

Making a Stand

Annie Makoff speaks to disability activists Kaliya Franklin and Sue Marsh about the 'Spartacus Report' – and its subsequent impact during last month's Welfare Reform Bill debates



Kaliya Franklin meets the media

What is the Spartacus Report?

KF: It's other name is 'Responsible Reform'. It's a report made by disabled people into the government's consultation about changing DLA to PIP.

SM: We based our report on over 500 submissions to the PIP consultation, and we are currently waiting on 5000 more from Freedom of Information requests.

The Report shows that the government broke its own code of conduct over DLA reform and entirely misrepresented the views submitted as part of the consultation, giving an entirely biased view. We found that the government's own statistics were misleading and gave a really distorted view. What's more, the government have been warned repeatedly that proposals for PIP may break International and UK Equality and Human Rights legislation.

How did it start?

KF: Sue and I felt concerned that the main focus was on ESA (Employment Support Allowance) and we decided that something had better happen on DLA.

SM: We just weren't being listened to – we lobbied MPs and peers, wrote articles and attended conferences but they continued to ignore us. We decided we had to present our own evidence.

Who has been involved with the Spartacus Report?

KF: Sue ran and coordinated the entire project and Dr. Sarah Campbell did the majority of the research. We had a working method where if one of us was less ill than the other, the less ill one did all the writing and the poorly one did what they could and then went back to sleep. There were actually all

sorts of other authors who helped out enormously, but many are too scared to be named. They were frightened that if the DWP saw their names they would think they were well enough to work – which just isn't the case.

What were your aims?

KF: We wanted to ensure that the evidence we presented became a permanent and credible body of research. We knew that our views were ignored and cherry picked and manipulated to reflect government views. We wanted people to realise the serious consequences the Welfare Reform Bill will have on people's lives.

SM: The government may well ignore us, but they can never claim they didn't know what they were doing.

Since the launch of the report, what has the response been like?

KF: It's been amazing and overwhelming. So many people tried to download it the hosting website crashed. There were three million tweets about it on just the first day. When there are people like Stephen Fry independently picking up on this, it speaks volumes.

SM: It's been backed by the Disability Alliance, Scope, Mind, RNIB and so many other charities. It's been picked up by *The Telegraph*, the *Daily Mail* and the BBC. Yet this campaign has cost people so much – many of us helped from our sickbeds and sofas, and both I and Kaliya have been extremely ill due to the pressure we've put ourselves under. But we've had to do it – lives and futures depend on it.

What has been the impact of the Spartacus Report?

KF: It's had a significant impact on the House of Lords. It was the

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crossbenchers that swung the votes and they have no political allegiance. The report was deliberately written to be non-partisan, so we feel that the crossbenchers should be really proud of themselves. They did exactly what the House of Lords does when it works well, and it meant we defeated the government on many key issues like time-limiting ESA and the structure and implementation of PIP.

If people want to get involved with the Spartacus Report, how can they help?

KF: They can search for and join the 'Spartacus Report' group on Facebook where people are organising into teams and carrying out different tasks that need doing now. And they can sign the petition by visiting <http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/20968>

The PIP criteria consultation needs a huge amount of scrutiny – it's really important that everyone submits their responses to that and copies us in to their submission so we can continue to build on the Spartacus Report.

Further Information

The Spartacus Report, AKA Responsible Reform: A Report on the proposed changes to Disability Living Allowance, can be downloaded at <http://bit.ly/ApQYvY>; for further details about the Spartacus campaign, visit wearespartacus.org.uk

