

## Feedback from the Local Groups Affiliate Day

### YHA Coalport

4<sup>th</sup> November 2006

Our current view about the relationship between YHA Centre and Local Groups is....

- We are not wanted (or feel like it)
- Different views on way forward. We think LGs want:
  - More local small hostels
  - Are not concerned with 'brand identity', 'super hostels' or 'improvements'. We need hostel networks so that we can walk/cycle from hostel to hostel and not only stay in 'honey pots'.
  - Lack of benefits reflects a lack of interest in particular insurance, advertising in Triangle, discounts.
- Lack of consistency in approach of Head Office to LGs over time.
- Weakening of membership as an idea – we have become 'clients' or 'guests' (your words, not ours!). 'Managers' not 'wardens'.
- Too remote
- Confusing messages
- Lack of support and publicity
- Poor communication
- Getting the impression that Groups are a thing of the past
- Disinterest
- Groups are regarded as a nuisance
- One way
- Centre do not appreciate the difference between LGs and other groups e.g. schools/youth groups
- Poor
- Non supportive
- Hidden agenda
- Lack of openness
- Contemptuous
- Chairman is anti-Group

*Feedback from Chris Boulton, Chairman "I am not 'anti group'. I am pro expanding the group sector in YHA. Groups do a fantastic job!"*

- Management decisions are being rubber stamped by the Board
- Tail is wagging the dog
- Perception is that the Groups are 'tolerated'
  - Hidden agenda?
  - Are we important to YHA?
  - Are we being pushed into the background?
  - Do YHA realise the importance that Groups have in encouraging new members?
- Today's workshop
  - Positive
  - Why only 17/18 Groups represented?
  - Symptom of poor relationship?
- YHA LGs website page – what will be detailed?

- Details of insurance – how will it work? Lacking information currently (new members during a year – will a top up be needed?)
- Could be improved
- Headquarters attitude is poor. Hostel managers are helpful.
- Our promoting role for YHA should be recognised.
- LGs loyalty be more highly understood.
- Too much ‘them’ and ‘us’!
- We feel undervalued and unwanted.
- We feel that YHA wants to ‘distance’ itself from us as a Local Group by changing logo and charging a licence fee for continued use of ‘YHA Local Group’ in title.
- Communication could be improved, i.e. did not originally receive the Strategy Review document when first issued for consultation/input.
- Will in future be treated like any other ‘group’ in that won’t get 10% discount off overnights.
- Not aware that our relationship is an issue because we operate fairly independently.
- Not appreciative of our role in encouraging new members to join YHA and introduce new people to hostelling, especially in the low season.

#### Our concerns about the future are:

- Local Group aim don’t match those of National Committee/BOT (LGs not included in new Volunteer Strategy)
- Alienation of LGs
- No new LGs/LGs are stagnating!
- Erosion of LG benefits, NB booking conditions
- Discrimination of small LGs e.g. deposit for bookings
- Loss of hostel network
- Concerns about central booking
- Adults of limited means cannot afford hostel process
- Use of 0870 numbers
- Concern that members will go to cheaper opposition
- Loss of charity status
- Pricing structure is too complicated!
- No 10% discount today
- Lack of clarity/legal position of charging B&B rather than just bed
- Difficult for LGs to book into hostels
- Lack of young people
- Glaring gaps in hostel network e.g. Quantock Hills, South Downs
- Booking procedure inflexibility – more suited to educational groups
- No cooked breakfasts – should school groups be restricted from sole weekend bookings?
- Closing of small traditional hostels – where can we go?
- Changing of booking terms – early payment and variation of numbers
- Obsession with youth – what about life members? Hostels supposed to be open to ALL!
- Shrinking of coverage of the country
- Difficult to book a group of twenty

- Compulsory B&B
- Pressure to take meals and not self-cater
- YHA seems to try to squeeze every penny out of everyone that visits!
- Lack of information in handbook – ‘flexible’ pricing and opening
- Is YHA becoming an outdoor activities organisation not a countryside organisation? Or maybe a budget hotel chain?
- Diminution of the status of LGs will result in a weakening of the democratic control of the organisation
- Paper only groups losing out to the net
- Central booking
- Non YHA members being unaware/not concerned with rules about using sheet bags/doing own washing up in s/c kitchen
- Long term commitment of ‘franchised’ hotels especially where they may form a crucial link for accommodation on long distance routes
- Decrease in membership within LGs as no need to be individual members if joining LG hostel weekends away occasionally
- If the age distribution at this meeting is representative of local group membership – something is wrong?
- Liability
- How legally responsible are LGs for safety of participants?
- What protection is there for groups/leaders from litigation?
- Any guidance on ‘acting with child care’/‘duty of care’ from YHA?
- Prices going TOO HIGH for people of limited means (by far)!
- Look after members you have already!
- Lack of hostels open in winter (outside cities)!
- Group bookings should allow £3 off for limited means members
- Should not need to argue about discount
- Should not have compulsory breakfast
- Members’ kitchens should be adequately stocked for groups and have enough!
- Loss of loyalty to YHA
- Groups need to be encouraged to mix instead of discouraged
- LGs have no value for management
- Concerns about ceiling price affect on early bookings
- There is a feeling “Do we want to stay with the YHA”
- We believe YHA doesn’t want us to use it’s name and logo
- Insurance.....
- Booking terms/conditions
- Perhaps we’d be better as a school group.
- We want to be local branches of YHA (like Ramblers Association, CTC etc)
- Where is YHA going and what is the role of its members?
- Will we have hostels except in Stratford on Avon, London and Windermere?
- We’d like to be able to hostel in the winter
- Inconsistency of pricing, approach to children in groups, B&B? Full board...? Causes concerns
- Supplements for bank holidays at some hostels causes concern – are we going to have peak prices?
- Can hostels be open on a pattern so you don’t have to check?

## The things happening between YHA Centre and Groups that should:

### Start:

- Start effective two way communication via known procedure
- Marketing:
  - What is YHA
  - Do people know about YHA
  - Involvement of LGs
  - LGs page in Triangle (news items)
  - Not all YHA members aware of LGs
- Elected National LG committee
- Partnership between YHA and LGs
- Name and shame 'bad' LGs
- Fund raising
- YHA membership no of small LGs
- Bring into volunteer structure
- Restart Group News and Post
- More free publicity
- London event
- Better communication between Matlock and LGs
- Training course to improve running of LGs
- Properly minuted meeting (notes on this meeting send to LGs and delegates forthwith)
- Discriminate between LGs and other hostelling groups
- Better communications
- Advertise LGs
- Obvious link on website to LGs
- Restart LG quiz
- Improve communications (i.e. late distribution of strategy)
- Being inconsistent with advance booking arrangements
- Discount for early bookings
- Mid-week offers
- Winter offers
- Better publicity
- Group News (paper and net)
- Keep info up to day especially website contact list
- Set up formal LGs committee (again)
- More and better info on YHA web site about LGs
- 2 tier hostelling: 'Basic' or 'standard' and 'deluxe' or 'superior'
- Hostel booking is on website: standby list – enable the entry of e-mail address if hostel is full, then auto e-mail should beds become available, inviting customer to contact hostel (first come, first served)
- YHA website/Triangle to feature a different LG each month.... description of membership, activities, history etc
- YHA reps to schools to encourage membership and participation

### Stop:

- Creating perception that LGs are not supported
- Rigid booking system proposed 1<sup>st</sup> March 2007
- Charge for insurance

- Licence for YHA
- Non use of YHA logo
- Alienating LGs
- Us learning about closures from the press. One of our groups spent a weekend painting Ivinghoe to learn one month later it was closing.
- 10% discount
- Other discounts available to members (since discontinuing issue of voucher booklets)
- Hostels turning away single night bookings
- Stop insisting on payment for all beds in a dorm – the rest can be booked by individuals
- Endless restructuring and change of personnel/dept
- Reward scheme

#### Continue:

- Maintain list of LGs contacts – YHA website
- 10% discount scheme – save admin costs
- Advertising Groups in Triangle
- Presidents award
- Exist LG Group Booking conditions
- Cadbury Group
- 5 places on national AGM
- Motions to AGM
- LG conference
- Budget
- Development fund
- Membership labels/e-mails
- 100% membership of YHA in LGs
- Annual conference
- Discounts
- Insurance
- Hostelling News
- The Handbook (we don't carry laptops in our rucksack)
- More flexibility in hostel group booking e.g. number of people
- Consistency between hostels e.g. discount, deposit
- Publicise more widely – not every member has access to internet and can view offers available e.g. English heritage outdoor wear company (printable voucher)
- Late payment for group bookings
- LGs conference
- Circulation of information
- Democratic representation
- Free, unlicensed use of YHA in groups names
- Advantage group hostel booking

#### Do differently:

- Enhance profile of LGs - promote!
- Encourage people to join – publicity!
- Administrate our own conference
- Interim LG half year meeting
- More inter-group events

- Hostel manager rep at meeting
- National LG week
- LG website
- Forum
- Tick box on YHA publicity/enrol box giving permission to give name to LG
- More respect for LGs
- Acknowledge that they are a real asset
- Acknowledgement that all LGs are different and have different needs
- Members views should be documented and actioned
- Keep small hostels open. Expand Enterprise scheme
- Make sure everyone (Board/Warden/Managers) are aware of LGs
- Stick to published meeting agendas
- Publicise open days
- Communications
- Easier to find LGs on website
- Important documents sent more than once

#### How and what should YHA communicate with LGs and vice versa?

- Both paper and electronic
- LG contact list
- Well publicised contact person at Matlock QW
- Offer prices, availability, times
- Legal changes which may affect LGs
- Dates of meetings well in advance
- That we are valued, publicity and consultation
- Communicate special offers QA
- Clear information on who we contact QW
- Clarify whether YHA means BOT or Matlock
- Non confidential minutes from BOT made available
- Well known procedures for communication
- LGs to feedback local issues, problems and activities – message board?
- Summarised, simple to understand policy and strategy documentation
- Dedicated person/team at YHA. Not a full time post. QW
- This is not an important issue
- Publicity regarding the LGs e-mail addresses
- Late availability bargains for LGs (e-mail and website)
- Groups need to keep YHA up to date with their info
- LGs can do some things for themselves, but would benefit from YHA involvement e.g. yhagroup.org.uk

#### How could YHA show its commitment to LGs?

- Publicise them better!!! QW
- Give them a significant voice in the YHA!
- Include them in the Governance structure
- Include them in the Volunteer structure
- Include them in the Mem and Arts of Association

- Recognise membership as opposed to customers
- Recognise our commitment and loyalty
- Retain benefits to LGs e.g. 10% discount QA
- Advertise to all YHA members that LGs exist e.g. in membership packs QA
- More flexible booking procedures for LGs QA
- Give LGs more publicity and more encouragement to YHA members to join groups
- Free advertising in YHA publications QA
- Free insurance and licensing QW
- Effective communication
- LGs should continue to volunteer at hostels etc possibly with 2 groups acting together @Friends of Hostels' scheme
- Special offers on struggling hostels to LGs
- Training to LGs officers, treasurers, secretaries, chairman, contacts including risk assessments and child protection QW
- Update LGs Handbook what?
- Better coverage on YHA website QW
- Central support for insurance (not financial support) QW
- Stop discrimination against us!
- Inform LGs how to limit their liability or the risk of QW

#### How can YHA balance the needs of individuals, families and groups?

- It can't!
- What is the problem? What are the needs?
- Insufficient range of types of hostels e.g. simple, small
- We cannot get into
- Hostel management – on room allocations, making best use of dorms QA
- Marketing – and availability of hostels at weekends QA
- Very young families need exclusive use/facilities i.e. children <3 years
- Separate facilities in hostels (where possible) – school party in one part, individuals in another – not on floor above e.g. Conwy, where the floors are not solid and all other guests could not sleep
- Good leadership of LG – education of LG leaders
- Better advertising of availability in each hostel of beds – facilities QA
- Recognise LGs are made of individuals and families and not educational groups
- LGs do not need sole use
- Vary the type of location of hostels so Dolgoch and S-on-Avon can coexist
- Clear child protection policy QW
- Website to include floor plan for bookings
- Family rooms?
- Mixture of high and low class rooms in a youth hostel QA
- Simple 4 5 star hostels QA

#### What do you think are YHA's key priorities? How do LGs fit into them?

- Pay off £30m debt
- Introduce young people to hostelling – local marketing and publicity by LG. Encourage under 26yr to form university/college groups

- Retain and increase membership (and usage of hostels)
- Comply with charitable aims
- Large hostels in cities
- Sound business plan going forward QW
- Efficient booking system QW
- LG encourage members to associate
- Increase the hostel network by use of camping barns and bunkhouses in areas where there is not a hostel (debate by table)
- Increase hostel usage
- LGs organise trips
- Look for additional joint partnerships (Enterprise)
- LG – raise/maintain YHA profile locally – use small enterprise hostels
- LGs can publicise YHA but need help with professional literature and approach QA
- LGs provide a route into hostelling for newcomers
- Financial solvency after debts have been paid
- Full occupancy
- Young people – YHA should market LGs to young people QA
- Right hostel in right place – adopt a hostel
- Reduce overdraft

#### How should YHA protect its name and maintain standards?

- Maintain standards of hostels – clean, staff attitude, self catering, preventative maintenance, quality of meals QW
- Act over poor group behaviour – name and shame – disaffiliate QW
- Clear guidance of behaviour standards QW
- LGs should register for affiliation QW
- Balance of members and non member usage
- Equipment
  - need good sheet sleeping bags and pillows QW
  - self catering – enough cups etc, fridge space
- H&S – lighting, clean rooms, mould free QW
- Competitive prices to compare with B&B
- Bookings – administration to be effective QW
- Ensure non members are aware of rules
- It seems that hostel managers with knowledge and experience are leaving. Why? Can this be addressed? QW
- Bookings – improve response to recorded booking enquiries QW
- Act on hostel inspection reports – praise or reprimand

#### What would be the key features of a perfect partnership between LGs and YHA?

- Communications – e-mail, updates (regularly quarterly)
- Publicity – national press, Triangle, advertising effectively
- Easier booking (more flexible) booking arrangements
- Bring back the 'old' YHA News with more input from membership, with letters, LG reports, hostel information etc
- Continue with current insurance arrangements

- LG page in Triangle
- Easier access to LG page on website e.g. Ramblers
- Discount on hostel overnights for LGs
- Acting as a pool of volunteers
- Trust! Respect! Mutual benefits!
- Formal written agreement
- Recognition and appreciation
- Openness and transparency
- Consultation and action based outcomes
- Trust on both sides and a shared recognition of YHA's charitable objectives
- Equality as partners
- Encouragement from YHA – like Ramblers and CTC
- Good 2 way communications
- Having workshops
- Volunteers – 2 way communications e.g. which projects need aid (well in advance)
- Trust and communication
- Respect
- Joint awareness of each others issues, problems, aims, objectives
- Two way support
- Publicity for LGs
- Easy to use website

Key

QA – question for Alan Hopley

QW – quick win