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Centre evaluates Leicester Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Strategy

Reducing teenage pregnancy levels is high on the political agenda at present and the Centre has been successful in winning a contract to evaluate work in this field.

The government has set a target of reducing the numbers of conceptions by young women under 18 by 50% by 2010, with a view to reducing the degree of social exclusion that can be experienced by young women in this situation. Each local authority has been required to identify the areas which have the highest number of conceptions and to target a range of new sexual health services at this age group within these areas. They are also expected to encourage schools to address the issue through their sex and relationship education (SRE) curriculum. Interagency teenage pregnancy prevention boards have been set up to oversee the strategy, involving education, social services, youth services, PCTs etc, and teenage pregnancy prevention coordinators have been appointed to co-ordinate and encourage new projects and partnerships. Achievement has been variable so far with some authorities recording a reduction in conceptions in line with the target, but others have only seen a small drop in the statistics and for a few, conceptions have actually risen during the strategy period.



Leicester City is one of the authorities which has achieved its mid- term target and their Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Partnership Board has commissioned an evaluation of their work to date, in order to identify the issues and services which need the most attention for the second half of the strategy. A research team from the Centre for Social Action, with support from researchers from the Youth Affairs Unit at De Montfort, carried out the first phase of the research, which in total is extending over nine months from March to November 2006. This has involved a city wide survey of the views of managers and practitioners actively involved in the teenage pregnancy prevention strategy, together with some mapping of existing sexual health services by ward. For the second phase of the study the team are recruiting and training a group of peer evaluators who will run group sessions with young people in schools and youth projects, to find out from them what kind of sexual health services and SRE lessons fit their needs best and what they think of the services which already exist. It is hoped that the project can work directly with three schools in Leicester and it will also be making contact with parents, as well as youth groups and young people, from black and minority ethnic communities. All the local authority services who work with young people are required to contribute to the strategy and the findings from the research should help them develop their services in ways that will be most accessible to young people.

Centre appoints new part-time researcher

Hannah Goodman writes:

"I am a new half- time Research Fellow with the Centre for Social Action and I have been in post since March 2006. I have also worked half time as a Research Fellow with the Community and Criminal Justice (CCJ) Division since June 2004.

Before joining the Centre for Social Action I worked as a Probation Service Officer for the Resettlement Team in the Probation Service in Leicester. I have also worked previously for the Victims and Witnesses Action Group in Leicester where I was the Project Development Worker and was responsible for carrying out research in conjunction with DMU into any gaps in service provision for victims and witnesses of crime and looking at how these could be tackled. I have a BA in Criminology from Middlesex University and an MSc from the Scarman Centre. I have also volunteered for Victim Support and the Probation Service in London.

I have previously worked with the Centre for Social Action on a joint project between the CSA and CCJ and look forward to being able to work with Jennie, Thilo and Alison more often. Since starting work with the CSA I have worked on the evaluation of the Bedfordshire Children's Fund. I am also working on the evaluation of the Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Strategy for Leicester which involves helping out with the recruitment, training and supporting of peer evaluators. We have already held a very successful Information and Selection day for potential peer evaluators. We will begin the training in a few weeks and I'm really excited about working with the young people on such an interesting project."

Reaction to Re:Action



Young volunteer researchers taking part in the training at the residential.

Thilo Boeck is working on a three year project with Youth Action Network in a participative research project with young people exploring the impact of their volunteering activities on themselves and their communities. Chris Johnson, Vice Chair Person of the Steering Group writes:

“The Re:Action research project (funded by the Big Lottery Fund) has been running now for several months. We now have a steering group consisting of young people from all over the country from different backgrounds. The group has met all together a total of three times, and is the hub of the project. The role of the steering group is to lead the way in this ground breaking research on participative youth volunteering and its impact on young people and their communities.

The steering group members were involved in choosing several Youth Action Network affiliates to be part of the research. These organisations throughout England, were contacted to send groups of young people to a residential that took place between the 4th and 6th of July. The place: Bilbury Hill; The reason: to learn how to conduct the research; The team: no fewer than 30 young people from the far corners of England. From London to Newcastle, and a lot of places in-between, these socially minded youngsters came together.

We decided how to do the research and we were given the skills of how to run focus groups with young people. We also decided who will be the participants in this research in our own organisations or communities. The training was led by Thilo and Jennie from De Montfort University.

I think the residential was a huge success. The young people left with positive attitudes, as did their accompanying staff. I'd say Thilo, Jennie and Jonathan have done a brilliant job in organising and implementing this residential.

This three year project is in its infancy and we will be working hard throughout the autumn and winter to begin the research."

The Standards We Expect Project

The Centre is working in partnership with a consortium of other agencies on a new action research project funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Michael Glynn, Project worker for this new initiative who is based at the Centre for Social Action writes:

"I am the Project Worker for the Standards We Expect Project and it is my role to support the consortium who are delivering the project, support the work at our partner sites and assist with background research. I began work in July and I have previously worked developing and managing a direct payment support service for disabled people and for a Council for Voluntary Services.

The Standards We Expect is a development and research project investigating the barriers to person centred support. It is a 2 year project funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Previous research has highlighted that the implementation and adoption of person centred services can be problematic. Our project is working closely with 8 partner sites across the UK to identify barriers to person centred support.

The services are diverse, ranging from services for people with learning difficulties from black and ethnic minority communities in one area to older people with dementia in another. Previous research has also identified that the voices of service users and front-line workers are not fully represented, something our project aims to address.

The project is being delivered by a consortium including Centre for Social Action, De Montfort University, Shaping Our Lives (the national service user network), Values Into Action (the UK-wide campaign with people with learning difficulties) and Brunel University.

During the summer, having filled the Project worker post, the project has been working on the necessary ethical approvals and beginning to interview managers, front-line workers and service users at our partner sites. The first phase of the project concludes in November with our partner 'Get-together', a conference in London. The second phase is supporting developments with partners at individual sites. We will keep you updated."

For further information email standardsweexpect@googlemail.com

Commissioning the Centre for Social Action

The Centre for Social Action is always interested in new contracts to do training, research and consultancy with a range of statutory, voluntary, or private sector organisations. All these activities are informed by our social action methodology; so we always aim to work collaboratively with our commissioners and community members to ensure there is full understanding and ownership of the proposed project on the part of all those who will be directly involved in it.

We are experienced in the fields of health, youth work, children and family support and childcare (particularly Sure Start, Children's Centres and Children's Fund), community development and regeneration, social capital, restorative justice and housing and disability issues.

We can be commissioned to undertake the following services:

Research: we undertake project evaluations and community consultations of all kinds. These often involve training community members and service users to be researchers or information gatherers in their own communities and always aim to ensure ownership and understanding of topics chosen for research on their part. We can also conduct surveys of a particular field in order to produce good practice guides, or conduct audits of existing practice such as community development work. We also offer training about research and evaluation for organisations and community members (e.g. training for health professionals and service users on participative research).

Training: we work directly with community groups using social action methods to enable them to identify issues important to them and devise action plans to address them. Trainers share their skills with community members and facilitate them to have direct ownership of eventual outcomes. We also offer training to practitioners from all social welfare fields in social action methods, which introduces them to a range of ideas and exercises which can then be used directly in work with their particular community groups, to stimulate greater community involvement and ownership.

Consultancy: we can provide consultancy to various groups, organisations, teams and individuals on setting up services and projects and running groups using social action methods. The social action methodology can be used in a very flexible way to address a wide range of organisational needs.

If you are interested in discussing any of these possibilities then please contact Jennie Fleming at the Centre for Social Action on tel (0116) 257 7777.

Centre supports community researchers to help with the evaluation of SRB 5 funding and the lead professional role

The Centre has trained and worked with community researchers in the Osmaston/Allenton area of Derby city on two different projects.

SRB5

In the first the Centre won a contract to work with Sure Start in Osmaston and Allenton to evaluate residents' perceptions of the impact of SRB 5 funding in the area. The project involved recruiting, training and supporting five local residents to undertake interviews with local residents and groups, to gather their perceptions of the impact of this funding programme in this particular area of Derby. The training in research methods included amongst other topics sessions on asking questions, listening skills, confidentiality, ethical issues and recording. All the female residents involved had completed the Sure Start confidentiality training and were also involved in the data analysis.

Lead Professional Role

This model of community research was used again in a second project designed to evaluate the impact of the new Lead Professional role, which was being trailed in the Osmaston/Allenton Children's Centre area of Derby City with the aim of working with children aged 0-11 years old and their families, in conjunction with local primary schools and nurseries, health and Sure Start staff. The key functions of the Lead Professional are to act as a single point of contact that children, young people and families can trust, and to support them in making choices and in navigating their way through the system and to reduce overlap and inconsistency from other agency workers. The evaluation was commissioned by the Information Sharing and Assessment/Common Assessment Framework (ISA/CAF)/Steering Group – an interagency body involving Health and the major children's services in Derby.



Jennie Fleming with community researchers and members of the Community Association

The community researchers were employed to carry out a preliminary evaluation of the role with a view to fine tuning aspects of the service delivery. The information gathering was undertaken by a group of three women who had previously taken part in the SRB 5 research. Jennie Fleming from CSA provided support to them in devising the questions for different groups of people. A meeting was held at the end of the project where the community researchers fed back their perceptions of the information they had collected and also commented on and improved a draft report which Jennie had written for it. They reported on common messages about the service – what people had seen as good or not so good aspects and where there were exceptions to these. They also gave their suggestions for recommendations. A total of 12 families, 11 lead professionals and 12 other professionals were interviewed. The findings indicated that most families found the lead professional role a helpful innovation and most lead professionals could see the benefit and justification for it although it did in some cases increase their work load.

Centre staff promote approaches to social capital which endorse positive community attributes

Thilo Boeck was invited to speak at the conference: Making Connections: Harnessing Social Capital in the North organised by ippr north in August 2006 to give a response to David Halpern (Senior Advisor and Chief Analyst to the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit and a Lecturer at Cambridge University) who talked about the latest research and government thinking on the policy role of social capital in economic development and social inclusion. Thilo, in his presentation, emphasised the importance of not using social capital to highlight a deficit in deprived communities, which could reinforce exclusion. Instead he talked about the need to recognise strengths within communities, the quality of social interaction and its impact, and to talk about 'releasing' or 'enhancing' social capital, rather than creating it. He emphasised that not every community needs to or can enhance the same type of social capital, and that there is a need for a balance between bottom up and top down approaches. Participants applauded the Centre's approach to work with community members and practitioners which invites people to explore what social capital means to them, indicating the delegates' understanding of the context specific processes of people's social interaction, and the influence of external factors, such as stereotypes, media and power structures on people's social capital.

Thilo Boeck worked with the Policy and Performance team of Leicester City Council to devise an evaluation and assessment framework for their Community Cohesion Strategy. Through the involvement of policy makers and practitioners a cohesion framework and a survey was developed. This might be used at different levels – from a city wide strategic level to a community level.

Thilo Boeck also worked with the Chief Executive of North West Leicestershire Council for Voluntary Service, in partnership with Leicestershire County Council and the County Local Strategic Partnership, on an enhancing and measuring social capital project as the baseline for the Stronger Communities element of Local Area Agreements. Centre Staff worked with volunteers from the County to devise the survey and trained them in administering it with members of the public. Currently work is underway to analyse the data.

As part of the dissemination of the ESRC funded project “Pathways in and out of Crime” Centre staff have produced a leaflet for practitioners which explores the importance of social capital in young people’s lives and gives practical examples of how to enhance it.

ESRC practitioners leaflet final - pdf_tcm2-40394.pdf 

Faith and Cohesion Project

Jennie Fleming worked with members of SDSA (School Development Support Agency) on a project funded by the Home Office they had been commissioned by the recently formed Institute of Community Cohesion to undertake. The aim of the project was to gain young people’s ideas and opinions about the successful promotion of inter-faith work, in particular:

- to gain young people’s knowledge and awareness of different faiths
- to gain young people’s knowledge of issues relating to inter-faith activities
- to gain young people’s views of constraints to inter-faith activities
- to seek recommendations as to how to promote inter-faith activities

Jennie facilitated a one day workshop with members of SDSA to help them plan the sessions they would then go on to facilitate with groups of young people.

Centre trains child care workers in Turkmenistan

The Centre has considerable experience of work in eastern Europe and central Asia with child care and social work professionals. The following account describes one of our recent training courses in this region.

Jennie Fleming from the Centre for Social Action, De Montfort University and consultants from the Social Action Company were employed by UNICEF Turkmenistan at the end of 2005 to facilitate a number of workshops for 60 professionals involved in child protection work in Turkmenistan, one of the former soviet republics in central Asia. The two workshops that Jennie took part in were ‘Basic Social Work Skills’ and ‘Communication Skills’. As the pool of people working with children and families is small, there was considerable overlap between participants in all the workshops.

The training used participative and interactive methods. It recognised that there is a wealth of knowledge and experience about the situation of children and families in Turkmenistan and support offered to them amongst the participants. The workshops were largely experiential, with some inputs of information about social work with children and families in the UK and from other CIS countries.



Participants discuss family assessment

The participants of the workshops evaluated them highly and said they would use what they had learnt in their work with children and families and also planned to share some of the materials, exercises and discussions with colleagues to protect and promote the interests of children in their communities.

Jennie adds “As always I was impressed by the dedication of the people who took part in the training and their commitment to improving the lives of the children in Turkmenistan. Many of them are very familiar with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and try to integrate it into all their work. All the people are working with limited resources but many are committed to developing quality services to support families.



Bedfordshire Children's Fund Evaluation completed

Centre staff embarked on this 18 month project in January 2005 and completed the final report in June 2006. Bedfordshire Children's Fund provided funding for a range of projects working with children and young people at risk of social exclusion, designed to achieve the Every Child Matters outcomes of being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well being. A total of nine projects were funded; some working with young children in primary schools, others providing support at the transition between primary and secondary school, while some community based projects worked with young carers and young people at risk, or offered one-to-one mentoring support.

Centre researchers took on the role of supporting project staff to carry out evaluations of their own projects and also collected information directly from children and young people. They facilitated workshops with project staff exploring evaluation tools and techniques and supported staff to devise the type of evaluation indicators which were appropriate for the kind of work they did. Centre staff emphasised the importance of involving children and young people in the evaluation in the work they did with project staff and they independently ran workshops with young people to devise questionnaires which could measure their achievement of the ECM outcomes in ways they could identify. A number of discussion groups were organised with children, young people and parents at the end of the project to gather their impressions of the work of each project.

The final report collated the evidence gathered by the projects with the information collected by Centre staff and broadly established that the local projects had been able to target their work effectively and address the needs of a range of children and families, but there was more scope for involving children and young people more extensively in decision-making within the projects than their staff currently believed was possible.

BCF Final Report_tcm2-40182.pdf 

OCN accreditation

As can be seen from the other items in this newsletter, the Centre is doing a considerable amount of training of young people or local people for them to be researchers or evaluators. For some time we have been keen to be able to offer participants recognition for the skills they have learnt that goes beyond a certificate of attendance. To this end we have worked closely with the Open College Network to be able to offer some courses for which participants can gain formal accreditation. We are now able to offer people the opportunity to produce a portfolio for both level 2 and 3 credits in 'Researcher Interview Skills and Techniques', 'Understanding Research Interview Procedures' and 'Safety Issues for Community Research'. An 'interview' can be a group session or an individual interview. So far we have enrolled students from the SRB evaluation, the Re:action project, two projects undertaken with the Youth Affairs Unit and we will also be offering the young people on the Leicester Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Strategy evaluation the opportunity to gain these credits. We hope that these can provide an accessible path to recognition for people who may not have experienced much success following conventional academic routes earlier in their lives.

Centre completes final evaluation of the NYA Global Youth Work Project

The Global Youth Work Project was a three year project funded by the Department for International Development (DfID) based at the National Youth Agency (NYA), which aimed to improve the awareness of global issues on the part of local authority youth service managers and practitioners and to increase the amount of targeted youth work with young people on this theme. A range of activities were organised during the life of the project including a conference, seminars, contributions to training courses, a dedicated website on global youth work, a regular newsletter and a final publication. Centre staff had carried out an interim evaluation in 2005 and it was agreed that there would be a more limited evaluation in the summer of 2006 to summarise the main lessons learnt. Interviews were conducted with youth service and project staff, NYA staff and an Advisory Committee member. A final report was compiled and submitted to NYA in September 2006. The findings showed that, among other responses, a new youth service in a unitary authority was helped to ensure that global issues featured prominently in their new youth service curriculum and young people were commissioned to provide photographs for a project publication, extending their knowledge and understanding of the issues as a consequence.

Both groups were asked questions about the use made of both resources and revealed extensive dissemination of information to other people and creative work with young people on global themes. The profile of users which emerged showed that the resources proved useful to other workers with young people in settings outside the youth service.

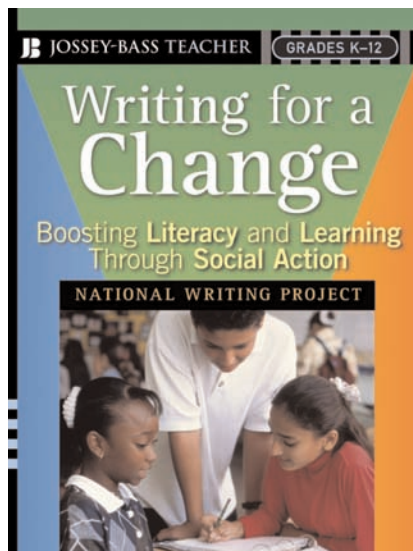
PhD's and Publications

PhDs

Mary Larkin, a member of staff in the Health Studies Division in De Montfort, successfully completed and defended her PhD in the summer of 2006 on the subject "An exploration of the postcaring experiences of former carers". Jennie Fleming was one of her supervisors alongside colleagues Lorraine Culley and Sally Ruane from Health Studies.

Social action practice in the US

The Centre for Social Action has a working partnership with the National Writing Project (NWP) based at the University of California, Berkeley and in previous years two Centre staff have run summer workshop training courses in social action methods for teachers who belong to NWP. Some of the teachers decided to apply the social action practice they had learnt within their schools and community programmes and NWP provided some small grants to support the work. It was proposed that where possible this practice should be written up and published. Centre staff alongside NWP staff supported the American teachers to reflect on and write up their practice and the final outcome has been a new book which is due for publication in the US in September. Publication details are as follows:



Writing for a Change: Boosting Literacy and Learning through Social Action. Edited by Kristina Berdan, Ian Boulton, Elyse Eidman-Aadahl, Jennifer Fleming, Launie Gardner, Lana Rogers and Asali Solomon. California: Josey Bass Publishers

An English edition published by Wiley is due in mid October and it will be available from CSA at a reduced rate.

Writing for a Change shows teachers how to engage students in "real world" problem-solving activities that can help them to acquire voice, authority, and passion for both reading and writing practice. The book describes the innovative Social Action process for encouraging students to collaborate on problems of their own choosing, to analyze options, develop action plans, discover solutions and finally to reflect on their work. Featuring stories by

teachers who have successfully used the approach, the book provides practical guidance for applying the process to any curricular area along with an extensive list of classroom activities.

There will be a launch of the book at the NWP Annual Meeting in Nashville in November 2006, and Jennie Fleming and the other editors and authors of the examples of practice will be running a half day workshop for people wanting to find out more about social action work.

Copies of *Writing for a Change* can be purchased from De Montfort University – cost £11 + 75p second class postage in the UK. Please make sterling cheques payable to De Montfort Expertise Ltd and send orders to the Centre for Social Action, De Montfort University, Hawthorn Building, The Gateway, Leicester LE1 9BH.

Centre publications in books and journals

Centre staff have been active in getting publications into journals and magazines during the past year. Subject areas have included social capital, young people at risk, victims of crime, foster carers and involving children and young people in creating change.

Boeck T, Fleming J and Kemshall H (2006,). 'The Context of Risk Decisions: Does Social Capital Make a Difference?' *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research* [On-line Journal], 7(1), Art. 17. Available at: <http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs-texte/1-06/06-1-17-e.htm>

Boeck T and Fleming J (2005) 'Social Policy – A help or a hindrance to Social Capital' *Social Policy and Society* 4:3 pp259-270.

Boeck T, Fleming J, Hine J and Kemshall K (2006) 'Pathways into and out of crime for young people' *childRIGHT* cR228, July/August, pp18-21.

Goodman H, Fleming J, Skinner A, Williams B (2006) 'Partnership Working for Victims of Crime' *Criminal Justice Matters* no 64, Summer, pp42-45.

Fleming J (2005) 'Foster Carers Undertake Research into Birth Family Contact – Using the Social Action Research Approach' in Lowes L & Hulatt I (Eds), *The Involvement of Service Users in Health and Social Care Research*, London: Routledge Chapter 6.

Badham B with Fleming J (2004) 'Finding Out What has Changed' in Badham B, *Act by Right – skills for the active involvement of children and young people in making change happen*. Leicester: National Youth Agency



health&life sciences

Centre for Social Action

Working alongside community members, practitioners, managers and policy-makers to achieve social change.

For further information contact:

Centre for Social Action
Faculty of Health and Life Sciences
De Montfort University
The Gateway, Leicester LE1 9BH
United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0)116 257 7777

Fax: +44 (0)116 257 7778

Email: dmucsa@dmu.ac.uk

Website: <http://www.dmu.ac.uk/dmucsa>