Welcome to Advance Together! To help make this newsletter some of our customers from Hackney formed an ‘editing panel’. Together, they helped decide what should go in the newsletter and how it should look. Here they are to introduce themselves, and to say why they got involved…

MEET THE EDITORS (seated left to right with Ricardo)

Savaas: - wanted to contribute some of his own ideas to help create the newsletter. Michael - joined the panel meeting because he had some spare time and thought he would give it a go. Jerry - attended the meeting because he wanted to find out more about the newsletter. Salih - got involved so he could meet new people and ask lots of questions. Lionel (not pictured) - joined the editing panel because he likes to get involved in Advance activities - he often interviews new staff.

If you'd like to help edit a future issue let us know at customerengagement@advanceuk.org
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**Our values**

- Partnership
- Respect
- Innovation
- Drive
- Efficiency
SOUTH WEST CUSTOMER CONFERENCE

In October customers from the South West were invited to Plymouth’s National Aquarium for a regional customer conference.

There were workshops and talks, as well as a regional Customer Forum, which took place in a shark tunnel.

Everyone had a great day and we look forward to the next one!

MELBA WILSON WINS AN AWARD

In December the now Chair of the Advance Board, Melba Wilson, won the award for ‘Beyond Governance’ in the 3rd Sector Care Awards.

The award recognises people who ‘have made an outstanding and sustainable contribution’ in care. Melba celebrated the achievement with customers Lisa and Fusun and other members of staff and the Board.

ADVANCE HAS A NEW WEBSITE

Our new website went live in October, and has a whole new look.

We have made the website easier to understand by using Word Bank, a tool which highlights and explains complicated words, There is also the option to have website content in audio form, using BrowseAloud.

Go online and take a look at www.advanceuk.org
In December we held the 3rd regional National Forum of 2017 in Oxford. We heard lots of positive stories and it was great to hear that 82% of you are happy with the service you get from Advance.

We asked you what you like and dislike about your home, and what was most important about your home. You told us that living close to friends and family, having privacy and independence and being close to shops is important. You also told us that you don’t like not knowing when people were coming to do repairs.

In the Customer Survey lots of people said that they find information from Advance difficult to understand. We wanted to find out more about this so that we can make it better. At the meeting customers told us that rent statements, tenancy agreements, and letters about repairs letters were difficult to understand. They told us that using larger and clearer writing and more pictures would be helpful and that having information available in other formats like videos makes it easier to understand.

Your feedback and suggestions will go to the Operations Board at the next meeting. The board will use this information to look at how we can improve our services for you.

The next National Forum will be in Leicester on the 6th March. If you live in the Leicester area, you will get an invitation to the meeting. We look forward to seeing you there!
MAKING INFORMATION EASIER TO UNDERSTAND

In the Customer Survey many of you told us that it can be difficult to understand information that you receive from Advance. We have been working hard to improve this. Some things we have done are:

- Using Word-Bank on our new website. Word-Bank gives definitions and pictures to explain difficult words
- Trained Advance staff on how to write in Easy Read
- BrowseAloud can be used to listen to our website
- Made an information pack for new people joining Advance as customers
- Learning about how we can use Makaton to communicate better
- We will be making more videos

We will keep working hard to make our information easier for everyone to understand. If you have ideas for how we can make information easier to understand please tell us by contacting customerengagement@advanceuk.org or telling a member of Advance staff.

IAN GILDER, DIRECTOR OF HOUSING, TELLS US ABOUT MAKING A COMPLAINT

We understand that sometimes things can go wrong, or you may be not be satisfied with the service Advance provides. If this happens to you, we want you to tell us. When you make a complaint, we will discuss it with you, look into it properly and do our best to deal with it.

We have a ‘Complaints Panel’ that reviews complaints to see what we can learn from them. Last summer we had complaints about poor gardening services, so we changed the contractor in several places. Other improvements include making letters clearer, involving family more in Positive Behaviour Support, and working with staff to improve their knowledge and skills.

If you want to make a complaint, contact the Customer Services team by phone 0333 412 4307, or email customer.services@advanceuk.org. Alternatively, you can fill out the ‘Comments, Compliments and Complaints’ form on the ‘Customers’ section of our website.

We also love to receive compliments and comments on our services, so please feel free to send us these as well!
JASON’S JOB SUCCESS

Jason* has been supported by our Employment services, after being referred by Job Centre Plus.

Looking for a job was difficult for Jason because he was worried about working somewhere that he didn’t know. We placed Jason in a 6 month supported business placement, somewhere that he had previously volunteered.

Jason was thoroughly enjoying the role, but struggled to find anything else he would like to do once the placement ended. When his placement was coming to an end, he was offered a permanent role at the company!

Working 16 hours per week, which is ideal for him, Jason is feeling confident and looking forward to starting his job. Jason’s confidence has grown over the last 6 months and his placement has played a huge part in that. The job, which would have been quite stressful for Jason before, is a great achievement - Well done Jason!

*Name has been changed for anonymity

STAYING SAFE ONLINE

The internet and social media (Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp etc) are great for getting information, talking to friends and having your voice heard. But it’s really important to stay safe online.

Top Tips for staying safe online:

• Always keep your bank details a secret
• Keep your passwords a secret. Try to use different passwords for different accounts
• If you make a payment online it is usually safe, but always check the website you are buying from first. If you are not sure, ask somebody before entering your bank details
• Be careful about sharing your information and pictures online. If you do not know someone, do not share any of your personal information with them.
• Check your privacy settings on social media, so that the things you share are only seen by people who you choose
• If you think that you are being bullied on the internet, contact the police or speak to a member of staff at Advance

Remember: If you are unsure, always ask a friend, family member or Advance staff member.
VALENTINE'S DAY

Valentine’s Day is approaching and lots of people are thinking about dating and relationships.

Dating is a great way to meet new people and can be great fun! To keep it fun, here’s some of our Top Tips:

• If you’re meeting someone new, meet somewhere you know and are comfortable
• Tell somebody where you’re going and who you’re meeting
• Chat to someone on the phone or on Skype before meeting them for the first time
• Relax and be yourself
• It’s okay to say no - if you don’t want to do something, or change your mind, you don’t have to do it

If you’d like support meeting new people, or advice about having a relationship, you can talk to an Advance member of staff.

Fire Safety in your Home

It's important to make sure that everyone is safe in their home. Advance carries out Fire Risk Assessments at all of our properties, but there are simple everyday things that we can all do to keep safe.

Smoking Safety - If you are feeling drowsy, are drinking alcohol or are taking prescription drugs, take extra care when smoking. Don’t light up if you need to lie down and never smoke in bed.

Chip Pan Fire Safety - If you have a chip pan fire, never try to tackle the fire yourself. Turn off the heat if it is safe to do so. Get out, stay out and call 999. To avoid a chip pan fire, it’s best to cook chips in the oven.

Don’t Leave Cooking Unattended - Make sure you know what’s cooking and how long it should be cooking for. Avoid cooking if you’re tired, have been drinking alcohol or taking medication that can make you drowsy.

Smoke Alarms - Always test your smoke alarm regularly and replace a flat battery straight away.

Get a free safety check - Did you know you can get a free home-fire-safety check? Call your local fire service on their general enquiries number and they will visit to fit smoke alarms and give safety advice on keeping you and your home as safe as possible.
WAYS TO PAY

In the last few months we have been working with Allpay to provide more convenient ways for our Housing customers to pay their contributions for rent and service charges. We are pleased to be able to offer new ways for you to pay, making it easier for you.

As well as being able to pay by cheque, through the post office or standing order, you can now pay using Direct Debit. You can do this through the Allpay app, on the website www.allpayments.net or on the telephone by calling 08445578321 (telephone charges will apply).

For many of these new services you’ll need a payment card. You would have been offered a card at the beginning of your tenancy with Advance, but if you don’t have one there’s no need to worry! If you ask your housing officer then they can order one for you.

WHO CAN I TALK TO?

It’s important that you know who you can talk to if you feel that something isn’t right about the service you’re receiving from Advance. Ian has told us about making a complaint to Advance (see page 6) and what the Complaints Panel does. You can also talk to a member of Advance staff, such as your support worker or housing officer.

Sometimes, if you don’t feel like you can talk to a member of staff, it can be helpful to speak to someone who is also a customer and can give you advice on how to get your problem sorted.

If you would like to speak to another customer about your concerns, you can speak to Helen or Tom. They are the Chair and Vice-Chair of the National Forum and can give you information as well as feeding back any concerns (see page 5).

To get in touch with Helen or Tom you can email customerengagement@advanceuk.org or call 0333 012 4307.
Upcoming Events

Here are some events coming up soon!

If we need you to come along to anything, we'll make sure you get an invitation.

FEBRUARY

1st - Dignity Action Day

13th - Pancake Day

14th - Valentine's Day - have you read our article on safe relationships?

MARCH

6th - National Forum, Leicester
All customers in the Leicester area will be invited to attend - we look forward to hearing your views!

APRIL

1st - Easter Sunday (also April Fool's Day!)

18th - Operations Board Meeting

MAY

14th-20th - Mental Health Awareness Week
A week dedicated to raising awareness of mental health and well-being, run by the Mental Health Foundation.

15th - Ramadan begins

JUNE

15th - Eid al-Fitr

18th-24th - Learning Disability Week
A week dedicated to raising awareness of learning disabilities, run by Mencap

19th - Customer Conference
Save the date! This is our big annual customer conference. We will send you details about the event nearer the time (places are limited).
Your Creations

Here we showcase your amazing artwork and creations!
If you’d like something you’ve made to be featured contact
customerengagement@advanceuk.org or tell a member of Advance staff.
Thank you Claire, Jackie and Chris for your beautiful art!
Riddle...

What can you catch, but never throw?

FIND
10
DIFFERENCES