

NATIONAL INFORMATION FORUM

www. nif.org.uk

**Working for the inclusion of disabled and other disadvantaged people
by encouraging better information provision.**

To all members of the National Information Forum

MEMBERS' INFORMATION SHEET NO.4

This information sheet has been compiled by Derek Kinrade. The views expressed do not necessarily represent those of the National Information Forum.

CARERS AT THE HEART OF 21ST CENTURY FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

This 168 page report, published on the 10 June 2008 and downloadable from the Department of Health website (www.dh.gov.uk/en/PublicationsandStatistics), sets out the government's plans for the future care and support of carers. First among a number of its short-term commitments is that of "Providing every carer with the opportunity to access comprehensive information when they need to. The information will be easily accessible for all groups of carers, and specific to their locality". The guidance explains that this will be achieved through a carers' information helpline and website and funding for accessible information provision about the local area.

A summary of the full report is available in English and ten other languages.

SYNERGY

Synergy is the quarterly newsletter of the Association of Social Care Communicators (ASCC), an organisation that links and supports communication officers in social services, health and the voluntary sector and whose work has many parallels with that of the Forum. Its benefits include a members-only access to a website (www.ascc.me.uk), an on-line publications 'swap shop', providing an opportunity to share good information and communication practice, and regional

meetings where members can meet and network with colleagues. £100 buys corporate membership for a year.

TEN SUGGESTED PRINCIPLES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF INFORMATION INITIATIVES

In the course of our move from Burne House, we came across an early (11/1991) paper proposing guidelines for “the provision of information for disabled people, for their families and carers, and for professional providers such as therapists, social workers and the medical profession”. We’re not sure where it came from, but thought it worth repeating.

1. Information should be accurate and relevant.
2. Information should be current and timely.
3. There should be no physical or bureaucratic barriers to access information and it should be locally available to all.
4. Information should include relevant local, regional and national content.
5. Content, presentation and delivery methods of information should be the result of consultation with representative end users. Consultation should also be sought with statutory and voluntary information providers so as to optimise the benefits of available resources.
6. As far as is possible, information should be available in format and media to suit the user’s needs, eg in print, by telephone, in Braille, on cassette etc. It should be suitable for face-to-face and telephone advice and available in appropriate minority languages. At no time should the content, format or method of delivery be determined solely or primarily by the availability of a particular technology.
7. Unless unavoidable, no charge for information should be made to users.
8. Matters relating to effective information provision, as suggested above, should be included in the induction, education, awareness training and retraining of all relevant and concerned professionals and service providers at national, regional and local levels.
9. The effectiveness and value of information provision should be monitored on a planned and regular basis. The monitoring process should include independent assessment by means of direct user feedback.
10. Information services should be widely publicised, by whatever means may be suitable, with regard to availability and accessibility.

WE HATE NO.12 : FOOTBALL

Not, I hasten to say, the beautiful game, nor yet the likes of Accrington Stanley or those who labour enthusiastically on Hackney Marshes. My distaste rises exponentially as we move into the higher echelons of competition.

But at all levels, club football attracts tribal support. The original pretext for one's particular attachment may be slight, but once implanted it tends to remain entrenched, like religious faith or heroin addiction. And it is irrational and deaf to common sense. At the lower levels of the sport this hardly matters, but at the top it translates to an allegiance and dedication to success literally at any cost.

Thus we have seen, increasingly, an acceptance that success can be bought. It amounts to a collective madness. Given wealthy owners, prepared to commit huge resources, there is virtually no limit to the importation of the talent thought necessary to achieve pre-eminence. And fervent fans have become party to this strategy, apparently unconcerned that, beyond the shirts the players wear, their favourite teams for the most part bear little affinity to the areas they allegedly represent.

Foreign owners, foreign managers, foreign players

Of the big four in the English Premier League, none has an English manager. Only Sir Alex is British. The players are largely drawn from the elite of footballing countries across the world: proven maestros imported to secure supremacy. And the costs are enormous, with massive transfer fees and top managers and players being paid incredible salaries. As we have seen in recent seasons, the result is that the contest has become more and more predictable, with most of the teams in the league destined to be also-rans. This process is reinforced by the inevitable drift of better players from struggling clubs to those challenging for silverware. Soon, unless something is done, I suspect that the big four will become the big two; perhaps even the big one.

Men predominate as the cheer leaders in this outrageous system. I have heard it said that some find the climatic moments in a game as "better than sex"; which is surely a sad commentary on their love lives. Apparently they have substituted the romance of football for romance in their

relationships. I think the sad fact is that they bond with other men, and prefer their company to that of their partners. And at such great cost. When I first went to watch Liverpool FC, it cost a shilling (5 pence) to get in and an old penny to store my bike in somebody's back yard. Nowadays, admission, refreshments, travel (sometimes over hundreds of miles), parking, replica shirts and other accessories add up to a whopping outlay, and for those men with family responsibilities this is inevitably at the expense of their nearest and dearest. Today, even to watch football on television mostly requires a slice of the family income to be diverted to subscription channels. Conversely, people who are hard up cannot afford to participate. It is another example of social exclusion.

Yet another unfortunate consequence of the system, with its over-reliance upon foreign players in our top clubs, is that the home countries are drawing talent from a contracting pool and finding it increasingly difficult to recruit the equivalents of George Best and Billy Wright so that they can field competitive teams. In the pursuit of localised aims we are frustrating national achievement.

Change will not be easy. As Napoleon Bonaparte remarked "There is no place in a fanatic's head where reason can enter".

(I swear I wrote this before the acquisition of Manchester City by the sheiks of Abu Dhabi (for the big four now read the big five) and before Andy Burnham's speech to the Cooperative Party).

WELFARE REFORM

In our last information sheet I was critical of the Green Paper proposals on welfare reform. I feel that the initiative is ill-timed and in some important respects regressive; not least the idea that long-term claimants on Jobseekers Allowance might be expected to take work offered by private contractors or lose benefit. Since then I have been reminded of Article 23 of the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights which, among other things, asserted the right to "free choice of employment". Does it really make sense to try to shoehorn lame, nervous and work-shy people into any kind of work?

I now read that the Social Market Foundation has a different (and perhaps more realistic) take on the situation. As I understand it, this 'think-tank' envisages that because it is planned that payments to contractors will be based on results, those with complex needs who are difficult [or impossible] to place, and who are therefore unprofitable, are likely to be 'parked'. According to *The Guardian*, Stephen Timms, the employment and welfare reform minister, has promised to "look closely at the results of the first phase of the contracts and carefully consider if any changes need to be made". Wouldn't it be better to think ahead and get it right first time? Perhaps the bar is being set too high.

CITIZENS ADVICE

The Citizens Advice Service is so well known as a respected source of information that we may tend to take it for granted and forget that it is the UK's largest advice provider. Certainly on reading its latest introductory brochure I was impressed anew by the scope of its work. In England and Wales alone there are 433 Bureaux, providing free information and advice in 3,300 locations. All of them are independent registered charities, while members of Citizens Advice.

The Service also delivers information through a website: **www.adviceguide.org.uk**, covering everything from benefits and employment rights to housing, consumer and legal matters. The website also has details of the accessibility of each bureau and includes frequently asked questions in seven languages, with downloadable fact sheets.

All bureaux offer telephone advice and a large number also offer e.mail advice. Local addresses and telephone numbers can be found in Phonebooks or on **www.citizensadvice.org.uk**.

Karen Buck MP comments that "Citizens Advice provides an essential and high quality service, open to all but [] especially valuable to some of the most vulnerable people in society. The service helps people make their rights a reality and facilitates improved policy-making."

The brochure confirms the impact of the Service with statistics: 6.2 million visits to the Adviceguide website in a single year (2006/7); 8.5 million hours of advice provided by CAB advisers. Taking the CABx and website together in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, figures show that 19% of enquiries relate to benefits, 16% to debt, 15% to employment and nearly 8% to taxation: a clear indication that money issues are the priority problem. Nothing is said to indicate significant enquiries about disability, but it is obvious that disabled people are acutely affected by the difficulties experienced in society as a whole.

Volunteers are vital to the work of Citizens Advice. Of the 27,000 people who work in the service, 77 per cent are volunteers. For younger people, volunteering provides work experience, training and a path into work or education. Some 39% of them have gone on to secure a paid job or further education. Older volunteers find that voluntary work for Citizens Advice keeps them active and

able to make a contribution to their communities. All CAB volunteers get free training resulting in an accredited qualification, ongoing support and expenses paid.

For further information see the relevant CA website for contact details:

England and Wales: www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Scotland: www.cas.org.uk

Northern Ireland: www.citizensadvice.co.uk.

OFFICE FOR DISABILITY ISSUES

Have you wondered what the ODI is up to? Well quite a lot, all aimed at improving good practice within the public sector. One of its initiatives is the publication of guidance on disability inclusion under the title 'Images of Disability'.

This gives information about how to involve disabled people in planning and delivering communications; how to communicate effectively with disabled people; and how to represent disabled people effectively and appropriately in government communications.

The guidance points out that some of the ways that government and others communicate may not work for disabled people. They may not be able to see the paper, to understand the words written on the page or to hear the radio.

The resources and guidance covers:

- how to involve disabled people,
- how to engage with government,
- how to implement disability equality schemes, and
- information on disability law.

Go to www.officefordisability.gov.uk/resources/imagesofdisability.asp

INFORMATION ACCREDITATION

We reported this Department of Health scheme extensively in our former magazine *Innovations in Information*. It will 'kite mark' approved information producers in health and social care who meet prescribed standards, so that people can more easily make judgments about the reliability of

information. It is, of course, hoped that by supporting information producers there will be improvements in the quality of information.

The scheme has currently entered its testing phase with 40 organisation spanning the voluntary, commercial and public sectors preparatory to a launch in 2009, when relevant organisations can apply for membership.

For further information go to:

www.dh.gov.uk/en/Healthcare/PatientChoice/Choice/BetterInformationChoicesHealth