



ELECTION 2015: Artist will broadcast her 650 austerity stories on eve of election 0

BY JOHN PRING ON MAY 6, 2015

ACTIVISM AND CAMPAIGNING

In the last hours before election day, a disabled artist-activist will highlight the impact of government cuts, with a six-hour performance in which the stories of 650 people at austerity's "sharp end" will be broadcast over the internet.

The performance will take place tonight (Wednesday) at low tide on the foreshore of Ladye Bay, Clevedon, near Bristol, and will be audio-streamed via [the project's website](#).

The reading will be accompanied by the ceremonial firing of 650 small clay human figures, each one paired with an austerity story.

The figures were sculpted last month at low tide on the foreshore of the River Thames over 11 consecutive days and nights by disabled artist-activist Liz Crow, and are made from raw river mud collected by hand from the River Avon.

Each time a figure was made, a corresponding story – covering issues such as benefit reform, local authority spending cuts, homelessness, malnutrition and NHS rationing – was released on social media.

At first light on election morning, the figures will be reclaimed from the bonfire that has been burning through the night, and gathered and prepared for the final phase of the performance, details of which will be announced after the election.

Crow said: "Regardless of an individual's political persuasion, any policy that does this much harm is wrong. Austerity is a policy that has exacted a terrible human cost."

The 650 stories – one for every UK general election constituency – include [61-year old Anne](#), who ran out of money and was living without heating or hot water over the winter until she received help from a charity.

She received disability living allowance and pension credit, in total about £120 a week, but her weekly electricity bill

DNS is run by journalist John Pring

To contact him:

Telephone: 01926 930519, 07776 206595**Email:** john@disabilitynewsservice.com

ACCESS



LATEST STORIES



MAY 8, 2015

0 3

COMMENT: What now? Tory victory provides clear course for DNS



MAY 6, 2015

0 0

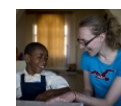
ELECTION 2015: Greens demand IDS apology for 'misleading' voters on benefit deaths



MAY 6, 2015

0 0

ELECTION 2015: DPOs announce '17 policies to reclaim our futures'



MAY 6, 2015

0 0

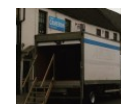
ELECTION 2015: Golden Paralympian's concern at government cuts to 'safety net'



MAY 6, 2015

0 0

ELECTION 2015: Artist will broadcast her 650 austerity stories on eve of election



MAY 6, 2015

0 0

ELECTION 2015: Cameron's visit from 'human cost of austerity' project



MAY 6, 2015

0 2

DWP told to publish ESA deaths report, after two-year delay

MAY 6, 2015

0 0

ELECTION 2015: Lawyers pledge

alone was £40.

Anne said: "It was hell. I felt like I was on my last breath. There was one day when I even started thinking silly things, about how I could go on. But then I got the oil [from the charity]. I know I wouldn't be here today if that had not happened."

Another story is that of James, who was deemed unfit for work by Atos after an occupational medical assessment and lost his job, but was then assessed as "fit for work" by the same company when he subsequently applied for employment and support allowance.

Another of the 650 stories describes the situation faced by Julian, a wheelchair-user who had been diagnosed with kidney failure, and was 47 when he died.

When the coalition's bedroom tax was introduced, he was told he would have to move to a smaller property, which would mean the loss of his essential dialysis room.

He said at the time: "Put simply, if I downsize, I die."

Crow has described We Are Figures as "a political artwork, but intentionally not party political", and says she wants to raise questions about "how we treat each other, what kind of society we want to be, and what role we might each of us have in bringing that about".

She told Disability News Service this week that We Are Figures was reaching "an extraordinary range of people", from people sleeping on the foreshore of the Thames because they had nowhere else to stay, to a smartly-dressed City worker who was "shocked" by what he learned of the impact of austerity.

Crow said that tomorrow's general election would trigger conversations, but the election was "not what was going to solve this".

She said: "This project is one more thing to try and reach people with the reality of what is happening and to support them to see what role they have in changing it.

"It is trying to open up conversations that badly need to happen to turn this around."

Many people have come up to Crow and her team during the project, pointed to the figures, and said: "It could be me there. That is happening to me, too."

One carer told Crow how he had been "interrogated" by the Department for Work and Pensions and accused of not being a carer and of "defrauding the system", even though he believed they knew he was legitimate and were just "setting out to frighten him".

Crow said austerity had had a "catastrophic impact", as demonstrated by the stories represented by the 650 clay figures.

She said: "We have had people who have died in ways absolutely associated with austerity, who certainly would not have died without the implementation of austerity.

"But also there are people in there who it has not had a significant practical impact on, but the level of insecurity and day-to-day fear [has been]catastrophic.

"I would look at my own situation and I would say I had managed to pull together a kind of fragile security before this, and that has gone.

"Even those of us who are currently managing it, I think we are managing it despite [what is happening]and we know things stand to get a lot worse. And then there are other people who are not managing."

Although the project is not party political and is not just about the election – but also its aftermath and the likelihood of further cuts justified by austerity – Crow said she was nervous about its outcome.

She said: "I don't think there has ever been an election when my stomach has churned to the extent of this one.



free help for disabled voters on election day

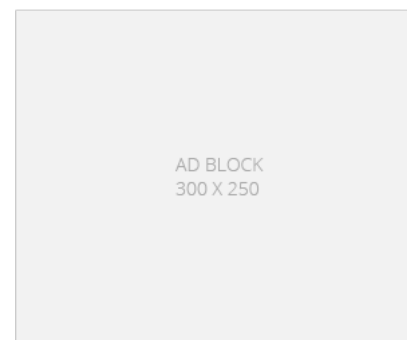


MAY 5, 2015

0

UPDATED: The story of the general election campaign, in 30 news stories

ADVERTISE WITH DNS



TRAFFIC COUNTER

Pages

Pages | Hits | Unique
Last 24 hours: 10,745

Last 7 days: 67,683

Last 30 days: 233,879

Online now: 57

"I am afraid what way the vote will go, [although] whatever way it goes we are just in for more austerity.

"The increase in inequality over the last five years and the idea of that continuing – and continuing to increase – is really frightening."

Crow said she agreed with many disabled people that there was no political party that represented their interests.

Although the Green party has pushed an anti-austerity line, and included a number of policies designed to boost disability rights and inclusion, its manifesto also includes a commitment to legalise assisted suicide, a position strongly opposed by most of the disability movement.

Crow said: "It is quite something to have a party saying, 'We would stop austerity but we would introduce assisted suicide.'

"I don't see anyone who really represents us."

The political sensitivity of the project has hit home twice in the last few days, with two local authorities – one Labour and one Conservative – banning the exhibition from visiting their area.

One of the councils confirmed a booking for the We Are Figures exhibition but then cancelled it with just 48 hours' notice after taking advice from lawyers.

Crow said: "A lot of local authorities are nervous, partly because of the budget cuts, so they have lost any courage they might have had, even when it is in the interests of their own community."

In place of the visit to the London borough, the We Are Figures team visited the start of the central London May Day rally – which was marking International Workers Day – and then moved to the rally's finishing point in Trafalgar Square.

The following day, they visited Witney, the constituency of the prime minister, David Cameron.

0%



USER RATINGS (3 VOTES)



austerity

Liz Crow

We Are Figures

SHARE.



< PREVIOUS ARTICLE

ELECTION 2015: Cameron's visit from 'human cost of austerity' project

NEXT ARTICLE >

ELECTION 2015: Golden Paralympian's concern at government cuts to 'safety net'

RELATED POSTS



MAY 8, 2015

3

COMMENT: What now? Tory victory provides clear course for DNS



MAY 6, 2015

0

ELECTION 2015: DPOs announce '17 policies to reclaim our futures'



MAY 6, 2015

0

ELECTION 2015: Golden Paralympian's concern at government cuts to 'safety net'

0 Comments

Disability News Service

Login

Recommend

Share

Sort by Newest



Start the discussion...

Be the first to comment.

ALSO ON DISABILITY NEWS SERVICE

WHAT'S THIS?

ELECTION 2015: Labour promises WCA reform, an end to the bedroom tax... ..

1 comment • 22 days ago

iNgobe — No provision for those too disabled to work, in a party for WORKERS only! So that's a continuation of the Make Work Pay ...

COMMENT: What now? Tory victory provides clear course for DNS

3 comments • a day ago

outinthecold — "Who was there to vote for if you were looking for progress on disability rights over the next five years?" Labour. ...

DWP carries out threat to ban questions from Disability News Service

17 comments • 22 days ago

dns Disability News Service — Thanks, James. I appreciate your thoughts. The ultimate goal is for DNS to be successful enough to take ...

ELECTION 2015: Liberal Democrats want BSL recognition and a single assessment

1 comment • 22 days ago

iNgobe — 'Complex Case Teams' based at Jobcentres... for claimants 'who may never be able to work'? So policies to demonize and ...

Subscribe

Add Disqus to your site

Privacy

ABOUT

Disability News Service (DNS) is run by John Pring, an experienced journalist who has been reporting on disability issues for nearly 20 years.

He launched DNS in April 2009 to address the absence of in-depth reporting in both the specialist and mainstream media on issues that affect the lives of disabled people. read more

LIKE US ON FACEBOOK



Disability News Service

Like

2,302 people like Disability News Service.



Facebook social plugin

SUBSCRIBE TO NEWSLETTER

Email * [input]
First Name * [input]
Last Name * [input]
[SUBSCRIBE]