

**Belinda Pratten and Rosie Chapman Associates**

**Biennial Evaluation of Sheila McKechnie Foundation  
2011**



**January 2012**

**Final Report**

## **Acknowledgements**

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## Biennial Evaluation of Sheila McKechnie Foundation 2011

### Executive Summary

1. This is the third biennial evaluation of the Sheila McKechnie Foundation (SMK). Our findings build on and are consistent with those of earlier evaluators: SMK continues to be a well-regarded organisation; indeed, one of the things that came across most strongly in the course of our work is the warmth that people have for SMK and its staff.

2. This report examines the impact that the organisation has had on those it works with, particularly award winners and participants on the Influencing Change programme. It also assesses the organisation's strengths and identifies potential vulnerabilities in a rapidly changing, and almost inevitably harsher, environment.

#### *Mission*

3. SMK was established in 2005 to 'help develop a new generation of campaigners who are tackling the root causes of injustice'. It describes itself as 'being entirely dedicated to helping campaigners create positive and lasting social change',<sup>1</sup> ie with a mission to support campaigning, rather than individual campaigns. This can be seen in the tremendous diversity of issues that award winners and trainees are campaigning on. The award system, for example, recognises people's potential to become effective 'agents of change', it is not an endorsement of any particular campaign. The same is true of the other programmes SMK runs, which are also designed primarily to build the capacity of individuals. Both Influencing Change and See Change are targeted at those who appear to be in a position to benefit most from the training on offer.

4. This places SMK in the unique position of being a second tier organisation that supports individuals. This may make it harder for it to explain its role and impact to a wider audience, including those in the funding community, although it is apparent that existing funders 'get it' and see this as a strength, for example enabling them to 'get through to the grass roots' and adding value to their other grants.

#### *SMKs USP*

5. There is a strong sense from these interviews that SMK's USP is its work with grassroots campaigners: individuals who have little or no funding or organisational support. A recurring theme is that SMK helps those who need it most, 'people whose voices don't normally get heard', and in so doing it 'fills a really important gap ... there isn't another way that those at the grass roots can get support.'

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.smk.org.uk/about-smk/>

6. This role is very much valued by alumni, external partners and funders alike. Any future changes to SMK's approach and offer should take this into account. However, it would require on-going external funding to be viable and to be able to subsidise campaigners with little or no resources, making it more difficult for SMK to become financially sustainable.

#### *Commitment to learning*

7. SMK is also very much a learning organisation. From interviews with staff and participants it is apparent that SMK actively encourages informal as well as formal feedback on its work and that this learning is fed back into the development of future programmes. This can be seen, for example, in changes made to the format and location of the residential weekend for award winners. Funders also identified improvements that had been made to their projects at the suggestion of SMK staff, learning from their experience of running the project and / or from other programmes. This suggests that a commitment to continuous improvement is part of the culture of the organisation.

8. It has also fully implemented a recommendation from the 2009 evaluation that it should improve the way it monitors and evaluates its work. New methods of managing information have been introduced, including quantitative pre- and post-training assessments; evaluation questionnaires; and interviews with award winners. This has provided SMK, and its funders, with stronger evidence of the impact of its work on individual participants, their campaigns and organisations.

#### *Programmes*

9. The Awards programme remains very much SMK's flagship. It is still the highest profile element of its work and the most intensive. However, since the last evaluation the Influencing Change programme has become much more established and this, together with See Change, Shout Out and the one-day campaign workshops, means that SMK now offers a range of support packages. It is evident that there is a close inter-relationship between the different programmes, for example, people who have attended Influencing Change or the campaign workshops have gone on to apply for awards and award finalists have benefited from Influencing Change.

10. Our evidence suggests that SMK offers a strong programme of quality support for campaigners that is highly valued by participants. As it has developed and extended its offer it has done so in ways that build on its strengths and expertise and enable the different elements to reinforce each other. This organic model of growth has enabled it to expand its offer using its very limited resources and capacity to best effect, although we question whether this is sustainable in the longer term.

#### *Relationships*

11. SMK, and especially the Chief Executive, has developed good relationships with its funders and is considered to be a 'trusted partner', both in terms of its expertise and its ability to deliver. There is also a degree of mutual benefit in these relationships, with funders benefiting from SMK's knowledge and reach to enhance the support they provide to their grantees.

12. Since the last evaluation, SMK has developed a vital regional presence, initially through the DCLG-funded regional campaign workshops and more recently through the Regional UK Campaigners (RUKC) programme. Those we spoke to were very

positive about this approach, as a model of good practice. SMK was also praised for the way it works with local and regional organisations, respecting local knowledge and skills and ‘not taking over.’

13. Yet there is limited capacity within the organisation to build on this: to develop relationships with new funders and partners or, indeed, with opinion-formers and others who can help SMK to raise its profile and increase the support (political, financial, moral) available to it. Developing such relationships is potentially time-consuming, but necessary, particularly in such a rapidly changing environment.

## **Recommendations**

The findings of this evaluation back the importance and timeliness of SMK’s current actions in conducting a full business review. As part of this we recommend that SMK:

- Invests time and resources in developmental activities, including building relationships with funders, partners and opinion formers, for example by:
  - re-evaluating its staffing mix, skills and numbers;
  - providing administrative and other support to the Chief Executive;
  - reviewing the role of the Board, for example taking account of the current skills audit.
- Builds on its existing strengths and synergies, for example by more explicitly aligning the awards with the influencing change programme and / or by developing the Oak Foundation model, providing a tailored programme of support to campaigners in specific sub-sectors.
- Builds on the cachet of the awards themselves, identifying new and innovative ways of promoting them to raise the profile of SMK and provide a showcase for campaigners.
- Continues to seek mutually beneficial relationships with grant-makers, particularly those interested in offering ‘grants-plus’ support, learning from and building on its relationships with current funders.
- Explores new ways of delivering programmes in partnership with other organisations, such as local or regional CVS’ or the Directory of Social Change, whereby they provide the logistical input and SMK provides the campaigning expertise.
- Makes greater use of the goodwill of award winners and other participants, for example using them as ambassadors to support bids for funding, to promote the value and role of campaigning, particularly at the grass-roots, as well as the value of SMK’s programmes.

# Biennial Evaluation of Sheila McKechnie Foundation 2011

## 1. Introduction

1.1 Following a tender exercise, Belinda Pratten and Rosie Chapman Associates were selected to carry out an independent evaluation of SMK, its quality and impact. SMK has a commitment to being externally and independently evaluated every two years to assess the quality and impact of its work. This evaluation therefore follows on from previous evaluations conducted in 2007 and 2009.

1.2 To assess what ultimate difference SMK makes, our work looked in depth at the quality and effectiveness of core programmes and particularly the difference that it makes to

- individuals, eg in terms of their campaigning ability and confidence, and the specific campaigns they are involved in, eg how they are managed, structured, connected;
- the wider strategic environment, including SMK's effectiveness at brokering relationships and building connections with other organisations and individuals; and
- the sustainability of SMK in terms of its organisational model, political positioning and funding.

1.3 This report examines the impact that it has had on those it works with, particularly award winners and participants on the Influencing Change programme. It also assesses the organisation's strengths and identifies potential vulnerabilities in a rapidly changing and almost inevitably harsher environment.

## 2. Methodology

2.1 There were two distinct elements to our methodology: desk research followed up by in-depth, structured interviews.

### *Desk Research*

2.2 As this was the third biennial review, we examined the previous evaluations carried out for SMK in 2007 and 2009, and we used these evaluations as a benchmark for assessing SMK's performance over time. We also spoke to Research as Evidence, who carried out the last evaluation of SMK in 2009.

2.3 The last evaluation made recommendations for enhancing SMK's monitoring arrangements, to include a process that measures 'distance' travelled' by those who receive support, as a result of their engagement with SMK. We examined this new performance information, alongside the organisation's other key monitoring information.

2.4 We also reviewed SMK's various publications, along with other internal and external evaluations and performance reporting it has commissioned or carried out.

As part of our literature review, we examined website information about SMK, and also information about the campaigning environment more generally.

*Structured Interviews*

2.5 The main focus of the research was a series of face-to-face and telephone in-depth structured interviews, which followed a discussion guide that was provided to interviewees in advance. The discussion guide was tailored for each category of interviewee. In one case, because of logistics, the interviewee supplied written answers to the questions posed in the discussion guide.

2.6 In discussion with SMK, we agreed to interview the following mix of groups and individuals. SMK provided the names of the organisation and individuals they wished us to contact:

<b>Category</b>	<b>Number of interviews</b>
Award Winners	5 (inc. 1 questionnaire)
Influencing Change participants	2
Regional partner	2
Other Partners/Stakeholders	2
Funders	3
SMK Trustees	3
SMK staff	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>

(We approached 22 people, and achieved 20 interviews.)

2.7 Because of the small number of respondents in each category we have not attributed every quote, unless there is value in doing so. The quotes themselves have been selected to illustrate points on which there was a broad consensus of opinion or to flag up an issue that may have a wider significance.

### 3. SMK's USP

3.1 All interviewees were asked what they thought SMK's USP is, what it did really well. The verdict was almost unanimous: its unique contribution is its support for grassroots campaigners, individuals who have little or no funding or organisational support:

*'SMK is filling a really important gap – there's nothing else like it; there isn't another way that people at the grass roots can get support.'*

*'Its USP is its ability to find the people doing interesting things at grass roots level ... It should not become more generic, that's where its value lies, providing tailored support and encouragement to first time campaigners or small organisations.'*

*'One really important thing it does is support small organisations.'*

*'It's about supporting new campaigns, and giving people the chance to run them. It's especially important for people whose voices don't normally get heard.'*

This aspect of its work was highly valued by all categories of respondent: alumni, funders and external partners. It is an important part of SMK's ethos, one which people would loathe to see change.

3.2 In these interviews, support for more professional approaches to campaigning was often tempered with caution against it becoming over-professionalised, 'the province of paid workers in well-funded organisations'. Respondents suggested that SMK currently had the balance right, pointing to the number of grassroots campaigners winning awards and the relatively low cost to participants (£100) of Influencing Change, as evidence of this. However, this is only possible because the course is funded by Trust for London.

3.3 The strength of views on this issue suggests that any future changes to SMKs approach and offer should take into account its continued ability to support the grassroots and reward potential rather than actual campaigns. However, such an approach requires on-going external funding to subsidise campaigners with little or no resources and therefore there is a tension between this and SMK's ability to become financially sustainable.

### 4. SMK Programmes

4.1 SMK's current programme includes:

- **Campaigner Awards** - for emerging and grassroots campaigners to be more effective and bring about sustainable change
- **Campaign workshops** – introductory workshops in planning and influencing for under-resourced, novice campaigners, often those who have been excluded from mainstream debates to have a strong 'voice'.
- **Influencing Change & See Change** - intensive programmes for grassroots and voluntary organisations.

- **Campaign Central** – a microsite that connects, informs and supports campaigners.
- **Reaching UK Campaigners** – a pilot programme in 5 areas of the UK focusing on SMK’s work in terms of equality & access to support for campaigners
- **Policy/influencing** – including an annual conference, People Power, to stimulate and inform debate amongst campaigners and influencers.

4.2 A summary of the approximate numbers it reaches per annum is as follows:

- Award Winners and Finalists (30)
- Intensive training course participants (45)
- One day/part-day Campaign Workshop participants (600+)
- Unique Campaign Central users (10,000+)
- Events (200+)

#### *Awards*

4.3 Award winners and finalists spoke of the ‘cachet’ of winning an award and the credibility that goes with that:

*‘We kept referring to the Award ...As it was a national award it gave us credibility at the beginning, for example with journalists and employers. It helped spread the news.’*

*‘As a new organisation and campaigner it was very important being able to say that I was a finalist.’*

4.4 Both the Influencing Change participants (ICps) we spoke to had previously been award finalists. The main difference between the support received by the two groups is that award winners (AWs) receive a bespoke package that includes individual mentoring over a period of time. Evidence from our research and internal evaluations found that this one-to-one support was highly valued by award winners:

*‘Best part of the programme, well-selected coach with excellent experience of organisational and logistical issues ...’*

*‘Has been the constant thread through the programme – consistent, flexible, challenging, probing.’*

Indeed, for some this has led to an on-going relationship with their mentor, independently of SMK.

4.5 Most AWs felt that SMK spent a good amount time working with them to identify their needs and find an appropriate ‘match’. This was appreciated and in most cases it worked well. Only one AW said that her coaching experience had been ‘of limited value’, with ‘too much focus on marketing rather than campaigning’. She wondered whether this was because SMK had fewer contacts in the North East at that time, which made it more difficult to make a more appropriate match.

4.6 Although the two finalists would have liked to have had more mentoring, there was otherwise little reported difference in terms of the impact of the training on AWs

and ICps: both groups were equally positive about the difference it had made to them personally and to their campaign.

#### *Distance Travelled*

4.7 As part of our evaluation we examined how far AWs and ICps considered that they had 'travelled' in their development since gaining the award, or taking part in the programme. The results show that SMK's programmes are extremely effective. The details are in an annex to this report, and show that:

- In 2009 SMK did not have a formal 'scoring' system in place. However, our review of the 2009 evaluation carried out in September that year shows all five AW programme participants provided positive feedback.
- Whilst the number is too small for the data to be regarded as statistically robust, the 2010 participants in the AW programme show an average improvement of between 73% and 92%, giving an overall improvement of 82%.
- The personal resources (knowledge and skills) and campaigning resources of participants on the 2010 Influencing Change increase by a third, as a result of the programme. However the increase in their organisational resources is only 6%. These results reinforce that this programme has a particular benefit for individuals, rather than perhaps the organisations they are engaged with. Our assessment of the programme's impact described below, reinforces this observation.

4.8 This monitoring system is extremely useful and a powerful tool for demonstrating impact. However, it would benefit from a greater discipline from participants in completing the information at all stages, and by adding some 'auto-format' columns to provide totals and rolling averages.

#### *See Change*

4.9 A separate evaluation of the See Change programme has been undertaken by Research as Evidence. This examined the impact of the programme on individuals, their organisations and their campaigns. This found that:

- *Individuals* had increased confidence in their campaigning skills; improved campaign effectiveness and focus; and had established new networks.
- *Organisations* were better connected; had developed formal opportunities to work with other organisations; and planning tools had been widely used and disseminated; and
- *Campaigns* had an improved framework and structure and had benefited from the media training provided; and within the organisation, campaigning activities had an enhanced profile.<sup>2</sup>

4.10 The greater focus on organisational learning in this programme is likely to reflect the fact that it is targeted at organisations, as much as it is at individuals within those organisations. Similarly, the emphasis on connections, networks and joint-working opportunities may be linked to the fact that participants came from a

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<sup>2</sup> S Tanner and A Kennedy, 2011, *Evaluation of the See Change Programme 2011* Research as Evidence

similar sector (housing and homelessness) and therefore had more in common than an interest in campaigning.

### *Campaign workshops*

4.11 It was less easy to measure the distance travelled by those who took part in the one-day campaign workshops, but we did look at a sample of the internal evaluations and interviewed two regional 'co-hosts'.

4.12 Internal evaluation information was obtained on the day of the workshop and using a follow up survey (survey monkey) 6 weeks later. At the initial stage, participants rated the training positively, particularly the contact with a local MP or MEP and media representative and the opportunity to make links with other campaigners in their area. This was also rated highly by the regional co-hosts that we spoke to.

4.13 Although the follow-up response rate was poor, it is important to note that of those who did respond: 2 out of the 6 participants in Belfast went on to apply for an SMK award, one was a finalist; and all those who had attended the Chesterfield event said they had since approached a politician and the media to gain support for their campaign, while half had made contact with other participants.

### *Impact*

4.14 Most interviewees were able to give examples of how they have put their learning into practice:

*'I drew up the strategy and action plan to mobilise other people – I developed it over 9 months with support from my mentor. I also revamped our fundraising proposals after the residential course – that taught me the importance of narrowing down who you asked money from.'*

*'After the training in UK, I got different ideas that helped me to re-structure and re-strategize my campaign. I repackaged my campaign messages and redefined my target audience.'*

4.15 Other examples included: engaging with civil servants effectively; 'planning an effective campaign - and knowing what one looks like'; and 'having a clear message that runs through everything you do'. These skills are also transferable: one AW had changed roles since completing the training, but had been able to use the skills in his new role:

*'because I'd had some training at the residential weekend on writing press releases I was able to knock one out in half a day – I wouldn't have had the confidence to do that before.'*

4.16 Another who worked at a local branch of a national organisation spoke of how he used his learning to advise and mentor others in his organisation. Similarly, the evaluation of See Change found that participants had disseminated course tools and learning within their organisations, again, highlighting the extent to which this programme supports organisations as well as individual learners. The most outstanding example of this, however, was the international award winner, who described how he used what he had learned to train others:

*'I have been organising training workshops to build capacity of organisations in campaigning. From 2010 to date more than 50 organisations and traditional leaders as well as Assembly members have been trained in campaigning.'*

### *Skills Plus*

4.17 What comes across most strongly in these interviews is the very human nature of this impact on participants, the difference it made to them personally. It validated them and their campaign, making them 'feel like a real campaigner' (a repeated refrain), boosting their confidence and giving them the momentum to carry on:

*'It has changed my life. I now see myself as a campaigner.'*

*'It has made me much more confident about campaigning - I now have the confidence that I'm doing the right sort of things, reasonably well ... I might have given up without it.'*

*'When I started I had no experience of campaigning or running an organisation. SMK gave me the skills and confidence to do both ... without SMK I really don't know how I could have continued.'*

4.18 It is also apparent that this human impact made a practical difference to the way people carried out their campaigns. As one respondent said:

*'It made a difference to the way I walked into a meeting with the local authority. Rather than thinking I should be grateful to them for letting me be there, I realised they should be grateful to me for sharing my expertise with them. That's a very important switch inside your head.'*

4.19 This suggests that SMK's approach is not just about developing knowledge and skills, its also giving people the confidence to put this into practice. This appears to be true not only for the award winners who received bespoke packages, but others attending Influencing Change and the campaign workshops. For example, we learned that five participants at one of the workshops had gone on to set up their own campaign on attitudes to mental health, while another was working independently on an animal rights campaign.

4.20 Clearly, becoming more skilled has made an important difference, but the impact of the training goes beyond that: respondents also talked about being 'inspired' and 'empowered'. The model used by SMK is therefore perhaps better described as 'skills plus'. Training is the core of what SMK does, giving people the knowledge, tools and tactics they need to run an effective campaign. But what makes it unique is the passion and enthusiasm that drives the organisation and inspires those it works with:

*'Their passion and enthusiasm gives them the edge over other training providers. It's not just about skills, it's about making people believe they can make a difference.'*

### *Accreditation*

4.21 One funder wondered whether the training provided should be formally accredited. This is something that SMK may want to think about in future, it certainly would provide a degree of external recognition and validation of training programmes. However, it could also mean losing this more subjective 'human' aspect, focusing less on the needs and enthusiasms of participants than on the

objective requirements of the accrediting body. Therefore any move in this direction should be considered with care.

## 5. Funder perspectives

5.1 SMK, and particularly its Chief Executive (CEO), has built good working relationships with each of the funders that we spoke to; indeed we were given two examples of projects, and funding, that had evolved out of conversations with the CEO. All three funders had similar views on SMK, seeing it as a 'trusted partner' who provides 'good value for money', achieving 'significant impact for a relatively modest sum'.

5.2 What is particularly striking is the extent of mutual benefit in these relationships, with SMK adding value to other funding programmes (eg as part of a 'funding plus' approach) and/or helping the funder to achieve its wider objectives as the following quotes, each from a different funder, show:

*'We have a wider ambition to reach parts of the sector we can't get to ourselves through partner organisations ... they are doing it better than we could have done.'*

*'We wanted to highlight that the sector is good at bringing about change and we wanted to highlight grassroots work.'*

*'We wanted the organisations we fund to question whether they should have a campaigning and advocacy role and if so how they should pursue it. This made the SMK project quite appealing.'*

5.3 All three suggested that the relationship with SMK added value to their work and could give practical examples of the difference SMK had made to their grantees and/or their organisation:

*'The people we fund talk about the techniques they've learned. They say they're more confident and proactive in their approach.'*

## 6. Regional and partnership working

### *Regional working*

6.1 As noted above, some interviewees, particularly from the awards programme, questioned the extent of SMK's geographical reach across the UK and its ability to provide training and support, including mentoring, to campaigners outside of London. Over the last two years SMK has actively sought to develop its presence outside of London. For example, funding from the DCLG Empowerment Fund has enabled it to run campaign workshops in every English region; it has also used other resources to fund similar events in the devolved nations. These have been co-hosted with local or regional organisations and have enabled SMK to build up a network of partners throughout the UK. The Regional UK Campaigners Programme (RUKC), set up in 2010, has been able to build on this and develop these relationships further.

6.2 As part of this evaluation we spoke to individuals employed by organisations working in two regions, both of whom had co-hosted campaign workshops and had

had links with their RUKC representative. Both respondents were broadly positive about the quality of the training provided at the workshop and said how much they valued their on-going contact with SMK since then. Significantly, both were trying to raise funds to enable SMK to run more workshops in their area.

6.3 Although RUKC is in its early days and is being separately evaluated, both interviewees were very enthusiastic about the programme itself and positive about their experience of working with the RUKC representative in their region:

*'The regional rep has met with us several times over the last year. She has been a real contact point and it has demonstrated a real commitment to working in the regions. Its a **really** good way of working. She works very much in partnership with us, its clear she wants to build relationships and she has promoted the awards down here – that's really important.'*

This interviewee added that she had recommended it as a model to other small national organisations. Both respondents questioned whether one day a month was sufficient - but also said that 'it's better than nothing'.

6.4 As a model it is seen to be a good way of enabling national organisations to achieve local reach without the costs of building an organisational infrastructure. For SMK it is also an effective way of raising its profile in the regions and building contacts with the campaigning community in those areas, both potential trainers and mentors and grassroots organisations.

#### *Partnership working*

6.5 SMK appears to be good at developing partnerships that further its core activities, eg with funders and regional partners, and doing so with integrity:

*'SMK is very good at building and supporting relationships with other organisations – supporting you in what you are doing, they don't take over, even though they are the experts.'*

Some interviewees suggested that SMK could do more to extend its reach, for example by working with sector training providers, such as DSC, NAVCA or local CVSs. These partner organisations could take on the logistics involved in running an event (venue, bookings etc), while SMK would use its expertise to deliver the training. This would be a cost effective way of maximising the SMK brand and make high quality campaign training more widely accessible.

6.6 There was a sense that SMK could collaborate more beyond this core. External partners value their relationship with SMK and expressed a wish 'to be used more', particularly in terms of influencing the wider campaigning environment.

#### *Influencing*

6.7 If AWs and ICps say that SMK made them feel like legitimate campaigners, for funders and other external stakeholders it also helps make campaigning a legitimate activity.

6.8 However, opinion was divided as to how far SMK should focus on raising its own profile or blowing the trumpet for campaigning more loudly. One person said that it could and should be more radical in its approach:

*‘SMK ... should be the most radical campaigners out there. Because they’re small they should target other people and organisations in the sector. They should increase their influencing role.’*

6.9 Others had sympathy with this view, but were concerned that such an approach could be limiting:

*‘They are in a difficult position though. They have some publicity. But if they had more it might lead to their position being challenged. ... So there are dangers of a very high profile. It could help, but it might make them a more ‘conservative’ organisation.’*

6.10 Ultimately this is a decision for SMK itself, but it might want to consider giving more of a platform to its alumni, using them to demonstrate the value of campaigning, particularly at the grassroots (perhaps as examples of the ‘big society’).

6.11 The previous evaluation was concerned that SMK was too closely associated with the then Prime Minister. It appears that SMK has a wider pool of political contacts, including those who had known Sheila McKechnie herself. Over the last two years it has been making the most of these contacts, for example organising an event hosted by Lord Howe. It has also asked the current Prime Minister if he would meet award winners at Downing St (emphasising the office, rather than the individual). Nevertheless, it could do more to build links with individuals from all political parties and other key opinion-formers, but it does not currently have the organisational capacity to do that.

## **7. Alumni Programme and Campaign Central**

7.1 A number of individual AWs and ICps continue to have on-going, if sporadic personal contact with SMK staff and this is very much valued: as one said, ‘when I’m feeling insecure I phone Linda’. However, reaction to more formal activities was mixed:

- People Power was rated very highly by all, although some said that, without the bursary they received as AWs, they could not afford to attend;
- there was an ambivalence about the Alumni programme – not all had heard of it and those who had were more positive in theory than in practice; and
- Campaign Central was not seen to be relevant to the needs of AWs or ICps, although external stakeholders find it more useful.

7.2 Time is a crucial factor: these are people who are all passionate about their particular campaign, rather than campaigning in general, and who have limited time. In this context networking is important but not essential:

*‘... because I’m running a big campaign on little funds and I don’t have much time to get involved.’*

*‘My problem is being really time limited. I am in a small organisation and I have a family as well – so the time I spend has to be really effective.’*

7.3 However, participants did say that they valued opportunities to make contact with other campaigners and saw SMK as having a role in bringing people together. Many talked about being inspired by others and wanting to learn from them:

*'That's what drives you on – its the people you meet doing brilliant things, having access to those people would be really powerful.'*

*'The chance to meet other people is the key thing. I'm interested in talking to people about how their campaigns have evolved over three, four, five years.'*

7.4 This suggests that people want to 'give and share', rather than listen to experts or discuss general issues around campaigning. There is also a strong preference for face-to-face contact:

*'It is very difficult to bring people together on-line: you can support people and point them in the right direction, but a lot of things you get through just talking things through.'*

7.5 Opportunities for peer support, particularly for those working outside of London or on similar issues, would therefore be very much welcomed: 'it doesn't have to be flash, its just making that connection'. Clearly, running a regular programme of events around the country is resource intensive. However, SMK may want to consider whether it could use its contacts to broker relationships as a means of building peer networks, perhaps with an action learning focus.

#### *Campaign Central*

7.6 Although we did not ask directly about Campaign Central, as it is being separately evaluated, it was raised by interviewees themselves and almost all responses from AWs and ICPs were negative. It is seen to be 'in its own separate space', with no clear role or relationship to other activities and appears to be too generic to really engage campaigners on the ground. However, it is used by external partners (regional and national), who said they find it informative and who wanted to know more about wider issues, such as campaigning law.

7.7 We understand that Campaign Central was created with limited resources and at a time when social media was less advanced than it is today. Since then the on-line world has changed significantly, with organisations such as 38 degrees and Avaaz leading high profile e-campaigns and individual campaigners using media such as Facebook and Twitter as a matter of course. Therefore it may be timely to review its function and functionality and its target audience.

7.8 For AWs and others there may be scope to use it, or something similar, as an on-line platform to support peer networks: there is some evidence to suggest that social media is most effective when it is used to supplement, rather than replace personal contact. This would give it a purpose and make it more relevant to those on the ground, who could use it to share ideas and tactics, successes and failures with others in their network who they know and trust. Alternatively, for those who want access to information about campaigning it has the potential to become a key resource provided that it can regularly be updated.

### *Giving back*

7.9 As well as wanting more opportunities to share with others, the alumni are also keen to give something back to SMK. They are the organisation's strongest supporters, advocates and ambassadors. More could be done to build on this relationship. For example, at last year's People Power conference, past award winners spoke in plenaries and workshops. Several of those interviewed for this evaluation also said that they had spoken at training or fundraising events and there is a clear appetite to do more. More could be done to build on this goodwill and to create opportunities for participation, enabling the alumni to actively support SMK and its work in a more structured way.

## **8. Organisational Strength**

### *Awareness of the organisation*

8.1 SMK was set up in memory of Dame Sheila McKechnie, and Sheila's name was important for building and enhancing SMK's profile in its early years. In 2008/09 the organisation 'rebranded' as SMK to reflect the journey it had travelled and its future aspirations.

8.2 The rebranding has worked. A Google search carried out on 11 January found the following results:

<b>Search Term</b>	<b>Results</b>
Sheila McKechnie Foundation	43,500
SMK Foundation	6,770,000
Sheila McKechnie Foundation awards	42,300
SMK awards	5,950,000

A review of the results also indicates that the SMK's awards programme helps to raise the profile of the organisation, as many organisations and charities publicise or link to them.

### *Organisational resilience*

8.3 The memory of Sheila continues to be important to SMK, not least in terms of SMK's aims and ethos. It is now less evident in its everyday work. However, it is apparent that it is still highly dependent on one individual, with funders, alumni and trustees all emphasising the central role that Linda Butcher plays within the organisation and their relationship with it. While this is a testament to Linda's integrity and commitment, it is a potential weakness for the organisation as a whole.

8.4 The 2009 evaluation was concerned that the staff team was working to capacity, leaving little opportunity for expansion. Yet, as noted above, activity has increased, but without any corresponding increase in capacity. In our view, the need to address this issue is becoming quite urgent: the staff team is working at full stretch and the Chief Executive in particular is juggling a number of roles - hands-on training, fundraising, organisational and staff management etc with very limited administrative support. This means that neither she nor SMK are able to be as effective as they could be.

8.5 SMK prides itself on being a lean organisation, which is important for organisational economy and efficiency. However, particularly in the current economic climate, the organisation needs the capacity and the flexibility to seek out and explore new ventures, and to build new relationships with funders and opinion-formers. Otherwise, SMK will incur significant opportunity costs, some of which could be critical.

8.6 Over the coming year we recommend that SMK invests time in these activities to ensure its future survival and sustainability.

8.7 In our view the organisation could grow without becoming overly bureaucratic or losing its reputation for leanness. We appreciate that getting the balance right will not be an easy task, particularly in the current financial climate, but we think that it is worthy of serious consideration, as part of the work being undertaken separately to review SMK's business plan.

## 9. SMK at a crossroads

9.1 The environment in which SMK is working is currently undergoing dramatic change. The economic climate, for example, appears to be making campaigning both more urgent and more difficult. Whilst there continues to be broad bipartisan support for the right of charities to campaign, some key players remain implacably opposed, and they will use the current review of the Charities Act as an opportunity to argue for legislative change<sup>3</sup>.

9.2 But there are also potential opportunities. In particular, in England and Wales the coalition Government's Big Society agenda aims 'to create a climate that empowers local people and communities', building a big society that will 'take power away from politicians and give it to people'.<sup>4</sup> Whilst there are a variety of views about the agenda, and whether it is actually 'new' or empowering, its basic premise chimes with many campaigner's aspirations. The Labour Party's ideas about how to build a 'Good Society'<sup>5</sup> also reflects the role of campaigners.

9.3 Against this background, support for campaigners and campaigning is more important than ever.

9.4 Over the last 6 years SMK has developed a strong programme of quality support for campaigners that is highly valued by participants. As it has developed and extended its offer it has done so in ways that build on its strengths and expertise and enable the different elements to reinforce each other. The key question is where does it go from here, particularly in the current financial climate. It is currently reviewing its role and in our view it is right to do so. However, it is apparent that one of SMK's key strengths are the 'intangibles' that it offers: its passion and enthusiasm; its belief in campaigning and in the campaigners it works with; its ethos and

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<sup>3</sup> See for example [Public Administration Select Committee 18 January 2011](#) and, more recently, the 25 October 2011 [session](#) with the Charity Commission.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/big-society/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.independentlabour.org.uk/main/2011/07/25/building-the-good-society/>

particularly its support for those at the grassroots. As it seeks to consolidate its position, it will be important that it does not lose sight of these.

9.5 There is scope for reconfiguring the current offer. For example, while the awards provide an important showcase for SMK itself and for campaigning / campaigners, they should not be seen as sacrosanct.

9.6 In the current financial climate sponsorship is relatively high cost; finding (and keeping) sponsors is also potentially time consuming. And while the impact on individual award winners may be significant, the number each year is relatively few. A question is therefore whether the awards are sustainable in their current form or whether it would be more cost-effective to tie them in more closely with other elements of the programme, eg Influencing Change. Given that this evaluation has found little difference in the experience of those attending both, it might be relatively easy to introduce 'Influencing Change Plus', eg the same training with additional mentoring support.

## **10. Conclusion and recommendations**

10.1 This evaluation comes at an important time in SMK's life cycle, as recognised by the current review of its business plan, and should therefore inform the development of that plan. As SMK goes forward, and identifies new opportunities, it is important that it builds on its existing strengths. The current programme is neat, discrete and effective at meeting need. This should be celebrated.

10.2 Going forward there will be some difficult choices to be made, as we have highlighted in this report. In particular, there will be a tension between moving towards a more sustainable funding model and continuing to support the grass roots, which will always be reliant on grant funding. And between its ability to maximise existing resources and invest in the future: not for its own sake, but to ensure that campaigners have the support, information and connections they need to achieve social change.

### *Recommendations*

10.3 The findings of this evaluation back the importance and timeliness of SMK's current actions in conducting a full business review. As part of this we recommend that SMK:

- Invests time and resources in developmental activities, including building relationships with funders, partners and opinion formers, for example by:
  - re-evaluating its staffing mix, skills and numbers;
  - providing administrative and other support to the Chief Executive;
  - reviewing the role of the Board, for example taking account of the current skills audit.
- Builds on its existing strengths and synergies, for example by more explicitly aligning the awards with the influencing change programme and / or by developing the Oak Foundation model, providing a tailored programme of support to campaigners in specific sub-sectors.

- Builds on the cachet of the awards themselves, identifying new and innovative ways of promoting them to raise the profile of SMK and provide a showcase for campaigners.
- Continues to seek mutually beneficial relationships with grant-makers, particularly those interested in offering 'grants-plus' support, learning from and building on its relationships with current funders.
- Explores new ways of delivering programmes in partnership with other organisations, such as local or regional CVS' or the Directory of Social Change, whereby they provide the logistical input and SMK provides the campaigning expertise.
- Makes greater use of the goodwill of award winners and other participants, for example using them as ambassadors to support bids for funding, to promote the value and role of campaigning, particularly at the grass-roots, as well as the value of SMK's programmes.

Belinda Pratten and Rosie Chapman Associates, January 2012

**2009 and 2010 Award Winners: distance travelled**

SMK introduced a new evaluation system in 2010 to monitor the effectiveness of their award programme. SMK Award Winners are now asked to complete a self-assessment and evaluation form at the induction, residential and evaluation stages of the awards programme. SMK records and collates this information.

Award Winners are asked to score themselves on a range of 1-5, answering the following questions.

- How would you rate your wider knowledge of campaigning (i.e. not just your own campaign, but others as well)?
- How confident are you in your skills to run a campaign?
- How well do you think you know and understand the key organisations and individuals that you need to influence?
- How would you rate your knowledge of how to utilise politicians to support a campaign?
- How would you rate your knowledge of how to utilise the media to support a campaign?

We examined the changes in the answers provided by the three 2010 award winners who attended the award winners' evaluation session in September 2011. Whilst the number is too small for the data to be regarded as statistically robust, all participants showed an overall improvement of between 73% and 92%, giving an overall improvement of 82%.

In 2009 SMK did not have a formal 'scoring' system in place. However, our review of the 2009 evaluation carried out in September that year shows all five participants provided positive feedback.

### 2010 Influencing Change participants: distance travelled

SMK introduced a new evaluation system in 2010 to monitor the effectiveness of work with influencing change participants.

At the start of the four day course, participants were asked to complete a pre-assessment form and to give a numerical answer, on a scale of one to five, for a series of questions covering three categories:

- Personal resources
- Organisational resources
- Campaigning Experience

At the end of the end of the course, participants were then asked to complete the same form. SMK recorded and collated this information in a spreadsheet.

We evaluated the results for those participants who had completed both forms in at least one category. (Because we could only look at forms where a comparison could be made, it may be that this affected the overall results. However, without talking to those people who did not complete a follow up form, it is difficult to form any firm conclusions about this.)

We also measured the average distance travelled by each participant, in each category.

The results were as follows:

<b>Personal resources (15 forms)</b>	<b>Ave score at beginning of course</b>	<b>Ave score at end of course</b>	<b>Percentage change</b>
Personal experience of campaigning	2.7	2.8	6.3%
Wider knowledge of campaigning	2.7	3.2	18.8%
Confidence in skills to run a campaign	2.9	3.7	27.3
Knowledge and understanding of the key organisations and individuals that the campaign needs to influence	2.5	3.8	54.1%
Knowledge of how to utilise politicians to support a campaign	2.4	3.5	47.2%
Knowledge of how to utilise the media to support a campaign	2.3	3.5	51.4%
<b>Overall average improvement in personal resources category</b>			<b>33.2%</b>

<b>Participant's Organisational resources (14 forms)</b>	<b>Ave score at beginning of course</b>	<b>Ave score at end of course</b>	<b>Percentage change</b>
Organisation's/group's resources	2.7	2.7	0%
Support for campaign or issue within local community, organisation or field of work	2.7	3.0	12.5%
<b>Overall average improvement in organisational category</b>			<b>6.3%</b>

<b>Campaigning experience (16 forms)</b>	<b>Ave score at beginning of course</b>	<b>Ave score at end of course</b>	<b>Percentage change</b>
Developed campaign plan	2.5	3.4	34.2%
Developed campaign aims and objectives	2.9	3.8	32.6%
Campaign's progress against its aims & objectives	2.3	2.9	29.4%
Clarity about what the campaign wants to change	3.8	4.6	22.1%
Developed campaign message	2.8	3.8	32.6%
Confidence in getting message across	3.0	4.1	35.6%
<b>Overall average improvement in campaigning experience category</b>			<b>29.8%</b>