



THE PHOENIX

Campaign for Independent Living in Lewisham

May 2007

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

Lewisham Council's review of adult social care is due to start shortly and so is work around their Disability Equality Scheme (DES). Both will impact on disabled people's lives. You can get involved in both. The Council wants to involve disabled people in the review of their DES and through our independent living support groups CILL will be working with disabled people to produce evidence and research about social care services. If you want to start making a difference to your life then please try to get involved.

Activities and Campaigns

Downham Health and Leisure Centre – CILL has now been involved in a visit to the Centre to assess accessibility. The Centre has many good features – automatic doors, good parking, disabled toilets but at the same time there are negative features – poor signage, lack of contrast between surfaces in the toilet areas (essential for those with a visual impairment) and level entrances that are not quite flush with the ground. Access Point had 3 'touch' screens (1 at wheelchair height) to get information, a large seating area, part of the help desk is dropped for wheelchair users.

The ticket machine (when they are busy you get a ticket so everyone gets seen in order) may be too high for some wheelchair users but there will be someone on the desk to give assistance. The Leisure Centre opened without any means for wheelchair users to transfer into the pool but a transfer seat is now available although it is only put in place when requested. As there is no signage that tells people to ask for the seat to be set up and no obvious seat at the poolside no-one knows it is there. Also if you cannot use a seat but need a hoist there is no access. There are two disabled changing rooms in the pool area – the good news is that they are large with shower areas and toilets one for right side transfer and the other for left side transfer but again there is no hoist or changing bed. So again if that is what you need there is no access. Hair dryers and hand dryers have been mounted on walls that restrict access for everyone not just disabled people and there are no adult changing beds in any of the accessible toilets.

The crèche will take children up to the age of five and the crèche itself looks great but the toilets are inaccessible – there is a large cubicle but the entrance door is very narrow and there are no handrails and again no changing bed. There is a wall mounted changing table for babies in the area outside the cubicles but it is too small for an older child and certainly it should be inside the cubicle for privacy. Wheelchair users cannot get close to the handbasins. For a disabled mother taking a child to the toilet or changing a nappy would be an ordeal.

Wheelchair users cannot get into the leisure centre through the turnstiles but have to wait to be let in through a gate the problem is that to get out again they cannot be seen by staff at the front desk so cannot get the gate opened. This will be rectified by putting in a buzzer but we have asked if something like a 'swipe' card system could be installed to give entry/exit to the Centre and disabled changing rooms. This would give security to expensive facilities and provide not just access but equality of access to disabled people.

There is nothing in the information booklet about access for disabled people yet just half a page with a few 'bullet points' would be great. We will be going back to the Centre in a few weeks to follow up what is happening and to look round the areas we have not seen. Just before our visit we were contacted by a disabled person about computer access in the ground floor library and plasma screen TVs so we will be looking at that. Meanwhile, if you have comments or want to share your experience of using the Centre please get in touch with CILL.

Loampit Vale Leisure Centre – CILL will be going to a meeting later this week to discuss access at the new leisure centre that will be built as part of the Loampit Vale development. We hope very much by involving disabled people at the planning stage that true equality of access can be achieved including the provision of 1 'full access' changing room and disabled toilet (hoist and changing bed).

Disability Forum – This week sees the 5th Disability Forum managed by Lewisham Disability Coalition (LDC). Readers of The Phoenix will know of CILL's concerns about how the Forum is managed, scheduled and reported.

One of the items for discussion is 'Proposed Cuts to Adult Social Services' yet once again the meeting starts too early for many disabled people to take part but just in case LDC does not understand we will spell it out. Some of the most vulnerable disabled people in Lewisham use social care services and rely on those services to get out of bed, be washed, toileted, dressed and fed. They are fearful that cuts and changing criteria will reduce those services they rely on. At best this is about reducing quality of life and putting a greater burden on the army of unpaid carers who are already expected to do too much. At worst we could be talking about possible deaths.

CILL wanted the Forum to be a platform for getting disabled people's voices heard at a strategic level but this has not happened. CILL believes that the Forum is in danger of becoming 'a talking shop' where non-disabled people working for groups 'for' disabled people have their say about what we need, want and think with a few 'token' disabled people included to give some credibility CILL's Trustees have therefore decided that they can no longer support the Forum They will however continue to explore ways of getting disabled people's voices heard.

Spatial Planning – This is Lewisham Council's proposed planning option for Lewisham for the next 15 years.. The Lib Dems have secured 5 policy changes including that the design of buildings must take into account the lifetime homes standard – this is where homes are designed to be adaptable so people can stay in them if they become disabled.

Advocacy and Independent Living Support Groups – The Ringway Centre at Grove Park and possibly Lewisham Library (awaiting confirmation) will be the two new venues joining The Albany at Deptford. Meetings will be held on a fortnightly basis and at each meeting there will be an advocate available to give you any support you need. Once a month, at each venue there will be an independent living support group meeting where disabled people can get together to support each other and share information.. As well as information and advocacy you can get help filling in forms – whether it's for benefits, a job application or anything else. Scheduled meetings so far are:

Wednesday 18 April	1 p.m to 4 p.m.	The Albany, Douglas Way. Deptford SE8	Advocacy
Thursday 26 April	1 p.m to 4 p.m.	Ringway Centre, 268 Baring Road (opposite Coopers Lane, SE12	Advocacy
Wednesday 2 May	1 p.m to 4 p.m.	The Albany	Independent Living Support Group plus Advocacy
Thursday 10 May	1 p.m to 4 p.m.	Ringway Centre	Independent Living Support Group plus Advocacy
Wednesday 16 May	1 p.m to 4 p.m.	The Albany	Advocacy
Thursday 24 May	1 p.m to 4 p.m.	Ringway Centre	Advocacy

We hope to confirm meetings at Lewisham Library in the next few days so if you want to know about them please get in touch.

Protests signal growing revolt against cuts - Edited from Disability Now, Paul Carter, April 2007

Three protests at council budget meetings in separate London boroughs could be a sign of a growing national revolt against cuts to care services for disabled and older people, according to leading disability activists.

The protests in Lambeth, Camden and Tower Hamlets were staged in response to proposals to restrict eligibility for care and, in Lambeth and Camden, extend charging for services.

Dame Jane Campbell, a founder member of the National Centre for Independent Living, predicted such protests would spread across the country. She said: "It will happen elsewhere and it will go on happening, probably until someone dies as a result of them being charged too much."

Anne Pridmore, chair of the UK's Disabled People's Council, said groups in other parts of the country should now join forces "to make a stronger protest" against cuts to services. She said: "I'm all for people working together because if we work together we're strong, and if we're divided we'll fall. If you could bring other groups together it could be much bigger."

A spokeswoman for the Local Government Association said: "In the last 10 years, NHS funding has increased by 300 per cent while social care funding has only increased by 14 per cent. "Councils are having to make very tough decisions around eligibility criteria as a result of lack of funding."

Denise Smith of CILL comments: *Next month Lewisham Council will begin its review of adult social services and I have asked that disabled people are involved. .I truly believe that Lewisham are trying their best to ensure that the most disadvantaged and vulnerable disabled people receive some level of services but let's be realistic and acknowledge that Lewisham Council will be forced to look at changing eligibility criteria and introducing services cuts as they try to 'balance the books'.*

*At the same time this is not about financial mismanagement nor do I believe that it is about raising council tax. Quite simply I believe that, regardless of where you live in the UK, disabled people should have an acceptable level of services to allow them to live with dignity as equal citizens with their non-disabled peers. Personally I find the notion of relying on goodwill from year to year, in the form of council tax increases or other local budgetary measures, to be patronising, dismissive and offensive to the lives of disabled people. If you accept that all people are entitled to basic rights then disability has to be seen as a human rights issue and **who pays for social care and services becomes a national issue***

Sometimes you have to say enough is enough and things have to change for the better. CILL believes that this is one of those times and that is why we are supporting two national initiatives this year - The Disability Agenda from the Disability Rights Commission and the national campaign supporting independent living from the National Centre for Independent Living. We will continue to lobby for a national resolution to the social care funding crisis. If you share our views, want to safeguard our services and want to be involved please come along to any of the independent living support groups.

Funding battles put user-led revolution in peril - Edited from Disability Now April 2007

Back in January 2005, the prime minister's strategy unit published its Improving The Life Chances Of Disabled People report, aimed at achieving full equality for disabled people in society by 2025.

One of the report's key recommendations, now part of government policy, is that by 2010 each local authority area with social services responsibilities should have its own user-led organisation (ULO) modelled on existing centres for independent living (CIL). ULOs currently have to bid for contracts to provide their services to local authorities, but are often unable to compete with larger, more established bodies and charities. So how likely is it that the government will be able to achieve its aim by 2010?

Lorraine Gradwell, chief executive of Breakthrough UK, an ULO said: "The competition comes from the large charities and care organisations who can often offer cheaper services and are, therefore, attractive to local authorities who've got their budgets squeezed."

Steve Strong, a member of the independent living review team in the government's Office for Disability Issues (ODI), the body responsible for taking forward the Life Chances report said "It's very important that we get past this year-by-year lurching of funding where user-led organisations are spending valuable time and energy just arranging for annual contracts to be renewed – if they're lucky."

Steve Mycio, deputy chief executive of Manchester City Council, said: "It's important to remember that local authorities are bound by national regulations and legislation covering the contracting out of services. Aside from the issue of funding, there is a great debate occurring on a national level about the true definition of a ULO, and how this fits in with the government's plans."

Steve Strong has been attending a number of government-led consultation events on how to move towards the government's aim of an ULO in every area.

"One of the things that has been striking me as a participant in some of those events is a lack of an agreed position on what a user-led organisation is and how you decide when something is actually led by disabled people. There's a whole range of different views on what a user-led organisation actually is."

At these consultation events, one definition proposed is that it should include carers and parents of disabled people and other "service-users".

Sue Bott, director of the National Centre for Independent Living (NCIL), adds: "I think we as disabled people need to be able to fight our own corner. While the interests of carers, disabled people and family members often do coincide, there are occasions when they definitely don't."

There are some important questions that need to be answered if we're going to have a ULO in every local authority by 2010. The government has just three years to find answers to these questions if it is to meet its 2010 deadline.

As Jeff Downing, from Southampton Centre for Independent Living: "We are successful, we are achieving things and we are going places, but at the same time, it is difficult. Do we know if we could be here next year? No, we don't. And that's the issue that needs to be addressed. Our future."

Public bodies head for sanctions as DRC pursues disability equality duty shirkers

The Disability Rights Commission (DRC) is putting organisations from across the public sector on notice after publishing the names of more than 60 public authorities which have failed to produce a disability equality scheme, despite a deadline of December last year and subsequent warning letters from the Commission.

Local councils, health trusts, colleges, universities, museums, fire departments and Channel 4 Television are among those to whom the Commission wrote to at the beginning of March, but 65 (3.7% as of 27 March 2007) still have not provided any evidence that the required scheme is in place.

Sir Bert Massie, chairman of the DRC, said "We'll now be considering issuing compliance notices to offending authorities, which could lead to court action."

Denise Smith of CILL comments:

"A strong DES can give disabled people equality of access to service provision – that is why it is so important. CILL was critical of the DES produced by Lewisham Council last year but they are now carrying out a review of the current DES to take forward issues into the development of a revised DES for 2008 – 2011.

Lewisham Council is working towards a single equality scheme framework for the Borough for 2008 – 2011 to enable the public sector organisations to take a joined up approach in delivering services in accordance with equality duties and to support this they are tying the delivery of their duties under the various equality legislation to the same time frame. This means that the revised DES will feed in to the new single equality scheme for Lewisham, so making sure it is a strong document is really important. CILL will be meeting with Elizabeth Sclater from Lewisham Council on Friday 4 May from 2 to 3.30 p.m. at the Civic Suite to give our views about the current DES and how we might work together with the Council over the next year to revise it for 2008 - 2011. If you would like to be involved please come along to the meeting (please let us know if you intend to be there so that we have some idea of numbers and also if you have any access issues to get to the meeting)

Child poverty targets need disability at their heart

With the Government's progress in meeting its target to halve child poverty by 2010 widely expected not to be met, the Disability Rights Commission (DRC) says that the focus should shift to ensuring that the strategy on tackling child poverty has disability at its heart.

Sir Bert Massie, DRC Chairman said "Getting this policy right is going to be critical if we are to avoid a situation where in 2010, families affected by disability account for an even greater proportion of the total number of children living in poverty."

Human rights campaigner highlights new international treaty for disabled people

Human rights campaigner Dr Rachel Hurst OBE called on the Government to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Convention, which opened for signatures at the United Nations in New York on Friday 30 March, is the first human rights treaty of the twenty-first century. It will protect and increase the rights of 650 million disabled people worldwide – a tenth of the world's population.

Britain will be one of the first countries to sign up to the treaty, which marks a significant shift towards the recognition that disabled people's rights are human rights. Signing the treaty is just the first step before ratification.

Review calls for wider ILF eligibility - Edited from Disability Now April 2007

Disability groups have given a cautious welcome to a review of the Independent Living Funds (ILFs), which support severely disabled people to live independently in the community.

The review makes a series of recommendations for improvements, including wider eligibility and a more transparent system. But it says the ILFs should remain in their present form until 2009 or 2010, although in the longer term there should be a smooth transition towards full integration within a system of personalised budgets.

Menghi Mulchandani, chair of the National Centre for Independent Living, welcomed the recommendations, and said: "The ILF has made a difference to thousands of disabled people enabling us to live independently and have control over our lives. This would never have been achieved had matters been left to local authorities alone."

*Review of Independent Living Funds; for a copy, tel: 0845 601 8815, or visit www.ilf.org.uk.

Focus Group Discussion

What are your views on your GP's use of the personal computer (PC) in the consultation?

What are your experiences?

A small scale piece of research is being conducted into the impact of the use of personal computers (PCs) on doctor-patient relations in the consultation and would like to hear your views on and experiences of your own GP's use of the PC during the consultation.

If you are interested in attending a focus group discussion on this topic, or have any questions, please contact Barry Sherlock Tel: 020 7188 5187 or E-mail: barry.sherlock@gstt.nhs.uk Refreshments will be provided at the meeting and I am able to cover participating patients' travelling expenses. Time, date and venue to be arranged.

100 blind children lobbied Parliament

In March the first ever blind children's lobby took place when more than 100 blind and partially sighted children from across the UK descend on Westminster to demand their right to read. They were joined by teachers and parents at the lobby organised by the Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB) as part of the Right to Read Alliance.

The 24,000 blind and partially sighted children in the UK are losing out at home and in school because they can't always get hold of books in a format they can read such as large print, audio or braille. RNIB is calling on the Government to act urgently and set up a nationally co-ordinated system for providing schoolbooks for children with sight problems.

If you believe that blind and partially sighted children and adults have the right to read the same books at the same time as their sighted peers, please add your name to the Right to Read Declaration at www.rnib.org.uk/righttoread

A new Women's Health Forum to give Women a voice and focus on broad inequality issues

A Women's Forum for Women Only will be held on Thursday 26 April 2007, 2pm – 4.30pm at Health First, Mary Sheridan House, 15 St. Thomas St, London SE1 9RY

To confirm a place, please contact Vannette Lewis email vannette.lewis@lewishampct.nhs.uk or on 020 7188 2837. Places are limited so please book by Friday 20 April '07. Supported by the Harambee Project.

New statistics show more people sectioned than ever before

New figures released by the Department of Health reveal that more people than ever before were compulsorily admitted to hospital under the Mental Health Act in 2005/6. The number of these detentions has been rising year on year since the Act's introduction in 1983, contrary to expectations at the time that there would be no such increase.

Mind is concerned that further restrictive measures proposed in the current Mental Health Bill – the controversial Compulsory Treatment Orders (CTOs), known as 'psychiatric Asbos' – will also sweep far more people up into compulsory treatment than predicted, diverting resource unhelpfully from the services so desperately needed by people when they first become ill. The Government says that CTOs will only be applied to a very small group of people, around 1,400, yet independent research by the King's Fund health thinktank showed that the figure is likely to be ten times higher. Even that, Mind believes, is conservative. With more and more people being detained under the Mental Health Act, Government estimates of the use of CTOs simply aren't believable.

Paul Farmer, Chief Executive of Mind, said: "People with mental health problems need better health services, not more legislation."

Mencap welcomes inquiry into the human rights of adults with a learning disability

The Joint Committee on Human Rights' is to conduct an inquiry into human rights of adults with a learning disability. Dame Jo Williams, Mencap's Chief Executive, said in response to the announcement:

"Mencap welcomes the inquiry into the human rights of adults with a learning disability. People with a learning disability are too often denied basic human rights such as having choice, respect and the opportunity to live their lives the way they want.

"Death by indifference recently highlighted the inequalities that still exist within the UK's public services, specifically the healthcare service. We hope the inquiry will focus attention on the positive action which needs to be taken to tackle the inequalities found throughout our public services, so that people with a learning disability can live full lives and participate in the community without being discriminated against."

For more information about the inquiry, please visit www.parliament.uk

RNID new communication software wins top innovation award

RNID, the charity for deaf and hard of hearing people, has developed TalkByText: innovative, new software that can be used by any business which communicates with the public. This state of the art software was awarded the SustainIT 2006/07 National eWell-Being Award for ICT Innovation in the Third Sector.

Prices are dependent on the set up for each individual organisation. As a guide, a 5 user licence installation and set up costs around £200 - the same as the cost of a single traditional textphone! To enquire about purchasing and installing TalkByText call RNID Products on 0870 789 8855 or textphone 01733 238020.

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