



investing in children

NEWSLETTER

May – June 2004

Issue 61

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Editors Column – Jane Morgan

Hello and welcome to another edition of the highly acclaimed (by me anyway) edition of the Investing in Children Newsletter which this time includes an article from a young person who said goodbye to liC two years ago. Read her article and find out if her experiences with liC help her now.

This month I've been toiling away sitting my GCSE exams, which I'm very glad to say are now finally over! Hopefully, all of my time spent revising in between MTV2's 'Top 69 Records You Should Own' and great shows like 'Top Gun: Behind the scenes' will have paid off, despite the fact that roughly 90% of the topics revised, didn't actually appear in the paper. (I've been told not to worry this always happens. I hope they weren't lying)

During all of this exam mayhem, I managed to fit in some discussion about the newsletter with some of it's recipients. Consequently I have discovered a number of people don't bother to read it, and some of those that do seem to think they could write better articles. Now, you may imagine I became disheartened at this revelation, on the contrary, I think it's great that there are readers out there who could produce more interesting articles, and I'm dying to hear from them!

Did you know that what you are holding in your hand right now, is not only the current issue of the

Investing in Children Newsletter , as you may initially suppose. What you are in fact holding is a tool which gives **you** the opportunity to voice **your** opinions, share **your** ideas and ask questions. So why not use it?

If you are eager to contribute an article, but struggle to think of a topic here are some suggestions. In future issues I am hoping to feature a series of reviews on local bands, so if you know of such a band, maybe at your school, why not provide them with some free publicity! Let other readers know about their music by writing a review and sending us a picture. If you're more of a budding food critic than a music enthusiast, why not review your school dinners. Everyone always comments on them, now you could have your comments in print. We have our first review by Stacey Honnor (page 5).

Alternatively, if you're now a bit too old for school dinners (though perhaps you don't like to admit it) feel free to write about anything you like, in particular I'd love to hear from some parents of young people involved in liC. You can send all articles and ideas to the email address on the back page.

Well now I'm done plugging the newsletter, all that's left to say is happy reading, and have a fab summer!!

Jane

Darlington Health Group

We are a group of young people involved in Investing in Children. We have recently taken part in an event called 'Choosing Health'. One thing Government are telling us is that there are choices for us to keep fit and be healthy, for example – healthy eating and physical activities, but there are problems with this because it costs money to do leisure activities and it is also too expensive to buy healthy foods. A lot of young people can't afford it.

Another issue came up about choosing your own doctor. We would like to make everybody aware that they are able to choose their own doctor if they are not happy with the one they have.

Another thing we have been looking at is stress. Being stressed is unhealthy, here are some of the things that make young people stressed: School, too much course work and exams, not being listened to and being treated unfairly by teachers.

Leisure time: Young people are fed up of being moved all the time. Here are some of the places we get moved from by the Street wardens - parks, street corner, the shops, schools and youth clubs.

One of the questions the Government asked was about antisocial behaviour. Here is our response:

Antisocial behaviour is not just about young people often they are the victims. When adults carry out antisocial behaviour they don't get moved on or chased. The balance is not right and young people are not treated as fairly as adults.

Thanks for reading our article

Dan Hebden, Sarah Watson, Sam Melville, Kelly Simpson, Jayney Waistell, Katie Armstrong & Kim Malcolm.

News Update

One of the questions raised by Bill Williamson in 'Grit in the Oyster,' his report on the evaluation of Investing in Children, was 'How inclusive is the project?' The point Bill was making was not that we weren't inclusive, but that we had no way of knowing whether we were, or were not. Bill's criticism was that we don't collect background of young people who work with Investing in Children.

This point was further emphasised in a recent article by Ruth Sinclair from the National Children's Bureau in which she comments 'Despite the growth in participation activity, there is still limited evidence on who is involved, and more importantly, who is not involved. Projects rarely monitor which children are participating, and in fairness it is not easy, or may not feel appropriate to do so' (Children and Society, 2004, Vol18 p112).

Investing in Children is a '**universal**' project – we are concerned with the rights of **all** children and young people – and to an extent, we have argued that there is an advantage in **not** categorising the young people with whom we work. For example we are currently working with a number of young people who have been 'looked after.' But we are working with them because they are young people, not because they are/were looked after, and one of the interesting effects of this has been the willingness and enthusiasm of some of these young people to engage in activity around issues which have nothing to do with the looked-after system.

I am aware that another aspect of the debate about 'inclusion' is the suggestion that 'Investing in Children' is 'exclusive.' This suggestion has never been made to me directly, so I'm at a bit of a loss to respond, but I gather that the general point is to diminish the importance of the work of young people by proposing that IiC only works with a small group of young people, drawn from a very narrow base. Contributions, by young people working with Investing in Children can be safely ignored so the argument goes, because Investing in Children is 'not representative' of all young people in Durham and Darlington. (As I say, I get this second or third hand, but it does seem to become a particular issue when a group of young people have been particularly critical of some aspect of the public service)

And of course, its true-young people working with Investing in children do not claim to represent other young people, but are contributing as individual citizens to public debate. Whether they are from a narrow base I will let you judge for yourself.

A brief scan through our files suggest that we have around 530 young people **currently** actively engaged in campaigning or research activity. The age range is from 6 years old to 20, with the majority in the 12-18 yrs range. We are working across the whole area of Durham and Darlington, and the work includes, for example, children and young people from travelling families; from the black and ethnic minority families; children and young people who are or have been looked after; who are or have been in trouble with the police; children and young people with learning difficulties; children and young people with disabilities. The issues being considered vary from school meals to the treatment of Spina Bifida; from urban renaissance to access to music venues.

These figures don't include the children and young people involved in the evaluation of membership applications.

We've been looking at analysing the home addresses of the young people with whom we work by geography, and in the next edition of the Newsletter we will show the distribution on a ward by ward basis. In addition, we are in discussion with a northern university about how we might collect data that would address Bill's original criticism. It's a complicated business.

Liam

School Meals

I think that school meals are over priced – the higher the prices the less food you get. There is not enough choice of food and there is hardly any healthy food. In the dining hall you have to wait in queues for around 10 minutes before you get served. Most of the time you have to stand and wait for a table as there are not enough seats to seat everyone in the school, and when you finally get a table it is not clean.

However, when a teacher comes in for their dinner, they do not have to wait in queues, they get served straight away and they get a table which has been cleaned without having to wait. Once they have finished their meals their trays get took back for them. I think the staff should be treat the same as the pupils. If you are last in for your dinner there is hardly anything left and you get all the cold food that nobody wants. They should make enough of everything.

Stacey Honnor

Membership News

Well done to our new members this edition, these are:

Foster Care Associates
Seaham Library

The good work also continues in the following projects that have been successfully re-evaluated:

Annfield Plain Library
Bowes Museum
Clarence Nursery Centre
Framwellgate Moor Children's Home
Gainford Primary School

Once again Well DONE to all involved, we look forward to seeing you next year!!

Some of the news in brief..... call into **Bowes Museum** to see some of the work that has been created by the children and young people from 'The After Schools Club'. For more details on activities visit <http://www.bowesmuseum.co.uk>.

No child is too young to be part of Investing in Children; **Clarence Nursery Centre** successfully renewed their Investing in Children membership by the Staff Team at Clarence Nursery Centre continuing to provide a varied programme of activities for the children who attend. Looking for new ways to include the children in choices and changes throughout the centre. Encouraging the children in routines that allow them to be part of what's happening.

Welcome to Seaham Library and to Foster Care Associates.

Foster Care Associates have many offices in the North East, all who are going through this process, so well done to the Newcastle Office for receiving their Investing in Children membership. To find out more about FCA visit <http://www.fostercareassociates.co.uk>

If you would like to know more about our members and their groups, and work please don't hesitate to contact us and we will tell you more!

New txt 4 consumer advice service

The Durham Consumer Support Network (CSN) was formed to provide expert, accurate and timely advice to consumers, The CSN consists of Trading Standards, Citizens Advice, Age Concern, Welfare Rights, Cultural Services, Connexions and the Legal Services Commission.

Research carried out by young people from Investing In Children for the '**Youth and the Law Report**' showed that many young people encountered problems when buying a range of goods and services. Many were unaware of their legal rights and unsure of what help was available.

The Durham CSN in consultation with young people from Investing In Children came up with the idea of providing access to consumer advice via mobile phones.

The service was launched at an event in Peterlee Leisure Centre on 18th June and leaflets and posters have been produced to promote the service. For more information go to the County Council Website at www.durham.gov.uk or contact Investing In Children at iic@durham.gov.uk

Copies of the '**Youth and the Law Report**' are available from Investing In Children

Lorraine Hewitt & Mark Middlemas

News from London.... From Helen Swanwick

I sadly waved farewell to 'Investing in Children' 2 years ago to study drama in London at Brunel University. But I knew after five years of 'IiC' the drive to continue working with young people would stick with me and - yes, I do still want to wire the jaws of all those toffee-chewing sweet shop owners who think '*only 2 children at a time*' signs are good for business.

Anyway, I became curious as to whether 'IiC' ways of working could be as effective in my Uni town of Uxbridge as they are in Durham and my 'Community Project Module' gave me the opportunity to find this out. I worked with 6 other drama-loonies (students like myself) to set up a company called 'Theatre In the Community – To Activate Change' (TIC-TAC) and ran some drama workshops to find out what young people from Uxbridge wanted to see changed. We got the town centre manager and others with the power to make change to agree that they would see a performance at the end of the workshops. The performance would be created by the young people and be based on their views of Uxbridge and what should be changed. The town centre manager told us that he thought the project was a great idea because the council had had difficulty finding out young peoples opinions about Uxbridge and therefore couldn't make informed change to benefit the young people and the rest of the community.

I thought that getting the local council (London Borough of Hillingdon) on our side would be the hard part – wrong – they were desperate to see the project through and immediately began offering us free workshop spaces and resources. Getting young people involved should be easy I thought – they'll be up for some free food, free drama, free opportunity to show the council what they think! Wrong again – the young people 'dissed' (as they say in Uxbridge)

our project explaining ‘Yeah! It’s a good idea, it’ll be fun, but they’ll never listen to us.’ One young man explained ‘I’ve done stuff with youth workers here and they listen but nothing changes.’ A female aged 16 who told us she was part of the ‘goth’ crowd explained, ‘they treat us badly because of the way we dress and don’t listen to us.’

Unfortunately after hours of recruiting only three young women turned up to our workshops. It was interesting that they wanted to see change where they live similar to what young people in Durham want e.g. such as, cheaper buses, more police on the streets, safer parks and more activities for young people.

Unfortunately lack of participants and time (due to excessive hours of recruiting) meant we had to cut the project short and a performance by the young people for the council would no longer be possible. A report is being created by myself and the other students outlining the issues put forward by the workshop participants, to be sent to the town centre manager and others instead. Of course, this should have really been written by the young people, lots of young people from Uxbridge who should have not lost their faith in the possibility of change and should not feel so disheartened that they don’t see the point in voicing their opinions anymore.

Although we had lots of problems with the project we collected some valuable information which will hopefully influence local authority figures to conduct more work with young people. In my University module portfolio I noted that the most important outcome for such a project is that adults recognise that young people have valuable opinions and should be listened to. I believe to some extent our project achieved this. The council have realised that young people in Uxbridge have a lot to say but that barriers must be broken between the young people and the adults in order before effective consultation and debate can take place – leading to change.

It’s good to know that I’ve been able to use my ‘IiC’ experience to inspire a few young people to make a stand and few adults to stand back and listen. (And also prove that there are other ways of getting involved in politics at Uni without going on protest marches!) I’ll update you with any news once the report has been sent to the council!

Helen

Community Engagement

Last October three young people (including me) attended a community engagement meeting organised by the County Council. The meeting was really boring and all the speakers seemed to do was talk and talk.

Because we thought it was so boring, we were told to do our own version aimed at young people. We invited 50 young people to our meeting that was held at the Gala Theatre (Durham). At each table there were two members of the group. The speakers we had invited had 2 minutes to speak and then a hooter was blown. The day was a great laugh and I thought that it was a lot more successful than the adult version was. The aim of the day was to engage the young people in the community, and I think we did exactly that!

Catherine Mcdowell

Investing in Children Development Agency

News from Newcastle

As part of the work that has been going on to expand Investing in Children beyond County Durham and Darlington, Liam and myself have been working with the Newcastle Children and Young Peoples Strategic Partnership to develop a Participation Strategy in the City. I thought this might be a useful point to bring everybody up to date with where we are at the moment.

In November last year IiC had an opportunity at a seminar hosted by the NC&YPSP at Newcastle Falcons Rugby Club to talk to our potential Newcastle partners about the IiC way of working with young people and how we would go about building a participation strategy for Newcastle. This was successful and IiC was commissioned to do this work and Liam produced a three-year Development Plan. Agreement was soon reached on the underlying principles and a reference group was drawn from the Strategic Partnership Board. Work is now well under way on the three strands of the strategy;

Developing the capacity of dialogue. The Reference Group have identified three age groups and three areas of the City they would like us to make a start in. These are Walker School in the East for the 13+ age group, Dinnington Primary in the North for the under 8's and the Gala Field Community Group based on Newbiggin Hall Estate in the West of the City for the 8-13 age group. Arrangements have already been made to hold an Agenda Day on 4 August at Gala Field and Liam and myself are visiting Dinnington Primary tomorrow.

The Membership Scheme. Members of the Partnership identified likely candidates and Helen Mulhearn is visiting the first of these as I write.

The Staff Development Programme. The Programme has been developed and is available on a CD Rom and we have a pool of trainers who are ready to deliver it. Fizz Shenton and Myself will be delivering the first Newcastle training days on the 12 and 13 July with more to come.

Although these are early days on the three-year road to Newcastle having its own Participation Strategy we have made a start and the will is there among all the Partnership members to make sure we are successful.

Graham Bristow
Project Development Worker

Full time

If you think you've something you think everyone needs to hear, or want to tell me what should be in the next month's newsletter, please write to our new editor:

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**Copy date for next Newsletter will be
21 July 2004**

**Large print copies of this Newsletter are available
from the IiC office**

Catonese, Bengali & Punjabi

The Investing in Children information booklet is now available in Chinese, Bengali & Punjabi. If you require a copy in any of these languages, please contact the above address or telephone on 0191 386 7485