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History of Breakthrough UK

Disabled People Take Control!

In the early 1990s Manchester City Council decided to change the way training and employment was offered to local disabled people. Disabled people were promised support to find real jobs (paid or voluntary), and training to do the work they wanted.

Breakthrough UK Ltd was set up to do this and was legally established in December 1997. Its first contract was with the Manchester Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). On 1st July 1998 Breakthrough UK began providing training and employment services under contract to Manchester City Council. We became a company limited by guarantee on 15th December 1997.

In March 2002 the [Liverpool Office](#) opened to offer employment support to disabled people. We also began working with a small group of disabled people to provide them with management skills to enable them to take control of the project in the future. In January 2003, Breakthrough worked in partnership with Liverpool Social Services to secure a contract with the Greater Merseyside Learning and Skills Council giving disabled people independent living skills and enabling other groups of disabled people to become trainers, a project which started in April 2003.

In November 2003, with a grant from the Community Fund (now Big Lottery Fund), Breakthrough UK started offering [independent employment advocacy](#) to disabled people in Greater Manchester. The Employment Advocacy Centre also offers an information service for employers, providers and organisations on best practice in disability and employment issues. Our first policy conference looked at the business case for employing disabled people and was held in March 2004 at the City of Manchester Stadium, with financial support from the [Northwest Regional Development Agency](#). This was followed by a second Business Inclusion Conference in 2005 at the Village Hotel in Hyde.

In 2006 the Big Lottery Fund awarded us £500,000 to continue and develop the work of our Independent Employment Advocacy Centre. New initiatives include regular employment self advocacy workshops which offer disabled people skills development around negotiating to remove barriers and using their employment rights.

Breakthrough took over the running of the Volunteer and Peer Mentoring Project from the Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People in January 2005. The aim of this project was to support disabled people to access a wide variety of volunteering opportunities across Greater Manchester, as well as training some volunteers to act as peer mentors who were able to share their experience and skills with others. This project finished in August 2006.

Also in 2005, we set up a consultative group of disabled people known as the Policy Think Tank. This group responds to plans from the government and other organisations, and produces its own material. Members of the Think Tank include some Breakthrough staff and directors, leading academics in the field, people working in disability issues in a social model way, and people who are significant in disability politics. Their reports to date can be found on our publications page. Currently the Policy Think Tank are working with Breakthrough on research into disability hate crime and how this compares with other equality groups' experiences. This research is funded by the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

Breakthrough's [Training, Research and Consultancy Department](#) continues to work successfully with a wide range of organisations from the private, public and voluntary sectors. All of our trainers and consultants are disabled people. In 2006 Breakthrough was commissioned to support the production of the North West Development Agency's Disability Equality Scheme, work which involved the recruitment and facilitation of a reference group of disabled people from across the region. Also in 2006 Breakthrough provided Disability Equality Training to all middle and senior managers at Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council, together with briefings for elected members.

In 2007 the department started running regular, open Disability Equality Action Training courses. Third sector organisations received free places on these courses until October 2009 funded by a grant from the Big Lottery Awards for All programme.

In 2008 the Training and Consultancy Department started a contract to deliver Disability Equality Training to 4,500 staff at Manchester Metropolitan University. Also in 2008 the department was successful in its bid to Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Executive (GMPTE) to recruit and facilitate a reference group of disabled people to be involved in the design stage of the planned Metrolink expansion.

In 2008 Breakthrough was one of twelve organisations controlled by disabled people which received funding from the Department of Health. The funding was to assist each organisation to become stronger in three or four identified areas through training and development work over a 12 month period. Known as 'User-Led Organisation Action Learning Sites,' each of the organisations will share their learning, which will then be collated and used to support the development of other user-led organisations of disabled people.