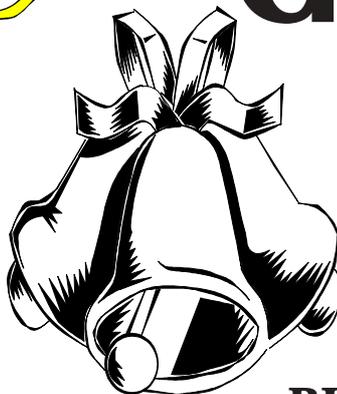


ICOD - *Link-Ability*

Inverclyde Council On Disability

Issue 4

January 1999



Seasons Greetings!

The Inverclyde Council on Disability would like to thank all the readers of Link-Ability for your support throughout 1998 and to wish you all the best of good fortune in 1999.

**BIP TO GO IN NEW
WELFARE REFORM PA-
PER**

MOTABILITY SKIDS

**EMPLOYMENT
THRESHOLD LOW-
ERED**

**LSA HOUSING IN
INVERCLYDE**

‘HAPPY NEW YEAR...’

STRANGE BUT TRUE

“Sifting through the vast amounts of information that comes into the Link-Ability office you come across an array of stories that either make you laugh, cry or in the main groan (for obvious reasons!!). Here are a selection to whet your appetite with and if you have any strange encounters of your own, why not let us know and we will do our best to let everybody else know.”

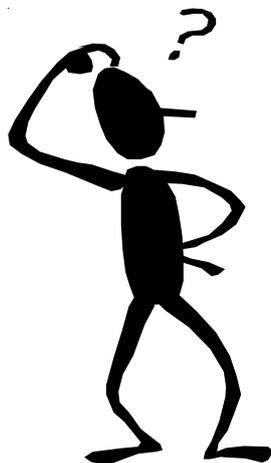
Readers using the M8 are asked to keep an eye on the new McDonalds at the Multiscreen Cinema at Uddingston. Recently a patrol car belonging to Strathclyde Police was spotted parked in one of the disabled driver parking bays. It was not displaying an orange badge, it wasn't an emergency, and we all know that the DDA does not apply to the operational side of the police.....

Good to see that the fine upstanding trade union movement is coming to terms with disability awareness. From the T&G Central Office no less, was issued a press release announcing that general secretary, Bill Morris, had taken delivery of a minibus for the “handicapped”. The minibus, a gift from Ford, was to be shipped to Jamaica to “transport handicapped children” – presumably by the tonne. Nice language T&G. Shows how up to date you are.

American Airlines was forced to grovel after it said that a girl with Cerebral Palsy, who is fed through a stomach tube, would have to eat in the toilet.

NatWest Bank was criticised after it refused to accept 24 different proofs of identity which disabled man offered when he wanted to open an account. It insisted that he had to produce two types of document which, as a man with severe diabetes, he says he has little use for – a driving licence and a passport.

Link-Ability was shocked to learn through Disability Now, when at the opening of East Anglian Disability Equipment Show which was held in Colchester recently, organiser Russell Howes started his speech with: “We all know there is nothing worse than being disabled, so everyone here will do their best to help you in every way.” It wasn't so much the patronising waffle that shocked; it was the reaction from the rest of the audience. Not a gasp or a murmur of protest. Link-Ability would like to know if they were in too much awe at being invited to such a prestigious event. Answers on a postcard please to the usual address.....



In a recent edition of Disability Scotland's bi-monthly magazine 'Disability News', there was printed the following snippet regarding a request for advice on building alterations. It must be said though that Link-Ability agrees wholeheartedly with Disability Scotland when they said that not all requests for advice come from people trying to improve premises for disabled people. Some are looking for ways to avoid compliance with Building

Standards or other local authority requirements – though why they bother to ask a disability organisation beats me. However, the enquiry in question really stretches the bounds of credibility.

In a nut shell, a pub owner had been told by his local council that, whilst refurbishing his premises, he should put in a lift to enable wheelchair users to get up the three steps between the lounge area and the bar. The publican felt that this was unnecessary as few people in wheelchairs used the premises. (I wonder why?)

What is even more incredible is that Disability Scotland were told that in order to obtain the building warrant a lift would be provided but, once the warrant was issued, it would be removed!

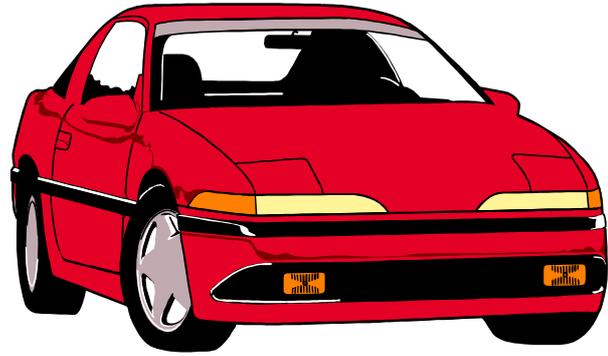
Link-Ability isn't sure which is stranger: that someone should go to all that extra expense and trouble to remove a newly installed lift, or that the Building Standards should allow it to happen.

AND FINALLY.....

The BBC was praised after an episode of Casualty included a story about a boy whose Hydrocephalus had been ignored by his grandfather – a retired doctor – who claimed he was just complaining of headaches to get off sports.

Association for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus publicity manager, Tony Britton said that this brilliant drama captured what the society have known years – that even doctors can fail to identify symptoms.

MOTABILITY SKIDS...



The UK's biggest motor manufacturers may withdraw from the Motability Contract Hire Scheme, and other companies are unhappy with plans to change it.

Ford, Peugeot, Rover and Volkswagen, has complained about changes in the operation of the scheme, which are being piloted over the next six months. Ford management has also confirmed that they may be starting a scheme of their own - in direct competition to Motability Finance Ltd.

Under the new arrangements, due to start in March of 1999, Motability Finance Ltd (MFL) the finance company behind the Motability scheme, is withdrawing maintenance from the three-year lease. This means that repairs and servicing can be done on a one off basis - not necessarily by the original dealer and at what is anticipated to be a lower cost.

It is also taking over the responsibility for setting the 'residual value' of Motability vehicles, i.e. the price they are likely to fetch after three years - and selling them on. Previously this was done by manufacturers.

A Motability spokeswoman said "Having improved customer service in many ways, we asked MFL to look at what else could be done to get a better deal for customers." She said that the

changes would save the customer money and that it would be good for dealers too.

Dealers would be able to buy back the better quality vehicles for resale, avoiding the more damaged ones. The more flexible lease could also take into account excess mileage.

This point has caused friction in the past between Motability, some dealers and customers.

But Ford is not convinced. Nick Thenistocleus, Ford's fleet marketing manager, said "We are seriously considering withdrawing from the Motability Scheme - there are a number of risks for us."

While Ford acknowledged that maintenance value-for-money could be improved, preferably from within the existing framework, their main concern is that MFL have no experience of setting residual value, and in three years' time it would be trying to dispose of 140,000 vehicles a year.

If the cars did not sell, many could end up at auction, which would result in the depression of the whole second-hand market.

Ford believe that in the long-term this will increase costs to the customer. They also feel that this plan would undermine competition between manufacturers,

leaving MFL with a monopolistic control over the Motability scheme.

Peugeot, Rover and Volkswagen agree and have expressed their concerns over monopolisation to Stephen Timms, the Disability Benefits Minister.

There are also fears amongst many of the country's Mobility Centres that the quality of maintenance will fall and that manufacturers could lose interest. The general consensus that customers are getting a fair deal could be undermined if the proposed changes are implemented.

Because the four dealers are still in discussion regarding the arrangements, it means that currently in Inverclyde you will be unable to obtain any Ford, Peugeot, Rover or Volkswagen vehicle through the Contract Hire Scheme unless delivery can be made before 28th February 1999. However, other motor manufacturers who offer vehicles on the Contract Hire Scheme will continue to do so as per usual. The purchasing of any Ford, Peugeot, Volkswagen or Rover vehicle through the Hire Purchase Scheme will also continue until further notice.

BIP TO GO - AND MAJOR SHAKE UP FOR INCAPACITY BENEFIT - IN NEW WELFARE REFORM PAPER

The Government has outlined plans for reforming disability benefits in “**A New Contract for Welfare: Support for Disabled People**”, consultation paper published recently. The proposals reveal a clever mix of changes with increased payments for minor groups interwoven with major cuts to fundamental disability benefits for future claimants. The thrust of the proposals concern limiting the numbers of people having access to a non-means tested income replacement benefit for disability or incapacity.

This will be achieved in part by altering the contribution conditions for receipt of Incapacity Benefit (IB) and abolishing Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA) for new claimants over the age of 20.

Future claimants who are disabled early in life will get an increased allocation from £52 per week to £78, thus removing the anomaly between SDA and IB. However, the bad news is that current SDA recipients aged 20 or over will have been deemed as having an opportunity to work or will qualify for Incapacity Benefit. They will continue to access Income Support and DLA but they will no longer receive SDA. These proposals are designed to save £10 million in the first year with savings of £100 million in the long run..

At the same time all new claimants will be interviewed by Personal Advisors to look at options for jobs, training, benefits and support. Initially these interviews will be piloted in four areas on a voluntary basis and then made compulsory by April 2000.

It is this compulsory aspect which raises concern to *Link-Ability*. It sends out a message to the public that disabled people need to be dragged kicking and screaming into work.

There is also so far, no reference on what happens for those not attending, nor about making the interviews accessible

to disabled people.

Link-Ability's main concern lies with the removal of the initial entitlement to benefit by tightening the contribution conditions.

This will exclude claimants moving from Job Seekers' Allowance onto IB – an estimated 170,000 in the long term; a move which could potentially encourage more people to move straight to IB without exploring work options. The abolition of Severe Disablement Allowance for new claimants over the age of 20 removes further support for those losing out as a result of the contribution changes.

As far as Incapacity Benefit is concerned it will now only be paid to those new claimants who have recently been in work, or who have paid National Insurance credits (NIC's) within the last two years.

The position of IB is further threatened by the 'limited' means-testing proposal to pensions or 'similar forms of income' of over £50 per week. In effect Incapacity Benefit recipients will be hit twice; once through means testing additional income and again through income tax.

These measures will increase the numbers of sick and disabled people on means-tested benefits and penalise those with limited additional income from private provision, something which the Government actively encourages. At the same time, many disabled people who are unable to qualify for means-tested income support due to a partner working or because of capital limit will actually be without an income replacement benefit.

The Reform Paper also discusses better provision of information for disabled people on employment and other options available through the new 'gateway to work' proposal.

However, while *Link-Ability* supports this, we believe that the assessments and

interviews must be carried out by properly trained and highly skilled staff to ensure a quality service.

We welcome the proposed increase to the therapeutic earnings limit to £58 and would urge the Government to improve the definition of therapeutic work and to increase awareness of it.

In the same paper the Government also announces an additional £12 million to the Access To Work budget bringing the total budget to £31 million. The increase is part of a £30 million package over three years aimed at helping disabled people into employment. The rest of the packages will go towards the retention of disabled people in work and includes £15 million which is intended to provide 1,500 new supported employment places and to test new ways of helping disabled people move into open employment.

The subsidy to employers of new and existing supported employment places has also increased to £4,760 per person per year.

An additional £3 million has been found to increase the job induction scheme increasing the subsidy from £45 - £75 per person.

Link-Ability welcomes the additional Access To Work funding but believes that the Government could go further by lifting the cost sharing element which can act as a disincentive to employers, particularly small businesses.

Extending Access To Work to voluntary work and part-time work under 16 hours a week would also be beneficial to disabled people.

Disability Living Allowance on the whole remains relatively unscathed.

The term 'life' awards will no longer be used, since it is viewed as a misleading term and there may be greater reliance on supporting evidence for applications and reviews.

However, entitlement conditions to DLA and Attendance Allowance (AA)

IN BRIEF

CARD TO REASSURE THE CARER

will in future be changed through Regulations as opposed to primary legislation.

The Government claims that this is done to speed change. The reality is that it will be far more difficult for peers and MP's to have a say on them.

The news that the Benefit Integrity Project is to be abolished is welcomed but *Link-Ability* would argue that this should take immediate effect rather than from next April.

The Project will be replaced with a "new fairer system" and an "active modern service" of regular checks. (Isn't that what they said about BIP?)

Link-Ability is not opposed to a fair review system, one which is carried out properly. However, further clarification is needed on what the Government envisages the new body would undertake and we would argue that there will need to remain a system of reasonable length of awards to ensure a level of security for disabled people.

Additionally the higher rate mobility component of DLA is also being extended to 3 and 4 year olds from 2001. (It is disappointing to note that it is only the higher rate which will be effected.) Other measures include:

- ◆ An additional £5.75 for a single adult or child and £8.30 for a couple in receipt of the highest rate care component and income support.
- ◆ Extra job related activities to be added to a renamed "All Work Test". This will also include information about people's capacity to help plan for a return to work.
- ◆ A new Disability Income Guarantee will be introduced for the poorest disabled people needing care both night and day. This will also be extended to children in that same circumstances.

Carers in Inverclyde can now carry a free emergency card provided by the Carers National Association (CNA).

The pocket sized card carries enough information so that Carers can rest assured that their caring responsibilities will be taken over by someone else should an emergency arise.

It is designed to include details of two emergency contacts who may be able to step in as Carers, and the telephone number of the local police.

Baroness Pitkeathley, CNA Chief Executive said the card "gives Carers a badge of office and a recognition of their services while being reassuring".

For further information contact Carers National Association, 160 Buchanan Street, Glasgow G1 2LL.

LARGE PRINT MUSIC

Music Teacher Leon Jess has recently introduced a unique range of large print music for visually impaired people to play their favourite piano tunes.

The music, which is not abridged in any way, is two and a half times the normal size of standard music and is printed across each two page spread, making it less fragmented and far easier to follow. The Large Print Music collection features mainly classical music as well as collections of favourite hymns and is available through mail order, or through selected retailers. It is also being distributed through the RNIB.

Mail order and other general enquiries should be directed to: Large Print Music (London), PO Box 47, Stanmore HA7 3BD. Individual Titles will cost £3.95 + p&p. Collections (featuring up to fifteen pieces of music) will cost just £5.95 + p&p.

LISTEN TO RELAX

The Pain Research Institute has produced two relaxation tapes to help people with long-term pain manage their pain and get on with living. The Pain Relaxation Kit has four types of exercise and advice on stress management and is available at a cost of £13.99 (p&p). For further information contact *Link-Ability* our address and telephone number are listed on the back page.

NEW MS DRUG DEPENDS ON THE STREET WHERE YOU LIVE

A new type of beta interferon, the drug used in the treatment of Multiple Sclerosis (MS), has been launched amid growing concerns over funding and availability of treatments.

In national clinical trials of Interferon beta-1a, or Rebif as it is more commonly called, it was found that the drug almost halved the number of people experiencing relapses. Those on Rebif who did experience symptoms were found to have less severe attacks, less often.

But a study carried out by the Association of Quality in Healthcare has revealed that 95 per cent of UK health authorities make no specific provisions for people with MS.

Over 60 per cent admitted to having no idea how many people with MS could benefit from beta interferon drugs.

Chief Executive of the MS Society, Peter Card, said; "People with MS are still facing a postcode lottery on new drug treatments. This situation is unfair. We want to see the Government enforce equitable guidelines and take firm actions against healthcare purchasers who fail to observe them."

LOCAL NEWS

LSA HOUSING RIGHTS



Researchers at Glasgow University have confirmed that Inverclyde is one of the worst served areas for housing advice in Scotland. So to help combat the problem, HomePoint (a Scottish Homes Initiative) has funded Legal Services Agency (LSA), to establish an expert legal advice and representation service in Inverclyde.

LSA is a national charitable law centre which provides advice on housing, social welfare and mental health law throughout Scotland.

The Project will focus on housing law including advice on such things as:

- Dampness
- Evictions
- Homelessness
- Rent Arrears
- Repairs
- Tenancy Problems

LSA's Project will seek to provide easy access to expert legal advice and representation. It will also act as a training resource for local organisations, with a view to improving advice provision generally. The Project will also provide Inverclyde residents with free access to LSA's team of specialist solicitors who operate throughout Scotland.

A free drop-in surgery will take place every Thursday afternoon from 1.30pm to 4.30pm at:

**Inverclyde Advice & Employment
Rights
18 Nicolson Street
Greenock**

Tel: 888415

Alternatively, those of you who would

prefer an appointment, which will generally be on Thursday mornings at Inverclyde Advice & Employment Rights Centre, can telephone LSA on 0845 600 8004 (local call rate).

You can also telephone the above number on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday mornings between 11.00am and 1.00pm for free telephone advice on housing law or to make use of the available services at their Glasgow Office. LSA's receptionist is available Mondays to Fridays 9.00am to 1.00pm and 2.00pm to 5.00pm.

INVERCLYDE COUNCIL PROVIDED FOR ITS CHILDREN

On 19 October 1998 Inverclyde Council unveiled the Inverclyde Children's Services Plan 1998-2001.

The Plan which was prepared in response to the Children's (Scotland) Act 1995; and was developed in partnership with Argyll & Clyde Health Board, the Reporter to the Children's Panel, voluntary organisations and other interested parties, sets out how the Council and its partners intend to provide services for children, families and young people in Inverclyde over the next three years.

The main intention of the Plan is to assist statutory and voluntary agencies involved in the provision of services to children. The Council also see it as an important means of consulting and informing the public, particularly those who may need to use these services.

The Plan outlines the range of services already provided and relates these to the needs of children, young people and their families. It seeks to consider ways in which services should be developed in order to meet identified targets and also identifies who should be responsible for any changes and developments.

A Council spokesperson said "This is the first time that local authorities have planned for children's services jointly with other agencies. It is an ideal opportunity to take stock of present children's services, to identify gaps and to state how we intend to address these over the next three years. However, it must be stressed that because we are new to this approach, it is not intended that the Plan be a detailed statement of services and developments, but rather the outline of a process which will take Children's Services in Inverclyde forward into the next century."

Ellen Finlayson, Project Co-ordinator of Barnardo's Inverclyde Family Support Team agrees. "It is anticipated that the Plan will foster greater degrees of partnership between those involved and those who wish to be involved, and that it will encourage more participative role in developing children's services within Inverclyde. The Plan is a very positive sign for the future."



EMPLOYMENT NEWS

Extension Of Threshold For Disabled People

Disability campaigners have attacked what they see as the watering down of promised extensions to anti-discrimination laws.

The Government has announced that from 1 December 1998 all firms employing 15 or more people will have to abide by the employment provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA).

Minister for Disabled People, Margaret Hodge, said that 45,000 more companies with some 750,000 employees will be brought into the scope of the Act as a result of this extension.

However many disability groups had been led to believe that the threshold would be reduced to companies with two employees.

Whilst this is an improvement on the current position, which exempts companies with less than 20 staff, *Link-Ability* believes that the Government could have gone further. Even with this extension of coverage, over 90% of companies are still outwith the Act's boundaries, justifying Lord Ashley's comments that the reduction was 'grossly inadequate'.

In many areas of Scotland small companies are the norm, so exempting those companies with less than 15 employees will have a particular impact on disabled people in rural areas. But there is another problem with exemptions. *Link-Ability* has always maintained that an exemption gives out the message that employing a disabled person is a problem – and this is wrong.

New Linking Rules

Changes introduced in October 1998 provide better protection to claimants of incapacity benefits who move off their benefit into work but need to reclaim their benefit at a later date.

Since 5 October certain claimants who have moved off benefit into work or training for work will be able to go back on to the same rate of benefit as before - if they reclaim within 52 weeks.

To be eligible you must have:

- been incapable of work for at least 28 weeks
- stopped receiving an incapacity related benefit
- started full time work or training for work within one week of your benefit stopping
- notified the Benefits Agency within one month that you have started work/training for work

The changes apply to those claiming Incapacity Benefit; Severe Disablement Allowance; Income Support; Housing Benefit; Council Tax Benefit and those on Income Based Job Seeker's Allowance whose partners receive an incapacity benefit or National Insurance credit.

Regulations also came into force from October removing the 16 hour limit on the amount of voluntary work claimants on Incapacity Benefit can do.

PARKLEA - BRANCHING OUT

Link-Ability

is produced on behalf of

**Inverclyde Council on Disability
Room 14 - Units 48-50
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Port Glasgow - PA14 5XS**

Tel/Fax: 01475 742 999

Parklea Association Branching Out Ltd have just produced the following price list for their flowers and bowls which can be purchased at the address below :

**Parklea Association Branching Out Ltd
Parklea Playing Fields
Greenock Road
Port Glasgow
PA14 6TR**

FLOWERS

CYCLAMEN	£ 1.00
PANSIES	£ 0.25
PRIMROSE	£ 0.40
SCENTED GERANIUMS	£ 1.00
SPIDER PLANTS	£ 0.70
KALANCHOE	£ 1.20
PRIMROSE BOWL	£ 3.00

BOWLS

SMALL	£ 4.50
MEDIUM	£ 8.00
LARGE	£15.00

Although the Inverclyde Council on Disability makes every effort to ensure that all details within this publication are correct, we can accept no liability for any errors or omissions which may be contained within these pages. If you spot any errors please let us know. Similarly if you would like to find out more about the Council on Disability, would like to join us as a member or would like to receive *Link-Ability* on a regular basis then please let us know. You can contact us at the above address/telephone number.

An answerphone is available outwith normal office hours.

For further information you can telephone or fax 01475 744516.

Please note that one weeks notice is required on each order.

TAXI NEWS

Due to unforeseen circumstances Matilda Care Transport (MCT), one of the taxi services for disabled travellers within Inverclyde, has had to withdraw the services of two of their taxi cabs. However, it is business as usual for the rest of their fleet - i.e. their accessible minibuses etc. It is anticipated that the cabs will remain unavailable for a short period only. In the meantime as an alternative you can call Inverclyde Specialist Taxis on 0410 436 629. We will of course let you know when MCT are back to full strength.