

Coast to Coast

**Residents Newsletter
Winter 2011**



Westcountry Housing
A member of Westward Housing Group

Large print version in 18 point Arial font

If you or someone you know, would like this issue of Coast to Coast on CD, audio tape, in large print, in Braille or in another language, please contact our Communications Team on 01803 217560 or info@westwardhousing.org.uk

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Barbara Shaw is new Westward Chief Executive

Barbara Shaw, currently managing director of Guinness Hermitage, will replace Julian Tuck, who retired after 27 years with the organisation.

Barbara plans to take on the role in January 2012. She has worked in the housing sector for the past ten years and prior to being a managing director has specialised in Care and Support Services as well as Communications.

Barbara said,

"This is a fantastic opportunity to lead an organisation that is committed to delivering great homes and services in what is becoming an increasingly challenging environment. I am positive that the key to the organisation's success will be working with the board, staff and stakeholders to get the best out of Westward for its customers."

Seasonal Holiday Closing:

We close at 5pm on 23rd December and re-open on 3rd January

Repairs Line - flexible open hours

Telephone between 8am and 6pm Monday to Friday to report any repairs on: 0300 100 1010. Or out of office hours on: 0800 378 410.

Emergency Repairs service will be available during the closedown between 23rd December and 5th January

Money Advice Team

You can pay your rent through our website **www.westcountryha.org.uk** using a debit card and the secure link will take you through to Allpay, or just pay direct at **www.allpay.net**. You can call Allpay or go online to make a payment, the number is 0844 557 8321.

How to contact us

Out of hours emergency repairs: 0800 378 410

Repairs (8am-6pm): **0300 100 1010**

Text repairs requests to us at **07990 536 536** – please give name, address, phone number and brief outline of work needed.

Neighbourhoods Team: **0300 100 1015**

Money Advice Team: **0300 100 1012**

Moving Home Team: **0300 100 1013**

Westcountry Housing:

Westcountry Housing, Freepost (EX2311), Torquay TQ1 3BR

If you wish to email us, send to info@westcountryha.org.uk and put the name of the person you are contacting in the subject line then we can ensure that if that member of staff is unavailable, your email will be forwarded to another member of staff who will be able to help you.

If you have hearing problems please use the RNID Typetalk service on **18001 0800 500 888** (textphone users) or **0800 7311 888** (hearing people).

www.westcountryha.org.uk

Coast to Coast welcomes contributions from all our readers (including children) - letters, articles, poems, photos, cartoons and pictures. The deadline for contributions for the Spring 2012 issue is 8th February 2012.

If you would like to receive an email with a hyperlink letting you know when Coast to Coast is available on the website each issue, please let us know at vanessa.gray@westwardhousing.org.uk

Please remember to always ask for and check the ID of anyone who comes to your home, including Westcountry Housing staff.

Volunteering

A number of residents have approached us as they would like to gain experience of working within an office environment. The reason for this is that they are hoping to gain skills and confidence prior to applying for jobs.

If this is something that interests you please let us know. You will receive support from Westcountry and from staff which could help you to change your world, your life or even your CV! Please note there are a limited number of places available.

For more information contact a member of the Resident Involvement Team on 01803 200300.

Call 101 For Police

You can now contact Devon and Cornwall Police by dialing 101. They have introduced this simple number to make it easier for you to contact your local police and report non-urgent crime.

You can call 101 to:

- report a non-urgent crime
- contact local officers
- get crime prevention advice
- make us aware of policing issues in your local area
- make an appointment with a police officer
- talk to us about other non-emergency matters

Calls to 101 from landline telephones and mobiles cost 15 pence per call, no matter what time of day you call or how long your call lasts. People who are deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired can Textphone **18001 101**.

101 is just one of the many ways that the public can contact Devon and Cornwall Police including email at:

101@devonandcornwall.pnn.police.uk or in person at Have Your Say meetings, John McGovern's Library Bus surgeries, at various community engagement events and by personal appointments.

For more information on your team check out the neighbourhood website via **www.devon-cornwall.police.uk** and entering your postcode.

Remember...

The 101 number does not replace 999, which should be used for all emergencies especially when:

- a crime is happening
- offenders are nearby
- someone is injured
- someone's life is being threatened
- immediate action is required

Making the business work better

We have been looking at the structure of the board of management for Westward Housing Group, with a group of customers, board members and staff from Westcountry, Tarka and Westward.

This will not affect how you receive your services, or change the legal structure of the organisation. We want to make decision-making about strategy, operations and service delivery work better so we are more efficient.

You are the experts on our services. We will strengthen customer decision-making and monitoring by creating resident service panels which are closer to the board of management.

Having a more efficient board structure is a key part of this.. At present Westward Housing Group operates through three boards – Westward, Westcountry and Tarka. Westcountry and Tarka's role is to deliver services locally, while the Group board deals with development, strategy, finance and other central services.

Any major decision has to be agreed by all three boards, separately; and the administrative time and costs of servicing all three Boards is considerable. So we aim to refine and improve this.

We will be in touch shortly to consult you about the future of these structures and aim to be able to take any agreed plans forward in the Spring.

We want you to be involved in helping shape service panels which monitor services by area and make recommendations to the boards.

If you have any questions before the consultation, please feel free to contact me, Vanessa Gray - Communications Manager, through the online form at www.westcountryha.org.uk, at vanessa.gray@westwardhousing.org.uk

Meet Kay – Neighbourhoods Manager for Devon

Kay Rowlinson is the Neighbourhoods Manager for Devon. She has worked for Westcountry for three years. Prior to working with Westcountry Kay was retired! She doesn't strike me as the sort of person who could be happy doing nothing and so when boredom set in she decided to come out of retirement.

Before she retired Kay worked for the M.O.D. in the Defence Housing Executive. Her area stretched from Salisbury Plain down to Lands End. She also dealt with high level complaints (I.e. when a Brigadier was unhappy with his plumbing!).

She started her housing career with a local authority and has also run an office in the Lake District for another housing association.

When I asked Kay about her job she said that the best bit was being able to empower staff and residents. She feels it important to help staff develop to their full potential. She is also enjoying working with residents on the Neighbourhoods Advisory Group (NAG). Kay struggled to find anything negative about her work. But she said it was probably when she can't get help for somebody, from other agencies, when she can see that they need it.

In her spare time Kay enjoys reading romances, interior decorating, listening to Charles Aznavour and going on holiday.

Kay has a grown up son, daughter and a beautiful three year-old-granddaughter. She lives in East Devon with her husband and three dogs and her favourite activity is simply spending time with them. Kay is a lovely, quiet spoken lady from Lancashire and I thoroughly enjoyed our chat.

If you would like to know more about the Neighbourhood Advisory Group ring Kay on **0300 100 1015**.

Interviewed by Pat Hammett



Neighbourhoods Advisory Group approve new Survey for Residents.

At the last meeting of NAG (Neighbourhood Advisory Group) a new survey was amended and approved. This survey will be delivered to residents so we can evaluate if our new Neighbourhood Strategy is working. As you may know our Local Offers commit us to improving the satisfaction level of residents and the survey will help with this process. Everyone who completes the survey will be entered into a prize draw for a Christmas Hamper.



Karen's Column

A big thank you to all the Westcountry residents who attended our Annual 'Big Event' which was held at the National Marine Aquarium, Plymouth.

With more than 80 residents joining in sessions on resident involvement opportunities, diversity and equality, and shaping our annual report for residents. They then enjoyed learning more about DIY, wildlife and having a go at salsa!

Children aged 5 and over, had an exciting guided tour of the aquarium. They then spent time in groups getting up close to sea creatures in the Aqualab, and enjoyed watching a film in the 4D cinema.

Westcountry also showed the unedited version of its new film made by current residents for new residents, to introduce the main services and explain how their tenancy works.

Westcountry asked residents to come along and give lots of valuable feedback about our services and any areas they would like us to improve on. This feedback helps us to tailor our community pledges and service standards to meet their specific needs.

As a thank you for their time, the resident's then had the rest of the day to explore the ocean's delights in the aquarium at their leisure.

Solar photovoltaic panels to provide cheaper energy

We have made a 'first of its kind' deal to provide free low carbon electricity to up to 900 suitable Westcountry homes with photovoltaic (PV) electric solar panels. It is the first 'rent a roof' project and private investor Anesco South West funded it, in turn receiving the government's feed-in tariff payment.

The scheme will provide cheaper energy to those who most need it, with a projected saving of at least £120 per year, per household.

Anesco staff and contractors are working seven days a week, due to the announcement by the government of an early end to funding on 12th December 2011, rather than 31st March 2012.

We understand that for those receiving panels, who have both suitable properties and can be fitted in time-wise, this may cause you some inconvenience. But we ask you to bear with us, as the savings will outweigh the light and noise nuisance.

Unfortunately, we will not be able to install panels on all of the properties we had hoped to, as the programme has had to be drastically cut.

Tenants who receive the panels will benefit with savings on their bills from the electricity generated during the daytime when the sun is shining on the panels. They need to use energy during the daylight hours to benefit most.

We wish more could benefit from this, but would like to assure you that we will be working to develop other initiatives to help make running your home more affordable in the future.

Tenants Tales from Supported Housing

Emma and Lauren go sailing

“We went on a sailing trip for five days on a four week program with an organization called NCS (national citizen service). We did this course over the six week holiday and it was packed full of activities which were fun as well as educational. On this sailing course, we learnt how to sail as well as having a fab time living on a boat for five days and then came back to Bethany House buzzing from what a good time we had. We also did a lot of voluntary work on this course. The course gave us a qualification equal to 5 AQA’s.” **Written by Emma, a Bethany House resident.**

Letters to the editor

Wins a £10 Voucher

My name is Iwona and I have recently come to live at Steepway with my daughter Nicole. I passed my GCSE's at school this summer with good grades which I was really pleased about, especially as I had to look after my daughter as well as study. I have now moved on to college where I am studying a two year Level 3 course in Uniformed Public Services. I am really enjoying the course but it is quite a challenge to get my child to the childminder and then get to my lectures by 8.45am! When Nicole goes to sleep at night I catch up on my studies and do my essays.

I am hoping to become a Police Officer or join the Military Police when I finish my course, which I hope will give me a good career and a good quality of life for Nicole and me.

I came to live at Steepway because I wanted to become more independent and learn to set up home for myself and Nicole. I have made friends with the other mums at Steepway and we help each other out. It's good to share experiences with other mums who know what you're going through.

Staff have helped me deal with money and my income which has been quite complicated. They are also going to support me to find somewhere permanent to live and to help me set up my new tenancy when I am ready.

Steepway is part of the Westcountry Housing Young Parents' Projects which provide temporary supported accommodation for young parents in Torbay, enabling them to gain the life skills they need to move on to permanent accommodation.

Redworth residents relax at annual BBQ

On August 2nd The Redworth Project held their annual resident's BBQ amongst the beautiful setting of Redworth's Land Project – where current and ex-residents can take up a vegetable plot, pick apples or just relax and take time out from their day-to-day lives sitting in the seating area by the pond, under the willow or with a picnic on the lawn.

The Land Project has been running for thirteen years now and enjoys a wealth of organic produce all year round. Fifteen Redworth residents both past and present turned up for the afternoon BBQ all bringing additional food and drink and welcomed by glorious sunshine and clear skies.

As well as all the burgers, sausages and fizzy drinks, residents also enjoyed a bit of poi, the odd game of boule on the lawn and the chance to mingle with other residents and take in the surroundings – I for one made good advantage of the apple trees which made towards a good apple pie later on!

Richard



What keeps you well?

Over the last year Westcountry's Support Services have been actively promoting the Recovery Approach in all of our work and across all services. This positive approach is about encouraging people to focus on their wellbeing and what's meaningful to them. It is about creating conditions of hope and enabling people to feel empowered to grow and reach their potential and increase their independence.

As part of this developing approach we were pleased to attend the Autumn Festival of Recovery and Wellbeing Innovations held at Exeter Castle in October. This two-day event was organised by the Devon Partnership Trust and Recovery Devon to coincide with World Mental Health Day and offered an exciting mix of presentations, exhibitions and workshops. There were also invitations to new experiences – riding segways and walking llamas amongst the highlights! - as well as time to talk to others and relax. All 15 clients and staff who attended came away inspired and buzzing with new energy around the Recovery Approach.

Westcountry's Support Services had a stall where we set up a 'Recovery Tree' and passing participants were asked, "How do you keep well?" and invited to write this down on coloured cut outs and attach to the tree. There were over 60 contributions with everything from: 'Singing in a choir with friends', "being nice to me", "going to the gym", "Hip Hop dancing & walking my dogs!", "spending time in solitude", "making the effort to call a friend", "Laughter, sunshine, baths, singing". We all have our unique ways of keeping well and it's important we find out what works for each of us and do more of it! So, go on, How do you keep well?

River Park, Horrabridge

Residents of River Park, Horrabridge have been working hard to improve their neighbourhood. With the help of a grant from the Resident Involvement Team, the residents have made their own wildlife garden.

The residents worked together to remove tonnes of rubble and to plant wild flowers and bulbs in keeping with their moorland homes.

The next stage of the process will be to put up bird and bat boxes on the side of the properties, to encourage even more wildlife in to the area.

Richard Thomas

Macmillan's Coffee Morning

Sheltered Housing Scheme, Markers in Uffculme had a lovely morning – glorious weather and some residents were able to sit outside. We raised £321.03 selling cakes, plants, bric-a-brac and a raffle. It was well supported by friends in the village.

I'm staying for good!

Judith Davies never thought she would be able to afford a home of her own. Living in a very small privately rented house in Bideford Judi couldn't afford to purchase on the open market. "My chances of buying a home were zero," she explained. "I saw some advertising about shared ownership and thought it looked interesting, but still didn't think I could afford it."

In early 2010, Judi heard about Westward Reach, Bideford from a friend who was buying a house there. “I signed up with the HomeBuy agent, South West Homes, and called the sales team at Westcountry Housing to get some literature. I fell in love with a top floor one-bed apartment that hadn’t been built at that time and started the process of gathering my information together.” That attempt to purchase didn’t work out for Judi, but she didn’t give up hope.

In February 2011, Judi’s landlord told her that her home was going to be sold and her tenancy would come to an end. “I thought, panic stations, what can I do now? I went back to Westcountry and the apartments were now built and the one I really wanted was still available – it was meant to be!”

Judi went along to a viewing at the development and fell in love all over again. As she had imagined the apartment had stunning views across the countryside. “I knew it was the property for me as soon as I saw it,” says Judi. “Everything came together, the price, location and some people I know had now moved on to the site, it felt like home.”

“I didn’t want to live in an apartment until I saw this one, that is. I love the flexibility of the property. You are never more than a few feet from a window.” Not everything was plain sailing for Judi, her mortgage offer fell through with the Woolwich and with the Nationwide. “I was so worried I’d lose the apartment at that point. I was on a low income and the development was rurally restricted meaning I could only buy a maximum 80% of the property. I rang Westcountry and we talked through the problem, they suggested a couple of other lenders and I ended up getting a really good deal with the Halifax.”

Judith finally moved into her flat. The conveyance period ended up being twelve weeks. “Considering the problems I had with my mortgage I thought the whole process was very efficient and relatively quick.” Judi went on to say “I would recommend shared ownership to anybody on a lower income who doesn’t think they can afford to buy a home. Now I’ve got mine, I’m staying for good.”

Homeowners News

81% of you asked for more written communication (Status Survey)

So we are delighted to offer your brand new newsletter!

Money Matters

Money-saving tips

Kinder on your skin and healthier for the environment too

Drain cleaner:

Pour 1/2 cup of bicarbonate of soda down the drain. Add 1/2 cup of white vinegar. Wait five minutes and flush down with a kettle of boiling water.

Oven cleaner:

Sprinkle water onto the stain whilst the oven is still warm and then add salt. When the oven cools, scrape the spill away. Always keep a sheet of aluminium foil at the base of your oven to catch any spills and replace it as needed.

Microwave cleaner:

Mix water and lemon juice. Place in an uncovered bowl and heat for three minutes. The condensation it lets off will loosen any spills, making easier to wipe away.

Window cleaner:

Mix 1/2 cup of white vinegar. 1/2 cup of household ammonia. 8 1/2 pints of hot water. It will clean well and leave no smears. Lemon juice or vinegar in water also gets good results

Lime scale:

Fill the kettle or container with equal amounts of water and white vinegar and boil. Switch off and let cool. Rinse thoroughly with clean water. Boil several times to eradicate any left-over vinegar smell.

Get a free energy monitor from your local library to check how much electricity you use.

Refrigerators and freezers use a lot of energy – especially when they are empty.

To keep fridges and freezers full, try filling containers with water or storing bread in the freezer to fill up empty space.

This cuts down on energy use.

Money Advice Service

The Money Advice Service works to boost financial capability and independence. Whatever the situation with your finances, it's good to know where you stand and that you are making the most of what you have.

The independent government service aims to help you understand monetary matters and manage finances better.

They provide a useful guide to making the most of your money which can be accessed online along with resources to help with financial management at **www.moneyadvice.service.org.uk**

The Money Advice Service has also produced a new online money adviser which helps you plan for the future in just 10 minutes.

The questions are straightforward, with no numerical data needed, and the tool creates an easy-to follow personalised action plan after completion of the short health check.

To try out the health check visit **<http://tinyurl.com/4yboqm6>**

Worrying about debt?

The debt help charity, Consumer Credit Counselling Service (CCCS), provides free debt advice and debt solutions.

They will assess your situation and recommend the best solution for you, whether a debt management plan, individual voluntary agreement, debt relief order or bankruptcy.

You can use their Debt Remedy online tool to receive personalised budgets and debt advice tailored to your specific needs.

Website: www.cccs.co.uk Telephone: 0800 138 1111

Colouring Competition

Enter our competition to win a £10 voucher



How to enter

Cut out the competitions you would like to enter, fill in the form and send them to the Freepost address by 8th February 2012. Coast to Coast, Westcountry Housing Freepost (EX2311) Torquay TQ1 3BR

Name:

Address:

Postcode:

Age (if child):

Autumn Wordsearch

Enter our competition to win a £10 voucher. Find the words associated with Christmas in the wordsearch below.

R	U	D	P	L	P	H	E	T	E
M	K	N	N	C	T	I	I	P	S
H	N	I	E	U	N	N	S	B	I
O	C	H	R	I	S	T	M	A	S
L	S	K	B	E	N	T	A	U	A
L	E	O	L	E	O	C	D	B	T
Y	R	V	S	I	W	E	C	L	N
Y	E	E	A	A	M	T	G	E	A
S	R	E	K	C	A	R	C	P	S
P	U	D	D	I	N	G	P	N	O

- Christmas
- Bauble
- Presents
- Turkey
- Snowman
- Tinsel
- Holly
- Santa
- Elves
- Rudolph
- Robin
- Pudding
- Cracker

Entry Form Closing date 8th February 2012

Name:
Address:
Postcode:
Age (if child):

The winner of the Crossword was Mrs A Brookes of Kenneth Court, Torquay who wins a £10 voucher, Well done!

Congratulations to Mrs C Mackie of Dower Court, Torquay, who won the Autumn Wordsearch by finding all wedding words and receives a £10 voucher.

Well spotted!

Lots of you spotted the fireworks in the last issue and the winner of the £10 voucher in the prize draw was Ann Davey of Whitecross Court, Plymouth, Well spotted!

Poetry Corner

Glorious Autumn Wondrous hues all around I see, Leaves changing, on the tree, Yellow, red, and rust, showing on those leaves, A mass of colour, it all weaves All too soon, they wither, and flutter to ground, Then the wind blows them, all around, Restless they seem, as they constantly race Hither and thither, hardly settling, in any one place, This is autumn, when everything seems to die, Nature is resting and all will come alive, bye, and bye, Spring, and once again, buds on trees will show, And flowers from the ground will grow.

Yvonne Garratt, of Prince Street, Newton Abbot

South West Homes helps struggling British Troops

Struggling British Troops serving abroad were given a helping hand by South West Homes in the series of latest road shows in Belgium and Germany. Working with the Homes & Communities Agency and the Ministry of Defence (MOD) the events taking place were to raise awareness of affordable housing to top priority MOD serving personnel.

Graham Phillips HomeBuy Manager for South West Homes met couple Tony & Nicola Ash, at the Joint Headquarters (JHQ) in Germany, who until attending the road show thought their options were limited. Staff Sergeant for the Royal Corps of Signals, Tony said “we had spoken to a few mortgage lenders but because I live at an address abroad they were unwilling to help because I have no history in the UK, it has been great to find a lifeline”.

Grant Shapps, Minister of State for Housing & Local Government said on Twitter “Good luck South West Homes with your important work letting our overseas troops know about the schemes”

For more information about the work South West Homes can do for armed forces see our special webpage on our website at **www.southwesthomes.org.uk**

New homes show in Plymouth...

Over 200 potential purchasers came along to the event in Plymouth on Saturday 24 October. Some were already registered with South West Homes and came to see which properties were available, others were finding out what their options might be for the future and some just wanted mortgage or legal advice. The two financial advisors, who attended, Warren & Co. and Positive Solutions, were kept busy as were the solicitors Clark and Weeks, who were offering a special deal to those attending on the day. A wide range of properties currently for sale in and around the Plymouth area were on offer including FirstBuy and shared ownership. The registered providers (RP's) and developers were positive that they had firm leads from the day to follow up, some of which they hope will convert to sales. Plymouth City Council was also on hand to give advice about future developments currently going through the planning process.

This is the third event of this type held at the Guildhall in Plymouth, previous events have always proved popular and this was no exception.

Housing E-Academy tenant training flyer

Resident Training Opportunities

We recognise that our residents have many transferable skills and we would like to help them to recognise and utilise these skills.

Training is being offered as an incentive to get more residents involved. By offering training we hope to increase the effectiveness of involved residents and to offer skills that are transferable which can be used in their personal life.

The training courses are for everyone. No qualifications are required. For every training course you complete you will receive a certificate of attendance.

If you are interested in attending any of these training courses please will you contact a member of our resident involvement team on **01803 200300**.

Free Tenant Training Course List (18 courses available)

Around the Home

- Basic Home Maintenance
- Saving Energy to Reduce Bills
- Pest Awareness
- Feeding a Family on a Budget
- What is Telehealth?

Community

- Gypsy and Traveller Culture
- Building a Community
- Cultural Awareness
- Respect

Social Issues

- Hate Crime
- Anti Social Behaviour
- Issues Surrounding Drugs
- Issues Surrounding Alcohol
- Preparing for Interviews

Using the Internet

- Starting out on the Internet
- Internet Safety
- The Power of the Internet
- Getting Started with Social Media

Independent lives

Partnership meetings have been held at our support scheme Norton Place in Exmouth with PHEW(Promoting Health & Emotional Wellbeing), NHS, East Devon Social Services & Westcountry Housing working together to develop and provide personal development courses for learning disability clients in Devon.

A course programme was developed and a coffee morning promoted the course and gave interested customers the opportunity to meet course tutors.

The course will run from September 2011 to January 2012, at Norton Place. The course is aimed at providing learning skills to people that are either hoping to or already living independently.

The independent life group which was formed by two students coming through a previous National Open College Network qualification who wanted to explore more training.

Those two students can now put their skills into practice by presenting peer training to the other course candidates.

Torbay at its best!

David Watkins a Money Advice Co-ordinator at Westcountry, had a photo he took of the Torquay harbour published in an October edition of the Herald Express, we thought we would share it with you!

If you have taken an amazing photograph that you would like to share with the chance to win a prize, please send them to the freepost address on page 6. We will of course post your photos back to you.

The sponsored push

On Saturday 15th October 2011 Dragon's Tail residents took part in a sponsored push, which was organised by Justin Wrigley. The aim of this event was to raise money for Macmillan cancer charity. Justin said "We did it for charity and we got lots of support on the way, people were shouting to spur us on and cars were beeping as they drove past!" Mary Wrigley added "It was a great day, enjoyed by all" and Jonathan Miles said "It couldn't have been a nicer day and I'm really glad I did it. Also attending this event were Claire James, with her carer Chrissy and Lara Verrell, with her Mum, Sandra.

We raised over £250 for the charity and are all very proud. The other residents who couldn't make the day still donated, which I think was fantastic.

Take care, be Gas Safe

All gas engineers must be registered with Gas Safe by law and carry their registration card with them when carrying out any work on boilers, cookers or gas fires.

All Westcountry's gas engineers are Gas Safe Registered.

The Gas Safe Register replaced CORGI. Badly fitted and poorly serviced gas appliances can cause gas leaks, fires, explosions and carbon monoxide poisoning. Carbon monoxide is a highly poisonous gas. You can't see it, taste it or smell it, but it can kill quickly with no warning. They will arrange a gas safety check every 12 months and leave a record of the check with you. Please help us by keeping these appointments or phoning to make alternative arrangements should they be inconvenient, failure to do so may result in us having to cut off the supply to your appliance if we are unable to service it within the legal timescales.

By helping Westcountry take care of your gas appliances, you are protecting your home and your loved ones. Follow these top tips to help keep you and your family gas safe:

- make sure only a Gas Safe registered engineer works on your gas appliances
- make sure gas appliances have a regular service and an annual gas safety check
- always check the engineer's Gas Safe Register ID card

For gas safety advice or to find and check an engineer visit the Gas Safe Register website at www.GasSafeRegister.co.uk. Alternatively call the free helpline on 0800 408 5500.

Housing with respect

Westcountry Housing and its Housing with Respect partners and Plymouth and District's Racial Equality Council teamed up for the annual Respect Festival, in Plymouth this October.

The event included a rich mix of cultural experiences, music, stalls, workshops and world food.

It had a great atmosphere and the free family event included live music performances which were uplifting and beautiful to watch.

The Plymouth Respect Festival is an important event in the city's calendar for highlighting diversity and celebrating differences

Repairs winner

£50 Voucher

Congratulations to our Maintenance Survey winner, Mr & Mrs Claffey of Plymton, who won a £50 voucher and thank you to everyone who entered the survey.

Good Neighbour!

Dear Coast to Coast

Bill is an angel. A former nurse, he was the only person to knock on my door to find out whether I was recovering and whether I needed anything, after my hip replacement.

He fetched my pension, got any shopping that I needed, posted letters, put out heavy recycling bags, changed a light bulb and cut back over hanging bushes in my garden.

He still pops in about once a week and cuts the grass outside our houses. A very good neighbour!

Miss P Strickland, Hatherleigh, Oakhampton

Do you have a good neighbour that you'd like to nominate? You could win a £10 voucher for yourself and your Good neighbour?

Julia's Recipe

This may not be the best looking pud in the world, but it tastes really good! You can use any fruit you want to or combination of fruit, but this is my favourite

For the Filling

1lb cooking apples
1oz butter
1/2 lb blackberries
3oz caster sugar
lemon juice
1/2lb/250g tub mascarpone

For the Slump

3oz butter cut into pieces
8oz self raising flour
2oz caster sugar
finely grated zest of a lemon
1/4 pt milk

Peel, core and thinly slice apples. Melt butter in pan and add apple slices and toss around for couple of minutes until starting to soften. Tip into a greased 3 pint dish then add blackberries and sugar and mix lightly and add the lemon.

Rub butter into flour (or use food processor) until you have crumbs, then stir in sugar and lemon zest. Make a well in the middle of the crumbs and add the milk to make a soft mixture.

Spoon blobs of mascarpone over the fruit and then follow it with blobs of slump – if there are any gaps it doesn't matter at all – it will look fine! Bake for 20 – 25 minutes at 200c/fan 180/gas 6 until it's golden.

It's best to leave it for about 10 mins before eating for no other reason than to save your tongue from being burnt!!!

Despite the fact this has got 1/2 lb of mascarpone in it, a jug of custard really is a must, or cream or ice cream ...

Potato and leek soup recipe

4 leeks,
1 diced onion
175g peeled, boiled and mashed potato
25g butter,
850ml vegetable stock
275ml milk,
seasoning

Begin by trimming the leeks, discarding the tough outer layer.

Now split them in half lengthways and slice them quite finely, then wash them thoroughly in two or three changes of water.

Drain well. In a large, thick-based saucepan, gently melt the butter, then add the leeks, onions and potatoes, stirring them all round with a wooden spoon so they get a nice coating of butter. Season with salt and pepper, then cover and let the vegetables sweat over a very low heat for about 15 minutes.

After that, add the stock and milk, bring to simmering point, cover and let the soup simmer very gently for a further 20 minutes or until the vegetables are soft – if you have the heat too high the milk in it may cause it to boil over.

Now you can put the whole lot into a blender – leave it to cool a little first – and blend to a purée. If you have to blend the soup in batches, make sure you have a bowl to hand to put the first batch into.

Now return the soup to the saucepan and reheat gently, tasting to check the seasoning. Add a swirl of cream or crème fraîche before serving and sprinkle with freshly snipped chives or parsley.

The Gift of Giving...

This year there are more than 10,000 people who need an organ. In the UK alone, there are 50,000 people receiving some form of treatment for kidney failure; a transplant, dialysis or conservative care.

80% of all patients waiting for an organ are waiting for a kidney; that is around 7,000 people. 3,000 people die each year on dialysis. A further 300 people will die waiting for a transplant.

Last year 3,740 transplants took place. The number of people in the UK with kidney failure is increasing at a rate of five percent each year and is expected to continue rising as the population ages.

This growing demand for organs, combined with a severe shortage of registered donors, emphasises the need to fund further medical research into better treatments and, ultimately, a cure for kidney disease.

For many kidney patients, a transplanted kidney is not a cure. Certainly it will improve their quality of life

immeasurably, but at some point, even if the transplant lasts the average of 10-15 years, most likely the patient will require further treatment.

Here at Tarka and Westward we have two staff members who know personally the effects of kidney failure on their own lives. Our Communications Group chair, Vanessa Gray, was one of the lucky ones. She received a kidney from a gentleman who sadly passed away but was thoughtful enough to leave his organs for others to benefit from. She said, "I'm so grateful, it's been two years since my transplant and I am doing really well. Thanks to my donor, his supportive family and the medical team in the south west. I wish more people could be helped though, so many are desperately in need. That's why I've spoken to the local papers a few times encouraging people to take that moment to fill in the donor form, online or on paper, and tell those close to them of their wishes." And Ami Mumford, Customer Involvement Assistant at Tarka receives haemodialysis 3 times a week for 4 hours a time to replace the work her failed kidneys should be doing. She said, "It is very restricting on your day-to-day routine, and working full time can make life very complicated. I get on with it, because you have no real choice in the matter, but I have been on the waiting list almost four years now and it is an exhausting wait! If I were lucky enough to receive a transplant my life would be much easier. It sounds blasé but even being able to book a holiday at short notice would be wonderful! You learn to be grateful for little things as a renal (kidney) patient and you don't take anything for granted."

In the South West alone there are 595 patients waiting for a kidney transplant and only 156 transplants took place in the South West – only just over a quarter of those waiting.

Ami & Vanessa are just two who have been affected by kidney failure and we are sure there are many others reading this that are similarly hopeful of a transplant. If you have found this story interesting and would like to know more about kidney failure, please contact www.kidneyresearchuk.org or www.kidney.org.uk and for more information on becoming an organ donor please visit www.uktransplant.org.uk. Would you take an organ if you needed one? Nearly everyone would. But only 29% of us have joined the Organ Donor Register.

If you do not have access to the internet, the National Kidney Federation which is run by patients for patients, is available on **(0845) 601 02 09**.

organdonation.nhs.uk

Colouring competition winners

£10 Voucher

We were delighted to receive lots of entries for the Autumn Colouring competition. The winners each receive a £10 voucher and congratulations to the following winners in their age groups:

Youngest category was won by Ruby Webster (4)

Cullompton

Children's category was won by Tyler Cutting (9) Exeter

Older children's category was won by India Taylor (10)

Falmouth, Cornwall

Adult category was won by Mrs A Willis, Bideford

Competition – Spot the difference

There are six differences on the photos below, can you spot them?



You need to send your circled six differences to the Freepost address on page 6

Big Jubilee Celebrations

Westcountry Housing has supported the Big Lunch since its start 3 years ago.

Next year the fourth annual Big Lunch will fall on the same weekend as the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. So anyone who would like to celebrate and commemorate the Queen's 60 year reign can do so by holding a Big Jubilee Lunch/Event!

There will be a special bank holiday for the Diamond Jubilee. The celebrations will centre around an extended weekend in 2012 on 2, 3, 4 and 5 June. The Resident Involvement team will be on hand to offer help with organising your event, providing start up funds, or just to answer any queries you may have about making your event the best in the South West.

For more information or a chat about what's available, contact the Resident Involvement Team on **01803 20300**

Alexander House update!

Earlier this year we held a ten week Personal Development Course – this was well attended not only by Alexandra House clients but clients from Norton Place and the East Devon FS Service; There were 10 clients involved in this project and the course ended with raft building session on the River Exe in Exeter.

Alexandra House worked alongside the Phew Centre/Mind in being able to deliver this training.

The training was part of National Open College Network and all tenants received a certificate.

A group of tenants have taken on the task of tidying up the garden at Alexandra House – early in the year tomato plants and other vegetables were successfully grown; this led onto the tenants building raised beds a trellis and wooden seating. The materials were sourced by the tenants from local building projects in the area. The raised beds will now enable fruit and vegetables to be grown the whole year; and with the trellis and seating area the garden can be enjoyed by everyone.

I-tea and biscuits

Digital inclusion for people in later life supported by Age UK

Age UK ran an initiative from 19-25 September to support organisations to deliver a network of 'taster sessions' throughout the UK.

These sessions were used to promote and celebrate the benefits of digital inclusion ensuring that people in later life are able to learn new skills and to access information.

Westcountry Housing took part in this and invited a number of residents from sheltered schemes throughout Devon and Cornwall to get involved. Those residents who took part were supplied with a memory stick which enabled them to save the information they had learned, their names were also placed in a prize draw, the prize being a laptop. The oldest resident who took part, Margaret Culling of Denyer Court is almost 99 years of age, which proves the point that you are never too old to learn! The winner of the prize draw is Brenda Howells of Denyer Court, congratulations Brenda!

The 'taster sessions' included volunteers from SWITCH Community Ltd, Age UK and Torbay library, and as the feedback we have received has been very positive, we are hoping to continue to promote digital inclusion in the future to include all age ranges.

Communication Group

Calendar

We hope you liked our annual report calendar which you received in the last issue of Coast to Coast – it is specifically for you, our customer, and has been developed by your Communications Group based on staff interviews by your Scrutiny Panel and Auditors.

We have already received lots of feedback survey forms (on the calendar back page) which have been very positive and helpful – we'll put a summary in the Spring issue when we have them all. So thank you.

Web review

If you love using the internet and know what keeps someone interested and on a site, we need you.

Our new website needs a fresh new look, as well a tenant portal.

Would you like to be involved? It would just be a couple of meetings in the early Spring and we cover travel costs.

Contact Coast to Coast Communications Team (Vanessa or Claire) at vanessa.gray@westwardhousing.org.uk or on **01803 217560**.

Join our youth Facebook group!

You told us you wanted a Facebook group for young people... so we made one!

Search '**Westcountry Housing Youth Voice**' and join us to have your say about what activities you'd like to get involved with!

The first 25 group members will be entered into a competition to win an iPod Shuffle or a voucher!

If you haven't filled in and returned yours do so now as you could win a £25 voucher in the new year – prize draw is on 15th January.

Make it your New Year's Resolution to get yourself into print!

£20 Voucher

What can we do to improve where you live?

Send us your suggestion and the winner will be published with your photo, name and win a voucher of your choice for £20.

Wanted – your letters, photos and poems!

£10 voucher for every article from you that we publish in Tenant Tales.

Write to: Coast to Coast, Westcountry Housing, Freepost (EX2311), Torquay TQ1 3BR, call **01803 217560** or email **vanessa.gray@westwardhousing.org.uk**

Coast to Coast is produced by Westcountry residents, staff and board members and published by Westcountry Housing. The views expressed are those of the writers and not necessarily of Westward Housing Group. Westcountry Housing Association Ltd is an exempt charity, registered under Industrial and Provident Soc. Act 1965 No. 19141 R.