

Disability News

Winter—Spring 2020



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Top left: peer group and trustee at the Hampton Court Tudor Christmas event.
Bottom left: a proud completer of the 5k Winter Wonderwheels challenge.



What's inside

Dear Reader,

2020 is now upon us! Let's take a moment to reflect on the autumn and winter months of 2019.

In between working hard on behalf of our clients' social welfare challenges, we threw ourselves into some team sports fundraising activities at Dorney Lake; had parties at Halloween and Christmas and welcomed in three new members of staff. Our counselling service has continued to expand and now operates three days a week.

Inside you'll learn about the new CILS contract, hear success stories from our advice teams, read the latest peer network activities, discover how disabled eco-warriors face police discrimination and more. Let's get things rolling with an interview with one of our more recent trustees—Scotty McLeod!

Interview with Scotty McLeod

We've known Scotty since 2015. He has a neurological condition called dysarthria which affects his speech and mobility. Scotty acquired this disability as a result of a train accident.



First off, no prizes to any of our readers as to your birthplace with that name!

Indeed! I'm from Glasgow. I went to St Andrews University and studied Computing.

Along with the hard work that a degree like that involves, I had a great social life (including Viking re-enactments)!

Oh, so you're a tech head?

Absolutely. I was an IT consultant, travelling internationally on a regular basis. It was crazy, I'd go from debugging desktop apps in Mexico City to talking about active directory security in Washington DC at a conference for Windows geeks.

Right. You're already talking another language there Scotty! How did you hear about Richmond AID?

I was referred to Richmond AID by the Council's social care access team. I was looking to connect with other people in the community who wouldn't judge me or make assumptions about me based on my disability.

People think my reduced language skills mean I'm stupid, which I can't stand.

Richmond AID checked I was getting all the benefit payments I am entitled to, and referred me to INS (Integrated Neurological Services). They also helped me get assessed for a disabled facilities grant so I could adapt my bathroom.

What's been the highlight of your year with Richmond AID?

I loved zooming round Dorney Lake in August for the superhero challenge. Especially racing David Merkel, one of our other trustees!

It's the social aspect of Richmond AID that means the most to me. I feel I have a purpose and am part of a community that supports people with all sorts of disabilities, we come from all walks of life.

What does being a trustee at Richmond AID involve?

The trustees steer the overall direction of the charity. We monitor the quality of the services delivered and look after the finances.

What would you say to anyone interested in becoming a trustee at Richmond AID?

Welcome aboard! Especially if you know about marketing, fundraising and digital technology. We need more people on the trustee board with these skills and experience.

If you think you have the right skills and experience to be a trustee at Richmond AID, contact us for more details:

Email: info@richmondaid.org.uk

Phone: 020 8831 6077 / 020 8831 6090

CILS update

Great news! Richmond AID were recommissioned by the council to continue to deliver the CILS Information Navigation contract



The new contract began on 1st November 2019 and it means Richmond AID will now deliver the Information Navigation service borough-wide.

CILS is a partnership of 20 local charities which support adults of all ages to live independently, improve wellbeing and stay connected with their local community.

There are two main features of CILS:

- 1. CILS Information Navigation** acts as the central access point into the service, as well as offering information, advice and support.
- 2. CILS Health & Wellbeing** offers a range of wellbeing, social and practical support. This is led by Age UK Richmond.

Information Navigators at Richmond AID can

- Offer information, advice and support
- Help you to find the right services to support your needs
- Support you through the health & social care system

Our Information Navigation areas include

- Housing
- Benefits
- Grants and food vouchers
- Social and leisure opportunities
- Employment, education and training
- Health, social care and independent living
- Transport and mobility
- Access, aids and adaptations
- Consumer issues / complaints
- Volunteering
- Befriending

Getting the help you need

We can help if you are looking for support for yourself, a family member, a friend or someone you are caring for. The service is free and confidential.

Contact our advisors on

Email: advice@richmondaid.org.uk

Phone: 020 8831 6464

Text: 07894 215 835

Website: www.richmondaid.org.uk (click on CILS)

“I feel like a big weight has been lifted from my shoulders. I am under GP with stress & anxiety. I feel really listened to and helped immensely” Richmond AID client, 2019

Logos of all 20 CILS partnership charities:



Peer group news

Jenny Pearman is now our Peer Network Coordinator. We asked her to tell us the latest news. Over to you, Jen!

Hello everyone, I'm Jenny and have been working at Richmond AID since August 2019. I already feel like I have been here forever (in a good way, of course)!

I've worked in the charity sector for a long time now and I really enjoy it. In the past I've worked for a carer's organisation, and I have also worked in fundraising.

We're a busy bunch in the Peer Group, we always have something exciting going on. In August some of us participated in the Superhero Tri-challenge, which involved swimming, cycling and running/ walking for Richmond AID at Dorney Lake in Windsor. In October the art group created Halloween decorations for our fabulous Halloween Party (this included crafting scary lanterns made from recycled bottles). We also had a go at pumpkin carving— see below! During December the art group designed lots of beautiful Christmas cards for people to use and buy at Richmond AID. In the same month, more peer members took part in the Winter Wonderwheels event—organised by the same team behind the Superhero Tri-Challenge. Our choir also enjoyed performing at various locations in December.

The cooking group has been fun as always, with the help of our wonderful volunteer Romain. The group have made many lovely dishes from sweet and sour chicken, to mac and cheese.



We need your donations! Do you have:

- Fabric, and thread for sewing machines?
- Small items in need of repair (e.g. a watch)?

It is wonderful to sit down after cooking to enjoy the food together, often with a pudding too. The board games and knitting groups are still going well on a Monday, and we've recently introduced sewing to the knitting group.

There's a number of new activities on the timetable now. We have a 'tinker and talk' group on Monday mornings. People meet to tinker with various items that need repairing, or create something new. We've also started a monthly film night, and have a ladies café on Thursday mornings designed for ladies in the group who'd like to meet informally and socialise.

Summary of current peer groups:

Mon Tinker n' talk | Knit n' sew | Games | Film
Tues Musical theatre | Creative writing
Wed Cooking | Job club | Choir
Thurs Art | Ladies chat café
Fri Fishing

Jenny works Mon to Thurs, contact her as below:

Email: j.pearman@richmondaid.org.uk
Phone: 020 8831 6129 / 07927 550774



Superhero series

**Six teams. Eighteen participants. Three sports challenges.
Six wheelchairs. Two captain marvels and a whole lot of face masks!**



These were just some of the key ingredients of a big, superhero themed day out in August at the legendary Dorney Lake in Windsor (site of the 2012 Olympic rowing).

Clients, volunteers, staff and trustees alike joined forces to take part in an all-inclusive para triathlon, one of the superhero series of events for people with and without disabilities to participate in sports together (see <http://superheroseries.co.uk> for more info). All our participants gained sponsorship from family and friends.

Over 60 charities were supported in the epic event by over 2000 participants.



Hot on the heels of the para triathlon came our next challenge— Winter Wonderwheels!

Not content with a para-triathlon, 12 of us went back for more fun at Dorney Lake in December. This time it was a bit simpler. We walked, wheel-chaired and cycled 1km or 5km, and wrapped up warm against the cold winter sun. Altogether both events raised £5000 for Richmond AID. Congratulations everyone, superb effort!

Transforming lives

Team-working and looking holistically at a household situation are some of the pillars to successful advice work at Richmond AID. We work together to support a client or household across a range of connected social welfare issues.

In the following paragraphs you will read about the support we have given to three clients. All are single parents and were in difficult circumstances when they arrived at Richmond AID for the first time.

The first story shows how advisors from the Information Navigation and Benefits teams worked together to make a huge change to not just one life, but a whole family's livelihood.

Fernando was suffering from post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). He is a single parent with several children, all living in private rented accommodation when he came to Richmond AID. He could not afford the monthly rent, and had fallen into rent arrears when his landlord decided to sell the property and evict the family.

After helping Fernando make the necessary applications and make his way through the changes involved, he and his family were rehoused temporarily (avoiding homelessness) and then offered settled accommodation with a social housing provider (far more affordable than private sector rent). We also secured a discretionary housing payment to help cover the rent arrears, and a grant of £250 to help ease his financial strain. We established that Fernando was not claiming the full benefits he is entitled to, so we supported him to claim Employment Support Allowance (ESA). We also managed to obtain further funding for furniture and white goods to help Fernando set up his new home.

Fernando said: "The staff are amazing and extremely helpful, they supported me so much at Richmond AID".

The next two stories focus on work done in our money advice teams. Our money advisors negotiate repayment plans and in some cases entirely write off client debts.

Graham is a single, disabled dad with four children. The family live in social housing. Graham claims ESA and PIP (Personal Independence Payment) for his physical disability. Graham came to us for help with the cost of replacing damaged flooring and a reduction in one of his utility bills.

We secured a £300 grant from RPLC (Richmond Parish Lands Charity) to help replace the flooring. We also took steps that reduced the monthly household water bill from over £50 to just £16, resulting in a significant saving of £34 each month (totalling £408 over one year).

Graham said: "Outstanding service. Thank you so much, I could not have coped without your service. The advisor was very professional, honest, caring and knowledgeable".

Monica is a single mother suffering a range of disabilities impacting her physical and mental health. As a result she claims ESA and PIP. She had fallen behind on a debt payment plan due to several periods in hospital, and the bailiffs were being threatened.

Through careful negotiation, we arranged with the utility provider for the full debt of over £300 to be written off. A grant from WaterSure plus was also secured, meaning that Monica's ongoing monthly bill would be halved (read on to find out about WaterSure and WaterSure plus).

The threat of bailiffs is no longer present and being able to meet her future monthly payments is now realistic. In addition, we completed an application for a blue badge and secured a taxicard, which help make those trips to the hospital more affordable (and parking is free).

WaterSure and WaterSure plus are national schemes to assist customers (of all water boards) who are either on a low income or have a water meter and use lots of water due to factors such as having a large family or a water-dependent medical condition.

Monica said: "I don't know what I would do without you. You listen to me when most people don't".

Disabled eco warriors

Are disabled people being denied their rights to peaceful protest?

In October 2019, climate justice movement Extinction Rebellion (XR) held a two week peaceful protest against government inaction to halt the climate and ecological emergency. Accessibility equipment (wheelchairs, adapted toilets, disability ramps and noise cancelling headphones) were seized by the police ahead of the protests, meaning some disabled people were excluded from being able to take part. Some of those who did take part reported harsh treatment from the police and several were arrested. In response to this a demonstration took place during the two week rebellion. Around 1000 people, disabled and non-disabled, gathered outside New Scotland Yard on October 14th in solidarity for equal rights to peaceful protest. Some disabled people chose to address the large crowd with personal testimonies of how they had struggled to take part due to police actions which are being cited as discriminatory.

Edward Freeman, a young medical student with cerebral palsy said that he had to pay for a hotel to stay the night in during the protest because the accessible tents had been taken by police before the rebellion began. "I was even told to go home by a police officer," he told The Guardian.

In an incident several days earlier, a protester in a wheelchair (Nicki Myers) was arrested when her carer arrived to adjust Nicki's oxygen tank. Why? Because her carer's arrival meant Nicki was no longer a single protester and had become an illegal assembly under section 14 of the Public Order Act. Nicki and other disabled people had been demonstrating to demand the return of independent living equipment confiscated by the Met in the run up to the XR protests.

Another disabled protester at the demonstration on the 14th, Mary Ellen, told the gathering that she had been "overwhelmed" to see so many people there. She also asked them to continue to stand with disabled people, and told them how Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC) had been fighting the government's austerity cuts

since 2010, "fighting their austerity, fighting their inequality, fighting their cuts, fighting their sanctions, fighting their brutality, and fighting for our lives, literally".

"I was even told to go home by a police officer"

Edward Freeman, disabled XR protester and medical student.



Are disabled people at greater risk of harm from climate change than non-disabled people?

Since the 2010 welfare reforms there have been frequent reports of disabled people stuck in their homes without access to food, water or sanitation. If a wheelchair user's home is flooded and their chair is carried away in the water, they will be at an even greater disadvantage than a non-disabled person to survive. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has already called the UK's treatment of disabled people a 'human catastrophe' following a two year enquiry—the first time a country has been investigated by the Convention for human rights breaches. Institute of Fiscal Studies stated in 2017 that the share of national wealth on disability benefits is now half of what it was in 1989 (Ellen Clifford, interviewed by RT UK, YouTube).

Climate emergency protest movement, Extinction Rebellion (XR) says: "Disabled people are far more at risk in the climate and ecological crisis. They are the ones who die when supply chains get interrupted, they are the ones stuck in their homes as hurricanes hit, they are the ones threatened by governments unwilling to fund their care and needs. The climate and ecological crisis will hit them worse than most."

Richmond AID services

ADVICE SERVICE

Advice, information and guidance for disabled people, carers and professionals on subjects including housing, benefits, aids and adaptations, support services and more.

BENEFITS SERVICE

Expert help and support from a team of Benefits Advisors with form-filling and advice on all aspects of benefit claims, appeals and general queries.

VOLUNTEERING

We have lots of volunteering opportunities, from advice, administration, editing and media to gardening and access work. Excellent training and support in a warm and friendly environment.

COUNSELLING

Therapeutic counselling delivered by experienced professionals. Cost operates on a sliding scale, depending on what you can afford.

SPADE GARDENING

SPADE provides a gardening service to disabled and older people in Richmond Borough. This popular project is staffed by a team of committed volunteers.

EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT

Helping disabled people into work, training or education. We provide a weekly job club in a calm and supportive environment.

MONEY ADVICE

Support with money and debt issues including payment plans and negotiating with creditors and applying for grants.

PEER NETWORK

We operate a range of hobby and interest groups, including art and a choir. Groups are lead by volunteers who have lived experience of disability.

BUDDY UP

Matches young people with a disability aged 14 to 17 with a buddy to go to fun social events.

If you would like to know more about Richmond AID's services please contact our Advice Team on **020 8831 6070 or email advice@richmondaid.org.uk**

Other Formats: Disability News is available in a larger format or on tape. Please contact the Advice Service on **020 8831 6070** or text **07894 215 835**.

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