**bResilient – a two year plan for you, your supporters and your community**

**DRN’s “Campaign for an Inclusive Economy” starts Boxing Day – here’s why.**

The economy is in crisis. The Chancellor has borrowed £374 billion so far this year to try and rescue the economy from the effects of the pandemic. The debt to GDP ratio means that our debt is 108% of our wealth. In response the Government are likely to want to raise taxes and cut public spending. It is possible that there will be a rerun of the austerity period with cuts in welfare spending such as benefits or attempts to bring in private medical insurance or reductions in entitlements such as industrial injuries compensation. It is in these circumstances probable that disabled people and those with a long term medical condition could be asked to endure poverty and destitution.

**Reluctance is futile**

Advocates like me need to help advocates like you resist this possibility both through your political influence but also through your resiliency plan. Planning not simply for self-sufficiency but mutual aid. What follows is a plan on how disabled people and/or their carers can act together to generate an income, reduce overheads and gain access to resources including information.

Disabled people are not vulnerable but are resilient people with rights. They may have already experienced a failure to be supported by the state or lack the finances to engage fully with the market but do know the kindness of strangers or the value of a “pushy parent.” This appeal is not written as a bleak scenario but as a optimistic campaign plan; it is not a make do response but a call to make better. Its success is down to me but it is even more down to you.

**DRN – Disability Resilience Network – what’s that?**

There are many definitions of resilience but essentially it is the ability to withstand a shock to a system or body and recover in part, whole or to an even better state. The shock may for disabled people be the onset of a serious health condition or loss of capacity due to an acquired impairment but for non-disabled people it may be seeing this journey in a spouse or child or even in themselves following a bereavement. Resilience is inherent but can be learnt, enhanced and even transferred. Resilience is vital to communities and organisations too such as businesses and of course local and national government and the structures that define them too. Resilient structures require resilient people to design, create and maintain or overhaul them and the DRN network aims to organise the transfer of the resilience of disabled people into the resilience of societies, businesses and communities and through this process achieve an inclusive economy that leaves no one behind.

**My resilience is your resilience and this is how we will become more resilient**

1. **Social Value Metrics**

Businesses seeking to win Government contracts will from January 1st be judged on social value. This means that some 10% of the value of the contract will be assessed for its performance on social and environmental criteria instead of simply value for money. This judgement is made against a basket of indicators (metrics) one of which is on disability recruitment and skills acquisition by disabled people. Businesses can chose which metric they wish to bid on. With your support or persuasion they could opt for the metric favouring disabled people and over the lifetime of the contract and possibly beyond too create jobs for disabled people to fill. The weblink below may be an helpful starting point for finding out what investment is due in your area, what contracts will be let to deliver the infrastructure, product or service and to whom. The DRN will support you to hold meetings, provide advice on monitoring recruitment and retention, best practice on reasonable adjustments and responding to any other advice needs you may have.

 [**https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-infrastructure-and-construction-procurement-pipeline-202021**](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-infrastructure-and-construction-procurement-pipeline-202021)

1. No reduction in support for those in receipt of disability related benefits

In the Chancellor’s budget following the pandemic he announced an additional £20 for each claimant on Universal Credit. He has maintained this payment but it is under review with the threat to end the so called “uplift” in a future budget . In addition he has not extended the uplift to and has not extended it to those still in receipt of legacy benefits such as the health related benefit Employment Support Allowance (ESA). The Disability Benefits Consortium (DBC) of Charities are campaigning for these commitments and I have also picked up on these demands in this campaign. Resources including a briefing, a template letter to send to your MP and additional support is available from DBC.

1. Form community, exchange and transfer assets and organise for your community to generate its own resources including insights and learning

**The bonds that underpin access in the broadest sense**

Strong ties like the forces that bind hydrogen to oxygen atoms create the molecules in water but it is the weak ties between the hydrogen atoms that makes water a liquid and in turn sustain life. In a similar way it is the strength of weak ties that is often critical in successfully obtaining work. A tie is an information carrying connection between people and a weak tie is defined by having contact with someone more than once a year but less than twice a week. In a famous study from 1970 by Dr Granovetter these weak ties were responsible for 56% of the jobs obtained by 100 people he personally interviewed from the 282 he surveyed (1).

**Value of peer to peer support**

Peer to peer support occurs when people provide knowledge, experience, emotional, social or practical support to each other. It has been documented to have benefits for people with a wide range of health conditions including mental health, diabetes, trauma, limb loss and sight loss. In 2009 the Blind Veterans Association of the United States launched "Operation Peer Support." The focus is upon giving blinded veterans access to new tools and resources so that they can adapt and establish new life goals. The NHS initiatives already committed to such as the expert patient programme pioneered by Dr Kate Lorig. The expert patient programme utilises the experience of “patient leaders” to effectively support those with newly acquired conditions to maintain their medical regime and adopt healthy lifestyles.

**Exchange systems**

Exchange systems embed the social nature of ties and peer to peer networks. They also build upon the idea that people have assets or qualities that are valuable to other people and that trading them can help people to connect in a social way with other people and in doing so enable them to gain access to other resources. These assets may be tangible such as trading the use of an item of equipment that a person possess but only uses occasionally or practical skills or qualities such as time. Sometimes these exchanges may be purely performed as gifts and exchange systems exist to facilitate the giving whereas sometimes these exchanges are conducted whereby the person giving earns a credit and the person receiving a debit and the exchange is conducted in what is called a complementary money system i.e. not in the official or normal currency of the country.

**Types of exchange systems - the gift economy**

There are many types of gifting that are well established and understood. These include Wikipedia that shares knowledge, filesharing such as Napster that shares media content, open source software that shares software development such as the Linux community and freecycle that sets up gifting circles and currently has nearly ten million members spread over 5000 groups worldwide. There are several ways to join the gift economy and quite possibly in your own area visit http://justfortheloveofit.org/ to share skills and assets you have or want. Skill sharing is also promoted through http://www.freeskilling.org.uk so that a person can acquire skills one week and then pass them onto someone else the next. At http://www.ilovefreegle.org/ you can become a giver yourself and give things away or "freegle" them. The "freegle" community has nearly one a half million members spread across 380 groups in the UK.

**Exchange systems that value time**

In timebanking people earn a credit by giving an hour or more of then their time to complete a useful activity for someone else and can use the credit to obtain an hour of someone else s time to fulfil a need of their own. The participants decide what can be traded and usually a catalogue or electronic directory makes the offers known. In "timebanking" everyone’s time is as valuable as everyone else’s so all participants trade on an equal basis. Timebanking rests on the principle of co-production whereby people are recognized as having resources that others value and need e.g. experience, caring, learning, socializing and that the exchange allows people within community to find many of the answers to their own problems. Visit http://www.timebanking.org/about/about-coproduction/ to learn more.

**Exchange systems that use complementary currencies**

Some exchange systems use a complementary currency i.e. not sterling, to enable people to barter without cash; examples include Local Exchange and Trading Scheme (LETS) such as the Brixton pound. Some local shops and businesses will accept these currencies and thus allow people to access resources beyond those that they have the means to pay in the national currency for. Businesses also benefit by gaining access to services for which they cannot get the credit to purchase. It is not simply the case that these currencies only exist in deprived neighbourhoods or bohemian communities; one of the most celebrated and evaluated is the WIR which has existed for more than sixty years in Switzerland. Sixteen businesses started the WIR as a mutual credit system. A debt in WIR is either reimbursed by bartering in sales with someone else in the network or paid in full with the national currency. Over time the network has expanded to include a quarter of all the businesses in Switzerland. There are thought by LETS UK to be some 300 LTE schemes in the UK with some 30,000 participants. A best practice guide on how to set up and maintain LET scheme can be found at http://www.letslinkuk.net/practice/best-practice.htm

**Building upon exchange systems to promote shared consumption**

Shared consumption works on the idea that sharing the ownership rather than every individual owning the same item realizes economies for individuals and reduces the environmental impacts of mass consumption. People on low or fixed incomes stand to gain from ways of living that require less capital outlay for goods whether it is a family car or a lawnmower or allows for savings by utilizing the power of group purchasing. Disabled people could share specialist equipment and rent or donate the use of it so that others could benefit who cannot afford the initial outlay.

**Value of exchange schemes to those moving from benefits into work**

Disabled people could opt to form or join exchange schemes to: 1) make state benefits stretch further, 2) gain access through increased social networks to information on job opportunities and 3) become providers of skills, assets or time themselves and thus establish or reinforce new identities as agencies of development themselves.

**Connected communities**

Robert Putnam in his famous study of social capital scientifically documented the dividend for society in terms of health, the economy, crime etc from stronger social relationships – social capital. He contrasted bonding social capital (connections within a community) and bridging social capital (connections across communities) and provided us with the evidence for why we need to create the infrastructure for it to happen. In the future connected communities of disabled people inter-connecting with the rest of society will exert a powerful influence on the shaping of both the private and public sectors. This is because just as Tesla’s experiments led to the national grid and allowed electricity to flow to further even more scientific developments so can the largely untapped creative energy of disabled people flow through these connections to those who will then be inspired to co-produce with them a new generation of fully accessible products and services. Our task is to co–create the infrastructure.

**References**

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