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Factsheet #30

Speaking out for Disabled People

If a disabled person is long term unemployed (2 years or more) and claiming benefits, they are more likely to reach retirement age or die than achieve one day's paid work.

Jim Murphy Labour MP speaking at Disability Alliance UK Conference

There are over 10 million disabled people in Great Britain. The Government's cuts to public services and benefits will have a disproportionate impact on disabled people in this country including those who are members of UNISON.

Around 1.5 million working-age disabled adults are already living in relative poverty because of the low benefit levels and the unavailability of suitable accessible work – further cuts will only result in a rise of the number of disabled people living in poverty. The Government wants disabled people off benefits and back to work without recognising that it is these same benefits that disabled people rely on to enable them to work and live independently.

Disabled people make up 20% of people of working age but only 50% of disabled people (of working age) in the UK are actually in work. Disabled people are more likely to be unqualified, unemployed; paid less than non disabled people, experience barriers to employment; incur more expenses as a result of living with an impairment, live in low-income families and rely heavily on public services

The impact on Disabled People in Employment

- It takes longer for a disabled person to find employment - employers are more unlikely to take on the additional costs associated with adjustments for disabled job applicants
- Disabled People who are made redundant as a result of the cuts will experience discrimination in their attempts to re-enter the employment market.
- The Department of Work and Pensions Access to Work Scheme provides support for Disabled People in the workplace but this is expected to be dramatically cut.

As a result of central and local government spending cuts there is a possibility that I may be made redundant. I firmly believe that in spite of the disability discrimination act, the current jobs market will mean potential employers will look to recruit fewer and fewer disabled applicants due to significantly higher 'on cost' (reasonable adjustments, sick leave, potential accidents at work etc) Where does this leave me??? UNISON Local Government worker Watford

Benefits – the effect on Disabled People

The Government are planning large and complex benefit cuts which will result in a rise of the number of disabled people living in poverty and forcing them into social exclusion.

- Disability Living Allowance (DLA) is a payment made in recognition that it is more expensive to live as a disabled person. The Government plans to make it harder for people to receive DLA by introducing a strict and controversial medical assessment for all existing and new claimants. They are planning to remove 20% of DLA from current claimants
- Disabled people, young and old, living in residential care will lose the mobility element of their DLA. Cutting this completely will mean that they could become imprisoned in institutions
- Housing Benefit I changes will lead to less affordable housing available for disabled people thus forcing more disabled people into unsuitable and inaccessible accommodation or even losing their homes.

Why Disabled People need Public Services

- Disabled people use and rely on public services much more than most people to help them live productive and independent lives. Therefore such severe generalised cuts to Public Services will inevitably hit the disabled disproportionately hard.
- Access to frontline services such as care support may be drastically reduced
- Local Government will have a statutory duty not to cut certain services meaning cuts will have to fall on non statutory “peripheral” services. Inevitably this will mean severe cuts to many schemes and local programmes that help disabled people and which save the longer term costs to public services caused by long term unemployment, lack of adequate transport facilities and the mental health issues associated with the isolation often suffered by disabled people.

What needs to change?

- **UNISON is calling on the Government and Local Authorities to keep the services that support disabled people to work throughout this economic downturn**
- **The Government needs to recognise the false economy of making cuts to services that result in short term monetary savings but will lead to much greater long term costs.**

Add your voice

We need as many people as possible to add their voice to our campaign:

- talk to your friends, family, co-workers and neighbours
- raise your concerns with your employer, local media, and political candidates
- visit www.unison.org.uk/million for more information, more campaign ideas and to tell us what you've been doing