

Advocacy Action

Developing Advocacy in Wakefield District

Coordinator's Report **September 2005**

It has been two months since the last meeting, and quite a lot has happened. I hope you've all had good holidays, and I hope this Autumn really will be a time for the sunny harvesting of the rewards for our past labours.

N.B. There were no Coordinator's reports in July (when steering group members gave their feedback instead), or August (since there was no meeting).

Management Meetings

Following the agreement at the last meeting for Paul and Carol to act as co-chairs for Advocacy Action, and Ben to be treasurer, some additional meetings have taken place over the summer. I met once with Paul, and once with Paul and Carol in informal supervision and support meetings which were helpful and productive.

Budget and Accounts

Several developments have taken place. Firstly I had a much more positive meeting with an accountant quickly after our last meeting. This yielded a much more compact and intuitive method of presenting and developing the budget and accounts, as a result of which the budget forecasts for the first year have been completed, based on the business plan. Also based on the accountant's advice we purchased a computer-based accounting package, *QuickBooks*, that will meet the future needs of Advocacy Action and was a bargain at the time.

In case of the project failing to secure funding to continue employing a coordinator after 6 November, I have agreed with Ben and Carol and Paul to take just over a 10% pay cut. This will save a few hundred pounds and will enable Advocacy Action to maintain its office, telephone, etc. for a few more months.

I have also agreed with Ben in his role as Treasurer that I will prepare monthly budget statements for the Steering Group from now on. Please find the first one attached, showing expenditure against our budget headings from May to 18 August.

Business Plan and Funding

The last draft of the business plan was completed at the beginning of August, and the budget forecasts. There are still many questions ongoing:

- *will we be able to secure independent funding in the short term?* I still believe that Esmée Fairbairn and Lankelly are suitable sources of funds, but we need to argue our case well as we don't seem to fit exactly squarely into their funding priorities. At the time of writing I still haven't rung either of them. We also have to remember the application timescales.

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- *are there any possible alternatives to independent funding?* There could well be, although they could require various levels of adjustment of the business plan. One possibility is applying for funding through the Council-administered Neighbourhood Renewal Learning Action Plan (NRLAP) which includes a heading for voluntary sector development. I have also been informally told about a possibility of some funding for a temporary post to explore the provision of advocacy for children making a complaint (through Connexions). This latter possibility is not directed at Advocacy Action as such, but AA could get involved and may be able to agree to some mutually beneficial services. Finally, as agreed in July I did contact Steve Stewart, Assistant Chief Executive of WMDC, to see if any funding may be available from the Wakefield District Partnership. We should hear back from him soon.
- *should we aim to fund the business plan fully as it stands, or should we seek piecemeal funding to keep going?* Personally I have always felt that running around trying to get scraps of funding from different sources just to keep going is not a very sustainable way of running an organisation. It also opens you to the risk of sacrificing the strategic plan in favour of short term reactionary activities. Maybe we have to be more realistic than this though. There are possibilities of attracting pots of funding for several pieces of work that fit in to the medium and long term goals of AA quite well. These include, in addition to the examples above, Social Enterprise development work (setting up advocacy training programmes that can be 'sold'), or managing and supporting other initiatives that promote communication and democracy (e.g. community consultation, supporting user involvement, etc).

In general I am quite happy with current progress.

Legal Status and Registration

The application went through the Inland Revenue part of the process very quickly and easily. The next stage should be a formality and papers have now been signed and posted. We should formally be an IPS within 6 weeks.

Action Plan

This will be discussed in the meeting on Friday.

Policies and Procedures

The Equal Opportunities and Adult Protection Policies have now been distributed for comments. They seem to be ok for our current purposes (no comments apart from some by the Council's Adult Protection Manager that you have seen).

Supporting Local Advocacy Projects

I am continuing to do bits of work for Rasa, I advised Lift Up on some adult protection issues, and I will be providing staff training for Carers later this month.

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There have been two incidents over the summer of Council officers 'grumbling' in various ways about the work of advocacy projects that have attracted my interest. I am aware that such grumbling is common, but I think it is slightly damaging and when can we should address it. I am working on some case studies and some guidance about boundaries in advocacy, what to expect of advocates, etc. I'm sure these will fit in well with and inform our wider work.

New Government Legislation

You will be aware of the new Mental Capacity Act (MCA) and Mental Health Act (MHA), both of which give a right in legislation for certain people to be supported by advocates. Part of the preparatory work will be developing various guidelines and standards that could have a significant wider impact on advocacy work.

People in Wakefield will be able to access these new rights from 2007 (current estimate), but there is consultation currently ongoing. I will be attending some of this, and I have offered to coordinate a Wakefield response to the consultation but with not much response yet. The deadline for the MCA consultation is the end of September.

Advocacy for Children Making Complaints

As mentioned in the May report, I have been attending some meetings of the Involving Children and Young People Subgroup of the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership. There is a proposal on the table to develop common multi-agency procedures for managing children's complaints across the District. This work is being spearheaded by SS&H's Children's Complaints Officer who works closely with the Children's Advocacy Service and is committed to advocacy.

One part of the procedures would be to ensure children making complaints could be supported through this difficult process by an advocate. I submitted a short briefing that provided some basic information about advocacy and some ideas of how simple advocacy resources could be developed to meet the needs. This led to the vague suggestion of the Connexions funding for some children's advocacy development work for a few months.

IT and Office Issues

Everything seems to be running smoothly.

New Prospective Committee Members

Fatemeh Shabram and Glynis Stirling have agreed in principle to join the committee as previously notified.

Henry Fisher
31 August 2005