

Better use of the law and human rights by the voluntary sector

A background paper for the Baring Foundation Strengthening the Voluntary Sector programme, September 2015

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Foreword from the Baring Foundation

This report is based on scoping research conducted for the Baring Foundation - it was originally prepared during the Foundation's strategic review and informed the decision of the trustees to focus its Strengthening the Voluntary Sector programme on supporting effective use of the law and human rights based approaches by the voluntary sector in the United Kingdom.

Neil's independent research and analysis describes the context for this work and details why use of the law and human rights based approaches can make a difference through:

- enhancing effectiveness and increasing impact;
- protecting and supporting voluntary organisations to assert their independence; and
- helping voluntary organisations to define and articulate their purpose and mission.

He details five areas of current activity, through case studies that highlight promising practice:

- creating bridges and fostering collaboration between the legal and voluntary sectors;
- using the law and human rights in the context of 'early action' and prevention;
- inspiring, educating and empowering others to use the law and human rights;
- employing strategic litigation in the context of campaigning; and
- holding the government to account on human rights.

As a Foundation, we hope our programme can catalyse further activity and embed use of the law and human rights based approaches as important tools for organisations to achieve their objectives.

We are very grateful to Neil for his hard work in producing this report.

“Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home - so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighborhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm, or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world.”

Eleanor Roosevelt “In Our Hands” (1958 speech delivered on the tenth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights)

1. Introduction

Voluntary organisations play a pivotal role in tackling the discrimination and disadvantage faced by individuals and communities. Many have successfully employed the law and human rights more generally to do so, as this report will go on to outline. It remains relatively rare however for non-legal voluntary organisations to do so by actively harnessing the law, or by explicitly applying a human rights lens to their work. The research and engagement with the field that lies behind this paper suggests that this is a missed opportunity and that significant benefits would accrue from such practices being replicated more widely across the voluntary sector. Better use of the law and human rights provides opportunities to strengthen the voluntary sector, including by:

- Enhancing effectiveness and increasing impact
- Protecting and conveying independence
- Providing a way to recast and reframe organisational purpose and mission

This report outlines the different ways that better use of the law and human rights might strengthen voluntary sector organisations, drawing on insight and promising practice from the field.

2. Background

2.1 Using the law and human rights – an opportunity unfulfilled?

Voluntary organisations are centrally placed to spearhead the ‘concerted citizen action’ required to uphold rights ‘in the small places close to home’ that Eleanor

Roosevelt spoke of over half a century ago and which, in the face of profound social and economic upheaval, has become so critical today.

Yet relatively few voluntary organisations beyond what might be termed the 'legal voluntary sector' (such as law centres and advice providers) actively support or participate in legal action, or draw on law more generally, in pursuit of their goals. Few employ 'human rights' to couch their mission or frame their actions, often preferring the language of social justice, wellbeing, anti-poverty, equality or fairness for example. Only a minority of voluntary organisations appear to engage directly with domestic or international human rights instruments and institutions in the pursuit of their goals.

Human rights and the law more generally appear often to be regarded as highly elite and specialist areas of knowledge and action. This can act as a deterrent to voluntary organisations engaging, either through lack of confidence or because they lack the knowledge to recognise where the law and human rights might add value, how to engage and who to go to for support.

The climate for protecting and promoting rights is challenging. The voluntary sector itself faces deep problems in relation to financial sustainability and appears ever more reliant on public service contracts as a consequence of depleting resources for advocacy activities and the disappearance of infrastructure bodies. The Panel on the Independence of the Voluntary Sector has noted the effects of this trend on the independence of the sector and its willingness to 'speak out.' As the panel also noted how:

'For those that do speak out, there is a growing climate of opinion against the campaigning activities of charities'.¹

It reports how the Government recently advised local authorities to stop funding what it called 'fake charities' that 'lobby and call for more state regulation and more state funding'. The Lobbying Act also seemed to have a 'chilling effect' on the willingness of voluntary organisations to engage in particular activities.

The public narrative regarding human rights and the government's stated intention to repeal the Human Rights Act can also act as discouragement. Research produced for the Equality and Human Rights Commission in 2010 and anecdotal evidence suggests many voluntary organisations will avoid explicit engagement with human rights as a consequence of the toxicity of public and political discourse regarding the Human Rights Act and the European Court of Human Rights.²

¹ Panel on the Independence of the Voluntary Sector (January 2014) Independence Undervalued

² For example see EHRC (2010) Human Rights and Equality in the Voluntary Sector

These challenges suggest that the space for innovation in the use of the law and human rights by the non-legal voluntary sector is limited. Yet evidence collated for this report suggests that for some voluntary organisations, engagement with and use of the law and human rights holds the potential to strengthen them considerably in a number of different ways, because of, not simply despite of the challenges outlined above.

3. How might better use of the law and human rights strengthen the voluntary sector?

3.1 By enhancing effectiveness and increasing impact

Interviewees for this report provided various examples of voluntary organisations engaged in advocacy for individuals or groups, seeking to challenge the decisions of public bodies or pursuing social change yet doing so without recourse to relevant law or by reference to human rights standards. The failure to do so can be costly in a number of ways, to the organisations involved, to the individuals and communities they are engaged with, to public bodies and to wider society.

The unaddressed legal components of wider social problems frequently undermine efforts to address them. For example, Coventry Law Centre attached lawyers to the City's 'troubled families' initiative and quickly identified that 90% of the families had outstanding legal issues related to benefits and 100% related to housing. As noted by the Low Commission:

'by building links with community organisations, advice agencies can help develop the capacity of individuals or groups to recognise when there is a problem with a legal solution and to know whom to turn to for help in solving the problem.'³

Various interviewees also argued that embedding the law within wider social action provided the opportunity to prevent costly litigation and to ensure expenditure on legal cases was targeted more effectively. In this sense, better use of the law and human rights by the voluntary sector is instrumental to the agendas of prevention and early action that increasingly dominate the public policy landscape.⁴

³ Low Commission (2014) Tackling the advice deficit

⁴ As noted by the Baring Foundation report 'Social Welfare Advice and Early Action, Randall, J (2013) and the Low Commission report 'Tackling the Advice Deficit' (2014)

A number of interviewees argued that a stronger appreciation of and capacity to utilise public law principles – to understand and work with the ‘rule book’ as one put it - empowered voluntary organisations in their dealings with and ability to influence public bodies, enhancing their standing and status. It was also suggested that this offered the potential to improve relationships between voluntary organisations and public bodies with each working within a common, mutually understood legal framework. As above, doing so not only offers opportunities to enhance impact and effectiveness, but also to deliver cost benefits to all concerned through minimising unproductive and costly action and engagement.

A 2011 evaluation of the ‘Empowering the Voluntary Sector’ programme led by NAVCA in partnership with NCVO and the Public Law Project echoes this:

‘There is substantial evidence that the project contributes significantly to improved understanding, improved relationships with statutory bodies, continuing benefits to service users and improved ability to support other organisations on Compact and public law issues. There is evidence that the project is highly effective in supporting organisations to resolve issues or disputes, with about three-quarters of survey respondents stating that they were able to influence outcomes..... Long term benefits of the service include improvement in relationships with public bodies, increased knowledge, skill and confidence to challenge in the future, improved practices of public bodies and continuing provision of services.’⁵

There also appear to be prospects for significant benefits resulting from activities to support better use of the law and human rights by the voluntary sector for strengthening the use of law and human rights itself. An evaluation for Atlantic Philanthropies of the impact of ‘Public Interest Litigation’ in South Africa concluded that:

‘the history of social change has proven many times over that a single action strategy – whether litigation on its own, or activism on its own, will always fail.’

It also concluded that:

‘for public interest litigation to achieve maximum success in advancing social change and achieving social mobilisation, it must take place in combination with three other strategies. These are: Conducting public information campaigns to achieve rights awareness; Providing advice and assistance to persons in claiming their rights; Making use of social

⁵ Needham, J (2011) - Formal evaluation of ‘Empowering the Voluntary Sector’

mobilisation and advocacy to ensure that communities are actively involved in asserting rights inside and outside the legal environment.’⁶

Discussion with those involved in legal advice has revealed increased emphasis on outreach and on re-situating legal support in the context of wider advocacy and social change activities. This has in part been driven by the reforms to legal aid, reductions in funding available for legal advice and the consequent need to locate new sources of relevance and funding. It nevertheless would appear, where it is happening, to both strengthen the voluntary organisations with which legal specialists/advisers are working, and the ability of legal specialists/advisers to deliver support and as already outlined above, to act in a way that uses the law to prevent costly litigation. One prominent interviewee from the legal advice sector even commented that the previous legal aid system had perhaps proven to be a disincentive to such outreach and ‘upstream’ action. They suggested that such a model of embedding the law in wider advocacy and social change offers a generally better way to ensure that the most marginalised and vulnerable benefit optimally from the effective use of the law.

3.2 By protecting and supporting voluntary organisations to assert their independence

The broad UK voluntary sector appears rarely to conceive of itself or to publicly position itself as in the business of promoting and defending human rights, nor does it typically employ the law as a tool for change. As outlined above, there are undoubtedly many (albeit undesirable and unfortunate) reasons for this. Nevertheless, it could be argued that at the same time the voluntary sector has failed to recognise and harness the valuable benefits that might accrue from doing so. In particular, the recognition of human rights as a charitable purpose in its own right in 2002 and the Charity Commission’s related guidance which provides considerable clarity regarding the actions and activities that are deemed lawful within the broad ambit of ‘promoting human rights.’ These include activities that are presently being contested, such as engagement with the political process and the law, commenting on legislative proposals, promoting ‘awareness of human rights issues by distributing material which does not present both sides of the argument but simply promotes its own point of view’ and promoting popular support for human rights.⁷ That is to say, more explicit engagement with human rights provides a way for the voluntary sector to protect and assert its independence.

⁶ Atlantic Philanthropies (2009) – Strategic Evaluation of Public Interest Litigation in South Africa

⁷ Charity Commission (2005) The Promotion of Human Rights

Interestingly, the central role of civil society in promoting and defending human rights is strongly recognised in British foreign policy. On International Human Rights Day 2014 Foreign Secretary, Philip Hammond said:

‘On Human Rights day, we call on governments around the world to do more to foster the role of civil society in promoting and defending Human Rights. States with strong civil societies are more stable, more prosperous and better neighbours. Civil society continues to play a crucial role in protecting and promoting human rights, and allowing citizens to hold their governments to account.’⁸

Foreign Office Minister Baroness Anelay went on to emphasise the importance of protecting independence in this context and in particular to look at how:

‘the UK can help stem the tide of laws and procedures, in many parts of the world, which portray civil society as a threat.’⁹

Of course the governments foreign policy position appears somewhat at odds with developments and the tone of political discourse regarding the role of the voluntary sector, the law and human rights domestically.

A number of interviewees suggested that better use of the law generally overall offers opportunities for the voluntary sector to establish, consolidate and convey its independence. An evaluation of the Empowering the Voluntary Sector programme concluded that:

‘The project is seen as helping to redress the power imbalance between public bodies and VCOs, both in the use of legal frameworks and the support of external (national) bodies. The potential for litigation in particular often results in a shift in power.’¹⁰

Moreover, better use of the law offers ways for the voluntary sector to defend its role and funding. For example, a central motivation lying behind the Women’s Resource Centre’s work to promote understanding of equality and human rights law has been requests for assistance from grassroots women’s organisations facing closure as local councils cut funding to specialist services for women. Evaluation of the Empowering the Voluntary Sector programme found that:

⁸ Foreign and Commonwealth Office, (December 10 2014) ‘UK marks UN Human Rights Day by reaffirming the importance of civil society for Human Rights worldwide’

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Op. cit

‘Without the project it is likely that hundreds of thousands of pounds would have been lost to the sector with many thousands of services users affected by loss of services.’¹¹

It is important to note however that some interviewees highlighted that the introduction of law and human rights into interactions between the voluntary sector and public bodies sometimes risked closing down existing fruitful channels of communication and cooperation, potentially weakening rather than enhancing some productive relationships.

3.3 By helping voluntary organisations to define and articulate their purpose and mission

Related to independence, some interviewees suggested that at a time when the role and purpose of the voluntary sector is under intense scrutiny – especially in relation to its right to hold government and public bodies to account – that ‘human rights’ provided a way for voluntary organisations to usefully recast or reframe their purpose and mission. That is, some voluntary organisations might consider either revising their charitable objects or describing their mission as the being in the defence or promotion of human rights. Few presently do - a 2007 report the Charity Commission found that:

‘Just 206 charities have registered with charitable purposes directly involving human rights issues, a tiny number representing just 0.1% of all registered charities.’¹²

Doing so also offers potential benefits in addressing the stigma and misrecognition of disadvantaged groups and the sense of status among those groups themselves. This seems particularly pertinent at a time when issues such as poverty and unemployment are increasingly characterised as consequences of individual personal failure. For example, one interviewee suggested there was a widespread view among young people that the primary function of the law was to punish them rather than to protect them. The ‘Just Rights’ manifesto aims to address this, rooting its demands for fair access to services and support for young people in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.¹³ In doing so, it helps shift the focus from ‘human deficits’ (young people are the problem) to ‘human rights’ (young people’s situation demands action by government and wider society). The women’s rights organisation the Women’s Resource Centre (WRC) similarly explained how a human rights frame, and in particular the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, helped shift

¹¹ Op. cit

¹² Charity Commission (2008) Charities Working in the Field of Human Rights

¹³ Just Rights (2014) ‘Make our rights a reality’

focus from 'seeking favours' to demanding that recognised rights are realised in practice. Moreover, it provided a common framework through which WRC is able to work grassroots women's organisations.

BRAP, based in the West Midlands, was established as a race equality organisation but over time increasingly became engaged in matters concerning other aspects of people's identities such as gender, disability and sexual orientation. In seeking a more coherent framework to think about inequality and how to deal with it, both for their own purpose and in the context of the services they provide to others including public bodies, the organisation began to focus on human rights. As the organisation's website explains:

'Because restrictive equality 'categories' frequently separate people and deny our shared humanity, we use human rights principles to help understand how decisions about 'entitlement' can be just and proportionate, while also recognising the complexity of the human condition.'

The organisation has developed its own human rights based approach to equality, allowing it to stitch together a range of belief systems and ideas and to underpin these with a credible and comprehensive framework of domestic and international human rights law.

4. In what different ways are voluntary organisations making better use of the law and human rights?

There are numerous ways that the voluntary sector can and indeed is creatively using the law and human rights. This section provides example of promising practice from the field.

4.1 Creating bridges and fostering collaboration between the legal and voluntary sectors

Mutual interest between voluntary organisations and those practicing public law has led to models of productive engagement and collaboration.

Networking the legal and non-legal voluntary sector together

The Disabled and Deaf People's Legal Network London (DDLN) is facilitated by Inclusion London and aims to bring together Deaf and Disabled People's Organisations (DDPOs) and lawyers to network, raise understanding of the legal system, legislation, case law and policy that relates to the quality of life, rights and inclusion of Deaf and disabled people. Its specific aims are to:

- create a forum for disseminating legal information of both individual / strategic importance. Explore the implications of case law for DDPOs advising, representing and advocating for disabled people.
- help DDPOS identify potential legal challenges in time and access legal advice
- help identify relevant evidence to strengthen existing cases.
- build DDPOs legal knowledge and skills so they can apply it in their work
- Help improve access to lawyers in spite of the difficulties with legal aid

The network meets quarterly, with the agenda set by DDPOs and covering topics such as social care, inclusive education, hate crime and access to goods and services. Around 30-40 lawyers and campaigners attend the meetings and both have opportunities to speak. The meetings also include a ‘speed-dating’ element whereby DDPOs enjoy a unstructured opportunity to talk to a lawyer. The meetings count towards Continuous Professional Development points for the lawyers attending.

Embedding legal advice in voluntary organisation delivery

Reaching out to young undocumented migrants

Coventry Law Centre’s (CLC) growing recognition of the situation of young undocumented migrants in the city coincided with a radical shift in the landscape in which law centres were operating. The reforms to civil legal aid, economic recession and cuts to public spending created major challenges. CLC recognised its own strengths lay in its independence and that the rules by which it operated enabled it to build trust with its clients. However, it also recognised that it needed to find new ways to get closer to its clients and into the communities in which they lived. It also realised that it needed to offer support that took account of the full picture of people’s lives and which therefore provided more comprehensive and sustainable solutions than only addressing immigration status. CLC developed a partnership with Grapevine and together they have developed and implemented a range of methods, including with other voluntary sector partners, to proactively reach young undocumented migrants to provide legal advice.¹⁴

4.2 Using the law and human rights in the context of ‘early action’ and prevention

¹⁴ For further details, see: Learning Lab Report – a quick deep dive into our model for supporting young undocumented migrants: <http://covlaw.org.uk/YMR/lab.html>

As discussed above, there is evidence that engagement with the law and human rights can play a preventive role in helping to resolve social problems. In this sense, engaging with the law and human rights provides a form of early-action. Doing so might additionally have the benefit of exposing the false economy of undermining access to the law for marginalised groups and the organisations representing them.

Improving standards of care

BRAP, an equalities organisation based in the West Midlands, were commissioned by MacMillan Cancer to advise on how to address inequalities experienced by cancer patients, with the support of a high level advisory group including the Department for Health and the Care Quality Commission.

In line with its organisational ethos and values, BRAP promoted the idea of employing human rights as framework to identify necessary behavioural changes at different stages of a patient's journey through cancer services. Beginning with action to improve awareness and understanding of human rights among the project participants, the organisation employed international human rights standards and case law to frame discussion with over 300 with patients, staff and managers about the chief things they considered to be going wrong and to explore how they could be put right. The issues identified have been described by MacMillan as 'moments that matter' to people affected by cancer and healthcare staff. The project found that while patients find it hard to define 'dignity' or 'respect', they are nonetheless very aware of behaviours that signify their opposite. For example, in respect the right to private and family life people emphasised the importance of maintaining their identity and that staff respecting the name that they chose to be addressed by was key to this. The benefits of such respect accumulate through the pathway.

Through this process a series of behavioural standards were developed, by patients, carers and staff, for the Cancer Care Pathway. As MacMillan says of the standard:

'...rather than thinking about how to make improvements for specific groups, the Macmillan Values Based Standard suggests that 'difference' is the norm and that care must respond to the needs of each individual patient.'

The 'values based standard' is now recommended as best practice in the National Cancer Reform Strategy and has been implemented by numerous health trusts.¹⁵

Making the case for legal advice to improve mental health

A study commissioned by Youth Access and conducted by University College London 'Health Inequality and Access to Justice – Young People, Mental Health and Legal Issues' (June 2015) found that young people who experienced 'everyday' social welfare legal problems (e.g. concerning debt, benefits, housing or employment) were five times more likely to report mental health problems. It has determined that social welfare legal problems are a clear predictor of mental health problems, with longitudinal data showing that young people's mental health deteriorated as new social welfare legal problems emerged.

Youth Access is seeking to position legal advice as a preventive service, estimating that huge savings could be made to the NHS budget through smarter investment. It is using the research to argue that Clinical Commissioning Groups should invest in legal advice to young people.

4.3 Inspiring, educating and empowering others to use the law and human rights

As noted in section 2, a significant obstacle to voluntary organisations making better use of the law and human rights is their lack of knowledge and confidence, coupled with a perception that these are elite and specialist areas. Activities are required that demystify the law and human rights, enable organisations to make sense of the potential of human rights in the context of their own work, to understand how to use the law and human rights and where to go for help.

Creating tools for voluntary organisations to use equality and human rights

Responding to requests from its grassroots members for support in their dealings with local councils, a number of which were employing equality law to justify cuts to specialist services, the Women's Resource Centre (WRC) has developed on-line tools for equality and human rights: 'Women making a chance – tools for equality and human rights'.¹⁶

¹⁵ The Values Based Standard can be downloaded here:
http://www.macmillan.org.uk/Aboutus/WhatWeDo/Inclusion/InclusionProgramme/InclusionProjects.aspx#DynamicJumpMenuManager_2_Anchor_1

¹⁶ The toolkit can be accessed at: toolsforrights@wrc.org.uk

Central to the approach taken by WRC is the insight that it is important not just to know the law, but critically how to utilize it. Hence the toolkit is designed to offer accessible information with a gender focus, rooting it in their experience of women's organisations. Moreover, the resource includes interactive features designed to enable over time the development by users of a community of learning, peer support and resource sharing, including webinars and a discussion forum. WRC hope that in time this feature will also enable bridges to be built between the non-legal voluntary sector and law practitioners.

The online resource is broken into learning modules, beginning with a general overview of equality and human rights principles and law and the historic struggles lying behind them. It will go on to provide learning sessions on the Equality Act 2010, Human Rights Act 1998 and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The final module concerns using the law to influence decisions and to win change. Accompanying the on-line resource is an introductory two hour face to face workshop.

Capacity building voluntary organisations to use the Human Rights Act

As part of its Third Sector Advocacy Programme, the British Institute for Human Rights supported the independent mental health charity Mind Brighton and Hove to develop its knowledge and capacity regarding human rights.

Through BIHR's human rights capacity building model, BIHR seeks to empower staff, service-users and the wider community with the knowledge and skills to use the Human Rights Act to advocate for better treatment.

Feedback from the work with Mind Brighton and Hove includes this quote from a Community Advocate:

“being able to state what the client's human rights are, with knowledge and authority, lent more weight to the complaint, rather than simply stating that the treatment was unfair or cruel”.

4.4 Employing strategic litigation in context of campaigning

Voluntary organisations typically use a range of methods to campaign for social change, or to challenge decisions that they believe will adversely affect the constituencies or causes they support. Strategic litigation, in combination with other methods such as research, parliamentary engagement and communications, can make a powerful contribution to campaigns.

Challenging government plans to withdraw support for disabled people

The Disabled and Deaf People's Legal Network London (see 4.2) was central to a High Court case concerning the closure by the government of the Independent Living Fund (ILF). Through the network ILF users were linked up with solicitors, evidence used in court was captured and collated and the legal action was situated within a wider framework of political and public campaigning. Although the case was unsuccessful in preventing closure of the ILF, it and a previous ruling established important points of principle regarding the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Public Sector Equality Duty. Moreover it helped considerably in raising awareness of the government's plans and their implications through widespread media coverage and in securing commitment by government to monitor implementation of the closure.

Protecting specialist services for black women

Southall Black Sisters (SBS) - a specialist provider of domestic violence services to black and minority women in Ealing - mounted a successful legal challenge in 2008 when Ealing Council threatened to withdraw funding under the guise of developing a single generic service for domestic violence for all women in the borough. The Council had sought to justify its decision on the grounds of 'equality', 'cohesion' and 'diversity'. It argued that the very existence of groups like SBS - the name and constitution - was unlawful under the Race Relations Act because it excluded women in the majority community.

The legal challenge succeeded in revealing that the Council had deliberately misconstrued and failed to have proper regard to its duties under the equalities legislation, in particular, the Race Relations Act (now replaced by the Equality Act 2010), in reaching its decision.

SBS said of the judgment:

"This victory is important for all grassroots specialist organisations that are faced with or likely to face cuts in their funding on the spurious grounds of 'cohesion' and 'equality'. Ealing Council has tried to portray us an organisation opposed to the need for all women in the borough to have a domestic violence service. This is far from the reality. We will continue to struggle for the right of all women to have effective protection from domestic violence but this also means struggling for the rights of the most vulnerable women in our society who due to cultural and religious pressures and racism need their own organisations to ensure that their voices are heard"

4.5 Holding the government to account on human rights

In ratifying various UN Human Rights Treaties the UK government has given its 'consent to be bound' by international law and has agreed for the UK to be subject to examination by treaty monitoring bodies – Committees of experts drawn from across the world that assess compliance by States with the obligations arising from the treaties.¹⁷ Following examination, the treaty bodies make concluding observations and recommendations which government is expected to respond to and act upon. To conduct their examinations the treaty bodies welcome independent submissions from civil society, including written submissions and attendance at the examinations that take place at the Office for the High Commissioner on Human Rights in Geneva, Switzerland.

Monitoring children's rights

The Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE) has for many years led the voluntary sector's work to promote and monitor implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child by the government.

CRAE has utilised the opportunity of the upcoming examination of the UK by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child to strive to reach out, engage and involve voluntary organisations concerned with children beyond those that had historically focused on human rights. The process has involved awareness raising and capacity building, in addition to close collaboration in gathering evidence and identifying the chief priorities to bring to the Committee's attention regarding UK children's rights. Working thematically on issues such as education, health, criminal justice, a series of working groups chaired by experts drafted chapters of CRAE's alternative civil society report to the UN Committee. The final report was endorsed by 76 organisations.

5. Conclusion

There are many opportunities and advantages for voluntary organisations to make better use of the law and human rights. Platforms for effective engagement between the voluntary and legal sectors, capacity building activities, research

¹⁷ The UK has ratified the Convention on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention Against Torture, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Convention on the Elimination of Race Discrimination, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

and evaluation and the dissemination of good practices – as well as funding – are key to supporting voluntary organisations to recognise these opportunities and to realise the advantages.

Annex 1 - Literature reviewed

Charities Working in the Field of Human Rights – Charity Commission 2008

Formal evaluation of ‘Empowering the Voluntary Sector’ (November 2011)
Needham, J

Giving hope and dignity to the poor - The story of ProBono.Org (2009) Atlantic
Philanthropies

Human Rights and Equality in the Voluntary Sector (December 2010)
EHRC/BIHR/EDF

Independence Undervalued: the Voluntary Sector in 2014 (2014) Panel on the
independence of the Voluntary Sector

Independent evaluation of the strategic legal fund for vulnerable young migrants
(May 2014)

Promoting human rights – Charity Commission 2005

‘Social Welfare Advice and Early Action (2013) Randall, J for Baring Foundation

Staying Objective (http://www.charitytimes.com/pages/ct_features/apr-may07/text_features/ct_apr-may07_feature3_staying_objective.htm) Charity
Times

Strategic Evaluation of Public Interest Litigation in South Africa (2009) Atlantic
Philanthropies

Tackling the advice deficit – A strategy for access to advice and legal support on
social welfare law in England and Wales (2014) Low Commission

Annex 2 – list of interviewees & contributors

Richard Hawkes, (ex) Chief Executive, Scope

Oonagh Aitkin, Chief Executive, CSV

Amanda Ariss, Director, Equality and Diversity Forum

Audrey Lugwig, Suffolk Race Equality Council

Angela Patrick, Justice

Rachel Zaltsman, Equality and Human Rights Commission

Jo Hickman, Public Law Project

Terry Perkins and Cat Barton, NAVCA

Matthew Smerdon, Legal Education Foundation

Jake Lee, Unbound Philanthropy

Rachel Takens-Milne, Trust for London

James Logan, Oak Foundation

Catherine Stancey, Lankelly Chase

James Kenrick, Youth Access

Stephen Bowen, British Institute for Human Rights

Helen Wildbore, British Institute for Human Rights

Sue Bent, Chief Executive, Coventry Law Centre

Matthew Evans, Aire Centre

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Annex 3 – about the author

Neil Crowther is an independent consultant specialising in equality, human rights and social change. His clients include government bodies, NGO's and donors in the UK, Europe and Internationally. He is also Director of the Thomas Paine Initiative, a grant-making organisation which aims to foster greater support for human rights in the UK. Neil has a particular interest in the rights of disabled people and in addition to his consultancy work in this area he is a Trustee of the organisation CHANGE which works to promote the human rights of people with a learning disability. He previously led the Equality and Human Rights Commission's work on human rights and disability rights and before that was Head of Policy at the Disability Rights Commission.