

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

[www.independentaction.net](http://www.independentaction.net) ..... [indyaction@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:indyaction@yahoo.co.uk)

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**Newsletter No: 29**

**November 2012**

## **When push comes to shove, how do we react?**

As the pressures of these awful times mount, more and more people and organisations find themselves on the receiving end of policies and practices that are as obviously damaging to vulnerable people, local communities, voluntary groups and professional agencies as the nose on your face. How people react to these pressures reveals a lot about the personal and organisational politics that lie behind these reactions. One observation on this process is that the divide between the professionalised services part of the voluntary sector and the rest is opening up rather than closing together. At our recent national conference, disability activists complained bitterly about the difficulties they had experienced in trying to get the disability professionals to even *help* them with their campaigning - "we are the people who are actually experiencing the cuts in income and services," they said, "why are we left to do all this ourselves".

While a strong message that comes from the material that forms this newsletter is the extent to which the second and third tier agencies in the sector are falling over themselves to make their faces fit with the government - see especially this month's 'That Takes the Biscuit' award. Personally I don't think that will save their funding or their precious seats at the table and the more they behave like this, the less I care. What would the government have to do to make them get off their backsides and actually join some serious opposition? Maybe we will all have to do it without them, but that's a disgrace and a crying shame.

## **News from the Coalition**

### **Lively national conference vents anger at cuts and contracts**

Our national conference on the 5th October, mounted jointly with the TUC, Unite, Unison and with the involvement of NAVCA, brought together more than 150 people

from all sides of the voluntary and community sector to debate how to counter catastrophic government cuts to jobs, services and living standards, and the damaging effects of privatisation on public services, the welfare state and the voluntary sector itself. The mix of service providers, community groups and activists was especially useful, enabling an exchange of views from different vantage points, about effective oppositional action.

Videos of the plenary presentations are now viewable - you can get to them here - <https://vimeo.com/album/2129806>; or here - [http://youtu.be/sUng\\_1AfaX8](http://youtu.be/sUng_1AfaX8). We're working on a report of the event and that will be up on the website soon.

## **Event reports now available**

Reports of two events we held back in the summer are now available on our website. The first is the event we ran jointly with LVSC at the end of May - 'Is commissioning killing us?' You can download it here - <http://bit.ly/Ub1ktE>

The second is the report of the workshop run in July with the National Community Activist Network called 'Gaining Power: Challenges for Activists'. You can clock that one here - <http://bit.ly/WEPCil>

## **The forked tongue of 'Localism'**

As the voluntary sector establishment tools up to sell the government's spin on the people power fiction of 'localism', we have published, with the TUC, about the only critical voice available on the subject. 'Localism: Threat or Opportunity' is a series of short essays looking at aspects of the new Act and their likely consequences.

A theme running through these pieces is how the provisions of the Act appear to offer new rights and opportunities whilst a different reality emerges from an analysis of the detail. You can download the booklet here: [https://www.tuc.org.uk/tucfiles/354/Localism\\_Guide\\_2012.pdf](https://www.tuc.org.uk/tucfiles/354/Localism_Guide_2012.pdf)

## **Meanwhile, let's keep an eye on 'localism'**

We are keen to keep a critical eye on the effects of the Localism Act and are discussing a new project - 'Localism Watch' - to provide a place to gather information and intelligence about what is going on at local level and how this can be useful to activists. We are currently looking at how this idea might be applied to the effects of the Neighbourhood Planning Framework, but we are also interested in how the Right to Bid and especially the Right to Challenge will get played out in local areas. If you are interested to work with us on developing the idea please get in touch with [andy@independentaction.net](mailto:andy@independentaction.net).

## **New commissioning page – tell us about your experiences**

It is common knowledge that our position on commissioning is that it's 'the devil that has come amongst us'. We have set up a new page on the website to collect experiences of commissioning and we are keen that you let us know how commissioning has impacted on you and your organisation - and the invitation of course extends to those of you who

have good experiences of commissioning! Please let us have contributions which you can make here - <http://bit.ly/RKfBz4>

## **Take some inspiration from our 'stories'**

The results of our 'stories project' are now all written up and on the website. Six stories altogether of groups determined to do what they think is best for them and their communities, irrespective of the pressures upon them. You can read about the free spirits here - <http://www.independentaction.net/category/stories/>

## **Events coming up**

### **Europe Against Austerity – 14th November – London**

The Coalition of Resistance has called a protest rally as part of a Europe-wide day of action against the austerity policies of European governments. Assemble 5pm - 5:30pm at the European Commission, 32 Smith Square, SW1P 3EU for a march past Parliament to rally at 6.30pm.

More information from: [coalitionofresistance@mail.com](mailto:coalitionofresistance@mail.com).

### **An Agreement of the People – November 17th – London**

In 1647, during the English Revolution, the Levellers set out an 'Agreement of the People' because relations between the people, parliament and the monarchy had broken down. In 2012, the relationship between the state, corporations and the people is in the same parlous condition. Is a new Agreement of the People is needed; a people's constitution?

World to Win and other groups are holding a meeting on the 17th November to map out and shape proposals. The meeting will be at the Waterloo Action Centre, 1-5pm. More details how to book yourself in here -

<http://www.aworldtowin.net/about/event17Nov2012.html>

### **Consortiums, Collaborations and Community Groups – 20th November, Nottingham**

The Community Sector Coalition, with the WEA and 'Nottingham Equal' are holding a meeting on the 20th November 10-12.30 to discuss how small groups can benefit from the larger funding programmes, such as those run by the Lottery Fund.

More information and book a place from [MRogers@wea.org.uk](mailto:MRogers@wea.org.uk). Free lunch too!

### **Celebrating and Reclaiming Community Development Learning and Practice – 21st/22nd November - Derbyshire**

The Federation for Community Development practice are holding an annual conference on 21st and 22nd November to debate community development practice "in an age of 'austerity for some' and increasing inequality for all". The event will take place in Alfreton, Derbyshire. Further information on the FCDL website - [www.fcdl.org.uk](http://www.fcdl.org.uk) or contact [admin@fcdl.org.uk](mailto:admin@fcdl.org.uk) or 0114 253 6770.

## **Where next for the In Defence of Youth Work Campaign? - November 29th in London; November 30th in Sheffield**

Four years on since launch of the IDYW Campaign, two meetings coming up to review where next for the initiative. "The Coalition has pursued relentlessly the targeted agenda set by New Labour. In addition it has propelled the neo-liberal fetish of the market deep into the heart of services for young people. Commissioning is the order of the day. This shifting landscape throws up a range of questions and concerns for the campaign...."

More information from the campaign website -

<http://www.indefenceofyouthwork.org.uk/wordpress/> and you can book your place with Tony Taylor - [tonymtaylor@gmail.com](mailto:tonymtaylor@gmail.com)

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

### **Open Democracy slams Border Agency's 'punitive campaign against children'**

Open Democracy has published a damning report from investigative journalist Clare Sambrook on the policies and behaviour of the UK Border Agency towards children in their 'care', including evidence of handcuffing children in hospital, smear campaigns against medical researchers, flaws in safeguarding arrangements, misleading Parliament, and deals with discredited security company G4S.

You can get angry here - <http://bit.ly/Qk2nvJ>

### **Wholesale privatisation at Cornwall Council hits the buffers**

Attempts by the ruling group on Cornwall County Council to privatise £300M worth of council services have been foiled. In tempestuous scenes, the plans have been thrown out by councillors, egged on by a petition of more than 6,400 signatures. Council leader - Alec Robertson - was forced to resign after a vote of no confidence and with him a raft of cabinet members. A new Leader and cabinet has now been elected and the outsourcing plans put on hold to allow an investigation into the future of Council services.

Councillor Andrew Wallis, who started the petition and led the revolt, said: "It is often said democracy is dead or dying in Cornwall, but I say that it is clearly alive if so many people's signatures have brought this issue back to the table again." You can cop the story here - <http://bitly.com/Ywhv9s>.

### **The insidious destruction of public services**

Excellent article in the Chartist magazine by Dexter Whitfield on the destruction of public services and the methods being pursued to do this, together with the fightback that we need to organise to stop this madness. You can clock the article here -

<http://www.chartist.org.uk/articles/econsoc/jul12whitfield.htm> and the themes are

picked up in another article by the same author in Red Pepper - check that one out here - <http://www.redpepper.org.uk/plan-b-and-beyond/>

## **Why Inequality Matters**

'My Fair London' has produced a mini version of the Spirit Level called Why Inequality Matters. You can download it now for free on the home page of their website - [www.myfairlondon.org.uk](http://www.myfairlondon.org.uk)

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

### **Fight privatisation and win? Yes it can be done!**

October 15th marked a decisive moment for anti-privatisation campaigners when the Gloucestershire Primary Care Trust announced that the county's 8 community hospitals and health services (including 3000 nurses and other health workers would remain in the NHS. This reversed an earlier decision to outsource services by creating a 'social enterprise' The decision follows a hard-fought 18 month campaign by anti-cuts campaigners across the county, including a High Court challenge against the PCT's outsourcing plans. You can read more here - [www.stroudagainstthecuts.co.uk](http://www.stroudagainstthecuts.co.uk) - and you can pass on your congratulations here - [contact@stroudagainstthecuts.co.uk](mailto:contact@stroudagainstthecuts.co.uk)

Meanwhile, a campaign to fight the coalition government's NHS reform plans is gathering momentum, as doctors from City and Hackney announced they will be the first in the country to write safeguards against privatisation into their constitution... They've joined forces with national campaign group 38 Degrees to create what they hope will become a model constitution for the rest of the country. Read more here - <http://bit.ly/SskLlf>

### **Fighting the cuts? Can you use the Law?**

The 'Empowering the Voluntary Sector' project offers free advice to organisations who want to fight cuts to their funding and explore whether there is potential to use the Law to do this. The project will also advise on Compact issues. You can contact them on 020 7520 3161 or [evsAdvice@ncvo-vol.org.uk](mailto:evsAdvice@ncvo-vol.org.uk).

If you have used the project, we would like to hear your feedback - good, bad or indifferent - email [andy@independentaction.net](mailto:andy@independentaction.net)

### **Campaign group forces debate but loses the vote**

The West Sussex based campaign 'Don't Cut Us Out' forced a debate within the County Council chamber on the 19th October about the Council's proposed cuts to adult social care budgets, following vigorous local action and a 5,000 signature petition. The Council banned the group presenting video testimony from disabled people about the effect of the cuts on them and went on to approve the budget programme previously agreed. The campaign continues - clock it here: <http://www.dontcutusout.org.uk/>

### **Community organising or mobilising opposition to the cuts?**

Interesting piece by John Diamond, Professor of Urban Studies at Edge Hill

University, on how we need to guard against being overwhelmed by the neo-liberal awfulness and remember our radical grassroots power. Published on the NatCAN site, you can have a look here - <http://bit.ly/TqmeEk>

## **This month's 'That Takes the Biscuit' Award**

### **The roll call of shame in more special pleading for charities**

NCVO, ACEVO, NAVCA and 11 other national organisations have written to the government pleading for more concessions to help the voluntary sector implement government plans to privatise public services, cut benefits and entitlements and encourage volunteering as a substitute for statutory services. Lowlights of this appalling letter include:

"Firstly, our sector stands ready to make a greater contribution to the Government's Open Public Services agenda."

"Our sector is keen to sustain (the Olympics) volunteering spirit and to develop new volunteering opportunities appropriate to the changing expectations of volunteers and the needs of our community and public services. We would be glad to arrange a meeting with Ministers to discuss how our sector, and volunteering, can make a greater contribution to the next stages of public service reform."

"As the government's welfare reforms take effect we know that some of the most vulnerable people in the country will be affected - including children. Our sector will be at the frontline - helping individuals and families prepare for and manage change. We therefore ask Ministers to give special consideration to the important work that our sector, and particularly advice services, can play in relation to welfare reforms and preparing for their impact."

You can see the full text here - <http://bit.ly/VTewFO> and - just so you know - here is the full list of those prepared to sign such a letter: Stuart Etherington - NCVO; Joe Irvin - NAVCA; John Low - Charities Aid Foundation; Caron Bradshaw - Charity Finance Group; Graham Benfield - Wales Council for Voluntary Action; Nick O'Donoghue - Big Society Capital; Peter Lewis - Institute of Fundraising; Steve Wyler - Locality; Seamus McAleavey - NICVA; Peter Holbrook - Social Enterprise UK; Stephen Bubb - ACEVO; Justin Davis Smith - Volunteering England; Issan Ghazni - Voice 4 Change; David Emerson - Association of Charitable Foundations.

### **'No new nuclear' campaigners gird up their loins**

The recent government announcement to spend £300M on planning for the next generation of nuclear power stations has given protestors another hill to climb. The 'Stop New Nuclear' coalition is the place to find out what they're up to - you can connect with them here - <http://stopnewnuclear.org.uk/>

## **This will put a smile on your face**

When Alex Nunn, anti-privatisation campaigner, was unexpectedly headhunted by private healthcare giant Care UK, he applied himself diligently to the job description with hilarious results. Have a laugh and give him a pat on the back here -

<http://bit.ly/Xg2Hxz>

## **New fund for "grants with a difference"**

The Edge Fund is a new source of funding to support "communities, campaign groups and activists who are working to oppose inequality, oppression and environmental destruction... or who are facing injustice themselves because of their class, ability, race, religion, sexual orientation, or other reasons, and who are actively working to challenge these injustices to create a more equal world."

Edge Fund members are donors, activists and communities facing injustice. Priority funding will go to grassroots or unfunded groups and those seeking "real and lasting radical change." First round grants are not likely to be more than £5,000 and for UK-based groups only. To apply, email one page to [edgefund@riseup.net](mailto:edgefund@riseup.net) saying who you are, what you do, your annual income and how you fit into the above description. Or call/text to 0776 712 6915 and pass the details over that way.

You can also make donations to the fund and get involved in its work.

[www.edgefund.org.uk](http://www.edgefund.org.uk) ; [www.facebook.com/edgefund](http://www.facebook.com/edgefund) ; @theedgefund ; Call or text 0776 712

## **Calls for a National Childcare Service based on equality for children not profit**

The National Child Care Network has come up with proposals to campaign nationally for radical changes to the way that childcare is provided - "a National Childcare service based on the principal all children having a right to access affordable, high quality childcare regardless of their parents or carers income status.

You may be too late now for this one, but they are meeting on Saturday 10th November 2012 at the Mechanics Institute, Princess Street, Manchester to give it a push. More information from [nccn2go@gmail.com](mailto:nccn2go@gmail.com)

## **Squatting fightback**

In case you hadn't noticed, residential squatting is now a criminal offence. But before you dash in to hang up your crowbar - there is hope yet. The law has more holes than a Swiss cheese and it'll be a good year before it becomes clear how the law is going to be interpreted and enforced. And helping in the fight against Section 144 of the Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act (LASPO) is the recently formed Squatters' Legal Network. The Network aims to provide legal advice and support prior to, during and after any evictions or attempted evictions. To that end they have an emergency phone number, an email address, a website, a Twitter presence and a band of eager activists - get in touch, get involved - here they are -

<https://network23.org/squatterslegalnetwork/>

## The madness continues

### Secret note exposes Bubb's collusion with private healthcare interests – why isn't this a resigning issue?

An astonishing expose by Social Investigations has revealed the role played last year by Stephen Bubb, chief executive of ACEVO, in pushing the interests of private healthcare providers. Bubb had chaired the Government's 'Choice and Competition' sub group - as part of the so-called 'listening exercise', set up after vociferous opposition to the plans for NHS reform. The document reveals not only that Bubb had secret meetings with the 'NHS Partners Network', a private healthcare trade and lobby group, but also agreed effectively to act as their covert spokesperson, "agree(ing) the approach he would take, what the key issues are, and how he would handle the politics".

Bubb's complicity with this lobby is praised fulsomely: "the arguments in favour of choice, competition, plurality and economic regulation put forward by the small handful of like-minded members ably led by Sir Stephen Bubb have often carried the day and won more support than we might have expected."

So there we are. This is what our Stephen gets up to on his day off. Has it been reported in the mainstream press? Has it heck! But you can read the whole sordid story here - [www.bit.ly/Qty2nSo](http://www.bit.ly/Qty2nSo)

### Who the hell is the 'Join In Trust'?

In a classic case of reinventing the wheel, the Cabinet Office has bunged the 'Join In Trust' (who?) £2M to '...encourage people across the country to get involved at their local sports facilities and promote volunteering in local community organisations and other institutions.' This not insignificant amount will apparently fund just the first year's work of this totally unknown organisation whose charitable registration was only confirmed in June of this year (see how little info there is about them here - <https://www.joininuk.org/>). Hello! - has anyone in the Cabinet Office heard of Volunteer Centres, you know those well established local projects that have been promoting volunteering for the last 50 years and which are now being cut to pieces???

### National second tiers on the skids

The extent to which the national infrastructure organisations allowed themselves to become overblown on government money is now becoming clear as they scramble into mergers or close down altogether.

**Volunteering England** has thrown in its lot with **NCVO**, which will no doubt mark its descent into meaningless managerial drivel. **NAVCA** and **Community Matters** are having comradely talks about joining forces, although 'forceful' is hardly an epithet one would apply to either organisation. This promises, according to the press release, to "create a powerful new champion for local charities and community groups". Charities and community groups will be delighted.



Meanwhile, **London Civic Forum** has gone down, announcing "since LCF's work is not a fiscal priority, LCF has to close" (strange relationship with your mission statement?). **CDX** is shutting down in December, having lost its 'strategic partner' status with the government and spent out its reserves. **Urban Forum** is on the skids and seems to be now largely confined to pushing government Localism spin about local groups running public services, whilst consulting on an impenetrable new structure seemingly rooted in the wonders of social media.....

### **But if your face fits.....**

On the other hand, it's not like there's no money about at all.... For example, **Locality** has just got an extra 7.5M quid to support its winsome community organisers programme as the bursaries have run out, and with **NCVO** and the **Social Investment Business** have got a cool £30M of government money to support the privatisation of public services and the acquisition of community assets.

While over at the National Citizen Service, a £200M bonanza was recently shared out between 8 lucky providers, the largest of which - winning 6 of the 19 contracts - was NCS, made up of sub-contracting youth charities **Catch22**, the **National Youth Agency**, **vinspired** and **UK Youth**, working with this season's 'must have', a prime contractor from the private sector, yes the infamous **SERCO**! Are the young people of this country in safe hands?

### **Freedoms lost in half of London's public spaces**

The erosion of civil liberties is perniciously incremental. One little known aspect is the ability of various authorities to declare special zones where you can be fined or prosecuted for certain activities - such as including leafleting, protesting, dog walking, gathering in groups, and drinking in public.

Now revealed by the Manifesto Club, in an interactive map, is the truly awful fact that there are no less than 435 of these special zones in London, the boundaries of which are often unmarked. You can check the map out here -

<http://www.bannedinlondon.co.uk/>

### **Crisis for the Third Sector? 'Worst of Times Dialogues' launched by research centre**

The Third Sector Research Centre has launched a series of 'dialogues' to debate the current condition and future of the voluntary and community sector. This will have a number of elements including discussion papers, seminars, and on-line question and answer sessions. Five themes will be explored: Is the third sector in crisis? No longer a voluntary sector? Is the third sector so special? Is the third sector being overwhelmed by the state and the market? A strategic lead for the third sector?

Sadly, what could be an important debate has immediately been undermined by the appointment of a 'sounding board' of the usual suspects, with scarcely a radical voice amongst them (here you are, have a look for yourself - <http://bitly.com/ViEPsD>). More air time for the same old tired rhetoric about 'challenges and opportunities'

'cautious concerns' and 'dilemmas going forward'. I'll lay money that it will all be about services and professionals, and its conclusions will be stuffed full of definite maybes and the need for further research. Meanwhile Rome continues to burn briskly. You can plug into this exercise, if you want to, here -<http://bit.ly/UohIHq>

## **Locality's Community Organisers gobble up another £7.5M**

Locality has been given another £7.5M for what is interestingly described as the "government's community organisers programme". The money will be used to subsidise the employment of 'senior community organisers' who have used up the £20,000 given to each of them in their first year but have found an organisation willing to employ them to keep going. This additional £15,000 will need to be matched by the employer. The funding is described as an "employment start up grant" and will be paid in instalments (will it be payment-by-results we wonder??).

According to Locality the grant total of 39 organisers have completed the training programme. Quite a way to go to reach the 500 promised and where has the programme got to with its target of 4,500 volunteer organisers? If all the £7.5M is spent it will take the total of government money sunk in this scheme to £22.5M by 2015.

## **Brave face put on payment-by-results**

Chris Grayling, the new justice secretary, has 'paused' payments-by-results schemes in the criminal justice sector "to assess strategy" but insists that PBR "remains a priority". Projects affected include plans to contract out some aspects of probation services in Wales and the West Midlands and a scheme at HMP Leeds that works with offenders released from prison. A community innovation scheme, which asks voluntary sector organisations to submit ideas about PBR to the Ministry of Justice, has also been put on hold.

Clive Martin, director of Clinks, the umbrella body for charities working with offenders said the decision to pause was "an opportunity to explore the complicated issues that have arisen from this controversial contract framework". But he said the delay could cause financial difficulties for a number of charities, which were relying on "business opportunities" from the Ministry of Justice. More fool them, says us.

## **Meanwhile more moaning about the Work Programme**

NCVO has published another report on the appalling Work Programme, pointing out that just under half of the 98 voluntary groups polled are subsidising the delivery of the programme from their own reserves. 46 of them said that their contracts are "at risk of failure within the next six months" and 25 said they are "at risk of failure before the end of the contract period". NCVO asks the government "...to investigate the existing funding arrangements". That should sort it out then.

Here's the link if you can be bothered to read what we all already know -  
<http://bit.ly/RhUKmx>