

Most of us have now heard of the One World Centre due to their work on increasing the Overseas Aid Budget here on the IoM, campaigning to Make Poverty History, encouraging us to cut carbon and reduce climate change, raising awareness of issues of contemporary slavery and so much more! We have heard about what they stand for and what they do, but do we know who “they” are? I took myself down to visit their resource centre in Derby House in Castletown and met with Cheryl Cousins and Katie Keenan. I asked them

What is the One World Centre?

“How long have you got ?!” asks Cheryl “Briefly, we’re a secular organisation and registered charity here on the Isle of Man, with the dubious charitable number 9 11?! We are recognised by the Development Education Association (DEA) in the British Isles as a Development Education Centre, and our remit is to raise awareness across the Island of issues of global poverty, inequality and injustice and to encourage a response... that’s the official version, but the reality is a lot more complex.... because the response is not necessarily about giving yet more money to charity. We’re not a fund raising organisation as such. The response is to encourage people to think about life, and to make changes that will enable others to have a chance to a better quality of life; to realise that our lives are interlinked right across the world. It’s strange to think that our decisions and actions affect someone we have never known and will never meet, but that is life today. We are aiming to encourage people to recognise that they can bring about change in this world through the way they live.

So, if you don’t do fund raising, how are you supported?

“We’re a coalition organisation” says Katie “We are supported by a number of charitable organisations operating on the Island, The Manx Co-op have given us the use of these premises, and Save the Children, Christian Aid, Zero Waste Man, Cafod, IoM Friends of the Earth, Tearfund, Oxfam, Churches Together in Mann, Amnesty International IoM, as well as the Department of Education all support our work. But that doesn’t mean we aren’t looking for funding” adds Katie “a number of our initial starting grants have now completed and to progress our work further and to meet the demand we need to take on more part time schools workers to help Cheryl, which means we are very much looking for additional funding and volunteers!”

Cheryl adds, *“Over the last three years the Department of Education have recognised that our focus on the global dimension fits closely with global citizenship which is increasingly becoming part of the National Curriculum and they have greatly increased their support of our work, Last year we provided the equivalent of approx 184 full teaching days to the Islands schools offering teacher support and workshops, preparing resources... it’s possibly the least known part of our work, but actually the backbone of what we’re about. We represent a methodology of education that is based upon active participatory learning, developing speaking and listening skills and encouraging young people to develop an*

enquiring mind. It's an exciting process, that uses whacky workshops, role play and creativity to help facilitate the learning process.

How does the organisation work.

"We have two part time members of staff, I'm administrator and fundraiser!" says Katie, "officially on 30 hrs a week, and Cheryl is paid as co-ordinator on 21 hours a week, going on 50+hrs. I think her record was an 83hr. week! We have a management committee who are the founder members of the One World Centre representing our supporting organisations, we report back to them with meetings every 6 weeks, and we're answerable to both the Department of Education and the DEA.

"We're a membership organisation," adds Cheryl, "without the support of our members and the work of our volunteers, we could have been a tad tired by now! We have a regular members meeting on the first Monday of every month at the Glue Pot at 7.30pm, everyone's welcome, and we produce a quarterly newsletter that keeps members updated on our work. In fact our AGM is coming up at the Sanctuary in Douglas on Thursday 20th Sept, in which we put together a photo review of the last years activities, so if anyone is interested to come along they'd be very welcome to come and find out what we're about!"

A last thought, what drives you, how do you know if you're making any difference?

Cheryl answers, *"We have an ongoing system of evaluation. Every school visit is evaluated, we produce annual reports for all our donor organisations, we have an annual evaluation from the DEA. We keep records of everything, how much media coverage we get, how many unsolicited enquiries and networking, how many invitations for talks and slide presentations, guide groups, youth groups, speaking slots. If people are asking for us, it means they now know we are here, if they ask us back it means they felt what we had to offer was meaningful!*

..... I suppose we do it because once you have taken a good long hard look at how the majority of people are living in this world, it just doesn't seem right to carry on as if they don't exist. I really believe that most people don't know about the imbalance of wealth and the poverty in this world, if they did they would choose to live differently. Our job is to help them know, so that they can make that decision for themselves".

As I left, I reflected upon the obvious dedication and commitment that Cheryl and Katie have for their work. They are not people wanting to give you a guilt trip. Their positive attitude and energy make you believe that these global issues really can be resolved, if only we started to work together.

If you would like more information about the work of the One World Centre see: www.oneworldcentreiom.org or contact Katie on Tel:825464 or email Katie@owciom.org