



BACK IN THE USA

“Amazing – an experience I will never forget. Expanded my thinking both personally and professionally” NWP teacher

Presenting at the National Writing Project's Annual Meeting in November in the United States has become part of the Centre for Social Action's routine. In 1999, the presentation in Denver followed six NWP members' participation in our Summer School in England earlier in the year. At the meeting in Milwaukee held in 2000 the social action workshop followed a series of four two-day training courses delivered by CSA for American teachers in Philadelphia, Tulsa, Sacramento and San Francisco. Last year in Baltimore our contribution was greater still: a full day follow-up session to last summer's week-long Social Action Institutes in Santa Fe and Baltimore; plus a social action workshop facilitated by two American teachers who had attended the sessions in 2000 and had begun to carry out social action work with their students.

This deepening of the collaboration between the Centre for Social Action and the National Writing Project is a logical progression for two agencies in similar positions and with complementary outlooks. Both agencies are professional development organisations allied to a university. **As De Montfort University is to**

CSA so the University of California, Berkeley is to the National Writing Project. Both organisations attract professionals who see critical reflection as an integral part of their work, refusing to accept the status quo either in relation to themselves and their practice, or for the students, parents and other community members with whom their work brings them into contact.

“Very useful, important, productive work. I think we all came away enriched, with new tools and renewed commitment to deepen our social justice work at the level and in the context that we are currently able” participant in Santa Fe, 2001.

But it is the differences between the agencies that mark this project as unique and provide the creative spark that will allow it to grow and develop in the coming years. The National Writing Project is made up of highly motivated professionals from just one profession: teaching. It operates projects in every state in the USA and attracts those who are as concerned about those students who are being let down by the education system, as they do for the

achievers. Their ideas are not necessarily limited by the four walls of the classroom or by statutory requirements. They want their schools to make as full a contribution to community life as possible.

“I would personally love to work with a group of inner city students from my school. I feel that what I have learned here will help me empower my students to change the odds in their favour” participant in Baltimore, 2001

The Centre for Social Action has a wide experience of working with professionals with that mindset but in different fields: housing, childcare, youth work, social work, health care etc. We are able to provide the teachers with a method of practice which will help them to work with hard-to-reach students in a community setting, as well as a framework for working in the classroom which develops their practice and gives voice to their students.

“I found the content very useful and have many ideas for using the process in the classroom and work place” participant in Santa Fe, 2001

After last summer's training, the National Writing Project invited the sites involved to apply for Social Action Mini-Grants of between \$3000 and \$5000 to carry out a piece of social action work over the next 12 months. Grants were given to 20 Writing Projects from all over the USA. The proposals cover a mesmerising range of projects including using the social action methods to galvanize students, teachers and parents to address social and racial inequality in their school, conducting social action workshops in English and Spanish with English language learners, training teachers who work with after-school programmes at the local chapter of the national hunger relief programme in social action methods and using the 5 stage social action approach in writing workshops with female juvenile offenders.

CONTINUED OVERLEAF

SOCIAL ACTION AND CSA WORK UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

The Centre for Social Action has much appreciated playing host to an American Visiting Professor for a year and supporting three PhD students, during the course of their studies. All have contributed new insights into social action and the work of the Centre, including evaluation work on the impact of social action on participants 20 years ago and the effects of current CSA work in Russia and Ukraine on childcare practice. The following interviews explore the different routes by which all four women found out about social action and made contact with Centre staff and describe their individual contributions. In the last piece, Jennie Fleming reflects on the experience of supervising PhD students and the impact of their work on her own ideas and practice.



Joan Arches was Visiting Professor at De Montfort University, working with the Centre for Social Action, from September 2000 – June 2001. She has been at the University of Massachusetts, College of Public and Community Service for seven years and previously taught social work at the Rhode Island School of Social Work. She teaches undergraduates aged 25-70 from diverse backgrounds, who are involved in community development and human services as part of the course. She is a co-founder of a Community Development Corporation and was active in developing the Centre for Immigrant and Refugee Community Leadership and Empowerment (CIRCLE) at the University of Massachusetts, Boston.

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The scope of the work should make for some interesting sessions at the Annual Meeting 2002.

“My overall response was a positive one. I see the collaboration between the NWP and the Centre for Social Action as a great opportunity for many teachers to do powerful authentic work with kids” participant in Baltimore, 2001

How did you first hear about Social Action?

I had been doing work with students in community groups using Participatory Action Research (PAR) which is very similar to social action.

When I had the opportunity to take a sabbatical I wanted to do something which would build on the work I was doing and also help me learn more. A friend was in touch with Audrey Mullender, co-author of *Self-Directed Groupwork* who referred me to the Centre for Social Action. I then found out more via the Centre website and made contact with Professor Dave Ward and also met Jennie Fleming when she visited Boston.

How did you decide what to do?

We talked about various possibilities and discussed what would be useful to the Centre and myself. Jennie talked about the problem of not having enough time to evaluate the impact of social action over time and in meetings with Mark, Jennie and Dave we refined the idea. We decided to look at two previous projects undertaken by the Centre – one in Nottingham 20 years ago and one in Birmingham five years ago. I would also get a flavour of current work by sitting in on the Centre project in Braunstone. We decided to choose projects involving young people in urban areas which were readily accessible.

I interviewed 12 former members of the Ainsley Teenage Project in Nottingham, 10 workers involved in various other projects at that time and three participants in the Castle Vale project in Birmingham. I also spoke to three workers and three participants from Bradford who had been involved in a five-year social action project.

How did you find it as an experience?

Just incredible and really interesting to get into, meeting other people, seeing other methods, conducting interviews with individuals and groups and starting to write about it, I have such a lot of information.

What do you see as the differences between PAR and social action?

It is similar but social action is more systematic. The kind of participatory action research community service learning I was doing with my students – it could be done applying social action.

What did you find was the legacy of social action?

People who were involved five years ago are still using the techniques – people from the project got jobs. People who were involved 20 years ago are applying the skills to their daily lives and interactions – the way they treat their own children and parents.

It was notable the way people felt it had increased their self-esteem. They chose and learnt skills, they developed activities on their own and made them happen. They had a great pride in their ownership of the project, they learnt about groupwork and listening skills. The political impact on their inter-personal relations after 20 years was considerable. They had an understanding of the process, they had kept out of trouble, they felt they had owned it and created a monument.

What was the impact on the workers?

Almost all were using aspects of social action in their work and they were involved in schools, community development and yoga and some were applying it in their inter-personal relations with their children or parents. They were using it to try and change attitudes in their work places and bringing people together to develop the orientation. There were problems with carrying out social action while being held accountable to quantitative outcomes. They all indicated that the role of consultants and support networks is very important – projects can and did fizzle out without networks.

What do you think are the strengths and limitations of the Centre's role?

Major strengths are that people are internalising aspects of social action over time – people are empowered. In the



Jennie Fleming is employed by De Montfort University as a Research Fellow and has supervised Jo, Annie and Sushila while they have been working on their PhDs. She is a longstanding member of the Centre for Social Action. Here she reflects on the experience of supervising PhD students who are working on social action issues.

love the fact that they are able to go and find articles and chapters in books I would never know about and see their relevance to social action. The way, for instance, that they can read Foucault, translate it into something understandable in English and then relate it to their subject. I have really benefited from that. I also really admire their commitment in seeing their thesis through for the length of time they have been involved.

One of the really good experiences of being a supervisor is seeing how you can help develop an idea and move it along. One of them was struggling with an idea and I was able to go and find a quote from Freire that really unlocked the whole concept for her and enabled her to take it on further.

In our every day work we really struggle to do reflection and the benefit of this role is that reflection time is structured in. Because the PhD students send me chapters to read, think about and comment on by a certain date, these have to be at the top of my reading pile and so they do get done.

supervisory relationship and you have to sign the forms to say that you have approved their work and support them to continue with their study. That does give you a power and a sanction that is not apparent in other relationships.

Do you think that the experience will have any lasting influence on your own social action thinking and practice?

Definitely. All of them in different ways have helped to move social action practice on - Jo's work on the power dynamics apparent in work in Eastern Europe has deepened my understanding about this. Annie's work about the ethical differences between workers will demonstrate whether social action workers really do respond differently to other workers and Sushila's work on training for transformation, even at this early stage, is certainly making me think about what we are really aiming to do in this field. The challenge is finding a way that these insights can be shared between the members of the team in the Centre and it is important that we find a way for this to happen. Every one of our PhD students is contributing to social action theory and practice and making it different to what it was, and it is hard to think where any of us would find the time and commitment to reach the level that they have.

We would certainly welcome anyone else who might like to come to De Montfort as a visiting researcher/fellow, or to do a PhD with us.

What have you enjoyed most about this experience?

I have really enjoyed being a supervisor. I love the enthusiasm for their subject that they all have shown and envy the opportunity they have to concentrate on detail and go into the kind of depth that is just not possible in other circumstances. I

What have you found most challenging about the role?

One of the hard things has been to tell them sometimes that what they have worked so hard to produce is not quite good enough. In contrast to the kind of relationship you would want to have in a social action process, this really is a



THE SEVENTH SOCIAL ACTION NETWORK INTERNATIONAL SUMMER SCHOOL

Trafford Hall, Chester
26th – 28th June 2002

SHARING PRACTICE EAST TO WEST AND WEST TO EAST



This June, practitioners from the USA, Ukraine, UK and elsewhere will come together to share experiences and run workshops on social action in their countries.

The Social Action Network International Summer School offers you the opportunity to work on common issues with fellow practitioners and experienced trainers, using a peer education-training model. Sharing experience will bring about fresh insights and ideas and contribute to your development as a radical worker committed to social justice. At the Centre for Social Action we believe that we learn best by doing. The Summer School provides an active environment for practitioners where everyone's experience, knowledge and skills are valued and shared.



This unique approach allows delegates to share responsibility for their learning and the learning of the whole group. This will happen through the creation of the Summer School's agenda, with participants facilitating and taking part in a number of workshops covering aspects of their practice and any expertise that they wish to explore and share. Experienced social action trainers take part alongside community members, service-users and workers from a wide variety of human services.

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misleading the funding body, or influencing the agenda of the group so that they can get money legitimately. What then happens to the group in this situation- do you go against the principles? It has become clear from the study that the ethical dilemmas for social action are not the same as ethical dilemmas encountered in social work.

How will you be using social action in your subsequent work?

I will be taking up a post as Lecturer in youth and community studies at the College of St Mark and St John in Plymouth, teaching a module which will be about groupwork, empowerment, research methods, conflict and power.

I will be teaching my students that social action is fantastic and how to practise it, but in a realistic way with an awareness of the potential barriers.



Sushila Raja was born in Sri Lanka and came to Britain in 1968. She has worked for local authorities and as a freelance trainer in London, Nottingham, Coventry and Leicester where she has now made her home. She spent two years in Johannesburg, South Africa in 1993-95. She is just starting out on her PhD studies.

How did you first come into contact with social action and the Centre?

I was working as a freelance trainer looking at value based training and picked up a Centre leaflet and realised CSA were doing similar things. I had heard of Paulo Freire and done work in South Africa using his ideas. I went on one of the Centre's social action courses and then became an associate and began to meet some of the

people. I then did some work for the Centre on one of their projects – a community consultation for the local NHS Trust. I then became more focused and decided I wanted to do research on value based training.

How have your ideas on this developed?

I originally started working in local authorities on equality issues and trained around this. I became a consultant on management training and over the years was exposed to the changes in thinking that has led to more emphasis on the need to involve and consult with communities. I then made the move from personnel to more community-focused work. In the old days, planning departments never thought they had to consult the community about the services they provided but these assumptions are changing now.

I worked for a couple of years in South Africa immediately after the elections and that was a very vibrant and interesting time. People were then ready to put the ideas about community consultation into practice. When I got back to England I found that the voluntary sector were talking about community consultation in a big way! I then worked with national organisations in the voluntary sector that offered opportunities to work with community organisations on the issue of capacity building in Leicester, London and Sheffield.

From this experience I developed the idea that I wanted to look at capacity building and training in the voluntary sector and examine to what extent training is value based and what kind of values are being transmitted.

When I was in South Africa Freire seemed far more real and achievable somehow. In England, the voluntary sector is rather insular and this kind of training was still new to them. People from minority ethnic groups are starting to take advantage of the opportunities for employment offered by the voluntary sector but their main concern at present is the work they are doing rather than training. But it is also the case that the usual type of training provided by academics can go above people's heads if you are not careful, so it needs to be relevant to the stage they are at.

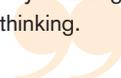
I believe it is important however that people make the effort to begin to engage with these issues. I have chosen to go out and engage and contribute to race relations and the system has worked for me and provided opportunities to both challenge and be challenged.

How are you going to do your research and what are the sorts of questions you are going to ask?

I will be focusing on Paulo Freire and looking at three organisations that are using his ideas and that will be the Centre for Social Action, another Leicester based organisation called Paulo and a minority ethnic organisation working in the voluntary sector. I will be observing the training programmes they run and asking what sort of personal and organisational values are bringing about changes in people. I will be looking to find out some common themes arising from the empowerment. For instance, is it focused on the individual or the group and what are the trainers doing that is making the difference? What are the techniques and strategies they are using to bring about change? Are people making paradigm shifts? What is likely to make people feel that group work is an inevitable way forward? I will be interviewing course participants and seeing where they are six months later. The training is likely to involve mixed groups, but I will have a special interest in women and ethnic minorities, those who Freire talks about as embodying the silence of the oppressed.

How long will the research last and how do you feel about it at the moment?

It will last five years, but I feel great about it. I am a mature student and I did wonder about what I was getting into when I registered, but it has offered me the discipline to think systematically about these issues. I am also finding it a very stimulating experience to work with two brilliant supervisors who have the role to question my ideas. It is difficult to get this kind of experience as a freelance, I used to get it when I worked for organisations from my colleagues, but when you are a trainer you are in a different kind of relationship to the people you are with. I am finding the interaction very challenging and it is helping my thinking.



projects, people are speaking positively about the principles and the process. Over time with the shorter-term projects, it is more difficult to see the impact and on-going support is more difficult to sustain.

The “Why” question doesn’t show up so much and it may be more difficult to sustain. There is a need for more support systems and networks. Because people doing social action face resistance from professionals and formal institutions, the Centre needs to provide more support. It is important to look at the power dynamics regarding race and gender in the groups. It would be useful to provide training regarding groups, group composition, dynamics and organisational change.

The limitations as far as the Centre is concerned is that they can’t spend enough time at present on consultancy, or build more time into exploring the “why” and reflection stages. Community building would help to institutionalise and sustain the efforts.

The work in Braunstone was impressive. I’ve seen the change in the participants. Young people started with no idea at all about the process, they changed, worked hard and accomplished things for themselves. The workers also benefited, they were good intuitively at the start but they found the process effective and they became more effective themselves.

If we were to do something differently...?

You are covering the basics and beyond, but some things need to be strengthened. The more international we get, issues of culture and group composition and group dynamics will come up and need addressing. Community building and sustainability require attention, as do issues related to power and professional backlash.

What will you do differently when you go back?

I would be more systematic in dealing with the “Why” question and I now have some exercises and techniques to do this. Some of the recommendations I have made to the Centre I will do myself, such as doing more advanced work with organisations and dealing more with organisational power analysis.

I am glad I came. I have learnt a lot and as a result I have a wealth of information to share with others which will be useful. Some of my recommendations I hope will be useful for the Centre and enable it to move on and enrich itself.



Jo Aubrey has lived in Leicester for seven years. Before taking her first degree in applied social and community studies at De Montfort University, she worked for a year and a half in Romania on behalf of CARITAS, the international Catholic Aid organisation, among other activities, setting up a rural nursery project and working with young care leavers. She has worked on her PhD in association with the Centre for Social Action for the past four years and has recently been appointed Social Policy Research Manager for ECOTEC, a consultancy organisation in Birmingham. The following interview draws on research conducted for her De Montfort University PhD thesis entitled “An evaluation of the process of consultancy and knowledge generation in the development of welfare services in Russia and Ukraine”.

How did you first get involved in social action and with the Centre?

When I finished my degree course I was not sure of the direction I wanted to take, since my main interest was in Eastern Europe, it was Dave Ward's idea to do some work evaluating the Centre's work in Eastern Europe.

How was this idea refined and what has been the overall structure of the work you have done?

It was decided that I would evaluate the Centre's work in Russia/Ukraine which involved developing childcare services through a process of social action. I visited Ukraine four times over a two-year period and interviewed the participants on the training courses being run by the Centre, social and community workers and researchers. In addition, I interviewed the heads of the three Centres involved - UNICEF, the Institute for Social Research

and the Centre for Social Action. I also conducted interviews with staff in children's home and had some informal conversations with children. As well as Ukrainian participants, I also interviewed social action workers about their experience of working in Russia and Ukraine.

What were you trying to find out?

I was trying to find out how social action can be used in a cross-cultural context and what was successful or not about the courses. I wanted to explore the transferability of the approach in terms of the activities and the training tools. I was also interested in development work in a post-communist context. There are many features of Central and Eastern Europe that make it very different from the more traditional development regions. Whilst there has been much research concerning business and management consultancies in the region, there has been little that has looked exclusively at the social sector, in spite of the fact that there has been so much aid poured into the region over the past 11 or 12 years.

How would you sum up your overall findings?

There has been a considerable amount of change in Russia and Ukraine if you measure the period between my first and last visit. In the field of fostering and adoption, for instance, they have gone from not even having a word for the concept in their language, to now having fostering and adoption institutions. The research has found that there are many things that impact upon the training delivered and subsequent changes made. Interpretation, for example, may seem like a simple process, but it's actually quite complex and poor interpretation can have a disastrous impact on the training. There are also issues in terms of the organisations involved, all of them have had a very different perspective and ways of working, and this has meant some confusion. Understanding of cultural context has also been an important finding. People in Central and Eastern Europe have worked in a certain way and have had a certain mind set for a long time – this will not change overnight, and consultants or trainers need to be very aware of this.

How did people react to the concept of fostering when they started to learn about it? What difference has it made to their childcare provision?

They learnt about fostering very quickly and embraced it. There was some initial

confusion about how it worked and how children and families were prepared, but participants were given the space to work through this and ask questions.

They were originally keen to find out how it was done in England and to be given specific information, but the social action workers did not want to impose this western perspective on them but give them the chance to apply the idea to their own circumstances. However, many participants interviewed were clear that they could not simply copy the British system within a Ukrainian context, rather the concept was so unusual for them, they wanted to have some idea about how it worked in general. Most of those interviewed wanted to understand the process and were prepared to adapt the features to a Ukrainian context. There are now fostering projects running in Ukraine and the participants have worked hard to increase public awareness which is key to the success of fostering, and to the changing of people's attitudes towards institutionalised children.

How did the participants respond to the training in general?

Some of the participants felt that initially the social action process made them start with very basic concepts and they found this patronising. However, once they had followed the process they felt that the starting points made absolute sense. For example, the fostering group were asked to recall their memories of childhood and what it was like to be a child – one of the participants who felt patronised by this exercise, went on to say in an interview that “this was the only place to start”. After initial hesitation, most people enjoyed social action as a way of working. They particularly enjoyed the way that they were allowed to come to their own conclusions about what they had to do.

What kind of issues have arisen from undertaking this kind of work in a cross cultural setting?

There are already some tensions in Ukraine about the impact of the West on the country. Parents I spoke to were concerned about the influence of Western culture on their children in general and the impact of Western media, music and films with a high sexual content, which they had not had access to before. They were concerned because during the communist period, these kinds of media were unavailable, now that Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union have been bombarded with all sorts of new influences from the West, parents feel that they do

not have the tools or experiences to be able to deal with the effects they have on their children.

There is also an issue about how you challenge discrimination when working in a cross cultural setting. In Western societies, our views on a range of issues including gender, race, and sexuality have been evolving over a long period of time and social work professionals here are very aware of the need for anti-oppressive practice and challenging inequality. In Russia and Ukraine, people have a quite different perspective. For instance in terms of race, the main concerns are with gypsies and immigrants from other countries in the region. The issue then becomes how you apply anti-oppressive practice principles in this setting. The social action model begins from where people are at, but the trainers do have their own beliefs and professional training and sometimes there is a clash. There perhaps needs to be an amendment to the social action principle addressing how to challenge oppression in a way that takes account of cross-cultural settings.

What did the Heads of Centres you interviewed feel about the social action approach, as it was important to create an understanding with them in order to get back-up for the people introducing the changes?

The Heads of Centres have had much experience of the social action approach and have embraced it as a method. One of the Heads expressed his disregard for many organisations that work in the region because their representatives seek to impose Western systems or practices. He argued that for him, social action allows people to define their own problems and create their own solutions. The Centre for Social Action has been working in Central and Eastern Europe for over a decade and I think that this is evidence of people's enthusiasm for social action.

When it came to action planning, people were facing enormous obstacles in getting their projects off the ground and I don't think that all the social action workers got a real sense of the time and financial implications of what was being proposed. For instance, Ukrainian practitioners were being pushed by people managing their pilot project to get the programmes going quickly, but they were concerned about the effects on the children of too much change too rapidly and wanted their needs to come first. There was a feeling from practitioners that the social action process needed to be used with politicians and

managers to improve their awareness.

What kind of changes did you observe in childcare practices?

The fostering group had the easier job as they were dealing with a totally new concept. People working in the children's homes had a more entrenched way of doing things and so it took longer and was much harder for them to create change. In two children's homes I visited, staff who had not been on the courses argued that there was a great deal of difference between their circumstances and conditions in the West. Over here there might only be between 4-15 children in a community home, whereas they might be dealing with 400 children at once and were faced with the sheer scale of trying to improve experiences for each individual. There were innovations however. One director got a group of staff together who were good with children, to work with them and start to listen to them. Staff reported that the children seemed happier and did not run away from the home any more. There have also been physical changes in terms of living space, one child told me that he used to play in a room that was also used as a storeroom, but now it had been changed into a playroom.

Also there was more placing of children in family groups and mixing different age groups together. In one of the homes, small kitchens and relaxation rooms had been created so that the children could prepare snacks by themselves.

Were managers training alongside practitioners?

This varied. In some cases there was one representative from the home who might be a manager or a practitioner, in others, there was more diversity in terms of those who attended.

What was the effect of the experience on social action workers?

There were some changes affecting them. People were enthusiastic about how the participants they trained had worked and how they had tackled their situations as both managers and practitioners. They felt that it had been rather humbling to see this degree of enthusiasm when people had so few resources. They felt that they themselves had developed as social action workers and were able to return to the UK with increased enthusiasm.

What do you think the Centre needs to learn from this experience?

Some trainers had not really been prepared for work in a different cultural context. Although some people said they

did not want to be over prepared, I think it is absolutely necessary to learn not just about the cultural and social history of Ukraine but also about the effects of living within a communist system for so long.

There is also an issue about being able to respond to some of the informal needs of the Ukrainians. Research shows that Russians and Ukrainians feel that informal social gatherings are very important aspects of work and doing business. They are also very keen to find out about the West – mainly because the information they had under communism was very limited. However, the budget did not allow for extra hours of interpretation and none of the trainers are yet sufficiently fluent in Ukrainian for this to have been a possibility.

How do you think your own understanding of social action has developed?

I was doing social action before I knew it was called that. In Romania, I had worked with children leaving care going through a similar process with them.

My experiences of interviewing social action workers have helped my understanding to develop. I have seen poor examples of social development consultancy and I think social action is probably one of the best methods, as it is the least patronising to recipients and is based on people's understanding of their own situation. I have seen huge changes in Russia and Ukraine which is a testament to the work – the childcare work has resulted in much more participation by young people.

Will you be using social action in your new job? Is there anything from this experience you will take with you to apply there?

The social action process is a useful method of working with people. It begins where people are at and enables them to get to where they want to be. I think that the "what, why, how, action, reflection" cycle is one that I will probably use again – apart from anything else, the process allows people and facilitators to organise their thoughts. I have learnt much from my research – particularly in terms of cross-cultural working – it is important to have an understanding of culture and be aware that people will think differently based upon their personal and professional values and beliefs.



Annie Sansfacon comes from Quebec, Canada. She originally started studying for a degree in Sociology, but then switched to a degree in social work. She spent some time working with a Native American community, taking a particular interest in issues of poverty and oppression. She then did a diploma in social work, covering groupwork and community work.

How did you first find out about social action and the Centre?

I was asking my lecturer about literature on groupwork and she mentioned *Self-Directed Groupwork* by Audrey Mullender and Dave Ward. I then attended a conference in Quebec on groupwork which Jennie Fleming and Dave Ward were also attending and giving papers and talked to both of them. They referred me to the social action web page and passed on their email address and Dave sent me a copy of the book. I did a year of self-directed groupwork with the native group.

How did you decide on the topic to study?

I chose the topic because in my groupwork practice I found myself coming up against ethical dilemmas and decided that I would like to come over to do research about social action and ethical dilemmas. This would be about exploring boundaries with a group of users.

What is the overall structure of the work you have been doing?

Because I was not used to the English social services system, I did some informal interviews with people working in the field for charities and social work departments, to see what they knew about empowerment and what kind of ethical dilemmas concerning boundaries they were encountering with their users. I conducted three exploratory interviews asking ten questions.

I realised that boundaries were not the main problem and there was more concern over other issues. I then went to the literature to explore empowerment, ethics and statutory responsibilities. I then joined six focus groups being organised by Judith Unell who was looking at the role of health and social care practitioners. Through that I got a wider perspective on ethics, boundaries and responsibilities, not just affecting social action but also social care.

I decided the study would compare the experiences of social workers from local authorities and social care practitioners from a national charity with social action workers.

After that I went back to the literature again and designed a questionnaire with 30 questions which was aiming to find out definitions of empowerment people were using, the ethical dilemmas they encountered, what the causes were and the role of statutory responsibilities in creating these dilemmas.

I got a lot of good information from this and from my analysis was able to develop a hypothesis. I then designed another semi-structured interview schedule and some vignettes which described some typical ethical dilemmas.

These included examples of the way in which the organisational context of work can cause ethical dilemmas.

Since you would prefer not to reveal your detailed findings until you have finished your PhD, what general comments do you feel able to make about social action?

The social action process is very good and you can see how it works, but it could be viewed as rather utopian. You need to be able to do it on your own with your own funding, but as soon as you begin working for even a small organisation, you will always have pressure or barriers to doing social action.

Taking a hypothetical example, you could have a social action worker working for a social action organisation who goes through the process with a group of people and comes up with some interesting suggestions, but there is no more budget or time. So worker X goes out to get private funding, but the funding body will not sponsor a group if they don't know what the outcome will be, which places the worker in a dilemma, since by following the process he or she will not know what the group wants to do in advance. What does worker X do? He or she can really only get the money by either

USER VIEWS ON SURE START

The Centre is currently evaluating the quality and effectiveness of Derby's Sure Start initiative in Osmaston and Allenton. This two-year project will include the views of a number of groups of stakeholders.

The aim of the evaluation is as follows:

- To develop an understanding of how well services are performing, their impact and perceived quality;
- To assess the extent to which families are involved, especially older children and ethnic minority families;
- To look at the effectiveness and extent of partnership working;
- To look for examples of best practice and ways to link into Single Regeneration Budget initiatives.

The Centre is currently working with the Sure Start Programme to identify focus group volunteers and local issues that need to be addressed within the evaluation. The groups will meet six times over the two years, the first being held at the end of April. As far as possible group membership will be kept constant, so that service users are able to go beyond describing the current situation, towards taking action to make the changes that they identify as necessary.

The groups will comprise:

- Parents Group (including fathers)
- Carers Group (anyone with responsibility for caring for someone else's children – this will include grandparents, foster carers, child minders, neighbours)
- Ethnic Minority Families' Group
- Young People's Group (many of these already have responsibility for childcare of younger siblings and may well be parents themselves by the end of this 10 year programme)
- Professionals Group (primarily concerned with the effectiveness of multi-agency working)

During the first three meetings the groups will be encouraged to find ways to approach the wider community, using public meetings, other groups, individual interviews and questionnaires to gather detailed information from all those that the Sure Start programme is designed to help.

The interview groups will be united for two presentation days at the end of the evaluation so that the final report's findings can be disseminated.

FOSTER CARE TRAINING HITS THE SPOT

Mark Harrison facilitated a two-day course for a group of foster carers, senior foster carers, family support workers, social workers and an ESF project worker from Warwickshire on the topic of Pathway Planning in the wake of the Leaving Care Act. Mark's previous experience as a foster carer for Birmingham Social Services Department gives him a special perspective on this subject.

Jane Smith Family Support Worker (Leaving Care) Rugby Children and Family Services commented:

"Mark worked creatively with us using exercises that were stimulating, challenging, fun and great at promoting discussion. Often we worked in small groups, but ones where the membership varied from exercise to exercise, so that the dynamics were different each time. This encouraged us to have a different perception of the issues and further, a greater sense that as each care leaver's situation is unique, this should also characterise their Pathway Plan. Personally, I found this training the best I have been on since I started working here four years ago. It was creative, dynamic and, most significantly, afforded me the chance of seeing things from a different position other than that of a Leaving Care Support Worker. I was able to gain a real sense of where foster carers are "at" with this legislation, and where I may be able to develop my role; what some of the questions are, (some sadly, still without an answer) and the feeling that this may not actually change the leaving care process for the young people we work with.

By meeting together in this training and by working together in groups, I came away with the feeling that there is a genuine commitment across the County to the young people leaving care and that if we continue to work together and face the challenges this brings, the path will ultimately be a successful one, both for the foster carers, staff and the young people themselves."

The Centre feels that this is a topical subject area at present that may strike a chord with workers in other local authorities or voluntary agencies who are currently working with care leavers. We would be happy to offer the training on Pathway Planning to staff groups in other areas. Please contact the Centre for further details.

AN EVALUATION – BECAUSE THEY'RE WORTH IT

The Centre has been commissioned by Boots Company plc to evaluate its "Time for a Treat" initiative which is based at the Nottingham City Hospital. The project takes a holistic approach to health and offers various groups (including hospital patients and community groups) access to free beauty and complementary health treatments. The key aim is to make a positive contribution to the physical and emotional well being of the service users.

This project is an exciting and new partnership between the Primary Care Trust, New College Nottingham, community based care and support workers and Boots. The evaluation will endeavour to find out how all of these stakeholders benefit from their involvement. In particular participants in these sessions will be asked about their views, feelings and also recommendations, on ways in which the experience could be improved. Students from New College will be asked how this placement contributes to their overall learning experience. Care and support workers (both from the hospital and the community) will be asked about the impact the experience has had on their working relationship with the patient/service user and on their ability to foster multi-agency practice.

Centre for Social Action

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