



THE PHOENIX

Campaign for Independent Living in Lewisham

October 2005

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

CILL has put in its first funding application so now we have to wait to see if we are successful. Fingers crossed!

On 6 September Steve Cheesman, our membership secretary, and I went to the Bellingham & Downham Community Forum. This was a very informative meeting and I have included some information we got about the Bellingham Gateway Project and volunteering in Lewisham. I also went to the Police Community Consultative Group Meeting on 20 September and there will be information about this in next month's copy of THE PHOENIX.

Please contact us if there is anything that you think we might be able to help you with.

CILL Campaign updates

CILL jumps in the deep end

Gary Evans, our Treasurer, and Denise Smith met with Annette Stead (LBL Head of Leisure) on 16 September. Lewisham are undertaking a warm water swim project headed by Colin King who was also at the meeting.

CILL raised a number of issues that included raising the water temperature at one pool in the Borough and various access issues that would allow a greater number of disabled people to use leisure facilities. The Centre that is already very accessible is The Bridge Leisure Centre at Sydenham and CILL has suggested that this is the venue at which warm water swimming and improved swimming and gym facilities for disabled people takes place.

The main points covered were:

- A new leisure complex is planned for 2010. At the moment it is still in the planning stage so it could include all the issues that disabled people need. There is a possibility that there could also be a hydrotherapy pool if that need is identified.
- Annette and Colin will take up with the contractors responsible for the pools, in the next couple of weeks, all of the suggestions put forward by CILL to find out what can be done now to improve access and water temperature.
- Annette will look into the use of a couple of school pools, one for swimming and the other for hydrotherapy, by disabled people as that may be a way of meeting need in the short term.
- Colin is setting up a consultative group of disabled people to get a wide range of views from people with different impairments. Gary and Denise will represent CILL on that Group.

CILL believes that both Annette Stead and Colin King are trying to improve facilities so more disabled people can use them. However it is not always easy or even possible to do. There are technical considerations that limit water temperature and everyone in the Borough, both disabled and non-disabled, often have different and conflicting needs. For example, many would like a very warm water hydrotherapy pool but serious disabled swimmers with their hopes and training fixed on the 2012 ParaOlympics in London (and yes Lewisham has some) have different needs. At this stage Annette and Colin should be congratulated for their commitment to consultation with disabled people to bring about improvements now and in the future.

CILL will keep you informed of developments.

Direct Payments

Adi Cooper, Head of Adult Services, at Lewisham Council is looking into the information requested by CILL about the service being provided by Choices, the results of a review and concerns we expressed about information being given to clients about direct payments by a social worker. We also want to know if disabled people can expect their applications for direct payments to be processed within certain time limits (we know of a request that was not processed for six months and we say that is unacceptable). If you are experiencing problems with Choices or are having difficulty getting direct payments please get in touch with CILL and we will try to help.

Inaccessible New Shop Front in Catford

CILL has had no reply from Lewisham as to why planning permission for an inaccessible shop front was given. We have asked again for the third time BUT 3 strikes and their out so no reply this time and we get mean! We have also become aware of another inaccessible restaurant shop front that has been installed recently so we are now adding that to our letter.

Cycle Paths But Not for All

CILL has had no reply from Lewisham about cycle paths in the Borough so we have written again this time to Darian Goodwin at Highways and Parking.

Bus 185

We have just received information about route 185 and the fact that a wheelchair user was unable to board three buses that came one after another because the ramps had apparently broken. Needless to say CILL will be following up this matter with East Thames Buses and Transport for London.

Council Budget Funding

CILL has had a reply from Rachael Turner at Policy and Partnerships at LBL to the specific questions we asked about the Achieving Access for All (disability equality) strategy 2004-07. We wanted to know specifically what works were being planned, whether local disabled people were consulted about what was wanted and whether there was going to be any evaluation of the strategy to measure how successful it had been. The information CILL received is as follows:

- There is a three-year programme of work split into a series of smaller contracts to allow flexibility given the Council's changing property portfolio and to allow for feedback from building users. For example, although not initially scheduled for 05/06, the stair-lift in the Civic Suite is to be upgraded this financial year as a result of a visitor finding he could not use it.
- Frequently used buildings are being targeted in these works 'to complement existing service solutions with further physical aids and adaptations. The programme of works to buildings aims to ensure that customers can easily access the reception area of all our buildings, where their requirements for service provision can be assessed.'
- The current contract will be completed by the end of October 2005 and includes work in over 70 buildings. Examples given are:
 1. Ackroyd Community Centre – works on entrance, including handrails, steps, power assist door, portable desk hearing loop
 2. Lewisham Irish Community Centre – works on entrance, including on ramp handrails, power assist door, portable desk hearing loop
 3. Mornington Centre – works on entrance, including on ramp handrails, steps, power assist door, fixed and portable desk hearing loop, wayfinding signage
 4. Sydenham Neighbourhood Housing office – works on entrance, including on ramp handrails, steps, power assist door, portable desk hearing loop, wayfinding signage
 5. Bellingham North Community Centre – wayfinding signage, works on entrance ramp handrails, portable desk hearing loop.

Apparently LBL consulted with local disabled people over four years and in summary that comprised:

- A mystery shopping exercise
- A review of accessible services
- A review of customer services
- A specific component of eight service reviews.

The DDA 2005 places a duty on public bodies such as the Council to produce and regularly review a Disability Equality Scheme by December 2006 and LBL will be publishing theirs early in the New Year. Evaluation of the Disability Equality strategy will be through this.

Rachael also says that 'if any disabled person is experiencing problems accessing Council buildings and services, they should alert the service manager in the first instance. If they wish to log the issue more formally, they should use the comments, complaints and compliments system, by phone, online or by completing a form from the service or library.

LBL will be consulting on their Scheme and CILL has asked to participate. We have also asked for details of all scheduled changes so that we can publish details in THE PHOENIX. If you have identified a specific problem with a building please contact CILL so that we can bring this to Rachael's attention and in this way we can influence the property improvement programme.

Steve Cheesman, CILL's Membership Secretary

My name is Steve Cheesman and I am CILL's Membership Secretary. Previously, I was an active member of Lewisham Independent Living Users Group (LISUG). I have had multiple sclerosis for the last ten years so I have direct experience of the issues faced by disabled people. I live in Bellingham and like to keep myself as mobile as I can so I am often out and about locally in my wheelchair or powered scooter.

If you have any questions about membership please ring me or write to me. I realize that filling in the membership form can be difficult so you can always telephone me and I will be happy to fill in the form for you. My details are: Steve Cheesman, 13 Marton Close, Bellingham, London SE6 3SS. My telephone number is 020 8697 5059 and I am available between 2.00 and 5.00 p.m. on Mondays and Tuesdays.

I am also representing CILL at the Community Development Forum meetings for Bellingham & Downham and Deptford and if I can help disabled people in any of these areas please get in touch.

Volunteering

Suki at Volunteer Centre Lewisham is part of a project to get all sections of the community involved in volunteering. If you are interested in doing some volunteer work why not give Suki a call on 020 8852 8200.

Bellingham Gateway

The Government's Decent Homes Standard has resulted in this initiative to deal with the Council owned properties at Bellingham. Eventually all these properties will be upgraded to an agreed standard. Elderly and disabled people do not need to worry about how they will cope with work being done to their homes as there will be a support team available to give practical assistance. Information can be got from PPCR tenants advisors on FREEPHONE 0800 317066.

CHOICES or CHAOS

As a follow up to our item in the last issue, we have received information that CHOICES, the organisation appointed by Lewisham Council in 2004 to provide services to direct payment users, is failing to pay personal assistants (carers) on time which is obviously creating real problems for both disabled people and their staff. This situation has been going on for some time despite CHOICES's assurances that they have sorted out their problems.

Furthermore, there appears to be a lack of communication inside CHOICES. One person in the organisation is saying they will pay PAs directly whilst at the same time another is saying that the responsibility lies with the disabled person. Conflicting messages are causing unnecessary levels of stress in the lives of disabled people.

Also, it appears that CHOICES is not carrying out vital checks leaving both disabled employers and their PAs at high risk. CHOICES's credibility is in question and CILL calls on Lewisham Council to investigate this situation as a matter of urgency and provide a public statement, together with a copy of the annual review on CHOICES's service.

Social service plan questioned

Disability and social service leaders have said plans to overhaul social services for adults must be better defined and receive cash in order to succeed, in their responses to the government's green paper on the issue.

The paper, released in April, promised disabled people "higher quality support and greater control over their lives", but said changes would need to be met with existing resources by redesigning services.

The British Council of Disabled People (BCODP), Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS), and others, reject the government's assertion that implementation will require no extra funding.

Simone Aspis (left), of the BCODP, told DN: "The cost of funding and support is not necessarily cheap and has to be planned for. There are management costs to go with it too."

The ADSS has also demanded a rethink on proposals to introduce individual budgets to "give people greater control over the services they need".

In its response, the association criticises the lack of clarity about the new system, saying members "question the wisdom of two parallel systems where there is considerable potential for confusion, unnecessary bureaucracy and duplication of costs".

No room at the inn - The hotel industry is failing disabled people

The UK's leading hotel groups are failing to accommodate disabled people, a new survey by disability charity Leonard Cheshire has found. The report is available to download from: www.leonard-cheshire.org.uk

The survey uncovered many potential shortfalls in levels of service across the board:

- Less than half of the hotels surveyed (46%) said that they offered fully accessible bathing facilities in their "accessible" rooms. The remaining hotels only provided a 'tub' bath that required lifting, rather than a wetroom, side opening bath or roll in shower.
- Less than a third of hotels said that they had lifts with Braille buttons to enable blind customers to travel to their floors
- A third of hotels said that their "accessible" rooms did not provide half size wardrobes or lower rails, to enable wheelchair users to hang up their clothes
- Only just over half the hotels (53%) said that they were able to provide restaurant or room service menus in Braille or large print
- Only 16/30 (53%) of the hotels surveyed said that they had a hearing induction loop installed in their reception area to assist customers with hearing impairments
- Only one of the 30 hotels surveyed said that it had a text phone installed in its disabled room.

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

Fear of getting sued is limiting lifestyle choices

Edited from Disability Now, September 2005

Health and safety risk assessment procedures are "leading to diminished opportunities across life" for disabled people, according to a Disability Rights Commission document released as part of its national Disability Debate.

In 'Whose Risk Is It Anyway?', the DRC calls for a "grown up" debate to stop organisations and authorities taking "wholly disproportionate steps" against disabled people and "limiting their choices to participate fully in society".

In one case, Lynne Coupe, from Chorley, Lancashire, went three months without a shower after her stairlift broke down. Social services refused to install a new stairlift because they said she needed help getting on and off. She was told "using the lift in these circumstances would be against health and safety rules", even though she had been using her stairlift for eight years. They offered to take her to the hospital once a week to be showered but her husband Francis refused and installed a shower in the sun lounge, despite being refused permission by the council.

Mr Coupe said: "If the rules being applied to disabled people were the same as those being applied to non-disabled people, then no one would ever get out of bed in the morning."

Lancashire social services are investigating the case.

£500 extra fee

Edited from Disability Now, September 2005

A disabled woman has criticised the "astronomical" prices charged for wheelchair maintenance. Elizabeth Nelson said she felt "taken for a ride" after having to fork out £595, charged by Aldersley Battery Chairs in the West Midlands, to replace the drive shaft on her wheelchair. She said the part then broke within a month.

Bob Ross, a helpline advisor for the Disabled Living Foundation (DLF), said: "When people are purchasing equipment it's important they shop around and check on aftersales service and level of care. If people have trouble after purchasing equipment, there are trading standards offices in all areas that people can complain to. There are a lot of suppliers out there and by calling the DLF helpline, experienced advisers can guide you on the various options," Helpline - 0845 130 9177 (charged at Local Call Rate). Opening times are 10.00am - 4.00pm Monday to Friday. The text phone number is 020 7432 8009.

Direct Payments survey

A research study into how direct payments are working for people is being conducted by the Multiple Sclerosis (MS) Society.

The survey is the first stage in the research work on the Direct Payments system and is an opportunity to have your say, along with the chance to sign up for the later stages of this work when discussion groups will be held in a number of areas across the country.

If you have MS, live in the UK and are using direct payments, thinking about it or wanting to find out more, the MS Society would like to hear from you.

Visit their website www.mssociety.org.uk to complete an online survey, and read more about the study.

Census questions need rethink

Edited from Disability Now, September 2005

A think tank has called on the Office of National Statistics (ONS) to improve its census questions that provide information about disabled people. The main concern of the group, part of disability employment company Breakthrough UK, is that inaccurate information, such as counting disabled and "sick" people in one group, can have a detrimental effect on services and planning as well as how funds are allocated to local authorities.

Member Pam Thomas said questions should be more in line with the social model of disability. "What they should be asking is, 'Are there things in society that stop you from doing what you need to do?'"

An ONS spokeswoman said the concern had been highlighted in a number of responses to a general consultation it had recently run on census data.

New DRC web guide: using your rights at work

Disability Rights Commission, September 2005

The DRC has launched a new Using Your Rights web guide, which gives disabled people and employment advisors practical advice on how to tackle discrimination.

This guide will help make clear whether you have experienced disability discrimination. It explains how you can try to resolve problems in the workplace and guides you through the complex process of taking a case to an employment tribunal.

You can download key resources on the DRC website, such as sample grievance letters and tips on how to complete an 'ET1' - an employment tribunal application form.

Please go to: <http://www.drc-gb.org/usingyourrights>

**ARE YOU A DISABLED PERSON
LIVING IN LEWISHAM?
YES!
THEN JOIN CILL NOW.**

From: Steve Cheesman, Membership Secretary

Campaign for Independent Living in Lewisham (CILL) welcomes applications for membership from disabled persons living in Lewisham. Membership is free and to join simply fill in the details below and return the form to CILL.

I will then contact you to confirm your membership and to answer any questions you may have.

Your Name:

Address:

Phone:

Fax:

Email:

If you would prefer to give me the details by phone my number is 0208 697 5059 – between 2.00 pm and 5.00 pm, Monday and Tuesday afternoons.

**Return to:
Steve Cheesman,
Membership Secretary
CILL
13 Marton Close,
London SE6 3SS**

OR

Email your details to: campaign@fsmail.net (do not click reply or forward as your details will not appear)

The National Forum for Organisations of Disabled People (NFDP)

The Government is inviting applications for members of an interim Advisory Group to work with disability organisations, disabled people, Ministers and government officials to drive forward the work to create this new Forum. We wish to encourage applications from disabled people, including disabled people from all ethnic minority backgrounds.

The creation of the National Forum for Organisations of Disabled People (NFDP) is a recommendation in the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit report 'Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People'. The Government recognises that it needs to increase involvement of disabled people, including disabled children and young people, in the development and delivery of policies impacting on their lives. The creation of the NFDP is one method within a broad strategy to achieve this.

Initial consultations are underway to gain insight into how disability organisations and disabled people want the Forum to operate. The results of this and future consultations will inform the ongoing work of the Advisory Group.

The remit of the Advisory Group will be to:

- offer strategic, confidential advice to Ministers and officials across government on the creation, composition, role, remit and reporting mechanisms of the new Forum.

Applicants must:

- have experience in disability issues and an understanding of the diverse range of concerns within the disabled people's community;
- be able to identify, commission and drive forward specific projects;
- be able to use research material provided to formulate proposals and measure outcomes; and
- be able to work as part of a team.

We would also like applicants to:

- have credibility with disability organisations and disabled people; and
- have a basic understanding of how large organisations/the public sector works.

It is anticipated that the Advisory Group will be in place for 6 months and that there will be approximately 18 working days required within the 6 month period. This will include meetings and preparation time. The ability to be flexible regarding days of work is essential. An amount equivalent to loss of earnings will be paid and expenses will be reimbursed.

If you have any questions about the NFDP or being an Advisory Group member, or you want further information and application details, please telephone 020 7962 8278 or text phone 020 7712 2492 or write to:

Wilma Jackson, Disability and Carers Directorate,
Room 124, The Adelphi,
1-11 John Adam St,
London WC2N 6HT
or email: wilma.jackson@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Information is available in alternative formats on request.

The closing date for receipt of applications is **30 September 2005**.