

# Research Institute for Consumer Affairs

14 Buckingham Street  
London WC2N 6DS  
01-930 0688

Secretary Peter Goldman, CBE  
Research Director Peter Sand

14  
The Secretary  
Union of the Physically Impaired  
Flat 2  
St. Giles Court  
Dane Road  
LONDON W13

1st December 1982

Dear Sir or Madam

The Research Institute for Consumer Affairs is a charitable trust, closely associated with Consumers' Association. It specialises in research relevant to the needs of the disadvantaged consumer, particularly the elderly and the physically handicapped.

We are now working on a major project which aims to find a way of providing information about the evaluations carried out on aids and equipment for the disabled. We already know that it can be difficult to find out which aids are robust, which function well, and which are safe, comfortable and convenient to use. More details about our project are given on the attached sheet.

We believe that this information must not only be easily available and sufficiently detailed to be of use to professionals but, particularly for cheaper or simpler aids, should also be directly available to people with disabilities themselves.

You will appreciate that we can only design a successful system or provide information that is going to be really useful if we fully understand what information is needed, and in what form it should be given.

We are writing to you to ask you for any ideas, comments or suggestions you may have which would help shape our research. These could be about aids, how people first hear about them, how they are obtained, how they are assessed - whatever you think useful. We are interested in information about small details as well as major issues - please tell us even if you feel you have only a minor point to make.

At this stage we felt that a formal questionnaire would not be an appropriate way of collecting such information. It may help you to read the list on the next page which will give you some idea of some of the things we are considering. We would be very grateful indeed for any information which relates to this or which is relevant to the project generally.

Later on in our research, we will be consulting people more formally - if you could contribute at that stage as well, or know of someone you think we should contact, please note down details.

I hope that you will be able to help us. We are writing to you as part of a sample of people and organisations who are concerned with the problems associated with disability; our consultations would be incomplete without your help.

We would also find it useful to have brief details of your organisation, if possible.

With very many thanks for your help,

Yours sincerely,



David Yelding  
Project Manager

This list has been compiled to give you some idea of the issues we are considering and the questions we are trying to answer. We would be very grateful for any information or ideas you have about any of these - or about anything else you think relevant

#### Information for people with disabilities

What information about aids is needed?

How much of this is already adequately provided?

How do people hear about what's available, do they always get enough of the right advice, are inappropriate aids ever chosen?

Who slips through the information net?

How could evaluative information (ie. how well things work, how long they last, how convenient they are) best be provided?

#### Information for professionals (purchasing and supply officers, occupational therapists, social workers, etc)

What information about aids is needed?

How much of this is already provided?

How could evaluative information (ie. how well things work, how long they last, how convenient they are) best be provided?

Are any new developments (information technology, internal re-organisations, for example) likely to affect the way professionals get information or the type of information they get in the near future?

#### Information distribution

How would professionals or laypeople prefer to get information about aids?

Could any of the following play a greater part in solving any information problems?

- leaflets
- sound cassette tapes
- personal advice services
- demonstrations
- radio and TV programmes
- phone information services
- video tapes
- computer retrieval systems

What other ways of giving information might be effective?

#### General

What is the most useful contribution RICA could make to this subject?

What research or surveys have already been carried out which may throw light on any of the above?

---

# Research Institute for Consumer Affairs

---

# Which? 25

RICA is an independent, non-profit making organisation which was registered as a charity in 1961.

It was set up to provide a complementary service to Consumers' Association (publishers of Which?) and takes as its particular concern the problems of the disadvantaged consumer.

Funding comes from CA itself, from government and from non-manufacturing organisations who commission projects consistent with RICA's aims.

RICA investigations have included assessments of the safety of children's playgrounds, the safety of the drug chloramphenicol, the problems of low-income consumers relating to food prices and evaluations of hospital meals. RICA has always had a strong interest in the problems of the disabled and has tested a range of equipment for the handicapped - most recently on behalf of the ATV programme Link. Other recent work has included a study of the consequences of accidents involving pedestrians, an investigation into the information needs of the elderly and studies for the DHSS on aspects of the welfare benefit system.

The Silver Jubilee project described opposite has been jointly set up by CA and RICA.

The Silver Jubilee Project - Information about Aids for the Disabled. People with disabilities find it difficult to get information about the aids designed for them. Tests of equipment have been comparatively few and the results of these tests can be hard to find or even difficult to interpret.

To celebrate its Silver Jubilee of 1982 CA has joined with RICA for a twelve month project which will explore ways of providing evaluative information about equipment for both people with disabilities and the professionals who advise them.

RICA is working closely with a specially convened committee - the Aids Evaluation Information Group - which represents some of the main organisations associated with the disabled, including the DHSS, the Disabled Living Foundation, the Social Services and relevant charities. RICA will also be consulting widely outside this group, not least with disabled people themselves, to discover what information is needed and in what form it could best be provided.

At the end of the year we hope to produce :

A design for a system of collecting information about aids, storing it and disseminating it in whatever form its users need

A Which? type report based on evaluations already carried out on aids currently available in the UK

A general guide to various categories of aids, showing what features to look for - this should help people decide about aids which have not yet been tested