

**Background to the GMCDP Archive Project**

**GMCDP and the Disabled People’s Archive**

The Disabled People’s Archive is run by Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People with the support of [Archives+](http://www.archivesplus.org/) which is part of Manchester Central Library.

In March 2020, the collections donated to GMCDP and its own collection were externally evaluated as 130 linear metres – taking up shelving as long as a line of 14 double-decker buses.

GMCDP is proud to be able to preserve this unique and invaluable resource. It brings together published and unpublished records from a range of organisations, demonstrating the power of collective action and highlights the achievements of the Disabled People’s Movement.

Our overall aim is to ensure as many people as possible can access this significant resource, and the next phase is to systematically catalogue the archive and make parts of it available via open viewing, exhibitions, web access and publications, which we are now able to do through our recently awarded funding from Wellcome. This is an exciting and innovative three year project, which will see the full cataloguing of the DPA, as well as development of accessible archive resources and toolkits, to support the accessibility of not only the DPA archive, but also wider archive collections.

**How did we get to where we are today?**

Shortly after the turn of the millennium, some members of GMCDP began talking about the need to properly house and preserve the history of the Disabled People’s Movement, our activism, creativity and all the hard work involved in fighting for inclusion in society. This led to receiving a grant from Heritage Lottery Fund to undertake a one-year feasibility study into setting up a national Disabled People’s Movement archive. The work for this began in 2004 in partnership with the British Council of Disabled People and Birmingham Coalition of Disabled People. There was also strong support from local interests, such as the Greater Manchester County Records Office, and academics including Colin Barnes from the Centre for Disability Studies at the University of Leeds. Although the project was not set up to collect material, a number of organisations and individuals sent their collections to GMCDP. Some reasons given were groups folding, the fear of material being damaged while being stored in lofts or garages, and a concern that once a person had died their collection would be thrown away by relatives who did not understand its importance. This forms the first cohort of what has become known as the GMCDP Archive.

Although responses to this work were very positive, further funding was not available at the time. Despite this, interest has not diminished. Organisations and individuals have continued to ask GMCDP to receive their precious collections of documents, magazines, posters and much more. In 2016, GMCDP once again had the capacity to consider taking forward the preservation of disabled people’s history. Discussions began with Archives+ - a centre of excellence for heritage and local history based in Manchester Central Library. Archives+ has an interest in what are known as community archives. These are archives produced by the people within the communities the collection embraces. The development of the relationship between GMCDP and Archives+ meant that a second cohort of the GMCDP Archive was deposited with Archives+ between 2016 and 2019.

In June 2018, GMCDP employed an Archive Worker to begin sorting and cataloguing. With the support of Archives+, around 6% of the archive was catalogued by the end of 2019, with another 2% being ‘sorted’ in preparation for detailed cataloguing.

The Archive was formally launched on 9 June 2019 at an event in Manchester Central Library attended by over 70 people. There was great interest in being able to view and handle some of the material from the archive, although the more delicate or rare items were only available to handle using copies, with the originals there to view behind protective film. As part of the launch, an archives themed Coalition magazine was produced.

**The Wellcome Project**

It is thanks to sustained and diligent work by volunteers that the collection has grown to the size it is now. This work, and more people finding out about the archive, especially since the launch in June 2019, has attracted a number of additional collections to Archives+, such as those of the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS 1972-1990), Professor Colin Barnes, Dame Jane Campbell and the Lorraine Gradwell Campaign Clothing Collection.

In summer 2021, GMCDP was awarded a grant by Wellcome, to catalogue and make accessible the first and second cohorts of material which were deposited by GMCDP to the Disabled People’s Archive. Project feasibility and the amount of grant funding available means that the additional collections are out of scope for this project. GMCDP are now recruiting for this exciting and innovative three year project.