

# Start over with help from divorce fair

A DIVORCE fair is coming to Guildford for the first time next week, with mortgage advisers, life coaches and a 'mystic housewife healer' on hand to help newly single people move on with their lives.

The Starting Over Show, which is taking place on Thursday June 16 at the Holiday Inn in Guildford, aims to give people access to services to help them cope with a relationship break-up.

The Guildford show, which will feature 22 exhibitors, follows on from other events that creator and producer Suzy Miller has set up around the UK.

'Divorce fairs' first started in Europe, and mother-of-three Ms Miller decided to bring the concept to the UK following first-hand experi-

ence of a break-up when her 10-year relationship ended in 2003.

However, private detectives or DNA testers will not be making an appearance at the Guildford show, unlike at the first ever divorce fair held in Austria, with Ms Miller pointing out that she wanted to actively promote a non-combative approach to a break-up.

"The Starting Over Shows provide a whole new alternative to the commercialisation of divorce, something that is taking off on a local basis and the like of which has never been seen before in the UK - or abroad," explained Ms Miller.

"Visitors learn about non-adversarial approaches to divorce but also have access to life coaches and

business start-up opportunities."

Ms Miller believes that these events are not only a valuable local resource, but that they could help local businesses reduce the amount of costly stress-related absence from staff.

The Starting Over Shows are supported by the Ministry of Justice, and Ms Miller is collaborating with the government in encouraging divorcing couples to use mediation and non-adversarial approaches.

"This not only saves them money, but also can make the process less painful for the children and the wider family as a whole," Ms Miller explained.

Some might expect the reaction of the church regarding divorce to be strongly disapproving, but

the Rev John Gooding, from the Guildford Diocese, said he welcomed the Starting Over Show.

"When I heard about the show, I found it immensely encouraging, because divorce is a reality for so many people, whether we like it or not," he said.

"On the one hand the church is out to encourage life-long marriage but on the other hand, there is this thing called reality, and the church recognises this reality."

Although some churches run groups aimed at helping people going through divorce, Mr Gooding said he understood why some people might be put off from attending them.

"Some might think that the church might stand in the way and might judge

people, and even though the groups are not like that, that can be the impression they get," he said.

He applauded the fact that the Guildford Starting Over Show features exhibitors who deal in mediation, and hoped that people would be more tempted to go down that route than turning to the more costly divorce lawyers.

"The legal system seems to encourage lawyers to simply make it so complex and prolong it to earn more money from their fees," said Mr Gooding. "I think it's so sad that the legal community seems to actually want to take an awful long time in these cases."

The event runs from 6.30pm to 9.30pm at the Holiday Inn in Guildford.