

IN THE BEGINNING

As a result of a National conference concerning child employment, organised by the Low Pay Unit, in the autumn of 1994, officers from 13 education welfare and social work services, representing 6 established local child employment networks, met in London to form the National Child Employment Network (NCEN).

At that time there was growing concern amongst professionals regarding the safe and legitimate employment of school aged children. With the recent (1994) EC Directive on the Protection of Young People at Work and the eagerly(??) awaited consultation document to be circulated by the Department of Health, which included new model byelaws, it meant that all LEA's would have to consider child employment issues within the next 12 months.

The Aims of the Network at that time was:-

- To offer Mutual Support,
- Communication,
- Child Protection,
- Monitoring and evaluating current legislation,
- Policy and Good Practice,
- Education and Training.

The first meeting of the NCEN took place at The Woodlands Centre, Sanda Croft, Chelmsley Wood, Solihull, on Tuesday 18 July 1995.

At that meeting a draft constitution for the NCEN, with amendments, was agreed as was an 'Action Plan' for the next 12 months. The 'Action Plan' included:-

- (NCEN) to continue to influence change
- Catalogue archive and distribute to local networks
- Develop a unified approach to regulation and enforcement across the country
- Put pressure on LEA's to fulfil their legal obligations
- Promote the existence of the NCEN
- Continue to pressure the Dept of Health to issue the consultation paper re: the EC Directive
- Form a Special Interest Group (SIG) to set out aims, objectives and a statement of intent, compatible with the constitution and including a code of practice for members and affiliated organisations.

The brief of the SIG was agreed as:

- To produce a policy document for the use of LEA's as an information document and members to raise the profile of the NCEN and child employment. Content to include; a history of child employment, the statutory requirements, an outline of the current situation.

The document should;

- Include information
- Raise awareness
- Be non-political but refer to the aim of the NCEN to promote change
- Contain a framework for a minimum standard of practice
- Include a proposed code of practice
- Include reference to links with child protection issues
- Include reference to links with educational issues
- Make reference to links between the NCEN and local networks.

It was not until the AGM of the NCEN held on Monday 8th July 1996 that the NCEN would also address issues surrounding children in entertainment.

I reproduce in full, the report to the AGM from the, then, chair, John Terry;

“Child employment continues largely unregulated. The EC Directive and Dept, of Health model bye-laws are still not in place a year after our first meeting and according to Robin Feline (DoH) are unlikely to be before the Spring of 1997 at the earliest. This will be too late for LEA budgetary cycles for 1997/98. They appear to have disappeared in the corridors of Whitehall. What has the NCEN achieved in the last 12 months? It is beginning to be known in LEA's thanks to the public relations work by members and the Public Relations Officer. Education Welfare/ Education Social Work Services continue to be seen as a “cinderella service” by many authorities and child employment as a “second cousin by marriage”. We look forward to a second year in which current plans will need to be actioned and achievements made”.

Sound familiar???????????????

Paul Kirkman
PR NNCEE.
12/01/2010.