

DIAL Network News

February 2013

Serving the disability advice network

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Welcome to the February edition of Network News.

I hope you find what follows a useful read. As always please do feedback any changes you would like to see. My contact details are at the end of the newsletter.

Disability Rights UK membership

Please look out for an email regarding this over the coming weeks. We plan to continue our offer of free membership for all DIAL groups into the new 2013-14 membership year.

All the best,

Suzi Mackenzie

Information Services Development Manager, Scope

News from around the network

DIAL Advisory group

February Advisory group meeting

Discussion in this month's Advisory group meeting was focused equally on ways to take the network forward, and also on how to give it a greater voice.

The feeling is that as local advice providers the network is at the mercy of politics. What happens if DPOs go? It could be argued that DIALs are delivering Big Society but not being recognised for it. You're not being funded, but seen as part of the solution.

Applications to the Big Lottery Advice Services Transition Fund appear to be common amongst many DIALs. It will be interesting to see how this greater partnership work at a local level impacts on the way DIAL groups operate.

The new DIAL quality checklist is now at a point where it can be trialled. Pending Board agreement, one of the Advisory group will take this forward.

More effective ways of sharing evidence that relates to the work you do, and experiences of the clients you represent were discussed. The Low Commission survey described on page 3 and visits from Scope's Stories manager to DIAL group events were suggested as new ways of gathering this information.

Advisory group meeting will take place each quarter. Dates are being agreed at the current time, and will be put onto the Scope website. Any new groups wish to join the discussion would be welcome.

It was proposed that the Advisory group elect a chair. The process for taking this forward will be initiated in the next meeting.

A photograph of Stephen Lee Hodgkin's 'graphik' from the meeting and/or full notes from the session are available on request (see contact details at end of newsletter).

Low Commission evidence gathering

The DIAL Advisory group have been discussing the significant pressure the advice and information sector is under, as a result of reduced funding and a surge in demand for advice.

The Commission on the Future of Legal Advice and Support, chaired by Lord Low, has been set up to investigate some of these challenges. It is looking for submissions on the likely impact of the cuts on the advice sector and the changes driving the need for advice (such as the impact of welfare reform).

We are trialling new ways of capturing information so that the DIAL Network's position can be more accurately represented.

If you are able to spend a small amount of time answering available through the link below, we will ensure that your data is submitted to the Commission.

www.scope.org.uk/lowcommission

Disability Action Alliance

Julie from Equalities National Council asked that we share the following link incase anyone wishes to join the Disability Action Alliance

<http://disabilityactionalliance.org.uk/>

The DWP/ODI are keen that as many groups as possible have a voice in its development and future endeavours!

News from external sources

Cornwall councillor Collin Brewer resigns over saying disabled children should be 'put down'

Source: The Independent

A Cornwall councillor at the centre of a row over comments he made about disabled children has resigned. Collin Brewer yesterday apologised for saying disabled children should be "put down" because they cost the authority too much money - but had refused to resign.

Mr Brewer, an independent Cornwall councillor, said his remarks at an event at County Hall in Truro were designed to "provoke a debate".

Mr Brewer told the BBC it was unlikely he would run as a candidate in the May elections. "I was wrong, I admit it," he said. "I will continue to apologise," he said.

Mr Brewer made the remarks to a disabilities charity at an event designed to allow councillors to meet equal opportunity organisations and understand the issues they face.

Mr Brewer reportedly approached a stall run by Disability Cornwall at the event, and was told about the work of the charity. He responded by saying: "Disabled children cost the council too much money and should be put down."

The veteran council member was been met with a storm of criticism from disabled people, their carers and campaigners - including former glamour model Katie Price, whose son Harvey is disabled - after the comments received widespread attention this week.

Disability Cornwall called for Mr Brewer to resign and a spokesman for disabled charity Scope described Mr Brewer's outburst as "outrageous", saying: "To hear such an ill-judged and insensitive statement from a councillor is deeply disturbing and demonstrates that they are clearly not fit for office."

Mr Brewer had initially refused to resign saying his comments were "a flippant remark".

But he has since reconsidered his position. Asked in an interview with BBC Radio Cornwall whether those offended by his comments would be pleased with his decision, Mr Brewer said: "I know they will be.

"This is my first indiscretion - not that there's any excuse for that."

He said he had received messages of support from at least half a dozen councillors who contacted him over his remarks. "They know this is against my character," he said. "I was wrong - I admit it. I will continue to apologise."

Read the full article at: <http://tinyurl.com/c6lsmao>

Welfare / Benefits

Paralympic stars express concern over losing disability allowance

Source: The Guardian

British Paralympic stars have voiced anger about the imminent disappearance of the Disability Living Allowance, a benefit they say provided them with vital support during training.

The athletes have expressed concern that they may not be eligible for its replacement – the Personal Independence Payment (PIP) – which will be available to fewer claimants when it is introduced in April with tightened qualification criteria.

Disability Living Allowance (DLA), worth between £20 and £131.50 a week, is designed to help disabled people meet the extra costs of disability-related care and mobility. It is not means-tested and is available to those in or out of work.

Sophie Christiansen, who has cerebral palsy, won three gold medals at the Games in dressage. She is worried that under the new criteria she may find herself no longer eligible for the benefit, depending on how assessors judge her ability to get around.

One of the questions the PIP assessment will ask is whether a claimant is able to walk 200 metres, with or without walking aids. If a claimant is able to walk that distance they will score no points on that part of the test, and may not be eligible for mobility payments that can be used to help pay for a car.

Christiansen expressed anger at the widespread misunderstanding of the purpose of the benefit, which is designed to support people who are in work as well as those who are not working. "We use this money in order to get out the house, not think, oh, we've got a comfy life here, living on benefits," she said.

The government's assessment of the impact of reform suggests that over the next five years more than 400,000 people will no longer qualify for the higher rate mobility allowance payment that makes it possible for them to lease adapted Motability cars.

A spokesperson for the Department for Work and Pensions said it was impossible to speculate ahead of the assessment over who might or might not be eligible for PIP.

"PIP will look at disabled people as individuals and not just label them by their health condition or impairment," he said. "Disability Living Allowance is an outdated benefit introduced over 20 years ago and needs reform to better reflect today's understanding of disability."

He pointed out that recent changes to guidance meant assessors would need to consider whether claimants could perform tasks repeatedly, safely and reliably – ensuring that the test made a more rounded assessment of someone's ability than simply judging whether they were able, for example, to walk 200 metres once.

The Paralympian and campaigner Tanni Grey-Thompson said: "People are either shown as amazing Paralympians who are competing for their country, who are

incredible individuals, or benefit scroungers.

"What I don't want to see is disabled people ghettoised and locked away like it was when I was young. The danger is if we just keep knocking disabled people back then we'll turn the clock back 30 years."

Read the full article at: <http://tinyurl.com/d8fbqtl>

Churches stepping in to fill gap left by welfare cuts

Source: The Guardian

There are a growing number of religious organisations setting in to provide social services as a result of welfare cuts.

The government is keen to promote churches and mosques as delivery mechanisms for social services. Lady Warsi, the faith minister, announced another initiative to make small funds available to multi-faith projects, and welcomed a survey showing that the hours donated by church volunteers have risen by 36% in the recession, that each church in the country delivers an average of eight social initiatives, and that three quarters of these projects were self-funding.

Some church leaders are suspicious of being recruited to prop up the welfare state. The bishop of Leicester, the Rev Tim Stevens, told the House of Lords: "I fear that we are heading in the direction of a US-style welfare system, where healthcare provision and pensions are large and protected but working-age provision is less generous and more stigmatised, barely providing enough for people to live on without relying on charitable handouts, where visits to the food bank are not an emergency response to an economic crisis but an integral part of the welfare state."

The following link provides more information on this article:

<http://tinyurl.com/ahoulky>

'Inaccessible' Luton disability assessment centre 'is compliant'

Source: BBC News Online

The government ruled that disability benefit tests can continue on the sixth floor of Cresta House, Luton despite concerns about accessibility.

The assessment centre is run by Atos Healthcare for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and served by a lift, although there is no emergency exit other than stairs.

Following the DWP's decision in November to look for an alternative building, it has now decided an additional site is not required as "alternate arrangements can be made for those claimants who are identified as being unable to attend".

Instead, home visits would be arranged or claimants could travel hours away to another centre, irrespective of if the claimant can drive, and that it is these "reasonable adjustments" that make the centre compliant with the 2010 Equality Act.

Mick Dillon from the Disability Resource Centre in Dunstable, which offered its building as an additional site free of charge, said of the DWP "there is just no human angle of understanding having to go through the [assessment] process is bad enough, having to go through it in your own home with strangers coming into your house, people don't want that," he said.

For further information, please see the following link: <http://tinyurl.com/a4gsqhm>

'Bedroom tax' rules re-examined

Source: BBC News Online

Welfare secretary Iain Duncan Smith has instructed officials to "look again" at how the "bedroom tax" will affect disabled people, the BBC has been told.

Under the plans, social housing tenants' benefits will reduce if their home has one or more spare bedrooms. But charities have told the government that couples who could not share a bedroom because of a disability would be unfairly penalised.

Mr Duncan Smith said he understood the concerns.

He said he had already issued an instruction to officials at the Department of Work and Pensions saying, "let's look at this again".

Heléna Herklots, chief executive of Carers UK said the changes would hit families for whom an extra bedroom was essential.

"If you care full-time for a severely ill or disabled partner, their condition may mean a separate room for you to sleep is vital. Disabled children often cannot share with their brothers or sisters," she said.

"Hitting carers and disabled people with extra costs for this essential

accommodation, or forcing them to move is simply wrong."

The charity said government figures showed the measure would affect 420,000 people. It said its analysis showed extra funding from government to provide "discretionary payments" to families hit by the policy would only protect 10% of the disabled people affected.

BBC home editor Mark Easton said Mr Duncan Smith recognised that one obstacle to changing the rules was how to identify people who might qualify for exemption.

However, if a solution was found it might be in place before the charge is introduced in April, our correspondent reports.

Under the government's so-called "size criteria", families will be assessed for the number of bedrooms they actually need.

The change affects council tenants, and those renting from housing associations, of working age who receive housing benefit. It does not affect claimants who rent in the private sector.

Read the full report at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-21541400>

Atos subcontracts tests for new disability benefit to NHS

Source: The Guardian

[Atos](#), the company contracted by the Department for Work and Pensions to carry out medical assessments of people claiming [benefits](#), has subcontracted elements of the work back to a number of [NHS](#) trusts in England.

The subcontracting of the NHS by Atos in Scotland prompted questions last year from MPs over whether it represented value for public money for the state to contract work to a private company if the work was then outsourced back to the state sector.

A number of NHS trusts south of the border are now reported to have been contracted by the company to help carry out assessments for a new disability benefit, the personal independence payment (Pip), which is due to replace the disability living allowance from 2013. The government aims to cut spending on the benefit by 20% over the next three years.

University College London, King's and York will deploy thousands of health professionals to carry out the assessments, according to the Financial Times.

A DWP spokesperson said: "We are taking a new approach working with regional

providers for a service which best meets local needs. It was open to NHS organisations to bid for a place on the health and disability assessment framework but none did so.

"We believe that it is right for Atos to partner with the NHS to offer Pip claimants familiar surroundings and experienced health professionals. The partnership proposed here demonstrated best value for money for the department and its claimants."

Read the full article at: <http://tinyurl.com/bsqgjinw>

Care and support

Care rationing is happening to those with learning disabilities too

Source: The guardian online, Service delivery hub

We all know that cash-strapped local authorities are making qualification for care funding ever more stringent, but what about one of their other duties: that of funding care and support of people with learning disabilities?

Residents have had their care needs downgraded by as much as 80%.

Providing support isn't cheap – about £450 a week for 30 hours about to be reduced to less than £100 a week, or less than an hour a day.

Some people are seeking legal advice on where to go with this. The fear is that opposing the decision will make life worse, as the council may remove people from the place that has been home for many years.

More information can be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/b2x3hk6>

Disability and the dentist

Source: BBC Online

There are many disabilities that can affect dental health and what people may not realise is that there are three oral health care options available for disabled people in the UK - the local dentist, community dental care services (usually attached to health centres), and special care dentists based in hospitals.

The most straight forward found to do this is via the NHS Choices website. Here, dentists are listed by area. Under facilities, each practice can fill in disability

access details about their surgery, including hearing loops, Braille translation services, disabled parking and wheelchair accessibility as well as wheelchair recliners so that people can be treated in their chairs."

Crucially, community care dentists are not under pressure to make money. So appointments can be longer and more frequent, there is often more staff available and they are used to working with disabled people.

There is "help" (in the form of sedation) available to stay relaxed during procedures - gas, oral sedation, intravenous and general anaesthetic.

For more information go to: <http://tinyurl.com/a65sy72>

Elderly 'suffer from poor home care'

Source: BBC

A quarter of home-care services provided to the elderly in England are failing to meet quality and safety standards, inspectors say.

More than 700,000 people above the age of 65 rely on home help for activities such as washing, dressing and eating.

But the Care Quality Commission found evidence of rushed appointments and botched assessments during its review of 250 services

Campaigners said it was a sign of how much pressure the system was under.

Michelle Mitchell, of Age UK, said: "There must be a zero-tolerance attitude to poor, neglectful care."

Councillor David Rogers, of the Local Government Association, said were trying to "stamp out poor performance".

But he added: "As this report highlights, even the very best efforts of councils are not enough to avert the real and growing crisis we are facing in ensuring older people receive the care they deserve. The stark reality is that the current care system is underfunded and not fit for purpose."

More information can be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/aw7mz7r>

Cuts and lack of assessments leave carers 'at breaking point'

Source: Community Care online

Mencap finds no let-up in stress for carers of people with learning disabilities as councils fail to assess their needs and make inadequate provision of short breaks.

Spending on short breaks for carers of adults with learning disabilities fell by 4% from 2010-11 to 2012-13, according to data obtained by the charity under Freedom of Information from 112 of England's 152 councils. It also found that there had been a 22% reduction in the number of adults receiving short breaks from 2010-11 to 2012-13, based on data from 76 councils.

Mencap said its findings showed that the situation had not improved for carers since a similar report into short breaks provision, *Breaking Point*, published in 2003; this also found that eight out of 10 carers had reached breaking point.

More information can be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/a8cbhje>

Employment

Disabled workers may be forced onto the dole

Source: Business Disability Forum

Workers with disabilities will be forced out of employment and onto Jobseeker's Allowance if their mobility benefit is cut by the government, research by an independent forum has shown.

Preston's Learning Disability Forum (PLDF) carried out mock assessments similar to those performed by Atos Healthcare to determine whether members of its forum would still be entitled to mobility benefits.

Research found that out of 90 people tested, 44 would no longer be eligible. The forum concluded that benefits would be lost by those who need it most, in particular employees who rely on the benefit to run specially adapted cars that enable them to get to and from their place of work.

Furthermore, relying on public transport is not an option for many mobility benefit claimants as their disabilities mean they are unable to make use of such services.

PLDF research group member David Wood said: "Our work has shown that there will be winners but mainly losers but everyone we talked to said how worrying and frightening these changes may be. It's clear the government want to make big cuts."

MPs recently voted on the latest reforms to disability allowance and the new regulations under which claimants will now be assessed.

In a House of Commons debate, a committee which included MP Esther McVey, the minister for disabled people, voted ten to seven to remove any help with mobility benefits for those who are able to walk more than 20 metres.

The proposed changes now mean that individuals will be bound by legal regulations and will be assessed on what they can do "safely, reliably, repeatedly and in a reasonable time period". This means that those who are assessed as being capable of walking more than 20 metres will be affected by the benefit entitlements.

PLDF is pressing the government to rethink how it plans to define the people most in need as it believes the new ruling has "clearly got it wrong".

Welfare-to-work scheme 'is failing'

Source: BBC News Online

A multi-billion-pound scheme to help long-term unemployed people into work has been branded extremely poor by MPs.

The government's Work Programme only managed to get 3.6% of the people on the scheme off benefits and into secure employment in its first 14 months, the Public Accounts Committee said.

The government said it was "early days" for the scheme and the committee's report had painted a "skewed picture".

But Labour said the programme was "worse than doing nothing".

The 3.6% of claimants on the scheme who had moved off benefits into sustained employment between June 2011 and July 2012 was a mark well below the target of 11.9% that the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) expected to achieve, the MPs said.

The committee's report pointed out that it was also below the official estimate of how many of those claimants would have found work anyway if the programme had never been launched.

Read the full report at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-21532191>

Finance

Charity bond will give people with learning disabilities homes of their own

Source: The Guardian

Mark Hogg is all too familiar with the indignities many people with learning disabilities have endured while confined to institutions. Hogg spent the best part of 20 years as a resident at Budock hospital in Cornwall, his final stretch being in its Lamorna wing – a unit shut down soon after he left in 2006 when a [series of abuses](#) including physical harm to residents and withholding food came to light.

"What Mark has now is something he never had in his whole life. He can go out when he wants, wear what he wants, buy what he wants. His self-esteem and his self-respect have improved so much," says Gray.

Hogg is one of more than 1,000 people with learning disabilities to be provided with supported-living [housing](#) by [Golden Lane Housing](#) since it was set up 15 years ago by the charity [Mencap](#). Most of those for whom homes have been found live in properties leased from landlords, but many of the homes – more than 350 – are owned by the charity and have been specially adapted to meet the needs of residents. To overcome a shortage of homes across the country for people with learning disabilities, the charity is planning to acquire more fully owned properties by taking the novel step of issuing a charity investment bond. The aim, according to Golden Lane director Alastair Graham, is to raise £30m to rehouse about 250 people across England, mainly from institutions similar to Budock.

The bond, issued by Triodos Bank and with an initial target of £10m, rising to £30m over the next 18 months, is thought to be the largest charity fundraiser of its kind in the UK (investors are being offered [a fixed return of 4%](#) over five years). Graham says issuing a bond was a direct response to changing economic circumstances and pressure on local authority budgets. The usual financing model – a combination of NHS and local authority grants supplemented by bank loans – is no longer sufficient, Graham stresses. He says: "Grants have been harder to get and there is not a lot of credit [loans] around any more."

Read the full article at: <http://tinyurl.com/balvvqp>

Children

Councils 'failing special educational needs' children

Source: Guardian online

More than half the councils meant to road test the government's proposals to give parents of [children](#) with [special educational needs](#) personal budgets have failed to produce plans to implement them.

The 31 "pathfinder" councils, [set up in 2011](#), were supposed to trial the "biggest reforms in 30 years to help disabled children and those with special educational needs" ensure their needs were prioritised. However, research by MHP Health Mandate found that of the 31, eight local authorities had not produced any strategies. The remaining 23 councils had plans — but nine of these did not mention "special educational needs".

The pathfinders were expected to run until the autumn of 2012, before the children and families Bill was presented to parliament. However, in November 2012, the [department for education announced](#) that the pathfinder trials would be extended by another 18 months and end in September 2014. The result was that MPs were voting through a bill today for key changes which critics say there was no evidence for.

Ben Nunn, the researcher who completed the [local government](#) audit at MHP Health Mandate, said: "The government's education reforms present an important opportunity to fundamentally change the way young people with special educational needs are supported and educated. However, this cannot be achieved without cooperation from the health system and, in particular, the bodies specifically designed to bring this about. Councils and government should consider this new evidence to ensure SEN services are being appropriately prioritised locally to deliver the best possible care for those at need."

Read the full article at: <http://tinyurl.com/cydkz4n>

Ministers accused of downplaying income in measure of child poverty

Source: The Guardian

In a speech, Iain Duncan Smith, the work and pensions secretary, outlined his theory that other factors aside from money caused poverty, highlighting his concern about children growing up in "dysfunctional families".

The government's desire to alter the official definition of child poverty risks

deliberately downplaying the importance of money just as a series of government policies will reduce the incomes of poor families, a group of senior academics warn in a letter to the Guardian.

Professor Jonathan Bradshaw, the lead consultant on the UK's contribution to Unicef's Child Well-Being report, said he believed that the government was "trying to move the goalposts" at a time when child poverty was increasing rapidly.

More information can be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/bxwc52t>

Paralympics

Paralympic sport on the anniversary of the London 2012 opening ceremony

Source: BBC online, Disability Sport

The Olympic Stadium will host a day of Paralympic sport on 28th July 2013, as part of a three-day event one year on from the London 2012 opening ceremony.

London 2012 chief Seb Coe says the three-day event "...is an important part of the London 2012 legacy that as many people as possible experience world class sport at the Olympic Park."

"London 2012 was an amazing year for British sport and what a way to celebrate its success by welcoming the world back to London once more to watch the biggest names in athletics."

Double Paralympic gold medallist Hannah Cockroft, who won the T34 100m and 200m titles in London, is confident the event will be popular.

The Paralympic competition at the London Anniversary Games will follow shortly after the IPC World Championships in Lyon.

In addition, 2017 Paralympic Athletics World Championships will be hosted in the Olympic Stadium, just one month before the World Athletics Championships - the first time a city has hosted the two championships in the same year.

For further information, please see the following link: <http://tinyurl.com/d5mo2n2>

Oscar Pistorius: Disability sport 'will move on' from murder case

Source: BBC Online

Disability sport will recover from the shock of Oscar Pistorius's murder arrest, says International Paralympic Committee president Sir Philip Craven.

Multiple Paralympic champion Pistorius, 26, denies murdering girlfriend Reeva Steenkamp at his South African home.

Craven, in an open letter on the IPC's official website, insisted "a wealth of high profile athletes" will still build on the momentum created by London 2012, despite the controversy surrounding the Pistorius case.

"The profile of our athletes has never been higher, nor has the demand to watch Paralympic sport," he said. "Together it is our job to continue building this profile regardless of the outcome of this terrible case."

British Paralympians won 120 medals at London 2012, which also attracted record ticket sales and unprecedented media coverage.

A BBC survey suggested 75% of Britons felt more positive about the role of people with disabilities in the UK following the Paralympics.

Craven also told the BBC he felt "sad" at seeing Pistorius, who has won gold medals in each of the past three Paralympics, weeping in the dock.

"Obviously sadness is very much in there and particularly sadness for the family of Reeva Steenkamp," he said. "Also of course thinking of Oscar and thinking of what a great athlete he has been."

Pistorius became the first double amputee to run in the Olympic Games at London 2012.

Read the full report at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/0/disability-sport/21504259>

Legal – case law

Disability Living Allowance: MMF v Secretary of State- chronic diarrhoea is capable of generating entitlement to higher rate mobility component entitlement

Source: Community Care Law

Walking and bowel operation are not usually thought of as linked processes. However, it is possible for bowel difficulties to affect walking and render a person virtually unable to walk. If so, the person meets the criteria for an award of the higher rate of the mobility component of DLA (currently paying £54.05 per week).

In order for a person to be entitled to the mobility component on the basis of virtual inability to walk, their inability must be as a result of their 'physical condition

as a whole' (reg. 12(1)(a) Social Security (Disability Living Allowance) Regulations 1991). The Upper Tribunal recently considered whether this condition was capable of being satisfied by an individual with ulcerative colitis which resulted in chronic diarrhoea.

When the case was before the First-tier Tribunal (FtT), it appeared to rule out an award as a matter of principle on the basis that 'though very restricted by chronic diarrhoea, [the claimant] does not have a physical disability which renders her virtually unable to walk'. The Upper Tribunal held that this approach was wrong. Chronic diarrhoea, if it is disabling enough, is capable of founding an award of the higher rate of the mobility component on the basis that it renders a person virtually unable to walk. The issue is whether it impedes the act of putting one foot in front of the other. It is possible that the claimant's condition so impeded her walking that she would be virtually unable to walk. In the Upper Tribunal's words:

"19...diarrhoea is capable of affecting the physical act of walking and *might* therefore make a person virtually unable to walk. The physical pain of preventing herself from soiling herself might stop her from walking, as might the added pain and soreness associated with faeces running down her legs."

The case was sent back to the FtT for re-hearing.

The Upper Tribunal (Judge Lane) gave its decision in *MMF v Secretary of State for Work & Pensions* on 7 September 2012: [2012] UKUT 312 (AAC).

Scope policy and campaigns

Why changes to DLA should put disabled people first, not targets

Eugene Grant, Scope blog

In 2013, with the economy in recession, unemployment levels still high and wages flat-lining, times are tough for everyone. But disabled people in particular are struggling to make ends meet and the way ahead is hazardous and foreboding. Already disproportionately likely to live in poverty, be out of work or paid less than non-disabled people, disabled people are about to be hit from all sides by a barrage of cuts to much-needed welfare benefits and changes to social care services.

Among these, one of the biggest concerns for disabled people is the future of Disability Living Allowance (DLA). DLA is a life-line for millions for the simple reason that it costs more to live in our society as a disabled person. The little

things so many of us do without thinking – like getting out into our communities, running errands or travelling to work – can be much more expensive – often prohibitively so – if you're disabled. DLA helps people meet these extra costs. In fact, such is the impact of these costs on disabled people's living standards that academics estimate that taking these into account when measuring poverty could put almost half of all disabled people in the UK below the breadline.

With this in mind, disabled people are understandably frightened by the government's plans to bring DLA to an end and introduce a new benefit called the Personal Independence Payment (PIP) – the subject of this week's Dispatches on Channel 4. Come the new financial year and PIP is to be piloted in a select few areas; in June it will be rolled out for new claims only; in October those affected will include those whose current DLA award is due to expire around that time and thereafter. In 2015, everyone else receiving DLA will be told that their support is soon coming to an end and they will have to apply anew for PIP; they will not be moved across automatically. While the department for work and pensions (DWP) has launched an online toolkit showing people chronology of changes, lots of people are confused about how they will actually be affected when the reforms come into effect.

The government's aim of creating a better targeted benefit through PIP is laudable, but what we and many disabled people are really worried about is that the assessment with which the government wants to re-test almost two million disabled people is not fit for purpose. As our past research shows and as we've said before, this is because it doesn't take into account the range of practical and social barriers that disabled people face in daily life. We're anxious because the government is set to get rid of the low rate of DLA care and that, under the new system, disabled people who might have less visible impairments but still face real barriers to living full and independent lives will lose out.

But most concerning is that the government is already predicting how many disabled people will receive support before PIP has even been rolled-out. As a result of introducing PIP, the department for work and pensions reckon more than half a million people who would've have received support now won't get it. For us and disabled people across the country, this raises alarming questions as to whether the government is working to predetermined targets instead of what's best for disabled people and their families. It looks set to repeat past mistakes it made with the much-derided Work Capability Assessment (WCA).

The government has to make some difficult decisions in terms of the country's finances; but, at the same time, some people need benefits. They aren't feckless, they aren't scroungers; they just need a bit more support to live the full and

independent lives that so many of us take for granted. If the government is really serious about leaving a lasting legacy after the Paralympics – one in which disabled people can fulfil their potential – then they urgently need to reconsider their approach to welfare.

Find out more about the changes on the [Department for Work and Pensions' website](#).

Government 'failing a generation of disabled children'

New analysis by Scope shows parents increasingly having to fight tooth and nail for basic support including school placements, therapies and critical equipment.

- Parents increasingly left at wits' end, struggling to hold onto jobs and pay bills as a result.
- Scope believes Government's once in a generation opportunity could fail disabled children rather than improve their lives.

Disabled children are increasingly being denied places at school, vital therapy and crucial equipment, while their parents are left at their wits' end because of never-ending battles with local bodies, according to new analysis from the disability charity Scope.

Children and Families Bill

The warning comes as MPs meet to debate the Children and Families Bill for the first time, a new piece of legislation which outlines the biggest shake-up of support for disabled children and those with Special Education Needs in over 30 years.

The Government introduced the Bill promising that it would “prevent parents being forced to go from 'pillar to post' in a battle between different authorities and agencies”.

Scope, which supports thousands of disabled children and their families across the country, has brought together new insight from its staff on the ground, experiences of parents and polling that paints a bleak picture of what it's like to be a family with a disabled child in 2013.

Professionals across the charity cite hundreds of examples of disabled children having to wait months for time-sensitive therapy including speech and language, occupational therapy or having to fight for critical pieces of equipment such as wheelchairs and orthopaedic boots or for appropriate placements in schools.

Penny Dickinson, one of Scope's regional support workers for families with

disabled children, said: “One family I met recently have a disabled baby who is currently being tube fed. They have been waiting nine months for a speech and language therapist. Another family have a child who cannot sit up properly. They are still waiting for an occupational therapist assessment.”

The charity is also increasingly hearing desperate stories from parents who see no end to the battle they are forced to fight with local councils, schools and health services in order to get basic support for their child.

The charity believes that the combination of 28% cuts to local authority budgets, NHS efficiency savings and the biggest reform to welfare support is creating the most challenging environment for families with disabled children in generations.

One mother from Hartlepool, who has four children including two who are disabled, said: “We spend a lot of time chasing up appointments as some people just don’t get back to you even when things have been promised. My husband had to give up work as it was too much for myself alone to spit myself in a million pieces to be at hospitals, schools nurseries. We are both carers for the two children with the difficulties which gets frowned upon by others thinking we get an easy ride not having to work. It’s not the case.”

Survey of parents of disabled children

The charity spoke to 600 parents last year. Findings revealed that:

- Almost two thirds (62%) of families with disabled children are not getting critical support such as childcare or nursery places, appropriate schools, essential therapies or even healthcare in their local area.
- 60% of the families describe the process of getting their child the right services they need as a “battle”.
- 80% said not getting the support they needed caused them stress and anxiety.
- 51% said it had a negative impact on their ability to work and 36% said it placed financial pressures on their families.

Training and events

Rightsnet welfare rights training

Source: Lasa

Full day courses

- Benefits overview – an introduction - 28 March, 21 May
- Personal Independence Payment – 22 March, 19 April, 16 May

- Universal Credit – 18 April, 15 May

For more information or to book a place on any of the training events visit:
www.rightsnet.org.uk/training/courselist/

New event for young people with a brain injury: Where's your head at?

Source: Children's Trust

When? Sunday 28th April 2013

Where? Holiday Inn at Chessington World of Adventures Resort

What time? 9.30am-2.00pm – then spend the afternoon at Chessington World of Adventures Resort!

How much: Registration: £15 per young person. Entry for an accompanying adult is free. This includes refreshments, lunch and entry to the theme park for both.

This event is aimed at young people aged 14-19 who have sustained a brain injury either through accident, injury or illness. The young person should be attending some classes in a mainstream school or college (accessing the National Curriculum). They must also have one adult who can stay with you as your supporter throughout the day.

Read more about the event on the Children's Trust website

<http://www.thechildrenstrust.org.uk>

Any questions please email contactus@thechildrenstrust.org.uk or call 01737 365890.

Completed registration forms must be received by Monday 25th March 2013.

DIAL Network training and development

As part of the new DIAL Network membership offer we would like to improve the training and professional development available to DIAL groups. If you have any thoughts about opportunities that would be particularly appealing to your group please do let us know.

As highlighted before, Suzi Mackenzie is keen to get your feedback, so please contact her on suzi.mackenzie@scope.org.uk or on 0207 619 7305

Digital

What to prioritise if you've only got limited digital resources

Source: Lasa Computanews

Digital is a very broad area so it can feel overwhelming to get started if you or your organisation is relatively new to the topic. Laila Takeh lists the main ingredients to consider for a comprehensive digital presence.

This article comes with a big healthy caveat. As with all things you should talk to your target audience/s first to see what they're using. It might result in your list being quite different to this!

1 - An up to date website

Having an up-to-date website for your organisation is still the topmost priority; without one your reputation may be damaged as most people (including potential supporters and funders) will check who you are by searching online. If you don't have much time; it doesn't need to be lots of pages, or constantly updated, as long as it's clear, has contact details and other info that won't date.

2 - Email newsletter / list

Email is still important, even with the explosion of social media, email is often how existing supporters and beneficiaries like to be kept up to date. And each email has a longer lifespan than a tweet or a Facebook post (it can be as low as 15mins according to [Edgerank Checker](#)).

Capture email addresses wherever you have touch-points with your target audiences, making sure you use the appropriate data protection opt-ins so you can regularly send email. And then, actually send email regularly. Once a month is enough, and it doesn't need to be long.

An email address ages quite quickly as people move jobs or change accounts. Sending a regular email means your contacts are more likely to remember you both in terms of getting involved but also when they move their email address.

See the knowledgebase articles [Best Practice For Sending Email Newsletters](#) and [14 Email Dos and Don'ts](#).

3 - Analytics

Knowing how people are using your website and email is critical in making plans

for what to do next, not just digitally but also in your wider work.

You can setup [Google Analytics](#) for free by inserting a small bit of code in your website and emails. Once you're set up make sure you spend at least 30 minutes a month looking at the results and sharing them across your organisation. See also the knowledgebase article [Reading Web Statistics](#).

If your website and email are very busy and more complex you'll need more time. It's worth it as it can help you decide where to best spend your resources moving forward.

4 - Facebook

The largest social network in the UK is still [Facebook](#). Having a presence on the [network](#) means a greater exposure for your organisation. It can be very time consuming but there are ways to constrain your efforts if needed.

The most obvious way is to make your Facebook page volunteer led, establishing yourself as the coordinator / facilitator. You'll need to recruit volunteers into Facebook admin / ambassador roles and provide the appropriate guidance. You should then check the page and check-in with your volunteer/s once a week or more regularly.

If this still sounds like too much time in your already busy job, set aside up to an hour a week of your time. With an hour a week you should be able to do just enough; post a couple of times and reply to people who have posted on your page.

Whatever you do, you need to be able to keep doing it. A Facebook page left alone for too long will simply dry up and might give you a reputation problem.

5 - Google Grants

Around 90% of the searches done in the UK are done on Google. Hopefully your website will already be listed against a few relevant keyword searches but you can also buy search adverts to make sure you appear wherever you think relevant.

Fortunately Google [offer a grant to charities](#) so you can get access to search advertising for free. Once you've got the other priorities sorted you should apply and (hopefully) when you're approved you can start to setup search advertising to get more people to your website.

You'll need to put aside a bit of time to keep monitoring and updating your search campaigns once they're live.

See the knowledgebase article [How Google Grants Can Help Your Charity](#).

6 - YouTube

After Google, [YouTube](#) is the next biggest place people search. Setting up a YouTube channel for your charity is a great way to be found. Luckily Google (who own YouTube) also offer a charity channel account for free, and you can [apply online for this too](#).

Once you've got a channel some simple videos explaining your organisation, and / or projects that have created impact, are the best way to start. They don't need to be fancy if you don't have the resource, interviews with supporters and beneficiaries are often a good format.

With a charity channel account you'll be able to include overlays and links out from your videos. Make good use of these to capitalise on the exposure you're getting.

See the knowledgebase article [An Introduction To Effective Use Of Video On The Web](#).

7 - Twitter

Still not as big as Facebook but with a growing audience, [Twitter](#) is a great way to publish quick updates to easily tell people what your organisation is working on. There's lots of journalists, bloggers and politicians using twitter to listen out for stories or political views. So gearing your efforts around engaging influencers can be a good place to start if you have limited time.

With political engagement the same rules apply as elsewhere, a large supporter endorsement (e.g. through retweets or posts on a specific hashtag) will help convince others that it's an important issue.

See the knowledgebase article [To Twitter or not to Twitter?](#)

8 - Google+

[Google+ \(G+\)](#) is Google's social network offering; it has some similarities to Facebook but also quite a few differences. There's still uncertainty about G+ and its effectiveness. But with the integration of G+ with other Google products there is value having a G+ page to get the extra benefits on those other Google products, particularly in search results.

Checking your G+ page once a month might be enough if you don't have lots of people following your page.

Dates for your diary

Claim Disability Living Allowance (DLA) while there's still time

Source: Turn2us

From April, people with disabilities in the areas covered by [Bootle Disability Benefits Centre \(link opens in a new window\)](#) will have to claim the new Personal Independence Payment, but people in the rest of the UK will still be able to claim Disability Living Allowance until June 2013.

If you have any clients who may be eligible for DLA, it is important to encourage them to make a claim before June. People who already receive DLA will not be reassessed for PIP until 2015, unless their award expires or there is a change in their care or mobility needs.

[More information on Personal Independence Payment](#)

[More information on the benefits changes timetable](#)

Awareness dates

March

[Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month](#)

[Prostate Cancer Awareness Month](#)

[Red Cross Month](#)

5 - 11 [Endometriosis Awareness Week](#)

12 - 18 [National MS Week](#)

13 [No Smoking Day](#)

19 - 25 [Down's Syndrome Awareness Week](#)

24 [World TB Day](#)

April

[Bowel Cancer Awareness Month](#)

[IBS Awareness Month](#)

[Sarcoidosis Awareness Month](#)

[National Autism Awareness Month](#)

7 [World Health Day](#)

11 [World Parkinson's Day](#)

16 - 22 [Parkinson's Awareness Week](#)

17 [World Hemophilia Day](#)

22 - 29 [Orchid Male Cancer Awareness Week](#)

23 - 29 [National Allergy Week](#)

Get in touch

Do you have something to tell the network?

This is your newsletter and we are always happy to hear from you. If you have something you'd like to share before next month's newsletter, please contact us. We'll do our best to add it in.

We also welcome your thoughts on this newsletter – does it meet your needs? Is there anything you'd like to see more or less of? Do you like this format or would you prefer an email with links?

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Please note we have made every effort in this mailing to use language in keeping with the social model of disability. However, some terms used might not reflect this.

Although these are not our preferred terms, some of the materials used are quoted directly from source and used in their original format.