

History & Policy/Strategy Unit Seminar, 15 June 2010
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Case study – the settlement movement, 1884-present

The settlement movement – an overview

- The 'settlement movement' was founded from the 1880s onwards, as a means of trying to build **civic leadership** in the deprived areas of towns and cities
- Settlements were charities which brought (typically) recent graduates to the deprived areas of towns and cities to **live and to undertake voluntary social work** in their spare time. The 'residents' were supported by paid staff (managerial, administrative and domestic).
- Settlements have always been **multi-purpose organisations**, catering for both sexes, all ages, diverse needs
 - Range of activities includes... free legal advice, clubs for children, clubs for adults, holidays for needy children, support groups, lunch clubs for the elderly, adult education
- Settlements have particularly functioned as **training for young people** (usually but not exclusively graduates) in aspects of social work and community development. In the first half of the 20thC, Toynbee Hall was seen as a destination for young men who wished to have public careers (alumni include William Beveridge and Clement Attlee), whilst Oxford House was a destination for those who would enter the clergy. Women's settlements were often used by women who wished to enter into careers in social work and medicine
- Historically, the settlements have used '**residential volunteers**' to deliver their services – a few settlements offer this today, but largely this has been withdrawn in favour of using local volunteers, often because of the cost of running a residential wing, also attitudes to institutional living, other options with voluntary work (CSV, VSO)
- The settlements have served as '**test bed**' for many social innovations:
 - Poor Man's Lawyer/free legal advice, Mansfield House 1891
 - Close ties with University Extension and the Workers' Educational Association, also in many cases providers of adult education themselves (Toynbee Hall until the 1950s, Mary Ward ongoing)
 - Services for disabled children – Mary Ward, CTWS, WUS
 - Providers of healthcare at neighbourhood level, voluntary or locally funded
 - Clara Grant at Fern Street – worked with Margaret McMillan on developing school medical inspections (c.1908)

- Settlements were and are heavily linked in with **local government**. For example: the West Ham settlements helped to direct medical services in the borough before the Second World War; residents at settlements were often to be found on the boards of schools; settlement managers often involved as JPs, local councillors etc.
 - Settlements in the US – especially Chicago – form the bedrock of local welfare organisation

Settlements and the 'Big Society'

- Settlements generally **have few problems in obtaining volunteers**, but as with many other charities, their volunteers tend to correspond to national patterns in volunteering. Thus white, middle-aged, middle-class women are the most likely to volunteer, whilst members of BME communities are the least likely (NCVO, <http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/research>, 2010). This is critical when charities, like settlements, are dealing with multiracial neighbourhoods
 - **Type of volunteer.** The services on offer help dictate what volunteering is undertaken – for example, Toynbee Hall has around 500 volunteers, but many of those are volunteers for the free legal advice services. These individuals are usually junior lawyers sent by their firm to build up their experience, are not involved beyond that service and will give their time in a very functional manner, leaving once they have their 'set hours'. In other cases, there may be a skill set required which is not present within the local community
 - **Longevity.** Residential volunteers typically stay around for 12 months, but often their involvement in the charity is relatively minimal, fitted in around work – true in the 1880s, true in the C21. Only a very small, atypical proportion will be those who stay for years doing useful work and/or who come up with truly innovative solutions. In the case of Toynbee Hall, it is worth remembering that Attlee, Beveridge and others stayed for a couple of years at most; more recently, John Profumo served the charity for over 40 years, yet he was not the longest serving volunteer. This was Mrs Rosetta Reardon, who began as cook in 1913, and continued undertaking voluntary work alongside her domestic work until her death in 1963 (Bradley, 2009, 42-3).
 - **Human factor.** Whilst NCVO and others have identified the macro factors in volunteering participation, what emerges from the micro level, over a longer period of time, is that **emotion** plays an important role in moving a volunteer from a 'surface' to a 'deep' level of engagement. Powerful motivations – such as religious or political – can be negated if the individual does not 'find their feet' within their chosen area of work. Factors in this emotional engagement include: transformation of identity; short term, 'quick and dirty' positive feedback in a loop of

reciprocity; longer term feedback ('old boys' coming back etc); boosting of self-esteem in longer and shorter terms. This level of engagement is often serendipitous, with such factors harder to forecast than other variables around volunteering.

- The question of **penetration into the local community** is one that has dogged settlements since their foundation – they may be *in* the community, but they are not necessarily *of it*. The measure of this is the use of their services by the local community. Take up is varied – for example, free legal advice will be used by people who are not necessarily from the local area, rather than exclusively by local people (Bradley, 155). Very specialist services may either have wide catchment areas, beyond the immediate area, or deal only with a very small proportion of the community (i.e. outreach with 'deviant' youth rather than the well-behaved majority). Likewise, there is the question of how staff and volunteers are recruited from the local community, and it is often doubtful how far settlements actually serve their local communities in terms of providing what is wanted as well as what is needed.
- In terms of their **relationship with the welfare state**, before the Second World War settlement activists were keen advocates of an expanded state – they were acutely aware that they were dealing with the tip of the iceberg. With the advent of the welfare state, settlements had to rapidly adjust, shedding work that was taken over by the state. Yet this was not their death knell – rather, they entered into ever more complex relationships with the state, such as undertaking work contracted out to them by the state, obtaining funding from the state for projects or developing projects around needs not met by the state (the need for free legal advice grew with the advent of the welfare state, as people fell foul of complex forms!)