

National Coalition for Independent Action

Celebrating voluntary & community action to change and challenge the world around us
www.independentaction.net indyaction@yahoo.co.uk

Want to talk back to the Coalition? Sign up to our Google group, have your say and share your experiences <http://groups.google.co.uk/group/ncia-discussions>

Newsletter No: 8

October 2008

Welcome to Newsletter 8. Well, we've all had a rubbish summer so bad news there. But while we've been ducking the rain, plucky folk around the country have been busy saying no, taking independent action, and debating what kind of voluntary sector we actually want to see around us. So - unusually - this newsletter is **FULL OF GOOD NEWS!** I know, I know, it's astonishing. Of course, there is some bad news about too, but that is sitting currently in a separate file and I will outrage you with that lot in a couple of week's time. But, for the meantime, bathe in the warm glow of people doing what they want to do, because they believe in it and want to do it.....

*However, we can't not mention that the Coalition may be in mortal danger, as it has come to our attention that we are being quoted by the **Conservative Party**. The Tories have put out their views about the voluntary sector in a green paper 'A Stronger Society: Voluntary Action in the 21st Century'. - see Colin Rochester's critique of this on our website www.independentaction.net/torysave. Included in this is an extensive quote from Coalition's Andy Benson on the damage being done by commissioning. With friends like these.....*

Please remember that we would like to hear your reactions to all this - both the issues that face us all, and the stance that we, in the Coalition, take on them. Join our Google group and tell us what you think. And please pass this newsletter on to someone else you think might want to read it....

News from the Coalition

'We won't roll over: Creating Alliances of Resistance' - Workshop 7th November in London

An event jointly organised by the Coalition and the Critically Chatting Collective (www.critically-chatting.0catch.com) - Friday 7th November 10.30am-4.30pm. Venue to be advised (but in the Euston area, London). Free - you'll even get biscuits (but bring your own lunch!). The workshop will focus on

the neo-liberal welfare agenda and its impact on both the statutory and voluntary sectors, using, in the morning, as a case study the changing face of Youth Work under New Labour - this will be presented by Bernard Davies. In the afternoon, we will ask how typical is youth work - what's happening elsewhere? And then, of course decide how we're going to change all that!

To book a place e-mail Tony Taylor at tonymtaylor@gmail.com

Catch the Coalition at.....

Come and catch the Coalition perspective at a number of upcoming events where we are speaking or running workshops....

- Advice UK Annual Conference - Wednesday 8th October in Warwick - www.adviceuk.org.uk
- World to Win Festival - Saturday 18th October in London - www.aworldtowin.net/about/standup.html
- Redbridge Advice Forum - Wednesday 5th November - afternoon - information from info@penandy.co.uk
- Why East London's Third Sector Matters - the case for thriving, independent voluntary, community and faith groups - Thursday 6th November - in Newham, London - <http://www.aston-mansfield.org.uk/s.nl/sc.12/category.132/.f>
- London Voluntary Services Council AGM - Wednesday 12th November in London - www.lvsc.org.uk
- Adur Voluntary Action AGM in West Sussex - Friday 14th November - www.adurvoluntaryaction.org

Working alongside local groups

In a number of areas, we are now working alongside local groups taking action on issues affecting their independence and voluntary action. Here's a summary of what's going on. If you live or work in these areas and want to get involved, please make contact locally rather than coming through us.

West Sussex

Several West Sussex CVSs have met with the Coalition, and decided to work together with us to influence the debate about future funding mechanisms. Support is gathering for an action research proposal, drafted jointly by NCIA and Adur Voluntary Action, which will look at impact/consequences of commissioning in the county, investigate and draw conclusions about funding models which will nurture independence and diversity, and create debate and action amongst VCS in the county. Adur's AGM in November will be used to spark further debate and find others wanting to be involved. We aim to connect this up with what others are also doing around funding issues. Local contact is Adrian Barritt adrian@adurcvcs.org.uk

South West

The South West Foundation, a small grant giving agency, is in touch with several hundred small community groups in their region. The Foundation has already produced a report, looking at the reality of funding for community action (Funders Footprints - phone 01275 333666 if you want a copy) and support the SW community development forum, as well as promoting other networks. The Foundation is currently undertaking research funded by Help the Aged looking at the value of older people's forums in having an influence and an independent voice. Working with smaller community organisations has led the Foundation to examine the position of women in communities. This has led to 'Where are All the Women?', a report based on the views of women who attended two focus groups in the area. They are planning, with the Women's Resource Centre, an event on 9th December looking at gender issues. The Foundation is about to send out their newsletter, with information about NCIA. It's hoped that this will prompt interested people to get in touch. Local contact is Jan Crawley - jcrawley@southwestfoundation.org.uk

Newham

The Coalition is working with groups in Newham defending the local VCS against attempts at Council control. The Council is using commissioning to take greater over control of VCS, including pressure on second tier agencies. It has funded only 25 voluntary groups and has said it will only talk to these bodies. The rest of the VCS has been excluded from LA/VCS discussions. Groups have rallied round their existing representational groups and are resisting the Council's attempts to create a new infrastructure body working according to their specification. There have been a series of meetings with different sectors and a statement/petition to show support for Newham Voluntary Services Consortium and opposition to Council plans.

Groups are being encouraged to contribute to the Government survey on the state of the "third sector", to show what is really going on. The local compact is moribund but tactically ("put up or shut up") it's seen as important to keep the shell going, especially since the PCT is a more collaborative party and can show the LA how it should be working. An independent review body, chaired by PCT, has been set up to examine commissioning in the borough, which will report in November 08. A conference is planned for November 6th, at which the Coalition will have a platform. The local contact is: Kevin Blowe at Aston Mansfield Kevin.Blowe@aston-mansfield.org.uk

Hackney

Independent advice providers in Hackney, through the Hackney Advice Forum, have been organising over the last year to resist Council plans to move the advice grants budget into a commissioning framework. An important step in this struggle was the creation of a strategic document setting out how the Forum intends to develop and sustain provision and relationships between groups. This document then formed the basis for the campaign to resist the Council's intentions. The outcome was successful and the Council backed off from its proposal, intending only to 'commission' grants over £50k (of which there were only two). Indeed the principle was extended to the whole of the grants budget thus protecting (for the time being) about £1.5M of grants expenditure. The action was not lost on the rest of the local voluntary sector and the Forum was given an award for achievement in influencing local policy. Also the example set by the Forum's stand is now beginning to feed through to the ways in which voluntary sector people regard the negative changes to their environment. It is hoped that this will encourage a more robust defence to VCS independence emerging from other parts of the local sector. The local contact is Andy Benson, Hackney Advice Forum, info@penandy.co.uk

Leicester and Leicestershire

A joint CVS/Coalition initiative began with a meeting in July, which focussed on issues around advice, disability, volunteering and infrastructure. The main themes were: commissioning/funding; difficulties around collective action; colonial local authorities; weak representation by CVS. A second meeting is planned for October to extend the debate. Notes of the July meeting are on Voluntary Action Leicester's website. www.voluntaryactionleicester.org.uk/news/2008/aug/have-voluntary-groups-lost-some-their-voice. Or get in touch with the local contact Jim McCullum, Voluntary Action Leicester: 0116 257 5028 jim@voluntaryactionleicester.org.uk

In a personal capacity, Jim McCullum has also posted his Viewpoint on the Coalition's website that it's *Time to Get Political* www.independentaction.net/getpolitical

Cumbria/NE

The Coalition held a regional event in Newcastle on the 1st October to bring people together to talk about independence and what people are doing or want to do. More information from Ruth Townsley on ruthtownsley@btinternet.com .

Manchester/NW

Coalition activists in the Manchester area look like they may join forces with Community North West to plan a regional event, some research into who is winning contracts in the region and the effect this is having on the sector and local communities, and continued support to the Homes Under Threat Campaign. The focus of this work will be on what we want to happen rather than what we don't like about what is currently happening. More information from Dave Hannay at Community North West (info@communitynw.org.uk) or from the Manchester end by contacting John Shiers (john.shiers@ntlworld.com) or Jon Taylor (jon@taylor34.eclipse.co.uk)

East Anglia

In the Housing/Homelessness sector in the region, there is a big concern about the sector's three-way split - the big corporates appear to be cleaning up because they can sell themselves rather than necessarily being good at what they do, small community groups remain marginal and offered small amounts of support and money and the middle ground of locally-based staffed voluntary agencies, with connection, history, services and complex local relationships (all good things for users and communities) are being shafted. Competitive tendering especially is seen as a ludicrous way of allocating public resources and is very unlikely to produce better services or improvements for users and communities. And the main Government budget for this area of work has been shrinking year-on-year since 2003, leaving service providing agencies heavily exposed.

Action is needed politically on these issues, and efforts needed to organise collectively to take a stand against these short-sighted developments. Action also needs to include the second tier agencies. In the East Region, there have been some discussions within Space East which brings together the directors of the main voluntary supported housing agencies in the area. There may be some potential for further action at a regional level through Space East. Individual agencies are also looking into new ways of avoiding dependency on Government finance, such as purchasing property or developing social enterprise activities. The local contacts are Halford Hewitt, Ipswich Housing Action Group - halford@ihag.freeserve.co.uk and John O'Sullivan, St. John's Housing Trust in Lowestoft, Suffolk - osullivan.john@stjohnshousing.org.

And at national level....

Advice work

AdviceUK, the national advice membership network, representing many hundreds of local independent advice providers, has decided it is time to take a stand against damaging developments in its field, and especially the strategic plans of the Legal Services Commission (LSC). These issues will be raised at a members' conference in three weeks time at Warwick University. Independence will be the theme of AdviceUK's next magazine and a new report is being launched which attacks the working practices of many statutory sector services, the effects of which fall on advice agencies and their users (the RADICAL project).

At the same time, AdviceUK is supporting its members and others in Cardiff, Bridgend and the Vale of Glamorgan in fighting the potential LSC's Community Legal Advice Network there and similar work is beginning in Manchester. This effort will be directed towards putting pressure on key local politicians. This work is now being spread out into the other closed-list CLAC and CLAN areas and other areas where the LSC is talking to the Local Authorities. More information from Phil Jew - Phil.Jew@adviceuk.org.uk

Community Arts

The Independent Theatre Council brings together a wide range of community arts groups and organisations and has 600 members across the UK. ITC is keen to re-engage the community arts sector with its role in 'changing the world'. Charlotte Jones, the Chief Executive says, "the drift of recent years has been into too much introspective activity of how to survive financially and what is needed and demanded by funders. Even groups that are politically engaged tend to be obsessed by how to access the next source of funding. We're excited by the arrival of NCIA and see it as a spur and encouragement to us and as a useful source of information and support for the things we want to do in our own space. To stimulate the debate that is needed we have begun by bringing together a number of the 'industry bodies', including community arts but also extending to museums, visual arts, dance, and music. With these connections we have set up a 'summit' to 'grow our brains' and look at what we should be saying and doing about these big issues. We have had 2 meetings so far and are planning our next tranche of work, to include calling 'expert witnesses' who can stimulate new thinking and move us in new directions." More information from Charlotte - c.jones@itc-arts.org.

New thinking across the sector

The Coalition held a meeting in Birmingham on the 24th September which brought together the views of a number of activists about the job we have set ourselves and the most effective ways of doing it. Between those who came to the meeting and those who sent information to it, representation came from people involved in advice work, housing and homelessness, youth work, community work, community arts, asylum and immigration, second tier support, funders, and health & social care. Some useful notes of the meeting, including ideas about the Coalition's priorities will soon be on our website - if you can't wait e-mail us on info@penandy.co.uk and we'll send you a copy.

Organising, mobilising and (sometimes) WINNING!

Victory for Southall Black Sisters' against Ealing Council

Most readers will by now have heard of the High Court victory won in July by Southall Black Sisters (SBS) in their struggle with Ealing Council. This landmark victory was the culmination of a long campaign to stop the Council cutting funding to SBS.

The outcome has important implications for other groups working with ethnic minority communities, especially that:

- Local authorities must have proper regard to the Race Relations Act which also means undertaking proper equality impact assessments at the formative stage of the decision making process;
- Cohesion does not mean disregarding the need for equality. Local authorities cannot hide behind cohesion arguments to cut specialist service provision;
- Positive action is an essential part of the duty to promote racial equality. Special services run for and by BME groups (whatever their name) are not contrary to the Race Relations Act.

In withdrawing its case, Ealing Council also agreed to pay the costs of legal representation - both SBS's and those of the Equality and Human Rights Commission which intervened in the case as an interested third party. The total costs are likely to amount to about £100,000 - the amount that the Council previously gave SBS on an annual basis!

The case raised important questions about the meaning of equality and cohesion and provided a reminder of the need to maintain solidarity between white and black women in the face of 'divide and rule' tactics. SBS and the Coalition hope that, in SBS's words "this victory will encourage other grassroots groups to fight on in the struggle to build a civil society based on the principles of justice, equality and humanity".

And the Government's position now on 'single issue funding'?

Readers will also remember that part of Ealing Council's justification for cutting SBS funding was their reliance on the apparent support of the Government for a recommendation from the Commission on Integration and Cohesion. This argued that groups serving one particular section of the community should only exceptionally receive public funding. In fact the Government had not accepted this recommendation although local authorities around the country were busy assuming so. A consultation on this and other matters has now finished and an announcement from the Department of Communities and Local Government is expected any day. However, Hazel Blears has been heard to say in public that the Government is not going to adopt this particular recommendation!

Oppositional action on this issue has been led by Voice4Change, who will be able to tell you the latest position - vandna@voice4change-england.co.uk

New Coalition To Tackle UK Poverty

Forty-five charities and campaigning groups have come together to form 'Get Fair' to lobby against the causes of UK poverty in the run up to the next general election. The campaign will launch publicly in September and voluntary and community groups are being asked to sign up. Get Fair is calling on

political Parties to commit to ensuring everyone has adequate income, fair access to services and affordable homes. To sign up to Get Fair or to find out more go to: www.getfair.org.uk

Seen recently on a visit to Dulwich Hospital, in South London, a sign on a dilapidated, closed down building directing one to the "Pursuing Perfection Team". Seems their pursuit has taken them elsewhere

Stand Up For Your Rights – World to Win Festival October 18th

The collapse of one major financial institution after another this week is a compelling reason why you should register for the Stand Up for Your Rights festival on [October 18](#).

People have no choice but to fight for their rights to a job, to housing and to a decent standard of living as the financial meltdown hits home. The festival will point to ways out of the crisis by challenging the status quo. There will be speakers, debates, drama, films, exhibitions, live music and food. Also a new book *Unmasking the state - a rough guide to real democracy* will be available on the day.

The Festival will take place on Saturday 18 October, 2.00-8.30pm at Waterloo Action Centre, 14 Baylis Road London SE1 7AA

Advocacy in Darlington – local group's stand vindicated

We have previously reported on the struggle between voluntary group Advocacy in Darlington and Darlington Council (there is an account of this on our website too - [here](#)). Now news comes that, after literally years of evidence gathering, one of the care homes at the centre of the dispute - Victoria House - is now not only subject to a 90 day closure notice, but also that the Police and CPS are considering criminal charges over the abuse of the Human Rights of the vulnerable residents of the home.

The council's position on the matter is being investigated and Councillors have arranged meetings to have this position clarified. Meanwhile the transfer of residents to other care homes is being undertaken.

Closure of Victoria House was recommended by Advocacy in Darlington over five years ago and by a Senior Council officer five years before that. But both reports were suppressed by successive management regimes within Darlington Adult Care.

Chris Close from Advocacy in Darlington says "Whilst we welcome the move to close this 'home', this does not make up for the years of neglect and abuse of people's Human Rights about which Darlington Borough Council were fully aware and yet chose for reasons known only to themselves to ignore." The group has called for an independent public enquiry into this scandal and that action be taken against the Senior managers concerned.

You can read the whole story and congratulate AinD at <http://a-i-darlo.com/wordpress/>

Criminal damage acquittal at Kingsnorth Power Station

Six Greenpeace climate change activists have been cleared of causing criminal damage at a coal-fired power station in a verdict that is expected to embarrass the government and strengthen the anti-coal movement.

The jury of nine men and three women at Maidstone crown court cleared the six, five of whom had scaled a 200m tall chimney at Kingsnorth power station at Hoo, Kent in October 2007. The activists admitted trying to shut down the station by occupying the smokestack and painting the word "Gordon" down the chimney, but argued that they were legally justified because they were trying to prevent climate change causing greater damage to property around the world.

It was the first case where preventing property damage caused by climate change has been used as part of a "lawful excuse" defence in court. It is now expected to be used widely by environment groups.

Greenpeace's Ben Stewart, one of the acquitted said "Today's acquittal is a potent challenge to the government's plans for new coal-fired stations from jurors representing ordinary people in Britain who, after hearing the evidence, supported the right to take direct action in order to protect the climate."

You can read more at

<http://www.guardian.co.uk:80/environment/2008/sep/10/activists.carbonemissions>

And the pressure on coal-fired generation continues

Kingsnorth Power Station was again in the firing line when it was made the focus of protest in August for the Camp for Climate Action. 1500-2000 people participated in this event for week of discussions, collective sustainable living, fun for all ages, protests and direct action against government plans to expand coal-fired energy production and the effects of this on greenhouse gases and climate change.

You can read accounts of the week's events taken from the www.climatecamp.org.uk website.

And more acquittals at EDO MBM

Meanwhile Brighton SMASH EDO activists have achieved yet another acquittal - this time against conspiracy charges - at Brighton Crown Court. The five protesters had been arrested originally for minor charges (they locked themselves to the doors of the factory). However, their charges were raised to 'Conspiracy to Commit Criminal Damage' which carries a maximum ten year sentence and must be tried in a Crown Court before a jury. The arrests took place on a day of action in October 2007, where several different actions occurred including the supergluing of EDO's locks. The prosecution claimed that all five campaigners were part of a conspiracy to glue the locks of the factory.

This was a serious escalation of the conflict by the Sussex Police because if the defendants had been found guilty it would have opened the way for conspiracy charges to be brought against anyone participating in demonstrations.

Smash EDO protests every Wednesday outside EDO MBM. On October 15th a mass demonstration against the factory is planned. More information from <http://www.smashedo.org.uk>

Challenge to Government's 'Empowerment Fund'

More than 50 charities have signed a letter calling on the Government to abandon plans to allow only charities with annual incomes of at least £400,000 to apply for funding from its new Empowerment Fund.

The Communities and Local Government department is setting up the £7.5m fund to help registered charities run community schemes. But a consultation document on the proposals, to which interested parties can respond until the end of the month, proposes that charities with income less than £400,000 cannot apply. This mimics other government departments who have introduced similar income thresholds. For example the Department for Children, Schools and Families' Youth Sector Development Fund requires organisations to have an average annual turnover of at least £1m over a three-year period, and the Department of Health's Third Sector Investment Programme will only award grants that do not exceed 25 per cent of a charity's income.

Jay Kennedy, policy officer at the Directory of Social Change, said "Arbitrary thresholds should be abandoned. The driving factor, surely, is the department's desire to cut down on administrative hassle." John O'Sullivan, chief executive of St Johns Housing Trust, a small homelessness charity in Suffolk, said: "If we continue on this path, they will shake out a good portion of the voluntary sector and diversity will be lost."

Cornwall advice agencies action commended for Compact award

Independent Advice providers in Cornwall have been commended for the stand they have taken against the plans of the Legal Services Commission.

Cornwall County Council had entered into a joint commissioning venture with the Legal Services Commission (LSC) to develop a Community Legal Advice Network (CLAN) in Cornwall. [For background on this issue see <http://www.independentaction.net/legalaid>] But the development of such a network was hindered by the Legal Service Commission's proposals to force an open tender process on service providers, which would have resulted in local services being directly in competition with each other to bid for money they currently received. It could not be guaranteed that local providers would be successful in the bidding process, and the whole process would have threatened the strong local partnerships that already existed.

Following a consultation exercise with local advice providers, the County Council decided to withdraw from its agreement with the LSC and design the network that was needed using a more collaborative approach with advice agencies. It is important to note that the initiative for this move came from within the local authority, and illustrates what can be achieved when statutory and voluntary agencies find ways of working together in genuine 'partnerships' (so there, to those who say that the Coalition is against 'partnerships'!!)

More information from Kim Mundy on kmundy@cornwall.gov.uk

.....And trade union Unite calls for a major review of Legal Services Commission funding

Unite, the country's largest trade union, has joined others in criticising the LSC' new funding rules for Legal Aid and called for a major review of the scheme, singling out the introduction of fixed fees as a damaging and retrograde step. Adding to the growing body of evidence from elsewhere, Unite believes that legal assistance is being reduced and people with complex cases are finding it harder to get a legal aid solicitor, or an advice agency to take them on. Rates paid to lawyers for this work are, on average, three times lower than the average solicitor's hourly rate. The effects of the new rules will be hardest felt by vulnerable groups with no-one else to go for legal advice and assistance.

Unite is also worried that the way the scheme has been introduced by the LSC will hit voluntary sector staff, who face reductions in their pay and conditions, as their organisations make savings to conform to the LSC's new financial strait-jacket. This was at the heart of the recent long-running dispute at Shelter. The new arrangements have put huge pressure on agencies, and many are fearful that they will not be able to last until the end of the year.

Unite National Officer for the Community and Non Profit Sector, Rachael Maskell condemned what she called as 'the marketisation of the vulnerable' and the 'totally unacceptable pressures being placed on dedicated and hard-working voluntary sector professionals working in this area.'

More information from Rachael Maskell on Rachael.Maskell@unitetheunion.com

ActionAid applies for permission to demolish St Paul's Cathedral

Development aid charity ActionAid has applied for planning permission to demolish St Paul's Cathedral so that it can mine for bauxite, which would then be made "into drinks cans and foil for chocolate bars". The application was made to highlight opposition to plans by British mining company Vedanta Resources to extract bauxite from the Niyamgiri Mountain in the eastern Indian state of Orissa. The mountain is considered sacred by the 8,000-strong Kondh tribe.

ActionAid spokesperson Brendan O'Donnell, said: "This is a David and Goliath struggle - we've applied to knock down St Paul's to raise awareness of Vedanta's outrageous plan to destroy the Kondh's spiritual home. Just as Londoners wouldn't tolerate the demolition of their cathedral to make a quick buck, so the Kondh people won't allow their treasured mountain and forests to be destroyed. "

Lambeth Council admits unlawful "error" as disabled asylum seekers get their Freedom Passes back

A successful challenge by Transport for All and WinVisible, the women-with-disabilities group, has resulted in victory over Lambeth Social Services. The Department had decided that disabled people who were also asylum seekers were no longer entitled to the Freedom Pass. The groups protested to the Council and began legal proceedings when they got no result, saying that it was illegal for Lambeth to operate its own immigration test on top of the existing rules, and accused the authority of racism and disability discrimination. In finally capitulating, Lambeth claimed instead that "it was simply an error stemming from a misapplication of the law."

The groups are now pressing Lambeth Council to identify the other asylum seekers who have had their passes taken away or been turned down for one, and to publicise the right to the pass for disabled or elderly asylum seekers.

Further information from Faryal Velmi on Faryal@transportforall.com or from winvisible@allwomenscount.net.

Disabled protestors not “written off”

The Disabled Peoples' Direct Action Network (DAN) carried out a successful protest at the recent Department for Work and Pensions conference - 'No one written off' - about welfare reform. The complaint was that no disabled people's organisation has been allowed to speak or even invited to participate in the event.

Four DAN activists protested outside the conference, and two others had booked places as individuals and were inside the conference. After causing enough noise and disruption to temporarily halt the meeting, the protestors were allowed into the meeting, to speak directly to David Freud, James Purnell and Anne McGuire. The course of the meeting was changed and it was forced to include disabled people's views and lived experience in the discussion.

Find out more about DAN at http://dSPACE.dial.pipex.com/telegraph/m_civrgt.htm

Writings, musings and resources

Organising without organisations

Clay Shirky has made a name for himself with his ideas about the use of 'social media' - using electronic networking to organise for change but without the need for centralised or costly organisations. His book 'Here Comes Everybody' (Penguin Books) sets out his thesis, but if you want a flavour of what he's on about, have a look at this video of a lecture he gave at the Royal Society of Arts <http://www.thersa.org/events/vision/vision-videos/clay-shirky>

Social inequality and citizenship

and for the intellectuals amongst you a talk by Loic Wacquant who offers ideas for rethinking 'urban marginality' and attempt to "reinvigorate the public debate over social inequality and citizenship". Included are some interesting ideas here about the role of voluntary and community action in marginalised and disempowered communities. You can listen at:

http://www.thersa.org/events/past_events/urban-outcasts-incubating-the-precariat-in-the-21st-century

Directory of Social Change hits out at “singing to the Government’s tune”

In a series of recent articles, the Directory of Social Change has come out strongly against aspects of the Government's new order for dealing with the voluntary and community sector.

On contracts, Jay Kennedy says, "Contracts are killing the voluntary sector. Why? Because the system that government is increasingly using to fund us - tendering for contracts - has not been developed

with us in mind. It is flawed and we are ill-equipped to adapt to it. This puts us at risk, and jeopardises the services we can provide to people....."

And Debra Allcock Tyler echoes this in her article - "Commissioning is crushing the voluntary sector. This sounds like an over-dramatisation but even a cursory glance at the anecdotal evidence and an intelligent assessment of longer term consequences shows that there are big problems with a culture of commissioning services traditionally delivered by charities on a demand-led grant basis....."

Meanwhile in a third article DSC slams Government obsession with 'measuring things' - "Why is the government so obsessed with the voluntary sector 'proving' through 'evidence' that it is worth working with? Does the government actually provide evidence that its policies are right or even working? Is that what the political process is really about?....."

Useful material and a good read. If you want to have a look for yourself you will find these articles and other setting out DSC policy positions here -

<http://www.dsc.org.uk/NewsandInformation/PolicyandCampaigning/Policypositions>

Why equalities work should be supported

'Gaps and Solutions', a report from HEAR (the network of equality organisations) highlights the role and value of frontline equalities groups in addressing inequality and strengthening community cohesion, some of the problems they face, and looks at the best ways of supporting these groups. The report set out the basic picture and the arguments and the report summary is a useful simple briefing for those who just don't get it on equalities issues. You can download the report from the publications pages at www.rota.org.uk

About this Newsletter

This newsletter is the voice of the NCIA. Views expressed are not necessarily that of everyone involved with NCIA. We aim to issue newsletters regularly to keep you informed of what we and others are doing or saying.

How Can You Participate?

Tell us your news, write articles, sound off with your opinions and feedback but - most important - find ways of taking your own practical action to defend and protect the independence of your work and aspirations.

Talk to us and others via the Coalition google group <http://groups.google.co.uk/group/ncia-discussions> or the Coalition email address - indyaction@yahoo.co.uk .

We are all volunteers here and we welcome more offers of help. If you'd like to help make this initiative prosper then please get in touch with us.

Unsubscribe

If you wish to unsubscribe to this newsletter, please email indyaction@yahoo.co.uk and put 'unsubscribe' in the subject line

Note on Links

Often website links will not work properly on browsers other than Internet Explorer, and links on this email may appear or act funny in your programmes. You can always get to sites by cutting and pasting the address into your browser. Please let us know any technical issues you encounter with this email.