

Presentation by Andrew Plant to the Inclusive New Lanark Conference May 2012: Research as a Signpost to the Heart – making Camphill more accessible to the wider world.

I would like you to imagine how an intentional community such as Camphill starts off. In a rather simplistic and generalised way, we can say that intentional communities tend to start off small and cohesive, with a great amount of vision, energy, with few resources but much hard work and dedication. When they first begin communities tend to be separate from the world – in terms of their physical location, their distinctive culture and also in terms of their belief systems. They focus on their own concerns and deliberately set themselves apart from and reject the world outside.

Later as communities evolve and develop, they move through different phases; phases of organisation and individualisation. In the process, communities begin to turn their attention to the world beyond their boundaries. They do this partly because they have to develop some form of connection in order to survive and partly because they begin to feel a social conscience - a responsibility to engage with and promote issues that are fundamental to their ideas and their work; issues to do with social justice, with peace and co-operation, issues to do with environmental and ecological concerns. Over time communities tend to develop an awareness of their responsibility to share, to learn and to collaborate beyond their boundaries as they strive to create a better world.

This touches on the question of what communities are for. Are communities for the benefit of their members or are they for the world? Obviously, they are for both. Communities are both places of retreat and places of mission and service. They are places for people to escape to from a society that they feel they do not fit in with; places where they can live out their ideals. But they are also places from which to serve the world. Communities have been described as 'social laboratories'; places in which people can develop new forms of social relationships; new and better ways of living together; new forms of equality and co-operation; new forms of social renewal.

Over time, as communities evolve, the walls they set up around themselves can begin to become bridges - bridges over which they can engage with the world. Boundaries can become not just places of protection but also places where new ideas can be shared.

Despite the fact that the early Camphill communities were indeed isolated, nonetheless they had to engage with society and the state through the very fact that they provided education, care, support and work for people with learning disabilities.

Camphill communities have to be accountable to society for the way in which they look after vulnerable people and the way in which they use the money that they are paid to do this. On hand of this there has been a great amount of regulations, requirements and inspections from all sorts of different external bodies. There has been the need for training, professional development and management and the need to learn new skills, new knowledge and new practices. I would suggest that the Camphill communities could only develop as they have because they have been directly influenced by the principles and practices of contemporary modern day education and social care - ideas and practices that they would have not have developed so quickly or at all without such external influence.

The emphasis in Camphill communities has always been on community. Now the emphasis is turning towards promoting the rights, needs and wishes of the individual - not just the individual pupil or resident but also the individual co-worker. As we know, modern day community is now about finding a healthy and sustainable balance between the individual and community.

It has been said that a society can be judged by the way in which it treats its most vulnerable members. During the course of the seventy years that Camphill has been creating inclusive communities, society has increasingly taken responsibility for the welfare of those people who need more support - in order to protect them from harm, from inequality and discrimination. Throughout Britain, and especially in Scotland, there have been many Acts of Parliament and a great deal of legislation and guidelines that promote the rights of people with disabilities.

In this process, the state approach to care and support has turned away from separation, away from institutional care and what is termed 'congregate care' and is now based on concepts of 'normalisation', 'inclusion' and 'care in the community'. In the process care and support in inclusive communities such as Camphill has fallen out of favour.

Yet we know that for some people sharing life in a community is a richly rewarding experience. People need to be able to have the choice to live in a community if this is what they feel they want and if meets their needs. For this reason, Camphill Scotland has been active in trying to set out the case for choice and diversity; that people should be allowed to choose where they want to live from a range of options - a range of options that includes choosing to live in a community like Camphill. Camphill Scotland is an association of all the Camphill communities in Scotland that has been working for many years to talk to government, to agencies, and to make the case for Camphill communities as settings for education, social care and for individualised support. Camphill Scotland also advises communities how best to integrate the increasing number of new laws, new requirements, new care and support principles and new funding systems. At the moment, for example, Camphill Scotland is working with the Camphill communities to assess the challenges and opportunities of the introduction of Self-Directed Support and to be active in responding to opportunities to contribute to the national debate as the Bill passes through Parliament.

As Camphill Scotland - and other groups and individuals - become more engaged in talking to the world of professionals, funders, policy makers and regulators, and as Camphill works more and more in partnership with other organisations, there is a growing realisation that we have to become better at explaining what we do and how we do it - to explain what life is like in a Camphill community and to explain the strange ideas and terms in anthroposophy so that they do not just put people off. Recently there have been situations that show that there is still a lingering image in the minds of some people that Camphill is a kind of sinister cult or a hippie commune.

We in Camphill **have** got better at lots of things. We have become better at internal governance, professional development, external accountability and public relations. There are Camphill shops and cafes that encourage the public to come and see what goes on in a Camphill community.

There are several innovative outreach projects that reach out beyond the traditional Camphill boundaries. The Bachelor of Arts in Social Pedagogy (BASP) is a degree level training course run in conjunction with the Camphill communities and the University of Aberdeen.

The Scottish communities and Camphill Scotland have put on several conferences for professionals. A book called 'Discovering Camphill' edited by Robin Jackson, came out last year that tries to make it easier for people to understand what Camphill is about. These are just a few examples of the ways that Camphill is going forward and developing dialogue and collaboration with the world. There is no doubt that we in Camphill have got better at partnership working and collaboration with organisations and professional bodies outside our communities.

But there is still a lot to do. We need to develop more confidence in making our case. We need to find a better way of sharing our insights and experience. We need to find a new language that will help us to communicate better with society, with the state and with a whole range of bodies that influence what we can do and how we can do it.

And this is where the whole area of research and especially the Camphill Scotland Research Group comes in. Published research can demonstrate in concrete terms the outcomes and benefits of the Camphill communities in the language that professionals can relate to and that people can understand. Research can translate the work of the heart and the hands into the language of the head.

There have been some noticeable pieces of research on Camphill over the recent years;

In 2004 Roy Brown published a paper called: 'Assessing quality of life in Camphill communities Aberdeen and the proposed AWPR' which made the case why the proposed new Aberdeen peripheral road should not be built right between two of the Aberdeen Camphill communities.

In 2006 John Swinton from Aberdeen University and Aileen Falconer published their research called 'Assessing the spiritual well-being of people living and working within the Aberdeen Camphill Communities'. Some of you might remember that Aileen gave a presentation of this research at a previous New Lanark Conference.

Several Camphill co-workers and people close to Camphill have produced their research theses as part of a post graduate university course.

And in 2009 we formed the Camphill Scotland Research Group and Professor Steve Baron became the part-time Research Facilitator. We started out enthusiastically with a roadshow in each of the Scottish Camphill communities in order to assess what is happening in the realm of research and what needs to happen. Our first finding was that, despite some suggestions of what research could be done, in general people are not excited about, or even interested in conducting research. That was a bit disappointing. Nonetheless we held a research conference at the end of 2010 and decided that the first piece of work should be something relatively quick and something that would have immediate results in the hope that this might galvanise interest and support for further research.

Steve Baron has recently completed the 'Quality Assessments of the Camphill Communities'. This was done by comparing statistically the gradings awarded by the Care Inspectorate to all the Camphill communities in Scotland as compared to those awarded to a random sample of 250 other service providers throughout Scotland.

There are four categories of service providers - Camphill providers; other voluntary sector providers; local authority providers and the private/commercial sector. The gradings are based on an assessment of four quality criteria, which are 'Care and Support'; 'Environment'; 'Staffing' and 'Management and Leadership'.

The research showed that Camphill communities as a whole have the highest gradings on all four criteria, along with other charities. Next are the local authority providers followed by the commercial providers. The Camphill communities stood out from all other providers in relation to 'Staffing' and 'Management and Leadership' ¹. Briefing Papers on these findings will soon be circulated to co-workers and Board members; parents and carers and professional colleagues. The full findings will be on the Camphill Scotland website².

In the opening address to this New Lanark conference, Annie Gunner-Logan of the Coalition of Care and Support Providers Scotland (CCPS) made the point that funding cuts are inevitable for social services. However, she said that it is only fair that these cuts should fall on providers who cannot show that their work is of benefit to the people they support. Through research such as this, this is exactly what we can now begin to show – that the Camphill communities in Scotland provide the best level of services as demonstrated by external inspections.

Following on from this, the Research Group plans to undertake a more extensive piece of research that will examine and define the unique qualities claimed by Camphill communities - qualities it is believed that make them such effective settings for education, care and support³.

We are also working on compiling a database of all articles and publications to do with Camphill. This will eventually go onto the Camphill Scotland website – along with all other material from the Research Group.

Research comes in many forms. It might be academic research, or professional research. It might also be what is called 'practitioner research' – research which is carried out by people living and working in the communities. As the Camphill communities move forward into increasingly challenging times, we will have a greater need of research in one form or another

The Camphill Scotland Research Group is hoping to develop research capacity in and among the Camphill communities and to encourage people to take up research, commission research and to support research endeavours as part of the range of Camphill activities. We will do this in the belief that research is the basis for developing a well-informed and forward-looking strategy and is a crucial factor in enabling the Camphill communities to have an informed dialogue with society and the state. We believe that research has an important role to play in promoting the future sustainability of Camphill communities.

¹ Since the New Lanark Conference re-analysis of the data has shown that Camphill Communities are also statistically significantly different from all other providers in terms of the 'Environment' created.

² These Research Briefings are now circulated and the full research Report is on the Camphill Scotland website.

³ This research is now under way