

THE CENTRE FOR SOCIAL ACTION

# Newsletter

No.1 March 2000

**W**ELCOME to the first issue of the Centre for Social Action Newsletter. This replaces the magazine Social Action Today that used to feature CSA news, but otherwise was exclusively focused on young people at risk. While the magazine was well regarded in many quarters, it has of late become too limited as a vehicle for communicating and publicising the Centre's work with people of all ages and circumstances.

Social Action Today is currently being phased out and is being replaced by a free quarterly newsletter, which is more flexible and quicker to produce.

The newsletter this time provides a round up of current activity in the Centre, but future issues will contain short articles on various aspects of our work.

## CENTRE'S BELARUS WORK FEATURED ON ITV

The Centre for Social Action has been working in the former Soviet Union for eight years now, but we achieved our highest profile to date recently when Centre for Social Action trainers were featured in a Carlton ITV production about the de-institutionalisation of child care in Belarus. An edition of the local current affairs programme called "Thirty Minutes" entitled "Nobody's Child" was shown on January 13th 2000. The programme presented a report from children's homes inside the former Soviet republic where CSA has been working with UNICEF on a de-institutionalisation programme.

The programme was chiefly about the plight of children in orphanages in Belarus, but included some shots of Centre trainers visiting children's homes, talking to staff and discussing the need for people in Belarus to be helped to find solutions to their own problems, in contrast to other Western consultants who were creating dependence. Images of the countryside included elderly women drawing water from the local well, horses and carts and dark pine forests.

The Centre had selected a multi-disciplinary team of trainers with specialist knowledge on a wide range of childcare issues to provide the following training courses:

"Development of a System of Foster Care – Ian Boulton CSA trainer and Roberta Manners – Foster Carer Birmingham Social Services;

"Family Support Services" – Steve Eyres and Marie Sealey Social workers Birmingham Social Services

"Preparation for Independent Living" Chris Hollis – Director of Childline Midlands and Selina Farrell – careleaver and independent consultant.

There was rather less hard information about the purpose and context of the Centre's visit than we would have liked, but the presentation of the work and trainers was very positive.

The Centre has copies of the programme. If you would like to borrow one please contact Alison Skinner on (0116) 257 7777.

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# PROJECTS NEEDING SUPPORT/FINANCE

## **Working with excluded young people on the school/community boundary in the United Kingdom and the United States**

The Centre for Social Action has forged a partnership with The National Writing Project based at the University of California, Berkeley, USA. It follows reciprocal study visits to the two countries by representatives of both agencies and discussions between agency managers on how best to proceed.

The discussions and visits were based on a number of theories and ideas that the collaboration would seek to test out, around work with socially excluded young people.

The two agencies aim to work with young people aged 12-17 in the UK and the US who have been excluded from school, or who do not attend regularly. This joint venture is not primarily about getting young people back into school, although that is a likely outcome in some cases. It is about understanding what is going on in these young people's lives and opening up possibilities for groups who feel trapped. The Initiative will aim to take a holistic, Social Action approach to excluded young people, which will help to improve teaching and youth work practice and address the shortcomings in the two systems of education.

The project is also about encouraging greater collaboration and joint working between teachers and youth workers which draws on the strengths of both professions. The following points explore some of the underlying thinking:

- community and youth workers may have an understanding of the difficulties of young people who are excluded, uncomfortable or having difficulty in school to the point of non-attendance;
- community and youth workers may have working methods which are more helpful than traditional school teaching methods, when dealing with young people on the school/community boundary;
- teachers may have an understanding of young people and working methods which can be used effectively outside the accepted school curriculum;
- in partnership therefore the two professions may form a powerful combination for facilitating learning with young people excluded from traditional schooling.

The project also wishes to develop a common language between teachers and community youth workers, a sharing of methods and respect between the two professions.

A key aim is to provide workers in the field with clear examples from a wide variety of settings of successful work with this particular group of young people, which can then be adopted in the future. It is also intended to show that listening and taking young people seriously works.

### **Project Proposal**

The Centre for Social Action and the National Writing Project are developing a fundraising strategy to launch this initiative in their respective countries.

We envisage four-six projects in the United Kingdom and eight-ten in the USA. All projects will aim to work with socially excluded young people currently experiencing life on the school/community boundary. The projects will run for four school years beginning in September 2000. Each project is likely to have the following characteristics:

- they will create a forum for continued dialogue between teachers and youth and community workers;
- they will contain a partnership between school and centre or street-based youth provision and between teachers and youth and community workers;
- they will include training in the Social Action approach and methods, literacy work and peer education;
- they will encourage an element of exchange among young people and the professional workers, both within and between the UK and the USA;
- they will be young person-led, locally managed and able to demonstrate benefits to the wider local community;
- they will work in a range of educational establishments including schools, community colleges, further education colleges etc;
- they will be monitored and evaluated separately by workers from the Centre for Social Action and the National Writing Project not directly involved in its delivery.

Over the next few months, details of the collaboration between the two agencies will be firmed up and funding opportunities explored.

## **Plans to Establish International Disabled People's Training, Consultancy and Research Agency**

The Centre for Social Action, De Montfort University and the British Council of Disabled People (BCODP) are planning a joint venture led by disabled people to create a new unit, which will have the task of competing for international contracts on the subject of disability.

A great deal of work is commissioned internationally by organisations on disability issues. Commissioning bodies include DFID, British Council, European Commission, European Union, national and international NGO's, the World Bank, World Health Organisation and UN agencies. Much of this work currently goes to organisations and consultancies not led by or involving disabled people. The same arguments are relevant to work in the UK commissioned by health authorities, local authorities and voluntary organisations.

The new organisation will have its own identity and management structure, including representatives of the sponsoring organisations. The focus will be on training, consultancy, project/service development, research and evaluation.

The Unit will promote, elaborate and develop the social model of disability using Social Action methods. The consultants employed will be disabled people. The work will primarily focus on international contracts with the aim of developing best practice, although work will be carried out in the UK where appropriate, or where it relates to international activities.

These proposals are subject to a full feasibility study and business plan and the approval of both organisations.

## **Somaliland Project**

Richard Wheeler, Business Manager at De Montfort Expertise and Mohammad Hersi, Project Co-ordinator on the Somaliland Project are flying to Somaliland in early March, to spend a week assessing the feasibility of developing agricultural projects within the country.

The 12 month Somaliland Development and Voluntary Returning Home Project funded by the European Commission is now at an end. The three visits to the country throughout 1999, undertaken by members of the Somali community in London, Sheffield, Liverpool and Cardiff, stimulated many ideas for social and economic initiatives which would help develop the country and aid its recovery from a destructive civil war. Already some community members and one of the trainers have returned home. The work of the project continues beyond the end of the EU project.

The next stage in the process is to facilitate community members in realising their plans for initiatives in the country. The involvement of De Montfort Expertise is one part of this strategy, but the Centre is also looking for funding agencies and other partners who would be willing to work with the Somaliland community both in Britain and abroad to achieve this form of grassroots development.

## **Development of a Joint Venture between Hawkins/Brown Architects, and the Centre for Social Action**

The Centre for Social Action, De Montfort University and Hawkins/Brown Architects have been involved in a series of discussions recently in connection with their future relationship.

The proposal is to build on a collaboration between Mark Harrison – Centre for Social Action and Hawkins Brown that goes back 14 years, with the aim of forging a partnership between community development and architecture. The two organisations have worked together on many projects that have required community development, or involvement in the design/urban regeneration process.

Recent projects include:

**New Horizons Project: 1993-1994.** Day Centre for young people living in Stratford and West Ham, providing creche, youth club activities and entry to local technical college. Centre for Social Action: Guided consultation and management structure. Hawkins Brown: Project Architects, Project Managers.

**Flamingo Group Harlesden: 1996.** Carnival group looking to establish permanent business and Museum venue with SRB/Lottery funding. Centre for Social Action: Consultation facilitators. Hawkins Brown: Conceptual architects/funding consultant.

**MacNiven and Cameron, Ramsgate: 1999.** Hawkins Brown introduced the Centre for Social Action to this commercial developer who needed to identify realistic

'planning benefit' for potential multiplex site. The Centre for Social Action carried out a consultation with the local community that established community needs and views on leisure development. Centre for Social Action: Consultation facilitators.

Hawkins/Brown: Project Architects/Project Managers.

**Barnet Voluntary Service Council (BVSC): 1998-1999.** BVSC commissioned the partnership to consult their membership on a new headquarters building and propose a number of design options for the scheme. Centre for Social Action: Consultation. Hawkins Brown: Project Architects for feasibility study.

### **Joint Venture**

The launch of a joint venture serves a number of purposes:

- to consolidate, record and build on the existing body of work between the two organisations;
- to publicise and market the approach, with the aim of influencing policy makers and planners to involve communities and service users in the planning and design of regeneration schemes and new initiatives;
- to break into new markets e.g. education sector, urban regeneration, rural development, international work.

*Centre for Social Action*

**working with communities for  
change throughout the world**

# CURRENT CENTRE WORK

## UK WORK

### MENTORING GUIDELINES PUBLISHED

Centre staff were involved for eight months last year on a project to develop a Quality Framework for Mentoring Socially Excluded Young People on behalf of the National Mentoring Network, funded by the Department of Education and Employment. Mentoring is a growth area of work at present with many new projects coming on stream and the Quality Framework is designed to provide a bench mark of good practice, with a focus on enhancing the participation of young people in the process. It covers the whole procedure of mentoring from pre-project planning and recruitment of mentors and young people, to review of action plans and evaluation and provides a checklist and examples of recommended practice at each stage.

A survey of projects in the field was conducted, along with visits to 18 representative schemes and findings from these were compiled into a research report. The Network has published a summary of the Framework, the full Quality Framework and the research report.

Contact National Mentoring Network:  
First Floor, Charles House, Albert St,  
Eccles, Manchester, M30 0PD  
Tel 0161 787 8600

### Evaluation of Mentoring Projects

The Centre has been commissioned to evaluate two mentoring projects being run by Youth Offending Teams in Leicester and the London Borough of Wandsworth. The programmes will match adult mentors with young offenders and young people at risk, to help them address issues in their lives that are causing them most difficulty.

Both programmes are currently in the process of being set up.

### COMMUNITY AND YOUTH CONSULTATIONS

The Centre's collaborative approach to work with community members and service-users lends itself very well to consultations in the community on a range of issues. This is a valued and important aspect of our work.

### Youth Consultation on Service Delivery in North West Leicestershire

The Centre has been commissioned by Leicester City Council to conduct an extensive youth consultation on four estates in the north west of the city, which documents the experiences and views of young residents on local services, including youth services. They will also carry out an audit of good practice both locally and nationally. This is funded through the Single Regeneration Budget. Centre researchers are currently carrying out a questionnaire survey of young people in schools and also making contact with young residents in their local areas via detached youth work.

They will be establishing focus groups of young people who have particular perspectives such as care leavers, minority ethnic young people and disabled young people and forming a representative youth steering group who will be trained as information gatherers.

These young people will carry out an audit of local youth provision and come up with ideas about the type of services that would meet their needs. They will visit and assess examples of good practice in other parts of the country. The final report will present recommendations on ways in which service delivery in these areas can be enhanced and developed.

### Radford and Hyson Green (Nottingham) New Deal Partnership

The Children's Society East Midlands Region has commissioned the Centre to consult them in connection with their work with the New Deal Partnership initiative. The three month consultation during January – March 2000 will create the framework for a longer-term project commencing April 2000.

The Consultancy aims to:

- develop a framework for ongoing participation of children and young people;
- establish a strategy to tackle child poverty and social exclusion with all stakeholders within the New Deal Partnership;
- explore the establishment of a management group, define its purpose and membership;
- establish a base in the New Deal for Communities Partnership area.

The consultancy will carry out an audit and mapping exercise of current youth provision and initiatives in the area and assess the current levels of involvement/participation of young people in current and proposed youth initiatives/services.

Young people will be consulted on their views regarding:

- existing facilities;
- quality of youth work/provision;
- good/bad things about the area;
- needs and wants;
- priorities for investment/development;
- desire to be involved in the NDC process.

### Nottingham City Council East Area Child Care Research

The Centre has been commissioned by the Training, Education and Employment Partnership in East Area to conduct a community consultation to support the development of high quality, affordable and accessible childcare in this area of the city. Nottingham Health Action Zone has funded this initiative.

The research will be used to inform the design of services in the statutory, voluntary and community sectors, which will enable parents and carers to be more confident in their role.

The Centre has recruited six local community members and trained them to act as information gatherers on the project.

The issue of the lack of affordable child care and play facilities in the area is a long-standing one and the consultation aims to talk to as many parents and children as possible and get a wide range of views concerning:

- how parents manage with their childcare;
- whether they go to work or not;
- what happens if they have a hospital appointment;
- whether there are people interested in offering childcare and
- what they think might help increase childcare facilities and opportunities in the area.

A report will be compiled from the findings, which it is hoped will form a plan of action for organisations and community groups in the area wishing to pursue the development of childcare and play facilities.