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www.independentaction.net indvaction@yahoo.co.uk

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Work Programme heralds doubly whammy for voluntary action

This month sees the beginning of the government's new 'Work Programme'. Leaving aside views about where this latest attempt to harness the skills of the workless come from or are likely to go, the programme marks another milestone, indeed millstone, in the relationship between the government, the private sector and the wonderful world of voluntary action. For, as predicted, 40 of the 42 of these massive contracts have gone to private sector companies. It may be that the mechanics of payments-by-results will anyway scupper the whole plan, since these companies are not used to waiting for such a long time to get their hands on the dosh. And making a profit out of the unemployed is the name of the game.

However, the programme marks a more sinister development and that is the welcome it gives to the new era of sub-contracting. The technique itself - of finding local voluntary and community groups to do the legwork on behalf of the corporate bosses - is not new, indeed the previous welfare-to-work programme turned up a number of abuses in the ways in which the sub-contractors were treated. What is new is that this is the first of a wave of similar initiatives and clearly enshrines an important aspect of how the government intends to roll out its privatisation programme. From their perspective, it's a perfect marriage - the service is out the door, the private sector picks up the business and the voluntary sector provides the we're-all-in-it-together-working-for-the-community cover.

But the implications for voluntary action are dire. Is this really how we see our future? Is this really what we want to recruit volunteers for? Our previous - and current - complaint is that too much of the sector has become an arm's length delivery van for government and state policies. Are we now also to be subservient to private sector contractors too in our acquiescence? All of which strengthens our belief that we are right in our choice of priorities within NCIA - to make visible and oppose the privatisation of public services, to support the alternatives to 'new

managerialism', so much a feature of the corporates, and to defend and nurture the autonomy and independence of the community sector.

News from the Coalition

Speak out, survive, thrive – notes from our Assembly in Manchester

Underground networks, public relations battles, keeping sane through organising - these were some of the ideas from our last assembly meeting in Manchester on 12th May. We talked about how to tell our stories, link with other groups and campaigns and get resources in a climate of cuts, recession and political bombardment. Click here <http://bit.ly/lZDuYX> for a short report and key points we can act on. Please let us know if you have comments or questions.

Knowledge is power – NCIA gives annual ARVAC lecture

Listen to a podcast (<http://bit.ly/ivsEXY>) of NCIA's Andy Benson speaking about whether there's enough power to go around in the voluntary and community sector at the ARVAC annual lecture on 9 May. You can also download a transcript (<http://bit.ly/mAvXzj>) of Andy's presentation (in Word) and the presentation slides (in PowerPoint) (<http://bit.ly/ileEWI>).

New NCIA papers on the damage of privatisation and the 'big society' show

Read our two new papers if you want to get thinking about what privatisation means for charities and community groups and how the 'big society' and localism damage independent action. These two papers are summaries of a larger, fully referenced paper, making our case for speaking out against the government's plans. You can download them here <http://bit.ly/mNoFDS>. The full version will be available in July.

And another one on 'managerialism'

Don't forget our new guide and manifesto for managing for independence (4 pages PDF) for ideas about how to get talking, make power visible, organise and act, and get help when you need it. The guide is designed to help us remember that effective voluntary action can't be reduced to targets and the latest management jargon, but is about changing society for the better. You can download it here <http://bit.ly/kOBe46>. We are also now testing our 'independence audit' with real life organisations. Can you take the challenge? If you're up for it let Rachael know - Rachael@independentaction.net.

Pensioner's Parliament gets the NCIA treatment

We were honoured to be invited to address the 2011 Pensioner's Parliament in Blackpool, on the 15th June. Andy Benson did the business and spoke about the 'Big Society' and what it means (and doesn't mean) for older people. We'll put a transcript of his speech up on the website soon.

Opening links with the TUC

An exploratory meeting on the 8th June with the TUC opens the door to future collaboration. We identified productive areas for close liaison and joint action, including the impact of the cuts and the relationship between voluntary and community organisations and public service delivery. We will also look for opportunities for jointly hosting events, reciprocal influence on policy development and working together to build local campaigns and networks.

This meeting was partly stimulated by the excellent TUC report 'Civil Society and Public Services: Collaboration not Competition', which we heartily recommend. You can get hold of it here: <http://bit.ly/lh63yN>. Also worth a read is Matt Dykes blog on the subject - catch that here:

<http://www.touchstoneblog.org.uk/2011/05/17023/>

And not forgetting the research angle....

Keen to influence the research agenda too, we've got ourselves accepted to present a panel discussion to the VSSN/NCVO 'researching the voluntary sector' conference in September. Our session will be called 'Voluntary action: fragmented, occupied and ignored'. Watch this space for more details.

Youth work gets a hammering

If you need reminding of how difficult it is to work creatively in this brave new world of commissioning then take a look at our two youth work case studies. One looks at a small community project's experience of the local authority tendering process and the second at what happened when a youth work project tried to evaluate their work in terms of what worked and what didn't, rather than ticking boxes for the Youth Service. You can alarm yourself here - <http://bit.ly/fr5fkhand> here - <http://bit.ly/jCI2Ku>.

Organising, mobilising, and keeping on keeping on

National Activist Network launched with interactive website

A new National Community Activist Network (NatCAN) has been launched to provide a platform for debate, action, solidarity and mutual back scratching. The interactive website provides multiple opportunities for exchange and seems to be able to do everything expect fry eggs. Interest in the site has been brisk and there are already quite a few discussion groups going covering housing issues, the environment, social enterprise and crime and policing. It's easy to join - just visit <http://nationalcan.ning.com/> and take it from there.

Activists gird their loins on community organising

An early initiative for the NatCAN has been to team up with the University of Central Lancashire to look into setting up an International Institute for Community

Leadership (sounds grand!). To kick this off they are organising a seminar to explore the feasibility of such a venture. This will be held on July 1st at the university's Burnley Campus. No charge for attendance and refreshments will be provided. To find out more and register your interest go to www.nationalcan.ning.com

Campaign for Community Development seeks sponsors and dosh

Previous newsletters have spotlighted the formation of the Campaign for Community Development, which was launched in Reading on the 7th March. If you haven't seen the report from this event you can get hold of it here - <http://bit.ly/ktIqGX>. This Campaign is vital to the future, coherent, advancement of community development.

The job now is develop momentum and 'roll it out' as they say down at the LSP. The organisers are looking for small amounts of money or sponsors to enable them to hold events across the country. Offers of help please to John Stevens at equal.voices@ntlworld.com.

Fightback on equalities threats

On its new Red Tape Challenge website, the government is looking for views on the future of the Equality Act - including scrapping the thing altogether. The Equality Act, which includes all anti-discrimination legislation in the UK, contains many important protections.

Equanomics UK has kickstarted some resistance to this daft idea and, with other organisations, including London Voluntary Services Council, has written to Keith Vaz MP, Chair of the Home Affairs Committee, highlighting that the Act - only a year old - should be outwith the terms of reference of the Red Tape Challenge, is the only piece of primary legislation being looked at there and is a bit of Law for which there is a lot of support. There is a three week 'spotlight' period on the issue on the Red Tape Challenge website until June 30th. Tell them how it is by putting your comments up on the site which is to be found here - <http://bit.ly/lrv6vS>

Protesters halt 'workfare' conference

Protesters have successfully halted a conference on the government's controversial 'Work Programme' after calling for a demonstration and picket on the first day. Conference organisers 'Inside Government' pulled the event after worries that the demo would harm their relationship with the venue, the Royal Society.

The protest was the launchpad for campaign coalition Boycott Workfare, an alliance of anti-cuts and anti-poverty groups, trade unionists, unemployed people and others, who are hailing the cancellation as their first positive achievement.

The Work Programme forms part of the Welfare Reform Bill, currently going through the House of Lords, and would force those on unemployment benefits to

work up to 30 hours a week in places like Poundland to earn their JSA. This works out as equivalent to £2.25 an hour for those over 25, and a measly £1.78 an hour for those younger. More information from www.boycottworkfare.org

Power Up London July 2011 – feel your power in planning

Talk Action and Friends of the Earth have teamed up to provide a training weekend on the planning system and legal rights to help activists do the business in their local area. The weekend is aimed at people working in disadvantaged areas and with groups whose voices are not usually heard in decision making. If you're already involved in a local campaign and you want to make sure you are using your rights effectively, then Power Up is for you. There will be workshops on the Planning & the Localism Bill; Getting Information; Using the Law; Campaigning & Outreach and Film Making, plus 1-1 advice from lawyers, planners and campaigners on your particular issue and opportunities to network and learn from each other's experiences. The event is residential and will take place on 1st-3rd July at Queen Mary University, Mile End Road, London, E1 4NS. It costs £75 for all accommodation, meals and refreshments (Free for unemployed people, students and pensioners). More information from Talk Action on jelliott@talkaction.org or phone 020 7324 4774.

Lottery slammed on cosy club of 'solicited bids'

Not many people know that the Lottery, which makes a big deal out of open access and fair process actually approves quite a lot of dosh going out of the back door via so-called 'solicited bids'. This process involves essentially private funding arrangements with organisations regarded as having especially good ideas or, as many suspect, especially chummy contacts inside the Lottery.

Now Richard Caulfield of Voluntary Sector North West and Gary Copditch of People's Voice Media have blown a whistle on the practice. Writing in their blogs, Caulfield suggested solicited bids appeared to go to people who "move in the right circles, drink in the right bars or attend the right parties" and Copitch reckoned that: "We now seem to live in a world of deals behind closed doors where only the connected will prosper."

More information about the scale of the practice is now emerging and it's very smelly indeed - nearly £25m to solicited bids since the beginning of 2010. This includes £11M (yes £11 million!) to Social Finance and £4.5M to the Big Lunch. The practice has been going on for years in fact - for example the Advice Services Alliance was awarded nearly £6M four years ago. The full list of the 2010 lucky winners can be seen here <http://bit.ly/jxDqP1>

On the back foot, the Lottery scrambled to put a brave face on its behaviour, issuing a press release full of weasel words - "BLF maintained a broad dialogue with the voluntary sector about emerging programmes, themes and strategies that occasionally throws up an opportunity to invest in the delivery of outcomes we are

not reaching through our demand-led programmes. We have made no secret of our powers to solicit and it is part of our intelligent funding approach to grasp those opportunities." Oh right.

Resistance mounts on threats to inclusive education for disabled children

David Cameron has acted on his threat to "Reverse the bias towards inclusion" for disabled children and other children who need extra help at school. The Government's green paper 'Support and Aspiration: A New Approach to Special Educational Needs and Disability' is based entirely on the medical model of disability and will push back all the progress for which disabled people have struggled over the last 20 years.

Disabled people and their allies are organising a 'Reverse the bias towards segregation campaign' and calling a demonstration for Wednesday 29th June 11am, Westminster Bridge in London. This is the last day of public consultation on the proposals contained in the Green Paper. More information from: rlrieser@gmail.com or mich@michathome.wanadoo.co.uk

Get genned up on Public Law & Judicial Review

The Public Law Project are running a conference and networking day ('Trends and Forecasts') for lawyers, advisers, advocates, campaigning organisations and public bodies on Thursday 14th July at BPP Law School, St James's Building, Oxford Street, Manchester, M1 6FQ.

The event includes sessions on challenging public sector cuts, the Equality Act 2010 and trends and forecasts in public law and there will be workshops looking at: An introduction to public law; Funding public law challenges; Community Care Law; Asylum Support; and Local Government Ombudsman.

If you're a subscriber to the Empowering the Voluntary Sector newsletter you can get a special price of £50 + VAT (better sign up now). More information from Terry Perkins on 0114 289 3972 or email terry.perkins@navca.org.uk.

The Big Society Show – latest manouevres

Fourth relaunch of the BSS

Apparently deaf to the advice that he is flogging a dead horse, the Prime Minister re-launched the Big Society for the fourth time in May. Having boasted about cuts in Corporation Tax, Cameron then went on to try again and tell us what this big society is all about. The clear bits relate to 'modernising public services' - cuts in expenditure and privatisation - no mucking about there.

However, as he moved into 'social responsibility' 'reward and effort', 'taking responsibility for your family... and your community' it all became a bit vague again.

You just don't know what the man means - for example "we're harnessing the space in between (the state and the market i.e. us) - society - the 'hidden wealth' of our nation"; or apparently what is being created is "a country of do-ers and go-getters ... Where nothing will stop people pursuing their dreams."

Meanwhile, we can see the reason for the PM's frustration, for the concurrent YouGov report 'Why the Big Society isn't working', reveals that we're mostly still "baffled" by the whole idea. The survey showed that:

- 62% still don't understand what the Big Society plan is
- 73% think that it simply won't work
- 59% think the policies are mostly "just hot air, being used as a cover for the Government while they cut investment in public services"

You can see this testament to British sensibleness here - <http://bit.ly/mBaQBI>

Bankers furious about low returns from BS Bank

The plan for the BS Bank included roping in £400M quid from HSBC, Barclays, the Royal Bank of Scotland and Lloyds Banking Group. However, according to the Financial Times, bankers are "furious" because the Big Society Bank is likely to make a loss for the first five years, and to make relatively low returns thereafter, meaning there will be no return on the banks' investment. When the Cabinet Office then said there is "no suggestion" that four high-street banks will pull out of the agreement, one probably reckons it's true. Since the whole gig was based on the capital injection being "on commercial terms", why this little upset wasn't foreseen is puzzling.

This month's 'That Takes the Biscuit' award goes to

THE CABINET OFFICE AND HMRC

The Charity Tax Group has been asked to help the Cabinet Office and HM Revenue & Customs produce a guide sorting out the differences between grants and contracts. The guide, aimed at public sector commissioners, would explain the differences between grants and contracts, and the benefits of each. John Hemming, chair of the Charity Tax Group said: "It's still at an early stage, so we're not sure exactly what will be involved. One thing that is needed is a clear explanation of when it is appropriate to give a grant or a contract."

Talk about bolting the stable door....

Community organising - the latest 'must have'

Community organising remains the hot topic on the blogs and the opportunists are gathering to pick up any scraps of funding remaining after Locality scooped the big one. In fact, not quite scraps. The Young Foundation appears to be one of the lucky blighters whose face fits with the Lottery as they have been awarded a 'back pocket sweetener' of a cool £822,508 for their 'Building Local Activism' programme. And what are they going to spend the money on - providing "business development support" to three (yes three) local activist networks to enable them to "translate their business models (and therefore their social impact) from ones heavily dependent on social capital to ones that mobilise social capital to deliver new market-driven solutions." In a separate strand they are going to provide similar highly valuable support to six (yes six this time) "communities" to support the development of digital activism - presumably the kind of thing that Joe Taylor and the NatCAN network are already doing at a cost of about 2s 6d. None of the £822k will be given in grants to any of these groups, presumably because the cost of this support from the thrusting young things at the Foundation is sooo expensive. You can have a good laugh at the arrogance of this proposal here - <http://bit.ly/kYwmMj> and here - <http://bit.ly/jG6o2o>

Meanwhile, a severe outbreak of sour grapes resulted in Locality being abused by Maurice Glassman of the competition losers Citizens Organising Foundation as "well-intentioned busybodies" and "toffs". COF then followed this up by proclaiming that they had signed up James Purnell ex-MP as a devotee. Readers will remember Mr Purnell as a great friend of the unemployed when Works and Pensions Secretary in the last government and one of those poor unfortunates to be misunderstood over claiming expenses (his included £247 for 3,000 fridge magnets - what do you think he did with them?).

Locality was, of course, outraged at the accusation and their supporters waded in to their defence. Mind you, they perhaps need to keep their head down as their programme is already delayed because they can't get the Treasury to agree that the burseries to community organisers aren't wages. An occupational hazard of promoting radical community action that demands the support of Her Majesty's Treasury. The rest of us just get on with it.

Localism – latest depressing developments

The lurch to 'liberalise' neighbourhood planning got off to a predictable start with the launch of a pilot plan to allow local businesses to make it easier "to change the designated use of buildings and expand facilities to meet changing needs and remove the need to apply to the council for every adaptation made to a building." The Business Neighbourhood Frontrunners "will work with local councils and community groups to prepare the planning and development framework to bring the right kind of development to their area." Critics fear that private sector interests in their own growth and profitability are just a bit likely to get in the way of all the cuddly

talk of "reviving neglected neighbourhoods, supporting schools or making a significant contribution to community facilities."

Meanwhile Housing Minister Grant Shapps set the bigger hare running with the launch of a new guide "that gives people an idea about what the new powers could mean for their area, and encourages them to think about the sort of community-led development they want to see." This is the 'community right to build' which promises that it will, in future, be local people who decide on new housing, shops, community halls and sports facilities. Not mentioning, of course, the special arrangements that are being made for local business.

The 'right to bid', another plan in the Localism Bill also comes in from some criticism - this time from umbrella body NAVCA. Saying what we all know, NAVCA points out that a successful local bid to deliver a service would 'trigger a commissioning and procurement process' that might favour larger groups and private sector bodies and leave public services in the hands of 'other relevant bodies or private sector organisations', including large national or international firms, mostly outside of the scope of the Freedom of Information Act..

On the other hand, NCVO's responses to the government's consultation on the 'right to buy' proposals were more limp wrested, saying that local voluntary and community groups should be given a right of first refusal when local authorities announce plans to sell buildings of community value and that the term 'right to buy' is misleading because the government's proposals do not oblige councils to accept a bid from local voluntary or community groups. . Presumably NCVO knows that Community Matters reckoned that 5,000 council-owned buildings used by community groups were likely to be sold before December. We really are looking at a 'sale of the century'

Private fundraisers bandwagon on the BSS

We've been getting some bizarre emails from private fundraisers trying to pick up a bit of trade on the back of the BSS. One such is from Tony Johnson at Funding Help, based apparently in Oldham, whose pitch begins "Is your community group or school missing out on £50,000 of Community Big Society Funding?", asks "Have we prepared properly for the cuts?" and offers "Guaranteed funding to help your community organisation or school withstand these times of economic hardship". A bit further down, you learn about the great opportunity offered by promoting their "shopping portal". Ah, got it.

Then there's Emica, a massive private sector outsourcing consultancy jumping on the wagon with their 'Big Society Accelerator Pack'. This is a real laugh. For a mere £9,995 + VAT, you will get:

- § 10 Grant and Funding Bids
- § An Income Generation Strategy

- § A Business Plan
- § A Website Review (including how to maximise income online)
- § An opportunity to joint tender with us (Ooh!)
- § 60 second bespoke video to promote your charity on DVD and online

with a full money back guarantee (but "terms and conditions apply - please ask for details"). Think the Coalition will be giving that one a miss.

The Archbishop wades in

The poor old Archbishop of Canterbury got it in the neck from the right wing press for wading in on the BSS, when he had the temerity to suggest that this flagship policy had become a bit tarnished, remains top-down and introduces regressive ideas about 'deserving' and 'undeserving poor'. You can find a good summary of the issues he raised and a commentary from Adur Voluntary Action here -

<http://tinyurl.com/6ba6exf>.

The madness continues

The work programme swings into action

The 1st June saw the beginning of the Work Programme, the latest manifestation of successive governments' obsession with 'welfare to work'. The programme, which will be worth £3-5bn to contractors over seven years, has been cleaned up by private sector contractors. In total, there are 40 prime contracts with only two going to non-profit outfits - the 'Careers Development Group' and an Irish charity called the 'Rehab Group'. Where voluntary action comes in, of course, is in the sub-contracting and the DWP press release boasted of the 289 community groups standing ready to help the workless and feckless to pull their socks up. Amongst the charities that are apparently happy to support the profitability of their masters are Mencap, Citizen's Advice, the Prince's Trust and Action for Blind People, all on a payment-by-results basis.

NCVO is setting up a special interest group for all the charity subcontractors, presumably so they can have a good moan about how badly they are being treated. Meanwhile Steve Wyler over at Locality has blogged his own impressive moan about the programme - you can catch that here - <http://locality.org.uk/comment/pushed-edge/> I wonder how many of Locality's members are amongst the sub contractors?

Privatisation to become a sheep in wolf's clothing

An interesting insight into the government sensitivities comes with the leaking of the minutes of a meeting between Francis Maude and the CBI, in which Maude indicated the intention to scale back plans to use the private sector to deliver public services. The leaked document that was obtained by the BBC suggested that the "wholesale outsourcing" of public services to the private sector would be politically "unpalatable" and that Ministers instead want to use more charities, social

enterprises and employee-owned "mutual" organisations. Sounds like good news for ACEVO and their chums, but not so good for the rest of us.

EDF jump the gun on new nuclear

New nuclear rumblings are afoot as energy giant EDF put in a planning application to clear a site for Hinkley C, the first new nuclear development in the UK since Sizewell B in 1988.

The proposed works would clear more than 400 acres of grassland, woodland and hedgerows around the two existing nuclear sites at Hinkley in Somerset - before formal permission to actually build the power station has been granted.

Hinkley A was decommissioned and went out of service in 2000, with Hinkley B due to be retired in 2016. After the 2002 UK government moratorium on building any new nuclear facilities, it looked like the same fate would befall all operating nuclear power stations in the UK. However, in 2008 the government announced eight sites they thought suitable for new nuclear and Hinkley is the first to get works underway.

In response to the application at Hinkley, Stop New Nuclear (an alliance of anti-nuke groups) has announced a non-violent blockade of the site on 3rd October.

Campaigners are heralding the action as the definitive moment in the future of nuclear in the UK, stating 'If [the industry] fails at Hinkley, it is unlikely the 'nuclear renaissance' will have the momentum to continue.' Join in the action at www.stopnewnuclear.org.uk

National 'strategic partners' given their marching orders

The Office for Civil Society has laid out a detailed set of objectives for the charities receiving money under its £8.2m strategic partnership programme. The list contains 14 "outcome priorities" and assigns responsibility for each of these to individual charities and partnerships. The priorities include "tracking the progress of the big society", "helping the sector and communities to better understand the opportunities of the big society" and "creating more public service mutuals".

Kevin Curley, of NAVCA said he didn't think the new requirements would unduly compromise the independence of charities: "Of course, the requirement to help charities understand the big society means being positive about what the government is doing, but overall I think the new priorities let the strategic partners continue being critical friends to the government," he said. "We will tell the government where we think it is going wrong."

Stuart Etherington, of NCVO reckoned the money "represents a very small amount of our funding. We do not believe the programme makes any organisation too close to the government."

And Steve Wyler, chief executive of Locality, kept up the good news saying: "Where things are going wrong we will be in a position to speak truth unto power, but we will also try to find solutions" and "When we bid for the funding we put forward our own agenda and we will now be able to carry that out."

I guess readers will know our take on all this....

Our fracturing society: Clobberings, cuts, and closures

Hounslow CVS goes down the pan

More evidence of 'entryism' into the sector comes with the announcement of the closure of Hounslow CVS. After losing funding last year, their bid to Hounslow Council to continue to provide support for the sector was rejected in favour of a bid from GLE Consulting. GLE Group is wholly owned by the 33 London boroughs, although it is commercially and constitutionally independent.

Concerns have been raised about the awarding of this contract to an organisation that has no previous connection to the area or obvious knowledge of it, no charity registration, a budget so large that it allows it to undercut local pricing, and somewhat dodgy 'conflict of interest' links with the 33 London local authorities.

Adur Voluntary Action resolves not to be next

Despite failing to attract BLF transition funding to help cope with the cuts and pressures, the CVS in Adur West Sussex is determined to find ways of sustaining independent voluntary action in the area. In a press release Adur VA says that: "doesn't intend to be dependent upon private sector largesse, or philanthropists' prejudices, or the current fashions amongst charitable trusts. They're all short-term, anyway." Instead, they are "researching local resources and needs, looking at ways of trading locally, and working closely with smaller local businesses. AVA is determined to exist as an independent voice and force for good under whatever future funding scenarios, whatever public sector policies." Good luck we say....

Youth work on the ropes

Our friends over at In Defence of Youth Work are no less angry than they were about the state of their bit of the world. In their latest circular they write:

"Youth Work seems on the abyss of extinction. Yet Youth Work is to be rescued by the 'new and innovative'. The scenario is a collage of confusion and contradiction. The responsible Minister, a certain Tim Loughton, asserts that youth services are in a time warp within a chummy conversation at the end of an Education Select Committee Inquiry with less teeth than a rodent with dentures. And the Coalition's track record after a year is hailed by Fiona Blacke, CEO of the National Youth Agency, as showing: 'a genuine commitment to the sector, from whom they have

actively sought advice and support, listening to our experience and drawing on our expertise.' Such eulogy sits uneasily alongside a carnage of cuts imposed on youth services across the country. Nor does it recognise the articulate anger displayed by young people themselves at the Choose Youth Rally and through their Facebook and YouTube offerings, typified by the Oxfordshire and Haringey groups... Meanwhile on the ground workers being made redundant are leaving the work altogether or looking to the possibility of re-emerging in a commissioned voluntary organisation or even exploring whether some form of 'mutual' collective might be viable. Those left in work are overwhelmingly being pushed into early intervention programmes of one kind or another. Overnight some are finding themselves in newly created Multi-Agency teams, where one hand hasn't a clue what the other is doing.... We remain convinced that in the struggle to nurture democracy the youth work! we define and defend has a significant contribution to make. Its present demise says much about today's creeping authoritarianism and its profound lack of an optimistic vision of the future."

Sounds like they need a message of support and solidarity, which you can send them here - <http://www.indefenceofyouthwork.org.uk/>

Bleak future for community groups warns S.W. Foundation

More impressive research comes from the respected S.W. Foundation which concludes that, with present policies, small community groups face a bleak future. The report - 'Crisis and Contradiction' - analysed questionnaire returns from 173 community groups within the region. The results were alarming and showed that funding is falling, outside support disappearing, reserves dwindling, services restricting, charges being considered and, beyond all that, groups are closing down altogether.

The report concludes that the findings demonstrate that current policies and funding cuts are in direct contradiction to the stated aims of the government. There is a lot of useful material here for those concerned about the future of the community sector. You can download it here - <http://bit.ly/kt5Ext>