



CIL Matters

# Summer 2016 Newsletter

This newsletter reflects the diverse views of Merton CIL members

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# 1. Merton CIL Update

## Message from the CEO



Dear members,

As you look ahead to the summer holiday, and hope for some summer weather to match, spare a thought for the team at Merton CIL who are working as hard as ever to bring you our great service. We continue to deliver advice and advocacy support, and, as cuts bite, it seems this support is needed more than ever (see page 14 [the ILF article]). If you think you have some skills to offer, check out our new caseworker vacancy on page 6. We're also thrilled to announce the launch of our new Disability Hate Crime service, see page 8

for more details.

Plus, there are more ways than ever to get involved with Merton CIL, whether through our volunteer training and opportunities programme (see page 13), by joining our monitoring and evaluation steering group (see page 5) or why not think about joining us as a trustee (see page 12)?

You can also get involved by attending our Annual General Meeting (page 26) where we'll let you know how we performed last year, and we'll ask you, our members, to start helping us plan for the next few years. Looking ahead is one of the reasons why we're covering a broad range of topics in this edition of the newsletter, including sex, adult education and disability in a conflict zone – we're hoping to get the conversation started and we welcome your letters and feedback if you're happy to have those included in the next edition of CIL Matters.

We hope that you enjoy our newsletter and look forward to hearing from you

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to be 'Lyla'.

**Lyla, CEO of Merton CIL**

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# Merton CIL's Programmes and Services



**RUN AND CONTROLLED BY DISABLED PEOPLE, FOR DISABLED PEOPLE**

**We offer services and opportunities for deaf and disabled people in Merton**

Advice and Advocacy Services - Debates and Events  
Volunteer Training and Opportunities  
Disability Hate Crime Prevention

**We support the independence and inclusion of deaf and disabled people, challenge discrimination, and enable people to achieve change locally**

To find out more contact us using the details below:

 020 3397 3119  
 07449 362 233 (SMS)  
 [info@mertoncil.org.uk](mailto:info@mertoncil.org.uk)  
 [www.mertoncil.org.uk](http://www.mertoncil.org.uk)

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## Monitoring and evaluation of last year

We have been busy over the last few months, not just delivering services, but also taking the time to reflect on what we did last year.

Did we support local disabled people to address the issues they came to us about?

Did we achieve what we wanted to?

Did we do what our funders asked us to?

Did we work in line with our ethos and values?

Did we work in the most efficient way to allow us to support the most people we could?

After an open tender process we commissioned CVA (Croydon Voluntary Action) to help us answer these questions, and more.

We also set up a Monitoring and Evaluation Steering Group to help guide CVA's work. The steering group is made up of Merton CIL members, our trustee Gina who is our user voice champion, and staff representatives.

We have one more space available for a Merton CIL member to join our steering group and help us learn and grow as an organisation. Training and support is available, so please get in touch with our office administrator, Charlet, to find out more on 020 3397 3119 or [info@mertoncil.org.uk](mailto:info@mertoncil.org.uk)

## Take a look at our new website

With the help of Superhighways we have updated our website. It is now more attractive and interactive. It is still under construction but we could not wait to share it with you all!

We have a lot more useful information on the website. There is updated information on PIP, other benefits and the guidelines to prepare you for an assessment.

We have a great new contact form which allows you to self refer to our services online and someone will be in contact to follow up. If you use this feature please be as detailed as possible within the message box.

We have a new section on the website called Merton CIL TV where we will exhibit video and audio footage. It is currently under construction but check out our 'Top Tips for Making Change Happen' video from last year's My Voice Matters event!

Take a look yourself – [www.mertoncil.org.uk](http://www.mertoncil.org.uk)

We would really appreciate any feedback you have on our new website. If you feel there is any information missing or if it is not as accessible as we hope, please do let us know or come along to the members group in September to share your thoughts and ideas on how we can make our website and social platforms more engaging for disabled people!

Thursday 1st September 2016 from 1pm until 4pm at Merton CIL, Wandle Valley Resource Centre, Mitcham, CR4 3BE

## New caseworker Vacancy

If you think you have skills to offer, please apply to our caseworker vacancy! 24 hours a week - £25,000-£29,000 – Deadline 1<sup>st</sup> August 2016

For more information please visit - <http://www.mertoncil.org.uk/news/new-vacancy-caseworker/>

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# Disability Hate Crime. Help us to help you: Tell us

At the start of the year, Merton CIL, alongside other community organisations, was invited to read a short piece at Holocaust Memorial Day. Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel was quoted by leader of the Council, Stephen Alambritis

"I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented."

Elie Wiesel died recently, which has led us to reflect on these words. At the same time, oppression, terror, and hate crime have been in the news more than ever, with atrocities including the horrific killings at an LGBT nightclub in Orlando and at Istanbul airport later the same month. Between writing this article and publication, more news keeps coming in; Nice, Kabul, Japan, and more.

Here in the UK, following the EU Referendum result, a surge in hate crimes is being reported, so, what does it mean to us, at Merton CIL, to speak up, and not to be silent?

For us, it is important to be clear that we stand in solidarity with all oppressed people. Disabled people are not other; we are part of many, many groups in society and like all people, hold multiple and simultaneous identities.

So, the reader may ask why we don't speak up on every outrage, why we don't change our social media profiles to reflect our solidarity or publish statements of support. While we understand that for many these approaches are an important way of showing support, typically, we do not express our solidarity through our social media profiles or other communications. This is because unless we are able to express support for victims of every single outrage, then those we chose not to speak out about, are further oppressed by our silence.

So we are silent in voice, where perhaps others speak up. But we are not silent in spirit, and we are not silent in action. Where we can make a difference, where we can act, we will.

## Merton CIL's New Hate Crime Service



Due to feedback by our members, we have been concerned about hate crime against disabled people for some time.

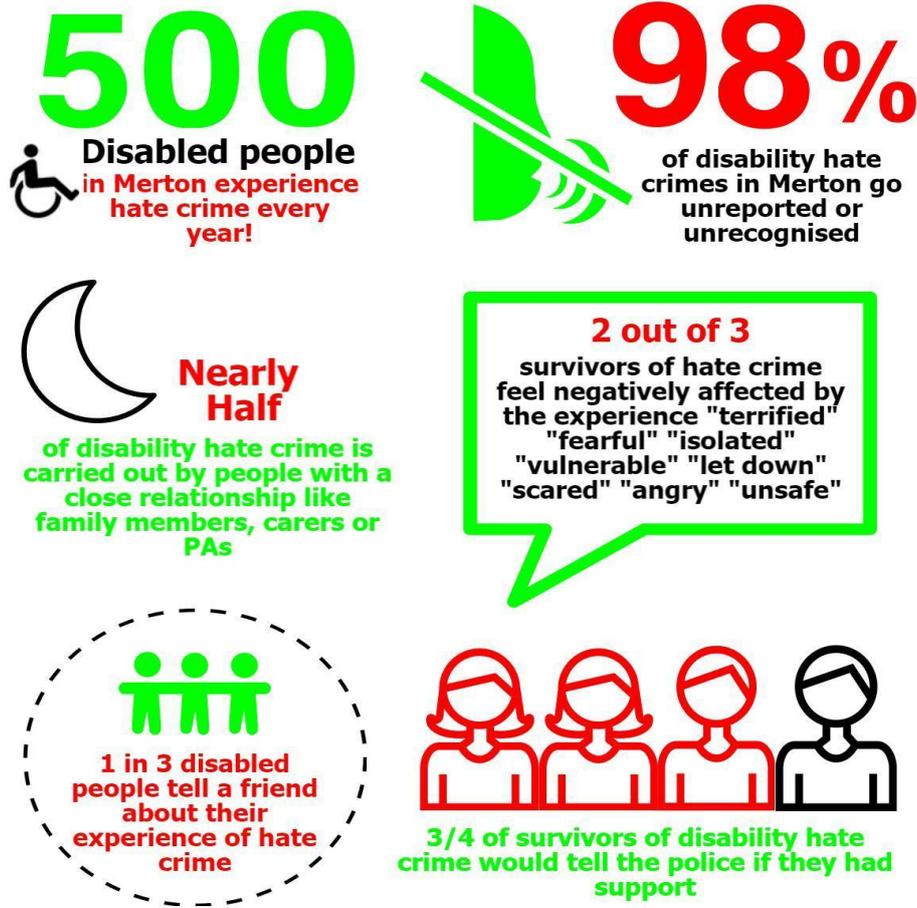
We commissioned a piece of research by Stay Safe East, exploring the scale and nature of disability hate crime in Merton. The research is about the impact of hate crime and harassment on disabled people from all communities and backgrounds and what can be done to prevent these crimes and to support victims.

Hate crime impacts on the victim's family, friends and community; it affects survivors' sense of security and makes them feel unwelcome. So it is a crime that has a disproportionate impact, which authorities must recognise as significantly different from other crimes. Even so called 'low-level' crime can lead to more serious crimes and ultimately to murder, as evidence by the case of Fiona Pilkington in Leicester, who in 2007 killed herself and her daughter Francesca Hardwick after years of disability related hate crime<sup>1</sup>.

9 years on from those deaths, we still have a very long way to go before disabled people can feel confident that we will be heard if they report a hate crime, and that effective action will be taken by authorities to prevent recurrence or escalation.

Based on the national data, at Merton CIL we suspected that there was an issue with underreporting of disability hate crime, but the findings of our research on the true scale of the issue have shocked us.

<sup>1</sup><https://www.ipcc.gov.uk/news/ipcc-publishes-fiona-pilkington-investigation-report>



We have been funded by the Mayor's Office on Policing and Crime to support disabled people in Merton around hate crime this year. Our work will only cover the tip of the iceberg, but we hope that it will be a start, and that our partners in the community will work with us to address this invisible epidemic of hate against disabled people.

This year we can support disabled people in Merton by:

- Supporting disabled people to report hate crime to the police. This can be anonymous
- Visiting disabled people's groups and talking with you about your right to be safe
- Running a support group for disability hate crime survivors and people experiencing disability hate crime
- Providing 12 disabled people with in-depth advocacy support
- Talking about disabled people's experiences with the police, housing associations, and the council

Our team includes:



Charlet: she will usually answer the phone and have a chat with you about what has been going on and what support you might need

Tam: he will be visiting groups around the borough, running the monthly support group, and providing advocacy support

Colin: he will also help with advocacy support

For any disabled person in Merton who has experienced or is still experiencing disability hate crime, we know that often you will tell a friend. Please, tell us too. Phone: 020 3397 3119 SMS: 0744 936 2233

Online Report: From the 8<sup>th</sup> of August you will be able to report to our hate crime service using an online form as well as by telephone or SMS

In the mean time you are able to report cases of hate crime through the True Vision website - <http://www.report-it.org.uk/home>

You will also be able to find a list of other places to get support or make a report on our website soon – We have added a new chapter to our information booklet which will focus on hate crime. It can be found under the useful information section of the website from 8<sup>th</sup> August 2016.

You can also come to our monthly support group: First Monday of every month:

1<sup>st</sup> August, 5<sup>th</sup> September, 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 7<sup>th</sup> November

Session Time: 1.30pm – 3.30pm

Venue: All Saints Community Centre, 44 All Saints Road, London, SW19 1BX

The main purpose of this group is to provide support and discuss experiences of hate crime against disabled people in Merton.



# DISABILITY HATE CRIME

**Providing support for disabled people within Merton that experience hate crime.**

Come along to our support group held on **every first Monday of the month** from **1.30pm – 3.30pm** at **All Saints Community Centre, 44 All Saints Road, London, SW19 1BX**

All enquiries are treated in the strictest confidence. To report an issue or find out more contact us using the details below:

 020 3397 3119  
 07449 362 233 (SMS)  
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 [www.mertoncil.org.uk](http://www.mertoncil.org.uk)

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MAYOR OF LONDON  
OFFICE FOR POLICING AND CRIME

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Foundation**

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## Trustee Vacancies – There is still time to express your interest



On the 14<sup>th</sup> July 2016 we held a Trustee Tea Party! We had a great turn out and there were lots of new faces interested in hearing more about Merton CIL. We are still very keen to hear from anyone else interested in potentially becoming a trustee at Merton CIL. Please drop Charlet an email – [info@mertoncil.org.uk](mailto:info@mertoncil.org.uk) for more information or call us.

For those interested in becoming a trustee, there is still time but don't delay! We have a short application form to complete and we're asking for these to be back to us by 31<sup>st</sup> August 2016.

Our trustees will look through the applications to join us with great interest, and will have the difficult task of short listing applicants. We will then invite shortlisted applicants to come and meet us and talk about next steps.

## Free Volunteer Disability Training – October 2016

Merton CIL will be providing training for volunteers, new trustees and other interested parties on the following days at the following times:

9.30-4.00	5 <sup>th</sup> October: Disability Equality Training
10.00-4.00	12 <sup>th</sup> October: 12 Pillars of Independent Living
10.00-4.00	19 <sup>th</sup> October: The History of the Disabled People's Movement and the roles we played
10.00-4.00	26 <sup>th</sup> October: Getting ready to volunteer at Merton CIL

Places are still available. Interested? Please contact Rich on 0203 397 3119 or by email to [inclusion@mertoncil.org.uk](mailto:inclusion@mertoncil.org.uk)

As well as our core training programme, volunteers can access our Volunteer Support group which runs on the third Thursday of the month. This is where volunteers can develop support for one another and receive Merton CIL's full Skills Set Training.

## Merton CIL Volunteer Opportunities

We have lots of volunteer opportunities including:

- 1) Admin and Reception. Merton CIL volunteers are asked to spend a minimum of 6 weeks on admin and reception, learning about us, who we are and what we do. Try your hand at computer skills, making calls, welcoming guests.
- 2) Volunteer Buddies. Befriend an elder disabled person who wants to take part in health activities with Age UK. Travel with your buddy and take part in the activity they choose. Activities include Gyrokinesis, Zumba Gold, Yoga, Tai Chi, Heath and Guided walks, tea dances.
- 3) Access Audits. Make Merton more accessible. Visit public buildings; express your opinions on how you got there, what you found and how you left.
- 4) Write for the newsletter. Our readers are interested about how you experience living with disability in Merton and all other aspects of your lives. Drop us a line. Give us your views.

## 2. News

# Almost half of former recipients of the Independent Living Fund (ILF) in Merton are facing cuts to their care packages



Merton council had the chance to increase council tax by 1.7 per cent to pay for extra social care funding, but turned down the opportunity because of an election promise not to increase taxes for four years. The end of an extra tax that Londoners have been paying for the last 10 years to fund the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games meant the council could have asked for extra money for social care without seeing overall council tax rates increase for 2016-17.

The council has also declined to ring-fence extra government money being given to local authorities for the next three years to support only former ILF-recipients, using it instead more widely across social care.

In January, the council faced protests over its plans to cut £5 million from its adult social care budget, with campaigners comparing these plans to “social cleansing”, and accusing it of “treating people no better than animals in Longleat”. In contrast, Government figures published this week show that councils in England overall will increase spending on adult social care by £308 million in 2016-17.

Campaigners say that disabled people who use direct payments in the borough are already losing their personal assistants (PAs) and finding it

difficult to replace them because hourly rates have been frozen by the council for the last five years.

A Merton council spokeswoman said: "The council has made a decision to ring-fence the grant from the government for adult social care, and to treat all our customers equitably over how personal budgets are set. Over half of the former ILF-users' care hours will stay the same while others will see their care hours slightly reduced."

She said the council was reviewing the rate it paid service-users who receive direct payments "to ensure that it enables the market to meet our customers' needs. Regarding the precept for social care, this was debated openly and at considerable length by the council in March when setting its budget, weighing up all factors including its promise to residents not to increase council tax."

Lyla Adwan-Kamara, Merton CIL's chief executive, said: "At Merton CIL we're very disappointed to hear that nearly half of former ILF-users are seeing cuts to their support by Merton council. We would question how these cuts can possibly enable people's wellbeing in line with the Care Act, and in some cases we fear that people's wellbeing and independence will be undermined.

In one case we know of, there is a 16 per cent cut, equivalent to over a day's support a week. We would also point out that for people whose support has been frozen, we've been made aware of a number of cases where they have been asked to pay more towards their care, even though they have not had an increase in their income; this is also effectively a cut."

And yet, the decision was made not to implement the precept, and council tax in Merton has gone down. We hope that this decision will be reviewed this year, and there has been a public commitment by the council to hold a consultation on the matter."

Since this article was written on 7<sup>th</sup> July by Disability News Service, it has come to light that at the point of budget setting for 2016-17, the Council thought they were overspent by £2.6 million, whereas they now know they had only overspent by £0.6 million. Their decision-making on the budget, including the £5 million of cuts allocated to Adult Social Care was based on thinking they had less money available than they actually did have.

At the time of decision-making, it was very clear that a number of Councillors, as well as voluntary sector leaders and local residents were all extremely concerned about the scale of cuts allocated to Adult Social Care. As a result,

Cabinet introduced a modest Savings Mitigation Fund which is there because the Council recognise that it will be almost impossible to cut £5 million from Adult Social Care this year without significant harm to local disabled people and older people.

At Merton CIL we know that while all this talk of budgets and overspends might all sound like a bit of an accounting exercise, in actual fact, cuts to services harm real people. We are already aware of people whose support is being cut this year and these cuts are damaging to people's wellbeing.

When Cabinet met in December 2015, the Leader of the Council, Stephen Alambritis, asked Council Officers to identify any large sums of money available to support Adult Social care and reduce the scale of the cuts. So we're really thrilled that there is now an additional £2 million available to support local disabled people and older people, and we're sure that the Leader and Merton Council as a whole will be very pleased to be able to reduce the pressure of cuts to Adult Social Care, and Merton CIL calls on the Leader to make that commitment.

In the meantime, we strongly urge anyone affected by cuts to social care to get in touch with us at Merton CIL and we will try to offer support for people to speak up and address the issue.

Edited version published with permission from John Pring at Disability News Service. See original article here:

<http://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/council-cuts-ex-ils-care-packages-after-spurning-chance-to-raise-funds/>

See also article published in January

<http://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/councils-wicked-care-cuts-are-like-social-cleansing-say-service-users/>

And DCLG report on increased spending on social care by other councils  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-stats-show-councils-prioritising-adult-social-care>

See also article by Wimbledon Guardian on the budget

[http://www.wimbledonguardian.co.uk/news/14633336.Budget\\_error\\_Council\\_made\\_5m\\_cuts\\_to\\_adult\\_social\\_care\\_based\\_on\\_a\\_budget\\_that\\_overestimated\\_the\\_deficit\\_by\\_2m/](http://www.wimbledonguardian.co.uk/news/14633336.Budget_error_Council_made_5m_cuts_to_adult_social_care_based_on_a_budget_that_overestimated_the_deficit_by_2m/)

# Merton Adult Education Provision Finally Agreed

Possible changes to the popular Merton Adult Education (MAE) provision at Whatley Avenue burst onto our consciousness in late 2014 when it became clear that the next four years of budget cuts included cuts to MAE as well as Adult Social Care, which we have covered in depth elsewhere. In response, the student-led campaign "Save MAE" was set up, and there was a huge outcry resulting in public meetings, petitions, call-ins. You can find out more about the campaign in our film on How to make change happen

<http://www.mertoncil.org.uk/merton-cil-multi-media/>

Having announced their preferred option, ie to close the Whatley Avenue centre and commission services elsewhere, Merton Council then launched a consultation on their plans. At Merton CIL we were concerned about the way the consultation was conducted because disabled people were not being given the same opportunity to respond to the consultation as other people. As accessible consultation papers were late. In fact, due to term dates and the closing date of the consultation, the lateness of accessible versions effectively meant that students wanting help with the survey only had ONE WEEK to do so, which was at odds with Merton Council's standard 6 week consultation period. We raised these concerns at the time and described the process as "flawed and discriminatory". Some discussions where people were supported to input into the consultation were set up, and in the end the consultation got the highest response rate of any consultation conducted by the Council.

Merton CIL also spoke directly to disabled students who told us that they loved being at Whatley Avenue, not just because of their classes and tutors, but because it was a mixed environment and disabled people who might in the past have been segregated, were able to mix with a whole range of people in the cafe and communal areas. The transition from a specialist class to a mainstream subject was also easier. Although in principle we at Merton CIL are for full inclusion rather than separation of disabled and non-disabled learners, we listened to what the disabled students were telling us and helped them present their views to the Council as part of the process. These were that they wanted to stay at Whatley Avenue and that suggestions that classes might move to day centres were unacceptable.

Despite strong support for Whatley Avenue, the Council decision was to close it. So what next for disabled learners? The Council decided to commission mainstream provision, and provision for people with learning disabilities separately. Merton CIL expressed grave concerns about this approach because

of the segregation of disabled learners from other learners. At the time, the Council position was that on balance it was best to commission as a separate lot to enable (but not force) bidders for the mainstream lot to also bid for the smaller specialist provision, whilst at the same time opening up the market and not precluding smaller bidders. They felt that the end result should be a wider choice of bids.

Unfortunately, the end result was no suitable bids to deliver adult education classes for disabled learners. Months of hard work by Council Officers followed, while tutors faced job losses and students wondered whether there would be classes next term. A few weeks ago the Council's website named Sutton College as the providers of adult education for disabled learners, but this changed again and now the provision will be kept in-house, as it always was, just not at Whatley Avenue. Meanwhile, South Thames College is delivering courses for everyone else.

The impression we get is of Council Officers working very hard in difficult circumstances to find a solution for disabled learners against all odds. There has to be an enormous amount of empathy for that position. But, take a step back and what have we ended up with? Classes for students with learning disabilities segregated from other people and placed in 3 venues across the borough, including day centres and libraries. Some of the key things students valued about Whatley Avenue, such as time and space to mingle with a range of people, lost. Additionally, it is not possible for students to pursue courses for pleasure, as central government funding guidelines mean that there must be 'progression'.

So, has anything been gained? More classes are being offered than before, and perhaps, embedding adult education in community venues around the borough is at the forefront of modern educational provision. Perhaps this is an opportunity for disabled students to access community resources more effectively. Perhaps. But unless Councillors agree to allocate extra funding to provide more support to disabled learners, our fear is that the end result will be disabled learners left unseen and unheard.

To see courses available for adults with learning disabilities, see page 31

To see courses available at South Thames College check out

<http://www.south-thames.ac.uk/merton-adult-education.html>

To find out more about inclusive education contact <http://www.allfie.org.uk/>

### 3. Your Views

## Merton Resident Column... on Disability in a Conflict Zone

**Trigger warning: Some readers may find the descriptions in this article distressing**

Bobby is my cousin. He's the third child of my mum's elder sister. He is about 25 years (or there about) old. He's smart, funny and has a huge sense of humour. After he was born, it took almost two years for his parents to realise that he could not walk. His legs weren't thin or fragile. They were just but lifeless. He could not stand.

In Sierra Leone, children start walking at age one. Or latest eighteen months. So when Bobby kept crawling around the house, we couldn't quite understand what was wrong with him. We thought he wouldn't walk so his mum will continue pampering him. We often shouted at him to get up and walk. But when he turned two and was still crawling, his parents started making serious efforts to find out why their child could not walk.

His mom is a nurse. So naturally, the hospital was the first point of call. They crisscrossed almost all the major hospitals in Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone. But the message from one hospital to the other was the same. They couldn't find any major reason for his condition. In fact, according to his mom some of the physio-therapists thought he was "faking it."

Then they moved him to churches. My aunt is Muslim but her late husband was Christian. The differences in religion did not stop either of them to find solution to their son's inability to walk. For them, anything that could make him walk, was good enough. They exhausted the churches and ventured into what they considered then, "as the last resort" – bush medicines.

Huge sums of money were spent on herbalists, bush doctors and people of that ilk. In some cases, they were forced to spend days in forests and shrines. My aunt will fall sick frequently. Her husband would run out of cash and rush to town to borrow money from friends and relatives, to meet the incessant demands for rituals of one bush doctor and the other. In one of the shrines, my aunt recounted that one of the many reasons why they stopped going to these bush doctors was because one of them tried to rape her one evening when her husband had gone to get some food in town but did not come back

early. She fled that night, carrying her son who was four at the time, on her back. She swore never to go back to any other bush doctor or herbalist.

In fact, some of the things those bush doctors subjected Bobby to, made his limbs and muscles stiffer. He became terrified of sounds and would panic at any odd sound and keep completely still.

The parents started waiting for a miracle. My aunt and her husband genuinely hoped that their son would wake up one day and start walking. The husband later died of cardiac arrest. My aunt became a single mother caring for a disabled child and four other children. It was tough.

Bobby is, a special person. He is smart, sharp and sassy. He has a response (often cheeky) for any (rude or otherwise) statement directed at him. When he was young, he was popular among his peers, but particularly among adults, who found his sense of humour appealing and beyond his age.

However, as Bobby grew older, he was seen by many as a "burden" to his parents and siblings. He had to be carried all the time. At the time, his parents had decided against buying him a wheelchair because they sincerely hoped he would wake up one day and start walking. Secondly, they could not afford it at the time. Especially after spending colossal amounts on bush doctors, churches and hospital bills.

So moving from one place to the other was generally a big problem for Bobby, his parents and us his brothers, sisters and cousins. Whenever we wanted to move as a family or group, the responsibility of carrying him fell squarely on Junior, Bobby's eldest brother. Junior was Bobby's carrier and carer. He'll clean him. Wash him, dress him, and put him on a bench or in his usual spot in the compound where he'll see whoever comes and goes and listens to whatever is being said or not.

And then came January 6 1999. Rebels of the Revolutionary United Front entered Freetown, with help from renegade soldiers of the Sierra Leone Armed Forces. They came in the small hours of the morning. Freetown was ransacked. The rebels took control of half the city. Soldiers loyal to the government fought alongside the Nigerian-led ECOMOG fighters to keep control of the rest and prevent the rebels from regaining complete control over the country.

After spending almost a week in a rebel-controlled zone, we decided to leave the mosque where we were seeking refuge. We moved to the house of my aunt's boss. It was a few kilometres from where we lived. But we had to scale

fences and barbed wires to avoid using the main streets. Up to this day, I can't remember how we carried Bobby during those journeys, but we did.

We spent three days with my aunt's boss and the rebels threatened to burn the house on two occasions. On the fourth day, they started chopping off people's hands and limbs. The first set of hands and limbs in that part of the city were chopped off right in front of the house we were hiding. The screaming from the victim silenced every other sound in my ears for days. We learnt that the machete wasn't sharp enough.

We decided to move again. This time to try and cross over to the ECOMOG-controlled side of Freetown. To do this, we had to go through a small stream, climb a hill and walk in the bushes to avoid being seen by the rebels. If any of us would have been caught, the rebels would have killed or cut us. We braved it. With Bobby on Junior's back, we walked for miles up the hills. It was a long journey. We were not the only ones trying to escape from the rebels. Other people in the neighbourhood were also using the same route to escape. So because the crowd had increased, the rebels in the area got wind of the movements.

They opened fire at us. We ran for our lives, dropping whatever we had at the time. Junior dropped Bobby by the side of the stream. Everybody kept running past him. He lay there crying. He couldn't move. Nobody stopped to help him. Nobody stopped to ask who he was. Nobody stopped to even check whether or not he had been shot. Even his mother forgot about him for a short while. He was about 9-10 years old at the time. A disabled child. Unaccompanied and abandoned in the middle of a conflict.

It was only after we got to a safe zone that we realised that Junior wasn't with Bobby. We all started crying. We thought he had been killed. Junior told us that he had to drop him by the wayside, so he could run faster while the bullets were flying everywhere. After things quieted down, Junior went back and Bobby was still there by the stream, frightened, but physically unhurt. No one has ever asked Bobby how he felt about being left behind.

Bobby's story, like many other stories of disabled people will hardly feature in memoirs or accounts of the war in Sierra Leone. The same could be said for many other disabled people fleeing wars and disasters across the world.

So when the debate about the current refugee situation in Europe emerged, I firstly recalled our own situation in Sierra Leone. How as internally displaced persons, we underwent some serious and terrible experiences. Secondly, I begin to wonder and ask myself about the countless, nameless and faceless

disabled refugees braving the oceans to find safety in Europe and yet get rejected and scorned. Do they make it at all? Do they have carers and carriers like Bobby? Were the carers and carriers patient enough to support them?

The questions that I don't see asked in both mainstream and alternative media, is the question about the disabled refugee fleeing the conflict zones. How many disabled persons have managed to survive the rough waters from the conflicts in Syria, Libya, Yemen, etc.? How many stories have actually been written about ordeals as well as current situation of disabled refugees in their so-called refuge locations? For those who were lucky enough to survive the journey, what plans do the governments in Europe have for disabled people fleeing those conflicts? Until these questions are asked, the debate on the refugee situation will remain half-hearted, and shamefully incomplete.

Yes, we should welcome refugees and we should ensure that people fleeing conflicts in their home states receive the same solace and support we would expect of them if we find ourselves in similar situations. But we shouldn't allow disabled people to be side-lined or blatantly ignored in the general discourse about refugees. The interests and concerns of disabled refugees must and should be given more priority and coverage. So far, the media has failed to do that.

## Disability, Sexual Health and Expression

Disabled People often joke that we are treated as though we have no gender right down to the signs on our toilets.



Sex is an area where people face a lot of barriers. People with health conditions whether physical, learning, social, sensory or mental health are often treated as if they are a-sexual by default. This can be very frustrating but also very short sighted. Sexual and romantic feelings and expression are one of humanities basic needs.

But people with health conditions and disabilities face many barriers. I feel one of the biggest of these is our access to sexual health, from basic medical things such as smear and STD tests to accessing advice and free condoms. To the more complex issues around having a sex life with a health condition – e.g medication side effects, needing support or equipment.

The hardest of all is the attitude of the health and social care world towards people with health conditions having sex.

Professionals act as though sex and sexual health isn't important when you have a mental health condition. They feel that those of us with learning and social disabilities don't understand what we want. That people with physical disabilities can't have sex and sexual feelings.

ALL of this is UNTRUE! ALL adults should have the opportunity to have safe consensual sex! For this to happen the barriers we face need to be removed!

Sexual health centres need to be accessible and welcoming to all. They need to have:

- Accessible rooms and examination tables
- BSL translators
- Information in different formats like videos Braille and easy read
- Mental health champions
- Accesses to sex therapists to explore different ways of having sex and expressing our sexual feelings

There needs to be better information and support such as:

- All health and social care plans should include sexual health provisions, that might include access to contraception
- Reminders about smear tests, STD checks, wellness checks should be given in accessible formats and there should be transport and support to attend appointments
- Support to find and maintain romantic and sexual relationships

Attitudes need to change too! Disabled people fall right across the sexual spectrum: straight, LBGT, a-sexual and more. We have romantic relationships and sexual ones. We have casual sex, flings and relationships. We get married and then have children too. It is our Right to be able to have these things and to do so safely.

If you have faced any barriers in your sexual health and expression, write in with your stories!

## 4. Dates for the Diary

### Merton CIL Members Group

#### Having a chat

Hi, it's been lovely to see you again and catch up on all your news.

I never knew you saw the world that way

Wish you'd told me before

This is not a formal consultation exercise. We're not here to ask you about what we are going to do with something that you don't really care about, before going ahead and doing it without any respect for your views.

Nope this is different to that.

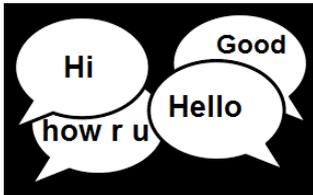
This is a chat and we want you to tell us what you want to chat about. On the last page there is a picture of someone's shoes. We'd like you to write in that page and write anything you want to write and send it to us. Tell us about your life. Tell us about what's important to you. Tell us what makes you happy, tell us what makes you blue.

Here at MCIL we shape our services, the support we give, the projects we build, based on what you have said to us. Previously we may have helped you reach those decisions by giving you choices. This time we want you to give us the choices. Tell us about you.

Do it in this newsletter and do it at **future members meetings held on the first Thursday of the month in Room 66, Wandle Valley Resource Centre, Church Road, Mitcham, CR4 3BE** where you are invited to chat. Or simply email us at [info@mertoncil.org.uk](mailto:info@mertoncil.org.uk). The chat lines are open and you are invited.

Please take a look at the final page to start your chat!

## Our next members group meetings:



**When:** 4th August, from 1-4.00pm

**Where:** Merton CIL

Tea, coffee and biscuits provided

Hope to see there!

MCIL are exploring the idea of using chatting as a means of consultation. The first august meeting will be our first opportunity to do that and Anjan Ghosh from the Public Health Team at Merton Council wants to talk to you about "what next?" and "what would you want?" for the Wilson Hospital in Mitcham

**When:** 1<sup>st</sup> September

**Where:** Merton CIL

Tea, coffee and biscuits provided

We are looking to invite a member of the local authority to explore parameters that tell the council they are doing a good job for us.

**When:** 6<sup>th</sup> October 2016

**Where:** Merton CIL

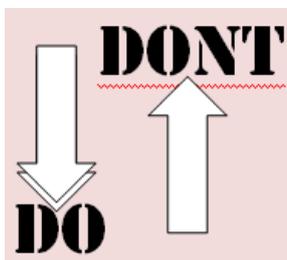
Tea, coffee and biscuits provided

Talk about the Website. MCIL are launching a new webpage. Do you like it?

How does it compare with Merton Council's? What would you change?

## Volunteer Skills and Support Group

**For our lovely volunteers!**



**When:** 18<sup>th</sup> August from 1-4.00pm

**Where:** Merton CIL

**Theme:** The Do's and Don'ts of Social Networking

**When:** 15<sup>th</sup> September 2016 from 1-4.00pm

**Where:** Merton CIL

**Theme:** Boundaries Training

**When:** 20<sup>th</sup> October 2016 from 1-4.00pm

**Where:** Merton CIL

**Theme:** Access Support. A new role for volunteers

Please see page 13 for more information on volunteer training and opportunities

## Merton CIL Events

### Merton CIL's Annual General Meeting 2016

Date: Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> October 2016

Time: 11pm until 1pm followed by light lunch

Location: Holy Trinity Church, 234 The Broadway, Wimbledon SW19 1SB

We will be reflecting on our work last year and over the last few years and asking members to tell us what is important to you, what should we focus on next?

Plus there will be an opportunity to meet our existing trustees and to elect some new trustees too. See page xx to find out more about becoming a trustee.

### My Voice Matters 2016

Date: Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> December 2016

Time: 11pm until 1pm followed by lunch

Location: TBC

At this year's event we will be focusing on what is important to you!

## External events and activities

Please note, Merton CIL is not responsible for the content of external websites or activities organised by other organisations below...



### Age UK Merton with Merton CIL - Get Fit, Get Healthy

Age UK Merton and Merton Centre for Independent Living are working together over the coming year to help people become more active and meet friends. The programme is aimed at older people who have been inactive previously and particularly at **disabled people**.

<http://www.ageuk.org.uk/merton/news--campaigns/get-fit-get-healthy/>

Participants will have the opportunity to set goals and develop a plan on a one to one basis and then encouraged to take part in different activities to suit their abilities and help them to achieve their personal goals. They will be given 8-10 vouchers to use on a range of activities at Age UK Merton.

### Merton CIL can offer volunteer buddies to disabled people who would like to take part, but aren't sure if they want to do it alone:

- Community Gardening – in partnership with Deen City Farm.
- Rhythm and Movement – a mainly seated exercise that engages brain, voice and body, and is good for building new neural pathways as you get fit.
- Zumba Gold – seated or standing lively exercise to music.
- Yoga – Gentle movement, stretching, and meditation to increase well-being.
- Tea dances and dance lessons – an opportunity to dance to favourite tunes.

If you would like more information or know someone who may be interested in taking part then please contact **Merton CIL on 020 3397 3119 or [info@mertoncil.org.uk](mailto:info@mertoncil.org.uk)**

## Mitcham Community Orchard and Gardens Fete

Date: Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> July 2016

Time: 11:00am-6:00pm

Location: Fieldgate Lane, Mitcham, CR4 3AL

This event will be attended by the local MP and past and current Merton Mayors. It will take the form of a rural fete, with a bar, BBQ, live music, Morris dancing, mini-farmers' market, WW2 vehicles, games/competitions, information stalls, tours etc. Come along with, or without, the family for a great afternoon experiencing a taste of the countryside celebrating this new community resource.

## The Canons Partnership Consultation

The Canons Partnership (Merton Council, Mitcham Cricket Green Community and Heritage, The Mitcham Society and Friends of the Canons) are working together to secure Heritage Lottery funding to improve The Canons. When we say The Canons, we mean the area of green space between Commonsides West and Cricket Green, including Canons House, Madeira Hall, the Recreation Ground, the running track, the East Lawn, the open space to the west of Canons House, the walled garden and the pond, but NOT the Leisure Centre

To obtain this funding they have to gather information from Merton residents about the current perception, appeal and usage of the area. This will be used as a benchmark against which any improvements can be measured if the bid is successful. The Canons Partnership have commissioned Arkenford Ltd, an independent Research Agency to gather the necessary feedback from local residents. Please spare a few minutes to click on the link below and complete the online survey. We are interested in your views, whether or not you visit The Canons. If you wish to take part, please click the link below to begin the survey - <http://sp1.arksurvey.uk/s3/The-Canons?survey=12>

Please ensure you complete the survey by Midnight on 31st July 2016 All respondents who complete the survey will be entered into a prize draw to win one of five £50 vouchers (for Amazon or John Lewis).

# May Project Gardens Grow Cook and Eat

Date: Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> July 2016 and Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> August 2016

Time: 1:45pm

Location: Pollards Hill Baptist Church, Wide Way Pollards Hill, CR4 1BN

May Project Gardens invites you to...



May Project Gardens is a grassroots community organisation. We aim to educate and empower communities by providing practical, affordable solutions for sustainable living in urban environments.

Starting with the root of the problem, MPG has created 14 free Sunday workshops for residents of Pollards Hill, running every fortnight from Sunday May 8th, where you can learn to...

**GROW**  
Your own food

**COOK**  
Delicious, simple recipes using basic ingredients

**EAT**  
Together with family and friends



**Meet at 1:45pm @**  
Pollards Hill Baptist Church, Wide Way, Mitcham, CR4 1BN

**Sessions run 2 - 5pm**  
Contact Kate & Ozichi on 07572 216 580  
[WWW.MAYPROJECT.ORG](http://WWW.MAYPROJECT.ORG)  
#growcookeat

## Interested in changes to waste collection?

Date: Tuesday 2nd August 2016

Time: 7.15pm

Location: Civic Centre

Do you have a view on the possible impact of changes on older people and disabled people?

Come along to a call-in meeting at the on Tuesday 2 August at 7.15pm.

A "call-in" allows decisions that have not yet been implemented to be considered by Scrutiny where this is causing some concern amongst Councillors. You can find out more about call-ins [here](#). The council provide guidance on being a witness at scrutiny meetings [here](#).

## Commonside's Community Garden

Date: 4<sup>th</sup> August 2016

Time: 4:00pm to 6:00pm

Location: New Horizon Centre, South Lodge Avenue, Pollards Hill, Mitcham, CR4 1LT

Make plant supports and garden signs, sow seeds, general garden maintenance - e.g. weeding and watering. Special Activities for children: making scarecrows grow your own sunflower, planting cress in eggshells, mini beast hunt, lavender bags, bug hotels, herb omelettes, salad planters and cupcakes using edible flowers.

## Mental Health Forum

Date: 14<sup>th</sup> September 2016

Time: 1:00pm to 4:00pm

Location: Vestry Hall, 336 - 338 London Road, Mitcham, CR4 3UD

The forum will provide an opportunity for organisations to exchange ideas about project development and implementation, develop shared understanding and will be a platform for in-depth discussions.

## Superhighways - Impact Aloud 2016

Date: 26<sup>th</sup> September 2016

Time: 9:30am to 4:30pm

Location: Everyday Church Wimbledon, 30 Queen's Road, Wimbledon, SW19 8LR

Impact Aloud 2016 is Superhighways' third annual event to celebrate the power of digital to transform the way charities and community organisations can collect and measure data and share their incredible stories of change.

## Towards Independence Courses for learners with learning difficulties and /or disabilities

Date: From Late Sept

Merton Council will continue to deliver a wide range of courses for adult learners with learning difficulties and disabilities (LLDD) in venues within Merton. Our new programme of courses will start in late September and you can see a list of the courses offered below.

The courses will be held primarily at three venues: MertonVision at the Guardian Centre in Colliers Wood, Pollards Hill Library and High Path Day Centre. All venues offer a safe environment with good transport links and safe drop-off points.

Our Towards Independence courses are offered to learners on an individual basis. If you or anyone that you know would like to attend one of these courses please call us on 0208 545 3640 or email [adultlearning@merton.gov.uk](mailto:adultlearning@merton.gov.uk)

Meal Prep	Creative Enterprise
Lip reading	Photography
Creative Enterprise	Design a Room
Practical Crafts	Life Skills
Art and Craft	Moving Towards Independence (IT)
Dance	Aspire -Towards Work
Aspire - Towards Independence	Knowing the World
Practical writing with IT	Using the library
Learn and Express My Rights	Look After Yourself
Managing social life (IT)	Personal Safety

## Health and Social Care Forum

Date: 3rd October 2016

Time: 10:00am to 1:00pm

Location: Vestry Hall, 336 - 338 London Road, Mitcham, CR4 3UD

The forum will provide an opportunity for organisations to exchange ideas about project development and implementation, develop shared understanding and will be a platform for in-depth discussions.

## 5. A Final Word... So, what is it like to be you?



Someone wiser than me said; "I wish for one day I could stand inside your shoes and for just one day I could be you". Imagine someone really wants to know what it's like to be you, to know your good news and the reasons for your blues. What would you tell them? Use this page to get your thoughts down and send it back to us!