

October 2009



## 2009 DISABILITY CONFERENCE: WELCOME TO DUNDEE

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## Forward



Welcome to the latest edition of Disability in Focus. The contents reflect the CWU's needs issues, all of which influence the work our DSNAC does on behalf of the membership to ensure that disabled people are treated fairly and equally. As do the policy decisions that delegates made at last years DSNAC conference in Birmingham

National Equality Officer. It was an inspiring experience to hear the contributions made by guest speakers and delegates on a range of issues from coping with visual impairment, autism and Aspergers Syndrome, to the problems faced by people who stammer and the need to forge a partnership with BT's "ABLE2" disability network.

The new Single Equality Bill brings together all strands of sex, race and disability discrimination legislation. The CWU made the most detailed submission of any union which has undoubtedly influenced the contents of the proposed bill. We will continue to monitor its progress to ensure that the rights of the disabled are promoted and protected.

The CWU Equality Department also produces an Equality e-bulletin and employment rights factsheets which contain the latest developments affecting our members. If you would like to subscribe let me know and please do not hesitate to contact the CWU Equal Opportunities Department if you have any queries or questions about disability and special needs related matters.

**Linda Roy**  
National Equality Officer



## Diary Dates by Tony Sneddon DSNAC Chair

This years CWU Disability Conference will be held in the City of Discovery Dundee on the 24 October 2009 in the Apex Hotel. The Apex Hotel has been the venue for the STUC Disability Conference for the past two years and ticks all the boxes as a suitable venue.

Believe it or not Dundee has its own airport with flights from Belfast City & Birmingham Flybe.com) and also serviced from London City Airport. The city is on the main east coast rail link as well as being serviced by Crosscountry trains. For those of you looking for the budget airlines Edinburgh Airport is 60 miles away with good transport links onwards to Dundee.

Look out for the LTB on the conference as demand is sure to be high and anyone who needs any information please contact the equal opportunity department in the first instance.

***PS. Do not forget the famous DSNAC social evening on the 23rd for a night to remember.***

## DEBUT Toolkit Launch



The CWU launched its pioneering DEBUT toolkit recently with over 60 branch equality officers plus General Secretary Billy Hayes and guests in attendance for a demonstration of this pioneering resource. In her opening speech the National Equality Officer Linda Roy said: "This union values the work that our Equality Representatives do. The toolkit is part of my commitment to equip our Equality Officers with the tools they need to do an immensely difficult and valuable job". She also explained that the CWU had also submitted its response to the governments Single Equality Bill which supported statutory recognition for Lay Equality Officers.

Linda also took the opportunity to outline the potential benefit this could have vis-à-vis industrial relations. Representatives from the government department BIS were in attendance at the launch and were very impressed with the feedback they received from CWU equality representatives.

The CWU are only the second trade union to launch such a resource and reps attending the historic launch generally commented that they were looking forward to getting to grips with the toolkit to assist them with their equality related queries. Linda added "this is a ground-breaking initiative and one we should all be very proud of".



### Editor's Comment **by Dave Curtis**

Welcome to this latest edition of the DiF, Disability in Focus. I hope you find some useful information here. We've covered quite a few subjects, but there are so many forms of disability there's always something new to find out about.

An example for me came from reading the latest Equality & Human Rights Commission newsletter. It mentioned the 'Campaign to stop unfair charges for oxygen on air flights'. Apparently there are 90,000 people in the UK who currently require some form of supplemental oxygen because of low oxygen levels in their blood. However, when these individuals want to fly anywhere they risk paying charges of up to £1,100 with some of the world's major airlines.

The Commission has been supporting the campaign to stop airlines penalising passengers with breathing difficulties. A recent announcement from Thomson Airways is that it is removing all charges for supplementary therapeutic oxygen and relaxing its policy on customers bringing their own supplementary oxygen onboard its flights. Thomson has also urged other airlines to follow suit and remove these charges.

Its always nice to report something positive, and another positive is a recent report of a vaccine that reduces the risk of contracting HIV by 30%. It's still in the test stage but its a great step.

# CWU Disability Champions courses



**by Ted Stead  
DSNAC**

“British society is changing fast in its willingness to recognise and celebrate diversity and difference,

but all too often disabled people are being left behind. The TUC recognises that there are many good examples of employers understanding and recognising the changes they need to make in order to offer a fair deal to disabled workers, but that many do not” Brendan Barber, General Secretary TUC May 2006.

Little has changed regarding the attitude of some employers since Brendan wrote those words in 2006, hence the need for Disability Champions. The CWU General Conference in 2007 unanimously carried a motion that called for all work places to have a trained CWU Disability Champion. This reflected the concern that our disabled members were not getting the level of representation that they deserved, through lack of training for reps regarding the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), available funding via the government backed Access to Work scheme, ensuring that management fulfil their commitment to making reasonable adjustments for disabled workers, and doing everything in their power to keep employees who become disabled in work.

The 1st Disability Champions course was held at the CWU residential education centre Alvescot from June 22nd to June 26th 2009. The course covered all the above items and more, myself and Paul Pritchard tutored the course and were delighted with how well it

went with all 15 students leaving at the end of the week with a keen desire to make a difference back in their workplaces.

Some reps were simply terrified of approaching disabled members and saying the wrong thing, the easy option would have been to say nothing, no help at all to the member. This course has empowered the reps to interact with the members and ensure management comply with the DDA.

Linda Roy, CWU Equality Officer visited on the second day of the course and was impressed with the enthusiasm of the learners and the topics covered on the course.

Time and time again when we have the Disability and Special Needs Committee meetings we hear of our members being discriminated against because of their disability, to have trained Disability Champions in every branch will be a great achievement and a boost for our disabled members.

The final part of the course was to do a presentation in pairs of a chosen disability that the learners had researched including diabetes, Parkinson’s disease, and multiple sclerosis. The learners were delighted when Trish Lavelle, CWU Education Officer came into the classroom to watch their presentations, Trish was extremely impressed with the standards she said: “it’s amazing how much work and effort has been put in by all the students in the past four days. This course will form part of the core education programme in the future as we recognise how the Disability Champions will impact in the workplace.

Mandy Bradshaw BT Customer Service advisor was on the course and was able to put her new knowledge of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and the 2 ticks scheme to good use. Mandy advised the Branch Chair who was dealing with a potential employment tribunal case for a disabled member that BT had not tried to make reasonable adjustments to enable the member to remain in employment. As such BT was clearly in breach of the DDA, this they accepted and are now in the process of compiling a BT Passport for the member to enable them to make adjustments to the attendance procedure.

This is what the course is all about, by having trained Disability Champions we should be able to reduce the number of grievances and Employment Tribunals, with all the stress and trauma that goes with them. The final word of the week goes to Paul Pritchard, "we have

waited a long time for the course but it's been worth the wait. We will learn from where things went well this week and where we need to change things. The main lesson is explaining the false perception that the fault lies with the disabled person. For example an employer stating "we've got a disabled person starting next week what's wrong with them?" (the medical model), lets look at what employers and us should be thinking, what barriers are we putting up to prevent the disabled worker achieving the same working environment as the other employees. Take away the barriers and the disabled person can work alongside their colleagues without hindrance as they should be able to". (the social model)

If you are interested in helping disabled members get in touch with your Branch Secretary. Courses can be run in your region as well as at Alvescot.

## MEET THE DSNAC 2009/10

**Linda Roy** (Equality Officer)  
**Fevzi Hussein** (Coordinator)  
**Tony Sneddon** (Chair)  
**Ann-Marie McCall**  
**Bernard Roome** (NEC)  
**Beryl Shepherd** (NEC)  
**Brian Booth**  
**Dave Curtis** (DIF Editor)  
**Elsbeth Bettany**  
**Gary Clark**  
**Fred Jones**  
**Gail Wright**  
**Garry Jacobs**  
**Ian Ward**  
**Jeffrey Till** (T&FS)  
**Karen Jones**  
**Kevin Smith**  
**Ted Stead**  
**Sajid Shaikh**  
**Pauline Granstan** (Researcher)

## Region Allocated DSNAC Member

**Scotland:** Elspeth Bettany  
**Northern Ireland:** Tony Sneddon  
**Wales & Marches:** Bernard Roome  
**South West:** Karen Jones  
 Garry Jacobs  
**London:** Jeff Till  
 Kevin Smith  
**Eastern:** Freddie Jones  
**South East:** Dave Curtis  
**North East:** Linda Roy  
**North West:** Ted Stead  
 Ann-Marie McCall  
**Midland:** Sajid Shaikh  
 Brian Booth  
 Gail Wright

# Fragile X Syndrome

by **Pauline Granstan, Researcher**

I wanted to write a short piece for Disability in Focus but wasn't sure what I should write about. After some thought I decided to do a short piece on Fragile X Syndrome because I happened to come across an article on the subject and also wanted to raise awareness of another form of disability. This article should therefore be seen in the context of a brief discussion and should not be taken as medical knowledge on the subject, as only a qualified practitioner is able to give such advice.



What then, some of you might be asking is Fragile X. Well Fragile X is a family of genetic conditions that impact on individuals and families in a number of different ways. But Fragile X Syndrome (FXS) is the most common cause of inherited mental impairment.

The prevalence of FXS is more pronounced in males than females with 1 in 3600 males and 1 in 4000 to 6000 females having some form of the disease, with no discernible ethnic or cultural bias. Examples of FXS include autism or autistic-like behaviours.

Physical features include, but not limited to: enlarged ears, long face with prominent chin, flat feet and double-jointed fingers.

FXS is caused due to a change or mutation in the Mental Retardation 1 (FMR1) gene of the X chromosome, the gene responsible for coding a specific protein required for the develop-



ment of the brain. When the brain lacks the normal protein FRMP, FXS occurs. As the gene changes size over generations, it becomes more unstable and as a result the condition occurs more frequently or severely in subsequent generations.

There is some uncertainty as to the level of FXS in the UK, notwithstanding the figures quoted above, as the problem is often misdiagnosed or not diagnosed. Females could have it and one would never know because their other X chromosome does not produce enough FMR1 protein.

At the time of writing there is no cure for FXS, but treatments to lessen the impact of the disease include special education, speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and behavioural therapies.

Further information on the subject can be obtained from: Buzzle.com and The National Fragile X Foundation at:

**[www.fragilex.org](http://www.fragilex.org)**

# INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN THE CWU



Last year Paul Pritchard on behalf of the DSNAC looked at the use of software to support those learners with visual impairments and reading difficulties such as dyslexia. Currently the education courses at Alvescot rely heavily on printed material and this reliance can, and does, present difficulties in supporting learners who have issues with this medium. Paul has been working with Jeff Till to evaluate the use of software whilst Jeff has been a student on one of Paul's courses, Trade Union and Labour Studies which has a particularly high level of complex reading. They have trialled a piece of software called Easyconvertor, by Dolphin software, which allows for documents, books etc to be scanned electronically and then converted into a format which students find more accessible such as MP3 or Daisy audio book or even Braille. The education department has now got a new photocopier at Alvescot which has a multi sheet scanner feature which will allow them to produce electronic copies of anything that can be photocopied. In effect Easyconvertor is used by the Tutor to provide accessible materials for the student. It costs in the region of £1,500 for the licence.

The Easyconvertor software works in conjunction with another smaller piece of software from Dolphin called Easyreader which is what the student can use to access the materials. One of the features of the Dolphin packages are the fact that the "voices" used by their reading tools are very natural and easy to listen to and are by far the best that both Jeff and Paul have come across in their research.

One of the things that does need to be borne in mind is that people with conditions such as dyslexia do need to be given opportunity to read materials and one of the best adjustments to be made for Jeff was that he be given reading materials well in advance of his course start so that he could begin to prepare and read them, otherwise straight from the off he was behind other students with little prospect of catching up. Again this boils down to having a more robust application process whereby students who do have additional requirements make them known on their application form and that these are then acted upon by CWU staff and Tutors so that adjustments are prepared in advance rather than fire fighting when the course starts.

The improvements at Alvescot have been finished and the accommodation now has two fully accessible bedrooms with en suite facilities. There is also an additional accessible WC in the accommodation block. A platform lift has been installed in the new dining area to allow for wheelchair users and those with mobility issues to gain access to the main house which is on a lower level than the dining area.

The accessible WC on the ground floor in the main building is to be looked at again in order that it more fully meets the needs of users. All Accessible bedrooms and WCs have assistance alarms fitted. A new rear door and ramp has been added to the back of the conference room. The library has now been moved downstairs, and we believe that plans are under way to digitise the library making it as accessible as possible to students



**Trish Lavelle,**  
Head of Education & training

Paul Pritchard was asked by Trish Lavelle to deliver a briefing on disability awareness to all staff and full time tutors at Alvescot and this took place in early January.

# DISABILITY FACTS & FIGURES

There are about 12 million disabled people in the UK.

Approximately 8.7 million people have a hearing impairment.

Approximately 2 million have a sight impairment.

There are approximately 1.5 million people with a learning disability in the UK

in 4 people have a mental health problem in the course of their life.

92% of disabled people live in their own homes.

50% of disabled people have a hidden disability

1 in 4 households have regular contact with someone who is a disabled person.

1.8 million in the UK are in receipt of the higher rate mobility component of the Disability Living Allowance

## CONTACT DETAILS

CWU Equality Department  
Communication Workers Union  
150 The Broadway  
Wimbledon  
London  
SW19 1RX

email **Linda Roy** at [lroy@cwu.org](mailto:lroy@cwu.org)

Telephone 020 8971 7238

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[www.cwu.org](http://www.cwu.org)

**Billy Hayes** General Secretary  
[www.billyhayes.co.uk](http://www.billyhayes.co.uk)

  
The communications union