

Pushchairs to Wheelchairs New Year initiative launched

Barcroft Hall's calendar of events for this new year is scheduled to include a 'Mobility Awareness Day' to be held on the estate and the launch of '**Discrimination Trails**' will be high on the agenda.

Brian Herrick commented; '*We are very excited about this project and the support we are having is fantastic.*

It was immediately noticeable when we bought Barcroft that the footpaths on our land and also in the surrounding area were in a very poor state of repair with little or no maintenance being done. No provision at all was being made for the many folk in the area who have mobility difficulties, with poor surfaces, many stiles and other obstacles for them to negotiate.

This is especially important here in our beautiful village of South Petherton in particular, with a large proportion of the population in retirement and many who find it hard to get about.



*The aim of this day and the launch of '**Discrimination Trails**' is to make other landowners, regular walkers and the authorities aware of how challenging it is for mobility constrained users. But we are not just catering for disabled people, it's pushchairs to wheelchairs!*

Over this past festive season I'm sure that families at home will have focused on the need that

everyone should have easy access to the countryside to get out and exercise. Which of course includes mums with buggies, children and disabled people it's their right, we must not discriminate against them.

When the website www.mobilityawareness.org.uk is fully launched this year anybody who feels that they cannot use a footpath because it has not been prepared for them or others and can easily be converted to accommodate for their requirements, can nominate the trail as a '**Discrimination Trail**' reporting the issue to gain support. These issues will be directed over the internet to the local authorities automatically starting with the Somerset area as a pilot.

They will also be able to download or order 'Discrimination Trail' way marks on line that they can attach to the route thereby marking it to make other people aware of their difficulties and gain support.'

Mary-Ann Nossent, has a seat on RAISE Equality and Diversity Action Group and is a Disability Access Auditor and Equality Trainer.

She was commissioned by the estate to report on the local footpath network and comments;

'Generally speaking the local footpaths do not cater for mobility difficulties and there are some extremely poor examples of this in South Petherton which surprisingly also include complete blockages for any user.

However the Barcroft estate network is a great example of what can be done to help. In addition to obstacle free walking it has kilometres of natural hedging and trees planted at the owner's expense, coupled with the wildlife areas adjacent to the paths, providing one of the best private land walking experiences I know in the area.

Brian and Denise should be warmly congratulated for their supreme effort and constant maintenance and conceiving the 'Discrimination Trail' project.

I am sure that other like minded landowners and local authorities will applaud this initiative, to provide a privately funded service like this makes life for those with mobility difficulties infinitely better.

All people should have access to the countryside, disabled people are no different from anybody else in their needs and aspirations. Sadly despite legislation to promote disability equality in the public sector, this is not always the case'.

Paul Dunn, Chief Executive of Equality South West responded warmly to this initiative:

'This is exactly what is needed, a great private equality initiative by Mr. and Mrs. Herrick. Local groups, people with mobility difficulties, councils and corporate supporters should engage with this and help make it a really effective event'

Details and email address to give support can be found at:

www.mobilityawareness.org.uk and www.discrimination-trails.org.uk

Ends

Pictures: Brian Herrick with mobility constrained supporters.