

GMWRAG QUESTIONNAIRE 1992

Listed below are all 32 replies to the question:

"Which changes or directions are most important for GMWRAG now?"

1. To be less formal and exclusive. Decide what audience you want because voluntary sector should perhaps organise separately from a local authority structured organisation. I stopped going, like a lot of others in the voluntary sector, because like national Welfare Rights Officers Group, it was a matter of sitting through a long meeting of male egos scoring points on obscure matters. Maybe GMWRAG should just be an open 'free for all' for men only.
2. Organisation dominated by male local authority welfare rights officers; other advisers and community groups should be included in GMWRAG activities. Setting up of a women only GMWRAG meeting and training.
3. More organisational structure, regular venue, regular date. Chairperson - can be rotating but needs to be known contact point. More training - possibly co-ordinated by training officer, through training group. Media officer - more 'on the ball' for changes in legislation or local scene. Structured introduction of 'faces', maybe by 'badges' or agenda slot. More speakers, breakdown of large meeting into workshops - sometimes.
4. They must clarify what their role is, based on realistic expectations. If they want to be more active - they have to move to some sort of executive/full council structure.

It is perfectly OK to be a talking shop - this is a useful function - but this and its limitations have to be accepted.

- 5(a) Sending out agendas in advance of meetings so that people can arrange to attend. They are always too late.
- (b) Stopping the in-group, Welfare Rights Officer dominated and use of jargon atmosphere.
- (c) The male welfare rights officers need to look hard at their arrogant attitudes which are often sexist and assume no-one else does representation or complex work.
6. One of GMWRAG's main functions is as an information exchange point, somewhere for people to share their successes, ideas etc. This should be done in as accessible a way as possible. BUT - there is an unavoidable inequality here - between the most experienced or knowledgeable ("I don't like expert") and the newcomer. The task is to find a way of making knowledge and experience accessible, and sharing it - which is actually very difficult - and not just to slap down the "experts" - although a certain amount of that might help! Clearer role for chairperson might help?
7. Keep organising to get the best training events and speakers on all Welfare Rights issues. Make the forum more accessible to small groups, newcomers and those blank faces who don't know what the issues being discussed are. Perhaps a people who like the sound of their own voice sub group?

8. GMWRAG is an invaluable source of information and training which can tap into the expertise and experience of many of its members. However, the meetings I believe are in danger of being a debating society for senior local government officers. I admit that I have found meetings somewhat perplexing and over bearing. I do not think that the approach of meetings at present encourages regular attendance by particularly new and less experienced, however no less hardworking advisers. Perhaps concerted efforts could be made in this direction.
9. I am not really qualified to comment on the above. However, it would be helpful if they could encourage participation by a wider/broader group of people to encourage sharing of information, expertise etc. To try and get away from the slightly "ELITIST" image, and to avoid duplication of effort amongst other agencies. A co-ordinated approach is what I think I mean, with as many agencies as possible.
10. Fewer meetings, more training (in house and external), Greater unified take up etc.
11. CHILD SUPPORT ACT
DLA/DWA
12. Permanent central meeting place - with known secretary and contact point.
13. Encouraging wider participation and making meeting less threatening to new advisers.
14. If it is to be more effective it would need more commitment from member organisations.
15. To set up a Women's GMWRAG.
16. I have found that working on my own as opposed to a Welfare Rights team an isolating experience. The GMWRAG meetings are often quite difficult as people seem to know each other quite well, so it is often difficult to make contacts.
17. I suspect you are seen very much as a group for Welfare Rights Officers (or aspiring ones). As a part time CAB Manager something needs to be very worthwhile to merit the time a meeting takes - even though I may not make it to meetings information is welcome especially on benefits issues.
18. More disciplined distribution of information geared toward volunteers more.
19. There ought to be centralised benefit posters and leaflets with pooled cost similar to the AIDS/GP's leaflets.

20. Not sure!
It may be helpful for you to know why I do not attend - difficulty (and time) in travelling to distant venues; short notice when the venue is local.
21. Much more could be done on sharing information and resources on take-up and on good practice issues.

Also, recent meetings have shown that GMWRAG has more success when it has useful/topical/interesting outside speakers at its meetings.
22. Encouraging participation by people other than principal WROS,
Avoiding jargon,
Increasing training for all.

23. GMWRAG needs to work on seemingly elitist attitude especially with regard to Equal Opportunities.
24. Not being able to answer 10, it follows that I cannot answer this question either. However, I have attended the occasional GMWRAG meeting/training course and have found them useful, but as I work part time it is difficult to spare the time to attend meetings on a regular basis. I am also fairly new to the Welfare Rights game and would find copies of minutes of all meetings useful. There must be many others in my position who can only be mainly "mailing list" members.
25. All information and benefits information I have found helpful, details re GMWRAG meetings has come late, therefore not enabling us to organise a representative. It is usually just pressure of job that dictates non-attendance, I think there should be a better mixed group attending ie Local Authority; Voluntary Sector; Statutory agencies. But, I am grateful for all that attend and inform us - it would be better to have a stronger network outside our own Local Authority area, if only for consultancy and help and social policy.
26. It depends on what sort of membership you wish to attract. The meetings I have attended have been for experienced specialist welfare advisers. As Welfare Rights is only a small proportion of my job, I would be more interested in training courses and sessions.
27. - Anti-Poverty campaigning,
- being pro-active,
- widening the appeal to all advice givers.
28. - More speakers on specific issues,
- fixed venue,
- more 'pooling' of information on every take-up issue.
29. a) Fewer meetings and all at central point.
b) More work done in Sub Groups (eg Take-up and Hospital Workers Group good examples)
c) Use of HOST computers to exchange information.
30. I cannot express an opinion on question 10, as I do not attend meetings.
- I would like to see meetings on different days of the week as I cannot attend on a Friday, I would think this could be a valued point for part-time workers.
31. To continue campaigning.
32. I do not know. Since the Principal Welfare Rights Officers' Group was established that seems more relevant to my job. But I think it ought to continue.