



# Women's Resource Centre

## DISABLED WOMEN'S GROUPS

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### DISABLED WOMEN IN THE UK

- There are 3.2 million disabled women of working age in the UK. <sup>1</sup>
- They face poorer access to education, employment, health information and public services than disabled men and non-disabled women.
- "Higher unemployment rates, lower salaries, less access to medical care, lack of education, poor or no access to programmes and services aimed at women, and a higher risk of suffering physical and/or sexual abuse are just some of the social aspects which women with sensorial, physical or mental disabilities must face". <sup>2</sup>
- A study into the experiences of disabled women in the UK found that many issues that are problems for all disabled people, such as low incomes or accessible transport, are exacerbated for disabled women. It found that disabled women felt their needs were not taken into account by service providers and this resulted in difficulties accessing information, housing, safety, transport, employment and education. <sup>3</sup>
- Services for women suffering sexual and violent abuse were rarely accessible to disabled women. <sup>3</sup>
- Disabled women in residential care tended to feel most isolated and to experience an extremely low quality of life. <sup>3</sup>
- Disabled women's issues have been often marginalised or excluded: "...pertinent issues effecting all women, such as health, domestic violence, feminism and sexuality, [are] overlooked or even denied of women with disabilities. This increases the vulnerability of women with disabilities as they are not seen to have the same issues as all women and they often lack vital information about their rights as they are unable or unaware to defend their right to have a presence within the feminist movement and indeed, wider society". <sup>4</sup>

### DISABLED WOMEN'S VOLUNTARY & COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS

- Organisations run by disabled women provide essential and unique services, for which there is high demand.
- Disabled women organise on many issues including: domestic violence and sexual abuse of disabled women (both in institutional and family settings), access to information on health, sexual harassment of disabled women and spaces for disabled women to talk about issues that affect them.
- Two very successful and well-attended disabled women's conferences have been held in the last three years, but resourcing ongoing events, programmes or activities has been found to be more difficult.





- Disabled women are often marginalised in both the disability movement, despite being very active, and the women’s voluntary and community sector: “Although the organised disability movement should represent and empower all disabled people, in practice disabled women have fewer opportunities to take part, to take action and to make change...Contact with the general women’s movement is not so easy. Interest, when shown, is often at the last minute, when disabled women approach event organisers to ask why there are no disabled speakers and are hurriedly asked to produce one”.<sup>5</sup>
- There are very few voluntary or community organisations in the UK run by and for disabled women, despite the obvious need and demand for them. ‘Guesstimates’ put the number of groups at around 20.
- The disabled women’s groups that do exist are usually extremely insecurely funded, or not funded at all, and several organisations are at risk of closure.

### **BARRIERS FOR DISABLED WOMEN’S VOLUNTARY & COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS**

- Women’s organisations, in general, are seen as marginal and are undervalued. There is a lack of targeting of women’s organisations by funders.
- Information on funding and funding application processes are often inaccessible (i.e. information and forms are not available in accessible formats).
- Finding opportunities to meet and organise are difficult because of barriers faced by disabled women in society e.g. many non-disabled women’s organisations are started by a group of women meeting in their own homes, but this can be more difficult for disabled women due to inaccessible transport or buildings or attitudes of staff in institutions.
- “Transport for all disabled people is an important key to the exercise of citizenship and participation in society. Women in general, and disabled women in particular, are less mobile than men – less likely to have access to a car; more confined to the home due to social and cultural patterns and to the actual or perceived threat of danger, especially after dark”.<sup>5</sup>
- Childcare and/or other caring responsibilities impact on disabled women’s organising.

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

Finding information on disabled women’s organisations is difficult because directories rarely categorise organisations by both gender and disability, and also because there are so few disabled women’s organisations in existence. Services provided by disabled women’s organisations include:

- Health information and empowerment for disabled women e.g. Frida Project, [www.womenshealthlondon.org.uk/projects.html](http://www.womenshealthlondon.org.uk/projects.html)
- Support and social activities for lesbian disabled women e.g. GEMMA, [gemmagroup@hotmail.com](mailto:gemmagroup@hotmail.com)
- Support, information and advice for BME disabled women, and policy and campaigning e.g. UK Disability Forum for European Affairs (UKDFfEA) Women’s Committee, [www.edfwomen.org.uk](http://www.edfwomen.org.uk)

#### **REFERENCES**

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