NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS  
and their role in the Disability Sector

Lecture Notes/ Presentation by J.M. Camilleri (September, 2003)

Definition of traditional charities

- non-governmental,
- non-for-profit, and
- concerned with charitable aims and objectives as defined by law.

Beginnings

- shared interest 
- need to socialise with peers 
- dissatisfaction with present service provision 
- need to: feel understood; feel valued; find an identity.

Structures

- informal 
- Formal  
  (that is, statute provides a legal identity, legitimates recognition, attracts more funding)

Statute identifies

- aims 
- identifies officials on main committee 
- identifies sub-committees 
- explains how meetings are to be structured (minute keeping, quorum, etc) 
- identifies mechanism for AGM, extraordinary meetings, dissolution of organisation 
- how funds are to be collected, maintained and disposed of.

Meetings

(according to statute) 
- informal 
- formal
Activities

- social activities (sport; entertainment; religion; drama; hobbies)
- educational activities
- service provision
- peer counselling
- peer support
- pressure group

Funding

- membership fees
- service provision
- government grants
- fundraising

Accountability

- to members
- to federation
- to government

Traditional charity - I

- impairment based (medical model)
- based on the idea of philanthropy
- disabled people occupy the majority of seats on the management committees
- run by non-disabled people on behalf of disabled persons

Traditional charity - II

- based on change (rehabilitation, adaptation, cure) located within the individual
- provides a social outlet
- depends on fundraising
- insular
- isolated
- based on voluntary work
Modern NGO - I

- rights based (social model)
- based on the fulfilment of rights
- run by disabled persons for disabled people
- based on equal rights (changing disabling, barriers)
- social change

Modern NGO - II

- provides services
- seeks government, &/or private funding
- outward looking
- seeks to combine with other groups (federation, coalition)
- uses more highly skilled, paid workers

Fundraising imagery

In fundraising advertising & publicity, some traditional charities portray disabled people as:

- Helpless
- dependent
- pitiable.

The end justifies the means?

- Some charities are not interested in presenting positive images
- “as long as the money rolls in, the end justified the means”.
- The concept of charity is emotionally charged.

Charity ... for whom?

People carry out charity work for different reasons:

- Public esteem & social approbation (i.e., warm praise; official approval)
- Public honours
- A sense that helping ‘those less fortunate’ is a valued activity
- A genuine desire to be of service to others.
Assumptions underlying fundraising images – I
*Charities believe*

- it is acceptable to publicise medical conditions that the majority of non-disabled decision-makers and staff may not have.
- impairments are undesirable; constitute a personal misfortune; give rise to special needs; and place a moral obligation to help upon the public at large.
- people with impairments both want and deserve public support.

Assumptions underlying fundraising images – II
*Charities believe*

- they are able to effect significant material change in the ‘plight’ of the target disabled population.
- That change is generally desirable and is specifically desired by disabled persons.
- that they are the bodies best placed to determine how public donations should be used.

Disabled people want quite different images and messages

- That they are full citizens
- Their rights are denied them
- The way non-disabled people have built society excludes many disabled people from public places and social life.

Disabled people demand

- the opportunity to acquire resources through work (not charity)
- An end to the portrayal of them as objects of pity
- An end to images which damage their dignity and social standing.
- “To boldly go where everyone has gone before.”

Select bibliography

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• Yeo, Tim (1984): ‘Time to tighten up on charities: mismanagement and downright fraud are levying a heavy toll on the nation’s generosity’. Reader’s Digest November 1984, Volume 125, pp. 45-49.