

THE BIG SOCIETY

A VIEW FROM THE FRONTLINE



Foreword by Nick Hurd MP



CALOUSTE
GULBENKIAN
FOUNDATION

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Edited by Nicholas Kent



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The Big Society: A View from the Frontline

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St Christopher's Youth Project, Bradford (<http://www.stcyp.org>) works alongside the young people of Holme Wood to provide opportunities which enable them to improve, change and develop their lives. The project is based in Holme Wood, a large and disadvantaged social housing estate, and the majority of their activities have a performing arts focus, although they also do some work in supported housing and sport opportunities. Through all their work they aim to help young people develop skills, increase their aspirations, grow in confidence and self-esteem and break out of cycles of poverty and deprivation.

FOREWORD

In *The Big Society: A View from the Frontline* the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation has continued its tradition of being a pioneer by taking the debate about the Big Society down to the grassroots of the voluntary and community sector.

As Minister for Civil Society I get the opportunity to meet the voluntary and community sector organisations that make such a positive difference to people's lives. During my visits around the UK I have witnessed a diverse range of organisations, and their activists, who truly illustrate that volunteers and professionals working together can deliver real benefits to communities. It is those working on the ground who are the most connected to their communities and understand how to make a difference to the lives of the people in them. So I welcome an initiative that enables those local activists to contribute to the debate about what the Big Society means.

It is sometimes perceived that what those on the ground have to say is uncomfortable for those who make public policy. But that is the key to the Big Society's success; we need people to speak with honesty about the problems they face, and the things they want so that Ministers and councillors truly understand people's needs. Big Society can only be truly driven from the bottom, and it is the Government's responsibility to enable power to be devolved to local communities.

I fully recognise that the next few years will be challenging. The difficult decisions that we had to take during the Spending Review will have implications for many organisations. However, the Government is committed to increasing the opportunity for these organisations, so that they become less dependent on government handouts and thrive and expand in their own right. Through the opening up of public services to increasing the power of local communities, the injection of capital through the Big Society Bank, and through growing the amount of time and money given as a result of our Green Paper, the Government is clear that the opportunities for the sector will increase.

Widening the sources and depth of funding is particularly important so that voluntary and community organisations are not reliant on handouts from the Government. The Gulbenkian Foundation was established by one of the twentieth century's great philanthropists,

Calouste Gulbenkian; the Government wants to encourage a new era of philanthropy.

All the projects featured in *A View from the Frontline* involve volunteers in their work. It is crucial that we bring forward a new generation of volunteers to continue Britain's great volunteering tradition; the National Citizen Service scheme is one way we can do that. This programme will one day be available to every 16 year old in the country and this will provide short-term benefits for thousands of local communities and embed the rewards of volunteering into future generations.

The Big Society is about devolving power downwards – we want to encourage social action, we want to open up public services and we want to make it easier for civil society organisations to operate. But part of the Big Society is about encouraging debate and exploring how communities want to take forward these different opportunities.

I have great pleasure in commending this booklet and film to you. The organisations featured here are full of ideas and inspiration and I hope that it does stimulate debate about the concept of the Big Society and how it can be made a reality.

Nick Hurd MP
Minister for Civil Society

INTRODUCTION

The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation is an international charitable foundation that has been working in the UK for over 50 years with a range of organisations – cultural, social and educational – all of them enriching and connecting the lives of people in this country.

We have a long history of identifying some of the most difficult issues and of pioneering compelling solutions to the problems of the age. Many famous organisations were supported at the outset by the Foundation including Community Service Volunteers, Samaritans, Shelter and Youth Music. Today, we are focusing in particular on organisations that can help fulfil the potential of people's lives, build cultural awareness or help protect the environment.

To do this, we recognise the need for us to break down silos, work across boundaries and ensure the whole is more than the sum of its parts. We are genuinely committed to building – not just a bigger – but a better society. And as part of this, we are keen to champion the work of organisations, celebrate their successes and enable them to share good practice. By doing so we encourage others to build on existing ideas to benefit society in general and the individuals they work for.

We have heard a lot from policy makers and thinkers about the Big Society and what it means but we wanted to hear the views of organisations working on the ground and those who are the beneficiaries of their work. *The Big Society: A View from the Frontline* shifts the debate from the philosophical to the practical. What are the common strands to be found amongst voluntary and community sector organisations in Britain? But also, what makes them different from each other? How do they connect to their communities? What do they think the Big Society means? Above, all what is their contribution to – and their big ask of – the Big Society?

Our film, and this accompanying booklet, focus on five very diverse civil society organisations and the work they do:

- Bournemouth Churches Housing Association
- Samaritans
- City Gateway Women's Project
- Craigmillar Community Arts
- Age UK Oxfordshire

What these five have in common is that they have all received funding from the Foundation at some point – though in two cases (Craigmillar and Samaritans) many years ago. We chose these organisations because we wanted to reflect the rich diversity of the voluntary and community sector in Britain today – working with young and old, women, people with multiple disadvantages in life or those in great distress. We also wanted to celebrate the work they do; each of these five organisations is improving people's lives in substantive ways.

What have we learned? Firstly, that the voluntary and community sector in Britain is vibrant and resilient. Despite the manifold changes in our society over the last fifty years the desire to help others is as strong as it ever was. This film is an excellent tonic for those feeling cynical or overwhelmed by a sense that Britain has become a selfish, uncaring society.

Secondly, it's clear that the sector wants to be part of the debate around the Big Society. Many feel they are delivering the Big Society already – and have been doing so for many years – and they are keen to have their voices heard. They want politicians and public officials not just to pay lip service to involving communities and volunteers but to ensure that they are part of the policy discussion at the beginning. The sector needs to be seen, they say, as having as much to contribute to policy formulation as to the delivery of services.

Thirdly, the people from the organisations we interviewed are honest about saying that the funding reductions that have followed the comprehensive spending review have cast a level of suspicion on the concept of the Big Society. Many feel strongly that it is inappropriate for public services simply to rely on volunteers when making cuts in core services; services which we have come to expect as part of our contract with government around public welfare.

But, whilst they acknowledge the funding challenges that lie ahead, they still want to grow and develop and can see the potential of the Big Society initiative to help them do that and improve the quality and scale of what they do. Many have survived previous periods of boom and bust in public sector funding and feel they have the resilience to survive. Given the chance, many will utilise the ingenuity of people working on the ground to get us through this difficult transitional period and to take advantage of the real opportunities that lie ahead.

Finally, they all acknowledge that volunteers are central to what they do. Without them, they would not be able to make such a difference to

people's lives. It is the volunteers that enable them to really connect with communities, to reach out and to show some of the most fragile people in our society that there are people who care about them and not just those who are paid to do so. Those volunteers are individuals who show passion and perseverance and who, working with others, form an essential part of our social fabric.

These concerns and hopes do not undermine the concept of the Big Society: they demonstrate that none of us should give up on the vision it encapsulates. That is not a political point – all three parties have been involved in initiatives to strengthen the voluntary and community sector over the last decade whether serving in local or national government.

My hope for the Big Society is that we can all be much more connected, as individuals contributing and playing our part but also as organisations, identifying what works, sharing good practice and really delivering for others.

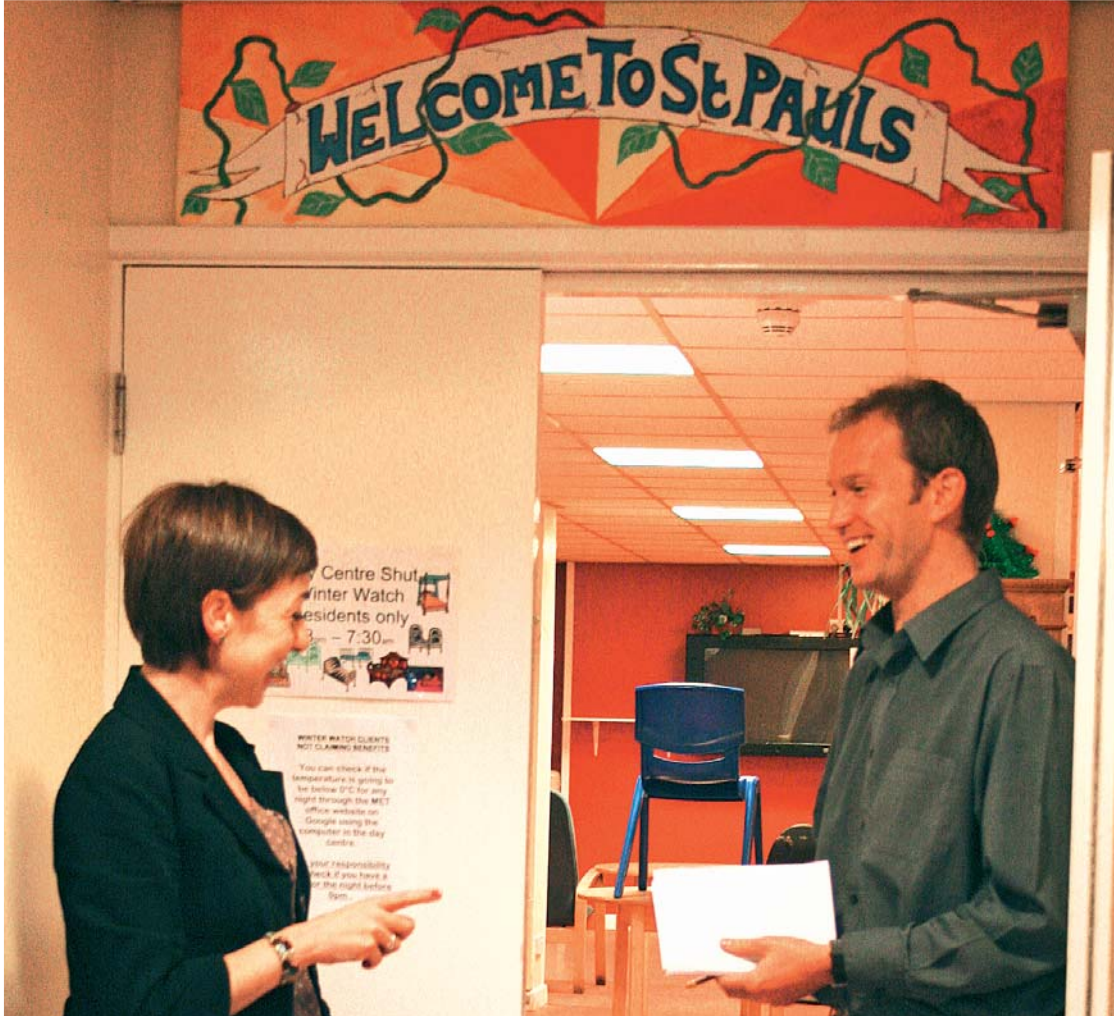
The Gulbenkian Foundation will continue to play its part in achieving that greater connectedness – providing a hub for organisations to come together as well as being a supporter of innovative ideas. We also have a role in exchanging and sharing international practice and, as part of our aim to maximise social and cultural value, will continue to support social leadership, greater collaboration across sectors and organisations, evaluation and learning.

The Big Society represents an important opportunity for the voluntary and community sector to expand what it does, to engage more volunteers and to reach out to a yet wider range of potential beneficiaries and users. I hope *A View from the Frontline* will help to move forward the debate about how we achieve that.

Andrew Barnett

Director

Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, UK



BCHA
Supporting homeless people
 Martin Hancock, Chief Executive

BCHA (Bournemouth Churches Housing Association) is a specialist housing and social care provider. We help homeless, vulnerable and other people to access the right housing, health, learning and work opportunities. Our mission is to help people who often have complex and multiple needs to take control of their own lives. Wherever people feel vulnerable or don't know where to turn,

BCHA managers Sarah Ward and Mark Horsford at the St Paul's hostel and day centre

we equip them to find a way forward by offering the highest standards of support for housing, health, learning and work – or any combination of these needs. Established in Bournemouth 42 years ago, BCHA runs services from Reading in the east, to Oxford and Chippenham in the north, and south to Exeter. We're currently building a new hostel for homeless people in Plymouth.

BCHA is collaborating with Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) on a new service in Somerset. This pilot will work with local partners to better coordinate existing services for people facing multiple needs and exclusions, improve outcomes and save money. As the pilot service is just getting started, filming focused on one of our well-established projects, the hostel and day centre at St Paul's.

Sarah Ward, Homelessness and Substance Misuse Manager

“To give you an idea of the scope of BCHA, and specifically the work we do at St Paul's, we've supported around 5,000 people over the last year through our services and that includes children as well, as we do offer services for young people. We've got just over 1,000 units of accommodation that we can offer people and here at St Paul's we've seen around 780 people pass through the doors receiving support from us.

BCHA manages to deliver this scope and range of services because we work very closely in partnership with a whole range of other organisations and that's the thing that we feel we do best; we're very good at brokering relationships between both statutory and voluntary organisations and individuals. Sometimes innovation comes about from joining up people who wouldn't normally work together.

St Paul's is our direct access provision, we offer 40 bed spaces to people who are out rough sleeping or homeless, and we also offer a day centre facility downstairs so people can come in and engage in different types of meaningful activity and also get their fundamental needs met.

Part of the service that we offer to people from the moment they walk in, through to the moment that they're ready to go into employment, is around training and employment opportunities. We're now delivering what we call AQA certificate ... where somebody can engage with [for example] an art activity and get an accredited unit of learning. For some people that might be the first time they've actually had an achievement recognised formally in that way and it can mean a huge amount.”



So what does BCHA bring to the Big Society? We have been answering the call for local leadership and active participation in the South West since we were founded. We are a central part of our local community – proactive and influential – benefiting and involving not just our clients but the wider society around us. Our volunteers, trustees and residents ensure that we are rooted in the communities we serve and we are deeply proud of our mutual commitment and respect for each other. We maintain a strong presence in local and national debates with the ultimate aim of eliminating homelessness and social exclusion.

As a multidisciplinary third sector organisation, we continuously develop our services, resources and partnerships, to help bring together different agencies across the housing, health and social care sectors (both statutory and voluntary) to deliver an ever-improving quality of support to society's most in-need people.

If this answers the question about what we can bring to the Big Society, we must also look at what the Big Society can do for us. In this we see five key themes.

The first is the need for Big Society to promote greater involvement in decisions that effect local communities and the individuals within them. Decision-making is more likely to be effective where there is transparency with regard to experience, knowledge and resources. BCHA has these attributes, and they should be utilised. Local authorities should consult more broadly with providers and the wider community when changes are being proposed – allowing those with ‘on the ground’ knowledge of the area an opportunity to input.

This links to the Big Society having a central role to play in helping local areas develop better

Sarah Ward

“BCHA's one big ask of the Big Society would be that we're very much included, that what we're doing already is recognised. We're doing a huge amount, we feel part of the Big Society and that we are creative and innovative. At the moment it's almost sometimes seen, we feel, as a hindrance, and actually there's a huge amount of creativity and innovation that we can offer that needs to be really harnessed.”

coordinated service pathways for people facing complex and multiple needs. All too often vulnerable people have to navigate their way through a complex ‘service provider maze’ only to find later that there were simpler pathways. These scenarios have massive economic costs associated with them as people ‘recycle’ between different services without an effective outcome, becoming



Service users at the St Paul's centre

further excluded and reliant on expensive unplanned and emergency interventions. The social costs are also high – the break up of family units and relationships, increased risks of

homelessness, offending behaviour, and deteriorating health outcomes. By encouraging all providers to work together in a more coordinated way the Big Society can help avoid these costs in the future. Local authorities should consider providing seed capital monies to fund pilot activity that could stimulate innovation and influence future delivery.

Big Society also has a role in allowing greater involvement from providers in commissioning. Local authorities should consider delegating some of the commissioning functions to civil society partners such as BCHA, who are often well-placed to work with stakeholders to determine local priorities. The third sector is not short of capable and willing experts who see the value of coordinated provision.

Resulting service models would feature a range of components such as education, training and employment options and provide tailored services based on customer preferences to tackle complex needs. The BCHA model of service delivery is already multi-faceted and we underpin our delivery with social enterprise, thereby also encouraging social entrepreneurship.

Sarah Ward

“We want to be round the table with the local authorities and other partners looking at what are the actual problems and what are we already doing and what can we offer in terms of finding solutions.

Often when tenders are put out there's a very prescriptive document laid out with a cost price to it. There needs to be trust both ways so that local authorities, especially, who are tied often by statutory constraints, can really make the most of what we can offer. ... A real open honest recognition of the fact that we have to operate in [an] entrepreneurial and business-like way would be very helpful.

A change that would help us would be less of an emphasis on payment by results and more of an emphasis and recognition that we're choosing to work with, and want to work with, some of the people who are most entrenched in terms of worklessness.

What would be really helpful is a real recognition around the impact of the work we do, and the impact should we not be doing that work in terms of the society and the communities that we're operating within. A huge amount of our work is around stopping things from happening – once someone is engaged in our services we'll be preventing them, for example, from having an A & E admission, we'll be preventing them from returning to prison through re-offending, we'll be preventing them from falling back into substance misuse, and the kind of costs implicated in terms of crime, health and social unrest.”

Next, the Big Society needs to encourage volunteering and social action. Whilst BCHA places an important emphasis on its volunteers, it is our intention to develop this further. Volunteering needs to be owned by the whole community as a way of making a contribution and not just regarded as a route to employment or meaningful activity. We will be working with key community players to encourage participation from their specialist field – for example local legal practices contributing expertise and support. We will also continue to be local leaders, utilising the democratic processes to support and harness the community so that its priorities are responded to effectively, with transparency, and as part of an agenda shared between local residents and providers.

Mick O'Neill, Volunteer

“The reason why I volunteer is because it's helping people and people that are down on their luck – I was like that once, I was down on my luck, and I needed help. I met a person the other day out there in Bournemouth [who] I hadn't seen for a while and now they're off the methadone and they're in a dry house. That's from knowing them when they first come here with an addiction, to now going through [a] methadone programme, coming off the methadone and moving on. That's how much this place has helped that person.”

Finally, security in funding. Historically, the majority of our funding has come from central and local government. The timing of the Big Society means we will now look to maximise our fundraising capacity in order to continue and enhance our offering. However, a truly effective Big Society will not develop unless priority is given by central and local government to supporting the infrastructure and security of funding needed to maintain and develop the many local partners that are critical to its success.

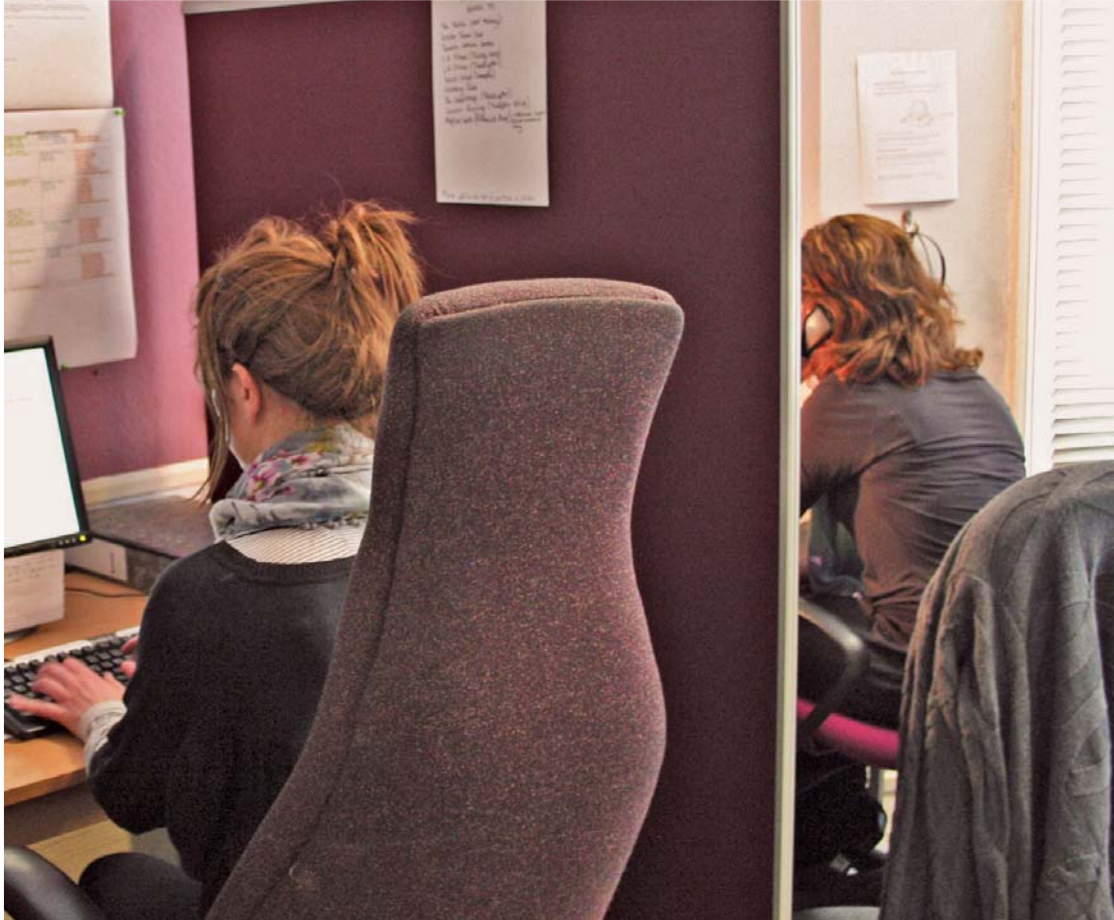
Cecil Peters, Service User

“If this didn't exist a lot of people would be on the street and there'd be a lot more crime because they would have to commit crime just for them to survive day to day. It's given me a lot of hope because I was pretty depressed before I came here and as I've been getting on with my key worker we are looking for me to move on to a hostel.”

Nick Hirst, Service User

“People would die on a regular basis if this centre didn't exist, it's as simple as that. I almost died during the very, very cold snap. I wasn't aware of the local services that were available – I was living in the bin store of an expensive block of flats on the edge of Bournemouth – and several times when it was down to minus 17 degrees, I had to get up in the middle of the night and walk for an hour or so to generate some heat. If I hadn't done I would've been dead.

In the space of about six or eight months I've gone from buying nice shoes and the occasional suit, and being suited and booted Monday to Friday and being quite good at my job, to being homeless, destitute and rather desperate. If this place hadn't sort of caught me on my fall, I'd probably be dead.”



SAMARITANS 24-hour helpline

Catherine Johnstone, Chief Executive

Samaritans was founded in 1953 by the Rev. Chad Varah, who started his confidential helpline with a single telephone in the crypt of St Stephen Walbrook, London. It was the first ever 24/7 helpline for people in emotional distress and at risk of suicide; the charity is now the biggest operation of its kind in the world. With 201 branches across the UK, Samaritans is run by 80 staff and 18,500 volunteers.

At the heart of the Big Society concept is the aim of encouraging volunteering, philanthropy and promoting a public-spirited service for the local community. With 58 years' experience of delivering a

*Above and opposite:
Kingston call centre*

volunteer-led service, the Samaritans has a great deal of expertise in this area. As the biggest provider of 24-hour confidential support for people in distress, the charity's volunteers answer more than 5 million calls each year. People of all ages provide the service by phone, email, text, or face to face.

If the basis of the Big Society vision is about encouraging people to take a more active role in the communities in which they live, then it is one that Samaritans shares – we are an organisation where ordinary people help save the lives of other ordinary people. We know that voluntary service can be a thoroughly enriching and life-changing experience. It allows people to build new relationships, master new skills, and make a real difference to other people's lives. It is critical that, in the aspiration to encourage more volunteering, we do not lose the essence of mutual benefit gained by the volunteer and the beneficiary of the activity, or undermine the importance of continued support to volunteers, which often costs in both time and money.

The Government's aim of stimulating this cultural shift towards more philanthropic giving and volunteering will be tough to deliver at a time when many charities will be facing cutbacks, job losses or even closure as the spending cuts begin to bite. In particular, the significantly diminished settlement for local government in the recent Comprehensive Spending Review will soon present a challenge to the credibility of the Big Society agenda, as local authorities look to make savings on non-essential activity and the traditional funding streams for voluntary groups begin to dry up.

Samaritans has benefited from having almost complete financial independence from government, which has given us a degree of stability during difficult economic periods. That said, if we were to



pay our volunteers for their time, it would cost the organisation approximately £54 million a year. It is little wonder then, that many smaller organisations have cautiously welcomed Big Society, especially when the extent of financial backing from the Government at all levels is still uncertain. The third sector must be seen as largely complementary to services that are the responsibility of the Government and not as a less expensive means of filling the gaps left behind by spending cuts.

If the coalition Government is serious about developing policies for public services that work from the bottom up rather than the top down, the new plans must enable voluntary sector organisations to feed in their local knowledge and expertise. Volunteers rooted in local communities can often be better placed to engage with people in a way that might not necessarily be achieved through central government. I would encourage policy makers to be cautious about creating new community networks and champions without first looking at what already exists and what could be sensibly grown or enhanced.

Rota board at the Kingston call centre



Nicola Peckett, Head of Communications

“We are engaged in the Big Society debate, because this is how Samaritans has provided its service for the last five decades. We can bring to the table the grass-roots view of what local communities are really feeling and thinking and we would like that to come from the bottom up.

Measuring impact for us is always very difficult because we don't know who calls us – Samaritans is an anonymous service. But one thing our volunteers do notice is that when we are out on the street, collecting or raising awareness of the service, somebody always comes up and says 'you saved my life' or 'you saved my mother's life' or 'you saved my brother's life', so you know that our service definitely is effective.

Our current strategy focuses on extending our service outside of the branch and into the heart of local communities, reaching out to vulnerable people and hard-to-reach groups. Lots of the branches are taking on new initiatives: for instance they are working in A&E departments or in GP's surgeries.

We are working with Network Rail in a five-year partnership to reduce suicide on the railways. There are about 200 suicides a year on the railways but obviously the impact is quite monumental. We are training the railway staff in how to approach a person that they are worried about. This doesn't mean tackling them to the ground, but learning how to approach them with words, to have the right words ... to encourage them to find other answers and seek help.

We [also] have what's known as a prisoner listener scheme, and this means that our volunteers go into prisons and train prisoners through the same selection and training process that Samaritans volunteers are given. Prison listeners learn how to listen to their fellow prisoners. Going to prison can be very distressing, especially the first 48 hours and prisoners are seven times more likely to take their own life than an average person in the UK.”

As the Government seeks to fund voluntary sector organisations on the basis of measuring outcomes and 'payment by results', it will also need to acknowledge that not all of the benefits to society that result from charitable activity are immediately recognisable or even measurable.





I would ask that the Government needs to keep charities, like Samaritans, closely involved at every stage to maximise the impact that public health initiatives can make. With a nationally driven strategy, supported by regional infrastructure and local delivery, we have been delivering our service in different community settings for a number of years – such as in schools, prisons, festivals, in the workplace, through partnerships and in the rail industry.

*Duncan Irvine,
Ex-caller/Volunteer*

The third sector has an excellent track record in embracing new opportunities for their volunteers to use their skills to work with other service providers and experts to influence local debates, decision-making and service delivery.

Many charities already offer an essential role in delivering services to the local community, but we should welcome the explicit concept of a Big Society. Although it is not a new concept for us, it promises to provide many opportunities for the third sector. Charities and local communities are at the heart of Big Society, and if we work together, it can only have a positive outcome for everyone.

Duncan Irvine, Ex-caller/Volunteer

“My first contact with Samaritans was many years ago when I was quite young, I was going through a very bad time, my mother had a severe mental illness and depression.

One day at work it all overcame me and I tried to cut my wrists but didn't succeed, so I started wandering the streets. I came across this telephone box with a Samaritans poster in it. I phoned Samaritans and was amazed to find – by speaking to this guy – he was totally accepting [of] everything I said. It was confidential and he wasn't judging me and it was tremendous.

I think it was really important for me because ... I felt able to talk about something that was going on in my head; it was charging around in there, I couldn't get hold of it. For the first time I could clearly see what everything was about and I was sharing it with someone who was just there.

I was always grateful for Samaritans helping me at that time and some time later, [when] I was in a stable job and a relationship, I felt that I would like to try to listen to people as he had listened to me and help people get through periods of crisis. So I went along to a Samaritan branch and was accepted as a volunteer and I've been doing it now for 20-odd years.

I went to an information hour which gives you information about the organisation, what it does and what it doesn't do. It doesn't give people advice but it does ask people if they have suicidal thoughts ... for a lot of people it's a great release to be able to talk about that. We are in many ways quite passive, it's active listening but we don't solve people's problems, we don't give people advice.

One of the great things about Samaritans is the support you get. In my own branch in central London we have a shift leader, who is not there to listen to callers but to support the volunteers. Even in other branches, which aren't that big, the volunteers will support you during and after a call.”



CITY GATEWAY WOMEN'S PROJECT

Women into work

Beth Johnston, Head of Women's Programmes

City Gateway is a charity, set up by a group of City workers in 1999, that is dedicated to bringing hope to the local communities of Tower Hamlets that haven't benefited from the area's wider economic development. We look to connect with local women and disadvantaged young people, and run programmes which engage them, train them and provide them with the skills and opportunities they need to enter work or further education. In partnership with a wide range of firms and community organisations we have seen amazing changes in both groups and individuals and made a visible difference to local statistics. In 2010, City Gateway's impact on Tower Hamlets included reducing the number of

*Reception desk,
Lansbury Lodge*

NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) young people by 4 per cent across the borough and progressed 85 per cent of our learners into employment or further education. We are the largest provider of apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeship training in Tower Hamlets and were recently graded 'Outstanding' by Ofsted for this aspect of our work.

Beth Johnston, Head of Women's Programmes

“City Gateway realised that they needed to look more holistically around young people and think about why they are economically excluded. A lot of those answers involved family, involved the wider community and how civic society can be used to help younger people... we also developed work with the parents of the young people, which is how the women's project came out of it.

If you support parents then it's the next generation of young people [who benefit], helping them not to become NEET, things like healthy eating, being able to help children with their homework; they're all part of the cause rather than the effect.

Often it's the very first step of learning English, coming out of the house, and meeting new people that is quite a scary first step but it's a very important step.”



The City Gateway Women's Project was set up in April 2007 to build upon the work that was already being done with NEET young people in Tower Hamlets. We work with hard-to-reach women in the community – predominantly BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) women – helping them towards social and economic independence through a holistic programme of community building, personal development and support, skills training and progression into work. We have worked with over 1,500 women since 2007 and have over 200 women using the centre and accessing our courses each week. In 2010, City Gateway Women's Project helped to find jobs for 61 women, and those accessing our courses achieved 362 accredited qualifications.

City Gateway seeks as part of our work to increase communication between children, parents and grandparents, all of whom use our services. The work of the Women's Project is also intergenerational. For example, the 100 Women project, which is part of the IntergenerationAll programme set up and supported by the Calouste



Above: English language lesson

Beth Johnston

“People that have gone through our different programmes usually come back and volunteer ... which makes a big difference because if somebody has been through an experience and has achieved things, they are excited about what they've done and want to share that with others.

We tend to have about 50–60 volunteers at any one time, a lot of them on the Women's Project come on three-month programmes, a lot of them come from the local community and it is part of their progression to achieving work because it gives them experience.

For volunteers to be effective they need to have clear guidance and support, and mentoring and coaching in areas like confidence, in customer service, and also, being accountable, to be reliable and things like data protection and understanding other areas of the community that [they] might not have had experiences with ... an organisation like City Gateway is a really good hub for those volunteers to be developed ... to make a big difference in the community.”

Gulbenkian Foundation, has helped bridge the culture gap between age groups through engaging women aged between three and 80 in sharing their stories, taking part in workshops and a range of courses, bringing communities closer together. We have included young people and over-60s in our steering groups to help bridge generational gaps, combat isolation and ensure that our delivery of courses is inclusive.

City Gateway has engaged with the challenges presented by the coalition Government's Big Society agenda, with our central themes of giving more power to local people and encouraging people to take more responsibility for their communities, encouraging volunteering and setting up new social enterprises.

Having been founded to link the skills of professionals into local needs, corporate support was at the heart of our work long before corporate social responsibility became as commonplace as it is today. Many of our projects have been directly funded by corporate giving and all of our work has benefited from pro bono support through volunteering, consulting, business development and other donations of time and skills. Many of our greatest success stories have only been made possible by partnerships with the business community, both in Canary Wharf and the City.

We have been engaging volunteers from a wide spectrum of faith-based communities, corporate businesses and colleges from across the borough. City Gateway Women's Project has sought corporate volunteers to take part in running courses, such as a publisher running a business administration course. We also encourage individuals to assist, for example, at the literacy and numeracy lunches designed to help women in Tower Hamlets who have little English to grow in confidence, one of the first steps to becoming more independent and contributing to society and the economy.

Beth Johnston

“Business admin is one of our shorter courses helping women who want to get into admin ... We're doing it in partnership with one of our corporate partners, *The Economist*. It is one of the ways that we work with our corporates to draw down their expertise but also to kind of break the mystery of the City for some of our women, so they feel it's not something outside of their environment and understanding.

In our beauty sessions the ladies are learning business and research with the University of East London – how to set up a business, about business plans, about profit and loss, so that after this course, they can either go off and make their own business and become self-employed, and we'll support them through that, or they can become part of an enterprise which City Gateway will launch.

One unique thing that City Gateway does is that it occupies this very unusual realm between being a college and being a community centre. A college is very much about progression – people achieving and moving forward – whereas a community centre is very much about families and about peoples' whole lives – their health, their heritage and so on. By bringing those things together we don't have the same kind of bureaucratic separation from the clients.”



Crèche, Lansbury Lodge

City Gateway has been developing its provision of services to ensure value for money and greater efficiency. It has been innovative in involving service users in the provision of services as partners in delivery. Our youth work project has developed Young Leaders, who are trained and developed to be leaders amongst their peers, whilst also growing their employment and work skills. The Women's Project has involved the women enrolled on our courses in the running of the

Fatima Shah, Ex-volunteer/ Outreach Assistant

“I first became involved with City Gateway when I was referred here by my caseworker. I started doing a few courses, to get some confidence ... City Gateway is actually the first place I've worked as a volunteer and as a paid member of staff because before that I was like one of the women just at home, but when I did take the step to come out it gave me some confidence. Now that I'm a member of staff I've got to know the clients more on a personal level and it has helped me gain the confidence and the skills that I needed to get out into the world of jobs.”

Rabea Begum, Volunteer

“City Gateway excels at attracting a broad range of women, especially within the community because of the location primarily – it's literally behind two primary schools – it's in the heart of the Poplar area, so a lot of people find it easy to access the building; and secondly because its doing such a great job that word of mouth spreads very quickly and people are comfortable coming to a place they know somebody else has ... One of the key mottos of this place is 'learn, grow and develop', and I believe that strongly ... you learn, you grow, you develop and then you go out into the community and ... help others do the same thing.”

project – through giving them administrative experience and reception work, through outreach and engagement in the community and also through training delivery.

City Gateway is committed to working together with local community and corporate partners, so that together we can raise the aspirations of women and young people. We give them the training and skills that they need, and bring hope to Tower Hamlets.

Beth Johnston

“The Big Society is something that's really exciting for us but a lot of it is still unknown at the moment and that uncertainty makes it very difficult to plan ... One big concern is the transition ... we don't want to lose good staff, we don't want to lose momentum because of this lack of short-term support.

I think my one big ask though is that [the Big Society] becomes and really focuses on the tangible, on people's lives.

Some of the most effective funding that we have had has been longer-term funding, like a three-year project, because that means that we can really plan and see people progressing, rather than shorter-term funding because that means that we spend a lot more time thinking about fundraising rather than just delivering.

A lot of mainstream funding is not always accessible to charities and its quite a difficult process to be able to get that funding and to be part of the commissioning process. If the commissioning process was made simpler and more accessible, a bit less bureaucratic, so we don't spend as much time reporting and more of our resources are going into making relationships with the community and delivering programmes, I think that would really help us to work on a local level, to be more effective in our delivery ... to meet some of these government targets. We want to maximise delivery, to have the biggest impact and biggest value for money.”



CRAIGMILLAR COMMUNITY ARTS

Art by the people for the people

Michael Greenlaw, Manager

Craigmillar is a housing scheme on the Eastern edge of the City of Edinburgh. It was built in the 1930s to house people from the cramped slum housing of Edinburgh's Old Town and Southside. In its early days, Craigmillar supported a population who worked in the local breweries and coal mines. The contraction of these industries in the 1960s coincided with the City Corporation's policy of dumping 'problem families' into the area. Craigmillar became an area of multiple deprivation – top of the league tables for infant mortality, suicide, drug addiction and unemployment.

Above: Craigmillar Arts Centre. Opposite: Nick Shaw, Service User/ Volunteer

Craigmillar Community Arts has its roots in the early 1960s when Helen Crummy, a local mother, went to her son's school to ask the Head Teacher for violin lessons for her son. The Head Teacher's reply astonished her – he said it took the school all their time to teach reading, writing and arithmetic and nobody in Craigmillar would ever be interested in the violin anyway.

To showcase local talent and to prove that good could come out of Craigmillar, Helen organised the first Craigmillar Festival. Over the years the Craigmillar Festival Society, as it became known, became involved in all aspects of community life. In 2002, the work of Craigmillar Festival Society was reorganised and the separate entity of Craigmillar Community Arts was formed.

CCA is a charity and company limited by guarantee, it is run by a Board of Directors who are all local people – this gives us our strength. CCA runs Craigmillar Arts Centre, which is open six days a week. We organise a weekly programme of arts activity, including photography, music sessions, community band practice, visual arts, drama, pottery and textile crafts, all of which is led by volunteers. People can drop in to the centre three days a week to take part or just to socialise. We pride ourselves in creating a friendly atmosphere where everyone is welcome in a supportive and non-judgemental environment.

Michael Greenlaw, Manager

“There are about 150 people a week that Craigmillar arts are in contact with ... Over the course of a year that would be about 6,000 people. I think what happens here in the arts in Craigmillar changes lives. It's a number of things: one is certainly the social thing, a number of people who are involved do live on their own so meeting other people is a bit of human contact ... it's an atmosphere where people with disabilities and people without disabilities are quite happy to be together.”





Nick Shaw, Service User/Volunteer

“I’ve been unemployed for three years but I’d rather get out and do something, and this place is fantastic, everyone’s really friendly. It makes a world of difference to me, and my family ... You need places like this for a community to actually survive, to breathe, so people can meet and talk.

Everyone, when they come in, they make a small contribution. Now my contribution is I’m doing a painting for the art centre to sell. Hopefully we’ll get commission on it and that’ll go towards paying the gas bills and the electricity bills for this place. The opportunity to give something back means the world to me, and I love doing it. It’s also put me in contact with my community.

One of the problems with volunteering, because I’m unemployed, is that you can only volunteer for 16 hours. If you try and volunteer over 16 hours, they’ll cut your benefits. It seems a bit daft to me because I’m not only volunteering here, I was also volunteering for Leith Festival – I was visual arts co-ordinator for Leith Festival – but I had to knock it on the head because I was getting threatened with having my benefits cut.

Why do we need arts in the community? It’s a big question and there’s no easy answer, we need art and cultural activities in the community, because if we didn’t we’d all be sitting at home, at playstations or on the internet ... We’ve become these isolated hermits that talk through computers.”



Right: Working on a project for Chinese New Year.

Opposite: Painting by Alexander Brown, Service User/Volunteer



Karen Toscani, Volunteer

“I think an art centre is very important within the community because it does bring people together, and it’s about bringing us all together ... It’s like an umbrella. I volunteer my time here but through being a volunteer I have managed to get employment within this area as well.”

CCA also runs an Arts and Environment Project working mainly with children and young people out and about in the community at large – using the arts to raise an awareness of the environment. The project recently made a whole series of animated films and 200 children travelled to Edinburgh’s Filmhouse cinema in the city centre for the premiere screening.

In 2011, CCA will be working with an artist and two local apprentices on a community consultation project to create a public artwork in Craigmillar, while two of our young musicians are taking part in a British Council funded Active Citizen’s Project which includes an exchange visit to Nepal.

Our ‘Be All You Can Be’ project – unfortunately coming to an end – has been running for two years, its remit has been to encourage new volunteers and to support them to realise their potential working in the arts. We are concentrating on consulting with the community, so that we can better assess how we are doing, and what perhaps we could be doing that we’re not doing already. It will also provide a body of evidence that we will be able to use in our approaches to funders.

CCA has been doing the Big Society since long before the term was invented – encouraging local participation and volunteering is at the heart of all we do. However, the work of volunteers should be in addition to the services that people have a right to expect from society, not as a cheap alternative to these services. Volunteers offer their help freely – they cannot be used to take the place of the people who run our front-line services.

Michael Greenlaw

“Craigmillar has volunteers because at the moment we don't have enough staff to do the work we do. On one hand it's that, on the other hand it's providing opportunities for local people to share their skills. One of the things about being unemployed ... is you're not needed, but if there's opportunities here for people to be able to share their skills, share their ability to be able to play the guitar, or share a love of drama, for instance, and that encourages somebody else, that's fantastic. Almost all of the activity that happens in here is run by volunteers and that's wonderful.

I think it would be good if the Big Society meant that people could volunteer without being penalised for volunteering. There are some people who are unemployed who I think give of themselves very well in a volunteering situation, but I think there are forces out there saying that they need to get back to work, but if there is no work to go to, then it would be better for them not to have the pressure and for us to have good volunteers.

Volunteers do need to be supported, and I think that's an issue. I as the manager attempt that as much as I can, but I think it would be wonderful to have somebody whose sole responsibility was to be able to keep these volunteers as well supported as possible.

In this community it is quite tough – you're dealing with sometimes quite vulnerable people and situations that require a bit of thinking ... There's all that going on [but] you've got to try and raise the money to keep the heating going and that's before you've got on to even trying to make dreams come true. A big ask from the Big Society [would be] people coming in here – not necessarily local to the area – but coming in and giving us the chance to repaint or replumb or fix our central heating. I'd be happy enough for that but I'm not sure that's what the Big Society actually means.”



CCA operates in an area where unemployment is high and there are few jobs. In this climate, volunteering is a very important way of enabling people to contribute to society and to keep their skills and talents alive. CCA's arts programme would be impossible to operate without volunteers. Our activities help to keep people healthy in body and mind, they help keep people out of hospital and prison and can sometimes reach parts that the education and social services cannot.

*Jimmy Devlin,
Service User*

If the Government's idea of the Big Society is to flourish then it cannot be used purely to bolster up public services in the wake of cuts. There is definitely a place for individuals to put something back into their communities, but organisations who use volunteers need core costs to provide basic materials and facilities, to cover staff to support and supervise volunteers and for disclosure checks.



AGE UK OXFORDSHIRE Bridging the generations in IT

Bee Myson, Manager Banbury Centre

Age UK Oxfordshire – formerly known as Age Concern – is an independent local charity which has been working for older people in the county for over 40 years. We provide a range of services and support including Community Clubs – where older people can meet for friendship, support and a hot meal; a Solemates toenail clipping service; Flexible Care service for older people with mental health needs; a Phone-link befriending service; and, central to almost everything we do, an Information and Advice helpline. Our approach is to listen to older people and to respond by working with local communities and older people themselves in a variety of ways to meet the needs identified.

*Above: IT suite at
the Northway
Community Centre*

Bee Myson, Manager

“In Oxfordshire there are over 200,000 people over 50 – and ... by 2031 there will be an additional 30,000 over-85-year-olds in the county as compared with 2006.

In the early days we started off the Information and Advice department in what was then Age Concern, in a broom cupboard more or less, with a telephone directory, a telephone and a volunteer. That has now grown to an organisation which today employs over 100 staff, many of whom are part-time, and has well over 500 volunteers who are placed throughout the county.”



Every Monday morning a group of eight student volunteers from Oxford Brookes University arrive at Northway Community Centre, in Headington, North Oxford, to share their computer skills with older people from the local community. Northway is one of six sites across the county where Age UK Oxfordshire is bringing younger and older people together to teach useful skills and strengthen community ties.

Funded by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation's IntergenerationAll programme, Age UK has built an alliance with Oxford Brookes Careers Centre and with Northway Community Centre to provide the free IT classes. Oxford Brookes Careers Centre is strongly backing the scheme because of the wide-ranging benefits it brings for students, building communication skills, motivation, confidence and experience – and new relationships. The Community Centre has a computer suite but insufficient funding to enable local people to acquire the skills they need to use it.

For Age UK the imperative to support older people to acquire computer skills is a strong one – only 38 per cent of people over 65 have ever used the internet, compared with 70 per cent of the overall population, which means that many older people are missing out on things that can make life easier and more enjoyable. Under the supervision of Ahmed Rahman, Age UK's IT Development Worker, the students have been giving one-to-one tutorials as part of an eight-week course.

The older learners at Northway vary from complete beginners to those with an intermediate knowledge of IT. They have been finding out about digital photography, word-processing and desktop publishing, as well as how to surf the Internet, send emails and even design websites.

Perhaps most importantly of all, the classes are helping older people to make connections across the generations through technology – with the Brookes students and with their own children and grandchildren.

Edmund Ogunleye, 67, loved to open and read emails from his children living in Nigeria and Canada. But until starting the classes, Edmund was unable to complete the connection by replying to the emails. Carol Jacobs, 72, is being mentored by 19-year-old Henry Edwards who is a first-year media technology student. She has found a long-lost cousin in New Zealand via the Internet and they are now in regular contact.

John Goodwin, 86, is a former navigational staff pilot with the RAF. He is being tutored by Tom Smith, 18, a first-year history student.

‘John had never looked at the Internet’, says Tom. ‘He has had a computer for 15 years and never surfed the World Wide Web, which really shocked me as the possibilities of the Internet are endless.’

He says John had all the skills to use his computer and simply needed a little bit of knowledge and confidence. ‘If I was to look at some of the stuff John used to do for the RAF, for example, I wouldn’t know where to start.’ He adds: ‘Working with John over the past few weeks has been fantastic, allowing me to develop his IT skills whilst also making a new friend.’

The Big Society is about fundamental change to the relationship between citizens, their community and the state. If it is to succeed, it



David Kirke, Service User

“I think bridges have been crossed here because people of my generation and older respond to younger people. Now there’s a strange thing in life: youth respects intelligence, age having seen the world respects kindness. If you can fit the two together, youth goes away feeling happier and age goes away feeling well, it’s been worth it.”

Dominic George, Volunteer

“I believe that, communication is a very important tool and peoples’ lives have changed quite considerably through the use of IT. I think the thing that I’ve learnt from this is not only a sense of pride and admiration for the people that come here, but I believe that it has also helped me -- of course it may help in bulking up a personal CV and gaining voluntary experience, but I also feel as though I’ve made some friends.”

Bee Myson

“I think there’s something to be gained for both parties from this inter-generational IT project. The older people gain a skill, apart from anything else, and they come and they are empowered, so they’re learning something which they may have ruled out as a skill that they would be able to achieve.

The students gain because they are brought into a pretty intimate relationship with an older person who is not a family member – friendships are formed, relationships are formed – and we found that some of the students have been absolutely overwhelmed with what they’ve learned about the older people that they’ve been working with and training with.”

Dorothy Pearce, Service User

relies on volunteering initiatives such as this one to create stronger communities – forging ties between people and across the generations. Unfortunately, as public funding is cut back, both the vital development work provided by organisations working with volunteers in engaging groups and individuals, and the support structures to recruit, train, resource and support volunteers are jeopardised. The future for initiatives such as this one could be very precarious indeed.

Bee Myson

“I think we have been doing ‘Big Society’ in collaboration with communities so we’ve been fortunate enough to be exposed to some of the very good things that a Big Society can bring about and one of these aspects is our work with volunteers.

Age UK Oxfordshire works with over 500 volunteers and in order to have that many willing hands out in the field it’s essential that we have a strong backbone of people in the office. We mustn’t lose sight of the fact that not only are we serving older people in Oxfordshire through our services, but we are providing a service in enabling people to volunteer their skills and services for the good of all.

One of the issues when dealing with large numbers of volunteers is that of CRB checking. If we’re going to increase the number of volunteers then we’re going to have to ensure that the process of CRB checking is as smooth as possible. It would be really helpful if delays in the CRB checking process were ironed out.

I think if you want to assess outcomes of the work, then you need to be looking at whether you’re making a difference in people’s lives ... it’s quite a nebulous thing to measure and capture, increases in, improvements in, what we’re doing for older people, except perhaps in terms of numbers.

What we’re hearing in our forums, from older people that we consult around the county, is that the work of Age UK Oxfordshire, is very much needed and desired and that more is required of us. We won’t stop working until we have responded to the demands that older people are making in the county for whatever it is that they feel they need in their communities.

I think ... if we were asked what we wanted of the Big Society, it would be very difficult to answer that question without referring to financial resources. When it boils down to it, volunteer services don’t come free, we have to resource them, if we want more volunteers we’re going to need to resource them with more support from staff, and in order to do that we are going to have to use the ‘R’ word.”

IN CONCLUSION

The Big Society: A View from the Frontline shows how five different organisations in the voluntary and community sector are making an important contribution to their communities and to society. Overall they are positive about the concept of the Big Society and feel they demonstrate the Big Society in action. They all have considerable experience and expertise to offer and believe that with the right help from central and local government they could do more. In the film, and in this booklet, they put forward their ideas.

Involvement

Government and the public sector should recognise and respect the contribution of people in voluntary and community organisations and fully utilise them; not just in the delivery of services but in policy-making at both local and national level. To get the best from the voluntary sector they should be involved at an early stage in the policy-making process, not just in its implementation.

The commissioning process for publicly funded services should be less bureaucratic, less prescriptive and easier to navigate. To enable voluntary and community organisations to participate more effectively, they need to be involved in a consultation process as to the best model to deliver what is required, and the shared outcomes being sought, before a tender is drawn up.

Voluntary bodies are often able to form innovative local partnerships and to mobilise a coalition of interested parties to jointly tackle a problem; this expertise at a local level should be recognised and encouraged.

Volunteering

Government should recognise that volunteers need resourcing. They offer a great deal but they do not come ‘free’; to varying degrees volunteers require training, mentoring and support.

Unemployed people often use some of their time to volunteer but there are restrictions on the ability of the long-term unemployed to volunteer for more than 16 hours each week. It should be recognised that such restrictions can deprive organisations of valuable support and

prevent an unemployed person from gaining experience that could help them get back into work – volunteering provides a key pathway into paid work.

Speeding up the process of CRB checks would also greatly assist the efficient recruitment of volunteers.

Evaluation

While the importance and usefulness of evaluation is understood, the process should be less bureaucratic and based around agreed outcomes and principles. Those organisations that work with the most disadvantaged and with people who have multiple problems and needs cannot easily calculate what they have prevented from happening in terms of financial and social costs. Results often take many years to deliver with those who are most disconnected from the opportunities available to them. Government needs to recognise that payment by results will not always be practicable for organisations working intensely and over time.

Funding

Some of the organisations featured in *A View from the Frontline* work with people who have long-term needs that are not going to be dealt with in six or 12 months. Longer-term funding enables organisations to build up their capacity and expertise and then deploy them to best effect.

There is a need for stability of funding during the current period of transition and in the longer term voluntary and community sector organisations require support through frequent reorganisations of publicly funded services.

The public sector should appreciate that charities need to take a business-like approach to their costs if a more robust and capable voluntary and community sector is to be developed. The notion that charities should not make a profit but provide services on a break-even basis fails to recognise the need for voluntary and community sector organisations to maintain their basic structures and to ensure that they can continue to operate in periods of lower-level funding.

The Big Society

A view from the frontline

There is currently much discussion, reflected in the media, about what ‘the Big Society’ really means. So far the debate has tended to be rather abstract and philosophical or concerned with public spending reductions or seen from a centralised, national perspective.

The time is right to move the debate on and refocus it around the practical and the local. The Big Society has to be about bringing real and lasting change to communities all over the UK. If it is to do that, then we should ask: What needs to change to make it possible? How can local communities make it a reality?

The Big Society: A View from the Frontline was commissioned by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation to address these questions. The film showcases a diverse range of voluntary and community sector organisations and gives those involved – users as well as managers – the chance to express their views about the Big Society.

Overall they are positive about the concept of the Big Society and feel they demonstrate the Big Society in action. They all have considerable experience and expertise to offer and believe that with the right help from central and local government they could do more. In the film, and in this booklet, they put forward their ideas.