



**Monday 22 June 2009**

## **Open Forums Give Disabled People A Voice**

A Devon organisation that supports disabled people to help themselves is encouraging new members to join its Open Forums – a chance to voice concerns and seek advice.

Living Options Devon is running the sessions at different centres across the county.

Elizabeth and Colin Wright regularly attend the forums in Exeter, and agree they have been of tremendous benefit.

“We are both members of Living Options Devon and regularly attend the forums. They’re very good and have helped us in a lot of ways, by providing important information,” said Colin.

Elizabeth agreed: “When we have had problems and have not known which way to turn, someone from Living Options has pointed us in the right direction, or if they can they have sorted out the problem there and then.

“When Exeter city centre was being redeveloped we got into a bit of a kerfuffle about disabled parking spaces. We rely on our car but the arrangements were changed and we didn’t know where to go. Living Options stepped in and sorted it all out by speaking to the developers for us.

“Living Options gives us advice, but is also helps me to educate others about how life is for us.”

Elizabeth and Colin, who live near Middlemoor, both enjoyed the guest speakers who regularly come to the forums, and some have been particularly helpful.

“My disability is epilepsy, but I am also deaf and after many visits to the doctor I thought no more could be done. However we had a guest speaker from one of the hospitals who told us about a new type of hearing aid. He took my details, I was referred for checks and now I have one – and it is a real improvement.”

Organisations such Social Services and Primary Care Trusts often attend the forums to find out how disabled people feel about a range of issues, and get

feedback on all sorts of things, from access issues to the wording on forms and leaflets.

Elizabeth said: “The forums give us somewhere we can find out information, advise others and meet our friends to share experiences. They are a great help.

The forums are held four times a year in six areas - North Devon, Mid Devon, South Hams, Teignbridge, Exeter and West Devon. Living Options Devon pays towards travel expenses, uses accessible venues with talk to type and induction loops, and welcomes all ages and all disabilities, whether it is physical disability, sensory impairment, mental health support needs, or learning disability.

There is a round of forums underway with another series planned for August. Full details are available at [www.livingoptions.org](http://www.livingoptions.org) or by calling 01392 459222.

**The next forum is on June 25<sup>th</sup> 1:30 pm - 3:30 pm Isca House, Haven Road, Exeter**

Others follow on July 2<sup>nd</sup> 11:30 am - 1:30 pm Grosvenor Church, Old Station Road, Barnstaple

July 8<sup>th</sup> 11:00 am - 1:00 pm The Boatshed, Steamer Quay Road, Totnes

July 15<sup>th</sup> 11:15 am - 1:15 pm Royal British Legion, Longford Lane, Kingsteignton

July 30<sup>th</sup> 1:30 pm - 3:30 pm East Devon Business Centre, Heathpark Way, Honiton.

Richard Turner, the director of service user involvement with Living Options Devon, said: “ The forums offer the chance to find out what is going on in Devon regarding disability issues, and the opportunity to have your own personal issues heard and to be signposted to people or organizations that may be able to help you.

“They are also a great chance to meet, network and socialise with other disabled people in your area. You can make a difference by informing us of issues that are affecting you which can then be taken forward as campaigns, and impact on the policy work of organisations such as councils, health services and the police.”

Living Options Devon also provides half and full day courses to a wide variety of organisations on disabled issues.