

## Chairman's Report

We said farewell this year to manager Olly Cooper who must be praised for the time and effort which he devoted to the affairs of Disability Huntingdonshire. He managed Dish over a period of over nine years. He is now enjoying a well deserved retirement, and we wish him well.

Audrey Gatford has been appointed to take over the manager's role at the end of October 2014. Nicola Gilroy was also welcomed to the staff as part time family adviser, after a period of freelance employment with us. We are fortunate continue to employ Jackie Newman as our information officer, and Michael O'Fee as our adult adviser.

We continue to have the invaluable services of our regular volunteer Hilary Bayles. She has been working closely with Jackie to contact members by telephone, and to update our database, along with several other tasks.

A new volunteer, Michael Searle is currently reviewing and re-designing our website and updating its contents. Caroline O'Brian is also welcomed as a volunteer, and will be working with us regularly.

As with previous years, although we offer a broad range of advice and information, our clients have requested most help and support with Benefits applications and appeals. The charts included in this report indicate this clearly, with over 81% of contacts concerning Benefits. Our records from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2014 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2014 indicate that we have obtained the total equivalent of £163,169.00 over the year in benefits entitlements for clients in Huntingdonshire and its environs. This not only supports individuals, but contributes to sustaining local services.

The Benefits landscape is a rapidly changing one, and many of our clients find engaging with it confusing and frustrating. We are proud to be able to provide accurate information which provides a way through the complex bureaucracy. We are also sensitive to the embarrassment that individuals often feel when, perhaps for the first time in their lives, they need to ask for financial support. It is with appropriate resources that our clients will then be able to achieve independent living.

As with most small charities, finance is always a concern. We continue to be grateful to the Varrier-Jones Foundation for continuing to give us office space in a client friendly environment, with its parking space and facilities for people with disabilities, at a much reduced rent. We share premises and often liaise with the Cambridgeshire Alliance, and Disability Cambridgeshire.

We value and give thanks for the funding from local Councils, Trusts and Foundations, and from individual donors. Without this, we obviously would not exist, and many of the most vulnerable residents in the Huntingdonshire area would lose a service which is much needed and highly valued.

We shall continue to investigate future funding, and along with other events, we are pleased to have Daniel Bayles as a runner in the London Marathon on Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> April this year. We hope that members and friend of DISH will publicise and support his efforts.

Sandy Ferrelly

Chair of Trustees  
January 2015

## **Treasurer's Report**

Our first year of the new agreement with our primary funder, Hunts District Council, along with a new £10,000 grant from Lloyds provided a welcome increase in income.

Unfortunately we also had to pick up a larger share of our premises costs due to Disability Cambridgeshire's difficulties, so our cost rose. Nevertheless we almost broke even, taking only £1765 from reserves.

During the year we continued to focus on our core services for which demand remained very high.

2014 will be a challenging year as we continue to seek new sources of support for our work which shows no sign of reducing.

We are, as always, extremely grateful for the financial and moral support from our funders who are listed in this report.

Our income : £55680 (up by 24%)

Expenditure : £57445 (up by 10%)

DL Morgan, Treasurer

## **Disability Huntingdonshire Staff Perspectives**

### **The Volunteer**

I have been volunteering with DISH for more years than I can remember. The main reason why I enjoy it so much is that every day so varied and I always feel like I have made real difference to the clients.

There is a great friendly atmosphere in the office too.

Hilary Bayles

### **The Family Adviser**

It has been a busy year for the Family project. In July 2014 we said goodbye to Liz Spencer who had been the family adviser for the last 6 years. We would like to thank Liz for all her hard work and wish her a happy retirement. Having worked at DISH previously I was very happy to return in August 2014 and take over the role of family adviser.

This year the project has successfully helped 46 parents claim Disability Living Allowance for a child. In financial terms, Disability Huntingdonshire has generated just over £76,000 in disability benefits for families with disabled children. Often, initial contact with a family comes via referrals for help with Disability Living Allowance forms from health visitors, hospital consultants and more recently local children's centres. For many families the application for DLA is a daunting experience, so having someone to help and guide them through the process is invaluable. The financial difficulties associated with having a child with additional needs can be worrying. Many parents I come into contact with are suffering from financial difficulties. Often a parent is unable to work due to having to care for their child, so being awarded Disability Living Allowance can be a huge relief to a parent or carer.

Nicola Gilroy

## **The Client Welfare Adviser**

In the past couple of years, I have noticed that administrative errors have multiplied, in nearly every official body I have dealt with. A bad decision can be appealed, but a lost letter or application has to be found first.

I recently had a client who was finding it increasingly difficult to make ends meet. When I looked at what little paperwork he had, I discovered he had applied for Employment and Support Allowance over 2 years ago and his claim still hadn't been processed. A phone call to the Jobcentre produced no more information than to confirm the amounts being paid. Operators have no involvement in the decision-making process, so their ability to help a client is very limited. I wrote a letter on the client's behalf requesting an urgent examination of his case; I have yet to receive a reply.

As systems become more automated and information computerised, decision-makers become more distant from the people their decisions affect. It has become increasingly difficult to tell a computer-generated letter from one written by a human being. Some of them are so strange, it is hard to believe they were sent out at all.

With the new Personal Independence Payments - which are slowly replacing Disability Living Allowance, all applicants are expected to have a medical examination. In the Huntingdonshire area, these are performed by Capita, who have stated that they will perform most of the examinations at clients' homes. Despite this, several of my clients have been forced to travel to Leicester for their medicals. Recently, a client living in Godmanchester was assigned an appointment in Peterborough at 8.10 am. He received 3 suggested travel plans, one of which advised him to leave home at 1.25 am. All required him to walk several miles, though he has severe mobility problems and had requested a home visit for that reason.

When dealing with official bodies, it is tempting to assign malicious intent to every poor decision received. The idea that someone in an office in Birmingham or Bradford deliberately chooses to make your life as tough as possible is a persistent one. I've long since given up trying to explain to clients that there's nothing personal about a wrong decision, because, for them, it *is* personal. Carers changed without warning, decisions delayed or just plain wrong have real and sometimes serious effects on people's lives.

Michael O'Fee

## **The Information Officer**

Again this year we have seen strong demand for the services which Disability Huntingdonshire provides. In recent years, perhaps due to current financial pressures, we have come across increasing numbers of cases where the demand for information and support is often acute and complex. In my role as Information Officer, and as the first point of contact for the organisation, I would say that in recent times I have experienced more calls to the organisation where the caller is often distressed about their situation, particularly in relation to financial matters. Cases often take a long time to resolve, with difficult bureaucratic procedures often adding to people's worries.

Here is an example of one such case: Mr R, a gentleman in his 60s, with mild learning difficulties, had had a problem with his Employment and Support Allowance claim. He had initially been given an award of ESA, but this was stopped, causing financial problems for the client. DISH was able to resolve this issue, so that Mr R's ESA was reinstated. This was not Mr R's only difficulty. He had also had long drawn - out problems with his boiler, resulting in his central heating and hot water systems being severely compromised. The government was offering people receiving certain benefits help to replace their boilers, and our organisation was able to steer Mr R through the complexities of having to get his boiler replaced. It was a lengthy and sometimes frustrating process, but in the end Mr R got his new boiler and was able again to live comfortably with central heating and a supply of hot

water. Had DISH not been there to navigate Mr R through the difficulties of applying for a new boiler, I doubt he would have had a replacement so quickly.

Jackie Newman

### **The Manager**

I am pleased and proud to have been appointed by Trustees to manage DISH. I have a varied back ground, but the main areas in my career have been in education, where I was the Head and SENCo of an Inner London primary school for 9 years, followed over a year later by 10 years as a Human Rights Advocate for asylum seekers. Additional experience has been: teaching in a Category "A" high security prison, and interim management of a charity serving the needs of people with experience of homelessness.

I have been impressed by the hard work and dedication of the DISH staff and trustees. I have been welcomed by them, and made to feel at home. I would like to thank the previous manager, Olly Cooper for his patience and help in introducing me to the intricacies of the DISH management systems. This includes Quickbooks accounting, which continues to give me a headache, and... I don't find very quick.

As a small charity, we shall continue to face the challenges of funding shortages and gaps, but I feel confident that we shall overcome obstacles by offering a high quality of work, and sensitivity to the needs of our client group. Benefits are entitlements and adaptations help to provide equality. It is grossly unfair that people who, on the whole, want to participate fully in society are subject to the current media representations of people being "scroungers". We rarely find evidence of this in our client group.

We shall, therefore, aspire to facilitating the achievement of independent living for all our clients.

Audrey Gatford

### **Our Funders**

We are grateful to the Local Councils and Trusts who fund our charitable work. They are listed below :

Huntingdon District Council  
Cambridgeshire County Council  
Huntingdon Freeman's Trust  
St Neot's Town Council  
St Ives Town Council  
Huntingdon Town Council  
Lloyd's TSB  
Barbara Ward Foundation