

VOYPIC – From little Acorns...by Nuala Ferris Magennis

I'm sure many people will know that VOYPIC started when Helen (Taylor), then the Project Leader at Barnardo's Leaving Care service, wrote an article in *Child Care in Practice* calling for a forum for young people in care. Looking back, I think it truly quite remarkable that the length of time between the resulting first meeting of interested professionals in July 1993 and the first meeting of young people in the October was only a few short months. It showed the exceptional, genuine interest and commitment of organisations and professionals in finally making something happen for young people in and leaving care.

I have a good recollection of those first days when the responses to Helen's now famous article 'Voices of young people in care' started to come into our office in Barnardo's in University Street. The resulting professionals' meeting in our Annadale building included representatives from a range of voluntary and statutory organisations, including the inspectorate and Queen's University. It was really great as Helen hadn't known what to expect.

As Barnardo's was the host agency, I had the job of taking the minutes, calling the forum the 'Voice of Young People in Care'; the minutes were saved under the initials 'VOYPIC' - the name has never changed !

Barnardo's resourced the administration of the processes, and a great many other agencies and people offered to take on aspects of the work and offered resources such as venues at Queen's and Whitefield for meetings for the young people. It really was a fabulously collective effort.

There was the front line work with young peoples' groups which was intensive and rewarding, but also huge amounts of work behind the scenes as the process continued in the years that followed.

There was of course a great deal of learning! A vivid memory is of the first young person newsletter coming into our office for distribution, and pointing out some of wording to the assembled group. This resulted in some major editing (i.e. frantic Tipp-exing) before the news letter went out! Even at that the newsletter wasn't widely distributed to young people due to a few remaining issues on content but this was good learning about the need for an editorial overview.

It didn't halt the momentum however. When NICVA got involved we became part of a competition for an award to develop a business plan. Save the Children and Barnardo's released Vivian and I to work with the

young people on this – it would pave the way for further development; how thrilled we all were when we won it and VOYPIC really took off from there.

The rest is a bit of a blur for me. Barnardo's continued to support the work of VOYPIC through the involvement of myself and my colleague Shelagh for some years in various parts of the organisational structure until VOYPIC came into its own and we no longer required to be involved.

I really cannot pay enough homage to all the people involved who worked tirelessly both at the coalface and behind the scenes over the years; including the groups of young people who were the pioneers in those early days, and indeed to the work and vision that has brought VOYPIC to where it is today.

How superb it is that VOYPIC has grown to such a fabulous organisation from Helen's one page article in Child Care in Practice.

A great many congratulations on your 'coming of age' VOYPIC!

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