

Campaign update

Issue 7, December 2010

In this issue, we thank you for your support during 2010 and explain why your support to help us meet the challenges in the coming year will be more important than ever. Also included – updates from your region, how to find out what the new Equality Act means for you and how you helped us achieve success with the “Losing Patients” campaign.

Increase your support by becoming a Key Campaigner

We'd like to invite you to sign up to our new network of Key Campaigners. By becoming a Key Campaigner you would commit to carrying out three or four specific campaign actions per year. You will receive a specific campaign briefing that explains the issue, with step-by-step instructions on how to take action plus follow up information on the outcomes you helped achieve.

If you'd like to more information about this opportunity please contact campaigns@rnib.org.uk or call us on 020 7391 2123.

rnib.org.uk/campaigns



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Thank you for your support in 2010

Dear Campaign Supporter,

Together we have managed to achieve some great campaign successes, including the Government commitment in March to protect Attendance Allowance and agreement to a 20 per cent audio description target by Ed Vaizey, the new Minister for Broadcasting.

As we all recognise, 2011 is going to bring unprecedented challenges and your support for campaigns is going to be more important than ever. The Emergency Budget in June and the October Comprehensive Spending Review promise amongst other things:

- a £1bn cut to the overall DLA budget with the introduction of new criteria to determine eligibility
- removal of DLA higher rate mobility from people living in residential accommodation
- a 12-month time limit on receipt of contributory Employment and Support Allowance

- a more restrictive Access to Work programme
- major cuts to Local Authority budgets threatening a range of services including rehabilitation, social care, concessionary fares and talking books.

We are working hard with other visual impairment organisations and the wider disability sector to challenge these cuts. The Prime Minister has argued that the test of a fair society is how it protects the most vulnerable in good times and bad. We will be reminding him of this in the months ahead. Our message is “blind and partially sighted people need better support, more opportunities and greater inclusion not less”.

I look forward to working with you in 2011.

Best wishes

Steve Winyard.
Head of Policy and Campaigns.

Cuts Watch

In October the Government delivered its Comprehensive Spending Review and it revealed some worrying proposals.



The Government's Comprehensive Spending Review has promised severe cuts in welfare spending and other areas of public expenditure. Their plans risk reducing the living standards of blind and partially sighted people.

We were optimistic when the Government outlined its vision of helping people into work soon after it was elected. It is shocking that in reality those worst hit after this spending review are disabled people of working age. We're mounting a campaign against Government plans to time limit contributory Employment and Support Allowance

(ESA) for individuals in the work-related activity group to 12 months. In short, this threatens to pull the rug from underneath disabled people who have paid contributions through National Insurance and tax, but who find themselves out of work and need support to help them return to the labour market.

The best piece of news concerned universal benefits for older people. We had long argued that free eye tests, bus travel, winter fuel payments and TV licences needed to be protected. We are less positive about the extra £2 billion for social care. This appears a drop in the ocean, especially when we consider local authorities are expected to deliver cuts of 7.1 per cent each year.

Take Action!

The precise impact of the Government's plans will emerge in the coming months. Public services will produce detailed plans for implementing the cuts and we need your help to monitor cuts threatening services that blind and sighted people rely on to stay independent. Please let us know what's happening in your area by emailing cutswatch@rnib.org.uk or calling us on 020 7391 2123.

Equality Act 2010

Dan Scorer, Parliamentary Manager, gives an overview of the new Equality Act, focussing on employment, discrimination and access to information.

The Equality Act 2010, which came into force on 1 October, covers the same areas as the DDA – employment, education, public services, provision of goods and services and travel.

Employment

The Equality Act says that in most situations it is unlawful for employers to ask questions about a job applicant's health or disability before short-listing or offering a job. This is a major change and will help break down barriers that have excluded many disabled people from work.

Discrimination

The Equality Act also includes new rights and protections. These include protection from indirect discrimination, for example a restaurant or shop's 'no dogs' policy has to be changed for a Guide Dog owner. It now also covers discrimination on the basis of association or perception, where a non-disabled person is discriminated against because they are perceived to be a disabled person or where they are discriminated against because of their relationship to a disabled person.

Accessible information

The duty to make reasonable adjustments is also clarified in the

new Act, particularly on the right to accessible information. Accessible formats are now explicitly mentioned in the reasonable adjustment duty, and it says that service providers must take steps to ensure that information is provided in an accessible format.

Public Sector Equality Duty

One area that remains to be implemented is the new Public Sector Equality Duty, which will come into force in April 2011. This will replace the current Disability Equality Duty. Government is consulting on what this will look like and their proposals have caused concern in terms of being weaker than the current Disability Equality Duty. We and other organisations are working to improve the proposals.

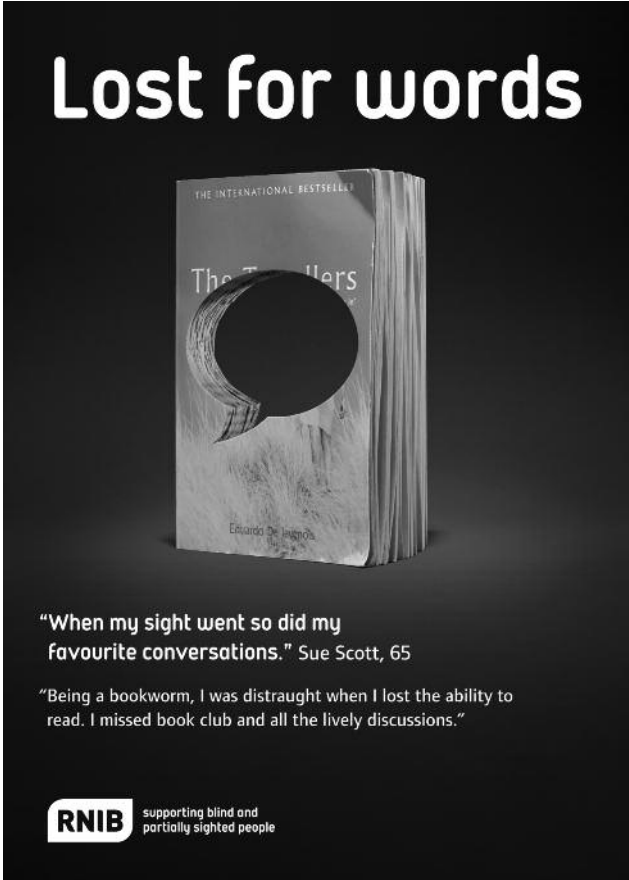
For more information on what the Equality Act means for you, visit RNIB's website, call our Helpline on 0303 123 9999 or email helpline@rnib.org.uk, letting us know your preferred format.

Lost for words

RNIB's new report, "Lost for words" reveals the emotional and practical impact of no longer being able to read standard print and the frustrations of being 'shut out' by services who simply don't provide information in a format which blind and partially sighted individuals can read for themselves.

The report, which recently launched the new phase of RNIB's five-year "Lost and Found" campaign, reveals the daily impact. Sarah shares her frustrations that she can not get the NHS to send her information in braille. James tells us he would like more "talking" cash machines and Sue speaks out about the injustice that so few books are available to people living with sight loss.

We want Government and public services to include rather than shut out blind and partially sighted people from the information they need. Many councils are consulting now with local residents about budgetary decisions that will impact on service provision. We need to remind them that they have a duty to comply with the Equality Act and ensure that consultations are accessible and



Lost for words

THE INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER

The Tellers

Eduardo De Legnía

"When my sight went so did my favourite conversations." Sue Scott, 65

"Being a bookworm, I was distraught when I lost the ability to read. I missed book club and all the lively discussions."

RNIB supporting blind and partially sighted people

that resulting budgetary decisions don't impact unfairly on services that are vital to blind and partially sighted residents.

Take Action!

Please use "Lost for words" to remind local councils that they must comply with the Equality Act and make information accessible to blind and partially sighted people. For more information about how to take action please visit rnib.org.uk/campaigns

Losing Patients campaign – it's over to you

For the past 18 months, all over the country, blind and partially sighted people and health care professionals have been coming together to discuss the Losing Patients campaign for accessible healthcare information.

Campaign achievements

An incredible 600 people have attended Losing Patients events in their local areas. Each event was spearheaded by a local blind or partially sighted person who'd faced problems in getting accessible health information. Dozens of people with similar problems joined them to challenge the invited local NHS to "end the practice of giving ordinary print to blind and partially sighted patients" and an exceptional level of TV, radio and press coverage was achieved. Each and every event has triggered local NHS action and hundreds of people sent accessible information request letters to their NHS services. In North London 175 requests were sent to local GPs while in Sheffield over 200 went to the local hospital.

NHS action

Across England, local NHS services have been persuaded of the need to take urgent action. Mid-Yorkshire Hospitals Trust modified their entire computer system to record and flag

accessible format needs. GPs have started to come forward to verify they'll provide accessible formats and Sheffield Royal Society for the Blind say there's been a sea change in the way their local NHS services handle accessible information.

Over to you

To everyone who shared their experiences at a public event, or sent a 'notification letter' to their local NHS – thank you. You made this campaign strong and have forged a "Losing Patients" toolkit that's now proven to work.

The toolkit is yours to use: the notify letter templates are available along with the rest of the tools, so if you are an individual, a part of a Local Society or Local Involvement Network who wants to take action to improve local provision of healthcare information, please use the online resources to plan your key actions, maintain momentum and deliver campaign success. Visit rnib.org.uk/losingpatients

Bus rights campaign kicks off at the European level

A huge thank you to the 500 key campaigners and campaign supporters who wrote to their MP during September and October demanding that the UK Government support new rights for disabled bus passengers – including those travelling on local buses.

Campaigners shared their own powerful personal experience of inaccessible bus travel with their MPs, explaining how improvements to accessible travel information and mandatory disability awareness training would significantly improve their ability to use buses safely and

independently. MPs were asked to put pressure on Norman Baker, Transport Secretary, to change his position to one that supports strong European Parliament proposals during negotiations in Brussels.

At the time of writing the outcome is uncertain as negotiations are ongoing. What we are certain of is that you helped boost the impact of the campaign message at a critical point in negotiations by sharing personal experiences with your MP. RNIB has secured a meeting with Norman Baker and we will keep you informed of the outcome.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is a landmark human rights convention which sets out the legal obligations on countries to promote and protect the rights of disabled people. It asserts rights in all the main areas of life, including access to the physical environment, transport, information, education and healthcare.

Whilst the Convention does not provide us with a “magic wand”, it is certainly an important document.

RNIB will work hard to call the Government to account where it falls short of the Convention’s requirements.

Thank you to campaign supporters who told us what they thought of the Convention. Your feedback informed a report to the UN on the implementation of the Convention’s requirements and can be found on our website rnib.org.uk/campaigns, or we can send it to you directly.

In your area

Local campaigners across the country have been identifying issues of concern and campaigning for successful outcomes. This section shares those stories – but it's only a taster! More campaign developments from your region can be read online at rnib.org.uk/campaigns, or you can call campaigns for an update.

Staff reductions on London Underground

Transport for London who are responsible for the Underground have announced a reduction of between 700-800 staff based in ticket offices. RNIB, along with other organisations, have written to both Transport for London and the Mayor to express our worries about this. In particular, we are concerned that this will mean fewer staff available to assist blind and partially sighted customers to and from trains. We have received reassurances that this will not be the case as there is to be no reduction in 'front line' staffing.

If you are a campaign supporter who uses the Underground regularly, please let us know if you have noticed any deterioration in service which we can then use as evidence to prove our original concerns.

Worrying developments in Plymouth

Plymouth council has been given the go ahead to continue with the

redevelopment of Plymouth. The recent redevelopment of West End in Plymouth has seen pedestrian crossings removed and some of the surfaces replaced with cobbled bricks. A number of local blind and partially sighted and disabled people are unhappy with these changes which they say have effectively made it a no-go area for many people.

We're working with local disability groups to challenge these changes and would like meaningful consultation on the redevelopment of Plymouth. If you live in Plymouth or use Plymouth town centre and would like to be involved then please contact Tara Melton using the contact details at the back of this update.

Helping the police in the West Midlands

Our Volunteer Campaign Co-ordinator in Dudley and Rebecca, our Regional Campaigns Officer for the West Midlands, are currently working with West Midlands Police to develop sight loss awareness amongst front line

staff within the force. Work has looked at accessibility of information, the process of reporting a crime and general understanding of some of the things that need to be taken into consideration when working with members of the public who are visually impaired.

Continuing with the important theme of safety and security in the community, our Dudley volunteer is also working with the Neighbourhood Watch group within his area to develop and pilot a scheme that raises awareness of sight loss and improves understanding of some of the problems that blind and partially sighted people face at home and within the community. If successful, the aim is to roll the pilot scheme out further within the region.

Health services in Lancashire and Cheshire

Do you live in Lancashire? If so, we need your help. Following our Losing Patients event in Blackburn in March, we now want to know if local health services like GPs and hospitals, are providing information such as test results and appointment letters in accessible formats. If you have recently visited your GP, hospital, walk-in centre or other health service, we would love to hear your feedback.

Alongside our Chester volunteer, we are also working with the hospital and Primary Care Trust in Cheshire West and Chester to ensure that all frontline staff are aware of how to provide accessible health information to blind and partially sighted people. We have drawn up a list of top tips that all frontline staff can use to make sure they meet a patient's needs.

Support at the time of sight loss in Hull

A joint event with Hull and East Riding Institute of the Blind (HERIB) was held to address the problem of a lack of support at the time of sight loss. A fantastic turn out of over fifty service users and supporters made sure the event was a success and really explored the issues that desperately need to be addressed.

Case studies highlighted the need for emotional support as people are left to "go it alone" after leaving the eye clinic. The role of the Eye Clinic Liaison Officer was particularly emphasised in the transition to living with sight loss and we can look forward to seeing the messages from this event being echoed around Yorkshire, Humber and the North East.

“Cars off pavements” comes to Loughborough

Parking on pavements is both dangerous and inconsiderate. So after a campaign, spearheaded by an RNIB volunteer campaign co-ordinator in Essex, saw a dramatic reduction in people parking their cars on pavements in Frinton and Walton in Essex, we want to see these results replicated.

The “cars off pavements” campaign is now in the process of being initiated in our next target of Loughborough. If anyone lives in the area and has had problems with cars parking on pavements please contact Claire Kay and let her know about the problems you’ve had. Contact details can be found at the end of the update.

Safe access to Mansfield Medical centre

RNIB Key Campaigner Brian Fox has been highlighting the problems caused by an unsafe crossing next to a medical centre in Mansfield. He has been in touch with the local MP and has gained their support. If there are any other people from the Mansfield area who would be able to support Brian in this matter please contact Claire Kay.



A-frames in Maidstone

Neville Butriss in Maidstone has been campaigning for a ban on A-frame advertising boards in Maidstone. In October he went to the Town Hall to speak out against the new licensing regime. The new system covered all of Kent and didn’t take into account any measures to allow town councils to ban A-frames locally. After hearing four people at the meeting speak against the local proliferation of street furniture, the councillors agreed that the policy would be brought back to a future meeting to be reviewed.

Neville’s petition against A-frames currently has over 2,000 signatures. The online version is doing well too and is available on the Kent County Council Website for people to sign. Visit <http://democracy.kent.gov.uk> and go to the link to e-petitions.

Help us save resources and improve our campaign communications

Regular readers will notice that the font size for Campaign update has changed. To keep costs down, we are sending print copies out in 16 point font, but will ensure that print readers who have told us that they require a print copy in larger font continue to receive Campaign update in their preferred format. Please also let us know if you're online and if you are able to receive your Campaign update by email by contacting the campaigns team with your current email address and postcode.

Get in touch

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