

THE BEGINNINGS OF A SHARED APPROACH?

As a result of our discussions, we drew out some common themes and some possibilities for practical work. Here is where I think we got to.

1. That we should have our own agendas

We need to take a position, to work out what we are FOR and what should be done, as well as what we are against...otherwise we are without direction and vulnerable to co-option. We need to overcome our own weaknesses.

2. That action and effort should be focused on achieving social change and social justice

Our efforts must lead to demonstrable benefits for those facing injustice, inequality and the abuse of power. It is structural factors that cause such things and which must be tackled. We must be clear what we mean by social change – for what and for whom - otherwise it is a meaningless statement.

3. A local focus with national/regional help

Our focus will be at grassroots, because this is where independent action leads to material benefits, where the damage is being done and where the green shoots lie. Our priority is to create fire in the belly, to help and nurture independent action at local level. We will take our lead by looking downwards, not upwards, and base our action on what those at local level say they need. Approaches based on community development will assist us. We will provide leadership in representing local agendas and action.

4. Demonstrate independence

We will go beyond discussion and show what independent action means in practice. Examples of successful social action will demonstrate what we mean. Straight talking is part of independent action. It will be needed, to bring to the surface how people feel about what is really going on; and to expose the gap between policy rhetoric and what happens in practice. We need to create and protect ungoverned space; assist guerilla social action; find out what tools and skills are needed to think and act independently and promote these to a wider audience.

5. Independent funding

We will look for, and create, sources of funding that will enable independent action. This may mean that statutory funding is no longer suitable and/or that we have to change the current assumptions and requirements behind statutory funding.

6. Playing our game and their game better

We need to create our own terms and conditions as a basis for negotiation. We talked about the politics of compromise, the nature of the strings that are attached and when it's right to have a scrap and draw up battle plans.

7. Getting organised

To pursue our agendas, we will put effort into finding allies, acting collectively when needed and holding to agreed positions. Allies are to be found in many places, including within the statutory sectors and faith groups. We need friends, powerful friends. We want to build a wide network. Solidarity and powerful friends are to be found through individuals with passion and politics, as well as from allies in influential positions.

SOME PRACTICAL IDEAS FOR COLLECTIVE ACTION

- Set up a digital space (My Space/Facebook?) for the grassroots voice, about their feelings and experiences of what is happening, what needs to happen, what would help and what is already being done successfully
- Provide training/sharing on how to pursue grassroots agendas, including challenging and influencing local authorities whether through legal challenge or otherwise. This could be done through the NAVCA/ PLP training programme. LVSC's "routes to influence" workshop might also be an opportunity for this. There will be other opportunities.
- Bring in the views and involvement of communities and individuals about the difference independence makes, if any, to those facing injustice and inequality. This will extend the campaign beyond organisational/sector views and action.
- Take direct action – picket Phil Hope when he is due to talk in April speech; turn up to key meetings even if you've not been invited eg. Big Lottery meeting about funding the London VCS, start a No.10 petition
- Set up a debate with the independent charitable trusts about their strategic role to support independent action
- Create a directory of funding sources most likely to support independent action eg. Capacity Builders & campaigning
- Start a debate in the North East about independent action.