



# THE PHOENIX

Campaign for Independent Living in Lewisham

March 2006

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

Next month CILL will be holding a meeting to discuss how we can take forward several initiatives that CILL has been involved in. We are proposing to set up a Centre of Independent Living offering various services including Active Life Projects (ALPs). The enclosed letter gives full details and I hope very much to see you at the meeting.

## Campaign Updates

Direct Payments and Choices – This week CILL had a very positive meeting with Aileen Buckton, Executive Director Community Services and Adi Cooper, Head of Adult Services, at Lewisham Council. We had previously received a detailed reply from Adi Cooper to all the questions CILL had asked. CILL is now satisfied that Choices are providing a professional service and Lewisham regularly monitors the services. There are issues around Direct Payment take up and a user network that need to be addressed but Lewisham is already looking into this. Lewisham have specific standards and time limits for all care assessments but have asked CILL to let people know that there have been delays when there has been a need to involve an occupational therapist. Lewisham has had great difficulty recruiting and retaining occupational therapists but this is now a priority so the situation should start to improve. CILL wants to work with Community Services and has offered to work with them in the future.

Inaccessible New Shop Front in Catford - CILL has now had a reply from Planning at Lewisham Council. One of the inaccessible shop fronts did not apply for planning permission for changes carried out and has now applied for approval to the works carried out being retained. CILL has objected to the retention of the shop front as it contravenes DDA Part 3. We have also asked Planning for other information regarding how DDA Part 3 is taken into account.

Bus 185 - CILL has had no response to the complaint we made to Transport for London (TFL). We have complained to them about this and have also contacted Greater London Association of disabled people (GLAD) to alert them to problems with this route.

Right to a fair hearing – Mayor Steve Bullock has written to CILL regarding this issue that was raised at the International Day of Disabled People meeting 'Let's Talk'. Lewisham has 'An Interagency Vulnerable Adult Protection Procedure' with the core principle to 'support vulnerable adults to achieve justice'. Lewisham is supporting an awareness campaign to empower and enable people with learning difficulties to challenge abuse. CILL is reassured that Lewisham takes this issue seriously and is committed to ensuring that vulnerable adults have a fair hearing.

## Council's free home care - Edited from Disability Now - Priya Kotecha, February 2006

Disabled residents of a London borough should no longer have to pay for home care, as their council prepares to abolish charges from next month. The move has been welcomed by campaigners, who have called on other local authorities to follow its lead.

Hammersmith and Fulham (HAF), is one of the first councils in the country to abolish charges - Derby City Council abolished its charges in October. The money would now come from extra central government funding and savings. It would not have to cut costs elsewhere in its social care budget.

Menghi Mulchandani, co-chair of the National Centre for Independent Living, said: "We think it's excellent news. It finally takes away an extra tax that disabled people have to pay and we hope that other local authorities will take note and do the same."

## Call to place disability at the heart of the Government's poverty strategy

During a keynote speech to launch a nationwide advertising campaign on the impact of disability discrimination in Britain, Bert Massie, Chairman of the Disability Rights Commission said "The inequality experienced by disabled people stands between the Government and its targets to reduce child poverty and increase the number of people in work, today."

His comments came as figures reveal that more disabled adults and those with long term health conditions are now living in poverty than children or pensioners.

This is having a massive impact on child poverty. In two thirds of families where both parents are out of work one parent is disabled.

In a speech aimed at re-positioning disability equality at the centre of decision making in Britain, Mr Massie said:

"The inequality experienced by disabled people affects us all. It stands between this Government and the ability to achieve its core ambitions for Britain. But despite positive steps in some areas, public policy is in danger of leaving disabled people behind."

"Successive governments have failed to break the culture of low expectations that holds disabled people back – including the present administration. There is a lazy fatalism that too often shapes the perceptions that politicians have of disabled people. In important areas, the distance between the living standards, opportunities and life-chances between disabled people and the rest of the population has widened."

"Despite recent developments, society still tends to come from the point of view that its best response to disability is through care, welfare and charity rather than extending rights, opportunities and citizenship."

### **Incapacity Benefit Reforms** - Edited from Disability Now - Priya Kotecha, February 2006

Disabled people on Incapacity Benefit (IB) could be forced to try to return to work or face a cut in benefits, according to the government's welfare reform green paper, unveiled in January.

The green paper outlines plans to get one million people off IB and into work over the next ten years, helping the government save £7 billion a year.

The plans will now be put out for consultation until 21 April, but many details are still sketchy.

Existing IB claimants who are deemed fit to work could see their benefits cut from 2008 if they do not cooperate with the new regime. Under the new proposals, existing IB claimants deemed fit for work will be expected to attend work-focussed interviews under the Pathways to Work scheme, which will be rolled out nationally by 2008.

Disability rights groups have given a mixed reaction to the proposals, many warning that they will create a two-tier system of those who can work and those who cannot.

Lorna Reith, Chief Executive of Disability Alliance said: "Instead of threatening sick and disabled people with benefit sanctions, the government should be concentrating its efforts on developing an effective retention strategy, which would prevent people being pushed out of the labour market in the first place."

Other concerns include the lack of funding for the reforms and the shortage of jobs available for disabled people to return to work.

Other proposals include placing employment advisors in GP's surgeries for a trial period and improved occupational health and safety to prevent employees falling ill in the first place.

- Mencap has expressed shock and disappointment at the Government's failure to publish its Welfare Reform Green Paper in an easy-read version for people with a learning disability.

### **Benefit system too complex, says report** - Edited from Disability Now - John Pring, January 2006

Disabled people often face serious problems coping with the complexity of the benefits system, according to a new National Audit Office (NAO) report.

Disabled people often under-claim for benefits they are entitled to because they find it so difficult to fill in forms and deal with the system, said the report.

The report said there were frequent errors in benefit payments due to mistakes by both staff and customers. Figures from 2003/04 showed nearly half of all Disability Living Allowance appeals and more than one in four Incapacity Benefit appeals were successful.

The report called for new, simpler benefits, easier application procedures and better use of technology. The green paper on benefits reform would include proposals for further improvements.

### **Don't Lose the Music**

Brian Lamb, Director of Communications, RNID said: "RNID's Don't Lose the Music Campaign is very interested in working with manufacturers to ensure that warnings, regarding the risk of listening to MP3 players too loudly, are made more prominent both on and in the packaging of their products. Don't Lose the Music is aware that there are ways that noise limiters on some MP3 players can be overridden. We are seriously concerned that if the anecdotal evidence we have that people are cracking these codes is true, then it could become a widespread problem."

### **Mind comments on SHiFT media coverage report**

Claire Ashby, Mind spokesperson said: "Undoubtedly reporting of some general mental health issues has improved. However, SHiFT's research shows the undeniable evidence of the stigmatising impact that media coverage has had on a significant number of people with mental health problems, as did Mind's survey, Counting the Cost (2000).

This latest survey backs up our grave concerns over sensationalist and negative media coverage, especially news coverage of one-off cases which Mind believes has directly influenced the Government's

draft Mental Health Bill. As the Parliamentary Joint Committee's report noted: 'the Bill is too focused on addressing public misconception about violence and mental illness'. It has perhaps never been more crucial to recognise the importance of accurate and positive mental health media coverage to reduce the overwhelming stigma still suffered by the 1 in 4 people who experience mental health problems."

### **Major improvement in legal access for deaf and hard of hearing people**

The Legal Services Commission (LSC) has now confirmed its recent decision to cover the costs of British Sign Language Interpreters for deaf and hard of hearing people accessing legal services also covers the costs of other types of Language Service Professionals such as Lip-speakers and speech-to-text operators.

The LSC decision to provide funding for BSL interpreters and other Language Service Professionals, comes after intense lobbying from RNID, the Disability Rights Commission, the Law Society and the Legal Aid Practitioners Group.

Simon Robinson, Senior Legal Officer with RNID's Legal Casework Service, says: "Deaf people have found it very difficult to get legal advice to claim their rights as full citizens as interpreters had not been provided. This has raised serious human rights issues. RNID is pleased that the LSC will now fund all language service professionals to enable deaf people to access legal advice."

### **Motability slammed for 'absolute incompetence'** - Edited from Disability Now - February 2006

The UK's leading car scheme for disabled people has been blasted for "absolute incompetence" and forced to apologise after giving out incorrect information on its helpline.

Mr Greenwood, from Bolton, was wrongly advised that he would have to pay the 17.5 per cent VAT on the purchase price of an adapted vehicle - a mistake which could have cost him around £2,550.

Mr Greenwood said: "People put a great deal of credence into what an organisation like Motability says. They don't have to give out information, but if they do, it should be accurate."

Motability senior coach, Koray Koraca, admitted he and colleagues had got it wrong in the case of Mr Greenwood and said future similar calls would be referred to the Inland Revenue.

### **Euthanasia**

A new report from Brunel University has found that medical practitioners ended the lives of an estimated 2,800 patients through euthanasia in 2004.

An anonymous survey of 857 doctors was carried out on their decisions when faced with terminally ill patients. It was estimated that 936 UK deaths were "voluntary euthanasia", where the patient asks the doctor to end their life. Another 1,930 were due to doctors "ending life without an explicit request from the patient". Both are illegal under British law.

About 175,000 deaths were due to "withholding or withdrawing treatment", which is legal, with about 190,000 deaths by doctors legally alleviating symptoms with possible life-shortening effects.

### **U-turn on Sativex** - Edited from Disability Now - February 2006

The Home Office has performed a dramatic U-turn, by signalling that disabled people with conditions other than multiple sclerosis (MS) could apply for permission to import the cannabis-based medicine Sativex.

The Home Office had previously said that only people with MS would be able to apply, through their doctors, to import the drug from Canada - a decision that would have turned UK drugs policy on its head. But the Home Office has now signalled that people with conditions such as arthritis or cancer pain can also apply to obtain the drug through a licensed importer.

Home Secretary Charles Clarke announced that cannabis would remain a class C drug, deciding not to overturn the decision made by David Blunkett two years ago.

Also, a new Royal College of Physicians report has suggested that cannabis-based medicines could offer future treatments for pain, cardiovascular diseases and osteoporosis.

Disabled people seeking information about Sativex should ask their GP to contact the importer GWP, tel: 01980 557000, [www.gwpharm.co.uk](http://www.gwpharm.co.uk)

### **Chip & PIN deadline**

On 14 February 2006 signatures will no longer be accepted when using Chip & PIN cards. This will not affect blind and partially sighted people and others who have been issued with a Chip & Signature card; signatures will still be allowed.

Some blind and partially sighted people who are unable to use PINs have a Chip & PIN card rather than a Chip & Signature card. They have until now been asking retailers to allow them to sign rather than key in a PIN. **The RNIB would strongly advise anyone in this position to contact their card issuer to request a Chip & Signature card.**

### **Flight victory in sight** - Edited from Disability Now - Priya Kotecha, February 2006

Disabled people put off flying for fear of broken equipment and poor treatment have praised Disability Now (DN) for helping secure new laws aimed at ensuring better services.

DN's Flight Rights campaign was applauded for its part in the move after European Union (EU) legislation, 'Rights of disabled people and persons of restricted mobility when travelling by air', was approved in the European Parliament before Christmas.

Under the new laws, disabled travellers will be entitled to compensation if their equipment is damaged. The European Commission is currently deciding who should be responsible for paying for damage and how compensation should be calculated.

The new EU laws will also mean that, from April 2007, disabled passengers cannot be refused carriage on the grounds of their disability or lack of mobility "except for justified safety reasons in accordance with international, community or national law".

The rest of the legislation, which will sit side-by-side with the UK's voluntary code of practice for air travel, will come into effect by April 2008, making it illegal for airlines or airports to levy a charge for wheelchair assistance.

Authorities are currently preparing a final version of the legislation.

### **Prison for vote thieves** - Edited from Disability Now - February 2006

Anyone who attempts to stop a disabled person voting in a public election could face up to five years behind bars, under the Electoral Administration Bill, which is due to go through the House of Lords.

Scope said it would help prevent service managers and care workers from blocking a disabled person's vote. Carers or household members often wrongly assumed that a disabled person did not understand the electoral process. Some carers even use the disabled person's ballot to vote twice.

Furthermore, Scope is pushing to remove a clause from the bill that would allow election officials to deprive a disabled person of their vote if they thought they did not have sufficient "mental capacity".

Meanwhile, a spokesman for the Department for Constitutional Affairs admitted the government did not have figures to show how many disabled people vote, or are registered to vote, even though they keep figures for other minority groups.

### **How to get audio description**

Audio description is a vital service that can help people with sight problems to enjoy fully leisure activities. It is an additional narration that describes all significant visual information such as body language, facial expression, scenery, action, costumes - anything that is important to conveying the plot of the story, event or image. Audio description is available on television, video and DVD, cinemas, museums, galleries theatres and sports venue.

Find out the latest information on audio description in the RNIB's website – [www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk)

### **La Bohème ticket offer**

Staged fully in the round the entire floor of the Royal Albert Hall will be transformed into 1940's Paris. Francesca Zambello's stunning production of La Bohème enthral the hearts of those present. From the rapturous grand scale celebrations of Cafe Momus to the tender intimacy of the artisan's garret, audiences are drawn from all sides into the unfolding action on the arena stage where passion and spectacle mix with despair and ultimate tragedy.

Performed by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and sung in English using David Parry's translation, La Bohème contains some of Puccini's finest music.

There is an audio-described performance on Saturday 4 March at 2.30pm and the Royal Albert Hall is offering disabled people two tickets for the price of one.

To book tel: 020 7838 3110 between 9am and 9pm, seven days a week and quote "Audio Description Offer".

It would be helpful if you could advise the Box Office of your access needs when booking your tickets. An administration charge of £3.50 per booking is made on postal, web and telephone orders.

This offer is subject to availability and the audio description offer is limited to the performance on Saturday 4 March at 2.30pm.

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

**SUPPORTED BY CAPITAL COMMUNITY UNIT – NEIGHBOURHOOD RENEWAL UNIT**

CILL, 5 Silverdale House, Silverdale, London SE26 4SD

email: [campaign@fsmail.net](mailto:campaign@fsmail.net)