

WESTERN ISLES COMMUNITY CARE FORUM**CARERS' NEWSLETTER**

ADVOCACY WESTERN ISLES aims to give a voice to people who have been disempowered by age, disability or ill-health.

The service is *free* and *confidential* and open to everyone who uses community care services, including older people, those with a physical or learning disability and those with a mental illness.

Advocacy is not new, it is just something which most of us take for granted. We come across advocacy every day where parents stand up for their children and children stick up for their friends. Someone who has to go to a difficult meeting or deal with a stressful situation might ask a friend to go along with them. This friend is being an advocate.

- ◆ Sometimes people don't have family, friends or anyone else to help.
- ◆ Sometimes they might not understand the information being given to them, or the options open to them.
- ◆ Sometimes people may have communication difficulties or lack the confidence to deal with a situation on their own.
- ◆ Many people find it difficult to speak up for themselves, especially people who are older, or have a disability or suffer from a mental illness.
- ◆ For whatever reason, they may need someone to help them stand up for themselves, or who can stand up for them.
- ◆ They may need support to challenge things they disagree with, to claim their rights, and to help ensure that they have control over decisions which will affect their lives.

This is when an advocate may be able to help.

Mrs Catherine Smith, Advocacy Co-ordinator said "We have now been in active operation since 21st July 2003, and have dealt with many clients in that time. At present there are 6 Volunteer Advocates who have been specially trained, and I anticipate a good response to my next recruitment drive. Anyone who is interested in becoming a Volunteer Advocate can contact me at the Advocacy Office." (27 Bayhead Street, Stornoway, HS1 2DU—open Monday to Friday 9am-4pm most weeks.) The opening times can vary depending on the co-ordinator's workload, therefore contact by telephoning 01851 701755 to make an appointment is advisable.

Developing a service across the Western Isles will take time and will need to be responsive to local circumstances and demand.

To establish organisations in response to identified need is one of the roles of the WICCF. It is therefore gratifying to see that Advocacy Western Isles, in the establishment of which the CCF was heavily involved, is now operating effectively. The article on this page explains why advocacy is necessary. If you need it, find out more about it and its potential benefit in your particular case.

Another article on page 3 refers to the WIPCIP, to which the CCF also contributed, and that project should be operational throughout the islands in Spring, 2004. The project will be the first of its kind in Scotland as was true of the recent Western Isles I-Reach Mental Health project which has been commended throughout the country. The Western Isles area is sometimes at the forefront of national developments but does not necessarily get the credit which it deserves.

In addition, CCF staff and Management Committee members have recently been involved in, for example, the WI Mental Health Partnership, the Learning Disabilities Partnership, Joint Futures Seminar, LHCC Patient & Public Involvement Project, Lewis Carer Support Group, Disabled Access Panels and the Allies in Change Conference. Shona Macleod of the Shared Care System for Alcohol & Drug Users and Christine Drake of Managed Clinical Health Project for Heart Disease & Stroke also consulted with the Forum. Further information on some of those will appear in the next Newsletter.

We wish all our readers a happy, healthy and prosperous 2004.

(WICCF JOINTLY FUNDED BY WIHB AND CNES)
CO-ORDINATOR: JOHN MACLEAN

**Old Hostel, Tarbert, Harris, HS3 3BG, Tel/Fax: 01859 50 2588
E-mail john.maclean2@virgin.net**

SOCIAL FUND PAYMENTS

The Social Fund exists to help people with expenses which are difficult to pay for out of regular income. Different rules exist for each payment, so it is advisable to contact your local CAB or Benefits Agency to seek advice on eligibility.

Community Care Grants

These can be paid to help people to continue living in their own homes rather than institutional or residential care, or to help them settle back into the community after being in care. A Community Care Grant can also be paid to families under exceptional pressure (e.g. as a result of a long-term illness). Applicants must be in receipt of Income Support or leaving some form of residential care within six weeks from the date of application and intend to claim Income Support on leaving. A Community care grant does not have to be repaid.

Budgeting Loans

These may be paid to help with essential household equipment or other items. The claimant must have been in receipt of Income Support for 26 weeks before consideration will be given. A Budgeting Loan must be repaid weekly out of benefit.

Crisis Loan

A crisis loan is a one-off payment to meet immediate expenses arising out of an emergency or disaster. It will have to be repaid.

Maternity Payment

This is a one-off payment to help with the cost of a new baby and is payable if in receipt of Income Support, Income-based Job Seekers' Allowance or Working Tax Credit. Maternity Payment from the Social Fund pays £300 for a baby born after 3rd December 2000.

Funeral Payment

If a person or their partner has to arrange a funeral, they may be eligible for help with costs if they are in receipt of Income Support, Income-based Job Seekers' Allowance, Working Tax Credit, Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit.

Cold Weather Payments

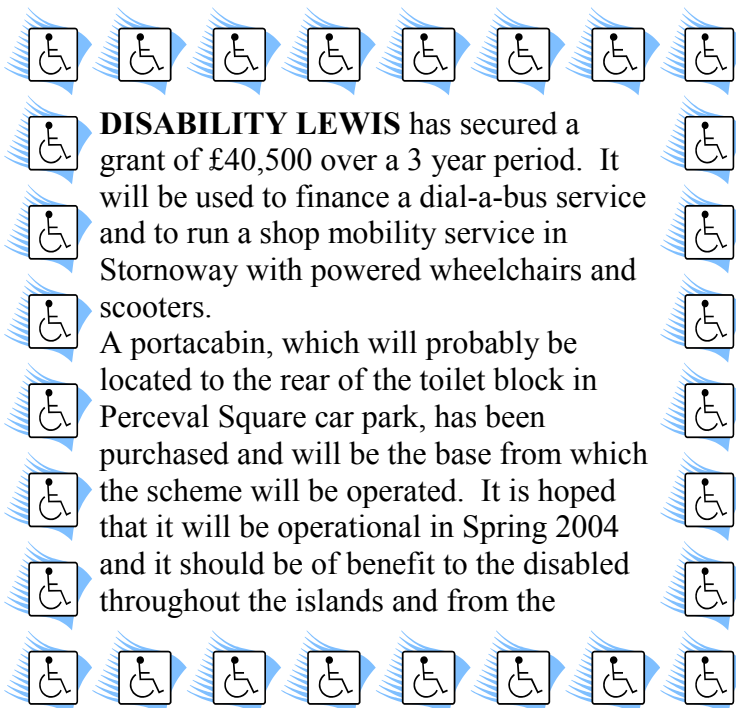
To be able to claim Cold Weather Payments you must be in receipt of Income Support or Income Based Job-Seekers' Allowance at least for one day in the week during which the period of cold weather payment is payable.

The Family Fund Trust (Scotland) is

funded by the Scottish Executive and provides practical and financial support to families who have children and young people, up to sixteen years of age, with severe disabilities or long-term illness. Applications can be made by families, or by professionals on their behalf, to the Trust headquarters in York. All eligible families are visited by a Family Fund Visitor who will look at all areas of stress and difficulty being experienced. The family's income forms part of the overall assessment.

Assistance can be given for almost anything that will improve the quality of life as long as it is not the responsibility of a statutory organisation. Such items can include laundry equipment, driving lessons, holidays, etc.

For enquiries and application forms, contact PO Box 50, York, YO1 9ZX, or tel: 01592 874541 or e-mail: jup@familyfund.org.uk



DISABILITY LEWIS has secured a grant of £40,500 over a 3 year period. It will be used to finance a dial-a-bus service and to run a shop mobility service in Stornoway with powered wheelchairs and scooters. A portacabin, which will probably be located to the rear of the toilet block in Perceval Square car park, has been purchased and will be the base from which the scheme will be operated. It is hoped that it will be operational in Spring 2004 and it should be of benefit to the disabled throughout the islands and from the

PRESS RELEASE contributed by Western Isles Patient & Carers Information Project (WIPCIP)

“Targeted at national and local priority groups, the Western Isles Patient & Carers Information Project is aimed at providing accurate and appropriate health information to NHS service users and their carers, addressing the requirements of the Patient and Public Involvement initiative.

Under the banner of WIPCIP, the touch-screen health information system ‘*Intouch with Health*’ has been purchased and is located in the Western Isles Hospital Tea Bar area providing access to patients, carers, visitors and staff alike.

‘*Intouch with Health*’ has been designed by practising doctors and pharmacists to provide all the latest health information available on medical conditions and surgical operations, as well as offering a comprehensive guide to NHS services from check-ups and screenings to home visits. It also provides important and useful tips on how to take care of yourself and prevent illness with all information available in English, Chinese, Gujarati, Bengali and Urdu Punjabi. (Information in Gaelic is also currently being discussed).

‘*Intouch with Health*’ is proving very popular and future plans are to provide the information service via the NHS Western Isles’ Intranet which will enable all NHS staff the opportunity to access information regardless of their grade, status or location.

In conjunction with the ‘*Intouch with Health*’ system, a number of trained volunteers will be available at a variety of agreed NHS and community-based sites throughout the Western Isles at set times, providing patients, carers and the general public assistance in accessing and searching for health information.

The project will be the first of its kind in Scotland and its official launch is expected in the New Year.

The WIPCIP Management Committee includes representatives from NHS Western Isles, Voluntary Action Lewis, Advocacy Western Isles and the Western Isles Community Care Forum.

WIPCIP is funded through various sources including a successful bid to Volunteer Development Scotland, the Western Isles NHS Board and the Western Isles Association for Mental Health.

For further information please contact Project Co-ordinator Marissa MacLennan, Health Promotion Dept., Health Centre, Springfield Road, Stornoway. Tel: (01851) 701545.”

Ambulance Helpline for Non-Emergency Patients

The Scottish Ambulance Service has a 24-hour telephone helpline for non-emergency patients in the Highlands and Western Isles. The number is designed for people using the patient transport service or an ambulance car to transport them to a hospital

appointment who may need information about when they will be picked up. The best time to get up-to-the minute information is to phone after 4pm (in particular between 4pm and 5pm) the day before your appointment. The telephone number is **01463 225863**.

DIRECTORY OF CARE SERVICES

The Forum recently updated its Directory which contains a variety of information on national organisations, local statutory and voluntary organisations, benefits and allowances and some further detailed information on services provided by the voluntary sector. This is a useful reference document which is used both by individuals and by organisations throughout the islands. It is available free of charge from the Community Care Forum (contact details on front cover).

People assume - wrongly – that they have to be incapacitated to be able to claim **DISABILITY LIVING ALLOWANCE**, but it is also payable to all those with **a long-term health problem**. DLA has two components (care and mobility) and is available to claimants under 65.

The care component is paid at three rates - £15.15, £38.30 and £57.20, depending on the level of care needed and the mobility component is paid at two rates - £15.15 and £39.35 a week.

If you think you may be eligible, contact your local Benefits Office or call the Benefit Enquiry Line (0800 882200) for a claim form. Help to complete the form is available from your local CAB-Lewis (705727); Harris (502431); Uist (01870 602421) or Barra 810608).

CALADH TRUST

The Caladh Trust runs a Road to Recovery (R2R) which regularly meets in Benbecula to minister to those in the community who are addicted to drugs or alcohol, and to offer support to their families.

The Trust hopes to develop the work by offering a Drop-In facility in its newly acquired building in Balivanich. It is also hoped that two care workers will be employed to complement the family support worker.

For further information, contact Rev I Macaskill, Myrtle Cottage, Lochboisdale, South Uist (01878 700247; e-mail: iain.macaskill@virgin.net) or Mrs Penny Macleod, Mission House, Grimsay, North Uist (01870 603340).

CHANGES TO HEALTH COUNCILS ROLE AND STRUCTURE

“The Scottish Executive Health Department issued the consultation paper ‘A New Public Involvement Structure for NHSScotland’ in March 2003. Health Councils accepted the need to modernise and reform against the current background of change in the NHS.

Background

Local Health Councils, of which there are 15 in Scotland, were set up more than 27 years ago and have changed and modernised since then. Health Councils represent the interests of patients in the NHS and promote patient and public involvement to ensure the voices of patients are heard, both locally and nationally.

Summary of Proposals

The existing 15 independent Health Councils are to be abolished. They will be replaced with a new organisation.

The new Scottish Health Council (SHC) will be part of NHS Quality Improvement Scotland (QIS), but will have “its own distinct identity”.

The SHC is to have 15 local offices (one for each NHS Board area). Each local office will appoint a Local Advisory Council, drawn from local people.

The main functions of the SHC will be:

assessment (monitoring NHS Boards’ work in public involvement);

development (spreading good practice in public involvement);

feedback (supporting individual patients to express their views).

These functions will replace all of the work currently done by existing Health Councils.

Ministerial recommendations

Malcolm Chisholm, Minister for Health and Community care, announced his recommendations on the future role of Health Councils on 26th September. The key points from his speech are given below:

The Scottish Health Council will be a distinct part of NHS Quality Improvement Scotland.

Health Councils will not be the ‘voice’ of patients. Patients must speak for themselves through various networks and organisations. Health Councils can, however, support patients to speak for themselves.

The SHC, nationally and locally, will monitor and quality assure the arrangements made by NHS Boards for patient and public involvement.

The SHC will not assist individuals with complaints. They will however have responsibility for monitoring and assessing the operation of the complaints process.

These recommendations will be subject to two readings in the Scottish Parliament. The NHS Reform Bill is then scheduled to receive Royal Assent in summer 2004.

Comments and Concerns

While we support a strong link with NHS QIS, we stress the importance of having an independent SHC. If the new SHC is to be part of NHS QIS, then we suggest safeguards are put in place. This will be essential to allow the SHC to pursue its own agenda in the best interests of patients.

We believe the proposed remit for the new organisation is too narrow and restrictive.

The consultation paper states that all existing Health Council functions will continue to be carried out, but not necessarily by the SHC. It still remains unclear which organisations will carry out these functions.

NHS Boards, **not** the Local Health Council, will be responsible for commissioning support and advice to patients and carers who have a complaint against the NHS. We are concerned that this model will cost more, take longer and cannot be truly independent.

The role of proposed Local Advisory Councils, and lay members, is unclear.

At present, Health Councils attend NHS Board committee meetings/working groups and LHCC meetings and voice the concerns and rights of patients. The new SHC must have the same rights of representation.

We believe it is important for an organisation that is promoting public involvement to make sure the patient’s voice is heard.”

Contributed by the LHCC Chief Officer, Donna Ross. To contact a local office, telephone 01851 03292 (Lewis & Haris) or 01870 602067 (Uist & Barra).