

A warm welcome to EQual Citizens

A warm welcome to this issue of EQual Citizens, the newsletter of *Community Living*. Our aim with this newsletter is to bring you the latest news about learning difficulties and, in accordance with the reputation *Community Living* has earned, we try to represent the perspective of people with learning difficulties themselves.

The newsletter is designed so you can follow up the stories. Wherever possible, links are provided to larger documents or web sites.

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Join the campaign today!

The following advertisement appears today (8 February) in *The Times* under the heading Campaign for a Fair Society:

If you are worried about coalition government cuts to services for disabled people, we invite you to join The Campaign For A Fair Society. Launched today (8 February) with the publication of a full-page advert in *The Times*, we hope that in the coming days and weeks many thousands of you will join the campaign.

In the government's comprehensive spending review, announced on 20 October last year, Chancellor George Osborne insisted that those with the "broadest shoulders should bear the greatest burden". In fact, the government is implementing cuts that will impact on some of the most vulnerable people in society, including people with learning disabilities and disabled children. Cuts include:

- **Reductions in local authority budgets of up to 25%, which lead to similar reductions in funding to all local authority funded care and support services.**
- **The closure of the Independent Living Fund (ILF) and the loss of funding, which will affect 21,000 of the most severely disabled people in the country, and may prevent many from continuing to live independently in the community.**
- **Changes to Support for Mortgage Interest benefit effectively rule out shared home ownership for disabled people.**
- **A threat to the mobility component of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for people in residential care, which helps meet some of the cost of things such as electric wheelchairs, mobility aids and taxis where there is no accessible public transport. Without it many people could be isolated.**

The campaign argues that cuts to benefits and services are counter-productive and unfair:

- **Counter-productive, because there is evidence that, when people have the support to lead fulfilling lives, their needs become less severe and the cost of supporting them actually reduces over time.**
- **Unfair, because they will prevent disabled people enjoying many of the things most of us take for granted: our own home, loving relationships, work, an income.**

The campaign is not just about protest, but also about making a positive contribution. It proposes seven principles to guide decisions about policy and funding, and seeks to engage policy makers in dialogue.

To join The Campaign For A Fair Society, and find out more about the principles it promotes, visit www.campaignforafairsociety.com

Help spread the word by circulating this to your friends, family and colleagues.



“Dear Dave & Nick – Why are you stopping us from getting jobs? Since you got into government it’s gone sort of pear shaped”

A group of people with learning difficulties from Lambeth People First have written to the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister to express their concerns about the cuts. “We are very angry about what is happening to people with learning difficulties”, Jennifer Taylor, a member of the group, told *Community Living*. The letter was the idea of Gina Barrett and all members of the group contributed to it.

“There is a lot of people who don’t understand where you are coming from. David, you told us you are a parent who had a son with learning difficulties. We are surprised at the way you are behaving towards people with learning difficulties” writes Jennifer.

“And if the cuts start where is everyone going to go?” asks Christina Watkins. “Since you got into government it’s gone sort of pear shaped”.

“And what are they going to do? How do you expect everyone to get jobs who has got a mental health problem and learning difficulties?” Jennifer adds.

Maggie Brennan writes: “It is hard to get a job. I know a lot of people who hasn’t got jobs who have got a mental health problem and learning difficulties. They want to get a job but the government is stopping them”.

“The government has not given us a proper choice with the cuts and everything” writes Susan Laffey.

See the full letter in the Spring issue of *Community Living*.

We need more grassroots responses like the one from Lambeth People First to tell the government how cuts are affecting vulnerable people.

Pictured (from l to r): Wenda Gordon, Maggie Brennan, Jennifer Taylor and Gina Barrett.

How bad have the cuts to be before we all take to the streets?

Over the last few days we’ve been watching the people of Egypt stand up for what they believe is right. In Britain we’ve started to see, for the first time since the poll tax protests, people out on the streets protesting about the decision to take away maintenance grants from students in further education and to raise the costs to students of their degree from £3,000 to up to £9,000 per year. There are vocal and high profile demonstrations about the closure of libraries and even the government’s attempts to sell off our forests are producing a response.

We are only just beginning to get mobilised over the extremely large impact of the proposed cuts to adult services by local authorities. How bad will this have to get before we all take to the streets to say this is all too much too quickly and the levels of impact on the most vulnerable people cannot be accepted?

Download the full article from the Community Living web site: www.communityliving.co

“This is about quality of life, not bricks and mortar”

Over 64,000 people are at risk of plunging into arrears and losing their homes resulting from changes in the Spending Review according to the National Housing Federation. These changes would have particular significance for people with learning difficulties.

This has spurred a campaign by the housing charity Advance who are urging people to lobby their MPs to reverse the plans.



“There will be broken dreams, including mine. We should all be able to live our lives like anybody else,” says home owner, Fiona Gendall, 36, who has a learning and physical disability, and has lived in her own bungalow in Hayle in Cornwall for two years.

Sarah Cookson (pictured) who is 30 and has Asperger’s Syndrome, says: “If you ask me how I feel now I am living my own life in my own flat, I can sum it up in one word: happy!”

“We’re not just talking about bricks and mortar, but about quality of life: about people with long term disabilities achieving independence, and their parents or guardians knowing that they will be secure for life,” says Mark Adams, Director of Advance Housing, which has helped hundreds of people transform their lives in their homes.

Advance points out that the cut in the Support for Mortgage Interest (SMI), to 3.63% from the previously frozen rate of 6.08% and the Financial Service Authority (FSA) 100% mortgage ruling are a double dip disaster for people with long term disabilities. “They could have to contribute between £92 and £264 a month to make up the shortfall caused by the SMI cut, and that has to come from the benefits that are supposed to cover the cost of specialist support or care,” adds Mark.

To support Advance’s campaign. Go to: www.advancehousing.org.uk/holdcampaign

Councils risk prosecution by cutting personal budgets

Councils imposing cuts on personal budgets may be acting against the law. Social workers on *Community Care's* CareSpace forum have warned that councils are cutting back on the amount of money they give service users through personal budgets. They are also restricting how they can spend it, contrary to the aim of personalisation to give people choice and control.

Commenting in *Community Care* Sue Bott, director of the National Centre for Independent Living said she is hearing of cuts as much as 40 per cent.

Legal expert Belinda Schwehr, writing in *Community Living* (Volume 24, No. 1) set out the legal framework of personalisation for councils. They can be open to legal challenge if they do not provide reasons to show they are reasonably satisfied that the budget is sufficient to meet the individual's assessed needs (established in the case of Savva v Kensington & Chelsea RLBC in 2010). There are also clear guidelines set out in community care legislation, including the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act (1970), governing what needs should be assessed to meet FACs criteria and how budgets can be used.

Are social workers properly trained to carry out assessments? There is evidence that some have no legal training and some authorities are even using unqualified staff to do assessments leaving councils exposed to legal action.

Community Living would like to report on the actions of councils which could lead to changes to support for service users as a result of illegal reviewing. We would also like to hear about positive action being taken to find non-damaging ways to manage the cuts.

Contact rosemarytrustam@btinternet.com



Get your entries in for the Oska Bright Film Festival

Entries are invited for the Oska Bright Film Festival 2011. This is the first and only festival managed and promoted by artists with learning difficulties. The festival is looking for films under 10 minutes long.

They can be in any genre, by groups or by individuals, but must have people with learning difficulties in control.

The deadline for entries is 30 APRIL 2011. The festival takes place over three days in

November at Brighton.

The website www.oskabright.co.uk has full information on how to enter and an accessible on-line guide to film-making. Or you can call on 01273 234 734 or email oskabright@carousel.org.uk for an information pack.

Pic shows film makers Matthew Hellett, Adele King, Chris Love and Sarah Watson in a still from their film MODERN LIFE, one of the entries for this year's festival.

Employment Support Allowance – it's good and bad news, but mostly it's bad

The government has estimated that 50% of claimants found to be 'incapable of work' under the test of incapacity for work will be found fit for work under the new Work Capability Assessment (WCA). The statistics for new claimants of Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) do not provide comfort for those people waiting to be transferred. For all completed initial assessments of new ESA claims between October 2008 and 31 August 2010 (ie. not including assessments still in progress or people who left ESA before completing assessment), 65% of claimants were found fit for work.

The other side of the coin is that of the people who made a claim for ESA between October 2008 and November 2009 and who were initially found fit for work, 33% have had an appeal heard by the Tribunals Service and 40% of those appeals were successful.

But that means nearly half of new claimants could be found 'fit for work'. Is the new assessment fair? Charlie Callanan writes in the Spring issue on what lies ahead for claimants.

Shut Up and Listen to music by people with learning difficulties on radio

The Shut up and Listen Radio show is the only place on the radio to hear music by artists with learning difficulties.



Supported by Carousel, Shut Up and Listen! is programmed and presented by a committee of artists with learning difficulties to celebrate and promote their music to a

wider audience.

During a pilot year the committee and its contributors gained wide experience in radio broadcasting and showcased the music of 22 bands and soloists, from Hyperkube, Brighton's rock/punks Heavy Load to The Todouno Band from Argentina.

The committee is ambitious for the project and have aspirations to expand its availability through wider broadcasting, recordings, travelling road-shows and training. "I'm really proud of our radio show, I want as many people as possible to hear it. I want it to be really big!" says DJ JJ (pictured with Ryan L)

Shut Up and Listen is broadcast at 8pm on the last Thursday of every month, with repeats every week. You can hear the show on 97.2fm in Brighton and online at www.radioreverb.com

Changes to DLA will have the opposite effect to government's aim

The government is proposing to replace Disability Living Allowance (DLA) with a Personal Independence Payment "to improve the support for disabled people and better enable them to lead full, active and independent lives".

However, part of this change means children and people with learning difficulties living in residential care homes will lose the mobility component of DLA. Currently this is routinely used to fund a minibus or other adapted vehicles for the use of residents at a care home. It allows residents (with staff support) to go out into the community for clubs, sports, other entertainment, and for more personal purposes such as visits to family, friends. Access to doctors and healthcare can be facilitated through such vehicles.

Mencap and a group of other charities have highlighted the issue in a report to ministers, and have set up an online petition. People are being urged to raise this issue with their Facebook and Twitter contacts.

See the joint charities report and sign the online petition via the link www.mencap.org.uk/page.asp?id=20515 Alternatively try: <http://sn.im/1w50qp>

Download the consultation paper at: <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/consultations/2010/dla-reform.shtml>

The consultation period ends on 14 February. Send your consultation responses to: DLA Reform Team, 1st Floor, Caxton House, Tothill Street, London SW1H 9NA Fax: 02 07 44 95 467 Email: consultation.dlareform@dwp.gsi.gov.uk Say whether you are responding as an individual, or on behalf of an organisation. If responding on behalf of an organisation, make clear who the organisation represents, and how the views of members were obtained.

How well are parents with learning difficulties being supported?

The Working Together with Parents Network has developed an on-line survey to find out about the ways in which parents with learning difficulties are being supported. WTPN would be very grateful if you could spend 15 minutes or so completing it.

The network needs up-to-date information about how parents are being supported. As well as providing WTPN members with a summary of the findings, they will be using the findings in an evaluation of a specialist service which supports parents with learning difficulties. More details are provided in the introduction to the survey.

The survey is open now and will close on Friday 11 February. The link to the survey is:
<https://www.survey.bris.ac.uk/sps/wtpn>

Coming events

Mencap is holding a series of roadshow events across the country aimed at individuals and family carers. Professor Luke Clements, a leading lawyer and expert in community care law, will be speaking about accessing support and rights. People will be able to find out exactly what cuts are being proposed in their area and how these could affect individuals and families.

16 February: Cambridgeshire, Woodgreen Animal Shelter Godmanchester

23 February: Nottingham, Nottingham Race course

1 March: Devon, ISCA Centre, Exeter

2 March: Avon, Gloucestershire County Cricket Club, Bristol

8 March: Surrey, St Georges Christian Centre, Ashted

9 March: West Yorkshire, Ramada Jarvis Hotel, Leeds

15 March: Staffordshire, Cannock Hockey and Cricket Club, Cannock

22 March: Manchester, Wythenshawe Forum Hall

23 March: Durham, Durham University

Info from: Wendy Mobbs, telephone: 01905 740500 Email: wendy.mobbs@mencap.org.uk

4 March Learning Disability Conference and Exhibition at the Point, Manchester. Speakers include Anne Williams and Scott Watkin, Co-National Directors at the Department of Health, Karyn Kirkpatrick, National Housing Lead and Sue Carmichael National Health Lead of the Valuing People Now Team. Delegates rate £100 + VAT. Entrance to exhibition free but please register in advance.

Details from Pavilion: 0844 880 5061 email: infor@pavpub.com

Valuing People what now? How do we keep on track? 31 March 2011 at the Holiday Inn, Bloomsbury, London. Hosted by the National Development Team for Inclusion, Helen Sanderson Associates, Dimensions and Inclusion North. As national and local structures change, the Valuing People Now strategy remains a priority for continuing the journey to achieving choice, rights and independence with people with learning disabilities.

Info at: Centrevents London Office, Tel/Fax: 020 8922 1135

The 10th International Conference on the Care and Treatment of Offenders with a Learning Disability will be held at the University of Central Lancashire, Preston, 18 & 19 April 2011.

This two day conference is now recognised as the foremost opportunity, in the UK and internationally, for reflection and sharing for services providing care for offenders with learning difficulties both in the public and independent health and social care sectors and the criminal justice system.

For further details and booking forms refer to www.ldoffenders.co.uk



In the Winter issue of Community Living From hate crime target to TV star: Chris Burke's story

PLUS

- **Doing the 'unthinkable' - what the Comprehensive Spending Review proposes**
- **GP commissioning – will it mean more or less equality of access to health care?**
- **Making a commitment to transition – Dimensions is at the forefront of developing personalised services**
- **The road to change begins with ourselves – review of a thought-provoking book**
- **Scott Watkin – interview with Co-National Director of Learning Disabilities**
- **Authorities should think twice before cutting direct payment budgets**

Why not take out a subscription? It costs only £27 a year for individuals, £23 for students, £45 for authorities. Get TWO subs for the price of one (delivery to one UK address).

STUDENTS - when you take out a subscription you can get all four issues in Volume 23 for only an extra £10. These include articles written by Paul Williams, who recently retired as social work lecturer at Reading University. These cover: the rewards of a career in learning disabilities; building a positive value structure; assessment; and communication.

By subscribing you can support our aim – to achieve for people with learning difficulties everything we would want for ourselves.

To subscribe online log onto: http://www.elfrida.com/comweb/subscription_online.htm

or download a form from the web site: www.communityliving.co.uk

Would you like to write for Community Living? Email your ideas to the editor:

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