

Independent Living on the Agenda

It is encouraging to see the recent emphasis in government policy on the promotion of independent living for disabled people. Last year the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit published the *'Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People'* Report, which outlines its vision for the next 20 years. The report states that the *'centrepiece of the strategy must be the promotion of independent living'*.

To remove the barriers to independent living the strategy identifies that *'more coherent and explicit standards should be developed bringing legislation and other rights into a coherent framework.'*

Lord Ashley's plan to introduce a private members Bill in the House of Lords in May '06 will represent a significant step forward to remove these barriers. The **Independent Living Bill** will give greater rights to independent living and is being supported by a number of key organisations such as the Disability Rights Commission and the National Centre for Independent Living.

The measures in the Bill will include:

- the right to choose where and how you live
- support based on self-assessment
- standards for a guaranteed minimum level of support
- safeguarding support when moving from one area to another
- the right to communication support and advocacy
- promotion of Direct Payments and individualised budgets

(continued overleaf)

New rates for Income Tax and NIC



The new tax and NIC thresholds for the year 2006-2007 have been published. From April '06 the Primary Tax Threshold is **£97** (for employees under 65). The Lower Earnings Limit is **£84** per week. Above this limit, you will need to register with the Inland Revenue and your workers will be entitled to Statutory Sick and Maternity Pay, if applicable.

The weekly rate for Statutory Sick Pay for this tax year is £70.05 per week and the rate for Maternity Pay is increased to £108.85 per week.

ILF – How can it help?

The Independent Living Fund (ILF) provides additional support for disabled people, which cannot be met by the local Health Trust.

To be eligible, you have to:

- be between 16 and 66
- be getting high rate care component of DLA
- have savings less than £18,500
- be receiving a service costing your local Trust at least £200 per week

ILF can pay up to £455 per week on top of the support you get from the Trust. You will be expected to contribute half of the care component of your DLA and the Severe Disability Premium element of your Income Support.

If you employ someone using money from ILF you should be aware that you have the same responsibilities as an employer as those using Direct Payments.

In May 2006 the government announced

a review of ILF which will look at any necessary changes and improvements to the Fund.

For further information on ILF please contact us or you could visit the Fund's website at www.ilf.org.uk

Independent Living on the Agenda (continued)

While it is unlikely that the Bill will make it into law this time around, it will still be useful in raising awareness, putting independent living on the political agenda and building a platform for success at a later date. Some of these

developments may only apply to England and Wales but hopefully, if the NI Assembly is up and running again later this year, similar policies will be developed to give disabled people in Northern Ireland the same rights to independent living.

See 'Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People' Report at www.dh.gov.uk

See 'Briefing on Lord Ashley's Independent Living Bill' at www.drc-gb.org

Training for Personal Assistants

If you employ staff, you need to provide a safe working environment and ensure that they work in a safe manner.

There needs to be a balance between protecting the safety of your workers and preserving your own sense of self-worth and dignity. A key element to getting the balance right may be appropriate training. If you think that your staff need training in for



example, 'lifting and handling' techniques or the use of mechanical aids such as hoists, you should discuss this with the Trust. They may be able to arrange the training or include enough money in your Direct Payments account to

enable you to pay a training provider.

You should bear in mind that failure to train your employees properly could invalidate your employer's liability insurance.

If you would like more information please contact us.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What can I do if I feel that the amount of support I am offered isn't enough?

A. If you think the support you are offered is not enough, you should discuss it with the Trust and ask them to reconsider. You may then need to make a formal appeal or complaint. However, you should be aware that Trusts have limited resources and may not be able to offer you all you require. You will be treated the same whether you are taking Direct Payments or a service from the Trust.

Q. Am I allowed to use Direct Payments to employ a relative?

A. Yes. You may use Direct Payments to employ a relative who does not live in the same house as you, but the Trust can permit this in exceptional circumstances. If you decide to do this, you should make sure that it is your needs that take priority.

Q. I have money left over in my Direct Payments account, how can I spend it?

A. You should discuss it with your key worker to agree how you can spend the money. You may be permitted to buy some extra support to meet your needs but if it is a very large amount, the Trust may ask you to pay at least some of it back.

If you would like a specific question answered, please let us know.

Get your PA into the cinema free



If you need help going to the cinema, there is a way that you can get the person accompanying you to get in free in participating cinemas. This person could be your Personal Assistant, a family member or a friend.

The scheme run by the Cinema Exhibitors' Association (CEA) is available to people who get DLA or Attendance Allowance, are registered blind or hold a disabled person's rail card.

You need to register for a Cinema Exhibitors' Association card. There is a registration fee of £5 for the card, which will be valid for three years. For further information, you can visit CEA's website at www.ceacard.co.uk or contact Paul at CIL – Belfast.

Information on Direct Payments

We have produced a series of information sheets dealing with all aspects of Direct Payments and becoming an employer. You are welcome to view these on our website or give us a call if you would like a copy sent out.



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