

SVS – The Building Bridges Forum **The Voluntary Sector and its involvement in Unemployment Matters.**

Historically, The Building Bridges Forum was developed by SVS some 15 years ago to bring some co-ordination to the voluntary sector bodies in the city involved in training and unemployment issues. This was originally to try and develop a consortium to formulate a bid for ESF money. The bid never materialised, but the forum continued usefully to meet for a number of years, but then gradually fell away.

The Current Situation:

Work is now being done to re-establish the forum, led by David Wrighton (Chair) and Auran Sood, who facilitates the group on behalf of SVS. There is a wide range of organisations that work in this field, from big players for whom it is their main business, such as SAFE or the Wheatsheaf Trust, to much smaller groups which do something to help people on the road to or towards employment, or as part of (or even incidental to) a much wider range of activities with a particular group or neighbourhood – a Community Centre manager, for example, who might spend some time with someone to try and put together a CV, or give some interview practice. It may be by no means their main work, but they deal with it when it arises.

But times have changed, and the need is recognised to put more effort in to this area. We have been recontacting people and organisations who were on the Building Bridges Contact and Distribution List to update it. There has been a very encouraging response to date. People agree that this is something that the City seriously needs to happen if we are to make headway towards the Aims and Objectives of Southampton Connect. A Robust voluntary sector presence around worklessness and unemployment issues within the city can contribute to most if not all of the priority areas of Southampton Connect, especially around employment, training, poverty and inclusion matters..

Renewing Terms of Reference

The Forum's terms of reference are well out of date, no longer fit for purpose and are currently being revisited. A small steering group is meeting to look at the aims and objectives of the group, to refine and renew them and, from that, to come up with a **new name**, which will be more indicative of what the renewed body will actually do.

What we have identified already as being important is probably fairly obvious, but it is also important that the sector accepts the need to go forward in this way:

- Better Co-ordination within the sector.
- Providing a “way in” to the Voluntary Sector provision for other sectors – a central point.
- Different organisations getting together to pool resources and co-operate where their work might be complementary.
- Forming partnerships to tackle specific identified local problems to bid for funding.
- Highlighting issues that really cause problems – such as the lack of affordable childcare.
- Providing a voice on behalf of the Sector and of those the sector serves, being advocates for people who do not have a strong voice of their own or the confidence to make a fuss.

There is already evidence of such co-operation. The Third Age Centre is receiving funding to map the sector's activities, and this will be shared to further the development of a worthwhile body. There is, however, a great deal more work to be done.
