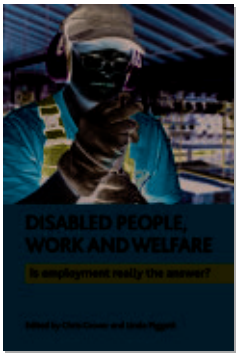
12. Thinking differently about ‘work’ and social inclusion for disabled people



Part Four
Alternatives to, and validated lives beyond, paid work

TWELVE

Thinking differently about 'work' and social inclusion for disabled people

Edward Hall and Robert Wilton

Introduction

Paid employment is the primary marker of social exclusion and inclusion in Western neoliberal states, including the two nations – Britain and Canada (Roulstone and Prideaux, 2012) – that we focus on in this chapter. Those not in receipt of income from work and reliant on welfare benefits, including disabled people, are being placed under increasing pressure to participate in state programmes of 'reactivation' to move from welfare into employment, as part of a broader transformation of the welfare state and government budget cuts (see, for example, Duncan Smith, 2014, in Britain). For some disabled people (in particular, those already in some form of work, or with higher skill levels and experience), there are new opportunities for access into and maintenance of employment. For many, however, gaining access to, and staying in, paid employment is extremely challenging.

There are numerous barriers to employment for disabled people, including:

- a lack of qualifications and experience;
- attitudes of employers;
- absence of adequate support from agencies;
- physical access to the workplace;
- a lack of appropriate job opportunities (Thornton, 2009; Crawford, 2012).

People can also face difficulties at work that include:

- the attitudes of fellow employees and supervisors;
- expectations in terms of behaviour and appearance;

- pay and conditions, including hours and flexibility (Roulstone et al, 2003; Wilton, 2004).

For these reasons, the proportion of disabled people in paid employment has plateaued at a level far below that for non-disabled people. Furthermore, as austerity measures tighten, many disabled people are finding themselves in a double bind. They are unable to secure a paid job *and* are denied adequate benefit payments to support themselves, with a resultant decline in wellbeing. Moreover, the rhetoric of welfare reform in both Britain and Canada is becoming increasingly sharp.

In Britain, popular and political discourses increasingly contrast those understood as 'strivers' (who take an active approach to gaining employment) with those seen as 'skivers' (in receipt of welfare benefits, and who make little effort to find work). The Canadian landscape is more uneven because social welfare is a provincial policy matter, but there too there has been a prevailing trend towards emphasising individual responsibility and (a lack of) motivation, while downplaying the 'complex and deeply-rooted social and systemic inequalities' that shape the employment prospects of disabled people (see Gewurtz et al, 2014, p 1; also Prince, 2012).

Given the difficult and constrained landscape of paid employment and a hardening of attitudes in relation to welfare payments and the perceived inactivity of disabled people (and many others), it is perhaps unsurprising that many disabled people have become increasingly disenchanted with mainstream employment and the claimed connection between being in work and securing broader social inclusion. Some are also vehemently protesting against current welfare changes and negative media portrayals of disabled people in receipt of welfare benefits (Briant et al, 2011; *The Guardian*, 2012; ODSP Action Coalition, 2014). However, there are alternative ways in which disabled people (and others excluded from mainstream paid employment) can become involved in 'work', conceived here in the broadest sense: undertaking a meaningful activity that is recognised by others as making a socially valuable contribution (in some cases paid, in many cases unpaid). In this chapter, we argue that there are a range of alternatives to mainstream paid employment that provide opportunities for many more disabled people to be involved in 'work' and so achieve an enhanced sense of social inclusion. We also suggest that these alternatives encourage a broader reimagining of the relationship of disabled people to the local places in which they live, and the networks in which they are embedded (Gibson-Graham, 2006).

The chapter comprises of three main sections. We look first at the nature of disabled people's current position in relation to paid employment, arguing that significant barriers to their expanded participation remain. We then consider the potential of two alternative forms of 'work'. The first of these centres on employment within the social economy as an alternative to the market economy. The second focuses on unpaid work, in particular volunteering and participation in the creative arts, which have the potential to generate social participation and inclusion, but without generating an income for disabled people. It is important to recognise that for both 'alternatives', there is the potential for the exploitation of disabled people's labour and for the perpetuation of dependent economic roles. However, the chapter argues that if these challenges are properly addressed, there is much to be gained by disabled people and those in wider society. Throughout, we present data and examples from Britain and Canada, drawing on our own research.

Disabled people and paid work

Despite the seemingly improved conditions in the labour market in Britain in 2013 and 2014, with the number of people registered as unemployed falling, and those in employment at an all-time high (BBC News, 2014; ONS, 2014), the position of disabled people vis-à-vis paid work has remained largely unchanged. Of the seven million people of working age (16–64 years) in Britain with a disability, 46.3% are in employment. This compares with 76.4% for non-disabled people (Berthoud, 2011; ONS, 2012). In Canada, approximately 50% of disabled adults of working age are in paid work, compared with 66.1% of non-disabled adults (Fawcett and Marshall, 2014). While there are undoubtedly more disabled people in work now than a decade ago, and the gap between disabled and non-disabled employment rates has therefore fallen, a significant difference remains (Sayce, 2011).

There is a dominant notion that 'some disabled people are unequivocally capable of work, while others are wholly incapable' (Berthoud, 2011, p ii). The reality, as Battams (2013, p 3) notes, is that 'the relationship between disability and employment is complex'. There is a 'sliding scale of employment probabilities' determined in part by the nature and severity of impairment (Berthoud, 2011, p ii). For example, data for the United Kingdom show that people with diabetes have an employment rate of 62%, and those with hearing difficulties 52%, compared with just over 12% for people with mental health conditions and learning disabled people (Sayce, 2011). In

addition, there is a clear gradient in employment opportunity related to the severity of impairment (Statistics Canada, 2008; Berthoud, 2011). Further, recognising the ways in which disability intersects with gender, age and, in particular, educational level, clear patterns of participation emerge, with men, younger people and those with degree-level qualifications much more likely to be in paid employment (ONS, 2010; see also Chapter Ten, this volume).

These figures reveal the complex relationship between disabled people and employment, with some limited opportunities for younger disabled people with high-level qualifications, but many more challenges for those who are older and, in particular, for those without qualifications (Berthoud, 2011; Ziebart, 2014). As the labour market becomes ever-more fragmented, with at one end, professional-level jobs requiring high-level skills, and at the other end, low-skill jobs needing people who can work long hours on flexible contracts, there is concern that for many disabled people there is a mismatch between what they have to offer and what is available.

In both Britain and Canada, disabled people confront a dilemma around mainstream paid work. Many express a desire to engage in paid employment, and there is increasing sociocultural, political and financial pressure to move from receipt of benefits into paid work. However, for many this is not possible. The majority of jobs available and workplaces are not accessible and appropriate for many disabled people, most of whom are without high-level qualifications and skills, and do not fit with the often demanding needs and expectations of the contemporary workplace. Concurrently, British and Canadian government initiatives also favour those with the most skills and employability. In Britain, for example, the Access to Work programme supports disabled people already in employment or very close to being in employment (for instance, having a job interview) through the provision of equipment, travel costs and a support worker (Sayce, 2011). Meanwhile, the Work Choice programme uses a supported employment 'place, train and retain' model to get someone into a mainstream workplace and keep them there (DWP, 2014). Evidence suggests that the latter programme best serves those who are most able to secure employment and progress (Hall and McGarrol, 2012).

In both Britain and Canada, the 'supported employment' model is now widely seen as the best vehicle to get disabled people into employment in mainstream or 'open' workplaces (Kirsh et al, 2006; Wistow and Schneider, 2007). At the same time, 'sheltered' employment factories in Britain run by 'Remploy', which employed over 10,000 people at 94 sites, are being closed (*The Guardian*, 2013a), with the organisation

now adopting the supported employment model, seeking to place individuals in mainstream employment. While supported employment settings can offer opportunities for some, those with more significant impairments, lower-level skills and fewer qualifications (that is, the majority who were employed at Remploy sites) will find it challenging to access employment in mainstream work contexts. The closure of sheltered workplaces and the focus on supporting individuals in open employment do not address the mismatch between the (lack of) skills of disabled people and the (lack of) access in mainstream employment.

It can be argued, therefore, that mainstream paid employment and workspaces, whether accessed directly or through supported employment programmes, are appropriate for only a limited group of disabled people. There are many others for whom such options are neither possible nor desirable. Challenging the dominant notion of paid employment as *the* route to social inclusion and wellbeing, we argue that there are substantive and hopeful alternatives to paid employment. We offer two examples: work in social enterprises and other forms of 'working' (volunteering and creative arts practice).

Alternative spaces of 'work' I: social enterprises

Recent scholarship has argued that the social and spatial organisation of work under capitalism has been based on a non-disabled norm, with the consequence that 'mainstream' labour processes, work environments and organisational cultures are designed to privilege certain types of bodies and minds over others (Wilton, 2004). As a result, it may be more realistic to imagine that truly accommodating job opportunities will be created in work environments that exist beyond these mainstream settings. Such environments can be conceptualised as what Leyshon et al (2003, pp 4-5) have called 'alternative economic spaces', settings in which individual and collective actors 'imagine and, more importantly, perform … economic activities in a way that marks them out differently from the dictates and conventions of the mainstream economy'. There are a number of different types of 'alternative economic spaces' that could be considered in the context of a discussion about disability. Here, we focus on social enterprises as one part of a broader social economy (Noya and Clarence, 2007), thinking specifically about the extent to which such enterprises have the capacity to provide accommodating employment opportunities for disabled people (Kirsh et al, 2006).

In this section, we draw on data gathered in recent interviews with key informants from Canadian social enterprises. This research

involved interviews with managers and directors of 46 organisations in eight different Canadian provinces.[1] In total, these organisations were operating 67 different social enterprises, employing more than 1,000 people (Wilton and Evans, 2014). These enterprises were engaged in a broad range of activities, including gardening and landscaping, janitorial services, food services and catering, packaging, painting and decorating, and textile/garment manufacturing. Some of the enterprises were run by larger service organisations, while others were started and run by groups of people with mental health issues. The specific focus of the research was driven by the recognition that people with such issues have some of the lowest rates of employment within the larger disabled population (Gewurtz et al, 2014).

Social enterprises are typically organisations with some degree of entrepreneurial orientation, but their economic objectives are connected to, and tempered by, a strong social mission (Amin, 2009; Hudson, 2009). They vary considerably in terms of their size and scope, organisational philosophy, division of labour and funding sources. However, they share in common the fact that 'their prime interest does not lie in profit-maximisation, but in building social capacity (e.g. through employing or training socially disadvantaged groups) and responding to under-met needs … and in the process creating new forms of work' (Amin et al, 2002, p 1). Existing research has suggested that there is a need to approach social enterprises critically. For example, scholars have cautioned that such organisations can be co-opted by the state, effectively serving as a means to prepare unemployed and marginalised groups for transition to mainstream labour markets, while managing those who fail to make this transition (Amin, 2009; Hudson, 2009). Moreover, the recent interest in 'entrepreneurial' activity must also be understood in light of increasing pressure on voluntary organisations to reduce dependence on state funding (Sepulveda et al, 2013). Notwithstanding these concerns, the potential of such organisations lies in their capacity to strike a different balance between the demands of an employer and the specific needs of disabled workers with respect to accommodation and the appropriateness of work.

Data from the interviews suggested that social enterprise staff typically had a wealth of knowledge and experience concerning accommodation and the creation of employment opportunities for people with mental health issues. Organisations varied in their specific approach to accommodation policies, but most offered a broad range of supports that related to the specific demands of work, as well as to the broader social environment of the workplace. The two most common forms of workplace accommodation were flexibility and security. Flexibility

covered a range of issues, including pace, hours, training and work tasks. For example, the manager of a market garden talked about the importance of flexibility in training:

> 'Something I ask in the interview [is] "How do you best learn?"…. Then they're able to tell me actually if you break things down to step by step and give me one step … then everything works out great. So it's about being flexible and understanding that someone's medications or their illness may have an effect on how they learn.' (K28, Ontario)

Many respondents were also attentive to the fact that when people were hired there was often a need to negotiate their suitability for specific work tasks and positions. As one manager from an organisation that ran several enterprises explained:

> 'We had one man who was working in a cafe who was really quite obsessive about money and it became a bit of an issue. He'd start closing early because he got overly worried about the money. So we found there was probably a better fit for him working with the newspapers. Right now, he's employed with the newspapers and he really enjoys it.… We just try to fit everybody to the business so they're gonna be successful.' (K38, Nova Scotia)

The idea of finding a position that will fit a person's abilities and strengths stands in stark contrast to expectations in many mainstream workplaces that people will adapt themselves to the requirements of the job and the broader demands of the business.

Alongside flexibility, job security was also a critical consideration. This was true both for short-term absences from work, as well as longer-term absences prompted by fluctuations in mental health. As one respondent explained, the willingness to provide job security in the face of declining mental health meant understanding, and making accommodations for, difficult behaviour:

> 'Sometimes if they're ill and they get really angry, we'll become the enemy and so sometimes they leave for that reason. It's not unusual for them to come back six months later and say: "I'm really sorry I was kind of off my lid. Would it be okay to be back?" Unless it was a serious

> incident, we almost always let them come back.' (K03, Ontario)

Again, the degree of job security provided in these organisations stands in stark contrast to the precarious nature of many jobs in mainstream workplaces, particularly the kinds of service sector and low-end manufacturing jobs that may be open to people recovering from significant mental illness. Also significant is the fact that the vast majority of social enterprises saw their role as the provision of long-term, stable employment rather than as training or transitional work placements. This model of long-term employment reflects a conception of the social economy as an alternative to, rather than intermediate labour market for, the mainstream economy (Hudson, 2009). This is significant not least because a commitment to long-term employment allows for the ongoing provision of workplace accommodations in these social economy spaces. This approach can also challenge broader assumptions about 'mainstream employment' as the sole route to social inclusion and meaningful activity.

Beyond specific forms of accommodation, enterprises implemented other strategies to build inclusive and enabling work settings. A key component of these efforts centred on disclosure and openness about mental health. There is ample evidence that stigma surrounding mental illness and the subsequent pressure to avoid disclosure constitute major sources of stress for workers. In social enterprises, shared identification and experience often contributed to a sense of the workplace as a 'safe space'. As one manager, himself a disabled person, said: "Really what it is, it just gives that feeling where it's like, disclose or don't disclose, everyone's cut from the same cloth. So that's very comfortable for some people including myself like I was, it was huge for me in the beginning, you know" (K09, Ontario).

Linked to the sense of shared identification, respondents talked about the significance of organisations as spaces for social connection. The nature and extent of such connections varies between organisations and among workers, but it is interesting to think about how the culturally valued status of the workplace promotes formation of social ties. As a coffee shop manager said:

> 'People that started working here, they became friends, they'd get together after work and go to a movie or that kind of thing whereas before they led pretty isolated lives. Even though they had the opportunity to have that social

> connection at the day programme, it was like being in the workplace, they thought of it differently.' (K12, Alberta)

Such observations speak to the multiple benefits arising from people's participation in paid work (Butcher and Wilton, 2008).

It is clear, however, that social enterprises face challenges and dilemmas in their efforts to sustain these work environments. For example, the expectation that social enterprises should/will achieve financial self-sufficiency must often be balanced against a desire to improve the wages of workers within the enterprise. How organisations resolve such ethical dilemmas relates to a broader question about the extent to which they are able to create and sustain what Hudson (2009, p 509) describes as 'something genuinely different' beyond the mainstream economy. In the context of this chapter, such a 'genuine difference' might be understood in terms of organisations' capacity to sustain settings that enable people with mental health problems (and other disabled people) to realise their productive potential.

One such dilemma concerns the decisions that organisations make about hiring policies. For some social enterprises, hiring begins with the needs of the organisation. This means that managers may be more selective in whom they hire, looking for specific skills or experiences that fit with the needs of the enterprise. The logic of this approach is that careful hiring ensures the wellbeing and long-term success of the enterprise. At the same time, respondents recognise that this approach risks 'creaming off' (their term) the most able members of a larger population of job candidates. For example:

> 'Some people have applied for a number of businesses over time but because of the competitive process you take the person who's the best fit for the business. That's one of the problems … people who have higher needs often are not the ones that are successful in the interview process.' (K38, Ontario)

Others respondents explicitly rejected this approach to hiring, arguing that it would undermine the very reason for their existence. As one respondent explained: "We don't really have a selection process.… We're here to reintegrate people with mental illness and if we start saying, 'OK, I'm going to select', I put all the chances of success on my side, but what chances am I putting on their side?" (K17, Quebec).

These statements reflect differences among organisations in terms of the balance struck between economic imperative and social mission.

They also reflect important contextual variations. In Quebec, for example, there are stronger and more formalised ties between social enterprises and the provincial government, which provides core funding for employees' wages. In this context, pressure to 'cream off' more productive workers is greatly reduced.

Alternative spaces of 'work' II: what it can mean to work without pay

Social enterprises offer opportunities of an alternative form of employment for some, although as the section above makes clear, tensions remain in their operation and employment strategies. However, there remain significant numbers of disabled people, including many learning disabled people, people with mental health issues and people with severe and complex needs, for whom, and for various reasons, even social enterprise employment may not be an option. Other options might include alternative ways of being in 'work', involving physical, mental and social participation that is socioculturally recognised by the majority population as a valued contribution, but which lies outside the competitive labour market and economy. Gibson-Graham (2006) argue that there are many ways in which people make 'non-economic' contributions – they cite childcare and volunteering – without which the mainstream economy would flounder and through which those involved can gain a sustained sense of value and inclusion (see Chapters One and Fourteen, this volume). It can be argued that removing the issue of monetary compensation allows for greater attention to the nature of the 'work' being done and the relationships that are formed in the process, leading to a broader sense of wellbeing. In this section, we consider volunteering and creative arts practice as alternative forms of 'work'.

While little research has been carried out on disabled people as volunteers (exceptions include Balandin et al, 2006; Farrell and Bryant, 2009), findings suggest that disabled people can gain a sense of self-confidence, status in their local community and society more widely, as well as opportunities for interaction with other disabled and non-disabled people, and improved health and wellbeing through volunteering (Bates and Davis, 2004; FreshMinds Research, 2011). The facilitating organisation, Access to Volunteering, found that volunteering activity can have significant mental, physical and social wellbeing benefits:

> I'm a bit more confident when it comes to speaking to people, because before I wasn't. I think the volunteering helped me with that.
>
> I'm meeting people. It is nice to be around people and share ideas and views and listen to others' views.
>
> I would say I get more exercise in coming out, up and down and walking around.... My surgeries and volunteering activity are helping me to cope better with my pain.
>
> I'm a lot more stable than I've been in ages. It's taken a while – gradual change to start with, but when I started getting to know people I was more confident.... when I've been really depressed, you feel like you can't do anything and you lose faith in your abilities especially when you've had a manic episode and feel like you can do anything. Picking up new skills has been great, I feel more confident and about the future because I know I can actually do the work even if I can't get a job. (Anonymous volunteers, FreshMinds Research, 2011, pp 69-70)

In some cases, the skills gained through volunteering 'work' – in particular, self-confidence, work skills, 'soft' skills of communication and dealing with people, and networking and knowledge of the 'real world' – can be a stepping stone into paid employment:

> I think it has [made me want to work] because it's made me think I'd love working in a [sports] arena.
>
> Since I've been here I've had full admin office training to go for these kinds of jobs.... Now I'm applying to West Lancashire [Borough] Council for a job as a full time administrative assistant. (Anonymous volunteers, FreshMinds Research, 2011, p 62)

However, for many other disabled people, in particular those with more severe impairments for whom employment is an unrealistic aim, for reasons of impairment and/or a perception that mainstream workplaces are not accommodating, volunteering can offer a viable and attractive form of 'work' (Trembath et al, 2010):

> I don't really see the point [in applying for jobs] – I've got a bad criminal record and my illness [bipolar] and not worked before. (Anonymous volunteer, FreshMinds Research, 2011, p 57)

> I don't think there is much out there for registered blind people – ordinary sighted people having a problem, it is very difficult at the moment. If you could be swallowed up somewhere it would be lovely – it did knock me back losing my job, because I thought that would never happen, because I can't see well enough. I feel more comfortable doing it this way [volunteering] because I don't want to be rejected. Rejection is awful. I used to get a lot out of my job and to be knocked back like that when it's something out of your control. I couldn't go through that again. (Anonymous volunteer, FreshMinds Research, 2011, p 57)

Miller et al (2003), in a study of young learning disabled people, found that a 20-week programme of volunteering led to increases in pride, empowerment, social interactions and communication. Significantly, Trembath et al (2009) noted that, in another study of disabled adults participating in voluntary activities, all referred to it as their 'work', even though it was unpaid. There is a further significance to disabled people doing voluntary work. For many, the reversal of roles from that of the receiver to the giver of assistance and support, is hugely empowering (Balandin et al, 2006).

The rate of regular volunteering among disabled people is significantly lower than that for the population as a whole (Cabinet Office, 2008; Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2010).[2] Much of this difference can be attributed to the same barriers that exist for disabled people in paid employment (that is, employer/organiser attitudes and assumptions, and inappropriate working practices/accommodations). Balandin et al (2006) found that while a fifth of those seeking to become volunteers through Australia's network of volunteer resource centres were disabled people, coordinators often found it 'difficult to refer' disabled people to positions, due to lack of resources to provide necessary support and improve access, and sometimes fears of negative attitudes towards disabled volunteers in communities (see also *The Guardian*, 2013b).

This barrier has been further raised as many voluntary organisations have become involved in the delivery of public services under contract to local or central governments and, as a result, have had to professionalise their activities and the training of volunteers. The skills and capabilities – including in some cases health and fitness – of volunteers are often assessed. There is evidence that some voluntary agencies see disabled applicants in much the same way as many employers do – as unreliable, lacking in skills and unable to cope

(Balandin et al, 2006). To encourage disabled people to participate in voluntary work, charities and organisations need to be more flexible and supportive (Institute for Volunteering Research, 2007). Beyond this, for many disabled people, volunteering in smaller, less professionalised organisations may offer more opportunities for involvement and making a valued contribution (Fyfe and Milligan, 2003).

Successive governments have portrayed volunteering as a route into paid employment (and off welfare benefits) for 'excluded' social groups, including disabled people. While this may be the outcome for some, it is important to understand the wider (and deeper) benefits of taking part in non-paid work in local communities. For individual disabled people, it can mean an enhanced quality of life, self-confidence and wellbeing (Corden and Ellis, 2004). More broadly, making connections with others through formal and informal volunteering (that is, helping friends and neighbours) can build positive perceptions of the roles and abilities of disabled people within society.

A second area beyond paid employment where disabled people have found opportunities to build self-confidence, interact with others and gain skills, is in creative arts activities (Hall, 2013). The British government identified the 'arts' – including theatre, dance, art classes and museums – as a mechanism through which excluded groups can enhance their wellbeing and move towards social inclusion, including employment (Jermyn, 2004). There is a lot of evidence of the benefits of participating in arts activities. For example, Hacking et al (2008) found that participation in creative arts by people with mental health conditions boosted confidence, self-esteem and mixing with others. For learning disabled people, creative arts have been shown to provide opportunities for enhanced social and emotional experiences, contact, expression and the development of mental and physical skills (Jindal-Snape and Vettraino, 2007). There is something 'special' about creative arts in their ability to release potential within people, such as learning disabled people, who are assumed to be without ability and agency.

Drawing on evidence gathered in Edinburgh in 2009, in a project with the 'Lung Ha's Theatre Company', a learning disability arts organisation, we illustrate how the (unpaid) 'work' undertaken by the disabled artists is hugely beneficial to them, and to those they encounter.[3] For example, through the social interaction of rehearsal and the improvising of performances, they experience and reflect on intense feelings of togetherness, friendship and happiness:

Int:[4] 'What is it about drama?'
Jillian: 'It's just being with other people. I like going.'

Int: 'Do you know each other well?'
Mary: 'Yes. You know in theatre, you've got to have team work. If you've not got team work, what's the point?'
…
Int: 'What brings you back every week? You've been coming for 20 years.'
Lorna: 'Make good friends.'
…
Int: 'Do you think you get confidence from Lung Ha's?'
Mary: 'Community. Sometime in the meeting [rehearsal] sometimes sad, sometimes happy. People are upset, people are sad, people are angry.'
Int: 'If people are angry or sad, how do you help each other?'
Mary: 'Understand each other's point.'

However, this is only one part of the process. While those involved gain hugely from the process of producing the performances, in terms of confidence and skills, often over many months, there is another perhaps more significant gain. Lung Ha's seeks out audiences for its work, performing in mainstream theatres in Scotland and Europe. Through this, the actors receive praise and strengthened self-confidence and, further, an opportunity to 'articulate their world view' (Rose, 1997, p 3) and their abilities. Moreover, the strength and quality of the performances can begin to challenge and shift deep-seated attitudes about learning disability (even though Lung Ha's productions never directly address disability, allusions are made to broader notions of difference and othering):

Int: 'What is the reaction of the audience to your shows?'
Jillian: 'People say it's really good. People say nice comments. People you don't know. We go to Glasgow, to "Platform" [a theatre venue]. I was really fascinated when we were there last year; the audience was shouting out. It felt really good.'
…
Int: 'Do people think differently about [learning] disabilities because of seeing Lung Ha's?'
Stephen: 'They see us on stage and after we've done the show, we don't try to, but hopefully we change people's perceptions on the way they see disabled actors.'

Lung Ha's is a charity, funded by Creative Scotland (the Scottish government's arts body). It employs a small number of staff, and the actors are unpaid. While this may seem unfair and even exploitative, as people attending the shows pay for tickets, there is a practical reason for this – welfare benefits can be reduced or even lost if an income is received. However, there is a far more important argument for keeping Lung Ha's and other similar arts organisations separate from the competitive economy. The unpaid nature of the 'work' carried out by the actors in Lung Ha's – and they do see it as their 'work' – disentangles the experience of inclusion from the task of paid employment. In this sense, social inclusion can be thought of as something different from getting a paid job. For most of the actors in Lung Ha's, many of whom have significant impairments, paid employment in a mainstream setting is not likely. Indeed, for many, 'working' for Lung Ha's provides most of the claimed benefits of paid employment – enhanced self-confidence, social relationships and satisfaction – without the common problems of discriminatory attitudes, stress and poor access in mainstream workplaces.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have argued that it has become necessary to think beyond mainstream paid employment, focusing on two examples within the broader realm of 'work'. First, social enterprises are a radical alternative to the dominant labour market, offering flexibility and accommodation in working practices, and an appreciation of the complex challenges of impairment. For many disabled people, in particular people with mental health problems, such a working environment is hugely beneficial, providing opportunities not available in the mainstream labour market. Second, we took the argument a step further, drawing on Gibson-Graham's (2006) contention that non-paid work both underpins the social fabric and offers the potential for many more people to make a contribution to the broader socioeconomy. The cases of volunteering and creative arts illustrated how, for many disabled people, unpaid work can provide many of the personal and social benefits of paid employment without the everyday experiences of discrimination *and*, through contributing something of social value, challenge dominant assumptions about the place of disabled people in society.

Together, these examples provide a valuable opportunity to reflect on the ways in which work is understood and valued in contemporary Western societies, and highlight very clearly why seeing paid

employment as a straightforward route to social inclusion is mistaken. Different forms of 'work' – labouring, participating, contributing, making and giving – can generate both objects and actions of social value *and* emplace disabled people (and many others) in new social relations and contexts where their presence is valued and they can build a sense of belonging. This form of 'inclusion' – feeling part of something bigger than oneself – is on a different register from the claimed social inclusion of paid employment. If we think about 'work' differently, as this chapter suggests, then opportunities open up for many more disabled people to play a significant and respected role in society.

It is important to acknowledge that these alternatives to paid employment, with low or no income, will never give disabled people the financial and material security they require. Indeed, social enterprises, volunteering and creative arts could be seen as exploitative, and even supportive of the mainstream low-wage economy. However, for the many disabled people who are finding it increasingly difficult if not impossible to get a paid job in often hostile workplaces, these forms of 'work' offer possibilities of being valued and feeling included. As such, they need to be encouraged as alternative spaces of 'work' where it is not the profit motive that determines the contribution that disabled people can make.

Notes

[1] This research was conducted as part of a project on employment, mental health and the social economy, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. The research was evaluated and approved by the Research Ethics Board of McMaster University, Canada and followed institutionally approved guidelines with respect to informed consent, confidentiality and the right to withdraw. In this section, interview extracts are followed by interviewee code and province of Canada.

[2] In Britain, approximately 28% of disabled adults volunteer compared with 45% of the overall population (Cabinet Office, 2008); in Canada, the figures are 34% and 47% respectively (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2010).

[3] The project was funded by the Nuffield Foundation (2008-10). The research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Dundee, UK.

[4] All names used are pseudonyms.

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