



The Employability Issue!

Winter Edition 2024

New Satellite
Clinic in
Northants



Employability
Signposting with
Liz Williams



Chris's Work
Journey



Emma - Working
with CMT



Donna's Super Powers!

Also inside
this issue:

- A Year of 10th anniversary celebrations!
- The Guldmann Hoist!
- Evenbreak Feature!
- Online Employability Session

MD SUPPORT CENTRE OPEN DAY

SAVE THE DATE

29TH JUNE 2024

11AM - 4PM

FINHAM PARK 2, TORRINGTON AVE,
COVENTRY, CV4 9WT



PLANNING A HOLIDAY?

Did you know you can apply for grants to help cover the cost of going on holiday!



Here are some websites to have a look at:

C S Disabled holidays

<https://www.csdisabledholidays.co.uk/>

The Victoria Convalescent Trust

<https://victoriaconvalescenttrust.org.uk/>

You can also use the grant search tool on Turn2Us

<https://www.turn2us.org.uk/>



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A Note from our CEO Sarah-Ann Moore

Happy New Year and welcome to this Winter edition of the MD Support Centre magazine!

We are delighted in this issue to be reflecting on our recent 10th Anniversary Celebrations (including fabulous celebratory events in Birmingham/ Black Country and Coventry) and to be looking forward to exciting things to come in 2024.

With the New Year being a time when many of us think about new challenges and goals for year ahead, we hope that this edition's theme of employability is apt. We often hear in Centre from service users who are navigating the challenges associated with seeking employment and managing in work with a disability, and we are pleased in this issue to be able to share some of their stories, along with some suggested resources and tips that we hope might prove useful for others. If this a topic of further interest, please also look at our MDSC Blog page for additional service user content (<https://mdsupportcentre.org/blogs/>), and we will be continuing to explore this theme with one of our Online Wellness Hub sessions being planned in April (see our website events page for more details <https://mdsupportcentre.org/events/>).

In the months since our last magazine, we have been incredibly busy continuing to settle into our new Coventry HQ, installing new therapy equipment (including our fabulous new ceiling track hoist, see page 10), recruiting for new team members (including physiotherapists, complementary therapists, a physiotherapy assistant, fundraising assistant, and reception volunteers - if you or someone you know would be interested in working with us, please let us know!), and piloting our latest satellite clinic location in Daventry (which we hope to formally launch in Spring 2024).

Thank you as always to our Service User Content Editor, Emily Bonner, for her hard work on this edition, and thank you to all our hardworking team of staff and volunteers who ensure that MD Support Centre can continue to grow and support more people with MD in the Midlands and beyond. As a small charity we survive and grow only through the kindness, generosity, and enthusiasm of our amazing community of staff, volunteers, service users, carers, funders, and partners.

Thank you for your continued support and I hope you enjoy this issue of our magazine!

Sarah



10TH ANNIVERSARY ROUNDUP

A YEAR OF CELEBRATION

It all started back in Summer 2022. As we kicked off celebrating our 10th Anniversary, we also moved our Coventry HQ to a brand-new location.

Beginning with our Open House, which took place shortly after our move from Hereward College to our new location in Westwood House let's look back on a year of anniversary celebration dinners and events, which culminated in our Coventry Charity Dinner in association with British Asian Business & Professionals Association (BABPA).

**October 2022
Open House**



**March 2023
Leicester 10th Anniversary
Dinner**



**May 2023
Open Day**



**September 2023
Birmingham 10th Anniversary
Dinner**



COVENTRY 10TH ANNIVERSARY DINNER

SUPPORTED BY BABPA



A huge thank you to BABPA

We were delighted to be nominated as chosen charity for BABPA's 23rd Annual Charity Dinner and to receive a donation of £1,000. Over £4,000 was raised in total!



Thank you to Cllr Parminder Singh Birdi for organising the event.





Many thanks to service user Sanah Rauf for taking some fab photos of the evening!

It was a pleasure to have our previous Fundraising Manager, Natasha Sweet (pictured second from left) join us for the evening. Natasha has played such an integral part over the years having been with us since the very beginning.



The evening featured African drumming for all to get involved!

Therapy Update

Recent months have been busy as ever for our therapy team and there have been some exciting developments in Centre, not least of which being our amazing new ceiling track hoist which we talk about on page 10!

New Satellite Location

Since September we have been piloting a new satellite clinic location in Daventry with local charity Reach for Health (Stefen Hill, Stefen Hill Ground, Western Ave, Daventry NN11 4UD). In this “pilot-phase” we have been gathering lots of feedback from service users, so thank you to everyone who has visited the clinic and provided feedback so far! Following the successful pilot run, we are excitedly planning for a formal clinic launch in Spring 2024. We are in the process of recruiting local physiotherapist/s ready for the launch, but in the meantime our therapists Lynn and Taher are continuing to run our twice monthly pilot clinics at Reach for Health.



Recruitment

In addition to recruiting for our Daventry satellite, we are also actively recruiting for positions across our other locations. We know that it can be difficult to get appointments with us at the moment, so we hope to be able to offer more appointment availability and build our weekday and Saturday capacity. We are currently recruiting for physiotherapists, complementary therapists, a physiotherapy assistant (to replace Navya who sadly left us in October), fundraising assistant, and reception volunteers – so if you or someone you know would be interested in working with us, please let us know!



Service User Resources

We are excited to be developing our Service User Resources website page (<https://mdsupportcentre.org/service-user-resources/>) and in recent months our team have been busily pre-recording some great new tailored exercise classes that will be uploaded to the site shortly so that you can take part in more sessions “on-demand”.

Check out below our latest in-person clinic and online class schedule. If you would like to book an appointment at any of our locations, join a class online, or would like more information regarding our services, please contact reception on 02476 100770 or by email at reception@mdsupportcentre.org.

Online Class Schedule



TUESDAY

2pm - Drop-In Seated Exercise - with Ulrike/Siobhan

Perfect for trying out an online class - Suitable for all levels as exercises will be graded and can be adjusted to individual needs. A gentle seated exercise class working on upper and lower body exercises, posture and core stability.

Theraband optionally required.

6pm - Floor Pilates - with Lynn

Intermediate Level Pilates class. 20 mins standing warm up/balance work followed by 40 mins matwork Pilates on the floor. *Theraband, Pilates ball, floor mat needed.*

6pm - Beginner Floor Pilates - with Siobhan

Beginner Pilates class. Standing warm up followed by Pilates matwork exercises on the floor. Attendants will need to be able to get themselves on/off the floor at home and have had a face to face session in advance to teach Pilates core principles.

THURSDAY - AM

10.30am - Drop in Standing/Seating Mix - with various therapists

Perfect for trying an advanced online class. Mixture of standing and seated exercise class working with cardio, posture, balance, core and a range of movement exercises. *Theraband and ball needed*

THURSDAY - PM

2:20pm - Seated Exercise - with Chandni

Seated exercise class. Working on upper and lower body range of movement, cardiovascular, core stability and stretches. *Floor mat required.*

5.15pm - Drop in Seated Yoga Class - with Rewati

45 min class consisting of stretching and relaxation using Yoga techniques. The aim is to enhance relaxation of muscles and body and learn breathing control. Warm up focuses on on breathing control, followed by chair based stretches, ending with a cool down promoting relaxation and mindfulness. *No equipment needed.*

FRIDAY

2pm - Drop in Breathing Class - with France

Breathing techniques and exercises to aid respiration and facilitate a more natural breathing pattern. Self-discovery of the art of breathing along with Mindfulness, which is being aware of the body and its most important function - breathing.

No equipment needed.



Dan



Ulrike



Lynn



Siobhan



Chandni



Rewati



France



The Guldmann Hoist

by Dan Foley, Senior Physiotherapist

The installation of the new Guldmann hoist system at our Coventry clinic is one of the biggest days to date for MD Support Centre. The buzz has been electric, and it has not disappointed.

Following a training session with the always helpful Christian Clay from Guldmann, we were let loose with the device, which not only hoists our most vulnerable service users in and out of their chairs and on and off our plinths, but also has the capability to bring appropriate service users into standing, with some or all their body weight supported.

From here, our possibilities are endless when it comes to therapy provision. Muscle strengthening, core stability, gait re-education and even games such as football, jumping and a dance or two!

So far, we have managed to achieve bridging, sit to stand work, standing balance, and standing strength and mobility in and out of our parallel bars. All of these would not have been achievable by the service user independently due to factors affected by their muscular dystrophy.

What this does is start to open, or re-open in some cases, services users' beliefs about what their bodies are capable of doing, and what they have had to avoid for such a long time to ensure safety is always at the forefront of everything they do.

The Guldmann hoist allows us as therapists to provide a whole extra layer of 'safety' and 'security' which allows service users to focus 100% on the task in hand to get the neurons firing and the possibility of new or improved movement!

Now that the Guldmann hoist is here, I believe it will become a hugely important part of what we are able to offer and will benefit many of our service users at MD Support Centre.



Upcoming Events

Coffee Morning in Tipton

Join us at our Black Country satellite for an informal catch up with fellow service users 10.30am - 12.30pm

 [Thursday 22 February](#)

Steering Focus Group

Help us shape the future of the charity and share your ideas on Zoom 6.00pm - 7.30pm

 [Wednesday 6 March](#)

Coffee Morning in Birmingham

Join us at our Birmingham satellite for an informal catch up with fellow service users 10.30am - 12.30pm

 [Friday 15 March](#)

Wellness Hub - Employability

Join us on Zoom to discuss all things employability and gain knowledge and support 6.30pm - 8.00pm

 [Monday 15 April](#)

Coffee Morning in Coventry

Join us at our Coventry HQ for an informal catch up with fellow service users 10.30am - 12.30pm

 [Wednesday 24 April](#)

Coffee Morning in Leicester

Join us at our Leicester satellite for an informal catch up with fellow service users 10.30am - 12.30pm

 [Saturday 11 May](#)

Steering Focus Group

Help us shape the future of the charity and your share ideas on Zoom 6.00pm - 7.30pm

 [Wednesday 5 June](#)

Coffee Morning in Birmingham

Join us at our Birmingham satellite for an informal catch up with fellow service users 11.00am - 1.00pm

 [Tuesday 18 June](#)

Annual Open Day

Save the date! Join us for our open day, more details to follow soon.

 [Saturday 29 June](#)

Coffee Morning in Coventry

Join us at our Coventry HQ for an informal catch up with fellow service users 10.30am - 12.30pm

 [Wednesday 24 July](#)





Fundraising and Thank Yous!

"I have been part of the team here at MDSC for a year, and gosh has it flown! It has been a pleasure getting to know all our supporters from individual donors to the trusts and foundations that support our work. Thank you all for your generous donations over the year. Every donation makes a real difference to the support we can offer to people living with MD, and I have been delighted to see what has been achieved this year thanks to you"



Helen Hone
Fundraising Manager

Community Fundraisers

Thank you so much to each and every person who organised a fundraising event in the community in the last 6 months. Fundraising events and challenges organised by our community are an amazing way to raise much needed funds for our therapies.



Off to a Tee!

A special thank you to Paul, Gary and David for hosting their annual Golf Days.

- Our Corporate supporter ABP, led by service user Paul Dowling, held their two annual golf days in aid of the MD Support Centre again and raised a whopping £4,765!
- David raised a fantastic £3,000 last summer at the South Staffordshire Golf Club. Players were asked to beat the pro for a small donation. I wonder how many managed?!
- Our service user Gary Evans managed to get friends, family and golf lovers together and raised an incredible £2,000!



Steve Pemberton, brother of service user Vicky, made a wonderful donation after raising £1,904 with the NAGS Golf Society. Thank you Steve!



Long-time supporter and service user Andy Colins is in the stocks after raising over £200 at The Crows Nest in Nuneaton, but it seems people were throwing donations at him and his granddaughter - so whatever works! Thank you Andy!

A big thank you to the Pratt Family and Leanne for donating their handmade Christmas decorations throughout the seasonal period. We were able to raise funds for therapy whilst spreading Christmas cheer!



A huge congratulations and thank you to Nick Randle who raised over £300 in December after hosting a stall for a Christmas Fayre at the Hare and Hounds in Kersley.

If you are interested in organising a fundraising event or taking on a challenge event in 2024, please do get in touch, contacting Nina at nina.hanks@mdsupportcentre.org

THANK YOU!





THANK YOU!

As always, MDSC has a long list of individuals and organisations to whom we owe a debt of gratitude for their support in recent months. We simply could not run the Centre without the generous help of our volunteers, supporters and cheerleaders. Thank you!

Trusts and Foundations

The National Lottery Community Fund
Garfield Weston Foundation
Coventry General Charity
The James Tudor Foundation
Tishie Young Foundation for the Disabled (DTD Charity)
Postcode Local Trust
Screwfix Foundation
Sheldon Trust
February Foundation
The 29th May 1961 Charitable Trust
The Hobson Charity
D'Oyly Carte Charitable Trust
Sylvia Waddilove Foundation
Patrick Trust
Birmingham District Nursing Charitable Trust
Archer Trust
P.F Charitable Trust
Edward Cadbury Charitable Trust
HEARTH Foundation
WPH Charitable Trust
DMF Ellis Charitable Trust
British Humane Association
Leicestershire and Rutland Community Foundation
Carmela and Ronnie Pignatelli Foundation
SHIRE Community Grant
Rowlands Trust
Edward and Dorothy Cadbury Trust
Heart of England Community Foundation
George Fentham Birmingham Charity
Michael Marsh Charitable Trust
G J W Turner Trust
Benham Charitable Settlement
BVSC – Fairer Futures Fund
Baron Davenport Charity
Edgar E Lawley Foundation
Provincial Grand Lodge of Warwickshire
L and R Gilley Charitable Trust
Tilehouse Trust
Keith Coombs Charitable Trust
Muntz Trust
Leamington Spa Community Fund
CB and HH Taylor 1984 Trust
Joseph Hopkins Charity (and Henry James Sayer)
The Co-operative Bank
Maud Elkington Charitable Trust
Grace Trust
John Avins Trust
Marsh Charitable Trust
Eric W Vincent Trust Fund
The Grimmit Trust
Dumbreck Charity
Christadelphian Samaritan Fund
Lillie Johnson Charitable Trust
Douglas Heath Eves Charitable Trust
Richard Kilcuppe Charity
Brian Shaw Memorial Trust
W E Dunn Charitable Trust
Austin Edward Charity Trust
Jubilee Tower Credit Union
Gilander Foundation
N Smith Charitable Settlement
JC Seccombe Trust
Geoff Hill Charitable Trust
Michael and Anna Wix Charitable Trust

Volunteers:

Emily Bonner
Debbie Meadows
Grace Kabinga
Mark Thompson
Nicholas Gibson
Neil Corfield
Richard Wilson
MDSC Steering and Focus Group participants
MDSC Project Board

Individual Fundraisers:

Andy Collins
David Salt
Gary Evans & family
Gayle Armson & family
Neil Corfield & family
Nick Randle
Paul Dowling
Steve Pemberton
Tracey Pratt & family

Other Companies/ Partners:

Mezei Design
Microsoft
Questionpro
Smugmug.com
Start.me

And last but not least

All our generous individual donors
All those who have run a Facebook birthday fundraiser
All those who have donated generously and wish to remain anonymous

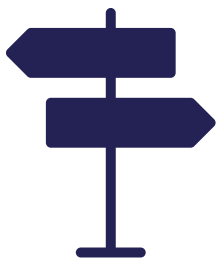
Thank you to our Corporate Donors

ABP Club
Armson Electrical
Bennett Workplace Solution
Thera Trainer
Wenman Healthcare

We appreciate your continued support!

A big thank you to our Open Day 2023 and 10th Anniversary Celebration Sponsors Thera Trainer.





Signposting with Liz Williams



by Paula Irish

Liz Williams is an ambassador for Muscular Dystrophy UK and provides signposting, advice and peer-to-peer support for others affected by Facio-Scapulo-Humeral MD as chairperson of the FSH-MD Support Group UK, which has more than 900 members on Facebook.

The mum-of-two from Northamptonshire says: “I’m on the end of the phone for people and provide support or point them in the right direction: usually those diagnosed with FSH-MD or whose condition has deteriorated, and so need access to PIPs, equipment, or help with employers needing to understand disability laws and reasonable adjustments.”

Liz, who is aged 49 and has FSH-MD, was previously a volunteer with the Citizen’s Advice Bureau and used to go into the office until the pandemic led to home-based working.

“It was great in a way but afterwards when we could go back into the office, they changed it around and where I would be working was moved up another flight of stairs,” says Liz.

“It was not easily accessible without asking for a temporary ramp to be put down every time I wanted to go up or down, so I gave it up for a bit and then never went back. If I’d been employed I would have had more rights or been able to work from home.”

As a former medical secretary and experienced volunteer, Liz has recently been looking for telephone work and attending interviews. She is a full-time wheelchair user and includes the details on her CV alongside ticking the disability box on application forms.

She explains: *“In an ideal world you’d just own up to being disabled but there is bias everywhere. People have perceptions about disability and you don’t have to disclose or tick the box.”*

“My approach, however, is that I am who I am and I’m up front about that because if an employer has a problem with it, it’s their problem not mine, and you don’t want to work for them anyway.”

“I also don’t want people to be scared when they meet me for the first time in an interview. My wheelchair isn’t little and I don’t want to surprise people. At least if you give them some knowledge in advance they can be prepared, and it saves having to deal with awkward questions on the day.”

“You can’t do anything about your situation other than make it the best for you that you can. People just see problems whereas I can give them answers: for example, that I can drive myself, and transfer from my wheelchair. When you apply for something it’s a case of focus on what you can do.”

Liz finds employers’ concerns are often simply around common-sense questions covered by disability working rights, which they do not fully understand or simply haven’t considered previously.

While finding a job can be hard, as Liz sums up, she doesn’t need ‘any favours’ other than an understanding of employment law and how to make the working environment accessible.

“Although it’s a mixed bag, with the worry that if you kick up a fuss your cards are marked, the law is with you,” says Liz. “And once you’re actually in employment, you have loads of rights.”

Following a successful interview for a telephone-based job just before Christmas, Liz was invited by the employer to look around the offices before deciding to accept and was hugely reassured.

Liz says the employer was concerned the lift might be too small but it was great; the building has permanent ramped access and automatic doors in most areas; a couple of doors need a swipe card but Liz can be provided with remote

control access for these; all the desks are rise and fall; and the disabled toilet is large enough to turn her chair easily.

She adds: “The person who offered the job told me they’d walked around the building that morning to identify any snags where being in a wheelchair might put me at a disadvantage. They needn’t have worried. I was so impressed and I started in January!”

Helpful Links

- Acas: Free, impartial advice on workplace rights, rules and best practice, including dispute resolution, accessibility and reasonable adjustments - www.acas.org.uk
- Citizen’s Advice: Support with benefits, work and money - www.citizensadvice.org.uk
- PIP: Personal Independence Payment for daily living and mobility - www.gov.uk/PIP
- Access to Work: Grants for practical support to help you get or stay in work if you have a physical or mental health condition or disability - <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work>
- AccessAble: Take the guesswork out of going out, find wheelchair friendly venues or check out disabled access and facilities - www.accessable.co.uk
- Evenbreak: online job portal where disabled candidates can search for jobs with inclusive employers, including a Career Hive with resources and tips - www.evenbreak.co.uk
- Neuro Muscular Centre: NMC Winsford, Cheshire provides employment support and training courses - www.nmcentre.com
- Scope: online and offline employment support services for working-age disabled people - www.scope.org.uk/employment-services
- Age UK: Money and legal, care and support, work and learning - www.ageuk.org.uk
- Carers UK: Expert information, advice and support for unpaid carers - www.carersuk.org
- Disability Rights UK: Latest news and employment resources - www.disabilityrightsuk.org

Employability with a Disability

CMT and Me
by Emma Hackett



People are always surprised when they ask what condition I have and if I work. When I answer yes that I work 4 days a week, the look on their faces is a picture. I simply tell them, if I didn't work, I would go "stir crazy". Work is my salvation, my socialisation and it helps that I really enjoy my job, not many people do.

It really helps that my employer and co-workers are so supportive and empathetic, you rarely find that at many workplaces now.

I am an administrator at a GP surgery in Birmingham. I have worked there for over 8 years.

I have always had symptoms of my condition - Charcot Marie Tooth disease - since early childhood. Many visits to the Doctors did not help and nobody knew what was wrong. Although Charcot Marie Tooth disease (named after the Doctors that discovered it and nothing to do with your teeth might I add!), or CMT as it more commonly known, is usually an inherited condition - however none of my family members who have been tested seem to have it. While it is seen as a rare disease (my GP tells me I am the only one of his 4500 patients to have it) it is one of the more common neuromuscular conditions affecting 1 in 2500 people.

I started displaying symptoms from an early age suffering from fatigue, muscle and bone weakness, nerve pain, scoliosis and other

medical ailments which my GP kept putting down to anxiety, IBS and growing pains. I had two-foot fractures and again, the Doctors just put it down to weak bones. In 2015, I changed GP surgeries and was by now displaying urinary symptoms, severe IBS, balance problems, severe pain and had already been diagnosed with scoliosis.

I also developed a ganglion on my ankle, so my GP referred me to an orthopaedic consultant. I had started doing my own Google research and had seen pictures of feet on the internet, that looked like mine - high arches, hammer toes, turned and very thin ankles and legs that had the appearance of upside champagne bottles. The people in the Google pictures had CMT. The orthopaedic consultant agreed it could be CMT and referred me to a geneticist for genetic screening. This blood test confirmed CMT.

At this point, I had worked at the surgery for just over a year and received my CMT diagnosis in 2016.



By now, my symptoms were getting progressively worse, however work helped me socialise and not cut myself off from the world. I have always wanted a job helping people and through this job I loved helping patients with booking appointments and registrations etc.

I was referred for surgery and in Jan 2019, I had my first major foot op. Unfortunately, it didn't work and a few years later I was informed it should have been done at a specialist orthopaedic hospital not my ordinary local trust hospital.

From then I self-referred to neurology at the Queen Elizabeth hospital in Birmingham and was assigned a neuromuscular specialist nurse. From there I was referred to neuro-physio at the West Midlands Rehab Centre, and finally to the MD Support Centre in Coventry. I was finally receiving the help I so desperately needed.

Throughout this journey, my workplace has been supportive with assessing my workstation making sure it was safe and they have been so amenable with the many hospital appointments I have to regularly attend. I am currently assisting with writing a disability policy for the surgery, which they wanted to put in place to help better understand disabilities in the workplace and the impact it has on staff. Since my first surgery I have had multiple hospital stays for other ailments and infections and my employer has been so understanding.

During the Covid pandemic they agreed that I could work from home to reduce my risk and have been flexible after I had to cut my hours following my first surgery. I had another foot surgery with multiple procedures at once in Jan 2023 and had an extended period off work as I was using a wheelchair for a several weeks. I had a cast for several weeks and then a boot for 12 weeks. My work colleagues kept in touch with messages of support and encouragement.

Due to swelling and post-op pain I needed to keep my foot elevated. After 4 months off, I started working again in May, starting with a one month phased return. I continue to work from home, I have a laptop, headset etc. and can do nearly all of my job remotely now. This is also safer as it stops me from having to get a taxi to and from work which is difficult, and I walk with crutches. It also

“

I will never let my disability stop me from living my life. People stare when I'm on my crutches and I hate it when people say what's wrong with you. Nothing is "wrong" me I am just different. I am unapologetically me.

”

helps with my pain and fatigue having no commute every day.

Also, during the winter months, with the threat of ice and snow, it's much safer.

There are many things I can no longer do; however, working is not one of them and I hope I can continue to work for as long as my body allows. More surgeries are no doubt ahead of me in the future, however I try to never let my disability stop me, sometimes I must find different ways of still doing the things I enjoy and just adapt how I do them. My disability does not define me, it is part of me yes, BUT it is not all of me. I am an individual and I will never let my disability stop me from living my life. People stare when I'm on my crutches and I hate it when people say what's wrong with you. Nothing is "wrong" me I am just different. I am unapologetically me.

INTERVIEW WITH CHRIS TOWLER

by Emily Bonner, Content & Engagement Volunteer

Service user Chris Towler works as a Coaching & Workforce Lead for England Handball Association, who are the National Governing Body for Handball in the UK.

He has been with the organisation for a little over 2 years, starting out as a Programme Support Officer before taking on his current role full-time.

We sat down with Chris to discuss employability from his point of view and to learn about his experiences with the workplace since graduating from university.



Chris has always had a keen interest in sport, playing cricket at quite a high level, coaching for a hobby and in more recent times, enjoying watching a variety of sports too.

Placements with Northants County Cricket Club and experience with Worcester Wolves Wheelchair Basketball impressively feature on his résumé. Chris tells us:

“I went to University in Worcester to study International Sport Management and graduated with my masters degree in 2019”

Afterwards Chris found a job working in financial services but quickly realised that it wasn't going to be a good fit and so he was let go at the end of his contract. 8 months of job hunting and a few interviews later Chris started working for England Handball. He explains:

“Working for England Handball is great, I work from home, it's a really good job in the sense that they are very flexible. I can go out to physiotherapy appointments if I need to and working from home is a massive advantage as well.”

Unfortunately, barriers are inevitable when it comes to living with a disability, and in Chris's experience he has encountered some in the employment field.

There have been a few instances where he has had to turn jobs down at the interview stage because job location changed.

There was also an occasion during an interview where Chris brought up wheelchair accessibility due to the nature of the job. One of the locations Chris would potentially have to work at had question marks around the accessibility. Despite doing well in the interview Chris was not offered the job, there was another candidate with a little more experience but the question marks surrounding the accessibility also were raised.

“It just proves that was one of the barriers that stopped me getting a job that I might well of had a good chance at.”

What is important here is that Chris has a good attitude, and an even greater approach. Especially when encountering discrimination in the workplace, he handled it with integrity, speaking up for himself but at the same time not becoming too embroiled.

“You never know how people are going to receive you. When I worked in my previous job my line manager liked using the word cripple a lot which I objected to. I brought it up, she got really defensive. I knew she wasn't receptive to it at all and then I started seeing in my review you need to put more effort in, you are not trying hard enough...”

Chris then found himself on a Performance Improvement Programme. Despite hitting most of his targets there were some subjective ones that he was told he wasn't hitting.

He knew something wasn't right when he was recorded as failing two quality assurances, after questioning it sure enough there had been an apparent error. Despite this, his line-manager acted in such a way that questioned Chris's capability to score well in the future.

We just scratched the surface with Chris's story over this experience with workplace discrimination but on recounting it with a friend a good year later Chris tells us what he told his friend

"I don't think I suffered it, honestly, I think I beat it."

So how do you overcome people's attitudes?

"The way you really overcome that is to have integrity, do your job the best you can, be open and be honest, document everything if you find yourself in that situation, and just stay true to who you are."

So how does Chris see himself career wise in the future?

"I try not to think about it. With the role I am in now I could potentially see difficulties with travel but not stopping the job because of that. I am really happy where I am, but I see this job as a stepping stone to better things, and I hope to have a career that spans the length and breadth of the industry. I can see this becoming problematic though because of what is physically required. I struggle nowadays to get outside to some locations to do coaching or to evaluate coaching sessions, and public transport has always been a bit of an issue."

"I am confident the world is an ever-changing place, it has changed a lot over the last 10 years, it is kinder to disabled people, and I have no reason to think that it won't continue to go that way."

Chris's Top Tips

- Think of your achievements and write them down on a piece of paper, it will be longer than you think!
- Remember no-one can take your achievements away from you, whether you did them when disabled or before, if you later became disabled.
- You can only control what you can control – if someone or something on the other end of an application form for example isn't a right fit, fine, keep putting your achievements down on paper.
- Don't be modest about your achievements – shout about them, you did them!

Super Powers!

by Paula Irish

Donna Scarrott was diagnosed with CMT (Charcot-Marie-Tooth) but has always been determined to forge a career in nursing.

Currently a Senior Sister with Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust, Donna is also chair of the Staff Disability Network, which she hopes to rebrand as DAWN – Diverse Ability Working Network.

Bringing both her professional and personal experiences to her roles, Donna has also been on her own self-development pathway following a breakdown working in the NHS through the pandemic.

After six months on leave following major foot reconstruction surgery in September 2019, Donna returned to work just as Covid hit, with stress levels rocketing from the pressure on the NHS at the same time as physiotherapy to support her rehabilitation had to stop.

The subsequent road to recovery has seen Donna working hard to adopt a positive mindset, which has included counselling, Slimming World - losing three stone and counting - meditation, journaling and getting on a bike with support from the government's Cycle to Work scheme.



"I decided to take responsibility to help myself be as independent as I can for as long as possible," says Donna. "I also wanted to do something new and took up cycling, set myself a challenge I would never have thought it possible to achieve in my wildest dreams and pushed it to the limit!"

Donna entered a 52-mile Garmin cycling event in the New Forest and then tackled a 97-mile charity ride from Evesham to Weston-Super-Mare in September 2023, sharing her story at work to inspire others with long term conditions to celebrate their achievements and reach their goals.

She is a passionate advocate for people with disabilities in the workplace and promotes equality, diversity and inclusivity as an essential part of the toolkit for recruiting and retaining staff.

"If you look after your staff, they're going to look after your patients or customers, and the way I see it is that there's a job out there for everybody," says Donna. "We need to make sure the environment is right for every person because the benefit an individual can bring to an organisation is massive. It's about having diverse abilities and bringing in people with something fresh and new."

"If you look after your staff, they're going to look after your patients or customers, and the way I see it is that there's a job out there for everybody,"

"I'm fortunate in not needing a wheelchair but many of the people I've met along the way are wheelchair users and their knowledge and skills are immense, and they have so much to offer. Having a disability is also a super power because you're looking at life through a different lens."

Following a Royal College of Nursing conference, Donna brought back the idea of having Health Ability Passports, which the Staff Disability Network then collectively worked on to introduce. These help people with long term conditions or disabilities to have conversations about their needs with managers, making it easier to overcome challenges such as asking for reasonable adjustments.

The Trust was also awarded a £10,000 NHS Innovation Fund grant to develop inclusive recruitment with online careers portal Evenbreak.

Donna accesses Disability Leave to attend MD Support Centre appointments, and any time off related to her condition does not trigger the sickness policy. Donna is also applying through the government's Access to Work fund for display screen equipment and an ergonomic chair.

She explains: *"I have previously had a lack of confidence but I'm trying to put a different spin on it now because otherwise I always feel like I have 'imposter syndrome' – either the job is too good for me, or I'm not good enough for the job, or I can't do that job because of my disability."*

"Through my role with the Staff Disability Network and my mindset work, my expectation now is actually I can do that job, because the minute I'm interviewed, I can start asking for reasonable adjustments to be in place. Although I'd shy away before, I now think I have something to offer, but in order for an employer to have what I offer, they need to help me into the workplace."

"I have previously had a lack of confidence but I'm trying to put a different spin on it now..."



Closing the Disability Employment Gap



Evenbreak

Job board for disabled candidates

by Evenbreak

82% of disabled candidates surveyed said the biggest barrier to work was not being able to identify inclusive employers. Evenbreak exists to remove this barrier and close the disability employment gap.

The social enterprise, which is run by and for disabled people, joins the dots with its global accessible job board and a Career Hive website full of guidance and resources to support candidates.

Did you know, one in five people of the working population have a disability or long term health condition? Did you also know that employers are struggling to recruit and complain about a so-called skills shortage?

76% of employers surveyed by the British Chamber of Commerce said they were struggling to recruit.

Jane Hatton, CEO of Evenbreak, said: “We call our candidates premium candidates because they bring more than their talent to your business. They are likely to excel in creativity, determination and will have exceptional problem solving skills due to their experience of navigating around the disabling barriers in society. There’s a pool of talented candidates that want to get back into work. Employers just need to recognise the opportunity.”

The Social Model of Disability

Evenbreak’s mission is to remove all disabling barriers and for disabled candidates to be valued equally.

The social enterprise adopts the social model of disability that says that people are disabled by barriers and attitudes in society and not by their impairment or difference.

The model was designed by disabled activists in the 1980s as an alternative to the medical model of disability, which suggested that people are disabled because of their impairment or difference.

Jane said: “The social model of disability is important to understand because it helps us to break down barriers in society. We educate employers using the social model of disability to make employment accessible for disabled people.

“For disabled people, the social model of disability helps us see that the barriers are external to our conditions. This provides us with a platform to champion change in society to make it equitable for all.”

Putting Talent First

Employers that advertise on Evenbreak put talent first.

The job board has over 20,000 live vacancies every week from over 100 employers including Heathrow, Tesco, Meta, PwC, Vodafone and Pfizer, just to name a few.

Lisa Kelly, Head of Talent Acquisition, at Heathrow, said: "Heathrow believes that diverse talent makes us stronger and we place great emphasis on inclusivity and celebrating individuality. Advertising our vacancies on the Evenbreak job board means we can attract talented disabled candidates that we might not otherwise reach."

Support for Disabled Candidates

The Career Hive website by Evenbreak provides disabled candidates with local support service information, resources and guidance to help them improve their confidence and access to free 1-2-1 career coaching with coaches that have lived experience of disabilities.

One disabled candidate who has used Evenbreak's services said: "I am ME again after 4 years of not being myself, I am back to managing a team, feeling empowered, feeling needed and engaging with the professional world in a way that is meaningful."

Evenbreak on the National and Global Stage

In its twelfth year, Evenbreak went big on national and global presence.

In the last year, Evenbreak has won an accolade of awards including its first international one at the Go Global Awards. They also released their first UK TV advert which premiered on Channel 4 in June 2023 during the Rosie Jones Documentary (The R Word), sponsored the UK's first step-free art trail with Aardman Animations supporting Whizz-Kidz. And then to top it off, Evenbreak sponsored the World Para Swimming Championships in Manchester during August 2023.

All this whilst helping disabled candidates and inclusive employers to find each other.

Make sure you follow Evenbreak in 2024 for more exciting initiatives.

Browse jobs and register for job alerts at <https://www.evenbreak.co.uk/>

Explore career support at <https://hive.evenbreak.co.uk/>

Find Evenbreak on socials:



· **Twitter** <https://twitter.com/Evenbreak>



· **Facebook** <https://www.facebook.com/Evenbreak>



· **LinkedIn** <https://www.linkedin.com/company/evenbreak/>



· **Instagram** https://www.instagram.com/evenbreak_talentfirst/

Evenbreak's Channel 4 advert

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X7sndnGVMWc>





Partnership with Wenman Healthcare

MD Support Centre recently formed a new partnership with local family-run business, Wenman Healthcare, to provide service users with mobility equipment advice and support. Operating from its independent living centre in Barford, Warwick, Wenman Healthcare is recognised by healthcare professionals as experts in both mobility equipment and on-going mobility advice, and prides itself on helping its clients with all mobility needs – from quick questions about daily living aids, through to mobility equipment hire, servicing and repairs.

MD Support Centre have been aware of the company and recommending them to service users for some time, but in forming this new strategic partnership, Wenman Healthcare will donate an agreed sum to the Charity as and when MD Support Centre service users or carers make mobility equipment purchases over £250. So, if you visit Wenman Healthcare, please mention MD Support Centre and if you purchase any equipment from them, we could receive a much needed donation to support the continued operation and growth of the Charity.

Sarah Ann Moore, our Chief Executive said: “We are excited to work with Wenman Healthcare, a local, family-run business that cares deeply about supporting members of the local community and their independent-living needs. It is great to be able to direct our service users to somewhere local where they can see and experience such a broad range of mobility equipment solutions – whether for advice, rental, or eventual purchase.”

Ian Wenman, Director of Wenman Healthcare added: “Muscular Dystrophy Support Centre is an incredible charity, which positively impacts the lives of hundreds of people across Coventry and Warwickshire on a daily basis. In forming this new partnership, the Wenman Healthcare team and I are committed to extending this level of support through expert guidance and advice in mobility equipment and support – not only benefitting service users, but also helping the charity to deliver on its objective to help individuals with MD maintain optimum mobility.”



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To hear about our fundraising, events and all things MDSC sign up to our e-newsletters here:
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Join Our Social Group!

To connect with other service users, to share ideas and support and to keep up with our social events including the monthly coffee mornings and weekly Saturday night get togethers. Or just to share how amazing you are!

CLICK HERE

www.facebook.com/groups/mdscsocial

Would you like to contribute? We are always on the lookout for content for our magazine and blog and we'd love to hear from you if you have a story to share or an exciting experience you'd like to tell the world about.

Do you have a creative hobby? Participate in sport? Or could you recommend a life changing piece of equipment or adaptation that would possible benefit others?

Please reach out to Nina or Emily to register your interest at
nina.hanks@mdsupportcentre.org / emily.bonner@mdsupportcentre.org