



don't agonise organise!

people are gathering...



a GROUNDSWELL report
with forward by Dr Mo Mowlam, Minister for the Cabinet Office

introduction

to the report



Tackling social exclusion is one of the greatest challenges facing Britain today.

And as the minister charged with making sure that change - real change - happens where it's needed most, I firmly believe that one of the greatest assets we have in making a difference is people themselves.

First and foremost, social exclusion is about waste. The waste of people's talent and of their potential to contribute to society. Above all, the waste of their lives.

Many people who experience poverty and deprivation feel detached from society. We are determined to support people in making positive change for themselves and their communities.

That means valuing the contribution they can make as well as the helping them to get the most out of life. Groundswell's work with and for homeless people is one of the ways of making that a reality.

Making connections to learn from the experiences of poor people, and building on the lessons we can all learn from this, is an important part in this process.

Groundswell and its network are committed to rebuilding confidence and harnessing the potential of individuals and communities for the good of all, and in this they have my full support.

Mo

Dr Mo Mowlam MP
Minister for the Cabinet Office



a word from
Jerry Ham,
Groundswell
Co-ordinator

Groundswell exists to support the involvement of homeless people in creating solutions to tackle homelessness. Over the last 4 years people have begun to mobilise themselves to learn from each other, to exchange skills and share experiences.

It can be very easy for people who feel the system is 'doing things to them' rather than 'for them' to feel frustrated by a lack of change. Sometimes we **agonise** over the state and charity's failure to bring about the changes we want. The message from Slum Dwellers of the world is loud and clear - 'you must **organise** yourselves and make things happen, no-one is going to do it for you'

meeting the policy makers

what they had to say

On the afternoon of day two, three UK policy makers joined the meeting to hear what these 64 representatives from Groundswell network had to say. Geoff Mulgan, No 10 Policy Unit; Louise Casey from the Rough Sleepers Unit and Georgina Fletcher-Cooke from the Active Community Unit all came along to listen to the views of the homeless and ex-homeless people who have been on the receiving end of their policies.

Maggie Baxter,
trustee, Pilotlight

"The challenge for all of us to listen to homeless people, learn from their experience and give away the power owned by officialdom and their agents and respond to the initiatives homeless people pose as solutions."

"We've invited you here to start to explore ways in which we can work together to help solve your and our problems. You're working to tackle homelessness, poverty and social exclusion. We are experiencing it. As a network of excluded people, we are offering to open a dialogue with Government. We are actively creating our own self-help solutions. We are inviting the Government to join us and bridge the gap between policy and practice and to end exclusion."

-D.

Geoff Mulgan, Special Adviser,
No 10 Policy Unit

"This Government, for the first time for a British Government in certainly twenty years, does want to make a difference to what are much worse problems of social exclusion than we've had for a very long time in this country with unemployment and homelessness. We all know that. And it's putting quite a lot of resources, quite a lot of political energy into trying to make solutions. I think that you're pushing on a open door in that the sort of approach that you're describing is absolutely in keeping with the lessons that we and everyone else have learnt - how solutions have to be made by the people involved themselves. We have to be wary of the resources all going to professionals, going to big organisations claiming to do things for people rather than the people themselves and a lot of mistakes have been made in the past. I hope we're beginning to do things in a better way and I won't pretend that change doesn't take some time."



meeting the policy makers

what they had to say

On the afternoon of day two, three UK policy makers joined the meeting to hear what these 64 representatives from Groundswell network had to say. Geoff Mulgan, No 10 Policy Unit; Louise Casey from the Rough Sleepers Unit and Georgina Fletcher-Cooke from the Active Community Unit all came along to listen to the views of the homeless and ex-homeless people who have been on the receiving end of their policies.

Maggie Baxter,
trustee, Pilotlight

"The challenge for all of us to listen to homeless people, learn from their experience and give away the power owned by officialdom and their agents and respond to the initiatives homeless people pose as solutions."

"We've invited you here to start to explore ways in which we can work together to help solve your and our problems. You're working to tackle homelessness, poverty and social exclusion. We are experiencing it. As a network of excluded people, we are offering to open a dialogue with Government. We are actively creating our own self-help solutions. We are inviting the Government to join us and bridge the gap between policy and practice and to end exclusion."

-D.
on behalf of the Groundswell network

Geoff Mulgan, Special Adviser,
No 10 Policy Unit

"This Government, for the first time for a British Government in certainly twenty years, does want to make a difference to what are much worse problems of social exclusion than we've had for a very long time in this country with unemployment and homelessness. We all know that. And it's putting quite a lot of resources, quite a lot of political energy into trying to make solutions. I think that you're pushing on an open door in that the sort of approach that you're describing is absolutely in keeping with the lessons that we and everyone else have learnt - how solutions have to be made by the people involved themselves. We have to be wary of the resources all going to professionals, going to big organisations claiming to do things for people rather than the people themselves and a lot of mistakes have been made in the past. I hope we're beginning to do things in a better way and I won't pretend that change doesn't take some time."



meeting the policy makers

afterthoughts

the exchange week

**Geoff Mulgan, Special Adviser,
No 10 Policy Unit**

"I'm very much in favour of dialogue. I think things work much better if you involve the people who are going to be on the receiving end of policies and it doesn't happen nearly enough. We've tried a lot of different ways of involving people both nationally and locally in the last few years and we need to do more of that. You get more out of Government too if you can say what you're bringing and I think you have got a lot to bring - resources, energy, ideas - than if you just say "Here's a problem, you solve it"."

**Toby Johns,
The Baring
Foundation**

"It was a powerful occasion which took you violently out of your normal box and made you look at it a different way."

**Louise Casey,
Homelessness Tzar,
Rough Sleepers Unit**

"If you can demonstrate that you really are representing users and that that's clear and we can see how that happens, it's brilliant for us to be able to engage with you on that. But for me, it has to be on rough sleepers. That's my end of my world that I have to worry about and, as you know, I have a short time to worry about it in and nothing's going to get in my way. So to that, I'm very happy to engage and I'm very happy to consult and we need to talk more specifics on the formalities of that. But I've said before, I'm committed to working with Groundswell and I think it's a question of taking it forward."



**Shed a Patel,
SPARC, India**

"The week in London was a useful milestone for us in many ways. It was a vital template for how we can showcase Slum Dwellers International. It will help us to present our perspective to various organisations with who we seek a relationship of partnership rather than being treated as objects or projects. The manner in which we collaborated was very useful and worthwhile because it reflected the very partnership we spoke of."

what GROUNDSWELL does

how does it support the network?

Groundswell has developed a number of initiatives to support the work of self-help groups...

small grant award scheme →

Groundswell's Small Grant Award Scheme makes awards of up to £500 for UK-based projects that involve homeless people and local communities. Awards are distributed four times a year to projects run by people with experience of being homeless and to organisations that want to increase the involvement of users in how their project is run.

self-help directory →

Providing contact details and descriptions in an easily indexed and accessible way, the self-help directory is for people who want to play an active role in their own lives and to encourage organisations to become more inclusive.

the birth of a network

← campaigning →

Groundswell aims to represent the network by campaigning around three key messages:

- ★ **homeless people are a resource not a problem.**
- ★ **homeless people have a right to information to make informed choices.**
- ★ **homeless people must be involved in creating practical solutions to tackle homelessness.**

← resource development →

Groundswell supports the growth and development of projects involving local people in their communities and provides groups and individuals with support in developing a fundraising strategy and securing the resources they

← newsletter →

Groundswell's newsletter is an arena for the exchange of ideas and experience, views and opinions, including a round-up of news from the network, information on funding and resourcing, reviews of books, videos, websites etc., news of events and new initiatives. Distributed throughout the network, the newsletter's open editorial policy provides an accessible forum for anybody with something constructive to say about homelessness.

supporting groups →

Groundswell's developing training programme focuses on sharing and enhancing the skills of groups and individuals within the network. Responding to and meeting the needs of homeless people to develop their own initiatives, the programme provides a full range of support services enabling people to share their own experience and knowledge throughout the network and beyond.

Street Arts

Street Arts was set up and is run by street people. The Street Arts Project aims to encourage those people who practise the art of street living to help themselves. Street Arts allows homeless people to find a way back into society without compromising their dignity or beliefs.

Jimmy's Nightshelter

Jimmy's is a nightshelter providing beds for 25 men and 6 women (and 2 dogs!) in Cambridge. John Walker is an ex-homeless person who has been actively involved with Jimmy's for a number of years. John essentially runs the nightshelter as a volunteer, and has been an active supporter of Groundswell and self-help activity in the UK.

Get up & Go Project

A project run by young people aged between 17 and 26 in Manchester. The Get up and Go Project have developed a board game about being homeless, designed to inform others of the realities of being homeless in Manchester. The group will be taking the game to schools and young people to share information about the realities of being homeless, in an attempt to prevent others from becoming homeless.

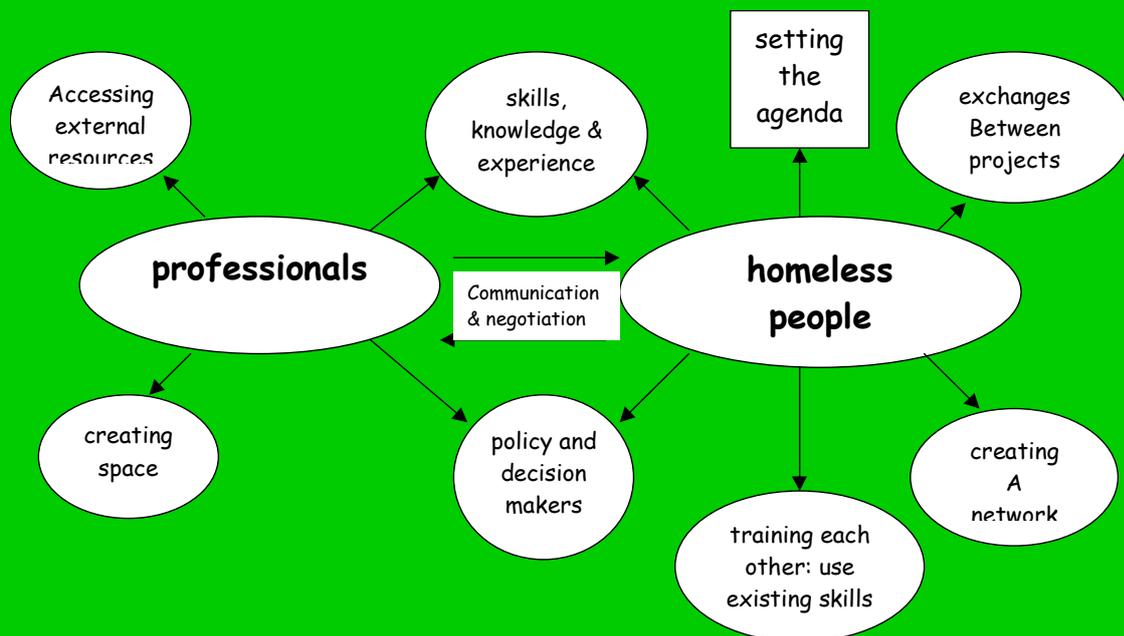


Tenants in Control

Tenants in Control are a group of young people who have experienced homelessness who have come together to take control of their housing situations. TIC leases and furnishes flats which are then managed by the tenants themselves. The young people make decisions about the rent set, redecoration needed, general maintenance, and selection of new tenants. TIC also organises training for all tenants and members in a variety of skills needed to run the project.

Travellers' Fire Safety Project

As a group of landless 'new' travellers living in vehicles and caravans, the Travellers Fire Safety Project aim to raise awareness about fire safety in travelling communities. The group also hope to provide first-aid information, as well as fire extinguishers, fire blankets, and fire guards to as many travelling households as possible, both traditional and new, in the Somerset area.



Some of the benefits this model presents are:

- ★ It creates a sense of ownership
- ★ It creates a sense of partnership
- ★ It allows for a continual redefinition of the model to support its changing needs
- ★ It allows easy and mutual communication to occur between 'professional' people and 'clients' as a process of negotiation
- ★ It removes the defined roles of 'giver' and 'receiver'
- ★ It utilises the resources of both homeless and professional people to the maximum.

Sheela stressed that this twist in the current arrangement is one that could occur easily without any substantial change in the working environments of the vast majority of projects. It could unify a sector otherwise at danger of losing the strength of its experience by fighting about the best way

to give up its power to the clients it supports.

Power can be shared and, by being shared, increased. The UK homelessness sector has a unique insight in to the needs, situation and abilities of homeless and marginalised people. In all its stated aims and heartfelt objectives it desires to offer people a real opportunity to engage with their own lives in a way that the present system of engagement has not honoured. If we are to set a new agenda we must recognise that we must all start to think differently. It is my firm conviction that the commitment and willingness of people and the tools to do the job are all in place; all that is needed is an example of how different things can be and the courage to make a change. Sheela's inspiration and the model of the way SPARC works with both the NSDF and Mahila Milan could provide a way forward."

Jerry Ham
Groundswell Coordinator

final thoughts...

Little problems and Big problems →

"A settlement without problems is unnatural, a community without tensions is dead. But sometimes, it's the small problems that make you go down, rather than the big problems. Somebody drinking, somebody isn't participating, competition for leadership, misuse of the money - these are all the kind of small problems that communities can get so absorbed in that they lose track of the real problems, so they can't even see them any more.

It's like holding up a small coin in front of your eyes - if you bring the coin close enough, all you can see is that little small coin - it fills your vision of the world - but it's still just a coin! So you can't see the rest of the world! That's when communities go down. We need to keep seeing the big problems: Land! Houses! Money! Services! This is why we come together - for the BIG problems - don't get stuck in the small problems!

Jockin,
National Slum Dwellers Federation,
India

"If you lead your life within the spaces that are provided to you, you are only going to go downhill. So if you are content with going downhill, and staying within the law and being good, and dying, that's fine. And I think that's one of the first things that you need to take on board. But that doesn't mean that you just go banging your head and doing things which are not strategic and that's where being together, being a federation, being an organisation is a strategic response and a smart response rather than trying to beat the system individually."

Shedra Patel, SPARC, India

what are we taking away from here?

Travellin' back from Groundswell
Got nothin' on my mind
Lots of thoughts already lost
They've found a place to hide.

We had a really good time there
We had a lot of fun
We shouted and we ranted
We laughed and cried and sung.

We put the world to rights my friend
Then tore it down again
We grabbed them by the bollocks
Then let them go again.

We listened and we learned
We acted like sisters and brothers
But the whole damn show isn't worth a wank
Unless we continue to look after each other.

Gary Saxton
Big Issue Writer

