

OUR community

NEWS

Eddie's Quarterly Round-up

Firstly, welcome to our new-look, quarterly, newsletter, which aims to provide everyone with news and views across all of Optima Care's settings. And what a lot there is to say! It's fantastic to see the kind of community-based activities and individual achievements that are happening across the organisation, thanks to the dedication and support of a superb team of staff.

Finalists in three categories

I'd like to wish a huge congratulations to the Gate House team, who made it to the finals of the National Care Awards in no less than three categories: Care Team of the Year, Dignity & Respect Team of the Year and Resident Engagement. The team recently attended a gala awards dinner at the Hilton London Metropole, attended by over 750 people and hosted by Eamonn Holmes & Ruth Langsford of *This Morning* fame. Although they were pipped at the post on the evening, the achievement of actually making it to the finals when up against national (& international!) providers should not be underestimated. Here's to next year! Please turn to the back page of this newsletter to read some extracts from their awards submissions.



It's official!

Meanwhile, I'm delighted to officially welcome on board Richard McKenzie, who has now joined us as Chief Operating Officer. Previously CEO of care services provider CuroCare, Richard brings with him an immense amount of industry experience and has been providing consultancy services to the organisation for over a year.

On the road

Richard and I recently visited each home to provide an update to staff and the families of the people we support on what's happening across the organisation as a whole.



Eddie and Richard met with the family members of some of the young people we support at Gate House

On that note, with the focus clearly now on the South East we are keen to further develop and support distinct areas of specialism for individuals with complex needs in each of our settings, with an overall emphasis on local services for local people. Enabling community contact and independence is key. We're committed to putting in place the tools and support to allow all of the people we support to explore their own talents and possibilities and, ultimately, achieve their personal goals. The stories in this newsletter are testament to Optima Care's success in this regard already and I'd like to say a huge thank you to all of the staff involved.

We'll be repeating our visits to all homes every three months and look forward to taking questions and gathering feedback and ideas on everything that we are doing as an organisation. In the meantime, I'd like to wish everyone a very happy Christmas and I look forward to more 'bursting at the seams' newsletters over the coming months.

Eddie Coombes, CEO

Supported Living set for launch

FROM JANUARY, we will be adding to our range of specialist services for individuals with complex needs with the launch of Supported Living.

This is an ideal option for those who are 'stepping down' from residential care and who are making the transition to living independently in the community.

A number of our single services will be set aside for this purpose, effectively giving people the option

to live independently within their own home. Individuals will also have the option to share accommodation with others.

Our support team will agree a package of care with the individual, their family, or circle of support, and this may be anything from two hours a week to go shopping, to 24/7 care. We will also be able to monitor from a distance using assistive technology if required.

TMVA roll-out

WE ARE enhancing our current practice with the addition of Therapeutic Management of Violence and Aggression (TMVA), which will now form part of our staff training programme.

In a bid to provide exemplary support to individuals whose behavior challenges, we want to ensure that all our staff

receive the most up-to-date and comprehensive training. The addition of TMVA fits perfectly with our Person Centre Approach, which also includes effective communication, Person Centred thinking and pathways planning, The National Autistic Society's SPELL framework, plus Active Support.

Care Pathway designed to 'fill the gap'

DENISE BANKS, Clinical Services Manager at The Chilterns, has designed and implemented a personalised pathway to fill a gap that we identified in the Department of Health's (DoH's) programme with regards to the transition from secure to non-secure care – namely the fact that the non-secure aspect has been omitted from the programme design.

Our 4-step transitional pathway and ongoing programme of person-centred care is helping to better realise the DoH's goal of providing a seamless, recovery-focused and cost-effective service.

The pathway continues throughout admission to discharge and ultimately aims to assist our individuals with a 'moving on' plan to Supported Living or other independent accommodation.

The Chilterns' news: In brief

Support for Macmillan

Tom, one of the people we support at The Chilterns, organised a coffee morning in aid of Macmillan Cancer Support. Over £50 was raised through sales of tea, coffee, cakes and also a raffle.



Running success!

Individuals from The Chilterns were involved in many sporting events over the summer. Here are just a couple of our success stories: Activities Co-Ordinator Jake Reading, together with Support Worker Louis Marshall and two of the people we support Lee and John completed Man on the Run – a 5k charity run set up to raise awareness of male cancers.



In addition, one of our Chilterns' ladies Diane, along with various members of staff, took part in Race For Life – a women's only fundraising event in aid of Cancer Research UK. The team managed to raise around £300.



Thorpe Park Fun

We recently enjoyed a fantastic day out at Thorpe Park. Nothing more to say - the photo speaks for itself!



Community garden project receives award

Volunteers from The Chilterns recently attended a celebratory event for The Garden Gate project, which was awarded 'Community Garden of the Year' in the Kent Wildlife Trust's annual Wild About Gardens awards. Garden Gate also received a special award for 'Best Community Wildlife Project'.

The Garden Gate project is an independent charity, one of the main aims of which is "to contribute to the improvement of the quality of life of people experiencing social exclusion through mental ill health and / or learning disability, living in Thanet".

The project is well supported by volunteers from The Chilterns, who help out at the garden a couple of times a week and have done so for the past couple of years.

Individuals grow their own fruit, vegetables and flowers, which they can take away with them. Recycling is also a key theme at the garden – one notable project recently involved the use of wood from local beach huts damaged



earlier this year in the storms. The wood was used to create large containers for planting.

The Garden Gate also hosts regular community art projects, open days and summer music festivals. Paul Boyce, Garden Manager, said: "The Garden Gate provides an invaluable social network for people with mental ill health or learning disabilities – the kind of diverse peer group that could never be brought together in a setting such as care home or day centre. We have volunteers of all ages, with different skills and expertise. Gardening represents the common denominator for everyone.

"It also provides a valuable work experience opportunity. People generally want to work, yet through illness or disability they are unable to hold down a job. The Garden Gate affords everyone the opportunity to put their focus and energies to productive use."

www.thegardengateproject.co.uk



John & Nathan are regular volunteers at The Garden Gate

Friendships, food & fun: 'Come Dine with Me' style

Inspired by the infamous Channel 4 show Yvette Hanlon, Senior Support Worker at Seahaven, decided to bring together four of the people in our care across a number of settings to recreate the 'Come dine with me' experience.

Competing for the coveted title of ultimate dinner party host were Stephen from Seahaven, Ben from Spencer Road, Ian from Kingsdown Lodge and Karen from Bon-secours.

Hosted at Seahaven over a period of a month, everyone took it in turn to cook a 3-course meal.

Yvette said: "It was lovely to watch friendships



develop within the group. Everybody made such an effort with all the food and dressing-up each week."

All four competitors received a prize and a certificate at the end of the experience. The winning title went to Ben in recognition of his innovative dressing-up and healthy, home-grown food.

"Ben put a terrific effort into his dressing-up. Plus his starter of homemade cheese and tomato tart included tomatoes he had grown from his garden. It was delicious!" adds Yvette.



Calling all hosts & hostesses! Christmas Come Dine with Me

The last event was such a success, it has been decided to hold a special Christmas version on 10th December. In addition to Stephen, Ben, Ian and Karen, we'll be inviting five other individuals from different Optima Care settings to help broaden the friendship circle. Yvette will be contacting all the services to find out who would most enjoy the experience. In the meantime, if you have anyone in mind, please contact Yvette at Seahaven on 01304 364704.

Local ladies group organises an afternoon tea fundraiser for Seahaven staff & residents

The ladies of Deal Inner Wheel put on a perfectly British afternoon of strawberries and tea to help raise funds to support Seahaven's sensory room project.

An impressive total of £625 was raised by the event, which was attended by Home Manager Sharon Head, staff member Susan Bush and two of the people we support, Steven and Alan.

Sharon had previously attended one of the Inner Wheel's monthly meetings and provided a presentation on Seahaven and their plans for a sensory room.

"My presentation, which focused on improving understanding of learning disabilities, also examined the merits of a multi-sensory environment for people with learning

disabilities – in particular the benefit of having immediate access to such a quiet, calming and private place," adds Sharon.

The ladies of the Inner Wheel subsequently chose Seahaven as one of their fund raising projects and quickly got to work on organising a fantastic afternoon. The event also provided some invaluable networking opportunities as the members of the Inner Wheel do a lot of voluntary work for local services.

Sharon comments: "We all had a wonderful time and I'd like to say a huge thank you to Jennifer Van Lens, Treasurer at the Inner Wheel and main organiser of the event."

Seahaven has now set up an account on behalf of its service users and is continuing to fund raise.



Steven and Alan enjoyed being guests of honour at the Inner Wheel's strawberry tea fundraiser

Spenser Road News: In brief

Macmillan fundraiser

The team at Spenser Road organised a Macmillan coffee morning in memory of staff member Debbie Brownley who passed away this year after losing her fight against cancer. The team, together with the people we support at Spenser Road and their families raised over £160 for Macmillan cancer support. A big thank you to everyone who contributed and took part.

Spa & sensory sessions

A number of our individuals at Spenser Road enjoy weekly visits to the spa pool and sensory room at Winchimes – a children's home in Herne Bay, which hires out its facilities to us. Home Manager Kerry Crane comments: "The joy of using these facilities is evident in spades with lots of laughter, blowing bubbles and clapping in the spa pool and dancing to the music in the sensory room!"

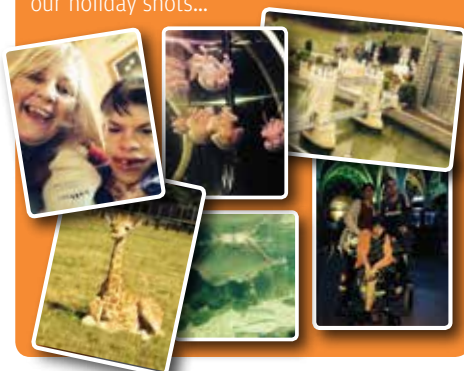


Horse riding hurdles overcome

Three of the people we support have passed their first stages of horse riding with one of our ladies Linda, who is blind, able to now guide her horse unaided with just the voice of the instructor for help. A small group from Spenser Road head to the Riding for the Disabled Centre at Cobbs Meadow, Canterbury, every week.

Summer fun at the caravan...

A number of our individuals and staff enjoyed lots of summer fun at the Optima Care caravan at St Margarets Bay. Some of the fun days out included visits to Woburn Abbey Safari Park, Brighton Sea Life Centre and LegoLand Windsor. Here is a selection of our holiday shots...



Eastry House fundraiser for Pilgrims Hospice

A Fun Day organised by the Eastry House team raised over £176 for the Pilgrims Hospice in Thanet.

The event was organised in memory of one of our individuals Marilyn Hope, who passed away earlier this year. Pilgrims Hospice provided invaluable help with regards to care and support to Marilyn and the Eastry House team during those final weeks.

The visit to Pilgrims Hospice provided one of the people we support Dawn with a good insight into their work. After handing over the funds raised, Dawn asked: "What is a hospice?". After being provided with a suitable response by Team Leader Caroline Cullen, Dawn replied: "I'm glad staff get help too."

The Fun Day, which was held at Eastry House, was attended by staff, all our individuals and

care managers. Staff, friends and relatives all donated raffle prizes and made produce for the cake stall.



Dawn and team leader Caroline Cullen hand over the funds raised to the Pilgrims Hospice in Thanet

Eastry House is highly regarded in its field for the provision of elder age care to individuals with intellectual disability and dementia, in addition to end of life care.

Eastry Villas' Doug rubs shoulders with the stars!

We're still waiting for star-struck Doug to come back down to earth after mixing with celebrities at the filming of a pilot TV show...

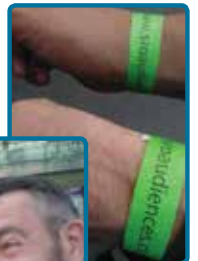
Doug and his keyworker Steve Vine travelled to Pinewood Studios in the summer to watch the filming of a pilot for a new Channel 4 comedy panel show.

They travelled by overland train and the London underground in order to reach their destination. Doug's favourite part of the day was seeing TV presenter Gabby Logan - of Match of the Day fame - in the flesh!

We are all now eagerly awaiting the arrival

of the show on TV so that we can try and spot Doug and Steve in the audience.

Doug loved seeing his favourite TV presenter Gabby Logan at Pinewood Studios



Michael's got talent!

Congratulations to Bon-secours (Seahaven) Michael on his 2nd place position in the Kent finals of a talent competition at St Margarets holiday park.

Michael gave an impressive singing performance and the audience responded with a very warm and positive reaction. Michael was rightly proud of his huge achievement and simply the fact that he had managed to overcome the pressure involved.

Staff members Steve Harris and Karen Honess were there to support Michael and thoroughly enjoyed watching him receive his award.



Michael was congratulated by a compere from the talent show. He received support and encouragement from staff member Karen

New cookery course at Eastry Day Centre is a sell-out success

Eastry Day Centre recently added a 6-week cookery course to its extensive list of courses and other activities for the people we support across all of Optima Care's settings. So popular is the course that a waiting list is already steadily growing.

The day centre is incredibly popular with many of Optima Care's individuals. It provides a relaxed, yet vibrant community where expert help and support is provided to encourage our people to explore their interests – whether honing existing talents or learning new skills.

Spenser Road's Ben recently completed a 6-week cookery course with staff member and cookery tutor Teresa Lane, and Dawn from Eastry House is about to complete her course.

They have both enjoyed choosing their own recipes, shopping for ingredients, cooking their dishes and then clearing up after themselves. Food hygiene also represented an important aspect of the course. All our budding chefs receive a book detailing their progress in photos and words and also a certificate to mark their achievements.



Ben using a temperature probe



Martin from Eastry House, mixing cake ingredients



Ashley from Gate measuring his ingredients

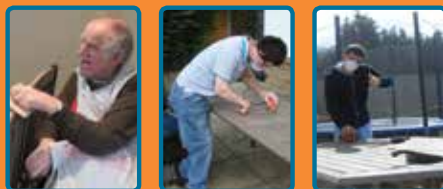


Dawn doing her washing up after cooking

Day Centre News: In brief

Woodcrafts

Theo from Heron House and Ben from Spenser Road have both recently completed a woodcraft course, including learning about the safety and protection needed to carry out this activity. They both helped to restore some old garden furniture to its natural beauty. Leslie from Eastry House is also enjoying these activities.



L-R: Leslie, Eastry House; Ben, Spenser Road Theo, Heron House

Sewing group

Our sewing enthusiasts chose their own materials and colour scheme to make the blinds for their day centre.



April, The Chilterns

We also made some bags inbetween these projects.

Techno-savvy

Day centre staff member Teresa is teaching a number of our individuals the basics of computing. Teresa comments: "I'm teaching everyone the way in which the mouse moves the cursor on the screen and then they can click it to watch things. I'm hoping to start a photography group in the new year and get others to take up the educational programs I have just set up on the PCs."



Eileen, Mill House



Mark, Mill House and Martin, Eastry House

Green fingers

We now have a number of keen gardeners. The photos below show Martin getting the compost. Ian helping lift the hanging basket



Linda, Spenser Road and Martin, Eastry House



Ian, Kingsdown Lodge/Seahaven and Eileen, Mill House

after planting it, Linda (who is blind) feeling the plant to put it into the hanging basket and Eileen watering the pots that we planted with Nikki Rhicards.

Woolcrafts

Last but by no means least, we have a woolcraft group. Fiona knitted her own blanket and Leslie designed, with help from staff, a weather map and then painstakingly created it all by himself.



Leslie, Eastry House

Heron House takes Halloween to a new level!

Heron House prides itself on the standard of its parties and the Halloween event was no exception. The people we support at Heron, together with staff, went to great lengths to design outfits, create suitably scary-looking treats (green and red themed food and drinks!) and to generally transform the setting into a residence befitting any ghostly or ghoulish character!



Service Centre News: In brief

Staff Consultative Committee: 1st steps

The newly formed Staff Consultative Committee (SCC) held its inaugural meeting at the end of October. Representatives from each of Optima Care's settings and the service centre were in attendance. The SCC was established with three main functions in mind: a forum for open communication and consultation between staff teams and the senior management team; to act as a forum for consultation and negotiation on terms and conditions; to consult on policy changes. The first meeting primarily focused upon the way in which the SCC will operate moving forward. Your staff representative will share with you the agenda items and issues raised after each monthly meeting. A chairperson will be elected by the staff representatives early in the new year.

Goodbye and good luck to Paula

Optima Care's HR Manager Paula Fitzgerald is leaving for pastures new at the start of December. Paula has been with the company for four years. Following the service centre move to Kent, her long commute from Surrey has understandably proven a tad too far. Chief Operations Officer Richard

commented: "I'm sure everyone across the organisation will join me in thanking Paula for all her hard work. We wish her a fond farewell and the very best wishes for the future."

Nicola Kerry, currently HR Administrator, will take on the role of HR Manager following Paula's departure. "Nikki has been with the company since February this year and has worked closely with Paula in the administration of HR processes. I'm delighted that she will be taking up the managerial reins from December," said Richard.

Website refresh

We've been busy adding news and refreshing content and imagery on the Optima Care website. Take a look when you get a moment. Please send all your news stories and photos to suzanne@optimacare.co.uk

Karen's 20th year!

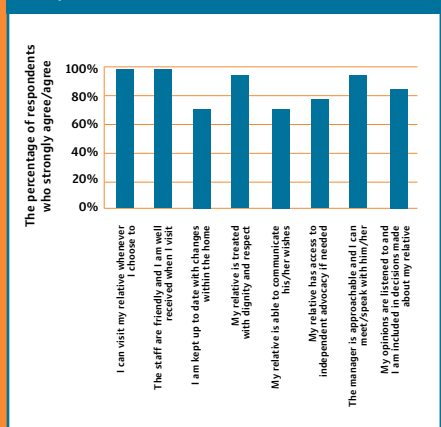
Congratulations to our Finance Administrator Karen Fox who is now enjoying her 20th year with Optima Care! By way of a small thank you, the service centre team had a whip-round and subsequently bought gift vouchers for Karen. These were presented to her by Eddie and the rest of the service centre team during an impromptu after work drink.

Results of Family Survey

We recently conducted an annual survey to ascertain how the organisation is meeting the needs of our families. This was carried out individually for each setting and we also asked respondents to review the organisation as a whole.

The overall results for Optima Care are shown in the chart below against the measures for one of our key objectives. For further information on the results, please contact the service centre.

Objective 1 : To ensure our services are safe and provide good outcomes by involving everyone who uses our services



Gate House is evolving into a complete communicating & therapeutic community

Ashley's big adventure

Ashley is deaf / blind and has a learning disability. With the support and encouragement of staff at Gate House his confidence has grown markedly over time to the point where he took a camping trip with Senior Support Worker Kate Smith over the summer – something he thought he would never do again due to the deterioration in his hearing and sight over the years.

The pair selected a campsite near Brighton then preparation began. Ashley was happy to help with loading and unloading the camping gear and pitching the tent. He enjoyed the scents of the campsite's sensory garden, the bonfire and al fresco cooking. He also relished the feeling of wet grass on his bare feet and the feeling of the (inevitable!) rain on his face.

Kate said: "It was a wonderful and, at times, quite moving adventure."

Ashley adds: "I learnt so much about being outside and doing new things. I didn't think I would ever go camping again in my life."



Ashley loved the sensory experience of camping, not to mention the independence

High days & holidays

Top of the wish list

Prompted by the wishes of some of the people we support at Gate House, the staff organised two separate trips to Alton Towers this summer. The first was just for John – who has been to Alton Towers before and absolutely loves it. He went there with Senior Support Worker Ellie and Support Worker Amy for a three-day holiday.



John enjoyed a holiday to remember at Alton Towers

The second trip was for four of our young individuals who had never been to Alton Towers before. According to the staff who organised the trip: "As we arrived at Alton Towers,



"It was like going on holiday with our friends and you could tell the people we support felt the same way"



Chloe, Bekki, Staci and Geoff looked on in amazement with happy faces. All four of them totally embraced the adventure and enjoyed a wonderful, life-changing experience."

Diggerland cures the blues

On realising that one of our individuals John was going through a particularly tough time and feeling quite down in the dumps, staff members Ellie and Kate decided it was time for some fun! They organised a surprise trip to Diggerland for John. Kate commented: "On arrival at Diggerland, John stopped and looked around for a few moments then let out the most enormous belly laugh!



John had great fun driving tractors, operating diggers and enjoying the crazy rides at Diggerland

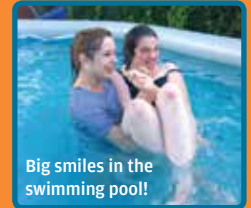


"This was a huge event for John as there were a lot of people around and he was unsure of the activity but, with support, he managed to take it all in his stride and thoroughly enjoyed himself. We returned home with a happy and relaxed John."

Gate House news: In brief

Splashes & smiles

The team at Gate House would like to extend a huge thank you to Barbara Plumptre, the mother of one of the young people we support, for the very generous donation of an outdoor swimming pool for everyone to use and enjoy in Gate House's garden during the summer months.



Big smiles in the swimming pool!

Masterchefs in the making

Thanks to positive reinforcement from all our staff at Gate House, the people we support are now cooking most of their own meals and really enjoying catering for themselves. This includes choosing what they want to eat and shopping for the items required.



Everyone at Gate is enjoying the independence of cooking their own food



Home books go live!

The Gate House team are now adding videos to Home Books, in addition to making them available via Talking Pens. The Home Books - basically a diary for each and every person we support - document individual activities and achievements in words, drawings and photos. They are provided to parents, allowing them to make their own notes and comments in response.

The independence specialists

The Gate House team recently made it to the finals of the National Care Awards in three categories: Care Team of the Year, Dignity & Respect Team of the Year and Resident Engagement.



Over the last 12 months, Gate House has evolved into a complete communicating and therapeutic community thanks to the care and dedication of a superb team. The staff have made exceptional bonds with the people they support, which is not only having a profound impact on them, but is also changing the lives of the individuals who live at Gate House. The examples included in the extracts shown on this page are testament to the way in which the team's strong person-centred approach is successfully enabling independence.

The team enjoyed a fantastic gala awards dinner at the Hilton London Metropole, attended by over 750 people and hosted by Eamonn Holmes & Ruth Langsford of *This Morning* fame. Eddie commented: "Although they were pipped at the post on the evening, the achievement of actually making it to the finals when up against national (& international!) providers should not be underestimated."



L-R: Ellie, Richard, Amy, Eddie, Denise, Tim, Cheryll, Sophie



Extracts from Gate House's awards submissions

- The parents of one client didn't allow her to attend review meetings due to difficult behaviour. Using objects of reference to help her communicate, the client told her key worker that she wanted to open her next review meeting. With the help of her key worker, she produced a dreams and aspirations board. She walked to the meeting on her own, using her rolvator. Her attendance was met with objections from her parents but these were calmly overcome by the key worker. The client showed her board and opened the meeting. Her parents were overwhelmed and apologetic after seeing that their daughter can cope, and not only cope but excel.
- Another client used objects of reference to state that she wanted to be able to go to the local shop. Her behavior had previously prevented this as she would grab at everything, scream and shout and become unmanageable around children. However, her key worker wanted to pursue her request. The trips were indeed very difficult to start with and involved a 3-person team. However, once her key worker discovered what she really wanted (2 tins of cat food!) her behavior became more manageable and she now goes to the shop every day with a smaller team. Her key worker discovered that the client enjoyed rubbing the tins of cat food together - it was something she did as a toddler and she found it calming. Care system guidelines would not generally encourage such items to be acquired (because the client doesn't have a cat) but it's our belief that such things should be permitted if it is not entirely unreasonable.
- We now take our clients swimming on a regular basis. One individual who didn't walk at all found that he could walk in the water (wearing a supportive jacket), which has encouraged him to now walk with a frame.
- One client used to love horse riding but was stopped from going by Riding for the Disabled due to weakness in her core strength. She was in a wheelchair at the time but her key worker, in conjunction with the occupational therapist, encouraged her to try a rolvator. This activity, together with swimming, is helping to strengthen her core. Her goal is to get back to horse riding.