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yourvoice

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▲ WHAT'S THIS ABOUT? SEE PAGE 4 TO BE ON THE SAFE SIDE

WHAT PRICE A CUP OF TEA?

Needless distress has been caused to an elderly couple and their disabled son because Shropshire Council's Personal Budget rules have been interpreted as denying him the right to buy a cup of tea. He is receiving a Personal Budget because the council closed Shrewsbury's Grange day centre, which he attended, making the cruelty of its attitude even more difficult to understand.

Tony Grimes, now 51, was very seriously injured in a road accident when he was just 18. His brother Gary was fatally injured in the crash. Tony needs 24/7 care at his adapted Oswestry bungalow. He can only move his right arm and has memory and concentration problems.

His parents, Helen and Sid Grimes, of Ellesmere, who are in their eighties, say that being taken to a cafe for lunch or a cup of tea and cake is one of the few pleasures he has in life, and something to which he looks forward.

But Shropshire Council stepped in recently and told them Tony's Personal Budget should not be spent on food or drink. Mr and Mrs Grimes said the council had offered to help



Tony Grimes with his parents and carer Chris Hyde

him claim benefits from other agencies to cover such costs.

The ruling has deeply upset the family. 'It seems they are just hitting the disabled hard again,' they said. 'They actually reduced his Personal Budget from £70 to £40 because he was not spending it, but that is

because he can't do much to spend it on. We were a bit worried when the Grange was closed, but then he was awarded his Personal Budget and told he could use it how he wished to provide activities for himself.

'For Tony, going to a cafe and having a cup of tea is an activity. He can only move his right arm so he does 10-pin bowling once a week and he also goes indoor bowling once a week, but other than that his only other activity is going out for lunch and a cup of tea somewhere. They called the Personal Budget programme My Life, My Choice, but really it is My Life, The Council's Choice.'

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Appeal Court allows challenge to day centres axe

The Court of Appeal has 'without hesitation' allowed campaigners to challenge Shropshire Council's decision to shut day centres in Shrewsbury for adults with learning disabilities.

In November, the High Court rejected

a request for a judicial review of the council's decision to close the centres. But recently Lord Justice Kay, Vice President of the Court of Appeal, said he 'would not hesitate to grant permission to appeal'. In August, Shropshire Council ordered the closure of Hartley's day care centre

and Sabrina Court in Shrewsbury, with the Avalon and Lorne Street sites in Oswestry also earmarked for closure after a replacement centre is built in the town. The future provision of day services in Bridgnorth, currently provided at Innage Lane, is also under review.



Triple treat at SDN December meeting!

SDN Members' Meetings are always interesting, but sometimes they go way beyond that and the only adjective that will do is 'great'. So it was at the meeting just before Christmas, where the three guest speakers kept the audience of about 40 members spellbound.

First up was a Shropshire soldier, Captain Nick Beighton of the Royal Engineers. Nick lost both legs and suffered massive internal injuries when he trod on a landmine while on patrol in Afghanistan. Before that he was a fit and active young man - with mountaineering, skiing, biking and many other high energy pursuits on his agenda. He lived life to the full.

Now, just four years on, he lives life to the full again, with mountaineering, skiing, biking and many other high energy pursuits on his agenda. And for good measure he rowed for GB in the Paralympics, with him and his partner being beaten to bronze by just 0.04 of a second.

Nick didn't paint himself as some sort of superhero. He left the meeting in no doubt about the physical, mental and emotional trauma he has gone through - and is still going through (his most recent operation was just two weeks before the meeting). But his attitude is that you just have to get on with life. Don't dwell



Nick, Ben and Tony at the SDN Members' Meeting

on what might have been, make the most of what is.

That philosophy also sums up the second speaker, wheelchair racer Ben Rowlings, from Newport. A lifelong cerebral palsy sufferer, Ben described how his mother had brought him up to be tough and to solve his own problems.

'When I was little, I fell over in a shop and she didn't pick me up, which shocked people around us. But picking yourself up is what matters. And that attitude has helped me achieve what I have done so far both in life generally, particularly at school, as

well as in sport.' Ben trains hard and follows a strict regime. He is happy to travel to get the best coaching available and goes to Coventry every week.

His achievements are already numerous, but Ben, who is only 19, has a list of goals that he is working towards, both to compete against others - perhaps even in the next Paralympics - and against himself.

The third speaker began by describing himself as physically 'at the other end of the spectrum' to Ben and Nick. Tony Lawrence is a fully qualified tai chi instructor who specialises in teaching tai chi for arthritis sufferers.

After a few introductory remarks about himself and the origins of tai chi (as a form of martial arts in China many centuries ago, and the various forms that it can take) Tony made the SDN member work for their tea and cake.

He put the meeting through its paces, encouraging everyone to try a few moves and to get the feel of tai chi. The type of tai chi he teaches to arthritis sufferers can be done either standing or seated, which is ideal for many people who suffer mobility problems.

Continued next page

Ben wins place on elite training programme

Since the December meeting Ben Rowlings has taken a leap towards his goal of competing at Rio 2016 Paralympic Games. He has won a place on UK Sport's elite World Class Performance Training Programme, which means he will be training with some of the best disabled athletes in the country.

There are some 90 athletes taking

part in the programme. Ben says he is 'somewhat shocked' by this opportunity, which has come 12 months earlier than he had thought possible.

This year he will be competing in the Swiss Open in May, the World Junior finals at Stoke Mandeville in July and the European Championships in Swansea, also in July. Go for it Ben!



New book reflects the realities of war

SDN's December meeting more or less coincided with the publication of a book on a subject about which Captain Nick Beighton could fairly call himself an expert. The book is *Wounded: The Legacy of War*.

It is a book of photographs and stories featuring servicemen and women who cheated death in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The author is well-known musician and photographer Bryan Adams, who later spoke movingly about the

impact that his subjects had made on him.

His main hope for the portraits, which will be shown as an exhibition this year, is to raise awareness of the plight of injured personnel and also to get people to reflect on the truth behind war.

'My hope is that the photographs will convey what words cannot as they reflect the true realities of the wars we've been in,' he told a reviewer for *The Independent*

'I worked with many different types of people with many different types of injuries, some who couldn't speak properly, others who had limbs blown off. Others had been burnt alive and one had been shot in the face.'

Proceeds from the book will go to a range of charities including Blind Veterans UK, Combat Stress, BLESMA, SSAFA and War Child. *Wounded: The Legacy of War* is published by Steidl and costs 58 euros.



Our three speakers are pictured doing their thing at the December meeting - there's no need to identify which is which.

Below are closeups of Ben's racing wheelchair and Nick's legs (about which Nick observed that he can now wear shorts all year round whatever the weather!)



Our next Members' Meeting is on Thursday 13 March in Oswestry

Oswestry Cricket Club in Morda Road will be the venue for the March meeting, with coffee at 10.30 for an 11.00am start. Guest speakers will be two Dementia Friends Champions, Sal Riding and Sonia Roberts (an appropriate subject, as this is the year of Dementia Awareness - see page 11), plus a speaker from Guide Dogs. Lin Stapley of Oswestry, accompanied by her guide dog, will tell us about the work of the dogs and the difference having one makes to her life. For more details about SDN meetings check our website (www.shropshire-disability.net) or contact Russell Price at secretary@shropshire-disability.net



Hotel agrees to instal ramp after SDN talks

Shropshire's newest Premier Inn, in Shrewsbury, has responded positively and constructively to criticism that disabled guests had to go in through the back door because the front door was not disabled-friendly.

Indeed, an SDN member who tested the entrance system, reported back that 'it was not ideal for a number of reasons, including the location of the disability lift and safety, especially at night.'

SDN got in touch with the company and last October two members of our management committee met three senior officials to discuss and put forward a case for better access.

Ruby Hartshorn, SDN's deputy chair, said: "We were really pleased with the discussions. They listened to us and asked us for our thoughts on anything else they ought to consider providing for those with a disability or long-term condition.

'Our comments were then put forward to the relevant departments at the head office of Premier Inn as costs would be involved, but having taken up our plea to have a ramped entrance at the front of the building, they have now drawn up plans which



we have seen and will be supporting.'

Ruby said a ramped access would do more than help those who use wheelchairs and walking aids. For example, parents with prams will benefit.

'SDN will be supporting Premier Inn with its planning application to Shropshire Council,' she said. 'We are also delighted to be working together on the on-going issues that Premier Inn have regarding parking for their patrons at the Raven Meadows car park as well as drop-off issues at the hotel.'

John Forrest, chief operating officer for Premier Inns, said: "On behalf of Premier Inn I'd like to thank SDN for their very constructive comments re-

garding the ramp, which subject to planning permission we aim to have in place by the end of this spring. Our dialogue with SDN will continue over and beyond the ramp planning application and we are delighted with the support they are giving us on this project and with our on-going conversations with Shropshire Council to provide a 24/7 parking operation at the rear of the hotel in all or part of the Raven Meadows multi-storey car park.

'At present our customers can't access their cars outside the 7am-7pm Monday to Saturday and 10am-5pm Sunday windows. We fully understand that extra costs will be involved to operate the facility but we are committed to contributing to those and believe that much of them will be offset by the extra income Shropshire Council would receive from the extra parking income.'

Ruby continued: 'Hopefully in the future, not only will we be able to hold an SDN meeting at Premier Inn Shrewsbury but they will be able to become a member of 'Safe Place' Shrewsbury Scheme. Thank you to all at Premier Inn for working with us, we are delighted and anticipate a conclusion on the ramped access by late spring of 2014.'

How SDN can be a Safe Place

As of this issue we will regularly include the Safe Places logo, seen at right and on the front page, in the pages of YourVoice. Although SDN is not a 'place' we are a Safe Place Reporting Centre – in other words, anyone who is bullied, intimidated or harassed in any way can contact us.

West Mercia Police have asked us to stress that they are by far the best

people to contact about hate crime. Please call 101 for non-emergencies and 999 in case of an emergency.

But if you can't do that, email SDN at info@shropshire-disability.net & we will action it appropriately. For readers receiving a postal copy of YourVoice please contact the person whose details are on the letter you received this month.





Wheelie good way to make smoothies!

Shropshire RCC's Wheels 2 Work team have acquired a 'smoothie bike' - a bicycle which, when pedaled, turns fresh fruit into delicious smoothies. They are happy to lend it out for use at events by non-profit making voluntary and community groups.

The bike can be used as a fun attraction at an event, to raise awareness of issues such as sustainable transport or healthy eating, and as a fundraiser.

For details about hiring, transporting and using the bike contact Contact Wheels2work@shropshire-rcc.org.uk, or telephone 01743 237883.

Pictured are team members working on their next smoothie.



There's a bike out there with your name on it (so to speak)

While hunting up interesting stories for this month's YourVoice the editor came across an organisation that is not only interesting but right here on our doorstep!



Quest 88 is based at the Old Bakery in Pontesbury, and its purpose in life is to get disabled people out and about on bikes.

Its website – <http://www.quest88.com> – encourages people from all over the country and from overseas to visit and be assessed for their cycling needs. It also does a good selling job for Shropshire as a place to visit.

Online disability magazine Access recently gave Quest 88 space to extol the virtues of cycling for the disabled and this is part of what it said:

'Cycling offers a range of different benefits that anyone can gain from, it

Could this be you in action?

doesn't matter how physically fit or able you are. That's the best thing about cycling – absolutely anyone can take part! It can be a really fun thing to do, and it's not an expensive hobby to have...it's good for your health, as well as your stress levels. Even if you're sure that your disability will stop you, there's bound to be a solution of some kind appropriate to your needs. Let's look at a few...

Cycling with a visual impairment
If you have vision problems or are blind, you can still cycle. The most common way to 'get your bike on' is with the aid of a fully-sighted companion... This experience can be made better by using a tandem ... If

you don't have a partner, there are a number of organisations that can help. Lifecycle UK, for example, runs a project known as Two's Company, which runs free tandem journeys with confident cyclists.

Cycling with mobility or balance problems: There are plenty of cycling adaptations on the market, each of which can serve a particular disability especially well. Whether you feel that a handcycle might be more suited to you, or believe that you would be better off with a recumbent bicycle, there's a great deal of choice... Other types include tricycles, side-by-side bikes, T bikes and specialist off-road cycles. Take inspiration from the incredible efforts on display at the Paralympics and get out there!

For more information regarding all-ability cycling and therapy products contact 0844 800 8886 or visit www.quest88.com.

[Source: Access, 17.12.13]

Workshops planned for family carers

A number of workshops are being organised by Shropshire Carers Service, starting with 'Understanding Dementia- a carers survival guide' on 25 February from 10.15- 3.30 - at the British Red Cross, Lower Galdeford, Ludlow, and repeated on Tuesday 4 March from 10.15- 3.30 at the Community Room, Bishop's Castle. Other courses include:

Everyday First Aid - coping well in an

emergency, 12 March, 10.30-12.30pm, the Lantern, Meadow Farm Drive, Shrewsbury.
Shifting not Lifting - safe moving and handling, 25 March, 10.30-1.00, Festival Drayton, Market Drayton
The workshops are free for unpaid family carers, and places can be booked at 01743 341995. Help is available towards travel/parking costs and also with finding respite solutions. [Source: VCSA]



SDN has been given another generous donation – but it is not so much the amount as the circumstances that make this one very special. The amount is £100 and the giver, indirectly, is everybody in Shropshire and Powys.

Our arch fund-raiser Ruby Hartshorn had applied for support from the Harry Tuffins supermarket group, which has several stores along the border and last year became part of the Midcounties Co-operative.

A letter duly arrived inviting Ruby along to the Churchstoke store to receive a cheque. Little did she realise what a wonderful afternoon awaited.

There were 101 cheques to be presented to community groups of all sizes and persuasions throughout the region, from disability groups to the Scouts, from pre-schools to over-60s clubs.

While the supermarket went on with the daily work of serving customers, one end of the vast hall was buzzing with excitement, plus mince pies, chocolates and mulled wine, as representatives from the many groups gathered.

Tuffins had £42,384 give away – the result of the company's annual Fun Day in August – and they really did it in style. Most of it was being pre-

Supermarket that serves up surprises!



A beaming Ruby hidden away in the midst of some of the other recipients at Harry Tuffins supermarket in Churchstoke

sented at Churchstoke by the chief executive of Midcounties Co-operative Ben Reid OBE. Two similar but smaller events were also planned for other stores.

The generosity was wonderful and the presentation stylish, but what made it all possible was the fact that

every year Tuffins turns its many managing and retailing skills to work creating the Fun Day. And the staff must be pretty good at the job. To raise more than £40,000 in not much more than an afternoon is a tall order! Tuffins really live up to their claim to be rooted in the community.

Exempt disabled from bedroom tax plead charities

The Disability Benefits Consortium - a coalition of more than 50 charities – is calling on the Government to exempt the disabled from the bedroom tax.

Official statistics show more than half a million social housing tenants being affected by the tax and the DBC says this is hitting disabled people particularly hard:

- More than 65% of housing benefit claimants affected by the tax are disabled;
- 100,000 live in adapted properties; and
- 77% of Disability Living Allowance claimants live in the social sector.

Those affected can see their housing benefit

reduced by up to 25%, losing an average of £14 a week.

Additional accommodation is essential, not spare, for the disabled the DBC says in a letter to the Secretary of State, in which it scotches reports that the disabled are protected from the policy.

It lists just three groups that are not exempt - those who need an extra room for essential equipment, seriously or terminally ill people who cannot share a room with a partner, and families needing a room for a carer looking after a child.





Tinnitus support groups now at work in Shrewsbury and Telford

Shropshire-based charity **Signal** has teamed up with the audiology department at **Shrewsbury and Telford Hospitals NHS Trust** to facilitate a support network for people living with tinnitus.

The support group starting up in the Telford area on 4 February coincides with national Tinnitus Awareness Week. This follows the successful launch of a similar group in the Shrewsbury in November.

One in ten people in the UK have some degree of tinnitus, the condition where you hear noises, such as ringing, hissing or humming, from inside your body rather than from an outside source.

The condition can impact upon everyday life, affecting concentration or causing sleeping problems or depression.

Deaf volunteers sought

A team at King's College London is creating a D/deaf awareness e-learning package and would like to include Deaf community members and their families in focus groups talking about how they would like health professionals trained in the area of D/deaf awareness. There is information in BSL at <http://youtu.be/YnkyMiXNIEc>

They would also like to film a personal story about Deafness and healthcare access. Anyone interested should contact Tiffany Wade, D/deaf Awareness Research & Development Lead, Division of Medical Education, King's College London. Email: tiffany.wade@kcl.ac.uk

Deafness forum meeting

Shropshire Deaf and Hard of Hearing Forum will meet on Wednesday 19 February at the White House Hotel in Watling Street, Telford, starting at 2.00. Speakers will include the chief executive of the British Tinnitus Association. All are welcome.



A full house for the first Shrewsbury tinnitus support group meeting in November.

People with tinnitus, or the rarer condition hyperacusis, are invited to join the support groups to share their own experiences and find out more about different ways of managing the conditions. Hyperacusis is characterised by an extreme sensitivity to everyday sounds.

The Telford support group gets underway from 10am-noon on Tuesday 4 February at the Education Centre, Princess Royal Hospital, Grainger Drive, Telford. Participants

will be able to speak to professionals from the audiology department and will have access to information from the British Tinnitus Association.

The first support group meeting in Shrewsbury enjoyed a strong turnout. Around 40 people attended and participants commented that the group 'removes isolation.' They

also found it 'comforting to know that it is not just me who has this problem and that there is help at hand.'

The next Shrewsbury meeting is planned for 10-noon on Wednesday 12 February at The Lantern, Meadow Farm Drive, Harlescott, Shrewsbury. Participants will have the opportunity to shape the group's agenda and development.

For more information, visit: www.signal.org.uk

The price of a cuppa - from page 1

Storm in a teacup? The council view

This is what Councillor Lee Chapman, cabinet member for adult services, was reported as saying: 'We ensure that we fund the care that is needed. Based upon an individual's needs, this could, for example, include funding 24 hour support. If an individual is eligible, part of the payment is provided for daytime activities and it is agreed through a support plan what this will be spent on, for example travel to do an activity and the admission cost.'

'While this payment does not cover food and drink, we support individuals to claim benefits to cover these costs from those agencies which are responsible for this funding.'

SDN: It's time to talk and to listen

SDN would like to see a full and open debate on Personal Budgets, with all parties able to put their points of view and explain any issues they have on the subject.

On behalf of our members we would be willing to facilitate such a debate, which would really be a follow-up to the debate we organised on the introduction of Personal Budgets. We know that many of our members and other disabled people have stories and opinions they would like to share. Please contact us if you would be interested in such an event.



NHS guidance on carers' breaks welcomed

The Carers Trust has welcomed proposed new guidance from NHS England on carers' breaks, a central feature of the Better Care Fund which includes £130million earmarked specifically for supporting carers as part of the drive to integrate health and social care services.

Carers Trust has been working with local carer organisations to make sure that health and social care services invest the additional £400 million allocated for carers' breaks for the period up to 2015, since it was made available in 2010.

Support for carers can help meet key outcomes, including reduced admissions to residential care and emergency admissions to hospital, and help save the NHS and local authorities thousands of pounds every year.

CT's chief executive, Thea Stein, said: 'This proposed new guidance is fantastic news for carers and for our local partners who work directly with carers, it recognises the moral and economic imperative to support carers.'

'In many parts of the country, we

have seen how working collaboratively with local carers' organisations and investing in carers can really pay off for CCGs and local authorities seeking to improve health outcomes.

'It has made a vital difference to carers by providing access breaks so that they can maintain their own health and well-being and prevent families from reaching a crisis. 'This now needs to happen in every part of the country and this guidance will help to make sure this happens.'

[Source: Carers Trust 19.12.13]

Lives of learning disabled 'blighted' by lack of time

Short-term and cost-driven care planning is blighting the lives of people with learning disabilities, a survey of local authorities has found.

More than 40% of councils planned the care of people with learning disabilities just one year ahead, while a further 17% looked only up to three years ahead, despite clients having lifelong needs.

More than 70% said cost was a disproportionately influential factor in making decisions about the lives of people with learning disabilities, while 64% admitted they were under pressure to save money at the expense of quality.

The survey of 100 of England's 152 local authorities was commissioned by learning disability support provider FitzRoy. It found that councils recognised longer-term planning as the best way to improve the lives of the learning-disabled, and also to reduce costs.

The biggest barrier to long-term planning was a lack of time, which was cited as an issue by 82% of councils.

The vast majority of councils want to see a national measure of quality of life for the learning-disabled to improve placement stability and reduce long-term care costs. FitzRoy said the Care Bill provides an opportunity

to address the problem, particularly by placing a duty on councils to promote individuals' wellbeing. It called on the Government to develop specific guidelines for councils to help them understand their duty to promote quality of life for learning disabled people.

Anna Galliford, chief executive of FitzRoy, said: 'With this resounding acknowledgement from local authorities that the current state of social care planning is illogical and unacceptable, and with a new governing framework due to come into force, there really is no better time for the Government to make a change.'

[Source: Community Care 08.01.2014]

Deaf cancer patient treated for dementia

A complaint against Abergavenny's Nevill Hall Hospital has been upheld after it failed to provide appropriate care for an elderly deaf man, who subsequently died.

No-one had written on his medical notes that he was deaf. As a consequence, he was treated as though he had dementia. He was given an unnecessary catheter, and staff

failed to inform him that he had cancer. His widow believes her husband's care was compromised because staff did not consider his deafness, even though she told them about it.

The health board offered an unreserved apology and says it has taken steps to improve deaf awareness in future.

[Source: BBC Ouch]

Cash boost for communities

The Big Lottery Fund is to invest £150m to support sustainable community-led enterprises, delivered by an independent trust. Find out more at <http://tinyurl.com/p3nvzua>



Big names back 'social supermarkets' to help victims of state policies

As the Government drives the disabled and other vulnerable groups further into poverty and debt, some leading retailers are backing a new initiative to help those on benefit. Britain's first 'social supermarket' has opened in the former Yorkshire mining village of Goldthorpe. It sells perfectly good stock but at a fraction of the original retail price.



Branded items on sale for a fraction of the usual shelf price

Retailers supporting the scheme include Asda, Marks & Spencer and Morrisons. The products are exactly what you would find on their own shelves and are all in-date, but have been rejected for one of a number of reasons, such as a problem with labelling, or as a result of over-stocking. If the Goldthorpe pilot scheme is suc-

cessful, organisers plan to roll stores out across the country. It is simple enough: Anyone on means-tested benefit can join the Community Shop, and you must join in order to shop there.

Social entrepreneur Sarah Dunwell said: 'Our parent company, Company

Shop, has a relationship with manufacturers that means we can get access to large, large volumes of residual food that we can get to the people who need it the most.

'None of the manufacturers, none of the retailers, want to see food going in the bin. They have all been really supportive of this project. What they need is an outlet for large volumes of surplus food, but that's very unpredictable. We don't know what's going to be residual next week.'

With prices such as 20p for a Warburton's loaf or 29p for a tin of Heinz beans the social supermarket is proving to be a godsend to desperate families.

[Source: Benefits and Work]

Mental health staff to be based at police stations and courts

Mental health staff are to be based in police stations and courts in England as part of a pilot scheme designed to cut reoffending and help get people access to treatment.

Psychiatric nurses and other professionals will assess people who come into contact with the police and court system for mental health, learning disability and substance misuse support needs. They will also offer advice to police officers in cases involving mental health.

Ten areas will trial the scheme (the nearest to us being Coventry). If it is

successful, it will be extended across the country by 2017. Mental health campaigners welcomed the move and said that effective liaison and diversion teams could secure the right support for those who need it.

'Well functioning liaison and diversion services can prevent people with mental health problems from being imprisoned and reduce the likelihood of further offending by putting better support plans in place for people with complex needs,' said Sean Duggan, chief executive of the Centre for Mental Health.

[Source: Community Care 08.01.2014]

90% of GPs want wider use of 'social' prescriptions

Four out of five GPs think social prescriptions, alongside medical prescriptions, should be available from GP surgeries, according to a survey. Social prescriptions are formal referrals by a GP to community support groups, like cookery clubs or dance classes.

Out of more than a thousand GPs surveyed, 90% thought patients would benefit from social prescriptions. Only 9% of the public surveyed had received a social prescription. Visit:

www.nesta.org.uk [Source: Health Information News]



'ShropShare' provides a hub for socially responsible businesses to come together and work in partnership with local voluntary and community sector groups. Launched last October, membership in Shropshare is steadily increasing.

Many local businesses are keen to offer their staff's skills and resources - through employee volunteering - to help good causes.

The Voluntary and Community Sector Assembly says that organisations which require some additional manpower for planned projects could benefit from the skills of local businesses. Just let them know by emailing VCSAssembly@shropshire.gov.uk 'We can't promise anything but we can work with ShropShare to try!' says the VCSA Find out more about ShropShare at <http://shropshare.org/> and encourage local business to get involved!

Arts archive tells story of fight for fairness

The Disability Arts Collection and Archive is being put together to tell the story of the influence of disability arts in the struggle for equality. It's a digital archive which will be complemented by a series of events and exhibitions. Shape Arts is the lead partner in the consortium developing the project, and Tony Heaton, Shapes' chief executive says: 'The important thing is to recognise that we need to take ownership of our own history...the important message is that it's really impor-

tant to get your own personal archive of material together.' [Tony Heaton reminisced about various artists, including Jag Plah: 'As part of his routine he used to come on stage with his crutches, and then he'd do this sort of fiddling around with crutches and microphone and it all looked a bit clumsy. And then his crutches would fall on the floor and he would look at them, and look back at the audience, and say, "Just look, they're useless without me!"' [Source: Disability Now]

Mobility support changes could cost 50,000 disabled their jobs, charities warn

More than 50,000 disabled people could stand to lose their jobs if changes to their vital disability support go ahead, leading charities have warned.

The Disability Benefits Consortium, a national coalition of more than 50 charities including Leonard Cheshire Disability and RNIB, has analysed the potential impact of planned changes to mobility support for disabled people.

According to the Government's projections nearly half a million disabled people are set to lose either part or all of their payments under planned welfare reforms.

A Freedom of Information request revealed that one in five people receiving this support are currently in work. In a survey of more than a thousand disabled people, over half of those in work and receiving DLA said it would be impossible to stay in work without it. This could mean that

over 50,000 disabled people currently receiving DLA would be put at risk of losing their jobs.

If these job losses happen as a result of cuts to mobility support, lost National Insurance and income tax contributions would cost around £278m. Disabled people leaving work would also require out of work benefits. Payments for disabled people leaving work could cost over £186m.

The Government's total cut in mobility support for disabled people in work could save £145m on paper. However, based on the DBC's estimates this could cost £464m before other costs are taken into account.

Rosanna Singler, co-chair of the DBC and Policy Officer at Leonard Cheshire Disability said: 'We are extremely concerned the Government has failed to fully consider the impact of these reforms. If it is the case that nearly 50,000

disabled people will be at risk of losing their jobs the Government really needs to think again.

'We are calling for a full investigation of the costs of these reforms to ensure disabled people can remain in work. It is hugely important that the Government gets the change from DLA to PIP right. This is a life-line to many disabled people.'

Steve Winyard, co-chair of the DBC steering group and head of campaigns at RNIB, said: 'One in five disabled people use DLA to help them in work. But thousands could be forced out of employment as a result of cuts to mobility help.

'The DWP has failed to analyse this issue to date. It is vital that cuts don't force disabled people out of work and cost more to the public purse overall.'

For a full copy of the report visit: <http://tinyurl.com/q7m3f3w>



County volunteer team is one of just five chosen for national care home project

The Shropshire Volunteering Team, a joint venture between Shropshire Rural Community Council (RCC) and Oswestry Community Action, has been selected as one of only five volunteer centres in England to deliver a collaborative project with the National Council for Voluntary Organisations and Skills for Care.

The aim is recruit volunteers to support older people in both residential and nursing care homes.

The 2012 Care and Support White Paper, *Caring For Our Future*, identified the need for closer integration of residential care homes with their communities and emphasised the benefits of promoting volunteering in

care homes. This project sets out to identify and promote good practice in volunteering in care home settings, and support care home providers to develop the skills required to man-

age their own volunteering programmes. It is funded by the Department of Health's Innovation Programme and will run until March 2016.

RCC named as charity of the year

The RCC has been named as its Charity of the Year by the Shropshire and West Midlands Agricultural Society. The new partnership will see Shropshire RCC develop a high profile at the showground's events, and staff from both organisations are already working on ideas for a number of collaborative activities.

Society director Ian Bebbington said: 'The society is committed to

developing strong and fruitful partnerships within the community and we are delighted with this announcement as the RCC does very important work in both the urban and rural community by assisting people in need.

'We look forward to helping them in spreading the good work that they do across the county and also to welcome their presence at our County Show in May.'

New website to help cancer victims make best choices

'My Cancer Treatment' is a website for people affected by cancer - victims, families and carers.

It has been designed to support patients in making an informed decision when choosing where to access treatment.

You can search the site for information by postcode, hospital or cancer type.

'My Cancer Treatment' provides up-to-date and accessible information about NHS cancer services in England, for most of the common cancers and for some of the rarer cancers as well. Visit:

<http://www.mycancertreatment.nhs.uk/>

[Source: Health Information News, December 2013]

2014: the year for Shropshire focus on dementia challenge

Shropshire Health and Wellbeing Board has fully backed a proposal to make 2014 the year of dementia training and awareness in the county.

The idea behind the proposal took hold in October at an open workshop on improving care and awareness.

The work will be taken forward by a partnership project board and supported by the Shropshire Council Graduate Scheme.

Four graduates from the scheme will provide support to deliver a coordinated approach for developing dementia friendly communities in Shropshire.

They will work to improve communication and awareness, improve web and IT links, improve links with the Compassionate Communities project, and

improve links with the business community.

Dementia occurs because of any one of a number of diseases that affect the brain, the most common being Alzheimer's. A series of small strokes can also cause dementia.

There are about 800,000 people in the UK suffering from dementia. Evidence indicates that a healthy diet and lifestyle can reduce the risk of developing dementia and raising public understanding of how to live it and care for those who suffer from it is a key aim of the plan for this year.

Mapping dementia

Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt has launched a new interactive online map to show the public what quality of dementia care and support they get in their local area. Go to <http://tinyurl.com/m6hanjj>



At last, the good news ... if you can understand it!

Science shows that chocolate may be good for you. Five chemical compounds contained in raw, unadulterated chocolate are highlighted to show exactly what they are and how they work.

First, antioxidant polyphenols that neutralize free radicals provide some of the most compelling aspects of eating chocolate because they can reduce processes associated with the development of dis-

eases like Alzheimer's, heart disease and cancer.

Second, chocolate contains anandamide, named after the Sanscrit word for 'bliss,' which is a neurotransmitter in the brain that temporarily blocks feelings of pain and anxiety.

The caffeine and theobromine in chocolate have been shown to produce higher levels of physical energy and mental alertness while

lowering blood pressure in women. Chocolate's heart-friendly properties may be due to the presence of epicatechins, antioxidants which are found in higher concentrations in darker and raw forms.

Studies showed that one-and-a-half ounces of dark chocolate a day for two weeks reduced stress hormone levels. Visit: <http://tinyurl.com/occ3w6b> [Source: Shropshire ME Group newsletter, December 2013]

Bedroom tax round-up - callous indifference vies with mismanagement for headlines

Pay-back time as loophole in rules helps thousands

A newly discovered bedroom tax loophole could see thousands of households paid back millions in housing benefit payments. Those affected are social housing tenants who have been living at the same address and entitled to claim housing benefit continuously since 1 January 1996.

Early council estimates of the numbers involved range from 4% to 15% of the 660,000 tenants already affected by the bedroom tax.

The bedroom tax has cost affected tenants £16 a week on average and has run for 40 weeks. Affected claimants eligible for a refund would be credited around £640 if it were awarded today.

While tenants are entitled to have their previous bedroom tax reductions refunded and are exempt from future re-

ductions (for now), the Department for Work & Pensions told councils on 8 January that it will be taking steps to close the loophole.

Residents who have been awarded money from a council's discretionary housing payment fund to cover their bedroom tax reductions will still be eligible for a full refund - and are under no obligation to return the crisis fund payments.

Councils may - or may not - inform tenants. The DWP is vague, saying councils should consider 'whether [they] are reasonably able to identify potentially affected claimants from your own records'.

If you are affected it would be sensible to contact the council's housing benefit department and say you want to make a claim.

Hurting the bereaved

Bereavement charities have warned that families will have to pay bedroom tax if a room remains unoccupied for just three months after the death of a family member. Many families in social housing have been told that rooms left 'spare' after the death of a child or other family member will become subject to the bedroom tax.

Current legislation allows households 52 weeks before they are reassessed, but the National Bereavement Alliance has said that under the Government's flagship Universal Credit scheme, which will see housing benefit rolled in with up to five other benefits in one monthly payment, the stay of grace is to be cut to just three months, warning there is a risk of the Government adding to the distress of grieving families.

Cruelty to disabled

The impact goes further, affecting families with disabled children, such as Dawn Lennon. Her daughter, Kelly Marie, 28, is blind and unable to walk or talk. Dawn now has to find more than £570 a year because the Government has deemed a room - used to store Kelly Marie's wheelchairs - as 'spare'.

How our councils use hardship cash

More than £350,000 of state funding has been paid out in Shropshire to help people suffering hardship because of the bedroom tax. By the end of last year, a total of 841 applications for support had been made to Shropshire Council, which has made 352 awards and rejected 489. It has more than £150,000 still in hand.

Telford & Wrekin has made 847 awards but could not or would not say how many applications had been received.



DWP keeps bailing as flagship keeps sinking

Figures show just 2,150 people are claiming Universal Credit, leaving the Government 997,850 short of its original target of one million for its flagship policy.

That shortfall has since been officially 'downgraded' to 184,000 - a target that will also not be met, observes the New Statesman in an article reflecting on universal Credit.

Universal Credit was initially due to apply to all new claimants of out-of-work benefits from October 2013 but is still only available in seven 'pathfinder' sites, two of which – Ash-ton-under-Lyne and Rugby – are in the Midlands.

The New Statesman says: 'Ministers are trumpeting the finding that 90% of people claimed their benefits on-line after earlier warnings that the system would prove too complicated. But it's worth noting that the only group of claimants currently included are single, non-home owning, non-disabled, childless people claiming

Jobseeker's Allowance.

'As Labour MP Glenda Jackson noted at a recent work and pensions select committee hearing, "The people you are actually testing are a small number, the simplest of cases.

How on earth are you going to achieve the evidence that you keep telling us you are going to learn from when the cohort is so narrow and so simple?"

The article harked back to a National Audit Office warning in September that:

- 'throughout the programme the department has lacked a detailed view of how Universal Credit is meant to work'
- the 2017 national roll-out date is in serious doubt
- the department 'has not achieved value for money', with £34m of IT programmes written off
- the current IT system 'lacks the ability to identify potentially fraudulent claims'

- the DWP repeatedly ignored warnings about the viability of the project.

In a statement to the New Statesman the DWP said: 'The early rollout of Universal Credit was always designed to start with small volumes of claimants in line with our determination to bring in the new benefit safely and responsibly.

'This figure only includes claimants to the end of September. Since then three other areas – Hammersmith, Rugby and Inverness – have gone live, nearly doubling the size of the Universal Credit roll out and we expect claimant numbers to increase as a result.'

In a further study measuring the attitudes and experiences of claimants towards Universal Credit, it appears that, despite 78% of claimants stating they felt confident that they could manage monthly payments, a considerable number needed to borrow money whilst waiting for their benefit.

[Source: Benefit and Work]

Could there be a catch?

There is so much to criticise about the Government's attitudes and policies regarding the disabled that when it apparently does something positive rather than destructive, it is easy to ask cynically 'what's the catch?' But this little item tucked away in the December issue of the DWP Stakeholder Bulletin may deserve to be taken at face value. Let's hope so.

Under the headline 'Access to Work extended' it says: 'Access to Work has been extended to help more disabled people into work. In a move designed to give disabled people the same

opportunities as non-disabled people, £2m has been set aside to help them take up placements as they prepare to start out on their chosen career path.

'Until now, Access to Work has only offered this support to disabled people who engage in work experience placements that have been organised through Jobcentre Plus. Although it is expected that it will mainly benefit younger adults, the latest development is open to everybody who has a disability and needs extra support in taking up a work experience placement.'

Info Standard on disability for NHS

NHS England wants to develop and implement an Information Standard that ensures disabled patients, service users and carers, receive information in formats and language that they can understand, and that they receive appropriate support to enable them to communicate.

A dedicated webpage on the NHS England website has been created to host all information about this work and three surveys are in progress to explore related issues. To take part in them go to <http://tinyurl.com/mw5b6db>

(An Information Standard is like a guidance document which health and social care organisations must follow). [Source: Health Information News]



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Names and numbers that might help

If your organisation or cause is not listed here please let us know. Email the editor at newsletter@shropshire-disability.net or write to him: Peter Staples, 8 Gorse Lane, Bayston Hill, Shrewsbury, SY3 0JJ

Shropshire Council Disability Services -
www.shropshire.gov.uk/disability.nsf

Telford & Wrekin Adult Social Care Directory - services available and how to access them
http://www.telford.gov.uk/site/scripts/download_info.aspx?fileID=116&categoryID=100010

A4U Disability Advice Centre - Guildhall, Frankwell Quay, Shrewsbury SY3 8HQ; 01743 256218; advice@a4u.org.uk

Autonomy - self-help and social for Aspergers in Shropshire, Telford and Borders - autonomyschropshire@yahoo.co.uk

British Red Cross Home from Hospital Service -
Shrewsbury - Bradbury Park House, 3 Park Plaza, Battlefield Enterprise Park, Shrewsbury, SY1 3AF; 01743 457810
Telford - Suite 3.01, Grosvenor House, Central Park, Telford, TF2 9TW, 01952 209840

Care Farming West Midlands - www.carefarmingwm.org.uk;
stewart.scull@carefarmingwm.org.uk or Mobile: 07957 839634

Carers Direct - 0808 802 0202
www.nhs.uk/carersdirect/Pages/CarersDirectHome.aspx

Citizens Advice Shropshire -
15 College Hill, Shrewsbury, SY1 1LY, 08444 119900;
www.cabshropshire.org.uk
Town offices all have the same number - 08444 991100
Ludlow CAB, Stone House, Corve Street, SY8 1DG
Oswestry CAB, 34 Arthur Street, SY1 1JN
Shrewsbury CAB, Fletcher House, 15 College Hill, SY1 1LY

Community Council (see under R)

Community Directory for Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin
<http://www.shropshire.gov.uk/community.nsf>

Disability Arts in Shropshire - 01743 272939/271676; www.dasharts.org

Disability Directory - Information, aids and mobility services
www.ableize.com/Disabled-Groups-and-Clubs-by-County/Shropshire/

Disability Football Directory 01952 407198
<http://www.disabilityfootball.co.uk/Madeleysports.html>

Disability-friendly holiday accommodation
www.friendly-places.com/categories/disability-friendly/disability-friendly.asp?Location=Shropshire

Disabled and Wheelchair Athletics Directory
www.apparelyzed.com/disability-directory/adaptive-sports/disabled-athletics/

Enable - supported employment services for people with disabilities in Shropshire and Telford, Unit 4, Owen House, Radbrook Road, Shrewsbury, SY3 9SR enable@shropshire.gov.uk. 01743 276900

Headway Shropshire (brain injured and families)
Holsworth Park, Oxon Business Park, Shrewsbury, SY3 5HJ
01743 365271; www.headwayshropshire.org.uk

Parent & Carer Council Shropshire

www.paccshropshire.org.uk/parent-and-carer-groups
PACC provides an index of support groups for children with disabilities in Shropshire. The following groups are listed on the PACC site. Where possible we list direct contacts, but refer to the PACC site for full details)
Allsorts (South Shropshire, for behavioural conditions) 07813043841
www.paccshropshire.org.uk/parent-and-carer-groups/71-allsorts
Bridgnorth Buddies (Parent-led, Special Needs) 07968 544182 or 07790 780631; email Buddies20@yahoo.co.uk
www.paccshropshire.org.uk/parent-and-carer-groups/72-bridgnorth-buddies
Haughton School, Telford, drop-in for parents of pupils with more complex special needs) 01952 387551 or 01952 387552; www.paccshropshire.org.uk/parent-and-carer-groups/83-haughton-school-drop-in
Onevision (visual impairment) 01952 385269
[/www.paccshropshire.org.uk/parent-and-carer-groups/77-onevision](http://www.paccshropshire.org.uk/parent-and-carer-groups/77-onevision)
STACS (Aspergers, 16+) 01952 254594 or 01939 260273; email louise.griffiths@carerscontact.org.uk
www.paccshropshire.org.uk/parent-and-carer-groups/76-stacs
Autistic Supporters (if you suspect your child is autistic, or has recently been diagnosed) 01743 356298
www.shropshireautisticsupporters.co.uk/?q=node/2
Deaf Children's Society 01952 770019; email: nat4sdcs@aol.com
www.ndcs.org.uk
Down's Syndrome 01743 233802, 01948 880110 or 01588 640319
www.dsa-shropshire.org.uk
Dyslexia Association 01743 231205; www.thesda.org.uk
Wheelchair Users 01743 350460 or 01952 252243
SKiD (Shropshire Kids Insulin Dependent, associated with Diabetes UK) 01743 873724 or 01743 364366; email: home@morkot.go-plus.net
SPECTRUM (Autistic Support group) email: netgriffiths@fsmail.net
www.spectrum.t83.net/
Telford STAA (supports parents/carers of children with ASD, ADHD, and challenging behaviour) 01952 457439 or 01952 617758; email: julie@parentpartnership-shropshireandtelford.org.uk or lesley@parentpartnership-shropshireandtelford.org.uk
Steps (help for parents/carers, lower limb abnormalities) 01743 355363
PODS (Parents Opening Doors - Telford, forum for views on services) 01952457439; email: julie@parentpartnership-shropshireandtelford.org.uk

Healthwatch -

Shropshire 4 The Creative Quarter, Shrewsbury Business Park, Shrewsbury, SY2 6LG; 01743 237884; enquiries@healthwatchshropshire.co.uk; www.healthwatchshropshire.co.uk

Telford & Wrekin Suites A & E, The Place, Oakengates, TF2 6EP; 01952 384990; info@healthwatchtelfordandwrekin.org.uk; <http://www.healthwatchtelfordandwrekin.org.uk>

Landau - supported employment services for people with disabilities, 5 Landau Court, Tan Bank, Wellington. TF1 1HE, 01952 245 015, admin@landau.co.uk

Listen Not Label - User-led organisation for disabled and carers in Telford & Wrekin; Tina Jones, manager, 01952 916109; admin team 01952-916108; Meeting Point House, Southwater Sq, Telford, TF3 4HS

Marches Community Enterprise
01584 878402 or 07891094901

ME Connect - Helpline 0844 576 5326 between 10.00-noon, 2.00-4.00 and 7.00-9.00; meconnect@meassociation.org.uk

Motor Neurone Disease Association - MND Connect 08457 62 62 62
mndconnect@mndassociation.org

Multiple Sclerosis Society - 01952 250038;
www.mssociety.org.uk/telford

NHS Choices - www.nhs.uk/Pages/HomePage.aspx

Omega (National Association for End of Life Care) - www.omega.uk.net/

OSCA Citizen Advocacy - Roy Fletcher Centre, 12-17 Cross Hill, Shrewsbury, SY1 1JE; 01743 368370; info@oscacitizenadvocacy.org.uk;
www.oscacitizenadvocacy.org.uk

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Parent and Carer Council (PACC) - see panel on previous page - Shropshire - making parents and carers aware of developments that affect their children and giving them a voice - www.paccshropshire.org.uk; PO Box 4774, Shrewsbury, SY1 9EX; 0845 661 2205; enquiries@paccshropshire.org.uk

Parent Partnership Service - www.parentpartnership-shropshire-andtelford.org.uk/#/useful-links/4551168089

PODS - independent forum in Telford for families of children with disability or additional need; Jayne Stevens 0777 534 2092 or 07824 631 297; info@podstelford.org; www.podstelford.org

Primary Care Trust www.shropshire.nhs.uk/Get-Involved/

Red Cross - see under B

Rural Community Council (RCC) - 4 The Creative Quarter, Shrewsbury Business Park, SY2 6LG; 01743 360641; fax: 01743 342179; www.shropshire-rcc.org.uk/

Scope (Cerebral Palsy) - www.scope.org.uk/services/shropshire

Shrewsbury Dial-a-Ride - Sundorne Trade Park, Featherbed Lane, SY1 4NS. Enquiries 01743 440350; Direct Line 01743 440744; Mobile 07891094901, linda@shrewsburydialaride.org.uk

Shrewsbury Hard of Hearing Club - URC Church Hall, Coleham Head, Shrewsbury, SY3 7BJ; Contact Erica Horner 01743 873540, ericahorner2@googlemail.com

Shropshire ME Group - www.shropshiremegroup.org.uk; 07516 401097

Shropshire MIND - www.shropshiremind.org
Observer House, Holywell St, Shrewsbury, SY2 6BL 01743 368647

Shropshire Peer Counselling and Advocacy Service
www.shropshirepcas.co.uk/default.htm

Shropshire Rehabilitation Centre - Lancaster Road, Shrewsbury, SY1 3NJ; 01743 453600

Shropshire Volunteering Team - Promote your volunteering opportunities. <http://shropshirevcs.org.uk/site/volunteering/>

Shropshire and Staffordshire Heart and Stroke Network
Lambda House, Hadley Park East, Telford, TF1 6QJ
Email: yuen-ting.cheung@shropshirepct.nhs.uk 01952 228490

Sight Loss Shropshire (formerly Voluntary Association for the Blind) The Lantern, Meadow Farm Drive, Harlescott, Shrewsbury, SY1 4NG; 01743 210808; sightlossshropshire@shropshire.gov.uk

Signal (tinnitus and hyperacusis sufferers, Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin) - 9 College Hill, Shrewsbury, SY1 1LZ; 01743 364 644, 358 356 or 364 644; info@signal.org.uk; <http://www.signal.org.uk/>

VCSA - Voluntary & Community Sector Assembly
www.shrop.net/shropvcsassembly

Voluntary Association for the Blind (see Sight Loss Shropshire)

All SDN members and supporters - and anyone who wants to criticise us - are very welcome to express opinions or promote events in YV. Email us at newsletter@shropshire-disability.net or write to the editor at 8 Gorse Lane, Bayston Hill, Shrewsbury, SY3 0JJ

'Major changes ahead' in role of pharmacists

A report from the Royal Pharmaceutical Society says people should expect pharmacists to offer far more than just medicines.

Now Or Never: shaping pharmacy for the future says a broader role for pharmacists as caregivers will be central to securing the future of community pharmacy, and that pharmacists are already playing a role helping patients to manage their own conditions, providing health checks, supporting best use of medicines, and detecting early deterioration in patients' conditions.

The report highlights the role pharmacists can play in supporting people with long-term conditions. It found that pharmacists are beginning to play a much bigger part in helping patients get the best from their use of medicines.

The report cites several examples where community pharmacists are supporting people with asthma and/or chronic obstructive airways disease to use their medicines more effectively. The full report can be read at <http://tinyurl.com/pdkmp2p>
[Source: Health Information News December 2013]

Library books on prescription

A new programme from the Reading Agency called 'Reading Well: Books on Prescription' supports people who have moderate to mild mental health conditions by providing clinically approved titles that GPs can prescribe. The programme offers self-help reading for adults based on cognitive behavioural therapy for a range of common mental health conditions including anxiety, depression, phobias and some eating disorders.

Books can be recommended by GPs or other health professionals from a core booklist and are available free from public libraries. Reading Well: Books on Prescription, the first national scheme for England, is based on a scheme developed in Cardiff.

YV services directory

This is a 'bulletin board' of services to the disability community. Any service that is genuinely for the benefit of people with disabilities is welcome to up to 40 words free. If you have a logo or artwork we will try to include it, but can't promise. Email your text to the editor at newsletter@shropshire-disability.net or write to him: Peter Staples, 8 Gorse Lane, Bayston Hill, Shrewsbury, SY3 0JJ

Sign as you speak: 1Starfish - to become a better communicator learn how to sign as you speak. Total Communication Training Courses for private, public and voluntary sectors. Also Makaton courses. Contact Mandy at www.1starfish.co.uk or 01743 891885 or 07939 600126

Used medical and mobility equipment: The British Red Cross sometimes has donated medical and mobility equipment for sale for a reasonable donation. Call Christine Hunt on 01743 457810 for further information. The donations received help maintain the medical loan department, which is an invaluable service offered by the Red Cross.

Shropshire Handyperson Service: Small jobs at £15+ VAT per hour, no call-out fee, 01743 458 347
mhishropshire.enquiries@mearsgroup.co.uk

New opener means you CAN do it

Opening containers such as tin cans and jars can be a real problem for people with hand or arm disabilities, but a new device - called the 6-in-1 Multi Opener - comes highly recommended in a review in the online magazine **Disability Now**.

The reviewer, who drafted her family in to have a go, writes: 'On first use it was not apparent how to use the gadget but ... we soon realised that you need to grip the opener where it is holding the lid and as if by magic, with just a light grip and a quick turn, the lid pops off!'

Her father-in-law has Parkinson's but was able to open a jar with the 6-in-1 without trouble. 'Very little strength is required to open jars, which is brilliant if you



have two fingers like I do,' she writes. 'As long as I hold bottles between my knees, I can open them safely. Tins with ring pulls are so much easier too ...

'One of the most amazing things this superb gadget opens is cheese packets But I have no idea how it works! You just put the handle end either side of the plastic packet, hold

it shut and pull along the packet and it slices through and there's your cheese! It's clever and a nifty addition to any opener.

'I tried very hard to find a negative for this opener and apart from not explaining how to hold it in the instructions, I can't find any. It's a fabulous kitchen aid which has given me a small piece of independence in the kitchen.'

The 6-in-1 is available from Essential Aids [Source: Disability Now]

YourVoice is pleased to bring information about products and services to the attention of our readers, and we publish reviews in good faith. However we do not test products ourselves and cannot take responsibility for the views of others.

Coeliac disease - a condition that is disabling in its impact on sufferers

When is a disease a disability? We often discuss that and still don't know where YourVoice should draw the line in what we report. However, this article about coeliac disease shows an illness or condition can impact so much on the lives of sufferers that it becomes disabling.

Coeliac disease is caused by a heightened immunological response to gluten in genetically susceptible people. Once triggered, the disease process can only be treated by eliminating gluten from the diet for life.

Historically, coeliac disease was believed to be uncommon, but studies now reveal that it occurs more often than previously thought. In the UK, the prevalence of coeliac disease ranges between 0.8% and 1.9% - although only 10-15% are diagnosed. Its prevalence is considered to be greater in people with auto-immune conditions, such as type 1

diabetes or auto-immune thyroid disease, and in first-degree relatives of people with coeliac disease.

Among sufferers of type 1 diabetes and thyroid disease 2-4% are affected, while among first-degree relatives the proportion is 5-19%.

Among people with the common but relatively mild immunodeficiency known as Selective IgA about 10% are affected by coeliac disease, and there is also an increased incidence in patients with Down's syndrome.

Coeliac disease is traditionally associated with gastro-intestinal symptoms such as diarrhoea, abdominal pain, bloating, constipation and indigestion, because chronic inflammation of the small intestine is a feature of the immune response to gluten.

In fact, symptoms for coeliac

disease may be similar to irritable bowel syndrome and consequently misdiagnosis with IBS may occur.

However, non-gastrointestinal features of coeliac disease are increasingly being recognised in people presenting with the disease.

Delayed diagnosis is a cause for concern as it means the symptoms of coeliac disease remain untreated, which can lead to possible long-term effects. Small bowel cancer and osteoporosis, for example, are complications of undiagnosed coeliac disease.

Once on a gluten-free diet, the patient's risk of malignancy is reduced to that of the general population. However, the increased risk of osteoporosis in the coeliac population persists due to less effective absorption.

[Source: Pulse Extra 07.01.2014]