

## REPORT TO DECEMBER EXECUTIVE COUNCIL 2014

# UNITE COMMUNITY MEMBERSHIP



Unite's community membership is continuing to grow in both size and influence and is empowering communities with a voice to tackle the injustices they face. Unite is now a visible force in communities up and down the country with street stalls, door knocking and protests on a weekly basis.

Unite is leading the fight against the demonisation of the poorest in our society, and are representing those workers and the disabled who are forced to survive on below subsistence benefits. Unite is the most effective critic of the Government's austerity

programme at a national and local level.

### BUILDING COMMUNITY BRANCHES

There are already **7800 community members** organised in **over 80 community groups** in towns and cities across our union. They meet regularly and develop campaigns to address issues identified as important to them.

Unite has established community groups operating in:

Barnsley; **Barnet**; Belvoir Women's Group; **Best Hill**; Berks, Ox and Bucks; **Ballybeen Men's Motivation group**; Birmingham; **Brent**; Bridport; **Bridgwater & Taunton**; Brighton; **Bristol**; Bootle; Bournemouth; **Bradford**; Camden & Islington; **Chesterfield**; Cambridge; **Cardiff**; Cornwall; **Coventry**; Crawley, **Surrey & North Sussex**; Derbyshire; **Derry**; Doncaster; **Dublin**; Durham; **Ealing**; East Belfast; **Edinburgh**; Exeter; **Falls Road Belfast**; Glasgow –Maryhill, Milton and East End; **Gorton, Manchester**; Great Yarmouth; **Grimsby**; Haringey; **Hastings**; Huddersfield; **Ilfracombe**; Kent (North); **Kilburn**; Hull; **Lambeth**; Leeds; **Leicester**; Liverpool; **Lincoln**; Salisbury; **Teesside**; Tower Hamlets; **Machynlleth**; Manchester; **Newcastle**; Newry; **Nottingham**; Northampton; **North Antrim**; Oxford; **Peterborough**; Portsmouth and District; **Renfrewshire**; Rochdale & Oldham; **Salford**; Stoke & Staffordshire; **Strabane**; Strathkelvin & Kirkintilloch; **South Essex**; South Yorkshire (Sheffield); **Southampton**; Sussex Coast; **Swansea**; Swindon; **Waltham Forest**; West Belfast; **Wigan**; Wirral; **Worcester**; Wrexham and **Yeovil**.

Unite has provided a home and collective voice for thousands of people in communities across our nations, over 7800 have already signed up wanting to make a difference, people who are prepared to engage in **street protests, campaigns** and **direct actions** to challenge head-on a relentless Tory attack on working class communities, human and trade union rights.

Through Unite Community hundreds of activists have been trained in campaigning and organising skills, skills that have had a positive impact in their local areas and further enhance the union's reputation as the 'fighting back' union. Community members have joined and offered tremendous solidarity to the union's industrial members in their struggles as well as supporting the union's leverage strategies and national priorities. They have and continue to give real meaning to our vision of '**one union – stronger together**'.

## FROM AROUND THE REGIONS

**North West:** Community members from Liverpool's CASA branch have negotiated a ground-breaking **Ethical Procurement Policy with the Liverpool Council** ensuring:

- The Council becomes a Living Wage employer
- Companies bidding for contracts pay the Living Wage and Living Hours of 15- 20 pw, thereby banning zero hours contracts.
- No companies who operate or have operated a blacklist will be allowed contracts.
- Trade unions, environmental and human rights are honoured.

The Branch will monitor the agreement with the Labour Group and Community members are now sharing how this policy was achieved with NW Regional Committee, Unite Learn and Unite Education Officers, as it is a major victory for Unite.

The branch has made a **legal challenge to the outsourcing of Mental Health, Disability and Drug and Alcohol Misuse Services** by Liverpool Council and has submitted a Freedom of Information Request to the local Government Minister, Eric Pickles.

Unite Casa Community member, Andrea Wall is standing as labour candidate in local council by-election fighting a UKIP candidate. The Branch is mobilising support along with ASLEF and PCS members.

Greater Manchester branch operate a drop in advice centre in the Mostyn Miners centre. They are also actively campaigning against the city councils working relationship with G4S.

Ellesmere Port group is very active and on its way to having sufficient numbers to constitute a branch as are community members in Preston.

Members are also campaigning against TTIP, Sanctions, Save Libraries in Liverpool, service cuts and Wirral Community members are active in a campaign to sack Tory Minister, Esther McVeygal.

**Scotland:** Starting in July, Jamie-Max Caldwell took over as the community coordinator for the region. Jamie was voted STUC young trade unionist of the year 2014, and has brought new perspective into the role.

A significant **success for Unite Community is on the campaign against Zero Hours at Universities.**

Unite Community member and president of Strathclyde Students Union, Gary Paterson has successfully negotiated a ban on Zero Hours contracts. And community members at Glasgow University have campaigned for over a year to ban such contracts and due to the pressure they have put on the University's management there has been huge reduction from 4,000 to around 700 workers on Zero Hours. As a result of this work Unite Community is conducting a recruitment drive among students.

Unite Community has been part of a coalition to **campaign for a Living Rent in Scotland** with community engagement planned for the months ahead.

Community held a popular placard-making workshop which attracted people not previously involved in politics. Members attended the A Just Scotland rally on 18<sup>th</sup> October.

**North East, Yorkshire and Humberside:** Joe Rollin, community coordinator has provided support for an exciting new initiative, the **County Durham Socialist Clothing Bank** which two community members, Dawn Wilson and Catherine Ainsley established after realising that charity shops can be too expensive for low income families. The clothing bank runs alongside a food bank in Brandon and

Stanley and is a pilot supported by the Durham Miners Association, and local union branches. If successful more will be rolled out in the region. **Dawn got the idea for the clothing bank when she overheard a mother in a shoe shop tell her young son that she could only afford to buy shoes for his sister this year.** They have made a special appeal for warm clothing and toys for Christmas and have already received an incredible response.

**Unite Community Radical Library** has opened up in the Union's community centre in Barnsley lending books on the history of the trade union movement and progressive books.

Community members in the region have participated in dozens of actions including:

- Unite's NHS campaign
- South Yorkshire Freedom riders
- Protest outside the UKIP conference in Doncaster
- Welfare reform rallies in Sheffield, Huddersfield and Leeds
- Anti-Workfare protests outside Savers shop
- Job Centre information stalls
- Solidarity with PCS picket lines

The branches in the region have been active in supporting industrial work and have **helped an organising drive at Toyoda Gosei factory** with early morning leafleting.

**London and Eastern:** With the extra responsibility of Unite in Schools and due to the sheer size of the region (14 million people) a second coordinator, Robin Sivapalan started in July, working with Pilgrim Tucker.

The region's has done some ground-breaking work with its **campaign on housing**. Community members are mobilising across London to defend housing rights, to protect existing council and social housing from being sold and/or demolished as part of local 'regeneration' programmes in partnership with private developers. And are campaigning against the new 'affordable rent' set at 80 per cent of private rents in new social housing and for rent controls and secure tenancies in the private rented sector.

Unite community members along with Unite London Region played an important role in building an alliance of housing campaigners, groups working across tenancies in London to highlight the housing crisis facing the whole working-class in London. This broad based Housing campaign led a successful protest outside the worlds biggest property fair in London Olympia where local authorities and the NHS estates were there to sell of publicly owned properties to private developers. The protest received huge local and national media coverage drawing attention to the issues.

On a very practical level **Unite community prevented the eviction of one of its members**, Asaf and his family from their home in Leyton when activists blocked bailiffs from entering the family's home to evict him.

Unite community membership in London is working closely with the NUS London Executive which recently voted to work with and recruit to Unite Community. Working with Unite industrial young members and our student activists we are delivering student worker advice and campaigning workshops hosted by universities in the SE and Central London. The plan is to work with our tutors, lay companions and industrial activists to train students in basic employment rights advice and run weekly drop-in surgeries. The reality for working-class students is they have to take low-paid jobs to see themselves through university, thereby needing support from trade unions.



**South East:** Unite Community have been highly visible in the region, much of which is Tory Heartlands. In less than two years the community coordinator, Kelly Tomlinson has established six functioning branches. Each branch meeting incorporates holding a street stall or a protest, which ensures our work looks outwards into the communities we are organising in. The activities of the SE branches include:

- Organising against UKIP in Thanet – the seat Nigel Farage intends to stand
- Campaigning in the bi-election area of Rochester and Strood
- Job centre campaign stalls in Southampton, Reading, Whitstable & Witney
- Public meeting on social housing rights in Woking
- NHS and TTIP meetings and demonstrations
- Disability issues including a disabled bus pass campaign in Southampton
- Public Transport
- Women's refuge with a further Christmas campaign in motion
- Regional Pride events
- Protest against the filming of Immigration Street in Southampton
- Living Wage publicity stunt in Portsmouth
- Attendance from all branches at 18<sup>th</sup> October march and rally
- Film nights being organised in Portsmouth
- Campaigning to save unemployed workers services in Brighton



Community members also held a stall at Ruskin College freshers fair where lots of students showed interest in joining and becoming active.

Members in Kent have wrote and performed a living wage song at a couple of events including the Whitstable Oyster festival and the opening of a new Morrison's. They produced local materials asking Morrison's to pay a living wage to their new staff.

Working in collaboration with PCC branch the council have now agreed not to use Workfare and are taking steps to become a living wage employer.

**South West:** A new group has been established in and around **Bridgwater and Taunton** and plan to campaign against employers and charities suing Workfare. Community members in **Cornwall** will soon establish a branch and a recruitment push is being undertaken with regular street campaigning on issues such as the privatisation of the NHS and austerity.

**Bristol** community and industrial members are working within a coalition to call for the reinstatement of Route 25 bus and 2000 people have already signed a petition, held public meetings and distributed leaflets in St Pauls, Bristol.

Working with Swindon Labour Party and Swindon People's Assembly Unite Community members are fighting the decision by the **Swindon borough council to close the majority of its Children Centres**. The campaign has attracted widespread community support and achieved a lot of publicity.

Students are being targeted for a recruitment drive at Bristol University.

**Wales:** The **Cardiff Area branch** is now a vibrant 80-strong branch with regular meetings of 25-30 people. Campaigning activity includes stalls outside job centres, and supporting industrial pickets.

Community members are also challenging Cardiff Lib-Dem MP, Jenny Willott over her position on the Bedroom Tax and the branch will be deliver her an eviction notice as a publicity stunt and to remind the community of her voting record.

**North East Wales branch** is now established and members are focusing on **the Living Wage** with lots of street activity. UKIP have opened an office in the area and Unite Community members are out there in the community doing stalls **challenging UKIP's anti-immigration message**. This has resulted in new members joining the union.



Oxfam Cymru have offered to actively support Unite Community and have offered to pay for community membership for 100 people they identify through the outreach work they do in communities across Wales.

Links have been made with **Cardiff People's First**, an organisation that supports people with learning difficulties. People are signing up to community on a weekly basis and are promoting the work we do. They bring so much diversity and passion to our union.



**Grandparents Raising Grandchildren** are now a part of Unite Community and their members have taken part in our education courses and have been empowered. Thanks to the sponsorship of industrial branches in Wales those who can't afford membership can join our movement and get a voice.

Other campaigns community members in Wales have participated in include:

- Save a community centre in Lansbury Park

- Sanctions
- Anti-workfare

The region is also looking at the potential of working with the NUM to open a similar community centre to the ones in Durham and Barnsley. A new branch in **Swansea** will be constituted in January.

**Aberystwyth students** community members are working together to support lecturers at the university who are really struggling to get by with some paid £14k a year while the vice chancellor has a comfortable salary of £250k. Community will be starting a campaign as Support services for students have been slashed.

**West Midlands:** There has been a push to recruit students at Newman University where Unite Community will be working with the NUS to train student representatives in public speaking, advocacy skills, welfare and employment rights. The NUS will pay the membership of its reps in exchange for the training we can deliver. If this model is successful it can be rolled out in other universities and higher education facilities across the UK.

Community members have participated in several events and pickets including:

- October 18<sup>th</sup> Britain Needs a Pay Rise National demo
- Choose Youth
- NHS strike
- Midlands TUC Hard Up Festival
- Diwali celebrations
- EDL demonstration in Birmingham
- Sanctions

The newly formed Birmingham branch will be putting pressure on Birmingham City Council to sign the union's pledge against the use of Workfare placements as well as holding stalls outside job centres to support the unemployed caught by sanctions.

**East Midlands:** Much of the work undertaken by the community coordinator, Dave Condliffe since he started in February, has been to develop six fully functioning branches with elected officers. Each branch was tasked with a recruitment drive which has seen the membership increase by 100 per cent in each branch. The coordinator has also brought together key activists from each branch for training, the sharing of best practise and coordinating campaigns into a new successful regional forum.

There have much activity by East Midlands community members including:

- Durham Miners Gala
- No Benefits Sanctions campaign week
- TTIP and supported Jarrow NHS march
- Local Authority dispute pickets
- Palestine demo
- Freshers Week stalls
- 18<sup>th</sup> October Britain Needs a Pay rise demo
- Living Wage Campaign
- Street Lighting campaign on Chillwell High Road, Nottingham
- EON parking campaign
- Stalls outside job centres

The region is also exploring the potential to open community centres in Bramblebrook, Swadllincote, Manton and Boston.

There has been a successful campaign led by Derby Community branch has won better mental health services for people suffering from Borderline Personality Disorder in Derby City. Before the campaign treatment was available for BPD in Derby County but was denied to people in Derby City.



**Northern Ireland:** Albert Hewitt took over as community coordinator in August and has already made inroads into the Republic of Ireland with a branch soon to be established in **Dublin** where a major **campaign against the water charges** is being fought. Seven community members were arrested and held without charge for 12 hours. Community members have been travelling around the city where water meters are being installed and helping residents organise resistance.

The **North Antrim Branch and Ballymoney** are campaigning against welfare cuts. Unite community members in Derry are also trained welfare rights advisors and tribunal representatives who are involved in fighting for people's benefits and have a 99% success rate in overturning appeals. Members in Derry City are organising the 2015 Unite in the Community Charity Boxing tournament in support of suicide awareness. Unite community members are also campaigning to get a drugs and

alcohol emergency detox centre in Derry due to the high number of suicides and attempted suicides due to the social problems related to poverty.

The community members in **Strabane** provide regular advice sessions to fellow members including filling in Disability Living Allowance forms and claims for Employment and Support Allowance.

- Living wage zone at the Three Rivers Project in Strabane
- Fit4Life to introduce

### **INDUSTRIAL BRANCHES SUPPORTING THEIR COMMUNITIES**

Unite community coordinators and community groups are continuing to develop strong links with the union's industrial membership.

A new development has started where community branches elect Industrial Link officers whose role is to build links with the union's industrial branches. And importantly many industrial branches are also electing Community Link Officers whose role is to link their branch with the activity of our community branches.

There has been generous support from our geographical and industrial branches both in **joint campaigning** which has seen our industrial activists link up with community activity and with now **some fifty branches financially sponsoring community activity**. Branches have paid for items such as lap-tops, branch banners, travel, refreshments and room hire for meetings.

### **UNITE COMMUNITY CENTRES**

In just two years, Unite Community has opened **six community centres** either self-funded or in cooperation with local authorities, campaign groups or sister trade unions. **Our centres act as community hubs**; a place to meet, to develop campaigns, for education and training courses and as a place to get advice and representation on welfare and other issues. Unite **Community Volunteers have won £1000's** for people who were not claiming the benefits that they were entitled to and centre volunteers have also won Bedroom and Council Tax helping people stay in their homes.

Our centres are in:

- Belfast
- Cinderford (Forest of Dean)
- Great Yarmouth
- Barnsley (NUM)
- Durham (DMA)
- Tower Hamlets (London)

There are now plans to open further centres in Wyndford, Glasgow; Paisley; Farsley in Leeds; and St Pauls, Bristol.

### **WELFARE, ACTIVIST AND CAMPAIGNING SKILLS TRAINING**

Unite community coordinators have been working with our education and learn with unite teams to arrange a variety of courses to benefit both our community and working members. **ESOL, welfare rights and campaigning skills training** has led to hundreds of members advancing their own skills

and **provided desperately needed support and advice** to our unemployed and disabled members in this climate of brutal sanctioning. Unite Community cannot plug the gap left by the massive cuts to advice services but is offering vital peer-to-peer advice, support and signposting.



Unite community also provides training to empower communities to campaign for justice. To date **over 700 community and working members have received training** in courses as diverse as:

- Public speaking
- Street campaigning
- Designing leaflets
- New media and blogging
- Representing members
- Condensed branch officials
- Activist training
- Debating skills
- Media interview skills
- Welfare rights
- Opposing privatisation
- Social media campaigning

## **UNITE COMMUNITY SUPPORT TEAM**

Unite currently employs eleven **Regional Community Coordinators** (two in London and Eastern) to deliver our strategy across the union. The coordinators are the main link tying our community and industrial membership, strategies and campaigns into the formal union structure.

They identify, nurture and develop community leaders and other activists while developing campaigns and strategies with our groups to win. They ensure that our community groups operate within the policies and wider values of Unite and are supported in their work by a National Coordinator based at Central Office.

In all regions apart from Ireland and Scotland, Unite Community Coordinators have also taken over the responsibility of delivering the Unite in Schools Programme.

## **CONCLUSION**

Unite community has worked hard to embed itself into the union, enhancing the union's social and political reach as well as our reputation in the wider labour movement both in our nations and internationally.

Unite is **standing up with ordinary men and women, their families and communities** and through Unite community demonstrating that we are an **active, relevant** and **progressive force** in communities on the front line fighting vicious cuts and a wider ideological austerity programme.

**We will continue to stand up with those who can and for the vulnerable that cannot.** We have laid the foundation for this and will continue to develop our strategy over the coming period.

