

## Countess opens Hospiscare's new centre

### Royal reward for community fundraising

Her Royal Highness the Countess of Wessex has officially opened Hospiscare's new mid-Devon centre Pine Lodge.

Patients, fundraisers and charity staff enjoyed a relaxed meeting with the Countess to mark the outstanding community effort to raise £250,000 to transform the former residential home in Tiverton into a thriving, multi-functional centre for local families.

The Countess was met by a range of key Hospiscare supporters including Dr John Searle who founded the charity nearly 30 years ago.

Pine Lodge – bought with a Department of Health grant – was a dark and neglected building when Hospiscare launched the ambitious campaign to transform it.

The Countess was given a tour by chief executive Glynis Atherton to showcase the transformation into a bright and welcoming centre offering a wealth of facilities including treatment rooms for complementary therapies, craftwork facilities and a fully-equipped hair salon to provide all-important "tlc" for patients. Outside she was introduced to Michael Hickson the former head gardener of the Knightshayes Garden Trust who has volunteered his time to design the Pine Lodge garden.

Her Royal Highness also met a number of patients who now attend the Pine Lodge day centre regularly including the charity's oldest patient Phyllis Lewis of Silverton who is 102 years young!

Phyllis insisted on standing to present the bouquet and was delighted when the Countess decided to stay a little longer to have a chat. Phyllis charmed the royal visitor by talking

about her large family which she joked made for a rather long Christmas list.

"She was so lovely," said Phyllis afterwards. "Absolutely charming and so natural. It was a real treat for us all."

The Countess completed her visit by unveiling a plaque and signing the centre's visitor book during which she joked that writing in public always invited comment as she is left-handed. "All the best people are," she said.

Afterwards Glynis Atherton thanked everyone involved on behalf of Hospiscare. "This visit was a real honour for us," she said. "The perfect reward for an outstanding effort by the local community. To raise so much money in just a few months in difficult times is extraordinary. It is also evidence of how much Hospiscare's work is both needed....and valued by local families. We couldn't be more pleased or grateful."

Glynis Atherton said the visit was also the perfect boost as the charity makes plans for a very special 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary year in 2012.