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TX: 19.03.03 – BIG DISABILITY CHARITIES EMPLOY ONLY A TINY PROPORTION OF DISABLED STAFF NEW SURVEY REVEALS

PRESENTER: WINIFRED ROBINSON

ROBINSON

In the autumn we reported on how two charities for disabled people - the RNID and Scope - had both appointed non-disabled chief executives. Now a survey has revealed that many prominent disability charities employ only a tiny proportion of disabled staff. For example, three per cent of Scope's workforce is disabled, the charity for people with cerebral palsy. The figure for Leonard Cheshire is even lower at two per cent, it provides care for people with disabilities and among other things it sponsors a jobs website for disabled people. The survey was carried out by Ready, Willing and Able - a recruitment bulletin for disabled job hunters. Its editor Nick Lewis is here and so is Claire Smith, who's director of human resources, what used to be called personnel, at Leonard Cheshire.

Nick, tell us about the survey - what did you do and what did you find?

LEWIS

What we did was we surveyed the top disability charities for the proportion of their staff who are disabled. And what we found was quite disturbing because as you mentioned some of the big charities - like Scope and Leonard Cheshire - did really badly. Some other charities like the MS Society, who represent people like me, I have MS, and others like the John Grooms and also the Wing Fellowship did really badly as well with MS Society four per cent of its staff and John Grooms two per cent of its staff.

ROBINSON

Anyone do particularly well - anyone have a 100 per cent?

LEWIS

Yes, well this is the thing and I would like to say that - the British Council of Disabled People have a 100 per cent of its staff who are disabled.

ROBINSON

What about your own organisation?

LEWIS

And our own organisation 100 per cent of our staff are disabled as well. And I would just like to say that amongst disability charities it's really worthwhile to do this because their staff know what the job is about and it's of a great advantage to them.

ROBINSON

Claire Smith why does Leonard Cheshire employ so few disabled people?

SMITH

I'd like to say that Leonard Cheshire would like to employ many more disabled people. But disabled people are quite practical people and they understand that many of the jobs that we have, in fact 90 per cent of our jobs, which is round about 7,000 people, are actually jobs that require a lot of physical work, it's providing direct care to disabled people, it's providing support services which often demand physical ability, demands high levels of communication.

ROBINSON

What about the staff then who don't do the physically demanding work - how many of them are disabled, you must have lots of office workers?

SMITH

We have - actually we have a very small amount of administrative staff ...

ROBINSON

How many?

SMITH

We have about altogether round about 800.

ROBINSON

Administrative staff?

SMITH

Administrative staff and managers. Of those 20 per cent actually have a disability. That's 20 per cent who tell us about their disability, many, many people don't tell us they're disabled and it would be against human rights if we insisted that they told us this.

ROBINSON

Nick, if a charity, like Leonard Cheshire, can say that one in five of its administrative staff have a physical disability then that about reflects the numbers in the general workforce - the Works and Pensions people tell us it's about one in five people looking for a job have some kind of disability - isn't that good enough?

LEWIS

It isn't good enough, no, because I feel that they should make a really big effort to employ more because they are a disability charity and it gives an example to other employers - to employers in general - to actually employ disabled people and that's what disability charities should be doing. And I'm very much in favour of disability charities, in particular, employing considerably more than the average employer in terms of disabled people. And I would also dispute the idea that people with physical jobs to do can't - employees with those jobs - can't be disabled, of course they can - I mean deaf people can and also blind people and also people with learning difficulties. So there's loads and loads of jobs that can be done by disabled people.

ROBINSON

Was there anything at all in your research that explained why some charities can do a 100 per cent and some have virtually none?

LEWIS

No there wasn't in the survey but I think it's very much the case that charities that are set up by disabled people themselves are very much more likely to employ disabled people than some of the older charities that were set up for disabled people by able-bodied people. But I would mention, for

instance, RADAR, which was a very much an establishment disability charity it does now employ 50 per cent of its employees who are disabled.

ROBINSON

You see Claire what Nick's suggesting is that charities set up by able-bodied people I suppose perpetuate these paternalistic attitudes to people with disabilities in what they can and cannot do. Do you feel any sense of embarrassment over these figures, given that you yourselves sponsor this job ability website and yet it would seem that you're sending out a rather discouraging message?

SMITH

I don't think we're sending out a discouraging message, on the contrary not only have we got job ability we also have work ability which has provided training.

ROBINSON

Well that's all very well but you only have two per cent of people on your staff that have disabilities.

SMITH

Can I say that it is a great deal more difficult to achieve 100 per cent employee - employees with disability ...

ROBINSON

But some charities are doing it.

SMITH

... when you have 8,000 employees ...

ROBINSON

But all of your 800 administrators ...

SMITH

... as opposed to ...

ROBINSON

... could have a disability couldn't they?

SMITH

... as opposed to Nick's organisation which has a dozen people working in a small office. Leonard Cheshire really does want to employ as many disabled people as possible but we only have two per cent of applications in administration from disabled people. If more people applied then we could take - we would take on more people and we do lots of adaptations for disabled people so they can work for us.

ROBINSON

Claire Smith, Nick Lewis, thank you both.