

## Charities and community groups give power to the people

Campaigning by charities got all-party support at the launch of **Campaigning is OK!** in the House of Commons Grand Committee Room on Monday 13th July, attended by over 70 people from the voluntary and community sector. Speakers included Angela Smith, MP, Minister for the Third Sector; Shadow Minister Nick Hurd MP; Greg Mulholland MP; Fiona Mactaggart MP and voluntary sector representatives.

Angela Smith, MP, recently appointed Minister for the Third Sector, said that pressure for better services made a difference. She gave the example of Hibiscus, the Female Prisoners Welfare Project, which runs campaigns overseas to persuade women not to get involved in the drugs trade. As a result, the number of Jamaican couriers arrested fell from a high of 30-40 a day to less than 5 per month. (see <http://hibiscuslondon.org.uk/eva.htm#EVA>). "The Government has invested substantial sums in building the capacity of the Third Sector, including support for campaigning and a £750,000 action research project run by Capacity Builders."

Nick Hurd MP, Conservative Shadow Minister, said whoever wins the next election faces tough questions about public spending. "This makes it all the more important that people campaign for their priorities and counterbalance the government. Whitehall doesn't always get it right. We need open minds to new ideas and new ways of doing things." In response to a question from Jol Miskin of the WEA, Hurd said he had changed his view about public funding for practical political education as a result of the work by Novas Scarman. "Public funding for citizens to learn how to influence decisions is probably more important when money is tight, so that people feel they can change things."

For the Liberal Democrats, Greg Mulholland MP defended campaigning politics. He mentioned CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale, as one of the most successful consumer campaigns which had a huge impact. "People have to challenge decisions they don't like, to get involved in dialogue and discussion. MPs need to hear from people who passionately care about things. If you believe something is important, come and see us and tell us in person."

Fiona Mactaggart, MP for Slough and former Home Office Minister, emphasised the importance of involving your MP. "Do not under-estimate the power of real people, telling their own stories, with all their passion. Borrow some start dust when you can - as in the case of Joanna Lumley and the Gurkhas - but be flexible. Go with the flow and make it exciting."

Other speakers included:

Daniel Wood of Parliamentary Outreach described how they provide free information and workshops for people to understand how parliament works and how to have a voice. Parliamentary Outreach works with local organisations, who can ask for a workshop in their own community.

Matt Leach, CEO of Capacitybuilders, spoke about improving support for campaigning, highlighting national work which was led by NCVO, with Novas Scarman as a key partner, and the support provided at a local support providers. A new £750k action research project to support campaigning by 30 small voluntary organisations had been launched in June, with the aim of identifying critical success factors for grassroots campaigns.

Clare Parry, Sheila McKechnie Foundation, described how they support individual campaigners with their annual Awards, training and the [www.CampaignCentral.org.uk](http://www.CampaignCentral.org.uk) website, which connects campaigners with each other, resources and support. Linda Ramsden of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHDUK), a past Award winner, was present and raised a question about difficulties of campaigning on the green outside parliament.

Sonia Omar, of British Institute for Human Rights, spoke about the importance of empowering people to claim what parliament and the Universal declaration of Human Rights have set out as fundamental rights for all. A human rights approach means that people should plead for their needs to be met as victims, but can assert their rights as citizens.

Phil Jew, Policy Director of Advice UK, outlined their campaign to change the funding system which prevents advice agencies from giving people the help they need and makes it difficult for them to campaign about the issues which cause people to have problems in the first place. For example, many problems with welfare benefits are caused by failures in the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), which could be solved by a systems approach to improving services.

Titus Alexander, Head of Campaigning at Novas Scarman and author of *Campaigning is OK!* said “Democracy can’t be taken for granted. Society is at risk if people lose faith in democratic politics or feel they can’t influence things. Campaigners are the entrepreneurs of politics. They identify problems and propose solutions, pushing issues up the public agenda. Big companies and charities can afford to employ campaigners or lobbyists to argue their case. Every citizen should be able to learn how the system works and campaign for what they believe in.”

*Campaigning is OK!* is a guide to building capacity for advocacy and campaigning, with reports from eight regional events involving over 600 people earlier this year. It is packed with information about why campaigning matters, where to get support and resources available, including training, materials, books and websites. It is aimed at a wide range of audiences, including learning and training providers, third sector support providers and anyone involved in empowerment, advocacy, campaigning and learning active citizenship. For the thinking behind this report, read *Learning Power: a contribution to the national skills strategy*, at <http://static.novas.org/files/learning-power-262.pdf> with reviews by Francis Maude, Bernard Crick, Helena Kennedy and others.

**Campaigning is OK!** can be downloaded from  
<http://static.novas.org/files/campaigningisok-456.pdf>

**For more information, contact:**

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***It's the System Stupid! Radically Rethinking Advice***  
<http://www.adviceuk.org.uk/DisplayPage.asp?pageid=12831>.

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British Institute of Human Rights, [www.bihar.org.uk](http://www.bihar.org.uk)

Capacity Builders: [www.capacitybuilders.org.uk/](http://www.capacitybuilders.org.uk) and [www.improvingsupport.org.uk](http://www.improvingsupport.org.uk)

NCVO Campaigning Effectiveness: [www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/campaigningeffectiveness/](http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/campaigningeffectiveness/)

Parliamentary Outreach [www.parliament.uk/getinvolved/outreach.cfm](http://www.parliament.uk/getinvolved/outreach.cfm) Tel: 020 7219  
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**Pictures from the event**

can be seen at: <http://photocast.me.com/justin.novas/iPhoto/campaigning-is-ok!/index.rss>

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