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Fact sheets on Britain

Rehabilitation and Care of the Disabled

Britain has a comprehensive system of help and care for the disabled whatever the cause or nature of their disabilities, while special services and priority treatment are provided for the war-disabled. The work of central government and local authorities in carrying out their statutory responsibilities towards the disabled is supplemented by, and integrated with, that of voluntary organisations.

Medical Rehabilitation and Hospital Care

The chances of a speedy recovery from illness or injury are improved and the incidence of permanent disablement lessened by the medical treatment available to everyone in Britain virtually free of charge under the National Health Service. Medical treatment includes a rehabilitation regime, when necessary, which is prescribed for the particular needs of each patient; the main hospitals and some smaller hospitals have well-equipped rehabilitation departments and there are special medical rehabilitation centres with specialist staff including, besides the medical staff, physiotherapists, remedial gymnasts, occupational therapists, speech therapists and medical social workers. Specialised medical and supply services (of such equipment as artificial limbs, wheel chairs and powered vehicles) are also available under the National Health Service.

Employment

Many of those left with a disability after medical treatment are capable of holding a suitable job, though they may need help in finding it. This help is provided by the Disablement Resettlement Service, based in Great Britain on the Disabled Persons (Employment) Acts 1944 and 1958 and available to all handicapped people over school-leaving age. (The minimum leaving age is 16 for handicapped pupils receiving special educational treatment, 15 for other pupils.)

The Department of Employment and Productivity is responsible for the administration of this service. At each of its local offices are disablement resettlement officers (DROs), both men and women, who have the special duty of advising and

helping disabled people in obtaining suitable employment. These officers are in touch with all hospitals in their areas and visit any patient who wishes to discuss future employment. They co-operate closely with doctors, local authorities and voluntary welfare agencies.

The help given by the service falls under five main headings:

1. *Vocational Guidance.* Vocational guidance is given at local offices by DROs in consultation with hospital resettlement clinics or medical interviewing committees, and also by occupational psychologists in the industrial rehabilitation units (see below).

2. *Placing in Ordinary Competitive Employment.* On the basis of a disabled person's qualifications and aptitudes and with medical guidance, the DRO tries to find work suitable for the individual, either directly or after a course of industrial rehabilitation or vocational training. All employers of 20 or more workers are required by law to employ a quota (3 per cent for almost all industries) of registered disabled people. Registration is voluntary. The number of disabled people registered in April 1969 was just under 645,000; of those estimated to be capable of ordinary employment, nearly 59,000 were unemployed.

3. *Industrial Rehabilitation.* DROs may recommend industrial rehabilitation for disabled people. This is provided at one residential, three partly residential and 18 non-residential units run by the Department of Employment and Productivity for about 14,000 people each year. Its aim is to improve the physical condition and mental outlook of disabled people and to provide vocational guidance for those who need it. In addition the department gives financial support to: two voluntary organisations giving similar facilities for blind people; one giving facilities for the cerebral palsied; and three voluntary organisations and one local authority providing industrial rehabilitation workshops for the mentally handicapped.

4. *Vocational Training.* The department provides vocational training at 42 government training centres which admit people with disabilities. Training is also arranged for the disabled at educational institutions and with private employers. For the more seriously disabled there are special residential training colleges run by voluntary organisations with financial and technical help from the department. Special arrangements are made for training certain disabled people, such as the blind, for ordinary competitive employment.

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Nearly 3,000 disabled people a year complete vocational training courses arranged or provided by the department.

Disabled people undergoing rehabilitation or training receive allowances which vary according to a person's age and domestic circumstances and whether he is living at home during the course or in lodgings or other accommodation. The rates are in most cases higher than the corresponding rate of national insurance sickness and unemployment benefit.

In addition to their value as preparation for work, industrial rehabilitation and vocational training help to prevent the demoralising gap which might otherwise occur between discharge from hospital or recovery from long illness and return to work.

5. *Sheltered Employment.* Work under sheltered conditions is provided for severely disabled people who, although capable of employment, are unable to compete with other workers under ordinary industrial conditions. Remploy Ltd., a non-profit-making company set up and financed by the department, operates 86 factories employing over 7,500 severely disabled people (including 150 home workers). The department also gives financial help to local authorities and voluntary organisations which provide sheltered employment under approved schemes for the severely disabled, including the blind. Some 5,400 severely disabled people, including blind, are covered by such schemes. A further 800 blind people are employed at home under homeworking schemes. Industrial Advisers to the Blind Ltd., a government-sponsored body, advises workshops for the blind on methods of production, types of product, and marketing.

The department carries out a comprehensive placing service for blind people in open industry and an increasing variety of jobs in commercial organisations are filled by the blind.

Financial Assistance

Disabled people who have been employed are entitled to national insurance or industrial injury benefits; they may also receive a supplementary benefit which may be claimed by those who have never been able to work. If their disability is due to injury at work or a prescribed industrial disease, they get a pension or gratuity and the war disabled receive special war pensions. The basic rate for all disability pensions is £7 12s. per week (to be increased to £8 8s. in November 1969) for 100 per cent disablement and there are, in addition, allowances for dependants, special hardship, unemployability, constant attendance, and hospital treatment, and death benefits for widows and other dependants. War pensioners are entitled to additional allowances on a somewhat higher scale and to other payments based on rank. The voluntary associations concerned with the welfare of the disabled are ready to make prompt advances in emergencies, to take up hard cases with the authorities and sometimes to supplement permanently the money granted from public funds.

Care and Welfare

Both disabled people in employment and those who cannot earn a living are likely to need substantial help and advice in adapting themselves to their disabilities. In addition to the hospital and specialist services, the practitioner services and the local authority health services, help is available through the schemes made by all county and county borough councils under the National Assistance Act 1948 for the provision of welfare services to people who are blind, deaf or dumb, or otherwise substantially and permanently handicapped. Voluntary organisations give important help in providing these services, often acting as agents of local authorities.

The schemes require local authorities to maintain registers of all disabled people in their area who seek the help of the welfare services. A wide range of services is available including advice on medical, occupational, social and personal problems arising from disability; assistance in overcoming the effects of disability, including adaptations in the home and provision of aids to meet individual needs; teaching of handicrafts or other occupations to those unable to take up employment, either at home or in occupation centres; and provision of recreational facilities, outings and holidays.

The services are staffed by social workers, occupational therapists and craft instructors and there is much scope also for voluntary workers. Certain social workers work specifically with the blind and are qualified to assist them in all matters, including the teaching of reading embossed literature. Services for the deaf, in which local voluntary organisations play a large part, are staffed by specialist welfare officers qualified to communicate with the deaf.

Local authorities, or voluntary bodies acting on their behalf, also provide residential accommodation for disabled people unable to live in their own homes and in need of care.

The Department of Health and Social Security maintains a welfare service for war pensioners and a homecrafts service for home-bound war pensioners.

Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, provision for rehabilitation and care of the disabled is, in general, similar to that in other parts of the United Kingdom but, except for war pensions, is administered by Northern Ireland's own government departments or statutory bodies. War pensions are administered throughout the United Kingdom by the Department of Health and Social Security, which is also responsible for the provision of special treatment required by war pensioners.

For fuller information see COI reference pamphlet *Rehabilitation and Care of the Disabled in Britain*. R.F.P.4972.

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