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Getting creative

Creative activities have long been recognised as a route to engaging and inspiring many of those who are marginalised in our society.

Isore Media’s Jason Turner developed his film making workshops for exactly that purpose. By attending his eight week programme participants gain not only a new set of skills but a feeling of self-worth that allows them to regain a sense of belonging within society. Read more on page 8.

Birmingham City Council launches a new initiative in 2012, the Beyond Art exhibition. This will showcase art works created by people who have physical disabilities or learning difficulties. Find out more on page 7.

Finally, if you’re looking for somewhere to hold a temporary exhibition of your organisation’s artwork, look no further than BVSC’s Citizens Gallery. Please send your enquiries to roSELLab@bvsc.org.
**Project Aspie celebrates award success**

“**It is so important to educate people about Asperger’s Syndrome and I am so grateful to The Prince’s Trust for helping me spread awareness.”**

Graeme Croton, founder and leader of Project Aspie (featured in the November edition of Update), has been recognised with a Prince’s Trust Celebrate Success Award.

Graeme was presented with the Community Impact Award by Aston Villa player, Fabian Delph, at a prestigious ceremony held at Villa Park ground in November 2011.

The Prince’s Trust Celebrate Success Awards honour the achievements of disadvantaged young people supported by The Trust who have succeeded against the odds, improved their chances in life and had a positive impact on their local community.

Graeme, who is 25 and from Birmingham, has Asperger’s Syndrome, a condition that was only diagnosed in the last two years and led to his setting up a community project, Project Aspie, with The Prince’s Trust.

Graeme said, “Without the support of The Prince’s Trust I wouldn’t have been able to turn Project Aspie into a reality. It is so important to educate people about Asperger’s Syndrome and I am so grateful to The Prince’s Trust for helping me spread awareness.”

**Merlin JETS celebrates success helping unemployed into work**

On 15 December 2011 Merlin Venture celebrated two years of continued success of their Merlin JETS division working across a number of work programmes.

Working across Birmingham, Merlin has assisted more than 1,200 long-term unemployed people with over 500 of them finding work as a result of the services received.

Merlin staff nominated clients who had showed dedication, commitment and enthusiasm while taking part in one of these programmes. 75 nominees comprising past and present Merlin clients attended the event, receiving their awards from Erdington MP Jack Dromey, Shadow Minister for Communities and Local Government.

Since March 2010, the Merlin JETS (Jobs, Enterprise and Training Support) programme has been working with job seekers across Birmingham from in and around Erdington, working on programmes that target long-term unemployment through work placement and one to one support. With over 1,200 clients the team had impressive outcomes, with over 500 people moving into work through The Future Jobs Fund, Working Neighbourhoods Fund and The Flexible New Deal programme.

All of these programmes came to an end in June but Merlin JETS is continuing to provide their services through their own Communities at Work Programme which is funded through company reserves whilst they continue to apply for further funding. This programme is unique, combining motivational workshops, training, volunteering and regular job search, and in less than 6 months has seen 400 people join.

**Christina joins LINk team**

Christina Jobe has joined the Birmingham LINk team as Outreach Worker. Christina has worked for a range of third sector organisations, most recently in the regional grant making team at BBC Children in Need.

The Local Involvement Network (LINk) is a Government funded initiative set up in 2007 to allow the public the opportunity to influence their local health and social care services. Anyone can get involved and there are different ways and levels of involvement to enable you to participate and communicate your thoughts.

Every LINk has a host which supports its work, and Birmingham LINk’s host is BVSC. Christina will be out and about in local communities raising awareness of the LINk in order to encourage and increase membership. She will specifically be targeting underrepresented groups in Birmingham to ensure that the LINk is representative of the geography and demographic it serves.

If you are interested in joining the LINk and having your say in health and social care issues affecting you, contact Christina.

**Learning Disabilities**

**Health**

**Jobs & Training**
Leading social enterprise, Enta, is one of the first information, advice and guidance services in the UK to achieve a new national quality standard.

Birmingham-based Enta was awarded the prestigious Matrix standard accreditation following an intense two-day assessment. Enta’s customers, partner organisations and staff were all quizzed during the inspection, which looked at the quality of the careers support and advisory services it offers.

As a social enterprise training centre, Enta’s guidance services are available to its learners and members of the public alike. They range from further education advice and help writing CVs, to supporting those who have been made redundant.

Matrix assessments are commissioned by the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills and carried out every three years on organisations that offer careers advice.

Although Enta had achieved the recognised Matrix benchmark in the past, the standard required was raised considerably at the end of November following a Government overhaul of the system. Enta is now one of the first organisations to meet the revised criteria.

Enta: www.entapeople.com | Matrix: www.matrixstandard.com

### Vintage clothes wanted for new pop-up vintage charity store

Birmingham charities Sifa Fireside and Trident Reach have gone into partnership with clothing brand Forgotten Vintage to set up a new ‘pop-up’ charitable vintage store.

It is Birmingham’s first charity shop dedicated to retro vintage clothing and accessories. The store will be open seven days a week and stocks a wide range of vintage clothing from the ‘60s to the ‘90s.

It is hoped that Forgotten Vintage will offer volunteer and training opportunities to individuals affected by homelessness and act as a platform into further training and employment.

The shop is based in the Great Western Arcade in Birmingham City Centre and it needs to be well stocked! So if you’ve got a fabulous faux fur coat you never wear, or a tea dress which hasn’t seen daylight since 2003, they want it!

To make donating easy, lunch time donation events will be hosted at local businesses and venues across Birmingham. If you can host one of these events, get in touch with Simon Hackett, SIFA Fireside Development Manager. Proceeds from sales will go back into the organisation to help the homeless in Birmingham.

Simon Hackett, Sifa Fireside: 0121 766 1700 / 07813989422 / simonhackett@sifafireside.co.uk

“ If you’ve got a fabulous faux fur coat you never wear, or a tea dress which hasn’t been seen daylight since 2003, they want it!”

### Making loan sharks pay

Local groups are being encouraged to bid for cash which has been confiscated from illegal money lenders, as part of an initiative organised by the England Illegal Money Lending Team.

The Your Choice scheme will give residents a say in how money taken from loan sharks is spent to improve their community. The England Illegal Money Lending Team, a specialist Team who investigate and prosecute loan sharks, have put forward £5,000 worth of proceeds from crime money to fund community projects.

Local residents, charities, community and voluntary groups, schools and statutory agencies that support people in the Tyburn, Shard End and Hodge Hill wards of Birmingham are all welcome to apply for cash to spend on worthwhile projects.

Details and application form are available from Christopher Connor (see below). Please put ‘Your Choice Birmingham’ in the subject line of your email.

Christopher Connor, Your Choice Birmingham, Birmingham City Council: christopher.connor@birmingham.gov.uk

“...funds which has been confiscated from illegal money lenders, as part of an initiative organised by the England Illegal Money Lending Team. The Your Choice scheme will give residents a say in how money taken from loan sharks is spent to improve their community.”
Budding social entrepreneurs offer inspiration

Birmingham based social enterprise Citizen Coaching is celebrating the achievements of two employees, hoping to offer inspiration to thousands of young people looking for work across the region.

Nate Sheridan, 25, and James Farrell, 23, were taken on by Citizen Coaching in 2009, both unemployed and competing with the growing number of job seekers in the city.

The pair were originally taken on for a six month period but they were able to contribute sufficiently to the business to enable the posts to become permanent, helping to develop two new ventures – Social Media Marketing Made Easy and Citizen Media Company.

Managing Director, Martin Hogg said, “What drives us, and thousands of social enterprises across the country, is improving people’s lives. There are many opportunities to work for a different kind of employer, a different kind of business, offering rewarding career opportunities that also put something back into the community. It’s really tough out there for young people right now. Even if they can get a job they’re at risk of being exploited by unscrupulous employers. We want to show that it is possible to do things differently — that you can take a chance on someone and grow a business in a socially responsible way.”

Citizen Coaching started in 2005 to help individuals and businesses create better relationships by providing anger management courses, one-to-one counselling and executive coaching.

Martin Hogg, Citizen Coaching: 0121 314 7075 / www.citizencoaching.com

Student Volunteering Week

Volunteering England’s Student Volunteering Week (20-27 February) is a national campaign during which the University of Birmingham Guild of Students will celebrate and raise awareness of the great work of its student volunteers.

Across campus more than 1,800 volunteers represent students’ views to the university ensuring their voice is heard. Not only do volunteers have a positive impact on the student body but also on the local community. Through its relationship with community partners the Guild is able to offer over 300 opportunities for students to volunteer within local and national charities, such as the Acorns Hospice.

Dee McCann, Volunteer Manager at Acorns, commented: “We are delighted to work with University of Birmingham students volunteering in a range of roles including befriending, marshalling at events, fundraising activities, and most recently providing music to children. By giving up their time the student volunteers have made a significant contribution to the running of the organisation.”

Student Action for Refugees (STAR) offer support by befriending refugees, campaigning and running a number of projects including play schemes for refugee children in emergency accommodation. Birmingham is home to a large numbers of refugees, many of whom have no relatives or friends and cannot speak English. After last year’s successful sleep under the stars at Saint Phillip’s Cathedral during National Student Volunteering Week, the students will once again stage the event in a bid to raise awareness of the thousands of refused asylum seekers who find themselves out on the streets of Birmingham once their asylum claim runs out.

Fliss Cross, Vice President (Activities & Development) at the Guild of Students, said: “Volunteering is an essential element of the student experience allowing students to develop personal and professional skills, whilst having a positive impact on the wider community.”

Key facts
- 66,940 volunteer hours registered
- 180 registered community partners
- In 2010/11, 83% of students felt volunteering increased confidence in their abilities and 59% felt it had instilled a sense of community.
- University of Birmingham Guild of Students: www.guildofstudents.com

Assets and inequality

Centre on Household Assets and Savings Management (CHASM), is hosting two events – in London and Birmingham – on the future of asset-based policies.

An exciting line-up of leading US researchers and practitioners in the field of asset-based policies are bringing together for the first time US and UK research, policy and practitioner communities to exchange and debate important challenges facing both countries.

This event will also include Anne Price, Director of Closing the Racial Wealth Gap, a US-based national research centre dedicated to building the economic health in vulnerable communities, Ricky Joseph (University of Birmingham) and Omar Khan, Head of Policy and Research at the Runnymede Trust.

The Birmingham event takes place on 9 March at Birmingham Business School, University of Birmingham.
Art exhibition tackles stereotypes

Birmingham City Council will be launching its first Beyond Art exhibition at this year’s Opportunities Fair, which will be held on Thursday 21 June 2012 at The New Bingley Hall.

The exhibition will be showing artwork from people who have learning or physical disabilities, mental health difficulties, autism, visual and hearing impairments, as well as adults who are aged 65 or over. It will allow people to look beyond someone’s disability or age and see the talent each individual has. As the event is taking place during Carers Week 2012 (18-24 June), carers will also be invited to display their artwork.

All community art groups, day centres and colleges across Birmingham are invited to come forward with great artwork for the exhibition. Artwork in all shapes and sizes will be exhibited, including pictures, paintings, sculptures, photos, models and pottery.

There will also be exciting art sessions taking place each hour, hosted by different community art groups. This will be a great opportunity for people to actively take part and see if art is for them. This will be taking place in the ‘Have a Go’ room, next door to the exhibition.

The 2012 Opportunities Fair will be offering great experiences for people across Birmingham and is also aimed at people who have learning or physical disabilities, mental health difficulties, autism, visual and hearing impairments, as adults aged 65 or over, as well as carers.

Appeal for exhibitors
The exhibition and fair are being organised by the Birmingham City Council Adults and Communities directorate, to bring together services and information in one place.

If you would like to display your work at the exhibition please email or post a photograph of your artwork to Sharon Staples at the Community Options Team. You should include the title of the artwork plus your name and address. The closing date for entries is Friday, 29 April.

If your organisation would like to book a free place to exhibit at the 2012 Opportunities Fair, if you want to find out more about the event, or you are interested in sponsorship opportunities, please contact Viv Eden (see below).

Sharon Staples: sharon.staples@birmingham.gov.uk / Community Options, Adults and Communities, CIBA Building, 1st Floor, 146 Hagley Road, Birmingham B16 9NX | Viv Eden: 0121 303 0222 / opportunityfair@birmingham.gov.uk

Northfield Town Centre Partnership receives £0.5m from Lottery

The Northfield Town Centre Partnership receives Lottery funding of £500,000 to continue running a one-stop-shop on the high street to help local people into jobs, training and personal development.

The service works with partners to provide business start up advice, community events and regular on-site access to the police, fire brigade and the local authority.

Local people are encouraged to take up volunteering opportunities such as helping to organise community events, run the shop and deal with telephone enquiries.

Andy Clarke, Chairman, Northfield Town Centre Partnership, said: “The facility is vital in providing a range of services to the local and wider community who may not otherwise access the sort of support available. We are able to offer employment support through our network of partners, which includes CV writing, interview techniques, providing advice on job searching and volunteering. We are also able to help people who want to give up smoking through the Quit Smoking service and encourage people to save and borrow at low interest rates with the credit union.”

www.visitnorthfield.co.uk/Partnership

“The facility is vital in providing services to people who may not otherwise access the sort of support available.”

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For 22 years JASON TURNER struggled with substance misuse: alcohol, cannabis, crack cocaine and then heroin. During that dark time in his life he alienated himself from family and work colleagues and admits that he lead a deeply troubled existence that included stints in prison, the inevitable consequence of funding an expensive drug addiction.

Today, at 42, Jason is clean, and has been for over three years, thanks to the Twelve-Step Programme – a recovery system that advocates total abstinence from drugs and alcohol. His desire to help others who have also found themselves drug-dependent and socially marginalised helps him stay drug-free.

In January 2011, after completing an advanced media techniques course at Birmingham Metropolitan College, Jason founded iSore media, a not-for-profit social enterprise that seeks to enhance the lives of people undergoing rehabilitation through the power of filmmaking and creative media projects. There are three strands to the organisation:

- Production of films for use in rehabilitative workshops.
- Workshops in film making for socially marginalised groups
- Promotional film-making service for businesses in both the private and third sectors.

**Flat Out and Back**

Jason felt strongly that the educational films generally shown in rehabilitative workshops simply bore no relevance to people's lives. By making films that were both relevant and interesting to this social group, Jason believed that a real connection could be made that would achieve much greater results.

In partnership with BDAAT, Birmingham Drug and Alcohol Action Team and Service User Groups About Recovery (SUGAR), iSore Media set about producing a powerful film 'Flat Out and Back' highlighting how the substance Naloxone can be used to reverse a drugs overdose and, literally, save lives.

So far, Naloxone has been used primarily by ambulance and paramedic crews across the UK, but pilot schemes are being rolled out to train chaotic drug users and their families to identify and manage overdose situations by administering the drug themselves.

The 15-minute film also features a contribution by Dr Ed Day, from the North Birmingham Community Drug Team, on how organisations in the region can best tackle drug misuse. "The film was inspired by statistics around heroin overdoses," Jason said. "I know people who have died after being clean for some time and then started using again. Your tolerance level drops".

Describing the film, Jason said: "It tells the story of what happens every day. A guy gets out of prison, tells himself he won't use again, heads for the off-licence, then loses all his inhibitions and gets back on the drugs again... It's a dangerous cycle".

Jason wants this film to be screened in prisons, rehab centres, community drug teams and rehabs, because he says statistics show that 95 per cent of overdose deaths occur within the first week of an ex-addict being released from some sort of institution.

Flat Out and Back was premiered at a public screening at Cineworld Solihull on 7 December 2011. The film was shown for the first time to its primary audience at HMP Only on 29 December 2011. All 12 inmates who watched the film expressed an interest in Naloxone training.

**Workshops**

Through its film making workshops, iSore Media also provides a valuable service to voluntary groups offering help to disadvantaged people. These workshops aim to give participants a worthy skill, potential work and placement opportunities within the media industry, as well as promoting a general feeling of self-worth that allows people from disadvantaged groups to regain their sense of belonging within society. Workshops can be tailored to the needs of the groups which can be large or small. Workshops consist of 8-10 weeks of learning and experiencing all aspects of film/video production, from creation of an idea through to storyboarding, script writing, handling film-making equipment, shooting, editing and post production. At the end of the workshop, the participants will have created their own short film on a subject that they choose as a team.

An Awards for All grant awarded in December 2012 will enable iSore Media to deliver three, eight-week film making workshops to socially marginalised groups in Solihull and Birmingham in 2012.

**Film making services**

iSore also provides corporate marketing and promotional film making services for charities, community groups, other CICs (Community Interest Companies) and private sector businesses. The calibre of their client experience speaks for itself. They have produced a 30 minute promotional DVD for Solihull Integrated Addiction Services (SIAS), which was used by SIAS to highlight the drug and alcohol services available within Solihull.

They have also created an informational DVD for prospective clients of an adult training centre, based in Nechells in Birmingham, called Forward 4 Work – funded by Birmingham City Council.

Following the success of these, iSore was approached to produce a promotional video for Waterloo Woodwork, a social enterprise providing work experience and training for men with learning difficulties and disabilities.

To promote the benefits that your business has to offer, you could try their DVD service. They can creatively showcase what your business does and produce a professional standard DVD production that will highlight the essence of your business.

**Looking to the future**

As well as making educational films and running film-making workshops with vulnerable groups, Jason hopes to expand the business side of the organisation, producing more films for other social enterprises, charities and private businesses. “I've big plans for isore” he added. “There are so many more films to be made, and so many more voices that need to be heard.”

iSore Media: www.isoremedia.org / admin@isoremedia.org / 0121 680 0267
point of view

“The film was inspired by statistics around heroin overdoses ... 95 per cent of overdose deaths occur within the first week of an ex-addict being released from some sort of institution.”
Mental health should be everyone’s business because many of us have or will experience mental health problems at some point during our lives.

Mental health impacts on all aspects of people’s lives: people with mental health problems often have fewer qualifications, are more likely to be unemployed, are more likely to live in disadvantaged areas and are more likely to experience poor physical health.

Furthermore, poor mental health has an impact on a wider community level too: areas with high health inequalities tend also to experience poor community cohesion, as people withdraw from social contact and become inward looking.

In Birmingham the Community Development Worker Service is supporting communities to build their resilience towards mental health and wellbeing. The community development workers work with existing assets, using the strengths and abilities within local communities to help them to manage and address mental distress and deal with social and cultural stresses contributing to mental illness.

Originally, community development workers were commissioned to work along the Delivering Race Equality in Mental Health Care guidelines, working specifically with black and minority communities (BME). However, since October 2011, the remit has been extended to include other vulnerable communities, and the service now operates a more comprehensive programme. This empowers BME and vulnerable communities to engage with a wide range of evidenced-based health and wellbeing activities that are known to support, or have the potential to support, improved mental health.

The Community Cohesion Programme
Fundamental to the work of the Community Development Worker Service are the principles of cohesion and equity. The service is supporting the delivery of seven strands of activities known as the Community Cohesion Programme (CCP). Each strand aims to raise awareness of positive approaches towards health and wellbeing.

It also offers a range of training and development opportunities into meaningful activities, while promoting integration and diversity so that people from different backgrounds work together to tackle local problems.

Caron Thompson, managing director of Common-Unity, said, “The city-wide Community Cohesion Programme is a ground-breaking new initiative that will give the people of Birmingham the opportunity to work, grow and develop together.

“I believe, if people have the skills and tools to do for themselves most would. The work of the community development workers will help towards the integration of communities, raise awareness of health and wellbeing and allow the people of Birmingham to make a more informed choice in relation to their own wellbeing”.

Why is community cohesion important to health?
Health (including mental health) and community cohesion are closely linked. The Institute of Community Cohesion says health tends to decline in communities where levels of interaction are low and where people feel insecure. In more cohesive communities the reverse is true and it is much easier for public services to develop a dialogue with local people and to be sure that services are meeting local needs.

Partnership approach
The Community Cohesion Programme is being delivered in partnership with key third sector organisations. The partners are Birmingham Mind, Common-Unity, Freshwinds and BVSC.

Caron Thompson explained, “Partner organisations have been selected based on their expertise to deliver a strand (or strands) of the Community Cohesion Programme. As communities become empowered and expectations change it is anticipated that the strands will evolve or be replaced altogether. As new specialist input is required to meet changing expectations, specialist input will be sought to realise changing requirements.”

The portfolio
The Community Cohesion Programme includes:

- **URBRUM – the Youth Social Inclusion Project strand.** Giving young people a platform to get their voices heard in regards to Health and Social Care.
ASIST – the Suicide Prevention strand. Intensive training for frontline workers and community members.

The Mental Health Awareness and Five Ways to Wellbeing strand. A bespoke training programme established to challenge the stigma and ignorance around mental health problems and supporting participants to adopt opportunities in life that actively support their mental health.

The Community Health Champions strand. Training local people to be champions for positive health by raising awareness, signposting individuals to services which promote health and developing health programmes within communities.

The Mental Health First Aid Training strand. Reducing the stigma around mental illness and giving participants the knowledge and confidence to recognise and provide practical advice to people they come into contact with who may have mental health needs.

The Recovery and Wellness strand. Tools to support individuals to adopt self-determined methods that have a positive impact on their mental health.

The Readers for Wellbeing Strand. A nationally recognised approach to supporting individuals’ mental health and wellbeing through engagement with literature in a socially supportive environment.

The Community Cohesion Programme has multiple access points, promoting a range of engagement opportunities and taking a holistic approach to engagement. “The aim is to make it easier for people to access a range of services that will promote mental wellbeing. Individuals can access the Community Cohesion Programme through any of the strands. They can then move onto other programme strands as they wish or stay solely within the strand of their choice”, said Caron Thompson.

“Good mental health and resilience are fundamental to our physical health, our relationships, our education, our training, our work and to achieving our potential.”

No Health Without Mental Health: A cross-government mental health outcomes strategy for people of all ages, Department of Health, 2011
ChildLine is launching a brand new service for primary age children and Birmingham schools will be amongst the first in the country to receive it.

The new ChildLine Schools Service is aimed at primary age children, particularly focusing on seven to 11 year olds, and aims to help them understand what abuse is, how to protect themselves and how to seek help if they need it – including through ChildLine.

Julie Hilton, ChildLine Schools Service manager for West Midlands, said: “Research undertaken by the NSPCC shows that the majority of children who contact ChildLine for advice, information and support are over 11 years old. However we know that the majority of children on the child protection register are under the age of 11. “These younger children are not connected so much with the outside world. So if abuse is happening to them at that age, then it’s very difficult for children to speak up. That’s why we want to educate children earlier and ensure they know how to keep themselves safe or seek help if they need it.”

In keeping with ChildLine’s long history of volunteering, the new schools service will be led by volunteers. They will be trained to deliver safeguarding assemblies and interactive workshops. All materials will be provided and volunteers will be given regular training and support.

Eventually the ChildLine schools service hopes to help every primary age child to recognise and protect themselves from abuse. By 2016 the aim is to visit every primary school in the UK at least every two years. Julie Hilton continued: “What’s key about our Schools Service is that we need a great team of volunteers. It is very much about mobilising the community and to make child protection everyone’s responsibility.”

First piloted in 2010, there are two phases to the new service. The first is a school assembly that provides definitions of abuse, places to go for help and an introduction to ChildLine. The second phase takes place one to two weeks later and is an interactive classroom-based workshop where the messages are reinforced and skills are developed.

About the NSPCC

The NSPCC aims to end cruelty to children in the UK by fighting for their rights, listening to them, offering help when they need it and making them safe.

The NSPCC provides national services, such as ChildLine and their Helpline for concerned adults, to provide support for all children. Their local services focus on the most acute forms of abuse and the most vulnerable, highest risk children – working in areas such as sexual abuse or children under one so that they can bring help, advice and treatment to children at risk or those who have been abused.

The NSPCC: www.nspcc.org.uk
ChildLine: 0800 1111 / www.childline.org.uk
NSPCC Helpline for adults worried about the welfare of a child: 0808 800 5000 / help@nspcc.org.uk

ChildLine Schools Service and volunteering opportunities:
www.nspcc.org.uk/schoollservice
At any one time there are around 2,000 children in the care of Birmingham City Council. Most are looked after by Birmingham City Council’s Fostering Service, which finds stable, secure and caring homes that suit each child’s age, ethnicity, religion and culture, along with meeting their emotional, educational and physical needs on a short-term or long-term basis.

Fostering can be challenging, but it is also immensely rewarding. The financial benefits are good too – the rates that our foster carers receive are very competitive – you can earn from £263 up to £429 per week per child, plus additional allowances. You may also be eligible for favourable tax breaks.

They have the children
When the Fostering Service is searching for a suitable home for each child they look to their own register of approved foster carers. But they need more people on that list so that they can place children quickly and meet their needs effectively.

Where they cannot find a suitable home within the register of carers the service will consider making a placement through an independent agency. So, if you would like to be given priority when a child needs a foster placement, it makes sense to apply to Birmingham City Council to foster.

Who can become a foster carer?
Foster carers come from a wide range of backgrounds. You can be single, married or with a long-term partner. You can be heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual or transsexual. You may or may not have children of your own, and your home may be rented or privately owned – but you will need to have a spare bedroom for a foster child.

Ideally you need to be over the age of 23 when you apply, you must be sufficiently emotionally mature and financially stable to provide the support children will need. You need to be sufficiently fit and healthy, both physically and mentally. Foster carers will need to be able to speak, read and write English to a competent level so that they can communicate in this language with both children and other professionals.

Pre-school children (under five) need to be looked after full-time, so the main carer cannot be in full-time work, although spouses or partners may be. Temporary carers for school-age children may work limited flexible hours, long-term carers can work provided the child’s particular needs allow it, although the service would only expect this to be part-time.

Applying to be a foster carer
This is a general guide. Your actual suitability to become a foster carer can only be determined during the approval process, when we get to know you better. From your formal application, including the assessment and training, through to approval takes about eight months. It is a very thorough process and not everyone makes it through to the final stage.

If you are interested in finding out more you can make an enquiry and they will discuss your circumstances with you and look to take things from there. For more information, please call the Fostering Recruitment Team or visit the website.

Birmingham City Council Fostering Service: 0121 303 7575 / www.birmingham.gov.uk/adoptionandfostering
See foster carers’ experiences on YouTube: go to www.youtube.com then type ‘fosterbham’
SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE’S NEEDS: 
THE COMMON ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

Background
Services for vulnerable children in Birmingham are currently undergoing transformational change. A new Children’s Services Operating Model is in place with a re-modelled structure of Integrated Access Teams and Integrated Family Support, part of Birmingham’s strategy to improve safeguarding for vulnerable children and young people in the city.

Children and families are supported most effectively and efficiently when services and information sharing are planned and delivered in a co-ordinated way. The vision across Birmingham is to develop a ‘think child, think parent, think family approach’ supported by flexible and responsive services.

The process that is fundamental to this vision and can be used by any agency in Birmingham working with children, young people and families, is called the Common Assessment Framework (CAF).

The CAF is a shared assessment and planning framework for use across all children's services and all local areas in England. It aims to help the early identification of children's additional needs and promote co-ordinated service provision to meet them.

The majority of children have their health, learning, developmental and basic care needs met by their families and by accessing universal services such as health care, education, leisure facilities and voluntary sector services. Others may require intensive support from a single agency, however, some often complex cases require the combined help offered by more than one or multiple agencies and in these circumstances a CAF may be appropriate.

Children’s Wellbeing Model 2010-13: The Windscreen
In Birmingham the Children’s Wellbeing Model outlines the approach to identify the intervention required for children with different levels of needs.

This Threshold Guide describes potential triggers of concern for children, young people and their families and supports identification of when a CAF may be appropriate.

The Interventions are categorised as:

- **Level 1** represents children with no identified additional needs. These are children and young people who make good overall progress in all areas of development.

- **Level 2** represents children with additional needs that can be met by targeted support by a single practitioner or agency.

- **Level 3** represents children with additional needs which can be met by targeted support by a multi-agency integrated package of care.

- **Level 4** are children and young people whose needs are acute and are at risk of harm and require immediate intervention from statutory or specialist services.

How the CAF Process Works
In the first instance a CAF Pre-assessment may be used if a practitioner feels that a family might benefit from a CAF, and in turn used to facilitate a discussion with the family and then gain consent if the CAF is required. If no intervention or single agency intervention is the proposed outcome a full CAF is not required.

With the parent/guardian/client complete the CAF Form. This details the child’s or young person’s strengths and needs, taking into account family circumstances. It includes information about what changes are needed and the list of agencies that will be contacted to help meet the child’s needs. There is space on the form for signed agreement for information to be shared with other agencies.

Hold an Integrated Support Plan (ISP) Meeting. During this meeting, preferably with the parent/guardian/client present, agencies come together and agree the needs of the child and what the desired outcome of the CAF should be. An Integrated Support Plan is put together which details what actions are required, by whom and the timescales for completion. A Lead Professional is agreed, who will have responsibility for co-ordinating the CAF process and liaising with the family.

Hold an Integrated Support Plan Review Meeting. This provides an opportunity to check the progress on actions against the Integrated Support Plan. All need to agree on whether the action has been completed and if more or less than the desired outcome has been achieved. The review meetings need to continue until all needs have been evaluated (all needs ‘met’) or when only one agency is involved the CAF process can be closed.

What are the benefits of the CAF?

- Provide an assessment that is common across services
- Help embed a shared language
- Support better understanding amongst practitioners
- Reduce the number of different assessments
- Facilitate early intervention

In April 2011 Birmingham’s Review and Development of the Common Assessment Framework made recommendations about voluntary sector engagement. The report states: ‘That the Cabinet Members and Executive Member work with the voluntary sector to
increase their engagement in all elements of the CAF process.

How have we responded?

CAF Briefings
A series of CAF briefings were delivered in conjunction with BCC CAF team in September 2011. The sessions, were attended by 75 VCS organisations, with the aim of refreshing understanding of the CAF process, raising awareness of the Operating Model in the context of Birmingham’s Improvement Plan and increasing voluntary sector engagement in the CAF process.

CAF Champions Group
A voluntary Sector CAF Champions Group met for the first time at BVSC on 18 January attended by representatives from Homestart Sutton Coldfield, Spurgeons: Beyond The Horizon, Birmingham & Solihull Women’s Aid, SOVA and Birmingham Citizens Advice Bureau, BVSC and Birmingham City Council CAF Team.

During a lively and productive first meeting discussions explored supporting voluntary sector engagement in the CAF process, how to enhance sector confidence in using CAF and the development of local support networks. Anyone with an interest in becoming a CAF Champion or who would like to find out more about this group should contact Jason Wright at BVSC.

Where can I access training and support?
Visit the training section on the CAF website. Training in the Common Assessment Framework will help you to build knowledge and understanding, develop practical skills, and prepare for your first CAF assessment. At the end of a course you will be better placed to offer appropriate support.

The on-line awareness raising training modules are sufficient for most staff however, those practitioners directly supporting children and young people should consider undertaking the additional CAF and Lead professional workshops.

The BCC Central CAF Team also has dedicated voluntary sector resources in the form of CAF Co-ordinators who can offer advice, guidance and set up your first Integrated Support Meeting.

Useful documents
The Children’s Wellbeing Model 2010-13: The Windscreen
2009 Birmingham City Council Scrutiny review: Who Cares? Protecting Children and Improving Children’s Social Care
Ofsted report, July 2010: Inspection of safeguarding and looked after children’s services
Department for Education: Improvement Notice September 2010
Birmingham Safeguarding and Children in Care Improvement Plan November 2010
The Review and Development of the Common Assessment Framework April 2011

About Third Sector Assembly
Third Sector Assembly
Birmingham is a network of voluntary and community organisations. It has been brought together by BVSC to improve communication across the sector, to grow its ability to influence and to improve relationships with the public sector.

Six thematic Assembly networks have been set up to capture key policy areas, they are:

- Children and young people
- Community safety
- Enterprise and training
- Housing and regeneration
- Arts and culture
- Health and social care.

Full Assembly meetings
Tuesday 28 February 2012
Tuesday 22 May 2012
Tuesday 18 September 2012
Tuesday 11 December 2012

Have your say on the future of housing in Birmingham

Labour in Birmingham has set up a policy commission to look at the future of housing in Birmingham and we want to hear from you.

It’s been estimated that 26,000 households in the city are overcrowded. Thousands of Council properties are in need of repair and maintenance. Homelessness is a real threat for too many families and the Council’s waiting list stands at over 30,000 with the biggest pressure on larger family homes.

For those wanting to buy a property, prices in Birmingham have fallen recently, but they are still unaffordable for many, particularly those trying to get their foot on the first rung of the housing ladder. Yet renting in the private sector often isn’t an option either with market rents rising faster than the incomes of many Birmingham families.

Changes to housing benefits and security of tenure being brought in by the Conservative-led government are likely to make things worse rather than better.

And for the Council itself, government cuts are likely to mean an effective loss of around £21m.

So there are big constraints on what Labour will be able to do. But having a decent home is so important to everyone that we owe it to Birmingham to do all we can to turn things around. We need to look at how we can work with partners to build more homes and to keep the ones that are already there in good repair; to make sure that people get the right kind of housing advice and are treated as human beings rather than statistics; and to make sure that Birmingham’s Housing strategy contributes to creating more jobs and building sustainable communities.

Email your views to assembly@bvsc.org

“Children and families are supported most effectively and efficiently when services and information sharing are planned and delivered in a co-ordinated way.”
2012 sees a range of changes in employment law. Do you know what is happening, and are you compliant? This guide should see you through.

1 February
New maximum weekly pay limits come into force for calculating statutory redundancy pay and maximum compensation for unfair dismissal claims. The weekly pay limit for redundancy pay increases to £430 (from £400). The maximum unfair dismissal compensation increases to £72,300 (from £68,400).

6 March
Close of government consultation on the introduction of fees for bringing employment tribunal claims. This is expected to lead to the introduction of fees later in the year. It is likely to deter some potential claimants from bringing a claim.

6 April
The qualifying period for unfair dismissal will increase from 1 to 2 years, so it will be less risky for employers to dismiss employees in the first 2 years of their employment (see Update November edition for a fuller analysis of this change).

April (date to be confirmed)
The statutory right for employees to take unpaid parental leave will increase from 3 to 4 months.

Working time rules are to be amended to allow employees to carry over holiday from one year to the next, in limited circumstances, when they are unable to take it in the relevant year.

9 April
Statutory maternity, paternity and adoption pay increases to £135.45 (from £128.73) for the first 6 weeks. The standard rate of statutory sick pay increases from £81.60 to £85.85 per week.

1 September
The Employers’ Duties (Implementation) Regulations 2010 come into force. These require all employers automatically to enrol employees in a pension scheme, and to make minimum pension contributions to the scheme. This will therefore have a significant cost implication. Large organisations must start auto-enrolment in October this year. Smaller organisations have start dates from 2013 to 2015. You must check when your organisation has to comply with auto-enrolment, and make preparations, including informing your Management Committee.

The national minimum wage may increase, depending on what the Low Pay Commission recommends in February.

Also likely to take place in 2012...

■ The introduction of financial penalties for employers who breach employment rights. This would change the current position where employers are generally only penalised by the award of compensation to an employee who brings a successful claim in an employment tribunal.

■ Early and compulsory ACAS conciliation of all tribunal claims.

■ The simplification of the legal requirements for binding compromise agreements. This would make it easier for an employer to make a pay-off to a departing employee, in return for the employee's agreement not to bring any claim against the employer.

■ Consultation about 'protected conversations' between employers and staff. "Protected conversations" would enable employers to propose resignations with pay off, without the risk of the employee bringing a constructive dismissal claim against them.

■ Consultation on rapid resolution schemes as an alternative to tribunal claims for low-value and straightforward disputes.

■ Consideration of a simpler dismissal process than that set out in the ACAS Disciplinary and Grievance Code.

■ The creation of a universally portable CRB check that can be viewed by employers instantly online (from early 2013)

Action points

■ Update your Staff Handbook and Policies regarding Parental Leave, Statutory Maternity Pay and Statutory Sick Pay

■ Redundancies – make sure you are using the new maximum weekly pay to calculate redundancy payments after 1 February.

■ Make sure your senior and HR staff know that it is safer to dismiss staff within 2 years of their employment.

■ Brief your trustees on pensions reform, be aware of your auto-enrolment starting date, and make sure you can fund forthcoming pension contributions.

■ Watch out for proposed changes on protected conversations, simpler dismissal process, and portable CRB checks.

Elizabeth Scholes is an independent employment consultant who specialises in the third sector.

She is a former employment solicitor who has worked extensively with charities and voluntary organisations. She has also been a trustee at two large Birmingham charities.

Elizabeth advises on a wide range of employment matters for the Third Sector, including contracts, dispute resolution, dismissals, redundancies, and charity restructuring, and provides employment law training.

For further advice and details of Elizabeth's competitive charity rates, contact elizabeth.scholes@talktalk.net or 07941 457580.
New year resolutions: the board

Is getting fitter and eating healthier one of the things on your new year’s resolution list? What about becoming a board member? Or are you an organisation looking for new board members?

Before you start looking for new board members find out what existing skills you already have on your board: you might be surprised at the hidden talents you discover. If you are an organisation looking for new board members the first thing to do is look inwards. When was the last time you conducted a skills audit? It gives you the opportunity to identify existing skills on your board but, more importantly, any gaps that you need to fill. Do you need more expertise in finance; what about marketing or using new technology? Do you have the essential combination of skills, knowledge and experience around the table to face the challenges in the next six months and year?

Have a process in place that includes, however formal or informal, interviewing prospective board members, and ask for a reference/testimonial. This person will, after all, be representing your organisation – it’s a bit like a recruitment process: you want to make sure you have the right person.

Now that you have a new board member what do you want them to do? What do you expect of them? First, do they know the organisation, its structures and, importantly, culture? Arrange a thorough induction – make certain they are familiar with the organisation; this must include, for example, some understanding of the Memorandum and Articles of Association (essentially a guide to the organisation’s purpose, the reason it was set up and a guide to what it can and can’t do) and how the organisation is financed.

Types of board members:
- Passive
- Challenging
- Engaged.

Passive board members turn up to meetings and don’t say much. They need to be encouraged – why not ask them about an area in which they have specialist knowledge. They might want to be a board champion for a particular area of work.

Challenging members question every decision, including the smallest operational decision. They often don’t challenge in a constructive way - this means that their contribution can often be dismissed or overlooked by other board members. However, they will sometimes see things that other board and staff members miss.

Then there are the engaged members; they are familiar with the discussions and make a contribution. They participate actively at the board meetings. They use their experiences and expertise to contribute to the organisation and its future development.

If you are looking for a board member, the key to success is to choose carefully – it is sometimes better to continue to have a vacancy rather than fill it hastily. Or, if you want to become a board member, look for an organisation that matches your interests, that stretches and challenges you; look for an organisation that you can help to grow and develop. In the fine tradition of volunteering look for an organisation that motivates you enough to give it your time, support and energy!

Jacqui Francis is the owner of AdinaMay Consulting which provides a variety of services including independent scrutiny of appointment processes, mediation and support for new and existing board members.

She has been involved in the voluntary sector for over 20 years serving on boards and chairing committees, including the BBC and HOB PCT. She is a past chair of BVSC.

Jacqui is an Independent Public Appointments Assessor and has a variety of clients including the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Home Office.

She currently serves on the board of The Birmingham Repertory Theatre, and is a Lay Adviser on the West Midland Strategic Management Board, which is responsible for protecting the public.

AdinaMay Consulting: www.adinamay.co.uk

"Before you start looking for new board members find out what existing skills you already have on your board: you might be surprised at the hidden talents you discover."
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**Find out more...**

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Should spending cuts lead to Marketing budget cuts?

Following substantial funding cuts, many third sector organisations are coming under increasing pressure to find ways to maximise their funding without compromising their services.

A recent survey carried out by lobby group False Economy (www.falseeconomy.org.uk), has revealed over 2000 third sector organisations that provide services to local authorities will have funding either reduced or withdrawn next year following cuts.

The immediate reaction by most organisations is to look at ways of combating the cuts. They will begin by looking at reducing internal costs and quite often marketing budgets are either substantially reduced or even abandoned.

At Creative Circles C.I.C we believe it is important for third sector organisations to recognise the benefits of marketing communications particularly during the current economic times. We work closely with you to help you to communicate more effectively, and to look at your existing marketing communications and to ensure you are shouting and making noise about the added value and benefits your organisation provides to wider society.

We also look at ways to help you to integrate and streamline your communications across all channels including the introduction of digital media and maximise on your ROI (return on investment), and how your organisation can embrace the digital era.

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