

# Our Rights - issue 3, September 2008

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**Lead Stories:**

**Independent Living in £74,000 House**

Like so many disabled people. Alan Brown (not his real name) has lived for many years in residential institutions, such as supported living for people with learning difficulties. Alan Brown decided he wanted to live in his own house. This is how he managed it. He found a £74,000, two-bedroom house through an estate agent. He bought half with income support which covers the interest payments on mortgages of up to £100,000 – and United Response, and organisation that supports people with learning difficulties and mental health issues to secure housing, bought the other half. Mr

Brown then rents the half owned by United Response through housing benefit.

This co-operation is called shared ownership. It is rarely used by people with learning difficulties. With the help from United Response more people like Mr Brown can live independently.

Read the whole article at

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2008/sep/17/housing.communities8>

For details of the organisation supporting the scheme go to

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

### **84-year-old Baroness says old people 'have a duty to die'**

Older people, who are unable to look after themselves "have a duty to die" says Baroness Warnock. People with dementia or Alzheimer's disease, and people who have other degenerative conditions, should consider ending their own lives, otherwise they can become a burden on NHS resources and their families. Pensioners in mental decline are "wasting people's lives", she said.

These views are seen as "immoral" and "barbaric". They have sparked outrage, especially amongst disabled people.

Neil Hunt, the chief executive of the Alzheimer's Society, said: "I am shocked and amazed that Baroness Warnock could disregard the value of the lives of people with dementia so callously."

Read the full story at

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/2983652/Baroness-Warnock-Dementia-sufferers-may-have-a-duty-to-die.html>

### **In the News**

#### **Mother kills disabled baby**

Joanne Hill drowned her four-year-old daughter in the bath. , Naomi, who had mild CP, "embarrassed" her because she wore callipers and had a hearing impairment. Naomi's father said she led a full and active life. Mrs Hill was found guilty of murder and jailed for 15 years.

This sentence demonstrates a step forward in recognising disabled people's right to life. Past sentences have been different.

Three years ago, Wendolyn Markcrow smothered her 36-year-old son Patrick with a plastic bag while he was tranquilised. He had Down Syndrome and was autistic. She received a two-year suspended sentence, and did not spend any time in jail.

Last week, a mother in Stuttgart, Germany, killed her 15-year-old disabled daughter by strangulation. She has been remanded in a secure psychiatric hospital.

A court in Berlin decided in the same week on another case. They found the mother, who killed her disabled 26-year-old son in 2007, to be innocent.

Links to the stories in English:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/beds/bucks/herts/4399832.stm>  
<http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/news/article-23552522-details/Mother+'drowned'+four-year-old+daughter+in+bath+because+she+was+ashamed+of+her+disability'/article.do>  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2005/sep/24/patrickbarkham.uknews2>

### **Testing times**

The number of babies lost as a result of pre-natal testing for Down Syndrome is without good reason.

Down Syndrome Education International estimates that two non-disabled foetuses are miscarried for every three found to have Down Syndrome. Screening is offered to every pregnant woman. However, more invasive tests are offered to those found to be "high risk".

Disability organisations are firmly against the idea of genetic screening, and the subsequent abortion of any foetuses.

The Department of Health thinks that the aim of ante-natal screening is to offer women the information they need to make 'the right' choice.

Abortion rates for unborn children diagnosed with Down Syndrome range from between 80% to 95%. In addition, prenatal screening for "abnormalities" other than Down Syndrome is becoming an increasingly popular phenomenon, with the result being that those unborn children deemed to be "undesirable" for various reasons are increasingly aborted.

Read more at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/7620742.stm>

For details on the bioethics debate go to the UKDPC (formerly BCDOP) website

<http://www.bcodp.org.uk/library/genetics/3disabhr.pdf>

### **UN Convention for Disabled People:**

#### **UN Convention in Norfolk**

The Norfolk Coalition of Disabled People is campaigning for the full ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled People. They want to show that all disabled people have human rights for simply being 'human' and are not just waiting for handouts from well-meaning people.

"To mark this, we are turning charity on its head, instead of asking for money we are giving it away", said Bill Albert from the Norfolk Coalition of Disabled People.

For one week in September, members of the Coalition offered 20p towards the cost of a stamp and urged people to send a postcard to their MP asking the government to fully agree to the UN Convention.

The Coalition anticipated that a lot of people would turn down the money but promise to send the postcard anyway. This, Bill Albert thought, was interesting in itself because it shows that people don't like being on the receiving end of charity.

More information about the Norfolk Coalition can be found at <http://www.ncodp.org.uk/>

**Action Alert: Ratify Now! Postcard to your MP**

**Send to: (Name of your Member of Parliament) House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA**

**"Dear .....**

**As one of your constituents I am writing to you in support of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. I urge you to read the handbook for parliamentarians on the Convention and to support an Early Day Motion (EDM 2138) so that the Convention will be ratified before the end of 2008. Yours sincerely ....."**

**Add your name and address.**

Thank you!

The text of the postcard is reproduced with the kind permission of the Norfolk Coalition of Disabled People.

**UN Convention - Ratification updates**

135 countries have signed the Convention (Treaty Agreement)  
75 have also signed the Optional Protocol (Additional Agreements)  
39 have fully agreed to make it happen (ratified) the Convention  
23 have fully agreed to the Protocol (ratified)

**Most recent signatories – alphabetical order**

Argentine ratified Convention and Protocol 2 September 2008

Brazil ratified Convention and Protocol 1 August 2008

China ratified Convention 1 August 2008

New Zealand ratified Convention 25 September 2008

Paraguay ratified Convention and Protocol 3 September 2008

Turkmenistan ratified Convention 4 September 2008

Uganda ratified Convention and Protocol 25 September 2008

Bolivia signed Convention and Protocol 13 August 2008

France signed the Protocol 23 September 2008

Pakistan signed Convention 25 September 2008

Romania signed the Protocol 25 September 2008

Russian Federation signed Convention 24 September 2008

Togo signed Convention and Protocol 23 September 2008

Ukraine signed Convention and Protocol 24 September 2008

The UK signed the Convention 30 March 2007. We are awaiting full ratification.

Full details at: <http://www.un.org/disabilities/countries.asp?id=166>

### **3<sup>rd</sup> December 2008**

The United Nations General Assembly in 1992 decided that every year the 3<sup>rd</sup> December marks the International Day of Disabled People. This is our day to celebrate, to promote our rights, to organise events and awareness-raising and simply to get together. Disability Awareness in Action has produced a Resource Kit on the International Day of Disabled People.

Each year the day has a theme. For 2008 our theme focuses on rights: "Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: Dignity and justice for all of us".

Disabled people get involved and organised to mark this day in many different ways.

At international level you will find more information at the UN Enable website.

<http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=109>

### **10<sup>th</sup> December 2008**

In the year of its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Human Rights Day equally focuses on the theme of "*Dignity and justice for all of us*". This reinforces the understanding that all people have human rights, and that the Universal Declaration is a true commitment to dignity and justice everywhere. It is not a wish-list, but a tool for change.

### **UN Convention – Basic Principles**

What are our rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled People? This is a Human Rights convention and therefore is based upon principles that apply to all people. The Convention, however, is also 'our' convention, and therefore protects rights that are meaningful to disabled people's different circumstances and life situations.

The basic principles say that disabled people, like all human beings, have the right to be respected for their dignity, the freedom to make their own choices and being in-charge over what is done to them. As disabled people the basic principle is our full inclusion in everyday, equally valued social activities without discrimination, disadvantage or threat.

Our rights are spelled out in the convention so that countries know what to focus on when it comes to protecting human rights of disabled people. These rights are fundamental, not a luxury and not only if it can be afforded. Our rights include education, health, participation, transport and freedom from exploitation.

### **UN Convention text resources**

Details of the Convention on the Rights of Disabled People can be found at

<http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?navid=12&pid=150>

<http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml>  
<http://www.un-convention.info>  
Easy Read version of the Convention  
<http://www.officefordisability.gov.uk/docs/international-agreement-rights-disabled-people.pdf>  
For Easy Read versions of the Convention's extra agreements (Optional Protocols) go to  
[http://www.hreoc.gov.au/disability\\_rights/convention/nz.htm](http://www.hreoc.gov.au/disability_rights/convention/nz.htm)  
A child-friendly text of the Convention can be accessed at  
[http://www.unicef.org/Child\\_friendly\\_CRPD.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/Child_friendly_CRPD.pdf)

### **International News:**

#### **50 Disabled activists arrested**

At approximately 4:30 AM on Monday, September 15th, hundreds of disability rights activists from across the country took over the plaza in front of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The activists, from a grassroots organization called ADAPT take this action because there is not enough accessible and affordable, non-segregated housing.

"The TV is full of news about the bank crisis, and the mortgage crisis, and the need for candidates to appeal to middle income people," said Cassie James, Philadelphia ADAPT organizer.

"Meanwhile, people who live on disability benefits, and people who are trapped in nursing homes because of no housing are being held hostage while the government bails everyone else out".

Read the full story at

<http://www.duhcity.org/press/duh004.html>

#### **Action Alert: Housing Crisis! Letter to candidates for President and Congress**

To support our campaign for accessible, inclusive housing action work, ADAPT needs your help! We need the candidates for President and those for Congress to hear from YOU - the VOTERS of this NATION!

1. Use the link below to send a letter to the Candidates for President and the Candidates for Congress in your district!

[http://capwiz.com/rochestercdr/issues/alert/?alertid=11928371&queueid=\[capwiz:queue\\_id\]](http://capwiz.com/rochestercdr/issues/alert/?alertid=11928371&queueid=[capwiz:queue_id])

2. Then send this action alert link to EVERYONE you know!

To contact ADAPT go to: <http://www.adapt.org/>

#### **Legalising Euthanasia in India**

The State of Kerala Law Reform Commission has presented a proposal, which recommends that euthanasia or 'mercy killing' should be made legal. The draft law also wants the 'attempted suicide' Section 309 of the Indian Penal Code removed. For people

with kidney failure, who need dialysis but can't afford the 6,000 Rupees, this means they would be able to commit suicide lawfully.  
<http://notdeadyetnewscommentary.blogspot.com/>

### **The colour of money**

The American Council of the Blind (ACB) and the National Federation of the Blind (NFB), two large organisations of blind people in USA, have different ideas about independence and how to achieve it.

The ACB took a case against the government to make paper money more accessible to blind and partially sighted people. The NFB, argued on the side of the government. They think that identifying items by touch (including currency) is convenient, but not essential to blind people being able to participate fully in society. They are worried it may reinforce society's misconception that blind people are unable to function.

The court agreed with ACB and is asking the government for a time-plan to make future currency accessible.

To read the full case at

<http://pacer.cadc.uscourts.gov/common/opinions/200805/07-5063-1117127.pdf>

For further comment see

<http://www.acb.org/press-releases/pr-currency3.html>

<http://www.nfb.org/nfb/NewsBot.asp?MODE=VIEW&ID=325&>

### **Quantas: Gold medal yes, legs no.**

Christine Wolf's is a paralympian Gold medallist, who uses prosthetic legs. On her flight home, Quantas staff refused to allow her prosthetic legs as carry-on-luggage.

Australian coach Iryna Dvoskina, who travelled back to Canberra with Ms Wolf yesterday, said she would make a formal complaint.

"The prosthetics are just so sensitive, we never check it into luggage, we take it on the plane all the time and now, on our last flight after two months away and we are just very happy to be home, it was just so unhelpful and unfriendly," Ms Dvoskina said. "I can't believe that it would happen."

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/news/local/news/general/qantas-snubs-goldmedal-paralympian/1278246.aspx?src=enews#>

### **"25 Years Independent Living in Sweden"**

Stockholm, November 28-29, 2008

This conference is celebrating 25 years of the Independent Living movement and to evaluate the achievements of our international civil rights movement in Sweden, Europe and other parts of the world and plan for tomorrow.

Plenary sessions and workshops will share experiences in working for de-institutionalization, personal assistance, legislation for non-

discrimination and accessibility, and for spreading the Independent Living philosophy and approach to other countries.  
<http://www.independentliving.org/25years2008/>

### **Independent Living conference in Spain**

The European Network on Independent Living will host a seminar in Spain: "Toward deinstitutionalization of disabled men and women in Europe - How can the UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled People impact this change?"

12th - 13th December 2008, Madrid, Spain

Go to ENIL website for regular updates:

<http://www.enil.eu/enil/index.php>

### **Celebrations and Events:**

#### **London Liberty Festival**

Liberty is a free festival of music, arts and dance, at which all the performers are disabled or Deaf. It takes place in Trafalgar Square, London. This festival attracts disabled and non-disabled visitors from all over the world.

Performances included comedians Steve Day, Liz Bentley the 'female Ivor Cutler' who describes herself as a sit-down comedienne, acclaimed comedian Laurence Clark and Liz Carr who 'tells it like it is'. They had recently performed together in "Abnormally Funny People" at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. They offer a sharp, almost sarcastic, sense of humour.

Speeches were given by Ken Livingstone and Dave Morris.

Liberty is London's most accessible outdoor festival.

Stewards were trained on disability equality issues, programmes were provided in alternative formats, induction loops and sign language interpreters. Speech, song and recorded lyrics were being displayed as text onto screens in both the Comedy and Cabaret and Club zones. An audio description service transmitting to cordless headsets was also available.

<http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor/equalities/liberty/index.jsp>

For photos of the festival go to

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/judygr/sets/72157607033700252/>

#### **Liz Carr and Kiruna Stamell present a not-so-girlie Ouch Podcast**

You can hear Liz Carr and Kiruna Stamell in conversation about trying to find an accessible and affordable place to live, discussing the recent controversy about the film 'Tropic Thunder' and other issues. Staring, a back-to-school quiz, Rob's news and a tetraplegic slide guitarist with homage to his dead assistance dog, are other items.

Duration 55 minutes.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio/podcasts/ouch/>

## **Scotland Mental Health Art and Film Festival 1st – 19th October 2008**

Between the 1st and 19th of October 2008 Scotland will be hosting the second Scottish Mental Health Arts and Film Festival. Events will be held in major arts and community venues in Glasgow, Lanarkshire, Edinburgh, West Lothian, Renfrewshire, Dundee, Perth. A network of festivals are springing up in Europe and the US as this festival develops international partners.

The festival seeks to promote positive attitudes towards mental health, mental illness, support and recovery, and to effect significant cultural change amongst opinion-formers and the public through the insights and influences of the creative arts.

<http://mentalhealthfestival.dreamhosters.com/>

## **DaDa Fest in Liverpool**

The annual festival for Deaf and disabled artists has a particularly strong collection of visual art exhibitions this year. This is also the first time DadaFest has gone international. Taking place in the A Foundation galleries Ju Gosling's 'Abnormal' is a fantastic mixed-media exhibition musing on the medical profession's definitions of normality and proposing a new "Scientific Model of Disability" – a challenging and confrontational work. Tanya Raabe presents 'Who'S Who - Defining the Faces of an Arts Movement', a collection of portraits challenging the notion of portraiture using disability aesthetics and visual language.

Liverpool introduces the festival here:

<http://www.liverpool.com/features/dada-fest.html>

You can follow Emma's trip to the DADA Fest, parts 1 and 2:

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/ouch/2008/09/dadafest\\_part\\_1.html](http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/ouch/2008/09/dadafest_part_1.html)

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/ouch/2008/09/dadafest\\_part\\_2.html](http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/ouch/2008/09/dadafest_part_2.html)

### **See highlights of the DADA Fest:**

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/gallery/2008/sep/05/disability.dadafest?picture=337327807>

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