

## **Charity, hit hard by COVID-19, set to launch international virtual disability event**

Disability Awareness Day (DAD) is recognised as the largest annual event of its kind in the world. Due to COVID-19, the 29<sup>th</sup> event will be held virtually online via [www.dadvirtual.org.uk](http://www.dadvirtual.org.uk) it is totally free, and goes live at 10am on Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> October. A week of free, complimentary workshops will also be available the following week between Monday 26<sup>th</sup> till Friday 30<sup>th</sup>. The website will remain available online for the year ahead.

DAD is a 'pan disability event which promotes a culture that focuses on what disabled people can-do'. Event Co-ordinator Dave Thompson MBE DL co-founded the organising charity Warrington Disability Partnership (WDP) in 1991 and the annual DAD event in 1992. Held in a tented village on the grounds of Walton Hall and Gardens Warrington, DAD provides a wide range of features including information, advice and guidance on products and services, a sports zone, a performing arts marquee, and entertainment for all. It has inspired similar events in over a dozen countries worldwide including Cameroon, Gibraltar, Uganda, Thailand and India, and has attracted special guests including members of the Royal Family and Ministers for Disabled People. The Royal Air Force have also supported past events with flypasts from the Red Arrows and WWII Dakota's. WDP was presented with the prestigious Queen's Award for Voluntary Services in 2006 in recognition of DAD's Army of volunteers who ensure the show runs smoothly.

In 2019, the event was supported by dozens of businesses, statutory and voluntary service providers including over 100 disability charities, with more than 25,000 visitors attending on the day. Over 600,000 people have attended past events, and charities have not only raised awareness about what they do, they have also raised over £1million for good causes.

This year, over 200 virtual exhibitor stands have been booked, as well as an impressive line-up of performers in the Arts Marquee, with 2018 Britain's Got Talent winner, Lee Ridley, best known as Lost Voice Guy, heading the bill. Plus over a dozen organisations will be promoting a wide variety of inclusive sports and activities such as scuba diving, cycling, wheelchair rugby and basketball, dance, angling and Tai Chi.

DADV2020 is dedicated to the memories of two members of the DAD team who have sadly died of Coronavirus, Peter Ives and Colin Whitfield, who together contributed nearly 50 years of voluntary work to DAD and WDP.

Exhibitors from across the region, the UK and as far afield as Israel and Australia will be showcasing their products and services including disability and age related support groups, health and social care, mobility and independent living equipment, education and employment, independent living options, magazines and exhibitions, arts, crafts and activities, sports and leisure, welfare benefits advice, housing and supported accommodation, rail travel, police and hate crime, and performing arts.

Tony Brown, Managing Director at Expanse Learning Group the event principal sponsors, said "We are all excited about the potential impact of DAD Virtual. Here at Expanse we learn from other organisations who are delivering education and support to young disabled people, and we love to share our achievements across the industry. DAD Virtual provides us with the platform to do both.

The event has been supported by United Utilities, Warrington & Halton NHS Teaching Hospitals FT Trust, Police & Crime Commissioner for Cheshire, Active Cheshire and the Coronavirus Community Support Fund, distributed by The National Lottery Community Fund, thanks to the Government for making this possible.

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*Picture caption: Virtual event site and marquees at the 2020 Disability Awareness Day.*

**Disability Awareness Day (DAD) is an event organised by the Warrington Disability Partnership (WDP)**

Warrington Disability Partnership is an internationally recognised and award winning user led registered charity founded in 1991. With a team of nearly 50 staff and over 200 volunteers, WDP offers 28 mobility and independent living services in and around Warrington, Liverpool and North Wales, including two Centres for Independent Living and two Shopmobility services.

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