

FIRST DRAFT

EVALUATION REPORT OF THE  
SPEEDWELL HOUSE ACTION GROUP

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SPEEDWELL HOUSE VIDEO FILM

For some years the Albany, a community action centre in Deptford, has housed a community video project which, with the advice and assistance of the video worker, has helped local groups of tenants and kids make their own video films about problems that concern them. The Albany community worker and video worker began preliminary discussions about the use of video at Speedwell during April 1975 when the rift in the group over the priority rehousing list was giving cause for concern. Following an earlier decision by the community workers to concentrate on common problems within the block it seemed that a video film would facilitate this process, as well as providing a new way for the group to communicate their case to the council.

On 29th May 1975 the video worker attended the action group meeting and demonstrated the way video could be used by showing a tape that a local tenants' association had made about repair problems on their estate. The video worker made it clear from the outset that, while he was prepared to advise the group on the use of the equipment and putting a tape together, it would be individuals in the group who would be actually making the tape. The group was very impressed with the way the tenants association had used video to highlight the issues on their estate and were keen to try it themselves. The workers suggested that a video tape would express visually the problems that would be raised at the public meeting planned for 3rd July. Seven women, all from the core group, volunteered to meet the video worker and one of the community workers to discuss the content and organisation of a video tape.

On 5th June, all the women who volunteered came to a meeting in the flats to plan the tape. During a lively and excited meeting, the women drew up a list of problems they wanted to cover in the film. These fell dearly into the two categories of the external condition of the flats,

- from the workers point of view, making the film helped to centre attention on shared problems and contributed to unifying the group.

- groups point of view, the fact that they had made the film boosted their morale and consolidated their identity and credibility as far as the council was concerned. As a weapon in the fight with the council it provided dramatic visual evidence of their case and allowed tenants, some of whom were unable or unwilling to attend the public meetings, to express in their own words what it was like to live in Speedwell House. Through the film, the group was able to reach a much wider audience than would otherwise have been possible. The showings in the squares for instance created a great deal of interest among tenants who were not active group members. It publicised the groups existence and aims in a way that these tenants could identify with.

- although the film expressed the general problems experienced in the block, for the core group, who were the most actively concerned, it provided a means of communicating in a very personal way their own frustrations and anxieties. The opportunity to master new skills and achieve a tangible result increased their personal confidence.

- the film made a significant impact on the council. The majority of councillors who saw the film had not visited the block and without the film would never have been aware of the conditions suffered by tenants. In these circumstances it is reasonable to suppose that the film made a lasting impression on them. It is difficult to assess exactly what part the film played in the whole campaign as it was only one of a number of tactics used by the group. But the attention that it created suggests that it put considerable pressure on the council to speed up the re-housing programme.

- the film not only attracted attention in the local press, but was picked up at a national level by both press and TV.

(N.B. a copy of the tape made by the Speedwell House Action Group is available from the Video Project at the Albany, Creek Road, SE8)