

The Disabled People's Movement



Book Four

**A Resource Pack for Local Groups *of*
Disabled People**

Published by the BCODP

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About this booklet

This booklet will not tell you *how* to run your group, or *how* to do things. It is designed to signpost you to the information that you need. It will:

- Give you ideas about areas you need to think about
- Point you in the direction of books and organisations that may help. Some of these books *will* tell you how to do things.
- Fill-in some of the gaps that these books leave about being a group *of disabled people*.

While we were working on these booklets, we talked to many local groups of disabled people. They told us about the hard work and determination you need to succeed. This Resource Pack has been written to help you find support and information so that your hard work does not go to waste. We hope that you will find these signposts get you where you want to go a bit more quickly than you would get there without them!

Full details of all books and reference materials mentioned in this booklet is contained in Resource Booklet 6

Introduction

What this booklet covers

This booklet covers the Disabled People's Movement:

- Disability and the Disabled People's Movement
- The History of the Movement
- International Issues
- Integration and inclusion
- Campaigning
- Self-organisation
- BCODP

There are some good books that will help you understand more about these subjects. They are:

On our own behalf

Disabled People in Britain and Discrimination - A case for anti-discrimination legislation

Disability Politics

Disability and the Disabled People's Movement

What is disability?

Many people don't realise that disability can be looked at in more than one way. People normally see disability as an individual's problem, and they talk to us about '*your* disability'. Perhaps the most important thing that the Disabled People's Movement has learnt is that it isn't *our* disability. We know that the problem is the barriers we face in life, as people with particular conditions or impairments. It is these barriers that disable us. And it is society, designed and run by non-disabled people, that puts those barriers up. It can take a while to grasp this idea but once you do it is liberating.

Disability as an individual's problem

Most non-disabled people, especially doctors and disability professionals, think disability is an individual's problem. Any difficulties we face are seen as caused by the particular impairment (or condition) we have. We cannot do what we want to because of '*our* disability'. So, if someone who uses a wheelchair cannot get upstairs to a meeting, people blame the wheelchair, and not the stairs. Or if someone who has dyslexia cannot fill in a job application form, employers blame the person, not the application form. People think we are limited in what we can do, *because* we are not 'the same' as the rest of society. This is often called the 'medical model' of disability. It has been around for a long time, and it is used by a lot of people, including Government departments, to decide what they should be doing about disability.

Disability as society's problem

The Disabled People's Movement has developed a very different way of looking at disability. We have learnt that disability is not caused by us - it is caused by society. This is often called the 'social model' of disability. It is not our impairment or condition that stops us doing what everyone else does. What stops us is the fact that we live in a world which ignores our needs - for access, understanding, transport, education, employment, and so on. So the wheelchair user couldn't get to the meeting *because it was upstairs*. The building was built with no lift, and the people organising the meeting didn't move it to a ground floor room. The wheelchair user was quite able to take part in the meeting - the way the building was designed, and the meeting organised, 'disabled' them.

Barriers to disabled people

Society excludes us by putting up many different barriers. These can be physical barriers, barriers in the way things are organised or barriers because of people attitudes. A three-storey building without a lift is a physical barrier. When people arrange meetings without providing sign language interpretation, that is an organisational barrier. When non-disabled people treat us as if we can't do things, that is an attitudinal barrier. All barriers are equally serious -all of them stop us taking part in society equally, no matter how they affect us.

The barriers are widespread

But these barriers are not just 'one-offs' - unfortunate mistakes in a world that usually takes our needs into account. Architects and planners are not taught to think about access, so buildings that exclude disabled people are still being built. Social institutions are run in ways that exclude us - for instance, the education system is not designed to include all disabled children in mainstream schools. We are often taught in segregated schools and kept separate from non-disabled children. Information of all kinds is not provided in a way we understand -in Braille, on tape, in clear language, and so on. So we are stopped from getting the advice and help we need that non-disabled people can easily get.

Special needs?

Some people argue that we are different because our needs are 'special' and we need 'special' equipment and treatment to be able to get on with our lives. They want to change *us* - not the environment - to make us fit in. But everyone uses 'special' equipment in their lives. Think about the 'problem' that sighted people have getting around in the dark. If society had tried to solve that problem in the same sort of way it tries to solve *our* 'problems', sighted people would probably have to wear miners' lamps on their foreheads after dark. But they don't! Instead, they change the environment. They put up street lights, and build buildings with electric light. This is an environmental solution - just like environmental solutions *we* want.

Taking pride in ourselves

Once we realise that it is society, and the way it is organised, that disables us, and not our impairment, we can take pride in ourselves again. If disability is caused by physical barriers and other people's attitudes towards us, it is possible to get rid of it. If all the barriers which face people with impairments were

removed, we would no longer be *disabled*. The Disabled People's Movement understands disability as society's problem, and works to take down the barriers which prevent us from taking our full and equal part in society.



.. the barriers which prevent us from taking our full and equal part in society.

The History of the Movement

Charity

It is not long since begging on the streets and accepting charitable hand- outs of food - often from churches - kept many disabled people from starving. Things are *supposed* to have changed. The Welfare State was created to make sure no one starved or went without essentials, like medical treatment. However, most disabled people still find they have to rely on charity to provide essential equipment or services which non- disabled people take for granted. This has a very destructive influence on our lives.

What charity does to us

In order to raise money, charities often publicly show off the disabled people that they give things to. They tell people how difficult our lives are and how *we* have to struggle to manage without essential equipment. They then show how grateful we are for other people providing what we need. This gives the public the impression we are helpless, and dependent on others, not capable of doing things for ourselves.

Being dependent on charity, rather than having a right to the basic things we need, gives other people power over us. If people have power to give us what we need, they also have the power to keep it from us. This gives *other* people the power to control *our* lives. We have to rely on charity, where others don't. Disabled people should not have to rely on others to provide what we need to live a full life; it should be ours as a right.

Today's charities

Many of today's charities are there to 'help' disabled people control their lives. Because a lot of non-disabled people would lose their jobs if the charities closed down, many of them do not *want* us to control our own lives. These groups often separate disabled people up according to their impairment. So if you have epilepsy, a different organisation will 'care' for you than for someone with diabetes, for instance. When the charities began, they would often provide education and employment for disabled people, so disabled people were kept apart from non-disabled people *and* from disabled people with different impairments. This still happens today. Separating disabled people from one another stops us understanding that we experience the same discrimination. It stops us seeing that discrimination comes from the way society treats us, and not from our impairments.

100 years of speaking for ourselves

In the 1890s, the British Deaf Association and the National League of the Blind were formed. These were the very first organisations run *by disabled people* for themselves. In 1974, the Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) was formed by disabled people, and it began to campaign for the inclusion of disabled people into mainstream society. UPIAS wrote a paper called *Fundamental Principles of Disability*. In this paper, UPIAS set out the ideas that are now called the 'social model' (see Disability as society's problem, earlier in this Booklet). Since then, many more organisations run *by disabled people* have been set up, like the Coalitions in Greater Manchester, Bradford and the West of England. They are known as 'of' organisations, to set them apart from groups run by *non-disabled people* for disabled people.

The first law

Disabled people have been treated differently from non-disabled people and prevented from taking part in society for a very long time. In 1351 the government passed a law called the Statute of Labourers. This Statute made it against the law for people to give money to beggars who could work. But they could still give money to disabled people - everyone assumed they couldn't work. This was the first time that the different treatment of disabled people had been put into law. This law was based on the idea that disability is an individual's problem. Since then, many laws have been passed, and many social policies made which treat disabled people differently.

Still being treated differently today

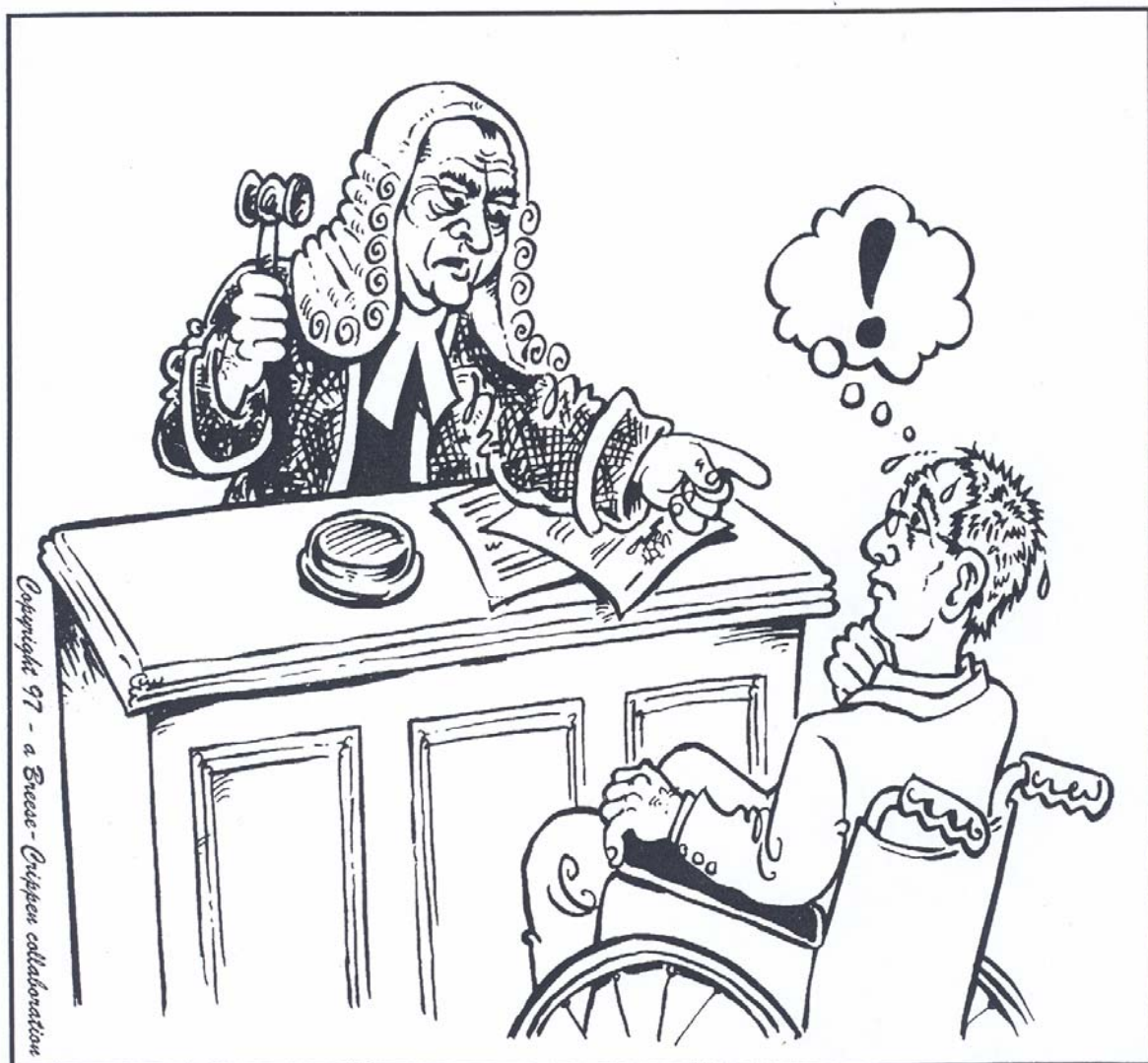
Incapacity Benefit is based on the assumption that disabled people are not able to work for a living. So the same assumptions about disabled people that were around at the time of the Statute of Labourers are still affecting our lives today. The Incapacity Benefit test does not test the particular barriers individual disabled people face in their lives - it just tests their impairments, which is not the same. So someone who experiences mental distress from time to time, and finds it impossible to get a job, may not get Incapacity Benefit. But someone who uses a wheelchair, who has been 'working all their life, would automatically get the benefit if they applied. People do not stop to ask why disabled people find it difficult to get employment. The latest law to be passed is the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act. Part of this Act says that discrimination against disabled people can be justified - so the law says it is all right for people to treat us differently. Although it is now well over 600 years since the Statute of Labourers was passed, disabled people are still not treated

the same way under the law as everyone else. We are seen as different from non-disabled people.

The campaign for Anti-discrimination Legislation

The Disabled People's Movement continues to campaign for full and comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation. We are demanding that laws be passed that would give us the right to be treated the same as non-disabled people in every area.

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 does not give us the same rights as non-disabled people have, and does not even give *all disabled people* the same rights. So we need to continue to fight for a better law.



" ... and I find you guilty of being disabled !"

Equality within the Movement

Impairment, or a medical condition, can affect anyone at any time of their life. So disabled people come from all ages and all groups of people. The Disabled People's Movement must be careful to include all disabled people. This means encouraging and welcoming people who are Black, Asian, gay or lesbian, men or women and of whatever age or impairment. No one should be left out. It is not enough to *say* that if they want to join they would be welcome. This is like non-disabled people saying we are welcome to live in their world, but taking no notice of our differences and our access needs. It will not work.

The Disabled People's Movement must be active in encouraging disabled people from all sections of the community to join us -and this means take *all* their access needs into account. There are many ways we can do this. These include holding meetings in area where people from all backgrounds feel welcome, arranging meetings at convenient times for people who have young children, and producing information in accessible formats for visually impaired people, Deaf people, people with learning difficulties and people whose first language is not English.



“ Sorry mate - we don’t allow dogs !”

International Issues

Do they affect us?

Sometimes we are so busy fighting for our own rights that it is easy to forget that in other countries disabled people have problems too. Sometimes they seem too far away to be important to us. But other disabled people's problems and successes can affect us. The rise of Fascism (like the extreme right neo-Nazis) in Europe, for instance, affects how disabled people are seen - and treated - in those countries. It affects us too, because some groups in Britain admire and try to follow what happens in Europe.

The European Union

Britain is a member of the European Union, which used to be called the Common Market. Some of our laws come from Brussels rather than from London. The European Court of Human Rights has made a number of important decisions that affect the lives of other minorities, for instance women and older people. What the European Court decides in the future could help disabled people who want to bring cases under the Disability Discrimination Act.

America and the Americans with Disabilities Act

Looking at what happens in other countries can also give us ideas on how to organise successful campaigns. For instance, what disabled Americans have achieved gives us ideas about how to fight for *our* rights. We can use the Americans with Disabilities Act as a good example of how things can be changed *by* disabled people *for* disabled people.

In America a group of students at Berkeley in California started to hold demonstrations about rights for disabled people early in the 1970s. They also did some very practical things, like building their own ramps out of concrete to make buildings accessible. Joined by newly disabled soldiers at the end of the Vietnam War, they put a lot of pressure on the government. In 1990, the US government passed the Americans with Disabilities Act. This Act gives disabled people real and enforceable rights, unlike our own Disability Discrimination Act which still allows people to treat us unequally in certain circumstances.

International Organisations

Disabled People's International (DPI) was formed in 1981 - the International Year of Disabled People. Disabled people from many groups and organisations around the world attended a conference run by Rehabilitation International - a world-wide organisation *for* disabled people. The disabled people were angry that the non-disabled people were excluding them from decisions and using their power to keep control from disabled people. DPI gives disabled people from around the world a chance to share their different experiences of campaigning and to learn from each other. Around the world many societies do not take disabled people's needs into account, and DPI realised that because of this, discrimination needs to be dealt with at an international level. In 1984 DPI helped to persuade the United Nations to change their Declaration of Human Rights to include disabled people.

Disability Awareness in Action (DAA) is another international organisation of disabled people, started in 1992. It aims to provide support and information to disabled people so we can organise ourselves at national and international levels to raise awareness of disability issues with governments and policy makers. For instance, they have written a Resource Kit for disabled people's groups around the world. This is the one we have suggested might help your group.

Integration and Inclusion

Do you want to be integrated?

'Integration' is a difficult word because people use it in different ways. Sometimes it is used to mean being involved in society, and treated equally, which is what we want. But often it is used to mean expecting disabled people to fit in with the rest of society without any help or support, and without any of our needs being properly met. This is not what we want, and it will not work.

Why we talk about inclusion

True inclusion happens when people recognise and meet the needs we have as disabled people -and as a right, not as a favour. It's about treating us as equal - giving us equal value to non-disabled people. But even though we want to be fully included in society, there are some very strong reasons why we may want to organise ourselves separately from non-disabled people at the present time (see Self-organisation in this Booklet) .

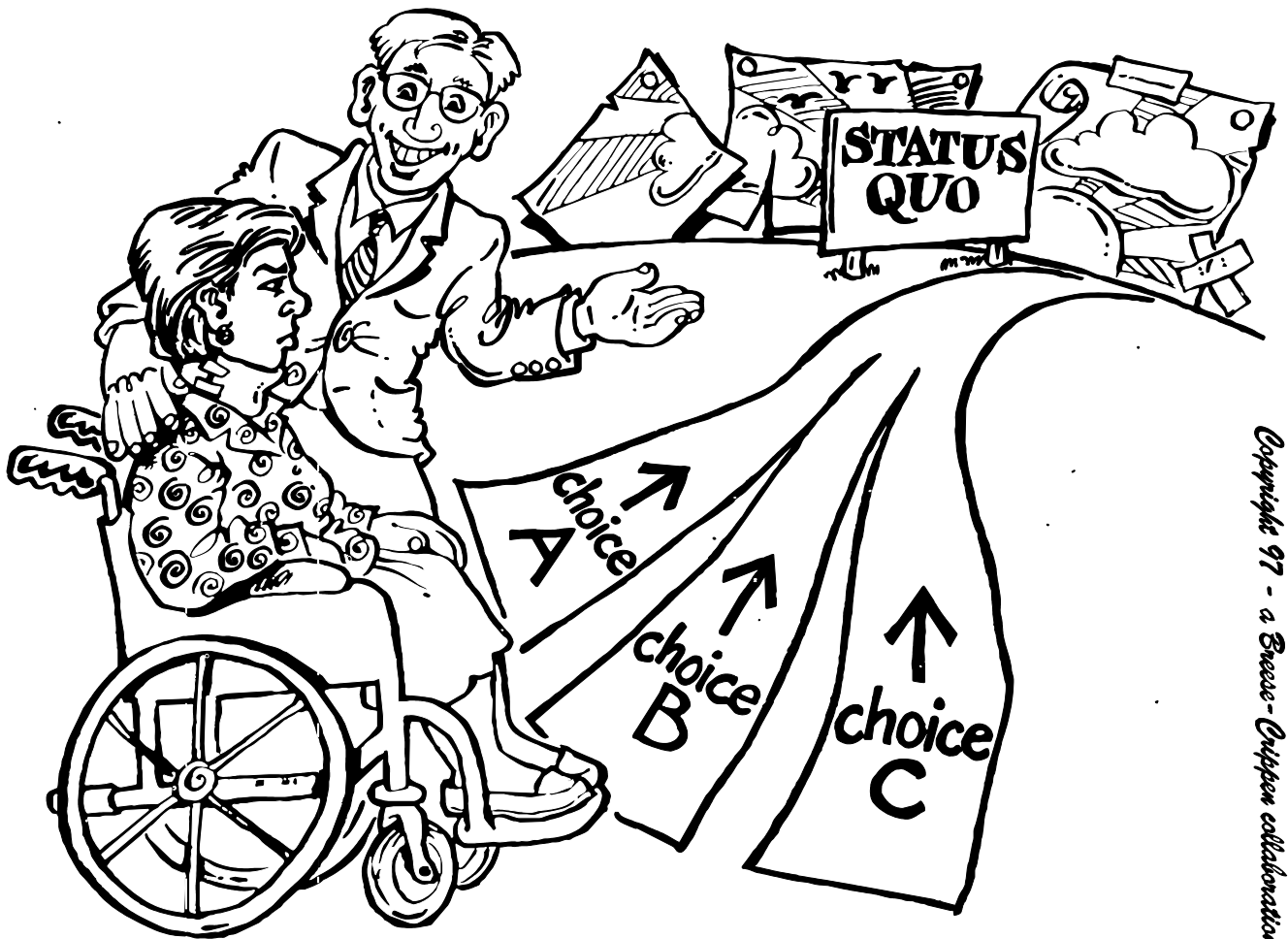
The importance of choice

We should have a free choice to be with disabled people, or with non- disabled people. This means there has to be a real alternative. Going to a day centre might feel like a choice, but is it really? Sometimes it may feel as if all your friends are at the centre. But perhaps this is because you have not had the choice to go anywhere else to make friends. What alternatives are there? Is there somewhere else you could go which is accessible, provides transport, and does the things you want to do at a time which suits you? If your only choice is between staying home or going to a resource centre, it is not really a free choice. If you have every opportunity to do things with non-disabled people, but you choose to spend your time with other disabled people, that *is* a free choice. The choice and control *over* where you go should always be *yours*.

Disabled people's right to be included

In the past, disabled people have been shut away, in workhouses, residential homes and so on. As a result, we have not been a part of society as it has developed. So it has developed without taking our needs into consideration. This is why so many books are not available in large print, children are not taught British Sign Language in school, and many non-disabled people feel awkward around, or even afraid of, disabled people. But we have as much right

to be included as anyone else. If our needs are not met this is not our problem. It is society's problem, and it is up to society to find ways to deal with it. However, history has shown that no one comes along and just *gives* people rights. Black people, women and all other disadvantaged groups have had to fight for their rights. They have done this by showing that they should have the same rights as everyone else; that although they may be different from other groups of people, this doesn't mean they are of less value. We can fight for our rights in different ways (see Campaigning in this Booklet).



“What do you mean – you don’t have any choices!”

Campaigning

Because disabled people are not treated equally, we need to campaign to change this. We need to learn how to fight for our rights, as other disadvantaged groups have to do.

Different ways of campaigning

Campaigns can be large or small. Sometimes we want to campaign about local issues that only affect a small group of people. This is just as important to the people involved, as campaigning about something that affects every disabled person in the country, like the Disability Discrimination Act. Not everybody wants to fight for their rights in the same way. Some people are very happy going on marches and demonstrations. Others would rather write letters or speak directly to the people involved. It doesn't matter how you choose to campaign for your rights. What is important is that you do it, and that you do it in a way which you feel happy with.

Direct Action

Direct action means doing something that directly affects other people, like holding up traffic, or taking over a building - 'having a sit-in'. This can show other people the kind of problems disabled people face, and how strongly we feel about them. Some people enjoy the excitement of demonstrating, and the feeling of belonging that being part of a big group of disabled people can bring. It can be a very empowering feeling - you realise *you* can do something to change the way things are. Direct Action Network (DAN) is a national group of disabled people who campaign for changes through non-violent direct action. DAN has local groups in different parts of the country, so if this is the way some of your group members would like to campaign, they might like to join one of these groups.

Lobbying

Lobbying usually involves writing letters, but it can include going to visit people to explain *what* you want to change, and *why* it needs changing. To be successful you have to find out who has the power to make or influence the changes you need, and write or talk to them. Local Councillors, Members of Parliament (MP) and Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) can be lobbied for change in this way. Most libraries have lists of your Councillors, MPs and MEPs, and where you can write to them. If you can't get to your library, you can ring and ask for a list. Councillors, MPs and MEPs also set

aside times when people can go and talk to them (sometimes called surgeries). If you can't get to see them, ask them to come and see you. If they will not support you, you can find one who does and write to them instead. The more letters that people who represent us get, the stronger they can argue for what we want.



“ It’s alright Sir, they can’t get in - we’re inaccessible !”

Self-organisation

We face the same discrimination

There are times when we would prefer to be with other disabled people. Disabled people, whatever their impairment, share the same kind of experiences of discrimination - we are not given the same opportunity and treated as equal to other people. If a visually impaired person cannot get information in large print or on tape, they are being excluded - left out of what other people take for granted. If information is not available in plain and easily understood language, people with learning difficulties and dyslexia are left out. If buses are not accessible, people with mobility impairments are left out. If 'public' meetings are held in places without an induction loop, hearing-aid users are left out. The exact problems that one disabled person has with access, for instance, may not be the same as the exact problems that someone with another impairment has. But the *reason* behind them *is* the same. The reason is that other people ignore our needs - whatever they may be. They don't understand that they have needs just like we do - a need for seats on the bus, for instance - and *those* needs are met! Our impairments may be different but we all experience the same discrimination.

What happens when we come together?

All disabled people face discrimination - we all know how it feels to be excluded. By coming together, we can share our experience and feel less alone. We can get support from, and give support to, other disabled people. We can learn how others deal with similar situations, and this can help to deal with our own. By acting as a united group, and showing our support and solidarity with each other, we become stronger, and we can show that disability is not *our* problem. And if we want to change things for the better for disabled people, we *must* work from our shared experiences of exclusion.

Groups run by *disabled people* for disabled people are often where we first come together to organise and campaign for change. But there are places where disabled people come together, and nothing changes. If our energies are sidetracked into teddy-stuffing or basket-weaving, we are not going to build the strong group identity we need to fight the discrimination that we face daily. We all need to work together and share a Vision for change.

"Divide and conquer"

Non-disabled people often try to divide disabled people into separate groups because we have different impairments. Then one group of disabled people can be played off against another - one group of disabled people can end up competing with other groups for limited resources such as money. Dividing us up into small groups makes it easier for non-disabled people to control disabled people. What we need to do is stick together and support one another in our fight to be treated as equal.



“ He says that he won’t talk to us until we split ourselves back up into impairment groups !”

Impairment and self-help

Some groups controlled by disabled people *are* based around impairment. For instance, Muscle Power is run by people with neuro-muscular impairments, unlike the Muscular Dystrophy Group, which is run *for* people with neuro-muscular impairments by non-disabled people. Groups like Muscle Power have their place. It can be really useful sharing knowledge about the effects of your impairment with others who experience similar effects. So being with other people with the same impairment as us *can* be a good idea, as long as it doesn't mean we end up fighting one another, and wasting energy we should be using for fighting for our rights as disabled people.

Who can speak for us?

The only people who know what it is like to be disabled are disabled people. The most anyone else can ever do is try to imagine themselves in our place. But they can only guess what it is like to experience our discrimination. They cannot know how we feel and think. This is why the only people who can speak for disabled people are disabled people themselves. Although we may have different impairments, we all experience the same discrimination - being treated as less than equal to other people because we are different.

Control and how to keep it

Organisations which claim to be for disabled people are only really *for us when they are run by us*. We are the experts on living our lives as disabled people - no-one else is. In order to control our lives, we need to be in control of the organisations which are run for our benefit. This does not mean that other (non-disabled) people cannot help us if we want them to, but it *does* mean not letting them take over. Non-disabled 'allies' -people who are *really* on our side - will understand about the need for disabled people to keep power and control over our own lives.

Can We Work Together?

Disabled people know what we need, but we might not have all the skills to set up a group. So it might be a good idea to use non-disabled people with the skills to help set up a group. The important thing to remember is that although they are helping us, we are the ones who have the power - it is *our* group, not theirs. We *can* work together if disabled people are in control, and the non-disabled people realise this.

How to let other people help without taking over

One way to let non-disabled people help without taking over is to use their particular skills for doing particular jobs - typing, for example. In this way they can help with the work that needs doing and learn about disability issues without having any power. But even when non-disabled people are volunteers, working for disabled people, it can be hard to keep control. Another way a non-disabled person can help is to become a member of the Committee, but without a vote. This way they can share their knowledge with you, help you come to your decision, but without the right to make decisions for you. (This doesn't always stop people from trying to take over!). Or they could be observers at your Committee meetings - people you invite to share their knowledge with you when you decide you want them there. This means they do not take part in any discussions unless you want them to; and they do not have a vote in any decisions you take.

If you want non-disabled people as members of your Committee, you need to decide how far they can be involved, and write this into your Constitution - this can save lot of problems later on (see Booklet 1).

Does it matter who is in charge?

Does it matter who runs disabled people's groups? Non-disabled people have a long history of thinking they know what disabled people want or need. But they are not disabled people - they do not know what it is like to be disabled. We are the experts on our own lives - no-one knows what it is like to be us except us. So no one else can speak on our behalf. Also, many non-disabled people have well paid jobs running groups for disabled people, and so they have a good reason for keeping things as they are.

The British Council of Organisations of Disabled People (BCODP)

Why join?

You're Not Alone

It is really good to know you are not alone fighting for your rights. Being part of a national organisation, like BCODP, with a lot of members all working for what you believe in, helps you realise you are not alone. Knowing there are many others who feel like you do, can be very empowering.

'Update'

Working alone can be very hard. Support from BCODP can make things easier. You will get 'Update', a newsletter which gives you useful information, and keeps you up to date on what is going on in BCODP, its projects and sub-committees. These sub-committees are groups that look into areas such as equality, independent living, and women's issues.

A Voice

BCODP represents the interests of disabled people in a lot of areas. It gets people to do research which helps us to argue our case, on Independent Living and Housing issues for example. It has a Parliamentary Representative, to try to make sure, nationally, that laws passed take into account the needs and interests of disabled people. It is also a member of Disabled People's International with a representative on its European Forum. So as a member of BCODP, you can have a national and international voice.

Networking

Being a member of BCODP also gives you opportunities to network with other members. You can share information, discuss what you are doing, find out how they have solved problems, and get ideas on how to solve your own. And your group's experiences can help others too. Each year the Annual General Meeting gives group representatives a chance to meet face to face, discuss important issues which may change the lives of disabled people, and just get to know each other.

What membership gives you

Provided you are an organisation *of* disabled people you can become a full member of BCODP. In other words, your Constitution says that a majority of your Committee and members *must* be disabled people.

Being a full member means you will:

- ✓ be able vote at the Annual General Meeting
- ✓ be able to nominate and vote for the Officers - Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary and Treasurer
- ✓ have an opportunity to be involved in the work of BCODP's sub-committees, and its national and international work
- ✓ be able to put forward one of your disabled members to stand for election to BCODP's National Council
- ✓ get the 'Update' newsletter every month

Individual disabled people can also become associate members of BCODP.

What is expected of your group

Membership of any group is a two-way thing. You will be expected to support BCODP with whatever time and energy your group can give. Members can expect to be involved in meetings - in person or by post. BCODP also expects its members to share useful information, and help BCODP to support other disability groups.

How to join

Contact BCODP for a membership pack.
Their details are:

**BCODP
Litchurch Plaza
Litchurch Lane
Derby
DE24 8AA**

Telephone 01332-295551
Fax 01332-295580
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This booklet is one of six that form
the BCODP Resource Pack
for Local Groups *of* Disabled People

- Booklet 1 - About your Group
- Booklet 2 - The Environment
- Booklet 3 - Money, Workers & other Resources
- Booklet 4 - The Disabled People's Movement
- Booklet 5 - Training
- Booklet 6 - More Help and Information

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