

Wishing you a peaceful festive season and a revolutionary 2012

National Coalition for  
Independent Action

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protects  
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## News from the world of voluntary action

### **It's the community, stupid!**

Colin Ball has written a book about the Australian voluntary sector that echoes much of what NCIA has been saying about the UK over the last five years. *It's the community, stupid!* says we need to distinguish "between genuinely independent organisations and those that have become agents for the delivery of government welfare services". The book goes on to say we need to tap into a rich history of mutual aid, and learn from participatory development in countries as diverse as India, Italy and Brazil. Colin Ball calls the UK's 'big society' 'political mumbo-jumbo' (something everyone apart from a few 'leaders' of the UK voluntary sector has noticed that by now). Check out the key ideas at Colin's [website](#). You can also buy the book there if you want.

### **Leaders of the pack**

Kevin Curley used his final speech as head of NAVCA (National Association of Voluntary and Community Action) to challenge people in infrastructure organisations to uphold their values and be part of a movement for social progress. How many workers and managers in

infrastructure organisations see themselves as part of a movement? If not, why not? Comments on our [website](#) please! Meanwhile, Stephen Bubb, chief exec of Acevo, told the Financial Times that the 'big society' is irreparably damaged as a brand. Shame he's only interested in branding. You have to pay for access to the article on FT, so here's a [report](#) on the Civil Society website along with a response from trade union Unite.

### **Unite community membership**

Speaking of Unite, they have set up a new community membership scheme intended to draw together marginalised people, unemployed and recently unemployed to challenge policies, offer mutual support and energise campaigning. Everything, in fact, that the government community organisers and 'big society' are not intended to do (except as a brand, of course). Read more on their website [here](#). What do you reckon? How do community groups and voluntary organisations relate to this? Let us know...

### **News from the dark side**

#### **Nasty practices continue in big corporate 'charities' (do we need to find a new name for them? Suggestions welcome)**

It's not only multinationals that are benefiting from the free labour supplied by the government's ever-expanding workfare programme, which makes unemployed people work for free. Information obtained under the Freedom of Information Act by the Boycott Workfare campaign shows that charities including Barnardo's, the British Heart Foundation, Age Concern, Cancer Research and Scope, are all accepting unemployed people sent by job centres and private providers for unpaid work placements in their shops. Read the experience described [here](#), of claimants sent to a Barnardo's shop in Leeds.

Lessons the voluntary sector has had rammed down its throat by government for years that the private sector still hasn't learned, part I: conflict of interests

The UK Border Agency has announced that its preferred bidders for **asylum accommodation provision for the next five years will be Serco, G4S and Reliance, the three multinational security companies that manage the most immigration prisons and forcible deportations in the UK.** G4S is accused of abusing and killing of detainees. Serco has been at the centre of ongoing fiascos and inquiries in the UK and Australia. Refugee support groups fear that asylum seekers housed by G4S, Serco and Reliance will be subject to abuse and negligence, given the companies' track records. They also add that there are potential conflicts of interest if the same companies are detaining and housing asylum seekers. More on the National Coalition of Anti Deportation Campaigns website [here](#).

#### **Part II: transparency and accountability**

Suggestions from the Department of Health that the companies running care homes be more strictly regulated provoked a quick response from private equity owned healthcare company Care UK, which warned "an inappropriate monitoring regime" could hamper its operations and may even "cause reputational damage". Try that line next time a funder asks you for monitoring information. The campaign group Corporate Watch looked into Care UK's accounts and found out why it's worried. More on their [website](#).

**Part III...no, forget it, it's the end of the year, we're**

## **knackered**

We could go on, but you get the idea. Here's some good news:

## **Keep on keeping on!**

### **Reversal of Disability Living Allowance cuts**

This month saw the announcement that the mobility component of Disability Living Allowance, which funds personal travel for disabled people and is worth up to £51.40 per week, was to be continued. George Osborne originally announced that it would be axed for those living in local authority care homes. The U-turn comes after a long campaign by a coalition of disability charities, supported by disabled people across the country.

### **Take them to court**

NAVCA has a workshop in Leeds on 10th January, 1pm to 4pm, on using the law to challenge cuts. They'll have a barrister and a solicitor who've won court cases to protect local services. The cost is £25. Go to [the NAVCA events page](#) to book.

### **Campaigning together for funding: London event**

London Voluntary Service Council, the Women's Resource Centre and Homeless Link are holding a free conference on January 17th to develop a joint response to the London Councils' consultation on its new funding priorities. Contact the [Voluntary Sector Forum](#).

## **NCIA news**

### **Occupying voluntary and community action**

Have a look at the assemblies page on our website for the notes from our [December 13th assembly meeting](#), held in the very special space of the Bank of Ideas, in the City: an abandoned office building owned by UBS bank, which has been turned into a home for discussion, protest, art and community activity by Occupy London. Anyone can use the space. Check out their [website](#) if you're interested. We hope to be back there soon!

### **Planning and more planning**

NCIA's last planning meeting included a lively exchange about planning, housing and the Localism Act. Bob Colenut and Laird Ryan followed up by writing an analysis of housing strategy for the NatCAN blog. Read it [here](#). Read the rest of the notes from the NCIA planning group [here](#). The meeting included reflection on alliances we want to make - please tell us if there are people who can help us make a louder noise about independent action. Our next planning group is January 17th, 2pm to 5pm in London.

### **NCIA folks out and about**

Over the last few months, NCIA people have been at: Aston Mansfield conference in London; In Defence of Youth Work conference in Sheffield; Resilience conference in Manchester (watch this space for a research report on community resilience from Community Northwest and Manchester Metropolitan University); Locality conference in London (more branding with a dash of straight talking); NCVO/ESRC seminar on 'Big Society' (yep, the voluntary sector's still just about taking it seriously - though it may be an empty space that we get to define ourselves. The joy.); LSE Gallileo group roundtable ('I've been studying the voluntary sector since the 70s and I've never seen a stranger

time..'). And of course all the places people are pursuing independent action in their own organisations, communities, imaginations...

**keep on keeping on x**