

## The Foyer Federation

### Parliamentary Voice project

The Electoral Commission established the New Initiatives Fund to support and promote new ways of raising awareness about voting and democracy. We have awarded grants to local, community and national organisations working with different target audiences across the whole of the UK.

This evaluation report provides information about the Foyer Federation's Parliamentary Voice project funded by the New Initiatives Fund. In the report we highlight the aims, objectives and achievements of the project, and lessons learnt by the Foyer Federation.

### Introduction

The Foyer Federation provide accommodation and support services for homeless young people to assist them in the transition to adulthood. The Federation provides a range of services to individual Foyers, raises awareness of their work, and represents the movement at all levels of decision-making throughout the UK.

### Aims and objectives

The aim of the project was to increase Foyer residents' understanding of and participation in the political process.

The project's objectives were:

- to educate and promote awareness and understanding of elections and government in the UK
- to increase voter registration among Foyer residents
- to increase the participation of Foyer residents in the 2006 local government elections
- To increase the involvement of Foyer residents in activities undertaken by the Foyer Federation in Parliament

- to increase the input of Foyer residents in the Foyer Federation's submission to Government on services for young people
- to give young people living in Foyers the opportunity to publicise their views and activities in relation to politics and politicians

### Funding

The project was awarded a grant of £30,000 over a one-year period, starting in January 2006.

### How successful was the project?

Project activities included campaign packs produced and distributed to all Foyers; young people attending meetings of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Foyers; involvement at an event in each of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland; and young people interviewing politicians, to be published in the *Foyer Voice* magazine.

Campaign packs were distributed to Foyer staff to provide ideas and information to help them begin to engage residents in thinking about the

democratic process. In particular it asked Foyers to become involved in regional events, and a total of five of these events were held across England ahead of the local elections in May 2006, attended by 33 people.

Ten young people were involved in two meetings of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Foyers. As a result of this, 13 young people attended an event in the House of Lords, and Foyer residents were present at a meeting on the 'Give us a Chance' campaign, which aims to give all young people, regardless of their background, a fair chance and to change the way young people are viewed by society.

In Scotland, residents at Aberdeen Foyer met with Malcolm Chisholm MSP; in Northern Ireland, Peter Hain MP hosted an event at Hillsborough Castle at which young people performed a play about their opinions of politics.

Another key outcome of the project was for young people to interview politicians. Six interviews were held, across England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, which was double the project's target of three. Also central to the project were the website, [www.giveusavoice.net](http://www.giveusavoice.net), which was set up by Foyer residents and had 1,094 unique visitors in December 2006, and the *Foyer Voice* magazine, which was utilised throughout the project for a variety of purposes.

The project was evaluated by questionnaires filled in by participants, interviews with staff and consultation with stakeholders.

The objective of increasing registration is difficult to measure, although 26 young people completed registration forms during events and took away more forms to distribute to other Foyer residents.

### Good practice

- The website [www.giveusavoice.net](http://www.giveusavoice.net) was set up by Foyer residents and had an increased number of visitors each month.
- Young people were given opportunities to meet face-to-face with elected representatives in Edinburgh and Belfast as well as Westminster. Four young people spoke at an event at the House of Lords.
- Campaign packs were sent to Foyer staff as the first step in awareness raising to encourage them to get residents thinking about the democratic process and involve them in regional events.
- The existing *Foyer Voice* magazine was made use of to raise awareness of the project and publish interviews with politicians.
- A strategic partnership with the YMCA has developed to promote the voice of service users. Relationships with

other organisations will be critical in moving the work forward.

### Lessons learnt

Projects of a similar nature can learn from the following lessons:

- Democracy/citizenship is not a high priority for Foyers and staff needed support to take issues on board.
- Sustainability should be built into the project from the start, i.e. embedding the aims of the project into other activities where possible.
- Projects should be consistently reviewed in the light of changes to Government policy, to ensure that these changes do not impact on the development of the project.

### Further information

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Further information about the New Initiatives Fund and the wider work of the Electoral Commission can be found at: [www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk)