The Spastics Society to Scope

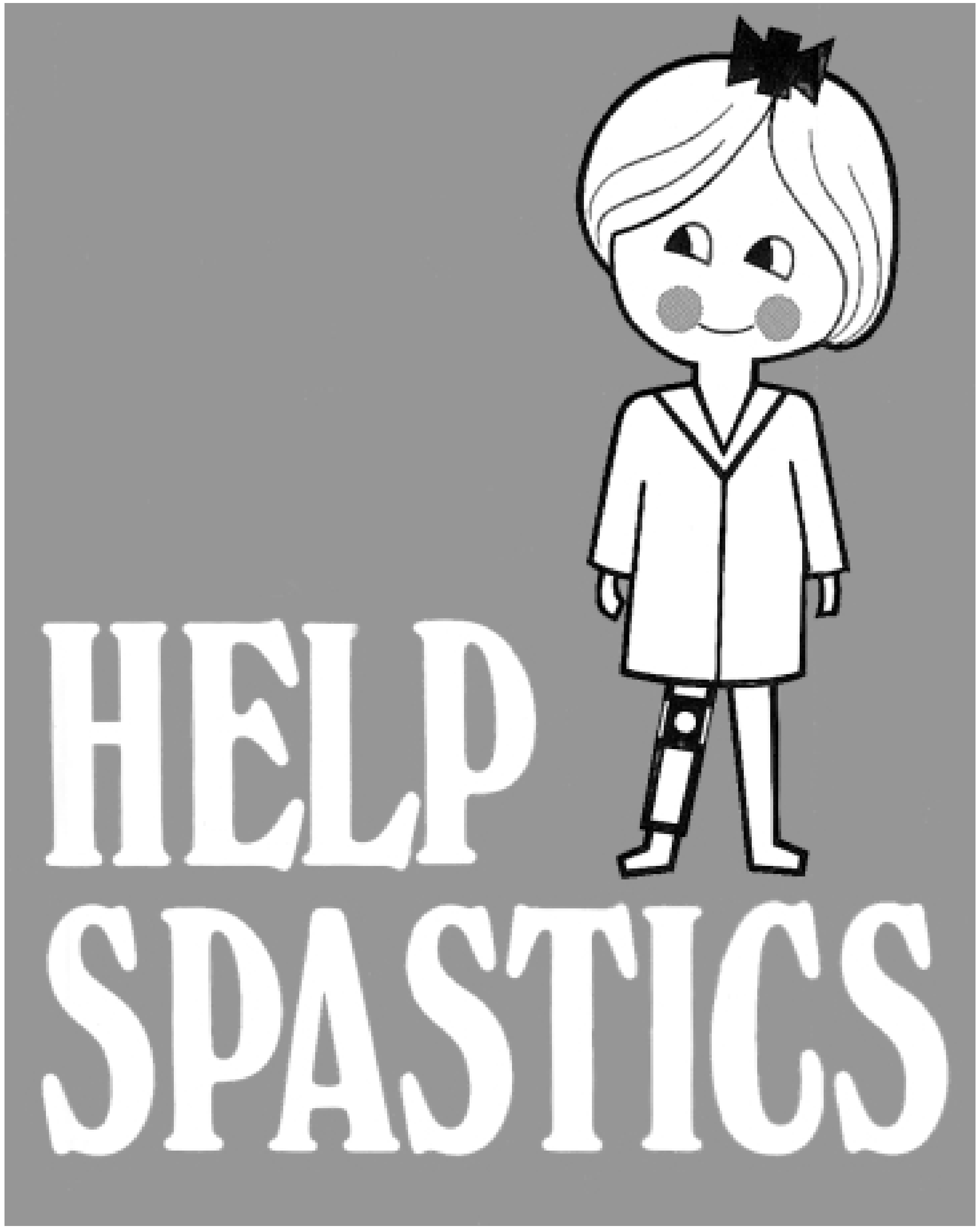
The story of the name change and relaunch November 1994

SCOPE
FOR PEOPLE WITH CEREBRAL PALSY

Introduction

The story of how The Spastics Society changed its name and relaunched as Scope in November 1994 continues to attract interest from other organisations, voluntary and commercial sector alike. The reasons behind the change, how we went about it in PR and communication terms and the lessons to be learned from the process are frequently the topic of individual enquiries and for conferences and seminars. Scope's name change and relaunch is acknowledged as successful and a model for others contemplating a similar process. What follows is a factual account of how we went about it and some of the outcomes and lessons learned.

James Rye MIPR, Assistant Director/Head of Public Relations, Scope 1988-2001



Flag Day poster, 1970s

Background: the image of The Spastics Society

The starting point of the name change and relaunch as Scope was the image of the organisation which was symbolised by the word ‘spastic’ in its name.

The issue was not a new one. Indeed there had been research during the 1980s to try to focus the organisation’s mind on the subject. However, further extensive research in 1989/90 amongst 13 key stakeholding audiences revealed the following picture:

- People with cerebral palsy, particularly younger adults living more independently in the community, reaffirmed their disquiet over the continuing use of the word ‘spastic’ in our name.
- Parents of children and adults with cerebral palsy also expressed reservations in many instances. It was particularly worrying that a significant number of younger parents had chosen not to seek the services of The Spastics Society to avoid their child being associated with the stigmatising label.
- Most staff and volunteers expressed pride and support for the organisation for whom they worked but had reservations about the word ‘spastic’ in the name – some to the extent that they would be reluctant to say the name of the organisation they worked for when asked.
- Individual and corporate donors again expressed support for the work of the Society but frequently said they disliked the word ‘spastic’. Companies were especially reluctant to link the word ‘spastic’ with their brand and products.
- A few older people with cerebral palsy expressed the view that they were “proud to be spastic” and a change of name was unnecessary.
- There were many established local groups affiliated to the Society comprising older parents in the main, for whom the word ‘spastic’ held few negative connotations.

There were other issues too. The link between the word ‘spastic’ and the diagnosis of cerebral palsy meant that the connection was often not made for parents desperately in need of support and practical advice. What is more, the continuing use of the word ‘spastic’ in the name of the Society undermined its campaigning activities and made it extremely hard for it to challenge prejudice and misconceptions. This was exemplified in the use of the word ‘spastic’ as a term of abuse or as a negative term when referring to anyone with a visible disability or using a wheelchair.

Shops poster, 1977

Though correct in a medical sense, in everyday use the word ‘spastic’ had become a mis-used, unpleasant, offensive word and was frequently used as a term of abuse not only in the playground, but more seriously by adults. Overall, across the vast majority of stakeholders, the word ‘spastic’ symbolised an image that was summed up by the market research company as “not for me”. In many ways this distorted reality. There was evidence of good quality services and a continuing tradition of pioneering and developing new ones. The implications of this research were serious: it created a barrier for many people in need of the organisation’s support, or who wished to get involved with us in various ways.

The name: ‘The Spastics Society’

The debate about the word ‘spastic’ in the name had a long history. There was evidence of the issue being discussed in the ‘70s and it became a pre-occupation – a distraction almost – to getting on with the day-to-day running of the Society. It was clear from the research and indeed previous anecdotal evidence that the word ‘spastic’ in the name was a critical element of the overall image of the organisation. Any name of course is a communication in its own right and contributes to the perception that people both inside and outside the organisation have of it.

It was clear after the 1989/90 research that the time had come to respond and, what is more, the will existed to do so. We needed to try to bring to a close the distracting debate about the word ‘spastic’ in the name and also to address some of the other underlying issues contributing to the Society’s image amongst so many people.

It was clear too that the viability of the organisation was being threatened by the continuing use of ‘spastic’ in our name. As already mentioned, there were instances of companies who were entirely supportive of the work we do but were reluctant to associate the word ‘spastic’ with their company brand or products. Continuing use of the word ‘spastic’ was costing us money as well as support and people’s involvement.

The research revealed a number of other fundamental issues that affected the Society’s image:

- There was a clear need for greater involvement of people with cerebral palsy in the organisation and its day-to-day work.
- Relationships with our local affiliated groups had to be improved. The perceived remoteness and largely unhelpful and bureaucratic response of the national organisation was impinging on the effectiveness of this crucial partnership.
- The Society needed to establish a mechanism for active involvement of far more individuals with cerebral palsy in the constitutional framework and governance of the organisation through an individual membership scheme and local involvement in planning to meet needs.
- Internal communications were described in the research as appalling and needed to be urgently addressed to help with the change in culture that was an essential part of the relaunch.

However there were a number of reservations and worries. For example, the prompted recall amongst the general public of the name 'The Spastics Society' was around 90%. It was an established household charity brand name. Within the organisation there were reactionary views and also a real fear of change amongst some. There was an inherent cynicism which was expressed in terms of "we've heard it all before".

Perhaps more than anything there was a real concern about the perceived fundraising risk if we abandoned such a well-known charity name. All these views and perceptions were understandable and needed to be taken seriously to ensure that the Society would move forward viably and with confidence.

What process was followed?

Having completed the extensive research in 1990, the details of this were fed back to staff, volunteers, affiliated local groups and service users. It was essential to gain ownership of the problem that had been revealed and to secure the necessary support internally for constitutional and cultural change needed. This process completed, a resolution was placed before the Annual General Meeting of The Spastics Society in November 1992 that comprised:

- Change of name in principle.
- Ways of involving people with cerebral palsy more directly in the day-to-day activities of the charity.
- New forms of membership, particularly for disabled individuals.

Special resolutions of this nature require a 75% majority. The vote at the AGM in November 1992 in favour of these resolutions was overwhelming – well in excess of 80%. The task of finding a new name that contributed to the desired repositioning and image that was wanted for the organisation could therefore begin. This was carried forward in a number of ways starting with an attempt to define what kind of organisation the Society wanted it be in the future. A range of criteria and branding words were then agreed to inform the process of name search and elimination. Over 400 possible names were identified and gradually, by using the criteria, they were narrowed down until 19 names went into a shortlist for final research and recommendation to the Society's governing Executive Council.

The research showed that people felt 'Scope' was the most appropriate name to convey and represent the image and positioning for the organisation's future. The recommendation to our Executive Council was therefore to approve 'Scope', which they did. The Executive Council however asked that the existing strapline of "for people with cerebral palsy" be retained and also that the additional wording "formerly The Spastics Society" should be used in appropriate contexts for an unspecified period after relaunch and name change.

A recommendation was therefore placed before members of The Spastics Society at an Extraordinary General Meeting in March 1994. Members voted 79% in favour of Scope as our new name in the biggest vote at a General Meeting in the organisation's history. There was truly a mandate for change both in name and also more fundamentally in terms of the underlying issues revealed.

ALL CHANGE!

AGM agrees package of reforms

THE SPASTICS SOCIETY is to change its name. The decision was taken by members attending the 40th Annual General Meeting as part of a wide-ranging package of reforms.

A motion was passed which empowered the Executive Council to explore new forms of membership, including individual membership. Many expressed their concern that this may weaken local groups, but it was stressed that the aim was to make meetings like the AGM more representative, particularly

Vote for name change AGM, November 1992

Relaunch planning stage

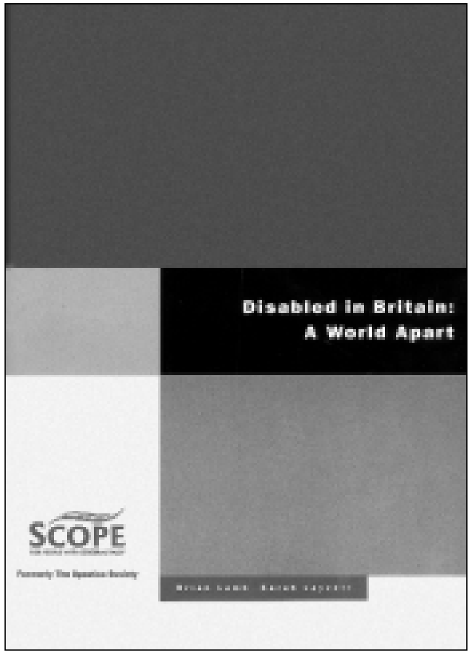
A decision was made to relaunch with the new name Scope on 3 November 1994, just two days before our 42nd Annual General Meeting in London, giving us about seven months to consolidate the planning and preparation. During his period we branded our communications with *'Becomes Scope in November 1994'*. We knew it would be impossible to keep the new name secret. It was important also to develop the media interest which had already been shown in the prospect of a name change, and increase the anticipation and excitement within. Finally we needed enough time to develop a new corporate identity in readiness for the November relaunch. This would require internal consultation and support, even though preliminary design work had been done.

Launch day flag unfurling, St Thomas's Hospital 1994

Relaunch strategy

The corporate communications strategy for relaunch was made up of a number of key elements:

- First and foremost, the engagement of all internal audiences through consultation, and active participation in planning.
- A combination of mass and targeted communication to external audiences ranging from letters and briefings for individuals and small groups, to mass mailings, shop re-branding and house-to-house collections with the new corporate identity. The new corporate identity would embody the new name and exemplify the desired image.
- Strategic use of the news media and national brand awareness advertising focusing initially on the word ‘spastic’ as a term of abuse, then going on to describe what Scope is and stands for.
- The employment of an overall theme of "flying the flag for disability" of which a petition was an integral part.
- The use of a ‘stunt’, attractive to the media but relevant to the relaunch.
- Finally, and crucially, the development of an underlying serious message through the publication of part one of an extensive survey into what it was like to be a disabled person in this country in 1994: *‘Disabled in Britain’.*

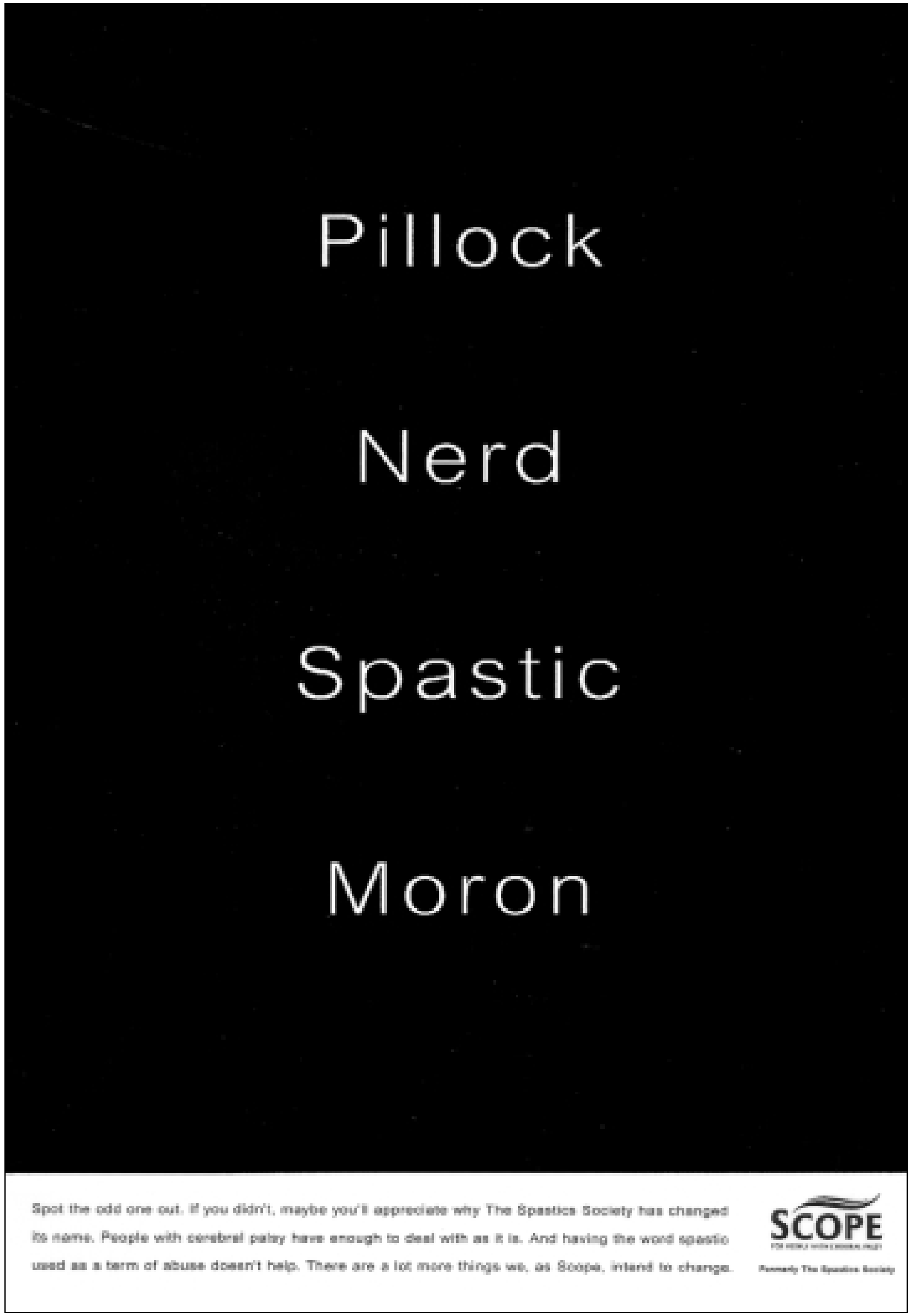


Disabled in Britain:
A World Apart

SCOPE

Formerly The Spastics Society

Relaunch planning incorporated a number of key principles therefore. Central amongst these was the involvement and consultation internally and also the backing of The Executive Council and Senior Management Team. Real efforts were made to provide continuing information and progress reports and to present the message of relaunch and name change consistently in a co-ordinated and integrated way both internally and externally. For audiences outside the Society it was important to present a relevant and rational case for name



Pillock

Nerd

Spastic

Moron

Spot the odd one out. If you didn't, maybe you'll appreciate why The Spastics Society has changed its name. People with cerebral palsy have enough to deal with as it is. And having the word spastic used as a term of abuse doesn't help. There are a lot more things we, as Scope, intend to change.

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Formerly The Spastics Society

change focusing on the word ‘spastic’ as a term of abuse, something most people readily understood, but clearly linking this with the need for equality of opportunity for disabled people in everyday life.

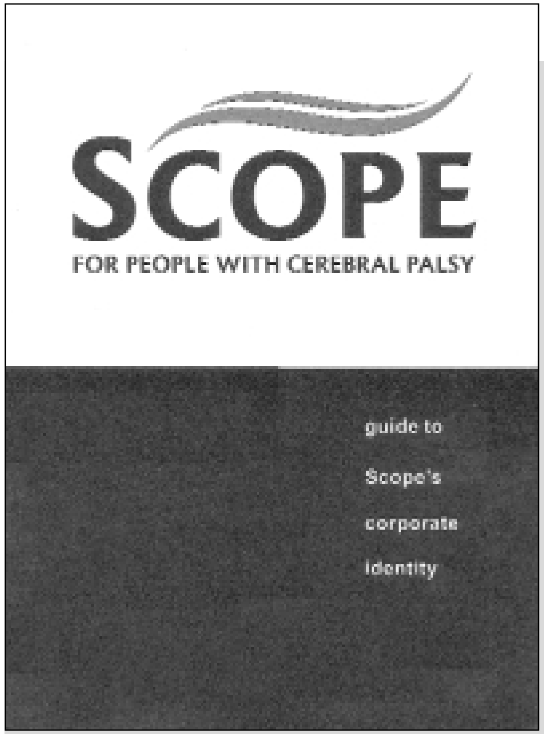
Engagement within The Spastics Society was undertaken through regional road shows and briefings, monthly team briefing meetings, a regular relaunch news sheet, practical guidance and information sheets, a new corporate identity manual, Scope-branded merchandise and new stationery, checklists, question and answer sheets and an advice and information helpline. Overall it was essential that people felt confident, equipped, excited and able to act as ambassadors of relaunch.

The main element of relaunch communication to external audiences was through the news media who were provided with news releases, briefings and at the point of relaunch, a video news release for television and syndicated radio tapes for both BBC and commercial radio stations. Spokespeople were available throughout the country, properly prepared and trained. Extensive case study material, particularly to support the “Disabled in Britain” survey report was provided to enhance the media relations strategy.

External ambassadors were developed for name change amongst key opinion formers such as MP’s, industrialists and even celebrities such as Ben Elton and David Dimbleby, both of whom directly contributed to relaunch day. Over 30 other celebrities signed up their support publicly to relaunch. Advertising was deployed strategically through national press, poster sites on the London Underground, radio and cinema commercials. Targeted communications were made to individual and corporate donors and also to other agencies, local authorities, local education authorities, other charities, professional bodies and so on.

The media coverage of relaunch was extensive with 2 hours 19 minutes of TV coverage amounting to 27 separate news items. There was extensive radio coverage and all the national press except the Today newspaper covered the news story. Over 460 newspapers covered the story locally and regionally.

Overall, the limited resources available were concentrated into making as big a ‘bang’ as possible to ensure that as many people as possible knew of the change of name.



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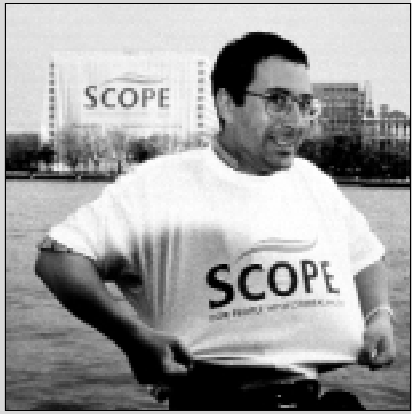
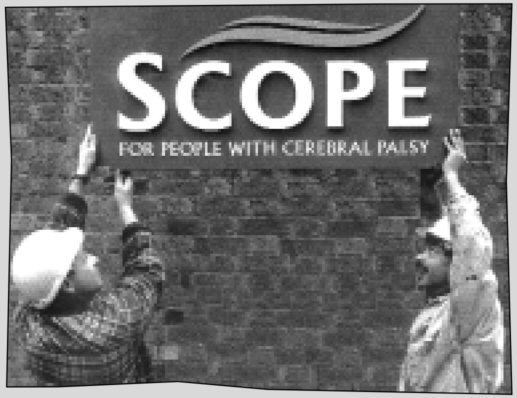
guide to

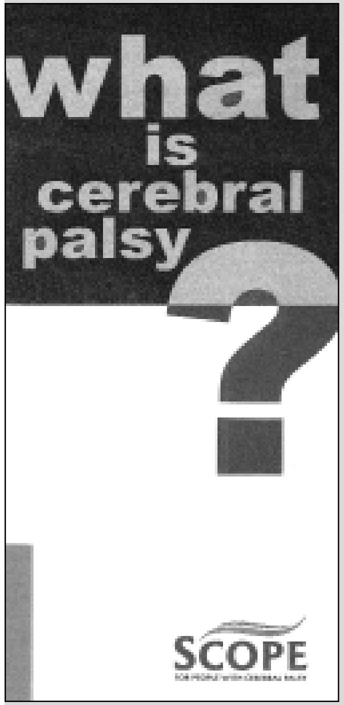
Scope's

corporate

identity







what is cerebral palsy?

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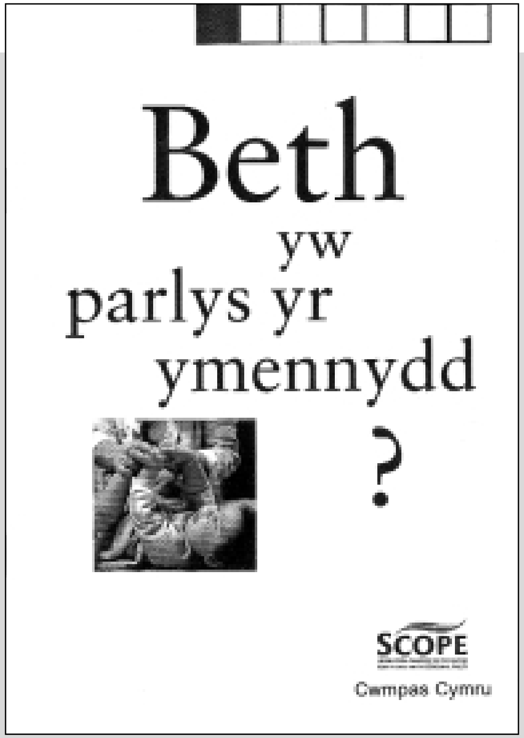

Beth yw parlys yr ymennydd?

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Cwmpas Cymru

Scope's Charter of Rights

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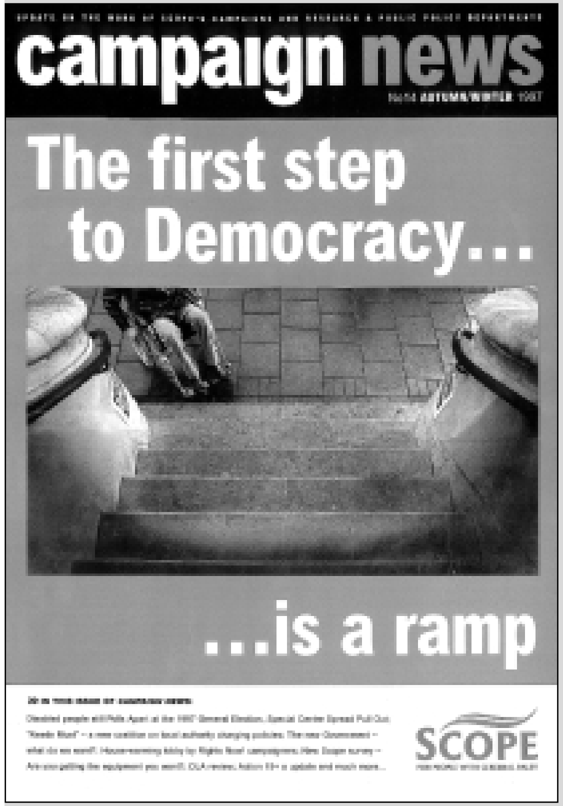


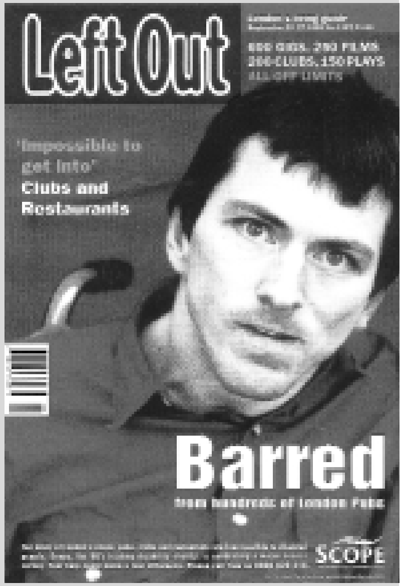
campaign news

No14 AUTUMN/WINTER 1997

The first step to Democracy…

…is a ramp

SCOPE



Left Out

600 GIGS. 200 FILMS
200 CLUBS. 150 PLAYS
ALL OFF LIMITS

'Impossible to get into'
Clubs and Restaurants

Barred
from hundreds of London Pubs

SCOPE

http://

www.Scope.org.uk/

Corporate identity outcomes

By Spring 2001 (over six years after relaunch), prompted awareness of Scope amongst the public had reached 71%. This, by any standards, is extraordinary and encouraging. Understanding is slowly beginning to emerge for what Scope is and stands for and its desired image although there is still much to do in this area and this will take time. A strategy is being developed for the next three years to accelerate this process of building brand understanding in the context of Scope's aim of equality. The 50th anniversary of the organisation in 2002 will help in this.

Over 80 new local groups have affiliated to Scope and there has been extensive take-up of the name Scope amongst older local groups with the word 'spastic' in their former name. Over 1,100 people – nearly 800 are disabled people – have joined our individual membership scheme. There has been an increase in individual and corporate donors and the introduction of the new corporate identity has proven successful. There has been renewed enthusiasm and commitment to the organisation and its mission for which relaunch provided a springboard.

Acceptance of the new name Scope is almost universal with very few people within the organisation having residual doubts. Perhaps most important is the reaction of people with cerebral palsy and their parents and carers which has been overwhelmingly positive.

One other outcome is apparent (although has yet to be tested objectively through research) and that is the use of the word 'spastic' as a term of abuse has noticeably declined. The removal of the legitimising effect and prominence of the word in our former name must surely have contributed to this shift.

Lessons of relaunch

Relaunch as Scope was without doubt successful. It was nonetheless complex and nerve-wracking! There were a number of learning points gained in hindsight, which perhaps give a pointer to others embarking on the same kind of exercise.

- Establish with key stakeholders what kind of organisation you want to be and what you want to achieve before you start thinking about a new name or corporate identity.
- Use external research to provide impartial evidence and support for a strategic change of this significance - also to track and evaluate progress.
- Ensure that you have engagement, understanding and commitment internally, especially amongst those who are influential with staff and members and in the role of leadership.
- Ensure that communication is continuous, consistent and sustained. Relaunch should be viewed as a long-term strategy and not an end in itself.
- The message or messages should be tailored and relevant to the receiving audience.'Blanket communication' is unlikely to be successful.
- There should be a serious underlying rationale as well as a media attention-catching stunt, if you have one. Ensure that you have a contingency plan in place for the stunt.
- Ensure that the plan is not over-ambitious and that the targets are clear, achievable and that the proper budget and resources are in place - however limited they have to be.
- Watch out for planning and consultation gridlock. Do not let the process impede the outcome!
- Beware of potential PR crises that may need managing and may distract from the positive message associated with the relaunch.
- Be prepared for criticisms about extravagance - inside and outside the organisation.
- Manage the introduction and use of the new corporate identity - avoid making its use optional or whimsical!
- Equip and prepare people properly, especially those acting as spokespeople.
- Invest in enthusiasts - champion the champions!
- Sustain the process internally. Ensure that relaunch and rebranding is seen as a start, not a finish.
- Monitor and measure before to provide a benchmark and after to measure progress and outcomes.

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