



Directions Plus

Annual Report 2005/06

Prepared for the **Annual General Meeting 3 October 2006**

See also:

- Trustees Report & Annual Accounts 2005/06
- Directions Plus website: www.directions-plus.org.uk

Please contact Directions Plus if you need this information in another format or language

Company sponsors:

RSP Safety Services Huntingdon



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RSP are delighted to sponsor the work of Directions Plus – both by donation to the charity and by subsidising their risk assessment. RSP also works in partnership with Directions Plus on access surveys.

For further information contact: RSP Safety Services Ltd, Building 14, North Gate, Alconbury Airfield, Huntingdon, Cambs PE28 4WX Tel: 01480 457 912; E-mail: raeanne@rpsafety.co.uk; or see our website: www.rpsafety.co.uk/

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For further information contact: Danwood Group Ltd, Danwood House, Vantage Park, Wasingley House, Huntingdon, PE29 6WP. E-mail: Trevor.benton@danwood.co.uk or see our website: <http://www.danwood.co.uk>

Working in Tandem Ltd



Working in Tandem is a small, friendly consultancy business based in Cambridge. Director Rebecca Jones has worked with Directions Plus since 2001,

designing and supporting their websites and providing general communication advice and services.

Working in Tandem sponsors the work of Directions Plus by donation to the charity and by subsidising the website design and support with Rebecca's time and ideas.

For further information contact: Working in Tandem, 23 Rathmore Road, Cambridge CB1 7AB; Tel: 01223 501 421; E-mail: info@workingintandem.co.uk; or see their website: www.workingintandem.co.uk

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Directions Plus – at a glance

Directions Plus is a disability advice and information charity registered in England, Number: 1091855. It is also a Company limited by guarantee, Number: 0437345

Our history: In the 1990s, Directions Plus evolved from the Cambridge Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) because it was felt that the volume and detail of disability enquiries needed a dedicated team approach. Between 1994 and 1995, an Advisory Group called Directions Plus, (but managed by the CAB), set up the necessary infrastructure. In April 1996, Directions Plus was registered as a charity. In 2002, it became a company limited by guarantee.

DIAL UK: Directions Plus is affiliated to DIAL UK, the national disability information advice line charity. One of the conditions of membership is that Directions Plus' Management Committee should consist of a majority of disabled people. Acquiring the DIAL UK Quality Mark is a current aspiration of Directions Plus.

Objects of Directions Plus

From Directions Plus' Memorandum of Association:

- To relieve disabled people and relieve the poverty of disabled people living or working in the City of Cambridge, and the districts of South Cambridgeshire, East Cambridgeshire and Fenland.
- To relieve carers of disabled people and relieve the poverty of the carers of disabled people living or working in the City of Cambridge, and the districts of South Cambridgeshire, East Cambridgeshire and Fenland.

Mission statement(s) of Directions Plus

Quality disability information and advice for the people of Cambridgeshire
and
a leader in co-operation among disability organisations

Where we aim to be by 2009 (from Business Plan March 2006)

Directions Plus:

- will be a leading participant and partner in increasing public awareness of disability issues from regional to local level
- in response to funding trends, will have built on these regional liaison efforts to win shared and exclusive funding to provide at least medium-term financial security for Directions Plus' core work
- will have applied for funding for non-core services of casework and outreach
- will be providing an excellent personalised advice and information service using up-to-date methods of communication
- will have gained the DIAL UK Quality Mark to acknowledge our professionalism
- will have an active Management Committee whose members will have taken on an added ambassadorial and fundraising-enabling role
- will have a Friends of Directions Plus Committee engaged in active fundraising
- will continue to have a cohesive, trained team of staff and volunteers
- will have improved further our cost-efficient administration
- will have an increased, well-informed membership.

How we help you - services provided

- **Disability information and advice for individuals** – by phone, online and face-to-face
- **Disability related benefits advice for children and families**
- **Access surveys**
- **Disability Discrimination Act and awareness training**
- **Campaigning**
- **Advice for employers** about disabled employees and applicants for posts
- **Publications** – we no longer have funding for publications but continue to publish our Directory of organisations and services, newsletter and factsheets – especially online - but also by request in other languages and formats.

The geographical area of benefit



Directions Plus' area of benefit is Cambridge City, East and South Cambridgeshire and Fenland.

DISH (Disability Information Services Huntingdonshire) is our equivalent in Huntingdonshire District, and DIAL Peterborough serves the unitary authority.

From census information, it is estimated that there are at least **59,504** people, broken down as:

- 11,106 people in East Cambs (15.17% of the population)
- 16,186 people in Fenland (19.38%)
- 17,265 people in South Cambs (13.27%)
- 14,947 people in Cambridge City (13.73%)

who have a disability or limiting long-term illness and that at least **39,570** people provide unpaid care.

These figures clearly indicate an enormous need, particularly in Fenland. In East and South Cambridgeshire, the need is frequently in pockets, surrounded by considerable wealth, which serves to hide the deprivation in statistics whilst exacerbating it.

Disability East

The six counties and four unitary authorities of the Eastern Region have formed Disability East with objectives including co-operation and the sharing of best practice.

Disability East elects a Community Stakeholder representative to the Regional Assembly. Since their formation in 2003, this has been Sheila Smith-Rawnsley, Directions Plus' Chief Executive. Directions Plus also hosts the registered address of this regional organisation.

How you can help us

Trustees and Directors – we need new blood!

Many of our Trustees and Directors have direct experience of being disabled and/or being carers, which can make their time even more precious. Each year, we have a turnover of people on our Management Committee, which can put additional pressure on those remaining.

In 2006, we have an urgent need for new blood to join our Management Committee. In particular, it would be really valuable to have more people with business, financial, legal or fundraising experience. We have a challenging agenda ahead of us, which has been agreed in our latest Business Plan 2006-2009. If you are interested in our work and would like to have an informal chat with Sheila Smith-Rawnsley, Chief Executive, or Joan Smith, our Chairman, please contact us via Directions Plus 01223 569 604.

Membership – why not join us – it is free!

If you are disabled, older and/or a carer and live or work in Cambridgeshire, why not join Directions Plus as a member? **It is free and easy to do.** You will get notification of events, the chance to vote (or stand) for the Management Committee at the Annual General Meeting, and informative newsletters. What do we get from your membership? We get a larger, more representative body underpinning the work we do, which helps hugely in consultations, fundraising and partnerships. Contact us for information or see our website.

Volunteers – we need your time

Directions Plus could not provide the range or quality of services that it does without our wonderful volunteers. We would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their valuable gifts of time and expertise. They are vitally important.

New volunteers are always welcome to help us with the wide variety of tasks in our accessible office or with our outreach work. For an informal chat please contact us via Directions Plus 01223 569 604 or see our website www.directions-plus.org.uk.



Donations – ways to say thank you...



There is always a gap between what we can raise from public bodies and what we need to do for disabled or older people and carers in Cambridgeshire.

People often wish to thank the person who has helped them. As we are not allowed to accept individual gifts (it is better for our waists, as we can't resist chocolates or biscuits), why not give your thanks as a small donation, which will help us to help someone else?

If you would like to make a donation, contact us or you can give online via our website www.directions-plus.org.uk. You can even 'Giftable it' now.

Friends of Directions Plus Committee – we need you

Do you have fundraising experience, lots of energy, good ideas or maybe you are a local firm who would like to sponsor us? The soon-to-be established Friends of Directions Plus needs your help... Contact Sheila for an informal chat.

'Who's who' at Directions Plus 2005/06

President: Lord Fairhaven KStJ, JP, DL

Honorary Life Vice Presidents: Mrs Ruth Palmer & Cllr Philippa Slatter

Management Committee:

All those on the Management Committee are trustees of the Directions Plus charity:

Chair: G Joan Smith

Vice Chair: Tony Barnes (to Nov '05) succeeded by
Chris Lakin

Treasurer: Eileen Cairns (to Nov '05) succeeded by
Jane Harris

Other Trustees: Doreen Brady, Muriel Swift, Mark Taylor
and (from Nov '05): Elaine Davies, John
Harris, Helen Kember, Maureen Symons

Volunteer Representatives on the Committee: Elaine Davies & Martin Felgate and (from
Nov '05): Alex Smith and Martin Felgate

Directors: Tony Barnes
Eileen Cairns (to Nov '05)
Jane Harris
Joan Smith
Muriel Swift

Staff:

Chief Executive: Sheila Smith-Rawnsley

Casework & Outreach Manager: Peter Wetherell

Administrator: Lynda Askew

Work Experience and Admin Assistant: Nikki Devan (to Feb 2006)

Forum Project Manager: Gerri Bird

Project Assistant: David Challis

Information Manager: Hilary Gorton

Outreach: Jan Hale

Children & Family Project Worker: Yvonne Herbert

External consultants/contractors:

Website designer/webeditor: Rebecca Jones
of www.workingintandem.co.uk

IT Systems Support: Clippy and Steve
of www.quantum-leaders.co.uk

Chartered Accountant: Geoff Mann

The Directions Plus Team 2005/06



Directions Plus benefits from a core team of paid staff, many of whom have been with us for many years, a changing team of volunteers and also some short-term work experience staff.

We consider our volunteers as 'staff members' and some even develop into paid staff... others volunteer on a regular basis for many years. We would like to thank them all for their energy, kindness and skills which allow us to help more people in need.

During 2005/06, we said 'goodbye' to Nikki Devan, who had been on work experience with us as our Admin Assistant. We said 'hello' to Noreen Jones, who now volunteers for us on a regular basis.

Reports from the Management Committee and other staff

Chairman's report

2005 – 2006, my third year as Chairman, was very demanding but very rewarding. The major event was the official opening of our new premises on the ground floor of Orwell House. We were very gratified that representatives of so many allied organisations made time to attend our opening. Staff appreciated the time our guests spent re-acquainting themselves with what we do and enjoying the spaciousness of our new offices. Above all, we were particularly delighted to have with us our new President, Lord Fairhaven, to perform the opening ceremony and engage so effectively with our staff and members. The move was the culmination of over ten years' striving and three previous moves to get what we wanted, namely: ground level accommodation for ease of access/evacuation, spaciousness for wheelchair users, our own toilets and small kitchen, and, at long last, a separate interview/board room. All of this involved an enormous amount of extra work for all staff and volunteers but our thanks must go particularly to Lynda Askew, our Administrator, for all her 'wheeling and dealing' to reduce costs and getting the jobs done/doing them herself, which made it possible.

I am also proud to report that despite the upheaval, we made good progress with our Business Plan 2004 – 2006, regularly 'ticking off' milestones as completed at our Management Committee meetings.

The Sub Committees met regularly to revise policies and agree new procedures and get our accounts presented in more meaningful ways.

We unfortunately lost two members of staff to prolonged illness and had two others disabled for a period with accidents which put a heavy strain on the rest of the team, but everyone coped wonderfully.

I would like to pay a special tribute to our Chief Executive, Sheila, who had to oversee all this as well as continuing to represent us and disability issues most forcefully from local to regional level where she served on the Regional Assembly.

As I step down from the Chair in November this will be my last report, so I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone – volunteers, staff and colleagues on the Management Committee – most sincerely for all their hard work and camaraderie. I am so proud to have worked with them all.

Finally, I hope the members will like the new format for this Annual Report

G Joan Smith, Chairman of Directions Plus

Chief Executive's report

For the last two years, our Management Committee's annual Business Planning event – which involves everyone from the Chair to the newest volunteer – had identified the effect of the straightened financial circumstances of the statutory funders and the increased competition for other decreasing sources of money as the major threat to the immediate future of the voluntary sector and Directions Plus. Consequently last year's Annual General Meeting was devoted to raising awareness of the need for co-operation to ensure that we do not duplicate effort and waste money.

Optimism about 'ChangeUp' (the Government fund to strengthen the infrastructure of the voluntary sector) in the early part of the year rapidly decreased as we realised that the rules did not allow us to do what we knew from our members what was most needed in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough – to start more groups that are sufficiently local for disabled people to access them. We eventually managed to negotiate funding for something we hope is useful and consigned acquiring money to increase the number of Forums (as we call the groups that already exist) to later Big Lottery or Trust Fund bids.

Our bid to ChangeUp was a partnership approach with DISH (Disability Services Huntingdonshire) and Dial Peterborough and one aspect of the work was in partnership with CamSight and Care Network, to demonstrate our commitment to a more cost effective way of doing business. Together, with limited resources, we researched over 200 small disability groups around the county and helped them with access advice, DDA (Disability Discrimination Act) information and training, etc. We also helped numerous non disability groups, including Meldreth Parish Plan Implementation Team, for whom we did a complete survey of the village. It was really pleasing to find people who wanted to get it right for everyone, from the beginning – if only others would follow their example !!!

We created www.disabilitycambridgeshire.org and gave groups without ICT the opportunity to have web pages. Initially, we had hoped to do this on our own website, which has thousands of

'hits' per year, but everyone thought (incorrectly) that we were trying to take them over! The new website will eventually contain all of our public domain information, replacing our 4 handbooks with up-to-date, easily accessible information. For people without internet access we will print and post the information they need and other people, eg Social Workers, District Nurses etc., will also be able to print copies for their clients

To further the partnership approach, we are part of the regional disability project through Disability East; represent all aspects of disability on the Regional Diversity Group and Regional Advice Group; and on the Circuit Rider Board, which has provided 15 organisations with an ICT strategy and equipment during the year and helped numerous others with technical advice, procurement etc.

Elsewhere this report shows some of the great strides forward we are making towards the objectives of our Business Plan, but significant challenges remain that we can only accomplish by working together – and being smarter! With this in mind, the Trustees have presented us with an extra Mission Statement: Directions Plus – a leader in co-operation among disability organisations.

I cannot end this report without sincere thanks to the staff and volunteers – including Management Committee members, Steve and Clippy from Quantum Leaders and Rebecca from Working in Tandem. Their often superhuman efforts have ensured that despite broken limbs, pregnancy, long term sickness, office move, new telephone system that just wouldn't work and numerous other little jinxes that have tried us over the past couple of years, we have not missed a single day delivering our services. Well done everyone!

Sheila Smith-Rawnsley, Chief Executive of Directions Plus

Casework & Outreach Manager's Report

This year the Directions Plus Casework and Outreach team comprised Yvonne Herbert (staff member), Jan Hale (staff member), Elaine Davies (volunteer), Alex Smith (volunteer) and Di Colegate (volunteer). In addition to our work based at Orwell Furlong, we also hold Tuesday and Friday afternoon drop in sessions at Addenbrooke's Information Centre.

Social Security benefit enquiries have become a major element in the advice and information aspect of the service, and the casework that derives from this activity continues to expand. This year, the Team dealt with 144 cases, which secured a collective total of almost half a million pounds in disability-related benefits for clients in all Community Legal Service casework categories.

We have, however, found that appeals have become increasingly time consuming. As an example, three particularly difficult cases were unresolved and are likely to continue well into the next reporting period.

Conflicting caselaw has produced a lawyer's feast of activity around the Human Rights Act. The Tax Credit regime has also added to the complexity of many benefit decisions, particularly for families who have disabled children.

The funding we received from Cambridgeshire County Council and the Children's Fund allowed us to develop our expertise in our work with families and children. By the end of the year, our reputation as the leading disability advice agency in the County was well established. This is a most difficult and demanding area of work. It is likely to become one of our main strands of activity in the years to come, providing funding remains available.

I would like to thank the whole team for their dedication to the collective effort of providing a professional and sympathetic service to our clients. The true measure of client satisfaction is the number of people who return to us year after year for help and support.

Peter Wetherell, Casework & Outreach Manager

Forum Project Officer

Hi everyone – I've had another very busy but enjoyable year, working all over the County.

It's been a particularly busy time with the Forums, In addition to administration for the Cambridge Forum for Disabled People, I have been helping the East Cambridgeshire Access Group and we hope to have more meetings around the East Cambridgeshire area.

I have also been working hard on the South Cambridgeshire Forum of Disabled People Sawston branch. The steering group is going from strength to strength. The group are now working on several campaigns eg dropped kerbs, disabled parking bays and transport issues.

I have been in the local newspapers many times bringing disability issues to light, because many disabled people in the Cambridge area are still having big problems with access issues. During the year, I have been out-and-about working with TV - one article was on the BBC webpage about the 'Problems of a wheelchair journey', showing how difficult it is for a wheelchair user to use public transport.

I am a member of the Cambridge City Council Equalities Panel, The County Physical Disability & Sensory Impairment Board, a board member of Hundred Housing Association and a Trustee of Cambridge CVS to make sure that disabled issues are not forgotten.

Our disability awareness training is going from strength to strength and I have given talks on the Disability Discrimination Act. I have also been giving a lot of access advice around the county to shops, offices and organisations, but a lot more still do not comply with the law. Let us know if you cannot access somewhere and perhaps come to learn how to give the correct advice yourself.

I have been invited to speak about Directions Plus to many Community and other disability organisations.

I would like to thank all my work colleagues for their help and support over the year and a big thank you to David Challis for his hard work.

I hope this coming year is as successful as the past one has been!

Gerri Bird, Forum Project Manager

Child & Family Worker's report

2005/2006 has been an exciting year for me as the Children and Families Worker at Directions Plus, and I can honestly say that one day is never the same as the next. I have also had the privilege of meeting and working with many wonderful children, families and professionals over the past year. We receive a little vital funding from Cambridgeshire County Council and the Children's Fund, without this support we would not be able to offer the level of service we do.

Part of my main role is to provide disability and general benefit advice to clients who are often stressed, confused and anxious as to their entitlements. Many of my clients struggle to access outside services due to the demands of being a mother/father and carer of a disabled child. I offer a home visit to families where necessary, I feel that this reduces the stress of organising childcare and enables me to reach families that live in rural and isolated areas. Directions Plus serves families throughout the county, we work in Fenland, East Cambs, South Cambs and Cambridge City.

In addition to the above, I also ensure families are aware of the support groups available within their area; provide information on carer's funds and additional financial support available; and liaise with social workers and other professionals. I also offer advice on the role of a carer; ensure that people are aware of their entitlement to a carer's assessment in their own right; and check their entitlement to carer's allowance.

Furthermore, I attend numerous meetings within the voluntary and private sector, which allows me to keep up with changes in policy and practice, thus enabling me to share information with families. Many of these meetings are attended by professionals working within health, social services, education and other voluntary groups.

I hope that the above outlines my role and offers an insight into the diversity and flexibility that being a Children's and Families Worker entails. I continue to look forward to working with many more families and offering them a high level of support.

Yvonne Herbert, Child & Family Worker

Partnership working

The voluntary/community sector in the UK is changing dramatically - in terms of its funding, its activities and, in particular, the way it works with other organisations.

We have always maintained good working relationships with similar disability advice organisations - for example, nationally, we are a member of DIAL. We are good neighbours with DISH and DIAL Peterborough - who provide similar services to us in Huntingdonshire and Peterborough Unitary Authority respectively.

Business Plan 2006-2009: an over-arching, unifying concept for the next three years has emerged, which Trustees believe can best be expressed by the idea 'First Among Equals'. This, we feel, embodies the unique ethos of Directions Plus, which serves people who have all types of disability and their carers whilst recognising and valuing the in-depth, expert help provided by smaller, specialist disability charities.

Directions Plus seeks to play a co-ordinating role in offering strength to the sector in meeting the emerging trend of grant-making bodies towards rationalisation in funding.

At Directions Plus, we believe that it is vital that voluntary organisations (including charities such as us) work in partnership. In order to strengthen their position as service providers voluntary organisations need to improve their collaboration and co-operation. Any who fail to do this are unlikely to receive public funding at the levels they need to continue to deliver their services.

The Directions Plus calendar - news and events



Directions Plus President Lord Fairhaven cuts the ribbon at the Grand Opening of our new Directions Plus offices in Orwell Furlong

2005:

May: Problems of a wheelchair journey - Directions Plus' Forum Project Director Gerri Bird is featured on the BBC website 'in pictures'.

September: Short listing for 'The Way to be' Awards.
Independent Living Conference in London.

October: Annual General Meeting (AGM) at Hester Adrian in Cambridge.
Grand Opening of new Directions Plus offices.
Cambridge Bus Station Shopmobility Launch.
RADAR Conference in London
'Improving Life Chances' Conference in Huntingdon

November: 'Way to be Awards' finalists' ceremony in Cambridge Arts Theatre.

December: County Council Physical & Sensory Network Meeting

2006:

January: Tony Barnes Directions Plus and Papworth Trust Trustee is awarded an MBE.
NHF East Carer and Support Conference
Big Lottery Fund briefing at Meadows Community Centre

February: Directions Plus staff start IT training with Circuit Riders.
Management Committee Awayday to revise business plans and discuss forward planning.
Cambridgeshire Voluntary Sector Infrastructure Awayday for the Change Up project.
Presentation to South Cambs District Council by representatives of the voluntary sector.

March: Disability Cambridgeshire website goes live.
Re-designed Directions Plus website goes live.
ChangeUp funded Disability Awareness Training
Cambridge Patient Public Involvement Forum
Women in Business Conference

Projects

A sample of our projects and activities for 2005/06:

Access surveys and liaison

Directions Plus staff offer informal and formal access surveys to local businesses and services, for which a small charge is made. In 2005/06, we received funding from ChangeUp to carry out some of these free for local voluntary and community organisations and groups.



We have helped a wide range of clients this year: residential properties, churches, private, public and voluntary sector organisations – even a whole village and a rickshaw service, helping the latter to get their licence to operate.

Our trained staff visit the area in question, give advice on the spot and write up the

advice in a report. The report provides guidance for architects and builders and suggests possible funding sources for voluntary organisations.

We also work closely with our company sponsors RSP Safety Services, who can carry out more detailed health and safety risk assessments.

For further information contact **Gerri Bird**, Forum Project Manager

Addenbrooke's Advice Centre - outreach work:

For many years, we have been invited to attend drop-in advice sessions in the Addenbrooke's Information Centre. Currently, we attend on Tuesday and Friday afternoons.

This service is provided by trained Directions Plus staff and volunteers who include Yvonne Herbert, Jan Hale and Di Colegate. It proves to be a very useful and popular disability advice and information service for the many patients, carers and staff at Addenbrooke's.



The Patient Advice & Liaison Service (PALS) for Addenbrooke's is also based in the Centre and other agencies such as Cambridge Citizens Advice Bureau and Cambridge City Council Housing Advice Service also have drop-in sessions.

Advice Line: 01223 569 600 etc

Since 1996, the Advice Line has been a core service of Directions Plus.

It has real people (Information staff and trained volunteers) answering calls on Monday to Fridays from 10am to 12.30pm and then 1.30pm to 4pm. Out of hours, there is an answerphone. We ring back the same afternoon if you call over lunch, or the next working day if you ring after 4pm.

If our advice line staff do not know the answer to your question immediately, they will take a message and someone will call you back.



Our new online Directory on the Disability Cambridgeshire website has now become an important part of our work. It is very useful for our staff to collect and find up to date contact information for local and national organisations and services.

A new task of the Advice Line is to take messages for some of the organisations we have been helping through the ChangeUp project. Small organisations who do not wish to advertise their contact details direct on the web, can give our contact details instead. This is also good for

disabled clients because they can contact us by e-mail, text phone or fax if they prefer. We can then pass on messages for them.

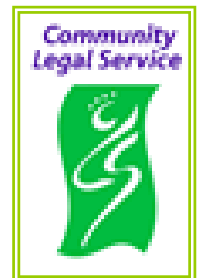
All callers are asked if they are aware of other available services and often a simple enquiry can lead to a person being given information about entitled benefits and services or useful organisations. We also offer membership of Directions Plus, so callers can chose to receive our Newsletters.

For further information contact **Hilary Gorton**, Information Manager

Benefits work – adults

Directions Plus staff spend much of their time answering queries about Social Security and other benefits for disabled or older people and carers. Some of these are fairly straightforward and can be answered immediately by advice line staff, others can become very complex and are investigated in more detail by our very experienced team of specialist advisors.

Since 1996, we have offered a benefits advice service for adults and have achieved the Community Legal Service Quality Mark for this service.



Because we know there is a real need for our specialist advice, we are working very hard to find funding to expand this service.

Cambridgeshire Circuit Riders project



During 2005-2006, Directions Plus has been an active part of the ChangeUp funded Cambridgeshire Circuit Rider project. Our web designer has worked closely with them and our Chief Executive is a member of the Project Board.

This project, based at Cambridge Independent Advice Centre (CIAC), has been carrying out pilot projects and offering services in information and communication technology (ICT) - which basically means 'computers, e-mails and phones'. Their aim has been to improve the capacity of the local voluntary and community sectors by helping them to become better equipped with up to date and

affordable technology and training.

For example they have been looking at open source (free) software and also Voice over Internet protocol (VOIP) phones. They have also worked closely with the ChangeUp funded 'website and homepages' project. They have followed up on contacts made by the ChangeUp development workers and given informal ICT advice to organisations.

From February to April 2006, Directions Plus staff and regular volunteers have also benefited from excellent IT training provided by the Circuit Riders.

We hope, funding permitting, that we shall be able to continue working with them in future.

Campaigning work - raising the profile of disability issues

Directions Plus staff and volunteers are encouraged to attend as many relevant outside bodies as possible to raise the profile of disability issues. This is because Directions Plus has the unique remit in its geographical area of representing all types of disability.

Gerri Bird, as Forum Project Manager, has been busy raising the profile of disability in Cambridgeshire and beyond. She has campaigned about the abuse of the Blue Badge System, local transport, Disabled Parking bays, lack of Loop systems and access to buildings. In this work, she has worked closely with BBC TV, radio, Cambridge Evening News and the Town Crier.



As an example, in May 2005, the BBC featured on their website 'in pictures' her hassles travelling around as a wheelchair user.

For further information contact **Gerri Bird**, Directions Plus Forum Project Manager

ChangeUp project - building capacity in voluntary/community sector

ChangeUp is the Home Office money to enhance the infrastructure of voluntary and community organisations.

In 2005-2006, Directions Plus, as part of a local consortium, were successful in getting a small, extremely time limited, grant to do some work across Cambridgeshire, including Huntingdonshire and Peterborough, which are not in our usual catchment area.



Working with development workers from Camsight, Care Network, DIAL-Peterborough, DISH (In Huntingdonshire), we contacted small groups and organisations offering them a range of development services and gathering up-to-date contact details. Services offered by Directions Plus included Disability Discrimination Act and awareness training and access surveys as well as homepages (mini websites) on the

Disability Cambridgeshire website, which was also ChangeUp funded. Other examples of positive outcomes include an Access Report which will, hopefully, be a useful contribution to Meldreth's Parish Plan, and some funding work with Different Strokes which resulted in two of their members joining our Disability Awareness Team.

Children & Families Project - disability information and advice

The Children and Families Project is funded by Cambridgeshire County Council and The Children's Fund. Whenever possible, we try to empower parents to complete their own Benefit Applications or argue their own case for services, with our guidance to ensure they maximise their opportunities. There is no funding for an advocacy service, yet parents, particularly single parents, of disabled children really do need one, so we do our best to fill the gap, although our 4 days a week to cover almost the whole county does not stretch very far.



Disabled young people remain under the auspices of this project until they are 24 years old. Many parents are very protective of their disabled children, whilst the young people themselves want to get out and do things. Sometimes the young person and their parents want radically different things, calling for great tact on the part of our staff.

Our Benefits advice staff provide disability advice and information to families affected by disability.

For further information contact **Yvonne Herbert**, Children & Family Project Manager

Disability awareness training:



For some years, Directions Plus has offered Disability Discrimination Act and awareness training. This can be for mixed groups or bespoke for organisations or companies.

In 2005-2006, we have had one-off funding to train people identified within the ChangeUp project.

We currently deliver the course in two ways: either over a half day, which is particularly cost effective for businesses, or within school hours to suit people who have younger children. The course is practically based and thought provoking. Courses are led by Directions Plus staff with help from disabled volunteers. The course rates highly on evaluation - and we would like to be able to offer more dates a year.

If your organisation would be interested in training for your staff, do contact us for rates.

Yes folks, its Gerri again - can't keep her away from a camera !!!

Forums - local and regional

In 2003 Directions Plus was the only disability charity in the region to receive a grant from the European Year of Disabled People to set up forums where the concerns of disabled people could be voiced and have an impact on local Plans and strategies

Our ultimate aim is that every disabled person who wishes to do so will be able to attend their local forum and contribute to its campaigns, training, etc. We are currently seeking funding to start three or four in each local authority district. They are quite expensive to set up as they need to cater for people with all types of disability: accessible meeting places and transport are still a big problem – even though it is over ten years since the Disability Discrimination Act came into force !!!

If you would like to help start a forum in your area – or just belong to one, please contact Gerri or David on 01223 569 601

Homepages - helping small voluntary and community sector organisations get on the web



Having a 'web presence' can be a very cost-effective way to promote the work of a small group or charity to its client group and potential volunteers - or to funders. But it can be scary, time consuming and expensive. In 2005, we were successful in our joint bid for ChangeUp funding to help develop the infrastructure of voluntary & community organisations in Cambridgeshire.

We used part of this funding to develop simple 'first-step' homepages (mini-websites) for organisations who were either nervous about going online, didn't have any funding or other resources, or had websites that weren't accessible. They could get online for free and we also helped them buy a web address and e-mail addresses, which they can use now and in the future wherever they end up having their websites.

Our ChangeUp outreach/development workers identified the groups/organisations from across Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire. Homepages were just one of a collection of services offered to them. Those interested were then contacted by Rebecca Jones, our website contractor, who worked with them to develop the content (text, pictures and attached documents) and set up the technical side.



So far, the project has been very well received. We have had some great feedback from those we helped and we have made some new friends.

Funding has now finished for this work but we would be interested in supporting other small groups and continuing its development.

Another useful service for people who run small groups from their homes, is to use Directions Plus' Advice Line as a contact point. This avoids the groups having to advertise their personal contact numbers on the web, although it keeps our Advice Line volunteers busy passing on messages to the groups. This was a very popular feature of the homepages service.

For further information contact **Hilary Gorton**, Information Manager

Newsletter re-launch

In 2005, Hilary Gorton, then still something of an IT novice, took up the challenge of becoming Newsletter Editor for Directions Plus.

Since the Directions Plus website redesign, we can now get the newsletter online much more quickly and in a format that is disability friendly.

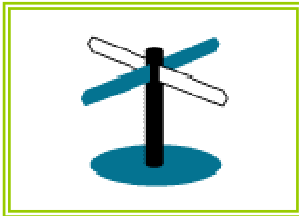
Where do we get our news stories? From you. We collect ideas from our postbag and email In-Box, from the web and from our staff and volunteers. If you have some news that may be of interest to our membership and website readership, let us know - it is free!



With increases in postal charges, we strongly encourage any member who has e-mail and/or website access to read the newsletter in an electronic format. This can either be the Word/PDF file attached to an e-mail we send to members, or the version on the website. This can save us hundreds of pounds a year in printing and postage. As we contact them, we shall be asking new members for their email addresses - please remember to let us know if yours changes.

For further information contact **Hilary Gorton**, Newsletter Editor

Signposts - online pointers to advice and information



In 2005/2006, part of the ChangeUp/Disability Cambridgeshire (DaC) website funding has been used to start researching and writing 'Signposts', a new series of mini-factsheets.

These aim to capture and formalise the practical knowledge of Directions Plus staff and volunteers on common areas of enquiry. They give pointers to existing sources of information (including to more detailed factsheets) and also to local services.

They will be published from the DaC website but can also be printed off and sent/faxed to people on request. We hope they will be a good resource for the induction and training of advice staff.

In 2006, Kate Bournnell and Rebecca Jones, website contractors and volunteers, have started this project off. We hope that it will spark interest in a larger pool of authors. We would also be delighted to collaborate with other local advice agencies/public bodies, especially if they have resources to help support the project in the longer term.

For further information contact **Kate Bournnell**, Signpost Editor

'Way to Be' awards

In 2003, in co-operation with Cambridge City Council, the 'Way to Be' Award scheme was first run. It gives recognition to disability-friendly firms and services. Its success led to other organisations joining the partnership.

These annual awards have had high exposure in the local press.

We need to make sure that people continue to nominate good services and facilities - it really is a valuable way to say thank you to the 'good guys' and to make sure that standards of accessibility



and service improve for disabled and older people.

For further information you can contact Directions Plus or look at the Way to Be Awards info on the Directions Plus website www.directions-plus.org.uk.

Website redesign for Directions Plus - and birth of a new 'sister' website 'Disability Cambridgeshire'



In March 2005, we launched our new 'accessible' **Directions Plus website**, which has much more of an emphasis on news and information about Directions Plus and its work: www.directions-plus.org.uk

Directions Plus first became a significant 'presence' on the world wide web in about 2001. At this time, the priority was to get versions of our popular printed handbooks online and to provide some background information about what Directions Plus did and how

to contact us. We were unable to attract funding to reprint the handbooks although demand for them, if anything, seemed to increase.

After some careful unpicking of the handbook information, we ended up with 700+ webpages, which were mainly descriptions and contact information for local and national organisations and services. These overlapped with the information our Advice Line used in-house, which was stored in a very old, creaky database! Every time we wanted to update the details, we had to change the database and remember to e-mail Rebecca Jones to update the website.

The technology used in this original website was very simple but it had the advantage of giving a very high-priority listing on common search engines (eg Google). Often, a search for a name of an organisation gave the Directions Plus pages as the first choice, which was good for our exposure - but embarrassed us if their records were out of date

By 2005, far more people were using the internet and we were even more convinced that the web was a very powerful tool for our Advice Line, our clients (for 'self-service') and also to promote the work of Directions Plus to users and potential funders. Technology was also advancing and, in 2006, the web has become a first choice for information (and entertainment) for many more disabled people.



Our priorities were:

- to make sure that our new Directions Plus website was properly 'accessible',
- to review and 'weed out' any out-of-date information
- to gather new up-to-date information
- to be able to make updates to one directory to be used both in-house and on the web.

By 2005, we still didn't have sufficient funding to do this for the Directions Plus website but...in late 2005, we were successful in our joint bid for ChangeUp

funding, part of which was to develop a website for disability organisations in Cambridgeshire including Huntingdonshire and Peterborough.

The new **Disability Cambridgeshire (DaC) website** is 'bigger than just Directions Plus' but holds the Directory of organisations/services information that used to be on the Directions Plus website: www.disabilitycambridgeshire.org.uk

We decided to use part of the ChangeUp funding to move the Advice Line database information and Directions Plus website information into a new online (database-driven) Directory, which now sits behind the new Disability Cambridgeshire website. The new DaC website is designed to be accessible and we could, therefore, re-use the template (with a few tweaks) to re-design the Directions Plus website very quickly and cost-effectively. Taking down the 700+ old Directions Plus webpages could be built into the project plan for the new DaC website... so we could launch two websites for (almost) the price of one.



The DaC website turned out to be a fairly mammoth project with several contractors, staff and, especially, volunteers contributing. By March 2006, we had two fairly basic but working websites - and the task for the future is to continue to add new 'content' to them. Now we can put the information into a single Directory from any computer that has internet access, which is a huge advantage and helps us work much more cost-effectively.

Work experience (formal and informal)

Our volunteers are essential to our services and they tend to make a regular commitment to Directions Plus. We also have people come to us for formal and informal work experience - they are with us for a shorter period and come to us for a variety of reasons.

During 2005/06 we have had five people of all ages come to us on work experience.



Each year one or more students from local disability educational units spend their work experience time with us. We have had some really great and talented disabled students working with us - usually for just a fortnight.

In 2005/06, we were also enthusiastic partners in the Skills Training/Midpoint work experience scheme, which sadly has now ceased operating. Under this scheme, people could gain office work experience while they gained useful skills in the classroom, for example, using computers. These people were really keen to get off benefits and back to paid work and we hope we helped them along their way.

Sometimes people just join us as an informal step back to work, for example, after being a full-time carer or after an accident or illness. It can be quite daunting going into a fast-moving office environment after a break - our office is much more flexible than most and we can usually find something useful but not too scary to try, which can help build confidence.

Having a properly accessible office has made a great difference - we now have room for wheelchair users to get around without our having to move the fridge or whatever! - and we even have our very own accessible loo.

The future...

In March 2006, we agreed our Business Plan for the next three years. There are three main areas for development:

Fundraising - we aim to

- appoint a full-time Information Officer and find resources for further partnership work
- gain funding for the unrecognised burden of appeals support and geographical or client group outreach
- enable and encourage gratitude donations from clients
- establish a high-level 'Friends of Directions Plus' Committee to spear-head fundraising events
- approach local firms for company sponsorship
- run more fee-earning Disability Discrimination Act and awareness courses

Professional (formerly 'training') - we aim to

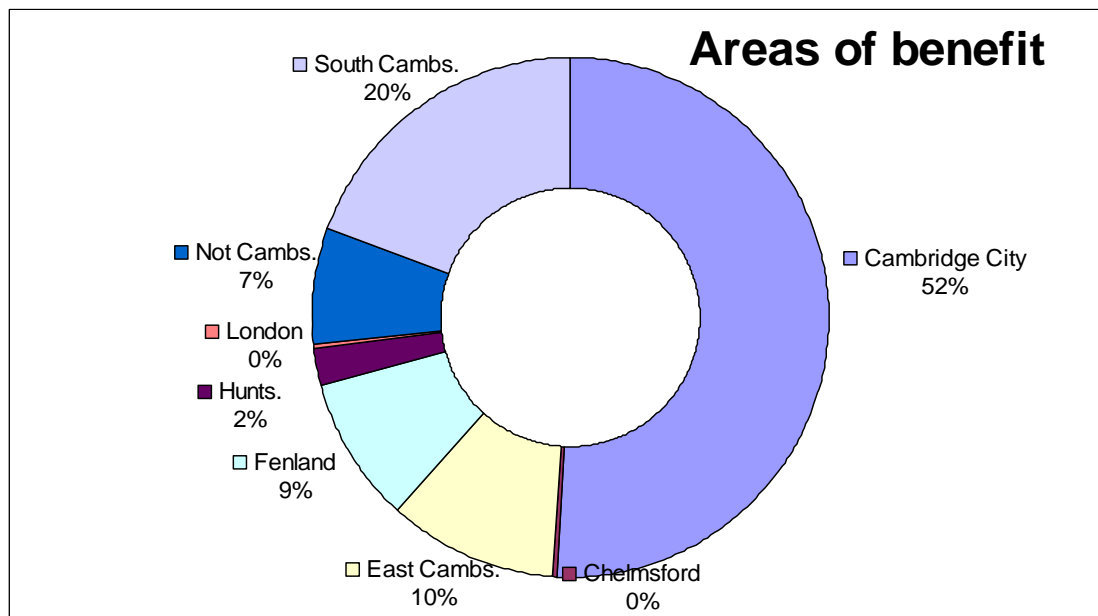
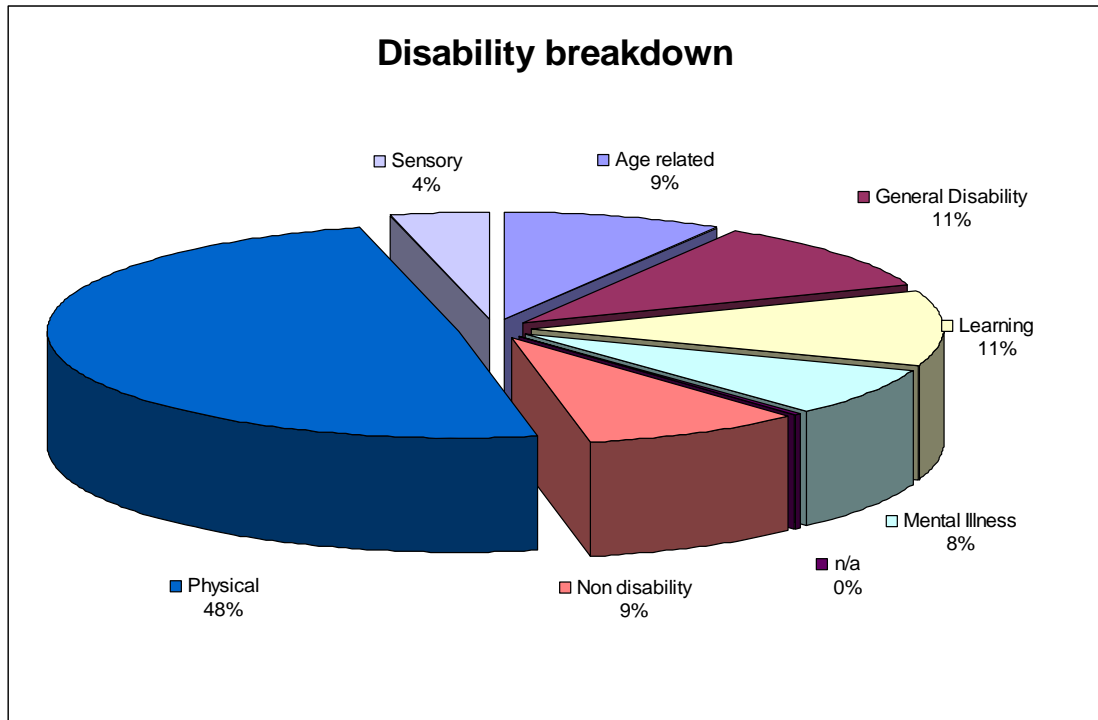
- run disability issues training for staff, volunteers and the Management Committee
- run an in-office induction course for new members of the Management Committee
- enhance our website as a core disability information resource and to replace our printed handbooks
- develop training course material for staff and volunteers
- ensure all new staff and volunteers complete a basic course of training, with systematic additional training to meet personal development goals
- hold regular staff and volunteer meetings
- make regular policy revisions and complete the set of revised procedures
- obtain the DIAL UK quality mark

Public relations - we aim to

- build and support co-operative organisations at higher levels to gain recognition for disability issues
- ensure representation at local disability organisations' events to enhance the likelihood of opportunities to work in partnership
- be pro-active in the democratic process to raise issues and seek funding
- link disability organisations via our website(s)
- continue participating in the annual disability access award scheme (Way to be Awards)
- publicise 'Friends of Directions Plus' fundraising events in local media
- continue the production of a regular members' newsletter

Annual statistics

These illustrate the type of work and client needs in 2005-2006:



Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2006

Statement of Financial Activities

	Notes	Unrestricted Funds £	2006 Restricted Funds £	Total Funds £	2005 Total Funds £
Incoming Resources					
Incoming resources from generated funds:					
Investment income	2	375	0	375	952
Incoming resources from charitable activities:					
Donations		1,880	0	1,880	1,145
Grants	3	100,728	74,406	175,134	157,834
Other income		4,791	0	4,791	8,570
Reimbursements		8,660	0	8,660	26,209
Total Incoming Resources	1	116,434	74,406	190,840	194,710
Resources Expended					
Charitable activities		136,581	62,049	198,630	209,058
Governance costs		954	0	954	1,171
Total Resources Expended	5	137,535	62,049	199,584	210,229
Net movement in funds for the year		-21,101	12,357	-8,744	-15,519
Reserves brought forward		35,526	25,446	60,972	76,491
Reserves carried forward		14,425	37,803	52,228	60,972

Statement of total recognised gains and losses

There were no recognised gains or losses for 2006 or 2005 other than those included in the Statement of Financial Activities.

Balance Sheet

	Notes	2006		2005	
		£	£	£	£
Fixed assets					
Tangible assets	6		0		0
Current assets					
Debtors	7	3,314		43,570	
Cash at bank and in hand		68,773		35,897	
		-----		-----	
		72,087		79,467	
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	8	19,859		18,495	
		-----		-----	
Net current assets			52,228		60,972
			-----		-----
			52,228		60,972
			-----		-----
Reserves					
Unrestricted funds	9		14,425		35,526
Restricted funds	10		37,803		25,446
			-----		-----
Accumulated reserves			52,228		60,972
			-----		-----

The management committee consider that the charity is entitled to exemption from the requirement to have an audit under the provisions of Section 249A(1) of the Companies Act 1985. No notice has been deposited at the registered office of the charity pursuant to Section 249B(2) requesting that an audit be conducted for the year ended 31 March 2006. The management committee acknowledge their responsibilities for ensuring that the charity keeps accounting records which comply with Section 221 of the Companies Act 1985 and for preparing accounts which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charity as at 31 March 2006 and of its deficit for the year then ended in accordance with the requirements of Section 226, and which otherwise comply with the requirements of the Act relating to the accounts as far as applicable to the charity. The accounts, which have been prepared in accordance with the special provisions of Part VII of the Companies Act applicable to small companies, were approved by the management committee on 11th September 2006 and signed on their behalf by the Chairman.

Contact us

Directions Plus Advice lines:

These are local rate phone lines:



- City and South Cambridgeshire: 01223 569 600
- Fenland: 01354 659 719
- East Cambridgeshire: 01353 669 431

Registered Office: **Directions Plus**, 1 Orwell Furlong, Cowley Road, Cambridge CB4 0WY

Freepost: **Directions Plus**, Freepost ANG 10543, Cambridge CB4 0BL

Tel (admin): 01223 569 604

Fax (admin): 01223 506 470

E-mail: info@directions-plus.org.uk

Web: www.directions-plus.org.uk

Disability Cambridgeshire (DaC) website including the Directory of organisations and services:



www.disabilitycambridgeshire.org.uk

Please contact Directions Plus if you need this information in another format or language