

‘Jobs Not Charity’

Promoting Disabled People's Access to the Labour Market and the Role of Organisations of Disabled People

<http://www.shef.ac.uk/jobsnotcharity/>

End of Project Report

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Introduction

There is a well established literature about the individual and socio-economic advantages of employment (e.g. Lonsdale, 1990; Hyde, 1996; Kitchin *et al*, 1998; Burchardt, 2000; Pannell and Simons, 2000) and much has been written about the barriers faced by disabled people in their attempts to access the labour market (e.g. Barnes, 1990; Burchardt, 2000; Branfield and Maynard Campbell, 2000; Pierni *et al*, 2001; DWP, 2001, 2003; Roulstone, 2000, 2002, 2004a, 2004b; Roulstone *et al*, 2003; Roulstone and Barnes, 2005; Hirst *et al*, 2004; DRC, 2004).

Recently, more attention has been paid to understanding and promoting practices that support disabled people to engage meaningfully with work. One significant development in promoting the inclusion of disabled people has been the input of organisations run *by* disabled people, aligned to the disabled people's movement and guided by the emancipatory philosophy of the social model of disability (Roulstone *et al*, 2003). Indeed, Hirst *et al* (2004, p1) argue that in the area of employment and disability 'development work might include further investigation of effective practice through equality, diversity and *disability networks* (my italics). Similarly, Watson *et al* (2005) note that research into disability and employment tends to focus on evaluating specific (government) employment initiatives but lacks an analysis of wider concerns and the direct involvement of disabled people in the research process.

This research project works with two organisations – at the cutting edge of development work and integral players in disability networks – to examine how they impact upon disabled people and their experiences of work. Clearly, promoting employment rather than charity is more than simply giving people work. It involves questioning and changing the conditions of a disabling society. Barton (2004) has argued that social exclusion, of which disablement is one element (Oliver, 1990), is:

- made of up many compounding and different forms of exclusion, including racism, sexism, heterosexism;
- not a natural but a socially constructed process;
- not easily addressed by one single act;
- in constant need of being analysed, campaigned against and challenged.

Consequently, faced with such complexity, commentators like Roulstone (2002) refuse to accept the simple assertion that employment integration is always good for disabled people. It is important to look behind the meaning of work, support and activism to explore those processes by which disabled people can assess the prospect of employment from an informed, supported and empowered position. Much is now being done in terms of the current government's disability policy, legislation and employment initiatives. Yet, questions remain about the under-riding assumptions and aims of those interventions. In this report, we turn our attention to two organisations that hold the potential to further develop our understandings of work and disability in ways that emphasise jobs over charity.

Aims

This report reflects upon on a research project that brought together Breakthrough UK Ltd (BUK Ltd), the Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People (GMCDP), researchers from the Centre of Applied Disability Studies at the University of Sheffield and the financial support of the European Social Fund. This project started in March 2004 and finished in December 2005, culminating in an end of project conference held at BUK Ltd on December 2nd 2005. The project had four research aims:

1. To examine the contemporary position of disabled people in the labour market (in Britain);
2. To qualitatively explore a number of disabled people's experiences of employment and to trace the impact of policy and practice on their life stories of work;
3. To critically account for the work of organisations of disabled people such as BUK Ltd and GMCDP, in order to investigate the ways in which such organisations promote the work opportunities of disabled people;
4. To disseminate the above findings in the context of recent legislation and policy in terms of furthering best practice and knowledge in relation to disability and employment.

The four aims were met through the following methodologies:

- Documentary analysis of archives such as Social Trends, Labour Force Survey, DRC and literature from the academy and organisations of disabled people;
- Narrative research with 30 disabled people exploring their life stories in relation to employment, policy and practice;

- Ethnographic research of our research partners that aim to offer meaningful work experiences for disabled people;
- Engagement with participatory research in which research partners closely contributed to the implementation of the research and the findings that emerged;
- The production of accessible versions and formats of this report and dissemination via conferences, mail outs and the project website.

The research partners

The project's research partners are established organisations who have demonstrated, over many years, the capacity to challenge discrimination and enable disabled people (Campbell and Oliver, 1996).

GMCDP was established in 1985 and is a leading organisation in the UK Disabled People's Movement. It has a great deal of experience in organising community-based responses which lead to the establishment of services that respond practically to the social exclusion of disabled people.

BUK Ltd is now eight years old and offers models of community-based support for disabled people to access employment. As an organisation controlled in the majority by disabled people (65%), it has the potential to provide community-based employment and training to disabled people seeking to overcome social exclusion through obtaining paid and voluntary mainstream work. Breakthrough UK Ltd now has offices in Manchester and Liverpool. This project focused primarily on partners from the Manchester site.

The links between the two organisations are mostly informal, including members of BUK Ltd also being members of GMCDP; GMCDP renting office space in the premises of BUK Ltd; GMCDP representation on BUK Board of Directors and referrals from one organisation to the other. This report will unpick, in detail, some of the practices of these organisations. As way of an overview, the following table is provided, to introduce some of the key philosophies, aims, foci and activities which made their involvement in this research so crucial:

Summary of Partner Organisations

Partner	BUK Ltd	GMCDP
Philosophy	<p>The social model of disability Influenced by the principles of independent living: <i>Information</i> – to know what your options are: <i>Peer Support</i> – guidance from other disabled people: <i>Housing</i> – a suitable place to live: Equipment - technical aids, to reduce dependence; <i>Personal Assistance</i> – human help with everyday tasks; <i>Transport</i> – to get where you need to be; <i>Access to the Environment</i> – to go where everyone else does</p>	<p>The social model of disability</p> <p>Historical association with the British Council of Disabled People and Disabled People International which have their roots in the foundation of the social model (e.g. Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation, 1976)</p> <p>High profile representation in the history of the disabled people’s movement (Campbell and Oliver, 1996)</p>
Aims	<p>An organisation controlled, in the majority, by disabled people. It commits itself to the following aims to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Work with disabled people on a one-to-one basis to support them to be independent and to seek employment; 2. Work to tackle the barriers and discriminatory policies and practices which 	<p>Internal:</p> <p>To be controlled by disabled people and use the wealth of knowledge of disabled people; To be a welcoming organisation that makes it as easy as possible for those who consider themselves to be disabled people to be involved; To demonstrate good practice in what we do and how we do it.</p>

<p>Aims continued ...</p>	<p>disadvantage disabled people in the labour market. BUK is a social enterprise potentially functioning as a model for public service delivery, engaging with local authorities and developing local provision</p>	<p>External: To promote the independence and integration of disabled people into a fully accessible and inclusive society; To actively promote an understanding and use of the social model of disability; To be a strong part of the disabled people's movement; To promote good practice consultation/forums/committees etc.</p>
<p>Key projects</p>	<p>Employment team offering support of people into work; Independent Employment Advocacy Project; Training sites for disabled people; Policy Think Tank plus local/national policy representation; Volunteers project; Training and consultancy</p>	<p>Core membership of GMCDP; Refugee project; Young Disabled People's Forum; Young Disabled People's Forum Theatre Group; Information and Advocacy project; Archive of Disabled People's Movement; Training and consultancy</p>
<p>Personnel</p>	<p>Disabled and non-disabled employees and disabled clients; Clients are accessed through social services, self-referral; other agencies (inc. Job Centre plus);</p>	<p>Disabled membership and disabled staff only (other than non-disabled support staff); Membership via self-referral; Staff gained through funding of projects and accessible application process</p>

continued ...	Staff gained through funding of key projects and accessible application process	
Focus	Employment, advocacy, information; Policy representation on local and national levels; Paid and voluntary employment; Training and consultancy	Activism, campaigning, advocacy and information; Development of key projects (with related personnel); Training and consultancy
Roles	Disabled clients and non/disabled staff (though disabled membership of board of directors)	Disabled membership
Remit	Employment support, coaching and advice and Independent Living Support	Consciousness raising, rights awareness, development of disability related community projects
Level of engagement	Individual clients and wider structural issue Including employers, businesses, policy makers	Individual members, issues of diversity and wider structural concerns
Self/advocacy	Advocacy on behalf of clients	Self-advocacy of membership
External associations	Organisational representation on statutory committees via chief executive	Some individual but accountable representation on statutory committees via membership

The involvement of these organisations allowed this study to go beyond a contemporary investigation of disability and employment policy, legislation, practice and associated government employment schemes. While these developments have grown markedly over the years – and constitute the policy landscape in which GMCDP and BUK Ltd find themselves – the impacts of organisations run *by* disabled people continue to be under-represented (Priestley, 1999). This report aims to address this imbalance.

Through bringing together the University of Sheffield, GMCDP and BUK Ltd, this report examines disabled people's experiences of work, reveals the institutional barriers that exist and exposes enabling practices that promote independent living and employment opportunities on the part of the partners.

Guiding principles of the research

As a research team, we had a number of guiding principles:

- We were committed to highlighting the ways in which organisations of disabled people challenge barriers and promote the rights and politicisation of disabled people (of which seeking meaningful work one key element);
- We aimed to work together, with research partners, in ways that are open, transparent and respectful and to document this often challenging and difficult process;
- We were committed to the employment and development of the social model of disability;
- We aimed to employ our research experiences and understandings from the social sciences in order to explain enabling practice on the part of Breakthrough UK Ltd and GMCDP;
- We aimed to use different methods – such as narrative research and ethnography – in order to capture some of the experiences and impacts of organisations of disabled people.

Outline of this report

Chapter 1 introduces readers to the social model of disability: the guiding philosophy of the research team *and* the partners. The chapter demonstrates why a social model analysis is needed for making sense of the impact of organisations of disabled people on, the lives of disabled people. A number of *social model perspectives* are highlighted in relation to employment and disability which will be followed up in this study.

Chapter 2 – Disabled People and Work: The Current Climate – addresses the first research aim of examining the contemporary position of disabled people in the labour market. This chapter provides a contemporary picture of some of the key considerations facing disabled people in relation to their citizenship and rights which will be explored further by this research. Of more interest are those questions that are raised about BUK Ltd and GMCDP, in terms of how they respond to disabled people in the contemporary policy and legislative climate. This review triggers the identification of a number of *emerging issues* and *recurring challenges* – which are highlighted throughout the chapter – that are later addressed in analysis chapters 4 and 5.

Chapter 3 – Methodology: Researching Work, Lives and Organisations - outlines how the research team used the methods of narrative research and ethnography in order to address research aims 2 and 3:

- To qualitatively explore a number of disabled people's experiences of employment and to trace the impact of policy and practice on their life stories of work;
- To critically account for the work of organisations of disabled people such as BUK Ltd and GMCDP, in order to investigate the ways in which such organisations promote the work opportunities of disabled people.

Chapter 4 – Life Stories of Work: Policy, Practice and Politics - brings together some of the overlapping themes that emerged from the stories told to us by members of BUK Ltd and GMCDP. We explore the influence of policy and practice on work and other life opportunities. Furthermore, this chapter considers the impact of the organisations as identified by the informants. The stories demonstrate:

- The importance and meaning of work;
- The continuing existence of barriers;
- How knowledge of legislation and rights impacts upon life stories;
- How the organisations promote the interdependence of disabled people – which in turn might support people in their relationships with work – through the values of commonality, respect, recognition, worth and professionalism;
- The significance of the social model of disability in understanding work, policy, practice and politics

Chapter 5 – Inside Organisations of Disabled People: Identifying Enabling Practice – critically accounts for the practices of BUK Ltd and GMCDP in order to investigate the ways in which they promote the work opportunities of disabled people. Our research has revealed that they involved in far

more than in/directly supporting disabled people into the labour market. This chapter will demonstrate some of the ways in which these two organisations:

- Support the self-empowerment alongside the employability of disabled people;
- Promote the valuing of diversity;
- Enhance the political awareness of its members/clients;
- Exhibit good practice by applying the social model of disability;

The focus here is on the culture and practices of the two organisations: to illuminate incidents of good practice that can be developed for the benefit of disabled people.

Chapter 6 - Towards Enabling Practice: Reflections and Suggestions – teases out some of the key principles of a Jobs Not Charity agenda. We consider some possible responses of our research partners to future challenges in the current policy landscape. In particular we pitch these conclusions in more general considerations of disabling society and possible enabling responses.

FORMAT AND LINKS

Throughout the report, reference will be made to other resources available at the project website <http://www.shef.ac.uk/jobsnotcharity/>

This End of Project Report and Executive Summary are available in a variety of accessible formats. Details can be found on the project website

Information on the research partners can also be found at:

www.breakthrough-uk.com

www.qmcdp.com

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References available at:

<http://www.shef.ac.uk/jobsnotcharity/>

Chapter 1

The social model of disability

Introduction

Our research, this report and the aims of our partners, are founded upon the stance of the social model of disability. This chapter will:

- Outline what we mean by the social model of disability;
- Outline our definitions of disability and impairment;
- Demonstrate why this approach was deemed necessary for a study of the relationship between employment and organisations of disabled people.

A number of ***social model perspectives*** are highlighted in relation to employment and disability which will be followed up later in the report.

(1) The British social model of disability

The last 40 years has seen the international rise of disability politics and disability studies. Perspectives on ‘disability’ differ around the globe and include North American (Linton, 1998; Albrecht *et al*, 2001; Longman and Omansky, 2001); the Nordic relational model of disability (Traustadottir, 2004, *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research*, 6, (1), 2004); emerging majority / developing world perspectives on disability (e.g. Stone, 1998; Chataika, forthcoming) and the British social model of disability (e.g. Shakespeare, 1998; Oliver and Barnes, 1998; Barnes and Mercer, 2003; Barnes *et al*, 2002; Barnes *et al*, 2003; Corker and French, 1999; Thomas, 1999; Swain *et al*, 2003; Goodley and Lawthom, 2005). The disability politics described in this report follows the latter perspective.

In this report, when we talk about disability we are referring to people who have self-identified as ‘disabled people’. Such a term includes people who have historically been defined in terms of their impairments including physical and sensory impairments, learning difficulties and people with mental health issues. A British disability studies stance, however, endeavours not to be impairment specific – as have many charities and organisations *for* disabled people – but instead considers disabled people as a heterogeneous group, with many impairment labels who face a number of overlapping experiences of exclusion or disablement.

The disability studies engaged with in this report is an *emancipatory disability studies*. It is tied to the development of the disabled people's movement: which we understand as a 'new social movement' (Campbell and Oliver, 1996), where many of the writers within the field are themselves disabled activists and intellectuals (Oliver, 1990; see contributors to GMCDP's Internationally renowned publication *Coalition*). Like other 'minority-group disciplines', including African / critical race studies, feminisms and queer studies, disability studies maintains close links with its own community and blurs the distinction between the researcher and researched (Olkin and Pledger, 2003, p296). Hence, this study brings together researchers from the University of Sheffield and partner organisations of disabled people. The social model of disability is the 'big idea' of The British disabled people's movement and British disability studies (Hasler, 1993).

The significance of disability theory and practice lies in its radical challenge to the medical or individual model of disability. The latter is based on the assumption that the individual is 'disabled' by their impairment, whereas the social model of disability reverses the causal chain to explore how social constructed barriers have disabled people with a perceived impairment (Barnes and Mercer, 1997, pp1-2).

The social model of disability has turned attention away from a preoccupation with people's impairments (and the associated 'consequences' on everyday activities) and focused instead on the ways in which disability is created – through the social, economic, political, cultural, relational and psychological exclusion of people with impairments (UPIAS, 1976, Oliver, 1990, 1996; Barnes, 1991). Following Goodley and Lawthom (2005) disability is therefore:

- A socio-political category;
- A cultural artefact;
- A relational and psychological phenomenon;
- An exclusionary and discriminatory process;
- A positive identity and entity around which people can collectively and politically organise.

Disablement – the exclusion of people with impairments – is a form of apartheid of the 21st Century. From leisure settings, to work, to education and everyday social relationships, disabled people continue to struggle with and against the humiliation of marginalisation. Disability is clearly a political phenomenon. When we speak of, label, react to, deal with, joke about, medicalise, professionalise, rehabilitate, drug, treat, think of or relate to 'impairment' then we reveal its fundamentally social nature. Therefore, the

social model of disability brings with it a social model of impairment (Abberley, 1987). A useful distinction between the dominant individual model and alternative social model is provided by Oliver (1996):

Individual model	Social model
personal tragedy (disability = impairment)	social oppression (disability = society)
personal problem	social problem
individual treatment (‘cure’)	social action (social change)
professional dominance (helping professions)	individual & collective responsibility
expertise (of non- disabled people)	experience (of disabled people)
adjustment	affirmation (increase visibility of disabled people)
individual identity	collective identity (of disability movement)
prejudice (attitudes)	discrimination (acts)
care	rights
medicalisation	self-help
control	choice
individual adaptation	social change

Taken from Oliver, M. (1996, p34) *Understanding Disability: From theory to Practice*. London: Macmillan.

Adopting the perspective of the social model calls for a ‘paradigm shift’; to look again at the conditions of disability and understandings of impairment.

Emerging social model perspectives

- What are the personal impacts of the political organisation of disabled people?
- What is needed to 'cure' the ills of social oppression?
- Can professionals work alongside disabled people as allies?
- How can disabled people be further supported in their own emancipation?
- How can employment be understood as an aspect of disabling society?
- How would 'work' be conceptualised as part of a wider enabling vision of society?

(2) Defining disability and impairment

In order to challenge the preoccupation with the 'consequences' of impairment, and instead make disability a social and political phenomenon worth eradicating, the British Disabled People's movement continues to employ the definitions proposed by the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (1976, pp3-4):

Impairment - lacking part of or all of a limb, or having a defective limb organism or mechanism of the body.

Disability - the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation which takes no account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from mainstream social activities.

This distinction allows disabled people and their allies to concentrate on changing the environmental conditions of disability. Tackling exclusion in relation to work is, clearly, one dimension of this complex call for social change.

(3) Why this approach is necessary for a study of the relationship between employment and organisations of disabled people

The social model of disability asks us to adopt a number of general positions:

- Examine cultures – such as those offered by organisations of disabled people – in terms of how they can best promote the socio-economic, organisational, cultural, relational and psychological inclusion of disabled people;
- Focus not on the individual impairment and its associated negative impacts on employability but on employment as one part of a whole host of experiences faced by disabled people;

- Consider disability not as a personal tragedy but as an unacceptable part of everyday life in which people with impairments are consistently threatened with exclusion;
- Find those factors that promote the wider independent living experiences of disabled people;
- Think creatively about the relationship between benefits, work and support in terms of how social inclusion can be enhanced.

Consequently, thinking in relation to employment and disability is of a fundamentally environmental perspective. Questions that emerge from this stance – of relevance to this research study – include:

Emerging social model perspectives

- What is the nature of employment in a disabling society?
- Do government employment schemes, policies and legislation *either* support individuals with impairments to adapt to their workplaces *or* encourage workplaces to adapt to individuals with impairments?
- How are disability and legislation understood in legislative and policy documents?
- To what extent are disabled people meaningfully including in policy-making?
- How can organisations run by disabled people promote the employment opportunities of disabled people?
- To what extent are the practices of organisations of disabled people following the principles of the social model?
- What constitutes evidence of ‘the social model in practice’?

With such perspectives in mind we now turn to addressing the first aim of our research: to examine the contemporary position of disabled people in the British labour market.

LINKS

For further details of the research team’s position in relation to the social model visit <http://www.shef.ac.uk/jobsnotcharity/resources.html>

For social model related literature visit:
<http://www.shef.ac.uk/applieddisabilitystudies/>

Chapter 2

Disabled People and Work: The Current Climate

Introduction

This chapter addresses our first research aim: to examine the contemporary position of disabled people in the labour market. Much has been written about the position of disabled people in relation to work (e.g. Barnes, 1991, 2000; Barnes *et al*, 1998; Burchardt, 2000; Branfield and Maynard Campbell, 2000; Pierni *et al*, 2001; DWP, 2001, 2003; Roulstone, 2000, 2002, 2004a, 2004b; Roulstone *et al*, 2003; Hirst *et al*, 2004; DRC, 2004; Hirst and Thornton, 2005; Thornton, 2005; Roulstone and Barnes, 2005). As BUK Ltd put it in 2001 'It is now widely recognised and accepted that disabled people get a raw deal in relation to employment' (p3).

The aim here is to provide a contemporary picture of some of the key considerations facing disabled people in relation to their citizenship and rights which will be explored further by this research. Of real interest are the questions that are raised about BUK Ltd and GMCDP, in terms of how they respond to disabled people in the contemporary policy and legislative climate. The chapter will cover the following:

- Definitions of disability/impairment and the associated problems with statistical measures;
- The socio-economic position of disabled people;
- an account of some of the key pieces of British disability legislation since 1995;
- An overview of employment provision and support for disabled people;
- The case for studying GMCDP and BUK Ltd.

In relation to the last point, this review triggers the identification of a number of **emerging issues** and **recurring challenges** – which are highlighted throughout – in order that they are addressed in analysis chapters 4 and 5.

(1) Defining and measuring disability/impairment

For disabled people the problem with most of the definitions of disability is that they were produced by non-disabled people for the purposes of producing statistics based on cost-effectiveness of service provision rather than an attempt to address the barriers to our inclusion and humanity. For many of us, fitting into a particular definition criteria determines whether we are able to demonstrate discrimination in a court of law or access educational opportunities, employment or social support (DAA, <http://www.daa.org.uk/disability%20definitions.htm>)

As early back as 1976 UPIAS highlighted the endemic problems associated with social policy measures of disability. Statistical analyses tend to be

based upon measures of the 'disabled population' categorised in terms of *specific impairments* (see Oliver's 1990 critique of the Martin *et al*, 1989, OPCS). Contemporary examples include:

- The DRC uncritically reporting the findings of the 2002 Labour Force survey and the 2001 National Census:

<http://www.drc-gb.org/publicationsandreports/campaigndetails.asp?section=oth&id=262>
<http://www.drc-gb.org/publicationsandreports/campaigndetails.asp?section=ddb&id=528>

- Key government funded voluntary agencies, that give advice to service providers and employers, do so using similar definitions and statistics

<http://www.cae.org.uk/dda.html>
<http://www.employers-forum.co.uk/quests/info/disability.htm>

The problems with such impairment-based measures are that they threaten to separate the socio-economic status measures into distinct impairment groupings. Consequently, the focus of legislation, policy and practice is on addressing exclusion as a consequence of impairment rather than as a consequence of disabling environments (see Burchardt, 2000, pp3-5). An example of this is in offered by the Universities and Colleges Admission Service application form for university/college, when they ask the applicant:

If you have a disability, special needs (including dyslexia or another specific learning difficulty) or a medical condition, you must select the appropriate code
(p13, guidance notes http://www.ucas.ac.uk/apply/applying_online.pdf)

Later on they do, to some extent, ask more environmentally focused questions:

Please say if you will need any facilities or support as a result of your disability or special needs (p13).

Here applicants are being asked about the support needs that the institution can serve though this is addressed in terms of perceived effects of their impairment. The distinction between individual and institutional responsibility in meeting support needs remains a controversial issue, as we shall see later for example in relation to the role of Access to Work. Clearly, though, how we understand and define disability and impairment will have clear implications for how legislation, policy and practice respond to the needs of disabled people. Other more critical definitions have been provided by disabled people:

The word 'retarded' [sic] is a word. What it does is put people in a class ... There's always going to be people who are going to hold it to the

ground. We're on one side of the wall and the stone throwers are on the other side (Ed Murphy cited in Bogdan and Taylor 1982, p77).

It means no one will hire me on a job unless they hear from a rehab counsellor or social worker. Get what I mean when I say it's hard for handicapped people [sic] to find a job? (Larry on what learning difficulties means in Langness and Turner 1986, p71).

If someone else whispers a lot during the play people might ignore it or get angry. If we whisper it is because we are retarded [sic]. It's like we have to be more normal than normal people (Martin Levine, self-advocate, in Freidman-Lambert 1987, p15).

As noted in the last chapter, the definitions adopted by the disabled people's movement remain those posed by UPIAS in 1976 (pp3-4). 'Disabled' people are just that - people disabled by a contemporary social, economic, cultural and political climate on the basis of their purported impairments. A key aim of this report is to consider how organisations such as GMCDP and BUK Ltd challenge this disablement.

Emerging issues

- What understandings of disability and impairment emerge in the practices of GMCDP and BUK Ltd?
- In what ways can a social model approach be used to account for impairment and disability?

(2) The socio-economic position of disabled people

In attempting to capture a snapshot of the current socio-economic position of disabled people, a number of resources were drawn upon. Throughout this chapter we make reference to some of these resources (many listed later in the reference section) and provide links wherever possible to web-based resources (though these are in no way exhaustive). We also recognise the limitations of those resources that employ an impairment-specific focus.

LINKS *These are key resources for disability and social policy data:*

Disabled People's international <http://www.dpi.org/>

Department for Education and Skills <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/>

Disability Rights Commission

<http://www.drc-gb.org/publicationsandreports/publications.asp?section=6>

Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund <http://www.dredf.org/>

Department of Work and Persons <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/>

Black information link <http://www.blink.org.uk/print.asp?key=6070>

Universities and Colleges Admission service <http://www.ucas.ac.uk/>

Jobability <http://www.jobability.com>

Higher Education Statistical Agency <http://www.hesa.ac.uk/>

Social policy research unit, University of York <http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/>

Working Abilities in Glasgow Explored <http://www.wage.eu.com/>

SKILL National Bureau for Students with disabilities
<http://www.skill.org.uk/press/archives/08042003.asp>
National Statistics Online
<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/CCI/SearchRes.asp?term=disability>
PMSU (2005) Improving the life chances of disabled people
http://www.strategy.gov.uk/downloads/work_areas/disability/disability_report/pdf/disability.pdf
For a key text about disability and work see Roulstone and Barnes (2005) *Working futures*. Policy Press.

According to world estimates from the DPI, there are 500 million disabled people; on average, 1 in 10 of a nation's population. Most people acquire impairment; as only 3% of disabled people are born with a congenital impairment. The number of people with impairments will rise substantially as a factor of old age and increased life expectancy (DPI). Only 12% of those aged 20-29 years have a current long-term disability or health problem compared with 31% of those aged 50-59 years (DfEE). There are about 10 million disabled people in Britain - more than one in seven of the population (DRC 2003/2004 Annual Report – June 2004). More than one million young people below the age of 24 have a disability under the definition of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. This represents 5.5%-6% of the 18.3 million in this age group (2001 Census OPC). About 8.5 million of disabled people are adults, which is approximately 14% of the UK population (DRC, 2003/2004 Annual Report). About 1.2 million pupils have special educational needs (14% of all pupils) of whom 250,000 have statements of special educational need (3% of all pupils). According to the DRC, across Britain, there are regional variations in the prevalence of disability. The North East of England and Wales have the highest proportions of disabled people, with one quarter of the local working age population in these regions being disabled: 25 per cent and 24 per cent respectively. London and the South East have lower than average proportions of disabled people at 16.5 per cent (DRC, 2004)

Work and benefits

- Branfield and Campbell (2000) remind us that disabled people are 6 times as likely as non-disabled people to be out of work and claiming benefits;
- Only 42% of disabled people of working age are in employment compared to 81% of non disabled people in the same age range;
- 16.1% of economically active disabled people are unemployed compared with an overall unemployment rate of 7.4%;
- Disabled people in full time employment earn approximately 20% less than non disabled people;
- There are 2.9 million disabled people out-of-work claiming benefits;
- Disabled people are more than twice as likely as non-disabled people to have no qualifications (DPI);
- Those who had worked were worse off than those who have never worked (Howard, 1999);
- 75% of disabled people rely on benefits as their only source of income almost 50% are living in poverty;

In addition, according to Working Abilities in Glasgow Explored:

- Disabled people's productivity rates are on a par with their colleagues;
- Disabled people have better than average safety records;
- Disabled employees are generally more loyal than non disabled employees ;
- The majority of people receiving long term Incapacity Benefits have made National Insurance Contributions in the past.

Any discussion of employment support schemes must be mindful of the impact of *disability benefits*.

LINK: For a comprehensive overview of disability benefits and work, see our project paper at:
http://www.shef.ac.uk/content/1/c6/02/75/50/benefits_document.doc

The PMSU (2005) has criticised the ways in which disability is assessed within the benefits system. It notes that the process is not only disjointed and extremely slow but that assessments such as the PCA (Personal Capability Assessment) focus in on an individual's capacity to work:

The PCA currently assesses abilities and disabilities of a person against an 'abstract concept of work'. The PCA assesses claimants in their ability to perform certain functions, e.g. walking, standing, seeing, hearing. The assessment is used to divide those required to search for work (on Job Seeker's Allowance (JSA)) from those with no work requirements. Once the claimant is eligible for IB, they are no longer required to search for work. The main focus therefore remains incapacity. The PCA does not provide an assessment of the residual capability, and certainly does not identify what steps would be needed

– rehabilitation, training, workplace adjustments, etc – to enable the individual to return to work (PMSU, 2005).

Emerging issue

- To what extent do these impairment-based assessments impact upon the ambitions of disabled people?

While the ‘benefits trap’ continues to exist, the DRC (2004) notes that there has been a gradual increase in the size of the working age disabled population over time, from 6.0 million in spring 1998 to 6.8 million in spring 2004: a growth of fourteen per cent over a six year period. The non disabled population increased by 0.6 per cent (172,000) over the same period. Since spring 1998, disabled people’s overall employment rates have increased steadily from 43 per cent to 50 per cent. Despite this, inequalities in the proportions of disabled and non disabled people in work persists, since only half of disabled people are in work compared with four fifths of the non disabled population. Disabled people in employment are more likely to work in manual and lower occupations, and less likely to work in managerial, professional and high-skilled occupations. Further up to date analyses were recently published by the DRC.

LINK: For 2005 data, from the DRC, on the economic status of disabled people in Britain and their employment by occupation Visit <http://www.shef.ac.uk/jobsnotcharity/>

According to the DRC, disabled people continue to experience high rates of unemployment. Estimates from the Spring 2004 Labour Force Survey (LFS) indicate that the unemployment rate for disabled people in Britain was 7 per cent, compared with 4 per cent for non disabled people. Just over half of the disabled population of working age in Britain are economically inactive. However, one third of inactive disabled people would like to work, compared with just less than one quarter (23 per cent) of non disabled people. At £9.52 per hour, the average gross hourly pay of disabled employees is about 10 per cent less than that of non disabled employees (£10.43 per hour) (DRC, 2005).

Housing and transport

Closely linked to work is the phenomenon of independent living. Howard (1999) found that 80 % of disabled people were living in inaccessible homes and this was more likely to be social housing. Of the 1 million people in Britain who have the label of learning difficulties, 60-70% of them live with their parents and / or in institutional settings (Valuing People, 2001) and those living in residential care may have a total disposable income of £14.10 a week. Howard (1999) also reports that:

- 38% of disabled people who could not get dial-a-ride or taxi card had no alternative transport;

- During the 1997 general election only 6% of polling stations were accessible with 20% having temporary ramping;
- Only 21% of disabled people had a car available to the household;
- Use of "special" services remained low - only 6% used the semi scheduled Dial-a-Bus service, and 5% the flexible Handicabs dial-a-ride service.

The main ways of getting about were by car (as a passenger, 66%), by bus (52%), taxi with Taxicard (27%) and Taxi without Taxicard (26%) (<http://www.mori.com/polls/1998/edinburg.htm>)

Variations

A number of interesting variations occur in relation to impairment labels:

- Employment rates vary greatly according to the type of impairment a person has. Disabled people with mental health problems have the lowest employment rates of all impairment categories, at only 21 per cent. For people with learning difficulties, the employment rate is 26 per cent (Beresford, 2000; LFS Spring 2004).
- According to the Equal Opportunities Review (1996), people with learning difficulties had the highest unemployment rate of all people with impairments (37 per cent);
- 7 to 23 percent of adults with mental retardation are employed full-time; 9-20% are employed part-time but most are either unemployed or not in the labour force;
- 20% women and 14% men have some form of 'mental illness', while compared with non-black people, Afro-Caribbean people are twice as likely to be diagnosed with mental illness and three times more likely to be admitted to hospital for 'schizophrenia' (Beresford, 2000). This raises huge questions about the cultural insensitivity of psychological and psychiatric assessment;
- Women with disabilities are denied equal access to education - their literacy rate as a group, worldwide, is probably fewer than 5% (DPI).

This indicates that while disabled people generally suffer the indignities of exclusion, specific impairment labels bring with them further inequities.

Emerging issues

- What are the lived realities behind these statistics?
- How do disabled people experience and challenge disabling barriers?
- In what ways do BUK Ltd and GMCDP tackle barriers associated with employability, housing, transport and independent living?
- Do these organisations engage with diversity/impairment issues?

(3) Legislation, policy and government strategy

Roulstone and Barnes (2005, p10) observe that the passing of disability legislation provides promise in terms of value in changing attitudes and reducing employment, transport and service barriers. The key legislative developments in policy and legislation since 1995 are represented below (extracted from *Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People* (Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, 2005).

- **Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and Disability Discrimination Act (Amendment) Regulations 2003** extended the DDA to firms with fewer than 15 employees and provided new protection for disabled fire-fighters, police, office holders, barristers, partners in partnerships and people seeking vocational qualifications. The provisions were brought into force on 1st October 2004.
- **The Draft Disability Discrimination Bill** will amend the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) in various ways. It introduces a wide range of measures recommended by the Disability Rights Taskforce. A particularly significant amendment is a new duty placed on the public sector 'to promote disability equality' (this parallels the Race Relations Amendment Act).
- **The Commission for Equality and Human Rights** – the Government announced in October 2003 plans to set up a new Commission for Equality and Human Rights. It is intended to bring together the work of the three existing equality commissions – the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), the Disability Rights Commission (DRC) and the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) – and take responsibility for new laws outlawing workplace discrimination on the grounds of age, religion or belief, and sexual orientation.
- The **Supporting People** programme was launched on 1 April 2003 to support vulnerable people, including disabled people, to sustain or improve their ability to live independently. The programme has for the first time allowed the provision of housing-related support services to be properly planned at the local level, allowing services to reflect local needs and priorities and to be better integrated with other local services.
- **The Government's Strategy for Special Educational Needs** – 'Removing Barriers to Achievement' was launched in February 2004. It sets out the Government's vision for enabling children with special educational needs to realise their potential. And it establishes a programme of sustained action over a number of years to support early

years settings, schools and local authorities in improving outcomes for children with SEN, within the context of the wider programme to improve outcomes for all children described in 'Every Child Matters'.

- **The Children's National Service Framework** – published jointly by the Department of Health and the Department for Education and Skills in September 2004, the NSF sets standards for services for disabled children and their families against which services will in future be inspected.
- **'Pathways to Work'** has been designed to improve work opportunities for those on Incapacity Benefit (IB). It sets out a strategy for encouraging and assisting those people moving onto Incapacity Benefit to return to work. The aim is to enable people to overcome obstacles to work, by focusing on their capabilities and thereby challenging the belief that people with health conditions are incapable of doing any work. It has been piloted in three areas since October 2003, and a further four areas since April 2004.
- **The New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP)** aims to help people on disability- and health-related benefits move into and keep paid work through a network of Job Brokers.
- **'Building on New Deal (BoND):** Local solutions meeting individual needs' is the Government's strategy for the evolution of welfare to work policies and programmes.
- DWP has developed a **'Framework for Vocational Rehabilitation'**, published in October 2004, which pulls together information about best practice, research and available capacity, and is in support of progress along the roadmap towards IB reform.
- **Vision for Adult Social Care** – the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) has been helping the Government to consult with people who work in and who use social care services on the future of adult social care. The results were published in August 2004, and are feeding into a government Green Paper due to be published later this year.
- DH has published the **White Paper 'Choosing Health'** which sets out actions to prevent injury, illness and impairment, and initiatives to assist recovery for full participation in community and working life.

While these developments have raised the profile of disability discrimination, they have also thrown up a number of challenges, which are of particular interest to this study.

Legislation: Recurring challenges

- *Impact of this legislation on the lives of disabled people* – while measures are growing of the practical translation of legislation into the labour market, this research was drawn to the more qualitative aspects of growing awareness of disability rights on the part of disabled people;
- *Reasonable adjustments* – the extent to which reasonable adjustments are understood is a product of the process of enacting legislation and the

resultant case law. Of interest to this project was the extent to which BUK Ltd and GMCDP were engaged with these processes.

- *Employers understandings of their duties* – this research took place in a climate of change with many employers uncertain about their responsibilities. We were interested in the ways in which GMCDP and BUK Ltd engaged with employers about their duties.
- *Individual or institutional support mechanisms* – the raft of legislation makes provision for employers and their institutions to support the participation of disabled people. However, the extent to which this promoted wider cultural change or specific support of disabled individuals remained key points of consideration.
- *Welfare to work philosophy* – as Roulstone and Barnes (2005) maintain the principal policy response of the New Labour government has been an increased emphasis on ‘welfare through work’ and ‘work-based welfare’ (Giddens, 1998). This raises real anxieties about the coupling of rights with responsibilities as disabled people access work and, crucially, the meanings and expectations of work that are promoted (Grover and Stewart, 2000). This study was interested in the meanings of work that were promoted and problematised by GMCDP and BUK Ltd as well as broad notions of employability (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005)
- *New social movements* – the relationship of disability politics with other social movement / equal opportunities issues is thrown into sharp relief by the creation of the Commission for Equality and Human Rights. Not only does this raise questions about the relative importance of disability in the contemporary policy climate but also about the relationships between organisations of disabled people and other political groups. Are our partner organisations able to adapt to the new ‘diversity’ agenda?
- *Impairment-specific legislation* – the 2001 White Paper, *Valuing People: A new strategy for learning disability for the 21st century*, outlines the government’s objective of ‘enabling more people with learning disabilities (sic) to participate in all forms of employment, wherever possible in paid work, and to make a valued contribution to the world of work’ (DoH, 2001, page 84). Details include changes to incapacity benefit so that individuals are not put off trying to work; changes to therapeutic earnings; Disability Living Allowance whilst working; and personal advisers and job brokers to help individuals make decisions about work. This magnifies the segregation of disabled people along impairment-specific lines. It also raises interesting questions about how our partner organisations worked in ‘non-impairment specific’ ways with their clients and members.

The release of the **Prime Minister's Strategy Unit (2005) *Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People*** report provides a timely overview of the government's aims. Throughout the report clear reference is made to the involvement of disabled people and their representative organisations in the development and implementation of policy and service delivery. In relation to direct payments, it states that:

Disabled people are best placed to take the lead in identifying their own needs and in identifying the most appropriate ways of meeting such needs.

Similarly, it regards disabled people's organisations as key agents of change in the implementation of Centres of Independent Living. The report also supports the business case for employing disabled people. It notes that advertisers and the media have a role to play in promoting positive imagery of disabled people, and that the government can take a lead in this, as a key advertiser. The report recommends that employers of disabled people should be offered more support, more incentives and better information. With such a report coming out in the midst of the empirical work for this study, the work of BUK Ltd and GMCDP were clearly of significance in such a policy landscape.

Emerging issues

- What knowledge do disabled people have of the legislation?
- How do BUK Ltd and GMCDP respond to these policy challenges?
- To what extent are the partner organisations involved in policy debate and development?
- What critical discourses emerge about policy and legislation?
- How do the organisations promote the business case for disabled people?

LINKS

Visit the Disability Rights Commission frequently asked questions section:
http://www.drc-gb.org/askdrc/category/index.asp?filter_cat=1

The full text of the DDA can be found at:

<http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1995/1995050.htm>

An accessible version of the White Paper Valuing People can found at:
<http://www.publications.doh.gov.uk/learningdisabilities/access/>

For accessible fact sheets and related information visit:

<http://www.breakthrough-uk.com/gmeap.shtml>

(4) Employment support

There are a range of different schemes instigated by the current government that aim to support disabled people into work. The type of support offered includes:

- Financial help with travel costs and specialist equipment;
- Grants for employers to pay for meeting the needs of individual employees;
- Training programmes, advice and assessment for disabled people looking for work or concerned about retaining employment;
- Support for looking for and applying for work.

Most of these schemes focus upon assessing and meeting the needs of individuals rather than functioning on a wider scale of culture change or employer training. However, to some extent, they are intended to work in parallel with the duties set out in the DDA that aim to define and enforce the responsibilities of employers to ensure that workplaces are accessible and inclusive. In general, the different schemes here are administered through local Jobcentres or Jobcentre Plus. The terminology used by the DWP when talking about these schemes does not generally follow a social model understanding of disability and impairment. It would be helpful, however, to briefly summarise some of these schemes of support.

LINKS:

DirectGov the website of the UK government, section on disabled people and employment. Accessed at www.direct.gov.uk/DisabledPeople/Employment

Employers Forum on Disability website www.employersforum.co.uk

JobCentre Plus website, section entitled "Help for Disabled People"
<http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/cms.asp?Page=/Home/Customers/HelpForDisabledPeople>

Employment for all: assisting people with health problems and disabilities into work" Memorandum submitted by the Disability Rights Commission (DRC Wales) to the Work and Pension Select Committee, Jan 2003:

www.drc-gb.org/uploaded_files/documents/10_351_WorkPenEv.rtf

JobCentre Plus and Support for Disabled People: Select Committee on Work and Pensions, Fourth Report, accessed at UK Parliament website
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200203/cmselect/cmworpen/401/3022604.htm>

(i) *Access to Work (AtW)* aims to provide advice, information and grants to meet costs associated with disabled employees. AtW advisers are put in touch with employers and employees through local Disability Employment Advisers (DEAs) at Jobcentres. The programme is only available to those who have a 'disability or health condition' that affects the type of work undertaken and must be likely to last for at least 12 months. Medicalisation dominates assessment and entitlement to this form of support. Grants given by AtW cover provisions such as communication support (e.g. interpreters) at interviews, support workers, special aids equipment, adaptation of premises or existing equipment and help with travel costs. The needs of the individual are assessed by AtW advisers and sometimes specialist/technical advisers, who will speak to employers and employees and visit the workplace. Temporary support provided whilst AtW is processing claims must be paid for by employers and then claimed back from AtW. Any support granted by AtW is for a maximum of three years, when individual circumstances must then be reviewed. The programme varies in the total percentage of costs met by AtW:

- All costs met of unemployed people starting work, people changing jobs and self employed people;
- For those employed for six weeks or longer, AtW will only contribute to costs over £300, when it will grant up to 80% of costs up to £10 000 and up to 100% of costs above this amount;
- Regardless of employment status, all costs are met of interview support, travel to work, support workers;
- AtW can draw upon the *Job Introduction Scheme* which offers a weekly grant to cover extra training costs associated with disabled employees continuing for the first few weeks of work. It is only available for jobs expected to last for at least six months.

JobCentre Plus explicitly states that solutions are *individually tailored* to meet the needs of individuals, and does not cover adjustments defined as employers' duties in the DDA. Problems noted include:

- Confusion about where the boundaries of these roles lie;
- AtW is not available to people who have made informal arrangements to stay on at a job after a placement ends;
- AtW does not facilitate career progression because of the lack of continuity of support when changing jobs;
- No independent appeals process to challenge AtW decisions;
- AtW used much more in the public sector than private and voluntary – though levels of satisfaction with AtW processes are low (Hirst et al, 2004);
- Danger of making the support of disabled people an *individual/specialist* rather than *institutional/general* issue.

(ii) *Disability Employment Advisers* – Disability Employment Advisers (DEAs) work within Jobcentres to provide support to disabled people looking for work. They aim to provide a range of support, including work searches, help for individual needs, information on job vacancies, advice on available support, specific advice on impairments, and action plans for getting or retaining work. These different support mechanisms are identified and achieved through assessments, referrals to work schemes for disabled people (such as WORKSTEP, Access to Work and the Job Introduction Scheme), referral to the Work Preparation scheme, occupational psychologist assessments, job matching and information about employers positive about disability. Difficulties include:

- High staff turnover of DEAs, which leads to inconsistency and upheaval for clients;
- According to the Select Committee on Work and Pensions, Fourth Report, many disabled people are not sufficiently aware of the presence of DEAs in Jobcentres.

(iii) *New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP)* – is a voluntarily joined scheme that aims to offer disabled people the opportunity to obtain employment. It is carried out through the involvement of Job Brokers, who offer different services related to employment, and who work with individuals to draw up potential routes into employment. Job Brokers offer support such as help with application forms, writing CVs, interview preparation, advice on training opportunities and providers and information about job vacancies. The programme also sometimes offers help with travel costs associated with looking for work, or other financial costs. Participants in the programme can go back to their previous benefits if they decide that employment is not an option they wish to choose. It is open to people on a number of different benefits, including Incapacity Benefit and Disability Living Allowance, but is not available to those on Jobseekers Allowance or those who already work more than 16 hours per week (see Stafford et al, 2004, for an in-depth overview of NDDP). A number of issues are raised:

- Threatens to throw disabled people into work, with the accompanying responsibilities, but with little focus on changing the disabling nature of work cultures (Roulstone, 2002);
- The scheme is focused on getting people out of welfare and into work: but work destinations remain neither supportive nor enabling;
- Being driven by a number of targets may lead to the ‘cherry picking’ of ‘easy to place’ clients (Watson et al, 2005)

(iv) *Supported employment programmes (SEP) and WORKSTEP* – the current governments’ SEP is operated by the Employment Service. Over 22,000 disabled people are employed at a cost of over £155 million, including, over 10,000 people employed by the organisation Remploy and over 12,000 people by the SEP run by local authorities and voluntary bodies.

40% of those people on the SEP have the label of learning disabilities (sic) (DoH, 2001, p86). In April 2001, the programme was renamed Workstep, with the explicit aim of supporting disabled people particularly those who experience barriers to finding and keeping work (see Corden et al, 2003; DWP, 2003a; DWP and DoH, 2004). Pallisera *et al* (2003) suggest that supported work programmes should provide people with the necessary support, both within the workplace and outside it, for them to be able to carry out their work in an ordinary environment of the community. O'Bryan *et al* (2000) pinpoint the following three elements to supported employment

- A person is hired and paid by a real employer;
- The job done meets the person's requirements and the employer's required standard;
- The person and the employer receive just enough help from a support organisation to ensure success.

Too often the supported work context is seen to provide the safest and most protective environment for disabled people; with the associated exclusion from more risky community-based work contexts. A study of social firms by Secker *et al* (2003) highlights further problems with supported employment. Social firms originated in psychiatric rehabilitation but now exist as potentially transformative places for the employment of people with learning difficulties: particularly in a context where local authorities are being urged to modernise day services. Secker *et al* report the views of service users who failed to complain about not receiving wages because they found the work 'easy'. It could be argued, therefore, that the blurring of service user and employee not only threatens to institutionalise but also suppress the development (and dissent) of people with the label of learning difficulties.

In a key analysis, Wilson (2003) notes how the philosophies of normalisation (and its associated framework of social role valorisation) continue to underpin the provision of supported employment. Normalisation, particularly in the USA, emphasises the involvement of disabled people in the normal activities of everyday life (including the workplace). While such ideas have helped to challenge the segregation of disabled people from mainstream work, the emphasis is on:

- Producing as 'normal' a worker as possible and reducing 'devalued behaviours' in the workplace (Wilson, 2003, p103);
- The individual to change rather than the culture of the work place, the views of employers or the expectations of supported employment services;
- The independence and individual development of the worker who, with appropriate training, should be able get on in work. Yet, the extent to which the culture changes in terms of becoming an inclusive or diverse workplace remains to be seen.

Indeed, a current concern of the Disability Rights Commission is the extent to which key agencies, including Jobcentre Plus; fail to take a proactive role in promoting awareness amongst employers of the Disability Discrimination Act and of good practice in recruiting and retaining disabled people as 'able' employees (DRC, 2004). Clearly supported employment contrasts often markedly and more positively with the traditional Day Centres accessed by disabled people. Bass and Drewett (1996) note that supported employment was found to provide engaging and rewarding activities for people of all levels of ability, with most supported employees saying they found their work activities stimulating and enjoyable. This contrasted with their day services where people said they had much less to do, were often bored and where higher levels of disengagement were measured (see also Simons, 1998; Beyer *et al*, 1999; Beyer *et al*, 2004). O'Bryan (retrieved 08/11/2004) has outlined the following guidelines for people with learning difficulties and their families, in ensuring engaged supported employment practices:

- Good information about what job and support options are currently available in their area;
- The expectation of all professionals that most people will wish to have a career and that it is possible;
- Job coaches and other champions who will find out each person's ideal job and develop job and career opportunities from which to choose;
- Job coaches and other champions who will work with Government people, such as New Deal Job Brokers and Benefit Advisors, to successfully support people into the work they want;
- Good information about White Paper developments and Partnership Board decisions which will affect people's job and career opportunities.

Significantly, in addition to the employment initiatives listed above, *Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People* (Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, 2005, p21) highlights one of our partner organisations as an area of good practice:

“Box 7.9: Good practice example of a social enterprise: BUK Ltd

BUK Ltd is a social enterprise managed and run by a majority of disabled people; their main activities centre on training and employment support for disabled people in Manchester and Liverpool. BUK Ltd supports disabled people towards independence, with a focus on working towards employment, and influencing policy and practice both locally and nationally. Their services provision and activities involve, employment support, work-related training and independent employment advocacy. BUK Ltd UK Advisers' roles are to:

- Receive referrals from Social Services, Jobcentre Plus, other agencies or self-referrals (30%);

- Conduct an initial employment interview and put together a personal profile (including skill assessment, agreeing goals and developing tailor-made training programmes);
- Develop clients' job skills (update/develop C.V., complete application forms, write covering letters, conduct mock interviews and improve personal presentation);
- Identify suitable vacancies (using existing employer contacts and current local labour market information or speculative approaches to companies);
- Market client to employers (focusing on their strengths and support then through the recruitment process);
- Provide planned follow up support to both client and employer; and 'sign off' client as appropriate, but remain available".

Moreover, as we shall see in this report, the impact of GMCDP on campaigning issues connected with direct payments, the DDA and disability politics; the employment of officers and project workers; the running of projects such as YDPF, Information and Advocacy and Refugees projects; the employment of the social model of disability, all indicate additional ways of tackling disability and work to those supported by the government.

Emerging issues


- What experiences do disabled people have of these different schemes and systems of support?
- Do partner organisations work in ways that bring together these various agencies?
- Do partner organisations provide an alternative to these schemes?
- What are the AtW experiences of the disabled informants in our study?
- What suggestions do our partner organisations have in relation to AtW practices?
- What makes for meaningful work?
- Is there a conflict of interest in the partner organisations working with segregated employers?
- How do our partner organisations support the employability of disabled people while pushing workplaces to change their cultures?

The case for studying GMCDP and BUK Ltd: A timely appraisal

In this chapter we have considered some key issues in relation to disabled people, work, policy, provision and practice. Clearly, while much is now being done to potentially support disabled people into work, questions remain about the under-riding assumptions and aims of those interventions. In particular, the input of disabled people and their representative organisations, remain conspicuous by their absence (Carson and Speirs, 2003). In a recent analysis of employment and disabled people, Watson *et al* (2005) conclude:

Employment initiatives would benefit from the further involvement of disabled people in a meaningful, local way (Watson *et al*, 2005).

In this report, we turn our attention to two organisations that hold the potential to:

- Further develop our understandings of work and disability in ways that emphasise jobs over charity (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005);
 - Provide in/formal means of supporting disabled people to thrive and survive at work (Roulstone *et al*, 2003);
 - Consider employment as one part of a more general drive to challenge the social exclusion of disabled people (Barnes and Mercer, 2003);
 - Develop a vision of enabling practice based upon the principles of the social model of disability (Gibbs, 2005);
 - Work alongside us as a research team to make this process participatory, open and transparent.
- 

Chapter 3

Methodology: Researching Work, Lives and Organisations

Introduction

The methodologies of *narrative research* and *ethnography* were adopted to address research aims 2 and 3. 'Methodology' refers to how researchers approach their study and choose their methods of inquiry. In this chapter we explain:

- The relative merits of each of these approaches or *methodologies*;
- How we used these *methods*;
- How we made sense of the material we collected (*analysis*);
- How we attempted to carry out *enabling disability research*.

(1) Narrative research

Research Aim 2

To qualitatively explore the experiences of a number of disabled people's experiences of employment and to trace the impact of policy and practice on their life stories of work.

Narrative research allowed us to:

- Explore life stories of work and the influence of BUK Ltd and GMCDP on our participants' lives;
- Critically evaluate the impact of recent policy and practice on work experiences;
- Gather insights into disability discrimination and attempts to counter such barriers;
- Collect and reflect on the expertise and experience of disabled people;
- Pitch considerations of work and policy in the life stories of a number of people.

Between May 2004 and November 2005 we interviewed 30 disabled people (15 from each partner organisation); representing equal numbers of men and women; a mix of ethnic backgrounds who were predominantly British born with some individuals from overseas (inc: refugees) with ages ranging from 19 to mid 50s. Most people were interviewed alone. One was interviewed with a parent present. Interviews were transcribed, written into stories and checked by informants. Stories were anonymised with non-corresponding initials instead of names. Informants included managers, employees and clients from the organisations. Narrative research deals with the collection, writing up and presentation of stories or accounts (Plummer 1983) which include autobiography (Hunt 1967), biography (Deacon 1974), life story

(Bogdan and Taylor 1976), oral history (Angrosino 1994) and life history (Whittemore, Langness and Koegel 1986).

LINK: For a detailed overview of *narrative research* visit <http://www.shef.ac.uk/content/1/c6/02/75/50/chataika-confpaper.doc>

LINK: For a useful introduction to Life story research by Goodley *et al* (2004) http://www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/ASIN/0415306884/qid=1123506303/sr=1-3/ref=sr_1_10_3/026-5929309-0064412

Telling stories can be cathartic and liberating but they also invite us to speculate on what might be changed and with what effect (Witherall and Noddings, 1991, p. 280). Narrative research raises a number of questions:

(i) *An adequate number of stories?* It is difficult for 30 stories to capture the range and richness of people's experiences (Bruner, 1986 p. 146) but a few stories can say much about life:

More than through any other social science approach, the life history enables us to know people intimately, to see the world through their eyes, and to enter into their experiences vicariously (cited in Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p81).

No one person's life can be wholly representative of an entire group, for each individual is unique. Yet I feel that a detailed examination of one life may provide insight into larger questions (Groce 1992, p175).

Drawing out points of convergence in a number of stories shows the relevance of a few accounts to many (Denzin 1970, 1992 cited in Hatch and Wisniewski 1995b, p126). Dorothy Smith, whom we return to later, suggests that a number of individuals' stories allow entry into a whole host of institutional practices: they are not merely about a person's story but the social world in which that story is formed.

(ii) *Research, science or telling stories?* Ferguson *et al* (1992) argue that the goals of research are perfectly compatible with the discovery of good stories. Mitroff and Kilman (1978, p38) argue that:

The best stories are those which stir people's minds, hearts, souls and by doing so gives them new insights into themselves, their problems and their human condition. The challenge is to develop a human science that more fully serves this aim. The question then is not, 'is story-telling science?' but 'can science learn to tell good stories?'

We approached our research with the conviction that stories of participants would provide deep, rich and meaningful insights into some aspects of living (and working) in a disabling world while highlighting the influences of our participants' involvement with organisations such as BUK Ltd and GMCDP.

(iii) *Ethics?* Ethical considerations inform each step of the narrative research. Participants were:

- Fully informed of why they were being interviewed (informed consent);
- Made aware that they could stop the interview or leave at any time (the right to withdrawal);
- Provided copies of their story to check and change;
- Given power of veto over the public presentation of their stories.

Ethical considerations go beyond these guidelines and raise even more important questions about enabling disability research which we consider below in section four.

(2) Ethnography

Research Aim 3

To critically account for the work of organisations of disabled people such as BUK Ltd and GMCDP, in order to investigate the ways in which such organisations promote the work opportunities of disabled people

Ethnography aims to uncover good practices as they emerge in the workings of the organisations. We investigated the ways in which BUK Ltd and GMCDP tried to counteract and challenge barriers to disabled people accessing employment. Ethnography is interested in representing/describing (graphic) these cultures/groups (ethnos). Culture is a nebulous term. Brandon (2005) describes it as involving elements connected to the atmosphere of an organisation, the ways of doing things, levels of energy, individual freedom, the kinds of personalities involved, values, norms and ideologies. Ethnographic research was carried out throughout the duration of the project from May 2004 until December 2005. This involved:

- Reviewing documentation produced by partners (documentary analysis);
- Attending staff development sessions (note taking);
- Shadowing workers and employees (non-participant observation);
- Offering help to organisations in relation to specific tasks (participant observation);
- Setting up specific information-finding and sharing sessions with partners (analysis workshops);

Researchers used various methods of data collection including: collating organisations' documents; writing qualitative field notes; interviewing key participants; email correspondence; the production of leaflets, question sheets and provisional findings to share with partners. In total, and in addition to numerous unplanned, informal days of participation, researchers were involved in 120 sessions of ethnography arranged with the partners. Examples included:

- ⇒ Shadowing the work of BUK Ltd's Independent Employment and Advocacy team with clients and employers;
- ⇒ Observing meetings between BUK Ltd's employment officers and new or existing clients.
- ⇒ Documenting the Archive project of GMCDP's Information and Advocacy Unit;
- ⇒ Attending days at BUK Ltd's training sites;
- ⇒ Participating as delegates at conferences organised by the partners;
- ⇒ Observing drama rehearsals of YDPF and meetings of GMCDP refugees project;

LINK: For a more detailed overview of ethnography visit <http://www.shef.ac.uk/jobsnotcharity/resources.html>

Our approach borrows from the thinking of the feminist Dorothy Smith (1980) who coined the phrase: 'Institutional Ethnography'. This approach has a number of aims:

- To expose wider social relations that shape people's lives and employment prospects of disabled people;
- To view members of an institution as expert knowers;
- To begin with the lived experiences of individuals in order to throw light onto the systems that impact upon, describe and inform their lives;
- To access the perspectives of those who have often been excluded from dominant discussions of policy and society;
- To unpick the philosophies that underpin an institution or organisations;
- To look at how people's activities contribute to the maintenance of that organisation;

From these we interrogated the ways in which BUK Ltd and GMCDP impact upon, describe and inform the lives of disabled people.

LINK:
For a more detailed overview of institutional ethnography, visit: <http://www.shef.ac.uk/jobsnotcharity/resources.html>

(3) Analysis of data

Narratives and ethnographic data were analysed through regular research team 'node meetings'. Nodes are points of analysis or themes that are drawn together by a research team as the data is collected. There were a number of reasons for holding these node meetings:

- Review our stories/field notes – were we asking the right questions?
- Reveal the complexity of the cultures we are investigating;
- Identify elements of a culture to (re)investigate: e.g. where to do ethnography next?
- Make data meaningful;
- Document methodological issues and dilemmas;
- Check we were answering the research questions;
- Raise further related research questions;
- Consider our data in light of the disability research and policy literature.

The findings in chapters 4 and 5 emerge from the development of these nodes alongside a number of partner participation activities described below.

(4) Towards enabling disability research

Lawthom and Goodley (2005, pp202-203) have summarised some of the key assumptions of disability research that are underpinned by a social model approach (e.g. Special issue, *Disability, Handicap and Society*, 7, (2) 1992; Zarb, 1992; Barnes, 1997; Oliver and Barnes, 1997; Clough and Barton, 1998; Stone and Priestley, 1996; Goodley and Lawthom, in press). These include:

- *Accountability* – the disabled people’s movement demands researchers and academics to be accountable to the experiences and aims of disabled people, reflected in the slogan ‘Nothing about us, without us’;
- *Praxis* – theories of disability emerge from an engagement with the changing nature of disabled people’s lives;
- *Dialectical* – research *draws* and *builds* upon the social model of disability;
- *Ontological knowledge* – disabled people’s experiences must inform understandings of the conditions of disablement and impairment;
- *Disablement rather than impairment* – disability research should engage with the material, social, cultural, relational and political conditions of disablement;
- *Partisan* – research/ers are on the side of disabled people.

Key to engaging with these aims was the need to work alongside partners in developing the research and our findings. Consequently, a number of partner participation activities were implemented, inc:

- ⇒ Analysis workshops: findings from our Interim Report were shared, discussed, changed and challenged through discussions with the partners;
- ⇒ Sharing of findings in accessible ways and formats;
- ⇒ Detailed feedback from partners through the input of critical readers;
- ⇒ Consistent feedback from members of our Steering Group and Partners’ meetings;
- ⇒ Accessible executive summary and report: available in various accessible formats including a Plain Language version produced by People First, Braille, Audioversion, large print.
- ⇒ Accessible conference: partners worked together to ensure that the conference was accessible and open

LINK: For examples of the powerpoint slides used in the analysis workshops with members of BUK Ltd and YDPF please visit:

http://www.shef.ac.uk/content/1/c6/02/75/50/BUK_staff_dev_presentation.ppt

http://www.shef.ac.uk/content/1/c6/02/75/50/YDPF_presentation_version2.ppt

LINK: For membership details of Partners meetings and Steering group visit: http://www.shef.ac.uk/content/1/c6/02/75/50/partners_and_sg_members.doc

For example of feedback from analysis workshops visit the following link which demonstrates how provisional analyses presented in chapter 4 were reviewed in light of comments from YDPF please visit:

http://www.shef.ac.uk/content/1/c6/02/75/50/YDPF_analysis_workshop_notes.doc

LINK: For a copy of the Conference programme & selected slides visit:

<http://www.shef.ac.uk/jobsnotcharity/>

The extent to which our research was enabling is open to debate: and a key point of analysis that we return to later.

LINK: For a detailed overview of emancipatory approaches to disability research visit:

[http://www.shef.ac.uk/content/1/c6/02/75/50/Conferencepaper-](http://www.shef.ac.uk/content/1/c6/02/75/50/Conferencepaper-draft%20june%202005.doc)

[draft%20june%202005.doc](http://www.shef.ac.uk/content/1/c6/02/75/50/Conferencepaper-draft%20june%202005.doc)

From methods to findings

This chapter has considered the methods adopted by the research team. An over-riding aim of the research was to connect with the stories and practices of the two organisations while foregrounding the perspectives of disabled informants. Our approach permitted us to:

- Pitch analyses of the meaning of work and disability in the accounts told to us by disabled informants;
- To uncover the underlying socio-structural relations of these accounts;
- Focus on the practices of organisations run by disabled people that are so often ignored in employment/disability research;
- Examine these practices in light of current developments in legislation, policy, practice, provision and disability politics;
- Work with partners towards a vision of enabling disability research.

Chapter 4

Life Stories of Work: Policy, Practice and Politics

Introduction

This chapter brings together some of the overlapping themes that emerged from the 30 life stories told to us by members of BUK Ltd and GMCDP. This chapter will explore the influence of policy and practice on work and other life opportunities while demonstrating:

- The importance and meaning of work;
- The continuing existence of barriers;
- How informants' knowledge of legislation and human rights impacts upon their life stories;
- How BUK Ltd and GMCDP promote the interdependence of disabled people – which in turn might support people in their relationships with work – through the values of commonality, respect, recognition, worth and professionalism;
- The significance of the social model of disability in understanding work, policy, practice and politics

(1) The importance and meaning of work

Whilst employment is key, it should not be the be all and end all. We try to provide a lot of different options. For instance, voluntary work for people who want to do that, where we can be a lot more flexible about the amount of hours they can put in. Or it may be that somebody wants to be much more home based and they actually need Direct Payments or Personal Assistant support (CB).

Olsen (2003) suggests that 'real work' is something that includes a certain amount of toil. The Danish workers she interviewed spoke of the socially competent roles and valued identities of being professional in one's job. People talk of work as a sign of nobility, self-empowerment, self-worth, enjoying pleasant work environments and being engaged in important pastimes. Work, then, is clearly more than just working. As a member of BUK Ltd asserts:

It's not about supporting people towards employment, it's about supporting people towards independence but with a focus on employment (KM).

Independence and work go hand in hand.

I got my current job through BUK. I work with the elderly now. I am an assistant care manager. I am currently doing voluntary work, but I wish it wasn't. I need the money. I am good at what I do. I am not being paid yet. But I will be (TF).

Financial incentives were not the be all and end all for the participants we spoke to. A number found a **vocation** in the strong links the organisations have with the disabled people's movement:

I have worked for GMCDP for many years. I actually enjoy my job and I think I am very committed to my organisation and its principles and what it stands for. If I had enough money to pack the job in, I would still want to be involved, maybe nominated to the Executive Board (T).

I actually enjoy my job and I think I am very committed to my organisation and its principles and what it stands for. Probably, that's why I have stayed for such a long time. If GMCDP was a stick of rock it would have my name in the middle of it (OO).

The mother of one of our participants, K, had this to say:

K goes to GMCDP for two days a week, Tuesday and Wednesday for photocopying and computers. He makes tea for them and he washes up, he doesn't wash up here though! They are very, very good with him. I don't think they have enough places for the likes of disabled people to go to. They put them in homes. They should have places for them to go during the day.

Involvement with GMCDP – in a paid, voluntary and/or activist capacity – provides belonging and opportunities to contribute to the development of a work culture and its practices. That said, the **meaning of work is complex**, particularly in the current policy context. This is borne out in the narratives we collected. As Roulstone and Barnes (2005, p9) argue:

There is ... a well-documented risk that the political dictum, 'work for those who can and welfare for those who cannot' although well intentioned, oversimplifies the relationship between impairment, disability and employment, the benefits system and disabled peoples diverse constructions of the value and accessibility of paid work (Roulstone, 2000).

Complexity is highlighted by this account:

I don't really want to get a job. It'd be too much now, because I need a lot of support, I can't go to the toilet on my own without support. I've done work experience before. But the woman who was working with me was taking the piss. So I thought, "I've had enough of this, I don't need this, I'm not even getting paid and I'm getting treated like shit". They didn't understand me. I don't think

there'd be much point. How I see it is, if I'm doing a job, I expect to do more to help other people. But what I'm saying is, I'd be getting more help for myself, so basically not learning nowt (RP).

During analysis workshops with members of BUK Ltd, a number of participants cited the above example as one of demotivation brought on by a lack of support (Barnes *et al*, 1998; Corbett, 1999). Other stories cited differing expectations:

I know one deaf man from Taiwan. He's a refugee, and he was saying that when he was in Taiwan he found it difficult to find a job. He would have accepted any job; he just wanted to work for money. He had four years pretending to be a Buddhist monk because he couldn't find another job. And then, when he came to Britain, he saw deaf people on benefits and he thought they were lazy, wasting their time and drinking. And he said it would be better for the British government to get rid of the benefit system and support people to get into work (ML).

These extracts raise a number of difficult issues. While much of *Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People* (PMSU, 2005) focuses on addressing disabled people's low expectations and concerns about the risky nature of being employed, we are reminded that employment in a disabling society is shot through with contradictions and dilemmas (Jolly, 2000; Roulstone and Barnes, 2005). Indeed, a number of the accounts demonstrate ***the need for work to be put into its institutional place***. Reflecting on a previous job, JJ recalls:

When it comes down to the real fibres of the organisational basics – actually supporting people within their jobs – from a social model point of view or in an empowering way, I don't think they [most employers] know how to do it. In fact they're so institutionalised in the way that they do things that I don't think they're capable of supporting you in the way that you need them to.

Reflecting on experiences of work, our participants illuminated the need for the ***careful management of acquiring skills***:

I feel pressured. I say, "Well you don't understand, I've been treated like a child, I've never done these things" (RP).

I'd been home since 2001. Not working. I realised I needed training. So I go Mondays to Wednesdays to the Breakthrough IT training site. I study computers, bringing my computer literacy up and office practices. I am going to continue going there until I am

confident enough. When I've covered enough ground, maybe after Christmas, then I will start applying for jobs again (QC).

There are disabled people who cannot work for the whole week but they can work two hours a day. So they need a little bit of a break, maybe three breaks as compared to other people having one break or something like that and also access to support in equipment (BM)

From researcher fieldnotes: Some members of BUK Ltd have reminded us of the need for people to find their level at work. As one person put it, "don't make yourself ill"

None have them have got jobs. I think most of them haven't got any qualifications. I know one asylum seeker who's got a PhD and then he became blind after that – that's just one. I think the others, I don't think they've got qualifications because of the war. For many people, education was stopped because of conflicts. Or sometimes, this might be due to cultural issues, for example, Somali/Muslim women generally are not expected to get education, and so they haven't got qualifications. I think that is similar to British disabled people, as a lot of them don't have qualifications either (ML).

Contrary to employment schemes fitted to impairment groupings – for example supported employment and people with learning difficulties (Beyer *et al*, 1999; 2004) – these accounts portray the developmental nature of work; culturally specific issues that give work different meanings and the need for sensitivity when working with individuals' own conceptions of work. As we shall see in the next chapter, there is evidence to suggest that BUK Ltd and GMCDP are aware of these complex issues that impact upon the attainment and achievement of disabled people: As a critical reader of our interim report put it, 'good practice is working with people close, but not too close to their comfort zones'. We were also alerted to the importance of **values** that underpin work contexts:

From researcher fieldnotes: During a chat over coffee, one member of BUK Ltd told me something very potent: that BUK Ltd "treats people with honour – regardless of colour, age, sex or whatever".

These understandings of work are testimony to the strong politics of disability and diversity that underpin the work of the organisations:

BUK Ltd would never have happened if the coalition hadn't happened, it certainly wouldn't have happened in the way that it did (KM).

We will return to these values in section four of this chapter and in the next chapter.

(2) Barriers

They used to lock the gates in school like we were in prison (comment about special schools from Young Disabled People's Forum – YDPF – analysis workshop).

This report simultaneously celebrates the possibilities for good practice while identifying disabling barriers.

LINK: For a detailed overview of the barriers faced by disabled people in relation to work see Branfield, F., and Maynard Campbell, S. (2000). (<http://www.BUK Ltd-uk.com/contact.shtml>)

LINK: For an introduction and overview of the barriers faced by disabled people and the aims of BUK organisations to tackle these difficulties visit http://www.shef.ac.uk/content/1/c6/02/75/50/IEAP-good_news_stories.doc

I just feel the law and the government needs to change, because of the way they treat us lot. Because we're not daft, we've got minds still, even though we're in a chair, or we've got learning disabilities. Society's stressing me out. The way I'm being treated with my housing and everything else (RP).

You are not going to negate and turn around years of institutionalisation in six months. We've still got people on the books that we inherited and they've moved on considerably, but they are not necessarily in paid work yet (KM).

Hirst *et al* (2004) summarise key findings from studies involving disabled people working in health and social care:

- Strikingly lower levels of job satisfaction among disabled rather than among non-disabled social services staff;
- Views among health and social care workers that colleagues had limited awareness of disability and of how it affected them at work;
- Perceptions that disclosure has negative effects on colleagues' attitudes to staff with a hidden disability or a mental health condition.

The narratives we collected similarly detail the barriers faced by disabled people. First, unsurprisingly, were **disabling attitudes** (Barnes, 1993; Hevey, 1993) ranging from rejection to inappropriate fascination:

You wouldn't believe the number of times I've been stopped by strangers who say "What's wrong with you?" My stock answer is: "It's that shop over there, it's got steps I can't get in". When they look quizzical I say "Well, disability's a social thing, I've got an impairment but I don't think I'll bother telling you what that is" (AM)

The second barrier appeared to relate to **impairment based assessments**. *Improving the Life Chances of Disabled people* (PMSU, 2005) outlines five main ways of assessing disability within the current benefits and tax credits system.

- *Incapacity for work* consists of two main tests of incapacity used for SSP, IB and IS: Own Occupation Test assesses an individual's ability to do his or her usual job; and Personal Capability Assessment (PCA) assesses an individual's ability to carry out a range of activities.
- *Needing care, supervision or watching over by another person* is used for the DLA care component and Attendance Allowance (AA).
- *Unable or virtually unable to walk* is used for Disability Living Allowance's mobility component and for war pensioner's mobility supplement.
- *Degree of disablement* is used for Industrial Disablement Benefit, War Disablement Pension and Vaccine Damage Payments.
- *At a disadvantage of getting a job* is used for Working Tax Credit (WTC); to qualify for the disability element of the WTC one must pass a separate 'disability test'

Clearly, assessment and the diagnostic processes such as these overemphasise the relationship between work and impairment:

You might have to go and prove for one benefit that you're 'this way' or prove you're 'another way' for something else. At the end of the day you're just a person who wants to work, who wants support putting in place for the things that you need (Br)

I went to a mainstream school and one of my earliest memories in school is of having an assessment to check if I could still stay in school. Someone came to watch how I interacted in class, so we were all told to act natural, and she stood around. The bit that I really remember was them showing the film to the whole class afterwards, and discussing bits of it with us. I thought, "Have I done something wrong? (JL)

Yet, even when disabled people accessed individualised support, they described practical difficulties. People described practical difficulties when trying to access individualised support For example, a recurring

complaint related to **problems with Access to Work (AtW)**, which was described as impersonal, slow and lacking cross-service communication. This led to delays, with massive impacts, particularly when an individual was not adequately equipped during the crucial three months probationary period of work. A member of the research team interviewed a number of AtW advisors who expressed their frustration at time-lags created by the lack of joined-up working of agencies. Even when employers and AtW worked together interventions were often aimed at addressing disabled individuals' particular impairment-based needs (if and when they arose) rather than addressing basic conditions of institutional disablement (anticipatory duties of employers). Wider issues of **institutional exclusion** were often ignored (particularly when the slippery notion of 'reasonable adjustments' entered the fray). Some anecdotes from education demonstrate the lack of widespread institutional support:

I also had a lot of arguments with my tutors. I had to argue with them to get them to photocopy student notes for me. They said it wasn't their job, but I said, "If I do it myself it will cost me money and more to the point it will be physically demanding photocopying a whole file,". And they're like, "Well, you know, that's what the disabled support service is all about" So I went to them, but they said they didn't do that (MO).

Sometimes the teachers would forget to bring things in the format that I needed – because I needed to have stuff in large print. Often I'd turn up to a lesson and the teacher would see me and go, 'Oh, I forgot to do it, I'll get it to you next time' (JL)

Although my supervisor was aware of my problems, she did not explain things to me clearly, and seemed annoyed when I asked her to explain things again. As a result I became reluctant to ask her again and got more mistakes (PB).

There was one occasion when I applied for a job. I was the best candidate according to the interviewers. But they wrote a letter to me saying; 'Sorry' they could not employ me because 'the job does require that you use a telephone to contact members of the public'. I did not have anybody to assist me (Ko).

Third, closely linked to these experiences was the **benefits trap**.

If he gets a job I think his benefits will be affected. If he can work again, we would have to start fighting again to get his benefits back. It wouldn't be worth it. I would rather let him go voluntary (K's mother).

You're sort of static in terms of progressing. I mean it's the uncertainty as well for a lot of people. But it's uncertain for non-disabled people as well: when you're in the comfort zone where you get a regular income, you get cheap food, you get cheap this and you might get picked up from home to the door. When you come into the normal job market, as such, you've got to find your way to work. You've got your own lunches to buy. So it's kind of limiting people's independence (TH)

The ubiquitous nature of how benefits are administered plagues the lives of disabled people. For example, the PMSU (2005) identify five main reasons – in relation to Incapacity Benefit - why Incapacity Benefit claimants (IBCs) perceive the transition into employment being a risky and/or complicated process:

- IBCs are afraid of benefit reviews;
- IBCs are wary of the financial implications of leaving benefits;
- Limited awareness of the existing return to work 'linking rules'; apply again
- Limited awareness of the financial incentives to return to work provided by tax credits;
- Permitted work rules for incapacity benefit claimants are restrictive

LINK: For more details about IBCs

http://www.shef.ac.uk/content/1/c6/02/75/50/The_benefits_trap.doc

LINK: For a comprehensive overview of disability benefits visit

http://www.shef.ac.uk/content/1/c6/02/75/50/benefits_document.doc

Furthermore, the benefits system takes an inflexible vision of impairment. When capacity to work is reduced to perceptions of impairment effects then this ignores a number of day to day realities such as:

- Individuals' impairments may fluctuate, thus impacting on energy levels (PMSU, 2005);
- Having an impairment or impairment-related illness might lead to a period of 'sick leave' in which people may or may not continue to work;
- Working while 'not healthy' might be a normal experience (PMSU, 2005);
- Skill levels fluctuate: all of us require support at some point, time and place of work.

Fourth, **poor housing, buildings and transport** were widely experienced by our informants.

I'd like to go out to the pub, concerts and things like that, when I move on my own, but the problem is I won't be getting the care that I get when I'm in here (RP).

GMPT buses are offering free bus passes to disabled people but the drivers don't know how to use the ramps. (NV).

Housing remains a huge issue for disabled people (Imrie and Hall, 2001; Imrie and Raco, 2001; Imrie, 2003; Thomas, 2004). The research team heard numerous stories of inaccessible housing and, when adaptations were made, about how long this work took before people could access their homes. Indeed, GMCDP explained the difficulties they had had in recruiting somebody to fill the vacant Director post in terms of the perceived problems of relocation (GMCDP, AGM, 2004). The YDPF members did not see any commitment from the private, public and voluntary sectors to make their premises 'accessible by tomorrow' (1st October 2004 deadline of the DDA – day prior to the rolling out of DDA). And when one finds a home, particularly one with the right support, it is difficult to leave. As JJ put it "I've got a really good PA package here, and I'm almost scared to move on". A 2002 opinion poll undertaken by the National Opinion Poll (NOP) Research Team in 2002 for the Disability Rights Commission (DRC), accessing the experiences of young disabled people found:

- Almost half (47%) of those questioned said that problems with public transport made it difficult for them to participate in activities that other people their age took part in;
- By the time they reached the age of 30, more than a quarter (28%) of young disabled people expected to be earning less than most other people of their age.
- One in six (15%) respondents said they had been turned down for paid jobs, and were told it was for a reason relating to their 'disability or health problem'.

In identifying these barriers this led us to question how BUK Ltd and GMCDP had helped the informants to start tackling exclusion.

(3) Knowing the legislation and your rights

GMCDP is strongly committed to the empowerment of disabled people and believes that the only way in which individuals can be enabled to make meaningful choices about how they live their lives, is for people themselves to have control over the shape, character and culture of the services they use (GMCDP, 2003, p3)

I haven't always been aware of what my rights are. I think that means it's very difficult to get the support you need (MO).

Participants highlighted the importance of knowing disability and employment policy and legislation. This is unsurprising in view of knowledge & information being one of the principles of independent living.

LINK: See the account by Kurt Matthews of GMCDP which explores the impact of a growing knowledge of policy and legislation on his life as a young disabled activist and campaigner
http://www.shef.ac.uk/content/1/c6/02/75/50/Mathews_knowing_rights.doc

Knowledge is crucial to the development of new social movements (Boggs, 1993; Shakespeare, 1993; Campbell and Oliver, 1996):

For us, the key consensus was that the oppressed have to organise themselves, in their own interest, for the transformation of society. Of course, to transform society you've got to work with others, form alliances (Finkelstein, 2001)

Broadly speaking rights can be civil (full participation), which are often pursued through political activity (as with the seven needs of independent living – see figure 1, introduction), and human (which tend to be legislative in nature). Reflecting on the relationship between work and disability, many participants located it in a wider framework of **equality and social justice**:

I became involved with organisations of disabled people through trade unions. I've always been – I *am* – a political animal. I consider myself a socialist. My socialist principles and political ideals were around and part of me long before I identified as a disabled person (JF).

I went to mainstream school: I'd inherited most of my impairments off my dad, and because he'd been to a special unit, he was dead against any of us going into the same situation (JL).

As well as being predisposed towards politics, many informants across the organisations had a strong history of activism within the Disabled People's Movement:

I went on a lot of demonstrations, and became involved with DAN. I went to some very early demonstrations with that so and then got involved with organisations such as GMCDP. I was also involved with trade unions at local, regional and national level...That was very useful for meeting a lot of other activists (CB)

I met some people who really opened up the movement to me. I remember them telling me about campaigns, inviting me to stuff. I was going to these really big AGMs with them and other things like the Independent Living Seminars (JJ)

BUK Ltd and GMCDP differ in terms of their political status. Nevertheless, informants from both organizations recounted political histories. Some spoke about being denied equality of education in special schools, others about inadequate education due to long-term hospital stays. Exclusion provided a steep learning curve; sophisticated understandings of citizenship and rights and knowledge brought **critical awareness**:

The DDA is subject to manipulation really. People take advantage of the 'get out clauses'. If it's gonna cost you a lot of money, an unreasonable amount of money, you don't have to do it (T)

You know it makes me laugh because everything should be accessible now; it's not something they have just suddenly dropped on the whole of the country. It's been coming for, I think, six years, so they have had six years to get prepared. It is making a difference because people are thinking that if they don't make something accessible to people they can be sued for it now. They are certainly getting frightened. (Nirv)

Such knowledge has informed the practices of the organisations, for example, supporting the development of BUK Ltd Independent Employment Advocacy Project:

[This project] arose out of something that keeps hitting us in the face really: that the agencies and the organisations that are there to help people into work and off benefits and into independent

living, are very uncoordinated, often are the barriers themselves. Independent employment advocates try to be the ones that help disabled people make sense of all that (KM).

Meanwhile, there may be a need for improving the transfer of knowledge:

I have heard about the Disability Discrimination Act, but I do not know much about it, not much really. No one has told me about it; even BUK Ltd has not told me about it. I want to know something about it. I think I need to ask BUK Ltd about it. [F]

There is always work to be done. The production of the provocative *Coalition* magazine by GMCDP and the many factsheets by BUK Ltd (see chapter five for more details) have been an essential part of ***creating a critical discourse:***

I think there are two strands of thinking on the social model. There's one that is called the radical social model, that's what the social model came from. I don't think anybody is trying to claim that it's a theory. It's not a theory of disability that encompasses everything, it's just a way of interpreting disabled people's experiences in society and it's a way of challenging the medical model. It's not a social model of impairment, it's a social model of disability and disability is defined as the social attitude and organisational barriers in society. I think it depends whether you are a post modernist or a structuralist. I am not a post modernist (RL).

Coming into the movement can be very daunting, because people are very radical, and you are suddenly being barraged with the rights and wrongs of terminology, the difference between the social and medical models of disability, which I found difficult to grasp at first. People need to learn about the issues in an accessible way and to develop their own opinions (JH).

LINKS: For details of partners' factsheets and publications visit:

<http://www.gmcdp.com/accessible/publications.htm>

<http://www.breakthrough-uk.com/publications.shtml>

The development of a critical disability discourse by our partners influenced how participants understood themselves as disabled people:

GMCDP does not aim to punish people. What GMCDP aims is to do is to inform people about issues and then try to educate them and support them, until they actually realise that this is a genuine

issue, this is not just a hoo-hah kind of thing where some disabled people have got together and they are just making noise to keep themselves busy, like in a day centre or something. This is not that. This is a seriously genuine issue as members of the society need these things to be done. So that's how we try to do it. And obviously whenever needed, we do sort of tell people off as well, where we can, in a reasonable way obviously. That's how GMCDP works (BM)

And the development of criticality generates new perspectives on phenomena such as independence, as we shall see in the next section.

(4) Interdependence

My Employment Adviser at BUK Ltd just helped me to find a job. We'd meet up to talk about jobs. Then this new DIY store opened and I got a job there. I do a lot of heavy lifting, you know the sandbags and cement and stones and stuff like that, and I help clean up. I work 20 hours a week on the night shift. I have a laugh; we have a good mix with each other. It's good because it's close by, and I don't have to travel, I walk to work. (LA).

I've been assessed through Access to Work and I work 25 hours a week and Access to Work have only agreed to fund the support for 16 hours. Because it's a new post and I need someone, you know for probably more than 16 hours a week, GMCDP have offered to pay for the difference and I can get it sorted out with Access to Work later on. So they're very supportive in that if there's a problem then they will support you, even if it means making a financial contribution (RL)

A key element of being supported back into work is the concept of **interdependence** (Reindall, 1999; Shakespeare, 2000). Roulstone and Barnes (2005) commend *Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People* (PMSU, 2005) for clarifying that disability is the result of:

disadvantage experienced by the individual... resulting from barriers to independent living, education, employment or other opportunities (Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, 2005: 8)

However, more negatively, the employment chapter of this important document devotes 26 pages to individual activation policies based largely on the perception of disabled people having '...pervasive and negative cultural expectations towards working' (2005: 158). The chapter only devotes five pages to employers, much of which looks at their fears or misapprehensions of disability rather than appraise

workplace barriers per se (2005: 185-191). The problems reside in individuals rather than work cultures. Moreover, the drive of many employment initiatives is the attack on dependency; a promotion of independence. Reindall (1999) considers this concept to be a myth, a false ambition, a peculiarly Western invention that ignores the ways in which all human beings are complexly inter-connected with one another and their social worlds. Hence, employment initiatives that entertain such visions are in danger of individualising achievements and targets: working with disabled clients towards some (unattainable) goal of independence. An alternative is offered by the concept of interdependence, which has its roots in feminisms and has become increasingly more popular in disability studies (see Goodley, 2001). Both Campling (1981) and Morris (1996) have persuasively argued that interdependence is an ordinary way of life: we all need support and help in order to survive in our day to day lives. Our options are increased when they we are able to access appropriate support.

I think there are ways to get round whatever impairment you've got so that you have got control to do things yourself. For me, I just want to pay people to do what I want them to do. I get funded by two different organisations, Direct Payments and the Independent Living Fund. They pay me money and I pay it out and then every so often, three months or twelve months, I'm audited to see that I've spent it all, and if I haven't I give some back. It's getting very hard for me now to do the audits because of my memory and I'm going to let an accountant do it who's employed by Direct Payments (AM).

Informants shared with us the ways in which BUK Ltd and GMCDP elevated interdependence through the values of commonality, respect, recognition, a sense of worth and professionalism and understanding the social model.

Commonality

You do tend to be able to share experiences, discuss barriers at school, in your childhood [with other disabled people]. It's camaraderie (Br).

I have been with BUK Ltd for eight years. I have learnt a lot from it. The employment officer I work with does stuff for her clients as well. She is partially sighted, so anywhere she goes she always has a personal assistant. I have decided that I am getting my own personal assistant, where I am, because I will need one in case I need help (TF).

My involvement with GMCDP made me aware of my rights as a disabled person, something I wasn't aware of before. It made me feel that although I was a disabled person, I was an equal, I am a person, and I am just the same as anybody else. When you are outside of that loop, you always feel as if you are alienated, as if you are different to everybody else, as if you should be seen and not heard. This was completely different, and this really appealed to me. I learnt so much in such a short space of time about my rights, about myself as a person, my confidence grew immensely (JH).

In both BUK Ltd and GMCDP, people *self-identify* as disabled. Lawson (1991) observes that people with impairments share many experiences of oppression and these shared experiences give meaning to the term 'disabled people'. This idea corresponds with the work of the political feminist Iris Young (2002) who argues that groups should be understood in a relational, rather than substantialist sense: groups do not exist on the basis of shared essential attributes, but are created through the actions and interactions of people 'inside' and 'outside' the group. A key aspect of this commonality is the premise that disabled people should be in control of their own organisations, and are better placed to support other disabled people than organisations run and staffed by non disabled people.

I do think we're the best people to do the training, do the educating, have the knowledge, the peer support, the role model stuff (JJ)

Coming here...it's the first time anyone has really believed in and supported me. I feel better about myself and more confident. Meeting other young disabled people who are living on their own and are happy, cheers me up and makes me think that I could do it as well (Over to Us, YDPF, p12)

Fieldnotes: One of the participants from the Refugee project said he had been 'shocked' to be taught by other disabled people. He felt inspired.

Commonality seemed to generate a perception that disabled peers were capable of addressing concerns:

It is about working with people who are on a similar wavelength as me; not having to assert that and then fight for that. It's about changing the structure of society, of breaking down barriers, and even though we might have allies, those allies might themselves be part of the disabling structures, and people are threatened by the changes we want to make (JJ).

There are not a lot of places like GMCDP. I've been to places where it's not for disabled people and they took the 'Mick out of me. I felt shut away, really different, strange. They don't understand us, it's not adapted. If there were more places like GMCDP then people would get out more. People who are not disabled, they don't understand us, I just think it should just be disabled. What do you think? (RP)

I like working there because I am treated as equal and not many people would do that with you being disabled and partly learning disabled, you always get the stigma (TF)

Organisations could be seen as encouraging the development of what Vincent (1999) terms 'alternative frameworks of sense': of commonality among disabled people, beyond impairment labels. Each takes very broad definitions of 'disabled', with people being involved not solely on the basis of sensory or physical impairments or learning difficulties. In BUK Ltd, for example, people had self-referred because of recent experiences of alcoholism and bereavement. During our analysis workshops, partners reminded us that commonality does not necessarily equal segregation from the wider community: 'to form some sort of 'crip camp' (sic, from BUK Ltd 11th November analysis workshop).

Respect and recognition

People out there have no respect for people like us like ourselves. People in BUK Ltd just respect each other. It just feels like a second home to me. Respect is everything isn't it? (LA)

By employing only disabled people and managing projects of hundreds of thousands of pounds, or even millions of pounds, GMCDP has proved that disabled people can do whatever is required of them. In the last 20 years there has never, ever been a non-disabled person employed in GMCDP, the organisation is still here, running successfully, making contributions to society and has - again I will say it – a lot of respect (BM)

Several people spoke of their dislike for the imagery of pity and tragedy used by charities *for* disabled people. They expressed a fundamental distaste for charity; as an affront to the dignity of the disabled recipients and as an inadequate response to social inequities:

Big organizations, like RNIB, RNID, Scope and so on. I'm aware of their approach to the issues of disability. I find it offensive the way that they portray disabled people in their advertisements, for

example, and the classic non-disabled response to that is, “Aaah, poor suffering disabled person”. (JF)

There are charities, the big charities, like Scope, RNIB and Leonard Cheshire. The ones that are just basically about providing services for disabled people rather than consulting with disabled people ...Whereas organisations of, places like GMCDP, the members are disabled people and promote the interests of disabled people (RL).

I believe, to be frank society's view of disabled people is that we are a pile of nuisances who basically are here and we sponge off the state and we don't give anything back. My viewpoint is that isn't true. There are very hard working, very respectable disabled people, myself being one of them” (I)

What have charities ever achieved? To me charities were the establishment...the benevolent do-gooders. Charity is a signal of failure within society (FE)

Organisations of disabled people appear to be related to the promotion of (self) respect and the concept of recognition.

The main strength of GMCDP is their politics, really. Things like the Young Disabled People's Forum are known throughout the country and in some other countries as well. The *Coalition Magazine* is read all over the country. They're about pushing the politics and raising awareness (AM).

As the narratives suggest, the presence of formal and informal social and political networks are often key to spreading knowledge and awareness of rights and in publicising important events. In a sense, this is part of the work that organisations such as GMCDP and BUK Ltd are trying to do, i.e. they represent a formalised attempt to press for rights both on a grassroots level (by arming people with knowledge, information and confidence) and on a state level (by promoting awareness and creating pressure on state level institutions to reform their policies and practices).

Such recognition is crucial in the face of so many negative stereotypes about disabled people:

A person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Non-recognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form

of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being.” (Taylor, 1994, p76)

Part of the function of the two organisations is related to the promotion of positive images of disabled people, to challenge negative perceptions of and assumptions about disabled people. The organisations do this in several ways, through:

- practically demonstrating the ability of disabled people to run successful organisations;
- training/campaigning;
- promoting and demonstrating social model ways of working;
- Developing and promoting high profile disabled role models.

Meanwhile, the very existence of the two organisations allows the potential for different forms of recognition:

It is about not overcoming my impairment but *recognising* my impairment: it's a part of me. More importantly it's about recognising that I have a right to be equal in society (FE)

Strangely enough, I've actually had the biggest impact on my mum. When I first got my white cane she wouldn't let me use it when I was with her, she was too embarrassed. But I've managed to totally switch that around now, and she actually understands the social model and everything like that – I think I've worn her down over the years! (JL)

Worth and professionalism

Finally, a key aspect of interdependence is the evidence that it actually works, and further, that it is desirable because it contributes to being a professionally respected organisation.

Organisations of disabled people are run by disabled people, they support the notion of the social model of disability and they show disabled people to be independent. They show disabled people to be competent and able to hold jobs (I)

It was only coming together with other disabled people that gave a sense that we could be in control because there is more than one of us (Mn)

Whilst BUK Ltd is not 100% an organization of disabled people, either in its management committee and board of trustees or in its staffing, it actually sets out to achieve, and does achieve, much more than many 100% organizations. I've not been involved with any other organization which has so effectively negotiated a path between running an organization which is economically,

financially, personnel wise executive, whilst retaining the values around disability that form the basis of my political view (JF).

And part and parcel of being professional is demonstrating these qualities in an outside of the organisation. As a member of GMCDP mentioned to us:

It is essential that GMCDP does not rest on its past achievements. It is important to remain cutting edge: for example, analysing the impact of the DDA and our response

Understanding the social model

What the social model says is that it is the responsibility of a wider society to cater for individual needs of members of that society. I am a member of the wider society, that's why it is a responsibility of the wider society to take up my individual needs as well. I'm not saying that GMCDP is the perfect organisation but what I'm saying is that GMCDP is an organisation that focuses on achieving social model of disability to the maximum (BM).

All narratives were more than simply accounts of work and the barriers faced. Throughout our interviews, participants from both organisations spoke about the significance of the social model of disability to their practice and / or activism; self-perception and understandings of themselves and other people from marginalised groups.

LINK:

For an overview and awareness of current debates relating to the social model and the disabled people's movement, subscribe to *Coalition* magazine, details available at:

<http://www.gmcdp.com/accessible/publications.htm>

The narratives alert us to the differing usages and interpretations of the model:

The social model, independent living, the acceptance of the right of disabled people to have reasonable adjustments, these are all cultured into the organization, our policies and our practice (JF).

Non disabled people have been duped by these ideas of what's normal. They have been disempowered by this concept of normality as much as I have (I)

Self-identification as a disabled person is a key part of challenging impairment-specific barriers and forming alliances around disability politics:

I had somebody that came and said "Well, I haven't got a card, but I used to have one years ago!", and I said well, don't worry, you don't have to register disabled any more, because there was a time when everybody used to be registered disabled and have a card (br).

Society's bad out there, it needs changing. Society makes us disabled. Sometimes it's your learning disability, or the disability you've got, it can put you off things, or you can't go out on your own 'cause you need support. But also out there it's difficult because things are not adapted for people, or it's not right for your impairments, or your needs (RP).

I had no idea that arthritis was classed as a disability until they actually said. Before then I always knew the arthritis itself would stop me from doing particular job. We had a talk in Breakthrough about the social model, where it was explained to us. And it makes a lot of sense, the way society is (GK).

Many of the participants contrast the clarity of perspective offered by the social model with the understandings held during earlier life experiences:

The whole school had been rallying round to raise the money for my computer. I guess that was a bit of a beginning of political awakening because I really felt evil about it. I hated every minute of it and I didn't know why. The fact that they had to do it, and also the way that I felt.... it was very hard. There was no one I could actually talk to about it because I sounded ungrateful. When I encountered the social mode for the first time and it was "Oh my God, this is what I've been waiting for all my life", (JJ)


I often think when my husband first had an accident, if there were awareness issues of disabled people and their rights, when he was still alive, he would have been able to get out of it more and be involved in it, but as it was, he used to get turned out of pubs (OO).

We are reminded of the potency of the social model as an organising philosophy, political stance and shared vision. Crucially, it also emerges as a key underlying principle of good practice.

Conclusion

Within the present context, policy developments in the employment field can have only a limited impact on the employment problems of disabled people... meaningful change is only likely through a radical reformulation of the meaning and organisation of work (Barnes and Roulstone, 2005, p319).

This chapter has illuminated the complex nature of employment in the life stories of disabled people. When we talk about work then we are thrown into broader questions about policy and legislation; interdependence and dependence; belonging and commonality; civil and human rights; ambitions and desires; support and services; the personal and political. Stories alert us to the socio-historical horizons that inform experiences of employment and disability. In the next chapter, our ethnography engages with practice.



Chapter 5

Inside Organisations of Disabled People: Identifying Enabling Practices

Introduction

When we started our fieldwork, the primary aim of the ethnography was to critically account for the work of our partners in order to investigate the ways in which they promoted the work opportunities of disabled people. Yet, BUK Ltd and GMCDP are involved in far more than in/directly supporting disabled people into the labour market. This chapter will demonstrate some of the ways in which these two organisations:

- Support the self-empowerment alongside the employability of disabled people;
- Promote the valuing of diversity;
- Enhance the political awareness of its members, staff and clients;
- Exhibit good practice by applying the social model of disability;

We turn our attention to the culture and practices of the two organisations; to focus in on incidents of good practice that can be developed for the benefit of disabled people.

(1) Supporting the self-empowerment of disabled people

It is vital that all disabled people join together in their own organisation so that there is a creative interaction between disabled people who are involved with the politics of disability and disabled people involved in the arts. It is this interaction which can be particularly fruitful in helping us to take the initiative in developing a new disability culture (Finkelstein quoted in Campbell and Oliver, 1996, pp111-112).

Both organisations are run by disabled people, have a long history of employing disabled people and purport to support disabled people towards their independence. While government employment schemes might also share the latter two aims, BUK Ltd and GMCDP differ in their wider focus on the self-empowerment of disabled people. Our first finding relates to an agenda, shared by both organisations, transcending 'welfare to work', and comprised of three elements. First, **holistic support**. In terms of hard figures, BUK Ltd can cite clear evidence of their success:

- The Manchester Employment Team gave ongoing support to:
- 13 people into paid work

- 3 people into “permitted earnings” work
- 25 people into voluntary work
- 13 people into education or training.

And our Liverpool Employment Team:

- 24 people into paid work
- 9 people to retain their jobs
- 9 people into voluntary work
- 12 people into education or training

(BUK Ltd, 2003a, page3)

LINK For other figures see <http://www.breakthrough-uk.com/mest.shtml> And <http://www.breakthrough-uk.com/lest.shtml>

At the time of writing, Sir John Bourn, Head of the National Audit Office, stated that interventions by the DWP – such as Workstep – had clearly impacted upon the employment experiences of disabled people (NAO, 2005). There was, however, no mention of social enterprises like BUK Ltd nor recognition of organisations of disabled people such as GMCDP. Behind many of the interventions of our partner organisations was a belief in what might be termed holistic support where disabled people – whether disabled clients of BUK Ltd or employees of either organisation – are supported towards employment or employability in ways that are committed to their self-empowerment rather than the attainment of discrete skills/aims (so often the focus of different groups of professionals such as OTS, psychologists, careers advisors, etc) or the meeting of arbitrary targets (so often the case of the NDDP). The following case study captures this approach in action:

BUK Ltd Independent Employment Advocacy Project (IEAP)

Case study

With Community Fund support starting in November 2003 BUK Ltd IEAP:

- Has got a compliment of five employees comprised of disabled and non-disabled people;
- Work with disabled people (currently around 30) living in Salford, Trafford, Tameside, Manchester and other areas in Greater Manchester;
- Gives information and support to disabled people to help them access employment and training.

How they offer help

- Giving information on disabled people’s options – including Easy Read version visit:

<http://www.shef.ac.uk/content/1/c6/02/75/50/Referral%20Form%20Easy%20Read.doc>

- Telling them about things that can help them find or stay in employment

- Supporting them with accessing services and getting their point across
- Supporting them to stay in control of what happens
- Giving information to employers to help them be good employers of disabled people

By doing the above, advocacy workers do not make decisions for disabled people, but give them the tools they need to reach a decision for themselves.

Case Study of Bob presented

Bob has learning difficulties and used to live with his father who was assisting him in various things whilst he was working. Sadly, his father died, he started drinking heavily and was heavily in debt. Eventually, he was referred to the BUK Independent Employment Advocacy Project (IEAP) by a local voluntary organisation.

Assistance from IEAP

Initially, the Advocates discussed with Bob what he wanted to do with his life and the nature of help he wanted. From the discussion they all agreed that help the following agencies was necessary:

- Manchester advice centre to help Bob sort out his finances since he was in debt.
- Doctors for his health though the doctor was initially dismissive.
- Bereavement counselling since he had not received any after his father's death.
- Police – he was being bullied by a neighbourhood family who were also taking his wages
- Housing – for relocation away from the local family who were bullying him.
- Detox agency – for his excessive drinking

The team also told Bob that they would support him in accessing any other agencies that he thought were necessary to him. At the same time, they were negotiating with his the employers who at first were sceptical of Bob changing his behaviour. But after being informed of what was happening and the support he was getting, they were supportive, and allowed him time to go and see these different agencies. One of the advocacy workers suggested that the employers are not necessarily malicious, but might not have thought about what Bob was going through or know how to talk about any problems he was experiencing. They explained that often employers do not understand disability issues. Bob was also successful in moving to another house away from the abusive neighbours. The home detox' programme worked very well as well since he was removed his drinking companions and he was now able to manage his finances. These achievements helped to build his

self esteem and to become more confident and he was successful in retaining his job.

This case study shows that this holistic approach helps an individual in staying in employment. The knowledge that such support is available itself has a positive impact upon the individual. The advocates are each allocated to different clients, but write up notes in detail, and regularly discuss issues so that even if one is not present, the others will be able to assist any client at any time. This seems to work well for the clients and also benefits the staff as it contributes to the building of good working relations.

This case study demonstrated independent advocates:

- Working in partnership with clients so that clients gained more control over their lives;
- Acting as lynchpins ('one stop shop') to bring together, access and, in some cases, challenge diverse services;
- Acting in times of crisis with more long term objectives;
- Providing paths of communication for different professional and voluntary groups who often work in isolation;
- Considering work as one part of a person's life.

LINK: For more details of six client case studies and the issues they raised for the BUK Ltd IEAP team, visit:

http://www.shef.ac.uk/content/1/c6/02/75/50/IEAP_casestudies.doc

For a number of 'Good news' clients stories from BUK Ltd IEAP visit:

http://www.shef.ac.uk/content/1/c6/02/75/50/IEAP-good_news_stories.doc

This approach contrasts sharply with the lack of joined up working that often occurred in the interventions of Disability Employment Advisors (interview with DEA, Leeds, July 2005). Organisationally, BUK Ltd was capable of combining a number of key initiatives:

- (i) *Employment team* – working alongside disabled individuals and workplaces to facilitate employment opportunities. They offer 'route training' which involves taking clients who have obtained a work placement through the transport options for their journey; interview and work preparation alongside support in relation to retaining employment through consistent reviews, visits and meetings with clients and continued communication with employers;
- (ii) *Independent Employment and Advocacy team* - providing:
 - Independent advocacy for disabled people – employment advocacy workers help with housing, benefits, training and support;

- Employment information for employers, policy makers and disabled people – provides really useful resource including Frequently asked questions;
 - Annual good practice Business Inclusion conferences
- (iii) *Policy think tank* – responding to National and local policy;
- (iv) *Training sites* – give employment-related training in realistic work settings including IT, retail (shop work and merchandising) and access (building projects, horticulture, furniture repair, delivery services and ecologically friendly paper recycling).

LINK: For an overview of the work of BUK Ltd visit:
<http://www.breakthrough-uk.com/index.shtml>

Holistic support was, at times, connected with the perceived independence of the partner organisations from social or health services. In commenting about the input of the BUK Ltd IEAP, one of the workers commented:

Whatever problems they have, we can accompany them and they know we are there for them because we are independent. There is often a mistrust of social services, government agencies. We connect with them (Br)

This fits with the government's current aim of building information networks and providing a 'personalised service of support, proactive job search and job-to-skill matching' (PMSU, 2005) but takes further this instrumental aim by adding an interpersonal aspect: promoting the self-empowerment of disabled people through commonality, respect and recognition (see last chapter).

Disabled people, especially, have had a lot of problems with benefits. And, sometimes, unintentionally I think, people can be pushed into certain programmes. By being totally independent we're focused on the client's needs. Their needs are paramount, and there's nothing else pulling them in a direction, or saying you must do this or you must do that (Br).

Success for BUK Ltd was linked to the actions of employment officers, information and advocacy workers, the commitment of clients and the input of training sites. The second element of a self-empowerment agenda, relates to **policy making**. Brandon (2005) argues that by the 1990s 'empowerment' had become a 'social aerosol' sprayed over troubled areas to reassure observers that professionals were engaged in worthy actions with the members of these communities. In contrast, empowerment is better understood as a process of reconnecting with one's own ambitions, sense of self and engaging in very real debates

about how policy affects one's life. We came across numerous examples of the two organisations engaging in what might be termed *golf course and street level policy making*. Both GMCDP and BUK Ltd have a history of engaging with policy and legislation. BUK Ltd, for example, articulate their two aims as (1) supporting disabled people to be independent with a focus on employment and (2) influencing policy and practice. BUK Ltd has actively sought to free its Chief Executive to be 'out on the golf course' through membership of a number of national committees including the Pensions Disability Employment and Advisory Committee; The Small Business Council; Prime Minister's Strategy Unit; North West Employer Engagement Board; Social Enterprise Group; Education and Skills subgroup. Similarly, GMCDP has close links with local government and councils through project work and through council employees also being members of GMCDP.

In addition to the work on the golf course, it was also possible to identify another form of policy engagement. Brandon (2005) uses the work of Lipsky (1980) to describe 'street level policy making':

Public policy is not best understood as made in legislatures or top-floor suites of high-ranking administrators, because in important was it is actually made in the crowded offices and daily encounters of street-level workers (Lipsky, 1980, p24).

These dynamics appeared in our stories and ethnographic data:

We're talking about developing our policy remit...we're aware that there's an opportunity there. On local or regional level, we've had some input, but to have much more of an impact we're going to have to do a bit more thinking about how to do it, and how to use our contacts that use the social model approach and then perhaps we can work together to influence social policy which in a way we're only doing in a limited sense at the moment (CB)

GMCDP has helped get me moved up the list. Yeah, they phoned the housing and said, "RP shouldn't be that low, she should be up on the list" so I'm at the top now (RP).

BUK Ltd. welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the White Paper proposing the establishment of the Commission for Equality and Human Rights ... In order to produce this response we have:

- a) Held a general discussion session with all staff as a part of our staff development programme,
- b) Held a more focussed meeting with staff volunteers to put together a first draft response,

- c) Held a discussion at a Board meeting where Directors added to the staff paper and agreed a formal response.
Response to the establishment of the Commission for Equality and Human Rights (from the BUK Ltd Think Tank, 2004)

BUK Ltd garners input from staff in order to feed bridge golf course and street level modes of operating. Third, a component of the dual process of promoting employment opportunities and self-empowerment was the input of **advocacy** which was widely enacted throughout the work of the two organisations. While professional advocacy is one of the biggest growth areas in the disability and welfare world (see for example *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, special issue, December 2005), the focus here is on advocacy relationships *between* disabled people, which included:

- Young disabled people supporting peers (YDPF);
- Disabled refugees and asylum seekers developing community groups (GMCDP);
- Disabled employment officers supporting disabled clients (BUK Ltd);
- Disabled experts contributing to national policy on behalf of disabled colleagues (BUK Ltd);
- Advocacy through the adoption of drama and performing arts (YDPF)

LINK: For a useful introduction to advocacy see BUK Ltd IEAP's staff development workshop:

<http://www.shef.ac.uk/content/1/c6/02/75/50/What%20is%20Advocacy.doc>

Clearly, the importance of advocating for one another has a long history in the Disabled People's Movement (Campbell and Oliver, 1996; Goodley, 2000). Yet the impact of this commonality is often ignored when employment support and provision is so densely populated by non-disabled professionals and service providers. As YDPF remind us:

GMCDP ... promotes the need for advocacy provision to be facilitated by disabled people, and this project [YDPF] also took this view. Having experienced disability themselves, disabled people are better qualified in understanding the effects of discrimination and oppression. Moreover, they are best placed to challenge it. The use of this kind of advocacy enables the disabled person firstly to identify with the advocate as a role model and to ultimately develop the skills necessary to self-advocate" (Over to Us Report, p7).

And:

I had never been involved with any sort of organisation where people were so aware of how I was feeling inside. I had never been involved

with anybody so radical. I can't really describe it, but there was a sort of passion involved in me becoming an equal person (JH).

Further examples of advocacy work were provided by GMCDP's Information and Advocacy Unit, which included:

- Development of the *Disabled People's Movement Archive Project* – establishing an archive, exhibitions of artefacts and documents produced by disabled people alongside oral history project of local disabled activist groups;
- Providing information to disabled people in Greater Manchester and beyond through the telephone enquiry service, capacity building workshops, conferences, consultancy work, advocacy signposting service;
- Publication of a quarterly magazine (*Coalition*) and a bi-monthly information bulletin.

Evidence of holistic support alongside the self-empowering aspects of policy making and advocacy indicate a broad understanding of **employability**. McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) argue that in order to promote an inclusive concept of employability then it is necessary to combine supply and demand visions of employment; put individuals in their socio-political contexts and promote interventions that train / educate individuals while simultaneously promoting inclusive workplaces. As the organisations moved away from a simplistic conception of employment support, this appeared to open up other practices that engaged with the complex realities of social exclusion. It is to this we now turn.

(2) Promoting the valuing of diversity

I find that BUK Ltd hasn't got that problem of ethnic minority issues because in BUK Ltd, they knew themselves, that the structure is to fight discrimination, the lack of confidence of disabled people within the system and issues about equal opportunities and all that. This is very political to BUK Ltd (QC).

We always try to encourage people from different ethnic backgrounds to get involved in everything [in GMCDP] (BM)

Both organisations demonstrated awareness of diversity through a number of high profile activities such as:

- Promoting accessible forms of information and dissemination (e.g. *Coalition* by GMCDP);

- Close relationships with the People First groups (collectives which normally have a 'learning difficulties' focus);
- Addressing specific diversity issues and concerns (e.g. GMCDP Refugees and Asylum Seekers conference);
- Celebrating diversity in organisational Handbooks (e.g. BUK Ltd, 2001, p6 defines and addresses 'managing diversity');
- Explicit workshops on managing diversity (e.g. Business Inclusion conference, 23rd March, 2005);
- Conference agenda items (e.g. 'Diversity of Disabled People' at the GMCDP Looking to the Future Conference, 24/09/05)

LINK: For more general details about diversity visit:
<http://www.embracingdiversity.org/>

Organisations can be understood as **polyphonic** (Hazen, 1993) - multi-voiced - with each member of the organisation being the centre of his or her own organisations (Rhodes, 1996). We were able to examine how organisational discourses were conducted through a number of procedures including:

- Agreement of constitutions and terms of reference;
- Writing of job descriptions and staff handbooks;
- Staff training sessions;
- Marketing and publicity literature;
- External training provision;
- Debate in public forums including conferences and the 'disability press' (e.g. GMCDP's Coalition and disability email discussion lists)
- Design of physical environment.

Throughout organisations appeared to perpetuate strong narratives about disability and social change: but this did not mean that there was one voice or one story. Roulstone *et al* (2003) observed that one of the key elements of supporting disabled people into work is **empathy**: most often found amongst other disabled people, particularly colleagues, with the acceptance of difference being a key component. BUK Ltd (2001, p10) set out the case for employers implementing an Equal Opportunities Audit which includes the following objectives:

1. To examine the business case for valuing diversity;
2. To develop an understanding of disability and diversity in general and create and manage diversity within the organisation;
3. To determine whether or not it is an issue for the organisation;
4. To decide on actions, if any, to be taken;
5. To set out a programme including review points.

The fight for equality is not simply a single-issue struggle for the rights of disabled people. We found, as Campbell and Oliver (1996) did, the perceived need to form alliances across marginalised groups:

To me, you cannot have equality, unless it is equality for all. I never saw how you could argue for equality for disabled people but not set that in the context of the wider equality struggle. How do you unite those single-issue campaigns? How do you get them to recognise that they were all saying the same things, in slightly different ways and with slightly different agendas, but all premised upon a process of social justice and equality? (Mn)

I think the social model means that there's nowhere there should be racism...you should treat people good, even if they do no right for you, it doesn't mean to say that the next man's not going to do right for you, or woman. It's about non-discrimination. One of the things with BUK Ltd - what you are taught is that there should be no ageism, it doesn't matter what race they are, what creed they are, what sexual orientation they are, it doesn't matter. Or what religion (KL)

Being polyphonic is, of course, not without dilemmas. Talking about another organisation of disabled people, the following participant had this to say:

You're always going to get that situation where a number of politically active people in any sphere of activity will tend to dominate, but hopefully they are sufficiently competent to be able to assess the feeling of their fellows, or to go and seek counsel of their fellows over issues in their constituency (bc).

Thomas (1999) has argued that a crucial part of a developing politics of disability is the need to be deal with different **impairment-effects** through mindful relationships:

In terms of wheelchair users, we've got a very accessible building, we've got 10 million accessible toilets, that's not a big deal. But some of the relational issues are more difficult and they will be in a smaller organisation, they always will be ... For instance, the prevalence of mental health issues and stress and so on, and that needs handling differently and once you've done it it's not necessarily finished, it'll come back (KM).

Some disabled people have impairments that fluctuate: in this case, it is useful to build regular reviews of reasonable adjustments into the supervision arrangements so those gaps in

provision are identified early (BUK Ltd, 2001, p22, advice to employers).

I know this may be controversial to some but I do think it's important to note that there are some drawbacks to mainstream education. For example, physiotherapy. Instead of having access to physiotherapy once a day, I had access to physiotherapy once a week, and that was almost a sacrifice that I had to make. I always have had an issue with the fact that there never seems to be a situation where you can combine both the academic needs and the medical needs of disabled people. In general, I felt like the teachers were really unaware of access issues, really inflexible (JH).

An interesting development within GMCDP's Information and Advocacy Unit was the funding of ***Refugee and Asylum Seekers Project***. This was an excellent example of managing diversity within the organisation. This allowed people from many communities in the Manchester area to come together to provide support in the following areas This allowed people from many communities in the Manchester area to come together to tackle common issues such as:

- Finding out information about rights, benefits, vouchers and support mechanisms;
- Access to advocacy and assistance;
- Understanding asylum and refugee status through connecting people with legal teams;
- Promoting networks among groups of people from the same national or ethnic backgrounds;
- Provision of regular support meetings;
- Contact with services (e.g. access officer from regional public transport), organisations of disabled people (e.g. Manchester Disabled People's Access Group) and black and ethnic groups (e.g. Chinese Young Carers Association).

Our ethnography uncovered many barriers faced by this group including:

- Lack of (accessible) housing;
- Access to healthcare and social services;
- Lack of interpreters, equipment and advocates;
- Isolation and trauma;
- Lack of employment opportunities;
- Difficulties in recognising existing educational qualifications;
- Status of asylum seekers;
- Lack of cultural sensitivity of public and professionals

Encouragingly, members of this project spoke to us about setting up disability groups in their own communities (i.e. a Disabled Kurds Group), while the input of members of GMCDP, including YDPF, emphasised the need to tackle issues of diversity both individually and collectively as organisations of disabled people. In seeking to make links with such an incredibly marginalised group of people, it is clear that valuing diversity applies as much outside of the partner organisations as it does within; witness the views of a member of the Refugees project:

An individual's context is different. Refugees, from abroad, I think they've got certain experiences because of war and then some of them become disabled after the war – or before – or some after, it does vary. I think some of the memories from the war are quite new and some of the people have lost children, so they've often come here on their own and they've become very isolated. So partly the project is about providing support, like a person to talk to, to give them the opportunity to talk (ML).

During analysis workshops with the Refugees Project a number of participants spoke of feeling accepted. As one participant, 'it is a place that I feel mentally healthy, loved, wanted and respected'

LINK: for more details on the GMCDP Refugee and Asylum Seekers project, visit:
http://www.shef.ac.uk/content/1/c6/02/75/50/GMCDP_refugee_project.doc

Similarly, it should be noted that the strength of the Young Disabled People's Forum (YDPF) in GMCDP illuminates the importance of making connections between **disability and the life course** (Priestley, 2003; Burchardt, 2005). YDPF show, through their work since they were established in 1992, that being young and disabled raises a number of particular challenges:

Ensure advocacy does not put young person at risk where they are living; do not take course of action without obtaining views of young people about what they want to do (Over to Us report).

I got in touch with the Young Disabled People's Forum at GMCDP. At the time, it was a young women's group – there weren't many of us, but we did quite a lot of workshops around different issues. I think the fact it was a women's group made a difference, especially around stuff like sex education. That was really helpful, you know, with practical information, because at school they hadn't told us very much! (JL)

YDPF boasted a number of activities including:

- Peer mentoring and advocacy;
- Community outreach work funded by the Youth Services;
- The 2005 DADA festival Community Award nominated YDPF Drama Group perform regular pieces of work to different audiences of service providers, educators, professionals ('Employment Sketch' was performed at the End of Project Conference on the 2nd December, 2005 – see project website for more details);
- Independent living skills training courses to be delivered in 2006.

Moreover, the existence of this group maintained GMCDP's engagement with inclusive education campaigns while also inviting BUK Ltd to make connections between educational experiences and employment ambitions. Diversity remains a crucial issue in the 'disability field':

My previous place of work attracted mostly white, middle class, middle aged women, who wanted to do a bit of good for poor little disabled people. I was a lot younger, I was only around 26, and I came from quite a radical background, so I never really got on there (MO)

(3) Enhancing the politicisation of members

Development work might include further investigation of effective practice through equality, diversity and disability networks and recipients of award and accreditations ... At the same time, steps must be taken to counter misunderstandings about disability, with active campaigning to educate the public about disability in general and legislation on disability in particular, and specifically to promote awareness of which conditions are included under the DDA and help to dispel myths about employing disabled people (Hirst et al, 2004, p11).

Clearly each organisation has a different slant on politicisation. BUK Ltd's is a business with the primary emphasis on supporting the independence and employability of disabled people. GMCDP primarily engages with campaigning and project work. Yet, both organisations showed evidence of contributing to the politicisation of staff, clients and members:

I have learnt to be that way because I am a disabled person, because I do face these barriers and because now I am very strong and know at least how to begin dealing with them (JH).

When I first joined BUK Ltd, I was not happy with a diagnosis, so BUK Ltd was to help me to sort of contest what the psychiatrist had said. But later they advised me to let go and rather concentrate on my personal and career developments and get myself a job (QC).

People who were involved in the early days of BUK Ltd have also been involved in the Disabled People's Movement. They bring that experience and perspective with them and that is embodied in Breakthrough and it's that which makes Breakthrough very different to more traditional organizations. We consider ourselves to be political with a small 'p' at Breakthrough (CB).

Unlike many other employment initiatives, and as I explored in chapter 4, both BUK Ltd and GMCDP promote ***complex understandings of human rights***. Human rights are often considered to exist only within a government or governance framework. They are generally promoted through state reform (or state building) and the fostering of civil society. Human rights are reliant upon state machinery:

[a person] is a citizen only relative to his or her own state, and more particularly to the state of which he or she is a citizen (Galtung, 1995)

For human right declarations or standards to become part of a national legislative framework then they must be ratified and adopted by the state. National human rights commissions can carry out important functions such as the development of a national bill of rights; relating the principles of international human rights documents and agreements to particular national issues. Simultaneously, grassroots movements – such as the disabled people's movement – can put pressure on states to adopt human rights standards, and function in terms of promoting awareness and demands for rights in a 'bottom up' sense.

It is widely recognised that a solely legislative approach to the promotion of human rights is insufficient: disability rights require attitudinal change *and* widespread barrier removal. Dialogues between state and the grassroots are essential. As we have seen in chapter four, membership of the partner organisations brought with it knowledge of rights and the promotion of a critical discourse. We have some evidence to suggest that disability employment advisors lack knowledge of disability rights and entitlements. As one DEA we interviewed put it:

We only have a very basic knowledge: its more an advisory role really, we are not legally trained. We usually refer individuals if they ask about such things.

This fits with the views of our informants:

They had what they used to call disability officers, but they didn't know anything about disability, and so I stopped going there (Ko).

I do think we're the best people to do the training, do the educating, have the knowledge, the peer support, the role model stuff, and I guess a lot of that is because of how it's touched my life personally and how I've seen it touched other peoples' lives. Regardless of the mess the movement might be in at the moment I still believe our best hopes are organisations of disabled people (JJ)

With many disabled people offering advice and support throughout the two organisations we found examples of politicisation prompting enabling practice:

If I also look at SENDA (2001), there are 'get out clauses' as well. I have got an ongoing issue with a training provider at the moment. Basically, I want to arrange for a member of staff who is hearing impaired to go to this course. I have asked them to provide an interpreter, and they are saying 'We don't have to provide an interpreter because it will cost us money. You will have to pay'. I said to them that they should review all their charges and give everybody an extra charge to cover the cost they might incur for a disabled person who needs their services. They can't just charge us because we need an accessible service. I am still waiting to hear from them (Br).

Consequently, the organisations urged others to tackle disability discrimination from a firm position of politicisation: as evidenced, for example, in BUK Ltd's emphasis on Disability Action Training (BUK Ltd, 2001, pp12-15)

LINK: For further details of Disability Action Training – contact BUK Ltd for a copy of the 2001 handbook. Telephone 0161 273 5412; or visit <http://www.breakthrough-uk.com/contact.shtml>

When faced with threats around funding, organisations have displayed evidence of a willingness to adapt:

In September 2002, the Executive Council of GMCDP met and reviewed fundamentally the organisation's vision, aspirations, structure, and priorities, updating GMCDP's aims and objectives. In summary, these now are:

- To be controlled by disabled people and use the wealth of knowledge of disabled people;
- To be a welcoming organisation that makes it as easy as possible for those who consider themselves to be disabled people to be involved;
- To demonstrate good practice in all aspects of its activity;
- To promote the independence and integration of disabled people into a fully accessible and inclusive society;
- Actively to promote an understanding and use of the social model of disability;
- To be a strong part of the Disabled People's Movement;
- To develop and promote good practice.

This re-examination of GMCDP's vision and direction came partly from a change in the organisation's financial circumstances... Despite changes to GMCDP's resources and capacity, the organisation remains vibrant and active (GMCDP, 2003, p4).

Even faced with financial pressures, GMCDP not only outline a number of specific aims and outputs of the organisation but frame them in wholly politicised ways:

This development plan is intended to be a tool to be used by GMCDP's members, supporters, customers and funders in achieving the changes necessary to bring about the full social, political and economic inclusion of disabled people in Greater Manchester (GMCDP, 2003, p3).

The origins of both organisations can be traced to the early days of the Disabled People's Movement in Britain (Roulstone and Barnes, 2005; Gradwell, 2005). Inevitably, the relationship between employment and disability being was viewed as a political one: structural, cultural, relational and attitudinal conditions of exclusion and inclusion. This was most obvious in the attempts of organisations to employ the social model of disability.

(4) Good practice: Applying the social model of disability

Low self-esteem, arising in part from the low expectations of others, means that disabled people often lack the information and self-confidence necessary to obtain the skills, resources and support needed to live independently. To be genuinely and fully included in society at large and in their local communities, disabled

people need to be equipped with the skills and resources which will enable them to assert their rights and achieve inclusion on equal terms (GMCDP, 2003, p4).

With employers, we talk about breaking down barriers. It can come up that somebody has a particularly medicalised way of thinking about things. Then I might need to step back from that a bit and have a bit of a discussion with them about how we work, and how we speak about disability. Because if I'm talking about disability as a social thing, and they're talking about disability as meaning somebody's impairment, we're going to be talking at cross-purposes (JL).

While Watson *et al* (2005) suggest that many employment initiatives lack disability equality training, GMCDP and BUK Ltd exhibit clear examples of good practice in relation to this agenda.

BUK Ltd doesn't need to know about someone's impairment. We would never go to an employer and say "I've got Joe Bloggs who's a wheelchair user". We work with the social model and the barriers that are faced. You talk about the overall picture and then once you've got an employer to buy in, we start talking about the client or bringing the client along to talk. They can talk for themselves really about what they want (TH)

Don't make assumptions about people and their abilities. Don't dismiss anybody. Don't dismiss a service provider. Think how you can influence it. So that it becomes more of a social model world. (Br)

Supporting disabled people

BUK Staff Development Session; Friday 29th October 2004

Employees of BUK Ltd were asked to identify areas of good practice in delivering services; employing disabled people and in strategic & policy work. Across these three areas, a number of overlapping themes emerged, including:

- Listen to clients and each other
- Always use the Social Model – barrier removal
- Allow clients to make their own decisions- empowerment.
- De-mystification of disability through the re-education of employees, etc
- Give less emphasis to qualifications, and more to experience
- Support people with employment and independent living related barriers
- Challenge/change attitudes of organisations and society as a whole

- Ensure staff are made aware of Access to Work (AtW) and the support it can provide: in the first week AtW is activated and then monitored;
- Strive to provide full accessibility to facilities/ environment
- Ensure the recruitment process is accessible and inclusive (e.g. advertising vacancies, adjustments required at interview and afterwards)
- Ensure staff are welcomed and not patronised
- We practice what we preach. We have proved that you can employ disabled people and run a successful company - Our staff is made up of 60% disabled people
- We do not compromise on quality

Much of what is outlined above hints at the application of the social model of disability (see Carson and Speirs, 2003; Barnes and Mercer, 2003). In order to unpack what this means in practice, a number of specific applications emerge:

- a. The promotion of capacity thinking over deficit thinking;
- b. Urging workplaces to adapt;
- c. Promoting social model thinking in organisations for disabled people and of disabled people;
- d. Creating an inclusive disability space.

a. Capacity thinking

Lawthom and Goodley (2005) demand professionals to ask themselves:

- What is my understanding of impairment and disability?
- Can my theoretical and professional knowledge help to challenge conditions of disablement?
- How do I understand inclusion and exclusion?
- What role do I play in the exclusion and inclusion of disabled people?
- How do I see disabled people – as active or tragic beings?
- Am I a hindrance or help to the furthering of inclusion?
- What is the aim of my work and how can it contribute to the aims of disability studies, the disability community and disabled people's movement?

Both BUK Ltd and GMCDP ask similar questions of their employees, clients and members. The former actually instigate formal social model training as part of their two day induction while the latter regularly contribute to social model debates through campaigning and their own publications. *Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People* (PMSU, 2005) criticises the role of GPs as key players in deciding whether or not people should be in receipt of Incapacity Benefit (IB). The report notes

that a medicalised approach to assessments relating to work is not necessarily appropriate. GPs lack information about people's ability to work and that they are ineffectively linked to employers and jobcentres. In contrast, our organisations alerted us to what has been called 'capacity thinking' (e.g. Booth and Booth, 1994).

Shadowing of employment officer in initial interview for potential BUK client: Capacity thinking

This interview was carried out between the new client, 'Ben', and his employment officer, 'George'. Ben attended the meeting, held at the BUK offices, with his stepfather and brother. Ben had come to BUK Ltd on self-referral, after meeting another of the employment officers at a jobs fair. He was currently near to completing an IT course at a nearby college, but had no plans as to what he would do on completion of the course, and said he had been given no support in applying for jobs, careers advice or development at the college.

Throughout the interview, there was a focus on finding out what Ben wanted to do, what support he might require, what benefits he was on, his goals (in terms of hours per week and training) and the options available. There was also time spent on ensuring that information was provided about the nature of BUK's services, the role that the employment officer would play, and the level of commitment expected from clients embarking upon training or work placements. The interview was centred on Ben's employment goals and needs but his circles of support, dis/likes and interests were considered. The interview was friendly and informally conducted, and Ben and his family evidently felt at ease speaking with George.

LINK: For an extended case study of the above visit:

http://www.shef.ac.uk/content/1/c6/02/75/50/employment_officer.doc

Note how the employment officer focuses in on Ben's support needs and ambitions rather than pathologising his personal limitations. The focus on circles of support is reminiscent of notions of interdependence (see chapter four). Nothing was asked about his particular impairment and he was not asked whether or not he identified as a disabled person. Instead, the emphasis is not providing the optimum conditions for capacity:

We did start looking, certainly in the [BUK Ltd] training sites, at whether or not people needed one to one sessions, whether they could be dealt with in two to one sessions, four to one or a more classroom based, eight to one, regardless of the impairment, because we won't classify people by impairment. But looking at what stage people are at in their preparations in looking for work really. And a recognition that some people might even start at four to one, but then for whatever, might even need one to one (KM)

Researcher field notes: We heard an anecdote from a member of GMCDP that the organisation was supporting a young disabled man to work as a volunteer through the use of pictures, cards and non-verbal cues.

[BUK Ltd] had a project that was funded by Training Enterprise Council, and they took major issue with us because in our recruitment we refused to ask for any qualifications. They said that that was naïve of us and that was dangerous. We said, 'Well you know, it's not an issue to us'. They couldn't make us do it, but it could have threatened the company. Basically, what we say is that if people can demonstrate that they've got the experience to do the job that means a damn site more than the qualification. After all, a lot of disabled people don't get access to formal qualification structures (KM).

b. Adapting workplaces

Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People (PMSU, 2005) addresses the need for employers to raise their awareness of their responsibilities in order to meet the needs of disabled people. BUK Ltd engage with employers in a number of ways:

- *Working with employers* – for example in a recent partnership with Manchester Airport on a project that aimed to engage disabled people with employment led to 22 people gaining employment in nine months;
- *Conferences Workshop resources* – including the 'Employing young disabled people'; 'Access to work', 'DDA masterclass', 'Encruitment that works', and 'Being a good employer' sessions of the Business Inclusion Conference ('How to be a good employer of disabled people', 23rd March, 2005). These offered practical support to businesses to employ more disabled people by identifying and removing barriers. It included a selection of workshops, speeches and one-to-one surgeries;
- *Newsletters and Bulletins* - IEAP newsletter (available at: http://www.breakthrough-uk.com/gmeap_employers.shtml);
- *BUK Ltd Policy Think Tank* responding to National and local policy <http://www.breakthrough-uk.com/publications.shtml>;
- *Representation* at North West Employer Engagement Board;
- *Individual and personalised (and ongoing) employment officer relationships* with employers;
- *Courses and training* – e.g. *independent Living Skills* course delivered at Liverpool City Council (BUK Ltd, 2003b);
- *Research and publications* – *Trailblazers project* (Branfield and Maynard Campbell, 2000), *Independent Living Skills Course*

Evaluation, Thriving and Surviving (Roulstone et al, 2003) and *Landing a Job* (BUK Ltd, 2001). The latter ESF project with Manchester Airport considered policies and practices to do with recruitment, retention, and day to day management in respect of disabled staff; the commissioning and provision of training, especially for those with line management and recruiting responsibilities; the promotion of a positive culture in the workplace, and ways in which this might be tackled (BUK Ltd, 2001, p3);

Specifically, in relation to the welfare state, GMCDP have a long history of challenging traditional patterns of service delivery and models of professional practice: exemplified through YDPF's Barrier Free Zone work (where institutions are given the red card for inaccessibility); their Drama work (which ridicules the disablist attitudes within society) and peer mentoring programme (where disabled peers support one another). By the organisations tackling workplaces on a host of structural and attitudinal levels, this permitted flexibility around supporting individual choices. For example, some employment officers from BUK reported instances of supporting clients into sheltered employment schemes. While this might be seen as counter to the aims of inclusion promoted by BUK Ltd and GMCDP, workers saw this as an opportunity to positively influence the practices of such organisations:

One of the things that we've trying to do with employers is to try and break down some barriers is putting ourselves up as a good practice example. Part of that is to say look, we are a small business ourselves, really, and we've got lots of disabled people working in BUK Ltd. We're managing to get a good amount of disabled people working for us, so we do know what we're talking about (JL).

The fact that so many disabled people work successfully for the partners demonstrates, clearly, the positives that emerge from employing disabled people.

c. Changing organisations for / of disabled people

A point of contention noted by a number of our informants was the way in which organisations traditionally associated with charity and individual models of disability were now stating their adoption of the social model. As early as 1990, Mike Oliver distinguished between traditional organisations for disabled people (inc: RNIB, Scope formerly the Spastics Society, MENCAP) and emerging organisations of the disabled people's movement (e.g. British Council of Disabled People; People First). The latter, he suggested, were more aligned with the ambitions of disabled people because they were run by and for disabled people along non-impairment specific lines, and were allied (or part of) to the

development of the emancipatory approach of the social model. Disabled people were brought together in these organisations to understand and challenge common experiences of exclusion. Interestingly, some of our informants spoke of their attempts to work critically with organisations that were traditionally associated with the segregation of disabled people:

I am open to working in partnership with organisations for disabled people, such as Remploy. If a client feels that they want to go and work for Remploy, who am I to tell them, "Well they don't work to the social model, I'm sorry but I won't put you on placement there"? We can educate people, we can tell people about the social model. I work with any other organisation if that was what the client wanted. In a lot of ways, our working with organisations like this can have a positive result – we can educate people. That goes for all the agencies we work with (Br).

Informants did not suggest that traditional organisations were actually becoming more inclusive but that representative organisations of disabled people needed to be the ones leading the debate about inclusion. JJ spoke of her time of working with a Charity run residential home for disabled people:

I met a number of people who I would have arguments with about being in there and they would say things like "I've been in the community. I sat at home. I waited for a PA to come for an hour in the morning, or they came for an hour in the morning, then I had the rest of the day on my own and I didn't know what to" (JJ).

Another informant reflected on time spent working with an organisation for disabled people:

There were just ongoing battles like that on a daily basis, it was quite extreme, but in a way it was quite comical. It was farcical, it really was, people like using words like 'dwarf', you know, they just didn't get the social model whatsoever. They just didn't get it; it was like banging my head against a brick wall. It was just like trying to teach the National Front racial awareness - where do you start? (MO)

Clearly, faced with such tensions, these experiences of exclusion led to a deep knowledge of the politics of disability:

The first day I went to the Day Centre, the morning was spent sat around, and then the afternoon we did colouring in! I was just in

total shock. The reason I kept going was I became good friends with someone there, and also there had some good points to it, like they had good computer resources, so I was learning more programming. And I did things like canoeing and stuff like that (MO).

The application of the social model – representative organisations leading debates about disability politics and its relationship with disability organisations – was also evident in relation to the wider disabled people’s movement.

At the Annual General Meeting there was a motion to withdraw GMCDP’s affiliation to BCOOP on the basis that the latter had deviated from its initial aims and objectives, which were:

1. to encourage and support the setting up and development of organisations controlled by disabled people, nationwide;
2. to support these organisations at local level to identify disability issues developed by local authorities (LAs) and where necessary to develop effective strategies to change policy and planning within LAs that would bring about an end to discrimination against disabled people and begin the struggle towards independent living or disabled people in the community;
3. to educate LAs into understanding the concept of the social model.

(from researcher field notes).

Time will tell how the disabled people’s movement develops and changes. A crucial point of this, however, is that we are reminded that employment and disability are components of a wider engagement with the politics of inclusion: and that organisations run by disabled people lead many of these engagements and debates. Consequently, the development of the social model is far more than an academic debate about the relative merits of theory but a very real philosophy underpinning politics and practice undergoing change through the debates with the disabled people’s movement.

d. Creating an inclusive disability space

The culture of disability comes out of our ghettos as a form of defiance just as it comes out of the ghettos of women, black people and ethnic minority people, gay men and lesbian women. A ghetto is not only a place of physical degradation, a slum, but can also be a spiritual dungeon, a psychological prison in which the mind is chained and tortured...We can only work against these

mental ghettos by getting together and sharing the common experiences of our lives.” (Brisenden, *Coalition*, 2002, p16)

[When I joined BUK Ltd] I didn't have to say anything about accessibility, because, you know, it's just all there. It's all taken into account, and because they have put wheelchair use into consideration, everything's on one floor, no lifts and stairs, which was brilliant (GK).

In contrast to a number of current Welfare to Work initiatives (PMSU, 2005), the close association of GMCDP and BUK Ltd, both physically and politically, adds to the emphasis on the promotion of wider concerns connected with disability and social inclusion. The accessible built environment of BUK Ltd, shared by GMCDP, allowed further inclusive developments:

- Sharing of skills, capacities and information;
- Informal peer support (followed up in more formal ways, for example, by the Young Disabled People's Forum peer mentoring scheme);
- Inhabiting a shared and valued culture;
- Support provided outside of (or in) work including moral support of friends and family, seeking medical, ergonomic, technical, psychological support (Roulstone et al, 2003) – where visitors and new clients and staff were given examples of the latest technology, access to a pool of trusted Pas and supporters as well as a wealth of experience in dealing with Access to Work;
- Promoting an awareness of current legislative, policy and political issues

Maffesoli (1992) argues that the promotion of social space is critical to the configuring of a social group. The premises of BUK Ltd are (i) physically welcoming because they are accessible (in contrast to the common experiences of inaccessibility, see previous chapter) and (ii) culturally embracing through the widespread usage of social model thinking and the elements outlined above.

LINK: For details of useful internet links and contacts, visit the project website <http://www.shef.ac.uk/jobsnotcharity>

Furthermore, inclusive spaces are based upon and promote inclusive ways of thinking. When the cultures of BUK Ltd and GMCDP worked as inclusive disability spaces, a number of common ideas were present:

- *Choosing to be there:* Both GMCDP and BUK Ltd do not ask people about their impairment. For example, clients who access BUK

services self-identify as disabled, and therefore there is no impairment assessment involved in the application process. Members of GMCDP join as people who identify as disabled people;


- *Being person/client-centred*: Clients who come to BUK retain control over their own choices and career paths and are able to access whatever services they require from BUK or be signposted to alternative sources of support.
- *Being flexible and open*: The processes within the organisations were inclusive when debates reigned and variety was apparent. “Disability culture is being built upon a ruthless honesty about the people we are and the role we play in society. Out of the recognition of our value comes the ability to organise ourselves, to put on events, to mobilise our forces, to produce works of art, ...and generally get together and share the common language of our experiences.” (Brisenden, Coalition, 2002, p15)
- *Developing something other than day centres* – as one informant told us, BUK Ltd expended a lot of energy in its early days distinguishing itself from sheltered employment and Day Centres. A number of people self-referred because they thought this was what BUK was about;
- *Encouraging and facilitating people* – for example through the careful training of IT skills in the BUK Ltd training site and the peer support of YDPF
- *Developing accessible materials* – the anti-jargon approach of both organisations was prominent: displayed through the accessible formats and versions of material produced (and followed in this case through the production of accessible versions of this report under the guidance of BUK Ltd and People First) and accessible advertisements, interview and job descriptions produced by both organisations (see Westbrook, 1996, 1997 for a useful discussion)

Conclusions

McQuaid and Lindsay’s (2005, p215) critical analysis of the concept of employability concludes with the following observations:

Employability deployed as a broad concept, enabling us to analyse and describe the multidimensional barriers to work or progression faced by many unemployed and employed people, offers an opportunity to ... arrive at explanations and policy solutions that reflect the multi-faceted and complex combination of factors affecting the labour market interactions of those in and out of work.

This chapter has provided numerous examples – from BUK Ltd and GMCDP – of contextualising, defining, troubling, supporting, promoting, explaining, expanding, theorising, politicising and adapting employability. What this means for further practice will be considered in the final concluding chapter.



Chapter 6

Towards Enabling Practice: Reflections and Suggestions

Introduction

Within the disabled people's movement and its organisations are many pilot services and projects that are highly innovative in their theory and practice. To the extent that they develop new competencies, have an independent training framework in the discipline of disability equality training and adopt ways to monitor outcomes, these have begun to 'professionalise'. Fragmented at present, these projects have the potential to network and conjoin, perhaps within a regional framework of public administration. In doing that, they will have the basis of a true profession allied to the community (Gibbs, 2005, p204).

Organisations run by disabled people are ignored by the disability and employment literature. This report not only addresses this imbalance but demonstrates, through evidence, that GMCDP and BUK exemplify some of the principles outlined by this above quotation. This chapter considers some of the findings and challenges.

(1) Recurring findings

To summarise, we found that the partner organisations of BUK Ltd and GMCDP have:

- Supported and employed disabled people for many years but the lessons learnt are ignored by policy makers, professionals and government initiatives;
- Demonstrated how to successfully run a business enterprise and survive in the voluntary sector;
- Promoted the interdependence of disabled people through the values of commonality, respect, recognition, worth and professionalism;
- Supported the self-empowerment alongside the employability of disabled people;
- Promoted the valuing of diversity and a critical disability discourse;
- Prepared people for work through education, training, peer support, information, advocacy, project funding and consciousness raising;
- Given paid and voluntary employment opportunities in and outside of the organisations;
- Invited people to access support mechanisms via government employment initiatives and schemes;

- Provided possibilities for bridging the good practices of a business enterprise (BUK Ltd) and a political organization (GMCDP) each run by disabled people;
- Provided evidence for the successful running of organisations by disabled people;
- Demonstrated a clear commitment to a shared vision of society of which employment is one aspect (the social model);
- Exhibited good practice by applying the social model of disability - pushing for cultural change in workplaces rather than individual adaptation to existing workplaces;
- Troubled the philosophy of 'welfare to work' through espousing wider understandings of employability that take into account disabled people's wider contexts, their experiences, the importance of voluntary and paid work, the barriers they face and the need for employers to enact cultural change;
- Enhanced the self-worth and confidence of disabled people through peer support, disabled role models and the promotion of a valued 'disability culture';

These findings match and take further five key areas of intervention identified by *Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People* (PMSU, 2005):

- Providing effective early support and guidance to those who need it to overcome barriers to work;
- Improving the skills and access to in-work support needed to enhance disabled people's employability;
- Connecting disabled people with work by making transition to employment less risky and complicated;
- Engaging employers to improve their attitudes towards disabled people and their understanding of what it means to employ a disabled person;
- Building information networks to bring together and disseminate important information to disabled people, their employers, family, friends and carers

(2) Recurring challenges

Priestley's (1999) study of organisations of disabled people highlighted the challenges they faced in a climate of community care. In this study, and in relation to employment, the positive endeavours of our research partners remind us of work that is still required in order to challenge disabling barriers and promote the interdependence and rights of disabled people.

(i) Education and training

- There is an ongoing need to proactively *support the inclusion of disabled learners* – highlighted in recent exchanges between Baroness Warnock and activists – about disabled children’s right to mainstream participation in schools. Many of our participants spoke of having to undo the impact of educational failings on their life chances.
- There is an urgent imperative to *link together issues of work with debates around inclusive education*: thus promoting discussion about different understandings of employment and education. A possible arena was suggested – developed through making links between organisations of disabled people and Connexions (www.connexions.gov.uk; www.connexions-direct.com).
- Issues are raised about how employees of BUK Ltd and GMCDP have their *skills formally recognised* through educational accreditation and/or a National Charter status (e.g. see Advocacy for Action’s <http://www.advocacyacrosslondon.org.uk/>). For example, we asked members of BUK Ltd IEAP to define their job titles. They suggested ‘advocacy information worker’; ‘advocate for disabled people’ and ‘information worker’. Clearly, in terms of career progression, identity and continuing professional development, it would help to think about matching job titles with existing profiles of other similar jobs. Similar issues were raised in GMCDP: ‘Even though I’d done Disability Action training, and was a qualified trainer, that’s not formally recognised anywhere’ (JL).
- *Working with disabled people who are already employed*. Both organisations have a long history of supporting disabled people who have lacked educational and employment opportunities. Interesting questions are raised about how BUK Ltd and GMCDP can support disabled people who are already employed or, as one participant put it, ‘work ready people’.

(ii) Organisational challenges

- *Constitution of a shared knowledge management system* – information is one of the seven key principles of independent living. To further address this principle, our research suggests that BUK Ltd and GMCDP should explore bringing together their distinct advocacy and information units in order to further share research and development across the two organisations.
- *Maintaining independence* is clearly an important aim for both organisations. For GMCDP this links to the aim of maintaining non-charitable status. For BUK Ltd this relates to their distinctiveness within the disability and employment business enterprise and service sectors.

- *Supporting the next generation of disability activists* could involve younger members of GMCDP in the management structures of the organisation, particularly in light of the success of YDPF.
- Questions remain about *GMCDP's relationship with the (Inter) National Disabled People's Movement* and how this impacts upon future work and projects of the organisation alongside its contribution to Inter/National debates.
- *Publicising good practice.* The End of Project conference demonstrated the potential for regular Open Days that showcase the work of both organisations to key invited delegates. This could help to address needs around follow on funding of key projects in BUK Ltd (e.g. IEAP) and GMCDP (e.g. Refugee project). Failure to acquire support threatens the potency of organisations; as evidenced recently by GMCDP when reassessing its aims and objectives (GMCDP, 2003).
- *Towards counselling.* A number of employees of BUK Ltd drew attention to the benefits of counselling: particularly for clients/individuals picked up in crises situations. An approach to follow might include that adopted by the Derbyshire Coalition of Disabled People which has counselling as one of its seven needs (<http://www.dcil.org.uk/About.htm>). However: any adoption of counselling should reflect and further social model thinking of the organisations (examples are given in Goodley and Lawthom, 2005).
- Questions continue to be raised about how *organisations expand while maintaining local links*. We know that organisations can be victims of their own success but local relationships must remain at the heart of both BUK Ltd and GMCDP.
- *Competition from organisations for disabled people.* While participants have spoken critically about such organisations (and some have mentioned working alongside them in critical ways) a key threat to organisations of disabled people is related to the increased incidents of head-hunting by leading charity based/organisations for disabled people.

(iii) Support mechanisms

- *Continuity of support* – this study supports Burchardt's (2005) finding that an improvement in the education and employment of disabled young people rests on continuity and the tightening up of support arrangements.
- *Towards well publicised and flexible AtW* – is the order of the day – worked through quickly and open to people on short term contracts and those on voluntary work experiences. AtW must be publicised. Our findings mirror those AtW problems identified by PMSU (2005) including the prolonged time taken for special equipment and workplace alterations to be provided; the lack of follow-up support

staff once the support is in place; lack of promotion of the programme and the need for fuller information about the range of options.

- *Explain responsive and facilitative support workers / Pas* – both organisations boast knowledge of skilled PAs whom they regularly call upon for their work. Questions are raised about the extent to which BUK Ltd and GMCDP could formalise this knowledge and contribute via consultancy and training about ‘The requirements of a good PA’ for disabled people, service providers and employers.
- *Develop close links with legal allies* - for example the Disability Law Service (<http://www.dls.org.uk/>) – can take up cases of disabled people: particularly those with a complex legal status (e.g. Disabled Refugees).
- *Couple accessible housing arrangements with employment opportunities* – remains a huge challenge as evidenced by the problems experienced in recruiting a GMCDP director. This was, in large part, due to the difficulties that potential applicants experienced in accessing suitable housing.
- *Work critically with other organisations* – Between December 2003 and August 2005, for BUK Ltd IEAP, most client referrals were either self-referrals or recommendations from other Breakthrough teams. A small number came from organisations including MIND, Mental Health Teams, Incapacity Benefit team, Connexions, Social Services and Jobcentre plus. Clearly, a case is to be made for BUK Ltd working alongside other organisations in terms of maintaining referrals. However, more testing questions are raised about the extent to which BUK Ltd and GMCDP work alongside others towards shared goals and visions, particularly when there might be a clash of philosophies. One way of thinking about collaboration might be to think of the costs and benefits of support. This links back to the earlier point about maintaining independence.
- *Increase disabled people’s knowledge of the benefits system* – currently, BUK Ltd provides clients with the Disability Rights Handbook and advocates will accompany clients to meet with professionals who can explain benefits and the impact on work. Similarly, GMCDP Refugees Project has worked closely with members around benefits entitlement. The research team feel that this is an area of support that both partners could develop – through bringing together expertise from project, employment, advocacy, information and training workers – to pool resources related to ‘knowing and working with benefits system’

LINK: A starting point for the pooling of information might be provided in the Jobs Not Charity benefits document:

http://www.shef.ac.uk/content/1/c6/02/75/50/benefits_document.doc

(iv) Employers' duties

Partners' relationships with employers have unearthed a number of key challenges. GMCDP's collaboration with the local City Council, BUK Ltd's consultancy, policy think tank and conference activities and YDPF's community outreach work have identified a number of key aims:

- *The need for access audits* – the partners' links with the work of Manchester Disabled People's Access Group (MDPAG) merits consideration by employers to assess their workplace culture from a social model position
<http://www.manchester.gov.uk/disability/policies/access/>.
- *Enabling arrangements from application to retention* – Employers must reconfigure their recruitment strategies (advertising, application, interview, liaison with AtW); provide supportive work contexts that retain disabled employees (reasonable adjustments, supervision and management).
- *Awareness of duties as a legislative given* – Ignorance is no longer an excuse for disabling practice.
- *Assessing the role of the public, community and voluntary sectors* – Hirst et al (2004) report that the number of working age disabled people in public sector employment in Britain grew from more than 660,000 in 1998/99 to just over 790,000 in 2002/03, an increase of almost 130,000 or nearly 20 per cent over the four year period. This compares with a 161,000 increase among non-disabled people, a modest growth of three per cent.

LINK: See the publications, reports and 2004 executive summary on the *Employment of Disabled People in the Public Sector: A Review of Data and Literature* by Michael Hirst, Patricia Thornton and Melissa Dearey (SPRU, University of York) and Sue Maynard Campbell (Equal Ability Limited) available at
<http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/research/summs/pubsector.htm>

Hirst et al (2004) cautiously suggest that the areas in which the public sector may perform better than the private sector are likelihood of employing and recruiting disabled staff; somewhat more inclusive interpretations of 'disability'; more awareness of the DDA; more likely to have a formal policy covering employment of disabled people; more willing to make adjustments for disabled staff and citing the law as a reason for making changes. These encouraging findings might provide some worked examples of good practice that can be taken up in the private sector – particularly small to medium sized businesses. On a more critical note, while *Valuing People* (2001) identifies the public sector as a key context for employment opportunities for people with learning difficulties, this raises concerns about the

reasoning behind the aims to deploy people with the label of learning difficulties in the existing service culture. So, for example, an individual moves from being a service user of an adult training centre to being one of the centre's cleaners. Olsen (2003) argues that such specially adapted work is ambiguous. It is usually labelled as the kind of work offered by the welfare state and at the same time usually lacks a significant aspect of what is recognised as ordinary work. There is a fine line between day centre worker and sheltered worker. In contrast, the work of BUK Ltd and GMCDP provide clear examples of inclusive work in the voluntary and community sectors (see also Gradwell, 2005).

- *Training staff about disability awareness* – such methods such not be, as BUK Ltd have argued, about the experiential aspects of living with an impairment (as exemplified by the old exercise of non-disabled being 'mocked up' as a disabled people for a day) but should raise wider questions about institutional, attitudinal, relational and structural aspects of disability.
- *Thinking creatively about impairment* – to recap on a number of points from *Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People* individuals' and supported by this study, employers must be mindful that impairments may fluctuate what might impact upon energy levels and working while 'not healthy' might be a very normal experience for many people. But we must remember that all of us require support at some point, time and place of work.
- *Addressing Quality and Diversity Impact Measures* – increasing the number of disabled people in the workplaces fits very neatly with the current vogue for demonstrating diversity measures – but this can only be done so with recourse to the aim addressed above.

(v) Policies and employment initiatives

The findings of this report raise a number of points of order that policy makers and practitioners need to be aware of – and organisations of disabled people will continue to address. Some of reiterated below:

- *Beware the spin.* Many employers and service providers state that they are using the social model but their practices lag behind the rhetoric (Gradwell, 2005). This report has demonstrated a number of examples of the actual interpretation of theory into practice.
- *Whose agenda?* If current reports are to be believed then the DWP's aim to contract employment initiatives to a smaller number of large service providers – who will then sub contract to smaller businesses – could threaten the existence of those smaller (potentially more radical) groups. This might particularly be the case for our partner organizations who problematised the preoccupation with 'welfare to work' and 'work pays' (Grover and Stewart, 2000);

- *The voice of disabled people?* Will organisations of disabled people continue to be ignored as agents of change and/or squeezed out of policy debate and employment support provision? This report
- *Only work pays?* By 2008, people in receipt of IB will be called in to an interview at the Jobcentre Plus office. New claimants will be put on a holding benefit. They will then have to do a personal capability test. If they can work there will be rehabilitation support. If they can't work they will be encouraged to try to seek work wherever possible for more benefit (Barker, 2005, BUK Ltd Business Inclusion conference). This raises real concerns about the meaning of work; for whom, for what and for whose benefit.
- *Disability awareness?* The establishment of a Single Commission for Equality & Human Rights raises issues about the prioritizing of the rights of disabled people alongside a more collective focus on the generalities of inequality. While clearly there are crossovers between marginalized groups – and the partner organizations have shows a willingness to engage with wider diversity issues – will disabled people receive the legislative protection that they require?
- *Reconceptualising Benefits* – there is an urgent need to undo the stigmatising distribution system associated with benefits (Barnes and Roulstone, 2005). We should keep in mind that many claimants of benefits help to generate employment for professional groupings which help perpetuate the ongoing dependency of disabled people. Benefits need to be revamped in ways that promote the rights of disabled people while reconfiguring notions of work and employability.
- *Engaging with new initiatives* – 2006 will see a number of government initiatives including:
 - Pathways to Work:* Government's most concerted effort to encourage and assist those people on Incapacity Benefit (IB) to return to work, and work with key stakeholders to promote the value of job retention.
 - New Deal for Skills:* NDfS is intended to focus on the low skilled, and will build on the entitlement of everyone to receive free training up to Level 2.
 - Employer Training Pilots:* ETPs are employer driven, with employers identifying basic and vocational skills gaps which affect their productivity.
 - Apprenticeships:* On 10 May 2004 new Apprenticeships were announced, to replace the current Modern Apprenticeships (MA).

LINK: For a more detailed overview of these initiatives visit the project website <http://www.shef.ac.uk/jobsnotcharity/resources.html>

The extent to which GMCDP and BUK Ltd will want or be permitted to work with these initiatives remains to be seen. Our partners, potentially, can play a key role in relation to these policy developments

and employment initiatives. Furthermore, the partners contribute new ways of thinking and working.

- *Proposing new initiatives* - in a recent piece by Thornton (2005, p162) that evaluates the provision of specialist advisors in JobCentre Plus and the new Pathways to Work pilots – she concludes:

A model worth exploring, used in one stop shops in the US system, is that of generalist employment advisors who deal with a range of claimants but are backed by specialists in disability issues behind the scenes.

This brings us back to the unique contribution of our partners: combining holistic support and disability awareness (in its broadest sense). Gibbs (2005, p204) envisages an approach to employment provision where ‘something has to be pulling from the community end as well as something pushing from the policy end’. Rather than considering the ways in which organisations of disabled people react to new policies and initiatives (as though they were the objects of policy) it might be more helpful to think of the relationship between these organisations, policy and the community. Employment support is best understood as a profession allied to the community:

This profession will be constructed around practice consisting of targeted interventions at points during a life course where someone encounters disabling barriers that their own resources cannot overcome. Its outcomes will be a barrier-free transition that strengthens an individual’s resources simultaneously. By focusing on barriers, support becomes developmental rather than palliative; it influences whole systems as well as individual progress; and it invests both in individuals and in the community that gains their active contribution (Gibbs, 2005, p204).

This is an apt descriptor of the good practices of BUK Ltd and GMCDP: which are a reality rather than a distant dream.

- *Inclusive, integrated and independent living* – the work of our partners contribute to the significant impact of Centres for Independent Living in this country and elsewhere which, while facing entrenched opposition from the vested interests of traditional disability service providers, remind us of the potency of the self-organisation of disabled people in reconfiguring concepts of work, employability and rights (Morgan *et al*, 2001; Barnes and Roulstone, 2005)

(3) Conclusions: the role of organisations run by disabled people

The setting up of a Single Equality Commission raises real concerns about the priorities that will be attached to the rights of disabled people to access workplaces; to embrace flexible forms of work and to explore myriad forms of employability. It is therefore crucial that organisations such as BUK Ltd and GMCDP are directly involved in debates about related policy, legislation and service provision. Too often the emphasis in the work and disability field has focused on the relative merits of specific forms of government intervention and has therefore (i) ignored the views of disabled people; (ii) under-represented the impact of organisations that are run by disabled people and (iii) failed to engage with notions of employability that take into account social, historical, political and cultural factors. This report has demonstrated that not only are disabled people running their own businesses; that many are working in a variety of contexts in spite of a whole host of barriers but that many disabled people still suffer the indignities of oppression; their representative groups are at the forefront of the development of a critical discourse about the relationship between disability and employment. The good practices of organisations such as GMCDP and BUK Ltd need to be disseminated across the sectors of private, public, voluntary, education, work, health and social care. Only then can non-disabled people, allies, professionals and policy makers begin to work towards enabling understandings of rights, welfare and work.

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