



Dear Reader

I am searching for the right perspective for this editorial. The news of devastation in Asia and of social unrest and change in Africa have moved the consequences of the massive cuts in public spending in this country off the front pages. In the face of such monumental reporting the issues this bulletin aims to address seem small, insignificant almost.

Yet, in the 33 years since ARVACs foundation there has always been bigger, seemingly more important, more devastating and more heart rending news. ARVAC is not a front page organisation. The perspective I need for this editorial derives from ARVAC's long standing commitment to listening and engaging directly with academics and practitioners without razzmatazz and without following the lure of political convenience but also without being intimidated by the seemingly larger and more important.

In this issue Kate

Jones quotes Jan, a family carer community researcher. Irrespective of all the headlines ARVAC must continue to help make Jan's voice and those like her heard.

In this issue Julie Worrall is impatient with the slow pace of change in universities. Irrespective of the headlines ARVAC must continue its dialogue with universities searching, for example, for a theory of user control and community integration in voluntary action research.

Despite its resistance against following political trends ARVAC must also remain open to people discussing them and both Ben Wright who is writing about his views on the Big Society and Ellie Brodie who comments on Jesse Norman's ideas about the Big Society are providing this issue with just such debate. Finally ARVAC must not stop working hard to make accessible relevant information and for this

Fleur Bragaglia is providing this bulletin with a book review. All of this as well as the upcoming events and ARVACs new interactive website are of course a small effort, not worthy of the front pages. However, it is and remains important if we don't want to get lost in the constantly changing flow of news and trends.

Steadfastness appears to be an old fashioned term and concept. Yet, as a relative newcomer to ARVAC I have always admired the organisation for sticking to its purpose in particular in the face of trouble and difficulty. By sticking to our purpose we are not diminishing the trouble and difficulties of others. We know what we are here for and we will continue to do so, with your help and collaboration.

Jurgen Grotz
(editor)

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Kate Jones

Community research in action – making the voices of family carers count in Suffolk

Turning Point, a national health and social care organisation that provides services for people with complex needs, has seen, first hand, how our current structure of service provision does not successfully meet a person's whole needs.

This led Turning Point to develop a new model for designing services - Connected Care. The aim of Connected Care is to help to bring the voice of the community to the design and delivery of health, housing, education and social service delivery.

At the heart of Connected Care projects are community researchers. The researchers speak with people in their community to find out about their aspirations, problems and perceptions of local services. They then bridge the gap by bringing the voice of the community to the commissioners' table, and work with them to redesign the services. Such a bridge ensures that new services better meet need, involve the community in provision and ensure they respond to local issues.

Turning Point's Connected Care team has recently trialed the Connected Care methodology with family carers in Suffolk. Funded by the Department of Health and led by Suffolk County Council, the Connected Care team was commissioned to work with family carers in a small market town in Suffolk.

The team recruited five local carers and trained and supported them to become

community researchers. Once trained the researchers went out into their community and spoke to other carers about the short breaks they would like to receive. In total the community researchers spoke to over ninety carers, many of whom had none, or very little, support or access to breaks.

The research turned some of our assumptions around; in particular that carers caring for their partners want time away from their cared for. We found that the majority of carers wanted a day out with their cared for – perhaps a shopping trip to a local place of interest or a trip to the seaside. Others wanted a meal out with their loved ones or a relaxation session at the local spa. Very few wanted traditional respite care for their cared for but they did want access to short breaks that were not complicated or expensive. In contrast family carers who were caring for an elderly family member often wanted some time away from the person they care for.

The community researchers gained much from their experience of working on the project. They learnt new skills and made new friends – a particular bonus for those family carers who were isolated by their caring role. They have also learnt much more about their community. Their confidence developed hugely throughout the project as the case studies show below:

Jan, family carer community researcher.

I am in my early 60's but I am not too dodderly! I cared for my husband who died 18 months ago. He suffered from Parkinson's, Lewy Body dementia, Emphysema and had a de-fib fitted due to Sudden Death Syndrome. The loss of my husband has been so very hard. We were inseparable so I had to find something to make me want to carry on alone. This project has done just that. It's given me the opportunity to channel grief into helping carers and their loved one along with the camaraderie of my fellow researchers.

Doing the research has been satisfying but at time also heartbreaking. I felt that I have made many carers feel a bit better by the chats we had. It has been hard leaving some of the carers and their cared for but it was great to be a friendly face that they could turn too. I have learnt a lot through this project – I know that there are people far worse than me out there, but also that there is help available once you are in the loop. I have also learnt that I can contribute.

I have also enjoyed working as a team. It has been great fun. The project has given me the opportunity to feel wanted and useful once again.

Lisa, family carer community researcher

I am in my late 30;s and care for my daughter Bethany who is 6 years old. Bethany has severe developmental delay, severe microcephally and is partially sighted. I got a flyer from Crossroads about the project and

thought the job sounded interested and felt that this was something I could do with the little free time I have. I also thought that the project sounded like a good way to meet and hopefully help carers.

I have found doing the research thoroughly interesting and hope it will help carers in the future. I have learnt that even a little money can help and that carers often don't want or need lots of money - it is often just company and people's understanding they need. I have thoroughly enjoyed being part of this team. I hope that the research we have done will enable carers to get more help and also get the sort of help that they require.

Many of the family carers involved in the research also really enjoyed being interviewed and appreciated the opportunity to speak to other carers about the issues they face. Simply being able to speak to another person about the problems they have has been cathartic for a number of family carers.

As a result of the research a carers support group is being established in the town and short breaks based on the findings of the research will be provided to family carers living in the area. This research will also help to influence how short breaks for family carers are provided across Suffolk.

Kate Jones is a Senior Research Advisor at Turning Point

Julie Worrall

Who is in control of the community research agenda? Not the academy...

I often find myself declaring to audiences inside and outside academia that knowledge is not the sole domain of universities; and by 'knowledge', I mean the research agenda as well as knowledge itself. To the more enlightened, I could well be stating the obvious but after six years of working in higher education I believe this still needs to be stated, and stated --often.

Research is conducted in, and between, universities, research institutes, industry, national and local government and community organisations. Let me cite one small example of collaborative community research. In 1997, as a local government housing policy officer in a former life, I was privileged to be involved in devising Norwich's first strategy to tackle street homelessness. National government required the local authority to take the lead but the process was a shared endeavour also involving local charities and volunteers. Despite the challenges that such collaboration brings, looking back, I can see how the knowledge and expertise of all those involved provided much, if not all, the evidence and the argument for government investment in tackling street homelessness in the city. This included our own primary research; a 'rough sleepers' head count which provided a snapshot of street homelessness in Norwich. I clearly recall standing on a table in the YMCA canteen at 2am, briefing the volunteers before they went out into the night to find and 'count' rough sleepers. Collecting, writing up and analysing the data was a collaborative process and I'm pleased to say that it not only led to a major government investment in community provision for rough sleepers in Norwich but we were invited to the Cabinet Office as an example of good practice, to share our strategy and talk about our collaboration.

Universities also participate in collaborative research, and support community-based research, but they do not control the community research agenda – and nor should they. Perceived by those on the outside as elite institutions with their own research grand narrative, they may appear to be immune to those forces that batter the rest of us but in fact they too have their own to deal with. In considering the research agenda specifically, there are major influences at work. For example, the utilisation

of research by government in policy-making ('evidence based policy making' and the selective appropriation of research findings - not always as beneficial as it may sound) and the commodification of knowledge (that is, the 'sale' of knowledge in an economy where sponsor validation replaces the academic validation of research). Another example is the decline of the academy's cognitive authority in the context of what has been described as the 'scientification' of society - the rise of a 'Mode 2' society where the production and control of knowledge (and therefore, the research agenda) becomes more pluralised (not a bad thing, in my view).

Craig Calhoun, who has written about 'The University and the Public Good', calls for a 'stronger analysis' of how universities can be more public. I believe that a more publicly responsive academy does have a role to play, alongside others, in the management and control of the community research agenda. As yet, it is not fully integrated as a team player. Unfortunately, communities and community organisations are still viewed in parts of the academy as research fodder and not as potential collaborators or co-producers of research and knowledge. As the CUE East Project Director, tasked with helping universities to become more 'public', and as a trustee and supporter of ARVAC, I aim to help turn this around. Certainly, we are starting to see a difference at the University of East Anglia (UEA), where CUE East is based, as we endeavour to bring about change, particularly at an institutional level. We have been able to support a wide range of engagement between the University and community stakeholders, including facilitating and publicising 'user involvement' debates and workshops which touch upon the management and control of the research agenda. As ever, the pace of change from within the academy is slow, and I am impatient.

**Julie Worrall, Project Director,
CUE East, University of East Anglia**

Fiona Poland

Making Community Research Accessible: For Public Benefit ARVAC's Workplan for 2011

In planning and implementing the work of ARVAC over the year, the Trustees have kept to the Charity Commission's guidance in making it clear how the work of ARVAC has an identifiable public benefit.

ARVAC exists to advance the education of the public by promoting the role and function of individual volunteers and voluntary organisations. Furthermore we believe that healthy, diverse and inclusive communities make a fundamental contribution to people's quality of life and living conditions and that research has a major role to play for local organisations through, among other things informing and improving the way community organisations are led and managed and producing evidence of need and impact that community groups can in turn influence policy makers with. ARVAC therefore acts a resource for people interested in research, promotes effective and appropriate research, facilitates networking, and ensures community research and community research issues are made available to policy makers.

During the year we again organized events including workshops on community research partnership and capacity building in community research. With funding from the Community Development Foundation we developed two new projects: one to share trustees' experiences of managing governance issues in practice and one to redesign the ARVAC webpages to broaden the potential for ARVAC to support community access to dialogue, interaction and resources to promote community research. We continue to

disseminate information widely through our bulletin to share news, reports and trends in community research. With CUE-East we also co-sponsored a seminar in which leading US and UK academics and community researchers debated approaches to user involvement in community research. With partner organisation VAI, we continued to support the development of a collaborative training programme for clusters of voluntary groups to gain skills in taking research through from community identification of issues to influencing decision-makers and policy-makers. In increasingly pressured climate for community action and research, ARVAC recognises the need to promote community research through brokering active cross-sector collaborations and to develop freely and widely-accessible resources to support community research. Our volunteer trustees continue to assist with answering questions of community research for anybody who accesses the organisation through the web site which will provide a central means for us to realize our aims as openly as possible on-line. The funding strategy we have developed has been to identify our strategic priorities that we need to develop and then to plan fundraising which can be achieved within our current resources to progress activities accordingly. This has allowed us to address our key aims for 2009-10 and to seek to build new directions informed by the interaction which this year's achievements are now opening up for ARVAC.

Enabling Interactive Community Research: ARVAC's Workplan for 2011

Thanks to the funding support from CDF, ARVAC has been able to meet two key priorities for developing resources in 2010 and can now move much of its core activities and resources to its new webpages, still in development,. This enables us to increase our range of activity and avenues for members, potential members and partners to connect more freely with ARVAC. Being inventive and accessible will gain importance as current cuts will hit community-partner organisations.

Developing the Website as a Networking and Interactive Base

The ARVAC website development was prioritised as vital for us to address our aim "to encourage and facilitate networking and collaboration between people working in this field". Thanks to the CDF funding and Jurgen Grotz' vision and commitment we are now upgrading our webpages. We will to identify other opportunities to develop and make community research resources available on-line, particularly our research database. We will continue to provide sign-posting for organisations looking for community researchers, providing help through answering queries via the web-site and putting individuals and organisations in touch with researchers known to the ARVAC members. This will be now be enabled though the interactive resources being made available through the Plaza, blogs and new forms of communication enabled through the redeveloped ARVAC website. We now aim to develop a web-based forum to engage groups working in community research.

Governance Workpages and Stories

Thanks to CDF funding and Kevin Nunan's enterprise and hard work, we have been able to further build on the successful involvement of the sector in inter-

actively developing Governance Workpages,.to realise a Governance Stories project. This has piloted a means to add valuable audio-visual research-based resource sharing Governance Stories to widen the accessibility and resonance of the Governance Pages. We aim to continued to innovate in this area through actively seeking ways to engage with and amplify community voices in 2011.

Bulletin

We again owe grateful thanks to Jurgen for producing our flagship output, providing three excellent issues of the Bulletin during 2009. We can continue to offer topical discussion articles reviewing, addressing and responding to developments in the sector. If we can set up a monitoring system to enhance our database this should give us additional access to news of publications and work in progress to complement the excellent materials already offered in the Bulletin. We aim to again produce 3 issues in 2011 and if feasible, to add some database-related information.

Building on Our Events Programme

The current partnership with VAI and CUE-East has allowed us to sustain the annual ARVAC conference as a free, low cost half-day event to shares examples of ways, means and outcomes of community research capacity building to actively promotes successful community action and influencing.

This has also allowed us to initiate and take forward an annual series of national research debates in 2010, on models of user involvement in community research. Related events will be actively promoted, to be organised with minimal involvement of the committee and with partnership or event-specific resources.

Collaborative Community Research Capacity Building

We continue to gain and share valuable lessons from the ARVAC/ VAI collaborative community research programme which has been able to develop through specific funding from the Trust for London (formerly City Parochial). This has enabled the successful development of a pilot programme of research development with community groups and training for research trainers which progresses community research from issues, to robust designs to influencing policymakers. This is planned to continue into 2011, and to explore a further level of development from research clusters through to sub-regional collaboration. We aim to work with VAI to ensure collaborative development and dissemination of research training materials.

Developing key working partnerships

We need to raise our profile to realise our aims. We continue to value our relationship with Roehampton University which provides our base and with those organisations at the centre of community-relevant education and research such as CUE-East, Voluntary Action Islington and the Salvation Army. We affirm the demonstrated value of partnerships for promoting collaborative community research and will actively seek new members to join the Trustees group. We aim to encourage Trustees to generate new strategic activity areas through partnership working.

Community Research Database

Our database of some 3,000 items is now available on-line, but needs further development. We are seeking a post-graduate student placement or other partnership to help update the entries to cover 2006 to 2010 and to identify the key sources to monitor to ensure the database is kept up-to-date. We could then allocate the task of monitoring one or two

sources each to a group of volunteers, encouraging database users to alert us to new publications to ensure the resource is comprehensive. After updating, we can assess the work needed to input new material, manage the database and then earmark resources for that purpose. We aim to explore the potential of a linked or complementary resource with other organisations developing community research resources such as The Third Sector Research Centre.

Gaining new resources

Thanks to our partners, our small funding group has succeeded in generating resources to support our events and key development activities over 2010. As our membership expands and our potential for creating and innovating increases with our changing knowledge of a changing community sector, we will need to engage with new areas and means of community research capacity-building. We will continue to seek joint bids to previous charitable funders of ARVAC and new potential funders whose aims can support ours. The ARVAC Trustees funding sub-group will continue to develop its focused bidding programme to enable strategically-relevant and currently-feasible collaborative community research capacity-building projects.

CUTTING OUR COATS...

In common with other voluntary groups and organizations we will aim to cut our coat according to our cloth. We will continue to shape our strategic plan in line with our key aims and taking account of time and resources available to us. Developing a sensible funding strategy will again be an important focus for 2011.

Fiona Poland is the ARVAC Chair and is Senior Lecturer in Therapy Research at University of East Anglia.

Ben Wright

Developing A Workable Big Society Model For Community Researchers

With news of Big Society 'failures', including Lord Nat Wei's decision to stop working overtime and Liverpool's withdrawal from the Conservative Party's flagship project, one might be forgiven for thinking that community needs, or funding requirements, are being neglected. This is not helped by those Members of Parliament who argue that volunteering could increase at a time when many people are desperately seeking employment. Let us not forget though that the economy has recently been hit by a deep recession, with all the traditional problems and large numbers of unemployed young people, followed by austerity cuts that have hampered recovery across sectors but perhaps less so in the private sector. Organisations need time to adjust to the new landscape, including the introduction of a Big Society Bank at the heart of community initiatives, but there are innovative ways to move forward for entrepreneurs.

The leveling of the playing field between private, public and voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations will not only increase competition but potentially plunge people in the latter two sectors into unfamiliar territory. The expected reduction of government input will remove an important safety net. By focusing on universities and VCS

organisations it is possible to see how this emerging landscape could affect communities, including researchers.

Universities are seeking alternative funding streams to overcome financial deficits in both teaching and research following the expected withdrawal of government funding. This has included the generation of increasing numbers of online short courses. Community forums are also relying more on internet-based communication and online bulletins rather than meetings and paper-based information at a time when people cannot guarantee when they will be available, in some cases determined by interview times, and funding is limited. Difficulties have increased attracting university students, at least those who have traditionally entered colleges full-time directly on completing A-levels, in the knowledge that they may pay up to £27,000 for tuition on a degree course. Yet students currently pay a large amount for accommodation and travel that could be reduced through more internet-based learning, necessitating more research on what is required and how this can best be implemented. It might additionally be possible to hold more meetings and conferences online.

With reductions in traditional grants, including research-related funding, VCS organisations are rethinking their legal structures as they consider generating income in a not-for-profit arena. The Government is, in particular, pushing models such as social enterprises, mutuals and cooperatives with which employees in this sector are largely unfamiliar. Communities can generate funds through the selling of locally-grown produce, including following its cooking in various dishes, and other locally-required products largely dependent on the availability of local expertise. VCS organisations will need to improve public and commissioner understanding of professionals in the sector as they compete with the private sector. They may also need to meet and be certificated for certain standards. They may need to work in consortia, to increase their combined assets, annual turnover and experience, and/or merge with other organisations, to improve skill sets and increase cost-competitiveness.

Although a larger proportion of research-related activities will need to be funded in future for a specific purpose, it is not always in the interests of funders to dictate how research should be undertaken which can help determine outcomes. CEMVO is undertaking research for the Office for Civil Society, Cabinet Office, on how the economy is affecting VCS organisations, on how the VCS can become more environmentally sustainable (an area in which there may be increased opportunities for funding) and on how the VCS can best take advantage of the Big Society once funding becomes available. Research is also required to deliver up-to-date training typically to people who have only a limited understanding of the topic. This is more likely to be funded by trainees in future and so will need to be more tailored to

their needs. There will, however, remain some scope for flexibility, including in the methodology used, and this is necessary to guarantee the development of competitive innovative ideas. There will be more opportunities for cross-sector collaborative work in which academics should be able to take a lead. CEMVO is delivering a postgraduate programme in partnership with SOAS, University of London, funded by Tower Hamlets Council to develop community leaders who can implement theoretical academic knowledge in practice.

Moreover, if research is integrated more into community life, arguably enabling it to better meet the needs of local residents, it is possible to generate related funding through alternative means. For example, dietary research might result in the development of produce and environmental research could generate new information and products that can be sold.

Finally, consistent with the Big Society theme it should be possible for several smaller communities, or societies, to work together on cross-community 'Big Society' projects. This will enable communities to attract funding only available to people resident or working in certain localities and, potentially, to compete for funding restricted to organisations working in different regions or countries.

Dr. Ben Wright is a new member on the ARVAC committee. He was the Policy and Research Officer for the Council of Ethnic Minority Voluntary Sector Organisations (CEMVO). He is a chartered Psychologist, Researcher and Liberal Democrat Politician.

Somerville P (2011), *Understanding Community, politics, policy and practice*, The Policy Press, Bristol

Reviewed by Fleur Bragaglia

Peter Somerville, Professor of Social Policy and Head of the Policy Studies Research Centre at the University of Lincoln, in *Understanding Community; Politics, Policy and Practice* draws together key concepts within the field of community including; community development, the politics of community, government approaches to community, community learning and community health and social care.

The book focuses on community as both an idea and practice. Somerville presents interesting debate on the concept and understanding of community, underlining that, although its meaning will always be contested, community can be understood through network, sociability, connected and cooperation. Using the works of Bourdieu, Habermas and Durkheim (and others), Somerville sees community as rooted in our everyday ways of going about the world, described in the text as habitus.

The book provides a wealth of references on research in/of community and practical applications of community but it is the 'beloved community' concept of Martin Luther King which holds the most relevance for Somerville. Chapter 2 explains that according to King's idea of Beloved Community, 'each individual must be free to fulfil his or her highest potential, but this can happen only through membership of a just community in which resources and power are distributed in such a way as to enable every individual to actualise their potential, and in which every member respects and values every other member equally,' (pg 35). Somerville argues that this 'beloved community' is a picture of a desired end state of a developed community. Many talk about achieving developed communities, from national and local government, to community activists and theorists but Somerville outlines that few have detailed what such an achieved state would look like. He rectifies this by presenting the concept of beloved community as one which everyone can recognise.

Somerville defines community as meaningful connectedness which, in turn, affects the development of a community, the politics of a community, the participation within a community and the health and social care of a community (to name but a few). At the beginning of the book, Somerville disputes the categories aligned to a 'strong' and 'weak' communities. Often the strength of a community is aligned to how inclusive or exclusive it is. He rejects this correlation as a strong community may be so due to it being closed and homogenous and a weak community maybe so due to its openness and heterogeneity. This argument has particular relevance for the work of ARVAC in terms of how research looks at community and assesses its success in terms of previously disposed government ideals of integration and cohesion. Under Somerville's definition, a strong community is one in which members experience bondedness and/or boundedness, characterises that may be adverse to openness and integration.

Somerville's text asks questions of researchers and research in the voluntary and community sector. For example, as researchers, how do we view strong communities? How can research in this area understand the concepts of success with regards to community and community development?

Understanding community, politics, policy and practice is part of the Policy Press' series on Understanding Welfare: social issues, policy and practice. Each text is designed to be accessible and student friendly and all are Social Policy Subject Benchmark Compliant.

Fleur Bragaglia is a researcher at The Salvation Army.

Norman, J (2010) *The Big Society: the Anatomy of the New Politics*, University of Buckingham Press.

Reviewed by Ellie Brodie

Jesse Norman, Conservative MP for Hereford and South Herefordshire, is one of the intellectual architects of the new – or compassionate – conservatism. *The Big Society* sets out the ideas that underpin the new conservatism and the political programme that stems from these ideas – the Big Society.

The basic premise of the book is that the British economy and society are facing deep-seated problems that the Big Society can tackle. Norman argues that the economy flattened and became less productive under Labour whilst inequality on many measures increased. This is primarily because the government 'placed too much faith in a relatively unproductive and constricting state' (p. 17) and its 'accompanying ideology of centralisation, managerialism and intervention' (p. 25). On top of this, we are in the grip of a 'moral panic about where our society is headed and what it is becoming' (p. 40). Social trends such as rising obesity and teenage pregnancy have been caused by a 'misunderstanding of economics within government, and an increasingly economic and financial view of human nature within wider society' (p. 78).

The middle chapters of *The Big Society* set out the philosophical basis of the new conservatism starting with a critique of both the Left and the Right. The root problem for the Labour Party, says Norman, is that the Fabians have taken over. The Fabians' intellectual, middle class and somewhat shady interests (in 'eugenics and selective breeding', p. 83) quashed other traditions on the left like non-conformist dissent, guild socialism and working class self-help. The Fabians are to blame for Labour's 'deep dyed commitment to state expansion and the centralisation of public services' (p. 84). The Conservative party, in contrast, has 'never become a sect' – it is broad, inclusive and has lots of traditions to draw on including libertarianism and paternalism.

Norman draws on thinkers including Hobbes, Michael Oakeshott and Edmund Burke to out-

line the political philosophy underpinning compassionate conservatism. He uses Oakeshott's distinction between a 'civil society' and an 'enterprise society' to determine what he thinks the role of the state, citizens and intermediate institutions should be. In a 'civil society', the role of the government is simply to govern citizens according to a system of laws, whereas an 'enterprise society' is organised as a communal undertaking where individuals are viewed as contributors to a common project and the role of government is to achieve certain social objectives. Norman firmly rejects the notion of an enterprise society: it is a rationalist position that treats the state as a one-size fits all vehicle for social advancement. Instead, the pluralism that he finds in Oakeshott's 'civil society' takes into account associative institutions of civil society – a 'philic' or 'new kind of association based on affection rather than procedure' (p. 103). Through drawing on these traditions, we can start to see why associational life, grassroots and community organisations and the decentralisation of state power are central themes in the current government's policy agenda.

Norman also draws on theories of human motivation and capability, notably those of Amartya Sen, which assert that human beings are happiest, and therefore motivated, when they can express their 'active self' in their work and other pursuits (sport, hobbies, etc). The active self can be expressed through: autonomy, or independence; mastery or being good at something, and purpose, or the deeper meaning an individual accords to something. This view of human motivation explains the proposition by advocates of the Big Society that there is an untapped social energy in Britain that, providing the state gets out of the way, can be released.

The influence of behavioural economics in the chapter on 'Institutions, Competition and Entrepreneurship' is evident. Norman argues, as one might expect, that sometimes choice and competition are positive but, in line with his rejection of neoclassical economics, for one-off financial decisions like purchasing a mortgage or a pension plan, choice often results in people making decisions that are not in their best interest (p. 169). The government can therefore have a role in helping to structure choices for people. Mutuals and cooperatives are discussed, with Norman claiming that they are a conservative and a capitalist idea (p. 172) and that local food co-ops offer potential inspiration as forms of entrepreneurship, devolved and democratised organisations in areas as housing, adult and children's social care, health care, agriculture and the arts.

The final chapters of the book set out the new conservatism as a political philosophy, drawing on earlier arguments about 'its scepticism of the power of the state, its respect for institutions, its pluralism and the scope it accords for individual to flourish' (p. 192-183). Norman also highlights three ideas that are not without tension within the new conservatism: the religious or Christian strand, concerned with social justice and morals; the fraternal strand, concerned with issues of personal and social wellbeing, and the civil strand, grounded in constitutionalism and statecraft. The key planks of the *Big Society* as a political programme are then set out, including the decentralisation of state power, a celebration of individual freedom (e.g. through scrapping the DNA database), and an emphasis on sharing British culture through (e.g. through a national volunteering programme).

The Big Society is essentially a critique of what Norman calls *rigor mortis* economics and the state – these are the 'problems'. The answers lie in a magnified role for civil society organisations and a reduced and decentralised role for the state, along with a new approach to economics (that blends behavioural, institutional and Austrian approaches). This, so the argument goes, will release the latent potential of individuals and tackle the 'great giants of poverty, inequality, class division and lack of political imagination [which] are the ultimate targets of the Big Society' (p. 195).

A few questions and issues were raised in my

mind when reading *The Big Society*. First, the state is treated as a monolithic, homogenous entity. Is this a helpful analysis? Would a more nuanced approach that unpacked 'the state' give us a greater understanding of 'the problem' and how it should be tackled? Also, if we take the expansion of the state as a given, can this be the primary cause of both societal and economic breakdown in Britain, as Norman suggests? To my mind this is a little simplistic - what of wider global forces (which are, by and large, totally absent from Norman's analysis)? What of long-term structural changes in the economy like the decline in manufacturing and move to a service economy? This is leaving aside the question of whether Britain really is 'broken' after all.

Norman is clearly an advocate of behavioural economics. Having read *Nudge* by Thaler and Sunstein, a major influence on Norman and the Conservative Party, I was left unconvinced that it will provide the silver bullet to the economic and social problems that Norman raises. Many would agree with his take on the failings of neoliberal economic models. But those same people might also question whether behavioural economic approaches are failsafe. This is largely because behavioural economics, indeed Norman's analysis altogether, does not account for the structural and geographical nature of inequality. Without a better account of the causes of inequality, it is difficult to see how 'the great giants of poverty, inequality and class division' which are 'the ultimate targets of the Big Society' (p. 195) will be tackled.

The *Big Society*, and the new conservatism are political ideas. Jesse Norman makes a clear argument in favour of an increased role for civil society institutions, a decreased role for the state and a capabilities approach to individual motivation and behaviour. Whether the vision of every citizen having the opportunity to release their 'active self' is borne out in practice will be seen over the coming years.

Ellie Brodie is a researcher at the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) on the Pathways through Participation project.

ARVAC ANNUAL LECTURE**'Power and Knowledge creation'**

towards a theory of user control and community integration in voluntary action research

Ian Bruce	Cass Business School
Bernard Harris	University of Southampton
Angela Ellis Paine	Third Sector Research Centre
Andy Benson	National Coalition for Independent Action

09 May 2011, 14.00—17.00

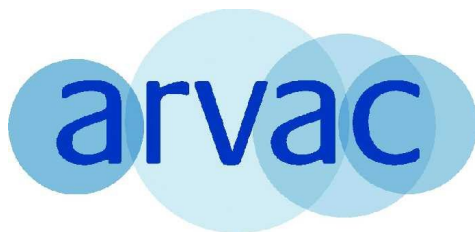
The Salvation Army
Territorial Headquarters,
101 Newington Causeway,
London, SE1 6BN

For full details see <http://files.arvac.org.uk/annuallecture2011.pdf>

Attendance is FREE but places are limited.

Please register and book a place by contacting:

Ruth Selwyn-Crome on 01603 591561 or community@uea.ac.uk



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promoting effective community action
through research

About ARVAC

ARVAC (The Association for Research in the Voluntary and Community Sector) was established in 1978. It is a membership organisation and acts as a resource for people interested in research in or on community organisations.

We believe that voluntary and community organisations play a vital role in creating and sustaining healthy communities, and that research plays an essential role in increasing the effectiveness of those organisations involved in voluntary and community action.

We want to hear from you:

Please send us:

- News items
- Details of new publications, resources or websites
- Information about research in progress
- Meetings or events you would like us to publicise
- Comments or opinion pieces you would like to share with other ARVAC members

by e-mail to
j.grotz@roehampton.ac.uk