



Young people's
'support and campaigning' groups:
A review and Good Practice Guide

**Funded by a grant from
the Carnegie UK Trust**

Summary Report

Debi Roker and Louise Cox

**Trust for the Study of Adolescence (TSA)
23 New Road
Brighton
BN1 1WZ
01273 693311**

**www.tsa.uk.com
droker@tsa.uk.com**

March 2005

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background and aims of the project

The Trust for the Study of Adolescence (TSA) has long been committed to highlighting the positive contribution that young people make to society. Earlier research by TSA (see Eden and Roker, 2002) identified an increasing number of 'support and campaigning' groups for young people. These groups were primarily for disadvantaged or marginalized groups, such as young disabled people, young carers, and gay and lesbian young people. These young people initially came together for information and advice, and peer support. These groups then moved on to undertake campaigning and social action. This new role involved trying to challenge policies, practices, or provision that affected members of their group.

Very little is known about these 'support and campaigning' groups. However, practitioners that we spoke to were very interested in them, and wanted to know more. The research described in this report therefore aimed to

- (a) survey the range and nature of these groups in the UK
- (b) explore key issues such as structure, funding, activities, successes, difficulties, plans, etc, and
- (c) identify learning from these projects.

Specifically the aim was to produce a user-friendly Good Practice Guide, based on this learning – this 'TSA Guide' is now available.

Information collected

There were three stages to the research:

Stage 1: A flyer was sent out to a wide range of organisations in the UK, asking for information about support and campaigning groups. In total 106 were returned from across the UK.

Stage 2: These 106 projects were sent a detailed questionnaire, or were interviewed over the phone. In total information was received from 71 projects.

Stage 3: Five case studies were undertaken of different projects. This involved a TSA researcher visiting the projects and meeting with workers and/or the young people involved.

Main findings

- There is a growing number of support groups for vulnerable, disadvantaged and marginalised young people. This relatively small scale survey identified over 100 such projects
- These groups exist in all four countries of the UK, although they are concentrated in large towns and cities
- The groups involved were diverse, and included projects for: young refugees, those who have experienced sexual abuse, young disabled people, young carers, young mothers, those living in temporary accommodation, the siblings of those with disabilities, and young people with mental health difficulties
- Many of these groups are supported by large organisations, both statutory bodies (such as Social Services) and large charities (such as Barnardos and the NSPCC)
- These support groups provide a valuable lifeline for many of Britain's most vulnerable young people – for example those who have experienced domestic violence or sexual abuse, gay and lesbian young people, those with mental health difficulties, young refugees and asylum seekers, and those Looked After by the state
- Despite providing a key lifeline to vulnerable young people, many groups struggle to survive and continue – this is largely due to shortage of staff, lack of suitable resources, and lack of funds
- Many of these groups have expanded their role in recent years – thus not only do they provide support to young people, but they work with young people to take on a campaigning and social action role. In this role the groups aim to challenge people's perceptions of young people in their circumstances, and/or to change aspects of practice and policy
- Many of the groups could demonstrate the many ways in which they had impacted on perceptions and policies – this had been achieved via such activities as lobbying and letter writing, presenting at conferences, peer support and peer education, contributing to websites, writing articles and newsletters, and putting on events
- Involvement in the groups was also found to have a significant impact on the young people involved. Young people were identified as developing in self-esteem and self-confidence, making new friends and social skills, and acquiring new practical skills (computer use, producing presentations, letter-writing, etc)

- Most of the groups experienced a number of difficulties in undertaking their support and campaigning work. This included: working with young people who are particularly vulnerable and often have multiple needs; lack of funding to help support key activities, and plan for the long-term; prejudice and discrimination towards certain groups of young people
- There was a large amount of learning that participants wanted to pass on to others, who are planning to set up support and campaigning groups. This included:
 - The key role of workers
 - The importance of securing funding
 - Listening to and trusting young people is essential
 - Practical aspects are important
 - Perseverance is essential.

Recommendations

On the basis of these findings, a number of recommendations are made. These recommendations relate to the establishment and running of young people's support and campaigning groups, and policy and practice initiatives to support these groups in the future. The main recommendations from this project are as follows:

- There is a demonstrable need for the groups highlighted in this study. They provide a variety of types of support to many vulnerable and disadvantaged groups of young people in society. It is therefore recommended that (a) *further support be provided* for these groups, both organisationally and financially, and (b) that *groups are assisted to publicise their activities* as widely as possible.
- Crucially, these support groups enable young people to take on a campaigning and social action role, to get their voices heard and to influence attitudes, policy and practice. They are therefore a key part of the youth voice and youth participation structure. Despite this, there is little research or information available about these groups. This project is considered to be a first step in this respect – the Good Practice Guide (see next section) provides a range of information and advice for others looking to support young people in this way. *Further such dissemination of good practice* is needed.
- Several workers in the study expressed concern about the numbers of young people that their project does *not* reach - ie that there are many young people who could benefit from their group that don't know about it, or find it difficult to participate in it. This was because of a lack of staff capacity, lack of time to make links, or insufficient funds to expand the

group, etc. A clear recommendation from this study, therefore, is *that information about support and campaigning groups are advertised as widely as possible*. In addition, however, further funding and resources are needed in order to help groups to meet this increased demand.

- A key issue that came up in the study was the attitudes of adults in authority to young people. In order for young people's voices to be heard, adults must be receptive, respectful, and develop some of their work practices (such as the use of complex language). In this study, it was clear that many adults had done this, and were addressing ways in which they could be receptive to young people's voices. However, many participants clearly felt that there was still a long way to go. A clear recommendation from the study is that *further training and support be provided to adult practitioners and policy-makers*, in order for them to deal appropriately with young people's support and campaigning groups.

Project output – a TSA Good Practice Guide

This report has outlined the main results from TSA's research into young people's 'support and campaigning' groups.

The main way in which this information has been used, has been the production of a 'TSA Guide'. These short, practical guides are part of a series at TSA, and are designed for use by organisations and practitioners who work with young people and families.

The 12 page Guide that has been produced from this project is now available from TSA. Please contact the authors if you would like further details about this Guide. Some free copies are available, for a limited period of time only. After that, a small charge will be made for copies. Please contact TSA in order to get a copy of the Guide.

Debi Roker and Louise Cox, TSA
March 29th 2005

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to express their gratitude to a number of people and organisations:

- All the organisations that provided us with information about their activities, filled in questionnaires, did telephone interviews, and allowed us to visit them to do case studies. Their openness and enthusiasm is very much appreciated.

- Morna Lane and Amanda Costello who provided administrative support to the project.

- The Carnegie UK Trust who provided a grant in order for TSA to undertake this project.

1.0 BACKGROUND AND AIMS OF THE PROJECT

“[before this] I hadn’t really come into contact with other disabled people, and it was a chance to meet young disabled people..... it’s kind of a great place to learn because you grow up conditioned on how society, you know, reacts to disabled people. [This group] shows you that it’s society’s fault and not yours, you know, your disability”

(17 year-old young man, member of a disabled young people’s youth council)

“.. young people today generally tend not to have much of a say in society, they generally tend to be dismissed. And when you’re a sub-set of a sub-set, you know you’re young and you’re gay or lesbian, or whatever, then you get pushed aside. So I thought ... if there were more of us we could actually achieve a chorus”

(18 year-old young woman, member of a gay, lesbian and bi-sexual support group)

Background to the project

The two quotes above are from a project that TSA undertook during 1999-2002. The views of these two young people were key to our designing and undertaking the study described here – we will explain what we mean by this later in this section. First, however, we give some more general background to this project.

The Trust for the Study of Adolescence (TSA) is an independent applied research and training organisation, and registered charity (see www.tsa.uk.com for further details). TSA has long been committed to highlighting the positive contribution that young people make to society, and to providing evidence-based research about how young people can participate in their communities (see for example Eden and Roker, 2002; Roker, Player and Coleman, 1998, 1999; Roker and Player, 1997, 2000). Our most recent project in this area was the ‘Youth and Social Action’ project, funded by the ESRC. This project was a detailed study of groups of young people who were trying to get things changed, either in relation to policies, practices, or people’s awareness. Groups in the study included youth branches of trades unions and Amnesty International, environmental groups, peer education groups, youth councils, and youth-police liaison groups.

One of the key findings from this research was the increasing number of what we called ‘support and campaigning’ groups. These groups were primarily for disadvantaged or marginalized groups, such as young disabled people, young carers, and gay and lesbian young people. These young people initially came

together for information and advice, and peer support from others in the same circumstances. Several of the groups were set up by the young people themselves, in an attempt to reduce isolation - the quotes above are from members of two of these groups. Each of these groups, however, decided to move on from providing 'only' a support role, to undertaking campaigning and social action. In this new role they were trying to challenge public perceptions and attitudes to people like themselves, or attempting to change policies, practice, or provision that affected members of their group.

During the course of disseminating the results of the project, it became clear to us that very little is known about support groups for disadvantaged and marginalized young people, which then take on a campaigning role. Despite having only limited information, practitioners such as youth workers, social workers, Connexions staff and the like were very interested in learning more about these groups. They wanted to know more in order to support vulnerable young people, and increase their engagement and involvement in decision-making processes.

Despite the small numbers of such groups in our research, there were three clear outcomes from the activities of these groups:

First, many of these groups had a direct impact on policies and/or practices, leading to changes in the provision of information, support and services. The gay and lesbian youth forum, for example, worked with the police on a project to address homophobic violence in their area; the disability group were asked by the local council to survey and recommend changes to the physical accessibility of local educational establishments.

Second, involvement in these groups provided some very vulnerable young people with an opportunity for personal and skill development, and opportunities for democratic and civil participation. Both young people and group facilitators commented on how involvement led to increased self-confidence and sense of self worth, the development of team-working and communication skills, and the acquisition of practical skills such as computing, writing, and information-gathering techniques.

Third and finally, there was evidence that these support and campaigning groups were influencing the views of other generations about the lives of young people in their circumstances. This was done through activities such as presenting at conferences, writing reports and publicity material, and through 'hands-on' activities such as marches and getting signatures for petitions.

Despite these valuable outcomes, however, it was clear to the authors that there was only minimal information about these groups, and the good practice that was taking place in many of them. The first author was therefore delighted to secure a grant from the Carnegie UK Trust, in order to conduct research with this key group of young people.

The following section describes the aims of the research.

Aims of the research

The project described in this summary report was designed to provide more information about young people's 'support and campaigning' groups. The aim was therefore to undertake a UK-wide review of young people's support and campaigning groups, and to develop from this a Guide to Good Practice. Whilst guidance is available for those supporting action groups in general (such as those produced by the British Youth Council, and the Carnegie Young People Initiative), this information is generally about encouraging a wide range of young people to participate in a particular activity.

This review focused instead on action groups where membership is limited to a specific, often marginalized and disadvantaged, group of young people. Our previous research (detailed above) had already shown that the needs of those involved in these groups are often very different from those participating in 'open access' groups. A Good Practice Guide was therefore considered essential for the development of work in this area.

Based on the information above, the aim of the project was to undertake a UK-wide review of young people's support and campaigning groups. The aim was to identify the range and nature of such groups, and highlight the issues that such groups are addressing. Crucially, the aim was to explore the perceptions of young people and facilitators involved in such groups, about issues such as purpose, achievements, funding, adult support and facilitation, decision-making processes, difficulties, successes, and their group's impact. The aim of the review was to focus in particular on learning and the identification of good practice. A key outcome was to write a Good Practice Guide, to assist other groups of marginalised young people, and the adults who work with them, to set up and run support and campaigning groups.

Further information about the project, and how the information was collected, is given in the next section.

2.0 INFORMATION COLLECTED IN THE RESEARCH

This section describes the information that was collected in the project. There were three main stages to the research, as follows:

Stage 1

A one side sheet of A4 was created, to use as the 'flyer' for the first stage of the project. This summarised the research that TSA was doing, and asked people to complete the form if they were involved in running a support group for young people in particular circumstances. These fliers were distributed in a number of ways, mainly through the mailing lists of organisations such as Barnardos, the Carnegie Young People Initiative, the National Youth Agency, Children in Wales and Children in Scotland. They were also sent directly to a range of projects and TSA contacts.

This form also asked respondents if they would provide further information about their group, either by completing a more detailed questionnaire, or completing the questionnaire over the telephone. In total 106 fliers were returned. Of these, 14 did not meet the criteria for being 'support and campaigning' groups, and these projects were not followed up further. This left 92 eligible projects.

Stage 2

The second stage of the research involved following up all of those who returned the one page fliers in Stage 1. A detailed questionnaire was prepared for this, which covered aspects such as:

- details of the project – including who it is for, aims, history, funding, adult facilitation and roles, etc
- activities and outcomes – for example activities undertaken, roles and responsibilities of members, successes and challenges
- learning points and lessons for the future.

This questionnaire was then sent to all those who indicated they wanted to provide information in this way. The questionnaire was also used as the basis for a telephone interview, for those who said they wished to provide their information in this way. In total, 48 completed questionnaires were returned, and 23 telephone interviews were undertaken. Thus 71 of the 92 eligible projects provided follow-up information.

Stage 3

The final stage of the research involved undertaking case studies with five organisations who returned their flyers. The aim of the case studies was to collect more detailed information about different types of projects, by visiting project workers and doing more detailed interviews on site. Young people were also involved in the case studies where possible. The case studies were selected to represent a diversity of geographical settings and type of group. The case studies were as follows:

- a support and campaigning group for young people with mental health difficulties
- a group for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered or unsure young people
- a peer-led youth empowerment group, to enable young people to become more involved in their communities
- a support group for young refugees and asylum seekers
- a support group for Looked After young people.

The case studies were drawn from a wide range of settings across the UK. The identity of all those involved (in the questionnaire/telephone interview stages, and in the case studies), has been kept anonymous. This was promised in order to allow project workers and young people to speak freely in the research.

Note that the fieldwork for the project (all three stages above) was undertaken between November 2003 and January 2005.

The following section summarises the main results from the study. Further information about the good Practice Guide produced from the project – which is now available – is given in Section 5.

3.0 MAIN FINDINGS

As stated in the previous section, 71 questionnaires or telephone interviews were completed. Five case studies were also undertaken, to investigate the issues in more depth. This section describes the results from this survey and the case studies. The main findings are presented below in four main sections:

- the range and types of projects
- the activities and structure of the groups
- the support and campaigning activities of groups
- learning from the projects.

3.1 The range and types of projects

This section describes the types of projects that were identified in the study. It covers the following:

- the range of projects involved
- organisational affiliations of the groups
- aims of the groups
- when the groups / projects started
- how the groups started
- how often the groups meet
- how many young people are involved
- the age range of the young people involved
- involvement of young people from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds
- whether membership of the group is open to all, or limited in some way.

The range of projects involved

The 71 groups which participated in the project represented a very wide range of projects. The groups were all working to support marginalised and disadvantaged young people, living in a range of circumstances and situations. The main groups involved included the following:

- young refugees/ asylum seekers
- young carers
- young people in Local Authority care ('Looked After')
- young people who have experienced domestic violence
- disabled young people
- young people facing severe deprivation

- young people from traveller families
- young people with learning disabilities
- young mothers
- young people who are being / have been bullied
- siblings of disabled young people
- young people who have been sexually abused
- young people from particular Black or minority ethnic groups.

The groups were located all across the UK, including England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. However, there were more replies received from projects in England and Scotland. The majority were located in towns and cities, with relatively few being based in rural areas.

Organisational affiliations of the groups

The majority of the groups were linked to other organisations in some way. Two-thirds of the 71 groups were linked to large organisations, ie they were either run by them or supported by them. These larger bodies were of two kinds: First, there were projects linked to statutory organisations, most commonly Local Authority Social Services departments. Second, groups were run by or embedded in large national charities – most commonly these were Barnardos, the Children’s Society, and the NSPCC.

The remaining third of the groups in the study were largely independent, either run by small voluntary organisations, youth groups, or individuals. These latter groups were generally the most unstable, in terms of their likelihood of continuing long-term (this issue is returned to later).

Aims of the groups

The aim of the study was to collect information about support groups, that are run for young people who are marginalised, vulnerable, or disadvantaged in some way. Thus all of the groups aimed to provide support for a specific group of young people, across the range described above – for example young people Looked After, gay and lesbian young people, young carers, disabled young people, and those who have experienced domestic violence. In addition, many of the groups had taken on a campaigning role, working with the young people to get policies, perceptions and practices changed. This ‘social action’ role is explored later in the report.

In the questionnaires and telephone interviews, we asked the participants to say more about the aims of their groups, in terms of providing support to young people. The aims were broad-ranging, and included the following:

- providing peer support

- reducing isolation
- having fun and providing 'time out'
- providing advice and guidance from workers
- raising awareness of young people's circumstances
- giving young people a say, giving them 'a voice'
- developing young people's skills
- providing guidance on rights and entitlements.

It should be stressed that the majority of the groups considered themselves to provide many of these aspects – few focussed on one alone. For example, a number of projects described how they provided support to young people by promoting friendship and peer support, having fun, and providing guidance or counselling. There is further information about these activities later in the report.

When the groups / project started

Very few of the organisations had been in existence for a long time. Less than a quarter of the projects were long-standing, which was defined as five years or more. The majority of the projects (54 of the 71) were quite new, and most had been set up in the last 2-3 years. Some further information is given below about how the groups came into existence.

How the groups started

The majority of the groups came into existence in one of three main ways, as follows:

First, groups emerged because of *workers' awareness of the needs of a particular group of young people*. In these cases the workers felt that more should be done to provide support to a vulnerable group of young people, and that this could most usefully be done by setting up a group that meets on a regular basis.

Second, groups emerged primarily because of *the actions of young people themselves*. Thus a group of young people raised issues about their needs, or proposed that some sort of group or activity take place for them. These young people then approached a worker or the organisation they were part of, and asked for help to set a group up.

Third, groups emerged as a result of *a youth consultation exercise, or the activities of a youth council*. Where this happened, the needs of a particular group of young people (such as gay and lesbian young people, or disabled young people), had emerged in exploring the needs of young people locally. The Council or organisation concerned then worked to set up a support group as a result.

How often the groups meet

The majority of the groups met on a weekly basis, usually for about two hours. This accounted for three-quarters of the groups in the study. A small number of the groups met monthly or on an occasional basis. A few mainly met for residential events only, which were held several times a year. However, even in these latter groups, there was a core group of young people who were involved with workers more regularly, in order to organise the events. As stated above, however, the majority of the groups met on a weekly basis.

How many young people are involved

There were very wide-ranging responses to this question. The smallest group had only two members at the time the study was conducted – another had 150 young people ‘on the list’. Most of the projects, however, said that 10-30 young people were involved in their group. Many could not be very specific about this question, as their group did not have ‘members’ as such – many had an ‘open door’ policy and had both ‘regulars’, and those who came to one meeting only. The majority of the groups, however, had a core of 8-12 ‘regular’ members who came to most meetings. This group were also involved in most of the activities, and undertaking most of the campaigning work (see later).

The age range of the young people involved

The age range of the young people in the groups was very varied. The majority of the groups had a nominal age range (such as 12-16 or 14-20), and young people had to be between these ages to join. However, whilst some kept rigidly to these age groups, others were more flexible and allowed those a few years younger and a few years older to join the group.

Involvement of young people from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds

There was a varied response to the issue of how many Black and minority ethnic (BME) young people who were involved in the groups. One of three responses was most common:

First, some projects were specifically aimed at (and limited to) those from certain ethnic groups. The aims of these projects were to provide support to particular groups (for example African young people, or refugees from particular areas) and to combat racism and stereotypes.

Second, some projects said they did not include any (or very few) young people from BME groups. This was largely because, workers suggested, the local area was predominantly white, with few BME families.

Third, some of the groups identified BME young people as those they have difficulty attracting to their project – this was for a range of cultural and practical reasons. This latter point is explored later in the report.

Whether membership of the group open to all, or is limited in some way

The nature of most of the groups in this study meant that membership was usually limited in some way, and was not open to all young people. Thus most of the groups were only open to those in certain circumstances or with certain characteristics, such as young carers, gay and lesbian young people, or those from particular minority ethnic groups.

However, a few of the groups were open to anyone who wished to join. This was for two reasons – first the broad definitions used by some groups (for example any young person ‘in need’, or living in a very deprived community), and second because any young person could become a volunteer in the group. Thus, for example, any young person could join several of the groups and become ‘befrienders’ or peer counsellors of young refugees, or young people with learning disabilities.

3.2 The activities and structure of the groups

This section details the results for the activities the groups were involved in, and the structures and staffing of the groups. It includes the following:

- the main support needs of the young people in the group
- the sorts of activities the groups were involved in
- the main achievements and successes of the groups
- problems and difficulties involved in running the groups
- the adult facilitator and workers involved in the groups
- funding for the project.

The main support needs of the young people in the group

As might be expected, there was a very broad range of needs amongst the young people in the 71 support groups involved in the project. These included the following:

- poor English / English as a second language

- discrimination, intimidation, and racist experiences
- not being listened to / having little say over their futures
- experiencing deprivation and poverty
- living in unsupportive environments
- having poor experiences of education and/or health services
- experiencing a lack of or inappropriate transport
- isolation and loneliness
- lack of adequate facilities, for example for disabled access to services
- violence.

The sorts of activities the groups were involved in

In the survey, the respondents were asked about the kinds of activities that their group was involved in. As might be expected, these were very broad. For the purposes of this research, the *general* activities the groups were involved in are listed below. A later section of this report addresses the *campaigning and social action* activities of the group. The general activities were therefore as follows:

- producing newsletters and leaflets
- training young people as interviewers for recruitment of staff
- going on marches and demonstrations
- one-to-one counselling
- re-writing documents in appropriate languages or formats
- groupwork activities
- speaking at workshops and conferences
- designing and/or contributing to a website
- holding debates and discussions
- running training sessions, for eg for social workers and teachers
- writing letters to councillors and MPs
- going on outings and social events
- producing publications
- providing peer support activities.

As this list shows, the groups were involved in a very wide range of activities. It should be stressed that these are the general activities of the groups. The campaigning and social action activities are described later in the report.

The main achievements and successes of the groups

The groups described their successes and achievements in a wide range of ways. There were two main types of responses – the first to do with the achievements of the group in organisational terms, and the second to do with the impact of the group on group members and those outside. These are explored separately below:

In terms of the *organisational achievements* of the groups, this included such things as the following:

- the group secured funding (“... *a minor miracle*” as one person described it)
- the group has survived (“...*we nearly folded more than once this year*”)
- the group had a substantial increase in members and regular attenders
- the group secured one or more volunteers to work with them.

The second type of success and achievements that groups mentioned was in relation to *the impact of the group, on individuals, practitioners, and policy-makers*. This included such things as:

- the group has provided support and advice for a vulnerable group (“...*without this group a lot of young people would be in real trouble*”)
- the group has helped vulnerable or marginalised people to develop friendships and systems of peer support
- young people from the group have got on to the boards and management committees of local community groups
- the young people have been heard “... *by those in power and authority*”
- the group has helped to train and support practitioners, such as teachers, social workers, mental health professionals.

Further information about how the respondents viewed their successes, in terms of campaigning and social action, is detailed in the next section.

Problems or difficulties encountered in running the group

In the study, we asked the groups about any problems or difficulties that they had in running their support group. A wide range of responses were received. The difficulties generally fell into three areas, as follows:

First, there were issues to do with the funding and management of the group.

This included, for example:

- workers spending considerable time writing grant applications, and being unsuccessful
- a high level of demand (ie young people wanting to join the group) and having insufficient capacity or workers to meet this need
- encouraging young people to think about and articulate their needs, and then not having the funding or capacity to meet those needs
- the costs and practicalities of getting appropriate transport, particularly in rural areas
- key workers going on long-term sick, or leaving the organisation – many of the projects reported a rapid turn-over in workers and volunteers
- not having enough Black or BME role models and workers.

Second, the nature of the young people and their complex needs. This included, for example:

- young people having no or poor literacy skills
- young people who fear speaking out, because they are afraid of being labelled or stigmatized
- some young people attending groups drunk or on illegal drugs, or being very volatile psychologically
- young people who have complex, multiple needs.

Third, the difficulty of working with some other adults, including those in authority. These difficulties included, for example:

- policy-makers and others not accepting that young people have rights (“... *convincing some adults that young people really do have rights is a big issue*”)
- practitioners and policy-makers making promises to the group, but then not following through
- some practitioners and policy-makers working to very short time-scales (“... *they want a consultation with young people done in a couple of days*”).

The adult facilitators and workers involved in the groups

The majority (three-quarters) of the workers involved in the groups were paid workers. They were generally employed as social workers, youth workers, and community development workers. The remaining facilitators were involved in the groups on a voluntary basis. As was mentioned earlier, those support groups that were part of large organisations, such as social services or Local Authorities, were generally able to provide a greater level of staffing for groups.

Funding for the group/project

Supporting the group financially was an issue for many of the support groups in the project. Approximately one-fifth of the groups had no dedicated funding – they were either run with an occasional one-off grant, or by volunteers/donations.

The majority of the organisations, however, did receive some funding for their support groups. These generally came from one of three sources: First, the groups got funding from statutory sources, mainly Social Services and the youth service; some groups also had funding from Connexions and CAMHS. Second, groups got funding from the larger bodies (generally charities) that they were part of, such as Barnardos or the NSPCC. Finally, the groups were funded by a very wide range of charities and grant-making bodies, including the Diana memorial fund, the Big Lottery fund, and Children in Need.

In discussing the finances of the groups, it is important to state that only a few of the support groups considered that they had stable funding. The vast majority of the projects considered that they did *not* have stable funding. Indeed, many of the groups only had funding for up to the next six months. Lack of funding repeatedly came up in respondents' answers to many questions in the survey.

3.3 The 'support and campaigning' activities of the groups

This section details the results for the campaigning and social action activities of the groups. It includes an analysis of the following:

- campaigning activities that the groups have been involved in
- the impact of campaigning work on policies, practices and perceptions
- the impact of the group on young people
- young people not reached by the groups
- the groups' plans for the next 6-12 months.

Campaigning activities the group has been involved in

A previous section listed the wide-ranging *support* activities that the groups were involved in. There was also a wide range of *campaigning* activities that the groups were involved in, in order to try and change policies, practices, and procedures in relation to young people in their circumstances. The main activities that were undertaken included the following:

- producing newsletters and leaflets
- training young people as interviewers for recruitment of staff
- going on marches and demonstrations
- re-writing documents in appropriate languages or formats
- speaking at workshops and conferences
- designing and/or contributing to websites
- teaching and training sessions, such as for social workers and teachers
- writing letters to councillors and MPs.

The successes and difficulties encountered in this work is detailed below.

The impact of campaigning work on policies, practices, and perceptions

In general, most respondents considered that their campaigning activities (listed above) had had some successes. Respondents considered that some of their activities had had an impact on how people viewed the young people concerned,

or on policies and/or practices that impacted on them. This impact was considered to have happened in three main ways:

First, it was considered that the groups had *raised awareness* about the needs of different groups of vulnerable and disadvantaged young people. Thus the campaigning activities listed above had highlighted the needs of some groups of young people, such as young refugees, disabled young people, and those who have experienced domestic violence. This was considered to be a very valuable outcome of the groups' activities.

Second, it was considered that the groups had had an impact because *young people were directly delivering the messages*. Thus, as one worker said, adults are hearing about young people's experiences "...*directly from the horse's mouth*". Hearing directly from young people, via training activities, presentations and the like, was considered to have a greater impact than getting these messages via other people.

Third, it was considered by respondents that the groups had impacted on policy and practice by *improving the skills of workers, who work with vulnerable young people*. This was done, for example, by running training courses and events for practitioners, and contributing to workshops and conferences. This enabled practitioner skills to be developed and improved, making practitioners more responsive to the needs of vulnerable young people.

The impact of the group's activities on the *young people* involved in the group

Most respondents gave a long list of ways in which they felt the groups' activities impacted on the young people involved. There were generally three kinds of impacts described, as follows:

First, the young people were considered to have developed in terms of their *personal confidence and interpersonal development*. Thus many workers described how the young people involved in their groups grew in confidence – for example: "...*huge changes in self-confidence*" and "...*they've really developed, more self-esteem, more confidence*". This issue came out more than any other. In addition, respondents described many ways in which the young people had developed in interpersonal terms. This included such things as: being more able to mix with a wide range of people, greater social confidence, and ability to work in teams.

Second, involvement in the groups was considered to have had an impact on young people's *practical and employment-related skills*. This was described in terms of developing skills in relation to information technology, letter-writing, making presentations, and facilitating groups. Indeed, some young people were

considered to have got into College, or found employment, because of what they had learnt or experienced in the group.

Third, involvement in the groups was clearly considered to help *support young people*. One worker described, for however, how a support group gave vulnerable young people “... *a space to breathe...*”. As described above, it enabled them to make friends and socialise with others, have ‘time out’ from difficult lives or experiences, and gain support from others.

Whether there are young people that the groups would like to reach, but have difficulty reaching

In answering this question, many of the respondents pointed out that the groups that they work with are, in themselves, difficult to reach. Thus young carers, young refugees, and young people experiencing domestic violence are always difficult to reach. In addition, however, most thought that there were particular young people that they did have difficulty in reaching. This included, for example, young carers who were not known to statutory services, and who therefore could not be encouraged to join a support group. Another example of those that were difficult to reach, included those young people who felt too anxious or vulnerable to join a group – for example gay and lesbian young people who feel they cannot go to a ‘public’ setting, in case they are recognised.

The groups’ plans for the next 6-12 months

All of the 71 groups had a very wide range of responses to this question. The responses generally fell into three groups. These were as follows:

First, some groups were looking to *change and develop the ways that they work*. This included advertising for and recruiting more members, developing a young people’s panel, and running more residential events. Several of the groups also wanted to develop quality standards. Securing long-term, secure funding was also mentioned by many groups.

Second, some groups were looking to change and develop the way in which they work, in order to have *greater influence on practitioners and policy-makers*. This included, for example, working in collaboration with other like-minded organisations, and replicating effective strategies that others have used.

Third, a few of the groups were keen to *demonstrate the value and effectiveness of what they are doing*. This included, for example, working with evaluators to demonstrate the effectiveness of their work.

3.4 Learning from projects

There were a wide range of responses to the question of the learning that has come out of projects. The responses can be categorised into five types, as follows:

The importance of workers

A theme that repeatedly emerged from respondent's comments was the importance of workers to young people's support groups. This related both to their role in support and campaigning groups, and the importance of their commitment to the groups. In terms of their role, workers suggested that it was important to have facilitators with a range of backgrounds and expertise – this was particularly important given the diversity amongst the young people involved. For example:

“... we needed specialist staff, specialists in different areas. The young people's needs are very different in this group”

Again, however, the numbers of adult facilitators available was linked to funding and support for groups (see below).

In addition, the respondents mentioned the importance of the personal commitment of the workers involved. For example:

“Workers have to give it 100% - these vulnerable young people need stability and continuity”

“... workers need to be professional, responsible, and committed to give up their time”.

The comments about the skills and commitment of workers was also linked to the importance of perseverance – this issue is addressed below.

The importance of funding

A large number of the groups struggled to get funding for their group, and several of the groups felt that they went from one financial crisis to the next. For example:

“.. we've been on the brink of closing several times...”

All of the groups talked about the importance of getting some financial security for the group, whether it was to support workers' salaries, or to cover the costs of meeting, transport, residentials, materials, etc. One of the key learning points that

workers wanted to pass on was the value of getting grants and support for these things. As these workers described it:

“GET SOME MONEY - it’s essential”

“Start early and keep applying”

“We have struggled with funding, and have actually done quite well, but you have to keep doing it, don’t we all these days?”

In concluding this section, it should be noted that some of the organisations in the survey had been quite successful in getting grants to support their group. Some of the places where they had got these funds from are listed in the Good Practice Guide which has been written from this project.

Listening to and trusting young people

A key theme that came through from the respondents in this survey, was the importance of listening to, and trusting, young people. As these respondents explained it:

“.. these kids [in this group] are never listened to, they’re ignored most of the time. I’d want to say to people just listen, take time to listen to young people”

This linked in to the importance of consulting and working with young people in setting up groups in the first place, and in running them:

“Always consult with young people before developing a group... this will ensure the content is truly child centred/focussed”

An additional point that several respondents wanted to make under this heading, was focussing on the positives and the skills that young people have. For example:

“Trust them – they will help each other probably more than you can”

“.. young people are the best peer supporters”.

Practical aspects

A number of learning points were raised by respondents, which can best be grouped under ‘practical aspects’. These included the following:

- The importance of fun - for example:

“Make sure meetings are fun”

“... have serious fun, however bad some of the issues are”

- Have clear boundaries and stick to them – for example in relation to the start and finish times of the group, the groundrules that people have to stick to
- Work with other adults to address their use of policy language and complex language – for example

“... some adults, honestly, they drone on like they’re at a board meeting – it’s a real turn off for the young people in the group”

- Always provide transport, even for relatively short distances
- Work with young people to address boundary issues, and how to deal with difficult issues. For example:

“...one day I might be peer educating about sexual health... and I might see the same people out of the club, and they expect me to be their best friend”.

The importance of perseverance

A final issue that emerged very clearly in the review, and that many respondents raised as a learning point, was the importance of perseverance. Many respondents described times when the group was ‘at a low ebb’, when events went badly, a key worker left, or a grant application was turned down. It was stressed that these sort of things happen all the time, to all groups, and the important message was “don’t give up, ever” (as one person described it).

“... if it goes wrong, try something else”

“[you] cannot expect to meet for 2 or 3 sessions and gel immediately”

“Be spontaneous and flexible, and able to adapt to strange or awkward situations”.

The following section describes the main recommendations that are made as a result of this project.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The previous section demonstrated that a large number of groups are now in existence, to help support some of the UK's most vulnerable young people. However, it has also shown that many of these groups have developed from mainly supporting young people, to working with them on campaigning and social action activities. This new role is enabling these young people to help change policies, practices, and attitudes towards young people in particular circumstances. This section outlines some of the general conclusions that arise from this research, and the recommendations that can be made as a result.

First, a number of **general conclusions** can be made, from this research, about young people's support and campaigning groups. These are as follows:

- There is a growing number of support groups for vulnerable, disadvantaged and marginalised young people. This relatively small scale survey identified over 100 such projects
- These groups exist in all four countries of the UK, although they are concentrated in large towns and cities
- Many of these groups are supported by large organisations, both statutory bodies (such as Social Services) and large charities (such as Barnardos and the NSPCC)
- These support groups provide a valuable lifeline for many of Britain's most vulnerable young people – for example those who have experienced domestic violence or sexual abuse, gay and lesbian young people, those with mental health difficulties, young refugees and asylum seekers, and those Looked After by the state
- Despite providing a key lifeline to vulnerable young people, many groups struggle to survive and continue – this is largely due to shortage of staff, lack of suitable resources, and lack of funds
- Many of these groups have expanded their role in recent years – thus not only do they provide support to young people, but they work with young people to take on a campaigning and social action role. In this role the groups aim to challenge people's perceptions of young people in their circumstances, and/or to change aspects of practice and policy
- Many of the groups could demonstrate the many ways in which they had impacted on perceptions and policies – this had been achieved via such

activities as lobbying and letter writing, presenting at conferences, peer support and peer education, contributing to websites, writing articles and newsletters, and putting on events

- Involvement in the groups was also found to have a significant impact on the young people involved. Young people were identified as developing in self-esteem and self-confidence, making new friends and social skills, and acquiring new practical skills (computer use, producing presentations, letter-writing, etc)
- Most of the groups experienced a number of difficulties in undertaking their support and campaigning work. This included: working with young people who are particularly vulnerable and often have multiple needs; lack of funding to help support key activities, and plan for the long-term; prejudice and discrimination towards certain groups of young people
- There was a large amount of learning that participants wanted to pass on to others, who are planning to set up support and campaigning groups. This included:
 - The key role of workers
 - The importance of securing funding
 - Listening to and trusting young people is essential
 - Practical aspects are important
 - Perseverance is essential.

Second, on the basis of these findings, a number of **recommendations** can be made. These recommendations relate to the establishment and running of young people's support and campaigning groups, and policy and practice initiatives to support these groups in the future. The main recommendations from this project are as follows:

- There is a demonstrable need for the groups highlighted in this study. They provide a variety of types of support to many vulnerable and disadvantaged groups of young people in society. It is therefore recommended that (a) *further support be provided* for these groups, both organisationally and financially, and (b) that *groups are assisted to publicise their activities* as widely as possible.
- Crucially, these support groups enable young people to take on a campaigning and social action role, to get their voices heard and to influence attitudes, policy and practice. They are therefore a key part of the youth voice and youth participation structure. Despite this, there is little research or information available about these groups. This project is considered to be a first step in this respect – the Good Practice Guide (see next section) provides a range of information and advice for others looking

to support young people in this way. *Further such dissemination of good practice* is needed.

- Several workers in the study expressed concern about the numbers of young people that their project does *not* reach - ie that there are many young people who could benefit from their group that don't know about it, or find it difficult to participate in it. This was because of a lack of staff capacity, lack of time to make links, or insufficient funds to expand the group, etc. A clear recommendation from this study, therefore, is *that information about support and campaigning groups are advertised as widely as possible*. In addition, however, further funding and resources are needed in order to help groups to meet this increased demand.
- A key issue that came up in the study was the attitudes of adults in authority to young people. In order for young people's voices to be heard, adults must be receptive, respectful, and develop some of their work practices (such as the use of complex language). In this study, it was clear that many adults had done this, and were addressing ways in which they could be receptive to young people's voices. However, many participants clearly felt that there was still a long way to go. A clear recommendation from the study is that *further training and support be provided to adult practitioners and policy-makers*, in order for them to deal appropriately with young people's support and campaigning groups.

The final section of this report gives more information about the Good Practice Guide that is now available.

5.0 THE GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE – FURTHER DETAILS

This report has outlined the main results from TSA's research into young people's 'support and campaigning' groups.

The main way in which this information has been used, has been the production of a 'TSA Guide'. These short, practical guides are part of a series at TSA, and are designed for use by organisations and practitioners who work with young people and families.

The 12 page Guide that has been produced from this project is now available from TSA. Please contact the authors if you would like further details about this Guide. Some free copies are available, for a limited period of time only. After that, a small charge will be made for copies.

Please contact TSA in order to get a copy of the Guide:

Address Debi Roker TSA, 23 New Road, Brighton, BN1 1WZ.

Website www.tsa.uk.com

Debi Roker email droker@tsa.uk.com

March 2005

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