

27 June 2008

Untapped economic value of disabled entrepreneurs recognised in new report

Research identifies potential economic benefit of over £2 billion

A report published today, (June 27, 2008) investigating the economic value of disabled entrepreneurs in the Northwest of England, reveals that bringing more disabled people into the business arena, could have a net benefit of combined public expenditure savings and better productivity totaling over £339 million or over a third of a billion pounds in the Northwest alone. Considered nationally, the economic benefit to the country could potentially be over £2.1 billion .

'Wealth Bringers - The Sustainable Value of Disabled Entrepreneurs in England's Northwest', written by a research team led by Professor Erik Bichard from the University of Salford and sponsored by the Northwest Regional Development Agency (NWRDA), is aiming to focus attention and encourage better, more direct support for this productive group of people.

The report, which is the second Wealth Bringers publication, shows that disabled entrepreneurs represent an untapped source of innovation and productivity, providing they are recognised and offered the appropriate resources.

Statistics found by the Wealth Bringers team suggest that there are potentially 14,000 prospective disabled entrepreneurs in the region whom, given the right amount of assistance and encouragement, would be interested in setting up their own businesses.

However, the report also suggests that there are barriers which make it too difficult for disabled people to engage in business enterprise. Wealth Bringers finds that the marginalisation of disabled people in relation to self-employment and entrepreneurship is more extensive than realised and there is a lack of any significant focus on the value of disabled entrepreneurs in economic policy.

There are widely differing definitions of disability currently in use and one of the recommendations of the report is to inform policy makers. The call is for policy makers to formally and actively adopt the more constructive approach or 'social interpretation of disability' which frames disability in a wider social context, and for rejection of the dominant, medical, individualised interpretation, which looks at disability simply in terms of the individual.

The report's findings suggest that business support agencies need to do more to promote self-employment and entrepreneurship among disabled people.

Professor Erik Bichard, author of the report, says: "The findings of this report support the view that a sustainable society is one that not only recognises, but also celebrates and values the diversity of its citizens. The report provides evidence to help policy makers and programme managers to take particular interest in providing support for start-up propositions and continued business advice for an existing group of people that could swell

into a significant economic force, given the right conditions."

Interviews were conducted with Northwest-based disabled entrepreneurs as part of the research carried out for the Wealth Bringers report. Findings show that disabled people often experience discrimination in employment and that the majority choose self-employment as a way of gaining greater control and flexibility in their lives. The report includes the experiences of four individuals who have successfully established their own businesses.

Mark Hughes, executive director of enterprise and skills at the Northwest Regional Development Agency, said: "This report shows the determination, success and creativity of disabled people, developing and running businesses in the Northwest. The NWDA recognises disabled people as a proud and resourceful group with a great deal to offer the economic and social growth of the Northwest. We have much to learn from disabled people themselves about the required changes to systems, practices and perhaps most importantly, culture, to remove barriers to entrepreneurship in order to make the Northwest a truly inclusive region where all can contribute to wealth creation."

The NWDA is currently producing its first Single Equality Scheme, which will prioritise a number of key areas. These include delivering learning and awareness programmes to all parts of the agency, including Business Link.

Julie Ryder, founder of HearFirst Deaf and Disability Awareness Training, and TalkFirst Baby Signing, features in the report. She says: "There needs to be more awareness from providers of support and a deeper understanding of people's needs. While specialist services have their place, mainstream services need to be accessible to all." ends

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Notes for Editors

1. The numbers willing to set up businesses can be taken as a nominal 10 per cent of those who want to work. Within the Northwest, there are 140,000 people who want to work and therefore 14,000 that would consider setting up businesses. This is a conservative estimate based on the 14.4 per cent of disabled people who are self employed nationally.

The economic implications of shifting 14,000 people from benefit to generating their own income through their businesses have been calculated using the long-term incapacity weekly rate of £81.35. The creation of 14,000 new businesses would therefore represent a saving to the public purse of over £59 million per annum in the Northwest alone.

The estimated added value to the regional economy shows the bigger picture. Calculations show that 14,000 new disabled entrepreneurs would add £280 million to the regional economy.

Taking the net gain of GVA and benefit savings together, assistance to the prospective disabled community would be worth a weighty £339 million, or over one third of a billion pounds to the Northwest.

2. Nationally, the corresponding numbers would produce 88,000 new entrepreneurs with a net economic benefit to the country of over £2.1 billion.

3. The first Wealth Bringers report was published in 2005. It set out to show how enterprising people with ethnic backgrounds were not only enhancing the economic prosperity of the Northwest, but were enriching the social fabric of society. The report also developed by a research team led by Professor Erik Bichard, and funded by the Northwest Regional Development Agency, helped to direct support towards this valuable, yet previously under-supported group. It also led to new thinking about whether other groups in Northwest society could be revealed to have value far beyond the perceived view.

4. The dominant definition of disability is that it is caused by individual impairment or health condition, meaning that an individual is not employable. This is an individual interpretation, which is enshrined in legislation, for example the Disability Discrimination Act, which defines disability as resulting from an individual's inability to carry out normal day-to-day activities due to their impairment. The second major definition is that society does not take account of people with impairments or long term health conditions, thereby creating disabling barriers and perpetuating cultural exclusion. This is a social interpretation of disability, often known as the social model of disability.

The Northwest Regional Development Agency

The Northwest Regional Development Agency (NWDA) leads the economic development and regeneration of England's Northwest and is responsible for:

- . Supporting business growth and encouraging investment
- . Matching skills provision to employer needs
- . Creating the conditions for economic growth
- . Connecting the region through effective transport and communication infrastructure
- . Promoting the region's outstanding quality of life

Disability Awareness Day

The Northwest's groundbreaking Disability Awareness Day (DAD) 08 takes place on Sunday 6th July. The event, sponsored by the NWDA, takes place in Warrington and is now in its 17th year. DAD is an annual independent living exhibition and a family fun day rolled into one. The main aim of the event is to promote independence throughout life and work. The exhibitors at DAD reflect a wide range of support services and are supported by a week of complimentary events.

For more information visit - www.disabilityawarenessday.org.uk

INTERVIEW OPPORTUNITIES

The following people are available for interview on request.
Photographs are also available.

Professor Eric Bichard University of Salford, School of the Built Environment

Mark Hughes Executive Director of Enterprise & Skills, NWDA
(Friday only)

Entrepreneurs featured in the report:

Laurence Clark: Comedian/Disability Pride Arts and Training, Liverpool.
www.laurenceclark.co.uk

Shameem Malik: Anisa Training and Consultancy, Whalley Range,
Manchester. www.anisatraining.co.uk

Terry Powell: Merseyside Inclusive Judo, Liverpool

Julie Ryder: HearFirst and TalkFirst, Bacup, Lancashire.
www.hearfirst.org.uk and www.talkfirst.net