

Outside the Box
2010 - 2011
ANNUAL REPORT





About Outside the Box

Outside the Box is a social enterprise. We provide community development support to people and groups who want to start something new or to make things better.

We are registered as a Scottish charity and a company limited by guarantee.

Four people were directors during the year:

- Lesley Brady
- Donald Macaskill
- Pat Scrutton
- Chris Taylor.

Pat Scrutton took over as chair of the board in October.

The development support is provided by staff and a network of associates. We also sometimes work in partnership with other organisations.

During 2010 -11

- We worked with 50 projects - with local groups or developing resources that many people can use.
- We worked with over 650 people and many more came to events or used our publications.
- We worked with people in 19 local authority areas across Scotland.

Aberdeenshire, Angus, Argyll and Bute,
Clackmannanshire, Dumfries and Galloway,
Dundee, East Ayrshire,
East Renfrewshire,
Edinburgh, Falkirk, Glasgow,
North Ayrshire,
North Lanarkshire,
Perth and Kinross,
Renfrewshire, Stirling,
South Lanarkshire,
West Dunbartonshire,
Western Isles



Work with projects

Overall, we worked with 42 local projects during 2010 - 2011. Over 440 people were involved - members of community groups, paid and volunteer workers at voluntary organisations, and staff in local authorities and the NHS who are part of or support local projects. Around two-thirds of these projects were new. The length of time we spent with each project varied widely. We only worked with some of the groups for a few months. Elsewhere, we continued to work with projects that we have supported for a year or longer.

The type of work we do with each project reflects the circumstances of the people involved and what they want to achieve.

- We worked with the lead people in groups to help them learn new skills and broaden their experience.
- We carried out review sessions, to help projects reflect on what they had achieved, what their future aims and priorities were, and how they could realise these.
- We carried out independent evaluations of some projects, where the organisation wanted a fresh perspective on what had been done and how their activities could have greater impact in the future.
- We worked with groups to plan new ventures: working out what they wanted to do, gathering the evidence of the need - and sometimes coming up with new plans when people said they wanted something different, developing an achievable plan to get the activity underway, finding the partners and allies, and working out what funding and other resources were needed.

- We helped groups with funding applications.
- We published reports and resources that explained what groups were doing and how their activities have benefited other people. These included reports, posters, postcards, booklets and 'how to' guides that people can get from a website. In each case, it is what fits these circumstances.

Over the years we have learned that some things happen quickly while others take a long time to develop. The work we do with a project can run over several years. Sometimes a new activity starts slowly and then the bigger impact happens when other circumstances are right. There are projects where we are now seeing the outcomes of work that started a few years ago. Similarly, we know that some things we are doing now will not have an impact for several years.

Example

Future of Addiction Services Team

FAST is the Future of Addictions Services Team and brings together the experience of people in West Dunbartonshire who have lived with an alcohol and/or drug addiction.

We started working with FAST in 2008. Since then we have picked up contact with them at several periods when the members of the group were mostly new as previous members had moved on in their lives.

In 2008 the group played a big part in identifying the need and making the case for a new out-of-hours telephone helpline that

would be available at weekends. The service began in December 2008 for a few hours on a couple of days over Christmas and New Year. In early 2011 the service is available 5 evenings a week - Wednesday to Sunday - throughout the year.

We worked with group members and staff at West Dunbartonshire Council to develop a report on a major conference they had run to promote service user involvement. This doubled as a resource for other community groups planning events - and we wrote in last year's annual report about how this was used by people in Wales to plan a service user involvement event there.

We started working with the group again in early 2010. Over the past year, we have helped the group become more independent and self-sustaining.

They developed 2 resources to help individual people through difficult times and support their own recovery. Supporting Our Recovery explained how people can use ordinary community resources. This has benefited hundreds of people in West Dunbartonshire - which is what the group hoped would happen. It has also been taken up and adapted by groups from all over the UK, so is now benefiting many more people.

The group then developed a resource to help people over the Christmas and New year period. The Surviving Christmas booklet has again been used by people in many places beyond West Dunbartonshire.

The feedback we have is that these are great resources, because they fill gaps that have been problems for a long time and which conventional support and care services do not really tackle. The other advantage is that the suggestions are very practical and are relevant to people in these situations - because they come from the lived experience of people who are learning to manage their addictions and have a good life.

Another gap the group identified is a place where people can just drop in and have a chat and get some company, as a complement to the more structured support services. We worked together to plan how this could work, found solutions to all the practical aspects, worked out how much funding was needed to run it as a pilot, and make a successful case to West Dunbartonshire Council for 6 months funding.

Throughout this period the members of the group became more confident in working as a group and when influencing the Council and other organisations. By late 2010 they were getting regular support from someone in a local voluntary organisation and no longer needed much involvement from Outside the Box.

In May 2011 FAST organised an event which was attended by 120 people. It showed what service users can achieve in influencing other services and doing things themselves.

The publications are all on the Outside the Box website.

Example

Barrhead Housing Association Community Research Team

We worked with a small team of community researchers over 6 weeks in January and February 2011. The group learned about planning and carrying out research projects in their own area. The people taking part included some who were new to this sort of activity and others who had been involved in previous projects - so we were sharing and learning from their experience as well as from the theory and good practice around doing social research.

Since then, the group have raised their profile and are planning to take on a couple of new pieces of research.

Example

Publications from work with a project

The evaluation of the Perth and Kinross Young Carers project was launched at an event that was led by children and young people from the project.

- There are posters and postcards which carry the main message from the evaluation, and these are now being used to raise awareness in schools across Perth and Kinross.

- The project has seen an increase in the rate of new contacts with children and young people who are young carers since the publicity material was circulated.
- The report has also been used by Perth and Kinross Council and NHS Tayside to help plan services for children and young people.
- The project is using the evaluation as part of their planning and as part of applications for future funding.

“Being part of this doesn’t just give a purpose to your day. It gives a purpose to your life.”

“I am accomplishing things I never thought I could. To be able to influence the Council and professionals in services is something I never thought I’d achieve at my age.”

Support to people who are making changes in their communities

This year we increased the focus on the support that is available to the people who are making change in their communities - both people who are part of projects we are working with and people in other groups.

- We talked to people who have been involved as community activists for some years, to ask them what had got them started and what had helped them along the way. Their experiences and ideas are described in Learning the Craft.
- We made contact with other networks that support people making change, to learn from their experience and ideas.
- We wrote a resource that explains how people can influence change in their communities - to get better services and opportunities for themselves and for other people.
- We have put resources from other organisations on our website, so people have a starting point to get useful ideas and practical tools.
- We developed a set of posters to help local groups explain the different aspects of participation and how these link together.
- We worked in partnership with other organisations to run an event for people with learning disabilities who are making and influencing changes in their communities. Taking Part, Taking Power took place in March 2011, just before the Scottish Parliament elections. Over 130 people took part and there are follow on sessions over the next 6 months or so.

“Don’t rush it. The best advice I got was to remember that it takes time to build good working relationships - with other community groups and active individuals, with staff in the statutory organisations.”

“Focus on the issues that matter most to your group, the ones that other people are not taking on.”

“Recognise that everyone - including you - can have other things happening in their lives and might need some help with those. Don't give yourself a hard time. Don't try to do it all on your own.”

Quotes from people involved in making change in their communities, from Learning the Craft

Publications to benefit many people and have wider impact

Outside the Box has always produced resources that are designed to help people in many places benefit from the experience and learning of other people.

Many of the people who are part of local projects helped us develop these resources. Often they identified the gap and came up with ideas on what it should cover. They helped develop material and gave feedback on drafts to make sure the finished versions reflected more people's situations and experiences.

These wider resources also brought in the expertise of more people in community and related service settings. Overall, another 120 people worked with us in this way during 2010 - 2011.

Example

Making changes in our own lives

People told us they would like to have a guide to the advice and support that is available to people when they were facing difficult circumstances, or when they wanted to make changes in their lives for positive reasons. Staff who worked in advice and support services also said they would find this useful – they often knew a lot about one subject but struggled when they were supporting people who were coping with more complicated situations.

They said they wanted a single resource that covered many topics that can affect people. The style was also important: we all wanted to present the information in a way that was positive and encouraging.

Making changes in our own lives brings together useful sources of advice and information.

- Finding out what your rights are.
- Getting advice on money, housing, employment and more.
- Keeping well.
- Getting access to care and support services.
- Keeping safe - help for anyone who is being hurt or threatened.

There are tips and hints from people's experience and case examples that show how people tackle issues and find the support that they want - from family and friends as well as from services.

“It took me a while to realise that the person who was responsible for my life was me. But I didn’t have to do it all on my own. Lots of people were there to give me help and encouragement.”

Example

Support for parents who have mental health problems

Some of the reports from the work with projects also go on to have a wider impact.

We worked with a mental health project in West Dunbartonshire, to help them look at the support that members who are parents would find helpful.

The parents identified gaps in the support they currently got. They came up with suggestions on ways Mental Health Services and Children and Family Services could work together and ways people in their circumstances could get better support from mainstream services.

We also looked at the available research, good practice advice and the experience of services in other parts of the UK to put the points people were raising in a wider context.

The project identified ways they could make some of these changes easily and quickly - so parents in West Dunbartonshire who are in touch with that service are getting better support.

We published a report and staff passed it on to colleagues. It was circulated through NHS and local authority professional networks and featured in national updates which share practice on promoting recovery and good mental health and wellbeing.

People in 4 more local authority areas are now using the report to help them raise awareness about the issue and start a discussion about how support to parents who have mental health problems and their children can be improved.

Example Our Vote, Our Voice

We heard from people who are still using the resources we produced a few years ago.

In 2007 we published Our Vote, Our Voice, which is peer-based advice around taking part in elections by and for people with learning disabilities.

This was used again to help people feel more confident at taking part in the Scottish Parliament elections in 2011.

In between times, it has been used by people voting in other elections across the UK and in other countries.

- We posted sets out to services and groups in touch with people who have disabilities in Scotland and then in other parts of the UK when the pack was first launched.
- We also sent sets to libraries across the UK and the feedback from them was that it was used by many different community groups and by individuals in a wide range of circumstances.
- The pack has been used by the Commissioner for Learning Disabilities in England.
- It was used by the Electoral Commission of New Zealand.
- It has been included in an official guide to good practice in Denmark.
- Copies of the pack and DVD have been sent to people in: Malta, Denmark, Australia, Canada, USA and New Zealand.
- We also know people in other countries are downloading the material from our website.

Overall, Our Vote Our Voice has been used by over 100,000 people. These are some of the comments they have fed back to us.

“I feel I can speak at all meetings not just elections.”

“I feel good and proud that I voted.”

“I would not change anything, the pack is very good. We LOVED the posters.”

“The children and young people in our school have used it in so many ways beyond the initial topic of citizenship. Your material about making choices has helped teenagers who don't have much confidence in themselves. Each part of the pack works well in itself as well as linking together.”

“We used it to show the parents of people we support that young adults are entitled to vote and made sure that each person was on the electoral role. Now we are planning to follow up and begin the discussions about these young people making more choices and perhaps moving on in their lives. The mums and dads seem to be reassured by the pack as it is ‘official’ and is in terms that everyone can understand.”

“We now have a ‘Politics Group’ at the Resource Centre. People talk about what is in the newspapers and what they saw on the television news. Those taking part enjoy it - we have had some really heated discussions and people are learning that you sometimes have to just disagree on something. It has also changed attitudes of some staff at the centre. The effects are going to be long lasting!”

Influencing policy

Outside the Box aims to give people who often feel they do not have a voice opportunities to influence the policies that affect them.

- We help people learn what the national and local policies are that affect what they do. They can use the policies to reinforce their activities and plans - to show that other people also think that these are good ideas. In other situations people can decide they want to influence policies that they think don't reflect their circumstances or are taking the wrong approach.
- We encourage people and groups to contribute directly to formal consultations. We tell them about Scottish and UK Government consultations that may affect or interest them.
- We give people tools to help them increase and use the opportunities to influence policy and practice. One example we published this year is the Guide to influencing services for people who use self harm as a means of coping.
- We also respond to consultations ourselves when people with whom we are in touch prefer to be part of a wider contribution.

Example

Self Directed Support

Self Directed Support enables people who use social care services to have much greater control over the type of support they

receive. The Scottish Government has been developing policies that will extend this to many more people.

We put in a response to the Scottish Government's consultation on Self Directed Support. Our response drew on discussions with people who were not feeding in their views through other routes. They included people who have addiction problems and people who are homeless, who are not able to use some of the current arrangements and had views and suggestions that the Scottish Government was unlikely to hear in many other responses.

We are also in touch with a programme in England which is looking at innovative approaches to the way people use Self Directed Support. We have put people and organisations in Scotland in touch with the English pilot projects and are planning an event for later in 2011 that will bring people from one of the pilots to Scotland.

How we organise the work

These are some of the ways we have improved the way we organise the work. The aim behind all our internal developments is to improve the support we give to the projects and people we work with

- We appointed new staff. This has enabled us to extend the range of work we do and be able to respond in flexible ways.
- We updated the website to make it easier for people to find the material they need.
- We commissioned an external evaluation of the Working Towards project which is part-funded by the Big Lottery Fund.
- We are developing partnerships with organisations that complement what we do, such as Community Enterprise and the National Development Team for Inclusion.
- We are looking at how we disseminate and market what we do.
- We are continuing to build up a wide range of income sources.

Looking ahead

These are areas we have identified as priorities for work in 2011-12 and over the next few years.

- Continue to develop work with people who are affected by addictions.
- Continue to work with disabled people on a wide range of issues.
- Continue to develop and expand work with older people and on issues that affect older people.
- Continue to develop links with Equalities groups.
- Continue to work with people affected by abuse or discrimination.
- Continue to work with people and organisations improving opportunities for people affected by homelessness.
- Continue to support people and groups who are working to make a difference in their community.

Where to reach us

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Copies of most reports and information about the projects are on the website: www.otbds.org

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