

**Proactive Voluntary/Community Group
Meeting
10am Tuesday 3rd February**

Present:

Steven Saddington – Bassetlaw CAB
Sarah Snowden – Centre Place
Tracey Clewes – New Roots
Sarah Dolby – HOPE
Jan Sellers – HOPE

Apologies:

Michael Newstead – BCVS
Marie Beedall – NACRO
Diane Herrington – Credit Union
Vicky Marshall – NCHA

Areas of Discussion Included:

1. Rationale for the group

Sarah and Jan explained how the idea of forming the group had come about as a result of their own organizational experiences in supporting service users

HOPE staff have become increasingly frustrated by legislation, policies and procedures which work against their clients and can place them in a position where they are more vulnerable to hardship and homelessness. Examples were given such as the Local Housing Allowance, Applications for direct payments and Housing Benefit restrictions for under 25's. Further impetus for forming a group came about as a result of:

- The recognition that many other voluntary organizations would be experiencing similar difficulties
- Other voluntary agencies expressing their frustration due to similar experiences but feelings of powerlessness to address them at a local or national level.
- The recognition that by working together we would be in a better position to initiate change for the good of all our service users.

It is widely recognized that influencing policy and decision-makers is at the heart of the Citizens Advice service and that the data collated by their service across the country produces a range of reports and briefings to enable them to campaign both locally and nationally. However, at present this information is

limited to the people who attend the CAB for support. If voluntary sector agencies came together as part of this group to address issues that are relevant to them we would be able to provide additional data/evidence. Consequently, the overall evidence collated would be significantly higher and therefore give further strength to bringing about legislative changes both locally and nationally.

2. Understanding of Social Policy

Discussion took place around the possibility that groups may not engage because they do not have a clear understanding of what Social Policy is even though they are dealing with social issues on a day to day basis eg. Homelessness, benefit claims, anti-social behaviour, lack of medical services.

In recognition that many people do not have a clear understanding of Social Policy; Steven has agreed to bring a basic Social Policy training pack to the next meeting. This will provide information about Social Policy and give a better understanding for all involved.

3. Group Processes for Initiating Change

A discussion was had by the group to identify the process for initiating change. In recognition that members may have numerous meetings to attend, the group agreed that in order to be effective there should be a clear structure to work to. This structure was outlined as below:

i) Identify key issues to put forward for change.

It was decided through discussion that all voluntary groups involved need to decide on the issues they feel are most prominent to them. Each agency would be required to list a maximum of their 5 most prominent issues which they would like to be addressed.

ii) Decide which key issues to address

The group would decide on which issues they would like to focus on for the following 3 month period. The number of issues addressed would depend on whether it required national or local lobbying for change and the amount of work involved in bringing about that change

iii) Decide on what data/evidence would be collated

Decisions on the monitoring format would be made by the group and dependant on the type of information required to build up a case for change.

The group felt that a universal monitoring form for all the agencies to use would be the most effective in collating the information required.

Steven (BCAB) has offered to bring forms used by CAB to gather their evidence, to the next meeting. These could be adapted and modified for the use of the group.

iv) Circulation and collation of monitoring forms

The monitoring forms would be time-limited and require completion by all relevant staff working for the voluntary agency. The most effective way for the information to be gathered will be addressed in more detail at the next meeting.

v) Present a case to local or national government

The group will decide the most appropriate format for presenting the collated data/evidence in order to present a strong case for change.

BCAB is hoping to recruit volunteers to work on Social Policy. This could be very advantageous to the group in terms of working with the group to foster change.

4. Appropriate Name

The group felt that a more appropriate (and catchy) name was required for the group. We would therefore welcome suggestions.

5. Distributing Minutes

Jan agreed to contact Michael from BCVS to request distribution of the minutes to all voluntary and Community Sector groups to ensure we cover as wide an area as possible. We will also be asking Michael to make contact with other CVS's to find out if and how other areas work within the voluntary sector to tackle Social Policy.

6. Next Meeting

Date: Wednesday 22 April 2009

Time: 10a.m. to 12p.m.

Venue: HOPE Services- 17 Queen Street, Worksop

Tel: 01909 531294

Please confirm by email if you will be able to attend- sarah@hopeservices.org.uk