

Your Opinions ...

HouseCall with Moorlands MP Charlotte Atkins ...

Minister learns at first hand challenges of disabilities



VERPUL focus to the real challenges faced by families who daily with the severe disabilities of loved ones was brought to the fore by the visit by Ed Balls MP to Rud Lake last Friday. The day was full of praise for the work of the sailing club for families with disabilities, and Special Forces, the group of local families working tirelessly to give their disabled children all the opportunities they need and deserve.

Ed Balls may be better known as the Chancellor of the Exchequer, but his commitment to disability issues is well known as the recently appointed Epiloptix Disability Champion and the Treasury Minister

responsible for disability issues.

He continued his praise for Sailability as he presented Dennis Freedy with the Royal Yachting Association's first national award recognising Sailability as a Centre for Education and Excellence.

There will be only 14 such awards and for Sailability to win the first is a real coup.

The Minister was on hand to launch Sailability's newest sailing dinghy - a servo electrically powered fingertip controlled boat - generously sponsored by Britannia Building Society out of its charitable fund. This dinghy can be sailed by the most disabled of sailors allowing them to compete on equal terms with able bodied competitors.

Personally, I have been out on the lake in such a boat and got an insight into the sense of freedom, excitement and achievement that such an experience gives those who struggle with mobility on land.

Perhaps, before the Staffordshire Moorlands District Council (SMDC) planners consider turning down Sailability's second application for an essential boat store to protect these dinghies from the weather, they should give these boats a try.

Also, they should listen to Jackie Griffith's powerful presentation on what it means to receive the devastating news that your child will have to live with disability for the rest of their life. Jackie and her family have come through the trauma, the isolation,

frustration and fear with the help of Special Matters, Sailability and a load of agencies.

However, the daily challenges they and the 770,000 disabled children in our country - face are still enormous. That is why I invited Ed Balls to visit Rudyard Lake to meet Special Matters on their home ground (he gave them an award in London last June) and to see the work of Sailability for himself.

Also, one test of a civilised society is how it supports the families in greatest need. Hundreds of people signed a petition in support of Sailability's application for a new boat store when it applied for planning permission.

I hope the SMDC proves itself to be a civilised council and finds a way to support Sailability rather than close it down.

But there is now a national campaign called 'Every Disabled Child Matters' which aims to improve the lives of families with special needs. I am fully signed up to the campaign which is hoping to collect 100,000 signatures.

I urge you to register your support and help lead these families away from the brink of despair.

Please visit www.edcm.org.uk or telephone 020 7843 6448 or write to Every Disabled Child Matters, c/o Council for Disabled Children, National Children's Bureau, 8 Wakley Street, London EC1V 7QE.