

National Coalition for Independent Action

It's about power, stupid!

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Newsletter No: 13

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News from the Coalition

NCIA Assembly meeting – 2nd November

The next Assembly meeting will take place on the 2nd November in the afternoon, in London. If you're an Assembly member and you intend coming, can you let us know please, so we can keep an eye on numbers. Help with travel costs is available.

If you're not an Assembly member but want to know more, please email the office on indyaction@yahoo.co.uk and we'll tell you all about it.

Standing up for our Rights – together we can

The Coalition is now working with advice and rights groups in Hackney, Gloucester, Leicester and Cardiff to fight against the effect on local people of oppressive bureaucratic, legislative and political practices and to assert their own autonomy in acting for local people. The picture of independent advice services is common in all four areas: increasing demand for help; inadequate provision of neighbourhood-based advice services, especially for black and minority ethnic communities; cuts to both generalist and specialist advice services.

But all is not gloom. In Hackney, Gloucestershire and Cardiff attempts by the Legal Services Commission to force one-size-fits-all Community Legal Advice Centres on to local areas have failed: in Cardiff and Hackney because of opposition by local groups; and in Gloucestershire because local authorities realised that they were bad news for local people and for their own budgets. And in Leicester, where there is a CLAC run by the A4E, the newly formed Action Advice Leicester will be monitoring the quality of service provided by this model of advice, to make sure that local people get a good deal from public money. The Hackney Advice Forum has got money to support bilingual advisers to tackle the pressures of those whose first language is not English. In Cardiff and surrounding areas, a small group of advice agencies are exploring how they can join together under a joint LSC contract in a way which will benefit local people. All four areas hope to draw up their own plans for independent advice in their areas, including the valuable role of advice based within multi-purpose neighbourhood groups. They will use their plans to develop services in their areas

and to negotiate with Councils and other interested parties. More information about this work can be found on our website or by contacting Penny Waterhouse indyaction@yahoo.co.uk

Organising, mobilising and keeping-on-keeping-on

Plans for new Law Centre bucks the trend

We are delighted to learn that a highly motivated group of people in Harrow have decided to buck the trend in the advice world and are setting up a new Law Centre for the area. The Harrow Law Centre Steering Committee aims to provide both free and independent legal advice, and a focus on public legal education to the local community. The advice needs of children and young people will specifically be catered for.

From the start the Group was unanimous that the law centre should be absolutely independent. Funding will not be sought from the Local Authority, and the group will ensure that the Law Centre is not reliant on any one source of funding.

Fundraising began in April 2009 and the money has begun to arrive. It now seems possible to establish a basic service by the end of this year, once premises have been secured.

Chair Pamela Fitzpatrick said: "Although at the start of this venture the prospect of setting up a new organization seemed somewhat daunting, particularly in the current climate, we have been surprised that generally we have received huge support. We still have a huge way to go, but this venture has reminded me of the reasons why so many of us went into advice work, and place so much value on an independent voluntary sector.

A website is under construction and the address will be www.harrowlawcentre.org.uk.

Want a moan about the Job Centre?

An unemployed workers group has set up a blog for people around the country to post all the abuse they get and hear in the jobcentre. If you want to add your own experiences then you can find it here - www.overheardatthejobcentre.wordpress.com .

The Real Third Way - Civil Society & Its Independence

Is the title of an upcoming 21st Century Network meeting on Thursday October 15th at 6.30pm. The focus of the meeting will be around the tension caused within the voluntary sector through commissioning to larger voluntary groups and the implications for civil society.

Sadly the meeting is to take place at the House of Commons, which some of us don't like to be seen in (we have our reputations to think of), a point we have taken up with the organisers (you can catch it here: <http://21st-centurynetwork.com/blog/?p=1404>

If you want to find out more and register then go to [21st Century Network](http://21st-centurynetwork.com).

New campaign to simplify licenses for community events

The regulations governing the licensing of public community events have got up the nose of Richard Searight, who has started a campaign to simplify things, arguing for the creation of a new single permanent license for groups wanting to put on fundraising and other events.

To spotlight the issue Richard and his mates organised a series of 'Tearing up cheques for charity' events, where people destroy cheques that cannot be given to good causes because the events are not officially licensed. You can have a look at what they are up to here:

<http://communityevents.2day.ws/CommunityEvents/>

NAVCA objects to 'grant dependence'

NAVCA has objected to the use of the term 'grant dependence' by the Adventure Capital Fund (the "ambitious new style of funder for community enterprise"). The Fund (Chair - Stephen Bubb, ACEVO) has been appointed to deliver Communitybuilders, the £70 million government programme for "investment in community-led organisations looking to develop long-term viability". In recent guidance on the Communitybuilders Fund, ACF refers to 'grant dependence', indeed saying "organisations need to move away from grant dependence". NAVCA thinks that this language, and the thinking which underlies it, damages the interests of the local voluntary and community sector.

Grant funding, NAVCA argues, is a legitimate and effective means for funders to achieve their desired outcomes, have relatively low transaction costs and can represent excellent value for money. The term "grant dependence", they say, is used to discredit grant funding, often in contrast with sources of earned income, such as contractual arrangements and trading activity.

"Grant funding plays a vital role in supporting local voluntary and community action and preserves the independence of the sector by maintaining the freedom and capacity of voluntary and community organisations to influence their own destinies and pursue their own missions and charitable objectives. In contrast, the experience of our members is that an over-reliance on contractual arrangements can result in voluntary and community organisations simply becoming agents for the delivery of closely specified state services, based on payment by results, where risks are inappropriately transferred onto providers. It may therefore be more apt for the Adventure Capital Fund to warn against "contractual dependence", rather than "grant dependence". Well said!

In Defence of Youth Work still expanding

In addition to the In Defence of Youth Work blog,

(<http://indefenceofyouthwork.wordpress.com/>), there is also now a Facebook group where you can pick up on and contribute to the debate. In no time at all it has attracted 283 members. You can clock it here:

<http://www.facebook.com/search/?q=in+defence+of+youth+work&init=quick#/group.php?gid=90307668820>.

Charities must not run prisons

Outraged by the prospect of charity involvement in running prisons, Kevin Curley, Chief Executive of NAVCA, has started his own campaign to oppose these developments. Says Kevin: "It's fine for charities to provide education, training, advice, mentoring and support services within prisons, but not, in my view, to run them. Whatever is said about using imprisonment to rehabilitate offenders the primary purpose is to incarcerate as a punishment. Even if that is a legal charitable purpose - and it seems most unlikely to me - it cannot be right for charities to do it."

Fuelled by a Facebook Group, the initiative has got some good publicity and strong support from the Howard League for Penal Reform. There's also an interesting debate about the issues here: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/sep/03/charities-marketisation-private-partnerships>

You can join up here:

<http://www.facebook.com/search/?q=charities+must+not+run+prisons&init=quick>

People and Planet seek judicial review of RBS climate chaos funding

Our friends over at People & Planet, alongside [World Development Movement](#) (WDM) and [Platform](#), are taking the Treasury to court, seeking a Judicial Review to stop the Royal Bank of Scotland pouring money into projects which are linked to climate change, environmental destruction and human rights violations. They will argue that the government has failed to do a proper assessment of the impact of the way RBS-NatWest runs its business. A judge has granted a hearing in the High Court on the 20th of October to make the case. You can catch up on this here:

<http://peopleandplanet.org/ditchdirtydevelopment/legalchallenge/takeaction>

'Thriving Third Sector' or one that's going down the chute?

Recession hits charities reserves

More evidence that our 'thriving third sector' may not be actually thriving at all comes from a recent Charities Aid Foundation survey. 322 voluntary agencies were asked how the recession was affecting their income. 41% said that they received less funding than they had budgeted for in the previous three months and 60% of these said they had used reserves to meet the shortfall.

Voluntary sector soft target for cuts says NCVO

In launching a new report (*The State and the Voluntary Sector*) NCVO warns that the Government could see charities and voluntary organisations as a "soft target" for cuts. About one third of the sector's income (£12bn from a total of £33bn) comes from statutory sources and about 25,000 agencies get more than three-quarters of their income from the State. Voluntary organisations that provide social services receive more State income than any other sub-sector, followed by employment and training organisations, according to the report.

Striking a note of touching naivety Seb Elsworth, director of strategy at ACEVO commented that public service delivery was more about partnership than patronage and continued funding depended primarily on voluntary organisations being able to demonstrate the value of their work. Backed up by a Cabinet Office spokesperson who said: "This is a Government committed to delivering public services through the third sector and that has a record that puts the third sector at the very heart of public service delivery." Nothing much to worry about then really.

If you want the NCVO report you can download it here http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/uploadedFiles/NCVO/What_we_do/Research/Almanac/NCVO_2009_The_State_and_the_Voluntary_Sector.pdf

Exceptional pressures will alter the face of the voluntary sector

Another statement of the obvious from the great and the good, but one that supports our Coalition position. A panel of "voluntary sector leaders" (the 'Recession Watch Panel') has concluded that the voluntary sector will look significantly different after the recession because of changing patterns of public spending and commissioning, and the rise of social enterprise.

Paul Breckell, executive director of finance and corporate resources at the RNID, said public spending cuts and the trend to larger contracts in government commissioning could polarise the sector between huge charities and small community groups. "The worst is yet to come because of the sector's reliance, directly or indirectly, on the public sector," he said. "The Government's desire to commission large contracts could require even the largest charities to collaborate or merge to win public sector work", he added.

Well done for getting there, but what are you going to DO about it?

Freedom of Information Act will not apply to charities

An extraordinary example of warped logic comes with the Ministry of Justice's announcement that charities which deliver public services should not be subject to the Freedom of Information Act. The decision specifically relates to "contractors who provide services that are a function of a public authority", so there's no doubt about the link to public services and that the charities in the frame here are those sub-contracted to the State.

The Ministry's view is that the benefits of bringing charities into the Act would be outweighed by the negative impact of the cost of compliance on their charitable causes. So if you find that your job search service or your meals-on-wheels is now provided by a charity, you won't be able to use the Act to find out what they are up to. It's shameful and we should be resisting this. If we ask others to be accountable then this includes us.

However, this move has been welcomed by ACEVO, Stephen Bubb being quoted as saying "Charities should always be transparent, but it is an absurd idea that because you take a penny of public money you should have to respond to hundreds of vexatious demands for information." Where the assumption of hundreds of vexatious demands comes from is not clear, though I guess ACEVO might get a few if it was subject to the Act. And NCVO too agrees - Belinda Pratten, head of policy at NCVO, said extending the act would also have undermined sector independence. Not sure how she figures that.

Meanwhile, Bubb calls for 'constructive solutions' to cuts agenda

Stephen Bubb of ACEVO does not believe we should "rush to man the barricades" over impending cuts to public spending but instead propose constructive solutions to government. Given that we can't imagine Stephen manning any kind of barricade (maybe a proposal to ban the import of that lovely little Italian Pinot Grigio he likes so much?), and that expressions like 'constructive solutions' mean virtually nothing, we are not surprised by his approach. He was reported as proposing: 'that charities should receive individual budgets from the state and then find support from providers that catered for the specific needs of different organisations. This would allow for capacity-building to be integrated into contracts with private sector providers in more complex supply chains, and for developmental support for the sector to be a mainstream corporate social responsibility activity.'

What on earth does all that mean?

And Infrastructure Consortia fiddle whilst Rome burns.....

A report prepared for West Midlands-based Destination: West Midlands concludes that infrastructure organisations are more concerned with their own survival than helping front-line charities. The report - *Get Real, Get Resilient!* is based on interviews with infrastructure groups in the West Midlands, but author Barbara Parkinson says the findings are likely to be replicated across the country. "Most West Midlands infrastructure consortia are not - either individually or collectively - prepared for the recession or for supporting their front-line organisations," the report says. "They need to become less defensive about their expertise gaps and to develop expertise-based sharing arrangements."

I couldn't find the report on their website - <http://www.destinationwm.org.uk/> - but you can email them from there and ask for it (that's what I've done....)

Talking of which.....a personal account from a CVS

We've received a powerful article from someone who used to work for a CVS and found herself tangled up with Capacity Builders and the 'fit-for-purpose' industry. In 'Am I a waste of money?', Charlotte Pell bemoans the work plan templates, the outcomes frameworks, the best-practice, the consortium monitoring forms, the self assessment toolkits, the fit for purpose criteria, the FAQ's and the expenditure spreadsheets, all designed or commissioned by "someone in London who is, 'committed to a vibrant and independent third sector'".

She quotes a CVS Director as saying "Increasingly in order to survive (voluntary organisations) are being forced into doing things they don't particularly want to do, and stopped from doing what they do want to do". We've put the article up on the website if you want to have a look.

The corporates come a cropper

DWP employment programmes in meltdown

The Government's Welfare to Work programme is in tatters as several of the large charities involved discover that all this corporate, big business, money-making is not as straightforward as it appears. So far:

- the RNID has pulled out of eight New Deal for Disabled People programmes and three Pathways to Work programmes (value £500,000, 14 staff laid off);
- Action for Blind People (£121,000) has stopped being a Pathways sub-contractor to A4e, Work Directions and the Shaw Trust (9 laid off);
- The RNIB, also into sub-contracting, (to 'England to Action') has abandoned a Pathways subcontract;
- And the troubled Shaw Trust - the largest voluntary sector provider of employment services for disabled people - turned a £7.4M surplus in 2007/8 into a whopping £2.8M loss in the following year.

All have blamed higher costs than they expected and greater difficulties in meeting their targets because of the recession, which has made the contracts "unsustainable". Well, well, well. Whilst one is tempted to say 'serves you right, you were on the wrong track anyway', the important question is that, as these charities abandon their work with unemployed and disabled people, who is going to do it?

Jim Knight, the Minister responsible said that prime providers were responsible for managing subcontractors. "Providers may have underestimated challenges and set high targets but we are working to improve performance," he said. "Many of the contracts run for three years and, due to start-up costs, providers would not be expected to make a profit immediately." That doesn't sound very helpful, Jim.

A4e watches its back

In the last newsletter we reported on A4e and other DWP contractors being investigated for fraud. We also pointed to the 'Watching A4e: making profits from the poor' website, which almost immediately disappeared. We asked A4e if they had anything to do with stifling this criticism and they said yes, they did: "In answer to your question, yes we did advise the internet service provider that some material on Watching A4e was defamatory and requested its removal. The ISP chose to close the site down..... We make no objection to criticism per se, but will act exceptionally against the most damaging and defamatory allegations."

Watching A4e has, however, found a new service provider and can now be found at <http://www.a4tea.co.uk/> (though there's not much here)

More sub-contracting muddles

We hear of more sub-contracting muddles as the 'new order' of commissioning and competing takes hold. For example, in Sussex, Job Centre contracts to find volunteer placements for unemployed people went to British Trust for Conservation Volunteers who prompted sub-contracted CSV to do the Sussex bit and Volunteering England the Surrey bit. As our correspondent said: "Perhaps Marks & Spencer got Kent". Local volunteer centres were upset that the first they knew of the work was the sub-contractors ringing up to say they couldn't make their numbers, and what about some help please? The Job Centre Plus 'Regional Relationships Manager' apparently acknowledged "there were issues that perhaps were not recognised at the start".

Our correspondent then rather eloquently went on: "There is such a difference in where the local volunteering network is coming from, as opposed to all these short-term opportunists. When a contract like the CSV one ends - they go. We don't - voluntary action being integral to each local community and a part of the culture and folk memory. The government is getting this really, really wrong, and we need all local organisations and public authorities to stand out against it if (as we all claim) local community means anything at all to us.

Naughty goings-on at Novas Scarman

A Wikileaks reveals the extent of financial incompetency, bullying, mismanagement, cronyism and general naughtiness that has been apparently going on amongst senior managers and their mates inside 'social enterprise' giant Novas Scarman Group ("People creating a better world"). The leak publishes a report by external accountants BDO Stoy Hayward into the Group's finances, conducted at the Housing Corporation's request. This not only revealed large and unsustainable debts which ran the organisation close to, or over the limit of, insolvency, but also reported financial anomalies, and allegations against the former CEO Michael Wake of cronyism, bullying, jollies to Malaysia on expenses, promoting his ex-girlfriends, buying art works, nepotism and generally behaving, in the words of the report, like "a dominant Chief Executive"!

Novas Scarman and the Tenant Services Authority (for whom it was produced) intended to keep the report secret and the latter, although finding that the charity "did not exercise full management of its financial affairs" decided to take no further action. Michael Wake and others

involved were, of course, by that time, far away. Nevertheless, sounds like 'clubism' to us. And now, of course, you can't turn to the Freedom of Information Act to find out what's going on with this charity.

One especially unfortunate consequence of this debacle is that the future of Arlington House, the homelessness agency in Camden, may now be in doubt. Because of the way the hostel was sold on to One Housing Group, the covenant that the building must be used for "social housing at affordable rents for single homeless people" was breached. This makes it vulnerable to take over by private developers.

Novas Scarman has twice threatened Wikileaks with legal action, demanding that the report be withdrawn. Wikileaks has refused and the report can be seen here - http://www.wikileaks.org/wiki/UK_charity_Novas_Scarman_go_after_WikiLeaks_to_suppress_corruption_report%2C_6_Jul_2009. Novas Scarman's statement can be seen here - <http://static.novas.org/files/nsgwelcomesreport-468.pdf>

The madness continues.....

Charity Commission endorses PQASSO Quality Mark

The remorseless march of quality assurance strides on. Last time we reported that CES's 'externally credited' PQASSO had snared its first victim. Now comes the news that the Charity Commission has thrown its weight behind the [PQASSO](#) Quality Mark. The Commission has announced that charities achieving level two or three of the Quality Mark would be able to display a Charity Commission-endorsed stamp of approval.

Suzi Leather, chair of the Commission, said the Mark would demonstrate to donors that charities that held it were well run. She was "delighted to welcome the PQASSO Quality Mark to our growing family of endorsed quality standards. Without evidence of both beneficiary need and a charity's ability to meet that need in terms of quality and fitness for purpose, there is no compelling reason for a funder to hand over cash or a commissioning authority to award the contract."

Just to be clear on our position here. There is nothing wrong with tools and resources that help agencies raise their act. But it's for people who know their own work and clients to decide the best way to do it well. Over the years PQASSO may well have done that for some groups. The problem comes when people are told that they HAVE to get particular certificates or endorsements, as a condition of funding, especially when the QA systems involved don't actually assure anything as far as the punters are concerned. And what is the motivation of CES here - why should they want Charity Commission endorsement? To stitch up the market; sell more copies; enhance their reputation; secure the 'brand' of quality assurance? Maybe we've got it wrong here but it all looks very smelly to us. Maybe CES could tell us what their business plan says about their work on PQASSO?

A quarter of the adult population to face CRB checks?

News reports indicate that up to 11 million people, a quarter of the adult population, may, from next month, be subject to CRB checks. That will take a while to process. The changes being brought in by the Independent Safeguarding Authority ('independent' is a bit of a misnomer here

as the ISA is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Government) will require any adults who have "frequent and intensive" contact with other people's children, within the context of any group or organisational activity, to be regarded as volunteers who will be required to register with the ISA. Does this include the person who delivers the milk? Those who fail to register by July 2010 will face a fine of £5,000.

Response from the sector has been mixed. For example Elizabeth Hoodless from CSV said that many volunteers resented the intrusion caused by CRB checks and many are just stopping doing it. Whereas Mike Locke from Volunteering England obviously thinks this is OK: "The new vetting and barring scheme has advantages over the present CRB system. It will continuously monitor the status of volunteers and should alert volunteer-involving organisations should volunteers cease to be suitable to work with children and vulnerable adults."

But outrage from the public has forced the Government to step in. Now the Chair of the ISA, Sir Roger Singleton is to 'review' the definition of 'frequent and intensive' and report to Children's Secretary, Ed Balls, by December. Might be better if the 'review' also included a review of the extent to which CRB checks prevent abuse of vulnerable people, a review of the issues that are likely to encourage or discourage volunteering, and a review of the civil liberty implications of subjecting $\frac{1}{4}$ of the population to this kind of scrutiny.

Commissioning – the 'That Takes The Biscuit' award

Here's a good candidate. Agency A, a well established voluntary organisation that had been doing sound work with young people, largely on a mixture of grants and trust income, is told that it has to bid for its own grant. £75k a year was the spec - a historic sum that had long since lost touch with real costs, so the agency had been effectively subsidising the work from their other fund raising. Nevertheless the contract spec stuck with the £75k, added more work to the existing brief AND THEN SAID TO BIDDERS that they would get an additional 5% of marks in the assessment process IF THEY OFFERED A DISCOUNT!!! That's the way to buy a quality service (not) whilst hammering your 'provider' into the ground.

Let us have your nominations for the 'That Takes The Biscuit' award.

New, shorter Compact comes in for criticism

"Compact refresh consultation events" are being held around the country throughout September and October to take feedback on the proposal to abolish the existing document's five codes of conduct and replace them with three sections on policy development, allocating resources and, commissioning and achieving equality.

Criticism of the proposed approach has come from Voice4Change England (which represents about 6,000 black and minority ethnic third sector organisations) and the Community Sector Coalition (which speaks for community groups). Voice4change opposes the moving of BME commitments into the broader equalities section. "The BME code exists for a purpose," said Vandna Gohil, director of Voice4Change England. "It recognises there are barriers that don't allow BME organisations to exist on a level playing field."

While Matt Scott of the CSC is upset about the loss of the code concerning community groups. "It is not clear where the commitment to that part of the sector and constituency now lies", he

says, adding ""In effect, what we have is a Compact for third sector subcontractors. If you look at the bulk of the content, that is surely how it reads. The majority of the sector will draw its own conclusions and figure that it is not for them."

You can download the 'refreshed' Compact here: <http://compactvoice.live.rss-hosting.co.uk/files/101223/FileName/CompactconsultationpaperFINAL.pdf>

NAVCA will help with mergers but will it help?

Infrastructure umbrella body NAVCA has announced that it will offer support to members who want to merge their operations. With public spending coming under increasing pressure because of the recession, NAVCA is understood to believe there is a strong case for mergers of organisations that deliver infrastructure services to make existing money go further. Whilst this may be a case of 'if you can't beat them, join them' the impact of such mergers, which have already occurred in a number of places typically forming a County-wide CVS, is to retreat from the concept of local CVSs supporting local sectors.

Reports, writings, resources

Windows for Peace – working with Muslim and Jewish young people

Windows for Peace (UK) works with Windows - Channels for Communication (Windows CfC) in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories to promote dialogue and understanding amongst Jewish, Palestinian and Arab young people in the area, as well as the communities in the UK. "At a time when so many of us feel despair at the inability of politicians and communities on both sides of the conflict to make any realistic progress towards peace, Windows offers us a chance to leapfrog the present impasse and support something creative with Palestinian and Israeli youth. These young people are able to show that there is indeed 'someone to talk to on the other side'. They not only give an example to their elders, but also provide hope that the next generation of adults could learn that there is truly an alternative to violence.

The group has produced a Resource Pack written by and for Muslim, Arab, Palestinian and Jewish Young People to facilitate dialogue about the Middle East. You can get more information about the group and the resource pack from their website - <http://www.windowsforpeaceuk.org>

New resource on 'people power'

There's a new publication on neighbourhood involvement knocking around, which has come out of discussions between various professional community workers and led by Dr. Tony Gibson. The result is "*Streetwise, Worldwide, where people power begins*". The group (listed at the back of the guide) met together to consider the ways and means that might become available as part of the response of everyday people to the challenges we all know so well and in particular how to connect with the vast majority of people who have stayed on the sidelines, who are skeptical of those in 'organisations', because most of what they attempt seems to begin and end in talk. The guide will have an official launch towards the end of this year or beginning of next and will exist both as an electronic resource and with the hope that hard copies will be available at a future point.

You can get a copy by emailing Tony on tony.gibson@blueyonder.co.uk to whom you should also address comments and queries.

Independence Matters – new guidance from the Commission for the Compact

A new guide to the Compact and 'third sector independence' has been published by the Commission for the Compact on behalf of the Compact Partnership (Office of the Third Sector, NCVO, Compact Voice and the Baring Foundation). This looks at a number of dilemmas, like what happens if you criticise your funder, or whose voice counts in local policy debates, and then outlines how Compact principles can help to untangle these dilemmas. Some useful tactical material here, although alongside an awful lot of glossy and obscure photographs illustrating we know not what. You can download the report here:

<http://www.compactvoice.org.uk/files/101230/FileName/IndependanceMattersGuidance.pdf>

More 'Third Sector strategies' from Government

Two more Government departments have unveiled their 'visions' for the role of the voluntary and community sector - Department for Children, Schools and Families and Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Both documents makes all the usual noises about vital role, sharing passion, working as partners, value of diversity, etc etc. But, with respect to the DCSF, the point of the exercise is clear enough:

"(We) are taking action to improve commissioning of children's services in order to open up markets and to offer more funding opportunities to third sector organisations. DCSF Secretary of State is also a member of the new Cabinet Office committee formed to examine the barriers faced by third sector organisations in securing and delivering public service contracts." (DCSF)

The DCMS strategy is a softer document, maybe because much more of the Department's interests are delivered through Non-Departmental Public Bodies (like the Arts Council or Sport England) and the role of volunteering is crucial to the issues involved (smaller groups, more informality required and so on)?

You can download these papers here: [Third Sector Strategy and Action Plan: Intention into Action](#) and here: www.culture.gov.uk/reference_library/publications/6144.aspx

Campaign Central – new resource from the Sheila McKechnie Foundation

Campaign Central is a new web-based resource aimed at "connecting, informing and supporting campaigners. The aim is to develop an accessible database of campaigns, news of events and resources intended to be useful to campaigners. An initiative of the Sheila McKechnie Foundation, you can sign up here: <http://www.campaigncentral.org.uk/>

Advice services study shows the pressure on small groups

An interesting study of advice agencies in Hackney, shows the pressures on advice providers (especially the smaller community advice groups) being brought about by changes in relationships with the statutory sector. The report, 'Independent Advice Provision in Hackney: the 'State of the Sector'', highlights the large number of agencies and community groups involved in supporting communities through advice work, and their "difficulties over funding and, more broadly, relationships with local statutory agencies, (which) more often create hindrance rather than help. Funding levels available are inadequate to meet the needs of its users, and the assumptions and approaches of local statutory agencies about the character and value of the work undermines their capacity to maximise impact."

You can get the report from our website.

About this Newsletter

This newsletter is the voice of the NCIA. Views expressed are not necessarily that of everyone involved with NCIA. We aim to issue newsletters regularly to keep you informed of what we and others are doing or saying.

How Can You Participate?

Tell us your news, write articles, sound off with your opinions and feedback but - most important - find ways of taking your own practical action to defend and protect the independence of your work and aspirations.

Talk to us and others via the Coalition website www.independentaction.net or the Coalition email address - indyaction@yahoo.co.uk.

We also welcome offers of help. If you'd like to help make this initiative prosper then please get in touch with us.

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