

Key learning from pilot 1 of the ‘Working with People in Your Community’ course.

The ‘Working with People in Your Community’ course aimed to support people from the community in:

- understanding and valuing the people skills and communication skills and knowledge they already have and use in their neighbourhoods, in local activities, in voluntary work, activism or local paid work – and which are crucial elements in sustaining neighbourhood and community life;
- having the space to learn more about areas of skill and knowledge for working with people that feel relevant to them;
- having the space to reflect on how the discussions, activities and learning within the session is impacting on their work with people – in their neighbourhood, in local activities, in voluntary or paid work;
- considering their strengths and weaknesses and the sorts of support that they could use locally that will help them develop and learn further;
- bringing together their community participation and lifelong learning so that they can, if they want, move on to further develop these.

The pilot course:

- was run during May 2006 over 5 evening sessions;
- and involved 12 participants, on average 8-9 people per session - and 3 trainers (including the researcher), and an additional trainer for one session.

The sessions involved:

- session 1 – activity around about ‘what is important’ for working with people;
- session 2 – drama and role-play to explore themes from session 1;
- session 3 – diversity and story-telling;
- session 4 – visit to Mediation Scotland;
- session 5 – what’s been learnt?

Main contributions to this learning report:

- Discussion with participants during the course;
- Feedback from participants through feedback forms for session 1,2 and 3, and a learning chart in session 5;

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- Reflections from trainers and researchers during the course;
- Discussion with the Advisory Group.

Session 1: What is important when working with people?

The session included:

- Introduction to the course;
- Warm-up activities – question exercise, and listening exercise;
- Looking at what community participation and action people are involved with;
- Picture-based discussion exercise establishing themes ‘important for working with people’

11 people participated with 3 trainers; 8 people completed feedback forms.

Participants feedback:

Scored from 1- 5 (where 5 is high): av. 4.48; range 3-5.

Main comments:

Picture-work – worked well, enjoyed (3 people); although another person thought they were ‘less useful’ (1) and 2 other people felt that it needed clearer instructions (2)

Discussions, comparing views and experiences – worked well, enjoyed, learning (4)

Community awareness and range of participation– learning (3)

Enjoyed the ice-breakers – positive comments of good, great, quite good, interesting (8)

Introductions – positive comments (5) & one ‘ok’ (1)

Other comments:

All of session – worked well, enjoyed (2)

Meeting everyone (1)

Trainers’ feedback;

Good enough: picture-work worked – but would be better if told people the whole exercise at start so people have a picture of where it is going; and complete the exercise within first session that key themes are established, and exercise doesn’t drag on into the next session(s). So needs stronger time management.

'Famous people' (ice-breaker) exercise worked well – but need to be careful around thinking about names, and supporting people if exercise is difficult for them. 'Active listening' exercise could be held in reserve.

One person during the picture-work told of a very sad personal event within their family. They seemed comfortable in talking about this, and the group did not ill at ease. Would this be true for every group on such a course?

Researcher's summary:

In looking back over the whole course (see pages 11-14) some of the participants remained uncertain of the value of the 'picture-work', whereas others clearly valued it. This resonates with the feedback above where some of the group clearly valued it, one was uncertain about it, and others were frustrated by not getting enough information about the direction of the activity.

The feedback on the session showed that generally people enjoyed it and learnt from each other; but it seems important to complete the 'picture-work' within session 1, and to give clear instructions about 'why' we're doing the activity. The themes from this activity can then inform the rest of the course.

It is fair to say that further piloting of the course would allow a better bringing together of this activity with the rest of the course – and so a clearer judgement by participants of how useful it is to them.

Session 2: Using drama and role-play.

Session included:

- Active listening work – as a warm-up;
- Completing picture-work;
- Drama/role-play (led by a drama/roleplay trainer) including:
 - Forum theatre
 - Stop/start
 - Chinese whispers
 - Listening/ dreaming
- Planning for visit and social activity.

8 people participated with 3 trainers/researcher plus an additional trainers for the drama work; 5 people completed feedback.

Participants feedback:

Score from 1 to 5, where 5 is high: av. 4; range 2 – 5.

Main comments:

Enjoyed role-playing (2 people), one person didn't, although enjoyed watching others – but felt it wasn't for them(1)

Found it nerve-wracking (2) - 'pressure to participate'

Forum theatre worked well (1), good idea but didn't work well, needs improving, felt ignored during the scenario (1)

Turning pictures into themes – positive (3), not keen (1) ... valued the chance to explain difficulties with the task (1).

Other comments:

Role-play – learnt about how others think (1) and about supporting each other (1)

Listening/dreaming – didn't work well (1)

Chinese whispers – not work well (1), too obvious (1).

Not starting on time (1)

Receptiveness of trainers to an idea for a visit from someone in the group – positive (1)

A discussion of the role-playing work between participants in session 3:

Revealed that most people had enjoyed:

- the acting; the spontaneity; felt it could be useful for learning – see things from different perspectives;

But others had found it difficult:

- the spontaneity, pressure to take part,

And some were not sure of the relevance to the course and themes.

Trainers feedback:

- can be difficult if all trainers get involved in the exercise because people 'get in role' – rather than staying in trainer's role;
- so at least one trainer should not get involved but stay in training role, and support the group in keeping perspective on the exercise and coming out of role at the end of each part of the exercise;
- role-play and listening are powerful processes and can throw-up difficult feelings and experiences for people – trainers learning to manage this process is important;
- a slightly larger group of active participants would help – we had 8 present but with 6 active participants;
- emphasis on doing/saying what feels comfortable.

Researcher's summary:

The role-playing was difficult for some people, but other's either really enjoyed it or valued the challenge.

The trainers felt that it worked well and could work very well; restructuring the work so that people start with easier exercises, getting people 'up on their feet' and building towards the 'forum theatre' which can be used to help them think about some of the issues raised in the picture-work in Session 1. Role-play and drama does involve people not just in thinking but feeling and 'experiencing' events and this needs careful support and management.

This session needs more development work with the course trainers and the drama/role-play trainer, *continuing* to work together to:

- spend more time preparing for the session and making the links with the issues raised in session 1;
- in deciding what roles each of the trainers will play during the session – so that one trainer is always standing back;
- thinking through how those who don't want to actual do role-play can find other ways of joining in.

Session 3: Working with difference and diversity

Session included:

- feedback on session 2;
- completing 'picture-work' from session 1;
- thinking about diversity;
- story-telling activity;
- final planning for visit.

9 people, plus 3 trainers, participated; 7 people completed feedback forms.

Participants feedback:

Score from 1-5 with 5 the highest: av. 4.7; range 4-5.

Main comments:

Enjoyed the story-telling activity 'Time to flee' (5 people)
Learnt about the plight of asylum seekers (2)
Learnt about listening to others and individual opinions (3)

Time management – needs improving (3)
Valued feedback session on 'role-playing/drama work' (6)

Other comments:

Recognising diversity is important (1)
Planning for visit and social activity – positive comments (3)
Thinking about 'learning chart' – looks interesting (4)

Feedback through discussion in session 5 on 'time to flee' storytelling activity:

Range of positive comments including:
Seeing different perspectives/ putting yourself in their situation (asylum seekers) (6)
Positive experience of working in a group/team-working (6)
Interesting/enjoyable (2)

Trainers feedback:

Time to flee exercise worked well – powerful in terms of story and team-working

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Diversity part of exercise needs more work – could use definition of diversity, and BBC ‘Working Abroad’ resource or similar

Researcher’s summary:

Time to flee exercise worked very well, and shows how valuable story-telling work can be when a group is open to it.

Diversity needs a little more work – helping people understand what diversity points to in a community, and making it clear how this links with the story-telling.

Discussion of drama/role-playing work was productive for people and helped the group realise the different ways people had found it useful, what had been difficult and what could be developed and improved.

Session 4; Visit

Session included:

- Visit to Mediation Scotland and joined in a simple, lowkey role-playing exercise, and discussion on different types of mediation including community mediation (1.25 hour) ... plus travel time of up to 1 hour.

No formal feedback taken but 6 people went and all gave very positive feedback.

Trainers' feedback:

Yes, positive, interesting visit. The other possible visit/speaker on 'support work' with vulnerable people didn't happen but could be interesting future visit. Likewise, drug/alcohol work, or befriending work.

Researcher's summary: very enjoyable visit for all, and widen people's experience of the idea of mediation. Good ideas from the trainers on future possible visits, and that it can vary according to the interests of the group.

Session 5:

Session included:

- discussion of visit to Mediation Scotland;
- final planning for social activity;
- gifts exercise;
- learning chart.

9 people participated in this session; 6 people completed the learning chart as 3 people had to leave after the first 2 hours.

Participants' feedback;

Were given via the learning chart exercise – see feedback on whole of this course (pages 11-13) for detail of the learning chart information. Key themes arising for this session:

- one half of the group felt the 'sharing gifts' activity was generally useful and 'very enjoyable'; they also felt 'the learning chart' was useful for feeding back on the course – and generally useful for planning/evaluation work;
- the other half of the group felt that generally 'sharing and learning' activities like these two exercises were valuable for talking about 'community expectations' and for 'effective planning'.

Trainers' feedback:

The trainers were unsure if using the whole session to review learning was enough for the participants. The gifts exercise worked well. The learning chart people enjoyed but used more as feedback on the course rather than as opportunity to think about what they had learnt about the key themes identified by the 'picture-work'. Two ideas were suggested:

- putting an emphasis on what people were learning personally and how they want to develop their 'people skills' in the future;
- and, bringing in a speaker who could link them to other learning and training opportunities.

Researcher's summary: People enjoyed and learnt from the activities in the session ... but the session as a whole could do with more focus, and be seen as a culmination of the course's work; something that individuals and the group have been working towards.

Whole Course:

Learning Chart giving 'the learning' from all participants on different parts of the course ... (one group's comments in plain text, the other group's in italics)

Relationship to Themes from Picture-Work	Useful	Useful, but ...	Unsure ?!
Generally	<p>Listening – who I am? (3 people)</p> <p>Feed back in pairs (3)</p> <p>Sharing gifts (3) – very useful and enjoyable exercise</p> <p>Visit (3) resounding success thorough info and enjoyable (mediation)</p>	<p>Listening – my week (3), useful but...</p> <p>Dreaming in pairs, useful but ...</p> <p>Chinese whispers, useful but ...</p>	<p>Listening – not listening – not really relevant to the course (3)</p> <p>Forum theatre (2) – vague and open ended.</p> <p>Picture Imagination (3) had reservations about relevance</p>
Inclusion/ isolation	<i>Visit</i>	<p><i>Drama</i></p> <p>Drama (freeze) (1) useful, (1) isolated</p>	
Community Expectations	<p><i>Visit</i></p> <p><i>Listen</i></p> <p><i>Sharing & Learning</i></p>		
Having Fun	<p>Story-telling (3) useful very enjoyable</p> <p><i>Visit</i></p>		
Effective Planning	<p>Learning Chart (3), very useful for feedback from pilot course</p> <p><i>Sharing & Learning</i></p> <p><i>Story-telling</i></p> <p><i>Listen</i></p> <p><i>Pictures</i></p>		

The above learning chart gives the feedback from the group on the different themes and activities undertaken during the course – 6 people took part and were divided into 2 groups of 3 (see different text types for different groups).

One group felt positive about the themes and saw their relevance to the themes the group had raised through the 'picture-work'. The group generally gave a positive response to the activities but were more doubtful about:

- Drama/ Forum theatre (2) – vague and open ended.
- Picture Imagination (3) had reservations about relevance

(Also the 'Listening – not listening' exercise ... but this was one short 'warm-up' exercise)

The other group were positive about all the activities ... although felt that that the Drama work needed some development.

This suggests that there is further development work to do on these two activities – which fits with the feedback from the individual sessions – before they can be said to have a clear cut place in the course. Also some work to refine other activities in the 'useful, but...' section is needed

Trainers' overall feedback across the whole course:

Positive experiences of the whole course. They wonder if the course could work towards some 'end result' in session 5 – would some sort of personal or individual learning 'plan' be a good end to the course? They suggested re-structuring of the course for further piloting work in the following ways:

	Main activity and comment
Session 1	<i>Use picture-work ... but complete by end of session and then think how to bring themes into rest of course</i>
Session 2	<p><i>Use theme of exploring issues raised in session 1 in more depth</i></p> <p>Restructure 'role-play/drama' and build people's confidence to take part in it, so that the group can build towards using the 'forum theatre' as a way of exploring the themes/issues raised in session 1 in a little more depth.</p> <p>Also develop 'active listening work' and 'case studies & spider diagram work' to give trainers <i>different, alternative options</i> for working with a group to explore the themes/issues raised in session 1 in a little more depth.</p>
Session 3	<i>Use diversity discussion and story-telling activity (time to flee about refugees/asylum-seekers) ... develop diversity discussion further, and think about generating other stories for other issues around diversity e.g. experiences of disabled people, different neighbourhoods, that could be used.</i>
Session 4	<p><i>Visit ... Meditation Scotland for learning about community mediation is one clear and very positive option</i></p> <p>Valuable to locate other options as well e.g. support work, befriending, drugs and alcohol etc.</p>
Session 5	<p><i>Use theme of bringing together learning and personal growth/development</i></p> <p>But develop structure further to consider including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Gifts exercise</i> (used in pilot 1) for feedback on their (positive) contributions to the group; • <i>Speaker</i> – outlining the value of personal learning and planning for this, and opportunities to do this (link with Volunteer Fayre or Volunteer Centre Edinburgh; or locally CBP and Adult Learning Link);

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Or instead of speaker, video of speaker on personal learning and growth e.g. Carl Rogers on Person-centred approaches to growth;• <i>Individual learning 'chart' (rather than a group learning chart)</i> looking at what they think is important to them in 'their work with local people' and how they might take this forward – needs to be done carefully so that people don't feel over exposed.
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Advisory Group's comments: key comment from the advisory group was that session 5 should involve a 'stronger learning and networking' input so that people can be clear:

- What the learning opportunities and organisations are within the area;
- And what the networking opportunities – for getting community support.

Researcher's recommendations.

General comment: The responses across the course from both participants and the trainers are very encouraging, and the core structure and activities of the course are a strong framework for future piloting work. There is more work to be done:

- on refining some of the activities;
- on locating and trying out other activities, to give the trainers more options;
- on focusing the course on to an underlying theme that the group are working towards completing in session 5 for example one of the themes the group raises in session 1 and/or individual learning plans for future work.

1. Refining the structure and underlying theme of this course: To use the proposed structure on pages 12 and 13 as the format for further piloting. This would allow the testing out of an overall or underlying theme for the course of:

getting better at learning how to support your work (unpaid and paid) with the people in your community.

There will be an opportunities within this to refine the key activities in sessions 1, 2 and 5, and to increase the range of possible activities or options for trainers to use in sessions 2, 3, 4 and 5.

2. Recommendations 4) and 5) on 'Diversity' of those attending the course and 'Follow-up' once the course has finished from the 'Understanding Your Community' course are relevant to this course too – see appendix 1 in this report.

Appendix one: recommendations 4 and 5 from Understanding Your Community first pilot.

4. Reaching a greater diversity of people: One person felt that the course had not reached people on the 'outside' of existing networks; another comment was the lack of minority ethnic involvement in the course. The researcher's own perception is that there was a reasonable mix of people on the course including:

- people with considerable experience of community participation
- people with growing experience, and already with significant contacts with the CBP and/or other local organisations
- people beginning to develop their community involvement

However, having established the introductory course, there is challenge for the CBP and the Advisory Group to take it further afield and increase the diversity of people getting involved, through:

- work with other local organisations and community groups to run the course (or parts of it) in people's 'own' spaces – centres, churches, schools, and support them in working on the issues that matter to them;
- increase the diversity of people involved particularly those with little experience of community involvement, people with disabilities, people from minority ethnic groups, young people, and older people

The proposed 2nd pilot in partnership with the Thistle Foundation, who have strong links with disabled people in the area, is one of example of how this can happen. The CBP and the Advisory Group should work together to plan future use across the community of these courses.

5. Follow-up work:

The course has 'started things' that need completing:

- *More work on the issues raised;* Community Safety remains an outstanding issue; Regeneration is being taken up by some of the group who undertook the Understanding Community Regeneration course; other issues – local decision-making, youth and inter-generational work, community knowledge, need to be returned to in some form or other. The CBP and the Advisory Group should consider how to take these issues forward.
- *Involving participants as co-trainers:* two participants on this first pilot have mention interest in working with a lead trainer on a future course; two others were more ambivalent. This would be a great opportunity for people to develop individually and for the course to benefit from their local knowledge and contacts. The CBP and the Advisory Group should consider running a 'training for trainers' course aimed at those

who've been on any of the pilot courses and who would like to think more about being co-trainers on future courses.

- *Accessing more training:* the worker from Adult Learning Link who gave a short presentation in session 4 suggested an 'exit guidance' session for those who had been on this or other of the pilot courses, to support them in considering other options. The CBP and the Advisory Group should consider developing such a session with other relevant local organisations such as Adult Learning Link, Worktrack, Child Care Services, and potentially a City-wide body such as Volunteer Centre Edinburgh.
- *Individual learning as well as group learning:* one member of the advisory group suggested that the course presently is focused on group learning and that some people might value an individual learning approach. This is definitely an issue for further consideration and potential further work, by the Capacity Building Project and the Advisory Group.