

# National Coalition for Independent Action

*It's about power, stupid!*

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Newsletter No: 14

December 2009

The last newsletter of 2009. Everyone says this is a bad time to send anything out but I wanted to do it anyway. For we need to mark the passing of the year and anticipate the next one. It's not been a good one, that's for sure, though that may not be true for the Bubbists and their corporate private sector friends, who are progressively taking over our precious public services.

At the other end of the spectrum, community groups have continued to be patronised by the 'empowerment' and 'fit for purpose' brigade, and some in minority communities demonised by the 'if-you're-not-with-us-you're-against-us' mantras of Preventing Violent Extremism and the 'War Against Terror'. And in the middle, the poor old historic voluntary sector, scrabbling for contracts, desperately forming consortia, trying to keep to their purposes and their commitment to local communities. This bit of the sector was recently described by Stuart Etherington from NCVO as the "killing grounds". A shocking - and inappropriate- reference to the Cambodian holocaust. But all the more scandalous in that NCVO and the other so-called representative bodies have done so little to protect and defend the independence and autonomy of voluntary action.

And on the plus side? Well, we no longer need to make the argument about independence; it is commonly recognised as an issue and a threat. Anger is mounting about the pressures on VCS groups to conform both to statutory sector agendas and ways of doing things (our own research into funding experiences in West Sussex being a case in point) and the external economic and political environment is rightly undermining the authority of the Government and our assumed 'partnership' with it. The bail-out of the bankers, with their obscene 'earnings' for incompetence and greed, the arrival of the cuts which will make us, the public, pay for this, MPs expenses and now the Iraq war inquiry, all have changed the mood music.

But this in itself will not change much unless we can find ways to persuade more people to speak out about what they don't like, argue for they do want, and be prepared to follow through on that. Remember it's not what you think that changes the world, it's what you do about what you think. Many of you will remember the playwright Denis Potter who died in 1994. Our inspiration for 2010 is a 3 minute clip of his last interview. You can see it here:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/video/2007/sep/11/dennis.potter> In it, he poignantly describes

the importance of recognising the true reality that surrounds us, that the time is now, not in the future and, though, at the end, he is talking about the Murdoch-dominated media, he could have been speaking for us in the Coalition by saying "yes, it's rescue-able, just - it's up to people to stand up and shout a bit".

Lastly, it's right and proper to say thank you to all of you who have supported and contributed to the Coalition over the last year, to the CIC Directors, the Planning Group and Assembly members; to the Tudor Trust, Network for Social Change, Advice UK, Directory for Social Change and New Economics Foundation, whose support has made so much more possible; and to all of you out there who are still banging away and holding onto the vision, against the odds, of a world of voluntary action that is truly thriving and vibrant. Keep on keeping on.....

## News from the Coalition

### **Tyranny or Democracy at work? Let's create our own ways of managing**

Tired of filling in pointless forms? Excluded from decisions that affect your work and horrified at the rise in salaries at the top? Cowed by a 'culture of fear'? Want to improve democracy at work and management styles that reflect your values, safeguard independence and gets the real work done?

Join us on Saturday, **FEBRUARY 27th 2010** in Nottingham to debate and create alternatives to current management styles and practices which don't work for you, or the people you're there for. NCIA and Nottingham Trent University have joined forces to spark a discussion amongst us about the impact of current management approaches on voluntary and community action and their alternatives.

Chances are, as a manager in a voluntary or community group, that commissioner's specifications, Byzantine application forms, targets, outcomes, evaluations, will have taken over your working life. As a worker you may be faced by managers who have lost touch with client and community needs or are as frustrated as you, but can't see an alternative. We believe that these practices are antagonistic to the values of the voluntary and community sectors: inspection; competition; standardisation instead of standards; top down hierarchies; mechanistic and uncritical quality assurance systems; prescriptive and uniform practices; the concept of "best practice", as if there is only one way of being good; a management elite which holds the power and authority without any forms of internal accountability; and professionalism which stifles the fire in the belly, political action and dissent.

There is no evidence that such approaches give a better result, indeed there is increasing anecdotal evidence that it, and the bureaucracy that surrounds it, leads to poorer services and are a waste of time and money. The loss of discretion and self determination in the way we run ourselves is interfering with the relationships between the citizen, voluntary action and the statutory sector. Check "Inequality - the Best and the Worst" below for what we're talking about.

NCIA is calling on the sector to question these practices and work towards more democratic and effective alternatives. Join us in this, to document what is going wrong, what works better instead and how we can get that inside our organisations.

Places are limited, so book early by contacting Daniel King [daniel.king@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:daniel.king@ntu.ac.uk) 0115 848 2694

## Getting our blogging act together

Although feelings are not unanimous on this one, there is a view that the Coalition needs to be more visible on the increasing number of relevant websites and blogs that debate the state of the sector. This could be commenting on what other people put up, or starting groups of our own. One such is Navcaboodle, the "place for third sector organisations to share, network and discuss", where we now have our own 'Coalition for Independent Action Discussion Group'. To participate in this and the other groups on the site, you need to sign up and can do that here:

<http://www.navcaboodle.org.uk/>

We're planning to do a list for the next newsletter, of the places where it would be good for us to maintain a presence, and it would be neat to have a few volunteers who could agree to keep an eye on a couple each, and make suitably incisive comments when they are needed. Anyone interested in this, get back to us on [info@penandy.co.uk](mailto:info@penandy.co.uk).

## Preventing Violent Extremism – policy position needed

As part of our work to produce a series of policy papers, setting out where the Coalition stands on the issues that concern us, we need to include a perspective on the Government's 'Preventing Violent Extremism' agenda and the response of communities and community organisations to this. We are aware of the mounting anger, and not only in minority communities, about the insidious effects of this policy. Anyone who'd like to be part of the working group to prepare our position, please get in touch with the office at [info@penandy.co.uk](mailto:info@penandy.co.uk).

And while we're on the subject, the Institute of Race Relations has produced a highly critical report called 'Spooked: how not to prevent violent extremism', which you can find here:

<http://www.irr.org.uk/spooked>

## A couple of testimonials

Though we put a brave face on it, our work here in the Coalition can be a struggle. Things are so much worse than even we thought they were, when we started this initiative. So, here's some Christmas cheer from a couple of the testimonials that we have received, which has warmed our cockles.....

"We are all so dominated by those in power in the voluntary sector, the chief execs and change managers that I think we (I) sometimes forget how many great principled people there still are. It highlights why what you are doing is so important. It's not just about the Government funding issues but also the culture that has grown up in the voluntary sector. The Democracy at Work campaign is much needed. Let me know if you want me to do anything on this."

"In 1993 when Care in the Community came on stream, I was Director of Age Concern Manchester and Chair of Voluntary Action Manchester. At VAM we set up a series of meetings for different sections within the vol sec: children, adults, elderly people and so forth. Our purpose was to set out the danger ahead: incorporation, and to enable people to share their experiences of what was happening. We sought ways to reduce the competitiveness we saw as inherent in the new world that was opening up in front of us but without much success. We said then that in 20 or so years' time, the voluntary sector would be forced to re-invent itself. Perhaps through NCIA and other routes, we are seeing the beginning of this. We have a long and powerful history; we must not lose

sight of that." [If you want to see the whole of this piece, then click here: <http://www.independentaction.net/?p=4353> and scroll down to the bottom of the page].

## Organising, mobilising and keeping-on-keeping-on

### Can you hear us? Women's uncensored experiences of detention and deportation

The All African Women's Group, Black Women's Rape Action Project and Crossroads Women's Centre are organising a meeting to present first hand testimony exposing the horrific reality of UK Government policy and practice towards women held in detention and deported from the country.

The meeting will take place on **Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> January** at 6pm in Committee Room 5 at the House of Commons, Westminster. Just turn up if you want to go, but you're advised to arrive half an hour early to get through the security that protects the Mother of Parliaments.

The event will be part of a broader campaign to call to account those responsible for instigating, operating, profiteering and collaborating with detention.

More information from All African Women's Group, [aawg02@googlemail.com](mailto:aawg02@googlemail.com); Black Women's Rape Action Project, [bwrap@dircon.co.uk](mailto:bwrap@dircon.co.uk); or Crossroads Women's Centre, T: 020 7482 2496 F: 020 7209 4761.

### Felixstowe radio goes live

Felixstowe Radio, a brand new community radio station, is now broadcasting on 107.5FM. Run by volunteers (already numbering more than 100), Felixstowe Radio is reaching out to local people. If you want to be part of the action go down to 3 Great Eastern Square [next to the Co-operative Store] and have a chat. They are looking for suggestions for what people locally want to hear, and aim to be a mouthpiece for all who live and work in and around Felixstowe..

Email to [info@felixstoweradio.co.uk](mailto:info@felixstoweradio.co.uk) or call 01394282123 Mob 07799365749

[www.felixstoweradio.co.uk](http://www.felixstoweradio.co.uk)

### FREdome Youth Team win film prize

Coalition supporter Greg Peachey's FREdome-YEA youth team won both the Youth Film category and the Public Vote in the recent 'One minute to save the world' video competition. This means that their film will now be shown to world leaders in Copenhagen. Not only that, the film sparked by far the most discussion. Of all the winning films, it was the one that went beyond raising awareness, beyond slowing down the problems, to resolving them - not just climate change, but also resource depletion - turning the threats of war, waste, excess CO2 and deserts into the solutions.

So, well done to all of them! You can see their film here:

<http://www.1minutetosavetheworld.com/2009/11/stop-global-war-ming/>

### 'What Price Equality?' - Plans for Racial Justice Manifesto

A group of race equality organisations - Equanomics UK, 1990 Trust, Operation Black Vote and JUST West Yorkshire - is working on a Racial Justice Manifesto and invites other interested organisations to join them in this.

"The 2010 Elections offer Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities a unique opportunity to influence its outcome particularly in marginal constituencies. It also offers us an opportunity to articulate our vision and expectations for Race from mainstream parties in relation to meeting the needs of BME communities and Third Sector organisations.

Over the last few years we have witnessed the attrition of Race as a public policy response to the needs of BME communities. Over the next few years, with public service cuts imminent, the recession will undoubtedly have a disproportionate impact on the most marginalised, excluded and poor BME communities.

Our aim is to develop a Racial Justice Manifesto which develops a shared vision for Race Equality."

Expressions of interest and responses should first be sent on to  
[racialjusticemanifesto2010@googlemail.com](mailto:racialjusticemanifesto2010@googlemail.com)

## **Christmas Appeal for women and children seeking asylum**

We don't normally do appeals but with asylum seekers sleeping on floors, many expected to survive on £5 a day vouchers, rape survivors and other torture victims continuing to be sent into detention and more.... This one is special.

Legal Action for Women has launched a Christmas appeal to provide assistance to women and their children over the 'festive' period. All the money raised will go directly to help women in need. None is deducted for expenses and volunteers make the arrangements. Last year's Christmas Appeal helped over 40 core members of the All African Women's Group (AAWG), the self-help group of women asylum seekers based with LAW at the Crossroads Women's Centre. Most women got quite small amounts of under £100 but the difference it made was dramatic.

You can donate on-line here: <https://www.charitychoice.co.uk/donation.asp?ref=21045> or you can transfer money direct to LAW's account (Legal Action for Women, account number - 50728361, sort code - 086001), or send them a cheque to LAW, Crossroads Women's Centre, PO Box 287, London NW6 5QU (email is [law@crossroadswomen.net](mailto:law@crossroadswomen.net))

## **The power of the Intranet – how staff can force a change of policy**

Here's an interesting story of how staff in one organisation were able to use their on-line internal forum to force a change on policy on their management. This concerned a decision to accept sponsorship from a company known to operate dodgy money-lending practices in poor communities. Since the charity worked in such communities, staff took exception to the deal. A lively discussion ensued and which continued beyond the management assertion that all was well and the deal would stand. Not taking no for an answer, the staff continued to speak with one, principled voice and forced the management both to back down and to implement a new vetting procedure for potential new corporate sponsors. You can read the whole heartening tale here:  
<http://www.independentaction.net/?p=4413#more-4413>

## **Unite slams 'choice' in charity services**

The catch-all clarion call of 'choice' undermines charities, their staff and the services they provide, Unite, the largest union in the country, has said. Rachael Maskell, Unite's National Officer, Not for Profit Sector said: 'The use of a nebulous word such as 'choice' implies improved quality services for clients and service users, when the opposite is, in fact, true.'

Rachael told Unite's Community, Youth Workers and Not for Profit conference in Brighton that 'choice' is confined to the few, not the many. The 'choice' is with the commissioners, not the service users and staff. This was compounded by the instability in the funding streams which were often short-term and inadequate for the services required. You can read the full article at [http://www.unitetheunion.com/news\\_events/latest\\_news/promotion\\_of\\_%e2%80%98choice%e2%80%99\\_undermin.aspx](http://www.unitetheunion.com/news_events/latest_news/promotion_of_%e2%80%98choice%e2%80%99_undermin.aspx)

## **Inequality – the best and the worst**

### **Inequality is bad for us all**

Based on some awesome research by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, 'The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better' was published (by Penguin) in March this year. The evidence they have assembled, documents how inequality is having a massive negative influence on our society and how more equal societies fare so much better. And the overall message is that rich people as well as poor people do better in more equal societies.

The Equality Trust has been set up to campaign for action, based on the findings. You can find out more at their website - <http://www.equalitytrust.org.uk/> , where you can see the evidence for yourself and you can download the most significant graphs here: <http://www.equalitytrust.org.uk/resources/slides>

### **But the great British public is not too keen on equality**

Research from the Fabian Society (undertaken July 2008–February 2009 and based on focus groups and two surveys) examines some of the values and beliefs that lie behind public attitudes towards economic inequality and welfare policy. It also explores approaches that might be used to build a public consensus for tackling economic inequality in the UK. Overall this makes depressing reading as it claims that there is little appetite for radical reform - about 20% of the population support action on social justice issues, are matched by another 20% who support free market entrenchment of inequality, both sandwiching a floating mass of middle-earning angry Daily Mail readers who think that not enough is being done to help them i.e. the middle earners.

The authors concluded that: "Participants were generally committed to the idea of 'fairly deserved inequality', whereby certain individuals deserve high incomes because of their superior ability, effort or the contribution they make to society. Participants also defended certain individual rights to wealth, regardless of judgements about whether it was deserved. However, incomes that were perceived as excessively large did often attract condemnation. Many participants exhibited strongly judgemental attitudes towards people on out-of-work benefits, motivated by beliefs about the ready availability of opportunity, and beliefs that those claiming benefits now will not necessarily make a future contribution back to society."

You can see the whole thing here: <http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/attitudes-economic-inequality>

### **And equality doesn't cut any ice down at the Housing Association**

Equality doesn't seem to be much of a priority at the nadir of our corporate voluntary sector - housing associations or 'registered social landlords' as they are now euphemistically called. For a recent report reveals that it is not only city bankers who have their snouts in the trough - the Chief Executives of many of these 'social enterprises' are doing very nicely indeed. John Belcher,

for example, of Anchor Trust, got a very tasty 20% boost last year to take his salary to £391,000 (not forgetting the £36k pension as well). This was partly made up of a 'bonus' (£110k), despite the Trust making a trading loss and closing a number of care homes during the period. Meanwhile, David Cowan, from Place for People, was able to manage on £321,000, David Bennett, from Sanctuary Housing Association, popped a mere £288,000 into his personal account, whilst Keith Exford, over at Affinity South, had to settle for a paltry £260,000.

### **Which will be joy to ACEVO's ears**

ACEVO has just published its annual pay survey of charity chief executives, which apparently reveals that 28% (i.e. only 1 on 4) have had their salaries frozen in the past year and those running smaller outfits (less than £150k a year) have seen their salaries fall to a median average of £33,600 (still more than 20% of the turnover though). The big boys got a raise though - average of 1.7% for those turning over £25M-£100M, taking their median to £104,500.

Stephen Bubb's commentary on all this was typically unhinged (ah, he is such a gift to us!) when he said that charity leaders had shown "commendable" pay restraint during the recession compared with their private sector counterparts and that "charity chief executives are shouldering much of the financial burden of the recession," (excuse me - could you say that again?). One of our newsletter readers posted a rather sharp comment on our website about Mr Bubb. Scroll down to the comment and add your own at <http://www.independentaction.net/?p=4353&cpage=1#comment-63>

Incidentally, another of the ACEVO survey findings was that 93.5 per cent of chief executives and 91.7 per cent of Chairs were white and that men were almost twice as likely as women to be Chairs. Well, well.

### **There is another view – Unite calls for an end to this 'corruption'**

According to the union Unite (60,000 members in the not-for-profit sector), it's not just the housing association bosses who are doing well. They also single out the National Trust, Age Concern and the RSPB who pay large salaries to senior managers. According to Rachael Maskell, Unite's national officer for the not-for-profit sector, excessive salaries corrupt the ethos of the voluntary sector and were an insult to people on average incomes who donated to charities. "I think the general public will be shocked by the scale of the packages that some executives are being awarded," she said. "This sector is losing its sense of what real value is." She called on charities to look closely at their pay scales and "iron out inequalities".

But ACEVO got its own back by pointing out that the two joint general secretaries of Unite, Derek Simpson and Tony Woodley, earned a combined annual package of £308,000 in 2008. Simpson received £186,626 of this!

## **The madness continues.....**

### **Compact hysteria and dizzy 'spin' culminates in Orwellian re-launch**

If it wasn't for the 32 campaigning groups that have now lost their promise of £750k from Capacity Builders, the recent furore over Angela Smith's (Minister for the Third Sector) decision to pull the money would be nothing short of hilarious. The decision, you see, involved the Minister

saying 'stuff the Compact!' The result was that, for a couple of weeks, the whole of the Compact industry was thrown into a state of shocked hysteria.

Egg on the face for Compact Voice, which purports to represent the voluntary sector end of this failed initiative, and who have been trying to persuade us that the Compact 'refresh' (how I hate that word....) consultation indicated a resounding endorsement of the revised 'grail' (despite only getting 80 or so responses). NCVO threatened legal action only to find they didn't have a case. The so-called independent Commission for the Compact pussyfooted about, saying that the decision was deplorable, but at the same time congratulated the Minister for admitting it - "that's the least she could have done" said Richard Corden, Commission Chief Executive. Compact Voice calls for an investigation, but the Commission refuses, saying the Cabinet hadn't yet given them the power to do any investigating. Editorial and commentaries in Third Sector magazine. A virtual petition on <http://www.louder.org.uk/> to try and get the doosh back on track (failed of course). Calls for the launch of the 'refreshed' Compact to be cancelled by Compact Voice, rejected by the Commission ..... and, of course, expressions of deep commitment to the Compact from the guilty Minister, whilst offering her "regrets and apologies" for the breach.

Now, however, the fuss is over, point made and it's all back to business as usual; this from Richard Corden, with touching naivety: "The main thing is to put a lot of effort into promoting the Compact from the new year onwards. One of the things that wasn't done with the original Compact was to promote and sell it to government. It was felt it would implement itself and it didn't. Next year is an important time to make a big splash."

So we got the 'refreshed' Compact re-launch on December 16<sup>th</sup> ([http://www.compactvoice.org.uk/information/101803/102028/compact\\_refresh/](http://www.compactvoice.org.uk/information/101803/102028/compact_refresh/)) and what do we find? A clear primary focus on voluntary organisations operating a sub-contractor role to the state (we know what side their bread is buttered on), to the detriment of those thousands of people engaged in supporting and developing their own communities through their own action, and most outrageous of all, the complete loss of the specific code for work with black and ethnic minority communities.

And to add a further terrifying chill to the whole sorry tale, the document invents a new description for the equalities world - **PEOPLE WITH PROTECTED CHARACTERISTICS**. This Orwellian description will now apparently be applied to black people, others from ethnic minorities, women, disabled people, gay and lesbian people, older people and people who express religious beliefs (which probably in total means the majority of the population!). What the f\*\*k???

But there's more! For then we see the famous five faces of our sector's leaders - Stephen (ACEVO), Kevin (NACVA), Stuart (NCVO), Justin (Volunteering England), and Debra (DSC) - welcoming this scandalous 'new speak' as heralding a new era of partnership between the two sectors

(<http://www.compactvoice.org.uk/files/102067/FileName/StatementofSupportfromfiveleadingsectororganisations.pdf>). Stephen, of course, we've been worried about for some time and his comment quoted elsewhere in this newsletter that charity chief executives have been shouldering much of the burden of the recession, confirms our view that he is in need of a little lie down. Stuart too can be relied upon to say the right cuddly partnership thing, and Volunteering England is hardly at the cutting edge of plain speaking. But Kevin and Debra - what are you doing in this company? Retraction is surely a minimum requirement to get back to some self respect?



Immediate opposition has come from the Community Sector Coalition but that's it. Not a word so far from Voice4 Change England, which has been shafted by the new Compact, and which is run by 'people with protected characteristics', whom one might think would object to being reclassified in this way.

Over here at the Coalition we hate saying 'I told you so' (not), but this is what we wrote about the Compact back in July 2008 - "The difficulty with the Compact reflects wider problems that the sector faces in its relationship with the State. The State has a plan and an intention for the sector, is determined to shape the sector to these intentions, and will do nothing voluntarily to limit the power that it, and their agents at local level, holds over that process. The task facing the sector is to rediscover our own perspectives, consider whether State intentions are compatible with these, recognise that structural differences between statutory and non-statutory are key to our understanding of our respective roles and, above all, organise to redress power imbalances to give us some chance of getting what users and communities want. If we do these things, then a Compact can be a useful weapon in our armoury. But without these things, it will remain a useless piece of paper."

Or expressed rather more succinctly: "When the local authority (or Government) wants to screw you, it will do it anyway, Compact or not". You can see the whole of our article here:

<http://www.independentaction.net/?p=763>

### This month's 'That Takes The Biscuit' award goes to....

#### The South West Forum

The Compact debacle was, of course, the competition this month for our distinguished Huntley & Palmers award. However, the S.W Forum has beat them off. In fact we thought this snippet so compelling that we leaked it to Third Sector magazine.

In its attempts to persuade groups in the S.W to take part in the Government's 'Total Place' pilots, the S.W Forum ("the regional voice of the voluntary and community sector") trumpets that "**participation in the pilot provides the opportunity to influence where public service expenditure cuts can be made**". Wonder where they got the mandate to say that? And has anybody in the S.W yet objected to what its so-called representatives are saying?

#### NHS as 'preferred provider' upsets the privatisation lobby

A decision by NHS agencies in Cambridgeshire to offer the "full range of services" at Hinchingsbrooke Health Care NHS Trust to 'private and third sector' providers has put the cat amongst the pigeons. This franchise - for 7 years - is intended to find someone who can simultaneously "deal with the hospital's historic debt (£38.9M), while improving service quality for patients and securing value for money for taxpayers." Something of a tall order, we'd say, and which itself smacks of blind desperation.

And it prompted a broadside from Unite, who accused NHS East of England of using voluntary sector organisations as a "Trojan horse" to break up the NHS. A spokesperson said: "We cannot put lives at risk in what could be an unstable market place. Charities are the Trojan horse for

privatisation. It is clear that the NHS in the east of England is using the region as a guinea pig for various privatisation initiatives, such as social enterprises."

This was then followed by an announcement from Andy Burnham, the Health Secretary, that the NHS should once again become the 'preferred provider' of health care services, an announcement this time welcomed by Unite. But which prompted an angry response from our old friends at ACEVO who said this was "...profoundly worrying in terms of the third sector's ability to compete on an equal footing. You can't have equality and a level playing field when one provider is preferred. Charities have to be sure when they bid that they have a reasonable chance of winning." To follow up the point various charity directors joined with the pressure group Progress, to write to Burnham urging him to change his mind. Thus creating another conundrum - a leftish think tank urging the Government to consolidate its privatisation programme. Funny world ain't it.

But Unite has the last word: "The not-for-profit sector cannot provide the stability needed for health provision due to the short-term nature of its funding, its high staff turnover and its race to the bottom on staff pay and terms and conditions," said a statement signed by Rachael Maskell, national officer for the not-for-profit sector, and Karen Reay, national officer for the health sector.

## Reports, writings, resources

### **New Rights Guide for Rough Sleepers**

Housing Justice has joined together with Liberty, Zacchaeus 2000 and the Pavement newspaper to produce a new **Rights Guide for Rough Sleepers**. The guide is needed because of the increasing use of heavy-handed tactics designed to force rough sleepers off the streets, such as waking people up and hosing down their sleeping places in the middle of the night, known as Operation Poncho, as used in the City of London. The guide explains the law regarding issues such as stop-and-search, arrest, dispersal zones and urinating in public places. It has been drawn up in collaboration with people who use services like the Salvation Army Drop-in Centre and Women at the Well, who reported the most common and distressing problems they experienced.

Printed copies of the guide are available from Housing Justice ( 0207 920 6600 or email to [a.murray@housingjustice.org.uk](mailto:a.murray@housingjustice.org.uk)). Or you can download it here:

[www.housingjustice.org.uk/publications/publications.htm](http://www.housingjustice.org.uk/publications/publications.htm)

### **Beautiful Star – a benefit compilation for women's charities**

Wears the Trousers magazine (which highlights women in the music industry) has put together a tribute album to the influential folk artist, Odetta Holmes. All the profits from the album will be split between the Fawcett Society and the Women's Resource Centre.

Dubbed the "Queen of American folk music" by Martin Luther King Jr in 1961, Odetta Holmes was one of the most influential recording artists of the 20th century and an important voice of the Civil Rights Movement. By the time she died in December 2008, Odetta had amassed a vast catalogue of folk, blues and spiritual songs and it's from all corners of this that the songs of **Beautiful Star: The Songs Of Odetta** are drawn.

The tribute has been released as a limited edition CD and download, and features established independent artists and newcomers. You can get your hands on it as

<http://wearsthe trousers.bigcartel.com/products>

## **New guide to procurement Law**

NCVO and NAVCA have produced a new guide to the 'bete noir' of the current funding scene called '**Pathways through the Maze - a Guide to Procurement Law**'. It aims to help voluntary groups understand the legal and practical issues of public sector contracting and is written specifically for people working for local charities, voluntary organisations, community groups or social enterprises. It is free to download from the NCVO and NAVCA websites.

"With the sector playing an increasingly important role in public service delivery, the guide is an invaluable tool to help voluntary groups get to grips with what is often a complex process," said Kevin Curley, chief executive of NAVCA. The two umbrella bodies say that they hope the guide will also increase the profile of charities and voluntary organisations in the public sector.

This is an interesting piece of double-speak, for the same guide is quoted in the 'Defending Local Grants' leaflet (see below) as written to help agencies *resist* procurement and commissioning strategies. Looks like another case of running with the hare and hunting with the hounds to us.

## **Updated 'Defending Local Grants' now available**

A list of resources that can be accessed to persuade local councillors and others that grants should be retained has been issued by the Local Grants Forum. This attempts to bring together in one place the different arguments that can be used to stop funding schemes being turned into commissioning programmes.

We tried to attach it but the file is too big so you can get an electronic version from [navca@navca.org.uk](mailto:navca@navca.org.uk). Paper copies are also available from NAVCA (same email as above).

## **Community Development South East – conference for the future**

CDSE is holding a one-day conference on 10<sup>th</sup> February (venue to be advised) to debate the challenges facing community development and how the organisation should respond to these. This will include the important questions of political and professional involvement and whether community development should be seen as 'neutral' in the face of prevailing social and economic circumstances.

£10 for activists/small community groups & £25 for large organisations. You can register your interest and get more information from: [equal.voices@ntlworld.com](mailto:equal.voices@ntlworld.com)

## **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](http://www.independentaction.net) or the Coalition email address - [indyaction@yahoo.co.uk](mailto: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.

## **Note on Links**

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