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**2010** is going to see wide reaching change and possible political change as well.

Cuts in essential services and the reversal of recent trends of improvement predate the economic crisis which is of course hitting the poorest most. 2010 is likely to be a year where the relationships between the state and the voluntary sector will come under increasing scrutiny with a projected £11b in cuts estimated.

This newsletter places and describes much of the Centre's work in this wider context and is particularly relevant to the current climate. An example of this would be our work, just about to start, with the WVRS, which will explore the understanding of older people of well-being, the questions of how well-being is defined and, importantly, who defines it and who responds. Our work considering the enhancement of social capital and the role it plays in community cohesion is another topical area of learning.

The role and place of research continues to be under scrutiny and much of our work has fundamental questions about research at it's heart. What is the purpose of research? Who is it for? Who can do research? The Associate Research Assistants, the work on public and patient involvement in research and RightSpace are all part of our exploration of these important questions.



# Centre for Social Action's new work

## Associate research assistants

The Centre has employed five young people from across England to be Associate Research Assistants (ARAs). Ben Yates, 18, from Solihull, 16 year old Harrison Carter and Susie Dobson from Sheffield and Iman Dalenius and Chloe Magorian from Leicester took up their posts in July 2009 and have been employed to work as research staff on a number of projects and training contracts. Chloe resigned in January 2010 due to other commitments.

Their first piece of work has involved evaluating the impact of Participation Works, a national project which offers a range of support services to voluntary and community organisations and local authorities to promote the active involvement of children and young people in all aspects of services that affect their lives. The ARAs had a key role throughout this phase of evaluation concentrating on the impact of Participation Works on practitioners, organisations and young people. The ARAs were colleagues in all aspects of the evaluation process and attended a training weekend where they developed the necessary skills and understanding to undertake research. In the process of the weekend the tools and programme for the site visits were developed. The ARAs have the opportunity to undertake an Open College Network (OCN) level 2 or 3 qualification. They were actively involved in developing the information collection tools for the site visits, they attended all site visits, taking responsibility for both collecting and recording the information from the interviews. They facilitated the young people's group sessions; they were also actively involved in the analysis and interpretation of the findings, attended a weekend residential; where all the information collected was considered and the quantitative and qualitative data integrated, major themes identified and the structure of the report agreed. Some of them have read and commented on a draft of the report.



Ben, Harry, Chloe, Susie and Iman

Before they started the work last summer, they all commented on what they hoped for from the work. Ben, who also volunteers for Solihull Youth Services, said:

“This job will allow me to further my skills in working with people of different ages and cultural backgrounds. I hope this role will enable me to explore what services are available for young people and find out about the different issues that affect them. All of the ARAs bring their own values and experiences to the team and this really helps open everyone’s minds to new suggestions and alternative ways of approaching things. My goal is to become a qualified youth worker and this work will help me acquire some of the essential skills and knowledge needed.”

Iman added:

“I am really looking forward to getting stuck into the work and would encourage any young people to take part in any similar projects in the future.”

Harrison added:

“This post offers a great opportunity for young people to be treated in a professional and supportive way; that doesn’t use young people as a tokenistic tool but instead allow them to assist with and evaluate vital research. The staff at DMU are wonderful, they treat me with respect, understanding and possess the same passion for the work ahead as me.”



Isabel Cartwright at the training weekend

In December – after completing the evaluation Harry said:

“The research I have been doing with the four other Associate Research Assistants is the evaluation of Participation Works – a consortium of charities working to get organisations to involve young people.

Over the summer we have all been going on site visits with Jennie, Thilo and Isabel visiting projects to find out about the impact of Participation Works. We devised questions and a workshop with young people to see how well Participation Works has helped them get effectively involved in their organisation. We have had a lot of comments from young people who have said their participation ranges from arranging football tournaments to sitting on steering panels and being part of the management processes of the organisation.

One of the rights of children is to be fairly represented and going to the organisations that work with young people, it was important that there were young people on the research team. There needs to be a researcher there who is a young person. Young people bring a different light to research. There is a certain stigma of what a researcher looks like and for us to go to the organisations not looking like that stereotypical researcher for young people is important. It is positive and uplifting for them.

When we had collected all the data from the interviews and the site visits and the survey, we split it into qualitative and quantitative. We looked at what the data was saying and we interpreted it. What we found was at times, the people from the university had a different interpretation to us young people, which was very interesting and added another dimension to the report that we will be produced.”

For us at the Centre for Social Action the employment of young people as ARA's is a real development – having young people involved in the work the centre does is extremely important; it is integral to everything that we do. Young people have the right to be involved in issues facing them and have the right to take action on their own behalf and the centre helps facilitate this. We have worked with young people on research projects before but this will be the first time any have been employed directly by DMU. We hope that by having young people employed at the university it will improve the quality of research and build on 30 years of participative work.



Chris, Thilo, Niral and Hogar at the House of Commons Launch.

## Re:action

It is important to remember that the Centre has worked with volunteer ARA's in the past. The young people – Niral Makadia, Chris Johnson, Hogar Salim and Nathan Cadogen – who worked with Thilo on the BIG funded project with Youth Action Network – **Re:action** were also Associate Research Assistants.

Their work came to an end in the Spring of 2009 with a big presentation of the findings at the Houses of Parliament at an event organised by Youth Action Network. The event was hosted by Richard Burden MP, and attended by Kevin Brennan MP, the then Minister for the Third Sector, Lord Frank Judd and many representatives from third sector youth organisations.

The project produced a series of reports and booklets. The main report is available at:  
<http://tiny.cc/eYqUf>

## The RightSpace

Is a partnership between Investing in Children (<http://www.iic-uk.org>), Practical Participation (<http://www.practicalparticipation.co.uk>) and the Centre for Social Action. In times of political, social and economic change how do we hold onto the progress that has been made to promote social justice for young people? How do we deepen the practice of listening to and involving young people in dialogue that leads to change? As organisational structures shift and practitioners are working in more challenging environments – how can we create space for children, young people, practitioners and managers to reflect and learn together?

These are some of the questions we want to explore by involving a wider community of practice of people involved in work with children and young people. The project will have its own online presence soon at <http://www.rightspace.org.uk>, please visit it and contribute to the discussions.



Thilo, Sue Thomas and Amplified members

## Amplified Leicester

“A group that thinks in diverse ways will address a problem from many angles.”

Charles Leadbeater, The Difference Dividend

Thilo Boeck is the social researcher in a city-wide experiment designed to grow the innovation capacity of Leicester by networking key connectors across the city's disparate and diverse communities in an incentivised participatory project enabled by social media. Amplified Leicester is managed by the **Institute of Creative Technologies, De Montfort University** in partnership with the **DMU Centre for Social Action** and **Phoenix Square Digital Media Centre**. The project is commissioned and supported by NESTA, an independent body with a mission to make the UK more innovative.

The objectives of the project are to develop a transferable model for amplifying a diverse city's grassroots innovation capacity by connecting diverse communities through key individuals. It also seeks to provide practical examples of how collaborative technologies can be exploited in a city context. For further information visit: <http://www.amplifiedleicester.com>



Enhancement of social capital are you in the harbour, or taking the risk to set sail?

## Older people's well-being

Jennie Fleming is part of a team with WRVS and Prof Peter Beresford (Brunel University) who have been awarded £497,000 from the BIG Lottery to investigate the best ways to encourage older people to help each other to improve their health and well-being.

The project is the first of its kind to focus on how older people themselves can help each other to improve their health and live well for longer. The results will change the way WRVS helps older people and the charity believes it will change the whole way we approach living well in old age, challenging national and local government, health authorities and other partners to enable people to help each other and themselves.

The project starts up in April 2010 and will run for three years. In the first year there will be a national consultation with older people on what they want in place to live well in old age. Followed by two years of work in five areas of the UK where project workers will develop new ways of engaging older people to help each other to improve their quality of life.

For more information go to: [http://www.wrvs.org.uk/news\\_item.aspx?newsID=678](http://www.wrvs.org.uk/news_item.aspx?newsID=678)

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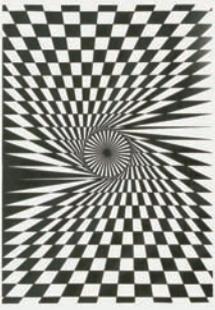
## Centre for Social Action's evaluation work

Evaluation continues to be an important part of the Centre's portfolio of work. We are currently supporting a number of projects in their evaluation work. We are working with some **Pacesetters** projects in Lincolnshire to support their self-evaluation of their work and to collect information on the learning from pilot projects that include access to mammograms and health information for women in prison and how patients with diabetes can continue to be in control of their medication whilst in hospital.

We are also working with **SupportNet** in Nottingham. SupportNet is a new project in two areas of Nottingham (Bilborough and Beechdale) and is working with people who live, work and run businesses in the local area to think together about what type of care people want, now and in the future. They hope to create better local information about care and support and more choice for people who need support as well as the potential for new businesses and new jobs for local people. The Centre is working with the SupportNet staff on capturing the learning from this project.

**Participation Works** Over the last year, Jennie and Thilo with staff from the Youth Affairs Unit have been working on the evaluation of Participation Works. The first part of the evaluation looked at how the consortium of six children's and young people's charities was working together and the second phase considered Participation Works' impact on the organisations that had used its services and considered whether it had resulted in increased participation of children and young people. It is this second phase of the evaluation that we worked with the 5 ARA's on.

**SELF-DIRECTED GROUPWORK**  
Users Take Action for Empowerment



AUDREY MULLENDER & DAVE WARD

Groupwork Series  
Editors: Allan Brown & Andrew Kenlake

## New edition of **Self Directed Groupwork – examples of social action practice?**

Professors Mullender and Ward, the authors of the 1991 *Self-Directed Groupwork*, have asked Jennie to join them in the creation of a new edition of this seminal publication. Whilst the revision is at an early stage we are seeking examples of practise that put into practise the **principles and process** of social action. If you have any group work examples you think could be included please do get in contact with Jennie ([jfleming@dmu.ac.uk](mailto:jfleming@dmu.ac.uk))

## Project updates – long term work

### Work on patient and public involvement in research and research advice



**Raksha Pandya** is part of the Centre for Social Action and is the EM-RDS (**East Midlands – Research Design Service**) here she writes about her work over the past year.

2009 has been a very busy and exciting year. Patient and public involvement (PPI) in research is developing very fast and I am having more and more conversations and debates with clinicians and academics about PPI and its 'hard evidence base' or lack of it. Questions about the value and impact of PPI in research are at the heart of researchers and community member's thoughts when engaging in this type of work.

PPI and the Centre for Social Action have very similar principles – to help people, whether they are patients, carers or the public, to understand that their views are vital to widen understanding of the problem or, in research terms, the process and outcomes of research. It is my responsibility to ensure that PPI is always considered in all research applications that we receive and offer help and guidance. To support this, in the last 12 months we put together a PPI workshop which has been attended by nearly 200 people.

Another major development which I am working on at the moment is to set up a 'PPI good practice in research' forum which will be an alliance across voluntary and statutory sectors within Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Rutland, involving PPI and research leads. At an initial exploratory event over 45 people attended to offer their support for this sort of a forum. Once operational, this forum will hopefully allow clinicians and academics to engage quickly with people who are interested in research, learn from each other and co-ordinate PPI in research efforts to reduce gaps and build on resources.

In the North of the East Midlands region, I am currently working with a Research Management and Governance group to set up a Service Users research event to learn about any sharing of experiences of being involved in research. This will hopefully lead to us having a better understanding of the issues patients and the public go through when engaging in research. In the pipeline is also the potential of doing some work with the Leicester Clinical Trials Unit – which I am confident I will have more to report on by the end of 2010!

In the interim, if you require any further details or information, or you simply wish to talk to someone about PPI, do get in touch and I will try my best to help you.

### **Raksha Pandya**

#### **Regional Lead for Public Involvement in Research and Advice**

National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) – Research Design Service (RDS) East Midlands  
Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, based at:

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E-mail: [rpandya@dmu.ac.uk](mailto:rpandya@dmu.ac.uk)

Tel: +44 (0)116 207 8778

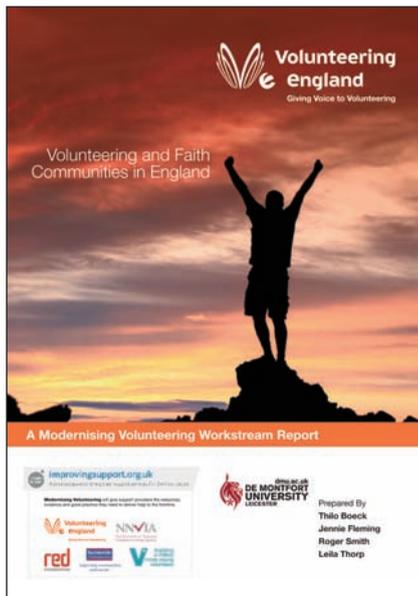
Website: [www.rds-eastmidlands.nihr.ac.uk](http://www.rds-eastmidlands.nihr.ac.uk)

## **Leicester social capital**

Since 2005 Thilo Boeck has been working with the Leicestershire Voluntary and Community Sector who delivered the Stronger Communities theme of the Local Area Agreements. The Centre for Social Action was approached by CVS Community Partnership to support the work by training local volunteers to train community members in peer research and to assist with the theoretical framework and the analysis of the data. We conducted a first survey in 2006 and now we are working on writing the report which looks at the results of the 2009 Social Capital Survey, compares the results with 2006 and analyses the impact the interventions of the Stronger Communities Workers have made. Following a participative approach we have verified the statistics with the experience of the residents – those who carried out the surveys, those in local voluntary and community groups and those who live in the area. The report will be finished at the beginning of 2010.

## **Faith and Volunteering**

To inform their programme of work in this area, the Modernising Volunteering National Support Service commissioned the Centre for Social Action to undertake research into 'volunteering in faith communities in England'. The Centre worked with colleagues in the schools of Applied Social Science and Business and Law at De Montfort University, as well as the Afiya Trust, on this project. The research was in two parts; a literature review to draw together existing evidence on faith-based volunteering and qualitative research with faith communities and local/regional infrastructure to identify needs and ways to improve closer working.



The research addressed a number of questions, including:

- What links and connections do different faith communities have with voluntary sector groups, local networks and local and regional volunteering infrastructure organisations and bodies? What is the nature of these links and how (and through whom) are they established?
- What are the perceptions of local and regional volunteering infrastructure organisations and agencies amongst faith communities and vice versa?
- What are the needs of these faith based organisations and how could these be understood and met by local and regional volunteering infrastructure?
- What are the appropriate forms for this support? What are the barriers and what could help to facilitate this support? What are the most effective ways for faith communities and the local/regional volunteering infrastructure to work together?
- What impact can and could this have on community cohesion and interfaith working?

The report, Boeck T, Fleming J, Smith R and Thorp L (2009) *Volunteering and Faith Communities in England* London: Volunteering England can be found at: <http://tiny.cc/EG9An>

## Moldova – Support to the Delivery of Effective and Sustainable Social Assistance Services in Moldova



Office of Labour, Social Protection and Family in Chisinau

Jennie continues to work with Oxford Policy Management (OPM) and EveryChild Moldova on a DfID/SIDA funded project in Moldova. The project is working with Moldovan partners to develop the policy and institutional framework to support the delivery of effective and sustainable social assistance services in Moldova. Jennie's work on this project has continued this year with a number of visits to Moldova to work with the national staff on aspects of the development of the community social assistant's role. The work in the past twelve months has focused mostly on the development of the training curriculum and training resources for the Community Social Assistants. Jennie, along with Hellmüth Weich of the School of Social Work, has been working with Svetlana Rijicova on the training strategy for developing the skills of the community social assistants, who have not had formal social work training when they start work, and producing guidance booklets for good practice.



Jennie and a participant at one of the Standards We Expect Get Togethers.

## Standards We Expect

Jennie continues to work with the partners on the Standards We Expect project – we are still finalising the outputs and plan to have a collection of publications ready for the summer. The main publication will be a book discussing the findings of the research project to be published by Policy Press.. The book explores the major policy move to ‘personalisation’ in social care and beyond, from first principles. It does this by focusing on the nature of such person-centred support, the barriers it faces and how these may be overcome. It does this from the key but under-examined perspectives of service users, carers, face-to-face practitioners and middle managers. It draws on evidence from a wide range of settings and service user groups in the UK, addressing policy, practice, philosophical and theoretical issues. It will be the first such book building on new knowledge to offer an independent and critical discussion of personalisation and person-centred support – the key policy identified for the future of health and social care – offering guidance for understanding and implementation. The book is also linked with a range of other outputs, both from the Standards We Expect upon which it draws and the wider Independent Living programme, which Standards We Expect forms a central part of.

## Commissioning the Centre for Social Action

The Centre for Social Action is always interested in new contracts to do training, research and consultancy with a range of statutory, voluntary, or private sector organisations. All these activities are informed by our social action methodology; so we always aim to work collaboratively with our commissioners and community members to ensure there is full understanding and ownership of the proposed project on the part of all those who will be directly involved in it.

We are experienced in the fields of health, youth work, children and family support, community development and regeneration, social capital, restorative justice and participation and service user involvement.

### We can be commissioned to undertake the following services:

**Research and evaluation:** we undertake project evaluations and community consultations of all kinds. These often involve training community members and service users to be researchers or information gatherers in their own communities and always aim to ensure ownership and understanding of topics chosen for research on their part. We can also conduct surveys of a particular field in order to produce good practice guides, or conduct audits of existing practice, such as community development work. We also offer training about research and evaluation for organisations and community members (e.g. training for health professionals and service users on participative research).

**Training:** we work directly with community 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. We also offer training to practitioners from all social welfare fields in social action methods, which introduces them to a range of ideas and exercises which can then be used directly in work with their particular community groups, to stimulate greater community involvement and ownership.

**Consultancy:** we can provide consultancy to various groups, organisations, teams and individuals on setting up services and projects and running groups using social action methods. The social action methodology can be used in a very flexible way to address a wide range of organisational needs.

**If you are interested in discussing any of these possibilities then please contact Jennie Fleming at the Centre for Social Action on tel (0116) 257 7873 or [jfleming@dmu.ac.uk](mailto:jfleming@dmu.ac.uk)**

## Publications

Members of the Centre have published a number of chapters and papers from our work.

Fleming J (forthcoming) 'Young people's involvement in research – still a long way to go?' *Qualitative Social Work*

Boeck T, Fleming J, Smith R and Thorp L (2009) *Volunteering and Faith Communities in England* London: Volunteering England 63 pages <http://tiny.cc/EG9An>

Fleming J, Goodman-Chong H and Skinner A (2009) 'Experiences of Peer Evaluation of the Leicester Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Strategy' *Children and Society* pp279-290

Kemshall H, Boeck T and Fleming J (2009) 'Risk, Youth and Moving On' in *British Journal of Criminal Justice*, 7 (2)

Boeck, T (2009) 'Social Capital and Young People', in J. Wood and J. Hine (eds) *Work with Young People: Theory and Policy for Practice*. London: SAGE.

Fleming J and Hudson N (2009) 'Young people and research: participation in practice' in Wood J and Hine J (eds) *Work with Young People: Theory and Policy for Practice*. London: Sage pp114-127

Boeck, T, Fleming, J. and Kemshall, H. (2008) 'Social capital, resilience and desistance: The ability to be a risk navigator' *British Journal of Community Justice*, 6 (3) pp. 5-21

Pandya, R. (2007) 'Working with Young Refugees and Asylum Seekers Through Participatory Action Research in Health Promotion', in M. Sallah and C. Howson (Eds.) *Working with Black Young People*, Lyme Regis: Russell House

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## Conferences

This year Raksha has presented at four conferences:

March 2009, **The Carers Federation, Regional Conference in Nottingham**, The Local Involvement Networks Midlands Research Group "Patient and public involvement in research design"

June 2009, Raksha offered two workshops at the **Collaborative Leadership Applied Health Research and Care (CLAHRC) Launch** conference Leicester Northampton and Rutland, Kettering Conference Centre, National Institute for Health Research "Patient and Public Involvement in research – a political hot potato"

November 2009, Thilo and Raksha co-hosted a workshop at De Montfort University's international conference held at the Watershead, by the Youth and Community Division. **Diversity and Difference** the international conference "Disentangling the notion of diversity".

December 2009, **Health Sciences Departmental Conference** at the University of Leicester Raksha spoke to 120 people about the "The Development of a Leicester, Northampton and Rutland Patient and Public Involvement in research Forum"

Thilo and Jennie have presented at one:

September 2009 Thilo Boeck and Jennie Fleming presented a paper 'Volunteering and faith communities in England' at the **NCVO conference Researching the Voluntary Sector** held at Warwick University.

September 2009 Thilo Boeck presented a paper 'Young People's participation in project Re:action – a youth led research project' at the **NCVO conference Researching the Voluntary Sector** held at Warwick University.

**health&life sciences**

*Centre for Social Action*

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



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