

Media Release issued by *Changing Faces*

For immediate release

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Online survey shows one third of people with disfigurements do not feel confident applying for jobs they are qualified to do

Changing Faces, the UK's leading disfigurement charity, recently conducted an online employment survey and was shocked to discover the results. Sadly, yesterday's media coverage of the £6m award to Penny Johnson for her 'botched facelift' will do little to improve this situation because it suggested that it is not possible to work in a high profile arena when your face is less than perfect.

James Partridge, Chief Executive of *Changing Faces*, says "it is profoundly disturbing that in the UK today people whose faces look unusual cannot expect their skills and knowledge to be more important to potential employers than how they look. If this situation is to improve, two things need to happen:

First, we need to make sure that individuals who have birthmarks, skin conditions, burns, scarring after violence or after surgical mistake that make their appearance 'different' get the support they need to face the world with confidence – and especially advice on how to manage other people's reactions. *Changing Faces* is the only UK-wide charity offering this practical and emotional support and knows that many many people don't get any support at all.

Second, we also need to make sure that employers understand that they cannot discriminate against people on the basis of how they look. Most employers know that it is against the law to reject someone because of their gender or race but do they know, or care, that it is against the law to reject someone because they have a disfigurement. Thanks to *Changing Faces*, the Equality Act provides legal rights for people with severe disfigurements and protects them from appearance-related discrimination but so far there have been very few cases taken to tribunal and there is no monitoring of numbers of people with disfigurements within the workplace".

Comments from clients include: "I got more and more disheartened when interview after interview, I would walk into the room and see the panel's faces when they looked up and saw me – they really didn't know how to deal with my disfigurement and this no doubt affected how they judged me. "

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Notes for Editors

- For further information, or to arrange an interview with a *Changing Faces* representative, please contact Rekha Patel, Press and Communications Officer on 020 7391 9276 (email rekhap@changingfaces.org.uk).
- In January 2008, a public attitude survey of 1000 people showed 9 out of 10 people have unconscious negative attitudes towards people who have disfigurements. The research also showed that people with facial disfigurements are likely to be marginalized because little is expected of them, both socially and professionally. The Face Equality campaign was launched in May 2008. The aim of the campaign is to make sure that everyone, irrespective of their facial appearance, is treated equally and fairly. In May 2009 *Changing Faces* launched the Face Equality at Work Membership Scheme. The scheme enables the charity to work in close partnership with employers to create an environment where employees are valued for their skills and talents and not judged by their appearance. Members include, Barclays, BT, Marks and Spencer, Shell UK and Tesco.
- *Changing Faces* is a UK Registered Charity, No. 1011222, launched in 1992 by James Partridge OBE, DSc (Hon), who sustained severe burn injuries following a car accident at the age of 18. The charity supports and represents people with disfigurements* of the face or body from any cause.
- *Changing Faces* employs a team of specialists who offer emotional support, practical advice and social skills strategies to children, young people and adults who have facial or body disfigurements and their parents and families. The help enables them to manage public reactions and succeed in every part of their lives. The charity also offers a consultancy and training service to health professionals, teachers and employers on best inclusive practice in teaching, recruiting or providing customer service for people with disfigurements. It also raises public awareness and campaigns for social change.
- Over 1 million people in the UK have a disfigurement to the face or body. Over 500,000 people have disfigurements to the face – one in every 111. Disfigurement can affect anyone, at any time or at any age. A disfigurement may be present at birth as a result of a birthmark or a craniofacial condition. Scarring, paralysis and other disfigurements can also be acquired following an accident, violence, an eye or skin condition, a surgical mistake, or cancer surgery.

* Note: 'Disfigurement' is a collective word *Changing Faces* uses when referring to the effect that any trauma or medical condition or their treatment can have on the appearance of a face or body, making it look different, unusual, scarred or asymmetrical, or cause it not to function normally. It is used in the UK's Equality Act 2010 protecting people from discrimination. But we recognise that disfigurement is not a term preferred by many people in the UK who are affected. They rightly prefer when describing themselves to say 'I have a birthmark' or similar.

- For further information, please go to: www.changingfaces.org.uk

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