

August 2010

# CIL Newsletter



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## **CIL has changed its name to reflect its wider scope of operations**

**Centre for Independent Living, Belfast** has changed its name to

**Centre for Independent Living N.I.** to reflect the fact that our services are available to disabled people, carers and health and social care professionals throughout Northern Ireland.

We now have four offices:

our Head and Eastern Area Office in Belfast

our Southern Area Office in Armagh

our Western Area Office in Omagh

our Northern Area Office in Magherafelt.

There will be no change in our commitment to the promotion of independent living for disabled people. The management and staff will continue to work tirelessly to ensure that disabled people are supported in making their own choices about the support they receive.

## **CIL Head Office and Eastern Area Office has finally moved**



We are delighted to announce that after nearly nine years in our temporary start-up office at NICVA, CIL's Head/Eastern Area Office has moved to our own premises on the Beechill Road in Belfast .  
*(cont. next page)*

*Deena, Debbie, Paul & Irene outside our new office in Beechill Business Park*



## **NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

The AGM of the Centre for Independent Living N.I. will take place at the CIL Head Office at the Beechill Business Park, 96 Beechill Rd, Belfast BT8 7QN at 12 noon on Thursday, 30 September 2010. (Registration with refreshments will be from 11.30 a.m.)

Please let us know by telephone on 028 9064 8546 or by e-mail to [info@cilbelfast.org](mailto:info@cilbelfast.org) if you can join us on the day. Thank you.

## Notes from the Chair

- As you can see, a great deal has happened since the last newsletter!
- Some of you will have already heard that Philomena McCrory, our Manager, has unfortunately been away from the office because of medical problems. This has meant additional pressures have fallen upon the rest of our team. The Board is very grateful to the staff for the way they have responded to the challenge and is doing all it can to provide support and guidance. In the meantime, we all wish Philomena a speedy return to health and fitness.
- Finally, we are hoping to see as many of you as possible at our AGM on Thursday, 30 September 2010. Why not come along and see the new office?

*Mike Hendra*

### **CIL Head Office and Eastern Area Office has finally moved cont.**

Our very smart new premises are situated in the newly-built Beechill Business Park. Finally we have enough room for each member of staff to have their own desk and additionally we have our own Meeting/Interview Room together a Board Room (which can double up as a Training Room).

The new office is easily accessible by road from the Knock Dual Carriageway and it is on the main bus route. (You can take the bus number 77 which will leave you right outside the gates of Beechill Business Park in which we are located. Our full contact details are at the end of this newsletter.

*More pictures of the new office*



Not wishing to be left out, the **Southern Area Office** has also recently moved to new premises in a unit in the Ulster Gazette Arcade behind Scotch Street in Armagh. The contact details for our Southern Area Office are also given at the end of the newsletter.

## Direct Payments - *A User Perspective by Anita Gracey*

I first heard about Direct Payments in 1997 whilst doing a degree in Social Policy at the University of Ulster. To a wheelchair user, as a result of a genetic neurological impairment, they sounded like a positive idea.

In July 1999, with my son Emmett in tow, I moved into a bungalow in Belfast and met my first social worker. I told her it was too tiring and time consuming to do jobs such as changing bed clothes or washing floors and so I needed a home cleaning help. She said they couldn't pay for a cleaner but could get me a cook. Rather than provide what I needed, their system

disabled me more as it took away my own skills -- not the person centred support I had naively expected. When I asked about Direct Payments, the reply was that they wouldn't suit me. (Perhaps Direct Payments only worked in academic theory is and not in the real world?)

I was assessed and granted a home-help for 6 hours – 10 minutes to take my son to nursery school, 1 hour to grocery shop and the rest to cook. In practice however the system didn't work as often they arrived hours late, never stayed be allotted time and it was someone different everyday. I don't really blame the individuals but the agency, which undervalued, underpaid and overworked their staff. When it came to the cooking, I would ask them to prepare a pasta lunch and they would lift the bag of pasta shells and ask "how do you cook this?" So I started buying more traditional food which it might be easier for them to cook.

Even then I couldn't win as one of my treats is eating raw organic carrots and when I put this on the shopping list, we home-help would come back from the supermarket with bland non-organic carrots saying "those organic carrots were awfully expensive, so I got you these instead." This may seem petty but it's a small example of how the right to decide was taken away from me. People who become disabled frequently speak about a loss of control and I felt I was being institutionalised within my own home;



I was eating food which wasn't my choice, home-helps were coming at times of the day which suited their workload and staying for inadequate time.

Sadly I don't think this is a uniquely negative experience of social services support and, even worse, it started to affect my son. Emmett normally would talk incessantly from the 6 a.m. start to his day until bedtime again and even then would talk in his sleep. However I noticed he was unusually quiet when some of the home-helps were in and it made me uneasy when he started asking "Who's coming today?". Of course I couldn't answer him and I realised how unsettling it was to him.

During the 2 years I used the home-help system I kept hearing about Direct Payments in magazines such as 'Disability Now', the internet and through voluntary work at Action on Disability. Knowledge is power, and, with the help of CIL I realised that Direct Payments would suit me. The CIL put me in contact with someone already using the scheme and encouraged me to keep a diary on my lifestyle. Armed with this, I contacted the same social worker who by now had obviously been on a training course about Direct Payments and was now both enthusiastic and supportive.

## Direct Payments, a user perspective cont

One of my regular home-helps offered to be my Personal Assistant (p.a.) as her second job and CIL arranged for me to contact with the Business Support Team at the Inland Revenue. They came out to my home and enabled me to fill in the relevant forms correctly. Insurance was simplified and arranged in a telephone call to an insurance broker. I set up a separate bank account, into which the local trust pays in the a regular amount I use to employ my own p.a. This arrangement worked out for a year, until she married and moved house.

I went back to CIL to get help with designing a job advertisement, job description, potential pay, p.a.'s essential/desirable criteria, application forms and a contract to safeguard everyone's rights. I was worried that having been so lucky to start with it might be hard to get someone as good as I advertised in a local post office shortly before Christmas. I had no replies! But then I reasoned it might have been the time of year and re-advertised in the job section of a local newspaper in January. This time I got 15 replies! Some I discounted on the telephone as living too far away or male! I interviewed a few women, all of whom turned out to be potential employees and, when trying to make a decision, I remembered one woman, Marion, who had asked my son's name, age and interests. Her genuine warmth and interest for my son got her the job.

It took little time to get used to each other but Marion is a great cook, with a very welcome inclination to experiment. Her cleaning skills are excellent and family and friends comment that the house is 'sparkling'. Whilst the home-help system is task orientated, a p.a is far more flexible and economical. Marion can multi-task as, while food is in the oven, she can clean the windows. Time allowing, Marion has accompanied me to school parent meetings, picnics, clothes shopping and even to the pub!

Our relationship is based on mutual loyalty and trust. I had a bad cold one Boxing Day and she sent us over a cooked dinner. It wouldn't have been possible to develop a relationship of such mutual respect using the home-help system. Marion gets on very well with my son, Emmett, and is very much a part of the family.

Having a stable home life has enabled me to seek employment and I now work as a Fieldworker for the Service User Support Team within Leonard Cheshire Disability, and work freelance as a Disability Equality Trainer. And so, as they say the rest is history, I feel direct payments have helped to improve my quality of life dramatically. I would encourage others to do the same.

### *Contact us* **Head & Eastern Area Office**

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