Black Country Empowerment Group
Reference Group Meeting
Friday 8 May 2009, 10am-12.30pm
Newhampton Arts Centre

Participants

Name	Organisation
Katherine Rogers	Dosti
Maxine Makin	Dudley Link
Sarah Oakley	Walsall Council
Mark Thomas	Police
Julie Winpenny	WMFS
Sheila Giles	ABCD
Janet Hilken	St Thomas's Dudley
Amanda Kenny	Dudley Youth Service
Janet Lavelle	DMBC
Steve Vincent	WMFS

Facilitators

Sam Axtell
Richard Ashwell
Lorna Prescott

Activity 1: Building knowledge and sharing perceptions about the Black Country Take Part Pathfinder - group work

Questions we asked participants:
- What do you know or want to know about the Black Country Take Part Pathfinder?
- What do you feel about the Pathfinder?
- What do you see as being benefits of the Pathfinder?
- What do you see as risks, or what concerns do you have about the Pathfinder?

Group 1 feedback:

What people know
- Know nothing
- Launch – echo – influence
- Not terribly aware
- Black Country Pathfinder – Take Part. National programme
- Learning programme – rolled out to other areas
- Parallel programme in Wolves

Feelings
- Looking forward to it – inspired by the launch event.
- Getting people involved. Good idea
- Mainly Wolves and Dudley. Want to extend to all of the Black Country.

Benefits

- Dudley LINk – it's important to be able to influence. Confidence and ability. "VOICE". Learning programme
- Grassroots group. Reassurance groups – tends to be top down. Challenge structures. Money where it's needed.
- End evaluation of impact of learning programme 20 people can make a lot of difference in a community/geographical based. Maximise impact.
- Individual benefits – learning programme. Confidence, empowering, stepping stones.
- Benefit the professionals networking across sectors

Risks/concerns
- Too scattered (geographically) so loses impact – get spread
- Maintaining interest
- Getting to the people who will make a difference (community to strategic level)
- Raising profile
- Different diverse communities
- Reaching Walsall/Sandwell

Group 2 feedback

- Some of the group felt that they know a lot about take part.
- One person stated that she only knows 'what is on the video'.
- One group member who has been on the programme stated that she was a 'bit confused' about the 'pathfinder' term. This was explained by other group members.
- One of the benefits of the programme suggested was that it provides a holistic approach to participation and empowerment.
- The programme identifies access to routes for action for 'empowered citizens' to influence and change statutory organisations.
- Concerns included – what will happen after the programme – how can we assure sustainability.
- Who will set the agenda
- There is a risk that it may end up within the responsibility of a single statutory organisation and that this will result in the programme changing.
- Group members felt that there is an opportunity through the programme to make 'real' change – to make things happen as part of the course – enabling participants to have practical experience of real participation resulting in real influence and change.

Activity 2: Reflections on learning and practice – what and how people express things that disempower them – pair and group work

Participants were set the following task, and then fed back.

Work in pairs for 20 mins. Consider your own experiences and your observations of people you work with (colleagues in the public sector, elected members, staff and volunteers in VCFOs, community activists, residents, young people …)
- What situations have you felt or observed people to be disempowered in?
- Why do you have a sense of your/their disempowerment?

Feedback

- Young people tend to be/feel excluded from a range of forums
- Structures disempower people

- Constraints on the funding process that doesn't lead to an empowering framework
- Respect from all sides
- Lack of opportunity to develop
- Lack of support
- Lack of enthusiasm
- Lack of involvement from partners
- Volunteers want to see the end result
- Buildings imply judgement, reception/procedures technology
- Rules that are not clear

Activity 3: Existing work and potential connections – pair and group work

Participants worked in pairs to share information about activities they know about which seek to address barriers to engagement etc. They then noted which parts of the Take Part Pathfinder the activities potentially connected with. These are indicated in the table below.

Activity	Learning Programme	Voice	Echo	Joint dialogue	Ongoing support
Support Community Networks - have a voice in strategic decision making.		✓	✓		✓
Support organisations to deliver healthy life style programmes, art projects, older people activities, play strategy					✓
Fire service going out to community to enable them to influence, listen to their views			✓		✓
Identify barriers to community influencing the Fire Service – involved at a strategic level. Participated in Echo (Internal)			✓		
Community Champions more of a role in their street. 'Estate walkabouts' putting in touch cllrs, wardens, police, ASB officer & then programme/menu of how much further they want to go.		✓		✓	
PACTs – partners & community together and NESPs – neighbourhood, employment – skills partnership.		✓			
Area Boards & Associations.				✓	
School governors & Local Neighbourhood Partnership's to address barriers – role of chair – language jargon – make people welcome – induction	✓	✓			
Safeside – teach safety to children empower them – they do sfety – pass on to parents. E.g car seats- measure children – show which ones – dangers of not.	✓				
LINk drop in – people can raise concerns & issues regarding health & social care.				✓	
Young people running workshops & being involved in recruitment & selection process for Youth Service.		✓			
Young people sitting on boards ie safe & sound				✓	

Activity 4: Group 1 - Developing a buddying scheme for learners

1) Why is it a good idea?
- When you walk in a room you might assume that everyone has the same abilities/confidence – could help people to understand that others might not be confident
- Orgs may benefit – finding out why/what participation experience barriers to involvement
- Joint meeting comm. and agency – didn't understand each other
- Difference in speed between orgs and how they work – help to understand
- Insight and understanding of different roles etc.
- Confidence

2. What kinds of support should a buddy provide?
- Shadowing
    - o observe, see what day is lie
    - o changes your perspective
    - o e.g. go to DYC – see how it works with Amanda
    - o (experiential so fits with TP – doing it)
- Buddying has to tune in to preferred learning styles of participant – participant could look at this first
- CRB checks?
- Summarise what you as a buddy can do in given time
- Good to match buddies with shared interest
- Would be good to have everyone in a room – don't be obvious regarding who, help people to see who they gel with. No point matching with someone you don't click with
- Being clear about not there for emotional support
- Be clear about commitment and benefits to buddy
- Be clear to learners about what to expect and what not to expect

3. What skills should a buddy have?
- Communication – come down to participants choice
- Background – your work in sectors
- Ask them why they want to do it – what do you personally or org want?
- Ask if they have the time
- Explain things like – police can't show what's on computer screens
- Need to find out about your role and your participation as a buddy

Promotion
- Hooks for different potential buddies – e.g. Community Safety buzzwords around 'Trust and Confidence'. Youth workers– "make a difference for someone else"
- How did you first get involved? Who helped you? Help someone else open their horizons.
- Lorna to promote buddying at 22nd May Echo event.

Other names for 'buddy':
- "Skilled helper"
- Opposite of gate keeper …

Activity 4: Group 2 - Developing indicators

Outcome	Indicator
Individuals feel more influential	▪ People have developed skills and knowledge and feel able to contribute

	- People feel that they are listened to - People are responded to when they take part in engagement activities (with a rationale) - People ask questions and become more critical - People develop small, informal groups - Attendance at meetings increases (as a proxy measure for people thinking that they could have an influence) - People have increased aspirations for themselves and their children - Something that they are working on has achieved results
Voluntary and community groups feel more influential	- People are appropriately represented on decision-making groups - Third Sector organisations are commissioned to develop work - Organisations are recognised as 'Can Do' organisations - Third sector organisations have influential people on their board e.g. a councillor or people in civic roles - The organisation is asked to send a representative to other influential boards - The organisation is working with other groups on common issues - The organisation is seen to make things happen
Public agencies are more open to influence	- Communities are seen as partners and are involved at the start of processes - Support is built in for community reps involved in structures - Structures are in place and there are places for community representatives - There is competition for places on boards and structures because people want to be there - There is clarity on engagement processes and people are involved throughout the process - There needs to be a measure around reaching the right people
There is 'authentic' community engagement	- All communities of interest and identity are engaged - Partnership working is two-way and equal - Consultation/engagement brings about real changes to services and policies - Community people are given real power and responsibility - Participatory budgeting is in place