

Section 7 - Campaigning and Lobbying

Introduction

This section provides advice and guidance on several, very different, approaches to the campaigning and lobbying which most community groups will need to undertake at some point in their existence. The first two articles on how to use the media and generate good publicity for campaigns and actions set the scene for ways of raising the issues publicly.

The next set of seven articles explore ways to lobby politicians in the more traditional sense with some interesting and effective proposals. Although based around lobbying members of the European Parliament they have an easy adaptability to approaching local and national politicians.

Non violent direct action has a long and honourable history within community development (from rent strikes to sing-ins) and the six articles offered here explain the concept, how to plan for it how to be effective and how to run the necessary supportive training. There are case studies to demonstrate some of the actions that communities have taken and some of the issues that have been raised and faced.

There is a case study to show how organisations can take an advocacy approach to empowerment through providing technical welfare rights support, which provides an example of how organisations can use their expertise to support the powerless.

The section ends with another case study based on building alliances with officials and councillors over the likely impact of the development of a new academy school.

In the Skills Manual 2001 there is a section on campaigning most of which is still relevant when thinking about planning and carrying out a community led campaign and the implications for the workers supporting them.

The section on virtual communities in this manual has several suggestions for using the web to support and run campaigns.

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DEALING WITH THE MEDIA

Introduction

This is an extract from Dealing with the Media – a pack produced by Seeds for Change to support campaigning groups taking actions over the effects of climate change. The full pack is available at climateaction.org.uk along with other resource packs on publicity. The advice given is easily adaptable to all groups wanting to get their message across to others using the media. More resources are available from www.seedsforchange.org.uk

First things first! - Before throwing yourself into media work consider some basic questions:

1. What's the aim of your action?

Don't spend lots of time on presswork unless that's one of the points of doing the action! If however the action is (at least partly) aimed at getting media coverage then it's worth thinking about which media to target, and how.

But, even if you don't actually want media coverage it's worth preparing a media release - just in case any turn up. You're also more likely to get your message across (rather than some skewed sensationalism) if you give the journalists your side of the story.

2. What's your angle?

How are you going to portray who you are and what you're doing? Does your media angle fit into the wider aims of the campaign?

3. Who will talk to the media?

Work this out beforehand so that the Media liaison person can prepare some sound-bites and revise the basic facts. The perfect person for the job is someone who is friendly, confident, able to be firm and good with words.

4. Which media? Any media?

Local newspapers and radio will cover virtually anything that is at least a little exciting. The telly is more choosy, and you'll need to come up with something fairly big to get them interested. National media are more difficult to get involved (but easier if you're doing your action in London).

Think about which of the above media you want to attract and then develop your media strategy. Ask yourself the following:

- What message do we want the media to pass on? Concentrate on three or four simple key messages.
- Is your activity / action exciting enough, or is it enough of a current topic to be of interest to the national media? Or is it only going to interest local and alternative media?
- Take a look at similar stories that national media have run in the past – is yours as exciting as those? If your action relates to another news headline (eg taxes raised on 4x4s) draw attention to it in your media release.
- Are there going to be colourful, dynamic images? Photographers and the telly will only bother to turn up if you're offering something with a good visual impact, and ideally controversial or topical.
- Do you know which journalists to contact directly? Ask other activists which journalists are friendly and likely to do a positive write up and try these first.

- Do you know where to send your News Releases? Make an up-to-date list of email addresses, fax and telephone numbers of your selected media. You can look up their email addresses on the web or ring them up and ask for their email address.

News / Media Releases

- Journalists are snowed under by media releases – make sure yours stands out. Grab attention with a punchy headline and first paragraph. The rest has to be clear and snappy too, whilst containing all the key information.
- Send your news release by email, or if you print them out then use A4 paper. Put your group's name (and logo) along with the words NEWS or MEDIA RELEASE at the top.
- Keep it short and simple - one or two pages only and make sure that all the facts are there.
- Make up a good headline: something short and concise.
- The news angle should be in the introduction to your press release. Cover the 5 big points: WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY. Eg: (who:) Local people (when:) today (what:) took action to (why:) cut climate changing emissions.
- Look at how articles in local papers are written, then write your media release in such a way that it can be used as an article with only minor or no changes. Local papers often do this.
- It's not a rant! Focus on the facts most relevant to your action. You can go into more detail at the end under "Notes for the Editor".
- Add a snappy quote or two, for example: have somebody famous saying "Climate Chaos is happening" and somebody involved in the action explaining what you're doing and why.
- Include your contact numbers on the release – ensure the phones are working, and that the person answering the phone is prepared.
- Add details of picture opportunities - put in a time and place along with a short, visual and enticing description of what will happen.
- Send the media release by email and fax (if you can). Follow it up with a phone call - "Just wanted to check our Media Release arrived ok".

Interviews

Being interviewed can be a nerve-wrecking experience, but it doesn't have to be. If you want a good write-up make sure that the media speak to people who know what they're talking about. The best way of doing that is to offer them interviewees who have prepared for this.

Interviews with the press are usually more relaxed and slower than with the radio or TV, but the same principles apply:

- Know your facts, take some notes, and read them before your interview. Then take a deep breath, and relax.
- Know your audience, you can go into more detail if you'll be on Radio 4, but if you're going to be on the local pop music station you'll need some seriously snappy sound-bites.
- Decide on two or three key messages. Keep these in mind, and stick to getting them across. Eg: Climate Chaos is happening; we all need to take responsibility; the action target is a climate criminal because...
- Think about what questions you may be asked and how you will answer them.
- Paint a picture, tell a story, but avoid statistics or long lists. People understand polar bears better than friction factors of polar ice-sheets.
- Avoid jargon or technical language - speak clear, simple English.
- If you do not understand a question, ask the journalist to repeat or explain it. Do not be drawn into topics you know nothing about, you have good reasons to take action, feel free to remind the interviewer of that.

Radio and TV Interviews

In addition to the above, bear the following in mind:

- Ask whether the interview is live or recorded, if it's recorded you may be able to have another go if you mess things up.
- Speak clearly and more slowly than usual.
- Vary your tone - it needs to match your message. Let your natural enthusiasm come over, this is one of your main strengths.
- Talk to the interviewer and make eye contact with them, ignore the microphone and camera.
- They may only use a really short clip from the interview - as little as 4 or 5 seconds, so make sure you have some sound bites prepared, snappy phrases that cover your 2 -3 main points.

Providing your own pictures and video footage

If you have the skills and equipment you can post your own pictures and videos of the action on a website. If you want the media to use these then you'll have to make sure that:

- They are of high quality (look good, and at least 300dpi for stills)
- Available immediately - ideally while the action is still going on.

Using the Letters page

Letters to the press can be an effective way of getting your message out to people, particularly local papers where you have a good chance of being published:

- Keep letters short and to the point. They shouldn't be a big rant, but come over as being reasonable.
- Focus on getting a few points across clearly. If you have lots of points to make you could split them between different letter writers.
- Letters are more likely to be published if they contain personal or professional knowledge or experience - so mention these.

Media Contacts

You can find contacts for many local newspapers at www.planningsanity.co.uk/media/news.htm

Find out about local / national alternative media newsletters and email lists. Here are two:

Schnews - national weekly email newsletter: www.schnews.org.uk

Rising Ride news sheet: info@risingtide.org.uk

Websites where you can post your story yourself:

www.earthfirst.org.uk

www.indymedia.org.uk

www.climateimc.org

Contact:

Seeds for Change www.seedsforchange.org.uk Tel: 0845 458 4776

A BASIC GUIDE TO GOOD PUBLICITY

Introduction

This briefing sheet was written to support groups taking action on climate change, but it is quite adaptable to any community groups with messages they want to get across.

To create the big changes necessary to avert climate chaos we need to involve lots and lots of people in taking action both in their personal life and in their communities. How

do we best get our message across to them? There are lots of options, but whatever you do, don't just rush into the first thing that springs to mind. Think about what's most effective for your campaign.

Good publicity helps you:

- ✓ To spread information
- ✓ To get more people involved
- ✓ To increase pressure
- ✓ To be more effective

1. What are your key messages?

As campaigners we tend to overwhelm people with information – issues are complex and there is so much we care about. But people are bombarded with lots of messages every day. To get our message across we need to focus on a few simple and clear things that will stick in people's minds.

You need to be clear about the aims of your campaign. What are the three most important things to get across to people? These are your key messages. Write them down in a couple of short, clear sentences and focus on them in the publicity. You may need to reword them depending on who you are talking to.

2. Who is your target audience?

People adopt different roles at different times throughout their week: employee at an oil company, parent, shopper, car driver, walker, tax payer. The same person will be receptive to different messages at different times.

Think about who you need to talk, and at what time to achieve your aims. Put yourself in people's shoes. What is it they will care about? What will interest them? Look for a way into a conversation.

Targetting people with messages and information relevant to them will be very effective.

Checklist

- ✓ What do you want to get across?
- ✓ Who do you need to talk to?
- ✓ What do you want people to do?
- ✓ What's the best way of telling them?
- ✓ Do we have the time, skills and resources to do this?

Publicity is about getting people on board and on your side. Be creative and welcoming. If you are confronting people with the consequences of their actions, criticise their behaviour rather than the individual person. Acknowledge people's ability to change and give people options of what they can do to help.

Think about how you come across: is wearing that favourite "car drivers are scum" t-shirt really going to encourage car drivers to listen to your argument?

3. What do you want people to do?

All your communications should contain a clear call to action and give people concrete things to do, whether that's joining your group, cutting car use, coming to see a film, boycotting a product, writing a letter, or growing their own vegetables.

Always supply your contact details so that people can find out more or get involved in your group. Having sources of further information ready is a good idea too, for example you could include web addresses on leaflets, posters and newsletters.

4. What's the best way of reaching people?

So you've worked out your basic message and who you are targeting. Now it's time to decide the best way of getting your message across to them. Remember you want to get people on your side, so make it easy for your audience to listen to you. Don't expect people to come to you for information – go to them. Use venues, language and styles that your particular audience will be comfortable with.

Think about the best way to catch people's attention. When talking to teenagers think stickers, gigs, skate festival. Business people may prefer to attend a talk by an expert at the town hall. Press like photos of stunts with kids and pensioners in it. Jo Public and local councillors are usually more comfortable at a panel discussion on neutral ground rather than graffiti on a wall.

Consider what time and resources you want to spend on publicity. What skills do you have in the group and what do you enjoy doing?

5. Top ideas for effective publicity

- * Posters – put up in local shops, community centres, GP's surgeries, schools, pubs.
- * Leaflets – for handing out in town, sticking through letter boxes, on stalls, giving to your friends.
- * Street stalls and stalls at events – great for direct contact with people, getting new people involved and fundraising.
- * Publicity stunts eg street theatre to attract attention or creating photos to get into the newspapers.
- * Banners at stalls and events – colourful well made banners catch attention and really get the message across.
- * Stickers/ badges – with your message or contact details.
- * Word of mouth – very effective!
- * Get into the press - newspapers, radio and tv.
- * Local/ national newsletter - keep your ever-growing network of supporters updated.
- * Subvertising billboards – altering wording/ images to subvert advertising messages.
- * Events, talks, films, workshops are great for giving people the chance to check you out without committing to anything and for getting people to think about stuff.
- * Benefit gigs – raise cash. Don't forget to have a stall and get the bands to talk about the issue.
- * Displays – in the library, schools, community centres.
- * Websites – very important nowadays. A cheap way of giving people lots of information.
- * Email lists – to stay in touch with supporters.
- * Blogs – here you can have your daily rant and people might just read it.
- * Rallies, demos, vigils – visible presence on the streets. Hand out leaflets, talk to passers-by, have lots of banners and get your story into the media.
- * Letters to the editor – especially effective in your local rag as that's the only bit most people read.
- * Endless other possibilities - postcards, t-shirts, window posters, mugs.

Contact:

Seeds for Change www.seedsforchange.org.uk Tel: 0845 458 4776

Costing the Earth? Good publicity doesn't have to...

- ✓ How many leaflets and posters do you really need? People often end up with stacks and stacks of out-of-date stuff under their beds.
- ✓ Use recycled paper, don't use glossy ink and get them printed with vegetable ink. Check out green printers such as Footprint in Leeds or Green Print in Oxford.
- ✓ Are there more effective ways of going public than using paper? Can you use the web and email lists?
- ✓ Get existing newsletters and publications to run stories about your campaign and advertise your events.
- ✓ Make banners and costumes from old sheets, materials from charity shops, plastic rubbish, leftover paint.
- ✓ Share materials and equipment with other groups.
- ✓ Make things that last and that can be reused.

ACTION ALERTS

Introduction

An Action Alert is sent out when you want your members to lobby a politician. They were first used in the United States to get people to write to Congress. The single purpose of an Action Alert is to arouse people to take action on the issue. They are not suitable for complicated issues. Action Alerts have a summary of the facts on the issue and a call to action. Please see the example below.

When to Send Action Alerts

Send Action Alerts when an issue you are concerned with is published as a proposal. Put extracts of the new proposal in your Action Alert. Give the full title and any reference number. Explain what is OK in the proposal and what is wrong with the proposal. In the 'Get Active' section, ask members to write to Officials, Councillors MPs, MEPs – whoever is the relevant target - to gather information about their initial attitude to the proposal.

You can also send an Action Alert to your members when there is to be a vote. Most elected bodies will vote on a proposal. In the 'Get Active' section, you may want to give the e-mail addresses of Councillor, MP, MEP - just before they vote on the issue.

Preparing the Action Alert

Use only one side, or at least do not put anything on the portion that is the 'Send Back Slip'. Remember to tell new members that from time to time they will get Action Alerts. Put a sample Action Alert in each membership pack. Have a place on your membership form where people can tick to get Action Alerts.

Mailing list

Have a mailing list showing how Action Alerts will be sent to members. The mailing list can show who gets faxed Action Alerts and who needs to have them sent by first-class mail, who by text messaging and who by e-mail. Ask your e-mail members to use the reply option to respond to the 'Send Back Slip' section of your on-line Action Alert.

Letterhead and date

[include contact information: web page – address – telephone – fax and e mail]

Action Alert!

Title of Action Alert

[Use a catchy title]

Background of issue

Under this heading, outline the issue. Give contact information about who in your group can provide more details. Do not use jargon or abbreviations

Get Active

Then in the 'Get Active' section say what needs to be done, ask members to get active on at least one of the three or four things you suggest.



Send Back Slip

At the bottom of every Action Alert have a 'Send Back Slip'. This Send Back Slip asks what have you done? To whom did you do it? When did you do it? Put in a space for your member to write their own name and a space for any comments. Then campaign HQ will know who has done what. It is a good idea to put your campaign address again on this part of the action alert

Action Alert

Members name

What I did

To whom I did it

When I did it

A semi fictional example:

The Regional Planet Action Posse
234 Prince Alinsky Boulevard, Ceramic City, CC1-3XZ
Telephone 01234-567890 sorry: no fax machine Email: zxcv@1234.com

Action Alert!

We have campaigned with your help and hundreds of others across Europe; to influence the special report prepared by the European Parliament on climate change.

Now the final report is to be debated and voted on by the European Parliament, at its Brussels session on 1st March. As our European Coordinator I am sending this Action Alert to ask you to contact three Members of the European Parliament [MEPs]. Please write from your own experience of climate change, so the MEP cannot just reply with a "form" letter. For any technical facts please speak to our Ms Belinda Chen on direct dial 01234-1233456

Get Active!

Please write in English to these MEPs asking them to vote for the whole report and against all amendments.

Ms Sally Pazaz, MEP, 33 The Drive, Ballymoray, Isle of Sternaway, Scotland YS1-1XZ

Ms Joan Razamatazz, MEP [from Bulgaria]
E-mail: research_assiistaqnt@europarl.com

Professor Elena Glitterati, MEP [from Romania]
E-mail: assistant1@europarl.com



Send Back Slip

Members Name: Ms (Belinda) Chen Ping Mei

What I did: Wrote to all three

When I did it: On or about the: 21 / 02 / 2008

Please return this reply slip to:

Ms Sally Yip, European Coordinator,
The Regional Planet Action Posse, 234 Prince Alinsky Boulevard,
Ceramic City, CC1-3XY, United Kingdom.

Thank you!

Contact:

John Huff, Director - euro_bureau@hotmail.com

WRITING A POSITION PAPER

Introduction

The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines a position paper as “a written report of attitude or intentions”. A position paper is a summary of your public attitude and intentions on an issue in a phase of your campaign.

Uses of a Position Paper

You may wish to use the Position Paper as a kind of agenda when you meet a councillor, MP (Member of Parliament) or MEP (Member of the European Parliament). Decide which media outlets you will send your position paper to. Put it on your web site if you have one.

Three into one will go

A Position Paper has three paragraphs that deal with:

1. The Problem
2. The Facts
3. The Answer

Writing the Position Paper

Put your Position Paper on just one side of A4 size paper. Use a letterhead, the same as you would for an official letter. Type “Position Paper” under the letterhead and give it a title. Read the position paper aloud, does it sound OK? Get someone you trust, who is not in your group, to review its contents. There is no such thing as good writing, only good re-writing. Use your computer to give the best layout. Create and save the sample format as a template.

Letterhead and date

Position Paper

Title of Position Paper

The Problem

In the first paragraph, describe the problem. Include a quotation from a person affected. Put in at least one quote. Give a brief but balanced view of the problem.

The Facts

In this central paragraph, state the facts about the issue. Give the source of your statistics. Only use those facts that support your argument. If time is short and facts cannot be checked, then exclude them.

The Answer

This is the paragraph for the answers, what needs to happen. Get beyond, ‘something must be done’. Put in the policies that would stop the problem. Suggest things, which are easy for the other side to agree to. Say what needs to happen immediately. Show that you group is aware of the costs of your proposals.

Summary

Your Position Paper is a lobbying tool. The prime rule of lobbying applies "Your credibility is the only thing, which stands between acceptance and rejection".

Contact:

John Huff, Director, European Information Bureau
Tel: 01782-266712. Web site: www.eurobureau.ik.com

CONTACTING A POLITICIAN

Introduction

This sheet is about making that first contact with a politician after they have been elected, politicians can be a local councillor, or members of the UK, Scottish, European Parliament or Welsh Assembly. Some of the examples given in this sheet relate to Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) but the principles can be applied to all politicians. This very first letter to a new elected Member is the introductory letter; you only get one chance at it. Your skill is in adapting the letter to both the political party and personality of the elected Member. Divide the work of writing the first draft of this introductory letter between your group members.

1. The `Well Done` Paragraph

In the first paragraph of your letter, you want to give the elected Member a good feeling about themselves.

- Congratulate them on their election
- Ask for the names of their office staff
- Ask for details of their web site, e-mail address, phone and fax number.
- Ask about their office opening hours
- If they have just been elected to the European Parliament wait until September before sending the introductory letter. They will be setting up their office during the summer
- Ask them which method they would prefer your action group use to contact them

2. The `We Are Watching You` Paragraph

The aim of this paragraph is to get credibility by showing that you know what they have done in the past, and by mentioning that you know which committees and delegations they serve on.

- Mention their political party and political group
- Quote what their manifesto said about the issues important to your group
- Mention any promises they made at Candidates Evenings or before the election
- Mention the committees they are on
- Mention any Delegations they serve on at the European Parliament.
- Ask how are they going to keep in contact with the electorate
- Ask if they will publish an annual report to the people of their Electoral Constituency

3. The `Shopping List` Paragraph

This paragraph is the heart of your letter. Write this paragraph first when you are drafting the letter. This middle paragraph states the reason why your group is entering into a political dialogue with the elected Member.

- Relate the Members interests to your own
- Mention your campaign issues
- Mention the type of background knowledge your group has
- Tell the MEP about your international and European Level links

4. The `About Our Group` Paragraph

The final paragraph is about your group so that the elected Member can decide the electoral power of your group has; the aim is to convince them that you are important as a pressure group rather than a waste of space.

- Tell them how many members you have in their constituency
- Tell them how to keep in contact with your group
- Give them permission to enter your group's details on their computer database
- Decide if you are going to include any items with this introductory letter

Contact:

John Huff, Director - euro_bureau@hotmail.com

WRITING LOBBYING LETTERS

Introduction

This sheet is designed to help you get your message across by writing lobbying letters. However, if the Member has already done something you yourselves like, write a short praise letter telling of your approval. Sending a praise letter is a good way to make sure that your next letter gets attention.

Starting the Letter

In the first paragraph put something that you know about the politician. At the start of a campaign, you may only know their political party and the area they represent. Do not worry; put that information in your letter. You could write; "I know you represent the _____ Party in the West Midlands European Electoral constituency and belong to the _____ Political Group at the European Parliament". (Or whatever the facts are). Or for a councillor "I know you represent _____ ward and are a member of the _____ political party.

You might know the politicians "pet" topic, if so mention that you know this. Try writing, for example; "I know you are active in the democratic struggle for more democracy in Indonesia. Nevertheless, on this occasion I write to you about something closer to home". This first part of the paragraph tells the politician you know something about them and you are watching their actions.

The letter has a heart

The second part of the letter is where you give the message. In the first sentence of this second paragraph, say what the topic of the letter is. You could say. "However, today I am writing to about the proposal on _____". If you know the official title of the proposal put that as a heading at the top of the letter. If you know the reference put it here.

Use facts, figures and reason to develop your argument. Try not to use emotional outbursts and dodgy things you cannot prove. Do tell the politician about your experiences on the proposal your writing about. Share with the Member a bit about the impact of the proposal, if it were to become law in its present form.

Above all else, ask the politician to vote the way you want; for, against or abstention. Ask just one question. Do not threaten or demand anything from this politician.

Letter Details

The most import detail is to get everything on one side of A4 paper. Edit your letter down to one side. If your letter is just on one side of the page it is easy for the politicians assistant to fax it to them if they are away. Extra sheets often get lost in a busy and cramped office. Use the computer to spell check and grammar check the letter. If you are sending a hand written letter, write in black not blue then your letter can be photocopied and sent by fax. Put the politicians name and address on the letter. Put the correct postage onto the letter and if writing to the Brussels offices of an MEP you need an airmail sticker.

Contact:

John Huff, Director - euro_bureau@hotmail.com

RESPONDING TO ELECTED MEMBERS LETTERS

Introduction

This sheet is about the importance of replying to an elected Member. Your reply letter is the important letter. Many action groups are happy or disappointed when they get a reply and then they do nothing more about the letter, that is wrong.

Checkout the MEPs reply

OK, the reply has arrived; what needs doing? After re-reading the letter classify it using Attitude and Activity as explained below.

Attitude

What is the attitude of the Member? The first thing to think about is how long they have taken to reply. Did the politician give an excuse for taking so long to reply? Did they spell your name wrongly? Come to a group opinion about the attitude of the Member to your action group

Activity

Now compare what you asked in your first letter to what answers the reply letter contained. What did they say they would do about the issue? Most Members will not promise to do anything, accept in some polite way. Evaluate what they have said they will do.

- Does the MEPs reply deal with the exact questions you asked them?
- Is what they say they will do just a fob-off?

Decide and record the agreed opinion of your action group on the reply.

The Waffling Member

In the Oxford Concise Dictionary, they define waffle as, "verbose but aimless or ignorant talk or writing". If the Member has waffled, then they have avoided saying where they stand on the issue. Reply with, "Thank you for responding to our letter about the vital issue of _____ May we ask you again what you feel about _____". That is re-asking your original question in the same format. Give them some new information. For example, "at a recent meeting of the Committee of xx, they endorsed the idea of _____". Try to give them some extra information from a relevant source, which they can check on. Decide if you need to meet this person.

The Supportive Member

If the Member is sympathetic, thank them for replying to your letter. Write back to them telling them how happy your action group is. Suggest something they can do that will help the campaign. Perhaps, your action group could arrange some media event. Lastly, give them some new information about the campaign in their constituency.

The Member is against your action group

Try not to either be angry in words or tone in your reply. Your group may need the support of this Member in your next campaign. Do not make snide remarks about the delay in replying to your letter. Write saying, 'Good to know your position on this topic'. Disagree with them; refute the points they made in their reply letter. In replying to them, it is very useful to mention another official body that agrees with you. Lastly, ask them to prove what they believe?

Contact:

John Huff, Director - euro_bureau@hotmail.com

VISITING A POLITICIAN

Introduction

This sheet explains the tasks your action group members need to perform when meeting with a Member of the European Parliament (MEP). Going as an action group to meet a politician is called a delegation. You can easily adapt the same approach to meeting an MP or local councillors

Prepare

Always have a role-play before you meet the MEP. Get someone who is not a member of your action group to play the MEP. This trial run will show you where you need to strengthen your group's presentation. Confirm the meeting a couple of days before. If it is the first time you have met an MEP, try to meet the ones you feel will be most friendly first. Below is the list of jobs which need doing when you are with the MEP. You want to get the MEPs Research Assistant to say to the MEP, after you have left 'that lot were just the sort of people who got you elected last time as an MEP'

Roles

Anchorperson - when you walk into the room to meet the MEP, the anchorperson speaks first and introduces your members to the MEP. Your anchorperson is the leader of the delegation. She controls the meeting agenda. Often at the start of the meeting, the anchorperson will give the MEP a copy of your Position Paper which will be a kind of agenda for the meeting. Your anchorperson decides when it is time to leave the meeting.

Note Taker – they are responsible for keeping a note of what the MEP agrees to do and what she declines to do. Often the Note Taker will intervene, to say something like, for example. 'Do I have it right, then, that you are going to vote for section 29 of the Draft Directive'. The Note Taker is also responsible for collecting copies of the free material on display in the MEPs office.

Primary Presenter - who presents the main argument of your group. She should have a good grasp of the issue and not be easily embarrassed. Another skill is knowing which way to answer questions from the MEP.

Secondary Presenter – they need to know a lot about how the European Union works. It is their job to make suggestions to the MEP on what they could do. Knowing the things MEPs can do and getting an appropriate level of action from the MEP is the skill needed. At a democratic level, you can ask the MEP to vote in favour of what you want or to get agreement on the wording of amendments, to be voted on before the passage vote. Your action group may want differing things from the MEPs of different Political Groups.

Peacemaker - they calm everyone down, if things get angry, including the MEP. Your Peace Maker clarifies misunderstandings and asks the MEP to explain jargon and abbreviations she uses. They smile a lot and get to know the MEPs staff members, particularly the Research Assistant. Shaking hands with staff members of the MEP is vital for this person. Perhaps saying 'And your name is....?'

Other members - there must be a strong reason for other action group members to come to the meeting with the MEP. This could be because they are in the same political party as the MEP or the same Trade Union

After Meeting the MEP

Agree beforehand that your delegation members will go to a café near the MEPs office for a de-briefing session. There will be tasks arising from the meeting. Some tasks will be known beforehand, some will come up at the meeting. For the planned tasks try to agree beforehand who will do them.

Media Responsibilities

If you plan to do a media release, then while you are still in the MEPs office take a photo of the delegation meeting the MEP. Work out the draft wording while you still in the MEPs office. Often the action group will have one person responsible for media follow-up. Your media person gets agreement at the de-briefing meeting on what the story angle will be. It is the responsibility of the media person not only to write the release but also to send it out and follow it up. Decide if you will send the release by e-mail or hand deliver it on the way back home.

Reporting Back

You need to let other members know what happened when your delegation met the MEP. After meeting the MEP, evaluate them, with one person taking responsibility for reporting to members. The more MEPs you meet the better you will get at evaluating an MEP, you can rate the MEP as:

1. Strongly against
2. Against
3. Unknown
4. For
5. Strongly for

Celebrate

If it is the first time that your action group has ever met an MEP and you got what you came for, then celebrate. Put a couple of people in charge of arranging the celebration.

Thank-You Card

You will have already bought a Thank-You Card. One person at the de-briefing is responsible for signing the card and posting it. Send it whatever the MEP said or did.

Unplanned Tasks

Life is full of surprises, so there will be tasks for the delegation which are unplanned. Perhaps the MEP is very favourable and wants to meet the whole group for a media picture story. Maybe the MEP has given you the names of two other members of their Political Group, one in Greece and the other in Finland, who are active on the proposal. Maybe the MEP tells you who will be the Rapporteur on the proposal. Possibly the MEP has told you that there is a strong pressure group in Brussels which is campaigning hard against your views. Some things the MEP raises will need debating by the whole of your action group, because you may need a change of direction. Nevertheless, never leave your campaign in the hands of any MEP.

Contact:

John Huff, Director - euro_bureau@hotmail.com

BUILDING UP PROFILES ON ELECTED MEMBERS

The more elected members you contact the more information you can gather on who will support your group and who may be active against you. You can build up a profile of them using the following form.

Profile Form	
Family Name:	First Name:
Title: Ms – Mr - Mrs – Dr – Miss – Professor	
Address:	
Post Code:	
Telephone:	Fax:
E Mail:	@
Web Page:	
Personal	
Previous Jobs:	
Interests:	
Religion:	
Other Information	
Constituency/ ward:	
Date elected:	
Political Party:	
Political Group if MEP:	
Position in Political Group:	
Committee Memberships:	
Delegation Membership:	
Evaluation	
Strongly Against / Against / Unknown / For / Strongly for	
[underline which applies] Facilitator Resister Neutral	

Contact:

John Huff, Director - euro_bureau@hotmail.com

WHAT IS NON VIOLENT DIRECT ACTION?

Introduction

Non violent direct action (NVDA) comes in many forms (see the other articles in this section). At its heart is a do-it-yourself philosophy - people seeking to make change in their community and environment themselves rather than asking others to make it for them. NVDA often bypasses official or traditional power structures empowering ordinary people instead. That's what makes it such an effective tool for communities and groups who feel powerless in the face of the establishment, whether that's government, corporations or other institutions.

Key points about NVDA

1. NVDA is often seen as confrontational, and it often is, though not in a negative way. It's about confronting injustice with 'truth', and, where necessary, confronting powerholders and taking back power to the community. But NVDA doesn't have to be "against" something. It's an inspiring and positive technique. Many forms of NVDA are about building a green alternative. Instead of just opposing something, the community creates a just alternative to it. Examples include food co-ops, car-sharing schemes, and community composting initiatives.
2. Communities across Britain face environmental problems: the construction of an incinerator, a road, a new runway or another out-of-town supermarket. Others face the destruction of playing fields, allotments, nature reserves, or greenbelt land. Communities have responded to these issues by taking NVDA and making their dissent heard through noise, colour and disruption. Actions have included setting up camps on the site of a proposed development, occupying the offices of the authorities, and attending the annual general meetings of the corporations involved.
3. NVDA is commonly, and wrongly, seen as the preserve of young hotheads or "professional" activists. We all have images in our minds of road protest camps with young people up trees, or of Greenpeace's professional climbers scaling a chimney. But people of all ages and ability have taken action. We've been on actions with under 16s and over 70s, with wheelchair users and activists who walk with sticks. There are specialist "minority" action groups including the Disabled People's Direct Action Network (DAN) and queer action groups, as well as, globally, many direct action movements made up of the poor and dispossessed. NVDA is available to anyone who wants to reclaim a little of their power and nonviolently stand up for what they believe in.
4. When should you use NVDA? Some groups like to see NVDA as a last resort they use only after all other forms of dialogue and protest have been exhausted. They feel vindicated in taking action by being able to say "we tried everything else". Others see NVDA as a complementary form of action that can be used alongside more conventional campaigning and educational techniques – if a corporation won't sit down and meet you, then an action might change their mind.
5. There are, of course, times when NVDA isn't appropriate. Most of those are to do with our personal or collective limitations. For example, when we haven't got adequate support systems in place, when we feel an action might be beyond our personal level of comfort and safety, or when we're unwilling to face the potential legal consequences.

Issues to Consider

There are serious issues to think about when considering taking NVDA – see the article later in this section.

Legal issues are a key consideration for anyone thinking of taking NVDA and we strongly recommend you inform yourselves of your rights. But don't be put off. NVDA has a very long and honourable tradition of making change. Much of it has been achieved by ordinary people breaking unjust laws.

Our responses - Another issue to consider is our own anger and potential for violence. When our homes face compulsory purchase, or our children's playing fields are being built on, or night flights over our homes are increasing, we can be carrying a lot of anger. Think about preparing yourselves properly for action. NVDA training sessions are available in which you can explore how NVDA affects you emotionally and learn techniques for dealing with them appropriately.

Community Support - Some action groups are concerned that NVDA will alienate them from the wider community. That is not our experience. We've consistently found people sympathetic to clearly nonviolent action. Some don't like illegal acts, but respect our nonviolent intentions. Our experience is that, overall, NVDA is an inspiring tool for building community. The way you do your NVDA can make all the difference. It's possible to be determined, disobedient, uncooperative and still pleasant and approachable. It just takes practice.

Further Resources

- Seeds for Change www.seedsforchange.org.uk – nonviolent direct action training and resources for community groups
- Turning The Tide www.turning-the-tide.org – workshops in 'active nonviolence'

Contact:

Seeds for Change www.seedsforchange.org.uk 0845 458 4776

Case Study

COMMUNITY NVDA AGAINST GENETICALLY MODIFIED (GM) CROPS

A powerful example of community nonviolent direct action took place between 1999 and 2002 in The Highlands of Scotland. As part of the UK government's Farm Scale Trials of genetically modified (GM) crops a large acreage of land near Munloch, on the Black Isle, was to be sown with GM oilseed rape.

The Black Isle was regarded as a pristine environment, so far unpolluted by other GM crop experiments. The community also feared for the nearby nature reserve, as well as for the health of their children. So local resistance was strong and the campaign group Highlands and Islands GM Concern (HIGMC) was formed to create debate, lobby politicians and farmers against the trial, and ensure local views were heard. HIGMC was very successful in attracting media attention and putting pressure on politicians. It soon had 400 members.

However, despite the pressure, the field of GM rape was still sown. Some of the local community decided to take nonviolent direct action. With the support of a direct action organisation, Scottish Genetix Action, they planned their first action – a night time foray into the field to 'decontaminate' an area of it, and send a message to the farmer and to the government. On the eve of the 2001 general elections a group of 18 people trampled a huge X into the field and sent the media a press release saying that with their X they had cast the first vote of the general election – a vote against GM crops. The media response was enthusiastic. More importantly, enthusiasm for direct action spread through the community, and over the next year there were many direct actions from locals chaining themselves to tractors to prevent GM crops being sown, to persistent decontamination actions in the growing crops. The Munloch Vigil, a 24 hour presence by local people in a layby opposite the site of one of the GM crop trials, provided a focus for action and media attention.

The campaign wasn't without its problems – although the Vigil sprang out of direct action, it suffered from personality clashes and poor group dynamics, and some of those who took 'charge' were vocal against direct action. A lot of energy was lost in these power struggles, and some people were alienated from the campaign altogether. Unfortunately in high pressure campaign situations, this isn't uncommon and a good NVDA group will look to maintain good internal dynamics as well as its external impact!

Further Information:

For more on groups working effectively see Section 6
www.munlochymvigil.org.uk/history.htm

Contact:

Seeds for Change www.seedsforchange.org.uk 0845 458 4776

PLANNING NVDA

Introduction

When planning nonviolent direct action (NVDA) it's essential that a community or community group has a clear and realistic aim for the action. Often the action will be one part of an ongoing campaign and it needs to be planned in that context.

Time spent planning will be repaid on the day of the action. Having a clear aim will allow your group to communicate your message clearly to the wider community, to the media, and to those in power. Working through a simple four step process can help:

The four steps approach

Step 1 – What is the aim of the action? Your action aim is unlikely to be the same as your overall campaign aim. You might be campaigning to preserve a green space from development. But the aim of this specific action could be simply to draw media attention to your campaign as a step on the way to saving your green space. Whatever the aim you settle on, be sure you can communicate it clearly. If it's so complicated that you can't quickly and easily explain it to your family or workmates, the chances are that your action won't be understood either.

Step 2 – Choosing an appropriate target for your action. Somewhere out there is a person, or small group of people that have the power to make your action aim become reality. For your overall campaign aim to save your green space it might be a planning committee of your local authority or a private developer or landowner. But as with the action aim, your action target might be different. If you wanted media attention you could plan something headline grabbing and visual, for example.

Step 3 – Deciding on your tactics. There are many ways you can go about your action. NVDA is limited only by our imaginations. You might stop tree felling on the site by climbing into the trees and refusing to move. You might form a human chain across the road giving access to the site. As a media stunt you might hang a banner between the trees or take over the offices of the developer. The important thing is that your chosen tactics relate clearly to your aim and directly influence your chosen target.

Step 4 – Making it happen. Many groups fall down at the last hurdle. They plan a great action but struggle to make it actually happen. It's important that we feel able to be daring in our actions, but we have to be realistic enough to be able to implement our plans with the resources available to us. So do a quick reality check – How many people can you get involved? Will your plan still work if some of them get cold feet? Is everyone aware of the possible consequences? Have you got all the information you need? and so on.

Issues to consider

There are some significant things to consider in planning your NVDA. These include

- The legal consequences of your plan
- Whether you can plan openly and publicly and still get away with the action on the day (or will the police be waiting for you?)
- Choosing a style of action that builds community and inspires support for your cause.

Legal implications of NVDA

There isn't room here to go into the legal implications of nonviolent direct action. There are resources available such as the Activists' Legal Project website www.activistslegalproject.org.uk and the Liberty 'Your Rights' website www.yourrights.org.uk, as well as local solicitors, that can give you that information. What's important is that everyone involved knows any potential risks and consequences. There are legal risks which shouldn't be ignored, but for environmental activists the legal consequences are usually fairly minor.

Open or closed planning

Some groups plan in secret to make their actions more effective on the day. The downside is that this inevitably creates a hierarchy of those in the know and those not. Public planning means you can draw on a greater range of experience and skills, and include more people in the action, but if your opponent hears about the plan, they can act to counter it. There's no right answer, but it's worth thinking about.

Building Community

Some people worry that NVDA alienates the local community. Others counter that it inspires people. There will always be those who feel that more provocative forms of campaigning are unnecessary, but our experience is definitely the latter. Good NVDA inspires people. They see a small group of people acting for a just cause, often in the face of significant odds and have a natural sympathy for the activists. But it is possible to do "bad" NVDA. Think about the community you're working in. Take into consideration cultural sensitivities. Try to build support for your cause through public engagement alongside taking action and don't claim to speak for others unless you have a genuine mandate to do so!

Contact:

Seeds for Change www.seedsforchange.org.uk 0845 458 4776

Case Study

PLANNING NVDA

For more than 20 years residents in the flightpath of Heathrow have campaigned against expansion of the airport, increased number of flights, night flights, and pollution. For years their demands have largely been ignored by the authorities. It was inevitable that some of them eventually chose to explore direct action.

In November 2006 about 30 residents, all active in the campaign against Heathrow, spent half a day with nonviolent direct action (NVDA) trainers exploring issues and techniques around taking action. Afterwards some of them agreed to plan their first action.

Early in 2007 they met and agreed that the aim of their action was twofold - to lift the campaign from a local to a national news story, and to tell decision makers what they felt in a more direct fashion. The Minister for Transport was chosen as an appropriate target. All that was needed was an opportunity, somewhere in London.

After some investigation the group discovered an aviation industry conference where the Minister was speaking. They visited the venue to familiarise themselves with the layout.

At their next meeting they planned tactics. One group would enter the conference, and whilst some of them distracted conference participants by unfurling a banner, the others would go on stage and speak face to face with the Minister. Another group would be outside to communicate their message to the public and the press, with leaflets and banners.

Props were assembled over the following weeks - banners, leaflets, and suits and ties.

Trusted journalists were alerted in advance. A press statement was prepared, to be emailed to national media immediately after the action. To ensure they got photographs for the media, one of the inside group would take a camera.

Experienced activists were asked to give a briefing on possible legal consequences. A volunteer was nominated to talk to police and venue security staff to defuse any tension, while another would be available by phone to organise support in case of arrests.

On the day, the plan worked like clockwork. The Minister was confronted by activists who told him calmly and clearly why Heathrow shouldn't expand. The press were there. There were no arrests. Having got their message across in exactly the way they planned, the inside group left together and joined those outside talking to the media.

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article1480361.ece>

Seeds for Change www.seedsforchange.org.uk 0845 458 4776

HOW TO TAKE EFFECTIVE NON VIOLENT DIRECT ACTION

This section gives some examples of the ways in which NVDA has been used and some tips for being effective.

Examples of NVDA

Office occupations are a common 'disruption' action. Simply put, activists enter a relevant building and occupy some area of it. Sometimes this is just the foyer. Other times it will involve taking over a specific office. Activists have used office occupations as an opportunity to sit down and talk to staff.

Shareholder actions usually take place at a company's Annual General Meeting. Share-owning activists (you only need to own 1 share) join with other shareholders and take the opportunity to ask the Board awkward questions, disrupt presentations by senior staff, hand out 'alternative' annual reports, and in some cases shut down the AGM altogether. This has been done by 'invading' the stage or setting off fire alarms, for example. Similar techniques have been used at conferences and trade fairs.

Blockades have taken place at supermarket depots, oil refineries and corporate offices amongst other places, in order to stop deliveries or staff arriving at work. They sometimes involve 'lock-ons' - equipment that activists use to lock themselves together to make it difficult for them to be removed (see Further Resources for information on lock-ons). Blockades can involve anything from small numbers of people with relatively sophisticated equipment, to a large group using their numbers to block a road, gate or doorway.

Vehicle actions come in many forms. Environmental activists have stopped construction equipment or bus loads of security guards reaching sites. Stopping vehicles requires a lot of thinking about safety issues, but makes a very public statement and can cost companies money.

Banners have been hung from motorway bridges, Big Ben, power station cooling towers and many other places. The more inaccessible the place, the longer the message is visible. Some banner hangs require expert climbers and equipment and so are not be suitable for all groups. Other related techniques have also been used – for example projecting a message onto the side of a building at night. There is also an auditory equivalent – using a sound system to blast a government office with sound equivalent to the aircraft noise suffered by residents living near airports, for instance.

Die-ins, sit-downs and sit-ins are all related actions that involve using our bodies to occupy a space in protest. Spaces occupied have included roads, university administration buildings, supermarkets, and steps to government offices. The die-in is a variation of the sit-in. For example, activists protesting against the building of nuclear power facilities have dressed as corpses and 'died' in roadways to symbolise deaths related to the nuclear industry.

Subvertising takes the form of reclaiming advertising space and using it for our own messages. Common examples are stickers stuck over ads on the London Underground, or billboards that have had their advertising messages 'enhanced' or in some cases obliterated. Subvertising has been taken to new heights with the publication of spoof newspapers, conference programmes and magazines that draw the unsuspecting reader in before delivering the community's environmental message.

Tips for effective actions

Taking effective action requires not only good planning but also good support. Good support makes NVDA more accessible to a wider range of people. We'd strongly recommend a group new to NVDA invites in an experienced NVDA trainer to help them prepare for action.

One of the most effective methods of providing support is to create an affinity group. An affinity group is a group of activists who feel a strong connection with each other, trust each other and share a common desire to make change. Affinity groups require good communication, honesty, co-operation and mutual support. For many people just working in an affinity group is seen as an act of social change because the values of the group represent the values of the society they want to live in! Working in affinity groups takes commitment, but well functioning affinity groups have carried out some of the most effective and audacious direct actions.

Even the most difficult action can feel more possible if there is the right support in place. You might need drivers to get you there, someone to liase with the police and keep things calm, people to stop traffic safely, others to talk to the public or the media. You might decide you want an observer to film any conflicts with police, security or the public. You might want someone on the end of a phone to get support for anyone taken into police custody. Someone has to email off the press release and so on. All of these roles contribute equally to the whole. Don't forget that support might need to be ongoing – if there are arrests it can be nice to meet people as they leave the police station or accompany them to court, for example.

Further Resources:

Seeds for Change www.seedsforchange.org.uk – for written resources and NVDA training

Turning The Tide www.turning-the-tide.org – for workshops in active nonviolence

Practical Protest Techniques www.activistslegalproject.org.uk/practicalprotest.pdf

Delia's Guide to Basic Blockading www.geneticsaction.org.uk/resources/delia.pdf – a well written introduction to blockading and support

Contact:

Seeds for Change www.seedsforchange.org.uk 0845 458 4776

NON VIOLENT DIRECT ACTION TRAINING

Introduction

A nonviolent direct action (NVDA) workshop is a space in which participants can explore both the physical and emotional reality of taking action, learn specific techniques, bond as a group, and explore possible actions and obstacles to action. Some people argue that training is an essential precursor to taking NVDA.

Whilst not unique to NVDA training, there are some specific issues that require particular consideration when facilitating an NVDA workshop.

1. Practical and Experiential

NVDA workshops need to be experiential. Within a few hours, days or weeks of a workshop, the participants may well be putting themselves in dangerous and confrontational situations. They may face arrest, be met with physical violence, and spend long hours in uncomfortable situations. They will almost certainly be acting under the influence of adrenalin. Using simulation and roleplay is an essential part of exploring NVDA.

2. A Safe Space

Creating a safe space for that exploration to happen is essential. Participants need a space in which they can make mistakes and learn from them. They also need a physically safe environment – NVDA is often a dynamic and fluid experience, so clear away the furniture and the coffee mugs, tape down the cables, and be observant.

Forewarn people that they may have to deal with unexpected emotions (theirs and others), but that it's OK. NVDA workshops can also often be very physical. Ensure your participants are warned to respect their own and, even more crucially, others' physical limits. Standing aside from an activity because of a bad back is fine. Make observer roles available to the group so that those who find roleplay or physical activities difficult still have an essential role to play. Above all, challenge macho behaviour. It's not welcome on a nonviolent action, so it shouldn't be encouraged in a workshop.

3. Deal with peoples concerns

It's quite likely in any group that you'll have a whole range of concerns about taking NVDA. They might range from the seemingly trivial to the more serious (I'm worried about being beaten up). There's a lot people can be concerned about – NVDA can be physical, confrontational, illegal and stressful. It can be misrepresented by the media. Of course it can also be exciting, inspirational, empowering and above all it can make change happen. As trainers, if we don't deal with concerns, a group may well talk itself out of action. So don't ignore concerns - either deal with them in your session or point people at resources they can use beyond the workshop.

4. Support Roles

Reports of actions often focus on the 'frontline' roles – the people who sat in the road or up the trees, occupying the office, or whatever. If this goes unchallenged, it can create unofficial hierarchies and undermine group dynamics, all of which makes the action group less effective. So, throughout your workshop reinforce the value of support roles. Build in those roles to your roleplays, and encourage everyone to take their turn at seeing just how hard it can be for the person offering support.

Some tools for NVDA training

We often use the following techniques to good effect. There's not room to give details of all of them here, but you can find more on our website www.seedsforchange.org.uk

Spectrum Lines (Continuums) are a great way to get a group exploring what they mean by 'non violent' and 'direct action'. As well as allowing personal reflection, it can flag up where a group agrees and where they differ, pointing to the type of action they might well be able to agree on. Issues that are worth specifically exploring include: whether damage to property or breaking the law are non violent and whether an action is more or less non violent if it's done in public.

Hassle Lines are one on one roleplays done simultaneously by the whole group, usually by lining everyone up in parallel lines opposite a partner. In an NVDA context they're ideal for exploring the dynamics of confrontation, between protestor and police officer for example. Hassle lines can evoke emotion; help demonstrate body language that escalates or de-escalates tension; and give participants an opportunity to experience confrontation in a safe space.

I'd do that if a discussion of what actions people would find easy to do and what they could do only with the right support - "I'd do that if we could guarantee good media coverage" ... So how can we get the media along?"; for example.

Quick decision making. Actions are often fast moving, and despite all the planning, the unexpected can happen. Quick decision making exercises using action related scenarios help groups strengthen their communication as well as preparing them for NVDA.

Legal briefing. Wanting to know their legal rights is a frequent key concern people express. How will taking action affect my life? Will I lose my job? Will I be able to get travel visas? A good legal briefing is often an essential part of a workshop. See Further Resources for legal information.

Further Resources

Seeds for Change www.seedsforchange.org.uk – a co-operative of experienced NVDA trainers offering support to trainers and action groups in the UK

Activists Legal Project www.activistslegalproject.org.uk -

The Rant Collective www.rantcollective.net – US based trainers with some useful resources on their website

Training for Change www.trainingforchange.org – another US based organisation with resources on their website

Contact:

Seeds for Change www.seedsforchange.org.uk 0845 458 4776

Case Study

THE VALUE OF ADVOCACY IN ADVICE WORK

Introduction

This case study is about the effectiveness of using a community welfare advice service to obtain the correct benefits for claimants despite an initial refusal on the part of the DSS. In other words it is about empowerment. The case-study is a typical example of work undertaken by our staff team.

Background

The advice project is based in an inner-city neighbourhood in one of the 4 poorest wards in the city. The local community includes indigenous white, Pakistani, African-Caribbean, A8 and other minority residents experiencing higher than average issues associated with poverty – poor housing, ill-health, unemployment, disability, reduced life expectancy, racism.

Case Study: Mr & Ms A approached the advice service as they were refused Income Support as they were deemed to have deprived themselves of capital in order to claim benefits. Mr A was disabled having mobility difficulties and the couple had 2 children. The case was highly technical and we made an appeal against the decision.

- The couple were already in receipt of some benefits but were £102 per week below the Income Support level.
- We identified another £78 of weekly child tax credits that the couple were not aware of which we helped them to claim.
- The couple were local Housing Trust tenants but were in arrears as their Housing Benefit was not being paid because of the IS decision. We liaised with HB who agreed that they would pay if the IS appeal was successful. The appeal was listed for hearing a year later!
- Throughout this period we liaised with their Housing Officer, Council Tax Department and their other creditors keeping them informed of the progress and our client made small weekly payments towards the arrears, to prevent any legal action or costs being added to their debt.

Months before the hearing we began preparation for the appeal: gathering medical and financial evidence both from the UK and abroad, interviewing witnesses, organising witness statements, and preparing a detailed and complex legal submission to the Appeal Tribunal. At the appeal itself we represented our client and argued their case.

The appeal was heard by the Deputy Regional Chairman of the Tribunal Appeals Service (appointed by the Lord Chancellors Department), who allowed the appeal.

As a result of winning the appeal the clients gained:

- £764 of Council Tax Benefit arrears
- Ongoing weekly CTB of £14.65;
- £2,726 of Housing Benefit arrears
- Ongoing weekly HB of £64.83;
- £6,196 of Income Support arrears
- Ongoing weekly IS of £102.45.

In total the benefit arrears secured for this family alone amounted to £9,686 and a weekly increase in income of £260

Nb These were the figures relevant at that time, they are not current figures.

Conclusion: Our clients were overjoyed - they had endured a year of severe financial hardship and debt. They could not thank us enough as without our expertise in this area of law they were certain they would have lost the appeal.

“Washing one’s hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral”

Paulo Friere (empowerment theorist & practitioner)

Further Information:

www.fwa.org.uk

www.adviceuk.org.uk

www.cpag.org.uk

www.fcdl.org.uk

Contact:

Julie Pryke for FWA Canterbury Advice Centre canterburyadvice@fwa.org.uk

Case Study

THE SITING OF A NEW ACADEMY

Newcastle City Council announced plans to replace Westgate Community College with a new Academy. Consultation was to take place via 3 public meetings and a survey form distributed with CityLife, the free local authority newsletter, outlining three preferred sites. The Community Development Unit were not a party to the consultation other than as a last minute afterthought.

There was an immediate outcry from residents in the catchment area. A number of people disagreed with the image of Westgate Community College as a failing school and others felt cheated that the Academy they thought was to be in addition to Westgate Community College was now to replace it.

In my role of Community Development Worker for the area, I talked as quickly as possible to the local groups I knew and arranged to take some residents to one of the public meetings with a collective record of the views of others not able to attend and get them recorded.

The results of this consultation organised by the Education Directorate with residents, were that the favoured position for the new Academy was on the site of Westgate Community College, and the second choice was to site it on cleared land south of Armstrong Road in the proposed Housing Exposition area (a scheme it was hoped would act as a major catalyst to the regeneration of Scotswood).

Disappointment and anger were expressed by a number of residents and the parents of school children attending Westgate Community College, when it was announced that Norland Road would be the site for the Academy. A number of meetings were organised and views collected were passed on to education, councillors and the Academy team but the decision was upheld.

A public meeting was arranged locally in conjunction with the local youth work strategy group who also had a number of concerns regarding the proposals impact on young people in the West End area of the city.

A number of meetings on the Academy issue were held between myself and the ward co-ordinator (this is the officer responsible for supporting elected members to co-ordinate strategic activities across the ward) who had also raised the issue with the Academy team and alerted elected members to their concerns.

The Academy team from a large private sector firm managing academy developments across the country, were adamant this was the best site for them and there would be no movement in their position.

Although most people agreed a new school was a major benefit to both the area and the children, there was a great deal of concern about it being built within a residential area, leading to the loss of both Norland Road Community Centre and the 'kickabout' area residents had campaigned for years before for their children to play safely. There was also a great deal of concern about the impact of around 1000 school children in the area outside of school hours and the impact on traffic.

An event was held at John Marley Centre by the Academy team to show people their initial ideas around the development of the academy. A number of residents who lived in the Yewcroft, Norland, Chepstow and Aldwick streets (the constituted area of a local tenants group), picked up on the illustrations showing that the east-west link road for the estate was gone. As this was the main link into the centre of the estate to the post office and a local primary school we questioned it immediately and were told it was a health and safety issue related to the security of the Academy and its pupils.

A meeting for the residents within the immediate area was organised to raise awareness and find out what people wanted (if anything) to do about it. It was agreed to organise a petition initially and residents talked about a new campaign. I hoped they might agree to explore possible objections to the application.

A presentation was subsequently given at ward committee by the Academy team, as part of the pre-planning application consultation and residents raised their concerns publicly. The architect for the Academy was adamant there could be no change to the proposed plan and the extra walking distance in question was only a few hundred yards (it was actually over a quarter of a mile all uphill to the post office and primary school!). One of the residents asked if the petition could be passed among the people attending the ward committee and councillors agreed to this, also voicing their concerns.

The next morning, the ward co-ordinator contacted me to say the architect had rang to say he would be prepared to meet with residents and discuss the issues being raised and to look again at the question of access. Informal discussions after the presentation had come up with some alternatives for access, which were firmed up at the tenants group and the community safety forum.

I contacted our planning section and took guidance from a senior planner on the processes of raising an objection to a pre-planning application.

By producing our own planned route and putting forward formal objections with a reasoned solution, I felt that using the system against the plan would achieve better results rather than the traditional campaigns which the Academy team seemed unmoved by. It was agreed at this meeting we would make a trip to the academy site and check the access ourselves first.

The issue of the access was also raised at other meetings and forums such as the Community Safety Forum and the Housing and Environmental Forum.

Police were at first unhappy with the residents proposed replacement access route, as they viewed it as a 'rat run' which would leave people vulnerable to attack, but, once the type of access required was explained they were happy to support us.

The local Community Beat Manager, after a discussion at the Community Safety Forum with local people, agreed to accompany a group of residents and myself to the site where we would walk out the pathway required and photograph it, using people to show the width and length necessary to comply with 'safer by design' regulations. The photos would be downloaded to a computer and a scale map of the area was marked to show the route and dimensions.

A meeting was held with residents to discuss how we would proceed and it was agreed that as many as chose could attend the pre-planning application hearing which is public, but only one resident could be invited to speak by the Chair (an elected member), this was settled by a simple vote.

The resident elected to speak was made aware of the hearing process and we talked through her role in presenting the objection.

On the day she was a star! She talked very knowledgeably about the subject and made a very clear case for the residents as to why their access should remain. It was received favourably by the council and 28 attachments and recommendations were made and attached to the Academy pre-planning application.

This was a first in the city and made the local newspaper! Residents were delighted and felt that at long last they had won a round and were being listened to.

In the longer term, residents have learned a new way of working and making the system work for them by building alliances with officers they would not normally meet, as well as the Community Development Worker and Ward Co-ordinator. Traditionally they would have started a campaign, marching on the civic centre with banners and speaking to the press with neither side coming out well and generating a lot of adverse publicity for the Academy.

In the interests of their children who would have to attend the Academy in the future it was worth taking the approach which de-personalised their objections and treated them in a business like way.

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