

# **LINKS**

## **Local Information Network & Support**

### **Annual Report 2006**

The **LINKS** project was established in March 2004 and is now in its final year of funding. The overall aim of the project is to enable vulnerable people to live more independently and to participate more fully in community life. This is being done by linking individuals into existing facilities and services, and working with other statutory and voluntary agencies on the research and development of new services that meet the needs of vulnerable people. Practical assistance is also offered to help set up island based self-support groups and forums. The purpose of these is to provide a supported environment to enable vulnerable people to have a stronger voice and greater influence over where funding and other resources should be targeted, as well as providing social and learning opportunities.

Sheridan Waldon, the Project Co-ordinator, supported by Helen Ross, the ACVS Administrative Assistant, are working with others in the social and health care sector to look at how services could be improved. The Community Care Partnership Group meet on a regular basis to report on ongoing work, exchange information and discuss the future of the project.

#### **Information Resource**

This is an ongoing element of the project. We gather data from the voluntary and statutory sector service providers, including what they offer, times / dates, any other support arrangements including transport. ACVS has also updated its existing database of community and voluntary groups operating on the island, which in turn will be fed into the community database managed by CVS North Ayrshire.

#### **Befriending Scheme**

The pilot project for this has now been set up in Lamlash. The purpose of the scheme is to assist vulnerable people to take part in community and other social activities, and to provide a social contact for housebound people. All volunteers for the scheme are fully vetted, and we use the Disclosure Scotland process for carrying out police checks. The scheme

has been supported by North Ayrshire Council, who have provided a grant of £300 through their Section 10 fund, to cover the volunteers' expenses.

The policies and procedures we have put in place to protect our vulnerable service users are available for other groups to use as good practice models, and we have worked with 4 other local groups this year to help them put mechanisms in place for managing their volunteers safely and effectively.

## Art in Mind

This is the weekly art class for people with mental health difficulties that we run in partnership with Arran Visual Arts. We have successfully secured further funding to keep the group running, with Choose Life providing an additional £1,670 and a new grant of £6,500 from Ayrshire & Arran Health Board. A milestone was reached in November 2006, with the groups 100<sup>th</sup> session.



The group continues to progress, with increased confidence and socialisation reported amongst the participants. The standard of artwork continues to improve, with a number of the participants selling their work at exhibitions. One of our members has also received a commission to produce 40 large paintings for a hotel.



## Helping Local Self-Support Groups

LINKS has worked with local people to set up the following self-support groups, and continues to provide on-going support when required.

The **Arran Parents Support Group** was started in May 2004. It supports the parents and carers of children with a disability or special needs. The group meet monthly to share information, exchange ideas and offer friendship. The group has successfully bid for money from a number of

sources to fund their activities. It is a tribute to the hard work and enthusiasm of the group that they have become so successful and self-sufficient in such a short space of time.

Unfortunately, the **Jubblys** group for people with mental health difficulties folded earlier this year. The organisers were providing a weekly drop-in service but found that this was difficult to maintain in the long term.

**Arran Disability Forum.** The group have had a busy year. They continue to meet monthly, both socially and to discuss ideas.

In addition, following an award £1750 from North Ayrshire Council's Literacies Challenge Fund, the Disability Forum undertook a newsletter project. With the support of a tutor from AccessAbility the group did a 6 week course in all aspects of producing a newsletter and are now using the skills they learnt to produce a their own regular newsletter called '*Enabled!*'. The Disability Forum have also successfully applied for Section 10 funding to cover their travel and stationary costs.



The Arran Disability Forum has made good contacts with other groups, inviting the Three Towns Disability Forum over to Arran for the day. The plan had been to trial one of the new disability accessible paths that the Arran Access Trust have provided. Unfortunately, they were thwarted by the weather and instead enjoyed an entertaining talk from ranger Kate Sampson at the Rangers Centre. However, not to be put off, both disability forums have already set a date for the spring to do a walk.

Working with the Princess Royal Trust for Carers, we set up a **Carers Support Group** on Arran in 2005. Attendance at the group has unfortunately dropped off, but we hope to tackle some of these issues in the future.

## **The Future of *LINKS***

Funding for the current 3 year project finishes at the end of February 2007. Following a successful outline proposal to the Big Lottery Fund we have been given the go ahead to bid into the Life Transitions programme. The staff, with the assistance of ex-manager Jan Schofield, are currently working on the application to extend the *LINKS* project for a further 5 years. The bid is timetabled to be in by the first week in December.