



Supporting Participation and Democracy in the Woodcraft Folk

April 2009

Context

The Woodcraft Folk was established in 1925 as an educational movement and charity run by young people for young people to develop self-confidence and activity in society, with the aim of building a world based on equality, peace, social justice and co-operation. It has a membership of currently around 3,000 people, divided between about 500 groups operating in England, Scotland and Wales (see www.woodcraft.org.uk).

In June 2007, ICA:UK facilitated a workshop at that year's Annual Gathering on how to make a Democracy and Participation Fair happen at the next, 2008 Annual Gathering. During 2008 we supported the strategic planning process started by the Woodcraft Folk in 2007, which culminated at the 2008 Annual Gathering.

The process for developing that plan of the Woodcraft Folk represented a different approach from the pattern established for the two previous medium-term plans (Dancing to a Stronger Beat and The Beat Goes On), which were developed largely by the General Council. In order to try and improve levels of implementation, this planning process took a more participatory approach, involving groups at the different levels of the organisation from the outset of the process.



workshop at June 2007 Annual Gathering in York

The planning process commenced in September 2007 with a meeting of 40 key stakeholders to consider how the new plan should be developed and how it could be made to work. This resulted in a questionnaire being sent out to all the groups in the UK, seeking their input on the future shape both of the movement as a whole and of their own groups.

The process was also taken to Regional Gatherings in the Autumn of 2007 and early Spring 2008 with workshops being run for people to feed into in a more direct fashion.

In April 2008 the data gathered from the groups was analysed and sent back out to the groups for their information and consideration prior to the Woodcraft Folk's Annual Gathering.

In June 2008 part of the Annual Gathering was used to generate further input, make some

decisions and add some detail, with the final plan being produced soon afterwards. An “Action Planning” pack was introduced at the Annual Gathering and provided to groups as a practical tool to enable them to develop their own plans in the context of the overall strategic plan.

ICA:UK’s role

ICA:UK’s role was to provide advice and support to the Woodcraft Folk as they developed their strategic plan. This involved:

- ongoing advice on the planning and follow up process, review of outputs
- sharing of experience from other organisations
- some direct facilitation on specific occasions (e.g. the “Magic Saturday” meeting in April 2008 to agree the shape of the plan and to begin to collate the responses to the questionnaires)
- working with/preparing Woodcraft Folk facilitators to enable them to manage the Annual Gathering discussions/workshops (including drawing up procedures, guidance notes)
- input on the design and use of the Action Planning packs for groups

Outputs & outcomes

The results of these events included:

- demonstration of effective participatory methods for consensus building and planning to Woodcraft Folk members, staff and other stakeholders
- development of the Woodcraft Folk’s Big Plan 2008-2013, involving larger numbers

and a wider range of Woodcraft Folk members

- a stronger group of facilitators within the Woodcraft Folk

The Facilitation Team wrote:

“Fantastic effort, brilliant energy and a really positive outcome - thanks very much to all of you for making it happen”

Danny Rowe, Chair, Woodcraft Folk wrote:

“It was great to see so many people participating in the workshops and giving their views and I felt that there was not only a really good feel to the Gathering but also a buzz of energy.”

Impact

What difference did our intervention make?

Firstly, a stronger sense of ownership of the Big Plan amongst the member groups. This was evidenced by:

- Big Plans received from all Centres, Projects and Regions by the end of January 2009, which had never happened before
- a high level of awareness of the plan across the organisation, and individual’s ability to identify one area for their group or district to begin work on
- reports to the Annual Review 2008-09 submitted under the five Ambitions – people really understand what they mean and how to fit their work into them

Secondly, the General Council reorganised itself to support better the implementation of the Big Plan, including having non GC members on the steering groups for each Ambition to widen participation.

Finally, also stronger calls for the increased use of participatory processes at the Annual Gathering.