

## **Barriers Disabled people in Camden experience** **in finding and staying in work**

### **Collated from:**

- Summer 2021. CDA video made from interviews with 12 local Disabled people
- 9th September 2021. Conversation of Change event. 32 people attended including local Disabled people, Council representatives, other local service providers, and funders
- September 2021. Themes raised in ALAG webinar about employment barriers for autistic adults
- Summer-autumn 2021. Interviews with 20 local Disabled people
- Summer 2021 onwards. Input from weekly meetings of an "Education and Employment Group " of local Disabled people who are leading a change project on these themes as part of CDA's leadership programme
- Oct -Dec 2021. 4 x Coproduction sessions with local Disabled people and Camden Council representatives
- Oct -Dec 2021 onwards. Input from fortnightly meetings of an employment coproduction "Ideas Group" made up of a small group of Disabled Camden residents facilitated by Camden Disability Action
- Nov 2021. Meeting with small group of Deaf BSL users, facilitated by Jeremy Yankey (leader on CDA Leadership Programme) to discuss access barriers to local services

## **I. Inaccessible and discriminatory recruitment**

### **A. Fear of disclosing impairment**

- constant weigh up of risk of discrimination if you disclose versus the need

to have adjustments in place but also a more fundamental need to be acknowledged as a Disabled person -that this is a valid and authentic part of your culture and life experience

### **B. Inflexible recruitment methods**

-most employers only offer open recruitment and interview routes which are either inaccessible or discriminatory towards many Disabled people or just don't allow Disabled people to show off their skills well

- a lot of resistance to work trials

### **C. Lack of reasonable adjustments or access support at point of application and interview**

-very few employers ask about access needs at application or interview.

"Only DPOs (organisation led and run by Disabled people) ask what reasonable adjustments I need before I've been appointed. One time I went for an interview and it turned out it was on the second floor and they had no lift. They hadn't checked what my access needs were beforehand"

-when employers do ask about access needs they don't necessarily have the access equipment or support that someone might need available

-having to ask for access equipment or support (or having to provide it yourself) raises anxiety for the applicant about how they will be viewed and whether it will reduce their chances of getting the job

### **D. Direct prejudice in interview**

-Being rejected because of way you look or come across in interview

-Rejections on health grounds

-Rejections because of a failure to understand legal rights to reasonable adjustments.

-"One time I was applying for a job at a supermarket and I said to them

that on a bad day I might need someone to fill the shelves up to waist level because my condition means that sometimes parts of me are immobile. They wouldn't make that adjustment. They said the other colleagues would have to do low shelves only and it wouldn't be fair on them so I didn't get the job."

-Openly expressed stereotypes and assumptions.

"I was rejected because I was slow getting out of a chair. They were worried I wouldn't be able to escape in time in case of an emergency with a client"(Disabled person with a mobility impairment who worked as a Social Worker)

-Rejection because of language and communication differences

"They just reject you when they realise you use BSL"

## **E. Role of networking and prior connections in finding job opportunities**

- the role of networking in finding out about job opportunities is a problem for many Disabled people

"Finding jobs is not just a simple matter of applying on a job board. Some of these jobs you have to achieve by networking or doing things outside the job which is a strong challenge for those with my condition. Also I feel we live in a culture of nepotism where acquiring jobs heavily relies on the connections you already have or finding new connections which is simply unattainable and a strong disadvantage to those especially with my condition" (person with Asperger's)

"I don't have a social network outside of work. It makes looking for new

work more difficult because I haven't got a friendship network I can turn to for new jobs" (person with Asperger's)

## **II. Poor quality employment support services**

### **A. Very poor standard of support from job centres and other employment support services**

-Rapid turnover of staff

-Lack of knowledge of rights or needs of Disabled people

-Approaches that are inaccessible, disrespectful and sometimes traumatising

"I've been harassed by the DWP." "They are too pushy"

"They don't know how to treat people with a learning disability or communicate with them"

"You don't need a knife to kill you"

"The job centre wouldn't let my daughter have an appropriate adult with her at the interviews. or job searches. She couldn't understand what was being said and what she needed to do and she was always getting sanctioned" (Parent of woman with learning difficulties)

"I am a Deaf BSL user. I had to go to the job centre about my ESA. They told me I couldn't have an interpreter. They said I had to use my daughter to interpret. She is 5 years old! They said children that age interpret all the time for people. Then I got letters saying I owed lots of money. I couldn't read them because they were in English and still they didn't give me an interpreter. In the end the legal centre helped me and I won at an appeal and I didn't have to pay the money back. But it went on for so long. It was

so stressful"

"The job centre, they just cast you aside"

"when I go to the job centre they giggle and laugh and whisper about me. It's not respectful behaviour. How would you feel if that happened?" Deaf BSL user

## **B. Poor and confusing advertising of employment support services- and limited criteria for services**

-There are lots of different employment support offers. It is really unclear which ones are accessible or have the right experience to support Disabled people

-It can be really hard to find out which support service is suitable so lots of people cycle through inaccessible and unhelpful support offers

-Different support services have different criteria, by age, or employment barrier, impairment, or length of time out of employment. It is totally confusing and means you can spend ages just being rejected or moved around between services before you even get any support to look for a job! If you get a late diagnosis (which for example is very common for people with Asperger's or Autism, you can fall out of the age criteria for support services.

## **C. Lack of involvement of Disabled people in design of services**

-Disabled people aren't given the opportunity to design or review services to make sure they are actually effective

## **D. No support to understand rights or explore access needs**

-Lots of Disabled people don't know what their legal rights are in employment but employment support services rarely support them to learn

these.

-Lots don't know what access support and adjustments will help them in employment. They don't always have any experience of good support. But employment support services rarely give space and support to think this through, to meet other Disabled people and find out what might work. Many Disabled people don't know about ways to get access support. For example, only one of the group of Deaf people consulted in Dec 2021 knew about Access to Work. This group felt that Deaf BSL users are particularly left behind through lack of information in their own language.

-Many Disabled people acquire their impairments later in life, or have late diagnoses so they don't necessarily understand immediately how their access needs will impact on work, or what reasonable adjustments would be helpful

### **E. Tokenistic or unsuitable job matches**

-Job searches are often focused on a small number of industries and job roles that are stereotypically considered "suitable" for Disabled people, eg catering, gardening, hospital porter, sanitation...and are not focused on people's skills, interests and career goals

"I was told to go and check jobs that I really don't want, like taking the rubbish out"

"They wouldn't give him the role he wanted at the hotel. He wanted to try front-of-house and they said he couldn't do that because of his speech impediment. They should have been more honest from the start about them not wanting him to do those things. What's the point in giving him the position and then not letting him try the role he wanted to do? With the

right support my son could have done that job".

-Job matches are sometimes completely unsuitable

"I've been pressured by the DWP to find unsuitable jobs"

"My son got an unpaid internship at a hotel for a year. The hotel was really far and my son had to get up at 5am to get there by 9am. The internship was organised by Mencap but Mencap wasn't understanding that my son couldn't get there if there was a problem with the trains. My son learned one way of getting to the job and if that way went wrong he couldn't work out another way on the spot. They should have been understanding of that because he has a learning disability"

#### **F. Pre employment training and internships often do not result in employment**

"my son's fed up with college. His college course was all about finding work and it all led to that unpaid internship at the hotel, which didn't work out"

#### **G. Support stops at point of getting the job. No support at other difficult points- so hard to retain work or progress in career**

-No support for challenging points such as change in manager, change in role, applying for a promotion, trying to secure training or other development opportunities, office moves, disciplinarys and performance reviews, dealing with incidences of bullying or discrimination

-Training and career development opportunities are inaccessible too but there is nowhere to go for support to challenge this or find ways round those barriers. This means that Disabled people often get stuck in low paid positions that don't use their skills fully and don't allow them to develop. The knock on effect is a lack of Disabled people in senior and influential positions...which means there are fewer Disabled people in

positions where they actually have the power to change all of this

## **H. Inadequate Funding**

-Services that support Disabled people into or towards employment are funded short term, or at low levels. This makes it impossible to provide services that are high quality, that can deal with the range of barriers Disabled people are facing, and that can work with people over long enough periods of time to be successful. It also means that any good practice is hard to keep going. Insecure funding means insecure staffing. Constant stopping and starting of projects means you can't really test approaches and build up ones that work

## **III. Bullying in work**

### **A. Common experience from managers or coworkers**

-"The world of work has become unkind"

-being asked to do tasks that are very obviously not possible eg because of mobility difficulties, is humiliating

### **B. Bullying is so common for Disabled people that it becomes accepted as normal**

-Rates of bullying of Disabled children in schools are very high. For many people this means that they start employment already viewing bullying as expected and ordinary

### **C. Judgement and discrimination because of difference**

-"colleagues would get annoyed or ignore me"

-"I'm a highly functioning person with Asperger's and Autism. I misunderstand people's facial expressions and sometimes my facial expressions might also confuse other people. It leads to misinterpretations and bullying at work. People often get very upset and they walk off in a



huff"

"when people don't understand your condition, especially when it is a mental one because it is invisible, they often get frustrated and they leave you alone and they don't want to talk to you. It has a huge amount of impact. I am often left alone even when there's about 50 people in the room."

**D. Lack of clear routes for reporting and support when bullying happens**

**E. Bullying stifles development and limits potential**

## **IV. Employer attitudes and lack of understanding**

### **A. Employers not on your side**

-Experienced and skilled Disabled people are overlooked. Employers assume Disabled people can't do the job

-There is so often an underlying idea that we as Disabled people will be more expensive to employ, unsafe, or less productive

-There is no acknowledgement of the amount of extra effort that Disabled people are having to put in in order to get and keep a job or undertake training. The focus is all on negative assumptions rather than noticing the skills people have had to develop and the personal sacrifices they make in order to get past employment barriers-and what that might mean in terms of them being a strong, valuable and reliable member of staff

-When your managers aren't truly on your side it limits your opportunity to access support when you need it in work, it makes you feel like you have to justify the things you can't do because of your impairment, it makes it

hard to talk about tasks that are impossible for you to undertake because of your impairment and so you can end up exhausting yourself by trying to "mask" and get by

- "I have depression and anxiety problems and after my Nan died I couldn't control my emotions so I asked if I could work at the back of the shop so I wouldn't have to interact with customers while I was over emotional. They wouldn't allow it and I was forced to work at the front of the shop with tears streaming down my face. In the end it didn't work and I left."

#### **B. Too reliant on individual employers with better attitudes**

- It is unfair that getting and keeping a job is often reliant on personal connections or individual employers with better attitudes

#### **C. Disabled people are expected to do work without pay**

- Disabled people are often asked to be involved in coproduction work; advisory work; peer support work; research for free- rather than being properly valued and reimbursed for their time, skills and contributions

- Disabled people are sometimes expected to do unpaid internships or volunteer positions that have no real prospects of resulting in paid employment

#### **D. Employers don't understand, or ignore, their legal responsibilities**

- Employers don't know what Disabled people's legal rights are. They aren't anticipating employment of Disabled people and don't have policies and practices in place ready

"One time they (employer) declined to reimburse me my travel costs for the interview even though I told them it was a reasonable adjustment for

them to do so. I can't use public transport and it cost me £52 to get there and back. I was really angry. I escalated the issue and eventually got my money reimbursed"

-There is no regulation of whether employers are keeping to their legal responsibilities so they easily ignore them or find loopholes. There is no consequence for employers who ignore their responsibilities

## **V. Lack of support or reasonable adjustments in work**

### **A. Employers don't know about Access to Work-leading to assumptions that employing Disabled people is costly**

-Employers' lack of knowledge of Access to Work means that Disabled people are often not getting access to support that would make them much more successful in their work

-Employers are worried about the costs of support or equipment which results in poor attitudes to employing Disabled people and they don't understand that often these costs will be covered by Access to Work

### **B. Access to Work will only fund from when you are already in work so you always start without the right support and equipment**

"My support needs are around travelling to work and getting an electric wheelchair and those needs are well taken care of by Access to Work. However the process of getting Access to Work support in the first place takes too long and you have to show evidence, it's kind of a cap-in-hand approach"

### **C. Access to Work process is really hard**

-It is really hard to apply for Access to Work particularly if you have less common access support needs

-Employers are often unable to support Disabled people through the difficult process of applying because they don't know enough about the process themselves

#### **D. Employers don't make reasonable adjustments or don't know how**

-Basic physical access needs sometimes not met, eg movement around an office, lack of ramps, being expected to carry files and equipment when you are a wheelchair user

-Lack of flexibility on job roles and tasks eg requirement made of people with hearing impairments to use the phone

-It's frustrating because many of the adjustments that are needed are really not that difficult to do - there just seems to be a reluctance - or an idea that making an adjustment for one person who needs it is somehow unfair on other employees. As well as a lack of knowledge of Disabled people's legal rights to adjustments there seems to be an underlying attitudinal confusion that equality is about treating everyone exactly the same

#### **E. Particularly hard to get support and adjustments for invisible impairments**

-Many Disabled people have late diagnoses' especially if they have invisible impairments which make it even harder to access support

"I was diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome at the age of 23. I have not received any support upon diagnosis. Services catered for those with Autism are only provided for those under 18 or 25 and age which people literally do not get diagnosed with. Most people with the condition are not diagnosed until after this period yet they receive no support when they need it the most."

#### **F. Standard HR policies and practices can discriminate or cause barriers**

## **for Disabled employees**

-Very few employers have HR policies that take into account fluctuating health needs, managing health appointments, impairment related leave. Lack of flexibility in employment policies and practices causes barriers that prevent Disabled people performing at their best, or actively discriminate against us. There is no necessity for this. There are good practice examples of different employment policies but employers are not aware of them.

### **G. Hard to find good quality access support staff**

-Finding skilled in work support staff (job coaches, PAs etc) is very hard. There are very few agencies specialising in recruiting and training up people to support Disabled people in work. People often don't stay in the jobs long. Supporting people well in a way that is empowering and controlled by the Disabled person is a skilled job but there is little good quality training for these support staff.

-Finding the right support can take time, leaving the Disabled person unsupported in work in the meantime

-Poor quality support can make it impossible for the Disabled person to work productively but this is then often than identified as the Disabled person's performance problem. Poor quality support can therefore even further undermine attitudes of employers towards employing Disabled people. This is a particular problem for employees with learning difficulties

## **VI. Impact on wider life and mental health**

### **A. Made to feel like a burden. Not noticed or valued in the world**

-working is a really important part of self identity and a feeling of being valued and connected to society. Being locked out of work means you end up feeling like a burden. It is really damaging to self esteem.

-loneliness - "one of my problems is that I don't have a social network outside of work so if I am unemployed for any time then I really do become a loner."

## **B. Frustration and sense of hopelessness, loss of confidence**

-Confusion and poor quality of employment support leads to frustration. "It diminishes your confidence when you are not supported"

-Lack of options, no control over job goals and ambitions, constant rejection or instability of employment leads to a sense of hopelessness, lack of purpose and depression and increasing lack of confidence to keep searching for work

## **C. Poverty and disadvantage**

-Not being able to find employment or losing a job "affects all other aspects of life - housing, utilities, and also the emotional impact".

-Benefit levels if you can't find work are too low to enable a decent standard of living

## **D. Internalised stigma**

-Loss of positive sense of self. Feeling that you are less than human

-Lack of value for your culture and identity as a Disabled person

-Loss of supportive community as so many Disabled people feel so negative and isolated that they can't come together to share experiences, culture and pride

## **E. Impact of "masking" on stress levels , job performance and long term**

## **mental health**

-hiding your difference and trying to fit in at work in order to avoid bullying and discrimination is stressful, exhausting and impacts on both job performance and long term mental health

### **F. Even if you have a job, constant worry about losing it**

-the probation period is particularly worrying in case you are judged to not be productive enough, particularly if your reasonable adjustments and Access to Work funded support are not in place at the start of your job

### **G. Trauma**

-some people's experiences interacting with the job centre, or dealing with bullying and discrimination within recruitment processes and at work ,are traumatic, with long lasting consequences. Interviewees used terms such as "terrifying experience", "traumatic", "upsetting" and described how these "bad experiences create anxiety and future problems in finding work"