

FORWARD MIDLOTHIAN DISABLED PEOPLE



HOMES FOR LIFE

In June 2008 Inclusion Scotland hosted a national conference on accessible housing in Scotland: Homes For Life

The key message brought from this conference were; Scotland's disabled people want homes they can live in.

Having an unsuitable home limits a persons potential. Information about the housing needs and demands of Scotland's disabled people is inconsistent and inaccurate.

We are not meeting current needs and are not planning effectively for the future.

Decentralising budgets and responsibility is likely to make an already fragmented picture worse.

Almost 1 million of Scotland's people are disabled and that is expected to rise to 1.2 million by 2025.

Inclusion Scotland has followed through on key messages on this conference by producing a freedom of information questionnaire which was sent to all local authorities in Scotland. They asked pertinent questions about their housing strategies and involvement of disabled people. It asked for hard evidence to back up conditions that disabled people know exist. It also gave those authorities who are doing their bit to meet their obligations an opportunity to be applauded.

Forward MID in supporting the work of Inclusion Scotland at local level in Midlothian publish here the summary for Midlothian Council in terms of good practice and areas of improvements with regards to accessible housing for disabled people.

Midlothian Council

Areas of good practice

 Council has a policy not to remove adaptations from an adapted house when a disabled person moves out.

Areas of improvement

 Poor estimation of number of disabled people living in Midlothian. Council estimate that the number is around 4790, however, the actual estimate is 15378.

 Could not provide any information on local unmet need for adapted housing for disabled people.

 Could not provide any information on the availability of adapted housing for disabled people.

 Do not know the average waiting periods a disabled person will wait for adapting housing.

 Do not know when the current needs of disabled people requiring adapted housing will be met.

 Could not state how disabled were involved in gathering housing needs

 No information on how disabled people were involved in setting the priorities of local housing strategy

 The following was spent on adapting homes in Midlothian Social housing £1.5 million private housing £1.2 million. Could not provide a breakdown of adaptations i.e. what was spent on stair lifts, wet rooms or ramps.

It is clear from the recommendations above that much work needs to be done to obtain accurate information re the housing needs of disabled people in Midlothian and subsequently to develop actions that translate these needs into reality. The current picture as described above can only be described as poor. Some people may use stronger language.

Forward MID wishes to be active in progressing positive outcomes from the this report. If you have something to express in relation to housing for disabled people in Midlothian please get in touch. The more disabled voices we have the stronger our case. We also invite a response from Midlothian Council it would be good to know how they plan to improve this unacceptable position.

Midlothian Walkie Talkies

The Walkie Talkies will celebrate their 5th birthday this month.

This group was formed to encourage people with disabilities, those who lived in isolation, those with mental health problems, and those who were bereaved to meet up once a week to go for a short walk and to chat to one another. As a founder member I can hardly believe just how far we've travelled and the miles we've covered in this time.

We walk in all weather -- well almost. We've occasionally had to cancel programmed walks because the weather was so bad that one would have had to be able to swim because of torrential rain. We put plan C into action on those days and would find ourselves sipping tea and eating scones in some weird and wonderful places. One time we went to Sunny Dunbar as we always aim for a piece of blue sky and it was chucking it down there as well so we finished up in the cafe eating fish teas and wearing our tongues out.

Another time we sat at the picnic tables at Preston mill enjoying coffee and shortbread when the heavens opened and we laughed our



heads off as we sat there and got soaked.

Many of our walks are wheelchair accessible which gives us all the chance to get together and have some fun. We walked along the shore at Crammond a few weeks ago. It was a lovely sunny day but there was a biting wind but didn't stop us biting into our sandwiches and enjoying ourselves.

Some of us have even made it into the Pentland hills and as far away as Pitlochry to do what we are experts in -- Walking And Talking and of course laughing.

The group has made a tremendous difference in lots of peoples lives by helping them to regain their confidence and do things the never thought in their wildest imagination that they would be able to do. Some have even been able to return to work.

One thing is for certain we have found lots of lovely places to walk in and of course some of the best placed to enjoy tea and coffee.

If you would like to come along and join us on some of the walks contact Local Area Co-ordination and they will put you in touch with the group. Tel: 0131-454-1785

Oophs

We must make an apology for the front page article on our November newsletter headed 'Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance' which may have caused some confusion to our readers.

In the first part of this article we wrote about the changes to Incapacity Benefit which is not, as we said the result of a 'new bill' but dates back to October 2008 when Employment and Support Allowance replaced Incapacity Benefit and Income Support, paid on incapacity grounds, for new claimants.

This is a separate issue from the second part of our article which mentions possible changes to Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and Attendance Allowance (AA). These benefits were targeted for abolition in a Westminster green paper in autumn 2009 and were specific to England. However, as disability benefits are not a devolved issue changes made by the government in Westminster would likely also take effect in Scotland.

The latest news on this is that the UK Government Health Secretary (Andy Burnham) officially

stated, in late October 2009, that Disability Living Allowance, for those under 65, would not be affected. Significantly, he did not rule out changes to Disability Living Allowance to over 65s or Attendance Allowance.

As we said, Billy Kidd MSP has put a motion forward for the Scottish Parliament to protect these benefits. If you wish to add your support to this motion you can write to Rhona Brankin, P.O.Box 11, 95 High Street, Dalkeith EH22 1AX and ask her to support "Motion S3M-4716 Billy Kidd" or send it to e-mail address at Rhona.Brankin.msp@scottish.parliament.uk. To petition the London parliament you can contact the 10 Downing Street website at <http://petitions.number10.gov.uk/AttendanceA/>

We would like to thank Andy from Grapevine (LCIL's* information service for disabled people) for pointing out this error and in giving us this update on the latest developments with DLA and AA. *LCIL is Lothian Centre for Inclusive Living not Integrated Living as we said in our minutes in this same issue.

Again, our apologies for any confusion caused.

Midlothian Youth Platform members meet ForwardMid members

On Tuesday evening the 27th October seven members of MYP-Midlothian Youth Platform involved in the PEST programme focusing on researching the aspirations and support needs of



young people with disabilities at the transition stage of leaving school and moving into the world beyond, met with 4 members of Forward MID, a group who focus on issues of equality and equal rights for individuals affected by physical disability to learn more about disability issues, services and rights.

Supported by Midlothian Council's Community Learning and Development service and PEST - Peer Education Skills Training, an organisation of Article 12 which promotes youth rights in terms of participation and involvement in Scotland, the group participants have increased their knowledge of the wide range of disabilities and developed skills as peer researchers.

After the meeting with Forward Mid,

Emma Mason, one of the young peer researchers stated, "I was really impressed by their enthusiasm and commitment to give individuals with disabilities a voice. They do a lot of work to make a

positive difference and produce really good newsletters. They told us about the medical and social model of disability which I found really interesting".

Recently participants carried out the peer consultation focus groups with young people with disabilities at Saltersgate School on Mondays the 16th November and the 30th November and will be presenting certificates to participants at Assembly at Saltersgate in December 2009.

In the near future a report will be written on the learning and findings of the peer research focus groups with recommendations for education. The young people will also develop a presentation of the experience which they hope to invite key stakeholders to.

Radar People of the Year Awards 2009 - Winners

RADAR is pleased to announce the winners of the People of the Year Awards 2009. The awards were presented at a glittering ceremony at Battersea Evolution on the evening of Monday 30th November 2009.

Liz Sayce, Chief Executive of RADAR, said: "Our RADAR People of the Year Awards celebrate pioneers of difference who are already working to make equality and human rights for all disabled people a reality. We celebrate the achievements of every one of the short listed individuals and organisations who are helping to bring that vision closer"

Nominations which have been highly commended are those which the Judges felt deserved special recognition for their efforts and success. These entrants received a certificate presented by Jonathan Shaw MP, Minister for Disabled People

and Trevor Philips, Chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

Liz Sayce said: "The greatest congratulations are due to all the winners, to those who were highly commended, and to all those on the shortlist. It is individuals and organisations such as these, with their emphasis on achievement, human rights and equality at all levels and in all areas of our society – in finance, in democratic participation, in sport, in empowering care services and in the media to name but a few - who are turning the theme of this event, Future-Proofing Equality, into a reality. Equality is not just a luxury for the boom years – in tough times it is more important than ever, and must be built to last."

For a full list of winners please visit <http://www.radar.org.uk/radarwebsite/tabid/265/default.aspx>

And now for something completely different

Argentina: Patients' radio station threatened by hospital closure

Since 1991, patients at the Jose Borda Hospital, one of Buenos Aires enormous mental institutions, have developed a unique radio station, La Colifata – Radio Loony. With the city's major planning to close all such large institutions, the future of the station is under threat.

Started as a hospital radio project, La Colifata soon was being listened to outside the walls. Over the last 18 years it has become a national institution, with an audience of 12 million a week. They listen to the patients sing, discuss politics, read poetry and interview guests.

The station was started by Alfredo Olivera, who was then working as a volunteer in the hospital. "The idea", he says, "was to give a voice to a part of society that is the classified as ill and marginalized." The station has more than done that, with patients who had been seen as outcasts suddenly becoming more accepted and even celebrated.

Although staff and patients are upset at the decision to tear down the building, they remain hopeful. "For now we're confident some solution

will be found," says former patient Hugo Lopez, a veteran presenter of the show who has helped set up similar projects in Italy and Spain. "Our final goal is to rid the world of nut-houses. You should know that people on the outside are just as crazy as us loonies in here."



As part of the efforts to save the radio station, Manu Chao, the Spanish-French, singer has, together with patients, recorded the album, Viva La Colifata!. It features "20 themes to laugh, to cry, to meditate... about life, death, mothers, loneliness, love, tango, Pope, Nero, the end of the world, the sun and more crazy grandmas... A crazy trip in this crazy world, those from outside and those from inside, all together."

You can download the album free from <http://www.vivalacolifata.org/> however it is in Spanish. They ask you to make a donation to help sustain the radio station and the groundbreaking idea that has allowed so many people to break free and celebrate their lives. Or you can listen on you tube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q71a89sao94&feature=related> .

Too Many Chiefs and Not Enough Indians

When I saw this I had to look twice. Then it occurred to me it is not a disabled parking bay sign it is a sign for people with one really long arm;no. Then I thought it was a parking bay for octomum; no. Then I thought with the change to the disabled



persons parking bill this was the new style sign.; No. Then I thought I would let you tell us your suggestions for this sign. I have trawled the web looking for bureaucracy gone mad so if you see any please let us know!

Alternative Publications

The editions of the Forward MID newsletters are available in large print or at www.forwardmid.org.uk For alternative publication please E-mail to eric.johnstone@mvacvs.org.uk or call Eric Johnstone on 0131-663-9471 or write to him at MVA 4-6 White Hart Street, Dalkeith EH22 1AE with your request.