

Our Rights - issue 4, October 2008

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To contact us with comments or your stories email the DAA team at: **mysay4daa@live.co.uk**

We look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you!

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Disability Politics: All Change at the Top

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Minister Brown's reshuffle. Ms McGuire had been a Department for Work and Pensions minister since 2005.

She was popular with many disabled people's groups who thought she had a very good grasp of the rights perspective and had been vigorous in support of the UN Convention.

Ms McGuire will be replaced by Jonathan Shaw MP, who was previously a minister at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Mr Shaw will also retain his post as Minister for the South East. He is a former social worker and 'care assistant' for adults with learning difficulties.

As a minister with two vital roles the concern is that disability issues will be further marginalised on the political agenda.

At Scope, Disability commissioner Andy Rickell, a long-time disability activist, is one of five senior managers made redundant to combat a drop in income.

Among other cost-cutting measures, Scope has also scrapped its co-production department, responsible for leading its work on involving disabled people in the running of the organisation and its services.

You can read an interview with Ann McGuire at Disability Now <http://www.disabilitynow.org.uk/latest-news2/mcguire-axed-in-brown-reshuffle> Details about changes in Scopes management and interview with Chief Executive Jon Sparks in Community Care can be accessed at <http://www.communitycare.co.uk/Articles/2008/10/09/109635/scope-chief-jon-sparkes-defends-credit-crunch-driven-staff-cuts.html> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/3128602/Scope-cuts-jobs-as-credit-crunch-starts-to-hit-charities.html>

In the news:

Police investigate assisted suicide

Police have begun an investigation after a young disabled sportsman travelled to Switzerland to commit suicide.

Daniel James, 23, from Worcester, injured his spine during a training session at Nuneaton Rugby Club, Warwickshire in 2007. He died in at Dignitas, the Swiss assisted suicide clinic.

Apparently, his parents reflected his own feelings that he would never be able to live a full life. Existence as a second class citizen just wasn't good enough. Daniel and his parents felt his life was not worth living.

Heather Frederiksen, at 22, was a non-disabled swimming Olympic hopeful. Following an accident she thought her life was over. A doctor told her that she would never swim again.

She had already gone back in the pool but found herself swimming in circles. Trying to swim on her front required a monumental effort. "It was a case of my life being over," she said. "I found it hard. I could not come to terms with the new me."

Inspired by watching the Paralympics in Melbourne in 2006, Heather knew what she had to do: she had to learn to swim again in a new and different way.

"It was very, very hard to come back because you have to find a whole new body balance and you still compare yourself with the times you used to do," she said. "It's really hard to get out of that type of thinking. I had to come to terms with what body could cope with and what it couldn't cope with."

At the Paralympic Games in Beijing 2008 Heather Frederiksen set a new world record in the 100 meters Backstroke event.

Disabled people with similar injuries to that of Daniel James have found different ways to live and contribute:

writers and activists, academics and poets have changed the way we think about disability equality. Other disabled people around the world with similar impairments have become cartoonists, accountants, comedians, and lawyers.

Disabled life is tough for lots of reasons. One of the main challenges is society's fears and misconceptions that think disabled people cannot have any kind of quality of life.

Our problems are then compounded by the way society organises itself. Essential services are not available or are too costly, there is little access to public buildings, shops, pubs and employment.

There have been varying responses to Daniel's death:

Like many disabled people, Day Al-Mohamed, Senior Legislative and Federal Affairs Officer with the American Psychological Association is angry. She says:

"Right now, I just wish the young man had had the opportunity to really talk to other people with disabilities. Those who've been there and who can relate and can let him know that there is so much more to living than just a "fully functioning" body. The waste, makes me angry..."

On the other hand, Baroness Warnock, writing in the Observer newspaper, called for liberalisation of euthanasia laws on the grounds that 'we have a moral obligation to other people to take their seriously reached decisions with regard to their own lives equally seriously'.

All around the world, disabled people have campaigned for the right to live. As the Not Dead Yet Campaign says:

"Disabled people have become aware of the dangers associated with the call for assisted dying to be legalised. The idea that disabled people, including those who do not have long to live, are "better off dead" is not new. We believe individual disabled people's suicidal cries for help

come from a lack of proper practical, emotional and medical support needed to live dignified lives, rather than from the 'suffering' they experience as a result of a medical condition."

Details about Not Dead Yet (UK) can be found at
<http://www.notdeadyet.org/docs/ndyukpr0506.html>
http://www.livingwithdignity.info/ndy_aboutus.html
Further stories in the media about Daniel James
at:<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/hereford/worcs/7679641.stm>
<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/at-23-daniel-chose-to-end-his-second-class-life-965447.html>
<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/health/article4962436.ece?token=null&offset=12&page=2>
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2008/oct/19/daniel-james-paralysed-euthanasia>
<http://www.disaboom.com/forums/p/35302/113953.aspx>
<http://www.raggededgemagazine.com/departments/close-look/000749.html>
<http://www.news.com.au/story/0,23599,24514943-401,00.html>
<http://www.disabilitypride.com/category/assisted-suicideeuthanasia/>
Stories about some of the legal debates at
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/7644094.stm>
Articles by disabled thinkers can be found at
<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/disability-studies/archiveuk/archframe.htm>

Disability Hate Crime

Many disabled people live in fear of crime. But many disabled people also feel that they are specifically at risk. Crimes against disabled people, **because** they are disabled have risen.

Sir Ken Macdonald, the Director of Public Prosecutions - has come out with a very strong message: 'many disabled people live in fear of crime because criminals view us as easy targets'.

He wants us to be better protected by the law.

Hate crime includes bullying and name calling. Sir Ken Macdonald thinks that each apparently minor incident of name calling and harassment on the street may seem relatively unimportant, but, taken together, a pattern of hostility could be traced.

You can read his full speech at

http://www.cps.gov.uk/news/nationalnews/dhc_dpp_speech.html

Read more details about this story at

http://www.cps.gov.uk/news/pressreleases/161_08.html

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7655244.stm>

The Crown Prosecution Service has issued a press release called 'Disability Hate Crime – Prosecution Policy and Guidance'. The Easy Read version is available at

http://www.cps.gov.uk/publications/docs/disability_hate_crime_policy_easy_read_english.doc

Credit crunch and disabled children

Essential equipment, services and support for disabled children is affected by the recent down-turn in the economy everywhere. And in Northern Ireland, a study found that families with disabled children go without essential food.

Worries are also rising over the growing increases in heating and fuel bills. Many disabled people need to keep warm in order to stay well and mobile.

"Gary can't walk or move around much so doesn't generate his own heat which means we have the heating on up to 12 hours a day. I've noticed a big jump in gas and electricity bills which is difficult to afford," says one mother.

One in 14 children, who are disabled or have a medical condition, is living under threat of losing their home.

This situation makes existing inequalities worse. The Going Places! report, published by campaigning group Every Disabled Child Matters (EDCM), found that disabled children routinely miss out on activities such as going out with friends, spending time away from their parents or going out in their local community.

EDCM asks every young person to "Take action! Email your council to get better places to go and things to do where you live."

Read details about how the economic situation affects disabled children at
http://www.channel4.com/news/articles/business_money/credit+crunch+affecting+disabled/2520672
<http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/local-national/families-of-disabled-children-go-without-food-as-credit-crunch-takes-its-toll-13958612.html>

Contact the EDCM campaign at
<http://www.edcm.org.uk/Page.asp>

TV Campaign to increase mental health awareness

England's first mental health promotion TV campaign is launched this month to show how lifestyle choices can boost wellbeing.

You can watch the video at

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2008/oct/07/mental.health.tv.advertising>

Cure me of my Deafness? No thanks.

Like many disabled people, Deaf people are critical about gene research, as it would deny their identity.

The British Deaf Association (BDA) has been campaigning for Deaf people's right to use and to be educated in British Sign Language, as well as to access information and services through it.

They believe this is the best way for Deaf people to take part in society, equally to hearing people.

Go to the BDA for signed news items <http://bda.org.uk/>
Go to DeafClub for more news items
<http://www.deafclub.co.uk/>
Read the full article at
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/health/main.jhtml?xml=/health/2008/09/01/hdeaf101.xml&DCMP=ILC-traffdrv07053100>

UN Convention for Disabled People

ACTION ALERT!

Remember, Remember the 5th of November....

In a modern twist on the Gun Powder Plot disabled activists and campaigners will present a petition of thousands of signatures to Prime Minister Gordon Brown, at 10 Downing Street.

We need your support! Let's make a lot of noise!

The UK government is threatening to renege on essential rights for disabled people. We need to demonstrate our strong disapproval. Please come and join us.

11.30 – 12.30 on 5th November 2008

at Richmond Terrace (opposite the entrance to Downing Street, go down White Hall or Parliament Street, or come from Embankment).

Have YOU signed yet? There is still time, go online today:

The campaign invites disabled people to encourage the Prime Minister to ratify the Convention in full - add your name to our online petition at
<http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/noreservations/>

Human Rights Committee Call for Evidence by 3rd Nov

The latest total number of states, who signed the Convention: 136 signatories to the Convention 78 signatories to the Optional Protocol 41 ratifications of the Convention 25 ratifications of the Optional Protocol

However, the UK Government is slow when it comes to making our rights in the UN Convention a reality. They have not yet ratified and are still threatening to reserve on immigration, the armed forces, mental capacity and education.

The Joint Committee on Human Rights are concerned about this. They have 'put out a call for evidence' on the Government's approach to ratification of the Convention. Disabled people and their organisations, in fact anyone, can write a letter or a longer submission of no more than 1,500 words.

Tell the committee what concerns you have about the implementation of the Convention. Your submission must be in by 3rd November 2008. The more letters they receive, the greater our voice.

Write to: Dr Mark Egan, Commons Clerk of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, Committee Office, House of Commons, 7 Millbank, London SW1P 3JA (email: jchr@parliament.uk).

Electronic submission in Word format is requested, but a signed hard copy should also be sent.

http://www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_committees/joint_committee_on_human_rights/jchrci.cfm

UN Convention update

Cameroon signed the Convention on 1-10-2008

Cameroon signed the Optional Protocol on 1-10-2008

Costa Rica ratified the Convention on 1-10-2008

International News

Disability discrimination is rife in Europe

The UN Convention is yet to have any real impact on the lives of disabled people, despite having had the highest number of state signatories on its opening day.

The lives of disabled people in Europe are not improving, argues Thomas Hammarberg from the Council of Europe.

Mr Hammarberg urges governments in the European Community to ratify the UN Convention and the Optional Protocol and start implementing it.

He wants them to use the European Action Plan as a tool to make the ideas a reality.

Here are some of his reasons why:

“More than 80 million persons are still neglected in Europe simply because of their disabilities. More inclusive policies must be implemented, stamping out social stigma and all kinds of barriers”.

He continues: “For far too long policies have focused exclusively on institutional care, medical rehabilitation and welfare benefits. More emphasis must be given to the human rights of persons with disabilities – charity is not enough.”

The full text is available at the Commissioner's website at www.commissioner.coe.int

Call for Action in Bangladesh

Abdus Sattar Dulal, Executive Director, President of National Alliance of Disabled Peoples Organizations asks disabled people in Bangladesh to write to the Secretary of the United Nations, who will visit Bangladesh on 1st November 2008.

Mr. Abdus Sattar Dulal says:

"We disable people in Bangladesh believe that the Secretary General of United Nations should consider the visit of our organization as UN Convention is encouraged and recognized disables peoples organization as a vital force for implementation of the CRPD."

"So, I expect support from all of you in this regard, please send your comments and endorsements in support of our invitation letter. Please send your comments and endorsements in support of our invitation letter."

To support this call for action, please note that the fax number of General Secretary of UN is 212-963-7055 and his email address is ecu@un.org.

Details about this Disabled People's Organisation can be found at their website <http://bpksbd.org/index.php>

Myanmar: Disabled people still wait for help after cyclone

More than five months after Cyclone Nargis struck southern Myanmar, disabled people are still waiting for help.

International aid has come to the area, but specific help is needed for disabled people. 2.4 million people were affected, many lost their lives, life stock and livelihoods. Disabled people also lost their mobility devices, wheelchairs, walking aids or prosthetic limbs.

"Many people were affected by the cyclone and are now receiving assistance. Unfortunately very little has come to us," said Nay Lin Soe, a member of the organisation.

African Youth Trust have an understanding with Governments

The African Youth Trust and the Secretariat of African Decade of Persons with Disabilities, signed a Memorandum of Understanding this month to aid young disabled people's voice and inclusion in different programmes. Active participation by young people is

needed in government, good governance, human rights and economic empowerment initiatives across East Africa.

The signing of the agreement took place in Nairobi, Kenya, on 19th September, 2008. The Secretariat was represented by the A.K. Dube and African Youth Trust was represented by its Nahum Okwiya.

This agreement and collaboration is expected to assist young disabled people to participate and give a positive contribution to achieving the Millennium Development Goals for the eradication of poverty world-wide.

For more information email: nafisa@africandecade.co.za
For more information on the Millennium Development Goals go to <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

Afghanistan: Deprives disabled children of education

Afghanistan has yet to join 134 other states that have signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Convention asks signatory states to ensure that "children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary education, or from secondary education".

There are at least 200,000 children in Afghanistan living with permanent impairments. Three decades of conflict have left the country strewn with landmines and other explosive remnants of war which kill and/or maim about 60 people, mostly children.

Read the full article at
<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/IRIN/3d24d00cf697ee9f0f2c12272de8431b.htm>

And Finally ...

Standing Short by Sarah Jackson Bennett
Yes I am disabled.

I am still a person.
Don't stare.
Remember that I am there.

I stand short and small.
I am still my age.

Don't judge me.
Remember I am there.
I wouldn't judge you.
Be fair.

<http://www.disabledperson.com/POems/standingshort.asp>

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