



## Hero's award goes to Liz

**Liz Barraclough admits she was taken aback when MP Iain Wright telephoned her to say she was going to receive an award.**

Her work for Hartlepool's disabled community means she has been chosen as the second winner of annual Mr Wright's Local Heroes competition.

The award, which the MP set up after not one Hartlepool person was named in an honours list, rewards unsung heroes who work tirelessly on behalf of the community. Liz certainly does that.

She also combines a host of roles with looking after her 11-year-old daughter, Eleanor, who has severe physical and learning disabilities as a result of a fault in her gene make-up.

She cannot communicate through speech but does enjoy singing, and became a member of Hartlepool Youth Choir five years ago.

Eleanor will also start mainstream education at St Hild's School in September, after studying at Springwell School.

"Eleanor is a really lovely person and adores the youth choir," said Liz.

"When she was six, she went on the bus to Springwell and came back again. It used to break my heart to see how isolated she was."

"I had been a member of the youth choir when I first moved to Hartlepool and I saw the director who said to bring her along."

"Making people like Eleanor feel welcome is one of the most important things that the community can do for people with disabilities."

"She now goes every week and really enjoys it. The other kids have got to know her, and it has been the same with Brownies where she is just about to move up to Guides."

"It has made a big difference that she has friends and people don't stare at her any more."

Liz is also a director for the Northern Partners organisation, which provides free courses for disabled adults and carers and encourages them to take charge of their own destiny. Carers are given information about the rights of disabled people and training on how to deal with various issues such as benefits and employment.

"If you become disabled, the system is incredibly confusing and you need to information to find a way through," she said.

## Hero's award goes to Liz (continued)

"There are a lot of positive things that have come out of the partners' work."

"It is all about working with carers and disabled people to bring about big changes in their lives."

"I believe in empowering people to make a change in their own community, and I am glad that work is being recognised."

"I work around two to three days a week and we do courses every month throughout the whole of the North-East."

When Liz is not working or looking after her family, she finds time to be chair of governors at Springwell School and is also a member of Hartlepool Borough Council's children's services scrutiny forum.

"I have been a governor at Springwell for the past three years and the school has turned round significantly in that time," she said.

"It has had a good Ofsted report and has good relations with the local authority."

"I suppose I have always had a political streak because I used to be a trade union leader and the governorship fulfils that link."

"I have really enjoyed working with the scrutiny forum to get a wider perspective of working with schools."

Liz, from Kestrel Close, in Hartlepool, celebrated her award with her husband Andy, 41, a development manager, Eleanor and son Leonard, six.

"Iain Wright rang me up and said he would like to give me this award and I was taken aback," said Liz.

"I was very flattered and a little gobsmacked that I was only the second person to get the honour."

Mr Wright himself decided to make Liz his second Local Hero.

She follows in the footsteps of Pansies Breast Cancer Support Group founder Isobel Wilson.

"I simply have no idea where Liz finds the time or the energy to do such a valuable role in the local community," said Mr Wright.

"I thought Isobel Wilson, the first recipient of the Local Heroes award, would be a hard act to follow although Liz has proved to be a worthy successor."

"To a large extent, Liz's award is not merely a recognition of the unbelievably energetic work that she does, it is also a recognition of the hard work of all carers."

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