

Talking

Avalon

Quarterly Newsletter For The Avalon Group
July 2010



In This Issue...

- 2 - A New Dawn
- 3 - Staff News
- 4 - grand Opening - The house of Avalon
- 5 - sound Bites
- 6 - The Butterfly Room News
- 7 - Avalink update
- 8 - spotlight On...
- 9 - spotlight On... contd.
- 10 - what's new
- 11 - martin's expedition to the polls
- 12 - Ode to Avalon





Angelena's message



A new dawn...

Summer is in full swing and the sun is shining on a new dawn for our organisation. Since I last wrote to you here in Talking Avalon, we have witnessed a new coalition government taking control of the country with a new budget and new cuts. Big Brother has become the Big Society, the pulse of public sector reform, while the Third Sector has become Civil Society, headed up by Minister for Civil Society, Nick Hurd.

26th July actually marks 15 years since our organisation was granted charitable status. That's 15 years of innovation and change, and now our evolution continues. Thus, Avalon becomes The Avalon Group, with a refreshing revamp of our brand. This is crucial to building a more 'corporate' identity that will help carry us forward through a more competitive market, and allow us to continue to grow in what will be testing times. Our name change came about because we now have so many diverse services that it made more sense to be known as The Avalon Group. In addition to our name change, we have developed a new look. Naturally, our seminal butterfly signature returns, which represents revitalisation, regeneration, and the profound effect we have upon people's lives; but some things are totally new, like our more advanced website with its integrated avenues for social networking.

Inside this new-look edition of Talking Avalon, we also discover more about The Innovations Hub, our home to social enterprise, work-related training and supported employment. Following in the footsteps of Michelangelo's Mates, we have a new vintage boutique in York called The House of Avalon, and a new partnership with East North East Homes Leeds (ENEHL) and Leeds City Council called The Garden Gang. We then have an update on a service called Betwixt and Between, which takes The Family Living Service into an all-new arena. This focuses on enabling independence, always a core consideration of The Avalon Group.

Our management team is certainly energised about future challenges and the world of opportunities up ahead. What's more, we are equally excited that you will enjoy this newsletter and are feeling as invigorated as our brand!

Angelena

Group Chief Executive Officer

Staff News

In Finance

Goodbye: It was with a small tear - and a lot of cake - that we said a fond farewell to our former Finance Director, Sue Creeley. Good luck Sue with all your plans for the future!

Welcome to Tony Hind who has taken over from Sue as Group Finance Director.



Tony Hind

"Hi everybody, my name is Tony Hind and I joined The Avalon Group in June as the new Finance Director.

"Although a South African by birth, I have lived in England for the past eight years with my wife Megan and children - Craig, Claire, Lucy and Ros - and yes, the media coverage generated by the football World Cup often made me feel very homesick.

"I am a Chartered Secretary by profession and my varied business career includes some years in the corporate banking sector, 14 years as the Finance Director of a packaging company and recently four years as the Managing Director of a small retail organisation. I have also enjoyed charitable sector experience, having recently spent 10 months on a short contract at the Royal British Legion owned nursing home Lister House in Ripon.

"I look forward to my role as the head of finance at The Avalon Group, which enters a new era in its lifecycle, facing the challenges of a global economic crisis, plus those arising from the financial austerity measures introduced by the new government to deal with this crisis.

"In my spare time I lead a very busy and active life which includes playing squash, running marathons and training in the gym, plus, when time permits, a bit of fly fishing, sailing yachts in the Med and scuba diving."

Other New Starters



Julia Lightfoot
Holiday Co-ordinator

Lisa Jeffery
Marketing & Communications Manager

Kimberley Jowett
TC Scarborough

Karen Slater
SL Manager Scarborough

Louise Cairns
Administrator Skipton

James McKenzie
The Garden Gang
Project Co-ordinator

Leavers

Mark Keech
Team Co-ordinator
Scarborough

Tracey Nelson
Administrator Skipton

Judi Hutchinson
FL Organiser Harrogate

Jenny Hough
Acting FL Organiser
Harrogate



Staff Changes

Lisa Fletcher and Sue Lloyd joined the Butterfly Room in June.

Paul Tait starts a 10 hour TC role in Teesside in July alongside his existing SC role.

Sam Leadbeater returns to provide some temporary TC cover at the Skipton office.

Karen Oddy increases her hours to replace Judi Hutchinson in Harrogate FL

The House of Avalon

In May our vintage clothing boutique, hair parlour and coffee shop, The House of Avalon, opened its doors and caused a huge stir in York. This unique retail business and social enterprise – a new addition to our Innovations Hub – turned heads with a red carpet welcome and live jazz to mark the launch, whilst members of The Avalon Group attended sporting vintage apparel.

STAR GUEST!

At midday crowds gathered on High Petergate for the arrival of a surprise special guest, Dita Von Teese look-alike and Britain's Got Talent 2009 contestant, Carrie Ann O'Dell, who mingled with customers and posed for the cameras.

The shop is located in a listed building on High Petergate – a popular historic thoroughfare between the ancient Bootham Bar and York Minster. Its interior is highly styled, with rails of vintage couture fashion and accessories, antique-style furniture and period decor. It was here that one customer proclaimed 'I'm in heaven!', as she sifted through the vintage handbag collection, and several others spent time trying on the clothes. Meanwhile, at the back of the shop, the quaint cafe area buzzed with excitement as shoppers, VIP guests, and members of the press flooded in to sample the homemade cupcakes and quality coffee.

A Quintessentially English Coffee Shop with a Dash of Vintage Couture

With impressive coverage ranging from The Daily Star to The Mail on Sunday and Guardian online, the shop's launch was a huge success.

Project Manager Violet Heslop commented: "We have had so much interest in The House of Avalon and feedback so far has been very positive. We are extremely passionate about this venture, which also provides opportunities for those who might not otherwise have had access to employment opportunities. We are very excited about what the future holds."

Thanks to external PR consultant Rachel Auty of Four Front Marketing for the excellent coverage. Rachel began working on the project back in December, from organising the launch to introducing a loyalty scheme for regular customers of the coffee shop.

'Going retro is not only on trend (think Kate Moss, Alex Chung and Fearne Cotton) but it's effectively recycling, so you'll be looking good and doing your bit for the environment,' Anita Brook, www.marieclaire.co.uk

"Where else in the UK can you get your hair styled, buy vintage gear and have a silver-service dining experience all under one roof?" asks *The Shop & the City*, produced by Visit York, suggesting a visit to the house of Avalon as a top insider tip, www.visit-york.org/shopandthecity

The House of Avalon can be found at
5 High Petergate, YO1 7EN.

Visit The House of Avalon online at:
www.thehouseofavalon.org.uk

Plus there are well-established Facebook and Twitter pages where you can keep up to date with events.

Talking Avalon – 'Quotes of Note' from The Avalon Group.

Sound bites from staff deliver news about some of our activities and achievements.

Teesside Football Day strikes again!

As Spain prepared to battle the Netherlands in the 2010 World Cup final, on Sunday 11th July, Power League football centre in Stockton-on-Tees became The Avalon Group's 'Soccer City'. It was here that professional coach Dean Brown, assisted by Theo Panayi, gave 17 Avalon customers a full hour of football training. This was followed by a medal presentation and buffet lunch at Avalon's office nearby.

"It's the third year running that we've organised this event," explained Teesside Team Coordinator Ian Davison. "Often the support we provide is on a one-to-one basis, so group events like this are great as customers can turn up and make new friends within Avalon. It's definitely a big win with all players, the coaches and the crowd."

Semi-professional player turned football coach, often working in association with Darlington FC, Dean told us: "This is the third time I've been involved in the day and it's always great to see people enjoying themselves. Plus, we have as much fun training as the players do playing."

"For us, it's a real buzz, helping people during a session and watching them progress and learn," added Theo.

Following the training session, Avalon customer Anne-Marie Pearson commented: "It's a good experience, and it felt great to score a goal when everyone cheered. It's also good to meet up with people and get to know them."

Teesside's football day will return in 2011. In the meantime, Dean told us to look out for more photographs, which were taken by another talented Avalon customer, Ryan Dack, in the upcoming Darlington FC programme!



Photo by Ryan Dack

A monumental achievement

Paul Tait, Support Coordinator for Teesside, talks about the outcome of his team's abseil adventure, which also turned out to be a fun fundraiser.

"It was with a mixture of adrenalin, ambition and angst that we abseiled off Middlesbrough Transporter Bridge, which towers above the River Tees," said Paul. "This is one of Teesside's main landmarks, and the only operational Transporter Bridge left in Britain. Thankfully the day was a huge success, with 22 Teesside support workers, office staff and Avalon supporters bravely completing the challenge, supported by a crowd of customers – overall raising between £1,500 and £2,000 for our Teesside Customer Activity Fund."



Monday, Thursday... Happy Days
A brand new day service type is emerging this summer – Monday, Thursday... Happy Days. We find out more details from The Supported Living Service Director, Jane Edmond.

"Our new pilot project – 'Monday, Thursday... Happy Days' – provides support to customers throughout the summer months in York," revealed Jane. "It's aimed at existing and external customers and has been brought to life by York's Supported Living Service team, including Christina Dunn, Debra Fisher, Bev Wilson and Andrea Merrick. Consequently, we've got plenty of activities planned for August through until September, from BBQs and day trips to arts and crafts adventures."



The Butterfly Room

The Butterfly Room News!

Well as you will already have seen, there is a new look Avalon. On the 1st of July we renamed ourselves The Avalon Group and with it came a new look. You will see we have a new-look Butterfly Room also. Not just a refreshed logo and branding but a new team.

Marketing

Well the new look says it all. We have been extremely busy with the launch of The House of Avalon and the new corporate branding of The Avalon Group. As well as this I am pleased to welcome Lisa Jeffery, new Marketing and Communications Manager. Read on to find out more about Lisa!

It is a very exciting time in The Butterfly Room. We comprise of three very different areas; Marketing, Learning & Development and Inclusion.

WEBWATCH

Well, need you ask? There can only be one recommendation this edition and that has to be the new-look website of The Avalon Group. Developed to reflect our contemporary brand the website will feature a rolling news feed and blog giving up-to-date news on our activities. It will be developing all the time but we would love to hear your feedback. Go to www.avalongroup.org.uk

Learning & Development

You will have now received your new-look 2010 year planner. The contemporary scrapbook theme is seen across the organisation and we had great fun creating the year planner. This handy booklet tells you about the courses and opportunities on offer from April 2010 - March 2011. Its handy size means you can pop it in your diary for when you need it.

As well as this you will see that we have a new approach to training this year, in that each service has had its own allocation of training days so that your team can have the training you want, when you want it.

Most important of all, we have two new Inclusive Learning and Development Officers in the shape of Lisa Fletcher and Sue Lloyd.

As it also folds out to become a year planner, you can plot your training and anything else for that matter for the coming year.

Read our very busy Spotlight on section to find out more about our new recruits!

City & Guilds

Celebrating Achievements!

Well Done to the following people who have all achieved their Learning Disability Induction Award.

Frank Fernie, Charlotte Byers, Richard Smith, Elaine Smith, Katherine Hagen, Paul Charlesworth, David Illing, Anna Cathenka, Ian Wight, Malcolm Stokes, Karen Pearson, Rebecca Nevison, Emma Tremayne, Lindsay Tonner, Leanne Mackay, Elizabeth Wiffen, Linda Giddings, Julia Barden, Joanna Blewitt, Simon Holden, Christine Rosecoe, Judith Best, Leah Devine, Andrea Merrick and Dawn Craggs.

Well Done!

Also Les Fornear has recently completed his Train the Trainer Course. Along with Sue Lloyd and Lisa Fletcher, the three are fully qualified to deliver First Aid training and Moving and Handling.

Inclusion

Read Sarah Kilby's report on the exciting customer roadshows that we supported Avalink, our strategic customer committee, to run.

The Butterfly Room

As Julie mentioned earlier, we are allocating training days to each service. We hope that the managers are getting used to this system and that it is working well for all.

For us in The Butterfly Room to be able to be as efficient as possible, the process for course booking forms stays the same as last year, ie they need to be with me two weeks before the training.

For Sue, Sarah and Lisa to offer the best course content they need time to plan their courses. This might mean advance notice of the delegate names; (some may have specific requirements) delegate numbers etc, so that they can deliver the most informative and up-to-date facts available. Your help to meet this closing date would be much appreciated.

As you can see from the Year Planner we have lots more helpful and, we like to think exciting training courses coming up in the future, but if you have any specific requirements, please do not hesitate to contact me and I will do my utmost to help you.

Janet Tweedy
The Butterfly Room Coordinator



Course Update



Avalink Update

Inclusive Learning and Development Officer Sarah Kilby reveals more about Avalink's all-new roadshow concept and how the strategic committee's work continues to evolve....

"As I am writing this Avalink are in the throws of their mission to meet as many of The Avalon Group's customers as is possible. The way they chose to do this was to run several events across all areas, in a fun and interactive way.

"The summer roadshows are proving a huge success and feedback so far has been amazing. The roadshow team has been running workshops on the day, to gauge customers' opinions and their views on key issues affecting their support. The outcomes of these workshops will directly shape and impact on the services we deliver.

"So I'd like to convey a huge thank-you to everyone who has supported and mucked in during the events. We could not have managed it without you!

"Meanwhile, away from the roadshows, the work continues. September will see the setting up of two new working groups headed by Avalink members. Their focus will be to review and change the way The Avalon Group's customers are involved in the training and recruitment of staff, providers and volunteers. What's more, the pictorial organisational chart requested by Avalink members has been delivered to all area offices. Plus, the third edition of The Avalon Express has been delivered to all customers and feedback remains positive.

"Avalink members continue to work in partnership with The Avalon Group, playing key roles on the development committee and policy and procedure group.



Scarborough Roadshow

The Butterfly Room

Read on to meet the newest members of The Butterfly Room Team



Spotlight On...



Lisa Fletcher

"I am really looking forward to this new challenge and meeting and training different people across The Avalon Group."

My name is Lisa Fletcher and I have worked for The Avalon Group for eight years in the Teesside area.

I am a mum to two children (11 and 24 years old) and have two grandchildren. We are a family of animal lovers and have two dogs, two guinea pigs, a hamster and a horse (which does not live in the back garden!). After a hard day's work I enjoy riding my horse around the countryside and walking my dogs. I like to compete at local shows and aspire to be a competent dressage rider.

I started my Avalon career as a Support Worker and then became Team Coordinator for the Floating Support Service in 2003.

After a long and happy time in my T.C role I have now embarked on a new role within The Butterfly Room as an Inclusive Learning and Development Officer. This has meant a change of location for me and I am now based at Harrogate, though I will be travelling to all other areas of The Avalon Group to deliver training.

My role will also include working on the Competency Framework, verifying LDQ, being involved in a customer interview group and assisting Sarah with the Avalink Roadshows (amongst many other things.) I am already amazed at the things that The Butterfly Room is involved in and I am really looking forward to this new challenge and meeting and training different people across The Avalon Group.

Lisa

The Butterfly Room

Hi Everyone,

I am really pleased to be introducing myself to you and am looking forward to being a part of the 'team'. My name is Sue and I am already familiar with many of you as I have been a Support Worker with Avalon on a part-time basis since 2004. However I have recently taken on a new role as an Inclusive Learning and Development Officer. This is an exciting role and one which, in the present political climate of austerity, needs to be more effective than ever.

I have been employed in Residential Care for the past six years but, previously, I have had a varied career, for most of which I had been self-employed. My experience ranges from banking, accountancy, payroll management, and P.A. and office management to being a proprietor of public houses and a cleaning company. Such were some of my experiences that I perhaps should have written situation comedies! My main interests are people, politics and philosophy...with rowing thrown in for good measure.

I am passionate around issues of 'Inclusion' and 'Independence' and I hope my enthusiasm will not only inspire and enthuse The Avalon Group's workforce but, more importantly, will be passed on to every one of our customers.



Sue Lloyd

"I am passionate around issues of inclusion and independence"

Hi all. I'm Lisa. A BSc (Hons) graduate with over 10 years' experience in marketing that ranges from a multinational electronics corporation to a small independent art collective. I am also a member of the National Union of Journalists and a budding photographer.

It was with a feeling of honour that I joined The Avalon Group at the end of May. My post is a totally new one – and one guaranteed to keep me more than busy in the months ahead. Indeed, as 'austerity' becomes a buzzword of the 'tenties' and the market place becomes ever more competitive/creative, so must all companies and organisations.

My arrival coincided with Avalon's revamp of the brand, so it's certainly an exciting time to find myself in such gracious company. Of course, I should also mention our new coalition government, which maintains that building the Big Society will involve the support and expansion of charities and social enterprises...

Anyway, suffice it to say, I look forward to shining a light of credibility on what can sometimes be known as a dark art (marketing) and helping to build upon the company's great work to date, with a similarly strong customer focus. After all, they are why we're all here!



Lisa Jeffery

Breakaway becomes The Freedom Company

The Avalon Group's supported travel division, Breakaway, is officially re-branding to become The Freedom Company. A secure one-stop-shop for all your holiday requirements that has roots stretching back some 10 years in the field of supported travel.

The Freedom Company Manager, Pete Gardner, told us: "Whether 24-hour one-to-one care is required or lower levels of support, The Freedom Company is about extending our expertise and experience to empower others - offering customers latitude in opportunity, choice, and a new voice in high quality travel, with a 360° approach. We definitely have plenty of fun activities in the pipeline; I am even planning to complete a sponsored skydive to raise awareness about the relaunch of our service!"

The diverse new service is divided into three main categories, according to the level of support that is needed: Freedom Holidays; Breakaway Holidays; and Tailor-made Holidays.

This year, countless good times have already been enjoyed and new friends made. However, there is always room for more, including the volunteers who support our customers on their holidays. So if you know anyone who shares our vision for liberty and empowerment, please get in touch. Pete and his team take care of everything from full training to CRB checks to organising a sample holiday, which ensures working with The Freedom Company is the right choice for you.



The Garden Gang is a new social enterprise from The Avalon Group working as a three-way partnership together with East North East Homes Leeds (ENEHL), an arm's length management organisation (ALMO), and Leeds City Council.

ENEHL is responsible for the maintenance of over 19,000 properties and The Garden Gang will supply a range of gardening services to disabled and older people living within these homes.

Anyone referred to work with this project will receive on-the-job training, leading to a recognised qualification. Some will then remain employed by The Avalon Group, and others will have gained invaluable skills that will act as a stepping-stone to future employment.

The venture is headed up by The Avalon Group's Innovations Director, Keith Wyatt, who commented: "Avalon has previously partnered with ENEHL on Michelangelo's Mates, which, in 2009, won the award for Most Effective Partnership in the National Federation of ALMOs Awards. Our combined vision for The Garden Gang is similarly ambitious, and advantageous. Most important, above all else, is our ongoing commitment to our customers, to providing real opportunities, paid jobs and training, and to leading innovation in social enterprise."

The Garden Gang has also forged alliances with disability employment advisers at Job Centre Plus and Mencap's Pathway scheme and everyone involved has been extremely excited to get this project off the ground (pardon the pun!).



It's said that nothing is as powerful as an idea whose time has come. Well, Betwixt and Between has arrived, taking The Avalon Group's Family Living Service into a brand new arena, with a firm focus on offering support to a diverse range of customers, continuing with the ethos of delivering a personalised service.

Lead by Senior Family Living Service Organiser/Project Manager, Jo Crook, a Registered General Nurse, who has worked with Avalon since 2001; Betwixt and Between endeavours to empower independence. The service targets people soon to be discharged from hospital that need additional support before they return home and is sometimes referred to as "intermediate support" or "re-ablement".

"Our core concept is about enabling independence through a high quality bespoke service offered by approved Family Living Providers," explains Jo. "We work closely with other professionals to develop each individual's plan of independence. Promoting earlier discharge from hospital and preventing re-admission is a key aim, as is offering the choice of an alternative service and reducing social exclusion."

Betwixt and Between can be tailored to anyone who has personal care, physical or mental health needs, or those with early onset dementia. Taking place within a Family Living Provider's own home, the service offers full accommodation and support as each customer moves towards regaining their independence.



Jo Crook



Martin

1	JONES Jane Mary Jones 10 Acacia Avenue Nowhere Town, N011 2CD	
2	SMITH Bob Smith 15 Hill View Nowhere Town, N011 2CD	
3	WILLIAMS James Anthony Williams 32 High Street Nowhere Town, N011 2CD	X

Martin's expedition to the polls

"Martin has been an Avalon customer for over three years and would gladly agree that his support has enabled him to access opportunities that he could never have imagined. Martin lives in a north Yorkshire village where he is very well known, liked and respected. He has an abiding passion for attending the local Auction mart where he associates with farmers, livestock dealers and office staff alike.

"However the Auction mart was where Martin's social life began and ended ...until Avalon came along. Although, quite wrongly, under the impression that he 'would not be wanted' at his local church I encouraged him to attend one Sunday morning; and there was no one more surprised than Martin, himself, at the welcome that he received. Hailed as a brilliant 'washer upper', Martin was delighted when he first discovered his name on the official church rota for Sunday morning duties. Through church, Martin also goes to loads of social gatherings such as barbecues, garden parties and day trips and as Martin's confidence grew, he joined his local bowling club and domino club.

"Martin often visits places near and far. I have been able to support him to widen his horizons and develop his skills and confidence in using public transport. Martin now travels on his own to a town that is 10 miles away from home, catching two buses to attend Self-Advocacy meetings - he really has come a long way.

"One of the most significant trips that Martin has made so far was on 6th May and one which was actually on his own doorstep; he went to his local polling station to register his vote for the very first time.

Seeing Martin develop in confidence and increase his social networks is a truly inspiring story. Such an outcome for Martin wholly illustrates The Avalon Group's philosophy and I am proud to have supported him along the way.

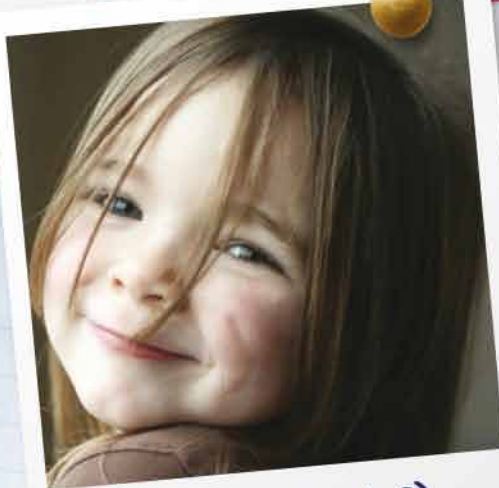
Sue Lloyd

Sarah Kilby, Inclusive Learning and Development Officer clearly takes her work home with her. Not only has daughter Shannon been helping out with the Avalon roadshows, but her other daughter Lauren has put pen to paper and written this inspirational poem that sums up Avalon to a tee!

Avalon

A is for achievements
V is for very good advices
A is for attention to customers
L is for love to everyone
O is for ~~off~~ open to all people
N is for no-one gets left out

by Lauren Kilby



Lauren Kilby (aged 9)

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Talking Avalon

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