

Newsletter

No.2 September 2000

CENTRE LAUNCHES GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE



The Centre for Social Action launched **Youthagenda**, a good practice guide for working with young people on their home ground, on July 24th.

This colourful, lively publication is the culmination of collaboration over several years between the Centre and the Guinness Trust.

The Centre was commissioned to carry out Social Action work with young people on three Trust estates in Derbyshire, Coventry and Trowbridge. Young people, contacted through streetwork, took part in the

project alongside Centre workers, giving them an opportunity to talk about their life on their estate and identify both positive and negative experiences.

A common theme on all the estates was the lack of resources suited to the very modest needs of the young people and a feeling by them of being shut out of local decision-making processes and having no power to change things.

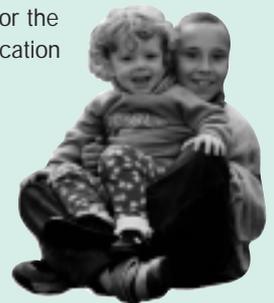
Getting involved in the Social Action process helped to improve matters. Young people identified goals for

themselves such as getting a local play area refurbished and organising a disco. They developed new organisation and planning skills and gained in confidence as they negotiated with adults. On one estate young people presented a video with their requests to Guinness Trust representatives at a public meeting and eventually gained a new ballpark, having been fully consulted on the design.

The **Youthagenda** handbook draws on these case studies to provide a detailed guide for anyone wishing to apply the Social Action process in their own community. It includes practical exercises and useful tips for working with young people.

One copy is available free of charge to tenants, residents and practitioners working in the social housing field. There is a charge of £5 for individuals and workers in other fields and extra copies requested by housing workers.

"Social action work with young people... epitomises – if executed properly – the very best of youth work practice. It embodies all those aspirations so freely bandied around today: consultation, involvement, participation, empowerment. This small, but succinct booklet... is clearly a valuable tool for the social and political education of young people."
Howard Williamson,
Cardiff University.



Training in Social Action Work

To support anyone who wishes to get involved in direct practice, the Centre for Social Action will be running two training courses on Social Action in the Autumn. These will be on:

October 17/18 The Old Ship Hotel Brighton
November 15/16 The Norbrect Castle Hotel Blackpool

Booking forms are available from Helen Douds, Centre for Social Action.

If preferred, training of this kind can also be delivered directly to staff teams within the organisation.



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SOCIAL ACTION WORKERS GO STATESIDE

Sponsored by the US National Writing Project, Social Action workers Ian Boulton and Jenny Fleming spent two weeks in July in the United States of America, running training courses on Social Action with teachers and community workers in four cities – Philadelphia, Tulsa, Sacramento and San Francisco.

NWP is a professional development agency based at the University of California, Berkeley, offering teachers in primary and secondary schools in 50 states, support and consultancy with the development of literacy programmes for young people.

The Centre has been developing a partnership with staff at the National Writing Project, since the two agencies share similar values and beliefs about how best to engage with disadvantaged and disaffected young people. Previous years have seen exchange visits between NWP and Centre staff, but this was the first opportunity for planned training with local NWP project workers.

On this trip, Ian and Jennie were offering two-day courses in each of the four cities, which provided a practical introduction to Social Action principles and methods for groups of 20-30 people. These were mostly teachers, although there was a higher proportion of youth workers and community activists in San Francisco.

The slant of the programme varied in different cities in response to the concerns of the recipients:

- in Philadelphia the primary interest was in ways in which community action by young people could be linked into the school curriculum;
- in Tulsa the emphasis was on individual plans that teachers could take into the classroom to inform their teaching methods;
- in Sacramento the group was entirely made up of teachers and the interest was in ways in which Social Action could be used in schools;
- in San Francisco the group contained a higher proportion of youth and community workers, whose main interest was mentoring work with street gangs and the development of group plans.

Jennie and Ian had these initial thoughts on their experiences:

Did you find that people had any existing awareness of youth work or Social Action philosophies?

Youth work as a profession does not really exist in the States and we only came across one organised youth group in San Francisco that had a co-ordinating role, outside of the national voluntary groups such as the Scouts.

We found that many of the teachers and community workers with an Hispanic

background had read and were familiar with Paulo Freire's work, but had not found a methodology that could take the principles and translate them into a practical approach they could use in their everyday work. The majority of their work was being carried out with minority ethnic students such as Hispanics, Vietnamese and African-Americans and these were teachers who were committed to working in alternative schools and offering bi-lingual education to students. We were impressed with the commitment of many of the staff who were quiet and thoughtful in their responses, co-operative in groups, receptive to new ideas and prepared to do all of their training and personal development during their school holidays.



What do you think Social Action was able to offer them?

It seemed to give them a new framework for thinking about good educational practice and techniques for planning meetings and lessons. Exercises we showed them for agreeing a common purpose in a group and determining acceptable and unacceptable language were very well received, with people saying they would be able to introduce this into their lessons immediately. Ways in which young people could be supported to act as consultants for their peers also seemed to be a novel approach. Teachers working with 5-7 year olds were very receptive to our training and could see the value in using the Social Action approach even at this young age.

People seemed impressed that we came with a framework to use with them and asked questions and were not just telling them things. Some were surprised that we were not more ideological in our approach. We were able to show that the methodology was not exclusively about protest or action, but could be used to address issues of vulnerability and powerlessness and the needs of specific groups.

In America, students who don't reach their required grades have to attend summer schools for extra coaching, provided by teachers such as these, and in San Francisco this can affect 48% of the student population. Teachers were clear that a new approach was needed to



motivate students and it was felt that Social Action might be an interesting technique to use in this setting.

What were the main issues for these groups?

There were some common issues across the groups e.g.

- how prescriptive the curriculum was for older teenagers aged 14+;
- cynical colleagues who were bad, uncommitted teachers;
- students who had English as a second language and ensuring the availability of bilingual education for them.

Some more specific issues included:

- in Tulsa, the influence of the religious right in determining what could be taught in classrooms, which could create difficulties;
- in San Francisco, the levels of youth crime and numbers of young people being locked up from an early age.

What do you think you learnt as trainers on the trip?

The importance of Social Action as an educational process. Our groups regarded us very seriously as teachers coming from a higher education institution – De Montfort University. Unusually, in contrast to other courses we have run, we found that group members were paying as much attention to the process and techniques we used as trainers, as to the content of the Social Action approach. We had worked very little with the teaching profession before and we were excited about the potential applicability of Social Action methods to the classroom, and the way in which the American teachers could see how the approach could work right across the standard curriculum, not just in the informal aspects. It is making us think hard about the connections between training and teaching and ways in which we might be able to work with teachers in this country.

What happens next?

The National Writing Project is a well-resourced organisation and their staff are keen for us to do more training in America, with different groups for longer periods of time. We would be using the same model as we do in Eastern Europe – a week-long training course, a period for the implementation of action plans, followed by a further week for reflection, assessment and evaluation. We would be interested to make contact with teachers in this country to see if they too could see the relevance of Social Action principles to their classroom teaching.

Ian and Jenny will be attending the annual conference of NWP in Milwaukee in November.





CONSORTIUM PLANNING EKATERINBURG PROJECT

The Centre has been invited to join a consortium of social work and childcare agencies who will be working on a three year Department for International Development Fund (DfID) programme to transform childcare in Ekaterinburg and the Sverdlovsk Oblast (region). The lead agency is the European Children's Trust and the other partners are the National Institute for Social Work and The Children's Society.

Ekaterinburg is an industrial city located east of the Urals surrounded by a large rural region. In Soviet times it was a closed city because of its importance as a radio communication centre for the Russian military. Structurally, the government departments are very similar to those in Ukraine, but since the fall of the Soviet Union people in Ekaterinburg have been able to develop a range of good quality services for themselves.

There are a growing number of children who are vulnerable or at risk in Ekaterinburg and Sverdlovsk Oblast. Some are children whose parents are alive, but who cannot take care of them, others have run away from home or from children's homes. The social care system in Russia relies on institutions to meet the problems of vulnerable children. Many will move around within the institutional system on a long-term basis, moving from social rehabilitation centres and shelters to closed establishments run by the Ministry of the Interior for those who commit crimes.

The project is designed to promote an inter-departmental approach, bringing together all agencies involved with the care of vulnerable children, as well as relevant NGOs and parents' groups.

It will have three main objectives:

- to innovate, through developing more community-based, family focused childcare services in project location sites;
- to improve current standards, in particular in residential institutions – through providing better training and supervision;
- to integrate all children within a coherent system of childcare.

The project will run for three years and will be undertaken in three phases:

- inception phase (six months)
- implementation phase (two years)
- consolidation and dissemination phase (six to twelve months)

There will be four different pilot sites in Ekaterinburg and the surrounding region where initiatives will be concentrated.

- The Sverdlovsk Oblast Temporary Detention Centre for Minor Offenders and Children's Shelter, Ekaterinburg
- The Centre for Social Assistance to Families and Children, Nizhy Tura
- "Caravel" Rehabilitation Centre for Children and Families, Ekaterinburg
- Revda Baby Home and Children's Polyclinic, near Ekaterinburg

The work will be overseen by an Inter-Sectoral Steering Committee. The consortium will be expected to assist Russian partners to achieve five main outputs.

- Strengthening of political and professional commitment to a family focused and inter-sectoral approach to childcare.
- Family focused social care that is inclusive in approach
- Improvement in quality and range of services and other support mechanisms available to vulnerable children and their families.
- Assessment and gatekeeping criteria developed and piloted to maintain children in families
- Increased public awareness of the new policy and practice of family focused social care for all children.

Representatives of the consortium, including the Centre, have made two visits to Ekaterinburg so far. Ian Boulton made an initial visit with colleagues to work with the Steering Committee on aims and objectives and Jenny Fleming and Mark Harrison from the Centre made a week

long visit to Ekaterinburg in June with other member of the Consortium.

As part of the Inception phase, this trip was about visiting the four pilot sites where the new approaches to childcare will be developed and tested and working with members of the Steering Committee and Universities to finalise the design of the project

Members of the Consortium met with senior Government members, city and regional officials and politicians to discuss the proposed direction of the work.

On subsequent days they met with local project managers to learn more about the local situation. Visits were also made to Ural State University, Ural State Teachers Training University and the Urals State Professional and Pedagogical University. At these meetings the programme was discussed and possible ways for universities to be involved explored.

Following their return, as a further part of the Inception Phase, the Centre helped to facilitate a week's study visit by the Russian Steering Group. They visited a range of services in Birmingham including the youth offending team, foster carers involved with Birmingham Foster Care Association, voluntary services for mothers and babies and disabled children and their families and a community-based family centre.

Ian Boulton, Jennie Fleming and Mark Harrison will return to Ekaterinburg in late September/early October to continue working with the Russian partners to finalise the design of the pilot project.

The Centre's main contribution to the project will be to facilitate the process of agreement and planning in the early stages to help the process go well. We will encourage and enable inclusive decision-making, ownership of the project, examination of common issues and themes throughout all the project sites. We will also consider child centred practice and the implications of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Jennie Fleming will be working with staff running social work courses at the universities to ensure that the learning outcomes of the project are incorporated into their teaching and work with practitioners.

Working in a Consortium with other UK childcare agencies is a new experience for the Centre and, from our perspective, the challenge will be to develop a coherent approach based on a shared set of values and a commitment to ensuring that ownership of the project remains with our Russian colleagues.

Centre for Social Action

working with communities for change throughout the world

CENTRE ORGANISES COMMUNITY HEALTH CONSULTATION

The Centre for Social Action is assisting the Leicestershire Community Health Council (LCHC) with a community consultation, designed to reach out to groups of people whose views are not always fully represented via conventional channels.

Far reaching changes are being proposed for acute hospital services in the three Leicester city hospitals, which are likely to lead to greater specialisation of services with the aim of achieving greater economies of scale.

Consultation on these changes is a statutory requirement and LCHC is keen to ensure that all shades of opinion in the communities affected are recorded. Funded to the tune of £25,000 by Leicestershire Health, the Centre for Social Action has been commissioned by the CHC to seek out the views of particular groups of people in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, who may not have had an opportunity to participate in the process so far. In discussions with the Centre, it was agreed that the opinions of minority ethnic groups, young people, older people and socially excluded people would be the ones to be targeted. Recording the views of women would also be a priority, as the proposed reconfiguration has significant implications for the provision of maternity services.

The research will involve dissemination of a short postal questionnaire and focus group work. People will be invited to identify which aspects of current hospital service delivery are most significant, in determining whether their stay in hospital is viewed as a positive or negative experience.

RESEARCH ON SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WITH HIV

The Centre has been commissioned by Nottingham Social Services Department, to contact a varied group of people with HIV status in the Nottingham Health District area and assess with them whether their social and support needs are being met.

The research will review the services targeted at gay men, but will pay particular attention to groups who have not traditionally been considered high risk HIV groups such as heterosexual women, and will include a review of the needs of ethnic minority and refugee groups in the area.

The study will highlight gaps in provision, by examining the experiences and perceptions of people who do not belong to the traditionally defined "high risk" groups, to find out how they access services and information and how satisfactory this has been.

The research will use questionnaires, interviews and focus groups to assess the views and attitudes of people in the target group on existing services.

MORE PARTICIPATION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE ADVOCATED

The Centre has completed a consultation for The Children's Society in the New Deal for Communities area of Radford and Hyson Green in Nottingham.

This was a three month consultancy/research project to make recommendations to The Children's Society on the framework for a longer-term project commencing April 2000.

The aim of the baseline consultation was to:

- develop a framework for the ongoing participation of children and young people
- establish a strategy for tackling child poverty and social exclusion with all the 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 partnership area.

Groups and individual young people were interviewed in various settings and asked about their experiences of life in the area and their views on being involved in regeneration issues.

It was found that the young people were very loyal to their home area although they were concerned about crime and safety issues. They were not part of any consultation process concerning their local areas but were willing to be involved. The Centre recommended the establishment of a Youth Participation Officer post with a view to facilitating greater involvement of young people, in consultation with other agencies in the area.

CONSULTATION WITH YOUNG PEOPLE IN NORTH WEST LEICESTER

The Centre carried out a four-month large-scale consultation with young people in an SRB area of Leicester, during Spring and Summer of this year, to enable them to contribute their ideas of what needs to be done to improve their communities and the services within them. A questionnaire was developed and used in schools with 11-14 year olds, alongside focus groups and detached youth work sessions with 15-24 year olds. Young people identified with their local areas but were well aware of existing deficiencies. It was a novel experience for them to be consulted seriously about their views and experiences of education, leisure, careers and health.

Many young people had to travel out of their estates to access good quality youth, leisure and sports facilities and were keen for local services to be upgraded and refurbished.

Many young people needed more support with careers advice and were not being reached effectively by the range of existing agencies. More Health promotion work

was needed to raise the profile of this aspect of their lives.

It was recommended that future involvement and consultation with young people should occur in both structured and unstructured ways, making use of streetwork as well as youth forums, school councils and area committees.

QUALITY AUDIT OF SERVICES TO BLACK CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Nottinghamshire Social Services commissioned the Centre to carry out an evaluation of social services contact with black children and families in late Spring, as part of their overall strategy to "incorporate a user perspective in evaluating the overall quality of their services."

The Centre was asked to use interviews as a method of information gathering and ensure that the backgrounds of the children and families matched those of the researchers used to question them. A schedule of questions designed by social services and revised by the Centre was used.

Introductory interviews were completed and respondents discussed in detail their contacts with social services and:

- whether they were able to express their views easily;
- how clearly matters were explained to them;
- whether they had received the services they wanted;
- any difficulties they had experienced with social services staff;
- their treatment by them and
- the most helpful aspects of their contact.

FIFTH SOCIAL ACTION SUMMER SCHOOL HELD

Delegates gathered over 28-30th June at the National Tenants' Resource Centre at Trafford Hall, Chester to take part in the fifth Social Action Summer School. This uses a peer education format, with delegates themselves deciding what subjects they wish to explore in workshops and what expertise they are able to contribute to the common pool in return.

This year, in addition to introductory courses on Social Action run by Mark Harrison and Jennie Fleming, practitioners explored the following subjects in their workshops: mediation, managing the expectations of people involved in social projects, positive practice with young offenders, supportive practice for moving to independent living from hostels, social exclusion, school exclusion and various aspects of Social Action practice such as ethical dilemmas, Social Action and the real world, ways of asking questions and taking the process further.