

Issue 21
August 2007



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



Azure's new Chairman – Joe Oliphant

At the Charity's Annual General Meeting in June Joe Oliphant, previously Vice Chairman, took over the chairmanship from Neil Robinson MBE (*there is a full report on Neil's retirement as well as some archive photographs on pages 5 to 8 of this newsletter*).

Joe has been a Board member since 2001 but his involvement with the Charity goes back to its earliest days when he was the manager at the TSB bank which was then responsible for SHAW's banking.

In his acceptance speech Joe expressed his appreciation of the support of members and fellow trustees – advising "it is a pleasure and a privilege to take over as Chairman".



Matrix quality standard recognition

On 20th July Azure's Employment Services department was subject to rigorous scrutiny of its advice and guidance provision against the requirements of the Matrix standard. Azure met the requirements and look forward to the full report, which will hopefully reflect the external assessor's very positive comments in the feedback given on the day. This achievement will greatly assist Azure in bidding for further work.



Garden Centre

Everyone is extremely disappointed at the way the weather has affected trading since mid May. Up to that point we were beating budget and making major improvements against the previous year's figures – with plant sales extremely strong. However, the British weather is a factor that we have to live with so, despite that disappointment, staff continue to think positively and plan for the future.



One of the key elements in that forward planning is a new and exciting café facility. With Board approval a planning application has been made to the local authority. We hope to receive advice of the outcome in mid August. We will say more about this development in future newsletters but for now we can say that it will be an attractive timber construction building with a number of “eco” advantages.

As previously alerted we were pleased to welcome back Marian Foster in April. She presented BBC Radio Newcastle's excellent live Sunday lunchtime programme “Garden Mania” from Azure – with John Taylor joining the panel of experts. We hope they may return again in 2008.



Late May saw the return of Andrea Youll to head up the Aquatics/Pet Supplies department within the Garden Centre. Andy is working closely with colleague Wendy Bowey to boost the department and move that business forward (which should be less weather dependent).

Azure's new Vice Chairman – Neville Furness

At the Board meeting in July, Neville Furness was appointed Vice Chairman. Neville continues as the Charity's Treasurer – a role he has occupied since joining the Board in 1987. He was extremely appreciative of being appointed to this role and “considers it an honour”.



Not even out of breath!

Azure's supported employee Helen Oliver recently took part in a fundraising abseil off the Tyne Bridge in aid of Cystic Fibrosis – and thoroughly enjoyed the experience. So much so that she has signed up to another abseil in Scotland – at the Falkirk Wheel.

The significance of the heading above and Helen's chosen charity arises from the fact that she herself suffers from this disabling condition. Helen had a double lung transplant at the Freeman Hospital in 2001. Clearly a very successful operation that has transformed her life!



Helen (right) with friend Michelle

A special retirement



Sky, Ivan Johnsons's guide dog, is being retired on grounds of ill health. Sky is a curly coated retriever – this breed necessary for Ivan as the more common labradors cause Ivan an allergic reaction.

Sky has worked with Ivan for about 8 years.

The good news for Sky and for Ivan is that she is to move to live with Ivan's mum who lives in Salisbury – so they will still see each other from time to time.

Due to the limited availability of the curly coated retrievers Ivan may have to wait some while for a replacement.

Winners – again!

On 9th May Azure fielded a team from Keele Drive to participate in the annual 5 a side competition for people with a disability at Northumberland College.

In true Azure tradition they ran out the winners beating a team from Ashington High School in a penalty shoot out - take note England!



Gone Fishing

The Azure annual fishing competition took place on Thursday 26th July. The event was again held at Andrew Green's fishing lake at Longhorsley - South Linden Fishery. Twenty two competitors participated with sixteen of them catching fish on the day. Azure are grateful to Andrew for setting out the lakes and for organising the end of competition barbeque.

A variety of competition categories saw a number of clients win some excellent prizes. Azure are extremely grateful to the various prize donors. Winners were: Daniel Mitchell (whose name will be inscribed on the Azure Shield), Clive Snowball, Paul Holroyd, Derek Thompson and David Craven.



Daniel Mitchell



Clive Snowball



Albert Bailey



Martin Jude

Keeping busy

Tom Turnbull keeps himself busy! A supported employee in Azure's Nurseries, Tom has many interests. As well as participating in the fishing competition Tom has recently received a certificate in Life Skills – awarded by Northumberland College at the completion of his course. Tom also found time to complete the Great North walk for charity.



Azure's 2007 Annual General Meeting

On 20th June 2007 Azure's 25th Annual General Meeting was held in the Robinson Suite. Outgoing Chairman Neil Robinson MBE reported upon a much better financial performance than in the previous year and illustrated his address with examples of the varied activities within Azure's many departments. He paid tribute to those whose vision initiated the existence of the Charity and to all, past and present, whose good work ensures Azure delivers its mission of "improving the lives of people with disability". At the end of the meeting, following a fitting tribute from incoming Chairman Joe Oliphant, Brenda Dalton presented Neil with a gift from the staff. The AGM concluded with a social gathering and an excellent buffet prepared by Lesley Smith and colleagues.



Brenda Dalton's presentation of a framed photo montage to Neil

Neil with Alan Kilburn and Neville Furness

Patron The Hon Matt Ridley with Azure's President The Bishop of Newcastle



Neil with Peter Elliott - enjoying Joe's speech



Neil with Joe Oliphant

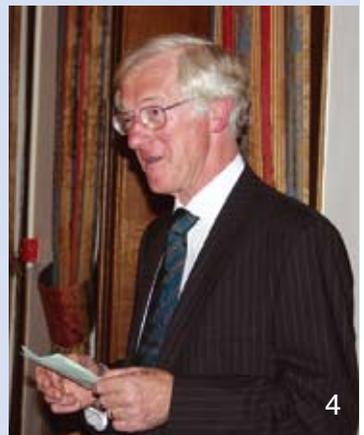
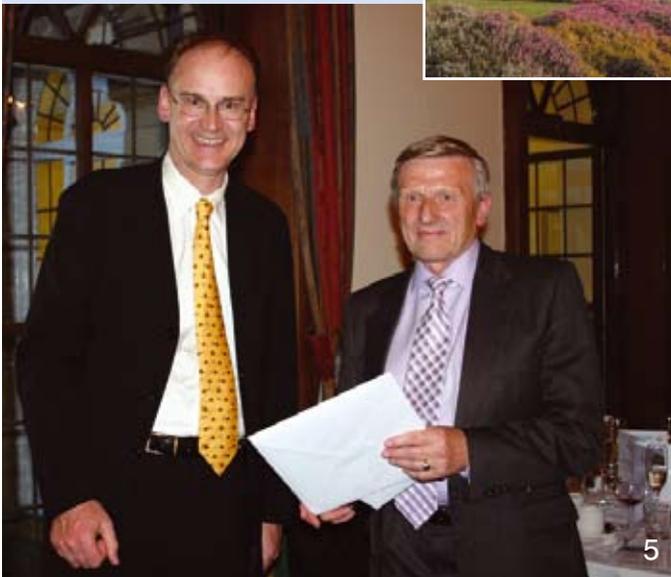


Neil Robinson MBE - Retirement Dinner

On 25th May a dinner was held at Kirkley Hall to formally celebrate Neil's retirement. Despite abysmal weather an excellent night was enjoyed by all - this partly facilitated by a very generous anonymous donation specifically towards the event. Neil was presented with a cheque reflecting contributions from Members, from Board and Senior Management colleagues and the Charity - in recognition of Neil's unstinting 21 years of leadership and commitment. The gift presentation was made by Patron Matt Ridley - with the main tribute wittily delivered by Alan Kilburn OBE.



- 1) Jackie Axelby (trustee), Alan Walker & Jennifer Walker (trustee)
- 2) Allan Lynn (Azure Printing), Christine Lynn, Judy Elliott & Jen Seaton (Azure Support Services)
- 3) Audrey Robinson
- 4) Alan Kilburn OBE
- 5) Neil Robinson with Azure's Patron The Hon. Matt Ridley



Neil Robinson MBE JP A tribute – and a big thank you to him

Neil Robinson first served as a trustee in 1983 and was appointed Chairman in 1986 (to what was then SHAW Project).

His involvement with the Charity preceded his appointment to the role of trustee as Neil was a key player in the resettlement of people with learning disabilities from long stay hospital – under the Care in the Community initiative in the late 1970s.

Neil had a long and very successful career in the Health Service eventually retiring after 40 years service from the post of Chief Executive of Northgate and Prudhoe NHS Trust in 1997. He was awarded his MBE for services to progressing the cause of mental disability. Neil has also served as a Mental Health Commissioner – appointed by the Secretary of State for Health.

Neil has only recently ceased serving as a JP – upon reaching his 70th birthday. Until that time he sat regularly as a magistrate at Bedlington Magistrates Courts.

Neil is a keen family man and together with wife Audrey they keep close to their married daughters and grandchildren – seeing them on a very regular basis. This can be somewhat demanding as one daughter lives in the South of England and the other in Sweden.

Audrey, who retired from teaching in 1975, has also greatly assisted the Charity - both as a volunteer and a part time member of the accounts team.

Neil has always had a close interest in sport and has actively participated at a high standard. He has now retired from playing squash (not so long ago) and in his footballing prime played for Blyth Spartans. Neil is still an active golfer and walker (despite a very recent temporary and successful interruption for a hip replacement).

Neil is also very involved with his local Methodist Church and has a lifetime of association with the Scouting movement.

From the above it should be clear that Azure have been very fortunate to have Neil so committed to Azure, given the demands on his time, and we are extremely grateful to him for his massive contribution over his 21 years as a trustee.

We all wish him well - in the certain knowledge that he will not be bored with so many remaining interests! Thank you Neil.

Neil's thanks

Neil has requested that his thanks be properly communicated. He is extremely grateful to Azure and for everyone's generosity and kind words.

From the archives



Neil with Professor Tomlinson, Chairman Northern Regional Health Authority, at the official opening of SHAW on the 23rd October 1987.

Neil with Lady Ridley and Jean McCallum MBE at the official opening of the Garden Centre in 1991



Neil, with Ian Hall, leading water based residential training for disabled clients.

AGM 2008

The date for the 2008 Annual General Meeting has been fixed for Wednesday 18th June 2008.



Susan and Mark Wardle

Susan Wardle (nee Dobbie) was married to Mark on 16th June 2007 at Tynemouth's Park Hotel. They honeymooned at San Pedro (Costa del Sol).

Susan is employed by Azure at Drummond Road, Newcastle (a Supported Living service). Work colleague Denise Forrest, also employed at Drummond Road, was Susan's bridesmaid.

Tim Morgan – proud father

Azure member (and some years ago Azure's Finance Manager) has become a father for the second time. He and wife Faustina welcomed new arrival Gabrielle, birth weight 7lb 15oz, on 2nd July - born at Newcastle RVI. She joins little sister Francesca.



Emma Richards – proud mother

A belated welcome to baby Saffron Elsie Brown born on 13th February 2007. Emma was on maternity leave when our last newsletter was put together. Saffron was born at Newcastle RVI, weighing 5lb 4½ oz, to Emma and partner Andrew Brown.

Congratulations and Best Wishes



Garnet Simpson – 60th Birthday

Garnet Simpson, Azure Employment Services' Basic Skills Coordinator, celebrated his 60th birthday on 12th June 2007. In true Azure tradition Garnet's milestone was celebrated very visibly by departmental colleagues.

Sandra Allaway – Level 3 NVQ

Despite health problems Sandra recently received confirmation that her Level 3 NVQ in Business and Administration has been externally verified and confirmed.

Sandra has worked at this qualification under the guidance of Northumberland College for the past 18 months or so and is now the proud holder of a formal qualification certificate from OCR.



Tracey Summerbell

Celebrated her 30th birthday on 5th August. Tracey is the Administrator for Azure's Employment Services.

Keith Henry – 60th Birthday

Keele Drive resident Keith Henry celebrated his 60th birthday and a grand party was arranged for him at Hartford Community Centre on 28th July.

There was an excellent turnout and everyone enjoyed the disco, buffet and, of course, highlight of the night, karaoke – Keith being the star!



In memory of Robin Gosden

Robin's obituary appeared in the December 2006 newsletter. Robin had just renewed his Newcastle United Season ticket prior to his untimely death and his family asked that the tickets be raffled to raise money that could be spent on something permanent for Keele Drive - in memory of Robin. Those raffles did take place and the proceeds have been used to buy a swing seat from Azure Garden Centre - now erected in the Keele Drive garden.

The swing seat was formally handed over by Robin's mum, Vera Gosden - who can be seen in the photograph with Fiona (who was Robin's partner at No 1).



Sadly missed

Brenda McGlen



Following a period of ill health Brenda McGlen, Keele Drive resident since 1987, passed away peacefully in Wansbeck Hospital on 15th June. Homes Manager, Julie Embleton was with Brenda at the last and had been stalwart in her support in Brenda's last weeks.

Julie made all the arrangements for the funeral which was held at The Links Cemetery, Blyth. A great number of people, including Brenda's sisters, special friend John (previously of Keele Drive), Keele drive residents and current and past Azure staff, overfilled the chapel with many having to stand for the moving service - where Jen Seaton read the eulogy.

Ingrid Larsen - Homes Manager

Ingrid joined Azure's Housing Support Services in Newcastle as a Team Leader in 2005. Having gained an NVQ Level 4 in Care and a Registered Manager's Award she has recently been promoted to Homes Manager - working at Washington.



Starting her career in 1986 as a Nursing Auxiliary at Blyth Community Hospital, Ingrid has amassed a great deal of experience in the care profession over the years - working with different client groups.

She has previously worked for the Social Services Directorate as an Assistant Unit Manager working with the elderly and as a Duty Manager working with younger clients with learning and physical disabilities.

In her spare time, Ingrid is an enthusiastic walker and cyclist.

Peter Guest - Workstep Adviser



Peter joined Employment Services in September 2003 as a Workstep Adviser supported through the Workstep programme. Now qualified to NVQ Level 3 in Advice & Guidance, Peter currently supports 35 clients in employment on Workstep.

Previously working as Operations Manager for a major paint manufacturing company, Peter left partly through ill health, but also to take some time out to find a more fulfilling career.

A keen allotment gardener and Chairman of his local Allotment Garden Society, Peter's speciality is growing and showing flowers, which have proved very successful in competitions over the years.

Peter is certain he made the right career choice in working with people with disabilities and is very happy he took time out to re-think his future.