

Notes of RPCAG Focus Meeting  
Friday 8 April  
Disability Living Allowance

Attendees

Yvonne Baxtrem	Benefit Advisor and Children & Families Officer / Richmond Aid
Lucy Byrne	Chair of Richmond Aid
Joanne Kemp	Chair of RPCAG
Christine Duke	Parent
Barry Woodward	Vice-Chair of RPCAG
Pat Leggett	Administrator

After introductions Joanne asked Lucy Byrne to explain what Richmond Aid does. Richmond Aid was set up 23 years ago. It started as an advice service. They now deal with individual caseloads dealing with many issues as well as still offering advice. Volunteers man the advice lines. All of the volunteers are trained to ensure they give out correct advice.

Richmond Aid do not offer a legal service but they can offer to connect people with two law firms, one of which is Richmond Legal Advice Service (RLAS). They offer a free service. They are available every Wednesday between 8.00 and 9.00 pm at Duke Street Church, Richmond. You do not have to make an appointment. They have a website which tells you all about their services [www.rlas.org.uk](http://www.rlas.org.uk). Richmond Aid can support people with free representation at tribunals. Usually the support is for benefit tribunals but they will also offer help with employment tribunals.

Richmond Aid is advertised through the Borough and Adult Services. They now have a new logo and their own website [www.richmondaid.org.uk](http://www.richmondaid.org.uk). At the moment they do not deal with children services but hope to do so in the near future. They offer benefits advice. They also have The Spade Gardening Service. This is for older people who cannot manage to look after their gardens. The service is overstretched and unfortunately does not get a lot of funding.

They offer an employment service for people with disabilities. They train employers in disability awareness. If needed, they can act as a go-between for people who may suffer some difficulty with their employer. They have been working with Karl Burgess and have set up a Job Club that meets every second Tuesday in the month. The Job Club is for young people who are in transition. LB said they have recently helped a young person to get a job in ground maintenance. They are now working with children and families offering benefits advice.

Richmond Aid is a partner of the Access Project. Access is a consortium of local charities so, as a partnership, they can offer a wealth of advice; this is funded by

Aiming High. Their Community Involvement Group meet every two months to discuss issues that affect them e.g. transport. Joanne Kemp pointed out that RPCAG organises focus meetings around parents' issues and felt that this shows there is some overlap in these areas. LB has asked JK to become a trustee of Richmond Aid. JK will visit Richmond Aid to see what benefits there would be in this liaison. JK felt there are lots of overlaps throughout the Borough that could be wasting time and resources. If there was more involvement with other groups we could prove to be more effective. It was felt RPCAG has a lot to offer Richmond Aid and vice versa. Barry Woodward suggested Richmond Aid could advise parents to join RPCAG. It was also suggested that a link could be set up between the websites of Richmond Aid and RPCAG.

LB said Richmond Aid has been in talks with like groups in other boroughs to discuss changes that are due and to find out and learn from how they will deal with these changes. JK said that simplification of all systems would be useful and said the aim of RPCAG was to improve things for parents.

Yvonne Baxtrem was asked to explain Disability Living Allowance. She said the most important thing that parents can do if they are applying for DLA was to describe the worst possible scenario, the worst day, the worst week, and to list these details on their application form. 'Say it as it is' was the advice.

YB said someone from Richmond Aid could visit peoples' homes to discuss and help with their DLA application. YB advised all parents to apply for DLA. If you received it, you can spend it or save it for the future. It enables parents to pay for extra things like transport, equipment etc. DLA will change in 2013 but it is not too clear how at the moment. Attendance Allowance will be kept for adults.

DLA for children is

- Not means tested
- Not taxable – it completely disregards income
- Those in receipt of it are not questioned how they spend the money

DLA is paid at three rates. YB will provide JK with details of the new rates. There are three care components and two mobility components. Anybody who is not sure about these components can contact Richmond Aid for help and advice.

When a person's DLA has been approved they can then apply for Carers Allowance. Carers Allowance is means tested on last year's income.

YB said that anyone needing to see someone for benefits advice might have to wait 3 to 4 weeks for an appointment. Help for a child is much quicker.

YB advised that if your first DLA application is not approved, do not accept the decision. You must challenge the decision if you do not agree with it. Richmond Aid will help with the challenge through the Free Representation Unit.

Finally, Lucy Byrne asked for support of the march on May 11<sup>th</sup>. 'The Hardest Hit March' has been organised by UKDPC to hi-light the impact impending benefit cuts will have on disabled people. The UKDPC website is [www.ukdpc.net](http://www.ukdpc.net). If you wish to take part there are lots of sites offering information.

16 April 2011  
Pat Leggett  
Administrator