

Talking Avalon

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FOR THE AVALON GROUP | JANUARY 2010



Support team enjoys a fantastic night

I nominated the Floating Support Team for the Great North Care Awards Team category as I thought they deserved some formal recognition for the fantastic work that they do.

To deliver this quality service is a real team effort, in which each support worker plays a part.

The Floating Support Team supports 70 people to maintain independence in their own homes in and around Stockton-on-Tees.

The support ranges from mail reading and completing forms, to assisting with shopping and odd jobs around the home. The mail reading service for customers with sensory loss is particularly valued as it requires a great deal of trust.

Floating Support Customers themselves have commented that they "would not get by without Avalon".

Part of the Great British Care Awards, the Great North Care Awards celebrate excellence across the

care sector, and are hosted by the Independent Care Group. The purpose of the awards is to promote best practice within the sector and pay tribute to those individuals who have demonstrated outstanding excellence within their field of work.

We were shortlisted into the final five out of hundreds of applications and, following an interview at York, we then went on to the awards ceremony on November 13 at the National Railway Museum.

We did not manage to win first prize but the fact that we made it so far was prize enough. We all enjoyed a fantastic night and came away with two trophies. I am very proud of the Floating Support Team and the service would not be the same without the dedication and commitment shown by everyone.

LISA FLETCHER

Teesside Team Co-ordinator

Pictured above l-r Julie Wilsher, Pat Lee, Liz Jenkins, Claire Evans, Janet Fishburn, Lisa Fletcher, Emma Henery and Paula Thomas.

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ANGELENA'S MESSAGE

A time to remember

It would be easy enough to imagine Christmas as a simple continuum of tradition dating back from the birth of Christ; however you would be mistaken...

The history of Christmas is a varied and interesting story – one that actually predates the birth of Christ.

- Early Europeans marked the year's longest night, the winter solstice, as the beginning of longer days and the rebirth of the sun; they feasted from late December through to January;
- German Pagans honored Woden, a frightening God, derived from the Norse God, Odin, who flew over settlements at night blessing some people and cursing others;
- The Norse peoples, in Scandinavia, celebrated Yuletide, with each family burning a giant log and feasting until it turned to ash.
- In Rome, some celebrated the festival of Saturnalia from December 17 to 24, in honour of Saturn the god of agriculture.
- By the fourth century, the Church decided that Christians needed a December holiday, and church leaders selected December 25 for the feast of Nativity, and Christmas gained ground over the next several hundred years to become a fully fledged holiday by the 19th century.

Early Christmas wasn't always peaceful: Christmas in the Middle Ages featured feasting, drinking, riotous behaviour and carolling for

money. Religious puritans disapproved of such excess in the name of Christ and considered the holiday blasphemous. Oliver Cromwell even went so far as to cancel Christmas when he sought control of England in 1645. It was not until the late 18th century and throughout the 19th century that Christmas began to take on the connotations it has today.

The tradition of giving Christmas presents has its roots in the Three Kings' offerings to the infant Jesus, Romans traded gifts during Saturnalia, and 13th century French nuns distributed presents to the poor on St Nicholas's Eve. Gifts are meant to remind people of the offerings to Jesus and of God's gifts to Christ and to humankind.

For Christians it is the time to renew one's faith, give generously and consider the past. But Christmas is also a celebration of family. People who are not religious and people of different religions are comfortable with celebrating, or simply enjoying the Christmas period.

No matter what your beliefs are, there is no doubt that coming together with families, people or friends at Christmas time is a special occasion and one that we are able to treasure. It is also a time to remember those people who are not with us or who are on their own. Therefore I hope you all had a peaceful and warm Christmas regardless of how you spent your time and wish you all well for this New Year.

ANGELENA FIXTER
Chief Executive Officer

No matter what your beliefs are, there is no doubt that coming together with families, people or friends at Christmas time is a special occasion

Introducing **gravity.**

Gravity Consulting has joined the Avalon team to help us with various aspects of our marketing communications in the first few months of 2010.

Gravity is based in Durham and has a track record of working successfully in PR and marketing for clients in the Third Sector, including Skills for Care (the employer-led authority on training standards and development

needs for social care staff in England), and Signature, the awards body for qualifications in deaf and deaf-blind communications.

The Gravity team, led by Chief Executive Stan Abbott, has edited and designed this issue of our newsletter and will soon be getting in touch with many of the Avalon team to build a network of contacts to ensure that we make the most of all opportunities to tell the

outside world about all the great things that we achieve.

Gravity will be sending out an e-newsletter about this shortly and will ask for everyone's help in spreading the word out to all the team. In the meantime, if you have good news about Avalon and our work, please send an email to: **marketing@avalongroup.org.uk**



ONE YEAR ON: BY KEITH WYATT, INNOVATIONS DIRECTOR

We celebrated the first anniversary of Michelangelo's Mates in September and what a rollercoaster of a ride it's been.

We had no idea how successful this would be, but we had high hopes and luckily got the right man for the job. Paul Deane came to us after lengthy interviews and has put his own special stamp on the service.

We now have four people employed on the scheme, and their skills have been recognised by the customer satisfaction comments we receive. Winning the National Award for Best Partnership Working with East North East Homes Leeds gave us a tremendous boost and got us national coverage throughout the National Federation of ALMOs (Arms Length Management Organisations).

Our first trainee, Robert, had been out of work for a number of years following a brain injury and was our first referral, working in partnership with Mencap's Pathway scheme.

Robert now supervises other trainees, and following the appointment of another worker to support Paul, we can have up to three separate teams working at any one time.

Paul uses empty properties as his classroom, giving new trainees 30 days on placement to assess them. Paul has been working closely with the Butterfly Room to write a training programme, which will give trainees a recognised qualification through the Open College Network.

I have recently been talking to other ALMOs about rolling this model out as Picasso's Pals, so watch this space!

Here is just a sample of comments from the 100 per cent positive customer satisfaction survey:

"A First Class job; all the operatives were very good and helpful. Thank you."

"Thank you so much for considering me. The lads have done a great job. At last there is someone who cares."

"Standard of work, appearance and attitude excellent in all respects."

"Thank you for a professional job. I must say you were prompt. A good job was done yet again,"

I could fill the page with these words of praise, but you get the idea!

HARROGATE NIGHT OUT

IT'S CHRISTMAS TIME
DID WE WANT A DO
THE UNANIMOUS CRY WAS
"IDO IDO IDO IDO IDO"

NOT MUCH TIME TO SORT IT WITH
ALL THE STRESS
I'LL HAVE TO E.MAIL OUT AN
"S.O.S"

HOW MUCH AND WHEN?
WE'D HAVE TO HURRY
WE'LL HAVE TO SAVE UP SOME
"MONEY MONEY MONEY"

IT WAS ALL ARRANGED
FOR DECEMBER 15
WE CAN BOOGIE ON DOWN LIKE A
"DANCING QUEEN"

WE START WITH A MEAL
OF PIZZA AND BEER
AND ONE ITALIAN LUIGI
SHOUTING
"MAMA MIA"

THE VENUE BOOKED,
IT'S OPEN TILL HALF PAST TWO
IT WAS A NEW NIGHT SPOT
CALLED THE
"WATERLOO"

A GREAT NIGHT WAS HAD
BY ONE AND ALL
IN FACT WE REALLY DID
HAVE A BALL
WITH COMPETITIONS WHERE
"THE WINNER TOOK IT ALL"

IT REALLY WAS A GREAT EVENT
BUT CAN YOU GUESS
JUST WHERE WE WENT?
BELIEVE IT OR NOT,
WE WERE ON OUR BEST BEHAVIOUR
OUR CHRISTMAS NIGHT OUT
WAS TO
ABBA MANIA

LORRAINE ASHTON
Harrogate Administrator



The Butterfly Room



NEWS

Well now Christmas is over, we are all working towards tying up the loose ends of 2009 and planning for 2010.

Crista Webber, **Marketing Coordinator, has gone on maternity leave and we are waiting for Sam Leadbeater to return from hers.**

Although I am sat typing this looking out at the snow, I am hopeful that spring will be with us soon.

LEARNING AT WORK



On May 20 it is National Learning at Work day, which is part of adult learners week. It aims to draw attention to the importance of workplace learning and skills.

Each year, thousands of organisations take part in LAW Day and stage fun and business-related learning activities to help their staff learn new skills that they can put into action at work.

At the last event, we had a variety of events running across Avalon, with people learning about recycling, fair trade food, how to make an authentic paella and learning to salsa.

Learning at Work Day has been run by the Campaign for Learning since 1999 as part of Adult Learners' Week. The Campaign for Learning believes that it is more important than ever that workplaces and individuals maintain and develop their skills levels in order to adapt

and thrive in the economic downturn.

This year's theme is Creating Connections. The theme highlights the links between different types of learning such as informal and formal learning, the benefits of bringing people together to learn from each other, the strength of partnerships and the role of learning in organisational success.

We want to have an even more innovative Learning at Work day this year and want your ideas.

If you have a skill that you would like to pass on to others, then let us know. It could be anything from juggling to a foreign language. It can be face to face or by email.

Send in your suggestions to juliecolley@avalongroup.org.uk

Dignity in Care – could you be a champion?

Could you be a Dignity in Care champion?

Can you stand up for the rights of others?

Are you committed to improving care services?

In November 2006 the Government, through the Department of Health, launched its Dignity in Care campaign. The campaign initially focused on care for the elderly but was soon extended to include mental health services.

The campaign aims to tackle stigmas and improve the safety, privacy and general levels of care which people receive. The campaign especially focuses on the following areas; communication, respect, privacy, autonomy, social inclusion, equality and diversity, pain control, eating and nutrition, personal hygiene, personal care, abuse, whistle-blowing and end of life care.

Anyone can be a Dignity in Care champion – health and social care managers and frontline staff, doctors, dieticians,

porters, care workers, MPs, councillors, members of local action groups and people from voluntary and advocacy organisations.

People who use care services, their relatives and carers – as well as members of the public – are becoming Dignity in Care Champions.

Dignity in Care Champions are willing to:

- stand up and challenge disrespectful behaviour rather than just tolerate it;
- act as good role models by

treating other people with respect, particularly those who are less able to stand up for themselves;

- speak up about Dignity in Care to improve the way that services are organised and delivered;
- influence and inform colleagues;
- listen to and understand the views and experiences of citizens.

For more information contact Gill Jackson on 01423 530053



INSPECTING OUR SERVICE

In November, City in Guilds carried out its remote sample of our assessment centre.

This means that it inspects a sample of work produced by candidates and checks that they have been administered, assessed and verified correctly and appropriately. Failure to do this means that we can be stopped from providing qualifications.

Thankfully, we had a positive outcome with no recommendations or requirements.

Thankyou to the following people whose work was included in the inspection, **Carolyn Jordan, Stephen Lilleyman, Ken Rose, Gillian Robinson and Sarah Kilby** (assessor).

WELL DONE!

Well done to the following people who have all achieved their Learning Disability Induction award: **Cara Nossitter, Sarah Weston, Nichola Holdsworth, Denise Humphreys, Tagarira Tariwana and Julia Wilkinson.**

Also congratulations to **Lorraine Kirkham and Gemma Garthwaite**, who have both achieved their NVQ 2 in Business Admin and finally, well done to Harrogate Support Worker **Michael Hesketh** for achieving his NVQ 2 in Health and Social Care.

As the Butterfly Room Coordinator, I am currently updating our records and database and need your help. If you have achieved an NVQ Care or Management Qualification prior to starting work with Avalon or with an external company, then please let us know. You can do this quite simply by passing a photocopy of your certificate to your line manager who will send it to us. Alternatively, you can send it directly to me at head office.

JANET TWEEDY

WEBWATCH

This edition we are watching social care TV. Go to www.scie.org.uk/socialcaretv

WHAT IS SOCIAL CARE TV?

Social Care TV is a new online channel for everyone involved in the social care sector, from managers to front-line staff, trainers to people who use care services.

As part of the Social Care Institute for Excellence's (SCIE) family of resources, Social Care TV brings to life the work and lives of people involved in all aspects of the social care sector, through a series of short films and links to multi-media and e-learning resources. This site offers access to video based training resources and general interest programmes, reflecting the issues, challenges and rewards in current social care practice.

The online nature of Social Care TV means you can choose what to watch when you want to watch it. You can search for programmes by subject area or visit the home page for new suggestions.

Social Care TV works with a wide range of partners: people who use services, employers, professional associations, trade unions, and learning providers, as well as government departments and national social care organisations, to deliver quality learning.

The online nature of Social Care TV means you can choose what to watch when you want to watch it.

The screenshot shows the Social Care TV website. At the top, it says "Social Care TV better knowledge for better practice" and "social care institute for excellence scie". There is a navigation menu with "HOME", "LATEST VIDEOS", "BROWSE BY TOPIC", "BROWSE BY KEYWORD", "ABOUT SCIE", and "FAQS". Below the menu, it states "An online channel for everyone involved in the social care sector." There is a row of video thumbnails with titles like "Emily's safety...", "Raymond's money...", "Nurture's move...", "Rapidly decid...", and "Personalisation...". A larger video player is shown with the title "Emily's safety" and a description: "The film introduces the principles of the Mental Capacity Act and explores the balancing of risks and freedoms for residents in care." To the right, there is a "Browse topics" section with a list of topics: "Personalisation", "Safeguarding Adults", "Dementia", "Safeguarding Children", "Nutrition", "Children Of Prisoners", "Seldom Heard Groups", and "Mental Capacity". At the bottom right, there is a "SIGN UP - FIRST 1000 GET FREE HEADPHONES" banner with a "Sign up here" link and a headphones icon.



HOW TO HELP AVOID DEMENTIA...

- **Eat a healthy balanced diet.**
- **Quit smoking- smoking hugely increases your risk of vascular dementia as it limits the amount of oxygen getting to the brain.**
- **Keep high blood pressure, diabetes and cholesterol under control as these can contribute to the causes of vascular dementia.**
- **Exercise regularly to keep your whole body fit and healthy and to keep the blood circulation nice and strong.**
- **Keep your brain active, do crosswords, puzzles, read books, anything to keep it active and keep all the connections within the brain strong and healthy!**
- **Only drink the recommended units of alcohol... Did you know that there is a specific form of dementia caused by alcohol?**

The National Dementia Strategy

The National Dementia Strategy was a landmark document, published in February 2009. It aims to transform the quality of dementia care, focussing on the three key areas of improving awareness, earlier diagnosis and intervention, and a higher quality of care for people with dementia.

As a result of the strategy many organisations have increased their training in dementia and reassessed the care they offer. Thousands of awareness courses and seminars have run and are running throughout the UK, all helping to raise awareness of dementia and allowing those who work within dementia care to share ideas, experience and expertise.

Several reports and pieces of research have also come about as a result of the strategy, highlighting some of the positives and negatives to be found within care for those with dementia. Living Well with Dementia is one of those key reports, along with others on specific areas of care within dementia, such as the over prescribing of anti-psychotic medications.

Within Avalon we have our own Ageing and Dementia course, which covers the physical, psychological and sociological aspects of ageing, and the practical implications of ageing, the different types of dementia, the signs, symptoms and effects of dementia and the ways in which people with dementia can be supported.

This course is continually being updated: the uptake so far has been very good and the feedback received from those who have attended has been extremely positive. This course is suitable for support workers, family living providers and managers. If you are interested in attending this course then please contact your line manager.

The Alzheimer's Society is running a memory campaign at the moment and it has lots of useful information on its website, www.alzheimers.org.uk.

Some of their tips are on this page.

GILL JACKSON

SOME TIPS IN SUPPORTING PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA...

- Be patient: people with dementia of any kind may exhibit some seemingly odd, distressing or annoying behaviour; they may repeat themselves or be forgetful and at times may do things that seem plain silly. It is important to remember that dementia is a disease affecting the brain and it is the disease that causes these behaviours, not the personality of the person affected by dementia.
- A healthy balanced diet, with regular meals and plenty of water is very important. People with dementia may struggle, or sometimes may forget, to attend to these basic needs.
- Regular trips to health professionals are important, including to the GP, optician, chiropodist and dentist. Pain or discomfort of any kind can be very distressing, especially to those with dementia and could potentially result in aggressive behaviour.
- Think about hazards in the home – clutter, trailing wires and the lighting – to avoid slips, trips and broken hips! Wearing well-fitting slippers and shoes is equally as important for this reason.
- Constipation can be very distressing, but is a common problem in the elderly as they might not be as physically active as they used to be. Keeping hydrated, having a balanced diet, and keeping as active as possible is very important to avoid constipation.



Well we finally got there. The first edition of the Avalon Express, a newsletter for customers by customers, went to print in late November and was circulated to all Avalon customers before Christmas. Editor Guy Balderson led the committee, which came together in the nick of time to choose and write articles for the first edition. Then, with the help of Crista Webber, two days before going on maternity leave, the newsletter was born!

It has taken nearly a year to come to fruition and we think it looks great.

I would like to say thank you to Guy, Sarah, Crista and all the editorial team and contributors for making it a success.

We are now waiting for feedback before we start on Edition 2. If you know a customer with a story to tell, then please send in your articles to sarahkilby@avalongroup.org.uk.

Avalink update: committee flourishes

Well it's hard to believe that it has been less than a year since the idea to form a strategic customer committee came into being and here we are already planning our third meeting for January 15.

At the last meeting, with introductions complete, terms of reference set and a buffet lunch provided, it was time to get down to business.

Avalink has made it clear from the start that to successfully fulfil its appointed role it must have a greater understanding of the range of services we provide. To kick start this process the committee invited along **Julie Colley**, Inclusive Learning and Development Director, and **Sarah Weston**, Family Living and Day Break Service Organiser, to talk to the group about the role they play in Avalon.

Sarah said: "I was really looking forward to meeting the committee and telling them about what I do. It was a fabulous meeting and I left feeling inspired to get more involved. I would recommend anyone to attend a meeting, if they are invited, as it is a great way to meet people and see some of the excellent work taking place."

After a very lively meeting, and a full agenda discussed and debated it was clear that we were leaving with more answers (and of course work to do) than when we had arrived three hours earlier. This is proving to be the beauty of Avalink, with every challenge or question it is set, participants are coming up with equally unique and challenging solutions.

Over the coming months they are spearheading the creation of training DVDs, featuring our customers, so that even those who are not

confident enough to stand in front of a room of people, can play a part in the learning and development of Avalon staff, providers and volunteers.

Also, a complete review of how customers are involved with the recruitment process will begin and they will play a primary role in the development of how Avalon is to be marketed as an organisation in the future

An Avalink road show will also be coming to an area near you in the summer months which, after some of the suggestions that came out of the meeting, promises to be an event not to be missed!

Avalink and its members continue to grow in confidence and direction. It is becoming abundantly clear to all those who have been involved that the move to create a strategic customer committee, to give customers a voice and the authority to scrutinise every aspect of our work, is not only working but flourishing. It is the members themselves who are responsible for this success and I for one am extremely proud to be their co-ordinator.

SARAH KILBY

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DAVID'S RIGHT ON SONG

David Gallagher, of Marton, Middlesbrough has recently added to his impressive list of trophies, all won in regional open music festivals. Watched by support worker **Bill Laird**, David triumphed at the 2009 Saltburn Music Festival, winning the Stage Musical Class with a typically energetic performance of Sit Down, You're Rockin' the Boat from the popular show, Guys and Dolls.

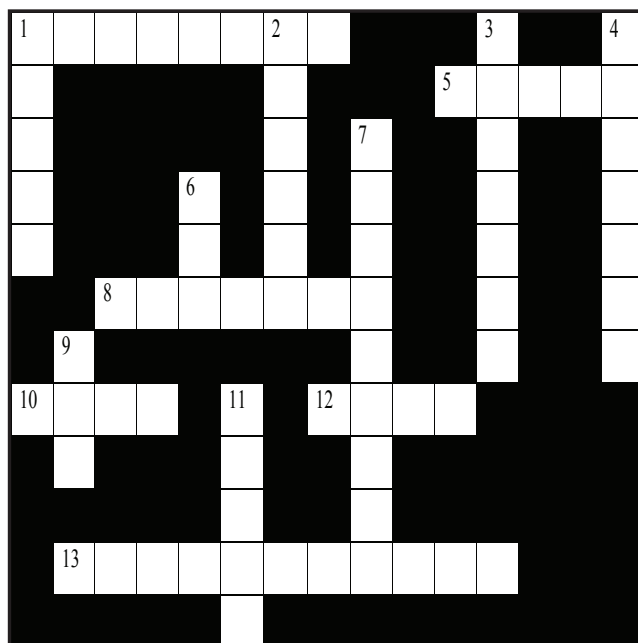
"I was absolutely thrilled and proud of David that day," said Bill. "There was some very stiff competition, but he really deserved to come out on top."

David, who lives at home with his parents, has enjoyed great success with his singing and, when he was younger, his modern and tap dancing. He has more than 30 trophies at home to prove it.

BILL LAIRD
Teesside Support Worker

CROSSWORD

Cumbria Service Organiser **LES FORNEAR** has sent this crossword for your amusement and to keep the brain cells ticking over!



Across

- The queen had it specially made and gets right behind. (8)
- A comical celebration (5)
- 8 and 1 down. Abide With Me and The Lord is My Shepherd to the funeral trade (sl) (4, 3, 5)
- Underpinnings famously wrinkled? That's Batty (4)
- Links a ceiling, a diamond cut and something you did this morning (4)
- The one place where even quantum physics collapses (11)

Down

- See 8 across
- This machine worked for us when it was cracked. (6)
- Fantasies inside, you think? This is outside (7)
- Jacuzzi for an artiodactyl mammal – utter rubbish! (7)
- Could be said to be fewer, minus the nineteenth, Mr Dawson (3)
- Canine not for the sea, but it'll go anywhere else (9)
- The dog that helped Poirot with his little grey cells (3)
- Everything's mothers fault really, so he says (5)



Hi, let me introduce myself:
I'm Pete

As you probably know by now Mary Scurr has retired after many great years with Breakaway. From the New Year I have officially taken over the management of Breakaway, after a hand-over period during which I worked with Mary who passed on her many pearls of wisdom!

So this is a brief introduction: my name is Pete Gardner. I live in York with my wife Erin. I also have a load of family and extended family there too, along with my cute pooch, a Springer Spaniel called Harvey. I love to go out with family and friends anywhere there's a party and also to see bands. I also have a few interests and if you want me to bore you to tears, ask me about motorbikes or surfing – you have been warned.

Previous to this role, I worked for nearly ten years in the charity sector, starting as a volunteer and most recently working as a senior manager for a charity and social enterprise in Lancashire. Throughout this time I have worked with many different organisations from youth and community programmes, to health clinics and children's homes in Africa.

HELLO PETE AND GOODBYE MARY

Breakaway's new Manager introduces himself and LINDA MIDDLETON reports on Mary Scurr's retirement party...

Alongside this, I also ran my own property development business for five years doing single unit residential developments – buying derelict or severely run down houses and making them into high specification, high quality homes, with things like plasma TVs sunk into walls. All great fun.

I'm really enjoying working at Avalon – I can't quite believe how friendly and nice everyone is. Given my previous roles, I wasn't quite prepared to be one of only three men in the office. On the plus side I haven't worked anywhere that smells so nice or has a greater abundance of snacks, I simply love it.

In December I had my first experience of holidays and found them great fun! The holidaymakers were all full of life and laughter and this was perfectly complemented by a brilliant team of volunteers, making the whole experience great. However during the holiday I realised I have a big challenge, I have to learn to dance! I can't wait for next year.

I am really excited to meet everybody, and work with the rest of Avalon to build on the hard work and great success that Mary has brought to Breakaway. We are also looking to meet with potential new holidaymakers to find out how Breakaway can provide a great service for them. This would be in addition to our current holidays, so please don't hesitate to contact me with any ideas.

I'd like to say a massive thank you to Mary, the team in the office, our volunteers and the holidaymakers for making Breakaway great, I feel privileged to be part of it.

I'm looking forward to the New Year and all it will bring, I hope to meet you along the way.

A special evening for a special lady

Mary's retirement party was to be held at Henshaws Art and Craft Centre in Knaresborough. We arrived at the venue to find a delightful room, suitably glam for the guest of honour with people ready to party.

There was a definite Christmas spirit, with the delicious arrangement of gifts and decorations, which had been lovingly made by Henshaws's students and had been strategically placed around the room. I immediately began to feel relaxed and ready to enjoy the night's entertainment.

The performance by members of Interact was lovely – a holiday spirit filled the room as the group, Mary included, gathered on the stage and sang their hearts out with songs about summer holidays and other foot tapping renditions. They sang with gusto and pride and everyone in the room joined in creating a lovely atmosphere.

All the guests looked fab in their holiday themed outfits and I bet Mary was very happy that so many of her friends, holidaymakers, volunteers and work colleagues had come

along to recognise and celebrate all her hard work since establishing Breakaway with Avalon.

We all enjoyed a dance, followed by a delicious supper prepared and served by Henshaws – the chocolate fudge cake was yummy and for those who wanted a healthy option there was plenty to select from, especially the giant plums which I found were too big and juicy even for me! Angelena gave a lovely speech and then presented Mary with a plaque from Avalon. Mary had lots of leaving cards and gifts to open and we all were given an opportunity to buy raffle tickets, the proceeds from which were to boost the Howard Catley fund.

I had a lovely evening and am sure that the sadness of Mary retiring from Breakaway was outweighed by the positive feeling that Breakaway would continue to grow and succeed well into the future, with its new project manager Peter Gardner. I would like to wish Mary all the very best for her retirement and thanks for a very special evening.



HARROGATE SLS NEWS

Rita Hindley, Avalon's new Harrogate manager, took up her new position on November 9. Rita has been really busy, going out and about meeting customers and staff. She is currently undertaking the task of completing the AQAA for the Harrogate Office – all this and she has only been here a month!

Rita and Carol would like to welcome **Taruwana, Sian, Julius** and **Jason** to the Harrogate team – all have completed their induction and are now supporting customers.

We held our Christmas Party at the Cairn Hotel on December 3. There was a pretty impressive turn out and everyone thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

The dance floor was never empty and our customers could really show us some fantastic moves to the music.

Joyce, Terry and the Support Team from Northallerton came with some of their customers – it was great they could make it and lovely to see them.

Three cheers for **Lorraine** for organising the party: it was fabulous!

CAROL GIBLIN

Harrogate Team Co-ordinator

Rita Hindley



Introducing: Martyn Miller

My name is Martyn and I started at Avalon on November 9, 2009.

Let me introduce myself – and the brand new position I have taken as Quality and Performance Manager.

This new post has been created out of the need for robust quality assurance systems to ensure Avalon provides the highest possible standard of service to our customers.

However, the role is not just about quality systems, and I will be working closely with Jane Edmond (SLS Director) to review and write policies and procedures. I will be providing help and support to managers and their teams to assist them achieve performance targets and regulatory standards and I will also be providing advice and support in Jane's absence.

So why do we need a Quality and Performance Manager? While Avalon provides high quality services and has a good reputation among customers, competitors and regulators, like other industries and services, we in the care sector must constantly strive to improve and create higher standards.

With the introduction of personal budgets, our customers will be able to choose their service provider. The regulatory standards set by Supporting People and the Care Quality Commission become increasingly stringent year on year and the present economic climate will result in Government funding becoming tighter.

For these reasons it is imperative that Avalon stay ahead of the game, building on its excellent record and ensuring we provide value for money services that are the preferred choice of customers. I see my role as crucial in helping to guide managers and their teams to achieve this.

Enough about the role. Now, about me: my work background has been predominantly in social housing management where I have enjoyed a variety of roles, with the majority having staff and team management responsibilities.

Working mainly in direct contact with customers, I had overall responsibility for customer care, customer involvement and compliments and complaints.

Social housing is regulated by the Audit Commission and I am used to operating in an inspection environment, where the quality of service, service standards and performance targets were all keenly monitored. I also had overall responsibility for integrating 15 sheltered housing schemes, together with warden and

care services, into the organisation and this provided me with an insight into the care sector.

I consider myself very fortunate to live in the Nidd Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and home is a smallholding eight miles west of Ripon.

I am fairly active for my age, which is a good job considering prior to coming to work each morning I help my wife to muck out her three horses, feed the hens and ducks, take the two dogs for a walk, check the sheep, feed the cats and get me ready!

Most weekends are spent at equestrian events, where I am head groom, transport manager and chief financier for my wife, who competes at dressage.

In January 2009 I was appointed as a Justice of the Peace and (in my spare time!) I administer justice as a Magistrate at Skipton Court.

I am looking forward to working with all at Avalon and helping to achieve our future goals and success.



Martyn: "Insight into care"

Welcome to the following personnel:

Rita Hindley, SL Service Manager in Harrogate

Pete Gardner, Breakaway Project Manager

Steve Fellows, FLSO Scarborough

Mel Dukta, TC Harrogate

Mark Keech, TC Scarborough

And two new posts:

Martyn Miller as SL Quality & Performance Manager and **Jackie Barnes** as ICT Manager

And goodbye to:

Val McLellan, TC Harrogate

Peter Haigh, FLSO Scarborough

Christina Murphy, TC Scarborough

Emma Henery, SCO Teesside

Sarah Holdstock, FLSO York

Cathryn Greenwood, TC Skipton

Mary Scurr, Breakaway Manager

Katheryn Rutter, Wagalon Co-ordinator

GOODBYE AND HELLO

We say Goodbye to **Peter Haigh** and **Sarah Holdstock** who left Avalon in the Autumn. We say Hello and Welcome to **Steve Fellows**, who has been appointed as full time Family Living Services Organiser in Scarborough.

Steve is moving to North Yorkshire from Derbyshire and was due to start just before Christmas. We know that the Scarborough Providers will welcome him to the role and area and we look forward to working with him.

In York, **Sarah Weston** will take up full-time hours and until any extra hours are advertised, we welcome back **Jenny Hough**, who is helping out. It will be good to see more of Sarah and we extend our grateful thanks to Jenny (again) for helping out.

PAULINE CLOSIER
FLS Director

Christmas shopping in Bruges

The community team at Scarborough arranged a visit to the Christmas markets of Bruges, in response to many requests from customers.

A group of 13 customers and six support workers made the trip to the historic Belgian city in early December and it was a real pleasure to share the experience with them.

The level of excitement and expectation among customers prior to departure was truly electrifying.

The ferry crossing to Zeebrugge was rather choppy, but we were all so busy eating, chatting and dancing the night away at the disco that we didn't notice the adverse weather conditions.

There were no complaints when we were packed like sardines in the cabins. We all enjoyed the experience of visiting Bruges and in particular the Christmas markets and many wonderful Belgian chocolate shops; we relaxed over a glass of mulled wine in the beautiful cobbled town square, adjacent to the outdoor ice rink.

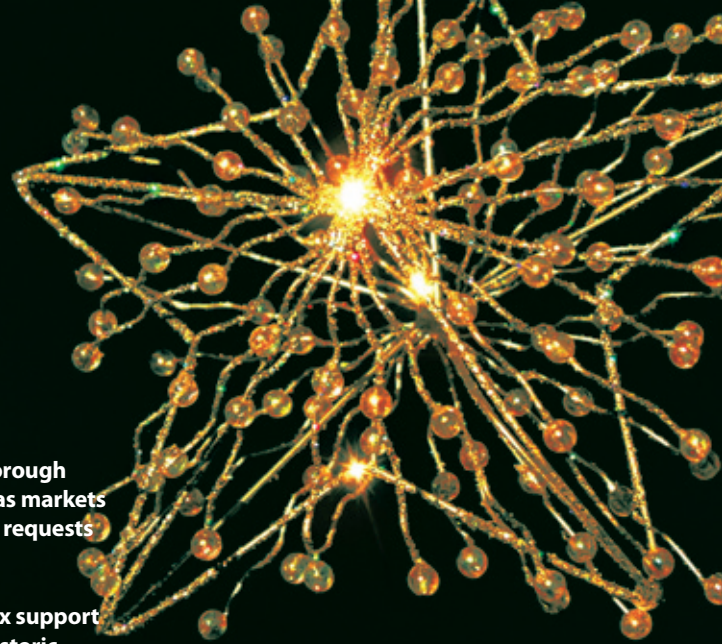
The need for risk assessments sadly ruled out "skating on ice" – especially after the mulled wine!

However, horse and carriage rides around the town were enjoyed by many – there was plenty of waving at the crowds from the carriages and pretence at being English royalty!

The visit was over in a flash and the coach driver remarked that he had enjoyed sharing some of the Avalon experience and would like to accompany us on future trips.

We all returned to Scarborough in one piece, having shared the experience of foreign travel. There was real comradeship among the group, who all shared responsibility for every individual's wellbeing throughout the three days.

The customers and support workers were all amazing and it was a joy to share the humour and togetherness of the group – a truly enriching experience.



Here are some of the customer comments about the trip and what they enjoyed best. Now they are all looking forward to the next adventure.

Sulina – *"Food, red wine and Status Quo"*

Sally – *"Enjoyed it very much – was well organised"*

Norma – *"Loved the town and shops"*

Crispin – *"Enjoyed it a lot – every bit of it"*

Ian – *"Liked it very much. Never been on a ship before – good!"*

Maureen – *"Liked all of it. Good on the ferry and walking – and the horse and carriage"*

Emma – *"Really enjoyed Bruges and socialising with everyone"*

Gary – *"The entertainment and Bruges were fantastic"*

Zara (Yo Yo) – *"Looking round shops – having a laugh – we all had nicknames - and enjoyed drinking hot wine"*

Liz – *"Shopping, piano bar and duty free"*

Gina – *"Climbing Santa, friendly staff on the ferry"*

Jo – *"My three girls are beautiful. Bought nice presents – rode in horse and carriage like Prince Philip"*

Andrea (Support Worker) – *"Pitta bread lunch and smashing santas"*

Jackie (Support Worker) – *"Enjoyed everyone having a nice time"*

ANGELA MCKEOWN
Team Coordinator Scarborough

CONTACTS

Talking Avalon
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Registered Charity
No: 1048236
Company No: 2976727

Registered Office:
3 Grove Park Court,
Harrogate HG1 4DP

Tel: 01423 530053
Fax: 01423 530388
www.avalongroup.org.uk

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I'm quite knowledgeable now, writes KEITH WYATT, as he reviews the Innovations Hub, 18 months on

You never stop learning...

My knowledge rivals the already huge bank of information that my pub quiz colleagues are constantly in awe of. I can retain a vast amount of potentially useless information to impress or bore, depending on your point of view.

When we researched the House of Avalon I became an expert on the price and vast colour range of wheelie bins one can buy. I learned about the recommended length and height of a Catwalk. I learned about health and safety requirements when organising a fashion show. I know that the Salvation Army is the biggest exporter of old clothes to developing countries.

I now know the recommended size and quantity of dog cages you can put inside a Citroen van, the gradient of the ramp needed to get a dog into the van, and the price of ventilators (this does depend upon whether they're powered or rely on the passage of air to make them spin)! Don't mock, it's an important consideration.

Although I didn't personally attend this, some of the Michelangelo's Mates staff went on a course on which you learn about household infestation and how to identify the protagonist by the droppings it leaves.

This doesn't work with woodworm because you can't actually see them! I know how long it takes two people to decorate an average sized

room and how much paint they will use. I know the cost of portable generators and what the recommended decibel rating is for one you can use indoors.

I've learned new expressions such as "tinning" a property and what a Shakespeare Block is.

When looking into setting up more painting and decorating projects under the title of Picasso's Pals, I was told I would have to get permission to use his name as the intellectual rights are held by the Picasso Foundation in Spain. This wasn't strictly true, the intellectual rights are in fact administered by the Design and Artist Copyright Society.

If you want to put an advertising banner across a public road, you have to find out how tall a double-decker bus is (for obvious reasons), and have to find someone who is a member of the International Platform Operators Federation to put it up or the Council won't let you do it.

Are you asleep yet?

If you want to get out of your comfort zone, being Innovations Director is a great way to start. I may not retain much of the information, but I now know where to look. I can't wait for the next pub quiz, just in case!

Now if any of you want to buy a Space Hopper...

UP AND COMING ON TEESSIDE

Because of an unfortunate double booking, we were unable to have our usual Christmas party last year. However, we hope by the time you have read this, a date and venue will be known for a disco in late February or early March.

After our successful day at Lightwater Valley at Halloween, and a firework display, we are working to organise other events throughout the year, such things as a trip to Flamingo Land and Ian Davison's annual Football Coaching Day.

We need to raise additional money to replenish our Teesside fund so it's important for us to organise fund-raising activities, such as bag packing, car boot sales, raffles and so on. Volunteers are most welcome and we are open to any brilliant new creative ideas you may have – please pass these on to your line manager.

We would like to take this opportunity to say a big Thankyou to our Northallerton office for kindly inviting Teesside to their Xmas party and Avaball.

A good time was had by all!

DEBRA WHISSON
Teesside TC