



United Response
making it **happen**

in touch

with United Response

The magazine for families and supporters of United Response / Summer 2011



Good to Great tool Matching staff

This is the fourth in a series of articles introducing and explaining the person centred planning tools we use in United Response to fulfil the promise to make everything we do meet the needs and desires of the people we support.

The matching staff tool is used to identify the personality 'characteristics' that need to be **PRESENT** or **ABSENT** in supporters

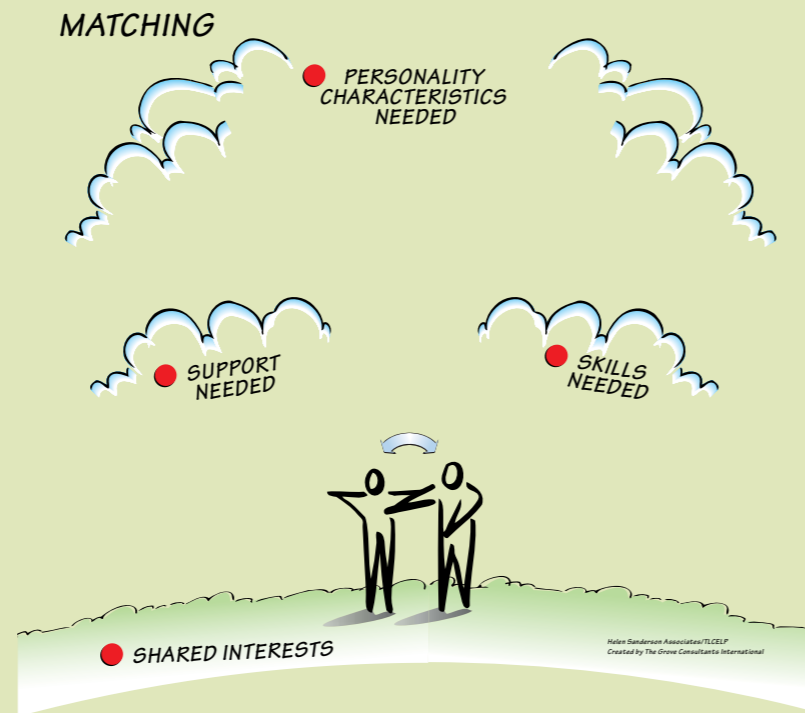
To learn the characteristics that need to be **PRESENT**, we consider:

- ☀ Who is closest to the person?
- ☀ Who enjoys spending time with the person?
- ☀ Who helps the person have good days?
- ☀ What characteristics do these people have in common?

To learn the characteristics that need to be **ABSENT**, we consider:

- ☀ Who does the person avoid?
- ☀ Who dislikes spending time with the person?
- ☀ Who helps the person during bad days?
- ☀ What characteristics do these people have in common?

In this way we can support people to identify the skills, characteristics and interests that their staff should have.



Case study

Pauline loves to go to watch Liverpool football team play. She also enjoys going out shopping for clothes and getting her hair and nails done. She needs support to use public transport at the moment but would like to be able to use it by herself in the future.

She likes to have a laugh with people but she can be shy with those she doesn't know well.

Supports wanted and needed	Using public transport Going to football matches Going out shopping and to beauty parlour
Skills needed	Patience to take time to get to know Pauline Encouraging - to build Pauline's skills and confidence in using buses and trains.
Personality	Fun Outgoing
Shared interests (nice to have)	Football (not Everton!)

Welcome to the summer edition of *In Touch* magazine. Thank you for all your very useful feedback on the magazine and the work we are doing – please keep it coming!

I am sure that those of you who watched the recent Panorama documentary about the abuse of people with learning disabilities were as shocked as I was – and I know that many people feel anxious about their relatives. I therefore think it is important to emphasise the huge importance United Response places on rigorously training all staff so they deliver the best possible support. Every service is visited on a rolling programme by our national health and safety team and we have many robust systems and policies in place to make sure that even the most minor problems are identified and dealt with as fast as possible.

These safeguards include a whistleblowing policy, complaints procedures, a telephone hotline to directly to me and our Quality Checkers - people that we support, who visit other services to check how the service is being run and talking to the people who live there to find out if they are happy with the way they are being supported. They know better than anyone how to tell if things are right or not and they report back to Area Managers on their findings. We also carry out surveys of the views and feelings of people we support as well as quality audits at each and every location every 3 months. So, if you have any worries or concerns, please don't hesitate to raise them in the first instance with your local service manager or the area manager. If you are still concerned you can contact the Divisional Director or ultimately, me.

Over the last six months we have begun to see the effect of the cuts and other changes heralded in last October's Comprehensive Spending Review. While we have experienced cuts in many locations, we remain in a robust position thanks to a lot of hard work by staff right across the country. You can read more on page 4.

We have also been busy on the campaigning front (see page 8) - adding our voice to the debate and supporting the people we support to have their say. We were proud to take part in The Hardest Hit rally together with some of the people we support – you can find out more on our blog by visiting www.unitedresponse.org.uk.

And, whilst most of our funding comes from our care and support services, we also raise money for things that really make a difference to people's quality of life. We'd like to say a huge thank you to all of you who supported our Assistive Technology appeal - your money has really made a difference to people's lives.

This summer we are launching a new appeal, *Bringing Back the Bloom*, to ensure that more people we support have gardens which are accessible and enjoyable – see page 12 for more details. And for the keen golfers amongst you, don't miss out on our third charity golf day – taking place at Richmond Golf Club on 18th July and hosted by Vice President Steve Rider, it is sure to go with a swing!

Last but certainly not least, it is always a pleasure to be in contact with relatives and in this issue we meet two families who share their stories. If you would like to tell your story please contact Lu Large on 0208 246 5120 or email lu.large@unitedresponse.org.uk. You can also get involved in the work that we do by joining our Families Panel – see page 19 for details



I hope you all have a very enjoyable summer and do get in touch if there is anything you would like to share with us.

Best wishes,

Su Sayer OBE, Chief Executive

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THE SPENDING CUTS THE SPENDING CUTS

Our response

We know that you will understandably be concerned about what the reduction in local authority spending will mean for United Response. And so we wanted to take this opportunity to update you on the proactive work that we are carrying out at a national level to ensure our sustainability for the future.

The Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) on 20 October 2010 announced significant public spending cuts. However, to gauge the real impact that these cuts would have on our work, we needed to wait and see what decisions on spending each of our funders would make: whilst a headline figure of 28% cuts over four years was included in the CSR, this figure is across all local authority spending. Local politicians have the discretion to choose where they make their savings and may or may not choose to treat social care in the same way as other areas of council expenditure as it, like the additional £2 billion of social care funding also announced in the CSR, is no longer ring-fenced.

Following the announcement of the local authority funding settlements at the beginning of December and, more importantly, communication with our funders, we are now seeing how the cuts are panning out on the ground. Whilst the level of cuts varies enormously from authority to authority, we are in some areas seeing some very significant reductions in our

income. We are working closely with each local authority that funds us to negotiate this and to do all we can to protect our frontline support and to ensure the viability of our services.

Financial planning

On the positive side, we anticipated these cuts more than a year ago and have been working hard over a period of many months to mitigate against their impact. In our financial planning we look in detail at all our projected income and costs over a five year period. We review this on a very regular basis in light of the latest intelligence on our funding - both the cuts that we are being required to make and also the new support services that we are developing. We revise our

“We have also found it is possible to find new ways of working – such as assistive technology – that both reduce costs and provide quality services to people we support.”

expenditure and spending plan accordingly to make sure that we are in as robust a position as possible.

We have also been looking at ways to reduce the costs of our services by exploring more efficient ways of working and ensuring overheads are as low as possible. We have already carried out significant steps to reduce our overheads, both centrally and locally, and a significant reduction in agency spend has been a real success story over the past couple of years. We have also found it is possible to find new ways of working – such as assistive technology - that both reduce costs and provide quality services to people we support and staff have come up with many other creative ideas to save money and to make us as cost effective as possible. We are continuing to plan so that we are resilient enough to cope with reduced budgets and so that we can respond quickly, should we need to.

Growing our support

Our aim is to come out of the recession at least as strong an organisation as we entered it – if not stronger – and one of the ways in which we are already achieving this is through growth. We are continuing to develop our work with people with personal budgets

and now support 200 people who have a personal budget for all or part of their support. We are also seeing a high number of local authority-led tender opportunities at the moment and have been successful in securing a number of new contracts, which will stand us in good stead for the future.

And, whilst the majority of growth to date relates to our core work in supporting adults with learning disabilities, we are now looking at where we might be able to build on our existing skills to support other client groups. We already support people with physical disabilities and Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) and are now proactively seeking opportunities to support more diverse client groups – including exploring outreach support to children and young people with learning disabilities and support to people with Dementia. Most importantly, we will only diversify where we are confident that we can support people effectively, without compromising our existing services – and most importantly, that we can enhance their lives.

Speaking out

Alongside this, we are committed to doing all we can to protect the people we support from cuts in their funding. We know that the reductions in Supporting People grants plus the abolition of the Independent Living Fund and changes to the Disability Living Allowance (DLA) will have a significant impact on people we support and in turn on the support that we are able to provide.

We will continue to challenge unfair and unjust cuts, for example by adding our voice to the campaign to reverse the planned cuts to the Disability Living Allowance mobility component, speaking out on the impact of other proposed cuts (for example, via letters in national newspapers) and feeding into consultations locally and nationally. You can find out more about our campaigning work on page 8.

Our vision and values remain unchanged – and we are retaining our focus on supporting people to move towards a true “community life” despite the difficult decisions that we are having to make. By working together we hope not only to withstand the pressures but also to keep growing and developing as an organisation and most importantly, as a provider of excellent services to all the people we support.



Diane Lightfoot
Director of
Communications
and Fundraising

What does your job entail?

I oversee all United Response's internal and external communications (including “In Touch”) and our fundraising. The communications side covers everything from press and policy work to marketing and events – not to mention the ever growing area of web and social media. I also have joint responsibility for corporate business development and making sure that local managers have the tools that they need to develop new support services.

When and why did you join United Response?

I joined United Response just over 7 years ago having previously worked at NCVO, an umbrella body in the voluntary sector. Whilst it did (and does) great work, I wanted to work for a frontline organisation and be able to really see the difference it was making to people's lives. I was already interested in the mental health field and had had a small amount of experience of working with people with learning disabilities many years before, so when I saw the job advert I thought it looked perfect!

What do you like most about working for United Response?

Two things – the variety and the people! My job is very varied with the opportunity to get involved in lots of different things, so there is never a dull moment. And the people – right across the organisation - are really what make United Response what it is. There is such commitment and passion and that willingness to really go the extra mile for people we support. I really do find that inspirational.

When you're not working, how do you relax?

I enjoy getting into the great outdoors – walking and cycling – and also spending time with friends and family.

“The greatest gift we can give our children, alongside love, is their freedom”

Robert Tappenden's story



Dorothy Tappenden (fourth from left), Robert (far left) and family

Robert is one of the first people ever to have been supported by United Response and is still supported by us today. Here his mother, Dorothy Tappenden, shares her story.

Our son Robert started at a boarding school for children with special needs at the age of ten. It suited us very well, as we had the weekdays when we could relax with our daughter, and weekends and holidays when we could be a family.

We were aware that schooling would end at the age of 16 and had been looking for residential care for Robert for some time. I knew of the difficulties in finding accommodation for 16-18 year olds, but we had hoped against hope that Robert might be allowed to stay where he was until he was 18; we were certainly not prepared for the sudden ejection he had from the school.

Eventually we were directed to Dr Wilde who was the Mental Health Officer for the West Sussex County Council; I have a feeling

someone was fed up with our pestering. I knew Dr. Wilde having met him at various meetings I had attended. He's a good sympathetic listener, and whilst agreeing with everything we said about the lack of facilities for 16-18 year olds, had to confirm there was nothing suitable available. However, he suggested that I contacted Susan Evershed, whom I knew through her tireless work on behalf of young adults with learning disabilities.

Susan lived in a large house with lovely grounds, which she was planning to turn into a residential centre for people like my son, and she explained it would be run by a new charity that had just been set up called United Response. Much to our relief Robert was accepted as part of what was to become a very happy community.

The house was in a tiny village with not much traffic around and so the gate was never shut. My husband still remembers to this day the time we went to pick Robert up to take him out and was told that he had just 'popped up' to the post office – WHAT! On his own? YES! On the main road? YES! Of course, he returned safely but that was only the start of his solo ventures and, eventually, he took himself off regularly to see the cricket and football in the parks. He made himself useful by taking round the oranges for football and clearing up after the cricket tea (that usually involved finishing off the leftovers!).

In due course the cost of running the house became too much and it was decided to re-locate. This was probably the most difficult time of all for everyone, including staff. An extension was built on to a house already used by United Response

and everyone was relocated. Robert HATES change and getting settled in was really difficult for him, but again United Response pulled out all the stops (not only for Robert I am sure, but everyone) and soon life began to settle down.

Then almost out of the blue 'independent living' became an issue. The staff felt that Robert would benefit from being a little more independent, and with the government funding which was available, asked us how we felt about him living in smaller accommodation and being less reliant on staff? I was unsure (a reaction I think most parents reading this will empathise with), but when we consulted Robert he said he would like to live in a flat with his own en-suite bedroom and carer.

As it worked out, Robert moved in with two people whom he knew

only through social activities, but he lives independently (in the broadest sense of the word) and has settled in well. Robert now lives in one of a pair of semi-detached bungalows which have been specially adapted to suit the needs of the people living there. I am always amazed at the way United Response seems to constantly work at getting things 'better', and although I was not at all happy with the change at the time, it's worked out well.

I am sure it has done him good to have to put himself out to get himself understood. Robert doesn't talk but uses his large diary as a constant reference. Although he cannot write, he makes sure we and the staff put in any necessary information.

I believe the Independent Living fund has now been stopped for new applicants, I just hope those

receiving it will continue to do so, since the improvement in Robert's life-style over the past few months has been a revelation.

I have always believed that the greatest gift we can give our children, alongside love, is their freedom. Robert (and many like him) was unable to fly the nest on his own initiative, so we had to make the decision for him. However, it is United Response who gave Robert the real opportunity to have a life of his own. Yes, we do 'interfere' occasionally, but Robert lets us know if we have overstepped the mark. We too have our freedom, along with the satisfaction of knowing that Robert's future is in the safe hands of United Response.

Dorothy Tappenden

Westminster watch



In the last few months the Coalition Government has announced several measures which are likely to impact on the lives of people United Response supports and their families. For people with mental health needs, one of the more positive was the announcement of a new mental health strategy aimed at tackling stigma and increasing access to talking therapies.

Both Nick Clegg and care services minister Paul Burstow were very vocal in their support of this strategy and pledged £400 million of new funding to support it. United Response publicly welcomed these measures but also warned that their impact was likely to be blunted, to say the least, if they happened at the same time as mental health services were axed due to funding cuts.

The NHS reforms were more controversial, partly due to very public rebellions by the Liberal Democrats and healthcare bodies such as the British Medical Association. Many people with disabilities rely on the NHS as a lifeline, which is why we join with all those who are urging

health secretary Andrew Lansley to listen to NHS users and

healthcare experts who are concerned that the proposed reforms haven't been properly tested.

At the time of writing, the future of proposals around GP commissioning still look unclear. What is clear, however, is that any shift in commissioning must be supported by proper training to ensure GPs have an in-depth understanding of the needs of all those they will be commissioning service for. We will continue to highlight our work in training healthcare professionals as evidence of this, and will be monitoring the progress of the NHS reforms closely. The fact that the Government has agreed to "pause" and take more time listening to other viewpoints before pushing through reforms is encouraging, and we hope it leads to much more robust proposals.

There were other signs that the Government does listen to opposing points of view when they are backed by hard evidence. For several months the Government has argued that the Disability Living Allowance mobility payment should be removed from people in residential care as it was a "double payment", and that local authorities already fund mobility. United Response worked hard alongside many other disability organisations and disabled people themselves to provide evidence that this was not the case, and that the removal of the mobility payment would effectively isolate people with disabilities from society.

We collaborated on at least two in-depth reports on how DLA mobility funds are actually used – for visiting friends, getting to hospital appointments, and getting out into the community – and also lent our support to a number of letters to national newspapers. Thank you to all of you who have got involved in this campaign and who have provided us with case studies to help us to lobby - your support is invaluable and your stories provide real, tangible evidence that illustrates far more eloquently than mere statistics the impact that this cut could have. The proposed implementation date has already been put back by a year, from April 2012 to April 2013, and we will keep working hard to persuade Government to reverse the decision.

Campaigning is important to us as an organisation, because it truly can lead to change. We know from talking to many of you that campaigning is very important to family members too, which is why we have been prominent in speaking out against disabled people being harassed or receiving poor healthcare, as well as standing up for their right to vote. We also campaign alongside likeminded organisations to ensure that support is properly funded, and that people with disabilities are not unfairly hit by the current round spending cuts.

But we also know that many people want to do more and to be able to get their own individual voice heard. We would encourage families who want to get involved and who have Internet access to check the United Response blog and campaigns sections – www.unitedresponse.org.uk/campaigns - for regular updates on the campaigns we are active in.

In addition, you'll find links through to our campaigning partners. We are founding members of the Learning Disability Coalition www.learningdisabilitycoalition.org.uk whose website gives excellent advice on how you can take action yourself, such as writing to local newspapers or contacting your MP about your concerns. We are also a founding member of the Campaign For A Fair Society, www.campaignforafairsociety.com which is setting out clear principles to guide politicians in making the right decisions for people with disabilities.

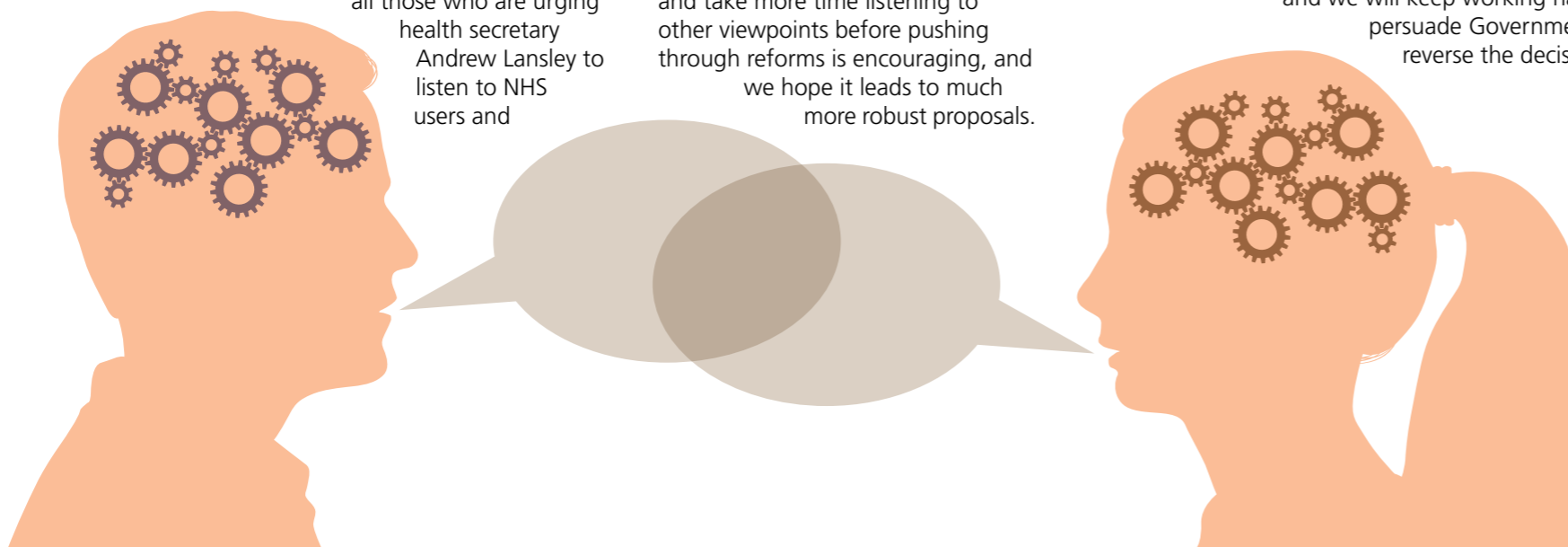
We know it's a difficult time and that many people are worried about whether spending cuts are going to impact on their family members. We understand these concerns, and will keep doing what we can to make sure that the Government understands our arguments and our point of view. We would encourage you to do the same, so that we can work towards a better future for all of us.

Campaigns Panel

This new panel helps us to reflect the views of people we support and their families in our campaigning work. The panel will not meet formally, but will be contacted for their views about potential future campaigns and what issues we should be speaking out on and will receive quarterly updates about United Response's recent campaigning work. This will allow us to ensure that the issues United Response speaks out on continue to reflect (and be informed by) what is important to the people we support and their families.

In addition to this, panel members will be given opportunities to take part directly in our campaigning work if they would like to - for example being interviewed by the press, taking part in a campaigns event, or allowing their story to be used as a case study on a particular issue.

If you would like to be involved in our Campaigns Panel please contact Alexis Camble by phone on 0208 246 5241 or by email alexis.camble@unitedresponse.org.uk.



“He is doing things that we never thought he would do”

Meet Maureen and Jeffrey Stafford, whose son, Zac, has been supported by United Response for almost five years.



Maureen and Jeffrey with Zac

Our son, Zac is now 32. For the first couple of years after he was born he seemed fine. Although he did cry a lot, he was very bright. He was talking and could identify things like the different suits in a pack of cards. Then he suddenly seemed to lose these abilities. We talked to the health visitor and Zac was assessed every two weeks until, just before he was due to start school at 5, he was referred to Guys hospital. He had a brain scan and we were told he was autistic.

We didn't know anything about autism and became completely obsessed, reading everything we could get hold of. It frightened the life out of us. We feel sorry for other new parents who have a child with a disability, doing everything to find a cure and trying everything that is suggested then finally realising, and accepting, that there isn't one. It took a long time for us to come to terms with the diagnosis. We always loved Zac but had to accept the fact that he would always have autism.

Our lives completely changed. Due to Zac's very high support needs we both had to give up work and become his full time carers as even throughout his school years, Zac came home in the holidays and at weekends (and now we have found that because of this it has affected our pension). We lost our social life. We couldn't let anyone into the house as Zac didn't like visitors, and we couldn't even take Zac out shopping with us.

We are very lucky with our neighbours who have been really great and very supportive and we have made good friends through the years with other families with children who have disabilities.

We were very worried about having a second child and went to Guys Hospital in London for genetic counselling and we talked it through a great deal between ourselves. When Zac was eight and a half, we had Joshua. Strangely we weren't worried at all during the pregnancy as we really felt that he would be fine - which he was. But, years later, when Joshua was to become a father, we were really terrified that the baby would have a disability but happily she was fine too.

We were always worried when Joshua was growing up that he would feel that he would have to look after Zac, so we always encouraged Joshua to live his own life. When we look at Joshua, we do wonder what Zac's life would be like if his circumstances had been different.

Since moving from child to adult services, Zac has been moved five times with none of the placements lasting more than five years. After being diagnosed with epilepsy at 17, he was batted about between social services and health authorities. He has had his hard won benefits taken away from him and has had bad experiences in the past in the adult care system. We fought for him every step of the way. We always explained Zac's personality to staff - how he likes to live and what events can trigger his challenging behaviour. For instance, Zac gets very distressed by loud noises but time and again

he was housed with people who, because of their disabilities, would be loud and would set Zac off. We always felt that we were never listened to.

Zac is a sweet, affectionate man with a sense of humour - he sings to himself and now makes eye contact with people. But his disability causes him to self-harm and display challenging behaviour at times. He never hurts anyone other than himself, unless by accident if they happen to get in the way, but he can be very destructive to objects such as smashing plates or furniture.

Zac has been with United Response for four years now. Before he moved in, staff visited him and got to know him and listened to us. They converted one of the garages at the service into a home for Zac, so although he has his own living space he is surrounded by neighbours and support staff. We feel he has accepted this as his own home and this has never happened before. He trusts and likes his carers who go out of their way to help him get through any difficult times. He now makes his own decisions - if he wants

to go out, staff go out with him whatever the weather. We really feel that the staff always go the extra mile with Zac and that he is important to them. They are also very good at keeping in contact with us and keeping us involved.

It's hard to hand responsibility of our son to another care provider because of all the problems in the past but we can honestly say, it has been a good decision and we worry less now. We really hope he stays where he is. His support is really bringing him out of himself and he is doing

things that we never thought he would do. He is much more mature now and is enjoying life more. His episodes of challenging behaviour are fewer and fewer and, when they do happen, are over in minutes whereas previously they could last for hours.

The main thing that has helped us through it all is that we managed to keep a sense of humour about life. It's not all plain sailing and may never be, but things are looking good for Zac and for us. Zac is the happiest he has ever been and that's all we can hope for. It's a nice feeling.

“We really feel that the staff always go the extra mile with Zac and that he is important to them”

Maureen and Jeffrey Stafford

Bringing Back the Bloom

Summer Appeal

After a year of gloomy economic tidings, summer is finally here – time to get out into the garden and enjoy the benefits of being outdoors!

The therapeutic benefits of gardens and gardening are well known, and yet, as garden writer, designer and TV presenter Ann-Marie Powell reminds us: "Many people with disabilities can find their gardens awkward and even dangerous spaces, difficult to access and not built to meet their needs". So, this year, our summer fundraising appeal is focused on bringing the simple pleasures of the garden to those who would not otherwise be able to enjoy them.

The appeal will raise funds to develop and enhance gardens at five United Response services across the country – one in each of our four geographical divisions plus a flagship project at our Community Network in Cheriton, Folkestone.

The Community Network, based in a former shop below the United

Response area office, opened last August as a space that the whole community can use to meet and interact. Its new garden will offer a peaceful, sensory, place designed to encourage meditation and time to think. The garden space will also be offered to small groups or individuals for communal activities as well as solitude and reflection. In addition, people with complex needs will have the opportunity and responsibility of tending the garden, for the benefit of their local community. Crucially, the garden will be low maintenance so that upkeep doesn't become too onerous and so that everyone can get involved.

Trish, who helps to run a hobby group at the Community Network, and Jane, who attends the group every week, are both keen to use the garden as an additional space where the hobby group can meet. Jane enjoys gardening and is looking forward to sharing her

skills with others and turning the garden into an area that the local community can enjoy.

Four additional gardens in Liverpool, Ripon, Wantage and Welwyn, will also benefit from revitalisation, from making the garden more accessible for residents by creating better paths and adding raised beds for growing vegetables to the purchase of special assistive gardening tools to allow people with disabilities to participate fully in the upkeep and maintenance of their space.

“Evidence shows that sensory environments can significantly improve self-awareness and task concentration and also lead to greater social interaction for people with learning disabilities”

Ann-Marie Powell,
Garden Writer, Designer
and TV Presenter

Gary Biddlecombe, Service Manager at Doublegates Green, said:

"If we are able to secure some money for our garden we will buy materials to build a wooden frame to close off a section of the garden. We would fill the frame with wicker or bamboo panels. Inside this structure we would grow herbs at nose level for wheelchair users. We would also put up gentle chimes and windmills for a truly sensory experience. We would call it our secret garden and it would be a place for the people we support to get away from it all for relaxation and intensive interaction."

Just a small donation can add real value to people's lives. If you would like to make a donation to this appeal, please use the donation form included with this magazine or visit:

www.unitedresponse.org.uk/summer-appeal



Here are just a few examples of what your support could help buy:

- £30** would purchase four Easi-Grip tools: a Cultivator, Fork, Trowel and Weeder
- £80** would purchase a set of four long reach tools, enabling gardening from a seated position
- £200** would allow us to create wheelchair-accessible vegetable patches consisting of raised beds with patio sides
- £600** would purchase a safe, containerised water feature to add sound, movement and touch to a garden

Seren Hajili was one of United Response's successful marathon runners. Well done Seren!

Virgin London Marathon 2011



On 17 April, 34 fundraisers braved the heat and ran the huge 26.2 miles that is the Virgin London Marathon. They put their bodies through one of the toughest tests, all in the name of supporting our fantastic work. As a team they are expected to raise an enormous £50,000 to support the work of United Response. Huge thanks to all our runners and their supporters for their incredible efforts – we hope that they are now enjoying a well earned rest!

Charity Golf



Monday
18th July
2011

Richmond Golf Club

On Monday 18th July United Response is hosting its third annual fundraising golf day. The event will be held at The Richmond Golf Club and hosted by our vice president, sports broadcasting legend Steve Rider.

Last year's event was a great success with 92 golfers taking to the course to raise over £13,000 for United Response.

If you're interested in taking part in the event or just want to find out more, go to:

www.unitedresponse.org.uk/support-us/fundraising/golf-event

or contact Alex Dunwoody on alex.dunwoody@unitedresponse.org.uk or 020 8246 5208.

Changes to the Benefits System

You will no doubt have read news stories in the newspaper about changes to the benefit system being introduced by the current government. In this article, we will cover some of the changes that have recently taken place, with a view of looking at proposed changes to the benefit system in a future next issue.

So, what has already happened?



General

It was decided that from April 2011, all benefits would be indexed to the Consumer Prices Index as opposed to the Retail Prices Index, which is a less generous method of increasing benefits.

Housing Benefit (HB) and Local Housing Allowance (LHA)

From April 2011, the maximum LHA payable has been capped at:

£250 for 1 bedroom properties

£290 for 2 bedroom properties

£340 for 3 bedroom properties

£400 for 4 bedroom properties

Properties with more than 4 bedrooms will no longer receive any extra payments (i.e. claimants will receive the 4 bedroom rate).

From April 2011, the way that LHAs are calculated has changed. Previously, local authorities have used the average rent charged in an area (the "50th percentile") to determine the LHA payable. In future, the 30th percentile will be used to set the LHA for each property size and each area which means that people receiving LHA will be restricted to renting only the cheapest 30% of properties available on the

market. For example, the LHA for a room in a shared house would have been £99.58. So people would be approx £10 a week worse off under the new rules. The impact will be less, the lower the rent i.e. there will be more impact on people who live in areas with expensive rents.

At the same time, Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) have been increased by £10 million per annum. DHPs are designed to help households who need extra help with housing costs and is therefore available to provide temporary help for people affected by the changes to LHA described above.

And a bit of good news! People with disabilities who claim HB will be eligible to claim enough HB to cover the cost of a two bedroom property if they need the extra bedroom for the purposes of overnight support – like a sleep in. This change also came into effect in April 2011.

Supported Mortgage Interest (SMI)

Supported Mortgage Interest (SMI) is a benefit available to shared owners with disabilities and a significant number of people with disabilities have used SMI to pay the interest on a mortgage and become home owners. However, following the emergency budget in June 2010, the coalition government set the SMI rate for all mortgages at a rate of 3.63% from October 2010 onwards. At the same time the Financial Services Authority changed some of its rules, which has

resulted in banks charging higher interest rates to shared owners.

Whilst the majority of existing shared owners have mortgages that track the SMI rate, some existing shared owners do not and face big shortfalls between their mortgage costs and SMI payments. In addition, these changes mean that anybody wanting to do this in the future will need to find in the region of £200 per month to make up the shortfall between their mortgage and SMI payments.

Employment & Support Allowance (ESA) & the Work Capability Assessment (WCA)

Whilst Employment & Support Allowance (ESA) is not a new benefit, having been introduced in 2008, there are two developments related to ESA that are worth mentioning.

One is that the migration of people onto ESA from other benefits, like Incapacity Benefit and Income Support on the grounds of disability, began in earnest in February 2011. This means that the people we support will transfer onto ESA, following a re-assessment, at some point between now and March 2014. The re-assessment will be based on a test called the Work Capability Assessment (WCA), which brings us to our second point, namely that evidence is emerging about how the WCA is being implemented that is rather concerning.

The WCA is carried out by a health care professional working on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions and is intended to find out whether the claimant has a 'limited capability for work' and is therefore eligible for ESA. Points are scored based on the claimant's ability or inability to carry out a range of physical or mental activities. If the claimant does not score sufficient points, they are obliged to claim Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) and find a job. Government expects to save

Disability Living Allowance (DLA)

The Government has recently postponed the withdrawal of DLA mobility for people who live in registered care homes. In addition, from April 2011, people classed as severely visually impaired will receive an automatic entitlement to DLA mobility at the higher rate.

£1bn over five years by encouraging people into work, or failing that, on to a lower-paid benefit.

The application of the test has been vigorously criticised by charities such as Citizens Advice and even by a government-commissioned independent review, which said that the process is impersonal, and ill-equipped to gauge the seriousness of mental health conditions, or the nuances of complex medical problems. A recent study by Citizens Advice showed that 69% of claimants are being initially assessed as fit for work, which is 20% more than government were expecting, although when they appeal, many are seeing this decision overturned, and are awarded the benefit. This is causing uncertainty and stress for vulnerable claimants and means that people who do not appeal, either because they do not understand the system or do not feel confident to challenge the decision, are losing out.

Whilst these changes will have an impact on people with disabilities and their families, it's not all bad news. In addition, United Response and others, such as the Learning Disability Coalition, are working hard to ensure that both the impact of these changes are manageable for people and to persuade government that current and future changes must be fair and take into account the impact on people lives in practice.

Working Tax Credit

Finally, Government has slightly reduced the amount of working tax credit payable to people who claim this benefit and who earn more than £6420 each year by increasing the taper from 39% to 41%

See www.hmrc.gov.uk/taxcredits/start/who-qualifies/workingtaxcredit/index.htm for more details.

Aiming

HIGH

As you will have seen from elsewhere in this issue of In Touch, we are now extending our support to work with more young people and with children.

Towards the end of last year we were delighted to be successful in our funding bid to run several Aiming High pilots. These pilots are Surrey based, designed to get a better understanding of young disabled people's preferred community activities and were run over the weekend and evenings.

The funding was provided through the government's Aiming High initiative which is part of the short breaks strategy. It provides opportunities for young people to take part in activities (usually away from the family home)

outside of school time which can help them develop new skills, raise their aspirations or just have a good time.

Working in partnership with Halow, a Guilford based disability charity for young people, and the Surrey Youth Development Service, we had a lively meeting with the group to find out what they wanted to do. So far we have been with them on a day trip

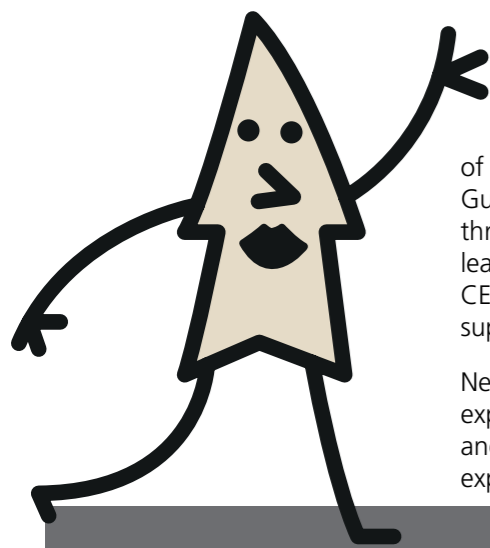
to London - including a ride on the London Eye. We have had a youth club day and also a visit to the West End to see the musical Mama Mia. Bowling and outdoor activities are high on the list of activities for the coming months.

For more information on our support to children and young people please visit www.unitedresponse.org.uk/what-we-do/transition-support/



A group of young people enjoy a trip to the London Eye as part of the Aiming High project

www.netbuddy.org.uk



Netbuddy is full of handy tips and bright ideas from parents, carers, teachers and therapists with experience of learning disability. Netbuddy began over a cup of coffee between friends Deborah Gundle and Linda Goldberg who met through Deborah's son, Zach, who has learning disabilities. Linda was then CEO of Cosgrove Care, a charity that supports people with special needs.

Netbuddy is all about pooling the vast expertise of parents, carers, teachers, and therapists... anyone with first-hand experience of learning disability. It's a

place for sharing advice and ideas, for overcoming problems and celebrating successes within a community that understands learning disability.

It uses videos and discussion forums, and currently has over 700 practical tips available. These include everything from how to make getting out and about less stressful for someone you care for, to advice on benefits. Take a look today and if you know of a family who could do with some online back-up, why not pass it on? Visit www.netbuddy.org.uk

Netbuddy is a registered charity.

Helping families across the UK

The Family Fund helps families with severely disabled or seriously ill children and young people aged 17 and under to have choices and the opportunity to enjoy ordinary life.

They give grants for things that make life easier and more enjoyable for a disabled child, young person and their family, such as washing machines, driving lessons, computers and holidays.



Equality Act made easy

The Equality Act 2010 has been updated with 20 key changes which will affect UK law. This includes fundamental changes to disability and discrimination laws, including changes to the definition of a disabled person, aimed at reducing the gap between discrimination arising from disability and indirect disability discrimination. An Easy-Read guide to the Act is now available from Liverpool Learning Disability Making It Happen Partnership at www.lldpartnership.co.uk/further-information

The Fund is a registered charity, helping around 55,000 families on the lowest of incomes across the UK. It provides grants to families totaling £33 million a year.

The Fund will consider a grant application from any family caring for a disabled child or young person aged 17 and under in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, where they are eligible for, and can send evidence of entitlement to, one of the following: Child Tax Credit, Working Tax Credit, Income based Job Seekers Allowance, Income Support, Incapacity Benefit, Employment Support Allowance, Housing Benefit and Pension Credit.

Families must still however meet all other eligibility criteria in order to be eligible

www.familyfund.org.uk/



Benefits Website

Turn2Us are a charitable service which helps people access the money available to them – through welfare benefits, grants and other help.

Their free, accessible website has been designed to help you find appropriate sources of financial support, quickly and easily, based on your particular needs and circumstances.

www.turn2us.org.uk

Assistive Technology

"Hi I'm Laura and this is me making my first cup of tea using the water dispenser, I never used to like drinking now I do because I can make my own drinks. The best thing about my new gadget is I can make my mum and dad a cuppa for the first time :)"



When it comes to finding new ways to get people engaged in their communities, a good plan can be essential. The most workable ideas often come from taking what we already know about someone – their interests and their strengths – and researching potential activities which connect with these. But to gain long-term success, a plan for community engagement can also benefit from having a clear aim, definite actions and a structured reviewing process.



All about PLANNING

Here, Ipswich service manager Julie Mayhew explains how her team worked together to come up with a unique community engagement plan for someone they support...

"We've been supporting John Deri in the same supported living service for 21 years," says Julie, "He's an extremely sociable man and someone who would happily chat all day long, but he has been very set in his ways and doesn't like to try new things.

"He chose to stop attending the local day service two years ago. Around the same time his sight started to deteriorate. Since then, he has been happy to spend his days going out for lunch or coffee, but that's pretty much it.

"We wanted to find a way for John to get more engaged with his community, so looked at what he already liked to do at home. One thing that came up was his passion for recycling. Every six weeks or so, John would gather together all of the glass and bottles from the rest of his housemates and take them to the nearby

recycling centre. Once there, he would get a real buzz out of dropping the bottles into the bins and hearing the smashing sounds – as someone who is partially sighted, he was always excited about sensory experiences.

"We thought we could try turning his interest in recycling into a more interactive activity by setting up a community recycling scheme. We spoke to John and he was keen, so we started to draw up a plan.

"Developing an action plan was important because we know that staff are often busy going about their day-to-day support not only for John, but also for the other four people he lives with, and so it could have been easy to get side-tracked.

"So we started by looking at dates. It was November, and Christmas was coming up, so we decided to use that as a launch date – a perfect time for recycling as people have more bottles over the festive period. We then worked out what needed to be done before we launched.

"Each of the above tasks had a deadline and this was added to the staff shift planners, so it didn't matter who was on shift, everything still happened.

JOHN'S ACTION PLAN FOR RECYCLING

1. Count the houses on one side of the street (to make sure John wouldn't get overwhelmed) so we knew how many flyers would be needed to advertise the idea
2. Design the flyers with John
3. Print off the number of flyers needed
4. Deliver flyers to the houses
5. Go and meet the neighbours who responded and arrange details of collections
6. First collection round.

"Before long, we were ready to go and I'm pleased to say it was a real success," explains Julie, "John loves the act of recycling so is pleased to have it incorporated into his weekly activities. And he has got to know his neighbours so much better. He has an excellent memory, and uses this to ask each neighbour about how they are when he knocks – he remembers who has dogs, or what country they come from. People now take the time to talk to him if they see him, and one even sought him out at the local shop to ask if he would take her bottles too.

"Now we know he can do it, we're getting ready to send out flyers to the other side of the street. He's even been given a Small Sparks grant to get equipment to make recycling easier for him. But without a good plan, this idea would never have got off the ground."

Why it worked



Bev Ashman,
Practice Development Co-ordinator

We know that in order to change the lives of the people we support we need to be able to turn Person-Centred Thinking into Person-Centred Action.

The use of person-centred thinking tools and person-centred reviews often leads to creative and innovative ideas on how to develop existing opportunities and/or to create new ones which will improve the lives of the people we support. But staff can be so busy providing day-to-day support that such new developments and ideas can get side-tracked and even forgotten.

Having a target date in mind enabled the team to work backwards to establish who would need to do what by when to ensure John's recycling service was up and running in time for Christmas.

This kind of planning doesn't need to take lots of time but is often necessary to transform good ideas to reality.

Families Panel

If you would like to help us ensure that we meet your needs for information and materials and to give you an opportunity to feedback on what we are doing, sign up to be part of our Families Panel.

I/we would like to join our Families Panel so that you can feed into the work that United Response does.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____ Tel: _____



3 Things you should know about... public campaigning

Why does United Response get involved in public campaigns?

Although by far the most important part of our work is providing expert support that transforms people's lives, we also believe it is our duty to speak out with and on behalf of people with disabilities or mental health needs. And, the fact that we are a service provider means that when we speak out, we do so with a strong evidence base - what people we support tell us is working and not working in their lives.

Our vision is a society where disabled people are equal participants and have access to the same rights and opportunities as everyone else - and sometimes this means speaking up about barriers that prevent this, whether that means influencing government policy or raising awareness amongst the general public. Depending on the subject, we may choose to campaign as United Response, or to join with partner organisations where this is more effective.

What campaigns are you involved in?

Several. As United Response, we have been prominent in speaking out against disabled people being harassed or

receiving poor healthcare, as well as standing up for their right to vote. We also campaign alongside like-minded organisations to ensure that support is properly funded, and that people with disabilities are not unfairly hit by spending cuts. Our current campaign around the Disability Living Allowance mobility payment is a good example of this.

How can I, or the people I support, speak out?

The United Response blog and campaigns sections – www.unitedresponse.org.uk/campaigns - feature regular updates on the campaigns we are active in and how you can get involved. In addition, it links through to our campaigning partners.

We are founding members of the Learning Disability Coalition www.learningdisabilitycoalition.org.uk whose website gives excellent advice on how to take action on spending cuts, such as writing to local press or contacting your MP.

We are also founders of the Campaign for a Fair Society, www.campaignforafairsociety.org which sets out clear principles that guide politicians in making the right decisions to ensure a better future for everyone with a disability. We urge everyone to sign up.



Feedback form

If you would like to contribute to articles, make a suggestion for future content or tell us what you think of In Touch please let us know below. If you do not wish to receive this magazine in future please tick here and fill in your details below.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____ Tel: _____

Comments: _____

Please return this form to Lu Large, United Response, Vantage House, 1 Weir Road, London SW19 8UX or call her on 0208 246 5120 or email lu.large@unitedresponse.org.uk