

## The social action principles

Social action workers are committed to social justice. We strive to challenge inequality and oppression in relation to race, gender, sexuality, age, religion, class, disability or any other form of social differentiation.

We believe all people have skills, experience and understanding that they can draw on to tackle the problems they face. Social action workers understand that people are experts in their own lives and we use this as a starting point for our work.

All people have rights, including the right to be heard, the right to define the issues facing them and the right to take action on their own behalf. People also have the right to define themselves and not have negative labels imposed upon them.

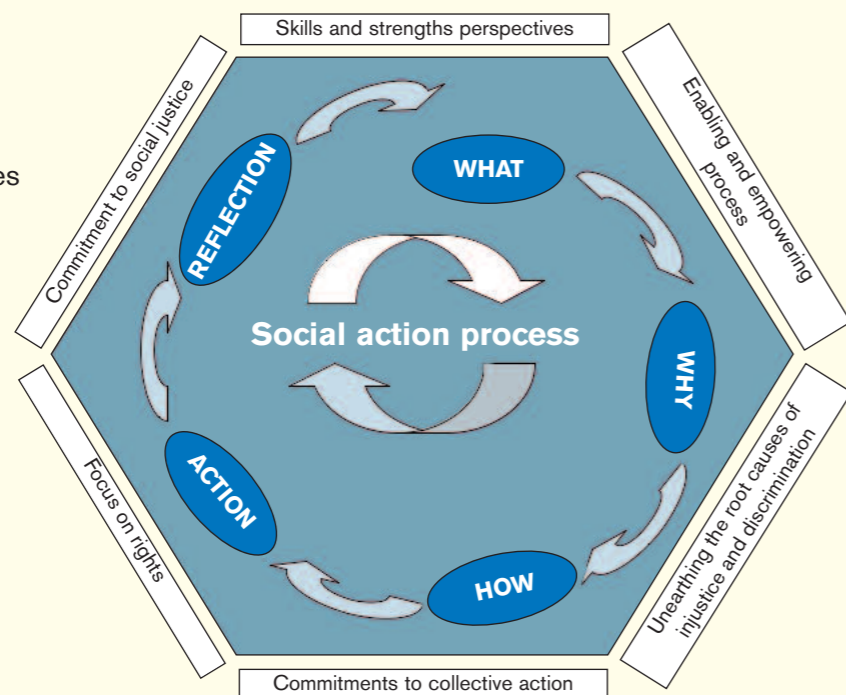
Injustice and oppression are complex issues rooted in social policy, the environment and the economy. Social action workers understand people may experience problems as individuals but these difficulties can be translated into common concerns.

We understand that people working collectively can be powerful. People who lack the power and influence to challenge injustice and oppression as individuals can gain it through working with other people in a similar position.

Social action workers are not leaders, but facilitators. Our job is to enable people to make decisions for themselves and take ownership of whatever outcome ensues. Everybody's contribution to this process is equally valued and it is vital that our job is not accorded privilege.

## Social action

Process and principles



We can provide versions of this leaflet in large print, Braille and tape.

## Centre for Social Action

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Photos: CSA for Unicef Project Turkmenistan, Youth Action Network UK, Power Mozambique

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[dmu.ac.uk/dmucs](http://dmu.ac.uk/dmucs)

# The Centre for Social Action

Working alongside community members, practitioners, service-users, managers and policy-makers to achieve social change.

The Centre for Social Action has been based at De Montfort University since 1995 and is part of the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences. A training, research and consultancy unit, the Centre has its roots in practical work with communities.

- We employ social action methods to ensure that community members and service users of all ages can play a full part in the setting up, management and maintenance of the services developed to meet their needs and also participate fully in their research and evaluation
- We aim to promote the empowerment and participation of those from the margins of society including disabled people, children and young people and people from the black and minority ethnic communities
- We work alongside people on a range of issues around health, youth work, family support and childcare (particularly Sure Start, Children's Centres and Children and Youth Services) social work, restorative justice, community development, regeneration and social capital, housing and disability

We are a self financing unit undertaking contracts in, for example, the UK, Russia and Ukraine, Eastern Europe, Mozambique, Peru and the United States of America.

## Centre staff

**Thilo Boeck** Senior Research Fellow

**Helen Douds** Centre Administrator

**Jennie Fleming** Principal Lecturer (Research) and Director of CSA

**Hannah Goodman** Research Fellow

**Eamonn Keenan** currently on secondment to the Northern Ireland Commission for Children and Young People (NICCY)

**Alison Skinner** Information and Research Officer



# The Centre for Social Action

## Research

The Centre carries out participative research with a range of practitioners, community members and service-users, often training them to be researchers or information gatherers in their own communities. We aim to ensure ownership and understanding of topics chosen for research on their part. We also conduct surveys to produce good practice guides, carry out audits of existing practice such as community development and also offer training about participative research and evaluation for organisations and community members.

### Examples:

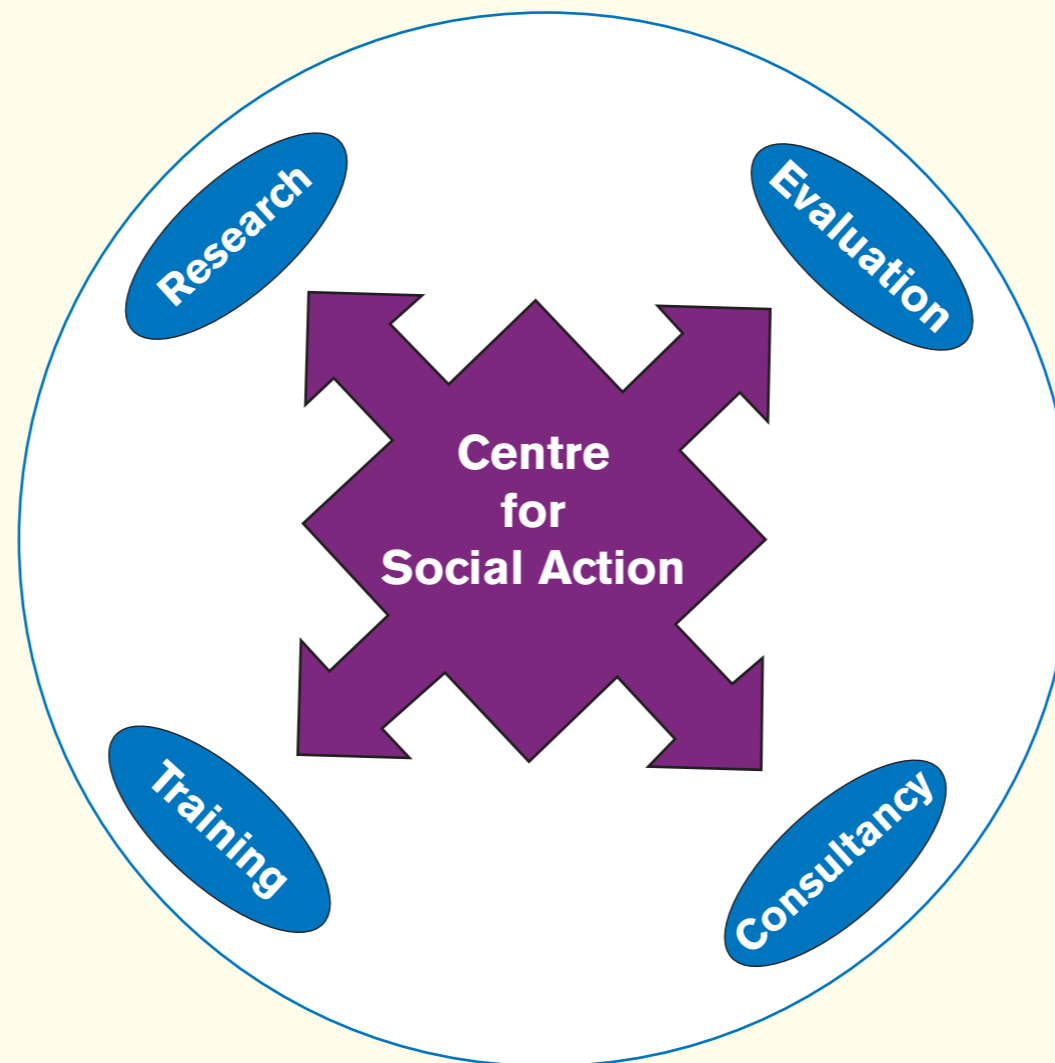
- The Centre is a member of a consortium funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation to work on a project called The Standards We Expect. The aim of the Standards We Expect Project is to encourage and guide the development in eight local areas of systems and processes to support social care service users to determine how their rights/needs are met through a process of involvement and negotiation among key stakeholders, sharing and exchanging with a wider network. Particular attention will be paid to supporting the involvement of service users and face to face practitioners, groups which continue to face particular exclusions in this context
- A three year project in partnership with Youth Action Network and funded by the Big Lottery, which will investigate how young people's community volunteering contributes to the enhancement of their social capital and the wellbeing of the community. This is a youth led research project
- A 12 month project funded by the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE), surveying the needs of disabled people who receive Direct Payments, which contributed to a Good Practice Guide for local authorities on running Direct Payment schemes.

## Training

The Centre works directly with community groups or professional groups using social action methods to enable them to identify issues important to them and devise action plans to address them. Trainers share their skills with community members and facilitate them to have direct ownership of eventual outcomes. Courses are interactive and enable participants such as practitioners to reflect on their practice and examine ways in which they can work more in partnership with service-users and be more responsive to their needs. We also work internationally, training practitioners and community members in Eastern Europe, United States and Latin America.

### Examples:

- Centre staff have worked with UNICEF in Turkmenistan providing orientation workshops on methods of social work for 60 people from various professions involved in child protection, aiming to impart the basic principles of the establishment and organisation of child and family support work at community level. Further workshops have covered communication skills for working with children, young people and families
- Centre staff have trained members of a research project sponsored by the Institute of Community Cohesion on methods of engaging with Black and Minority Ethnic young people in focus groups using social action methods



- Centre staff have trained community members in a number of areas on social capital, developing a framework and indicators to evaluate their project activities.

## Evaluation

The Centre is experienced in carrying out evaluations of a wide range of projects and services. Wherever possible these involve community members and service users in determining the themes for the evaluation, gathering information and contributing to the analysis. Past commissioners include local authorities, voluntary organizations and centrally funded community groups such as Sure Starts.

### Examples:

- A 15 month project evaluating the work of the Bedfordshire Children's Fund which has funded a range of community and school-based projects working with children, young people and families, looking particularly at how their work has contributed to improving their health, well being and educational performance. Project staff were supported and trained to evaluate their own work
- A nine-month project evaluating the effectiveness of the Leicester Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Strategy. A team of young people will be trained to interview their peers in schools and youth centres in three different areas, to gather their views on the sex education lessons and preventive services provided for them. Managers and practitioners who are the service providers will also contribute their perspectives
- Centre staff have carried out numerous evaluations of Sure Start projects in the Midlands area, involving community members as information gatherers and exploring ways in which these services can become more responsive to the needs of their users.

## Consultancy and project development

The Centre advises organisations, teams and individuals on setting up services, projects and running groups using social action methods. This can be in the form of ongoing consultancy or in-depth development.

### Examples:

- Centre staff have carried out a consultancy with the Policy and Performance team of Leicester City Council to devise an evaluation and assessment framework for their Community Cohesion Strategy, based on a social capital framework devised by a staff member. This has the potential to be used in a number of different settings – from a city wide strategic level to a community level
- Trent RDSU, Shaping Our Lives and the Centre for Social Action working in partnership, have offered training and consultancy for researchers, practitioners and service users who wish to develop collaborative research projects involving service-users and support service-user led research
- The Centre worked with Osmaston and Allenton Children's Centre and Derby City Council's Children's Strategic Partnership to support local parent researchers to undertake an evaluation of how the trail blazer lead professional role was working in the area from the point of view of parents and professionals.