



Advocacy Action

Developing Advocacy in Wakefield District

Management Committee Meeting - Friday 21 October 05

Advocacy Action Office, 21 King Street, Wakefield, 10am-12noon

Meeting Notes

Present:

Ben Brown	Urban Space Community
Maggie Clarke	Children's Advocacy Service
Henry Fisher (notes)	Advocacy Action Project Coordinator
Bev Land	DIAL Wakefield
Carol McGrath	Carers Wakefield District
Fatemeh Shabram	Rasa Advocacy Project
Ian Wilson	Age Concern Wakefield District
Paul Wright	Cloverleaf Advocacy

There were no apologies.

1. The notes of the last meeting were accepted as a true record.
2. **Looking back over the last two years**

Henry thanked everyone for coming and said that before anything else was discussed, we should all congratulate each other on the distance we have come over the last couple of years that the Steering Group, now Management Committee, has been meeting. Stronger bonds have certainly developed between people and their organisations, and the commitment made by people coming to meetings every month despite their heavy workloads shows the belief that the project can make a positive difference to local advocacy work. Someone recalled the evening meetings where we talked more about our personal practice issues - a very positive experience.

We are now coming to the end of the current funding, with Henry's contract due to end on 6 November, and although there are a couple of possibilities on the horizon, it's currently unclear what will happen next. So this also seems like a good time to refresh our memories about what has happened.

More detail will be available in the end of project report, but it seems good to highlight two of the interventions by Social Services that have caused the project problems.

The first was in May 2004 when Henry first came into post. Up until then SS&H were pushing the project towards becoming a social enterprise, and had even considered registering it as a limited company to get things moving. This seemed in line with the decision in the stakeholder day in July 2003 to set up a support organisation on the GAIN model. In April/May 2004 this changed and Henry's job

was to do more consultation and research, although the change wasn't noticed by many people. Even seven months later at the end of November it was difficult to persuade SS&H that what was needed was a working organisation with staff who could make a difference rather than simply expecting existing projects to just form a network that could easily end up as being a time consuming talking shop.

The second problem was almost a repeat of the first, and occurred almost straight away. It was agreed to set up Advocacy Action as an independent organisation in November - first by the SS&H Directorate, and then publicly at the Stakeholder Day. Because so much time had been spent doing additional consultation, the timescales for the implementation of Advocacy Action were now extremely tight, but in January we heard that there was a problem, and basically we couldn't do any work until this was resolved. Unfortunately it took until March to meet the SS&H Directorate again and resolve the misunderstanding, and by this time there were only six weeks left for the project. At this point it was not possible to progress with work because there was so little time before the end of the project, and we focussed on obtaining some funding for an extension - finally secured in late April, and finalised on 6 May.

In May Henry believed it would be possible to get Advocacy Action up and running in six months, and a lot of progress has been made, but the earlier delays had set the project back further than expected. We were also left without much time to properly develop the business plan, which therefore was quickly formed into quite a static document.

While it is important to acknowledge some of the problems the project has faced, we mustn't forget the positive note this report started with: there is a belief in and a commitment to Advocacy Action, and we have made a lot of progress ourselves and made a difference to quite a lot of people already. The next question is, where do we go from here...?

3. Where next for Advocacy Action?

There are currently two applications either submitted or pending

- an application to the Neighbourhood Renewal Learning Action Plan (NRLAP) for funding to develop training courses in Communication and Conflict Resolution for young people and community groups. These would take an advocacy approach and could help develop the interest for further advocacy training as well as help Advocacy Action develop its training portfolio with an eye on selling training in the future.
- a tender for a contract to support work on the voluntary and statutory sectors in Wakefield involving children and young people more in their work. This development work is very much along the lines of the early development work for Advocacy Action, and although it's not focused on advocacy there are advocacy elements in the work and the contract as a whole will fit in well with AdAct's aims.

This latter contract would also help to move AdAct forward in some quite interesting ways. After the last few months being spent in the office with considerable uncertainty over the future of AdAct, it would be good to be more



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tightly focused for a few months - and at the same time have to get out to meet new groups around the District. It will also be good in terms of the process of applying for and managing such a short-term contract - and achieving positive outcomes.

In general one of the problems with the business plan as it exists at the moment is that the social enterprise elements of the plan only begin to come in after 2-3 years, after the foundations have been set. Unfortunately it's far from clear how we are going to get funding to set these foundations - especially for three or more full-time staff.

At this point it seems the best way forward is to become more flexible and concentrate on carrying out smaller pieces of work for a while until we build up enough of a portfolio of work to demonstrate our value and reliability for larger bids.

Carol reminded us that we must still keep the focus on making larger bids as soon as possible so we can fund our core work.

Paul said we shouldn't take on any contracts just for the money - we should ensure all our work fitted in well with our principled approach.

Both these comments were unanimously agreed.

A final Project Report will be prepared over the next couple of weeks. This will have more detail on the work we have done and the lessons we've learnt. It was agreed that this report should be circulated widely.

4. Action Plan progress

We have done pretty well on this. The only area we have not managed to achieve our objectives at all is in developing the good practice standards. We have also not done very well on the funding side, having not submitted four applications. We have made significant progress on every other target however (see handout from meeting).

5. IPS Registration, Management Committee, Members, etc.

We are now registered (officially since 21 September). We need to set a year end date, amend our stationery, put up a plate outside our registered office, and start a register of members and committee members.

It was agreed to set the year end as 31 October. This was also conveniently close to the end of the current project. The need for employers and public liability insurance was also discussed. We have been covered under Urban Space's policy, but it seems appropriate to get our own cover now.

All those present at the end of the meeting paid their £1 subscriptions (Jody, Bev, Ben, Shabnam, Maggie and Ian).

The next full meeting was arranged for Friday 13 January 2006, 10am - 12noon at the Children's Advocacy Service, 51 West Mead, Airedale, Castleford.

There will be an interim meeting on Friday 11 November 10am - 12noon at 21 King Street to discuss the current funding bids and the work that needs immediate attention.