Awards 2008
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Foreword

Congratulations first of all to the winners *Heavy Load*. Well done also to the runners up *Stars in the Sky Yorkshire, Age Concern Yorkshire* and Startuponline. They were all fantastic entries and the Ashden Trust’s sponsorship meant that, as well as the recognition and the trophy, the winners received £5000 and the runners-up received £2000 each. A special mention also for the other shortlisted entries, all highlighted below.

We were delighted to receive 117 entries for the SupportActionNet awards this year – the most we’ve ever received. For the first time this year practitioners could vote online for their favourite entries. This received an enthusiastic response. Two hundred and fifty practitioners voted and the eventual winners, *Heavy Load*, topped the online poll.

We had a distinguished panel of expert judges (mentioned by name below) and they too selected *Heavy Load*. Some of their commendations of the winners and the runners-up are also shown in the pages that follow. Our great thanks to the judges for their time, their help and their wisdom.

Finally enormous thanks to Mark Woodruff and the trustees of the Ashden Trust for their generous sponsorship of the awards. We greatly value *SupportActionNet’s* longstanding partnership with the Ashden Trust. The commitment and the generosity of the Ashden Trust has inspired us to continue to share amongst the *SupportActionNet* network the dynamism and originality of members and supporters.

Look forward to keeping in touch

Gerard Lemos
Lemos&Crane
Winner:

Southdown Housing Association

Stay Up Late Campaign and Heavy Load

Judges’ comments:

"Absolutely brilliant. What a spectacularly obvious thing to challenge! Everyone should be able to stay up late if they want to."

"I was so inspired to read this entry! Such a fundamental choice for any individual to ‘stay up late’ and to enjoy punk music at the same time has to be a great thing, I hope Heavy Load get to tour wider afield!"

"This was the submission that made me smile as I read the ideas and the results. The Stay Up Late campaign is infectious in its simplicity. It was great to see something that was both fun and had a serious policy focus - engaging both service users and challenging practitioners."

"Catchy funny campaigning method insisting on individual freedoms on equal terms."
Paul Richards, Support Worker at Southdown Housing Association, bass player with Heavy Load and co-founder of the Stay Up Late campaign

**Summary:** We started a campaign called Stay Up Late to challenge the practice where a lot service users have a 9pm ‘curfew’ due to inflexible staff rotas. This means that people with learning disabilities are missing out on a full social life and not able to enjoy gigs, meet their friends, go to the theatre etc.

How did you become involved with Heavy Load and the Stay Up Late campaign?

It started about 12 years ago, one of our service users wanted to start a band so a support worker sent round a memo for others to get involved. I wasn’t in the band to start with, I was working as a support worker for Southdown - the original bass player broke his arm by falling off a bar stool so I stepped in and it went from there!

What was the inspiration behind the idea?

It was really simple, we were frustrated at seeing people with learning disabilities leaving gigs just when we felt the evening was getting going. We talked about the idea and we could see this was something that could potentially take off and something that was much needed.

How did you get the ball rolling?

We played a few gigs at local organisations via Carousel (a Brighton-based organisation that works with people with learning difficulties to achieve their artistic ambitions). We actually became their resident band for a while, playing gigs throughout the year. Gradually more opportunities came up for us to play further afield at other disabled organisations and club nights, including Heart and Soul in London. Eventually a film crew approached us interested in making a documentary about the band, they managed to get a screening of the film shown at the ICA (Institute of Contemporary Arts) in London and also the Empire in Leicester Square.

There must have been a few obstacles along the way – inflexible staff rotas being the biggest – how did you overcome these?

Yeah, that was really how the campaign came about - we were starting to play lots of gigs but the time we had to be on was getting earlier and earlier, obviously this is crazy for a punk band! We were also getting fed up of seeing our fans leaving half-way through our gigs because of ‘curfews’. We used the film crew who were working with us as a platform to expose our Stay Up Late campaign and promote a more flexible social life for people with learning difficulties. We were lucky in that we had some really positive support workers with a can-do attitude, I realise others aren’t so lucky but I think you just have to challenge negative attitudes. We wanted everyone to have the same opportunity as us and we wanted to be able to push our band more and more.

What have you gained personally from this experience?

It’s wonderful to see a really simple idea take off and touch a lot of nerves. We had no idea Stay Up Late would become this big so it’s inspiring for me and the band to be able to wake people up and encourage them to think differently. I get to meet some really interesting people and hear excellent bands through touring with Heavy Load, it’s a lot of fun.

What piece of advice would you give to others who’d like to get involved in this kind of work?

Just plug away – network and, most importantly, persevere! We have and it’s worked out.

More info:

www.stayuplate.org
www.heavyload.org
www.carousel.org.uk
www.heartnsoul.co.uk
Runners up:
Stars in the Sky Yorkshire

Summary: Stars in the Sky Yorkshire gives people with learning disabilities exciting new opportunities for friendship and dating. Since December 2007 we have run 15 events, resulting in new friendships, and set up 16 dates, leading to 4 longer-term relationships. People with learning disabilities have been fully involved in running Stars in the Sky Yorkshire since it started. We have 50 members and 10 volunteers including someone with a learning disability, and an accessible website.

Judges’ comments:

“Great use of mainstream techniques and facilities to help people to meet and form social and loving relationships.”

"Positive interpersonal relationships form the heart of what most people would see as a 'good life'. It was great to see Stars’ approach to friendship and dating for learning disabled people really paying off. What better outcome is there than lasting and loving relationships?“

"Services and staff come and go, but friendships and partnerships are what sustain us through fulfilling and happy lives and help us through hard times. Service providers in Yorkshire have had the humility to recognise this and do something, with their clients, about it."

“Safe and fun way to find partners and friends, the most important thing to us all.”

Karen England, Development Worker at HFT

How did you become involved with Stars in the Sky Yorkshire?
Before I started working here HFT had done lots of research into whether there was a need for this kind of service. Based on the findings a steering group was set up to decide how to move things forward, and HFT/Dimensions funded my post to develop Stars in the Sky Yorkshire (SITSY). I am responsible for developing the project and running things on a day to day basis.

What was the inspiration behind the project?
We were aware of a similar project in London that had been successful. We found from our research that there isn’t enough support out there for people with learning difficulties or disabilities to make friends and start relationships and many people are isolated so we felt that needed to be addressed.

How did you get the ball rolling?
We started by setting out some core aims then began networking with other local organisations, e.g. Mencap, People in Action, Connect in the North, as well as parents’ groups, local councils, day centres, supported living, residential homes etc. We have representatives from organisations across Leeds and Wakefield on our steering group, with 50 percent of the members having learning disabilities. We gave some presentations to those groups, attended team meetings, and had stands at parent’s events in order to promote SITSY. We designed a leaflet and put together an application pack then we started advertising more widely in local newspapers and on the radio. We also have a team
of volunteers recruited to provide support. We got a great response from the start, lots of people said they’d been wanting something like this set up in the area for a long time.

**Were there any obstacles? How did you overcome these?**
There were some concerns from parents in the beginning but I think that’s natural and will always be the case with something like this. Once people realised we had good safety measures in place (one-to-one meetings and events are chaperoned by trained volunteers) they were very encouraging and supportive of the project.

**What have you gained from this experience?**
I have loved being part of developing SITSY – it’s fantastic to see people develop friendships and relationships and really see the benefit of the project.

**What piece of advice would you give to others who’d like to get involved in this kind of work?**
We’ve talked to a lot of people wanting to do the same kind of thing – we’re actually designing a consultancy package to help people along the way. I think it’s important to get as much research done as possible before you begin to start work on things. Also, get as many organisations on board beforehand – we already had a steering group set up so groups across the district were behind us from an early stage and already doing some campaigning.

**More info:**
- [www.starsyorkshire.co.uk](http://www.starsyorkshire.co.uk)
- [www.citn.org.uk](http://www.citn.org.uk) (Connect in the North)
- [www.peopleinaction.org.uk](http://www.peopleinaction.org.uk)
Age Concern Liverpool

Summary: The Nintendo Wii Ten Pin Bowling Project was set up by Age Concern Liverpool’s Active Living Programme in 17 sheltered schemes and has so far been outreachted to 700 residents. It has received vast media coverage and organizations have used the search engine Google to locate us. The project works well with all abilities and disabilities. People have felt like they have a new lease of life and have also had fantastic benefits, both of a physical and psychological nature, including a sense of belonging.

Judges’ comments:

“A very fun and interactive way to get the community actively involved. I am very impressed.”

“Such a simple idea that has improved so many older people’s lives...love the idea and would be great to see it extended further”

“The idea behind Age Concern Liverpool’s Nintendo Wii project is refreshing in its boldness, challenging the assumption of some that older people can’t enjoy technology or will find it too hard. It has created an excellent platform for shared fun and achievement right across the age spectrum as the project takes its next steps.”

Shona Caldwell, Active Living Outreach Manager at Age Concern Liverpool

How did you get involved with the Nintendo Wii Ten Pin Bowling Project?
I run an Active Living Programme at Age Concern Liverpool that focuses on a preventative approach to health and aims to appeal to all generations and abilities. Part of my job is to come up with innovative ideas to promote healthy lifestyles (we run a youth club for the over 49s) so we came up with the idea of using the Nintendo Wii and the Ten Pin Bowling game as a way to encourage activity across a wide range of people.

What was the inspiration behind the idea?
Elderly people often see their grand-kids playing Nintendo Wii’s at Christmas or birthdays and can feel left-out or nervous about joining in and playing it themselves. We thought it’d be a good idea to use the Wii as part of our Active Living Programme – as a way to break down generational barriers and encourage people to be more active. We work widely in deprived areas where many older people become socially isolated so we thought this would also be a great way to bring people together.

How did you get the ball rolling?
We visited a local sheltered housing scheme run by Liverpool Mutual Homes to try out some sessions and see what people thought of the Wii and the bowling game. We got a fantastic response from the start and as a result the individual schemes each had a Wii installed. There was lots of media coverage from newspapers and TV because it was quite an unusual idea! Now news spreads by word of mouth and we run monthly tournaments to allow new people to get involved and also promote a bit of healthy competition among the pros.

Were there any obstacles along the way? How did you overcome these?
Getting older people to try the Wii was a bit of a challenge at the start. We made sure that we focused on the fun, social side of things not the health benefits, and we made a point of showing how simple it is to use (it was important we used an easy game like ten pin bowling that everyone could play and was based around teams). Soon everyone was up for having a go. In terms of getting the go ahead from others in the organisation – there were a few raised
eyebrows when we suggested it! But after some informal discussions people came round to the idea and were willing to try it out. I handle the budget for the programme so it wasn't too difficult to get my hands on a console.

**What have you gained from this experience?**
Anything can appeal to any age – we shouldn’t be so quick to dismiss things. We’ve heard some really lovely stories from people who’ve played on the Wii with their grand-kids and felt closer to them. People feel better about themselves, physically and emotionally, and you can see from the look on their faces how much they enjoy playing it.

**What piece of advice would you give to others who’d like to get involved in this kind of work?**
Just go for it – don’t let barriers stop you, this is something that can be done in a chair by people with disabilities as well as by people who are more active and can move around. The most important thing is that it’s inclusive; people make new friends and have fun as well as get a bit of exercise.

**More info:**
www.ageconcernliverpool.org.uk
Summary: Startup has developed and proven a scheme to help offenders over the age of 30 to start their own businesses. We:
- identify potential candidates in prison, often from prison business courses
- help candidates build their business plan
- support selected candidates with a mix of modest grant funding plus coaching.

Having the means of earning a living has an immeasurably positive impact on their lives and those of their families.

Judges comments:

"A very good service for those who want to take the step to achieving on their own and having their own business.”

"An innovative and excellent approach to challenging and helping prisoners to have, and achieve, higher aspirations. I am particularly impressed by the mentoring angle.”

“A great opportunity, would be so keen to see this extended to other prisons so that more ex-offenders had the opportunity to realise true employment opportunities on release. WELL DONE”

"Gives prisoners a reason to go straight and take their futures seriously." 

Mari Simpson, Mentor Director at Startuponline

How did you become involved with Startuponline?

It was started by our current CEO, Juliet Hope, as a project with the Royal London Society. I started working here 5 years ago in a different role and gradually became more involved with the running of the project.

What was the inspiration behind the project?

There’s a lot going on in prisons in terms of finding interim employment for ex-offenders but employers are still put off by criminal records. Some people come to us after months of trying to find a job. People learn skills in prison but don’t always have the means to put them to use when they get out. For example some people learn construction skills but they can’t afford to buy tools when they leave prison, we can help them with this. The idea to have a programme that bridges that gap was so simple and easy to replicate, and cost relatively little to set up.

How did you get the ball rolling?

We started out as an experimental project with RLS then we got our own funding from various charitable trusts. We began in the south east as we had a strong link with the governor of Brixton but we’ve grown since then. We invite candidates to present their ideas before a panel of judges at what we call Entrepreneur Days held within prisons – it works a bit like Dragons’ Den. The panel is made up of one of our trustees, business experts, or people in industry, for example we recently had someone from Forbes magazine judging, and we commit to funding there and then. We also regularly include some of our past successful candidates on the panel. Ideally we like to get things in place for people 4-5 months before their release. People move around a lot in prisons so news of our programme spread by word of mouth, but we also dropped round leaflets and put up posters in prison educational and resettlement departments. We’ve also had write-ups in some magazines, including Inside Time, a national prison newspaper.
Were there any obstacles?
Funding – there’s so much demand within prisons for this kind of work and not enough money to support it. All the agencies we’ve worked with have been really supportive, lack of employment is a key factor in why people re-offend so most people can see the benefit of running a programme like Startup.

What have you gained from this experience?
Giving somebody the chance to start afresh and provide for themselves and their family is so uplifting. Some of the people we work with have had so many setbacks in their lives and have never been given this kind of encouragement before. It’s very satisfying to see people come through this with a real sense of hope for the future.

What piece of advice would you give to others who’d like to get involved in this kind of work?
The main thing is building long-term relationships within the prison service, especially with education and resettlement departments, and finding out what they want. You also have to prepare yourself for disappointment as not every business is going to be a success and people don’t always stick to their original ideas.

More info:
www.startupnow.org.uk
www.insidetime.org
Shortlisted entries

**Kellie Richmond, Activities Co-ordinator at What Women Want** – a peer-led women’s support group

*What was the inspiration behind the idea?*

When we were running a support group here there was one particular session where only one woman came along, she was sat alone doing knitting. We thought, there must be something we can do for people that’s better than this!

*How did you get the ball rolling?*

We had a meeting with other local agencies, it was clear that the women had lots of ideas of how to make support groups fun and stimulating. Some of the women involved in these support groups have been victims of domestic violence so making them feel comfortable and safe was paramount if What Women Want was going to be a success. After running a successful 12-week pilot of the scheme, the women decided a church hall in the town centre would be a good place to regularly hold the support group. So we approached the church and asked if we could book their hall on a weekly basis and also have a buffet in there too. As the group became more established we also started to run 10-week programmes in different activities that the women chose, for example belly dancing, acupuncture or keep fit classes. The women involved in the support groups now take charge of everything.

*Were there any obstacles along the way?*

Getting money! Lifeline paid for our 12-week pilot at the beginning and we then got some funding from Safer Newcastle. We try and get our activities for free or Lifeline pay, Safer Newcastle cover the cost of hall hire and food which is great.

**Elizabeth Bezzant, Supported Housing Manager at Mendip Housing** – Inter-Scheme Olympics

*How did you become involved with the Inter-Scheme Olympics?*

I was approached by some tenants from one of our sheltered housing schemes who wanted to challenge another sheltered scheme to an evening darts match. It was such a great evening that I thought we should do this kind of thing for other activities which were accessible to everyone.

*What was the inspiration behind the idea?*

We had been concerned about social isolation for a number of our tenants and I realised that this was something that could help combat this. There was a real sense of pride in their community team, many of our tenants are unable to go out as often as they would like, because of mobility problems or a lack of confidence, but this really brought everyone together. Some of the players really shone at darts and I started to wonder what other hidden talents our tenants had!

*How did you get the ball rolling?*

Myself and my staff team started to publicise it as the Inter-Scheme Olympics and included a whole host of activities that everybody could take part in, from flower arranging and arts and crafts to poetry and short story writing. We asked people what they needed and what kind of things they enjoyed doing. Gradually it got its own momentum and our residents started to advertise it themselves. We’ve also held a couple of exhibitions in our offices to showcase their work.

*Were there any obstacles? How did you overcome these?*

Accessibility was a problem and transport an even greater one, as we are a very rural area. On those occasions we paid for the hire of wheelchair-adapted mini buses from our local community transport and sometimes staff offered lifts to tenants. Many of the activities were arranged so people didn’t have to join a group; they could send in an entry from their home and still be part of their team.

*What have you gained from this experience?*

It’s too easy for us to look at older people and forget that they were once young people who had hobbies and talents. It blows me away seeing what a talented, creative group of people our tenants are.
**Steve Davies, Hostel Support Manager at King George’s Hostel (ECHG) – Fitness Programme**

**Speaking on behalf of King George’s Hostel, Westminster City Council, and the Hungerford Drugs Project**

**What gave you the initial idea?**
We talk a lot about setting goals with clients and running compliments that. I spoke to Robin Cope, Managing Director of British Military Fitness (BMF), and he told me that after leaving the army he found going to the gym quite a synthetic experience. We work with ex-rough sleepers to help them cut down their drug use so the teamwork and structure that goes along with an outdoor running group led by BMF worked really well.

**How did you get the ball rolling?**
We did a pilot of 10 sessions and based on the success of that we made it a permanent programme. After the programme had been running a while we hired two instructors from BMF to permanently run beginner and intermediate programmes as some of our clients had become more advanced in their training. We also set a goal of training for six months for a 10k race to keep people focused. When people saw others start to become healthier and eat and sleep better they wanted to join.

**What have you gained from this experience?**
It’s amazing to see what fitness can bring to this client group – it acts as a springboard for people to work on all aspects of their lives. The structure, discipline and goal-planning all have far-reaching effects beyond just going running.

**Paul Brewer, Co-ordinator and Co-founder of Sound Minds - arts project for visual artists and musicians**

**What was the inspiration behind this project?**
There’s lots of talent and aspiration out there that’s not being catered for. The idea behind Sound Minds was for our members to take charge and run things as experts in their field. Using the arts enables people to get across a positive message without compromising the gravity of their situation.

**How did you get the ball rolling?**
Sound Minds started out as a partnership between the local Mental Health Trust (MHT) and a church. A few far-sighted MHT staff who I managed at the time wanted to use a community studio run by the church to involve local people in making music. We started weekly sessions, engaging the unemployed and people with significant mental health problems. Steadily our media attention grew and our activities expanded, for instance we’ve run workshops in schools combining education on mental health problems alongside songwriting and DJ-ing.

**What piece of advice would you give to others who’d like to get involved in this kind of work?**
We started with a strong foundation, including our members in all of our decisions. Many of them were on our management committee from the start so we’ve built up loyalty with people. You should see potential in everything that’s suggested by your members - often wild and creative ideas contain a nugget that you can work with to turn them into reality.

**Terry O’Leary, Associate Artist at Cardboard Citizens – homeless people’s theatre company**

**How did you become involved with Cardboard Citizens?**
I was in a hostel and saw one of the shows that they put on. After that I got involved with one of the regular drama workshops and was offered paid work, I then did a Hostel Tour myself. All the actors who perform in our shows have experienced homelessness.

**What was the inspiration behind the idea?**
The initial idea came from Adrian Jackson, our founder and Artistic Director. He was working at the London Bubble Theatre Company at the time and wanted to use forum theatre with homeless people living in Cardboard City (a nickname given to the homeless community around Waterloo). Forum is a form of theatre that allows the audience to really get involved, it provokes them to look at the main character and solve their problems, many of which will have been experienced by the audience. It’s all about the sharing of information and not being passive. This encourages
people to think about making changes in their lives, maybe also get involved with us. I think audiences tend to connect with us well because they can relate to us, we’re from that background.

How did you get the ball rolling?
It started about 16 years ago, we ran weekly drama workshops at a hostel in Hackney who supported us and kindly allowed us to use their facilities. We’ve built up a strong set of connections in the hostel world over the years, they keep asking us to come back and perform. We’ve also done shows around the country and some stuff in schools, highlighting situations to youngsters where they might get in trouble and keeping them aware of homeless issues. We also do work in prisons through their education departments as well as collaborations with other theatre companies. News of us spreads by word of mouth, forum theatre is studied internationally by academics and people in the arts so we’re quite high profile as we’re one of the leading organisations who use it.

What have you gained from this experience?
It’s been a complete change of career for me – I teach, perform, direct...it’s a completely different way of life.

Liz Atkinson, Self Advocacy Manager at The Advocacy Project – Our Choice, friendship groups for people with learning disabilities

How did you become involved with the Friendship Group?
One of the people I work with, Sarah Jane, felt there was no provision in the borough to help people with disabilities learn about making friends and enjoy their social lives. Sarah Jane worked with her empowerment worker and gave a presentation to the Partnership Board highlighting this, and then I helped her to set up her group.

What was the inspiration behind the initial idea for this project?
We came up with the idea of using multimedia as a way for people with complex needs to get to know each other better. For example, we thought it’d be good to use a large screen to display photos clearly so everyone could see them, and people wouldn’t have to pass around fiddly, small photographs. Usually projects for people with complex needs tend to focus on the boring stuff – health, medication, diet – but Sarah Jane really wanted the Friendship Group to be about the things people enjoy – comedy, music, family.

How did you get the ball rolling?
Firstly, Sarah Jane wrote to a small group of people with learning disabilities to find out what kind of things they’d like to see at the Friendship Groups. Based on their feedback and ideas, she then sent round some invitations asking people if they’d be interested in coming along to the first group meeting. We worked closely with an external Multimedia Advocate to discuss fresh and unique ways to use multimedia resources in the groups. We used a large lounge for all our meetings. It was really important we used a space that felt natural. After the first successful meetup we worked more with the Multimedia Advocate to replicate a way of working that staff could use in care homes, effectively training the staff to run Friendship Groups themselves.

What piece of advice would you give to others who’d like to get involved in this kind of work?
Get it led by a service user! Whether you work with homeless, BME or elderly service users – that’s the key to success. There were no questions about funding with the Partnership Board, Sarah Jane put forward such a good case and was amazing at getting everyone motivated.

Faye Stewart, Outreach Manager at art + power – supporting disabled and socially excluded artists

How did you get involved with art + power?
I used to work at Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID) in Bath as a Craft Co-ordinator. I facilitated RNID workshops so that residents could come along and become independently creative. I worked at RNID while I studied a Fine Art degree at UWE (University of the West of England, Bristol). From my experience of working with disabled people at the RNID, I thought that getting involved with art + power would be a perfect opportunity for me to make use of my artistic skills whilst doing something that I enjoy.

Have there been any obstacles along the way? How did you overcome these?
Sadly it is funding! art + power receives no core funding – all the money we need, we raise ourselves. We are constantly looking for supporters to keep in touch with art + power and help us to continue our activities. We are also looking for more volunteers to help support others to develop their art and learn how an exciting arts organisation works.

What piece of advice would you give to others who’d like to get involved in this kind of work?
At the heart of all of this is the drive for a positive experience, and for people to feel like they can achieve anything. I think that creating role models is especially important in this kind of work – seeing someone else doing something can inspire you and motivate you to try things yourself. My other advice is to join us! There are plenty of opportunities available for everyone who joins our new campaign for creativity, which helps release the arts in every individual so that we can end cultural exclusion.

Patsy O’Dwyer, Resource Manager at Art Blanche – arts project for adults with learning disabilities

How did you become involved with Art Blanche?
Art Blanche started out as an art project run in two of our day centres. Our art tutor, Billie Evans, did two sessions a week working with our service users who have quite high needs. We decided to enter the town show one year with our own float and things grew from there.

What was the inspiration behind the project?
Billie was very keen to use recycled materials in a creative way. Entering the town show proved a great way to bring carers, service users and staff together, so we wanted to make it a regular thing not just a one-off.

How did you get the ball rolling?
In the beginning all the recycled material we used in our projects was supplied by staff, now we get help from businesses in the area like Asda and B&Q. We actually won first prize in the town show for our Out of Africa float so we gained quite a lot of attention from that. Other organisations at the show asked us if we’d do some pieces for them, for example we did some artwork for the See Me conference that was being held in the area and some canvases for the local Learning and Living Centre. We entered the town show again the following year, this time with a Finding Nemo float (the theme was Disney) and won again. Since then we’ve been regularly approached to do things at local events like The Big Green Day as well as continually being “commissioned” to do things by organisations in the area. We’d like to turn Art Blanche into a social enterprise eventually, as we’re funded by Barking and Dagenham Council we can’t charge for our artwork. The council would still provide the support for the project but it would be independent.

Catryn Grundy, Tenant Empowerment Officer at RCT Homes – Gardening project for a sheltered housing scheme

What was the inspiration behind the initial idea?
The residents were unhappy with the grounds at their scheme, at the time the building was undergoing renovation so it made sense to improve the outside area too. Some of our tenants are quite socially isolated so we hoped working on the garden would be a good way to bring everyone together and that ultimately it would be used as a place to socialise.

How did you get the ball rolling?
RCT Homes and the tenants drew up a Tenants Compact and we then focused on helping the tenants lead the project for themselves, right down to applying for funding. It started off quite small, people did a bit of gardening here and there, but now we have a vegetable patch and even people who can’t do the physical work help out. One lady makes gardening pinnies for fellow residents and other tenants have painted flower pots or helped out cooking when we have barbecues. We’ve also had a lot of help from the local disabled gardening team who’ve done lots of heavy lifting on our behalf. Residents have been successfully trained on how to apply for grants or get support now so they’re quite happy to run the project themselves!

What piece of advice would you give to others who’d like to get involved in this kind of work?
We took a real partnership approach with this project and I think that’s been one of its key successes. Also it’s important to keep things fun and to focus on empowering tenants, don’t tell them what they should or shouldn’t do.
This garden is an extension of their home so we really wanted to give them control, we were only really there to support them when they needed us.

**Liz Hare, Artistic Director at Citadel Arts Group – playwriting by mature people**

**What was the inspiration behind the project?**

Through my work at Workers’ Educational Association and the Office of Lifelong Learning I’ve met a lot of older people who have talents in playwriting but have no support to get their ideas off the ground and no access to performing arts facilities. The stories people were telling revolved around lucid personal memories and close-knit communities, I wanted to turn them into something living and tangible to reflect that.

**How did you get the ball rolling?**

From the initial idea of developing reminiscence sessions stories into simple scenes our project has developed into something more sophisticated almost of its own accord. We started to cast professional actors into roles and took the mini-plays into schools and bingo clubs. In terms of getting actors we had open auditions and used new young actors from local drama colleges. Some of the original storytellers actually became performers too which was amazing. We now perform readings in period costume across the area to hundreds of people.

**What have you gained from this experience?**

This is the biggest community project I’ve done with professional actors – it’s been incredibly satisfying and moving. One time we had the whole audience in a miner’s club singing! We get feedback from each individual performance so we’re constantly developing our plays about the communities that mean so much to them, then to take that play to the community that inspired it.

**Philip Ireson, Chaplain at HMP Doncaster and Co-founder of Restoring Broken Walls Trust – homeless and vulnerable people’s charity**

**What was the inspiration behind the project?**

Extending our work in this way is not normal practice for Chaplains – once you’ve worked with people on the inside you don’t work with them outside. It’s unusual for us to be involved in this way but we felt it was important, we’ve had to think outside the box a bit.

**How did you get the ball rolling?**

A few of the Chaplains got together and discussed how we could realistically provide support for people once they’d left prison. We started out working as a small support group and met every Friday, but we wanted to hold our meetings more centrally so we looked for a base in the town centre – this turned into the Hope Centre, a place for people to work through their problems and receive practical support to turn their lives around. We also run an organic allotment on two and a half acres of formerly derelict ground near the town centre, this haven of tranquility and fruitfulness provides volunteering and employment opportunities for ex-offenders.

**What piece of advice would you give to others who’d like to get involved in this kind of work?**

Foremost you must network and not be a lone ranger. We talk to lots of agencies, including the local drug intervention programme, churches, community police and homeless organisations. It’s crucial for keeping everyone safe and making sure we know the background of each of our service users.

**Sharon Berry, Chief Executive at Storybook Dads – maintaining family ties between prisoners and their children**

**How did you become involved with Storybook Dads?**

I volunteered at Channings Wood prison in Devon to set up a radio station, prior to that I was volunteering at BBC Radio Devon so I had a bit of experience with radio equipment and software. Our writer in residence at Channings Wood noted that the software we were using could easily be used for editing stories so she asked me to develop the idea.

**How did you get the ball rolling?**

First we had to win over prison security – they’re very strict about allowing recording devices into the prison so it was a struggle to be accepted. We also had to convince the governor. The prison eventually gave us an empty cell to use
as an editing suite, up to this point I was doing the editing at home. As the prison staff became more and more supportive we trained two prisoners to work with us on the recording and editing equipment and started to promote Storybook Dads in the local press. News spreads by word of mouth now, we’ve got ten prisoners working as editors from Dartmoor and it remains our main headquarters. We’ve also got three fully equipped editing suites, and we give presentations at other prisons to raise awareness of the programme.

**What have you gained from this experience?**

It’s been a massive achievement personally for me to develop so many new skills and grow in confidence. Also working with such a fantastic and dedicated team has been really rewarding. Working in prisons is not as bleak as everyone thinks, it’s really worthwhile and uplifting to be part of this.

**What piece of advice would you give to others who’d like to get involved in this kind of work?**

Be tenacious and pester people, knock on enough doors and someone will listen!

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**Trevor Martin, Senior Training and Employment Adviser at Devon and Cornwall Housing Association (DCHA) and co-founder of the Plymouth Foyer Sailing Programme**

**What was the inspiration behind the initial idea?**

I have been involved with sail training programmes in previous posts and have seen first-hand the incredible agent of change that these experiences offer struggling young people. Although it’s on the sideline of my main job at DCHA it fits in with what we try and do here in terms of engaging with young people.

**How did you get the ball rolling?**

I contacted the southern branch of Ocean Youth Trust (OYT). One of the staff there had previously been very open to the idea of our young people getting involved with their programmes. Eight young people went out on that first voyage - it was a great success. Over the course of the three seasons we have been involved, it became clear there were three ‘champions’ who carried the bulk of the responsibility both in preparation and when at sea. They have encouraged and supported others who would never otherwise have dared to have participated. Since then we’ve held regular sailing trips across the UK and beyond. One young man with severe learning problems said to a member of OYT staff that he’d love to be able to sail to America one day – through our programme he did, and he helped two others to join him.

**What piece of advice would you give to others who’d like to get involved in this kind of work?**

Don’t believe you can do this all on your own – it takes time and more than one or two people to really pull it off. Our residents are at a time of change. Long range planning causes disproportionate changes; work in the moment as much as possible, be flexible, even fluid and take deep breaths at times. I work with a great team of people who’ve been really supportive of the project and my involvement in it. My best advice would be to think of the amount of time you think you’re going to be spending on the project then triple it – that will give you a realistic picture of what’s involved.
Judges

Sara Llewelin, City Bridge Trust

Rob Williamson, Northern Rock Foundation

Rachael Byrne, English Churches Housing Group

John Crowther, Thames Reach

Darren Augustin, former Thames Reach service user

Liz Dixon, National Probation Service

Clive Martin, Clinks

Val Keen, Communities and Local Government
Appendix

Other Entries

- 42nd Street
- A1 Housing Bassetlaw - Seated exercises
- Aberlour Outreach Edinburgh - Play Peace Programme
- ADAS (Alcohol and Drugs Advisory Service)
- Amber
- Ark Trust, The - Dis:Course
- Axiom Housing Association - Fair View Court
- Big Issue Foundation, The - Taking Health to the Homeless Programme
- Bolton Lads and Girls Club
- Booth Centre Arts Programme
- Bradford District Care Trust - Keighley Day Service
- Broadway Lodge
- BUBIC ( Bringing Unity Back Into the Community)
- CAFPH (Centre for African Families’ Positive Health)
- Carers Association, Southern Staffordshire - Learning and Leisure Project
- Caris Islington - Cold Weather Shelter Project
- CASA Support - Swale Foyer
- Chance UK
- City Homes in Mind - Stepping Forward
- Colebrook Housing Society - Carers Champions
- Colebrook Housing Society - Mental health and learning disability support services
- Communication and Action - Communication and Strengthening Relationships Programme
- Dominion Housing Group - Life: Meeting it and Beating it
- Dorset Probation Area - Education and Skills Project
- Do You Panic?
- Eastbourne YMCA - Inner Journey Project
- Eaves Housing for Women - Amina Scheme
- Edinburgh Cyrenians - Amber Mediation
- Endeavour Housing Association - Hestia Service
- English Churches Housing Group - Hostel counselling service
- English Churches Housing Group - Quays, The
- FAIR (Family Advice and Information Resource)
- Families First
- Festival Housing Group - Sheltered Housing IT Training Programme
- Forum Housing Association - Resident’s Panel Project
- Gentoo Living
- Gloucestershire NHS Foundation Trust - 2Gether
- Herefordshire Primary Care Trust - Assertive Outreach Team
• Huntingdon Learning Disability Partnership Community Team
  • Junction, The

• KATE (Kensington Access to Training and Employment) - Health Energy Advice Team (HEAT)
• Kickstart Community Programmes
• KnifeCrimes.org

• LCT Homelink
• Lifeline - Outlook Manchester
• Lifeline - What Women Want
• Lincolnshire Gypsy Liaison Group
• Living Room, The
• Lothian Centre for Integrated Living
• LS11 KK (Kidz Klub Leeds)
• Luminus Group - Young Parent Project

• Maidstone Mind
• Mencap - North East Parent Support Service
• Mersey Care NHS Trust - Involving service users in service Development
• Mind in Birmingham
• Mind in Croydon - Boxing Project

• Natural Justice
• Nehemiah Project, The
• Network for Change
• North Somerset People First
• Novas Scarman Group - Children Can Do Project

• Ocean Somali Community Association - Somali Women’s Group
• Outward - Autism Spectrum Disorder Specialist Outreach Service
• Outward - Participation Development Team
• Optua - Disability Sport Academy

• Paragon - Service user events
• Plymouth Befrienders
• Praxis Care - Befriending Scheme
• Praxis Community Projects - Undocumented Migrant Advice Project (UMAP)
• Providence Row Housing Association - Open Access Art Project
• Providence Row Housing Association - Sky’s the Limit Service

• Respond - Elder’s Project
• Rethink - Early Intervention in Psychosis Service
• Robert Hibbert Almshouse Charity
• Rock Trust, The
• Rodney Housing Association - Paragon Project

• Salford City Council - Salford Heating Installers Partnership (SHIP)
• Salvation Army, The - Early Intervention and Prevention
• Sanctuary Housing Association - Ruth House
• Saviour Trust, The
• Saxon Weald - Handy Van Service
• Sefton Opera
• Simpson House Counselling
• SPEAR - Views from the Street
• Stepping Stones Trust
• Stockport Homes - Supported Housing Scheme

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● Stockport Refugee Support Group
● Stoke-on-Trent City Council - Children in care model
● Stoke-on-Trent City Council - Lunchbox Cafe, The
● Stonham - Alternatives Project, The
● Stonham - Batley Foyer
● Stonham - Kinara Refuge
● Sunlight Development Trust - Shout Out
● Surrey Community Development Trust

● Together Women Project
● Tyneside Cyrenians - Brighter Futures

● UR4Jobs

● Weaver Vale Housing Trust - Work Experience for homeless women
● Wirral Council - BME Support Service
● Women's Recovery Group