



# SPECTRUM NEWS

December 2018

Think you know  
Disabled People...

Think Again



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Happy Holidays

## From the Editor: Lesley Long-Price



### **Welcome to SPECTRUM's December 2018 Newsletter!**

Its that time of year again, when we dust off the Christmas Tree and put up the decorations. Its also time for a festive December newsletter that reviews the year gone by. We start with an article from our Chief Executive who kicks us off with a review of the year for SPECTRUM.

Next we publish a new Independent Living Position Statement put out by the Independent Living Strategy Group which we are pleased to endorse. We then have an article about our Annual General Meeting held on 27th October. Gerry writes us an informative article on, 'Reforming social care calls for radical solutions'. Followed by Sam, our volunteer who provides us with an article about our work on hate crime.

Next we have a series of articles from our projects starting with one from our SPECTRUM, Advocacy and Mentoring Team, then one from our Independent Living Team, then from our Community Navigator Team.

This is followed by two articles from our subsidiaries, Unity 12 and SPECTRUM Continuing Care.

We end with an article from our Marxist who poses the question, 'An unusual activity for a blind person or is it?'

Happy Holidays!

## Chief Executive's review of the year

Ian Loynes



Welcome to our Christmas/End of Year edition of our newsletter. I hope you enjoy reading our review of the year, as we take time to mark the ups and downs of the roller-coaster that is SPECTRUM!

The simple fact is that the quest for Independent Living for all Disabled People is a 'One Step Forward...Two Steps Backwards' process. The Government continues to implement austerity cuts, which as a recent [EHRC report](#) concludes, has reduced Disabled People's income by 13%, more than anyone else except loan parents. Despite such clear evidence, including a damning [UN Report](#) on the UK's treatment of Disabled People, the Government continues to keep its head firmly in the sand, claiming that Disabled People are well supported in the UK. On a daily level, SPECTRUM sees just how badly informed this viewpoint is.

Brexit may also have a big impact for Disabled People, particularly in respect of the employment of PA's from the EU. Sorry that's enough mention of the 'B' word!

SPECTRUM has been badly affected by public sector spending cutbacks, resulting in the loss of valuable and skilled workers - and reduced our ability to support Disabled People in their time of need. Regular readers of this newsletter have read how difficult this year has been for SPECTRUM.

### **But don't write us off yet...we are bouncing back!**

We are focusing our development work in areas that we know we are experts - Personalised Support, Independent Living and Direct Payments - as well as increasing the income of our building, Unity 12.



We are rapidly expanding our Managed Budget services, where we support people to manage their Independent Living funding, We are also now ready to expand our Payroll Service - particularly targeted on helping people who employ their own PAs but don't want the hassle of doing payroll.

Our Direct Payments service in Southampton has been extended (again) and we now have more confidence that the City Council are committed to getting things right - they are even asking us our opinions and listening to what we say - that is real progress, believe me.

Likewise, our Community Navigation service has been expanded in size, and duration, and whilst the future of this service is still being considered, we are very well placed to win any contracts which are commissioned in the future.



Indeed, you will see examples of the fantastic work done by SPECTRUM people throughout the rest of this newsletter. **We continue to out perform our small size.**

## Chief Executive's review of the year continued

As you will see from their report elsewhere in this newsletter, our subsidiary, Unity 12, which runs our building for us, is doing a fantastic job in gaining ever more demand for our fully accessible conference and meeting rooms, as well as office space - and in the process providing much needed income.

We continue to lead Southampton's Hate Crime Network, and as you will see on pages 14-17, we had a fantastically successful Campaign this year to mark National Hate Crime Awareness Week in October. We have also managed to get funding to enable us to empower a Hate Crime worker to co-ordinate the work of the Hate Crime Network, and we will be recruiting this person early in 2019.

When it comes down it it though, SPECTRUM is all about Independent Living; supporting people to have choice and control over their own lives, and the support they need to live as equals in our society. SPECTRUM have been totally committed members of the House of Lords based ILSG (Independent Living Strategy Group). Recently we have been increasingly concerned about the increasing misuse of the term 'Independent Living'. Disabled People defined what Independent Living meant - and we have recently published a 'Position Statement' to stop this misuse. We are keen for as many Disabled People's Organisations, and others, to endorse this position. Not surprisingly, SPECTRUM was at the front of this queue! We are pleased to publish this Position Statement on Independent Living on pages 8-9.

As we move into 2019, we are still awaiting the Government's Green Paper on Health & Social Care reform (not that we have high expectations of much reform from it!). We hope the next edition of our newsletter will be a **special edition** where we will analysis the Government's proposals, provide Disabled People's opinions - and - yes - I suspect we will be happy to tell you what they **should** be doing to reform these services which often nowadays simply are not fit for purpose.

Finally from me in 2018, SPECTRUM simply would not exist if it was not for the huge commitment and loyalty of our MC, staff and volunteers - who do far more than can be expected from them. The last few months have been personally difficult for me, and a few words in a newsletter simply cannot communicate how important our peer-support services are - even for senior staff. **Merry Christmas to you all**



Unity 12 Open Day



Us doing Independent Living!

# Independent Living - A Position Statement

By Ian Loynes, Member of the Independent Living Strategy Group

The Independent Living Strategy Group is a network of Disabled People's Organisations and their allies. The group meets in the Louse of Lords, is chaired by Baroness Jane Campbell and includes Disabled People who were part of the Independent Living movement from the 1970s, as well as younger activists, other individuals and organisations concerned with the future of Independent Living.



## **“Independent living is what non-Disabled People take for granted”**

Independent living means Disabled People living in the community with the same choices, control and freedom as any other citizen, with the removal of barriers to equality of opportunity, and where any practical assistance is based on our own choices and aspirations. The same principles extend to people managing long term health conditions, and include people of all ages.

Over the last thirty years or so, we have seen major improvements in Disabled People's life chances. Our society now expects Disabled People to be treated with respect, to have opportunities, to live in their own homes with their own families, and make their contributions to their local communities and to society generally.

Much of this progress has been brought about by the efforts of Disabled People themselves and their organisations. We persuaded both central and local government that the resources that society makes available should be spent in ways which enable us to achieve our goals, to participate and to contribute just as much as any other citizen. Our case for a more integrated and joined up response to our needs, with the emphasis on supporting self-determination, has been largely accepted (although not yet fully realized).

These victories were a reflection of support for the kind of society which includes everyone and a recognition that we all benefit from living in inclusive, accessible and welcoming communities. There is widespread support for public services which meet people's aspirations and the needs of modern society.

Our aspirations for Independent Living are, therefore, a shared enterprise between Disabled People, government and the wider society - and they will only be achieved if policies and their implementation are carried out in partnership with us.

Independent living is not just about social care. Neither is it about living on your own or doing things for yourself. Instead it means having choice and control over whatever assistance we need to go about our daily lives. It means, as the **UN**

# Independent Living - A Position Statement

continued

**Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities** says, “having the equal right to live in the community, with choices equal to others”.

Our aspirations rely on an integrated support framework and the removal of barriers in all aspects of our lives. We all want a society which invests in the things that connect people to one another and to communities, the things that make us all feel part of society and not ‘apart from’ society.

It is this vision of Independent Living which we believe must underpin the political and public debates about the future of social care. We look to both central and local government to promote, protect and fulfil the rights of Disabled People to live independently in the community and to secure their full inclusion, contribution and participation in all aspects of social and economic life.

We urge public and politicians alike to move beyond the current debate about the cost of residential care for Older People. People of all ages, who need assistance to go about their daily lives, want to be connected to their communities and to have choices equal to others. The best practice that currently goes under the heading of ‘social care’ is about enabling the lives we choose to live. When this is achieved it is the most important thing that our society can do for its citizens. Our public and political debate should therefore be about how do we achieve this because, if we do, all our lives will be improved.

As a Group, and also as individuals and organisations making up the Independent Living Strategy Group, we will:

- work with the Equality and Human Rights Commission to develop an enforceable right to Independent Living;
- campaign to build public understanding of and support for Independent Living and to raise it up the political agenda;
- work to influence the full range of policies relevant to Independent Living;
- identify and share the best and the most promising practice in supporting Independent Living;
- make the case for resourcing a national network of Disabled People-led organisations to promote and support the right of Disabled People to live independently and to secure their full inclusion and participation in all aspects of social and economic life;
- support the case for extending the NHS’s ‘need, not ability to pay’ principle to social care and for fully funding the service as part of ‘new social contract’ between the citizen and the state (as recommended by the 2018 Darzi review of health and social care).

**SPECTRUM is pleased to endorse this Position Statement**

# SPECTRUM's Annual General Meeting

By Lesley Long-Price

SPECTRUM's Annual General Meeting on Saturday 27th October 2018 went well. We had a very good attendance from members and were easily quorate.

In the morning we tabled the business of the day. We voted for Management Committee members. With Phil Coldham, Byron Oliver and Becky Clegg voted in to join, Chris Andrews, Geoff Wilkinson, Steve Polden and Jackie Vincent.



We voted for our Treasurer, Phil Coldham and our Company Secretary, me.

Phil Coldham chaired a session under any other business on strengthening the MC. He noted how the MC could be more robust. We needed people with the right range of skills. He reported that we needed to find out what support members needed to join the MC. We still have spaces available, if you would like to know more about joining the Management Committee please contact the office and ask for me and I put you in contact with a member of the MC (contact details on the back page).

Another item of any other business was about our hate crime PR campaign. Members were urged to download the Southampton hate crime app from the App Store, on Apple or Android.

In the afternoon session Gerry Zarb SPECTRUM's Business Development Manager gave a presentation on 'reforming social care'. It was noted that the government were due to publish a Green Paper on plans for reforming social care by the end of 2018. SPECTRUM wants to contribute our own ideas of how Social Care should be reformed. We want to encourage membership and staff to contribute their own ideas so that we can present a vision for social care that meets everyone's needs in a sustainable way. The purpose of social care should be to enable people to 'have a life'. This means people needing support having the same choice, control and freedom as any other citizen. To get a social care system fit for purpose we need to build a clear understanding of what it should be delivering—backed up by guaranteed outcomes linked to basic civil and human rights.

# SPECTRUM's Annual General Meeting

## Continued

The Members had a discussion about the future shape of social care. When the Green Paper is published, then a special edition newsletter will be published. If you would like to be involved in SPECTRUM's response to the Green Paper please contact me at the office. (contact details on the back page). (See pages 12-13 for more details)



## Reforming Social Care calls for radical solutions By Gerry Zarb



The Government will shortly be publishing a Green Paper outlining plans for reforming Social Care.

We plan to publish a special edition of the Newsletter in response to the Green Paper in early 2019. This will set out our own vision for a social care system that meets everyone's needs in a sustainable way.

### **A broken system of social care**

Both people who need support and local authorities who are charged with providing it have been saying for quite a few years now that social care is in crisis. More recently, after 10 years of cuts, most agree that the system is now well and truly broken. Not only have budgets been cut by more than 30 per cent, this has happened at a time when the number of people needing support has been increasing - mainly as a result of the population getting steadily older.

This has created a perfect storm with the result that only people with the most critical needs stand any chance of getting much in the way of publically funded social care - and even then it is unlikely to be even a snippet more than what local authorities are legally obliged to provide.

### **Can we fix it?**

Quite simply, we have to! The alternative doesn't really bear thinking about. The crucial question is how?

Part of the answer - obviously - is that we need to increase the level of funding for social care. The current consensus is that the system faces a deficit of around £2.5bn just to meet existing demand. But, even if the Government were willing to fund that, it won't provide a long-term fix as an ageing population means that demand will continue to outstrip supply unless a sustainable funding solution can be found.

The hints dropped by the Secretary of State suggests that the Government plans to propose some form of social insurance scheme. That isn't necessarily a bad idea in principle but it would require a Government with a strong enough stomach to devise - and stick with - a plan that is bound to be politically unpopular. Previous plans along these lines have fairly speedily fallen at the first hurdle.

This highlights a long-standing issue, which is that the general public does not place anywhere near the same value on social care that it does on health - despite the fact that we need it just as much in order to live a healthy and decent life.

## Reforming Social Care calls for radical solutions Continued

So, the answer to finding sustainable funding solution for social care is not so much about the money itself but changing how we think about social care and the value we place on it. The big question is how. What would convince the public and politicians that social care is essential and worth investing in?

Some have argued that we need to reframe our arguments about social care and have even questioned whether we should be using the term 'social care' at all. Instead, it has been suggested that we should be focusing on what social care can do to help people live their lives in the same way Disabled People have for many years demonstrated the crucial importance of Independent Living to enabling people's inclusion. Services like social care and just a means to an end - what people really want is simply to 'have a life'.

However we resolve the issue of what social care is for, we still need to find an answer to how it is paid for and this raises the question of what it is that we are investing in?

### **What kind of social care do we want in the future?**

The key issue is what kind of society we want to build and what role social care can play in that. This leads on to thinking about what social care is for and what kind of social care we want and need in the future.

SPECTRUMs view is fundamentally informed by the principles of Independent Living. For us, the purpose of social care should be to enable people to 'have a life'. Simply, this means people needing social care support having the same choice, control and freedom as any other citizen - at home, in education, at work, and as members of the community.

While our current system of social care has shifted over the years to have a greater focus on choice and outcomes, it has never really been driven by an overarching goal of any kind, with the result that it has never come close to delivering on what ought to be its main purpose. This has also left the system extremely vulnerable to the savage funding cuts we have seen in recent years.

If we are ever going to get a social care system that is fit for purpose we need to build a clear understanding of what it should be delivering - backed up by guaranteed outcomes linked to basic civil and human rights.

We will also need to radically change how we design, commission and deliver support - with genuine co-produced solutions and partnerships between public bodies and service users.

We can do this - if the will is there.

# Hate Crime

By Sam Waddington



To coincide with National Hate Crime Awareness Week in mid-October, SPECTRUM Centre for Independent Living CIC, launched the 'Love Don't Hate' campaign in Southampton. The week-long campaign was aimed at raising awareness of the seriousness of hate crime, not only towards Disabled People but all types of individuals, and tackling it in the most effective way.

With Southampton being one of the worst cities in the UK for levels of hate crime, as a disability advocacy organisation we feel we have a responsibility to stand up for people being targeted because of their individuality. Hate crime is any form of physical attack, threat of attack, or verbal abuse, insult or harassment that is, or perceived to be, motivated by prejudice towards someone's protected characteristic like race, religion or sexual orientation.

# Hate Crime

## Continued

One of our main aims at SPECTRUM is to change the way Disabled People are perceived by people in society. That is why, alongside 28 other local organisations, we set up a campaign to enforce the message that everybody should be appreciated for who they are, and that hate crime is unacceptable. Through continuing this work after a successful campaign, we hope to help change the negative mindsets of those who are targeting people just because they are different to them. This is what was achieved during the campaign:

- Launched the 'Southampton Love Don't Hate' smartphone app to make reporting of hate crimes easier for victims and those who have witnessed incidents
- Used the Southern Daily Echo to write stories about hate crime on each day of the campaign –helping to get almost a million people reading about the anti-hate campaign on print and online outlets
- Had the campaign covered on BBC Radio Solent, with an interview given by SPECTRUM chief executive Ian Loynes and stories about hate crime incidents - reaching over 300,000 listeners
- Had high social media activity with the #SOLoveDontHate hashtag, set up for 'Love Don't Hate', reaching nearly 105,000 accounts
- Built a network of 29 local organisations, including both statutory organisations like Southampton City Council and community groups such as Breakout Youth, to collectively manage hate crime in the city



# Hate Crime

## Continued

Despite the success of the Southampton 'Love Don't Hate' campaign, we feel we have only made a start in helping deal with these shocking incidents. Recent national news stories, like a school for Disabled Children being targeted with offensive graffiti, have highlighted how there is an awful lot more work to do educate the public about hate crime. To put a stop to these incidents we do need hate crime to be better reported, but it also needs to be considered as socially unacceptable as something like not wearing a seatbelt or drink-driving. Certain individuals committing hate crimes will then hopefully treat people who are different to them as ordinary human beings. To help achieve this in the future, this is what we want to do as an organisation:

- Get more individuals downloading the 'Southampton Love Don't Hate' smart phone app, so they can report incidents to any of the 18 Third Party Hate Crime reporting centres across the city, that we have helped set up prior to this campaign
- Continue working with our hate crime network to deal effectively with incidents, offer the appropriate support to victims and promote anti-hate crime in Southampton and beyond
- Have more companies, particularly those running overnight when a lot of offences happen, supporting us in raising awareness
- Encourage more people in the area to come forward with their personal hate crime stories - to show the public the serious effect hate crime has on individuals, their families and a community as a whole



# Hate Crime

## Continued

From 2015/16 to 2016/17 there was a 30% increase in the reported number of hate crimes in Southampton, and as a lot of incidents go unnoticed we fear the number of crimes happening overall could be much higher. In such a diverse, multicultural city where hate crime should not be happening at the rate it is, we are however proud of what we have done so far to improve the situation. Before the campaign SPECTRUM had already:

- Set up a network of Third Party Hate Crime Reporting Centres across the city, so victims know where they can go to receive suitable advice and support to deal with incidents
- Been recognised for bringing organisations together to deal with hate crime in Southampton - through an award to SPECTRUM CEO Ian Loynes from Hampshire Constabulary (mentioned in the last newsletter)
- Been working with a local PR Agency, Carswell Gould, to help us plan a successful anti- hate crime campaign

It is only a start but if SPECTRUM can continue what has been done in promoting anti-hate crime over the last few months, we are confident that one day those responsible for incidents will have different perceptions about certain people. Then, we can hopefully be one of the organisations that prevents someone from being targeted in the first place.



## **SPECTRUM Advocacy & Mentoring (SAM) Team**

**By Jeff Downing**

This has been a very interesting period for the SAM Teams Advocacy Service for a number of reasons. As regardless of one's view of austerity, its effect on service delivery will be with us, for a number of years to come. As the very services that Disabled People rely on together with many other groups has been significantly affected by this policy. This has been evident in the type of referral we receive rather than the quantity, as many of the referrals are very complex and range across, Adults, Children and Families.



The referring agencies have also altered as at one time a significant number of referrals came in directly from Service Users, where as now we receive a significant number from statutory agencies. This in turn has required SPECTRUM to carefully review such referrals to ensure we do not become unpaid agents of statutory bodies, whom are also struggling to cope with the demands made upon them.

The number of students on placement with the agency has been considerably less this year which has resulted in all departments have to support each other to ensure we continue to maintain our primary role in supporting vulnerable people.

Although as a Marxist I generally view Christmas as a Capitalist extreme, although I respect those of you with a strong faith. You may be interested to know that the Christmas Holiday in my experience can put a considerable strain on Social Workers supporting individuals and groups in crisis. So despite my political views, enjoy yourself give a thought for all those whom struggle at this time of year.

## Independent Living Team

By Michael Grimmett

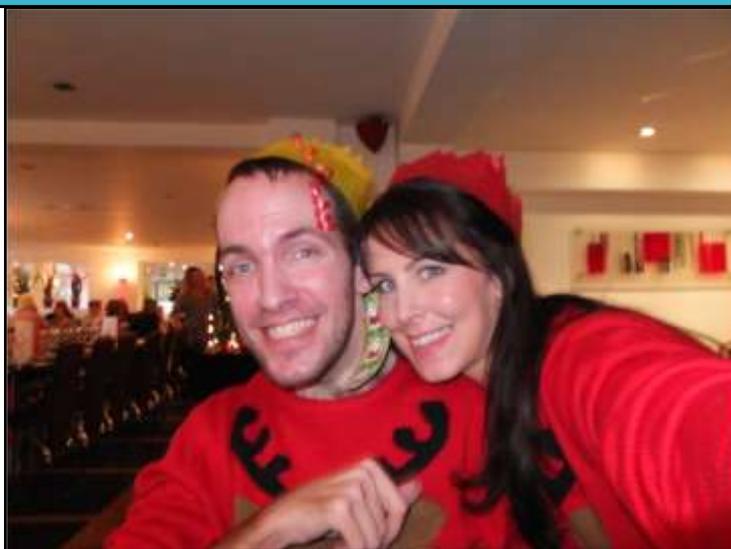
This year has been an entertaining year for the Independent Living Team. We had our tender renewed by Southampton City Council. We gained a wonderful member of our team, Paula Pace and lost her to upstairs, as she liked my singing far too much.

Referrals have been at a steady pace, with the team supporting people with a wide variety of Direct Payments / general care scenarios.

The council have been a lot more communicative in recent times and we hope this continues. I hope this means we can get Direct Payments back up the league table and provide a good support structure within the city.

The Payroll Service is going well and I hope the team can expand this Service massively in 2019, so watch this space!

The team would like to wish all our readers a wonderful festive period.



From left, Michael Grimmett & Julie Wall



# Community Navigator Team

By Paula Pace & Berni Vincent

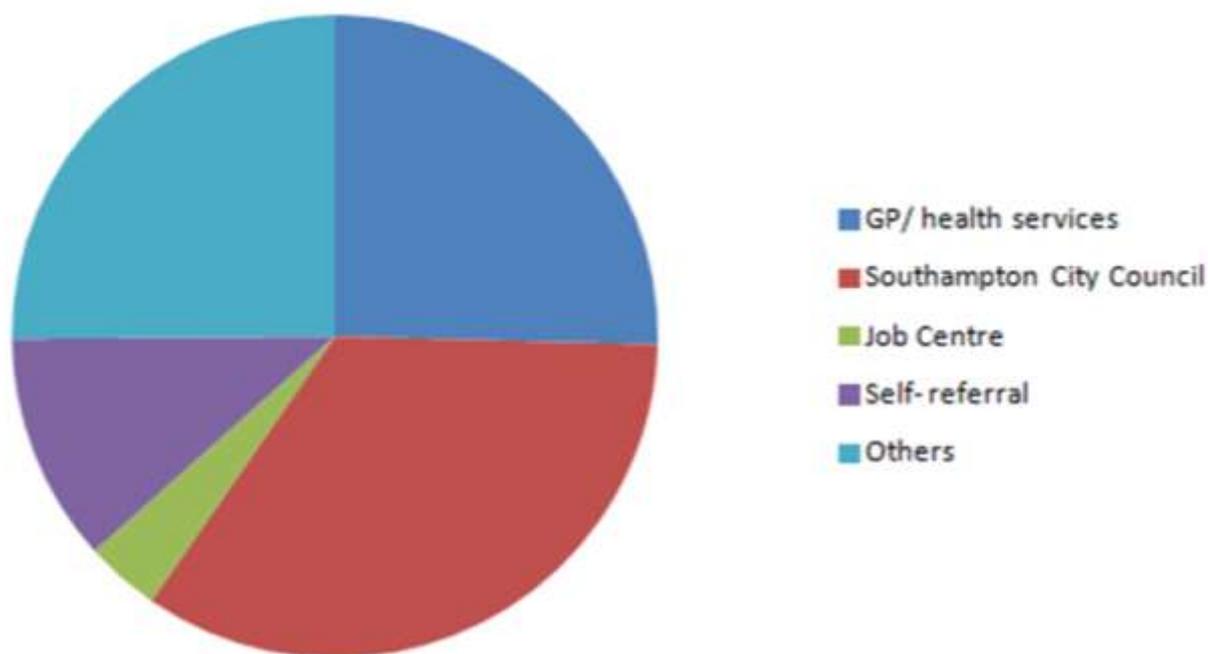
The Community Navigation team cover clusters 1, 4 and 5 (Shirley, Freemantle, Milbrook, Redbridge, Bargate, St Mary's, Bevios, Woolston, Sholing and Peartree) across Southampton.

We are commissioned by the Clinical Commissioning Group and Southampton City Council to reduce the number of non-clinical referrals to General Practitioners and other healthcare professionals. We provide support with a range of social needs including housing, benefits, social inclusion and leisure opportunities.

We tend to offer a home visit, telephone appointment or office appointment. We put service users in touch with projects and organisations in the community that can support with identified needs. We do not provide on-going support, the emphasis is very much about empowering people to build on their own strengths and utilise resources available in their community.

We receive referrals from a number of sources including General Practitioners, Social Services, Teachers and Job Centre Plus. Individuals can also self-refer to our service.

**Source of referral**



## Community Navigator Team

### Continued

The Community Navigation team has experienced significant staffing changes throughout 2018. Our fantastic team leader Jacqui Hager has now left the team and her skills, knowledge and enthusiasm will be greatly missed. Paula Pace, a previous social work student in the team, has now fulfilled Jacqui's role and works full time in the team.

Berni Vincent is an integral member of the team and focuses her time on community engagement and casework. Ross Runham is one of Berni's Personal Assistant (PA) and is the team's statistical wizard! Ross is currently managing Continuing Care as well as supporting the team. Katie Zammit is Berni's other fantastic PA.

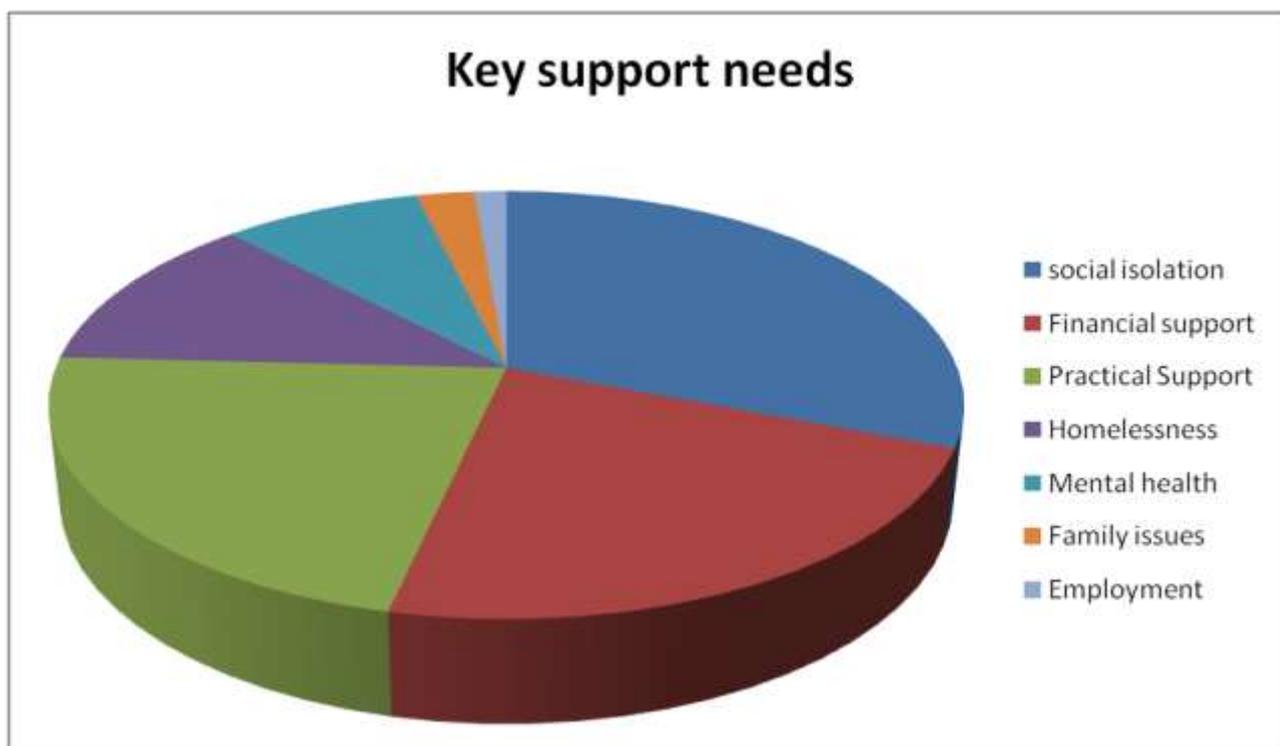
Jeff Downing, AKA Satan, has also stepped in to support the Community Navigation team and is joint-team leader alongside Paula.

We currently have two university social work students on placement in the team, a significant reduction in the number of students compare to previous intakes. We are hoping to welcome more students in early 2019.

This year has been a challenging year and referrals reflect increasing pressures on statutory services such as Adult Social Care. We are seeing a growing number of complex cases that are requesting support outside of our remit. This requires us to question the role of statutory services as a lot of these referrals fall under their responsibility.

## Community Navigator Team Continued

The following reflects the diversity of the support we offer:



80% of our referrals in the last 6 months were from Disabled People. During 2018 we closed 181 cases in 8 weeks or less. 106 were closed in 9-16 weeks and 87 in 17 weeks or more.

Our current contract has been extended until June 2019. We anticipate being part of a consortium model that continues to provide Community Navigation throughout Southampton.

See pages 26 and 27 for newsletter article



## Unity 12

By Jennie Musson



**Hello and Goodbye....**2018 was off to a bumpy start, as in March we said an extremely sad "goodbye" to our Facilities Manager, Cicily Hunt, who had been with Unity 12 for many years and who did a fantastic job of keeping everything running smoothly. Nicola Gillie, our HR Manager, stepped into the breach and helped to steady the Unity 12 ship, with Garth and Mariana ably assisting. Mariana went on maternity leave in May and gave birth to a lovely baby boy, Martin, in June. Jennie Musson, who previously was working with the SPECTRUM membership until February, made a temporary comeback to cover for Mariana until next March.

Sadly, Nicola left us for pastures new in October; however, we hope to have a new Operations Manager in place in the not-so-distant future, which will help improve our capacity.

**Bookings.....** Our income from bookings, both internal and external, steadily continues to grow, with one of our long-term regular hirers now wishing to extend their hire of our large conference room. Unity 12 is now also getting bookings via conference booking websites such as Meetingsbooker.com and has just started getting bookings from Mencap, who is fast becoming a regular hirer. As well as these new additions, we continue to have regular bookings from long-term hirers.

**Cost Savings.....** A money-saving drive has been ongoing throughout the year and will continue into 2019, with both Garth and Jennie negotiating discounts wherever possible and sourcing from elsewhere if the prices are cheaper.

**New Tenants.....** this year we gained some new tenants in the shape of the University Hospital Southampton Disclosures Team now working in what used to be the Continuing Care Office within the (so called) NHS block. The remaining offices within the Unity 12 block let out to University Hospital Southampton, are occupied by UHS Informatics Teams.

**Volunteers.....**Jean Baker continues to do an amazing job in Reception supporting Garth on Thursdays and Fridays. Jennie has the support of another volunteer, James, to help set up conference rooms as and when we have events, which has proven extremely useful.

**Looking to the future...**We very much hope to continue our current scheme of cutting overhead costs as much as possible, whilst maximizing our income streams. We also look forward to welcoming Mariana back to Unity 12 next March.

## Continuing Care

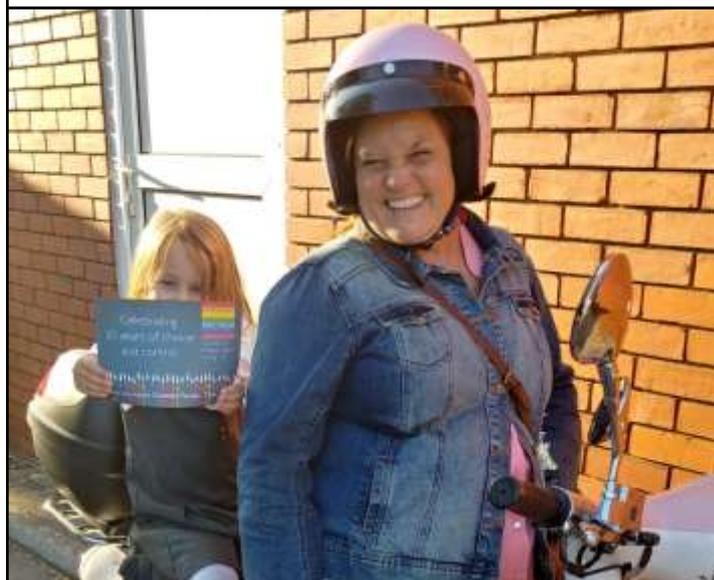
By Ross Runham



Continuing Care is SPECTRUM's care agency. We have been running since 2009 and I joined in 2010.

We've had a lot of changes in Continuing Care over the last twelve months. This time last year, Hayley Hilton had joined us as our new manager, and the office staff consisted of Tracey Osman, Amy Fenn and myself. We are a much different team today. Both Hayley and Amy have left for new opportunities, and very recently Tracey Osman (who had stepped into the role of manager) was in a serious road traffic accident. She is recovering well, and will be back in the office in the New Year. And so, for now, in the office it's just me. Don't worry Tracey, I won't break anything in your absence...Probably!

From left, Mina Runham & Tracey Osman



Through all this change, one thing has remained constant: We've always had great Personal Assistants. Our current team of Amy, Clare, Claire, Danielle, Junaid, Kaylie, Kelly, Kirsty, Naomi and Racheal have kept things running through all of our ups and downs. They are a hard working, professional and unrelentingly cheerful team. They have been patient as I have fumbled my way around trying to learn Tracey's role, and helpful when I've got completely lost in the process. My particular thanks go to Amy, Clare and Danielle, who have gone far above and beyond.

It's been a tricky year financially for Continuing Care, as the pressure on the NHS and Social Services has affected our care packages. Budgets are smaller and people are receiving less hours of support. The demand for good quality care is always there, but purse strings have tightened. We are a smaller company than we were a year ago, less PAs, less, hours delivered and less money coming in. But we are stable, and there are a number of opportunities on the horizon that show real promise. I hope that this time next year we will have a larger, stronger company delivering the same top quality care that we are known for.

## An unusual activity for a blind person or is it?

By The Marxist

Although a large number of qualified recreational scuba divers could well have what one could consider being a visual impairment, in that they wear glasses to maximise their vision, to find one who is registered as blind and uses a guide dog to aid mobility may well be considered unusual or remarkable. My impairment is clearly evident when operating on land, whether using my guide dog, white cane or sighted guide.



Yet should you meet me underwater in the warm and clear waters of Menorca, with my sighted buddy, you may just consider that we like holding hands. However should you take the time to watch more closely, you could well pick out some clues that indicate that something is different. I wear two face mask mounted Orca Pilot Talking computers, they supply me with essential information in relation to dive time, depth and no stop times. They also have ascent alerts and decompression information.

In order to obtain the essential information in relation to my air consumption, we use a system of hand to hand communication, which enables us to monitor each others' air consumption, essential for our joint safety.

Standard touch signals for direction and ascent and descent, together with the essential ability to ask each other if we are happy and how we respond if we are not. We have also developed signals that indicate the variety of sea life that surrounds us, and perhaps one or two others, which are best left unsaid.

So to the question as to what pleasure do I actually get by limiting my essential sense of hearing, which has perhaps become far more important to me, than most people? Well it is complex but here goes.

As teenager in the 60s I enjoyed watching a television programme called Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea. Admiral Nelson and Captain Crain and the crew would spend an hour each week battling monsters and they did not all dwell in the sea. I would sit in front of TV dreaming of being a frogman. My Action Man doll was dressed as a diver and our local swimming baths provided the backdrop for my adventures.

The military presented me with the opportunity to make the fantasy become a reality and Stone Cove became my adventure playground. Oh yes I forgot, this is when I could see to drive a car and do a lot of things we all take for granted.

## An unusual activity for a blind person or is it?

### Continued

My rise through the British sub-aqua training programme was slow and sometimes embarrassing, such as when I had to be towed back to the boat by my fins, but I persevered and eventually make it to the esteemed qualification of BSAC Advanced Diver. However I did not stop there and then started on my diver teaching qualification, club instructor, open water instructor and eventually advanced instructor.

However the vision started to fail due to a trauma in my 20s and I had to hand in my Escort Gear car keys. A crossroads was reached, should I consider a new sport, like golf. I know a good joke about blind golfers, but that is for another day. So although I have dived mainly in the UK, my trips have taken me to the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, Mediterranean and Red Seas. These days you will find me in Menorca on my yearly holiday, on the same dive sites, where I am on first name terms with the sea life.

Even though I say so myself I am very comfortable in the water with years of experience and all my own equipment, although the wet suit would appear to shrink more each trip. I can get rather grumpy if people move my kit without telling me. It would also appear that a number of male divers have high testosterone levels when around female divers, competing with their diving stories of daring do. I am no different, but am working on it as I sit quietly on the boat listening to the conversations around me and sometimes having a little smirk on my face. So as we approach the dive site, my buddy starts to hand me my kit and I kit up just the same as any other diver, preferring to do most things myself. However, one is never too old to learn as on this year's trip I had the cheek to ask my buddy to turn on my air, who in turn informed me that divers should take responsibility for turning on their own air and not rely on a third party. So that was me put straight.

So once I have checked there is nobody behind me and I am safe to drop off the boat, making sure I have got air in my jacket, I fall into the sea. I then have to locate my buddy who ensures we both reach the anchor line safely before we descend into the environment we both know so well, that I have come to love and respect. Not being able to see does present a number of drawbacks, but surprisingly, it is perhaps also an occasional benefit, especially in not being able to see the ever increasing damage of human interference and detritus which, yes, is even in evidence within this environment, but that is another story.



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