

Direct Payments Newsletter

Welcome to the 2nd edition of the Direct Payments Newsletter!

The Direct Payments Newsletter is for users of direct payments and their families, and anyone wishing to learn more about direct payments.

The newsletter will now be brought to you quarterly, as requested by you, the direct payment users. It will be posted out to you, but will also be available at the Direct Payment website

www.merton.gov.uk/living/care/directpayments.htm.

In this issue you'll find an interview with Welfare Benefits Co-ordinator Suzie Rollins, a feature with direct payment user Marcia Brown and an article on the future of Individual Budgets in Merton. You'll also find feedback from consultations, and much more.

Spotlight on Welfare Benefits!

We spoke to Merton Council's Welfare Benefits Co-ordinator Suzie Rollins about the work of her team and what inspires her about her work.

What is the name of the team you manage and what is their role?

Our team is the Welfare Benefits Service and they provide advice, information and guidance for Merton residents. The Welfare Benefits Service has created a Joint Visiting Team with the Local Pension Service called MOVIT, a service that provides assistance to Merton residents with identifying the benefits they are entitled to and applying for them.

How big is your team and how quickly does it usually take for your team to deal with customers?

We have 2 Senior Support Administrators and 2 Welfare Benefits Officers. There are also 6 members of staff at Mitcham's Local Pensions service.

We try to contact customers within 24 hours.

Continued

Continued...

Do you go out and visit people if they cannot get to the Civic Centre?

We will always go and visit people in their homes if they cannot get to the Civic Centre. We are trying to reach as many people as possible to help them as much as we can.

Are there any groups you feel are under represented, and would like to reach?

We see a lot of people from all walks of life, but the ones we feel are missing out are the Tamil and Chinese communities. We are trying to reach these groups through delivering leaflets and putting up posters at the places they tend to visit.

How can people find out what they are entitled to?

You can make an appointment for us to see you. Our contact details are on the website at www.merton.gov.uk, or you can call 020 8545 4178. Alternatively, you can ring the Benefits Helpline, Citizens Advice Bureau, or the Jobcentre.

How do you promote your work?

We have a publicity campaign, which includes leaflets, the website and various newsletters such as Raising the Roof and the resident magazine My Merton. We also advertise in Care Connect & The Link within the Civic Centre.

What is the best thing about your job?

I love to help people and the satisfaction of knowing that I am getting to people who would otherwise not get what they are entitled to. There are many benefits available and it seems like a minefield to anyone who doesn't know what they are.

What is the nicest thing a customer has said to you?

I think the nicest thing has been a comment from a young person aged 18 who suffers from psychotic episodes as a result of childhood abuse. She'll be on anti-psychotic medication for a very long time. I got her Income Support arranged, and her Disability Living Allowance claim was successfully awarded. She said she trusted me and she hasn't trusted anyone for a very long time.



If you would like to find out more about the types of welfare benefits available, and whether you are eligible, you can contact the team on:

020 8545 4178

Email WelfareBenefitsTeam@merton.gov.uk

Web www.merton.gov.uk

You said, we did

You may remember we started this feature in the last newsletter. Since then, we've had some more feedback from you, and have introduced more improvements as a result:

Website

You told us exactly what you wanted to see on our website, so we have been busy making improvements. You'll now be able to download and print all the appendices you need such as monitoring forms. You'll also find all our booklets and forms, and details of all the surveys we have carried out. You can also find details for the next Direct Payment Forum, and the minutes for all previous Forums.

Finance and Monitoring

39% of you told us you needed help with completing your monitoring forms, and would attend a surgery. We have therefore set up monthly finance surgeries, on the first Tuesday of every month. You can make an appointment at a time suitable for you and get help with any issues you may have with direct payment finance. To make an appointment, please call Krishna on 020 8545 3609. We will also produce a Finance Guide, which will contain all the information you need to deal with your direct payments.

Newsletter

You told us you would like to receive the newsletter quarterly, and made suggestions of what you would like to see featured in it. We will make sure the newsletter stays interesting and relevant to you, by including real story features from direct payment users. You also requested online, so all the newsletters will now be available to download from the website.

Complaints

26% of you told us you would not know how to make a complaint if you needed to. We have now produced a complaints booklet to give you all the information you need to make a complaint, comment or make a suggestion. If you would like a copy of this, please contact us on 020 8545 3632, or download it from our website www.merton.gov.uk/living/care/directpayments.htm.

If you would like to see the full analysis of the feedback you gave us through the annual newsletter questionnaire, this is also available on our website.

Complaints feedback

When we receive complaints, comments or suggestions, we try our best to act on these and use them to improve our service to you.

From April 2008, we have received one official complaint. This complaint demonstrated to us we perhaps had not made the finance and monitoring process as easy as it could be for you, so we have now taken steps to improve this.

Our Service to You

At the Direct Payment Team, we are committed to delivering the best service that we possibly can.

One way we do this is by sending customer satisfaction surveys to complete, so you can let us know what we are doing right and what you would like to see improved.

We asked how satisfied you are with each aspect of the service, and this is what you told us:

- 80% of you are very satisfied or satisfied with the visits you have received from the team
- 80% are satisfied or very satisfied with the ongoing support you have received from the team
- 70% are at least satisfied with the information you have received regarding direct payments
- 80% of you feel you have been treated fairly

For a full evaluation of the results of these surveys, visit the website:

www.merton.gov.uk/living/care/directpayments.htm.

The results of these surveys will be published quarterly.

Customer Charter

The Direct Payment Team has recently published a new Customer Charter. This charter sets out our targets and standards we aim to meet when dealing with our customers. The standards include things such as:

- Answering your phone calls within five rings
- Answering the phone politely with a standard greeting
- Making an appointment to visit you within two days of receiving notice you would like a visit

We will be feeding back our performance on how well we are meeting our standards on the website, and in future editions of the newsletter.

If you would like a copy of the Customer Charter, please contact 020 8545 3632, or download a copy from the website.

Personal Budgets in Merton

What is Self Directed Support?

A Government document called *Putting People First* (Dec 2007) set out a 'shared vision and commitment to the transformation of Adult Social Care'. By 2011, people who use social care services and their families will be able to know how much money they are entitled to and be able to choose their own services.

Currently services in Merton are generally good, and we are making improvements in our person centred approach and offering choices to our customers.

The recent report on the pilot individual budgets sites found that people receiving a personal budget were more likely to feel in control of their daily lives, compared with those receiving conventional social care support.

What's happening in Merton?

This year, we plan to launch the pilot by offering certain individuals who are eligible for social care services a personal budget. A project board has been set up, with six working groups to make sure this happens.

How can you get involved?

We will be holding a service user event in April, where you will be able to have a go at completing a self-assessment and design your own support plan. You will also be able to meet with local providers who will help you design a personalised service.

For more information, or if you would like to be part of the pilot project for personal budgets this year please contact Heather Begg (Project Lead) on 0208 545 4515, heather.begg@merton.gov.uk.



Your shout!

Each issue we will bring you an interview from a direct payment user.

This issue we interviewed Marcia Brown. Marcia has been receiving direct payments since 2006.



When Marcia was first assessed as having care needs, she was given a six hour care package from Merton Social services to support her at home. Marcia's care was started through care agencies set up by Social Services. As time went on, Marcia noticed that her health was unpredictable, some days she would be in good health where she did not require an agency carer, other days her condition was considerably worse.

Marcia noticed that when she was having a good health day, agency staff would make

her feel uncomfortable by looking at her as though she was able to cope by herself with the tasks which they were assigned to do.

When Marcia heard about direct payments, she asked her social worker for more details. The social worker made a referral to the Direct Payment Team and Marcia then received a home visit from the Direct Payment Support Visiting Officer, who explained that she could take control of her own care package. She could employ her own staff, and use the hours flexibly to suit her needs.

Since receiving direct payments, Marcia has employed her own personal assistant, who was recommended to her by a friend. She now feels more relaxed. If she is having a good day her personal assistant doesn't have to see her and Marcia is able to carry over any unused hours for a later stage.

In November 2008, Marcia was awarded the Chartered Institute of Management, NVQ Level 3 Introduction to Management. Marcia said it was a great achievement for her, and she would now like to work as a volunteer with disabled people in her community.

If you would like to feature in the next issue of 'Your Shout', contact Amy Bannister on 020 845 3610.

Direct Payments Open Day

The Direct Payment Open Day took place on the 30th January at The Hub in Mitcham. This event was held for direct payment users, personal assistants and any one interested in finding out more about direct payments.



The Direct Payment Team

A number of organisations that help to support the function of direct payments also attended. Richard McGuire from the Inland Revenue was present to assist anyone interested in finding out what it takes to become an employer or self-employed personal assistant. Sandra Swann from the Payroll Agency also attended to discuss with direct payment users any concerns they may have with payroll.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) was on board to answer any questions about benefits. Robin Murray-Neill from Care Services Improvement Partnership (CSIP) was also available to answer questions for direct payment users, and give advice on the implementation of Individual Budgets.

The Go Forum, a forum set up to support disabled people in Merton, made themselves available to give advice and share experiences with those considering direct payments.

The Mascot team, who specialise in home security for vulnerable people living in Merton, displayed their latest electronic technology that links the client directly to their call centre. They were also available to offer general home security advice.

Advocacy Partners, who provide help and support to people with learning and physical impairments, older people and people with mental health needs were available to offer help and guidance.



The open day at The Hub

The Direct Payment Team would like to thank everyone that came to the Direct Payment open day. We hope you found the event useful and enjoyed the day. If you would like any information on any of the stall holders that attended the open day please contact us on 020 8545 3632.

Direct Payment Forum

Direct Payment Forums are held at 1pm in the All Saints Day Centre, All Saints Road, South Wimbledon, every two months. This forum provides an opportunity to meet with other direct payment users, and discuss any issues you may have. The forum is open to everyone receiving direct payments, and those who would like more information.

Dates for the next forums:

Monday 6 April 2009

Monday 1 June 2009

Monday 3 August 2009

Monday 5 October 2009

Monday 7 December 2009

If you would like to attend, please contact us on 020 8545 3632.

The minutes of all previous forums are available at <http://www.merton.gov.uk/living/care/directpayments/directpaymentsforum.htm>. Minutes of future forums will now be posted on the website, rather than being posted out. If you would still like to have the minutes posted out to you, please contact us.



Questionnaire Winner!

Our last issue included a questionnaire that we asked you to complete and return to us. All the responses were entered in a prize draw.

The lucky winner was Mrs Emmanuel of Mitcham, who won a £40 Marks & Spencer voucher! Thank you for your input Mrs Emmanuel, and we hope you enjoy your vouchers!

Next edition....

Look out for the 3rd edition of the Direct Payments Newsletter in May. In the next issue, you'll find:

- Information on the volunteering activity carried out by the team
- Details on the PA Database
- Information on the Independent Living Fund
- Feedback on the issues you want us to cover
- An update on the team's application for Customer Service Excellence

Have you won an award, taken up an interesting hobby, or maybe you've found an inventive way of using your direct payments. Whatever it is – you could feature in the next 'Your shout'.

Contact Amy Bannister on 020 8545 3610.