 4 times a week. I get help with issues and can talk over any problems

If we ask for something, the staff will provide it ”



Sunrise Club in radio award

Members of the Club also took part in an award winning radio programme about mental health issues. The programme, called Warning: May Contain Nuts with BBC Radio Berkshire won a Gold Award at the Sony Radio Awards in 2010 for Best Community Programming.

The programme involved people in Berkshire and Sussex telling their stories and reading out some of their own poetry.

Judges said they awarded Gold for:

“High quality programming on mental health which shed a positive light on the subject.”



Don't forget to check our website out for the latest news and events.

www.ability-housing.co.uk