



2009

DISABLED PEOPLE TO ENJOY THE COUNTRYSIDE THANKS TO LIVING OPTIONS DEVON

Devon's leading disability campaigning and empowerment charity is celebrating after being awarded ££423,642 to help disabled people get out into the countryside.

Natural England has just announced 12 new projects which form part of its £25 million Lottery grant programme entitled 'Access to Nature'.

Living Options will be tasked with rolling out the Countryside Mobility project across the South West in partnership with a wide range of organisations including the South West Coast Path Team, the Forestry Commission, Cornwall, Devon and Dorset County Councils and the South West Lakes Trust.

Forty specially designed electric wheelchairs, called 'trampers', will be distributed across around 30 country parks and countryside sites spread across the region. The precise locations, which have yet to be finalised, will be chosen to ensure as many people can enjoy the new facilities as possible.

The wheelchairs, which have extra robust tyres and sturdy balance, can be driven across rough terrain which would normally only be accessible to walkers.

People with disabilities will be able to book the mobility vehicles by the hour, in many cases for free.

Living Options Chief Executive Diana Crump said: "We put a great deal of work into bidding for the money for this project because we so strongly believed there was a need for it. We're delighted to have been selected as competition was so fierce. The 'trampers' vehicles should be purchased and ready to use by August 2010 and we look forward to helping wheelchair users see parts of our beautiful region which would previously have been completely inaccessible to them."

Announcing this new batch of grants, Helen Phillips, Chief Executive of Natural England said: 'Creating greater access to nature for everyone is really important to Natural England and I'm delighted to see such a broad range of projects using the natural environment in such interesting ways, quite often tailored to meet a specific local need.'

'Without projects such as these many people would miss out on the opportunity to get active in their local environment and benefit from the many health, social and educational benefits these projects provide.'

Other initiatives include snorkelling safaris in Plymouth Sound, a fully accessible boat on the South Yorkshire Canal and a project to introduce people from Bristol and Somerset towns to bushcraft and outdoor activities. educational activities at an area of woodland in Bristol.

Living Options Devon supports disabled people to help themselves. In 2008, the charity helped more than 700 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 many different organisations to comply with the Disabilities Discrimination Act – many of whom made improvements that cost nothing.