



supporting blind and partially sighted people

Campaign update

Issue 9, July 2011

The Hardest Hit – the campaign continues...



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Take action!

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If you only do one thing...

If you only have time to do one thing, please support the “Hardest Hit” campaign. The campaign will be at a crucial stage over the next few months as the welfare reform bill makes its way through parliament. Read on to find out how campaign supporters have taken action at each stage of the bill and what you can do now to support the campaign.

Take action!

The Hardest Hit: the campaign continues

On an incredible day of protest on 11 May, “The Hardest Hit” saw thousands of disabled people march through Westminster and past parliament to make their voices heard on key issues like the plans to reform Disability Living Allowance, Employment Support and cuts to social care services. The largest ever co-ordinated protest by disabled people was supported by over 40 disability organisations and gained fantastic media coverage. It really showed the government and the general public the strength of feeling around the cuts to services and benefits.

Over 600 campaigners explained the impact that the proposals would have on their ability to live independently, directly to their MP on the day. A huge thank you to every RNIB campaign supporter who travelled

from across the UK to make their voice heard. Outside Westminster thousands more disabled people were also making their voices heard with updates and messages of support and solidarity lighting up the internet through Twitter, blogs and Facebook.

If proof were needed that the day was a success, the following day we received news that the protest significantly increased the ability of the House of Lords to positively influence the welfare reform bill. But there is still more to do...



Our key campaign objectives

- To challenge the 20 per cent budget cut to Disability Living Allowance (DLA).
- To ensure the benefit that replaces DLA, Personal Independence Payment, meets the needs of blind and partially sighted people.
- To make sure people receive contributory Employment Support Allowance (ESA) for as long as they need it to assist them with their pathway towards work.

The campaign continues...



- During May and June, the final stages of the debate on the welfare reform bill, which brings in many of the proposed changes that we are concerned about, took place in the

House of Commons – with all MPs having an opportunity to debate the bill and move for amendments to it. Campaign supporters kept the pressure up by emailing, calling, writing to and visiting their MPs to ask them to speak up against proposals.

- The bill enters the Lords in mid June until October where it will go back to the Commons for debate by MPs on Lords amendments.
- During October, with the bill back in the Commons, a potentially significant influencing period begins for campaign supporters, with disability groups gearing up for local “Hardest Hit” day of protests.

Take action!

There is still much work to be done to ensure that the plans – particularly those to replace Disability Living Allowance with a benefit designed for only those with the “greatest needs” – do not go ahead. Remember – your stories really do make all the difference: if DLA and/or ESA are important to you, please share your experience with us to help us influence the debate.

Over the next few months, we will need the weight of all our campaign supporters to maintain the pressure for positive reform. If you have access to the internet, check our web pages (rnib.org.uk/campaign) for updates and sign up to be part of our “rapid response” email campaigning force. You can also follow us on Twitter (@rnib_campaigns) and stay up to date with campaign news and activity as it happens. If you do not have access to email, contact the campaigns hotline for up-to-date information.

Campaign voice – Torquay to parliament!

Determined to take part in the Hardest Hit march, Monty Clode, a volunteer campaigner for RNIB, made the long journey from Torquay to London on 11 May to protest about the changes to the welfare reform bill. “I left the house at 6am, it took me a while to wake up but it is such an important issue that we had to get our voice heard.”

Monty, along with over 5,000 disabled protesters marched along Victoria embankment to Westminster Hall to lobby his MP on the proposed changes that will push disabled people further into poverty and isolation. “I think we are all concerned that the standard and our quality of living will be reduced, so much so that I have written to David Cameron about this. I might send a copy to that Clegg guy and see what he comes up with as well.”

Brandishing his RNIB placard that had a “secret” braille message on it (“secret” only to non-braille readers!) just for Mr Cameron, Monty roared along with the rest of the protesters as the Rt Hon Liam Byrne MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Work and Pensions took to the stage to slam the cuts. “I thought he made some really good points and hit the nail on the head,” remembers Monty.

Monty’s MP is Adrian Sanders and they had met in Adrian’s constituency office last month so Monty decided to forgo meeting him at Westminster Hall. “I decided to let someone else have the chance to meet him and she came back with a really positive response. He needs to see some fresh faces, but we will be keeping in touch with him, he (Adrian Sanders MP) is largely supportive of what we are doing so that helps.”

The day ended with everyone piling onto the Paddington-bound coach and onwards to the trains, “it was all so well organised that it didn’t feel like a huge task,” says Monty “and the journey home was fine. Even though I didn’t get in until 9pm, nobody was tired on the train, they were quite sprightly in fact having a chat about the day’s events.”



Adrian Sanders, MP is lobbied by RNIB campaigners, Elli and Rose

Reprieve for registers – for now...



This is a critical year for the future direction of social care. This spring, The Law Commission (which advises Government on changes to the law) published its recommendations on reforming social care. From our perspective the report it published represents a positive first step in the pursuit to improve the care and support people receive in their homes and communities. Importantly, it recommends local authorities should be required to establish and maintain registers of blind and partially sighted people. This is a significant victory.

“RNIB is delighted with the outcomes of the Law Commission review on adult social care. The registers mean people who have lost their sight can receive the early support they need to remain independent. Making it a duty on local authorities to keep the registers is crucial and we will be campaigning to see this in the new statute.”

Steve Winyard, RNIB head of campaigns and policy

Take action!

There is still a risk the government could abolish the registers as part of its overall attempt to modernise social care so we will be pressing the Department of Health to act on the Law Commission’s advice. We would like to hear from you on your key priorities for a Government White Paper: what difference did registering as blind or partially sighted make to you in terms of income and extra support? Are there other issues concerning access to, and paying for care, that you would like us to emphasise?

Money talks

Those of you who receive **Campaign update** via email may recall us asking you last year for information on your experiences of using cash machines. Thank you for all your feedback to help get this campaign going. We have now written to the major high street banks in the UK including RBS/Natwest, Lloyds/HBOS, HSBC, Santander and Barclays and hope to meet with them in the coming

months to find out what plans they have to make their cash machines (ATMs) more accessible – including the provision of text-to-speech output. Text-to-speech works by allowing the ATM user to plug in their own ear phone, enabling them to listen privately to the details of the transaction they are making, whilst allowing them to stay in contact with what is going on around them.



Take action!

Who do you bank with? Would you like your bank to make their cash machines accessible to you and their other blind and partially sighted customers? How do you access your cash at the moment? Please contact the campaigns team to let us know your experience, it could make all the difference to our campaigning outcomes.

Using the law to challenge inaccessible services

RNIB's campaigns team is very fortunate to have its own legal officer, Samantha, who provides the team with the "teeth" it needs to bring inaccessible service providers to book under equality legislation.

Samantha says, "When a service provider makes a change or develops a product that creates accessibility problems for disabled customers, we tend to get an increased number of calls to the campaigns line on a particular issue. A good case study can make an enormous difference in our ability to persuade that service provider to change their practices. I review a caller's experience with them, searching for factors that might present a good case for the basis of a legal challenge."

A successful challenge on behalf of one individual or a group of individuals can reap benefits for blind and partially sighted customers across the country when a service provider finally understands the impact of their inaccessible service, and takes steps to improve it.



As well as collecting case studies to support the talking ATM campaign (see previous article), over the past few months Samantha has been looking for blind and partially sighted individuals who use the following services:

- Virgin Media Digital TV Service. Virgin have failed to provide talking output or improve the accessibility of their set top boxes, including the new TiVO box.
- The bmibaby website (bmibaby.com for booking flights). BMI promised to make the site accessible by March 2011 following a previous complaint – this does not appear to have been done.

Take action!

If you are a Virgin Media Digital TV service user or have tried to use the bmibaby website, Samantha would love to hear from you. Please contact the campaigns hotline or email with details of your experience.

Campaign news

Taking eye health campaigns to parliament

In the past few months we've been to parliament twice as part of our long running campaign to push for an end to unnecessary sight loss. Nearly 50 per cent of sight loss is avoidable in this country and we're worried that government and local health authority policies are threatening to make this situation worse.

In May we launched a new access to cataract treatment campaign with an event in parliament designed to highlight our concerns that a growing number of primary care trusts (PCTs) are now restricting access to this life – changing operation as part of their “efficiency savings”. At the event, MPs pledged to contact PCTs in their own constituencies to help ensure timely access to cataract surgery is made available on the NHS in all areas of the UK.

“People who would benefit from this cost-effective surgery, could potentially be forced to wait for it while their vision deteriorates. I have contacted [Leicestershire and Rutland PCT] asking for a meeting to discuss this and to be kept fully informed about the progress of their review into eligibility for cataract treatment... excellent progress has been made since the cataract waiting time

initiative was introduced in 2002 and I intend to support RNIB with their efforts in maintaining this.”

Nicky Morgan, MP

If you or anyone you know has had problems getting cataract treatment, please share your story by emailing us at cataract@rnib.org.uk.

National Eye Health Week (13 to 19 June) was the perfect context to support an event in parliament where we could lobby MPs directly over the publication of the new government Public Health White Paper. This paper systematically fails to put in place simple straightforward measures which could help tackle avoidable sight loss.

Thanks to campaigners writing to their MP asking them to attend this reception, we had a good turn out of politicians all of whom went away with their ears ringing about the need for health strategies to include specific targeted policies on eye health.



New eye health ambassador programme launched

In May, our first group of new volunteer eye health ambassadors got together for a training day with Ciara Smyth – a communications expert.

During the day, the volunteers got to know one another and brushed up on tips and techniques for communicating effectively and with impact to different types of audiences. Ambassadors will be using their own experiences and stories to ensure professionals who plan services and treatment options really understand the impact of their decisions. They will also help influence the public's behaviour when it comes to their own eye health directly and through the media.

If you have experience of wet AMD, cataracts, diabetes-related eye conditions or glaucoma and this opportunity interests you, please contact Victoria in the campaigns team on 020 7391 3267.



Key campaigners collar councillors

Ahead of the May local elections, our key campaigners were busy writing to their council candidates to ask them to support five key pledges crucial to the independence of blind and partially sighted people, from accessible information to a safe and clutter free pedestrian environment.

Devon-based campaigner, David, went one step further and secured a meeting with one of his Conservative council candidates to explain what the pledges were about. Whether their council candidates were willing

to “sign up” to the pledges or not, our key campaigners did a brilliant job of spreading vital messages of independence around the country and of discovering their own councillors' views.

Key campaigners receive a briefing three or four times a year and clear step-by-step advice on what they can do to support RNIB campaigns. If you want to find out more about being an RNIB key campaigner, call Victoria on 020 7391 3267.

Hire vision

A new RNIB campaign report, due to launch in the autumn, sets out the business case for employers to give newly disabled employees the support they need to retain their jobs.

The clearly argued business case, which includes case studies, shows a “net value” to employers if they support employees by ensuring:

- access to an assessment to identify capabilities
- a reasonable rehabilitation period to acquire new skills
- reasonable adjustments, such as flexible working hours.

As spending cuts continue to bite, affecting employment opportunities,

RNIB is engaging with potential employers to break down barriers to blind and partially sighted people getting and retaining jobs.

A “Hire vision” campaign event in Manchester (in partnership with Job Centre Plus) on 9 June attracted thirty-five employers and we are working with the private sector to increase the number of social firms (employing a minimum of 25 per cent disabled people). Students are getting involved too. We are working with UK universities with the aim of running a competition in 2012 for students to produce plans, capable of attracting investment, for new businesses employing visually impaired people.



In your area

Great result for hospital access campaign in Devon

Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital (RDE) have taken strides to improve access to the hospital for blind and partially sighted people.

In response to the Losing Patients Event RNIB hosted in Exeter and a report into access to the hospital produced by Devon LINK, RDE set up a working group to address the issues raised. Patients with a visual impairment, Devon LINK and RNIB have all been invited to be part of the group and are working together to find solutions.

As a result, the RDE have already implemented a number of changes and have assured us that they are committed to ensuring that blind and partially sighted people are able to use their hospital services and access information confidently. If you use the RDE hospital, then please do ask for accessible information if required. You can feedback both positive and negative experiences and find out more by contacting the Patient Advice and Liaison Service at RDE.

Saving services in the South East

RNIB regional campaigns officer, Lynsey Brooks moved on to pastures new in May, but managed to celebrate another campaign success before she left us – this time in collaboration with BucksVision.

BucksVision provides an important service in Buckinghamshire for anyone who is registered blind or partially sighted or being treated for sight loss. They carry out an early face-to-face assessment, provide rehabilitation and mobility training

and also run a club, resource centre and volunteer car service.

Lynsey worked with the local society of the blind to develop a campaign plan, including a lobbying and media strategy, in response to the threat to cut the county council grant, which threatened the provision of services. As a result of the joint work with the local society the contract was extended for another year meaning local people won't miss out on the vital services BucksVision provide.

Celebrating success in YHNE

It's fantastic when plans come together! Campaigners in Yorkshire Humber and the North East have been celebrating successful outcomes on a number of long-standing campaigns. In Scarborough, the hospital has implemented several improvements to accessibility as a direct result of the Losing Patients campaign. In Northumberland, the

amount of time blind and partially sighted people wait for support has been dramatically reduced from an average wait of two months to around 20 days thanks to local action group, "NAG". And in Sunderland, the local council caved in to demands for a safer pedestrian environment near a campaigner's home.

A-boards in Merseyside

Sefton Council on Merseyside has been challenged by RNIB campaigners over its hazardous use of advertising boards in the town of Formby.

The council have responded, indicating that they have inspected the area and all offending traders have been written to. They are also proposing to carry out further

inspection in June, accompanied by Merseyside Police.

Our roving campaign volunteers will continue to monitor the situation in Formby, whilst ramping up pressure at Grange-over-Sands in Cumbria – another area where dangerous positioning of A-boards is causing problems for blind and partially sighted residents and shoppers.

Nottingham City Council transport success

Nottingham City Council has been nominated for an Accessible Transport Award due to the work that has been done to improve the accessibility of information at bus stops for blind and partially sighted people.

This successful outcome was the result of a collaboration between a Nottingham VI Focus group, RNIB's regional campaigns officer, Claire Kay (RNIB) and an energetic public transport officer at Nottingham City Council called Laraine Reckless.

Guide dogs and minicabs – the challenge is on

A campaigner and guide dog owner in Newham, who has been repeatedly refused service by a number of minicab firms, is taking a stand against this discriminatory practice.

Health grounds are a common excuse given by drivers for not taking dogs. However, the Public Carriage Office who are responsible for the licensing of all minicab drivers have assured us that only a tiny minority of drivers have an exemption from carrying dogs on the basis of health.

Other common practices include:

- cab drivers attempting to impose an additional charge for the carriage of a guide dog

- cab drivers insisting they have a right to refusing carriage if the passenger didn't inform the cab office that they were a guide dog owner when making the booking
- cab drivers making the dog sit in the boot, rather than remain with the passenger.

Many minicab drivers appear to be unaware of the duties imposed on them by the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act, and continue to discriminate against guide dog owners. Our Newham campaigner is working on a media plan to raise awareness of the issue locally – and will be investigating the possibility of taking legal action against the worst offenders.

Could you be a RNIB volunteer campaign co-ordinator?

We are now recruiting for more volunteer campaign co-ordinators in the North-East, East of England, Dorset, Wiltshire, Plymouth and BANEs and in the East Cheshire area, covering areas such as Crewe and Macclesfield. If you are blind or partially sighted and want to help achieve change for the better locally, and support other people in your area to do so, this could be the opportunity for you. You will be responsible for and support:

- building links with local organisations supporting blind and partially sighted people
- identifying local campaign issues
- involving local people in RNIB's national campaigns.

Contact your regional campaigns officer for more information, or check for "volunteer campaign co-ordinator" adverts in your area on the volunteering webpages at rnib.org.uk/volunteering

Introducing Emily and Henri

In May, RNIB's regional campaigns team increased from seven RCOs (regional campaigns officers) to nine. With one officer now covering each of the English regions, our support for local and regional campaigning has been strengthened at a time when blind and partially sighted people are facing some of the biggest challenges.

Emily Papaleo is our new campaigns officer in the East of England, covering Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk. She has a background in local and central government and the voluntary sector. Emily is particularly keen to ensure blind and partially sighted people do not lose vital services despite the challenging economic climate, "I would like to hear from you if you are being affected by cuts, for example to Norfolk's concessionary bus pass scheme or funding for the Talking Books Service in Suffolk".

Henri Murison is RNIB's new campaigns officer in the North-East, covering Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, County Durham and Teeside. Henri has a background in political campaigning and working with students. "I have started work straight away on Cuts Watch to protect local services for blind and

partially sighted people. I also hope to help break down barriers to transport, like the issues reported on the Metro in Tyne and Wear – as well as working on local events to support the Hardest Hit campaign".

Both Emily and Henri are recruiting their own teams of six to ten volunteer campaign co-ordinators to help them with the challenges ahead. Contact Emily or Henri directly, or check our volunteer web pages for opportunities – rnib.org.uk/volunteering



Emily Papaleo, Campaigns Officer East of England



Henri Murison, Campaigns Officer North East

Get in touch

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