



Hello...

It was great to see a high turnout at our recent public meeting on the government's long-term plans for the NHS. Understandably, many people feel strongly about this subject, and by joining together we can have a louder voice. Over the next few pages, you'll find more ways you can get involved with important issues.

We've recently welcomed staff members Heather, Deborah and Rebecca, as well as two new governors and Priorities Panel members. They're all great additions to the LINK team.

John Fletcher,
Chairman, Kent LINK Governors' Group

Why I've joined the LINK

Kath Pavely, 53, from Tunbridge Wells



Like many other LINK volunteers, I've had direct experience of Kent's health or social care services over the years. In my 30s, I developed type-1 diabetes during pregnancy. Unfortunately, complications since then meant both of my legs have had to be amputated below the knee. I also now have limited vision in my right eye, and two years ago I had a kidney and pancreas transplant after kidney failure.

The transplant cured my diabetes, and despite everything I've been through I see myself as pretty lucky. When I took medical retirement from my job working with disabled children, I knew I wanted to volunteer for a worthwhile organisation. The LINK appealed as it's all about giving people a voice.

After a selection event in 2009 I was invited onto the governors' group, which meant I'd be helping decide which LINK projects go forward. As a lay person with no experience of committees, I wasn't sure what I'd have to offer. But I've definitely made a good input.

I'd fully expected everyone else involved in the LINK to be able-bodied, so it's been refreshing to meet others with different physical disabilities. Being able to do something to help other people has also helped me process what's happened to me over the years.

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What is a LINK?

A Local Involvement Network (LINK) is about listening to and gathering your views on local health and social care services. The LINK allows people to help influence, improve or change the way these services are planned and delivered. Anyone can join and have their say.

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8.30am

I'm covering for Louise while she takes maternity leave, and as I've only been in the job a few weeks I'm still finding my feet. But the first task of the day is always the same no matter where I'm working: I make a cup of tea.

We want to get more young people involved in health and social care issues, and I'm heading up LINK's youth strategy. It's all still in the planning stages and the fact it's a brand new task is really exciting. My previous role was as a Youth Engagement Manager at the youth organisation Connexions Kent & Medway, so my contacts have been useful.

10.30am

This morning I'm off to a meeting at Kent County Council in Maidstone about encouraging young people in Kent to participate. It's a good chance to talk to other youth organisations about what we're up to and see

My day...

if any of their volunteers can help. I love working with young people because they come up with great ideas. Most adults have a tendency to over-analyse things.

12.30pm

The on-site canteen is quite expensive, so I've been bringing in my own sandwiches. The unusual fillings provoke daily discussion – today it's ham, cream cheese and gherkin. Being far from the temptation of the high street – we're based in Folkestone Enterprise Centre – saves money, too!

2pm

We're always looking for events and schemes participants can get involved in. Checking the central LINK email account, I spot a few press releases

Rebecca Barraclough,
24 from Ramsgate

LINK development
worker, East Kent

about upcoming consultations. They'll be perfect for our monthly bulletin.

4pm

Off to East Kent Hospitals University NHS Foundation Trust AGM. The situation's uncertain for many at the moment, but it's interesting to see the changes they're proposing for next year. Cate, who does my job for Mid-Kent, comes with me to do the introductory chat about LINK until I'm up to speed.



New dates for your diary

Community Engagement event with Kent Adult Social Services

11 November 10.30am-2.45pm,
Ashford Enterprise Centre, Towers
School, Faversham Road, Ashford,
Kent, TN24 9AL.

Governors' Group meetings

17 November 4pm-7pm
Maidstone Community Support
Centre, 39-48 Marsham Street,
Maidstone, ME14 1HH.

15 December 10am-1pm
Lenham Community Centre,
Groom Way, Lenham, Maidstone,
ME17 2QT.

Priorities Panel meetings

10 November and 8 December.
All Priorities Panel meetings take place
2pm-4pm at Salvation Army Centre,
74-80 Union Street, Maidstone ME14 1ED.

*We welcome attendance from LINK
members at any of our meetings.
New events are being announced
all the time. For the most up-to-date
information please see website or
call us. Please contact us if you
want more information or
to book a place.*

Get involved!

Aged 18-24? You can help

As you'll see from Rebecca's 'My day...' (left), we want to get more young people involved in health and social care issues. Our aim is to find out how easy it is for them to access the services they need. And that's why we're looking for 10 'community researchers' aged 18-24 to help us.

We've teamed up with the University of Greenwich, who'll be training our community researchers in the skills necessary to get other young people's views. You needn't be a student, or in education, and this is a great chance to help others while gaining valuable experience and skills to help your own career prospects. We're also recruiting older people who work with young people, as well as youth organisations. Please contact us for more information.

Who cares?

A recent episode of BBC's *Panorama* highlighted the low levels of training and supervision given to care assistants who go into people's homes.

On the back of this, we're planning to launch a 'Training and supervision of care assistants' project. First it'll involve checking what monitoring arrangements Kent County Council have in place. We'll also carry out mystery shopping in residential homes for older people.

Before we start the project, we need to find volunteers to help. If you'd like to make a difference in this vital area, please contact Cate.



Up-to-the-minute quality

Our NHS Quality Accounts project made it easier for people to find out how their local hospital trust had performed last year. But we want to make it simple for people to tell us about recent experiences, too.

That's why the 2010/2011 Quality Accounts will be different. Rather than wait until the end of the year to ask what people think about their local hospital, we're aiming to get feedback every few months. This will also help us keep hospitals in the loop about what users think – and get quicker responses from them.

Together with Canterbury Christ Church University Centre for Health and Social Care Research, we're working on a new toolkit for this. Would you like to be part of the project? We're looking for volunteer reporters to use the toolkit and help us gather vital information. Contact us to find out more.

See back page for contact details

**Want to do more
with Kent LINK?**

Help shape Adult Social Services

We'd like to find volunteers to help shape Kent Adult Social Services in the future. This will include people with a disability, older people, users of sensory services, mental health service users and carers. Come along to our event on 11 November to find out more (see details left for where and when).

We need you!

There's a lot going on at LINK at the moment. As well as the projects in this newsletter, we're asking for volunteers to join groups to work on these issues:

- Improving the patient's journey through the hospital outpatient system
- Quality monitoring of residential care homes in Kent
- Hygiene and cleanliness in hospitals
- Stroke care
- Improving the uptake of screening for cervical cancer

Interested?

Please contact Heather on the main office number.



Your LINK for improving health and social care

What have we been up to?

Looking at day centres

Day centres provide a much-needed lifeline for many pensioners. In April we started our 'Day care centres for older people in East Kent' project.

To find out whether services meet the needs of local people, and identify areas to be improved, we ran focus groups in Age Concern day centres in East Kent, consisting of 188 people. Next, 14 mystery shoppers visited centres pretending to be prospective users. We also ran a survey, which 170 people responded to.

'There was lots of variety in activities, services and opening hours,' says Sophie, who co-ordinated the report. 'But what really hit home was how much support the centres provide. Many users said the staff and clients are like family to them.'

Many sites we visited are trying to move beyond the classic image of day care centres. A few of the innovations we spotted include:

- Tables and chairs arranged in coffee-table layout to encourage interaction
- Forums for users to discuss new ideas or suggest improvements
- Lunches automatically delivered to users if they hadn't turned up that day

- Lists of trusted tradesmen such as plumbers and gardeners

Thanks to all the centres that took part. For a full copy of the report, please get in touch (see right for contact details).

Putting on a good show

In July, we had a stand at the Kent County Show. It was a great chance for us to spread the word about what we do. Thanks to the hard work of our enthusiastic staff, we managed to get lots of new people to sign up and have their say about health and social care services in Kent.



Volunteers at the Kent County Show did their bit to raise the LINK's profile.



Join the LINK

There are a number of benefits to becoming involved with the LINK.

They include:

- helping to influence those who make decisions about new or existing health and social care services
- giving communities a stronger voice
- highlighting neglected ideas or issues

Contact details

The Kent LINK
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phone: 01303 297050

Local contacts:

Mid Kent
(Ashford, Maidstone, Sheppey and Swale)
phone: 07976 596709

East Kent
(Canterbury, Dover, Shepway and Thanet)
phone: 07976 596797

West Kent
(Dartford, Gravesham, Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling and Tunbridge Wells)
phone: 07976 596410

Having a say on NHS changes

Thanks to everyone who took part in our 'Equity and excellence: Liberating the NHS' consultation, about the government's long-term vision for the NHS. As well as getting people's views via questionnaire, we held a packed public meeting in Maidstone on 15 September. There was a lot of discussion about how every LINK will turn into a 'HealthWatch' next year. Plus there was concern about how GPs' focus must remain on quality of care rather than the bottom line.

We've let the Department of Health know about people's views (see www.thekentlink.co.uk for a summary), and we look forward to their feedback, which we'll share with you in a future newsletter.



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