

## **Craigmillar Learning for Community Participation and Action report: Chapter 3 – Local campaigning.**

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*Ó Craigmillar Capacity Building Project*

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A 'research group' of local people - to initially locate key issues and concerns

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A full list of those who wished to be acknowledged is found in the separate Chapter 12: 'Background information (appendices)'.

**Thanks also to the following for allowing the use of text from one of their publications:**

Craigmillar Communiversity (see chapters 7 and 9)  
The Estate of Bill Douglas (see chapter 7).

## **Chapter 3: Local campaigning**

### **Introduction:**

Many local groups have been involved in campaigning work. This chapter describes the skills and knowledge they have accumulated which have helped them in seeking to create change. It covers:

- the value of finding out more/researching (pages 4-5)
- a variety of campaigning activities used locally (pages 6-8)
- complex campaigning (page 9)
- a final comment on what a learning programme needs to consider (pages 10-11).

**Note:** Before reading this chapter it would be useful to look at Chapter 1a. This will give you some background information on lifelong learning, community learning and development, and participatory research.

## **Research: finding out more about what's happening**

The Lismore Parents Action Group successfully campaigned against the threatened closure of their local primary school from February to September 2004, and put time into finding out more about issues connected with the school's closure. These included finding out:

- about the City Councillors in Edinburgh through the internet
- about land values
- that the school is a listed building
- finding out about health and safety issues on routes to a different school.

They felt more confident about what they were arguing for, but also found information that asked important questions about the Council proposals – such as there were other schools that had fewer pupils than Lismore Primary School that weren't threatened.

Research also helped them locate local expertise. For instance they found someone who is an Advocate within the court system to give them advice and information on legal matters.

Another person has done a lot of learning through the East Edinburgh Older People's Forum: they have been to 2 Age Concern conferences, been to visit another local forum, and visited the Scottish Parliament with the Older People's Independent Party MSP, John Swinburne. This learning through meeting with others is a form of research and it has kept them up to date on a range of older people's issues. It has led to them being involved in campaigning for older people's rights by joining in with campaigning against the council tax<sup>1</sup>.

*Researching a manifesto* – Womanzone, a local organisation working with local women around the theme of health and well-being<sup>2</sup>, have developed a charter of women's rights with women in Craigmillar – linked with the 1998 Human Rights Act<sup>3</sup> covering healthcare, housing, disability, children and childcare, employment, violence against women, poverty, racism and sexuality. This acts as a backdrop to their activities including campaigning

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<sup>1</sup> The council tax can particularly discriminate against older people who often live alone, are more likely to be on low incomes, and can be more likely to live in a larger family property from when they were working.

<sup>2</sup> Womanzone's activities include: swimming at the Thistle, outings with CAPRO including orienteering, counselling, drama group, work on stopping smoking and drug abuse, Food Coop, cookery group, pregnant women's cookery group and pregnant women's health eating pack, literacy, advocacy and more general help, for instance, with homework and moving house. For contact details go on the internet to: [www.craigmillarcapacitybuilding.org/pdf/directory%202004.pdf](http://www.craigmillarcapacitybuilding.org/pdf/directory%202004.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.yourrights.org.uk/your-rights/the-human-rights-act/index.shtml> for detail on the UK's Human Rights Act 1998

activities such as the annual '16 days of protest' in December – giving them easily accessible and strong arguments for their work.

**Comment on learning:** local people have knowledge of research skills and have found investing time and effort in research pays off. It helps them both in campaigning but also more broadly in the work they are doing – they have more knowledge to work with. A learning programme can support people in gaining confidence in their research skills, and putting them in touch with other local people who have already done this.

### **Tactics that local people have used in their campaigning work**

*Using film* – one person connected with the Craigmillar Ability Network<sup>4</sup> used a video camera to get results

*I was with one blind person and one person using a wheelchair. I was just filming them getting a ticket and getting on a train to see what happened. It was going to be undercover but we were stopped by railway management. They said that we had to attend a training session on health and safety, be accompanied by two railway staff, and pay £800-1000.*

*We learnt a lot from doing this. It almost doesn't matter, the actually doing it, because it can spur people into action. A blind person uses the texture of the ground through their shoes and we found the turning circle at the railway was very dangerous to blind people. The upshot was temporary barriers we're put up around the turning circle.*

*Using the Arts to deliver powerful messages* – a local resident and arts worker worked with young people to develop a road safety campaign, 'We live here – please slowdown':

*We got 2000 Polaroids from Jessops and put up boards. Kids painted from photos on to half-size plywood boards. 8 people on the doles helped 8 kids at a time. 300-400 kids on a play scheme took part.*

The boards were put up along Newcraighall Rd to tell drivers to slow down – although they were only allowed to be up for a few days they gave a powerful message.

*Using a conference as a springboard* - the Disability Democracy and Society Group<sup>5</sup> held a conference in 2001 on the accessibility of public transport to people with disabilities.

*The findings of conference were that there was no public transport in Craigmillar for disabled people at that time. The conference has improved things – the buses are now accessible – this is ongoing work though. We have produced a taxi-driver training pack as well.*

*Using action research* – A group of 9 young people, the Castlebrae Casuals<sup>6</sup>, worked together with the support of local organisations, Instep, the Venchie

<sup>4</sup> For contact details for the Craigmillar Ability Network go on the internet to: [www.craigmillarcapacitybuilding.org/pdf/directory%202004.pdf](http://www.craigmillarcapacitybuilding.org/pdf/directory%202004.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> For more information on the Democracy, Disability and Society Group (DDS Group) look on the internet at: [www.ddsg.org.uk](http://www.ddsg.org.uk) The group is connected with the Thistle Foundation.

<sup>6</sup> For contact details for Instep, the Venchie Children and Young People's project and the Craigmillar Capacity Building Project go to the internet at: [www.craigmillarcapacitybuilding.org/pdf/directory%202004.pdf](http://www.craigmillarcapacitybuilding.org/pdf/directory%202004.pdf)

Children and Young People's Project, and the Capacity Building Project, and the Edinburgh film-makers, Young People Speak Out, to find out what concerned young people across Craigmillar thought. In meetings with 100 young people<sup>7</sup>, they:

*Showed youth groups photos of the good and the bad of Craigmillar, interviewed them about the good and bad things, and the things they wanted to change.*

Their report showed that young people had these key concerns (priorities):

- *more clubs and recreational facilities*
- *fear of some adults addicted to drugs and suffering from alcoholism*
- *community safety – feeling safer generally*
- *a better environment.*

Their work ended:

*With an event at UCI Kinnaird Park which include 'Oscars'; what was the best thing and what was the worst thing – 3 good and 3 bad nominations - also had great food, a footballer came, and bowling.*

A panel of local decision-makers attended the event. In the process they produced a video, learning about:

*Recording and getting the angles right for the video, and had to put a lot of work in – making a questionnaire and discussing things*

*Finding a local 'guide' – a group of local parents whose children are at Castleview Primary School were concerned about road safety for their children because of heavy traffic. They contacted a range of representatives and organisations including the council to raise awareness of this issue. They had success in getting local radio to cover their campaign and a local paper sent a photographer but did not use then use the photo. They also made contact with several MSPs<sup>8</sup> for Edinburgh and gained their support for their campaign.*

They worked closely with a Community Education worker who guided them through local decision making and local services. Eventually it was agreed with the City Council that the Council would fund a 'lollipop-person' for the road although it has not yet been possible find someone to take up the job. The City Council has not been willing to consider other measures until statistics show an increased risk ... that is an actual increase in accidents on the road!

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<sup>7</sup> Including the Brownies at Richmond Church, Greendykes Hut, Jack Kane Centre Boys Club, The Venchie, St.Teresa's Chapel, Castleview Community Centre, Craigmillar Out of School Club (COOSP), and the Thistle Foundation.

<sup>8</sup> Member of the Scottish Parliament

**Comment on learning:** local people have a range of skills and tactics for campaigning work - creating powerful messages through pictures and film, on how to get decision makers to focus on issues and take action, on how to work with the media and on how to make links with other active people and organisations. This is a strong base for a local learning programme to draw upon.

### **More complex campaigning: thinking about strategies**

Several people spoke about the importance of developing your thinking about what will make a difference. One person described the importance of learning how to work with officials:

*You need to know how to participate in discussions and public meetings. Some people are 'shouting and screaming' at the authorities. They have passionate views and you come away feeling you've won. But authority officers are used to dealing with this.*

Further that going to meetings in themselves is not enough:

*Decisions are not made at meetings but outside of them, between meetings. Don't mouth off at meetings but think about how you can get what you can for the area. It's a tall order to gain those sophisticated skills and it requires confidence, as professional people have a lot of education and speak the right words.*

It's important to understand how decision-making systems such as within the council work if you want to impact on them – see chapter 8 for more on partnership working.

Another person recognised that taking part in public meetings is not necessarily an effective strategy - it may act as a block to your concerns:

*The role of public meetings is to put down the opposition. Then they tell you what they are going to do the day before.*

The Lismore Parents Action Group described their campaign as:

*A war of attrition ... we were not giving in. If they were not listening, what are we going to do? We were thinking about it all night. Be passionate ... we're not stupid people, they underestimated us.*

Two different people described how they learned about:

*Intense lobbying of councillors– targeted,*

*Learn who's genuine and who's bull-shitting*

**Comment on learning:** It takes considerable commitment to campaign effectively on some issues. There can be powerful forces ranged against you, such as local and central government bureaucracy and economic issues like making profit, where the needs of the private sector and of the market will also impact significantly. It takes sophisticated skills to have some impact on these forces. These are skills that some local people have, and that many others can develop. Again it is crucial to draw upon such knowledge and a learning programme would need to tap into these local resources

### **Final comment on learning for people who are active in the community**

Not all of this sort of work is about hard-hitting campaigning. A key element can be about building up relationships and good communication. It can be about building up an ongoing relationship with local representative. For instance, several members of Bingham 50+ Management Committee spoke of keeping in communication with their local councillor. This sort of communication is a key starting point for influencing decision makers.

This chapter shows some of the discussions that local people are wanting and needing to have with decision makers; local, city-wide and national decision-makers within government. A key starting point is having the confidence in your concerns and in yourself to actually do this.

One worker working with local people and the Pilton Partnership in North Edinburgh has spent considerable time in making sure that local active people feel able to think carefully and critically about national and city-wide policies. In particular to support people in thinking about 'the bigger picture' and how local campaigning might successfully impact on day-to-day concerns – concerns such as domestic violence against women, and low wages in mundane jobs.

One way of thinking that the worker has found useful is that of 'Community Psychology'. A community psychology course can support people in exploring how their experiences fit into 'the bigger picture'. There is a clear danger of people being forced to see themselves as being individually responsible (taking the blame) for the unjust situations they face, or likewise responsible as an individual community. For instance, people living in poverty, women suffering domestic violence, communities losing self-belief can be blamed in this way. This sort of blaming continues this process of 'victimising' individual people and individual communities.

The Community Psychology course has created a space for people to look outwards towards the bigger picture, to understand the psychological damage that poverty and discrimination creates. It gives people the chance to think through their experiences, come to terms with them, and ask how they connect with:

- government policy and how resources and services are distributed
- the economy – profit-making, the role of the market in directing investment
- cultural and social 'norms' – the assumptions we make about how things *should* be, and how these can be discriminatory.

And by giving people this space, it allows them to think about what needs to change and how that might happen, 'what might move their situation on'. This can be valuable for local campaigners who are seeking to both make a difference to their community and are working to make change last, making it sustainable.

A learning programme can work with the idea, raised in Chapter 1b through the work of Jane Thompson, of 'committed dialogue'.<sup>9</sup> A learning programme can see the range of experience and knowledge that people have described in this chapter as parts of the process of creating this dialogue - experiences such as:

- the value of community research
- campaigning tools
- campaigning strategies.

Such a committed dialogue can lead onto the sorts of thinking that community psychology brings, and give people the space to talk through the injustices and inequalities they face - and think about how realistically this can be challenged.

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<sup>9</sup> See Chapter 1b pages 12-13 and 17, and also Jane Thompson's (2001) report, 'Rerooting lifelong learning: resourcing neighbourhood renewal.' Details from the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education on the Internet at: <http://www.niace.org.uk/>.