



## **Building mutual support and organising in our communities**

Stories and experience from London Coalition Against  
Poverty and other independent groups



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**Above:** LCAP members demonstrated together on the "March for the Alternative" in 2011

**Cover photograph:** Hackney Housing Group demonstrate outside the Hackney Service Centre

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### Acronyms used in this pamphlet

#### LCAP

London Coalition Against Poverty

#### HHG

Hackney Housing Group

#### IPAG

Islington Poverty Action Group

#### WAH

Welfare Action Hackney

## Introduction

*"Together we can make a difference. The way I see it, in the future [other people may] have this problem. The government cuts will affect us, like a large percentage of people. I think people must involve [themselves] now to know what they must do to avoid bad things in the future. I think all of us have something to say in any situation. We must be together."*

Vera, Hackney Housing Group (HHG)

### Why this pamphlet?

In the wake of government announcements that an 'army' of community organisers would be trained up to deliver the Big Society, the London Coalition Against Poverty (LCAP<sup>1</sup>) brought together several independent and grassroots groups to talk about what community organising meant to them. One person at the discussion summed up our concerns when he said government-sponsored community organisers would "organise compliance not resistance... Their message will be 'We can help you, you cannot help yourselves.'" **David, Islington Poverty Action Group (IPAG)**

By sharing the experiences and expertise of LCAP members and the other groups that took part in the discussion we hope to explore what makes independent groups different.

Read the original discussion at:

<http://organisingcommunities.wordpress.com/>

### What is different about LCAP?

LCAP groups are run by their members collectively. They use pressure and direct support to solve each other's problems. They are not controlled by any political party or ideology, and all agree with general principles of mutual help, equal participation and respect [see page 6 for LCAP's principles].

**1.** Acronyms for the names of frequently mentioned groups are listed on the inside cover opposite

The groups have face-to-face meetings in which decisions are made collectively; people discuss their issues and find solutions.

*"One of our strengths is that we really are focused on finding out what our rights are together. It is a different relationship. We are not caseworkers and clients."*

**Lani, IPAG**

The majority of LCAP's membership consists of people who joined at first because of a personal housing or benefits problem, which the groups are often successful in solving. As the current coalition government strips away our rights to benefits, housing and legal aid and many more aspects of the welfare state are eroded, mutual help groups will become more and more necessary.

### Using this pamphlet

In the pages that follow, we haven't tried to create a handbook because we don't think there is a blueprint for successful organising. Instead it's about finding what works for you where you are. Perhaps you are reading this because you want to change injustices that affect you and your community. If so, we hope you'll find points of learning and inspiration here, and that you'll be in touch as you build your own stories and successes.

More information is available on [www.lcap.org.uk](http://www.lcap.org.uk)



**Above:** Our actions can be fun as well as effective – Boycott workfare held a "Leaving Party" when workfare firm A4e had contracts cancelled

## Our attitude to organising

*"I think the way we treat each other is good, because we don't have a leader. Everybody has the same position. We are free to say what we think. I think it is more effective this way."*

**Vera, HHG**

We hope that sharing stories of how LCAP groups have worked is the best way of showing what our ethos and approach mean in practice. LCAP's principles (see below) provide a collective statement of how we work. Other things we think important are that the people most affected by issues are involved in efforts to find solutions. This means we work from the bottom up, not the top down, and that we work hard for everyone in LCAP to have an equal voice. It is important to be flexible and allow the organisation to change as the members decide together it needs to.



## LCAP's Principles

Every group in London Coalition Against Poverty agrees with these principles, which were written and agreed collectively.

**Solidarity:** LCAP is a coalition of mutual support groups that organize to defend and extend our rights to decent housing, wages and benefits.

**Equal voice:** LCAP groups are open and democratic. We do not separate ourselves into 'caseworkers' and 'clients' or 'leaders' and 'followers'. Everyone involved has an equal say in what we do and how we do it.

**Group Support:** We make change by supporting each other and sticking together. We challenge oppressive behaviour including bullying or discrimination, based on race, religion, education and others, or harassment of any kind towards any of our members.

**Social change:** LCAP is part of an international people's movement that is pro-actively working to abolish poverty and improve the quality of our lives.

**Independence:** LCAP is an independent coalition. We are not a political party, charity, or religious group.

**Members' Contribution:** LCAP groups succeed because of members' contributions and our willingness to offer mutual aid. Each member decides on our own input according to our own time and ability.

**Education:** We believe education is important for our groups' development to understand the ever changing political landscape.

**Fun Fun Fun:** We organise events and evenings to get together and enjoy socializing.

## A Brief History of LCAP

In March 2007, inspired by the Canadian direct action organisation, Ontario Coalition Against Poverty LCAP was formed to challenge the disrespect experienced by people trying to access housing and benefits. LCAP's first focus was the 'gatekeeping'<sup>1</sup> of homeless people by councils. Clear and concise information was given to people who were being turned away without help by the housing office. Shortly after starting to hand out leaflets LCAP began to support people to make homeless applications by organising groups of people to go to the housing office together to support the person's case and not take no for an answer. LCAP found that this worked, not always, but often.

Many people that were helped by this did not stay involved but some did and about a year later groups began to form around common issues. Hostel residents in Stoke Newington began to meet twice a month in an adventure playground and later formed Hackney Housing Group, Hackney Unemployed Workers Group (now Welfare Action Hackney) started to tackle the issues faced by people on benefits, Islington Poverty Action Group formed in Islington, and Kilburn Unemployed Workers Group affiliated to LCAP. Some LCAP members helped to get Boycott Workfare going, which rapidly grew into a national campaign network.

As the groups grew, we reflected on what mutual support meant. Rather than trying to support everyone with a benefits or housing problem, we agreed to support people who joined the groups. This means that people receiving help helped others in turn. Things began to change; more group members became committed to running the groups, more people took responsibility. People who joined in the throes of a housing or benefit crisis found solutions and then started to help others with the same problems.



**Above:** One of LCAP's first public actions called for conditions in a Hackney hostel to improve

**1.** Gatekeeping means the practice common to local authorities, especially in London, of turning homeless applicants away without giving them the assessment they are entitled to by law.

## Starting a Group

The first and most important thing you will need if you want to start a mutual help group is people. Haringey Housing Action Group describes how they spread the word about their group below:

*"We leaflet outside the local customer service centre or Job Centre with a simple leaflet saying when we meet. We get people through that who have got housing problems, either from private landlords, or people housed by the council, or other problems, like not being able to bid for housing. We've had a few key people who've got involved and they've spread the word to friends of theirs and they leave leaflets at children's centres where they take their kids and leave leaflets at schools. We get more people that way than people coming from leaflets at the housing office."*

**Jane, Haringey Housing Action Group**

*"[Welfare Action Hackney] came together as a group... as a result of bad treatment received by many people at the Job Centre in Hackney."*

**Harry, Welfare Action Hackney (WAH)**

**Right:** Many members found out about our groups through leafleting and stalls outside Job Centres and housing offices



**Lola from Welfare Action Hackney** remembers how she joined: *"I got involved with LCAP one sunny afternoon, coming out of the Job Centre, feeling a little bit confused. I looked around and saw someone standing there with a board and leaflets. She was smiling; she said "If you have any issues about the Job Centre, do you have anything to say? We're going on a demo to Downing Street and we're going to take people's messages." Well, that was wonderful because I had loads to say, so I wrote down and filled up two pages of the board! I left my email and as a result of that I got contacted with all the information."*

**Right:** Haringey Housing campaigners demand better treatment for private tenants in autumn 2012  
© Pat Philips



The good thing about forming a group around a specific issue is that you can train yourselves in the relevant law, build connections with lawyers and other sources of help and really make an impact as you campaign for your members. It is important to remain flexible. Hackney Housing Group started off as a hostel residents' meeting but over time as people discussed the issues they faced, the group decided to broaden its scope to include all housing issues. This decision was key to the group's success and ability to grow and was made because the members were in control of the group and its direction.

## Inclusive and effective meetings

The group meetings are where decisions are made, members can ask for support and where the activities of the group are organised. Here are some tips, in limerick form, for how to run a successful meeting:

*When organising a meeting,*

*Begin with a welcoming greeting,*

*Go round introductions;*

*Don't brook interruptions;*

*Take minutes - decisions are fleeting.*

It's useful to explain the ethos and activities of your group at the beginning if there are any new people or if the people there haven't heard this before. When you are helping each other with personal problems people are likely to assume the group is a service like the Citizens Advice Bureaux so it's important to explain that the group needs everyone's active involvement.

**Vera** explains how **Hackney Housing Group** meetings work:

*"We meet each other every two weeks. The kind of thing we do is we make [an] agenda, we find which issues or questions we should discuss. If any member has any problem, [we decide what] kind of thing we can do to support [and if] it's important to do some kind of demands or demonstration in Hackney's housing office."*

In Hackney Housing Group meetings, every member of the group has a turn to speak about their issue with the rest of the group. This structure helps people be supported within the meeting. Talking about the issues in the group also means that the whole group can clearly see what issues are held in common by its members.

*"It's about quality of life. LCAP may have the answer for someone else's situation and that can happen just by conversation. It can happen*



**Above:** Ensuring events are child friendly means that parents are able to attend and kids get involved too

*to you. It can make life much easier. You might be on your own, scratching your head, trying to solve this problem, but it can just be by sharing with someone else in the meeting that you're able to find out the answer to your question and therefore become a happier person. And once you're a happier person, you can impart that happiness to someone else. When you're happy, your children become happy and it will just make communication and life a bit easier to get through. By helping people, you're helping yourself because you feel empowered and you feel that you're doing something."*

**Lola, WAH**

To help the meeting achieve its aims a facilitator or chair is useful. They should make sure everybody who wants to say something does, try to stop the discussion from drifting off and summarise and clarify points that need deciding. As with other group roles, it is a good idea to take turns facilitating the meeting so that more members develop skills. Keep meetings as short as possible or take breaks, and try to start on time so that people don't get into the habit of arriving late.

Try to ensure your meetings are open and friendly. Welcome new people, ask them to introduce themselves and make sure they have time to speak if they want to.

*"I think when people come to our meetings for the first time they really become the star of that day. I think it is very important that they are embraced and made to feel completely comfortable and part of the group, encouraged of course to come back and take a part in the group. We listen to them, we listen to what they are doing, we make sure nobody is interrupting and we do what we are supposed to be doing: show interest, show support and encourage them to open up. I suppose we smile a lot and look friendly, which always helps doesn't it? Maybe even crack a joke or two in spite of everything."*

**Harry, WAH**



Think about how you let people know about the meeting, and make sure it reaches the people you need it to. It might be a good idea to send a text message instead of an email before the meeting, especially if your members tend to use phones more than computers or speak other languages than English.

Remember that the way you organise the meeting will determine who is involved. Is the meeting at the right time of day or day of the week? For instance, Hackney Housing Group meets on a Saturday because many members work or study, while other groups whose members are unemployed often meet on weekdays.

In the early days of Hackney Housing Group childcare was organised for each meeting, which helped encourage parents to attend. The first meeting venue was an adventure playground close to many of the hostels, which was great for the children. If the meeting had not been in a child friendly place or at a time when people could bring children many members would not have been able to attend.

Another crucial issue for Hackney Housing Group is language:

*"Sometimes many of us we don't speak English very well, and then sometimes we can translate because we have many nationalities: Portuguese, Spanish, Brazilian, any kind."*

**Vera, HHG**

When the group was starting, a big effort was made to provide interpretation in the languages members needed at that time – sometimes as many as four languages at once. If that effort had not been made, it is unlikely the group would have grown to the size it is today, as most of the members require some kind of interpretation. Many members have since studied English and now help interpret for newer members.



**Above:** Haringey Housing Action Group successfully demand housing for a member  
© Pat Philips

## Supporting each other

One of the most valued aspects of LCAP groups is the support that members offer each other.

*"I've always been the one to help people; I've never really had anyone to support me. Sometimes people have the misconception that if you're educated and born in this country, you know what to do. But there are times when you just do need the support of people, and LCAP was that for me, that support system, somewhere to share."*

**Lola, WAH**

The support LCAP groups give to members is mutual and it is not a service.

*"I feel free to help others or give my contribution, because it is this group that helped me. LCAP made me happy, and I want to make others happy as well if I can."*

**Vera, HHG**

People find relief from knowing they are not alone and are able to discuss their situations with others.

### What is good support:

- Listening**
- 📌 being a good listener, a resource;
  - 📌 providing encouragement to share experiences;
  - 📌 allocating enough time for adequate support;
  - 📌 recognition/validation of someone's anger, pain, fatigue, frustration, etc.

- Empowering**
- 📌 identifying options and choices;
  - 📌 facilitating problem solving; building analytic skills by weighing consequences of decisions;
  - 📌 showing respect;
  - 📌 promoting equality & anti-oppression principles;
  - 📌 building self-esteem.

- Caring & Encouraging**
- 📌 being understanding of difficult situations;
  - 📌 giving praise for a person's strength;
  - 📌 helping a person develop skills and self-esteem

- Focused & Structured**
- 📌 clear boundaries and time-frames;
  - 📌 being honest about what support you can offer and what you can't;
  - 📌 being reliable

*"Just being able to talk to other people who have experienced homelessness or who have experienced living in temporary accommodation can be a really nice thing. Everyone says that one of the reasons they come to meetings is that people listen, because they're able to talk about their problems and meet people who have experienced the same thing. And because they're in a supportive environment where people in the group will help them to take whatever action they're comfortable with."*

**Izzy, HHG**

There are many things to think about before you begin to support

### What to avoid:

- Judging**
- 📌 criticizing someone for their decisions;
  - 📌 not creating a space for someone to speak;
  - 📌 rushing a person or not providing enough time;
  - 📌 only listening to details/circumstances, not paying attention to someone's feelings.

- Dis-empowering or 'Rescuing'**
- 📌 making decisions for someone;
  - 📌 coming up with answers for someone;
  - 📌 using quick-fix or 'sticking plaster' solutions;
  - 📌 assuming that you are better than the person you are assisting;
  - 📌 creating dependency.

- Being Frustrated or Dismissive**
- 📌 making someone's problems seem unimportant;
  - 📌 making someone feel guilty/bad about decisions;
  - 📌 using your skills instead of sharing your skills.

- Open Ended/Without Boundaries**
- 📌 being available at all times;
  - 📌 telling someone you will make everything better;
  - 📌 not following through;
  - 📌 not meeting deadlines.

other people. LCAP may be able to provide some training to new groups and give advice on how to get started. In mutual support group meetings normally one or two people volunteer to help a group member who raises a problem. Tasks that need doing range from making appointments with solicitors, writing a letter or sending a text message to group members to ask them to come to the housing office or Job Centre to support the person. Although with complicated problems members may be supporting each other for some time, updates should still be given to the main meeting to keep the group informed and make sure that everyone



involved is happy with how it is going. The best way to safeguard each other is to ensure that no one does any activity alone. Working together is also the best way to share skills and information. Experienced members tend to take more responsibility and to support newer members as they start to support others.

Offering mutual support and asking people to participate in the group while still helping them to solve their problems is tricky.

As Harry from Welfare Action Hackney says:

*"It's a balancing act really. We have to try and offer advice in the meeting as to what they should do and where they can go and at the same time inform them that we work as a group, mutually. We give them information that is useful for them, but not trail after them through the city to solve it, going to unemployment offices, housing offices, lawyers and on and on and on. What we would do is the person would come back to the group the following week and we would offer more advice and we would kind of do it that way. The person would find that if they were taking a part in the group then they would get more help."*

**Right:** Young participant of Hackney Housing Group's fasting day in 2010 shows her enthusiasm for better housing conditions



**Above:** Welfare Action Hackney challenges problems with private welfare to work providers as well as at the Job Centre

## Taking Action

*"If we have more people we can make a greater result. We can push Hackney Housing to try and improve social housing for people in Hackney. If we are more, we can show them. In Portuguese we say 'In group, we can make a difference. If the group is bigger, we can make a bigger difference.'"*

**Vera, HHG**

After several years of campaigning LCAP is able to achieve good results. In Hackney, for instance, both the council's housing office and the Job Centre recognise LCAP's name and pay attention to their complaints.

As Lola from Welfare Action Hackney remembers:

*"When I joined LCAP I had a situation: I hadn't signed on before so I didn't know what was involved. For me, the success was the support I was given from LCAP to enable me to go to the Job Centre and get the money that was owed to me. Further down the line I got sanctioned, and I got real*

support from LCAP in terms of phone calls, writing emails and going down there, and because of that, even though in normal cases what the Job Centre says happens, in this case it was overturned and I feel it's the pressure that LCAP put on my case caused that to happen."

LCAP groups use many different tactics to support their members, as Izzy says:

"When someone comes to the group it is their decision what action they take and they're supported in the way that they want to act. So for example, if someone is comfortable with taking direct action, they might march down to the housing office and get their problem resolved quickly. If that isn't the best way of dealing with their situation or if that person isn't comfortable with that, being part of the housing group is still really important because they might learn from someone else not to use a certain solicitor because they're not very good, and might get another recommendation."

Vera explains how **Hackney Housing Group** takes action for its members:

"Beforehand, we study the person's situation to try to see the possibilities and the kind of things we should do. We organise a small



**Right:** Visual themes can help get media attention

meeting, to see what kind of thing we could do, what kind of questions we should ask. We organise a certain amount of people and we go into the housing office. It is difficult, even though they know us now. When we go there, they try to evict us; they say "No we don't have any managers available to speak to you". But we already know what we should do when they say this. We say "Without seeing a manager, we're not going to leave this place". We get a lot of progress in these situations. When we are not satisfied about our colleague, or our member's situation, when we want a decision or some explanation about what is going on with a case, we will go to the housing office. Sometimes they give us the right explanation. They take too long to work on cases, so we make them work hard and give us an early decision as well. It doesn't work all the time, but in many cases it works."

As Vera says, although public action has an '80% success' rate it doesn't always work. **Zana remembers joining Hackney Housing Group** when she was homeless and heavily pregnant. The Advisory Service for Squatters found her a squatted place to live, and then she found out about LCAP and joined Hackney Housing Group. Despite initial scepticism she thought "There's nothing to lose, let's attend the meetings and see what happens". Then, once she joined the group:

"We took public action going to Waltham Forest Council, staying there till the late evening. But it wasn't successful and they called the police and there were two vans of police waiting outside. I had a baby with me. She was at the time four days old and they just wanted me to go out from the building into the cold and pouring rain, so it was really unbelievable that these people could do that to a baby and a family, just throw them outside in such conditions. But what happened, happened. The public action at that point didn't work out because they were really cold-faced just standing there and refusing me any housing at all."

Despite the public action not working, Zana did eventually get housed and stayed involved with the group. She says:



*"Afterwards, I realised I'm not the only one. It's happening almost every day I would say. At first I was thinking "Why's it happening to me?" but after a while I realised it's happening quite a lot nationwide. I know that I'm not alone but I'm trying to support those people. Maybe in my mind mostly! But if I have a chance, if there is any trouble for the others, I will try to be supportive as much as possible."*

Action for wider demands can help with supporting individuals as well, as **Anne-Marie from Welfare Action Hackney** explains: *"After our group had been meeting for a while, we realised that there were many problems which we wanted to challenge. Over several weeks, we put together a list of demands including treating people with respect, providing access to toilets, no more sanctions, and benefits you can live on rather than just survive."*

*"Then we got in touch with everyone we had spoken to outside the Job Centre and invited them to come and present the demands with us. About 30 of us marched into the Job Centre and demanded to speak to the manager. We were there nearly an hour, speaking to people who had come to sign on or make a phone call, and attempting to get the manager to come and hear what we had to say."*

*"The police were called and the manager refused to see us. Our meeting decided that we would shout the demands out together and leave on mass. We walked together to an open space and took turns to say what we'd learnt and what we thought we should do next."*

*"On the face of it, it seemed like we hadn't made any headway but the following week someone came to our meeting who had been sanctioned for no reason. Just two of us went with her to the Job Centre, and she got a meeting with the manager and an interpreter within a couple of hours."*

**Right:** We think we should enjoy the way we take action: this is the kids tent at Hackney Housing Group's protest fasting day for better housing conditions in 2010.



When you start being successful you may find you get the chance to contact managers directly without having to take action first.

This is a sign of success but also something to think about, as **Anne-Marie says:**

*"We were invited for a meeting with all the Job Centre managers in the area to ask us to bring our problems to them rather than take action! This had its benefits – it was a lot easier to help someone sort out their situation when you have a direct line to the manager. But it also had drawbacks because it was less clear when we should take direct action and newer members of the group did not experience the collective action which gave us this power."*

From LCAP's experience we would encourage other groups to try using public action to challenge decisions and take action to support their members, but to be aware that there are no guarantees that any tactic will work. The group needs to understand this and prepare for it as best they can. Keep trying and encouraging each other and you are likely to succeed in the end.



## Sharing out the work

A common complaint in voluntary organisations is that most of the work gets done by only one or two people. *“One way to get around that within a group is to rotate roles in some way, to have meetings where you don’t have fixed roles but the group decides on who is doing what within the meeting. Decisions are made, not necessarily by voting because there are no guarantees that most people will be right, but by some kind of consensus so that everyone’s views are heard and listened to. And go-rounds obviously are one means of doing that.”* **David, IPAG**

It is often a lack of confidence or experience with certain activities that holds people back from volunteering.

*“I know a long time ago when I was a shop steward and I was trying to get people to go to branch meetings what people said was “Well, we don’t actually like walking in the room by ourselves because we don’t know if we are going to know anyone”. So we used to arrange beforehand and all go together. Anything you can do that makes people more comfortable is really important.”*

**Linda, Disabled People Against Cuts**

LCAP organises training events, which encourage their members to take on new roles. Past trainings have covered, amongst other topics, advocacy, different aspects of welfare and housing rights, media training and meeting facilitation. *“While we’re supporting LCAP, at the same time we’re getting developed in other ways, for me particularly in terms of media. One of the things I’ve done is speak at a women’s conference, I was at a high table looking down thinking ‘Whoa’ but after a few shakes and a deep breath I managed to do it. I’ve also been asked to do a radio interview. In fact during one of the demonstrations, I was pulled by a camera man to give a small talk about why I was there. It’s boosting my confidence to articulate my feelings. It’s been really good.”* **Lola, WAH**



**Above:** Members often gain new skills – like public speaking or working with the media

People enjoy their involvement in LCAP because they become more connected with other people in their community:

*“I make friends in this organisation; I improve my English as well. It looks like a family; you can’t separate with your family.”*

**Vera, HHG**

LCAP creates a community feeling by holding events to socialise and raise funds.

*“Events we organise could be anything basically. It could be jumble sales, an event that we organised to fund our group. The group is independent, so we need to keep up somehow. There are events like historic projects, some volunteers are looking for people and taking interviews and recording about their lives, how their lives changed, history about Hackney housing. Recently we are organising events like a cultural party.”*

**Zana, HHG**



**Above:** Boycott Workfare has become a UK-wide campaign which has forced many companies and charities to withdraw from forced work schemes

## Branching Out

Apart from the work carried out within your group, how do you work with others to make change on a larger scale? Again we have no quick solutions, but below are a few examples from our experience.

### When London Coalition Against Poverty finally became a coalition!

London is a big place, so we'd always intended to be a coalition of locally-rooted groups. It took a few years, but the coalition now includes: Haringey Housing Action Group, Housing Action Southwark and Lambeth, Hackney Housing Group (which meets with Welfare Action Hackney), Islington Poverty Action Group, Kilburn Unemployed Workers Group, as well as the Boycott Workfare campaign. Local group discussions and meetings of the coalition spent some time developing our principles to reflect what we have in common and think is important (see page 6). The way the groups work varies, but we all come together every three months to share news and make any important joint decisions. We've found that most people are more interested in talking to others and sharing ideas than in the formal meetings, so we try to have regular socials and fundraisers. If a new group wants to join the coalition, they come to one of our quarterly

meetings to introduce themselves and a decision is made there.

### A campaign born from the experience in our welfare mutual support groups

In 2010, few people not on the New Deal were even aware that unemployed people were regularly being forced to work without pay in high street stores like Tesco and Primark, as well as for charities and in the public sector. LCAP members helped bring people from other groups together to start a campaign, which eighteen months later had succeeded in branding the schemes "workfare", led to multiple companies and charities pulling out, and put workfare on the agenda for those tackling austerity. The campaign doesn't offer personal support to people facing workfare but may never have started without LCAP groups identifying what issues were faced by unemployed people through the mutual support groups.

Find out more about how the campaign organises:

[www.boycottworkfare.org](http://www.boycottworkfare.org)

### Organising nationally using social media

*"A lot of disabled people are isolated and confined because they haven't got the right support to get out from their homes, so we very much use social networking. If we want to know what people think about something we message all our Facebook members and put something on our website and they all send back message; then we sort of work from those responses we get."*

**Linda, Disabled People Against Cuts**

### Nothing about us without us

A future shaped without us will be one that excludes us. As we build links with other groups, we need to make sure that our members' voices are still heard.

*"It is really important for us that we organise as disabled people because historically disabled people have been viewed as dependent, charitable cases. The government and councils tend to ignore disabled people and their views and speak to the charities who speak for us, who are not always saying what we would want them to say."*

**Linda, Disabled People Against Cuts**

*"For black minority women autonomy is not separation actually. Autonomy is a space you need because you are invisibilised by everyone else and you need that space because that helps you to come together and to articulate what your needs are. For us it also means placing ourselves in wider progressive movements. But autonomy is as necessary as it ever was because I think that otherwise certain voices just completely get drowned out."*

**Pragna, Southall Black Sisters**

*"Because Boycott Workfare grew out of LCAP mutual support groups, we have always found it crucial that people affected by workfare are involved and help shape the direction of the campaign. We're also really open to including new people so our campaign can grow."*

**Anne Marie, Boycott Workfare**

### Who should we work with?

This question will almost certainly be one your group will encounter. Other groups' priorities are not always the same as ours, so this will be something you will probably need to navigate in order to work together. Again, there are no hard and fast rules, but here are a few useful reflections.

*"I don't particularly want to be controlled in a Stalinist, top down way but at the same time people that are more hierarchical probably don't want to organise in the way I want to either. I think we have to be understanding of each other and try to respect people who organise in different ways which may be more or less liberatory. I am very keen on trying to keep this a broad movement where we compromise with each*

**Right:** Disabled People Against Cuts are organising against Atos, the private company responsible for throwing thousands of people off sickness benefits

© Pete Riches



*other. If you look at the [successful campaign to stop the privatisation of the] forests there were a lot of people who cooperated with us who have really different politics, so I don't think we want to cut off our nose to spite our face."*

**Jim, Oxford Save our Services**

Above, Jim argues for broad alliances and respect for different forms of organising. Below, Pragna points out that it depends on what you want to achieve:

*"Talking about alliances in the abstract does not make sense, it's got to be thought of in terms of what are you doing, what are the objectives, you've come in the alliance to fight what? An anti-cuts alliance is easier in a way. Even if you think about the TUC march, there were all sorts, everyone was on that march. That is a different kind of alliance to one where you are challenging something and the very people you are in alliance with are undermining that very thing."*

**Pragna, Southall Black Sisters**

We'd love to hear from you as you start to organise in your community. LCAP members are often willing to offer workshops or talks; you'd be welcome to visit our meetings to see what we do and tell us what you are doing. Stay in touch!



## LCAP ([www.lcap.org.uk](http://www.lcap.org.uk)) groups:

Hackney Housing Group ([via lcap.org.uk](http://via.lcap.org.uk))

Haringey Housing Action Group  
([haringeyhousingaction.org.uk](http://haringeyhousingaction.org.uk))

Housing Action Southwark and Lambeth ([housingactionsl.org](http://housingactionsl.org))

Islington Poverty Action Group ([ipag.org.uk](http://ipag.org.uk))

Kilburn Unemployed Workers Group  
([kilburnunemployed.blogspot.co.uk](http://kilburnunemployed.blogspot.co.uk))

Welfare Action Hackney  
([hackneyunemployedworkers.wordpress.com](http://hackneyunemployedworkers.wordpress.com))

## Groups which took part in the discussion on community organising:

Boycott Workfare ([boycottworkfare.org](http://boycottworkfare.org))

Disabled People Against Cuts ([dpac.uk.net](http://dpac.uk.net))

Oxford Save Our Services ([oxfordsos.org.uk](http://oxfordsos.org.uk))

Southall Black Sisters ([southallblacksisters.org.uk](http://southallblacksisters.org.uk))

## Useful Organisations:

Edinburgh Coalition Against Poverty  
([edinburghagainstopoverty.org.uk](http://edinburghagainstopoverty.org.uk))

Seeds for Change ([seedsforchange.org.uk](http://seedsforchange.org.uk))

National Coalition for Independent Action  
([independentaction.net](http://independentaction.net))

Ontario Coalition Against Poverty ([ocap.ca](http://ocap.ca))



**London Coalition Against Poverty** is a coalition of mutual support groups.

Contact one of the groups directly or email the coalition at [londoncoalitionagainstopoverty@gmail.com](mailto:londoncoalitionagainstopoverty@gmail.com)