

Review of the Year 2015/2016

The year 2015/16 has once again been a very successful year for the Disability Resource Centre. It was also a year of celebration as we marked 21 years since we set up the charity, moved into Poynters House and started providing services to disabled people, in 1994.

To mark the occasion we invited Her Royal Highness The Duchess of Gloucester, who had officially opened the Centre in 1996, to revisit us. She accepted and we had a wonderful and very special day in September 2015 celebrating our achievements over 21 years.

Our Chair, Nadia Deadman, reflected in her speech on the vision of those founding members of whom she was one. The Disability Resource Centre would be

- the focus of disability services
- where disabled people would be involved at every level of the organisation
- and where disabled people and their families could get the information and advice needed to live independent and full lives.

Over 100,000 enquiries have been made to those original services and we have added other services

- for those managing their own social care
- welfare benefits advice
- support for carers
- recruitment and training for personal assistants
- and supporting disabled people into employment.

Our reach now covers Luton, Bedfordshire, and Northamptonshire.

2015/16 was a year of achievements.

Over 10,000 people contacted us with an enquiry related to a disability or health condition and two thirds asked about more than one topic.

Over 800 people received training or support from the Health Learning and Work Department.

We supported over 2,000 disabled individuals to directly employ their own carers.

We managed over 1,800 personal care bank accounts on behalf of service users.

Each enquiry and person supported is important to us, as it is part of an individual disabled person's journey to make informed choices and gain independence and control of their lives.

Recognition was received in the form of three community learning awards.

- the Way Ahead project received 2 awards
- and I can Do IT received an award.

We were also awarded 'Community Business of the Year' by Dunstable and Houghton Regis Business Network.

2015/16 was a year of change.

In September 2015 we welcomed the appointment of 4 new trustees and co-opted a former trustee thereby providing us with a wide range of experience and skills to strengthen Board.

During the year two trustees resigned. We particularly wish to thank Margaret Luther for her commitment and hard work as a trustee over many years.

Mick Dillon Chief Executive, left the organisation at the end of 2015, having overseen the growth of DRC over 15 years.

We were pleased to appoint Melanie Hawman as Chief Executive in March 2016. Her experience as Head of Operations and Development has given us continuity and a smooth transition. She also brings valuable experience to the role and a commitment to quality and innovation as we look forward.

During the year I took on the role of Acting Chair due to our Chair, Nadia's, ill health. We hope that she will be able to attend Board meetings again early next year.

Looking Forward

Although it is good to look back and celebrate our achievements we are not complacent and are committed to facing the challenges ahead.

During the year the Board agreed a new Strategic Plan setting out strategic priorities up to 2019.

We are working with the University of Bedfordshire to develop a CRM database to better record and monitor and analyse the services we provide.

There are challenges resulting from on going public sector spending cuts. This has resulted in growing volumes in some services needing to be delivered by either the same or a reduced budget. Staff have coped well with the demands to deliver more for less and use, streamlining processes through better use of technology. We are also committed to use the skills of volunteers more to ensure that we continue to meet the needs of our service users.

There has been a fluctuating landscape in commissioning with our major funders, local authorities and Clinical Commissioning Groups undergoing significant change in their infrastructure. This has led to many short term extensions to existing contracts rather than new contracts. This sometimes

makes planning ahead difficult. However we expect that we will have to retender for our main Personalisation contracts later in this financial year.

Following the setting up of the new enterprise partnerships and a gap in funding, we have recently been successful in obtaining European Funds for employment related services to disabled people.

On behalf of the Board I would like to thank our committed staff and volunteers for their support and hard work.

Finally thank you to my fellow trustees for their support and the important role they have played over the last year.

Jill Pick
October 2016