

## Dear Reader

For over 30 years, under the leadership of distinguished chairs like Fiona Poland, Colin Rochester, Justin Davis Smith, Cathy Pharoah, Peter Lloyd, John Lansley, Ian Mcroft, Barry Knight and Marilyn Taylor ARVAC has been and remains a voice for the co-production of knowledge in and about the voluntary and community sector. ARVAC was founded to provide a focus and a forum for those who were interested in what was then a new and undeveloped field of study – the voluntary sector. It has since found its focus, the local, community-based organisations and groups. We now describe those interested in the co-production of knowledge about and within local, community-based organisations and groups the COMMUNITY RESEARCH COMMUNITY.

We should remember that ARVAC has been around since Wolfenden published his report on *The Future of Voluntary Organisations* and a decade before the Open University established its first Voluntary Sector Programme. ARVAC was here 20 years before the Compact and has outlived a gaggle of departments set up by government to deal with our community, from the ACU at the Home Office to the now seemingly disappearing Office for the Third Sector. This is no reason for ARVAC to still be around but it shows the endurance and tenacity of our community.

Since ARVAC's founding this is possibly the time of greatest difficulty for our community. Local, community-based organisations and groups are squeezed out of existence and researchers too find their livelihoods and their institutions under threat. Unfortunately, there can be no longer any doubt that some of us will not be able to contribute to our community in the way they have done in the past. However, we believe that they will want to and can remain a part of it.

With over 30 years experience of doing so this is the time for ARVAC to step again into the breach. ARVAC hasn't got the resources or the desire to directly broker the collaboration of researchers and local, community-based organisations and groups. However, as ARVAC is made up of researchers and practitioners from local, community-based organisations and groups it asks its supporters and members to share, to build and to enable. To enable the Community Research Community. You are ARVAC, get on enabling.

It is at this difficult time that I have been asked to take over as Chair of ARVAC. I am greatly honoured. Yet, my being ARVAC's chair will mean nothing to anyone if it doesn't come from you and what you do to strengthen our community. Let's stand by our principles.

As always I am grateful to the contributors to this bulletin. Alex Whinnom from GMCVO draws a sobering picture of 'The voluntary sector in transition'. Angie Daly and her colleagues report about 'doing research together', Lucy Brill and her colleagues give us 'Methodological Reflections on Participatory Research on Poverty in Bradford' and Carol Packham and her colleagues write about aiding third sector organisations' resilience. Finally Kevin Nunan reflects on catalysts, Jinimi Cricket calls on you to let your conscience be your guide and I outline ARVAC's plans.

**Jurgen Grotz** (editor)

## Inside this issue:

- |   |    |
|---|----|
| <b>Alex Whinnom</b>   | 2  |
| <b>describes the voluntary sector in transition</b>   |    |
| <b>Carol Packham, Eve Davidson and Green Nyoni write about 'Aiding Third Sector Organisations Resilience?'</b>                        | 4  |
| <b>Angie Daly, John Anderson and Denis O'Driscoll report from doing research together</b>   | 6  |
| <b>Lucy Brill, Mike Quiggin, Derota Kordecka and Joe McEvoy offer methodological reflections on participatory research on poverty</b> | 8  |
| <b>Jinimi Cricket suggests that you always let your conscience be your guide</b>  | 9  |
| <b>Kevin Nunan wants to provide a catalyst</b>  | 10 |
| <b>ARVAC's new Chair on Enabling the Community Research Community</b>   | 11 |
| <b>INVITATION ARVAC ANNUAL LECTURE</b>  | 13 |

## The voluntary sector in transition

Alex Whinnom

### GMCVO

Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisation (GMCVO) is the voluntary sector support organisation covering the Greater Manchester city region, established 1975 and supported by the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities. We support local voluntary action by local people, working in partnership with other support organisations and with the public and private sectors.

GMCVO is what it says on the label – a “centre for voluntary organisation”. It is unique nationally – because Greater Manchester is unique. We mirror the city region, and work on the same principle of subsidiarity, that is, we do things best done on a wider geographic footprint. GMCVO doesn’t stop at the boundaries of the organisation – we are at the centre of a spaghetti of networks, formal and informal partnerships and relationships.

We are proud of being a value-led organisation. Our priority values are Locality, Equality and Collaboration: our primary loyalty is to the people of Greater Manchester; we are predisposed towards those who are disadvantaged or discriminated against; and we believe in working with others in a spirit of trust.

### The Greater Manchester voluntary sector

Voluntary Sector Support (partnership of GM/c organisations providing support to frontline groups) reviewed our sector in 2010; at that point it had changed little since 2005. It comprises over 11,000 constituted organisations, and we estimate at least double that number of unconstituted groups. The majority are small, user-led, client-focused providers, very diverse and very specific; fewer than half are large enough to register as charities (i.e. with an income of £5k pa or more). Collectively the sector is a signifi-

cant employer with around 67,000 paid staff. Income for charities only is £1.2b pa; the added value of volunteering easily doubles this.

A number of our districts have recently undertaken “state of the sector” surveys. The Sheffield Hallam University study commissioned by Salford CVS is fairly typical. This study found 1,376 organisations serving around 3 million clients pa and so providing significant support to local people. Of these, 70% had an annual income of under £10k. The collective income of the sector in 2009/10 was £156m; it employed 6,500 people and enabled volunteering worth £121m. Whilst 65% of groups receive public sector funding, 80% of groups attract other kinds of funding.

### The voluntary sector in transition

The Labour government gave the “third sector” a much higher profile and a different relationship with the public sector. There was a move from grant funding to commissioned services with a growth in the delivery of public sector services by voluntary organisations. Many organisations diversified to take advantage of opportunities, and the national voluntary sector workforce grew by 40% between 2001-11. There was also a change in thinking - for organisations wanting to expand, there was a move from identity based on “charity” to identity based on “non-profit”. This all worked in a context of plentiful funding but the world has changed now.

The commitment and high profile have been carried forward under the current Coalition government under the new label of “civil society”. But the name change also marks an attitude change and an upheaval in the relationship with the state. Current national policy is based not on investment but on volunteering as the answer to creating a “big society”.

The decline in resources in the voluntary sector has lagged behind the start of the recession but is kicking in now. In a normal year we see “churn” within the GM/c sector of 1 – 2% but April 2011 was always a crisis point, and this has been added to by recession and public spending cuts. Unfortunately cuts correlate with deprivation – the more deprived the area, the higher the cuts - and the big regional cities like Manchester have come off worst. We expect to lose a quarter of the 2010 sector before April 2013. We are starting to hear about the impact this is having on people and communities, especially those who were already most disadvantaged.

There are some immediate risks. The large scale loss of preventative services and crisis interventions can impact on expensive services that must be provided by the state. The loss of key organisations will reduce community cohesion and could increase tensions in stressed areas. Finally the loss of services, organisations, jobs and volunteering opportunities will have a disproportionate effect on women, people from ethnic minorities and disadvantaged individuals and communities.

But the change is not entirely negative. The current spectrum was built in the context of a strong public sector and considerable independent funding, and groups were encouraged and incentivised to be reactive. In the new world we need voluntary groups to do more to prevent problems and to diversify into areas that have for some time been left to the public and private sectors. This doesn't mean some kind of spontaneous uprising of goodwill from a grassroots army of individual volunteers – it will require resources and organisation, new thinking and new models of operation, and strong partnerships between all three sectors based on much more equal relationships.

We now have an opportunity actively to re-shape and regrow a voluntary sector that will better meet the current needs of individuals, families and communities in GM/c.

### **What is GMCVO doing about all this?**

In the short term we have focused our general services more strongly on fostering resilience in both frontline voluntary groups and local infrastructure organizations. We will continue this

work, but going forward, we are looking at quite radical re-positioning and redevelopment of our voluntary sector through a range of programmes:- leadership and communications; public service reform and delivery; volunteering; community enterprise; community transport; reducing poverty; community hubs and green energy; St Thomas conference centre; open source databases.

All our priority programmes over the next few years are based on some important premises.

We believe that organised and resourced voluntary action is a solution, not a need, and people who are economically and socially disengaged are untapped assets, not problems. The voluntary sector in its current form is unsustainable - but the people involved in voluntary organisations are resilient. They often understand what needs to be done with an individual, family or community to restore it to full functionality better than outsiders do, are trusted, and are able to commit to long term mutually fulfilling relationships.

We believe that GMCVO and others in a leadership role need actively to re-shape our sector to meet the current needs of people and communities. There are real opportunities here to change how we do things for the better, and it is important to try.

### **What do we need from ARVAC members and other academics?**

Researchers and academics interested in the voluntary sector will be in a very exciting place over the next ten years. GMCVO would greatly welcome more involvement with ARVAC members and I hope some of you will wish to work alongside us on areas of mutual interest.

For detailed information about GMCVO's work please see [www.gmcvo.org.uk](http://www.gmcvo.org.uk) . If you are interested in working with us please contact [alex.whinnom@gmcvo.org.uk](mailto:alex.whinnom@gmcvo.org.uk) or [susanne.martikke@gmcvo.org.uk](mailto:susanne.martikke@gmcvo.org.uk)

**Alex Whinnom is the Director of the Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisation.**

## **Aiding Third Sector Organisations Resilience? - Participatory and formative research approaches in the ESRC Taking Part? Capacity Building Cluster.**

**Carol Packham, Eve Davidson and Green Nyoni**

The Taking Part? Capacity Building Cluster (CBC) is a five year ESRC funded programme based in Lincoln, Goldsmiths and Manchester Metropolitan Universities. The research consists of Case Students, research placements, vouchers and Knowledge Transfer Partnerships, all working with partner organisations with a focus on active citizenship and community empowerment.

The cluster is built on the relationships, formed with Third Sector Organisations (TSO) and Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) during the Active Learning for Active Citizenship and Take Part programmes (2004-2011), and shares a commitment to experiential learning through the use of active, participatory engagement, and inclusive research approaches. As a result the CBCs work is aimed at building the capacity of our partner organisations, not only by producing useful insights and research data, but also through the research process. To enable this research partners are involved throughout, from identifying the research focus, research questions and methods, analysis of findings and co production of recommendations for action.

The advantage of this approach is that the research will provide evidence based practice, ensuring that we are able to 'ask the right questions' and so have a more accurate reflection of what is required by the agency and service users. The partnerships also establish working relationships for the HEI and the community, providing an ongoing source of two way information, and access to resources and staff.

However this formative approach to the co-production of knowledge has proved challenging as well as productive. Participatory working is slow, and the HEIs have had to clarify expectations of expertise, elitism, roles and responsibilities and debates over practical and actual ownership of the re-

search outcomes. In addition to these challenges posed by our research approach, over the first three of the five years of the CBC it has become apparent that economic and policy changes have created tensions and insecurity within the sector. Increasingly partnership working between organisations has been threatened as commissioning of services has made some TSOs reluctant to share ideas when competing for resources, and tendering processes have resulted in the adoption of secretive practices rather than cooperation.

However the research has been able to help capacity build the partner organisation, for example, providing information for the partner organisation to aid their sustainability (e.g. by strengthening funding bids, or being able to confirm the need for their service), as well as developing their knowledge and skills in relation to the specific focus of the research, and to general research approaches, and trends.

The CBC has also been able to link the participants into the Take Part National Network, that provides resources, information and peer networking to enable the development of active citizenship approaches, and the strengthening of the sector.

Two examples of the formative research approach being carried out by the CBC illustrate how the researcher was based with the partner agency and HEI, receiving supervision from both. In both cases the researchers' work is informed by the requirements and changing context of the agency, and the findings from their research is fed back to the agency in an ongoing way, usually through the manager, and management committee, but also in the case of MRSN, through worker, volunteer and users meetings.

The first example is a partnership with Community North West (CNW) exploring the resilience of small TSOs\*. Here CNW identified the focus, partly as a result of its own vulnerable future, but also to be better able to ascertain how to meet the needs of small community and voluntary groups in the North West. A reference group was established and through this group, and meetings with representatives of small groups, the questions to be asked through an online questionnaire were identified. The responses to the questionnaire were then discussed at a Resilience conference organised by CNW, to check their significance, and to help make recommendations for action. The quantitative work was supplemented with case study interviews with a sample of respondents. The research findings showed that from the 211 responses (70% of these groups had incomes of less than £10,000pa.) Two thirds stated that they had been adversely affected by funding cuts and 42% stated they expected their organisation would fold within the next 6 months to 3 years, this at a time when 75% expected there would be an increased demand for their services over the next year. The research has been able to demonstrate the importance of small groups in responding to local needs and the importance of volunteers for their existence, but also the role that these groups play in supporting volunteering.

The second example is that of a 3 year Case Studentship\* with Manchester Refugee Support Network (MRSN), exploring the effectiveness of networks in relation to meeting the needs of this community and in relation to being representative. Again the agency, through the Management Committee, suggested the focus of the research, were involved in the appointment of the researcher, (who was coincidentally already a member of MRSN). The researcher made comparative visits to several similar networking organisations and carried out an analysis of the work of MRSN, feeding findings back to inform decisions about the structure and organisational functioning of the agency. The research identified that representation of potential users was af-

ected by their own circumstances, e.g. if they were destitute, and this has now become a significant element of the study. The Case Studentship has shown the difficulty of formative research, and the need for findings to be reported back to the agencies members in a way that is accessible and reduces the possibility of negative responses to perceived criticism. In addition, as a result of the worsening economic situation and cuts in funding to the organisation, it has also become apparent that the length of the Case Studentship has outlived some of the members of the agency. Managers, management committee members and some workers have changed, as well as service users, resulting in the need to continually regain the consent for the work and its focus.

The research in the CBC is fortunate to be able to chart the rapid changes taking place across the Third Sector, we hope that through our participatory approach that we are able, not merely to record these changes but to help sustain organisations, and develop their capacity and resilience in challenging times.

Much of the work of the CBC is still in progress; however you can see reports of completed work through the Third Sector Research Centre website or by accessing <http://www.ioe.mmu.ac.uk/caec/>

**Dr. Carol Packham is Director at the Community Audit and Evaluation Centre, Manchester Metropolitan University.**

[c.packham@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:c.packham@mmu.ac.uk)

**Eve Davidson, Research Associate, and Green Nyoni, Case student, Taking Part? ERSC Capacity Building Cluster.**

## Doing research together: a study exploring the impacts of funding and welfare policy changes on a homeless service and its service users

Angie Daly, John Anderson, Denis O'Driscoll

In 2011 Nugent Care conducted a small scale qualitative study to explore the effects of public sector spending reductions and welfare policy changes on the services and service-users of its Community Resource Unit. The purpose of the research is to provide information and evidence for advocacy by Nugent Care on behalf of those who have experienced or are at risk of homelessness during a time of considerable change.

As our research sought to capture experiences of change from the perspectives of service users and service providers we adopted an inclusive approach to enable participation in the research from data collection, to analysis, to sharing findings. The first stage of the research involved reviewing and discussing the impact of local authority cuts and welfare policy changes with staff and service users. The second stage of the research carried out during May-October 2011 involved interviews with five service users and three stakeholders and two focus group discussions (one with the service user group and one with staff). Capturing and analysing the experiences of service-users, *with* service-users were central to the project therefore for this stage we developed a co-research team comprising the researcher and two co-researchers who have direct experience of homelessness. Emerging findings were discussed with staff and an advisory group set up to support the development of the project.

A sustainable livelihoods approach was adapted for the fieldwork to draw together experiences of service-users, views of staff and organisational perspectives, and to provide a framework for analysis. Briefly, it explores **five areas of assets held by people themselves that support sustainable livelihoods**:

- human assets including health and well-being
- social assets including social and support organisations
- physical assets including housing
- public assets including community resources and services
- financial assets including access to income and benefits

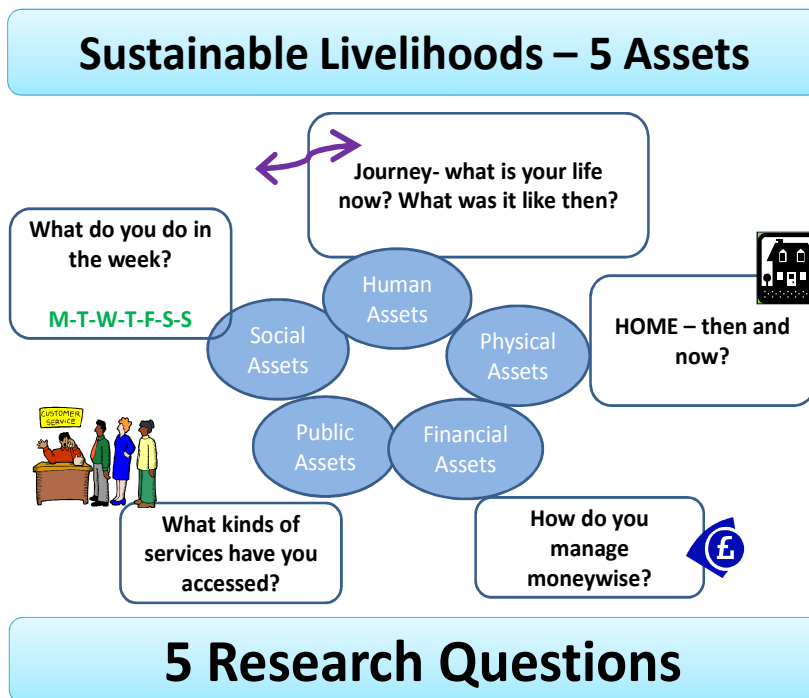
The rationale for this approach is that service users depend on Nugent Care in one part of their lives. A sustainable livelihoods approach explores on many assets in the whole of a person/family's life and will give a rich picture of what is happening to people in 2011. For further information on this methodology see the Oxfam/Church Action on Poverty resource *The Sustainable Livelihoods Handbook*. <http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/ukpoverty/downloads/Sustainable%20Livelihoods%20Handbook2.pdf>

**Our five research questions** were mapped to five sustainable livelihood assets.

- Tell us about your home, then and now? (Social and Physical assets)
- What is your life like now? What was it like before? (Your journey) (Social and Public assets)
- How do you manage financially? (Income/benefits/Costs) (Financial assets)
- Tell us how you organise your week? What are you involved in? (Human, Social and Public Assets)
- What Services have you accessed? Have they helped you? (Human and Public Assets)

Our **co-research research** approach included the following:

- Development of a co-researcher group from the start of the project with Angela, Denis and John (volunteers and ex-service users at Nugent Care). This group worked specifically on the second stage of the report, interviewing service-users
- Developing an ethics protocol together for interviewing service users empathically and for how we would work together as a team. This built on the ethics protocol signed off by the CEO of the organisation. The ethics protocol used as a starting point the mission statement of Nugent Care and the BERA guidelines for Good Practice in Educational Research Writing (2004).



- Identifying five appropriate research questions to use in the service-user interviews and thinking about how they would relate to the sustainable livelihoods frameworks of five assets.
- Ensuring appropriate support was available to respondents after interviews to discuss any troubling issues that may have arisen.
- Using visual motifs as well as written questions to facilitate the focus of the question (especially helpful for some service users for whom English is not their first language)
- Developing a PowerPoint presentation for the research that anyone from Nugent Care can use (again using visuals to explain key findings, concepts and frameworks)
- Setting up an Advisory Group to discuss the emerging findings of each stage of the research and to provide a reflective account to the Trustees as part of each report. This group included several staff, one Trustee, the CEO and two external supporters.
- Using opportunities for sharing the research with the Advisory Group and the Community Resource Unit as further stages of analysis.

The ARVAC Annual Conference gave us an opportunity to reflect on ‘doing research together’ with other community and voluntary sector researchers. We discussed the process of developing ethical practice and to what extent a university endorsement is desirable for research done under the auspices of the community and voluntary sector itself. We talked about the importance of developing action or advocacy from research and how we perhaps need to join forces to be more effective. The value of small qualitative studies that show the reality of people’s lives was affirmed as useful knowledge, particularly in the current context of funding cuts and welfare policy change.

This summary outlines the research approach. The full research report can be accessed at [www.nugentcare.org](http://www.nugentcare.org). For further information on the research methods contact Angie Daly at [dalya@edgehill.ac.uk](mailto:dalya@edgehill.ac.uk)

**Angie Daly is Research Officer at the Widening Participation Research Centre, Edge Hill University. John Anderson and Denis O’Driscoll are Volunteers at Nugent Care, Liverpool.**

## Methodological Reflections on Participatory Research on Poverty in Bradford

Lucy Brill, Mike Quiggin, Derota Kordecka and Joe McEvoy.

Our presentation at the ARVAC conference was based on our experiences working in different roles on a nine month participatory research project which documented the impact of the 2008 recession on people living in poverty in Bradford District and identified key policy changes that would increase the resilience of local communities to external shocks in the future. This project was developed and delivered by Oxfam, with the support of academics from the International Centre for Participation Studies (ICPS) at Bradford University and the Centre for Local Policy Studies at Edge Hill, and funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation; research findings are available at

[www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/poverty-recession-Bradford-summary.pdf](http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/poverty-recession-Bradford-summary.pdf)

Researchers from the Bradford Resource Centre & Community Statistics Project (BRC) were seconded to work on the project; they worked with a team of community researchers who carried out qualitative interviews with people living on a low income in four neighbourhoods, using the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach as a framework. These were complemented by interviews with key stakeholders and participatory research in the four neighbourhoods to verify findings and to identify ways to improve the livelihood strategies of people in poverty within Bradford.

Our presentation focussed on the methodology used within the project, to what extent we achieved our objectives, and in particular what we learnt about using the Sustainable livelihoods approach, working in neighbourhoods and with community researchers. We were fortunate to have a responsive audience who asked some great questions!

Although the different speakers had slightly different perspectives there was general agreement that key achievements and strengths of the project included:

- We delivered a quality research report to the funder;

- We recruited a diverse team of community researchers, with direct experience of poverty and local links in several neighbourhoods;
- We built the community researchers' capacity and confidence, and several team members are now working with BRC to develop a Claimants' Union project within Bradford – an outcome that we believe flows from the findings of our research;
- The Sustainable Livelihoods model provided a very useful open framework for the interviews, which started with the positive aspects of people's lives;
- We were supported by a strong steering group, including academics from ICPS and CLPS, who worked with us on the literature review, community researcher training and final report.

### Challenges

- The community researchers were paid (on a self employed basis) for time spent in training and interviews, but the budget did not cover team meetings and outreach work;
- Ambitious project plan (due to funders' timetable), accentuated by decision to work in four neighbourhoods – this made the research more rigorous but stretched resources so community response was limited;
- Tight definition of poverty and timetable made it hard to find interviewees, despite recruiting community researchers with strong local networks;
- Some interviews were shorter than expected, reflecting researchers' inexperience;
- The community workshops were only well attended when participants were paid a fee (for verification but not for stakeholder), and did not lead to local actions at neighbourhood level.



### Lessons learnt

- Include more time at the start of the project to clarify roles, expectations and project plan – and to build understanding and relationships;
- Ensure that the Community researchers' contract are very clear and explicit;
- Build in more time for community development work within neighbourhoods, before holding participatory workshops (or work with neighbourhood based partner);

- Build in more support for community researchers, through supervision, on going training, accompaniment on interviews or peer support meetings.

**Lucy Brill is Programme Co-ordinator at Oxfam (UK Poverty), Mike Quiggin is a Bradford Resource Centre worker, Derota Kordecka and Joe McEvoy are Community Researchers and BRC volunteers.**

## 'always let your conscience be your guide'

### Jinimi Cricket

I am Jimini Cricket, the well known philosopher and friend of Pinocchio and as you may know I have suggested in the past that

- when you get in trouble and you don't know right from wrong,
- that when you meet temptation and the urge is very strong

you always let your conscience be your guide.

Well, I wonder, when did you last consult your conscience during your activities in the voluntary and community sector?

Do you consult your conscience when you try to anticipate the government's next move and skilfully practice proactive compliance for your voluntary organisation?

Do you consult your conscience when you respond to a research tender?

When did you last ask yourself what is right and what is wrong?

My friend Pinocchio was a puppet who lost its strings. But you surely know that. So when nobody could pull his strings he had to find his own way and that led to so much trouble.

Of course, that's different for you but do you always know how to remain independent as a researcher in academic institutions that may have strings attached.

Or do you always know how to act in the best interest of those who you set out to act for when others who provide the funding ask you to do something else.

When you make your decision, has conscience come into it recently?

It is easy for me to ask these questions. I am just a cricket. Can you answer them, honestly?

**Jinimi Cricket is the nom du plume of a member of AR-VAC.**

## 'catalyst'

### Kevin Nunan

The New Year is traditionally a time to reflect and make plans. Now is probably as good a time as any to consider ARVAC's role.

The current situation the third sector finds itself in has been described as the strangest in living memory. The sector has never had a higher profile or been more talked about by politicians, yet has never suffered such a dramatic shrinkage of resources at the very moment demand has exploded. ARVAC has the advantage of having been through the dramatic loss of funding much earlier than most - way back in 2006. That change required a shift in gear from the ARVAC board as the organisation became all-volunteer run and developed a realistic eye for what was possible with limited resources. ARVAC has concentrated on re-building its community and keeping the debates arising from its principles alive.

ARVAC was once seen and funded as an infrastructure body. As a mature sector, infrastructure membership bodies have taken the time to define what infrastructure means for their members. Take NAVCAS's definition as a guide: a second tier local infrastructure body is expected to undertake Development/Support/Liaison and Representation/Strategy.

This can be further subdivided into five areas of work:

- Identify needs and facilitate improvements in services
- Assist members to function more effectively
- Facilitate effective communication and networking between members
- Represent the sector to external bodies and facilitate two-way communication
- Have a strategic impact in local planning and implementation.

Yet for an unfunded organisations like ARVAC this is a rather ambitious list. Can volunteers be expected to deliver all these ar-

reas of activity. Should they be expected to? Can there be such a thing as an unfunded infrastructure body? Perhaps there is another way of looking at ARVAC's key roles?

Many voluntary organisations now play the role of catalyst, and just as a catalyst allows single molecules to react with vast complex compounds - helping them to find exactly the place that they should bind to, so voluntary organisations help the individual and small group access the vast impenetrable bureaucracies of the state.

The role of organisations like ARVAC may seem easy to overlook, but the reaction doesn't take place without the catalyst, no matter how insignificant it may seem. ARVAC already collaborates with others like CUE EAST, GMCVO, Wellcome Trust mostly to help build its community but without a distinct approach to its distinct catalytic effect.

ARVAC volunteers support a unique community. This community includes voluntary sector workers and university staff, researchers and practitioners.

We know that universities often struggle in their endeavour to reach out to communities they operate in and that voluntary sector organisations on the other hand struggle to get past the gatekeepers and enter the citadels of the academic institutions.

In ARVAC's community the relevant components come together. Can ARVAC be the catalyst and find an effective and cheap way of putting the two together?

Can ARVAC collaborate with other infrastructure bodies and offer this its catalytic knowledge and potential?

What do ARVAC volunteers need to do to trigger the reaction?

This is a time to reflect and make plans.

**Kevin Nunan is the developer and administrator of ARVAC's Governance Pages Project.**

## Enabling the Community Research Community

### Jurgen Grotz

ARVAC's work plan and its ability to deliver it is defined by and depended on the volunteers from within the community it serves. This means ARVAC will need to maintain and if possible increase the level of volunteer participation in ARVAC's activities.

We expect three key components to ARVAC's work programme for 2011-2012 designed to enable the Community Research Community:

1. Maintain platforms for networking and collaboration between members of the Community Research Community.
2. Be a leader in the debates relevant to the Community Research Community and actively disseminate findings from those debates.
3. Support the Community Research Community.

For this we intend to undertake the following activities

#### **Maintain platforms for networking and collaboration between members of the Community Research Community.**

- Maintaining the Website as a Networking and Interactive Base  
The ARVAC website now has over 350 registered users which enables us to encourage and facilitate networking and collaboration between people working in this field.

- Governance Workpages and Stories

The Governance Pages website is now unfunded but maintained by Kevin Nunan. For next year he will keep the News pages and Newsletters going, update the site, develop a limited amount of new content, and pursue potential funders and partnerships. We aim to continue to help innovate in this area through actively seeking ways to engage with and amplify community voices.

#### **Be a leader in the debates relevant to the Community Research Community and actively disseminate findings from those debates.**

- Events Programme

We are already planning the next ARVAC annual lecture which will be held at the Wellcome Trust in London, 08 May 2012.

We will apply again to the ESRC for funding for a series of 5 seminars on critical voluntary and community sector studies.

We plan to host the ARVAC annual conference in 2012 again in conjunction with the AGM.

- Bulletin

We aim to again produce 3 issues in 2012.

## Support the Community Research Community

- **Direct support**

We will continue to provide signposting for organisations and individuals looking for community researchers, providing help through answering queries via the website and putting individuals and organisations in touch with researchers known to ARVAC members. We will, for example, be assisting colleagues in Nepal with the development and delivery of resources.

- **Capacity building**

We continue to gain and share valuable lessons from the ARVAC/VAI collaborative community research programme. This is planned to continue into 2012.

- **Community Research Database**

Our database of some 3,000 items is available on-line, but needs to be maintained. In order to support our community with this database we need to engage our community in maintaining the resource.

In 2007 ARVAC had to review whether it still needed to play a role in the Voluntary and Community Sector. Since then the external environment has changed significantly and ARVAC is again exhibiting more clearly the vital role it has to play. However, this is a perilous environment and we recognise that members of the Community Research Community are under severe pressure. In order to maintain ARVAC's contribution it is imperative for us to also undertake the following activities.

## Developing and maintaining key working partnerships

We need to raise our profile to realise our aims. We continue to value our relationship with the University of East Anglia and with 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.

## 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 2011. As our membership expands our potential for creating and innovating increases. We will continue to seek joint bids to previous charitable funders of ARVAC and new potential funders whose aims can support ours.

Over the last 5 years ARVAC has managed to re-emerge as an important resource to the Community Research Community. We intend to develop a 5 year plan to be fundamentally reviewed on the ten year anniversary of the critical 2007 AGM. Part of the development of the 5 year plan will be a review of ARVAC's governing documents and ARVAC's organisational structure.

**Jurgen Grotz**  
is Chair of ARVAC.

# ARVAC ANNUAL LECTURE

## NOT A GAIN!

Critical approaches to the re-emergence of the impact debate  
in the Voluntary and Community Sector.

**08 May 2012**

at the  
Wellcome Collection  
183 Euston Road  
London NW1 2BE

**For full information please see our website.**

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](mailto:community@uea.ac.uk)



School of Business and Social Sciences  
Roehampton University,  
Southlands College  
80 Roehampton Lane,  
London SW15 5SL

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](mailto:j.grotz@roehampton.ac.uk)