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WOMEN OF TODAY
Report from the successful Manchester event
Welcome to the third edition of the Word which is dedicated to the four strands of equality.

The decision to create one all inclusive magazine to replace four separate equality publications was controversial, and as with anything new there has been a bedding in period. But I’m pleased to report that the feedback we have received from members about both the new format and the content of the magazine has been extremely positive.

Articles in this issue reflect the spectrum of equality issues. Many have been written by members of the Advisory Committees. I thank them all for their dedication and commitment. We also welcome contributions no longer than 500 words from members. Send them to me at lroy@cwu.org.

A big thanks to our dedicated and talented team in Comms, the four editors and everyone who has contributed to making the Word a success.

Read, enjoy, spread the Word.

Linda Roy
**TUC LAUNCH LGBT SURVEY**

The TUC has launched a major new survey into how Lesbian, Gay, Bi and Trans (LGBT) people find working life in the UK.

Despite changes in the law that should have brought an end to discrimination and prejudice, the TUC is concerned that LGBT people are still experiencing difficulties at work:

In 2013, Stonewall reported that 1 in 4 (26%) LGBT employees were not at all open with colleagues about their sexual orientation.

More than half (53%) of trans workers have also felt the need to hide their status from colleagues, according to Totaljobs.

If you’re a lesbian or bisexual woman you may be at risk of sexual harassment as well as homophobic abuse. TUC research found that more than half (52%) of women said they have experienced sexual harassment at work.

TUC General Secretary Frances O’Grady said: “We hope that this comprehensive research will let us shine a light on the range of issues faced by LGBT workers across the UK – many of whom may be experiencing bullying, harassment and discrimination in the workplace and have no one to turn to.

“It’s vital we understand what modern working life is like for LGBT workers, so we can challenge prejudice and have a zero-tolerance policy to homophobia, biphobia or transphobia. We know that getting these policies right makes business sense because employers retain experienced staff from all backgrounds.”

You can complete the TUC survey at: www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/LGBTworker

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**WOMEN WORK FREE FOR A FIFTH OF THE YEAR**

The TUC has highlighted the injustice of women working free for a fifth of the year, compared to the average man.

The Women’s Pay Day was highlighted on 7 March this year, the day when the 66 day mark comes up.

However, in some jobs women have to wait until April or even May for their Women’s Pay Day.

The current gender pay gap for all full-time and part-time male and female employees stands at 18%. This pay gap means that across the board women effectively work for free for the first 66 days of the year.

In a number of key industries – even in jobs dominated by female workers – women have to wait until even later in the year for their Women’s Pay Day:

In education, the gender pay gap is currently 27%, so the average woman effectively works for free for more than a quarter of the year (97 days) and has to wait until the 7 April before she starts earning the same as the average man.

In health and social work, the average woman waits 69 days for her Women’s Pay Day on 10 March.

The longest wait for Women’s Pay Day comes in finance and insurance. There the gender pay gap is the equivalent of 137 days – more than a third of the year – before Women’s Pay Day kicks in on 17 May.

TUC General Secretary Frances O’Grady said: “The UK has one of the worst gender pay gaps in Europe. Even in industries where women dominate, like education, they get paid far less than men.

“Paying lip service to the problem is not good enough. Companies that don’t pay women the same as men for work of equal value are breaking the law. But with Employment Tribunal fees of £1,200, too few women can afford to access justice when bad bosses break the law.

“We also need to remove the barriers that stop women going into better paid, male-dominated professions. We must improve pay for vital, but undervalued, jobs such as social care, which are predominantly carried out by women.

“Employers must do more to help mums and dads to share out caring responsibilities more equally.

“By joining a union, working women can have their voices heard at work, and can work together to win equal pay and fair treatment.”
DISABLED MAN LYNCHED AND LEFT FOR DEAD

Brendan Mason, who was suffering from several learning disabilities, was attacked in July last year by two people claiming to be his friends. Joshua Hack and Keith Lowe were sentenced to life in prison for the attack on Brendan.

The scale of the unprovoked attack was shocking as they hung Brendan from a tree and took turns hitting and taunting him. They also filmed the whole event, telling him to “smile for the camera.”

Brendan was discovered with 99 separate injuries to his head and body and he eventually fell unconscious. Hack and Lowe then stripped him and threw him into a nearby pond. He was found hours later by a groundsman, still unconscious and bleeding. Brendan was airlifted to the nearest hospital but later died from his injuries.

Judge Michael Chambers condemned the attackers for their “extreme violence” and the “pain and humiliation” they caused their victim, going on to say: “I find that each of you were equally involved and responsible for what was a joint attack. I am satisfied you made the recording for your own gratification and took a number of trophy photographs.”

Brendan’s family said in a statement before the sentencing that they thanked the police and those who supported them but added that they would never find closure.

Since government disability benefit reforms, changing from Disability Living Allowance to Personal Independence Payment, some 48,000 disabled people have had their Motability cars taken away. Despite 60% of Motability claimants winning their appeals, vehicles are often seized straight away.

MP Angela Eagle, campaigning on behalf of claimants remarked:

“It is a scandalous waste of money to take vehicles away from people and sell them at a loss before they can appeal, which often results in a brand new vehicle being awarded.

“People who contact my constituency office, experiencing difficulties claiming PIP suffer serious hardship as a result. They report the process to be cold-hearted and degrading.

“The Tories’ eagerness to snatch vehicles away from people, who struggle to walk just a few yards, is just one element of the inhumane ‘I, Daniel Blake’ benefits system that they have administered since 2010.

“The Tories seem to view their cuts as figures on a spreadsheet, paying little attention to the people suffering. It leaves me shaking with rage.”

MPs have been inundated with harrowing accounts of disabled people having their lifeline taken away, many being left housebound and others losing their jobs.

Labour MP Siobhan McDonagh made an emotional appeal in Parliament on behalf of one of her constituents, Tina Leslie.

“The victim (Tina Leslie) of a house fire when she was 12 weeks old, she has no hands and has multiple physical problems, in the migration from DLA to PIP, she could not open the envelope telling her to go for her assessment. On February 1, all her benefits ceased, and on February 10, her Motability car was taken away. This cannot be right,” said Siobhan.

Paula Peters, of DPACs (Disabled People Against the Cuts), best summed up the situation, when speaking at an anti-cuts protest, at Parliament on budget day:

“This is an inhumane government. Thousands of people are seeing their health deteriorating, they’re having their care packages cut, they’ve lost their PIP, lost their Motability cars – they’re imprisoned in their own home. This is an ideological policy designed to remove the welfare state and just leave us at home, unable to take part in society,” said Paula.
A motion brought to the Disability conference by Nottingham and District called for disability awareness training for CWU reps.

Delegates heard how the course was much needed, to provide educational support around the many complexities of disability awareness.

The motion called for a bespoke one day awareness course, with availability across the regions.

DAC members Jill Coulson and Des Gibbons are now working closely with NEC and Lee Wakeman of the CWU Education department, to develop the one day awareness course.

A substantial contingent of CWU members took part in the United Nations Anti Racism Day march and rally in London.

The march, organised by Stand up to Racism began at Portland Place, just outside the BBC studios, heading off towards Parliament Square.

Greg Ammisah of North Lancs and Cumbria branch and the Race Advisory Committee told delegates that there was a CWU banner together with representation from other unions like Unison, Unite and UCU. “There were banners denouncing Donald Trump and declaring that black lives matter,” said Greg, who also recalled calls for the rejection of Islamophobia and the welcoming of refugees.

“Along the march we came across two small groups of counter protesters but they were drowned out by the march. It just went to show and remind us that even though we were out in large numbers, there were still people who thought it was right to show and spout off their messages of hate,” said Greg.

The march ended up near Big Ben where we had a host of speakers including Roger MacKenzie and MP David Lammy.

CWU HELPED AT DIFFICULT TIME OF STROKE

Steve House explains how the CWU helped him get back on his feet after a stroke.

My name is Steve House; I hold the positions of Health & Safety, IR rep, sub ASR and Equality officer. I am now 51 – at 47 I had a serious stroke.

Royal Mail Sheffield was good to me but I was also protected by the CWU representing me. The reps in question were Richard Isdell and Saimon Taylor.

I was off work for a year having home visits from my manager and friend Mick Copley and later Rob Braddock.

I had the usual contact with ATOS, later OHS. The conversations at first were a bit heated because I could not walk let alone speak. But they listened and helped me later with my assessment to get me back to employment.

I carried on with my CWU roles because I enjoyed them and thought I could help members with their problems. Since returning to work I have used my experience to help out two members who have had strokes and a few members in difficult situations.

I did nights for 18 years but since having my stroke I have been diagnosed with sleep apnoea and diabetes. The CWU and Royal Mail have given me a new way of life, even obtaining me a morning shift dealing with damaged and vague letters.

The effects after my stroke are a slight lack of confidence and tiredness. In my eyes I have upper and lower gaze palsy, basically I can’t move my eyes up and down resulting in my needing two pairs of glasses and a built in prism.

Once back to work my rehab started at an hour a day and built up at a steady pace controlled by Richard Isdell and Rob Braddock.

I can write much more about various interviews, appearances in newspapers, my connections with the Stroke association plus talking on Radio 5.

Belonging to this great union I received the help that gave me this new life.
FINDING ADAMS OLIVER SYNDROME

DAC chair Tony Sneddon explains how it has taken 57 years and advances in medical knowledge for him to discover that he has extremely rare Adams Oliver syndrome.

I was born on 11 June 1958, along with my twin brother who was perfectly healthy.

I was born with a number of birth defects, including a deformed left hand and an open scalp.

Throughout my life, I was told it was the result of my twin lying on me in the womb; however I was brought up as a normal child and told I was the equal of anyone.

There was sheer delight on mum’s face when I left school and started in the Post Office – little did I know after 40 years I would still be employed. There was great satisfaction when I learned to drive in a “normal” car and passed my test first time.

Well, after getting married, my wife got pregnant. Of course there was the worry as to whether the child would be born healthy. The thought was always at the back of my mind but I am glad to say we have a lovely son and daughter.

Then my daughter came home one day and told us that she was going to have a baby. However, as the pregnancy progressed everything went pear shaped. She was advised to terminate (I have always been a strong advocate of this); anyway, my daughter took the decision to have the baby.

Charlie was born on the 8 April 2014, however he had similar birth defects as me but it was his foot that was was slightly deformed and he had the same open scalp.

GENETIC RIDDLE SOLVED

Charlie was in the sick kid’s hospital in Glasgow for the first three months of his life but with great medical care he is now a hyperactive wee boy.

Due to the advance in genetics the specialists knew more about the condition. I was summoned up to the hospital to see a genetics doctor, who said Charlie and myself had Adams Oliver Syndrome (AOS). The condition is to do with the XX & YY chromosomes. It was explained how the condition misses a generation. So, I had given my daughter a dodgy chromosome, hence Charlie’s condition.

AOS is a rare developmental condition that affects less than 150 families worldwide (I always knew I was the special one). It was scientists at Kings College London who uncovered the gene responsible.

So at the age of 57, through new medical developments, I have finally found the cause of my disability. However, it was instilled in me from an early age, by my loving mother, that I was the equal of anyone.

I am also glad of the support and opportunities the CWU have given me over the years and the respect given – we are indeed one big family.
The number of disciplinary or performance cases, surrounding women who are menopausal, is on the rise.

We, as a union, need to work with our members to raise awareness and advise what support there is in the workplace. The TUC has put together information on working through the menopause – an extract follows:

“Employers have been slow to recognise that women of menopausal age may need special consideration and for too long it has simply been seen as a private matter. As a result, it is very rarely discussed and many managers will have no awareness of the issues involved. This means many women feel that they have to hide their symptoms and will be less likely to ask for the adjustments that may help them.

“This must change. The menopause is an occupational health issue, and one that is growing in importance. Women now make up almost half the workforce and there are an estimated three and a half million women over the age of 50 currently in work. That number will rise as the retirement age for women increases over the coming years.

“It is important that trade unions raise the issue in the workplace and make sure that employers are aware of their responsibilities to ensure that conditions in the workplace do not make the symptoms worse. Women, who are experiencing the menopause, also need to know that there is someone they can go to discuss any difficulties they are having.

The menopause, also known as the ‘change of life’, marks the time when a woman’s periods stop. It usually happens between the ages of 45 and 55. The average age for a woman to reach the menopause in the UK is 52. Periods generally become less frequent, the odd period is missed and then they stop altogether. A woman is said to have reached the menopause once she has not had a period for one year. After this point, she can be described as post-menopausal. This period can lead to changes in a woman’s health and may also lead to emotional changes. These can affect how a woman does her work and her relationship with her boss and colleagues. Unfortunately, there is often very little understanding of the issues and very little support for women who are going through the menopause”.

I have witnessed cases recently where members going through the menopause have had no adjustments made and are expected to reach the same performance targets as other team members. But with the help of the CWU – raising awareness with both the member and management – the member now has the necessary adjustments in place. So we need to make ourselves aware of the symptoms, so we can assist and support our members and colleagues.

Information for this article was taken from https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/TUC_menopause_0.pdf
Welcome to the spring edition of the Word. First, I would just like to congratulate all who attended the equality conferences, as they were the best attended to date. The women’s conference had the highest attendance. Well done to all who contributed especially new delegates.

Welcome to the spring edition of the Word. First, I would just like to congratulate all who attended the equality conferences, as they were the best attended to date. The women’s conference had the highest attendance. Well done to all who contributed especially new delegates.

How to Help WASPI

Women Against State Pension Inequality (WASPI) is an action group, conceived in April 2015, by five ordinary women who had been personally affected by the changes to the state pension age.

The changes came about due to the 1995 and 2011 Pensions Acts. WASPI’s focus is to raise awareness about and to campaign over the unfair changes to the state pension age – imposed on women born in the 1950s.

The changes brought the retirement age for women up to 65, the same age as men; however, there was a lack of notice to the women affected. The campaign claims that a large percentage of women received just one year and others two, three, four and five years notice that they would now have to work an extra five years.

Now a membership company limited by guarantee, the campaign raised £100,000 in under three weeks to allow it to pursue on-going legal action against the government.

WASPI and their lawyers Bindmans have produced a Guide to Making a Complaint and a Guide to Maladministration, which can be downloaded from www.waspi.co.uk/action

As a direct result of WASPI’s lobbying and reach, there have been six Parliamentary debates that have added more pressure on the government to look again at making fair transition pension arrangements for the women affected by the pension’s acts.

How can you as a woman in the CWU help?

1. You can as an individual lobby your local Members of Parliament and the Government to support the WASPI women’s fight for a fair transition to the new state pension age.

2. You can speak to your branches about raising awareness of the WASPI Campaign among women who may be affected.

3. You can invite WASPI to speak to your branch officers, members and retired members to inform them about the changes in state pension age and to let them know how our campaign can support them.

4. You can become involved with 1 of the 150 local groups throughout the UK.

Bras Support Women in More Ways Than One

Kath Kelly looks at an ingenious initiative to provide bra support

I would like to personally thank the women who brought awareness about Bra Bins and Smalls for All to a WAC meeting last year.

I was personally flabbergasted to find out that in the 21st century a simple thing like a bra, which we take for granted, could help young girls and women in Africa.

When wearing a bra, it is seen by their community that they are looked after by a husband, brother or father and they are far less likely to be raped. Bra Bins also help with breast cancer.

The north east women have taken this on board and are now collecting bras and underwear for children aged between three and 15.

I have taken this awareness into the Tyneside APC and set both charities up with the help of a female manager. The donations are coming in fast and furious I’m pleased to say.

May I ask that all women’s regional committees follow suit and help our sisters in Africa and the young orphaned children in Ethiopia.

To find out more information please visit www.smallsforall.org
The CWU’s Northwest Regional Women’s Committee (NWRWC) has for the past three years hosted an event titled ‘Women of Today’. This year’s event was held on 26 January 2017 at the Mechanics Centre in Manchester, attended by many CWU members and other activists from across the UK.

The day started with tea and coffee. Everyone received a ‘goodie bag’ from the NWRWC, which included a folder with an outline of the day, information on the speakers, a feedback form, Unionline and UIA information and a few freebies.

Following an introduction by Karen Bosson, the NWRWC secretary, and chair of the event Jean Sharrocks of the CWU’s national Women’s Advisory Committee (WAC), the event got under way.

The first speaker was Carol Scheffer, a full time national officer for the CWU Republic of Ireland (ROI), who specialises in the area of equality and diversity and is also on the Executive Board of UNI Europa Global Union.

Carol spoke about some of the issues currently affecting female members and gave a fascinating journey through some of the women activists who’ve played a big part in the history of the ROI’s.

She worked closely with the labour leaders, James Larkin and James Connolly and during the 1913 Dublin Lockout, worked tirelessly to provide food for the workers’ families. Two years later she helped organise and train the Irish Citizen Army.

INSpirational WOMen

During the famous Easter Rising, Markievicz was active in a fighting capacity, throughout the week. Afterwards, she was the only woman to be court-martialed (4 May 1916).

In the general election of 1918, she became the first woman ever returned to the Commons at Westminster but as a Sinn Féin member she did not take her seat.

She died in a Dublin hospital in 1927 and the working class people of the city mourned.

Next, Lynn Collins, regional secretary of the Northwest Trade Union Congress (NWTUC), gave an overview of some of the amazing experiences she had including travelling the world and meeting well known people.

The first woman to hold the post, Lynn encouraged all present to challenge themselves and take their rightful places to speak up at work, in society and in the labour movement. Lynn’s speech about ‘imposter syndrome’ caused much hilarity and solidarity with women who had similar experiences.

Lynn recognised Betty Tebbs, a local activist for women’s rights and a peace campaigner, who had died three days earlier at the age of 98. Betty was a lifelong union member and had been active since being a teenager, when she realised that a boy she was working with at that time was paid more money than she was for the same job!

Betty had been given a People’s
History Museum’s Radical Hero award, as they viewed her as “a radical hero who worked tirelessly and with great humility to campaign for equal rights, workers’ rights and peace her whole life.” Throughout the day we all felt that we could be ‘….more like Betty’.

ENGAGING SPEAKERS
Becky Weller, a telecoms engineer with Openreach, was next to tell us her story about how she became an engineer and what her working life entails. Becky explained that she had been working in one of BT’s contact centres, when given the opportunity to change into an engineering role which had she had embraced fully as she wanted a new challenge.

Becky had many of us laughing as she told of days out on the road in her van and the reactions of some people towards her.

Becky encouraged more girls and women to come into the industry and said how much satisfaction she takes from being the woman that she is.

Kathy Devlin from Merseyside based organisation Beacon Counselling Trust was the next speaker, who brought tears to some eyes, when she talked of her brother’s death and how it had influenced her work.

Kathy gave an overview of what areas the Trust can help with and focused on the issue of women’s gambling which is an area that Beacon specialise in. She gave figures that show there are nearly 600,000 people currently classed as having problems with gambling in the UK and the number of women within that is rising. The NWRWC intend to work with Beacon to create a campaign to raise awareness of gambling issues for all CWU members.

Bexi Owen, the ‘singing, swinging showgirl,’ then talked about her ‘Forget Me Never’ project, which was initially started with the help of crowd funding. Bexi gave us all an easy to remember outline of how dementia affects most people and how music can be used as a therapeutic aid.

“A radical hero who worked tirelessly and with great humility to campaign for equal rights, workers’ rights and peace her whole life”

Age UK support Bexi’s initiative, as they say that: “The power of music, especially singing, to unlock memories and kickstart the grey matter is an increasingly key feature of dementia care. It seems to reach parts of the damaged brain in ways other forms of
communication cannot.”

Bexi involved everyone in a sing-a-long to Que Sera Sera which lifted everyone’s spirits before lunch.

After lunch, we welcomed the incredible comedian and writer Francesca Martinez who had us all howling with laughter at descriptions of her take on life. This was followed by a question and answer session where Francesca was very open and straightforward about her political beliefs and motivation.

Francesca is known to many from her younger days as a cast member of BBC1’s Grange Hill and she has appeared on TV many times as a commentator and entertainer. Francesca gave us the opportunity to purchase her book What The **** Is Normal?! Signed copies of the book and had photos taken with us. She also gave her support for the CWU’s 4 Pillars campaign.

To finish off the day we had a panel discussion, led by CWU national Equality Officer Linda Roy, where questions were asked from the floor and the panellists answered with their own views.

WONDERFUL EVENT

The panellists included Lisa Nandy, Labour MP for Wigan and women’s issues campaigner and Lynne Morris, who works for Unison as an Operational Manager, holds many positions in the NWTUC and is an active Labour member.

Lynne’s background is in education and children’s services and she has extensive experience in the field of educational welfare and child protection. Joining them from the CWU were Joanne Shaftoe, a personal assistant from BT, who is on full time release and holds many positions within the CWU. These include branch chair, chair of the Northeast Region and being a member of the CWU’s Telecom and Financial Sector Standing Orders Committee for CWU conferences.

Clare Drummond, a Royal Mail postal worker, who is a workplace Sub-rep, is her branch’s Equality Officer, Chairs the NWRWC and sits on the WAC.

This was another great event that our members enjoyed and the feedback given included:

“My first union event. Really enjoyed it. Great talks”

“Very good day. Day flew. Interesting mix. Felt inspired and proud of our union.”

“Fantastic event. So glad we attended. Look forward to the next one already. Well done to all who spoke and organised.”

“Great venue and atmosphere. Really enjoyed it.”

Thanks to everyone who supported the event (especially including the guys) and we hope to see you again in 2018!
WHAT’S THE WHITE RIBBON CAMPAIGN?

Paul Moffat, Eastern regional secretary, calls for support for the White Ribbon campaign to end violence against women.

The White Ribbon Campaign UK is part of a global movement to stop male violence against women and girls.

It is the largest global effort of men and boys to end male violence against women, with an aim to educate and raise awareness of the scale of violence against women and to engage men in these issues.

The issue of male violence against women and girls is not, and never has been, a ‘women’s issue’. The UK campaign addresses men directly so they understand the scale of the problem and become part of the solution, with women.

Men and boys are pivotal to campaign objectives and have a crucial role to play in creating a culture where male violence, abuse and harassment against women and girls is simply seen as unacceptable.

The White Ribbon Campaign supports men and boys to oppose violence in their workplaces, schools, communities and families.

The programme is not anti-male; it is all about creating healthy and positive ways of being a male. It is true that most men are opposed to violence against women and girls.

The campaign also recognises that restrictive gender roles harm men, as well as women, boys and girls.

The campaign is happening in many areas of life within the UK, especially within sports, which is where I first became involved in the campaign through rugby.

Campaigns are run in music, faith groups, schools, WRC Councils and organisations, and through an ambassador programme.

More recently the CWU and the Eastern Region’s are committed to get all unions to adopt the White Ribbon campaign, of which the CWU is the first. The CWU has adopted the campaign nationally with affiliation from the national union, regions and branches.

GET INVOLVED

There are many ways of getting involved: spreading the word by telling your friends family and colleagues about the campaign; take action online to defend women’s rights; order a white ribbon and wear it; email your MPs, as the government has a range of initiatives to end violence against women and girls.

Other ways to get involved are: take the campaign to your workplace; raise awareness of the campaign and problem of violence against women and girls; and challenge yourself by spending time learning about masculinity, gender inequality and the root causes of gender violence.

Although, most men will not be violent, this part of the campaign’s work examines ways that men might try to control women, such as putting them down and limiting their activities.

A large part of the campaign, that will impact and raise awareness, is the White Ribbon Ambassador. The campaign is looking for influential men and boys to take a stand against gender violence. The ambassadors will be role models who inspire and inform through talking in schools, workplaces, communities, etc., on social media, and through their own personal behaviour. The ambassadors call out violent behaviour wherever they witness it, encouraging other men and boys to step up and show that we do not buy into the idea that being a real man means being aggressive and dominant.

Wearing the White Ribbon is a personal pledge that I have taken to never commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women. The campaign urges everyone to wear a white ribbon.

As a union we will continue to strive to eradicate violence against women and girls, educate men and boys and support the campaign. As a region we will continue our campaign to have all branches affiliated to the campaign.

I would encourage all regions, branches, officers, representatives and members to sign up and get involved. Together we can stop gender violence and address men directly in doing this.

Information, resources, the history, merchandise and how to get involved can be found on the White Ribbon Campaign website. http://www.whiteribboncampaign.co.uk/

There will be a fringe White Ribbon Campaign meeting at CWU conference 2017 on Monday 24 April, with the campaign founder Chris Green OBE as guest speaker. Join us at the fringe as your first step. Wear a ribbon and pledge never to commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women and girls.
Hello reader, I am the newly elected chair of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Advisory Committee and welcome you to this section of the Word magazine representing the ‘O’ for ‘orientation’. The union has a number of advisory committees, mainly consisting of ordinary branch members. These are to ensure that the needs of women, ethnic minorities, retired members, young people, lesbians, gays and those with disabilities are brought to the attention of the National Executive Council. Our committee has a busy year ahead. We plan to carry our rainbow banner far and wide as explained in this issue by the committee’s vice chair, Jason Reynolds. Other articles in this section include John Monk on decriminalisation of homosexuality and Merlin Reader on LGBT behaviour. I hope you enjoy reading our contributions and if interested in supporting or joining, we will endeavour to assist you in any way we can.

After a successful year for our committee regarding Pride events within the UK and Channel Islands, we are now hoping that 2017 will be as good if not better.

We are planning to visit another group of regions this year. Please see below the list of areas and dates for your diaries.

It’s really important for us to get the support from the local branches and their members on the day.

So if you have never attended a Pride event before why not think about coming along with your family and friends this year. Make a day of it. Support your branches and other members from the LGBT committee. We would like to meet you.

Hopefully all these events will be blessed with sunshine and not rain like Glasgow in 2016. Although we still did the march.

• Bristol  8 July
• Hull    22 July
• Norwich 29 July
• Belfast  5 August
• Plymouth 12 August
• Manchester 25 August

The big event this year is in Hull – the city of culture for 2017. The city will be holding UK Pride on the 22 July. We are trying to get as many people as possible to attend this event.

If you would like to talk about any of these dates or your Pride event, please call Jason Reynolds on 0777 7673 266
The question of whether homosexuality is natural, is sometimes asked by opponents of LGBT rights. One Christian said ‘you don’t see that sort of behaviour in farm animals. On being told it’s actually commonplace in many farm animals, she then retreated to ‘well it’s still disgusting’.

Homosexuality and transgender behaviour are almost never shown on nature programmes (often presented by atheist scientists – they can be prejudiced, consciously or not, as well), which generally imply that everything is to do with breeding successfully and passing on your genes.

In fact, less than 10% of mammal species form long term (heterosexual) pairs. These never occur in dolphins and whales, although you do get male couples in some of them. This includes various forms of sexual activity (including using the blowhole). It is also not exclusive. They, and other marine mammals, like walruses and sea cows (also known as dugongs or manatees), may have group sex sessions, involving both sexes, and both ‘homosexual’ and ‘straight’ sex.

Identifying gender, with many birds and mammals, can be difficult – so mating positions were often used to determine gender (and unfortunately, some researchers still do). Not surprisingly, this meant ‘homosexuality’ wasn’t widely observed by scientists. Where it was noted, attempts were made to explain it away as ‘abnormal’, a case of ‘mistaken identity’ even where males and females look/sound different even to us, or a ‘substitute’ for unavailability of females (including occasions when females were present but being ignored).

The lack of research and difficulty in publishing means it is being ‘discovered’ in species repeatedly by researchers unaware of previous findings.

Bruce Bagemihl, in his book ‘Biological Exuberance’, researched every paper he could find for instances of homosexual and transsexual behaviour in the animal kingdom. He found that in a third of all species, with 2,000 hours of scientific observation, LGBT behaviour had been observed.

In some species it was rare,
There are many more examples – pairs of female grizzly bears rearing young together (they never pair with males, mating is ‘casual’). Perhaps the most interesting species are those where homosexuality is dominant for many animals. In some seal species, most males (90%) – will never breed as only a few reach the size and strength to become a ‘beachmaster’ with access to females. Homosexuality is therefore the only sexual activity for these males. And there is transgender behaviour in some species. Dall (Bighorn) sheep, trophy hunters’ favourite in North America, live in all male or all female herds for most of the year. They only come together briefly, when females are on heat for a few days a year. At all other times females refuse to be mounted. So most males mount each other – frequently – all year round. It has been found that there are a few males who live in the female herd and refuse to be mounted, thereby exhibiting typical ‘female’ behaviour for this species.

If you watch many nature programmes, you may notice (although it’s never discussed) that monogamous pairs are not found in any of the great apes (our nearest relatives), nor in many other primate species. Homosexual behaviour, both male and female, of many types, is found in all our nearest relatives. Only in the smallest primate species, such as Tamarins and Marmosets in South America, where two adults are needed for rearing young, are (supposedly) monogamous pairs found. And even in some of these species, homosexual behaviour has been observed.

Native American peoples had no issues with ‘two spirit’ people, who had same sex partners and/or lived as their ‘non biological’ gender. Missionaries were distraught at one group who cared for children communally. ‘How can you look after the child of someone else,’ they asked. The reply: ‘You live in a very sick society, that you can only care for your own child’.

The conclusion I draw from all this is that life isn’t only about breeding, despite nature documentaries pushing this line. Also, monogamy may work for some humans, but ‘the family’ is very much a social construct of our time. And ‘nature’ is far more varied and weirder than most people would assume.

In others, common. Clownfish are relatively well known for being able to change their gender more than once. They breed as either male or female. Less well known is that some gulls form ‘lesbian’ pairs, even quartets, for raising young.

Pairs of male black swans will drive a ‘straight’ couple off a nest and take over incubating and rearing young. There is a species of lizard in the US that has no males, and reproduces solely by parthenogenesis (‘virgin birth’). It seems some other reptiles may have this capability. There are many more examples – pairs of female grizzly bears rearing young together (they never pair with males, mating is ‘casual’).

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You live in a very sick society, that you can only care for your own child.

90% of males in some seal species will never breed.
LGBT RIGHTS TRUMPED IN THE US

The White House has stated recently that the 45th President of the USA is “determined to protect the rights of all Americans, including the LGBTQ community”.

If you search for ‘LGBT’ on the internet at whitehouse.gov, then what comes up is: ‘sorry, no results found for LGBT’. The same happens upon searching for ‘gay rights’.

I searched for the same keywords on obamawhitehouse.archives.gov and found more results than you can shake a stick at. Isn’t it a shame that the 45th President and his staff have seen fit to remove all trace of us gays?

Perhaps one of the reasons our American family’s rights have been removed is the draft of an Executive Order to allow “establishing a government-wide initiative to respect religious freedom”.

The draft order could permit the refusal of a range of services to people, based on their sexual orientation or gender identification, if providing those services “conflicts with the person or organisation’s religious beliefs”.

We will have to wait and see if such an Executive Order becomes federal law, the effects of which would be felt in areas such as adoption, marriage and even welfare services.

How can one person’s rights Trump those of another?

IDAHOT / LGBT AWARENESS

An LGBT awareness school will take place at Alvescot between 12 and 14 May.

It’s a useful course and will offer participants further insight to LGBT issues in the workplace and particularly useful for branch secretaries and equality officers.

Applications should be made via the usual route to Alvescot.

PRETEND TO BE STRAIGHT IN AFGHANISTAN

The UK government has recently provided guidance for LGBT Afghani asylum seekers, who are being deported, to ‘pretend to be straight.’

Afghan laws prohibit being gay and if caught homosexual acts are punishable by up to 15 years imprisonment. The Taliban execute people for being gay.

Although, recognising the extreme dangers that gay Afghans may face back in Afghanistan, after being deported, the guidance suggests people should remain closeted and to not attract attention to themselves.

50 YEARS OF THE SEXUAL OFFENCES ACT

John Monk looks at the how gay life has changed over the half century

This year is the 50th anniversary of the Sexual Offences Act. Much progress has been made in that time. The Sexual Offences Act decriminalised private homosexual acts in England and Wales between two men, providing both had reached the age of 21. At the time homosexuality between women wasn’t illegal.

Homosexual acts in Scotland were only decriminalised in 1980, with the passing of the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act and in 1982 in Northern Ireland when the Homosexual Offences (Northern Ireland) order was passed.

The change of law in 1967 had been pre-empted by the publication of the Wolfenden report in 1957 (named after the chair of the Government committee, John Wolfenden). It said male homosexuality should be a private matter and should no longer be a criminal offence, if enacted privately, and if both parties were over the age of 21.

These recommendations were eventually introduced in the 1965 Sexual Offences Bill initiated by Leo Abse MP and Lord Arran. The bill took some time to go through, much opposition coming from the establishment at the time.

Subsequent bill amendments reduced the age of consent to 18 in 1994, and the equalisation of the age of consent to 16 in 2000.

The passing into law this year of the Policing and Crime Bill meant that 49,000 gay men - who were originally found guilty of sexual offences pre and post 1967 - have been posthumously pardoned. Men like Alan Turing have had previous convictions revoked. Statutory pardons are also available to people who are still living to have their convictions removed.

We have much to appreciate. History shows the difficulties and struggles people encountered for just being who they are.
FEATURE

Chair of the RAC, Amarjite Singh (AJ), looks at the remarkable life of Sophia Duleep Singh

Next year, we will be celebrating 100 years of women winning voting rights – although many were still excluded until 1928. This was in part because the campaign was stopped during the First World War.

It is important to say that women from all classes contributed to the campaign, so I would like to tell a brief story of a woman from an ethnic background. Princess Sophia Alexandra Duleep Singh.

Sophia was born in the UK on 8 August 1876 and died on 22 August 1948.

Although from a wealthy family, Sophia was a prominent suffragette in the United Kingdom. She is best remembered for her leading role in the Women’s Tax Resistance League, but she also participated in many other women’s suffrage groups including the Women’s Social and Political Union.

Sophia Duleep Singh was the daughter of Maharaja Duleep Singh and his first wife Bamba Müller.

Sophia combined Indian, European and African ancestry with an upbringing among the British aristocracy.

Duleep Singh had been the last Maharaja of the Sikh Empire in Punjab and was exiled from India by the British at the age of 15, while Müller was of mixed German and Ethiopian descent.

Among her four sisters was the suffragette Catherine Duleep Singh. Sophia inherited substantial private wealth from her father on his death in 1893, which she used in the women’s vote cause.

Sophia marched at the head of the Black Friday deputation to parliament in 1910, alongside Emmeline Pankhurst, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson and Dorinda Neligan.

She obtained particular prominence through the Women’s Tax Resistance League, appearing in court several times due to her refusal to pay taxes, and remarking, “When the women of England are enfranchised I shall pay my taxes willingly. If I am not a person for the purposes of representation, why should I be a fit person for taxation?”

Sophia’s public life was mostly spent campaigning for women’s rights, but she also supported the rights of lascars, the Indian merchant seamen.

HELLO COMRADES!!
GREG AMISSAH EDITOR – BLACK, ASIAN AND ETHNIC MINORITY NEWS

Once again may I take this opportunity to welcome you to the 2017 general conference issue of the Word. In the magazine, you will find articles that cover a wide range of issues. I hope that you find them both informative and interesting.

This year has been a difficult one, with Brexit, and its associated pros and cons – depending on where your individual opinions lie.

The union is also going through major change and restructuring. Hopefully, it will not affect us as BAME members disproportionally. Questions circulate like will we still have a magazine like this? Will our equality conferences still run? We wait to see what happens and hope that the right decisions are made.

Once again I would like to thank everyone who took the time and effort to contribute to this edition and hopefully this does not become the last edition of the Word. As before you are always welcome to send in your contributions and articles to me at gregamissah@gmail.com. The next edition should be out for the next equality conferences.

I wish you all a good and productive conference.

Greg Amissah

BAME WOMEN ROLE MODEL FROM THE 18TH CENTURY

Chair of the RAC, Amarjite Singh (AJ), looks at the remarkable life of Sophia Duleep Singh

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Although from a wealthy family, Sophia was a prominent suffragette in the United Kingdom. She is best remembered for her leading role in the Women’s Tax Resistance League, but she also participated in many other women’s suffrage groups including the Women’s Social and Political Union.
A J and I decided to take some time out from our daily lives to go and visit the refugee camp in Calais. We had made a day visit with the CWU Equality Department a few months prior. That day visit just made me feel that I needed to go back and try to help the refugees in their struggle to establish a normal life, away from their war torn countries because that is no life for any human being as we all deserve to live a normal happy life.

So AJ and I decided to plan a trip where we would try and spend a week at the refugee camp. The dates we picked were from 15 to 19 June 2016. We did try to encourage other people to join us but I think the notice was too short and also a national convoy was being arranged by several groups.

We felt we needed to separate ourselves from this convoy because we had decided to work with the people in the camp and use our skills effectively with the other volunteers in the camp.

The time spent, with other volunteers and the refugees in the camp, was mind blowing because it made us appreciate the easy lives we live at home with our families. It also made me appreciate what we have and how easy every day is for us because we don’t live in poor facilities whereas refugees struggle to have a normal life and they don’t know if they are going to get a regular meal or if they will ever see their families again. It is brave thing these refugees are going through to get a normal life but the goal they have is to go somewhere where they can be happy one day.

Sajid Shaikh tells of a visit he undertook with fellow CWU member Amarjite Singh (AJ), to see how they could help the refugees living in the camp in Calais.
The fight against racism is one of the biggest challenges facing the workers’ movement. In recent years we have seen a surge in hate crime and the resurgence of views that belong in the sewer. In this context the need for a mass anti-racism movement has never been more crucial. Since 2014 Stand up to Racism has placed itself at the centre of the fight against racism, islamophobia, anti-semitism and the scapegoating of refugees and migrants. Every year on UN anti-racism day we hold a demonstration against racism in conjunction with our partner groups in countries as far and wide as Australia, Greece and Poland. We also have local groups in many towns, workplaces and schools across the country. They have been able to respond to racist attacks, collect for convoys to the refugee camp in Calais and produce information challenging the scapegoating of migrants in their particular area.

Stand up to Racism helped to launch the Stand up to Trump coalition which organised the demonstration of 40,000 at the US embassy against Donald Trump’s Muslim ban. The CWU has a proud history of fighting racism and has supported Stand up to Racism since its inception. The Essex Amalgamated branch was one of the first branches in the country to affiliate. We understand that the fight against racism and scapegoating is inextricably linked to the fight against austerity and attacks on workers’ terms and conditions.

Learning from history

Workers are having their employers privatised, their terms and conditions attacked and their pensions raided. Outside of work we face attacks on our rights to decent housing, education and healthcare. Those at the top of society have tried to deflect anger at their attacks onto scapegoats such as immigrants and refugees. Aided by the media and dishonest politicians they have created a poisonous atmosphere in society. This is by no means a new issue; the revolutionary Karl Marx wrote the following regarding Irish immigration as long ago as 1870, “The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who lowers his standard of life. This antagonism is artificially kept alive and intensified by the press, the pulpit, the comic papers, in short, by all the means at the disposal of the ruling classes. This antagonism is the secret of the impotence of the English working class, despite its organisation. It is the secret by which the capitalist class maintains its power. And the latter is quite aware of this.”

We must learn from history; racism weakens our movement as it distracts us from our real enemy (this government). Join your local group, ask your branch to affiliate, ask your colleagues to wear a badge, bring a delegation to one of our demonstrations, and get involved. We must stand up to racism.

Adam Cochrane outlines the challenges facing the Stand up to Racism movement. Politicians using divide and rule to deflect anger from real issues
Will Britain ever have a Black Prime Minister, presented by actor Dave Harewood, provided some devastating facts to illustrate the prejudice that still exists in British society.

Facts such as that 45% of black children were growing up in poverty, compared to 25% of whites. A black person is 12 times less likely than a white one to become Prime Minister.

The programme went through the various institutions, such as education, the media, the law and Parliament, finding high barriers in all to the advancement of black people.

There are just 13 black MPs, representing 2% of the total number of MPs, whilst 4% of the total British population is black.

A visit to the BBC news room, revealed a sea of white faces. There was reference to past Director General Greg Dyke’s comment about the corporation being “hideously white.”

Little, it would seem has changed in the Corporation, though there are more Black And Minority Ethnic (BAME) people fronting programmes like the news.

What the programme did not make clear was the role of class in keeping working class people out of the top positions in society. The few people who go to public schools, then Oxbridge are those who dominate the top roles in society – whether it be in Parliament, the City, the law, medicine or education. The privileged route for the mainly white, and wealthy. Race and gender also play a key role, disadvantaging people even more. So those with the least chance are likely to be working class BAME females.

The programme presented by David Hare, with Faiza Shaheen, director of the think tank Class, providing the stats, did well in outlining the problem but failed really to provide solutions. There was no mention of positive discrimination or forcibly opening up some of these institutions to make them more diverse.

Solutions are what is needed, because a more ethnically and gender representative Parliament is bound to act differently to one drawn largely from a narrow privileged band of what are in the main are white males (Faiza Shaheen’s blog provides some answers – see: @faizashaheen).

These solutions are also part of addressing the increasing feeling of disempowerment that was so clearly voiced at the EU referendum.

It would also be wrong to suggest that if we had a black prime minister all would be well. A black prime minister could be an indication that things are moving in the right direction but not that the problem is solved.

Hare was quick to unfavourably compare Britain with America, which has even greater race issues. Yes, there may be more BAME actors in prominent roles in the leading roles in society – notably the first black president, Barack Obama. But the presidency of Obama has not done much for the welfare of the average black working class person in America. If anything, America provides a salutary lesson for Britain, in that in the US there was a tendency amongst some, especially the middle class, to regard the election of Obama as a sign of diversity and a lack of problems for the black community. Nothing could be further from the truth.

So there is much to be done when it comes to giving proper representation for BAME but it is wise to remember that this is only part of a problem that is also class based, requiring some major changes in society - if the country is ever to be run for everyone as opposed to a narrow clique of the privileged.

Paul Donovan looks at actor Dave Harewood’s thought-provoking documentary that asks: “Will Britain ever have a black Prime Minister?”

see: paulfdonovan.blogspot.com
WELCOME

Natalie Flemming
EDITOR – DISABILITY

The Disability Advisory Committee has been working hard this year on issues that have arisen in both the Postal and Telecoms sections. The articles included in this edition cover topics that we have discussed at recent meetings. The committee members have also formed working parties to ensure that all relevant information is collated and shared with members.

We know that there are difficult times ahead with Brexit and with the NHS facing even more cuts, but we must continue as a union to fight against this Tory government and their austerity measures which are having a negative impact on our disabled members.

FOOTBALL IS A RICH GAME BUT DISABLED FANS REMAIN SHORT CHANGED

Jonathan Bellshaw looks at the lamentable record of some Premier League clubs when it comes to providing for disabled supporters.

On Saturday the 18 March I had the privilege to be one of the 3,200 Lincoln City fans who watched us beat Burnley 1-0 in the 5th round of the FA Cup.

Don’t worry; I am not going to say too much more about that. Despite the win, I found myself very frustrated with the club and their lack of thought for disabled supporters. Yes, they had a wheelchair section and those in there were well looked after by all the stewards, however, for those of us with hidden disabilities I can’t say the same.

There was no disabled toilet that I could find and when I asked an employee I got a shrug of the shoulders. Getting to our seats was another challenge as the steps – once in the stand – were double height and there was no hand rail to help. I managed but boy I felt it or should I say my knees did.

I posted about this on a fans’ page and got the ‘how well disabled fans were looked after there was a wheelchair area’. I found myself frustratingly having to yet again defend those of us with hidden disabilities, trying to educate people on the facts around issues that aren’t obvious to many people, certainly not at first glance anyway.

This got me thinking about overall access for disabled fans. A report on the BBC Sport website on the 2 March (http://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/38828349) states that three Premier League clubs will miss the deadline to have an appropriate number of wheelchair spaces.

What it does also say is that the three clubs promoted last year Burnley, Middlesbrough and Hull have been granted an extension to 2018. This is very disappointing that clubs are hiding behind frankly lame excuses. The amount of money that clubs get through the broadcasting deal means that there should be no issue about doing this.

There also needs to be more done on issues like ensuring that where there are stairs that are not too high and that adequate hand rails are in place, making sure that the food lists are in a dyslexia friendly format, even give staff training on how to help people with, for instance, autism.

This should not only be the case for those clubs at the top but for every club to achieve. If they ever looked at it from a business perspective they would soon see that the benefits far outweigh the costs.
It’s thought that four out of every five adults will experience back pain at some point in their life. Back pain is the leading cause of sickness absence from work. But why do we get back pain?

Simple daily habits, like hunching to read your smart phone, slouching in front of the computer, even having a weekend lie-in, can, over time, strain your spine and the surrounding muscles, leaving you vulnerable to serious back injury. People often say “I just bent down to pick something up and my back went”, but actually it’s their behaviour in the months or years before which has led to the weakness – the one-off event is just the proverbial straw...

There are, however, things that can be done to prevent back pain. So why not try targeting the following 10 unexpected culprits-

Sitting still
Forget heavy lifting – sitting hunched over a computer all day is one of the worst things you can do for your back. People who do desk jobs suffer more back pain than those where lots of lifting is involved.

Using your joints and spine strengthens them, reducing risk of injury. But inactivity weakens them, which makes you more prone to problems.

Fix it: Get up and walk around for two minutes, at least once an hour and improve your posture while sitting. Avoid bending forward aiming for a “neutral spine position”, everything in line, with no strain spots. Shoulders should be relaxed, feet flat on the floor, eyes in line with the middle of your screen.

Smart phone
The head-down position used to look at the phone, iPad and laptop strains the muscles in the neck and the pain can extend all the way down the
spine to your lower back. This is especially bad, if you are using them for hours on end because your body will eventually start to adopt this hunched position.

Fix it: Make sure you take frequent screen breaks. Try to look straight ahead rather than down at your screen. Accenture supply laptop risers to hold your laptop at a more back-friendly height and angle.

**Stress**
Just like the rest of you, your back muscles will tense up when you start to feel under pressure. Muscles are designed to contract and relax but when you’re stressed, they may contract so much that they can eventually start to spasm, which in turn will trigger pain.

Stress also causes levels of the hormone cortisol to soar, which increases inflammation in the body, making the problem worse.

Fix it: Forget lying in bed, gentle exercise, such as walking or yoga, is much more effective at relieving back pain. It also has the added benefit of being proven to reduce stress levels.

**Sneezing**
This seemingly innocuous, activity is apparently a very common cause of back pain – thanks to its sheer force. (speed of release can be up to 100 mph). It’s not considered polite to sneeze over someone, so instinct is to quickly cover our faces and turn away. Spontaneously twisting to the side, combined with the force used by the chest muscles to sneeze, can wrench the back muscles in just a second.

Fix it: If possible, turn your whole body when you’re about to sneeze, your back remaining straight.

**High heels and ballet pumps**
Heels cause problems because they force your foot forward, altering the angle of your body so your weight isn’t evenly distributed over the spine, which can trigger pain from your knees all the way up to your back.

Popular styles of shoe – such as ballet pumps and flip-flops – aren’t a great deal better as they allow your foot to slide around. The lack of stability that this causes puts pressure on your spine.

Fix it: Ensure your shoe holds your foot firmly in place to keep you stable and protect your back. Alternate between high heels, mids and flats. By wearing different shoes every day, you lessen your chance of experiencing long-term problems caused by using only one type of shoe.

**Pot belly**
Even an extra couple of pounds around the middle makes your pelvis tilt forward and puts it out of alignment as your body works to rebalance itself. This means that your spine isn’t getting enough support from your abdominal muscles, which can cause excessive strain on the lower back.

Fix it: Sit-ups won’t flatten your tummy if there’s fat on top. Fat-burning cardiovascular exercises, such as running or swimming, for 45 minutes, three times a week, are more effective at shifting the bulge.

Favourite bra
Around 80% of women wear a bra that doesn’t fit, which can cause several muscular problems.

A bra that offers no support can lead to hunching and sore neck and back muscles, while one that gives proper support can help to minimize that forward hunch and relieve pain.

Fix it: Get measured and fitted by a trained bra fitter – Many stores offer this service for free. Certain styles offer better support and encourage you to pull your shoulders back.

**Lie-in at the weekend**
Many people find a sore back is the downside of those extra hours spent snoozing in bed on a Sunday morning. This is because your body is resting in the same position for too long, which can trigger or exacerbate existing aches and strains in both your joints and muscles.

Fix it: To stop this stiffness developing, switch the morning lie-in for an afternoon siesta instead.

**State of mind**
State of mind can play an important role and it’s easy to become depressed when living with chronic pain.

Fix it: Stay positive - Although it can be difficult to be cheerful if you are in pain, research has shown that people who remain positive tend to recover quicker.

**Smoking**
It is thought that smoking reduces the blood supply to the discs between the vertebrae and this may lead to degeneration of these discs. Fix it: Try and stop smoking.
I first noticed a Blood Bike parked up near my mum’s house, it looked a bit like a police bike and the week after a group of people were collecting in Accrington for donations to the service.

In the North West, we are lucky to have this free voluntary service covering Lancashire and the Lakes, which successfully collects and delivers urgent hospital needs such as blood, platelets, samples, medication and donor breast milk.

The majority of deliveries are out of hours with the exception of breast milk (any time). These avid volunteer riders deliver 24/7 including bank holidays.

The free service and charity started up back in 2012. The main reason for this was to save the NHS money that was being spent on taxis when urgent supplies were required out of hours.

Since it was set up the volunteers have delivered over 30,000 items and last year completed over 11,000 jobs. The need for this service is on the increase.

Although, the NW Blood Bikes have now got some lottery funding and won a good causes award and sponsorship from various companies, they still heavily depend on public donations. They are also very proud to have also won the Queen’s Award for Voluntary service.

Riders
All motor cyclists can volunteer as long as they have a safe road worthy bike and all bikers will then be encouraged to complete their advanced rider certificate so they can also ride the official liveried motor bikes. In fact, approximately 85% of the volunteers in the NW have already done this.

Controllers
It’s not just bikers who are needed to run this service they also have a team of people who are required to take the initial call from the hospital then allocate the job to the nearest volunteer rider. They complete a basic form and also ensure the item has been safely delivered and of course the biker is also back safe too. All you need is a phone and to commit to a few shifts a month.

Fund Raisers
Of course, this free service needs funds to keep the bikes on the road, pay insurance, petrol and obtain the official livered bikes. They rely on people to carry out collections by shaking collection boxes and also organising fund raising events.

The NW Blood Bikes is a charity and there are others set up around the UK all working independently. One was recently set up in Wales.

Maybe you are already aware of this fantastic voluntary service and there is one in your area? Maybe you are now interested in getting involved and volunteering as a biker, a controller or just happy to make a donation?

Better still if you are not aware of one in your area maybe this article has inspired you to start one up!!!

For more information, you can contact the NW Blood Bikes
www.nwbb-lancs.org
Telephone: 01772 659059 Email: contact@nwbb-lancs.org

Disabilities in Focus special at (Please provide web address)
Extra articles include:
- What is Joint Hypermobility or Joint Hypermobility Syndrome?
- Punishing the disabled on the transport network
- BPAN
- Irritable Bowel Syndrome