

Issue 31

Spring 2011

# SOLIDARITY

*The quarterly newsletter of DUWCs and OFFA*

## DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL WITHDRAWS SUPPORT



## NOW WE NEED YOURS

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Supporters of Derbyshire Unemployed Workers' Centres have described the decision of Derbyshire County Council to completely withdraw its annual grant support as 'utterly reckless'. On Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> February, the ruling group at a County Council cabinet meeting ignored the arguments put forward by Labour and Lib Dem Councillors from all over the county and voted to cut off this valuable source of core funding. Several of those Councillors opposing the cut have shown their support through awarding us Community Leadership Scheme grants. With this support and the kind donations of well wishers we are continuing our work.

More on P2

## Campaign News

From P1

### Reckless, Regrettable, Reprehensible

**Derbyshire County Council is removing funding worth £40,000 per year from DUWCs and Trust and handing it to Citizens Advice Bureaux in the south of the county to purchase specialist legal services.** This is despite unemployment and service user numbers continuing to rise and the peak not yet reached. Colin Hampton, Co-ordinator said:

‘To take money from an established organisation giving direct service delivery, which all agree is first class, and give it to others to buy in services creates more tiers of administration. This is a waste of Council Tax payers’ money. They should be investing in advice services at a time when more and more people are seeking help and representation. Moving monies, from one overstretched organisation to another, is going to achieve very little and damage service delivery to the most vulnerable.’

John Bradley, advice worker for Amber Valley, added:

‘People who wish to access our services in Alfreton, and other areas with Conservative Councillors such as Dronfield and Wingerworth, will be reminded that their representatives voted to deprive them of this service. We will not go away but we will fight for more support for the advice sector, and we will continue to give a voice to those needing help and support in these difficult times.’

At time of going to press, the following Councillors had expressed their support through the Community Leadership Scheme grants: David Stone, David Chapman, Kenneth Stevenson, Alan Charles.

### ...But the Fight Goes On...

Derbyshire Unemployed Workers’ Centres joined in a national day of protest against benefit cuts on January 24<sup>th</sup>. Despite our own cuts, DUWCs will continue to do all we can to draw attention to the inadequacies of the benefits system.



We gathered together 30 benefit claimants and centre supporters, who each held up cards awarding nil points to the Department of Work and Pensions. This is a reference to the nil points that many of those taking part had been awarded during their Employment and Support Allowance medical assessments, reducing their benefit payments by £25 per week.

“Many people continue to receive benefit cuts” said Tim Wilkinson, DUWC adviser for North East Derbyshire. “These are people who have health conditions which mean that employers are highly unlikely to give them a job. With more and more people looking for work with the government cut backs, those with physical and mental health problems will fall further to the back of the queue for jobs. Losing benefits and having to live on £65 per week does not help anyone’s health or chances of moving back into work.”

DUWCs file of pending tribunals currently stands at over 700. Many of these are Employment and Support Allowance claimants challenging decisions to award nil points at their medical. Nationally, 2.5 million Incapacity Benefit claimants are to be migrated onto this new benefit.

## Campaign News

### In the National Press

Two national newspapers—the Daily Mirror and The Guardian—have picked up on one of our Staveley cases and run articles based around this Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) tragedy.

Mr G had a heart attack in 2006 aged 53. He continued to try and work on a self employed basis in order to regulate his work—but his doctor told him to stop in 2008. The former miner and foundry worker had arthritis and vibration white finger as well as his heart condition and he rightly put in a claim for ESA. Atos carried out the qualifying medical but only gave him 6 points out of the 15 needed –so he was put on Job Seekers Allowance and told to look for work. DUWCs helped him to appeal this decision—where he was awarded 9 more points. He was placed in the Work Related Activity Group and received some backdated money.

5 months later he was called in for another medical and Mr G told our adviser how worried he was. On the day before the appointment, Mr G died of heart failure aged just 57. Two days later his widow received a letter from the DWP informing him that his ESA payments would stop if he could not provide a good reason for his failure to attend the medical. Mrs G is convinced that the stress killed her husband.



Picture courtesy Daily Mirror

The Daily Mirror called their article “Sick—Who gives Atos?” Atos completely disregarded the opinion of Mr G’s GP and did not even bother to seek a Cardiologist’s opinion. Atos clearly has its own agenda.

### Who’s Who at the Centres

#### Welfare Rights Bolsover District:

Andrew Parkes  
 andyparkes2009@hotmail.co.uk  
 Glynn Power

#### Welfare Rights Chesterfield/N E Derbyshire:

Neil Buxton  
 neil.buxton@duwc.org.uk  
 Katrina Hudson  
 Tim Wilkinson

#### Welfare Rights Staveley:

Kathy Farr

#### Welfare Rights Amber Valley:

John Bradley

**Tel Chesterfield: 01246 231441**

#### Co-ordinator:

Colin Hampton  
 colin.hampton@duwc.org.uk

#### Fundraiser:

Sarah Walters  
 sarah.walters@duwc.org.uk

#### Administration:

Lynn Bagshaw  
 lynn.haythorne@duwc.org.uk

*Not forgetting our wonderful team of volunteers including Jo Moran*

**Tel Shirebrook: 01623 748161**

## Fundraising

### HELP US. DO IT NOW.

Complete the bankers standing order form below and return it to your nearest DUWC office (see back page for venues).

To (Name of your bank).....

Branch..... Sort Code.....

Address of your bank.....

Account name..... Account number.....

Please pay: Unity Trust Bank  
Nine Brindleyplace  
Birmingham  
B1 2HB

Sort Code: 08 60 01    Acc Name: Derbyshire OFFA    Acc No: 50511183

Amount monthly (please circle):    **£1**    **£2**    **£5**    **£10**    **Other**

Commencing.....  
(Until altered by me in writing)

Signature.....

Address.....

Date.....

**Work for a local council, the PCT, fire service, ambulance service, Stagecoach or Bryan Donkins?** Then we have a check off facility where you can make a contribution directly from your wages. If you can help recruit more subscriptions from your work colleagues then we would like to hear from you! If you can help secure a new check-off facility with your employer, then get in touch with us:

Colin Hampton 01246 231441

Sarah Walters 01623 748161

According to a DWP report: 46% of all claimants found the ESA50 questionnaire difficult or impossible to complete. How will the 46% resident in Derbyshire complete theirs without a fully functioning advice service?

One of our volunteers recently handled an outstanding case in Shirebrook. She has been giving ongoing help and support to an elderly couple living in the town. They asked for help because, after their weekly outgoings, they were living on just £14 per week and were struggling to manage. They had taken out loans with the Provident to meet their living needs. Our volunteer went and reviewed their income. She found that they were entitled to, and not claiming, Pension Credit, Savings Credit, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit and Attendance Allowance. She helped them to make these claims and they are now £497 per week better off.

## Volunteering

### Considerably Smaller Society...

Derbyshire Unemployed Workers' Centres are by no means alone in facing a significant funding cut. According to the TUC the UK voluntary sector is set to lose around £4.5 bn of funding in the new financial year. Brendan Barber, General Secretary of the TUC said:

"These savage, ideological cuts will impact hardest on Britain's poorest, most vulnerable communities and undermine our civil society at a time when the country needs it more than ever before."

The question that we are all now asking the Government is – how can we be expected to deliver your much trumpeted "Big Society" without any resources?

Liverpool City Council have resigned from a Big Society pilot project due to cuts making their participation too difficult. Meanwhile Dame Elisabeth Hoodless, Head of Community Service Volunteers, said that these council cuts would make volunteering harder.

Ironically, at a time when DUWCs need more volunteers due to our increasing workload and shrinking resources, the support structure is diminishing. Chesterfield Volunteer Centre – an important part of our recruitment strategy – is also facing a funding cut. We will have fewer staff able to support the volunteers, which makes them less likely to stay in the role. Affordable training will be increasingly difficult to source.

The message to anyone thinking of volunteering for us is you are welcome to join DUWCs. However, our ability to help you make a contribution to your community is seriously impaired.

### Welcome...

To those volunteers who have joined us in recent months.

- Karen Seymour is from Forest Town and has joined us at the Shirebrook office for two days per week.
- George Atkin is from Chesterfield and is helping out at the Saltergate office.



**As we go to press we have just heard the sad news that our former volunteer, Colin Ridgeway, has died after a long illness.**

Derbyshire Unemployed Workers' Centres feature in a new publication from Community Links. Their Tackling Poverty booklet showcases a selection of UK-wide projects which are working towards combating poverty and bringing down social inclusion barriers. The introduction states that "Each of the organisations in this publication are highlighted because of the fantastic work they are doing in supporting people dealing with issues of poverty and social exclusion but also to represent the vital work that hundreds of thousands of voluntary and community sector organisations do around the UK."

DUWCs are proud to have taken part in their events to mark the 2010 European Year for Tackling Poverty and Social Exclusion.

[www.community-links.org](http://www.community-links.org)

## News

### Welfare Rights No Longer Important Enough for Legal Aid

**The Government has published a Green Paper which proposes a removal of Legal Aid eligibility from welfare rights advice.** In order to find savings of £350 million, targets for cuts also include debt issues where the person's home is not at immediate risk; employment and some housing issues. The Government says:

“We consider that these issues are of lower objective importance (because they are essentially about financial entitlement) than, for example, fundamental issues concerning safety or liberty... [clients] may also have access to help and advice from other sources in order to help them resolve their issues without recourse to publicly funded legal assistance.”

That may have been the case before the voluntary sector cuts began to bite. David Robinson, the co-founder of Community Links – which helped to fund our listening events last year – commented:

“Removing Legal Aid funding for advice on welfare benefits will wipe out agencies who would otherwise resolve this problem and there is next to no chance of local councils picking up the tab when most are stopping funding, not increasing it.”

Yet again, it is the poorest and most vulnerable members of society that will pay the highest price for a recession that was not of their making.

### The 3 Year JSA Sanction

Benefit sanctions may take a turn for the worse with those proposed for claimants who do not comply with Mandatory Work Activity (MWA). MWA will apply to JSA claimants who have been unable to find work within 12 months of their claim. The activity will take place over 4 weeks for 30 hours per week.

Those who fall foul of the new scheme will receive a 13 week sanction for the first breach, and a staggering 26 weeks without payment for the second breach. After two previous “offences” a claimant may lose their benefit for three years. Citizens Advice have voiced their concerns that it is unclear how much training Job Centre advisers will be given in the implementation of the scheme. The organisation also says that “it is difficult to see how homelessness and destitution will be avoided for some families.” In both Citizens Advice and DUWCs’ experience of sanctioning, claimants often do not understand the regime and fall foul without realising. This is particularly the case where a claimant has low levels of literacy.

Also worrying is the scheme’s lack of help with childcare costs during MWA. The ability of a parent to restrict the hours in which they are available for work is available under JSA regulations. So far, this has not been carried over into MWA regulations – so a parent may be forced into work activity where they are unable to meet their child after school and are then forced to pay out for after school care with no additional money.

## TRUST

### Blood in the Canadian Snow

On 9<sup>th</sup> December 2010, DAST, along with asbestos widows and campaigners, met in London to call on Britons not to holiday in Canada during the winter months until it stops mining and exporting asbestos.

Canada, one of the few remaining countries to export asbestos, is looking to establish new mining operations at the Jeffrey Asbestos Mine in Quebec. The Quebec government is actively considering a \$58 million loan to the company which could mean an export of 5 million tonnes of asbestos over 25 years to developing countries.

The protest coincided with an Asian delegation from India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea and Hong Kong who travelled to Canada to protest against the new proposals.

A number of DAST's widows and family members spoke out to the media, joining in solidarity with their Asian counterparts.

Margaret Bailey, from Ripley, whose father died of Mesothelioma stated:

"How can a country like Canada be so callous? I wouldn't wish on anyone what my father went through; the heartache of his suffering is seared into my memory and that of my family. Canada knows what this stuff does and yet they carry on and even expand the trade. The Autumn Colours are in sharp contrast to the colour draining from my father's face as he died. Anyone who skis in Canada should think of the snow as the white dust that killed him."

Quebec not only exports asbestos, but its Premier, Jean Charest, claims that its asbestos can be safely used overseas, in spite of his own medical associations telling him otherwise. By supporting an asbestos mining and export business, Canada flies in the face of a ban on the export and import of asbestos around much of the world.

The fact that the Quebec government is considering supporting production of asbestos shows how out of touch with reality they are. Exporting a deadly product to vulnerable countries is hugely hypocritical, as Canada does not use its own production of asbestos.



Shay Boyle, on left of picture, protesting against Canada exporting asbestos to Developing Countries.

**Trade Union Safety Team and Derbyshire Asbestos Support Team  
Contact Joanne Carlin, or Natalie Woodward on 01246 380415**

## Where to get advice

<b>ALFRETON</b> Alfreton House High Street  Tuesday 9.00am –12.00pm Wed,Thur 9.00am—12.00pm 1.00pm—4.00pm	<b>BOLSOVER</b> Adult Education Centre Castle Street  Monday 1.00pm—3.30pm	<b>BRIMINGTON</b> Community Centre High Street  Monday 9.15am—12.15pm	<b>CARR VALE</b> Bainbridge Hall Chapel Road  Wednesday 1.00pm—3.30pm
<b>CLAY CROSS</b> Adult Education Centre Market Street  Monday 9.30am—12.30pm	<b>CLOWNE</b> 48 Mill Street  Tuesday 1.00pm—3.30pm	<b>CRESWELL</b> Resource Point Elmton Road  Thursday 1.00pm—3.30pm	<b>ECKINGTON</b> Business Centre Market Street  Monday 1.30pm—3.30pm
<b>GRASSMOOR</b> Community Centre New Street  Thursday 10.00am -12.00pm	<b>HEANOR</b> Salcare Ray Street  Friday 8.30am-12.30pm	<b>NORTH WINGFIELD</b> Community Resource Centre  Thursday 1.00pm-3.30pm	<b>PINXTON</b> Village Hall Kirkstead Road  Tuesday 1.00pm—3.30pm
<b>SOMERCOTES</b> Parish Hall Nottingham Road  Monday 1.30pm-4.00pm	<b>SOUTH NORMANTON</b> Cyber Café High Street  Thursday 1.00pm-3.30pm	<b>STAVELEY</b> Learning Matters High Street  Mon,Wed,Fri 9.00am—1.00pm	<b>WHITWELL</b> Community Centre The Square  Tuesday 9.00am-12.00pm
<b>Telephone</b>  01246 231441  01623 748161	<b>CHESTERFIELD</b> 70 Saltergate  <b>Mon—Thurs</b> <b>9.00am—3.30pm</b> <b>Friday</b> <b>9.00am—12.00pm</b> 01246 231441	<b>SHIREBROOK</b> 44 Patchwork Row  <b>Mon—Fri</b> <b>9.00am—11.30am</b>  01623 748161	<b>Email/Web</b>  info@duwc.org.uk  www.duwc.org.uk

## Help us Go Green!

If you are able to receive your issue of Solidarity via email, please send your address to:

info@duwc.org.uk

Don't forget to join our group on Facebook for interim updates, photos and opportunities for discussion.

## Don't Forget...

To remember us in your will, or to ask for donations in lieu of flowers at your funeral.

Let our future be your legacy.

**Our current service is shown above. However, due to our Derbyshire County Council funding cut there will soon be a contraction of the face to face advice available. After April 4<sup>th</sup>, contact us on 01246 231441 or 01623 748161 to check that any sessions that you may wish to visit are still running.**

Our Staveley outreach is now funded by Chesterfield Borough Council's Working Neighbourhoods Fund.