

February 2009

Did you manage to join us at the Conference? Everyone agreed that the speakers this year were excellent, and gave very different takes on the issues around work and benefits. Ross Smith is pictured here telling everyone about his journey from education to employment. He has since featured on the BBC programme *On the Fiddle* - as a model of good practice, I hasten to add! More on the conference on page 2



NEW CENTRES AGREED

It is always good to welcome new members to the Karten Network. Recently, the Trustees have agreed :

- Schonfeld Square Foundation in London, a residential home for elderly people plus 2 hostels for people with mental health problems
- Stockport CP, providing day services for people with Cerebral Palsy
- Beacon Centre for the Blind in Wolverhampton, a new build centre providing residential and day services throughout the West Midlands
- An extension to the CTEC Centre at Share Community, London

Quite a few others are under discussion, so watch this space!

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VALUING PEOPLE, VALUING WORK? - the real choice for people with disabilities

Those of you who weren't able to join us at the conference missed some fantastic speakers, each giving a different slant on these issues. As well as informative workshops, and the wonderful hospitality we always receive from QAC. And, of course, many of you commented on how great it is just to have the opportunity to share information with each other.

Caroline Ellis from RADAR gave the strategic view—but full of passion and drive. She agreed with the government agenda of people wanting a job, but expanded that to say that what people really wanted was a LIFE. She gave us an overview of the proposed changes, and the RADAR response. We all felt inspired by Caroline, and very much appreciated her joining us at the conference.

Following Caroline was David Barker from the Percy Hedley Centre in Newcastle. He focussed on how his organisation is facing the challenges of preparing their clients for an independent life and experience of work. David described their Employability project, and the strategies they use to engage with local employers.

Our final speaker in the morning was Ross Smith, who gave a personal perspective on the challenges of benefits and work. This made the messages of the morning very real, and fired everyone with enthusiasm to continue their good work.



The photos (clockwise from the top) show the workshop run by Graham Jowett examining the future direction members of the Network, David Barker giving his presentation and Caroline Ellis giving the keynote address.

Once again we were supported by TechDis, with John Sewell updating us with new technology and applications in his workshop. Some of the suppliers to the Network joined us too, and exhibited some interesting equipment.

Look out for details of our next conference—it promises to be bigger and even better!

Extra curricular activity for Karten CTEC graduate and current student at the Centre for Deafblind Persons in Tel Aviv

In November a Karten CTEC graduate and current student, together with 3 members of our Social Recreational Club, went for a scenic bike ride - for the first time in their lives. They rode two-person (tandem) bicycles, each with a volunteer in the front seat, through the Ganei Yehoshua Park in Tel Aviv. This is no small feat, as our Karten CTEC serves individuals who are deaf-blind (or hearing and visually impaired). Our CTEC, which is now entering its second year, has had 41 students, of whom 17 have graduated to date. Most of the students have Usher Syndrome, which causes congenital deafness and progressive blindness. For them, biking is a real test of mutual cooperation, physical coordination and balance. Despite the difficulties, everyone enjoyed themselves thoroughly.

That in fact was one of the goals – to improve morale, provide emotional support and really help lift their spirits. As one participant said, it was “Quite simply an exceptional experience. I enjoyed myself so much that I forgot all about my problems and everyday worries and had the time of my life.” Another, a woman who is usually very negative and antagonistic and only once every few years says something positive came back happy and said that she really enjoyed herself. The staff was thrilled to hear such a positive statement from her.



This is not a one time activity but rather has become a regular part of the lives of the women that chose to continue with this activity. By chance, all of the current participants are women, although this activity is certainly open to men and women alike.

The Karten CTEC student, who is a young woman with small children, said:

“I count the hours and minutes until it’s time to go. Every Shabbat my children ride their bikes and I watch them and wish I could ride too.” Despite the practical difficulties involved in getting out – for example she needs to leave her children

with her mother and to organize everything – she works hard to do it. Her whole family understands the importance of this and helps her to get out each time.

This activity also provides an opportunity to be with individuals who have different disabilities and not with other deaf-blind individuals. From our perspective, as well, it enables us to finally offer something sporting, an outdoor, physical activity to complement the indoor studies at the Karten CTEC.

The activity is run in cooperation with Etgarim (Challenges - the Israel Outdoor Sports and Recreation Association for the Disabled). They provide the bicycles, dedicated counsellor, logistics and volunteers to ride in front. We hope to strengthen our connection with them in the future, including adding more participants. There is already a list of 12 such potential participants. One is a young man who is severely depressed. He has a rare disease which caused him to lose his sight and hearing and the hope is that this activity will improve his morale. For more information, contact Chaim Fuchs at chaim@cdb.org.il

The CTEC Centre at Pengwern, Mencap National College

Pengwern college has just completed work on a new access suite based on the college's main campus site. The suite consists of two rooms hosting a wide range of technology from interactive boards to touch screen and specialist sound systems. The aim of the rooms is to help users develop the skills needed to undertake office work and interact with the digital world around. The Centre has many accessibility features such as touch screens, alternative keyboards and mice. There has been a conscious decision to use freeware accessibility tools when possible, so that users can develop the skills needed to access the software in the centre and use the same skills on computer systems away from the centre.

Following advice from speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and teachers the Karten centre has access to Nintendo DS systems and a range of games. The titles were chosen to promote communication, movement and learning. Alongside the DS the college has also installed a Nintendo Wii and Wii Fit again to promote learning and develop communication, coordination and social skills. Both systems are extremely popular with learners and staff.

The suites have a number of relatively new technologies including a soundfield system and a fingerprint login system. The soundfield system is a microphone and speaker system fitted in the room but rather than amplify the system processes the sound in such a way that everyone in the room hears the speaker as if they were standing face to face. The system has been shown in peer reviewed research to promote better attention and improve concentration in classrooms. Staff experiences of the system back up this claim.



One of the concerns the college had around using computers is that learners often cannot remember login details. We have developed a fingerprint recognition system which allows user access the computers in the centre without the need to remember a username or password. Learners simply place their finger on the reader and are logged into their own personal learning space.

Following the centre's launch event the college is going into partnership with the local authority. The agreement will mean young people who are supported by social services will be able to access sessions in the Karten suites. The college has also been approached by neighbouring authorities who would like to take advantage of the facilities offered by the centre.

The staff and the users at Pengwern college would like to thank Ian Karten and the Ian Karten Charitable Trust for their generous donation. For more details contact Matt Lee at matthew.lee@mencap.org.uk.

ASPIRE Mini CTEC Centres make a real difference

I thought you might like to hear about two people, one who works in a centre and one who is a patient. For more information, contact Christine Robinson at Christine.robinson@aspire.org.uk

'I was injured 15 years ago and completed my rehab at the Spinal Centre in Salisbury. Before my injury I worked in customer support for a large electronics company. I have since re trained and now run a small company offering website design and PC support.

Amongst the many websites that I have designed and supported, it was very rewarding to design and now manage the 'Salisbury Spinal Centres' website www.spinalinjurycentre.org.uk



I have worked in the Aspire/ Karten Mini CTEC Centre at Salisbury since it was opened in 2006. I volunteer just one afternoon per week and on average see 3 / 4 patients each week.

I like talking to patients and I am keen to show them that there is life after a spinal cord injury.

While I was a patient, there was an old chap who would visit each week sharing a lardy cake with patients and talking to them. I remember the camaraderie and the difference this small action made to us all.

In volunteering for Aspire, I hope I am making a difference to the patients I teach in a very practical way.'

'After arriving at Southport Spinal Injuries Centre I was told that I would have to remain on bed rest for a few months. At this point I had only just arrived in the country (as I had lived abroad in Spain) and had very few possessions with me. Naturally, I was unhappy about being stuck in bed for months on end with nothing to do.

I was told by one of the Occupational Therapy staff that I could have access to a laptop computer with an internet connection whilst I was in bed. This was obviously great news as it meant that I could keep in touch with my family and friends via email and Facebook. It proved an absolute lifeline during the months that I had to spend in bed. I was told that the laptop had been donated to the Spinal Injuries Centre by Aspire and was given some information about the organisation. I would like to thank them personally as having the use of the computer made life far less tedious and much more bearable during my long time in bed and it was nice for my family and friends to be able to keep in touch with me when they couldn't get to visit.'



Visitors from a CTEC Centre in Israel

In January we were pleased to welcome colleagues from a CTEC Centre in Israel. Chaim Fuchs is the Director of the Centre for Deafblind Persons in Tel Aviv, and was accompanied by his wife Naomi. They wanted to visit some centres catering for clients with learning difficulties. It was only a flying visit—they arrived on a Sunday and left on the Wednesday—but managed to fit in visits to 3 CTEC Centres and to see Ian Karten. They visited Share Community in London, Treloar College in Alton, and Enham in Andover. So three very different organisations, delivering a service in different ways. Chaim and Naomi were full of new ideas when they left, so many thanks to Share Community, Treloar's and Enham for their hospitality.



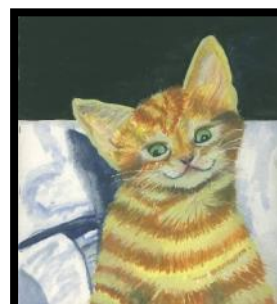
NETWORK COMPETITION

It seems only days ago that I was asking for entries for an electronic card competition, but already Christmas is a distant memory. We had some wonderful entries, with fantastic images—and some even included Christmas music! But the Trustees all loved the snowman drawn by Barbara Land, who started at the Karten Centre at Cromford in September last year to learn about the basics of computers. She says: 'So far I have completed part of my New CLAIT course. I found the centre an interesting place to learn, with friendly and inviting staff. My main hobby is drawing and I feel the use of a computer will allow me to present my pictures to friends in different ways.'



Barbara has severe arthritis in both hands and is learning to use computers to help her keep in touch with family abroad. Many thanks to Barbara for allowing us to use her lovely snowman.

Here is another example of Barbara's fine work.



Royal visit to the Seashell Trust—formerly Manchester School for the Deaf

In November the Countess of Wessex attended the official opening of the new extension to the Royal College Manchester, the Seashell Trust's college for students aged between 19 and 22 with complex communications difficulties. During her visit the Countess took time to pop into the Karten CTEC Centre based in the college, to see how students attending are able to use the latest technology to assist and develop their communication. The Countess was able to see students using the touch-screen monitors and interactive software.

Earlier in November, the oldest charity for deaf children in the North West changed its name from the Royal School for the Deaf and Communication Disorders to reflect changes to the services it now delivers. The new charity, the Seashell Trust, oversees



three newly named divisions – **Royal College Manchester, Royal School Manchester, and Adult Services.**

Hilary Ward, Principal and Chief Executive, says: “The increasingly complex nature of the young people’s disabilities, the fact that half the students are of college age combined with the opening in January 2009 of our first supported tenancy for adults meant that it was no longer appropriate for everything to come under the umbrella title of a ‘school’.

“Our emphasis now is very much on working ‘with’ our students rather than providing things ‘for’ them. It was felt that our name had become somewhat out of date.”

The beginnings of the organisation date back to 1823 when Manchester merchant Robert Phillips and fellow businessman William Bateman decided to set up the first provision for deaf children in Manchester, after failing to find a place at schools elsewhere for a local girl.

The CTEC Centre at the Royal College, Manchester has been in operation since October 2007. If you want more information on how the Centre operates, contact Dominic Tinner, dominic.tinner@seashelltrust.org.uk

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