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Devon charities becomes national leaders in supporting disabled people and their carers to help themselves

Three Devon charities have been chosen amongst 12 organisations in Britain to pioneer new ways of improving support to disabled people and their carers in order to change their lives for the better.

The Department of Health has asked Living Options Devon, SURF and Westbank to pilot new ideas to share across the whole of the UK.

Living Options, which is led by its users, currently supports people with physical and sensory disabilities and ensures that they can make an active and equal contribution in society.

SURF (Service Users Regional Forum) supports people with learning disabilities to speak out and play an active part of their community.

Westbank provides a wide range of services to patients and carers across Devon.

As part of the year long grant-funded project, the Department of Health wants the three organisations to work together to pilot new ways of providing better and more suitable services for thousands of people.

Diana Crump, Chief Executive of Living Options Devon, says: "I am delighted that Living Options Devon has been recognised for the good work it's already done and this is a fantastic opportunity for us to help make even more improvements to the lives of many more people around the county."

Mary Nisbett, Chief Executive of Westbank, says "We are pleased that this pilot will allow us to build on the work we are currently doing for carers and those they care for. We are delighted to be working with Living Options and SURF in this exciting new partnership which will deliver real benefits for service users and their carers in Devon."

Simon Langridge from SURF said: "SURF members are delighted to be part of a project that will help their work to be more recognised. Working

together with Living Options and Westbank, people with learning disabilities will be able to learn new skills to run their project. Together we can make Devon a better community – for everyone.”

Mencap is also pleased to be supporting Surf to enable people with learning disabilities to run their organisation.

There are three key areas that the partnership will be working on. One is looking at improving the support to disabled people to enable them to live more independently in their own homes and how they can make the most of direct payments. The second is improving support for carers and the third is promoting human rights.

Living Options Devon supports disabled people to help themselves. In 2008, the charity helped over 130 people with disabilities change their lives for the better by providing training in assertiveness, confidence building and other skills. SURF supports over 200 people to discuss issues in their lives and to bring about positive change by engaging with Devon County Council and others. Westbank supports adult and young carers across Devon by providing respite, information, access to sitting services and involvement in decision making processes.

The initiative is part of a government strategy to help transform the lives of disabled people. Six central government departments will work with disabled people and organisations such as Living Options to ensure they have the opportunities others take for granted.

For further information go to: www.officefordisability.gov.uk