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# TX: YOU AND YOURS - DISABILITY - 07.01.03

#### **PRESENTER:** Peter White

#### WHITE

On Call You and Yours at around 12.30 we pick up our theme this week of disabled people in work, or rather, more often than not, out of work. Even the most optimistic estimates suggest that only about 40 per cent of disabled people who want to work have jobs - so why? Joining me for your calls is Tania Burchardt who's a research fellow at the Centre for the Analysis of Social Exclusion based at the LSE, Tania's also written a study of disabled people in the workplace.

Tania Burchardt, there's no shortage of initiatives on this subject - New Deal, job centre plus, tax credit - so why do they seem, all of them really, to have so little impact?

#### BURCHARDT

Well I think that's a very interesting point that you make. I think one of the problems is that most of the initiatives we've seen to date have focused on the disabled person themselves - encouraging them to try harder, look for more jobs and generally be more active in the labour market.

#### WHITE

So it's sort of blaming disabled people for being out of work in a way?

#### BURCHARDT

And not focusing enough, I think, on the structural problems and problems in the workplace e

Il certainly there's far too much of that around but I think it's unfair also to simply blame employers, after all most employers are operating in a very competitive market economy, so they don't necessarily have the scope to do anything than choose the employee who they think is going to give them that competitive edge. Where I think there is a big gap is in terms of retention, job

Is this, in the end, down to legislation, are we actually waiting for 2004, when there are going to be a lot of changes, to kick in, is that the only thing that will really make a difference?

# BURCHARDT

No I think there's plenty of scope for change before that legislation comes in, I think it would be a great mistake to leave things until that time. Apart from anything else there's all the people in the meantime - between now and 2004 - who need the help to get back into work.

## WHITE

Okay, well stay with us Tania Burchardt as we go to Call You and Yours and take people's calls. I'll also be joined by Stephen Alambritis of the Federation of Small Businesses. Call with your own experiences - positive or negative - of the job market, we'd very much like to hear from employers too - are you being unfairly made the scapegoat for problems which perhaps have deeper roots? Do call, the number is 08700 100 444.

## WHITE

It's Call You and Yours, the subject this week: Is there some iron law of nature which says the majority of disabled people are destined to be jobless? Despite anti-discrimination laws, awareness campaigns, New Deals, tax credits, only 40 per cent of disabled people available and willing to work have a job. So why should this be? It was suggested on yesterday's You and Yours that many employers had ill-informed and outdated attitudes about disabled people's capabilities but is this the whole picture? We're constantly being told we're dealing with all kinds of skills shortages - teachers, nurses, plumbers - do disabled people have the skills and training needed to fill these jobs or is an opportunity being missed? Does the government give enough help to employers or is it more concerned with getting people off benefit into any job, rather than matching applicant to job? Do call on 08700 100 444 and we want to hear both from disabled people and employers about their direct experiences of this issue.

We've already heard from Tania Burchardt of the Centre for the Analysis of Social Exclusion, she's still with us. Also with me is Stephen Alambritis of the Federation of Small Businesses. But let's go to the callers first.

Ann Eastwood is calling from Barnsley. Ann good afternoon.

# EASTWOOD

Good afternoon to you.

WHITE What's

So their attitude, as far as you understand it, is that they only want to make New Deal jobs if they lead directly to full-time jobs?

# EASTWOOD

I assume that is so, yes, because you cannot stay on benefits and have a job for more than six months without stopping and starting again six months later.

# WHITE

So there you are, you're sitting at home, you want to work and basically you're saying government rules won't allow you to do so?

# EASTWOOD

Yes, yes.

# WHITE

Thank you very much for your call. Susan Utley is calling from Bideford, Susan good afternoon.

UTLEY Good afternoon.

# WHITE

What about you - what's happened to you?

# UTLEY

Well basically I am lucky enough to be in full-time employment but the only way I am in full-time employment now is the fact that I have been lucky enough to use the Access to Work. Now I only stumbled upon Access to Work by accident really.

# WHITE

Shall we explain, straightaway, that this is a scheme which will help employers and help you directly with equipment or assistance that you need to do the job on equal terms.

# UTLEY

That is correct. But no one seems to know anything about it. I only stumbled upon it by accident because a lady I work with her husband worked in the vicinity of the Access to Work, there's no advertisements about it, there's no press releases. I did hear it, perhaps, on your programme yesterday in connection with but I've been lucky to draw on that for the last six months at my place of work because I was - well I was working in the same job and then I became disabled - partially sighted.

# WHITE

So why do you think they would have a scheme a not advertise it? I mean are you suspicious that maybe they don't want too ...

# UTLEY

Well are they saying - basically the things that they said to me, when I stumbled upon it, well if you'd have been unemployed and looking for a job you would have had all these gates open for you but because I was not and never have been, thankfully enough, unemployed or unemployable I hadn't accessed these things. But on the other hand for the last kind of 8 or 10 years have, through my sight, found difficulty in lots of things, if I'd have known about that I could have had help much, much sooner.

# WHITE Susan thank you very mu

.. I mean if you're better off on benefits it sounds as if your wages are low?

# YATES

No the benefits are too high. We're now in a silly position where I'm afraid it's right across the board benefits are so high and also so complicated that people are scared to come off them and they'll be quite honest with you - you've got to live in a real world I think, I think one of the problems is that employers actually are dealing with the problems all the time and they're there at the sharp end. Sadly the government and people who do these various plans aren't there and they don't understand that people will play the game and they will use these benefits to suit themselves.

## WHITE

Okay. Before ...

## YATES

The other side of it, of course, is regulation.

## WHITE

What sort of regulation?

#### YATES

Well more regulations sadly means less jobs and I think all employers will say that, especially smaller ones, and if you really want to increase jobs for disabled people then you should stop regulation for anythere and iTw 15vfp7.3838 454.9417 Tmployet un 12 nuly mJ 12 0 0 16237323.88 454.9417

Okay let me go to another caller before I bring Stephen back in. Phil Jenkins is calling from the Welsh Development Agency, Phil good afternoon.

## JENKINS

Hi, how are you?

# WHITE

Fine. You are ringing with a kind of solution really or an approach anyway?

## JENKINS

Well it's an approach to helping small businesses develop a positive attitude towards employing disabled people yes.

## WHITE

Okay, what do you do?

## JENKINS

We work with small companies across Wales, developing examples of good practice where employing disabled people is concerned. And then use those examples to persuade other similar organisations of the benefits of employing people in this way.

#### WHITE

So when you hear people say people aren't

flu again. And then I've been on the New Deal and I've just found that it's not really helpful because of this six months limit thing, that we actually have to work like two days for therapeutic hours or go full-time and I'm finding, for my condition, as I'm improving I need a sort of progressive programme.

# WHITE

Right, let me - let me go - stay with us for a minute - because I want to go back to Tania Burchardt because this is exactly the point Ann made right at the beginning. This seems to be a perennial problem for quite a lot of people, is this just misconceived do you think by the government?

## BURCHARDT

Well I think what the six month limit was trying to address, although perhaps a bit hamfistedly, was the problem of people who were continuing to claim benefit and work part-time pretty much indefinitely and these were often on schemes that were supposed to be moving people on and helping them progress into full-time work or a more permanent kind of employment in the mainstream.

# WHITE

Is this what we used to call therapeutic earning?

# BURCHARDT

That's right, yes, and it seemed to be acting as a bit of a trap in fact and people on therapeutic earnings for very long periods of time are not actually moving through on to full-time employment, perhaps despite their best intentions. So I think the idea of - behind the six month limit was to try to ensure that there was progressive on from that first sort of toe in the water ...

# WHITE

Six month's not long is it?

## BURCHARDT

It isn't very long and I think there is certainly a case for evaluating how that's going, listening to people like Judith and Ann and their experiences of it and seeing whether a more nuance, a more subtle approach to the types of time limits on this sort of benefit can be reached.

## WHITE

Maybe that's the kind of thing we can discuss with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, he's going to be part of our discussion on Friday when we raise a lot of these issues. Let me go to Janet Boreman, calling from Burton-on-Trent, Janet good afternoon.

## BOREMAN

Good afternoon.

WHITE What's your point?

## BOREMAN

Well my point is employers could be a little more flexible. I was recruited by a company and wasn't allowed to use the car park because it was an executive perk and had to walk from a public car park which was very difficult and had to give up.

## WHITE

You have a mobility problem?

## BOREMAN

YesI have a mobility car in fact.

# WHITE

Right.

# BOREMAN

So my mobility is difficult.

# WHITE

So do you think this is sort of typical - that they'll em

Oh yes I'm not bothered about that because he doesn't - what I'm talking about is somebody dealing with customers. If I owned a supermarket, which I don't obviously, I wouldn't be happy that the custom

Oh you do, yes you do, you have to fight for it, you have to know your rights, you have to find out who you need to contact - Access to Work in actual fact have been extremely good to me. I find out an awful lot about what my rights are and once I tell my employer and I push and push and push I do eventually get what I need.

# WHITE

Tania Burchardt just before we have to end, what - having listened to these calls - what do you think are the key things that need to be done that aren't being done?

# BURCHARDT

Well there's been such a range of issues that have been brought up in the discussion here and certainly one of the things that comes through to me is the crucial role that continuing support for people when they have got into a job, disabled people once they've got into a job, so that these kinds of problems, such as Janet experienced of the lack of flexibility, problems perhaps of people not actually getting the tax credits that they might be entitled to, to help the job actually pay for them, negotiations with employers about adaptations that need to be made and so on. So that kind of continuing support once someone has actually found a job is clearly missing.

# WHITE

Can I get one very last - you'll have to be quick Geoffrey Thomas - 20 seconds - what's happened to you?

# THOMAS

Hello Peter, yes I've had incredible service from the Access to Work team here in Cardiff. I'm actually the national spokesperson for Dr Hadwen Trust for humane research. I'm blind and my wife is my driver and secretary. Without the really flexible support I simply wouldn't be able to fulfil this job at all.