

Disability News

Spring/Summer 2017



In this issue...

.....
Breaking Barriers

.....
Volunteer Awards

.....
Disability
Employment Gap

.....
Client Journeys



Richmond AID
Advice and Information on Disability

Getting out and about

Edinburgh Festival access

If going to busy arts and book festivals is what you like to do, having a mobility impairment need not stand in your way! Richmond AID Vice-Chair Pauline Hill and husband Ashley have been to the Edinburgh Festival every summer for nearly thirty years, but wondered how they would manage when Ashley had an accident which severely restricted his mobility.

Following a visit in 2016 Pauline and Ashley would like to reassure people that Edinburgh is surprisingly disability friendly, despite its hills, cobbles, narrow lanes and stairways and the crowds who throng there in the summer. They found that the Festivals which run in August – the Main Arts Festival, the Fringe and the Book Festival – all had strategies in place to get visitors with access needs to most venues. The front of house staff, mainly young students, were well trained, friendly and welcoming even in the most crowded places like the Pleasance Courtyard - providing a chair to wait and guidance via staff lifts, through lighting galleries and behind stages in order to achieve step free access and then a reserved seat in the normally unreserved seating.

A favourite with Pauline and Ashley is the Traverse Theatre which has two theatres and a bar/café - all deep under a modern building. Not the most promising of location but with the help of the staff lift, reserved seating and a friendly welcome the impressive line of walking sticks, crutches and wheelchairs is a testament to their inclusive approach . You just need to warn them in advance that for the duration of the Festival you will need special assistance. Pauline talked last year to a young wheelchair user who came every year to Edinburgh and went to all of the dozen or so productions at the Traverse during the Festival.

Things of course don't always go to plan and it is advisable to make a few enquiries about access before booking tickets, but Pauline and Ashley are off to the Fringe this year for another fortnight, and maybe they'll see you there!

Richmond AID Sailor Takes Top Spot Worldwide

Last September saw the second running of a worldwide sailing race in memory of Andrew 'Bart' Simpson, the British Olympic medal winning sailor who died in 2013 while training for the America's Cup. This year the focus was on raising funds for disabled sailing and local sailing clubs. Queen Mary entered a team from their Sailability group of disabled sailors.

Wheelchair user and RYA High Performance helm Nev Millard needed a crew member for the event and Gary Shelley, not a sailor himself but a Richmond AID service user, stepped forward. They came 3rd out of 63 disabled entries worldwide and 440th out of the total global entry of over 4500 boats, a remarkable result for a novice crew in such a high profile event. Well done Gary and Nev and even better luck this coming year!

If you would like to know more about Queen Mary Sailability group please email sailondon@queenmary.org.uk. If you are disabled or have a long term health condition and you would like to try out sports of physical exercise you can contact our Sports Inclusion Officer Sam Blake call 020 8831 6129 or email s.blake@richmondaid.org.uk



Nev Millard and Gary Shelley well ahead of the competition.

Getting out and about

Cirque du Soleil Trip

This January a group of young people on our BuddyUp project and some other Richmond AID clients were lucky enough to see the latest Cirque du Soleil show 'Amaluna' at the Royal Albert Hall. Everybody loves a freebie and we had managed to secure some free tickets to the final dress rehearsal.

The group got pre-show drinks and we discussed how great it would be to work at the Royal Albert Hall as we settled in to our seats. Even before the show began there were random performers wandering around in the audience with lots of little 'scenes' going on as the venue filled up. Our group had an amazing half man half lizard preening himself on a raised platform in front of our seats and it was fantastic to view the stunning impersonation of the animal movements and the amazing costume and makeup at close quarters. Casey who went along from Richmond BuddyUp commented, "The acrobats were amazing, the music was good, the costumes were good. Everything was great. I can't wait to go again!"

"The acrobats were amazing, the music was good, the costumes were good. Everything was great. I can't wait to go again!"

The show was loosely based on Shakespeare's The Tempest and the theme was female empowerment. The cast is composed of 70% women, including an all-female rock band – the live music certainly went down well with our group! The whole group thoroughly enjoyed every element of the show. I sat next to David for the show, I just heard repeated cries of 'wow', 'wow' throughout. Cirque du Soleil may now be a world touring giant but it certainly hasn't lost its ability to inspire and provide a feast for all the senses with those same characteristics that



imbued their very first tour; acrobatics, wild outrageous costumes, magical lighting, and original music.

I just heard repeated cries of 'wow', 'wow' throughout the show.

Cirque du Soleil emerged out of a small street theatre troupe in a small town near Quebec City in Canada in the early 1980's. Founded by Guy Laliberté their first official province-wide tour in 1984 was a dramatic mix of circus arts (without animals) and street performance. It now has close to 4,000 employees, including 1,300 artists from more than 50 different countries.



Breaking Barriers

Richmond AID ran an event in March to celebrate the achievements of local disabled people Breaking Barriers. These stories send an important message about the challenges disabled people in our society face in order to have the same opportunities as everyone else.



Elias Kotpa, Lillyella Barker, Reuben Moore, Shirley Smith, Joanne Atkinson, Tony Morley, Tia Taylor and Amanda Winterburn were all presented with Breaking Barriers awards for their achievements. See below for just some of the wonderful and inspirational stories.

Reuben Moore, age 7, a young man with Down's syndrome, had overcome challenges to learn to ride a bike without stabilisers. Reuben and his family were not put off by those who said it couldn't be done. The determined Reuben trail-blazed his way to success with the help of www.pedalproject.co.uk.

Shirley Smith, 42, has cerebral palsy and uses an electric wheelchair. In her twenties she chose to move out of her parents house and live independently. Shirley receives care twice a day and sets the agenda for how she wants to live her life; whether it's using public transport, shopping, going to meet friends, learning new skills or volunteering for a number of charities. Shirley told us how she is living life on her own terms – defining for herself what it means to be independent, successful, active and happy.

Joanne Atkinson, spoke about the challenges of adapting her life when cancer left her with a physical impairment. Now using a wheelchair to get around, Joanne talked about how she had negotiated her way back into paid work as an expert in the welfare rights field.

Lillyella Barker, 15, has high functioning autism, along with ADHD, Tourette's syndrome, OCD, Body Dysmorphia, Dyspraxia, Special Educational Needs and other medical conditions. Lillyella has overcome many difficult situations and worked incredibly hard to try to alleviate as much anxiety as she can to work on her issues. Her mum says, "I would like her to be recognised for the great effort that she puts in each and every day, and let her know how very proud I am of how far she has come."



Volunteer Awards



At our event in March we also presented our **Volunteer Awards**. Stephen West, Brian Garcia, Jim Fuller, Marie Murorunkwere, Tia Taylor, Suzanne Brown, Zara Qasim and Viv Sankey. are pictured above receiving their awards. Janet Morsey, Laurent Briant, David Rodgers, Richard Clift and Martin Faiers also received Volunteer Awards. A huge thanks to all our AMAZING volunteers. We are very grateful for your time, skills energy and enthusiasm. Richmond AID has over 50 active volunteers working on our projects from administration to gardening roles.

Zara started volunteering with BuddyUp in September 2016 and has already made a big impact befriending and supporting her Buddy. Jess who manages the project says, Zara 'is an inspiration in all areas of her life and is always finding opportunities to support, contribute and mentor people where she can. She already contributes a lot to society and at such a young age – she's quite the role model. Zara's attitude to her Buddy volunteering is very impressive. She takes such interest and joy from supporting her Buddy from organising their buddy sessions together, making the most out of them and keeping in contact in between. Great work Zara!"

Marie provides a valuable administrative role to the advice team helping to organise new referrals, scan key documents and type up important case records. She takes on all new tasks willingly and with enthusiasm. Marie is particularly helpful when the advice team is busy (most of the time!) as her input enables the advisors to concentrate on clients and complex case work. Jo from the advice team says, "Marie is consistent and reliable. Thank you for all your hard work and support, we really appreciate your help and commitment!" If you are interested in volunteering with us email info@richmondaid.org.uk

Disability Employment Gap

The current UK Government was elected on a manifesto commitment to halve the disability employment gap. The economic recovery following the financial crash of 2008 has seen high employment rates, 80% of working age people without impairments are now in some kind of paid employment. **This does not compare well with disabled people where only 48% are currently in paid work.** This difference is referred to as the disability employment gap.

This stands out as one of the most significant inequalities in the UK today. An outrageous and unacceptable social injustice.

Government interest in the employment situation of disabled people is far from new. The 1945 Disabled Peoples' (Employment) Act brought in a raft of employability measures. The 1945 Act, was interesting in that it recognised, to some extent, the need for state intervention to address the extra barriers disabled people face in the open labour market. One of these was a quota scheme which legally obliged employers of a certain size to employ a minimum number of disabled people. Quotas are controversial, however they were at least symbolic of a disabled person's right to a job and clear recognition of the role that the state can play in compensating for a discriminating labour market. The quota scheme was ultimately a failure as it was too easy for employers to get exemptions from the duty.

So where do we find ourselves now? The past 50 years could be categorised by the rise of individual responsibility over obligations of the state. Since the abolition of the quota system and the arrival of anti-discrimination legislation through the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) and the Equality Act (2010), it could be said that disabled job seekers have been left on their own to fight their own corner. This of course would be fine if disabled people had the same chance to find and keep a job as everyone else. But we know that

they don't. It is widely known and accepted that many disabled people experience high levels of discrimination from employers as well as barriers in the built environment, transport networks, legislation, policies and our welfare systems.

But disabled people have the Equality Act (2010) right? Most research shows that anti-discrimination legislation has had little impact on the disability employment gap.

What about employment schemes like Work Choice, the Work Programme etc.? Historically the effectiveness of 'back to work' schemes has been limited. Certainly there are examples of good work and some people will have been helped. It is fair to say however that the results of these programme have been disappointing and arguably the people that need them the most have been served least well by them.

Where can we look for hope? New DWP initiatives are involving disabled peoples' organisations in new delivery models which could offer new hope to some disabled people who need a different approach. Richmond AID welcomes this new approach but feel for real change to happen, the trend of individualism needs to be reversed and the state needs a more prominent role in ironing out the unequal playing field.

Richmond AID has been attending the All Parliamentary Group on Disability – which has recently published a series of recommendations to halve the disability employment gap. Part of these recommendations are for the government to only award public sector contracts to businesses which demonstrate that they will employ more disabled people. Disabled peoples' employment disadvantage can only be undone through more obligations, like this, being imposed upon employers. We hope the Government take heed of the report. Find a copy of the APPGD report "Ahead of the Arc" at <https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/sites/default/files/pdf/AheadoftheArc9Dec2016.pdf>

Client Journeys

Independent Support

The independent support project has been running at Richmond AID for nearly 3 years. Families, Children and Young People are supported if they require a new Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or are having an old statement transferred to become a plan. The team work with clients in a range of ways; we often initially meet with families to explain the process, sometimes a year or two before a request is made. We then meet with them to help write their own evidence and support the client with meetings with school and local authority teams. The service is flexible and support is adjusted to meet the needs of the individual situation and can involve mainly telephone support or face to face meetings. Members of the team can get involved at any point in the process although we are not able to advise at the formal stages of disagreement resolution (mediation or tribunal). We work with plans for children from birth to the age of 25 years.

In a recent case, a member of the team met a family to explain the new process to them, attended meetings with them and the nursery school to provide support and advice around an application for a plan. The plan has now been produced in a draft form. The next step will be a multi-agency meeting, where all of the professionals involved with the child, will meet with the family to discuss the draft. Our role will be to check the draft before the meeting, share our thoughts on the plan with the family and identify any particular concerns that they have. We will then, if requested, attend the meeting to ensure that the professionals take account of the parent's views in making any amendments to the plan before it is agreed, and provide support in school. Please contact us on independent.support@richmondaid.org.uk or 020 8831 6076 if you feel we can help you.

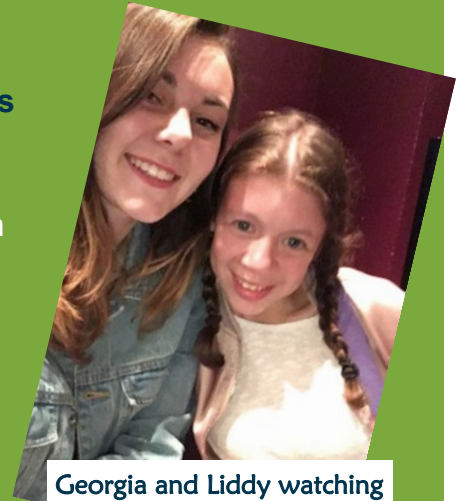
Kingston BUDDYUP Project

Georgia and Liddy have been buddies since December 2015 – this is their story...

BuddyUp matches disabled young people with volunteer buddies - helping them to get out, have fun & meet people! Richmond AID run BuddyUp projects for young people that live in Richmond & Kingston boroughs for age 14-17.

Liddy (volunteer) says: "I found out about the BuddyUp Scheme through Esher College and decided to join as my community volunteering placement. I love it so much that I have continued to meet with my lovely buddy even after my official placement ended! We have a lot of freedom in choosing what to do for our outings, discussing between ourselves, planning routes together etc. So far, alongside trips into Kingston, our outings have included visits to the zoo, parks and bowling. It's always fun looking out for creative ideas that Georgia and I might enjoy, for example, recently we went to a local production of one of her favourite musicals, High School Musical! The Buddy Up coordinators really care about matching pairs well, getting to know the individuals' interests and personalities well enough to find buddies that really get on and feel comfortable around each other. This is exactly how Georgia and I feel – I couldn't have asked for a better buddy or overall experience!"

Georgia says: "Liddy is like a best friend and we have good chats. I always look forward to spending time with Liddy!"



Georgia and Liddy watching High School Musical



Liddy getting a volunteering award from Esher College

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.

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

INDEPENDENT SUPPORT Can support you through the process of applying for a new Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or the conversion from an existing statement to an EHC Plan if you live in the Richmond, Kingston and Hounslow boroughs.

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

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.

GET INVOLVED Richmond AID promotes the interests of disabled people through various forums, meetings and groups. We have a range of opportunities for disabled people and carers to shape local services and the services of Richmond AID.

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.

INTO SPORT Helping disabled people to access sports or physical exercise. We have a number of activities you can join in too.

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

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.

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.