



## **WEN Café: Impact of Covid 19 on Disabled Women**

**22<sup>nd</sup> May 2020**

### **Summary of discussion**

#### **Speakers:**

Rhian Davies CEO of Disability Wales

Selena Caemar, Activist and Founder of Aubergine Café

Grace Quantock, Psychotherapeutic Counsellor

Speakers shared insights on the issues affecting disabled women more generally, the particular struggles arising out of the Covid 19 pandemic, and potential strategies for change.

### **Disabled Women in Wales**

Studies on disability and gender have revealed that there is a 22% pay gap between disabled women and non-disabled men and the pay gap between disabled women and disabled men is almost 12%. Disabled women are also more likely to work in lower-paid occupations. The already-existing social and economic inequality experienced by disabled women has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **Impact of Covid-19 on Disabled Women**

#### *The Fundamental Rights of Disabled Women*

- Concerns raised that Covid-19 legislation would suspend duties under Social Services and Wellbeing Act, reduce access to social care, and infringe on the rights of disabled women under the Equality Act. Reasonable adjustments were not made from the outset meaning that many disabled people found access to testing sites, food, and PPE incredibly difficult, intensifying mental health conditions. Letters regarding Covid-19 were not always in accessible formats and calls for shielding excluded many health conditions.
- Treatments/investigations for non-Covid related conditions have been delayed. Coupled with the tendency for women to underreport medical conditions, there are concerns that Covid-19 will impact long-term healthcare of disabled women.

- Disabled women make up 75% of the care home population. Their fundamental 'right to life', under the Human Rights Act, has been threatened by the increased risk of exposure to the virus.
- Disabled women are twice as likely to suffer domestic abuse which has risen during the pandemic. Safeguarding issues have been raised since messages surrounding support for domestic violence have not always been relevant to disabled women.

### *Home*

- The burden of childcare is disproportionately placed on women. Many disabled women are responsible for caring for the emotional and physical wellbeing of children who may have disabilities themselves. During Covid-19, these responsibilities have been combined with working from home and home tutoring responsibilities.

### *Interaction with Wider Society*

- Issues surrounding non-consensual touch have remained despite social distancing.
- For many disabled people, social isolation has been exacerbated.
- Increased anxiety surrounding access to public spaces, supermarkets, healthcare and increased feelings of social marginalization.

### **Strategies for Change**

- Public policy and services should consistently apply the Equality Act and consider the multiple roles that disabled women undertake as carers, parents, household managers, workers, entrepreneurs, home tutors as well as the intersection of disability with other identities e.g. sexuality, faith, and ethnicity.
- Calls to raise social awareness of disability to ensure that society listens to disabled women and develops an awareness of the structural and systemic inequalities faced by disabled women.
- Society should make reasonable adjustments for disabled people so that they can continue to work from home post-Covid if it benefits them to do so and receive online health consultations if travelling poses a problem.
- Panellists also discussed the benefits of a universal basic income to replace universal credit and discussed incorporating the UN convention on rights of disabled people into Welsh law and policy as part of a Human Rights Wales Act.