



Wednesday 27 May 2008

Helping people to speak up

People who find it difficult to speak up about issues that are important to them and get the services they need can now get from a new service in Devon.

Haven Advocacy is a joint venture between Living Options Devon and Age Concern Devon and it aims to represent people who have physical and /or sensory disabilities, those who are elderly, frail and vulnerable as well as those who care for them.

The service can assist individuals who have issues around housing, health and/ or social care and is being supported by Devon County Council.

There are three paid advocates who will work across Devon and it is hoped that they will soon be joined by an enthusiastic team of volunteers.

Jo Morgan, Lead Advocate, said: "Advocacy is about supporting people to speak up about issues that are important to them and ensuring they obtain their rights and can access services. It is the sort of thing that most people take for granted but can be frustratingly difficult without appropriate support and there are few places to turn for help, it is hoped that Haven Advocacy can fill the gap."

One example already dealt with by the service was an elderly lady with health problems and sensory difficulties who received help in expressing her wishes about her future accommodation following a long stay in hospital. Her advocate worked with her to explore the options around accommodation and supported her to make her choice once all the opportunities had been explored. The advocate then help her identify what external services she needed and worked with the appropriate agencies to ensure a care package was in place.

Diana Crump, Chief Executive of Living Options Devon, said: "Haven Advocacy is an exciting joint project that has been set up following the identification of a need that has not previously been met in Devon. People with sensory and physical disabilities have experienced real difficulties in securing advocacy services to support them in expressing their wishes and needs and in accessing their rights. It will give people confidence and empower them to make important changes in their lives".

Ann Ovens, Chief Executive of Age Concern Devon said: "This is a very important project which will support and enable individuals who have complex care needs to overcome their problems and improve their quality of life. During the first year Haven

Advocacy will be externally evaluated to identify how effective it is with the hope of a continuation of the service in the longer term.”

Age Concern Devon seeks to enhance the quality of life by providing services that empower people to take advantage of the ever-changing opportunities of modern day living. Every year Age Concern Devon supports over 8,000 people over 50 through their range of services, including advocacy which are tailored to individual need.

Living Options Devon supports disabled people to help themselves. In 2006, the charity helped over 120 people with disabilities change their lives for the better by providing training in assertiveness, confidence building and other skills. During the same year, Living Options also helped 50 different organisations to comply with the Disabilities Discrimination Act - many of whom made improvements that cost nothing.