

Dear Reader

Starting from the British Library a short walk takes you to the British Museum, passing Great Ormond Street Hospital or Coram Fields, a playing field which admits “No Adult unless accompanied by a child”. All these offer you glimpses of a legacy of knowledge of voluntary action. I walk this way as often as I can.

Yet, when I do, I sometimes cannot avoid the impression that the voluntary and community sector community does not seem to acknowledge and learn sufficiently from our legacy and maybe because our legacy is such a rich one or maybe because we are so pressed for time we show insufficient interest in the knowledge and legacy of other nations and cultures. I hope ARVAC will always try to stand against this trend and will be open to learning from the past and the experiences of others.

This edition of our bulletin is hopefully again evidence of this. Firstly Sharon Clancy will look back, if only one decade while Daniel Stevens looks abroad. Then we will learn from Fernanda Sigliano and Celeste Eugenia Meza about some developments in Argentina whose work is to encourage monitoring in friendly societies. Then we learn from Berit Sandberg about discussions in Germany which have similarities with ours about professionalisation.

Of course I am also grateful to our book reviewer Chloe Pritchard who keeps our feet firmly grounded in the here and now of recent publications. My sincere thanks go to all them.

Looking ahead at this year’s AGM and Annual Conference, to which you are all cordially invited, I wonder how we can ensure that we continue to learn from the past and appreciate difference. This year’s conference theme is “Weathering the Storm: sharing community stories of survival and evolution” and it highlights how vitally important these considerations are for the survival of our community.

I fear we cannot rely on our political leaders. Our academic colleagues may sometimes be subsumed by competing demands and our colleagues in voluntary sector organisations may feel they have to turn to commerce as a means of survival.

Especially in such a climate we must not forget that while all of us mostly rely on ourselves we are part of a rich tapestry tied in with the best and most inspiring examples of voluntary action and we are part of a world wide community.

In ARVAC we will always have a desire to maintain our legacy, our knowledge and our respect for all voluntary action, everywhere.

Jurgen Grotz (editor)

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The Big Society and CVS – a Personal View of a Decade of Change

Sharon Clancy

From 2000 – 2007 I was CEO of a Council for Voluntary Services in the East Midlands. I believed in the values of the CVS movement, born in the Victorian period out of massive social inequality, a drive to fight injustice and to push back at the boundaries of the state, where it was failing its many citizens living in abject poverty. It was an attempt to organise, to contest the alms system, the doling out of aid to the ‘deserving poor’ from the pockets of the wealthy. It was a means of promoting infrastructure for the systematic organisation of voluntary social work, nationally and locally, and for creating a campaigning ‘voice’ for those without any power. To me, the CVSs were always the goad and social conscience to the state, prefiguring state-run social services, and at the nexus of the state and the market – a space for debate, dialogue and action which Habermas refers to as ‘the public sphere’.

Distinct from ‘the state’ and from formal politics, the public sphere exposed prevailing ideology to public scrutiny and debate and was important as a counterbalance to agencies of power, the unrestrained pursuit of economic growth and the accumulation of capital, and political control. It was also the starting point for civil society – citizens and organisations coming together independent of government and, through freedom of speech and collective organisation, expressing their own will and opinions. And this included tackling complex and often ugly societal issues associated with economic, cultural and educational inequality.

I was a third sector CEO during a period of great change and one of increasing focus on the ‘not for profit’ sector as one of the cornerstones of Labour’s ‘third way’, a response to neo-liberalism which embraced the decentralisation of central government power, personal responsibility and investment in ‘social capital’, often at a very local level. In fact, the period between 2000 and 2010 was one of tremendous growth for the sector as a whole.

By 2010 the East Midlands had 11,617 registered voluntary organisations with a cumulative income of over £1.2bn, and expenditure of £1.1bn (NCVO Civil Society Almanac). At a

UK level, the sometimes uneasy alliance between state and civil society – represented here by the organised third sector – was involved in creating one of the largest public service industries in the world. The proportion of charities and social enterprises delivering public services grew dramatically from 2000 to 2010. And public trust in the organised voluntary/third sector remained consistently high. There was also an acute interest from local strategic structures and regional bodies in the representational, and therefore democratic engagement, power of the third sector at a time when many voters were growing ever more mistrustful of, and disengaged from, the state.

Despite, or perhaps because of this interest, the parallel demand on the whole third sector during this period was to ‘professionalise’ and to become leaner, fitter for purpose and more efficient. In effect, this meant assuming a more business-orientated management ethos, as well as becoming a more rational and transparent sector to public and private sector partners – a sector with which to do business.

The next wave of Labour party thinking included the Change Up programme, designed to impart rationalisation to infrastructure bodies like the CVSs – through mergers, at one end of the spectrum, and the sharing of resources and functions at the other. Within the CVS movement, many individual CVSs stepped up to the plate and some also sought to become more entrepreneurial and to diversify income streams away from a strong reliance on local government sources such as Grant Aid.

But, whilst there was recognition within the CVS sector that our responsiveness to local need could also be conceived as duplication and muddle and that some limited rationalisation through Change Up might be beneficial, for many CVSs this latest demand constituted a further assault on the principles of independence, community-focus and self-regulation which lay close to the historical heart of the CVS movement.

I started to wonder myself about how far our debating power with government had been compromised by our run of state finance and the growth of contractual relationships. The very ethos the Labour government admired – based on a creative form of self-regulation and genuine social values - started to appear out of kilter with a streamlined, professional, regionalised agenda and the CVS movement began to look tired, uncertain and even quaint.

So, the CVSs were certainly not fully fit at the advent of the Coalition government in 2010 and the massive change it has heralded. Many have not been able to effectively fight for the value of infrastructure – already reeling from reorganisation and values-drift. And unlike the previous government, who saw the CVS movement as a tactical route into communities out of state reach, the current government's ideology of 'rolling back the state' appears to me to take with it the infrastructure sector. The Coalition sees no role for representational bodies or the organised third sector, focusing instead on a fluid – if not completely slippery - re-working of the concept of civil society, encapsulated in Cameron's 'Big Society' idea. The argument goes that there is a huge untapped and inexhaustible resource of volunteers – unpaid – who can work their magic at a highly localised, community level. As the Big Society Audit identifies, this ideology is starting to bite:

'Far from being strengthened in the first two years of the Big Society, the voluntary sector is facing £3.3bn of cuts in public funding up to 2016. Voluntary organisations working with disadvantaged groups in deprived areas are more likely to depend on statutory funding but local authorities with the highest levels of deprivation in England suffered the deepest cuts in spending in 2011-2012' (Big Society Audit, 2012 – Civil Exchange).

'Big Society' volunteers are far more likely to form part of local civil society in well-heeled, economically stable areas, where private monies can oil the wheels, potentially bringing with them a set of values and mores which are consistent with Conservative rhetoric – and which are uncomfortably reminiscent of the models of alms-giving and private finance for 'the deserving' of the pre CVS era. We are starting to see a widening gulf between deprived and affluent areas and this is not translated to the Coalition vision of civil society,

which blanks out such inequality.

As an example, through its various youth programmes, such as the National Citizens' service, the government claims to be entering a 'decade of social action', equipping young people with employability skills and the capacity to 'do the right thing' and to 'give something back' to civil society - all Cameron's words. Yet the very civil society to which the young are abjured to 'give back' is at risk in my view. And what does 'doing the right thing' mean for those with no money and no power, whose social background does not fit the rhetoric?

I wonder how equitable any system can be which places such total belief in business and private finance. The private sector thus far seems to be the main beneficiary in the opening up of public services. All around I see a growing number of trusts, social enterprises and public-private hybrids eager to benefit from a close relationship with government. And I worry about the services that are the purview of the traditional third sector, those that have no commercial value - for example, local libraries for people who can't afford to buy books from Waterstones, debt and welfare advice services, such as the Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB), drug and housing support schemes. I also worry where the voice of those who need support and welfare is disappearing to and whether the much-vaunted CVS movement values of collective voice, campaigning power and representation can survive in the face of political incomprehension and increased competition for resources.

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“Legitimizing the actions of the organisations of the civil society” Fernanda Sigliano and Celeste Eugenia Meza

[The authors work with organisations which are comparable to friendly societies. The editor]

With the increasing demand for greater transparency in NGO's actions in the context of a crisis of values that seeks more concrete evidence, we need to find the right tool for displaying the daily activities.

The Social Report “Legitimizing the actions of the organisations of the civil society” is a voluntary management and evaluation tool that has the purpose of offering methodical and systematic information of the solidarity action assumed and exercised by the organisation in a certain period. It is an annual qualitative and quantitative demonstration of social action organisations. It is a tool for assessment, management and strategic business planning that helps identify opportunities for improvement in the outcome.

When the organisation *“possesses trustworthy and honest information about the development of its labor we can say that it has in its hands a diagnosis of its own reality”*⁽¹⁾, which *“generates a tacit commitment of progressive improvement”*⁽²⁾. It allows institutional transparency in the exhibition of its actions and the accountability considered as the possibility of *“preserving the confidence of the public at the same time as it is capable of explaining the promises made by the organisation to people who support it, all this without moving away from its mission”*.⁽³⁾

Our goal, then, would be to allow the sector to go one step towards the idea of standardizing parameters that legitimate processes with the objective of benchmarking. To facilitate, at the same time, a continued self evaluation with the aim in mind of prioritizing the intervention to provide more and better services to the whole community.

What to consider as the core purpose of the report?

Firstly, it is necessary to determine the main purpose of it, if we know that there is an underlying goal related to accountability and transparency, we should be able to identify this at a specific activity level. After this, indicators will emerge.

Which is the purpose of the tool?

Shape the development of activities of the organisation over a period of time using some predetermined structure.

How to embody it?

The preparation is based on interdisciplinary work for the development and analysis of information collected and the contributions from all areas of the organisation for data collection.

How to structure it?

The peculiarity of the social report is the “balance” between the quantitative and qualitative aspects. The indicators are quantitative and the descriptions, case studies, illustrations, charts, graphs, concept maps, are qualitative. Another important aspect is the definition of a uniform period of time to perform measurements, allowing comparison and trend analysis.

How to select indicators?

The chosen indicators should have the majority of these features:

- **Availability:** the basic data for the construction of the indicator should be readily available without any restrictions.
- **Simplicity:** the indicator should be easy to manufacture.
- **Validity:** the validity of the indicators means that they must be able to actually measure the phenomenon being measured and not others.
- **Specificity:** if an indicator does not really measure what is to be measured, its value is limited because it does not allow the proper assessment of the situation to reflect features that belong to a parallel phenomenon.
- **Reliability:** the data used to construct the indicator should be reliable (Satisfactory information sources).

⁽¹⁾ Fernandez Villa, María Isabel; Gallego Franco, Mery y Ortiz Cancino, Jaime Eduardo; Balance Social: Fundamentos e implementación; Editorial elats; Perú; 1991; P. 94.

⁽²⁾ Gallego Franco, Mery; Foro perspectivas y futuro del Balance Social; Colombia, Medellín. P.13.

⁽³⁾ Kearns, Kevin P.; Managing for accountability; San Francisco: Jossey-Bass; cop. 1996; P. 40.

- **Scope:** The indicator must synthesize the maximum number of conditions or factors affecting the situation described by this indicator. Where possible the indicator should be globalized.

After defining the indicators, a collection system of data issues, which must be kept under control, should be designed:

- **Information collected:** We must take into account all activities, pre-set minimum requirements to report.
- **Sources of information:** The data are scattered in each area, therefore the provision of information sources in a quick and reliable way should be established.
- **Frequency of reporting:** To allow a proper analysis a uniform period should be considered.
- **Presentation:** According to the indicator, the information may be quantitative and qualitative, and may or may not be systematized.
- **Responsible for the collection:** The organisation must determine who will be the responsible team for the collection and subsequent tabulation.

Social Report Benefits

- **Internal Communication:** Facilitates the opening of work areas knowledge to other parts of the organisation.
- **External communication:** It allows the contribution to institutional transparency, giving information to members and donor fund organisations, as well as government agencies, supranational organisations, etc.
- **Information setting in order**
- **Highlight the contributions of the organisation.**

Whom is it addressed to?

It is a "multi-stakeholder" report.

To conclude...

In order to achieve the successful development of the proposed tool it is necessary to be highly aware of all the elements that the organisation provides. This refers to the reports that tabulate systematic data. At the time of accountability, we explain everything

we do, and that means a wide knowledge of those who we must address too, as they are our stakeholders in the organisation. We can distinguish two types of stakeholders: the internal ones, such as: managers, staff labor, and members; and external ones: the community, potential members and partners, donors suppliers, controller organs and other institutions. Also we should consider others that can be mixed.

Every organisation must know how to diagram their accountability based especially on their mission. Because through this statement of activity the fundamental points of action that in future may become indicators can be seen.

There is no single model that fits perfectly in all nonprofit organisations. However, all organisations can venture into accountability and earn legitimacy and transparency. These standards allow us to appear as a sector in a homogenous way.

That is why we took different NGO's mechanisms to systematize the information that emerges from their daily activities, so that by developing and adding certain particular elements of analysis, we can get to the social report. That is to say, beyond the social report in its strictest sense, we are referring to a flexible and dynamic instrument that is adaptable to NGOs according to their themes and specific actions. It is a tool to integrate the concepts of the various proposals that are now trying to respond to the needs of accountability of the nonprofit organisation sector.

We invite you to visit Social Report examples in Argentina:

<http://www.ampf.org.ar/quienes/balances.shtml>

<http://www.odema.org/img/descargar/SocialReportOdema2011.pdf>

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Foundation Management Without Managers

Berit Sandberg

Foundations are a small, but growing part of the Third Sector in Germany. As of 2011 there were 18,946 foundations having legal capacity and making up for 17% of nonprofit-organisations. About 95% of them are charitable foundations. Not least because of their sociopolitical prominence they face demands to be more professional as well as other non-profits.

Professionalism has two aspects: internal differentiation of activities and changes in the respective occupational area. Within the organisation activities are diversified both vertically in terms of governance structure and horizontally regarding labor division. As for the occupational area, volunteers are displaced by full-time or part-time staff and often you do not gain access unless you have a degree.

We do not know how many employees there are in foundations. An estimate suggests that it is 150,000, but this might as well be a figure plucked out of the air. Most foundations are very small organisations. Including members of the board as well as both employees and volunteers 10% of foundations are represented by only one person. Half of them have at most five staff members, three quarters have at most ten staff members. (Sandberg 2007) Is there the same trend towards professionalism in foundations as with nonprofit service providers? (Hwang/Powell 2009)

The following findings on management positions in German foundations are based on a content analysis on job advertisements. 897 job adverts, which German foundations placed between

May 1st and July 30th 2012 were retrieved from the internet and reviewed.

18% of the job advertisements (161 ads) refer to management positions, but only 14% refer to management positions with a focus on business functions. Therefore, almost 25% of management positions are not designed for the classical management profession as far as the job description and the requirement profile are concerned. They are filled by representatives of other professions instead. The chief pharmacist of a hospital or the cleaner who is a foreman are examples. You will find cases like these especially in the occupational area "education and social affairs" as well as in "medicine and health care". Usually they cover positions on the lowest management level like care service, residential area management, and ward management.

Two thirds of the job advertisements refer to positions in first line management. 25% of the offered positions belong to middle management. Only 12 positions are on the top management level (members of the board, executive officers).

Especially in upper and middle management duties are performed by professional managers, who have been trained to act as such. Stepping down the organisational ladder the job contents and requirements become less business related. In top management you will definitely need managerial skills. In middle management 84% of positions require them, whereas on the lowest management level it is only 73%.

The requirements on education are according to this. Most management positions in foundations demand a degree in business administration studies, but often a comparable degree or commercial training are sufficient as well. A degree in law or social sciences is usually not considered to be equivalent to a degree in business administration. You can occupy a management position with any other academic education. However, degrees in educational sciences or humanities do not exceed 10% each. Ten out of hundred management positions are accessible by a medical or nursing training.

If no degree in business administration is required, basic commercial knowledge is not either. The social worker with additional qualifications in business administration and the regional manager in air rescue, who is trained in emergency medicine as well as in business, are exceptions. The educator, who has had an academic education as such and is supposed to perform the tasks of a controller, is an exception, too.

All these findings support the general assumption, that above all in social services and health care there is a differentiation of tasks within the organisation. Professionals with competence in management can be distinguished from those with a base in a substantive field, such as medicine, or social work.

This indicates some professionalism, but it is only true for a good third of foundations. Only those have full time employees. Atypical forms of employment relationship are prevalent. Part time employment and other atypical forms have a share of 36% of employment forms and 25% respectively. (Sandberg 2007; Priller et al. 2012)

Three quarters of German foundations largely rely on volunteers. Boards are characterized by volunteering, too. 90% of foundations have a board whose

members are partially or entirely volunteers. (Sandberg 2007; Sandberg/Mecking 2008; Priller et al. 2012)

There is no empirical evidence for professionalisation in German foundations yet, because there are no empirical findings on changes in the employment structure yet. However the structure data suggest a gap between ambition and reality.

Programs of advanced training place special emphasis on matters of business administration such as strategic management, asset management, accounting and communication. Providers seem to notice a demand for professional expertise in these areas. Trainings to become a certified "foundation manager" even claim a distinct profession. However, this seems to be less fact than wishful thinking.

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Should voluntary organisations do research? Insights from the international development community

Daniel Stevens

I was in a workshop recently when a senior representative of a major international development donor provocatively suggested that NGOs shouldn't do research. He was exaggerating a little to make a point – of course an international development NGO should do research in the broadest sense of learning and improving, but in the narrower definition of academic research should NGOs really be devoting resources to something that is not their core business?

It's a good question that helps us think about how as voluntary organisations we relate to the research 'professionals'. A recent project funded by the Development Studies Association, coordinated by INTRAC (a development research and training NGO), University of Bradford and World Vision UK, looked at how we can 'crack collaboration' and many of the lessons are likely relevant for the wider voluntary sector.

One word sums up the pressures that are pushing NGOs and academic institutions to work closer together – and that is 'impact'. In common with the wider voluntary and community sector, international NGOs are having to demonstrate results – particularly during these tough economic times when the 'charity begins at home' argument is particularly salient. Donors want NGO impact reporting to be 'rigorous' which requires technical expertise in research methods and ideally an independent adjudicator. So NGOs are increasingly looking to academic institutions to help meet this challenge. At the same time academic institutions are under pressure to demonstrate the 'impact' of their development research – and a great way of showing that research is shaping practice and policy is to work with development NGOs.

But being pushed together does not nec-

essarily lead to a happy marriage, and our project, along with an initiative of an organisation called 'Enhancing Learning and Research in Humanitarian Assistance', has identified some useful pointers on how to make the relationship work. None of these are particularly new, but salutary reminders of what is needed to make the relationship work.

The first is to recognise there are culture clashes between voluntary organisations and academic institutions – stereotypes of the other are rife, but in short academics are seen as theoretical, ivory tower critics, and NGOs as hot-headed and unreflective. Each group dances to different institutional tunes, and critically work at different paces – academic research has horizons of years, NGO need to make decisions tomorrow.

The second is to appreciate that the clash of cultures can be creative if there is time taken to communicate, and that process is helped by an increasing number of individuals who straddle the two worlds. It is likely that most reading this have moved between the academic research and voluntary sector communities, and this ability to understand both worlds is critical in ensuring that collaboration can be successful.

The third is to respect the different expertise each side brings without too rigid a division of labour. If we divided the research process crudely into 'design, delivery and dissemination' then there is an increasing consensus that both sides need to work intensively together on the design. Academics need to move away from just bringing in NGOs at the 'dissemination' end of the process. Likewise NGOs need to beware completely contracting out the delivery of research.

What does that mean practically for a voluntary organisation like World Vision? We commission research to not only demonstrate our impact, but also to improve our programming approaches and inform our advocacy. We have struggled at times to find creative ways of working with academic institutions – often they cannot deliver according to our timescale or exactly what we want. So we are learning to change our expectations of a research timeline – thinking years for a final product, and months for interim outputs. And we are experimenting with co-production of knowledge through doing data collection jointly with outside experts – having a staff member accompany the research professional on piloting any tools and in actually collecting the data. In this way we ensure we maximise the internal learning that research can produce, as well as benefiting from external expertise. So our answer to the question of whether NGOs should do research is a clear yes, but not in isolation.

‘mergers mergers everywhere, and all the boards did shrink’

Jinimi Cricket

Well I know, it is meant to say water water everywhere, and all the boards did shrink but I did think it was funny. Of course, as a cricket it is not really my forte but I thought I'd borrow a line from the “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” as you cannot jump around at the moment without bumping into organisations which either have already or are about to merge. For example, the British Association of Settlements and Social Action Centres and the Development Trusts Association became ‘locality’ in 2011. The National Council for Voluntary Organisations and Volunteering England have announced their plans to merge in January 2013 and the National Association for Voluntary and Community

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daniel.stevens@worldvision.org.uk. Details of the Cracking Collaboration project are at <http://www.intrac.org/pages/en/cracking-collaboration-a-new-look-at-partnerships-in-international-development-research-.html> and the ELHRA guide on effective partnerships is at <http://www.elrha.org/effective-partnerships-guide>

Action is in merger talks with Community Matters. The stories that are told sound hauntingly like the old tale:

*The souls did from their bodies fly,
They fled to bliss or woe!*

I am not a man or a wedding guest but listening to all the stories of merging I feel as if the last lines of the poem may very well have been written for this very cricket:

*He went like one that hath been stunned,
And is of sense forlorn:*

A sadder and a wiser man

He rose the morrow morn.

Jinimi Cricket is the nom du plume of a member of ARVAC.

Social Capital, Children and Young People: Implications for practice, policy and research, Edited by Julie Allen and Ralph Catts (2012)

Reviewed by Chloe Pritchard

Social capital is defined in the book as a product of social relationships, and the 'norms and values which shape them'. These relationships range from the basic networks of family, friendship and the local community, to those within state institutions and community agencies.

The research was carried out by the Schools and Social Capital Network (SSCN), which is a strand of the Scottish Government and Scottish Funding Council financed Applied Educational Research Scheme. One of the main aims of this was to carry out research to benefit the lowest achieving 20% of the school population. The SSCN was tasked (amongst other things) with exploring social capital and its potential for children and young people in educational settings. The book provides a synthesis of the group's findings, discussion and debates around the concept of social capital and its usefulness in the endeavour of improving opportunities for disadvantaged children and young people.

The 3 main proponents of Social Capital theory, Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam, are referenced by contributors and debated in terms of their usefulness throughout.

The book is structured into 8 research case studies examining different contexts involving children and young people. Each uses social capital as an analytic tool to assess the quality and utility of the relationships within and the benefits (or limitations) these have for participants. The first four case studies look at programmes for children and young people, some of which were for particular groups including refugees and young carers.

The second half looks at social capital within educational settings (schools and an alternative learning programme for young people not in education or training). There are commentaries following each section on the findings and the discussion produced and its relevance for policy and practice. This configuration is a useful mechanism to reflect on the powerful messages each case study offers about the groups represented, and the

relevance these have for national policy and practice, whilst ensuring that the issues raised about those individual groups are not lost in the wider debates offered. However, as each chapter is written in an academic journal structure and therefore includes similar discussion, this can produce repetition of the points raised, which can at times feel laboured to the reader.

The case studies employed an interesting and considered range of research methodologies which were specifically tailored to the context observed. In the main these were participatory, and there were heartening examples of researchers working to ensure that children and young people benefited from the research process and were able to develop and utilise some form of social capital as a result. An exception to this approach was the case study within an independent school. The authors discussed the difficulties they experienced in gaining access to this research setting, which they attribute to the schools' involved utilisation of power in order to protect their public image. The methods used in this example seemed more detached, which perhaps was a consequence of the access issues and potential restrictions on the methods used. It could also be argued that the inclusion of this setting was to provide contrast to the lives of disadvantaged people, and therefore was intended to include criticism or suggestion for change to this system. This immediately changes the dynamics between the researchers and the participants and necessitates some distance between them for ethical reasons.

Throughout the discussion of the case studies, key themes emerged as particularly salient points for consideration, in terms of policy development and educational practice.

Trust was a significant factor in the development and maintenance of relationships both between children/young people and agency representatives as well as between agencies and establishments themselves.

A key concern for many of the contributors was the effect of transitions on children/young people, and the durability of or disruption to the social capital they acquire in different settings. Childhood and adolescence by their nature are characterised by transition as individuals pass through developmental stages towards adulthood, and therefore will experience a range of social relationships throughout this time, some of which will remain consistent and others more fleeting.

One of the case studies focused on this specifically, exploring the transition from primary to secondary school and the ways in which previous social networks were maintained and new ones formed. The findings were revealing in that the young people's social networks experienced a significant decrease, which was also shown to be linked to their attitudes to school. The authors propose that this lack of security may contribute to what has been found to be a general decline in educational performance for this age group, rather than what has always been attributed to changes in adolescence or disruption in curriculum.

The influence of space and place were addressed frequently throughout the discussion, as it served as a facilitator to the development of networks and the norms that were experienced within it. Many young people from disadvantaged communities characterised by limited opportunities and poverty appeared to have restricted aspirations which were constrained by their locality, which they very rarely had the opportunity to move out of.

Linked to this is the importance of family networks, which were viewed as positive influences overall, however could serve to either enhance or restrict opportunities for young people, which also impacted on aspirations.

The messages from this research are important in current political discourse, particularly around social mobility, as they reinforce the (often conveniently ignored) vital influence of relationships. Children and young people need access to information and opportunities, coupled with a carefully fostered and reinforced sense of possibility and self-belief to achieve their potential, which can only be formed through interaction with those who have the ability, connections and knowledge available to share with them.

The case studies produced in this book illustrate the reality of the contexts that many disad-

vantaged young people are operating within. The research in independent schools was a highlight as it starkly contrasted with the others to show that children and young people are not competing on a level playing field, and there are many other factors working against disadvantaged young people, affecting their ability to succeed in today's education system and subsequent job market.

The inclusion of research into other contexts (even if by reference) further along in the life course would have been interesting to explore how these relationships affect young adults moving into further education or employment. This could have indicated the impact on their individual lives and communities, as well as the wider economy. Though, it is noted that this was not the scope of the project.

The contributors agree that social capital is a useful tool in exploring the way in which individuals move through and up the social ladder, however it cannot be seen in isolation from structural factors such as poverty and deprivation, which serve to maintain inequality. Again this is illustrated by the independent schools case study as these individuals were able to buy access to valuable social capital opportunities.

There are therefore limitations to the usefulness of policy initiatives to stimulate social capital amongst disadvantaged groups which are not coupled with wider aims to reduce inequality.

This book focuses on educational settings, however there are lessons for the voluntary sector. There was recognition of the value of community organisations in forming a link between individuals and schools, and reinforced the importance in both sectors working together to improve outcomes for children and young people by ensuring that they have access to the information and resources they need.

The research presented in this book provides an engaging and passionate contribution to the debate around issues of social mobility, inclusion and equality. Although the language used is targeted towards an academic audience, it would be useful to education policy makers and practitioners, as well as those interested in these issues and social capital theory.

Chloe Pritchard is researcher at the Salvation Army.

INVITATION

ARVAC Annual Conference and AGM

**Weathering the Storm:
sharing community stories of
survival and evolution**

21 November 2012

**Studio 11, Lenton Lane, Kings Meadow,
University of Nottingham, NG7 2NR**

**For full information and registration see our website.
Attendance is FREE but places are limited.**



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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
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