

Black Country Empowerment Group Take Part Pathfinder



Building on good practice

Community leadership and active citizenship development work started in Wolverhampton in 1998 through a women's community development and health project, when the focus moved from running workshops on 'dealing with the menopause' and 'how to be a mother and stay sane' to working out how women can influence the decisions that affect their lives. It evolved from a series of workshops around women and leadership which, by 1998 had expanded to include a programme of training, practical support and mentoring. The first accredited 'course' of this type began in January 2000 and it focused on women's own experiences and opinions whilst setting out to explore local, national and European decision making structures.

Funding came from a variety of sources - Health Action Zones, National Lottery, Barrow Cadbury Trust - to develop ideas around women becoming more active in community and public life through using a community development approach, countering the notion of elevating a few women as community leaders to talk on behalf of others, engaging with civic structures as a token (and not necessarily particularly representative) voice for women. A key aim of the programme was to encourage women from a whole range of backgrounds to speak out and make their voices heard in whatever context is most appropriate and relevant to them

The success of the pilot courses led to further developments around the main topics - citizenship, democracy, leadership and participation - and then to an invitation by the Home Office **Active Learning for Active Citizenship (ALAC)** programme to showcase the IMPACT! approach as a creative learning initiative (2004-06).

ALAC provided opportunities and resources for those involved in this work to take it one stage further and brought together a local partnership comprising of:

- **Fircroft College:** an independent residential further education college in Birmingham
- **Wolverhampton Asian Women and Diabetes Group:** a support and lobbying group with an interest in Asian women's health - working across cultures to achieve change for women - involved at the start of this work
- **GATE:** a Local Authority adult educational advice and guidance service
- **Black Country Women's Development Network:** a voluntary organisation with staff working to develop women's fora in the Black Country
- **Working for Change:** an independent group of trainers and facilitators who had originally conceived the idea and worked to develop it over the years. (several members are now part of [changes](#) partnership)

The experience of Impact! contributed substantially to the development of the **Framework for Active Learning for Active Citizenship Learning**; the document was jointly written by Jill Bedford from Impact! and Helen Marsh from London Civic Forum (now working at as Empowerment Manager in CLG) and launched by CLG in November 2006. The Framework was subsequently named the Take Part Framework and the original group of seven ALAC projects became the Take Part network. www.takepart.org

The ALAC initiative was evaluated by Professor Marj Mayo and Alison Rooke from Goldsmiths College and their findings, including comments about IMPACT! are available at www.takepart.org

The West Midlands dissemination of the Learning Framework took place at the Molyneux Stadium in Wolverhampton in December 2006 with cross sector and cross regional attendance. A range of agencies from three Black Country Boroughs expressed interest in scoping how they could use this approach further. Following this event a meeting was set up and all those who had expressed an interest were invited. It was mainly representatives from a variety of agencies in Wolverhampton that attended, although parallel discussions were also taking place with a representative from the community sector in Dudley.

Throughout 2007 discussions took place in Wolverhampton between

- Wolverhampton Voluntary Sector Council
- Wolverhampton Learning Partnership
- Wolverhampton City Council
- Wolverhampton Network Consortium
- Wolverhampton Disability Network

....which culminated in a '**Project plan for a 'Take Part' approach to support citizen involvement in Wolverhampton: *Developing empowering structures and empowered people within the structures***'. These agencies all contributed time and funding to buy in facilitation and guidance in order to develop the proposal.

In addition to this activity, during 2008 Council Officers in Wolverhampton made connections with Officers in Birmingham (both Local Authority and LSP) as part of the Empowering Authorities Network, to discuss and scope out joint developments based upon the Take Part Learning Framework. Senior policy officers in Wolverhampton delivered a presentation at WMGO to Senior Officers from CLG on the Wolverhampton Take Part (or ALAC) approach.

A summary of activities undertaken to develop Take Part or ALAC in Dudley:

November 2006: Dosti (Dudley Community Empowerment Network) facilitated multi-agency attendance from Dudley at the Regional Take Part Launch at the Molyneux Stadium on the 23 November, including

- Dosti
- Dudley PCT
- Public Health / PALs
- West Midlands Police
- NCH
- Dudley MBC Social Services
- Adult and Community Learning

March 2007: Dosti hosted a multi-agency meeting in Dudley to discuss initial ideas for delivering learning opportunities in Dudley Borough using the Take Part Framework, and to agree actions to take forward the ideas

Throughout 2007: Various discussions between

- Dosti

- Dudley Neighbourhood Management
- Centre for Equality and Diversity
- DCP Director

...about resources for a Take Part programme and links to existing work being undertaken by Dosti and its member networks

This led on to discussions between Dosti and Wolverhampton VSC about opportunities to run a joint Dudley and Wolverhampton Take Part programme, building on the work of the Take Part Steering Group in Wolverhampton

Building on research - Women Take Part

During 2007 members of **changes** partnership, who have been involved in these developments since 1998, were approached by **Government Equalities Office** and **Communities and Local Government** to undertake research on under represented women in public life. This was called Women Take Part and built directly on the work of Impact! and other Take Part hubs.

The Women Take Part (WTP) research was funded by the Government Equalities Office (2007 - 2008) to examine the participation of women, in particular under-represented women, in governance and decision making, in both community and public life. Women Take Part collected information about two sides of the story: **'what works'** in terms of approaches, initiatives and learning models that encourage different groups of women to become more involved, and **'what needs to happen'** so that structures, policies and organisations work in ways that encourage the recruitment and support of more women.

Women Take Part builds upon successful work done by some of the Take Part Network, (as part of the Home Office funded 'Active Learning for Active Citizenship' programme¹), engaging with and supporting women from all walks of life to 'get more involved'.

The report (**September 2008**) provides a summary of the research findings and guidance on models and approaches which can be used to encourage, equip and support women. It is a resource for Government Equalities Office, and other agencies, from which they can extract information and ideas to inform delivery of relevant performance targets. The report draws upon contemporary research and knowledge² which confirm and articulate the inequalities surrounding women's active participation in public life. The need to develop and grow the 'pool' of women available for civil participation and civic engagement is emphasised.

For full report and Executive Summary see www.equalities.gov.uk and www.changesuk.net

take part
pathfinder

The Black Country Take Part Pathfinder project is managed by Wolverhampton Voluntary Sector Council. It forms part of the Take Part Pathfinder programme which is funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government and managed by the Community Development Foundation.

¹ ALAC Evaluation report. Mayo and Rooke 2006. Home Office available at www.takepart.org

²Includes Councillors' Commission Report, Joseph Rowntree Foundation Report on Citizen Governance, Leadership Centre for Local Government, Where are the Women in LSPs, Urban Forum / Oxfam / Women's Resource Centre, Routes to Power: research on ethnic minority women and decision-making, Fawcett