



Advocacy Action

Developing Advocacy in Wakefield District

Notes of our Inaugural Annual General Meeting

Held at our registered office on Wednesday 5 April 2006

Present:

Maggie Clarke
Chris Dean
Elaine Edwards
Rosemary Evans
Henry Fisher
Carol McGrath
Dorothy Naylor
Fatemeh Shabram
Maureen Slack
Karen Stansfield
Ru Telford-Brown
Phil Walters
Paul Wright

Apologies:

Dennis Appleyard
Nasim Aslam
David Bowen
Ben Brown
Rosey de Csernatony
Jody Gabriel
Bev Land
Isabel Pender
Steven Pilling
Glynis Stirling
Andrea Weir

Fatemeh, Maggie and Maureen thankfully arrived early and helped out. Maureen sorted out the fair trade chocolate, while Maggie and Fatemeh chopped salad. Maureen also helped register everyone who came. Henry brewed up some organic coffee in the machine Urban Space lent us - just what was needed after a late night and early morning getting ready.

By 11 o'clock everyone had arrived and the main meeting started. It was agreed to try to be as informal as possible. Henry thanked everyone who had come, mentioned some of the apologies that had been received, and we all introduced ourselves briefly.

Henry outlined the simple agenda:

- Introductions and apologies
- Annual Report
- Financial report
- Resignation of Committee
- Election of new Committee
- Short talks
- Buffet lunch

Rather than repeat the contents of the Annual Report which everyone had copies of, Henry said he would keep his contribution brief. He said that during his training session with Connexions the day before he had mentioned the work of the Family Centre in New Zealand. Working with the local Maori people required an introduction of some simple daily spiritual activities - like eating lunch together as a staff team. From these simple beginnings they began to realise that many of the



activities they took for granted and carried out in a relatively mechanical way had much more significance for the Maori and Pacific Island people. One lesson was the ritual significance of meetings, which must be held in the correct way and given appropriate respect.

It struck Henry that AGMs were a good case of this. They are very like rituals, but are often given scant notice or are dominated by mechanical procedures. Henry said he would like to see this first AGM as a moment of affirmation for Advocacy Action and a recognition of the community of the people who had come.

Moving on to the next item, as stated in the Annual Report the income was so low last year that we had applied the audit exemption, and we agreed to apply this exemption again this year.

The Committee then formally resigned, and the new nominations for the Committee were accepted unanimously. These were:

Ben Brown
Carol McGrath
Maureen Slack
Paul Wright

Maggie Clarke
Fatemeh Shabram
Glynis Stirling

Finally Henry introduced two speakers, Maureen and Carol.

Maureen is Secretary of Lift Up Self Advocacy, and she talked about some of the things they do. She told us about the recent trip to the National Coal Mining Museum, and their visit to David Hinchliffe MP and the Houses of Parliament at the beginning of last year. It was Maureen's first visit to London, and she was very happy with the invitation, the meeting with David, and the rest of the trip. Lift Up has made a big difference to her life and to the lives of other people in the group.

Carol talked about some of the difficult decisions advocates have to make in their work. In particular helping carers when they are getting so much abuse from the person they are caring for that in your heart you just want to tell them to stop caring and send them to a nursing home. This is a very difficult position to be in as it challenges what carers support is about (helping people to care), but it is quite common. It's very difficult to act as an advocate for people in this position because they often feel unable or unwilling to ask for any support services, so the advocate is left just trying to maintain some contact.

After these two short talks, the floor was opened up, and Fatemeh talked about the experience of starting up RASA and all the different kinds of work they did with local refugees and asylum seekers. There is a big challenge in dealing with such a wide variety of problems and languages, as well as getting funding to make the project sustainable.

Before we broke up and went for the organic lunch that was waiting next door, Maggie said a thank you to Henry for sticking with the project even through hard times and for all the positive work that had been done.