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TX: **YOU AND YOURS - DISABILITY - 06.01.03**

PRESENTER: **Peter White**

WHITE

Now why don't more disabled people have jobs? It's a question that we'll be trying to answer throughout this week and it's prompted by two statistics - both government figures - which seem totally contradictory. We've been repeatedly told by ministers that a million disabled people without jobs want them but we're also told that current unemployment rates amongst people with disabilities are five times higher than for non-disabled people genuinely seeking work. What's more, despite a whole range of initiatives, these figures have hardly changed over the last 20 years - just slight fluctuations. Initiatives such as legislation, which prevents people discriminating against staff or prospective staff on the grounds of disability without justification, financial help from the government with the cost of equipment or adaptations - schemes like Access to Work for example - our very own New Deal we have aimed at helping long-term unemployed disabled people.

So why do the numbers of disabled people with jobs remains so stubbornly low? Is it just that there are too many employers - like this one as depicted in an ad screened in cinemas last autumn?

CINEMA AD

[This uses the David Brent character from BBC2's sit-com 'The Office']

INTERVIEWER: Would you hire a disabled person?

DAVID BRENT: Oh yeah definitely, yeah, definitely. Not dwarves, they can't reach stuff and they take a lot of time off as well - Christmas and January panto season. But all other disableds. Not the little wheelchair ones, they knock stuff over, but all other - not blind obviously, no good, a dog's no good to you in here, they can't grip - a Labrador. But the deaf - no reason why a little deaf fellow couldn't work here, although in the afternoons it might be a bit of a problem because he'd looked round and he'd see us all laughing and he'd think we was taking the mick and we ain't we're listening to Chris Moyles in the afternoon. We had a woman here once.

WHITE

Okay, so maybe Ricky Gervais's unreconstructed and chauvinist boss is a bit of a caricature but how many such attitudes lie at the root of much unconscious discrimination? Well that's the suggestion which seems to be borne out by some new research done by the charity Scope, which has a particular focus on people with cerebral palsy but also deals with other disabilities as well. Their research, due out in March, says really that initial trends show that focused on the attitudes of employers, staff and disabled people and what they seem to show is there is a great deal of misunderstanding.

With us in the studio is Margie Woodward of Scope's campaigns team. Margie, what does the research tell us?

WOODWARD

Well it's early days but we've just done the initial kind of looking at it and it picks out some astounding figures that it's actually attitudinal why people think they can't employ disabled people. We launched this survey in September and closed it at the end of December and our initial findings from employees, employers and disabled people are going to knock the tops of people when we publish the report in March.

WHITE

I mean some of the more startling ones are that over half the population say they've never worked with a disabled person?

WOODWARD

Yes and if you think now the latest figures of disabled people in the UK is something like 11.2 million that is unacceptable.

WHITE

And what does it say about employers' perceptions about disabled people as employees?

WOODWARD

Well 90.3 per cent of the employers on the survey thought that disabled people would work more slowly and 14 per cent thought that disabled people wouldn't fit in with other staff and that being a disabled person in front line you put the customers off.

WHITE

Does that actually fit in with what the staff say?

WOODWARD

Yes it backs up, the employees because they've never worked with disabled people find it fearful, they're frightened of this and really and truly they're missing the point because if we actually identify through this survey not by hammering people but actually working in partnership to remove the barriers we'll take away the fear and hopefully change the attitudes.

WHITE

Margie, thank you very much. We'll come back to you. And those findings really which suggested fear and ignorance are surprising in the sense that it seems that even knowing someone well won't always protect you from people's preconceptions about what disabled people can and can't do. Many people lose the jobs that they were doing when they became disabled - some leave because they feel they can't any longer do the work but many are eased out before the possibility of them carrying on with the job have been properly explored and possible adaptations made. People like Alan Franklin who worked for the same firm of bookmakers for over 30 years, Alan Franklin is also with us. Alan, just explain what happened to you.

FRANKLIN

Well basically I lost the use of my legs about a year ago, I'd been with the company E. Coomes for 32 years. I informed them of my problems and said I'm getting a wheelchair - a new wheelchair - that would be very - make it more accessible for me to go back to work. The day I telephoned them and said I will be coming back now and I'm ready for work panic seemed to set in, that was on the 17th - that was in July. Can I read part of the letter?

WHITE

Yes, you got a letter from them almost immediately after that, just read me the one paragraph.

FRANKLIN

Yes certainly. On the 17th August I got this hand delivered. It says: "It has been decided that a licensed better office cannot be managed satisfactorily by a person confined to a wheelchair who is unable to leave that wheelchair to walk, even with the aid of sticks or crutches. As there is no alternative employment available within the group for a person confined to a wheelchair it is my sad duty to have to inform you that your employment with the company will be terminated on the 31st August next."

WHITE

Now were you in any doubt that you could go on doing the job?

FRANKLIN

I was in no doubt that I could do the job.

WHITE

And what did you then do? Because I think you actually looked at adaptations that could possibly be made just to deal with the physical disability ...

FRANKLIN

Yes we went to Access to Work previous to this letter coming and we met up in the shop and the engineer said there wouldn't be no problems, they would supply an electric wheelchair for me at no cost to the company, they would do the adaptations basically at no cost to the company.

WHITE

And what did the company say?

FRANKLIN

They didn't say anything. Apparently they'd had a board meeting three days after this meeting, I found out in letters from solicitors afterwards, and they decided to sack me in July but they waited for me to say I was going back to work and then they sacked me.

WHITE

But the upshot is that you actually have - you took a case, you've won your case and you have had compensation?

FRANKLIN

Yes that's right, yeah.

WHITE

Okay, Alan Franklin thank you very much indeed.

FRANKLIN

Thank you very much Peter.

WHITE

And all this is borne out in Scope's work, which suggests that disabled people need to make two and a half times as many applications to find one job, because Alan, one of the things I should have asked you is, you've been trying to get jobs haven't you ever since?

FRANKLIN

Yes, yes.

WHITE

And what's happened?

FRANKLIN

I've sent out over a hundred applications for positions, not all management, I've now basically downgraded myself and I'm going for clerical positions like assistant or whatever. I've had one reply and that was basically saying that I didn't evaluate the position of filing.

WHITE

So one reply from 102 applications?

FRANKLIN

That's right.

WHITE

And how do you feel about that?

FRANKLIN

Well it's very, very disheartening - you know you go on courses, you try to improve yourself but if you don't get a reply well you're knocking your head against a brick wall I think at the moment.

WHITE

Well as I was saying this is borne out in Scope's work, it suggests disabled people do need to make two and a half times as many applications to find one job. Let me bring in Sally Whitcher who chairs the Disability Employment Advisory Committee which has been set up to advise government ministers on policy for the employment of disabled people. Sally, what we've heard so far suggests that government initiatives, such as beefing up anti-discrimination legislation, the New Deal for disabled people, job centre pluses, for example, which are aimed at giving extra advice to disabled people, haven't worked or at least nowhere near quickly enough. What more needs to be done do you think - why haven't they worked so far?

WHITCHER

Well I think the first thing to do is to acknowledge that this is a huge problem and that the government itself has acknowledged that by setting up the Disability Employment Advisory Committee to have a close look at precisely what the barriers are and how they may be overcome. And it's not a straightforward matter. Clearly there have been a range of programmes and many of them are fairly new and lots of changes in terms of the types of provision. But notwithstanding that there clearly are a range of barriers and we've already heard about employer attitudes and the extent of ignorance and lack of awareness that may in turn lead to unnecessarily inflexible work practices and so on which could prevent somebody from working. Inaccessible buildings, transport and communication methods, it may well be that discrimination earlier on in education means that disabled people are less well qualified.

WHITE

So are you saying the kind of initiatives won't work - that it's much more institutional than that?

WHITCHER

Well I think certainly we need to look at the initiatives and the programmes and that's part of the Disability Employment Advisory Committee's role. But we need to have a thorough look at the nature of the barriers and unpack it rather. I mean, for example, again fears about coming off benefits and what might happen, age discrimination - disabled people of working age tend to be older than non-disabled people of working age - and they also tend to be long-term unemployed or are more likely to be and in various cases that tends to be more difficult.

WHITE

Sally let me stop you there. I want to see the extent to which it does come down though to employer attitudes. B&Q, the DIY chain, is a company with a comparatively good record, it claims that just under five per cent of its 32,000 staff has a disability, that this is a deliberate policy to match its employees to the profile of its customers. Sue O'Neill is with us, she's B&Q's head of diversity. Under five per cent that's good comparatively, we've looked at other figures and many companies are well below that, indeed some, like the BBC, is under two but it actually still nowhere near matches the proportion of disabled people in the community does it?

O'NEILL

No it doesn't but at B&Q we do have a very positive approach to employing disabled people. We want to ensure that we employ people who understand and respond to the diversity of our customers as you've already said and disabled people make up a huge proportion of our customers and it's important that we can reflect that with our employees.

WHITE

So what else could you do that you're not doing now?

O'NEILL

Well I think for businesses what we have to do is look at all of our employment practices, our employment opportunities, our recruitment processes and also the way that we retain employees when they do become sick or disabled. So it's about looking at what we do and ensuring that disabled people feel that they can access that employment and those opportunities that we have. For instance, we're creating 4,000 new jobs this year in B&Q and we want to ensure that disabled people feel that they have the opportunity to apply for those jobs and indeed be successful.

WHITE

Okay, we'll come on to perhaps how good those jobs are and management jobs is by no means all gloom and throughout the week we're going to be telling you about the stories of people in the job market who have bucked the trend, as well as those who've been excluded by it. Dorothy is profoundly deaf, after initial difficulties in finding a job she now works in a London store, which specialises in women's wear. Her words are spoken for us by a translator.

DOROTHY THROUGH TRANSLATOR

My name's Dorothy Obeng and my job here is as a sales assistant. I work in the women's clothing section of H&M. Occasionally I work in the lingerie section also. I work in the sitting room, I operate the till, sometimes if there's been a problem with a garment offering refunds etc. And that keeps us very busy.

My first job was at a job club particularly for deaf people and I worked as a carer, caring for children and for old people. The job club for deaf people was only for nine months, there was no permanence about that at all.

I have had bad experiences. I would fill in application forms and send them off, I would get no response whatsoever. H&M is my first permanent job and I'm very happy here. On the form it states that they're an equal opportunities employer which did give me some confidence. And the interview seemed to be so over so quick. I met the manager, Julie, with an interpreter and Julie was able to tell me that she knew a little bit of sign language.

JULIE

I think she's a very good communicator, she's very expressive and she makes good eye contact. So

in terms of customer service, sort of helping people and being attentive, she's ideal. All they want is to be normal in the workplace, so all you have to do is treat them as you would everybody else and expect the same standard from them. So it's when you make someone feel special or feel wrong or different for having the disability that you're probably going to get the problems. So, for me, she's treated exactly the same as everybody else and I think that's why it works.

DOROTHY

Not all of the staff sign, a few of them do, quite often they'll come to me and say to me - How do I sign this or how do I sign that?

WORK COLLEAGUE

I know the alphabet, but that's about it. As to hold a conversation I'm learning now - just how to say hello because at the end of the day we're all communicating, if we weren't able to communicate neither one of us would be here. Customers come in and obviously they don't realise that she can't hear so then I'll just step in and say she can't hear you, what is it you're looking for or if Dorothy needs some help then she'll come and look for me.

DOROTHY

Some of the customers will shout at me because they don't realise that I'm deaf - you know they'll maybe shout to attract my attention - and they other staff will remind customers. When I was working on the accessories I was concentrating on my work and somebody was shouting at me and I turned round and I hadn't noticed that there was somebody there and there was somebody there and they were shouting at me because I hadn't noticed them and she got really angry with me. And another member of staff saw and heard what was going on and came over and said please, apologised, the member of staff is deaf, please don't get angry with her but the woman just got really angry and walked off.

I do want to progress through the company and develop my skills, I'm very interested in the fabrics and the materials and the different materials that are used, so many of them are made in foreign countries and management are very supportive in me learning and identifying these fabrics.

I feel I have achieved up till now but I want to carry on. I would love to become a floor manager in the future but obviously I have a lot to learn in the meantime, that's very important but I would love to become a floor manager.

WHITE

Dorothy's story. Sue O'Neill can I pick up the point that Dorothy's making there, quite strongly, about wanting to progress? One of the criticisms of companies is that even when they do employ disabled people it's very hard to climb the ladder and the glass ceiling against which women have been beating their heads for so long perhaps applies even more to disabled people - how many of B&Q's jobs are management jobs?

O'NEILL

Certainly we have many employees that are in management positions - people in store positions, store managers positions - and people who have progressed through the company.

WHITE

But is there a bit of a feeling that if you've employed someone who's disabled you've almost done enough and it's quite easy to just sit there?

O'NEILL

No I really don't believe there is. I believe that we see people as individuals, we recognise people for

the contribution that they make and we see people for the commitment and their ability to do the job and the disability really doesn't come into it.

WHITE

Well there certainly is evidence to show that given the chance disabled people can do jobs at the highest level and involving great skill and responsibility - it's not just politicians like David Blunkett and formula 1 team bosses like Frank Williams who defy the preconceptions, there are some less well known names working in some pretty unexpected places.

ACTUALITY

TWEDDLE

Hi Mr Davis I'm Alan Tweddle.

DAVIS

Alan hi, I've asked you here today to give me a bit of advice please. I'd like to know the stamp duty implications of a transfer of a property portfolio between two companies.

TWEDDLE

Well I'd need a little bit more information ...

WHITE

Alan Tweddle displaying the caution traditionally associated with accountants and perhaps with good reason - he is, as far as he knows, the first totally blind person to have passed the Institute of Chartered Accountants' exams. He now works for international company Ernst and Young as a corporate tax consultant, which means giving advice about large sums of other people's money.

TWEDDLE

Say you've got a hotel chain that's selling off a bundle of hotels for a hundred million pounds, there's potential stamp duty on that of four per cent, which is four million pounds, which is a lot of money. And if a mistake is made, say, and the property is transferred twice, instead of just once, that can be eight million pounds.

ACTUALITY - COMPUTER VOICE

I use a lot of technology, I use a standard PC but I also use Access technology - so I have a speech system on my computer and also a Braille display which translates the material on screen into a Braille format, which is readable for me. I think probably that a blind person could do my job without technology - you'd rely more heavily on a reader etc. but it could be done. I don't necessarily think that they could get this job without technology, I think an employer looks at technology and is impressed, for one, and is also persuaded that this technology will solve the problems that they can see. Some of my colleagues can have quite a sort of abrupt style, I think perhaps I have a more friendly amicable style and I think that definitely works better, it's much less intimidating and they're not expecting to be intimidated by me.

WHITE

Do you think you do have to work a bit harder, a bit longer, do you have to be, as some people say, a bit better to work at this level?

TWEDDLE

Yes you do. I mean essentially we're working for clients, we provide a service to clients and we bill them for that service and there are times, if a job takes me a great deal longer, you can't necessarily expect a client to pay for that. I would tend to just soak it up into my own time. But that's - I mean that's the price you pay for wanting to do what I do.

WHITE

Alan Tweddle. Margie Woodward, what people say when they hear cases like that is oh yeah but they're exceptional people, that doesn't apply to lots of other people. Can I be blunt - are we perhaps in the name of political correctness expecting miracles, implying that kind of anyone can do any job regardless of the disability?

WOODWARD

No we're not asking for miracles, we're just asking for a fair crack of the whip. We've got expertise, we want to work, we have the experience, you're missing out on a great workforce. Obviously if you're qualified for the job and if you have [indistinct word] in the job you should be given the chance for that job.

WHITE

Let me bring in Sally Whitcher. Your job, as I said, to advise ministers, Margie says there are many disabled people who could do jobs who aren't being given the chance but presumably there are some disabilities which are harder to place than others - that would be true wouldn't it?

WHITCHER

Well it's certainly the case that employment rates are different for people with different forms of impairment and that people with mental health problems or learning disabilities, in particular, have difficulty in getting work, although whether that's to do with their condition or to do with employer attitudes and the nature of barriers confronting them of course is somewhat open to debate.

WHITE

So what would you advice be to ministers to get people like that - those kind of groups of people - because I believe the evidence is that actually in some areas it's harder for people in the groups you've mentioned to get jobs than it was perhaps in the '80s when there was more manual work around, when perhaps there was higher employment as well?

WHITCHER

Well certainly the availability of certain types of jobs, or lack of availability, may mean that some people with certain forms of impairment are more likely to be employed or less likely to be employed. But there's some more fundamental issues here: in 2004 we're going to see an extension to anti-discrimination legislation and that will bring into the frame a lot of small employers who currently aren't covered, so that will strengthen the recourse that disabled people have who work for small employers or who want to be employed by them when it comes to challenging discrimination.

WHITE

Let me bring in Sue O'Neill at that point because employers are quite worried about that, particularly small employers - do they actually need more help than they get if they're going to fulfil these criteria, the kind that Sally's talking about?

O'NEILL

I think often small businesses do miss out on knowing some of the legislation and knowing certainly some of the services that are available to them, particularly services like Access to Work. And I do think that more can be done to increase the knowledge of small businesses.

WHITE

What sort of thing? Because I mean it's all very well sending out sort of tapes and pamphlets and ads, like the one we heard at the beginning, but does that really get through to busy people who think their main job is to make a profit?

O'NEILL

Possibly not but I do think you have to make a start and I think organisations such as Scope and Leonard Cheshire are raising the profile of disabled people. As well as cases like Alan's would actually make businesses sit up and think well this is ridiculous, they've lost 32 years of experience in Alan's case.

WHITE

Well let me bring in Alan at that point. You're at the sharp end of all this, you're the one who's had the experience that we're going to be talking about all week, is there one thing anyone could do - government, employers, disability organisations - which would help, I mean you're still waiting to get a job basically?

FRANKLIN

There are courses but at the end of the course there's still nothing there for them. I actually got in touch with a company called Remploy and basically their area manager said to me people go there because they want to relearn and adjust to other jobs and when they've finished there they feel so comfortable and there isn't any job for them to go to.

WHITE

So people are being trained for non-existent jobs a lot of the time, maybe to massage the figures a bit?

FRANKLIN

They're actually clogging up the system because nobody - somebody new like me who comes into the system can't get into the system because they're so comfortable being in these places.

WHITE

Well there are many things to discuss and we're going to be dealing with them over the next five days. Meanwhile Margie Woodhead [sic], Sally Whitcher, Sue O'Neill, Alan Franklin thank you all very much indeed. The debate and the individual stories go on throughout the week. We're going to be looking at sheltered and supported employment, which Alan was talking about there, also those who go it alone and are self-employed, the long-term unemployed. But tomorrow on Call You and Yours it's your turn, tell us your experiences - if you're disabled what's been your dealings with the job market, have you been rejected and if so who by? Or perhaps your experiences have been positive - do your own attitudes to work and the workplace make a difference? As for employers - have you taken on disabled people, what's been the results? Some employers say they find it hard to find disabled people. Do you feel you get enough support and information - support in terms of grants or advice? Or do you perhaps feel you're being asked to act as social workers rather than run a profitable business? Well whatever your views we want to hear them. You can call us today on 0800 044 044 or e-mail us at [bbc.co.uk](mailto:youandyours@bbc.co.uk) - at youandyours@bbc.co.uk. But please if you want to be considered for taking part in tomorrow's programme do accompany your e-mail with a phone number on which we can call you back. Meanwhile thank you all very much indeed for taking part and although you haven't heard her lately Winifred Robinson says goodbye as well.