

11 Derbyshire Coalition for Inclusive Living

The Coalition was founded by a group of "strong, charismatic, communitarians" twenty years ago. Their legacy is a clear vision, principles and aims. The Coalition continues to refer and revisit these, developing a strategic approach for the achievement of the aims. Both the principles and aims encompass 'full participation.' There is a strong sense of ownership, based on a common set of experiences and beliefs. Members are directly connected to the issues the coalition seeks to address and are not simply users of the services that it provides

What it Does

The Derbyshire Coalition for Inclusive Living (the Coalition) is an issue based organisation within a defined geographic (county) boundaries. As a County wide organisation it incorporates both rural and urban areas.

The current coalition is a merger of two former linked organizations: the Coalition of Disabled People established in 1981 and the Centre for Integrated Living established in 1985.

The two organisations merged in 2000 and operate as a Company Limited by Guarantee and as a registered charity. The Centre for Integrated Living was a registered charity, however the original Coalition was not. In its early days registering as a charity would have restricted the campaigning or political role that members wanted, therefore a positive decision was made not to register. The clarification of what constituted political activity in the Charities Act 1991 and the merger of the two organisations led members of the new Coalition to decide they could legitimately be registered as charitable.

How it Came About

The original Coalition of Disabled People was the first organisation of its kind to emerge in Britain. It was set up in 1981 as a

result of an International Year of Disabled People (IYDP) conference. The Steering Committee adopted the IYDP slogan 'full participation and equality', and began a sustained task of campaigning, education, and practical support, putting into practice the new social understanding of disability.

The Coalition linked with the wider Disabled People's Movement, from their debates emerged an action programme based on seven needs:

- Information;
- Peer Counselling;
- Housing;
- Technical Aids;
- Transport;
- Personal Assistance;
- Access.

This in turn led to the establishment of a sister organisation, the Centre for Integrated Living, which opened in March 1985.

Changes to Government policies and direction resulted in a reduction of funding for both the Coalition and the Centre. Reviews of each organisation concluded that the best way to safeguard the original wide-ranging objectives and community emphasis was to combine the Coalition and the Centre.

Governance Structure

The Coalition has been concerned to keep its structure "as flat as possible." Only full members (disabled people) have voting rights. They elect a General Council at each Annual General Meeting (AGM). There are fifteen disabled people on the General Council and they meet quarterly. Those members who are also paid workers cannot be nominated for election to the General Council. The role of the Council is to focus on the strategy and direction of the organisation.

Facts & Figures

- Organisational Type – Charity
- Legal Form – Company Limited by Guarantee
- Date Established – 2000
- Location – Ripley, Derbyshire
- Number of Members – 85 active members, including 22 operations volunteers
- Number of Workers – Seventeen
- Turnover – £1.05million for the financial year ending March 2003



Participation is fundamental to the organisation, and participation is embedded within the structure and systems.

The General Council appoints from amongst its members an Executive Sub-Committee, of seven members. The Executive meets monthly and its role is to concentrate on the implementation of the development plan and on the management of the organisation.

Sub-groups are established from time to time to focus on particular areas e.g. finance, editorial etc. These groups consist of one or two members of the Executive with others from amongst the wider membership who may have relevant skills, knowledge, experience or interest in the topic under discussion.

Members are encouraged to join in local members' groups. These groups are not a part of the governance or management structure. They do however play a role in the dissemination of information and discussion across the Coalition.

Participation Practice

The organisation states:

"Participation for us is essential – we are in for the long game – we have to be able to outlive any government or policy to get the changes we need."

The Coalition has 22 years experience of developing and maintaining an organisation committed to "full participation and equality".

In order to give consistency and coherence to the way disabled members developed the Coalition, the founder members built four important principles into its organisational aims.

The key words underlying these principles are:

- Participation;
- Independence;
- Integration; and
- Control.

These were written into the Coalition's aims and given expression in the Constitution.

The group states:

"Members participate as much or as little as they want to. Some people's circumstances prevent them from playing an active part, but they can feel included simply by receiving the Newsletter."

Participation remains at heart of the organisation, the structure, the strategy and the methods all reflect a passion and determination to achieve full participation for disabled people.

The Memorandum of Association (adopted in 2000) now includes the following as the objects of the company:

"By promoting ... active participation in providing or encouraging the provision of facilities and services which facilitate their independence in daily living activities and active participation as full and equal citizens in all aspects of social life."

The principles and belief that underpin the organisation stem from a common experience that connects the members – discrimination, oppression and exclusion – as disabled people. The Coalition is built on mutual support and benefit that is achieved by coming together to tackle individual and shared problems that:

- Deal with the immediate – the symptoms;
- Influence and make changes for the long term – tackle the causes.

At any one time those involved may be users, members, volunteers, managers and Board members. There is a recognition and reliance, but not dependency, on individual and collective experiences and learning – *"Amalgamated we are strong – individually we are weak."*

This results in a culture of honesty, openness, trust and respect which encourages an in-depth exploration of problems and ideas.



The organisation states:
"The members are the organisation-members report to the executive committee-the committee assists the members."

At the time of writing, much of the current debate in the Coalition about participation centers around membership and as a result, membership development has become a priority within the current plan.

Like most other organisations the Coalition does not want to rely on the few – the activists. However, there is an acceptance that the membership will always contain both active and passive members. People are careful about the assumptions they make about the reasons for this, and the organisation states:

"Members participate as much or as little as they can or want to. Peoples' disabilities may prevent them from playing an active part from time to time or they may benefit by receiving the Newsletter."

Members get involved in a number of ways, as there are a variety of routes for participation. However, a common pattern is:

- Individual recruitment of members – one on one – often through sharing of information or personal experiences;
- Information, advice, support from peers/other members, the Coalition's workers, resources, including a Newsletter;
- Personal/ group decisions about changes, improvements that need to be made for members to be able to fully participate, equally in society/their community;
- Some go on to take ideas to local members' meetings for discussion.

The present strategic plan arose from seminars and workshops held in the three years up to merger in 2000. To enhance member participation, several local member groups were set up.

These link with the core structure of General Council and Executive Sub-committee through a Members' Sub-committee, which oversees representation on other bodies and monitoring of progress. Local members' groups within strategic guidelines and a member participation budget decide local campaign actions, with staff support by agreement.

There are several key drivers for participation that exist within the organisation. These are:

- To keep things local – that people can engage with from their own experiences.
- To ensure lots of discussion and debate amongst the members
- Don't say 'no' to anything until it is fully explored

The organisation takes the view that responding or participating in minority issues is directly correlated to the employment of people from those minorities. It also feels that the wealth of the organisation can be in part measured by its contacts, information and networking and there should be a high value placed on these.

Participation also assists in the creation of a clear agenda and strategic plan that is actively used by the General Council and Executive Committee and holds people together. It also assists in decisions about direction and allocation of resources.

Stakeholder Engagement

The organisation considers a range of external bodies and individuals as having a stake in the organisation. Like many similar groups, the organisation is keen to involve and engage a number of public bodies providing services to communities, including people with disabilities.

In addition, the Coalition also considers groups other than disabled people who share experiences of exclusion and, like the Coalition, develop solutions, as important external stakeholders. The organisation feels that such alliances are important for sharing information and learning opportunities between different groups.

The organisation actively involves and engages with the range of stakeholders through participation in various local networks, for example Local Strategic Partnerships and in day-to-day community development work.

Measures of Success

The organisation, since its merger in 2000 has achieved:

- An organisational structure based on peer support, that encourages confidence, active participation, and disabled people's identification of their own goals.
- Pilot and model services that demonstrate fully developed alternatives to services that segregate and create dependency.

Key to Success

The organisation states that the key factors in the success of the organisation have been the support and encouragement between peers, and the long-term vision and strategy of the organisation.