

NCIA calls on NAVCA to speak out on poverty and inequality



Inequality and poverty is increasing in the UK. Policies that cut rights and entitlements, and dismantle and privatise public services, make this worse. Voluntary and community agencies cannot be silent on this. They must speak out and act alongside those campaigning to stop this damage. It is the job of charities to fight poverty and inequality. It is not their job to be compliant or silent.

NCIA is calling on NAVCA, the national umbrella group for CVSs, to start a debate with its members to:

- oppose the privatisation of public services
- oppose contracts with voluntary agencies for mainstream public services
- oppose contracts which make voluntary groups a sub-contractor of private companies
- join with campaigners, and others, acting against the privatisation of public services
- join with campaigners, and others, acting against cuts to entitlements, rights and public services
- encourage and support its members to do this at a local level.

Here We Stand, the NCIA Inquiry into Local Activism and Dissent showed that local voluntary agencies are largely absent from local struggles. *“The mainstream voluntary organisations have sold out and don’t campaign. They are too professionalised and self-interested”* said a policy commentator. One activist explained that *“local networks are council creatures with no critical analysis, coherence or purpose of their own.”*

Many local umbrella groups, like CVSs [Council for Voluntary Services], are frustrated and unhappy with how they are responding to the pressures on local communities, **reporting** that CVSs are “adrift from the grassroots and they tend to be silent around issues such as welfare reform”. There is a **groundswell** of discontent amongst some local CVSs, “our CVS is not resisting harmful changes and supporting communities under pressure” and that “public service money is going to large global private companies, which increase poverty and reduce environmental sustainability. It is the CVS role to mobilise against privatisation, whether through private or voluntary agencies”. But the practice of many CVSs is quite different, as they encourage their members to compete in the fight for contracts. Gone is co-operation and collective action alongside local people. Here comes compliant cheap labour as a subcontractor to the State and private sector.

Yet amidst this bleak picture, there are examples of challenge and constructive dialogue with local decision-makers. Positive action based on a new way of operating. Some are

finding that loss of funding, by throwing off contractual shackles, can result in freedom of action and community benefits.

NCIA calls on NAVCA to speak out and take a stand against privatisation, cuts and austerity. And encourage their members to do the same locally.

NCIA Director Penny Waterhouse said:

We were shocked to hear reports of how local communities and activists are being let down by local organisations fearful for their own survival. These organisations are forgetting their missions, or being silenced by funding regimes and political pressure. On the positive side, activism is flourishing across cities and rural areas in innovative, non-bureaucratic initiatives like Stroud Against the Cuts, Peoples Republic of Southwark and West Sussex Don't Cut Us Out. Yes, it's difficult to survive in the current climate, but voluntary organisations have a duty to their users and communities. Unless these groups make a concerted effort to defend their social missions, and stand visibly with people affected by cuts, more radical groups will take their place as they wither away or become sub-contractors to the profit making of the private sector.

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