



THE PHOENIX

Campaign for Independent Living in Lewisham

February 2006

Message from Denise Smith, Chair, Campaign for Independent Living in Lewisham (CILL)

CILL was successful in its first funding application to Capital Community Foundation and now has funding for this year for THE PHOENIX newsletter, to produce other publications and to develop a website. This means that THE PHOENIX is now available in large print and on tape on request.

Campaign Updates

CILL jumps in at the deep end – This campaign was to raise awareness about some disabled people's need for warmer water swimming and improved access facilities. Annette Stead and Colin King (LBL Leisure) have recognised this. A new advisory group of disabled people on sport, leisure and physical exercise will start very shortly and Colin King has secured a trial period for disabled people to use hydrotherapy – see item below. CILL has achieved what it set out to do so the campaign is over.

Blue Badge Parking and Cycle Paths – This campaign was to highlight some confusion that had arisen over some changes to Blue Badge Parking regulations and how the barriers on the cycle paths were restricting access to disabled people. Following two meetings with Darien Goodwin (LBL Highways and Parking) it is clear that the parking regulations in Lewisham are certainly as good as, and in some cases better, than other Boroughs, in future communication about proposed changes will be better and the Council is looking very seriously at the whole issue of access to the paths. CILL will be gathering information about disabled cycling and access to pass on to Darien Goodwin so that he can take this further. The campaign is at an end - we will pass on any information we get from Lewisham about plans. There has been no change to any of the other campaigns and information is still awaited.

HYDROTHERAPY

One of Lewisham's Special Schools has kindly agreed that disabled people can use their hydrotherapy pool at certain times and Lewisham Council have given CILL a trial period until Easter to see whether there is a need for hydrotherapy and if using the school pool works for disabled people and the school. There are seat and hoist transfer into the pool (carers will be shown how to use them), and in the two changing areas there are wheel-in showers, toilets and changing beds. If the trial is a success then use can be developed so we need to use the pool over the next two months to see if it is suitable.

At the moment the pool and changing rooms are available at specific times and to use them you must pre-book through CILL. You must also have someone with you – this is a safety requirement as the pool does not have a lifeguard.

If you would like to use the pool please telephone CILL to get more details and to make bookings: the number is - 020 8776 6967

Any comments that you have will be appreciated (for example if you would like to use the pool but the available times are unsuitable or if you would like an exercise class in the pool with a therapist or you have other access needs) and will be used to assess whether the trial is a success and how the project can develop.

The Chair's 2005 'Lemon' Awards

Disabled people and their concerns are still being ignored by some officers at Lewisham Council. They are:

John Miller (LBL Planning) – He has consistently ignored every attempt to obtain information about planning approval given for shop fronts which are inaccessible and contravene DDA Part 3.

Adi Cooper (LBL Community Services) – She has failed to respond to several issues that have been brought to her regarding direct payments and the support service 'Choices'.

Aileen Buckley (LBL Head of Community Services) – She has also chosen not to respond to questions regarding direct payments and 'Choices'. At the meeting with the Mayor on 2 December she suggested a meeting between her and CILL to talk about a few issues including advocacy. This did not happen.

Centres for Independent Living in danger of collapse

Edited from Disability Now, January 2006

Leading campaigners have raised concerns that Centres for Independent Living (CIL) are in danger of collapse. At a meeting of the All Party Parliamentary Disability Group in November, Jane Campbell, chair of the Social Care Institute for Excellence, urged the committee to highlight in parliament the fact that CILs were losing direct payments contracts to large, non-user led providers. She said this contradicted government commitments to service delivery by organisations led by disabled people.

Sian Vasey Director of Ealing CIL, said: "There is no evidence at all to show that the (non-CIL) organisations getting the commissions are doing good work."

Nick Danagher, Executive Director for the National Centre for Independent Living (NCIL), said he was hopeful that some of the issues would be addressed through new public duties being introduced under the Disability Discrimination Act later this year, and through government commitments.

Winter death toll proof

Edited from Disability Now, exclusive by John Pring, January 2006

Disability Now can reveal the strongest evidence yet that disabled people are dying every winter because they cannot afford to heat their homes. New figures - compiled from answers to a parliamentary question asked by Labour MP Roger Berry - provide an estimate of the number of people who have stopped receiving Incapacity Benefit (IB) during the winter months because they have died. The figures, released by disabled people's minister Anne McGuire, provide the first solid evidence that winter cold kills disabled people under 60. About 400 "excess winter deaths" provides DN with the first evidence yet from the government that cold weather kills disabled people.

The statistics are supported by a new report, Monitoring poverty and social exclusion 2005 by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, which says three in every ten disabled adults of working age in Britain are living in poverty - double the rate among non-disabled adults.

Poverty among disabled people is high and rising. The government has been warned but they are not doing anything about it. The Department for Work and Pensions said again that it stood by its decision not to extend winter fuel payments. The Chancellor, Gordon Brown, failed to extend the payments in his pre-budget report.

Cannabis rules in turmoil

Edited from Disability Now, January 2006

The UK government's policy on cannabis-based drugs appeared to be in complete disarray. The Home Office (HO) has ruled it would not allow people with conditions other than multiple sclerosis (MS) to even apply for permission to import the cannabis-based medicine Sativex.

The decision appears to run contrary to HO drugs policy and it contrasts with a Department of Health statement in November which stated: "A clinician wanting to import for a condition other than MS is effectively asking for a new import license and effectively both HO and the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) would consider its merits separately."

Christine Jones, Chief Executive of the MS Trust, said, "There seems to be an awful lot of misinformation about this. The Department of Health should take this up. One of the difficulties is that two different government departments are involved."

More in care

Edited from Disability Now, by Priya Kotecha, January 2006

The number of disabled people living in residential and nursing homes is on the increase, as local authorities fail to follow the principles of independent living, campaigners say. The latest Department of Health figures show the number of disabled people under 65 in care homes increased by more than 7,000 to 51,375 between 1997 and 2002.

The figures include all those who received financial support from a local authority, but do not include disabled people aged 65 and over. The figures showed that the increase was due to more people with learning difficulties and mental health conditions in residential care. The number of people with sensory and physical impairments has dropped slightly.

Tara Flood, Scope's head of external affairs, said: "These figures make for depressing reading when you consider all messages from the government currently are about supporting disabled people out of institutions and into independent lives."

Slow take-up of accessible housing plans

Edited from Disability Now, January 2006

Only four of 31 boroughs have implemented policies on wheelchair-accessible housing contained in the London Plan, according to new research. The Greater London Authority said in its February 2004 plan that ten per cent of all new housing should be fully wheelchair accessible. Research by John Grooms Housing Association (JGHA) has revealed that only four London boroughs make a clear reference to the ten per cent figure in their planning and housing frameworks. Eight did not mention wheelchair standard housing at all.

Tim Fallon, chief executive of JGHA, said the shortage of wheelchair accessible housing meant "thousands of disabled people throughout London are living in unsuitable homes", and the JGHA has called for stronger planning agreements between councils and developers.

More disabled people below poverty line

On 13 December in The Guardian newspaper – "Three out of 10 disabled adults of working age are living in poverty and the proportion is increasing in spite of the government's commitment to tackle social disadvantage, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation reported yesterday. It found a higher proportion of disabled people are living in poverty than 10 years ago. They are more likely than pensioners or children to be living below the official poverty threshold and twice as likely as able-bodied adults to be below the breadline."

"About 800,000 disabled people aged between 25 and retirement age were classed as being economically inactive but wanting to work, compared with 200,000 officially counted as being unemployed. For any level of educational qualification, a disabled person was around three times more likely to lack employment but to want to work than an able-bodied person."

Disability Rights Commission (DRC) warns of culture of complacency in public sector

From December 2006 the DDA will extend to functions of public authorities, placing a duty on them to promote disability equality. The DED places a duty on the public sector to actively promote disability equality, similar to the duty to promote race equality under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act. In addition, public sector bodies dubbed with 'specific duties' will be required to publish a Disability Equality Scheme setting out how they intend to eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote equality of opportunity. Crucially, organisations with specific duties – which include public bodies from local councils to government departments and from universities to hospitals - must involve disabled people in drawing up their schemes.

But a DRC survey among public sector managers revealed that:

- Senior public sector managers had low levels of interest in the DED and, unlike the race equality duty, lacked the personal commitment to see it through;
- Senior managers were transferring their responsibility to take the lead in implementing the new duties to HR Directors and equalities officers;
- There was evidence of marked complacency on the impact of the DED on employment practices and workplace issues.

Speaking on the publication of the Code of Practice Bert Massie, DRC Chairman said:

"Most public bodies must have their Disability Equality Schemes in place by December 2006 and this means they need to start involving disabled people in both design and implementation right now. Public sector organisations have grasped the message about better building access for disabled people. However, they need to understand that the duty is more wide ranging than this."

Mr Massie continued:

"Our campaign will arm them with the tools they need to critically examine the readiness of their organisation to meet the challenge that the new duty will pose."

End of Routemaster transforms the lives of millions of disabled Londoners

The last London Routemaster bus ran on 9th December 2005. Bert Massie, Chairman of the Disability Rights Commission (DRC) said: "Providing accessible buses has transformed the lives of some two million disabled Londoners, in many cases allowing them to travel freely and independently across the capital for the very first time."

Transport poses significant challenges for disabled people. Leonard Cheshire survey found that:

- 23 per cent of respondents had to turn down a job offer and a further 23 per cent a job interview because of inaccessible transport;
- almost half of respondents claimed that inaccessible transport had restricted their choice of jobs;
- 29 per cent of respondents without access to a car missed medical appointments because of inaccessible transport and 20 per cent had deferred treatment compared to only 7 per cent of the general public.

IN CELEBRATION OF TWO FRENCH 'ACTIVISTS'

Louis Braille

Edited from the RNID website

Louis Braille invented "braille", a world wide system of embossed type used by blind and partially sighted people for reading and writing. It has been adapted to almost every known language, from Albanian to Zulu.

Louis Braille was born in a small town near Paris on 4 January 1809. One day when Louis Braille was 4 years old, he crept into his father's workshop to play. He picked up an awl, as he bent over, the awl slipped and pierced his eye, destroying it forever. Some time later his other eye became infected by the first and he lost his sight altogether.

Despite his sight loss the young child attended the village school with his sighted friends for two years. Eventually it became clear that he would not be able to learn much more, largely because he could not read or write. Without an education it was likely that he would have to beg on the streets.

At the age of ten he was lucky enough to be sent to a school for blind boys in Paris, one of the first in the world. One day something happened that changed the lives of blind people forever. In 1821, a soldier named Charles Barbier visited Louis' school. He brought with him a system he had invented called "night writing". Night writing had originally been designed so that soldiers could pass instructions along trenches at night without having to talk and give their positions away. It consisted of twelve raised dots which could be combined to represent different sounds. Unfortunately it proved to be too complex for soldiers to master and was therefore rejected by the army.

The young Louis Braille quickly realised how useful this system of raised dots could be, provided it was simplified. Over the next few months he experimented with different systems until he found an ideal system using six dots.

He continued to work on the scheme for several years after, developing separate codes for maths and music. In 1827 the first book in braille was published.

Even so, the new system did not catch on immediately. Sighted people did not understand how useful braille could be and one head teacher at the school even banned the children from learning it. Fortunately this seemed to have the effect of encouraging the children even more and they took to learning it in secret. Eventually even sighted people began to realise its benefits.

Not only could people with sight problems read braille but they could also write it for themselves using a simple stylus to make the dots. For the first time blind and partially sighted people began to be truly independent and to take control of their own lives.

Louis Braille eventually became a teacher in the school where he had been a student. He was admired and respected by his pupils but, unfortunately, he did not live to see his system widely adopted. He had always been plagued by ill health and in 1852, at the age of 43, he died from tuberculosis.

In France itself, Louis Braille's achievement was finally recognised by the state. In 1952 his body was moved to Paris where it was buried in the Pantheon, the home of France's national heroes.

Deaf Education Pioneer - Abbe Charles Michel De L'Epee, 1712-1789

In the 18th century, the Abbe, a priest, visited a home and found two little girls who did not speak (and because of their silence, he thought they were rude). Soon he found out they were not rude, only Deaf. This inspired him to invent a sign language and teach these language deprived children.

To develop the sign language, he observed and learned from a system of signs already being used by the Deaf people of Paris. The Abbe's system incorporated these signs into a more formalized sign system.

The Abbe Charles Michel's success led to a "class" of at least 40 students, and in 1754 he set up and funded by himself, the first public school for Deaf children in France, the "Institution Nationale des sourds-muets de Paris," which translates to the National Deaf-Dumb Institute of Paris. The formal sign system enabled Deaf people in France to communicate words and concepts, and became the basis for American Sign Language and also influenced other European sign languages.

In addition, the Abbe also published a book, *Instruction of Deaf and Dumb using Methodical Sign*, and a sign language dictionary.

France has honoured the Abbe by putting him on a stamp that was issued in 1959.

"Independent Living is not a service, it is freedom; it is liberation; it is equality for disabled people"

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