



Inside: Challenging Cuts to Disability Benefits and Richmond AID in the Media

Featured: Meeting Tania Mathias MP, Richmond AID's Quality of Advice Recognised, News, Events and more



Celebrating our Buddy Up Travel Coordinator's Aman's Birthday!

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Welcome to the Summer Edition of Disability News!

Over the last few months Richmond AID hit the media, had a few royal encounters and achieved the Advice Quality Standard!

We have welcomed on board our new CEO Administrator Ali Kent, who started back in January 2016. Colin Brummage, our new Operations Manager joined in February and Harres Yakubi joined our team of Benefits Advisors.

Sadly, we have had to bid farewell to a few along the way – Fiona Berry, Federica De Angelis and Aman Ahluwalia. We wish them all the best.

Over the past few months we have been keeping busy as ever. Our Employment and Inclusion Manager Jamie Cutler went along an event celebrating the newly refurbished stables at Park Lane Stables and rubbed shoulders with royalty! See the photo opposite with Jamie and Princess Anne who opened the

event. A group of staff and volunteers from Richmond AID went along to the Queen's 90th birthday in Windsor (see page 5).



On a more serious note, in this edition of our newsletter we focus on the big benefits news that saw our very own CEO Lucy interviewed by BBC news back in March. In 2017, the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) for new claimants placed in the work-related activity group will be cut by £30 a week. For more information on what effect the cuts will have on those with disabilities, see page 6.

Disabled Job Seekers Tell Their Stories of Looking for Work, Not Given a Chance

In April this year Tania Mathias MP came to Richmond AID to learn about the experiences of local disabled people in their quest to find a paid job. We requested a meeting with the MP for Twickenham following her vote for a £30 cut in Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) which will apply to new claimants in 2017 who are in the Work Related Activity Group (WRAG). See page 4 for more on our campaign work against this cut.



The Government's thinking behind this strategy is that the current benefit level (£102.15 per week) for people in the WRAG acts as an incentive to not work. Moreover the savings made through the cut of £30 per week are considered to be better used if recycled into practical employment support schemes.

The lived experience of disabled people however, presents a very different narrative. Our experience is that disabled jobseekers are doing everything they can (and more) to find work but are coming up against discrimination, while at the same time living in relative poverty with the additional costs arising from disability.

Tania's visit was a valuable opportunity to learn and gain insight into the effort, desire and commitment that disabled people are putting into finding work. In some cases, people are searching for work over many years, attending hundreds upon hundreds of interviews and going on countless training courses. We also felt it was very important for a local MP to hear about how government employment schemes have failed many disabled people. For example, the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion reports that the Work Programme had only supported 10% of clients on ESA into a job.

Richmond AID are concerned that the newly proposed practical support fund is very likely to follow the same path as all previous schemes – disabled people who are in most need of this provision are often the least well served by it.

'I have been looking for work for at least 11 years and been doing all I can to find a job. I have also been on many government training programmes but still have not been given a chance.'

Fiona, disabled jobseeker

Richmond AID, along with the wider disability movement, believes that the government misunderstand the reasons behind the high unemployment rate for disabled people. All the evidence points to social barriers i.e. employer discrimination, prejudice and lack of flexibility within recruitment processes and work practices.



We believe that reducing people's financial entitlement is both ineffective and unjust. Although Richmond AID does welcome more practical support for disabled job seekers in the WRAG, none of these proposed schemes will address institutional discrimination.

Richmond AID wants to see a society where disabled people have the same chance as anyone else of finding a job which will lift them out of poverty. Currently, we do not live in that society. The only way to realise that vision is to impose obligations and targets on employers to recruit more disabled people.

Richmond AID on the Box

Richmond AID made a media splash earlier this year, being featured on the BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5 for our campaign work against the cuts to ESA due to be implemented in April 2017.



The vote for cuts to Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) was carried by the government despite rebellions in the House of Lords and warnings from disability charities that the proposed cut would make it more difficult for disabled people to find work—and that many struggled to afford food and heating on the benefit at its current level.

The measure will have an impact on people in the ESA Work-Related Activity Group (WRAG) who have been found not fit for work—including those with deteriorating conditions such as cancer, Parkinsons and MS and people with mental health problems, learning disabilities and autism.

One disabled Richmond resident applied for ESA in 2010 but was declined and put on the assessment rate, which is similar to the proposed amount people will have to live on with the cut. The client approached us for help in 2013 and we took on the case and finally resolved the issue in 2015.

During this period the client fell into debt and we supported him with food vouchers and charitable grants to help him survive financially. He had to borrow money and blankets from friends to get by, as he didn't have money for heating.

Another Richmond AID client with a learning disability is 'desperate' to find work. They were on ESA WRAG but are now on Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) and have fallen behind on gas, water and electric bills.

In the past, Richmond AID were able to support this client with a part-time cleaning job but currently he is unable to afford the bus fare to come to our weekly Job Club:

'I get a bit down and depressed,' our client tells us, 'I just want to get out and about and find a job. It could be my speech or language, people just don't give you a chance.'

Lucy Byrne, Chief Executive of Richmond AID, said:

'Richmond AID believe that the cuts to ESA will have a severe and detrimental impact on the lives of disabled people and will make it more difficult for people to find work. It must be recognised that being a disabled person means higher general living expenses, for example to keep warm, to travel to get to activities and to participate in the community and travel to medical appointments. For people who are close to getting back to the workplace add to that the cost of taxis to interviews, smart clothes for work and internet access.



'We believe this cut moves disabled people further away from the workplace and increases the social isolation of people who are already vulnerable and already experience barriers in getting employment.'

The Queen's 90th Birthday

Staff and volunteers of Richmond AID headed off to the Queen's 90th birthday celebrations at Windsor Castle. Richmond AID were generously given tickets from Waitrose, one of the event sponsors. The six of us headed off by train and had guards on hand to help with ramps. Once at the event, we hailed down the accessible golf buggy to get us around. We stopped for a bite to eat at the array of food stalls before hailing our next buggy to our seats. We had time to quickly nip into the Waitrose hospitality tent to pick up our goodie bags before the show!



The Queen's 90th Birthday



Pictures of our volunteers and staff Shirley, Alex, Janet and Lucy enjoying the event! Thanks to our CEO Admin Ali for putting together this collage.



The joyful event was a celebration of the Queen's life, her love of horses, her dedication to the Commonwealth and her involvement with the Navy, Army and Air Force. It included 900 horses, 1,500 participants from around the world and took us through the milestones of the Queen's life such as her early years, World War Two, her marriage, the coronation and a reign of more than 60 years. Horses, actors, bands and dancers were used to tell the story. The excitement was a bit too much for the horses at times and there were a few comedy moments when things didn't go quite as planned! Thankfully there were no serious incidents: just a few close calls. We had a lovely evening and thoroughly enjoyed the show and hope Her Majesty did too!

Claiming Disability Benefits Entitlements - Our Stories

Richmond AID see people every day who are in dire circumstances due to issues with benefits.

Many people have not been awarded the benefits they are entitled to. Many experience communication difficulties with the DWP and benefits sanctions, so are forced to live on no money at all. It often takes the involvement of an organisation like Richmond AID or Citizens Advice to make sure people get their entitlements.



If you are a disabled person living in the borough of Richmond and need help with making a benefit claim then please call **020 8831 6077** or email benefits@richmondaid.org.uk.

Please note: case studies have been anonymised.

Case Study: Tim

Tim is a man in his late 30's who lives with his mother Jean in Richmond. He has post-traumatic stress disorder, schizophrenia, severe depression with constant suicidal thoughts, social anxiety disorder and a learning disability. His mother Jean has a respiratory disorder and is on continuous oxygen which she carries in a shopping trolley as she also has mobility problems. They only leave the house together due to Tim's anxiety and paranoia.

Tim had made a telephone application for Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and completed the PIP form himself but, due to his learning disability, had ticked the boxes on the form but not added any comments as he had little insight into the extent of his disabilities. His claim was declined and he scored 0 points. He approached Richmond AID in November 2013 and we assisted him through the reconsideration and appeal process and sent supporting medical evidence. At reconsideration

stage the PIP claim was declined and the next step was a Social Security Tribunal.

Tim attended the tribunal with his mother and they paid for their own taxis from Richmond to Sutton and the return journey. During the Tribunal session Tim had a major panic attack. The Tribunal took five minutes to make their decision and Tim was finally awarded the full benefit in June 2015 of PIP Enhanced Daily Living Rate and Enhanced Mobility for five years. He also received a backdated payment of £3500 as the claim process took so long.

In September 2015 the client was informed that his ESA would be reinstated and he would be placed in the WRAG. Despite many interventions by Richmond AID so far we have been unable to achieve a satisfactory outcome for the client to be moved to the Support Group.



Case Study: Jamal

Jamal has angina, depression, a mild learning disability and dyslexia. Therefore, it would be very difficult for Jamal to find work and perform to the demands of most employers. Jamal applied for ESA in 2010 and failed the Work Capability Assessment – essentially declared fit for work.

He appealed his ESA and was awarded the assessment ESA rate, which is the lower 'holding benefit,' while the DWP considered his appeal. This meant that Jamal was only given £65 a week to live on while waiting for the appeal. However, the DWP didn't respond for three years to Jamal: explaining that his appeal was still being considered and a decision hadn't been reached.

Last year Jamal contacted Richmond AID who were able to support the appeal process and overturn the work capability decision and finally, six years on, Jamal received the correct entitlement of £109.30 a week.

Richmond AID also supported Jamal to apply for PIP. His first application was rejected and he was not considered eligible for any money. Again, we supported him through the appeal process and he was finally awarded an additional £100 a week from PIP – fourteen months after first applying.

News

Elleray Hall Open Day: The Hall were delighted with the attendance at their Open Day back in April. It was wonderful to see so many members and to welcome visitors of all ages, including the Mayor of Richmond and local MP Tania Mathias. It was a great opportunity to present Elleray Hall to the wider community and raise and awareness of their work.



INS enjoyed the sunshine at their Garden Party hosted by Trumpeter's House on Sunday 5th June, while raising vital funds for such a fantastic cause.

Richmond AID celebrated another great annual Volunteers Week by attending a **fair run by Richmond Council for Voluntary Services** – lots of networking and inspiration!

Events for the Diary

Join the **Creative Writing group** every Monday @ The Avenue Club in Kew, Richmond TW9 2AJ, 11am – 12.30pm.

You can visit the **Green Gym** with The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) every Wednesday from 10.45am – 2pm: meet at KG Café in Kneller Gardens, Meadway, TW2 6PH.

The **Women's Friendship Swimming Club with English as an Additional Language** is on at Teddington Hydrotherapy Pool, Vicarage Road, Teddington, TW11 8EZ, Sundays 10am—12pm.

Moving On with the South West London Stroke Club meetings are on every 1st and 3rd Thursday of the month: 10.30am—2.30pm at the Sheen Lane Centre, SW14 8LP.

Richmond Council for Voluntary Services are running **free summer training courses** including social media and project management. Call 020 8843 7945 or email action@richmondcvcs.org.uk.

Activity Station are running a Sensory Cinema Screening of Grease (Olympic Cinema, Barnes) on Monday August 15th. Visit: www.activitystation.org.uk or call 07974 028375.

Richmond AID Achieves the Advice Quality Standard

Richmond AID were thrilled to be awarded the Advice Quality Standard! We received some excellent feedback from the awarding body, Recognising Excellence. The Independent Assessor said she was 'satisfied beyond any doubt that the organisation does meet the requirements' and commended our team of 'highly competent and enthusiastic Advisers' who 'demonstrated their commitment and passion for the essential service they provide throughout the audit.' In addition, 'the Chief Executive and Advice Manager have a high level of involvement with strategic forums and have ensured Richmond AID are well-positioned to continue to develop the service and influence local initiatives.'



Richmond AID's Chief Executive, Lucy Byrne said, 'We have worked hard to achieve a high standard in our Advice Services and we are delighted that this has been recognised. We will continue to deliver to our own high standards in the face of constant increasing need and demand for our services.'

A user of our Advice Service told us: 'I am really impressed with how I was helped. Following a couple of extremely helpful phone calls with Advisors, I was greeted sincerely and politely by my Advisor. I felt supported and treated with respect and he seemed extremely knowledgeable and able to answer all my queries. He spent time with me filling in the online application form which saved me a great deal of stress.'



What our Clients Say About Our Advice:

“I would like to thank you, the team at Richmond AID, for the hard work and dedication you give us as clients — it is priceless.”

“Better than excellent. I was at such a loss when I came to Richmond AID but you have made me feel empowered. Thank you.”

What our BuddyUp Service Users Say:

“The project is helping a lot with my daughter’s independence.”

“My son is now 100% better at travelling than when he started. Now I don't panic when he goes out because he knows where he's going and what he's doing. His Travel Buddy really helped to give him those skills. Before getting a buddy he had absolutely no travel skills, I had to take him in the car everywhere other than college. Now he's so confident travelling on his own.”

What our SPADE Users Tell Us:

“Wonderful service – these friendly people left my garden looking super.”

“A very nice group of volunteers who work hard to keep my garden neat and tidy and looking lovely!”

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.

Disclaimer: Although Richmond AID checks all information carefully, it cannot accept legal liability for any inaccuracy or omission. Richmond AID does not recommend any product nor do the views expressed in Disability News necessarily represent the views of the organisation.

**INDEPENDENCE
AND CHOICE FOR
DISABLED PEOPLE**

Richmond AID
Disability Action & Advice Centre,
4 Waldegrave Road, Teddington, TW11 8HT
www.richmondaid.org.uk

**TELEPHONE
020 8831 6080
ADVICE LINE
020 8831 6070**