

*We're not an arm of the state – we have our own arms*

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**Newsletter: 27**

**May 2012**

## **Is dissent becoming de rigeur?**

There appears to be an outbreak of dissent amongst some of the large national charities, in opposition to government policies and practices. This hopeful sign that retaining a 'seat at the table' may not be the driving force behind their public pronouncements was first triggered earlier this year by the high profile campaign by the National Trust, Campaign for the Protection of Rural England and others against the government's proposed changes to the planning regulations.

More recently Paul Farmer, chief executive of MIND has resigned from a government committee - and went public in protest - at the ATOS work assessments, part of the moves to disentitle thousands of people from disability benefits.

This was followed by Victim Support's Jahed Khan, who publicly opposed the plan to hand commissioning of services for victims and witnesses of crime to 42 local police and crime commissioners, to be elected in November. Khan says: "Eighty per cent of our funding comes from central government, so it is a very bold and brave step we have taken and not something many charities do. It is not something we have done before, but we have done it for very good reasons." Khan then got support from Andrew Flanagan, CE of the NSPCC.

And in praising the growing number of dissenters, Stephen Cook, editor of Third Sector magazine has recently called for more courage on the part of sector agencies in the need to challenge political and bureaucratic conditions on funding. "Government funding", he said, "frequently comes with strings attached in the form of

confidentiality clauses and even requirements to sign up to political policy objectives..... Independence should not be negotiable."

Much more of this and we'll be able to hang up our clogs and get back to the garden (only joking).

## **News and events**

### **Last Chance!! Growing People Power - Grassroots 2012 – 26th May 11.30 – 5.30**

Grassroots 2012 is an event jointly organised by trade unionists and community activist organisations committed to tackling the big challenges we face right now. This year's gathering will focus on three areas:

- § Rise up! Building support - How we campaign effectively on issues.
- § 2, 4, 6, 8: How will people congregate - How can we build membership organisations that engage?
- § Reaching Out - How do we communicate our messages effectively?

For each theme there will be three speakers with 20 minutes to put forward their idea and demonstrate its practical use. After the ideas, there is a networking session to allow all participants to discuss what they've heard and share experiences.

NCIA will be there on the day! Find out more and sign up for the event here - <http://grassrootsuk.org/>

### **Last Chance!! Is competition killing us? - Tuesday May 29th, 9.30am to 4.30pm**

NCIA has joined with London Voluntary Services Council to organise an opportunity to explore the effect commissioning is having on the voluntary and community sector.

- § Where do you draw the line at taking on a contract?
- § Can you be commissioned and still have a strong campaigning voice?
- § Are there alternative options to taking government money that has too many strings attached?

We will have contributions from Dexter Whitfield, University of Adelaide, author of 'In Place of Austerity', James Rees who is researching commissioning for the Third Sector Research Centre, and personal testimonies from practitioners who are battling, or choosing not to battle, with the demands of commissioning. As well as lots of time for debate and some open space exploring. And lunch!

The event will be held at Resource for London, 356 Holloway Road, London N7 6PA and is FREE. Please join us! You can register online on the LVSC website here: <http://civi.lvsc.org.uk/civicrm/event/register?reset=1&id=51>

Any questions or for further information please contact [rachael@independentaction.net](mailto:rachael@independentaction.net)

## **Upcoming event!! Gaining power: the challenges facing activists**

The next in our series of events to look at the crucial issues facing us will focus on community action and will take place early in July. This is being organised jointly with the National Community Activist Network (NatCAN) and will be in London.

With NatCAN, we have set up a discussion forum so that YOU can help to shape the event - both what we talk about and how we do it. Please join the discussion if you have ideas about speakers, topics or even know of a venue we can use. You can read more about the event here: <http://nationalcan.ning.com/page/natcan-update-17th-may-2012>.

If you haven't already registered with NatCAN, you'll need to do this - it's easy, just go to this page: <http://nationalcan.ning.com/> Click on 'Sign up' on the right-hand side.

Alternatively email [melaina@independentaction.net](mailto:melaina@independentaction.net) to get more information or to contribute your ideas.

## **Alliances Fund – here we go, here we go....**

Last month, as part of our anti-privatisation/defend public services work, we asked local groups to make suggestions about work they could do in their own areas which would be helped along by a little financial support. Making the decision was difficult but we have managed to offer some support to three groups:

§ **Don't cut us out West Sussex**, a group campaigning to protect services for disabled and frail elderly people gets £920 to organise a 'guerrilla strawberry tea' in July on the lawn outside West Sussex County Hall;

§ **Life after civil legal aid** - £420 goes to Ipswich & Suffolk Council for Racial Equality, to bring together voluntary agencies and the local authorities in the county to plan how free and low cost legal help can continue in the face of Legal Aid cuts, whilst maintaining independence amongst the providers;

§ **Middlesbrough Voluntary Development Agency** gets £1,000 for a workshop to revisit the question of independence and the role of the voluntary sector in the face of public services commissioning, localism, etc. and "how we organise ourselves to ensure that the VCS doesn't become the victim of public sector reform."

We'll let you know how they get on.....

## **'Drive to the Market – the marketisation of youth and community work' – 26th and 27th April**

In alliance with the 'In Defence of Youth Work' campaign, we mounted two events in April that looked critically at the implications and contradictions of the marketisation of youth and community work and the wider voluntary sector as a whole. One in London and the other in Manchester, both events produced lively and sophisticated discussions about the damage that privatisation and marketisation is doing to youth work, especially open access youth work.

Some material from the seminars is being posted on the In Defence website (<http://www.indefenceofyouthwork.org.uk/wordpress/>) - the first is an impressive presentation from James Beecher (from Stroud Against the Cuts) on the role of social enterprise as a Trojan horse for privatisation. You can download James stuff here: <http://bit.ly/KIcfeV>.

## **'Tell us how it is' stories are in the pipeline**

We think it's vital to record and publicise what's actually going on for people active in their communities and in voluntary and community groups - to show the impact of privatisation, commissioning, cuts and the rest. And we got a good response to our appeal for people willing to tell their stories about their own experience - frustrations or furies, about what's put a smile on their face, or just about surviving the daily grind. We're now on the case to collect and write up these stories.... Watch this space.

## **Barings Panel hears from NCIA**

On 26th April we responded to an invitation from the Barings Panel on Independence to offer our views at its open evidence-gathering meeting, alongside NAVCA and Community Matters. We were represented by Matt Scott, who spoke of the overall contemporary context, and Elizabeth Bayliss who set out the reality on the ground of a local agency trying to hold to its own perspectives and priorities. Matt's assertion that the culture of much of the voluntary sector has now become 'predatory' seemed to catch the attention and the press coverage. We are writing up an extended version of what Matt and Elizabeth had to say and will post this on the website shortly.

## **The evidence builds....**

### **Housing Associations – no better landlords than local authorities or ALMOS**

More and more, we find ourselves in NCIA facing this issue - why is there this uncritical and unchallenged orthodoxy that if you want to improve public services you have to find someone other than public agencies to run them? Where is the evidence to support the claims that charities and voluntary organisations are more efficient,

more effective and provide higher quality services than their state-run counterparts?

Writing in the latest issue of the Voluntary Sector Review, Andrew Purkis sets out a summary of his research into the experience of housing associations (HAs) which examined the alleged 'distinctiveness' of associations as voluntary sector providers. His conclusions indicate that: the independence of HAs is heavily qualified; they do not display unique advantages when it comes to user satisfaction; they do not use their independence to campaign and raise awareness; they do not work through volunteering or charitable fundraising and they are not sure how far they want to go beyond delivering quality services to paying customers or performing effectively in what the government wants them to do.

His overall conclusion is dynamite: "In the light of HA experience and consistent research findings, is it not time for a moratorium on discredited generalisations about the distinctive ability of voluntary organisations to provide mainstream public services better as well as more cheaply than state organisations?"

Quite. I can't find the article online but you can read the research report from which it is taken here - <http://bit.ly/MhhXSV>. You might like to point your local councillors and commissioners to it too....

### **ConsortiCo goes down the chute**

Local voluntary groups are frequently being advised to form themselves into consortia as a way of fighting off the big boys in the dog-eat-dog world of today's commissioning environment. Evidence of the shortcomings of this approach now comes from Bedfordshire when in April it was announced that ConsortiCo, a bidding group of 40 local charities, has closed down after failing to win any contracts and being unable to meet its debts.

The consortium was set up in May 2009 with the backing of a £60,000 loan from the Futurebuilders Fund. The balance of this loan has now been written off. Interesting light is also thrown on the loan strategy of Big Society Capital by this case - a spokesperson for ConsortiCo said "the consortium could have continued were it not for the need to make repayments to Futurebuilders, because it had few other outgoings."

### **Boris and the disappeared millions**

Homelessness charities have accused London Mayor Boris Johnson of filching more than £5m of government funding intended to help rough sleepers. The cash has gone missing from Johnson's budget for support for rough sleepers, which is wholly underwritten by Whitehall. Repeated efforts by the charities have failed to win assurances that it will be restored.

The government had transferred a total £33.8m to the London mayor to fund services for rough sleepers over four years to 2015. But Boris' figures only promise spending of £28.5m over that period. Writing to Boris, the charities assert that:

"The £33.8m was specifically transferred from central government to be spent on commissioning services that cannot or would not be provided at a London borough level." The letter goes on: "Cutting those resources can only imply that in future years such services will in turn be ended or their funding cut back ..." They have received no reply so far.

### **Time to call 'time' on the Work Programme?**

The bad press associated with the Work Programme continues as more voluntary sector sub-contractors withdrawn from the scheme (the latest being two homelessness agencies, Single Homeless Project and St Mungo's) and Action for Blind People tells the Public Accounts Committee that it cost them £73,000 in staff time, to pull together the information demanded as a condition of their participation. And in return they have received "negligible referrals" from the seven prime contractors with whom they are associated.

London Voluntary Services Council reported to the Barings Panel on Independence that an informal survey of 16 London-based VCS 'tier 2' subcontractors found that, almost 10 months into the programme, 11 had received no referrals. Five were considering pulling out of the programme, two had already withdrawn and one never signed a contract and should not have been on the list of contractors. Only one of the organisations said it was happy with how things were going.

On top of the scandal about fraud at A4E and Emma Harrison's personal enrichment at public expense, surely the time has come for the government to acknowledge the shortcomings of this whole approach to contracting out of public services?

Pushing in the same direction, NAVCA has criticised the government's new 'procurement pledge'. Joe Irvin from NAVCA says that it will not support the pledge saying it takes a top-down approach that places too much emphasis on multi-million pound companies to the detriment of the voluntary sector and local businesses". In contrast, NAVCA believes that another pledge - this time from the Local Government Association - "starts with users and citizens and gives a greater emphasis to voluntary organisations". Leaving aside the issue of whether these kinds of statements are worth the paper they are written on, the point about big business is well made. You can have a giggle over the high minded language of the government's offering here - <http://bit.ly/LqmRtU>

### **Law Centres, cuts and access to social justice**



A new research report from Goldsmiths College tracks the threats and dilemmas for Law Centres in the face of swingeing cuts in Legal Aid funding and the injustices for disadvantaged people and communities that will result.

You can download the full report here - <http://bit.ly/Kp1axucontext> or the summary here <http://bit.ly/KaNBCt>. A discussion of the findings by Goldsmith's Prof Marj Mayo can be seen here - <http://bit.ly/J8HP5v>

**This month's 'That Takes the Biscuit' Award goes to:**

### **NCVO Barclays Leadership Programme 2012**

***"Leadership is a craft - you need to learn it"***

Apparently oblivious to the perils of reputational damage, or maybe just a case of 'we'll take money off anyone', NCVO has again teamed up with that upstanding pillar of social responsibility - Barclays Bank - to offer the NCVO Barclays Leadership Programme. This means says NCVO that: "... in this difficult time, leaders in our sector will get a fantastic, subsidised programme that can really impact on the success of their organisations. Great leaders inspire great performance in individuals, organisations and whole sectors. They anticipate the future and create direction, bring out the best in people, inspire trust and deliver results." And Sir Stuart Etherington, NCVO's own 'great leader' adds his personal endorsement: "If we package our passion, nurture our leaders, and invest in our skills, we will lead the social and political change that is too important to leave to chance." Does that social and political change have anything bearing on the activities of its corporate raider pals? Probably not.

## **Heros, heroines, & keeping on keeping on**

### **Funding cuts forces rethink on 'community action support'**

Following on from the experience of CDX (Community development Exchange), national second tier agency Urban Forum has embarked on a consultation exercise about its future, and especially about new ways of working on a slimmer funding base.

The Forum has put out a paper and is asking its membership to respond. In circulates statement the Forum says: "We believe that the best way to support social action in communities and to genuinely empower the groups we work with, is to adopt a less centralised approach to how we work. Rather than employing a traditional model of support that concentrates power and capacity at the centre, we want to move to a more distributed network that recognises the capability and strengths throughout our membership."

You can access the paper here - <http://bit.ly/Kasu3a> as well as ways in which you can put your own views into the mix.

## **AYANNA WORKSHOPS offering an alternative....**

Ayanna Workshops is a new initiative that came out of some community workshop conversations bringing together activists and community workers in London.

The starting point was: "a wish to do something a bit different to the organisations many of us had experience working with. We identified organisations in the voluntary/third/campaigning sector as one of the barriers to truly exciting social change based on values of social justice - with models of funding, marketing, management hierarchies and bureaucracy that don't often do best by the people these organisations claim to represent and advocate for."

You can clock the programme and more information here - <http://bit.ly/KBLyoz>

## **Disability activists show the way again**

Disability activist Pat Onions has been busy. In addition to setting off a direct-gov petition calling for a stop and review of the damaging changes facing disabled people (37,000 signatures so far and rising - you can sign up here <http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/20968>), she and her mates seem to have organised the professionals to stick their heads above the parapet too. This has resulted in a feisty letter to the *Guardian* signed by an impressive list of chief executives and other luminaries of the disability world.

"We are concerned about the current and projected impacts on disabled people of the changes to employment and support allowance; the ongoing issues with the work capability assessment; the reduction in local authority social care expenditure; the replacement of disability living allowance by personal independence payment; the closure of the independent living fund and the cap on housing benefit," says the letter. You can see the whole thing here: <http://bit.ly/JKqiNQ>

## **NatCAN reviews the way forward**

NatCAN, the National Community Activist Network surveyed its 750 members on what they want from the network and how it ought to go about its work. The results were fed into a review the results of which are now available. I particularly liked: "NatCAN is like a good pub, where a few hosts are welcoming - people can choose to enter any of many rooms and find good company/issues as they wish. That doesn't stop any member suggesting to all NatCAN members that a single issue could be pursued, but there's no NatCAN line that everyone has to follow."

You can see the working group report here <http://bit.ly/IChqqv> and add your own comments to it.

## **JUST West Yorkshire challenge Bradford Council**



JUST West Yorkshire has issued an open challenge to Bradford Council's decision to withdraw funding from Anah, a specialist service for BME communities facing domestic violence. In their statement, JUST say: "JUST has had no option but to issue an open statement as Bradford Council has failed to respond to our concerns to date."

All Council funding to the project was withdrawn despite, says JUST, a flawed Equalities Impact Assessment. The manner of the decision and the Council's behaviour has also led to the accusation that: "The lack of openness and transparency around current decision making processes and the differential allocation of funding to BME DV projects suggests that the Council is institutionally racist (using the Macpherson definition). Calls from Anah to investigate the charge of institutional racism have been ignored, despite the seriousness of the allegation."

You can read the whole sorry story here: <http://bit.ly/JqhQCF>

## **WSCC slammed for cancelling Health and Social Care Select Committee meeting**

West Sussex County Council has been slammed by the Don't Cut Us Out Campaign for cancelling the Health & Adult Social Care Select Committee meeting on May 24 for 'lack of anything important to discuss.'

Barry Pickthall, spokesman for the Campaign, which is opposing £31 million Council cuts to front-line services and care support, said, "This is just unbelievable. The most recent statistics show that 12% of elderly, and 20% of those people with learning disabilities have lost all their care support in the cuts, and more than 50% have lost an average of between £37 and £47 per week in their support packages. These are people who are already living on subsistence levels. The very least this Select Committee should be asking is for facts and figures on how they are coping."

In April, the Don't Cut Us Out Campaign published its latest WSCC Dossier of Shame, exposing the fact that while cutting £31 million from their Adult Services budget, the Council is salting away a staggering £38 million into reserves which now stand at a record £146 million!

You can get more details of what the campaign is up to here - [www.dontcutusout.org.uk](http://www.dontcutusout.org.uk)

## **Keep on cuts campaigning....**

Caroline Molloy from Stroud Against the Cuts gives some campaign tips they have learnt from their high profile and effective campaign to defeat attempts to privatise Gloucestershire Health Services. Get the gen here - <http://bit.ly/JPAHdP>

## **Unite gives the voice to cuts victims**

Unite now has a section of its website devoted to accounts of the effects on the cuts from people in the voluntary and community sector. To see these testimonials - and add your own - check in here - <http://www.uniteforoursociety.org/cuts/>

## **The madness continues**

### **Privatise the Police: will it be the army next?**

Though not yet directly involving the voluntary sector this news from the blog of journalist Clare Sambrook is so shocking that we've included it here.

Clare spotted an image of the epaulettes now being worn by Lincolnshire civilian police workers which proclaims G4S / Lincolnshire Police. Believing this was a spoof to highlight the fact that 540 police staff had been transferred to private contractor G4S as part of a £200M deal to privatise police functions, Clare then established that the new corporate logo was indeed genuine. As Clare noted: "What self-respecting police authority would submit to its name being attached to a corporate logo at all, let alone a corporate logo in the striking red, white and black colour scheme favoured by the Third Reich?"

According to spokespeople from G4S and Lincolnshire Police the epaulette was jointly designed and agreed by both parties. It is worn by employees working in departments such as the Force Control Room, Custody as well as by Town Enquiry Officers. G4S staff will also run, among other things, the crime management bureau, the central ticket office and collisions unit, the criminal justice unit, the resource management unit and firearms licensing.

This is an awfully long way from police minister Nick Herbert's assurances just weeks ago that, "This is all about supporting the front line by making sure that the backroom jobs that do that can be done more efficiently" and that core policing would not be privatised.

You can catch up with Clare's blog here - <http://www.claresambrook.com/>

### **Government funding – who's on the inside track?**

Interesting figures released show who had the kindly light of Cabinet office funding shined upon them in 2011/12. 60 organisations were awarded a total of £32.4m (not including funds passed to arm's-length bodies).

Top of the list was the Challenge Network, set up Lord Wei (remember him?) in 2009 which received a cool £7.1m, more than 20% of the total. The Network is the main provider of the National Citizen Service project. Next in line is V, the volunteering

charity which got £3.1m. The other organisations that received more than £1m were Catch 22 (£2.3m), the Football League Trust (£1.7m), Big Society Capital (£1.6m), the Community Foundation Network (£1.6m), Safein Tees Valley (£1.3m), Young Devon (£1.3m) and the Prince's Trust (£1m).

Also of interest is the double funding that went to the Citizenship Foundation who got two grants of £300,000 and £200,000 respectively from the Social Action Fund. According to an inside leak this was the result of a mistake. A source close to the application process said: "Administrators intended to commission one project but there was confusion about which one and two civil servants each sent an email, relating to different projects. There was then a general hand-wringing and the courageous decision to make it look like the plan was to spend on two projects all along rather than own up to a mistake." Needless to say the Office for Civil Society had a different account: "Both programmes were scrutinised separately by grants assessors in the Social Investment Business, who evaluated the applications on their independent merits. Both programmes were also considered by independent experts that make up the Social Action Fund advisory panel, who approved their grant funding". However, they declined to release the documents demonstrating the truth of this account.

### **'Open' public services 2012 – government review of its awful progress in privatisation and community (dis)empowerment**

The Cabinet Office has just published a first update report on the progress of the Government's Open Public Services work. It boasts of their achievements and confirms their intention to push forward "competition, choice and accountability".

Essential reading really, but do choose a time when you're not already thinking about shuffling off your mortal coil. You can nonetheless depress yourself here -

<http://bit.ly/Hn7ygy>