



*Disability Action in the
Borough of Barnet*

Annual Report and Accounts

2006/07

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A few months ago I took over as Chairman from Mike Nash who, regretfully, tendered his resignation. Unfortunately Mike has not enjoyed the best of health recently and felt that after 10 years of service with DabB he should pass over the reins. Mike is a very experienced campaigner and intends to pursue a wider role in the community to fight for the rights of disabled people. I am sure that everyone involved with DabB would like to thank him for all his many years of hard work. During my short time as Chairman I have enjoyed the experience and opportunity of getting more involved with the disability movement.

DabB continues to grow and this year we have embarked on yet another project. We undertook a joint project with the Barnet Carers Centre and appointed Sara Mabger as a new outreach worker to identify and support more carers and raise awareness of their issues.

As DabB grows office space becomes tighter and tighter and although in the past we have actively sought to move to larger premises it was finally decided to stay put and redesign the offices so that BILA got a much needed extra office. All the offices have been redecorated and recarpeted and the staff agree that it is a much more pleasant environment in which to work.

We had an uncertain period with funding but finally secured a new Service Level Agreement from Barnet Council and I thank them sincerely for their continuing support. I would also like to take this opportunity to voice our appreciation for the generous help we have received from various Trusts, Charities and individuals that have allowed various projects to go forward.

Last but by no means least I would like to thank the hardworking DabB staff and acknowledge the valuable contribution made by the DabB volunteers. We are all working together to fight for equality and inclusion of disabled people in our Community.

Andy Kefala
Chairman

I am delighted to report that DabB has had a successful year in terms of service delivery and campaigning work.

During the last year DabB has been operating without a formal Service Level Agreement (SLA) in place whilst continuing discussions with the London Borough of Barnet in this regard. A business plan was produced and submitted in support of the Information, Advice and Advocacy work. This eventually led to a favourable conclusion with continued funding being agreed by the Council, including the full time cost of the executive director's post for the next three years.

As reported in our newsletter, the Skylark Counseling and Psychotherapy service is now being funded by Barnet Primary Care Trust and will form part of the general SLA. Although the initial funding is for twelve months I am optimistic that long term funding will be secured.

Regrettably the Life Options project came to an end in 2006, nonetheless I am hopeful that a similar project will be incorporated into the future SLA as part of promoting independent living for disabled people.

Our Outreach information and advice service has proved to be a lifeline for many of our users who find themselves isolated at home or are unable to travel to our North Finchley office. The project continues to be funded by The City Bridge Trust (formerly the Bridge House Estates Trust). Since the commencement the project has held weekly outreach sessions at the Sangam Centre in Edgware. The project is in its final 12 months of funding and it is envisaged that new funding will be secured in partnership with the Sangam Centre.

The Active Volunteering by Disabled People project continues to go from strength to strength. Since its inception the project has supported over 150 disabled people into volunteering opportunities of their choice. Many of the volunteers have successfully secured gainful employment as a result of the initial volunteering opportunity. I wish to thank Community Service Volunteers/Retired and Senior Volunteer Programme (Barnet) for their continued partnership in this project. The funding on this project currently ends in the autumn of 2007 but the directors are optimistic that new funding will be secured in time to continue the work of this vital project.

Sadly the funding for the part time Administrator post will come to an end in June 2007 and it is not expected that new funding will be forthcoming to continue its work. The post funded by Milly Apthorpe and Lloyds TSB provided administrative support to our Access in the Borough of Barnet group and internally at the DabB office.

The supply of disability equality training has generated much needed funds confirming the demand for this type of service. DabB will continue to provide the necessary expertise together in association with other leading disability Organisations.

In partnership with the Barnet Carers Centre we have appointed the Physical and Sensory Impairment Adult Carers Support and Outreach Officer in April 2007. This is a 3 year project funded by the London Borough of Barnet and housed jointly between the Barnet Carers Centre in North Finchley and also in DabB's own premises. The Officer is to work closely with individuals providing unpaid care support to family members.

Our Barnet Independent Living Agency (BILA) project has not relocated and despite this has had a satisfactory year. The project is nevertheless still exploring methods of increasing the client base and services offered.

Thanks to funding received from Awards for All, HBOS Foundation and Beatrice Laing Trust we were able to renew the computer stock during the year. This has resulted in a dramatic drop in hardware crashes and less frustrated staff.

I have continued extensive networking with key organisations such as the Greater London Authority, SCOPE and Disability Equality in Education. Locally I have continued my involvement with the Barnet Physical and Sensory Impairment Partnership Board, Barnet Voluntary Service Council, and Equalities National to promote the inclusion of the disabled peoples agenda. I have also advised local and national organisations of their duty under the new Disability Equality Duty which came into force in December 2006.

Jaspal Dhani
Executive Director

DabB Advice Service continues to be a key service in Barnet enabling disabled people to exercise as much freedom, control and choice over their lives as possible.

The advice service operated satisfactorily throughout the year and we are fortunate in having a loyal staff group together with three volunteer advisors. Many of our users have been seeing the same advisor for years and this leads to a personalised service.

Most of our users know of us through previous contacts. New users hear of us from professional services e.g. London Borough of Barnet social services department, housing department, health care services, friends and family. We also ensure we have a presence at borough wide conferences and publicity events of significance to disabled people. DabB participated in the following events during the year: "Which Way Now" – an event for young people to explore what they want to do next, "Parent Partnership Conference", North London Hospice Open Day, and the Multicultural Community Day.

As in previous years, problems accessing social security benefits generated the greatest volume of queries. A lot of our time is spent helping users complete Disability Living Allowance forms. Many other organisations in the borough do not provide this service but we attach great importance to it as we know from first hand experience what a great need there is for it. Our work on welfare rights problems ranges from dealing with relatively simple queries to advising on questions involving more complex areas of law. The fact that many of the people whose cases we take to appeals are successful is testimony to our expertise in the area but in many ways also a sad indictment of flaws in the social security system. Claiming Housing Benefit continues to be problematical. Users report that there are lengthy delays in their claims being determined and they are repeatedly asked for the same information and supporting documents. The Tax Credit system unfortunately seems to be in a permanent state of chaos and causes much distress to the very people it sets out to help.

Housing generated the second greatest number of queries. We can help users negotiate their way through the processes of trying to access housing but the severe and chronic shortage of suitable housing in the borough means that many disabled people are confined, often literally, to very unsuitable housing.

It is estimated that nationally one in four people are disabled. Clearly the need for advice is much greater than we can meet but we are constantly engaged in looking for new sources of funding to enhance our services.

Thanks go to the staff group for their unfailing dedication, loyalty and hard work. Thanks also go to our team of volunteers who help in so many ways and add value to grants given to us by funders. Volunteers help with reception, administration, maintenance of premises and delivery of advice.