

## **Craigmillar Learning for Community Participation and Action report: Chapter 4 – Working with people.**

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*Ó Craigmillar Capacity Building Project*

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

**Please note:** the views of individual people, groups and organisations used within this report, and those of the lead researcher in expressing his interpretations and views in this report, cannot be assumed to be those of the Craigmillar Capacity Building Project.

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

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

## Chapter 4: Working with people

### Introduction

Many people are working with individuals or groups of people, either in supportive roles and/or leadership roles and have developed a strong understanding of how to work with others – what can be called ‘people skills’. These could be said to be skills for working with people and getting the ‘best out of them’ in that particular situation. For example, supporting people in working effectively in meetings or in joining in with a survey.

There are many circumstances where this is happening – in community groups and organisations, at committees or in meetings, at social clubs or ‘out in the community’. The way such skills are used will depend on the particular circumstance and the type of culture and expectations within that group or network of people.

This chapter covers the broad themes that local active people talked about:

- general people skills including boundaries and listening (pages 4-8)
- building trust (pages 9-10)
- using creativity (pages 11-12)
- human rights and ‘the bigger picture’ (page 13)
- working with groups (page 14)
- leadership roles (page 15-16)
- recognising conflict (page 17)
- final comments on a learning programme (page 18).

**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.

### **General ‘people skills’: Working with confidentiality**

Many active people recognised the importance of confidentiality in their various roles.

One person giving support on health issues spoke of how they had built their understanding of confidentiality:

*I got counselling training ... the course convinced me I was doing the right thing. Confidentiality I (had) learnt through doing office paperwork.*

Thus they were using their past experience and confirming that through relevant training and learning.

Another person working as a volunteer with children and young people said:

*I had to learn to work with confidential things when doing youth work ... you're not just a local person but a worker.*

The ‘research group’<sup>1</sup> had a common understanding of the idea of confidentiality and agreed that this research project needed to take confidentiality seriously:

*If it's not confidential people won't open up*

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<sup>1</sup> ‘The research group’ was a mix of local active people from different parts of the community. It involved 7 different local active people; 4 people who were volunteers or activists; 3 people who were both staff with local organisations, lived locally and were active in the community and 2 people who were staff in local organisations but did not live locally also attended 1 meeting. There were 3 meetings in all – some people attended once, some twice.

### **General ‘people skills’: Using ground-rules and boundaries**

Several people or groups spoke of the value of ground rules – that is agreeing with another person or within a group or network what the guidelines for working together will be. Some people also spoke of the importance of boundaries - that is developing an understanding with someone or a group of the ways you will be involved in working with them. This could be to do with what you will talk about, what your role is with them, in what ways you are committed to the work, and where that commitment ends.

Women who are members of Womanzone, the women’s community health project, described how the organisation has developed a set of ground rules with its members:

*Rules for Womanzone include confidentiality, respect, no bad language<sup>2</sup>*

Another group used ground-rules on a development day that included:

- taking a problem solving approach
- not personalising issues
- have fun!

One person who works with local young people spoke of the value of the ACT<sup>3</sup> youth work course they undertook through the Capacity Building Project, which:

*Opened our eyes to ‘rules and regulations’, which are important to learn, and the idea of ‘boundaries’.*

The ACT group, 4 people who had been on the ACT youth work level 1 course, likewise spoke of the value of boundaries:

*Boundaries – learning about yours and everyone else’s*

*Child protection – keeping yourself safe; although the ACT never went into (full) detail.*

They spoke about learning to be clear about:

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<sup>2</sup> Womanzone rules for groups cover – respect, listening, confidentiality, bad language, violence, racism, sexism, stolen goods, alcohol and drugs, male partners. For contact details for Womanzone go on the internet to: [www.craigmillarcapacitybuilding.org/pdf/directory%202004.pdf](http://www.craigmillarcapacitybuilding.org/pdf/directory%202004.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> A group of people who had been involve in the ACT youth workers training through the Capacity Building Project. The ACT course, ‘A Consortium o f Training’, is a training course for part-time and volunteer staff in Community Learning and Development. It is aimed at local authorities and voluntary organisations and is for those involved in work with 5-12s, youth work, adult learning or community work. Current consortium members are: Midlothian Council, Moray House Institute (University of Edinburgh), Scottish Borders Council, West Lothian Council and Craigmillar Capacity Building Project. The training is accredited – that is it is recognised by colleges and university.

*What to share, what not to share.*

For instance if you are feeling more emotional than usual, you may be vulnerable to saying more than you would normally say. One example given being for (some) women during their menstrual cycle.

Others too were aware of the importance of boundaries. One person giving advice to people with a health problem advised:

*Meet with people in a public place rather than a private place e.g. a café. I used to meet with 16-30 people but now I'm down to about 4 (a year).*

One volunteer with the Craigmillar Credit Union, which provides financial services, spoke of situations where people come over in a financial crisis, and that staff then step in to work with people in these circumstances - an example again of being clear about where the boundaries of your role lie.

### **General ‘people skills’: Listening and good communication**

Being able to communicate effectively with people was also seen as important. One person working with a group of young people felt that an introduction to counselling course had developed their listening:

*You need counselling skills to listen to young people. It’s really good, and gave me deeper insight into what I want to do.*

The ACT group discussed the value of ‘listening’ fully:

*Understand body language – the way people are standing and holding themselves. Crying doesn’t always have to be because you’re hurt – you could be happy.*

They also saw the value of drawing on your life experience in communicating and working with others:

*Drawing on your life experience – ‘I never knew I knew half of what I knew till I went there.’*

One person spoke of learning facilitation skills and using participatory research skills, through the ‘We have the Power’ campaign group<sup>4</sup>

*I learnt how to be a facilitator and can work with big groups and small groups ... People can put a cross (so works for people don’t have literacy skills) and uses simple questions<sup>5</sup>.*

The research group felt that ‘active listening’ was important to any research work:

*Be seen to actively listen and writing down what people say*

**Comment on learning from general ‘people skills’:** This range of knowledge and skills for working with people – confidentiality, ground rules, boundaries and listening – are skills that local people have mastered and brought into their roles in the community. They are the basic skills for maintaining positive working relationships with people and can be used in a variety of situations. Here they’ve been used in working with young people, advising and researching – but they could be useful in meetings and

<sup>4</sup> The group worked with Craigmillar Adult Learning network (CALNET) and the Capacity Building Project to produce a video-report and report, ‘That wee word MON£Y (and other things) in Adult Learning’, and these are available through Adult Learning Link and the Capacity Building Project. For contact details go on the internet to: [www.adultlearninglink.edin.org](http://www.adultlearninglink.edin.org) or [www.craigmillarcapacitybuilding.org/](http://www.craigmillarcapacitybuilding.org/)

<sup>5</sup> This particular participatory research method is known as the ‘H-Frame’ – and is a simple but effective method for getting groups of people to talk about what is ‘good’ and ‘bad’ about a plan or a situation, and how the proposal could be ‘improved’.

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negotiations too. They are 'transferable' from one situation to another – that is you can use them in very different situations with people.

This means that they are a crucial area for a learning programme for people who are active in the community. They will be vital to support people in sharing and developing their knowledge and skills for working with others.

## **Building trust**

Another important and closely linked theme to the 'general skills for working with people' is that of building and maintaining trust so that people feel confident to work together.

One person working with young people through drama saw its value in increasing trust between people:

*People aren't always trusting and want to know what's behind it. Drama is valuable in this.*

The ACT group, people who work with young people, spoke of the value of seeking to work with young people:

*Working with is easier than dictating to a child: we learnt about encouragement, be nice to them.*

That is the value of building trust rather than 'laying down the law'.

Another person working with young people through the arts spoke too of the importance of encouraging young people and working cooperatively:

*Looking to be 'an adult in the background' for young people. They are 'the next generation' and if we don't encourage them we're going nowhere'.*

Respect was also a common theme and the 'research group' felt any community research needed to:

*Respect other people's views, and let other people speak by being: open-minded, not judgemental, encouraging people to say what they think, not putting words in people's mouths, and not having your own agenda*

Likewise community organisations and community services needed to develop a culture that builds trust. One person volunteering with the local Credit Union spoke of induction training<sup>6</sup> from a staff member about that organisation's policies:

*(It) has policies which include, respecting views, include(ing) people and equal opportunities*

Sorting out mistakes needs careful attention if people aren't to lose trust. One person with experience of taking leadership roles within committees explained the sorts of thinking that is useful:

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<sup>6</sup> Induction training is training when you first start that introduces you to a role and the organisation or group.

*Leadership, if anything goes untoward be accountable – say we’re going to rectify the situation. Admit I’ve got it wrong and I’ve made a mistake ... but it needs good communication and dialogue between officers. There’s a danger of ‘my pal will think I’m weak’ and the loss of brownie points, so that the losers will be the community ...*

There is a tension here between:

- on the one hand, being open about mistakes and using them to build trust and learning from them;
- and on the other hand, recognising the sensitivity around mistakes and handling them with care so that relationships aren’t damaged and the community’s opportunities, concerns and interests aren’t sidelined.

**Comment on learning:** Many active people spoke of the value of building trust and it was recognised as being crucial in many different situations. Knowledge and skills that support trust, openness and a culture of learning are valuable to active people in their community participation and can be adapted to fit different situations.

### **Using creativity: mixing fun and work**

The use of creative activities to support people in learning has been extensively in Craigmillar for decades, for instance, in the work of the Craigmillar Festival Society and its 'Arts: the catalyst model' – see Chapter 9 for more details. This type of work continues to do this day.

A group of younger people took part in the Revolting Youth course.<sup>7</sup> This was a pilot course aimed at developing young people's abilities to campaign on issues that are important to them, and was organised by Café K with the Jack Kane Community Centre and the Capacity Building project. In their own report on the course, they pointed the value of arts and craft work to them:<sup>8</sup>

*"We had a good laugh doing the art in groups and plus we found some things out about each other."*

The Children Decide group, supported by the Venchie Children and Young People's project<sup>9</sup>, have used a variety of creative approaches to both design and then work to get built a skate-park; these included:

*Built a model of what the areas was like and what we wanted it to be like using cartons, boxes, pictures.*

*Producing an exhibition of photos and then a booklet about the project.*

*Looking at the play parks in the area – took photos – saw what was suitable for teenagers – nothing.*

A local company, Simmers, have worked with young people at Castlebrae Community High School, through 'the Simmers Challenge' – a piece of work that has won awards and is being used as model by the Scottish Executive in its advice on partnership working and community planning between the private sector, public sector, voluntary sector and communities. The students compete to develop a new type of biscuit:

*'From design and costing through to production and marketing'<sup>10</sup>*

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<sup>7</sup> A pilot training course for young people developed with young people by Café K, the Jack Kane Community Centre and the Capacity Building Project, with support from the City of Edinburgh Community Education and the Craigmillar Partnership, which "aimed to provide 'alternative active citizenship' and explore the responsibilities of society, the government and those in local community structures to young people".

<sup>8</sup> See the 'Revolting Youth' report produced by the young people who took part in the course, and is available through the Café K and the Jack Kane Community Centre – for their contact details go on the internet to: [www.craigmillarcapacitybuilding.org/pdf/directory%202004.pdf](http://www.craigmillarcapacitybuilding.org/pdf/directory%202004.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> For contact details for Children Decide and the Venchie Children's project go on the internet to: [www.craigmillarcapacitybuilding.org/pdf/directory%202004.pdf](http://www.craigmillarcapacitybuilding.org/pdf/directory%202004.pdf)

The ACT group emphasised too that they were thinking about the need for a:

*'Happy learning environment', involve young people in learning but in a fun way*

Creativity works for adults as well. One active person who went on an outward bound course with other local people concluded:

*Fantastic to see what you can do with 'nothing' – trees, the great outdoors – 'we used ourselves, trees, water – didn't need a football'*

*Out of the everyday routine ... learn to adapt to others including falling out with people*

Womanzone have a drama group which local members described as building:

*Confidence, assertiveness, listening (skills) and team-building*

**Comment on learning:** the use of creative activities brings in a different dimension to learning that many people who are active in the community find both enjoyable and effective in supporting what they are trying to achieve – not just young people but adults too. A learning programme needs to recognise the value of creativity in increasing the confidence and the powers of find imagination to find solutions.

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<sup>10</sup> The Simmer's Challenge was a Big Tick winner at 'The Awards for Excellence 2004. The BUPA Healthy Communities Award supported by the Department of Health'. For more information see [http://www.bitc.org.uk/resources/case\\_studies/hc\\_205\\_simmers.html](http://www.bitc.org.uk/resources/case_studies/hc_205_simmers.html)

## **Recognising people's rights and seeing the bigger picture**

The ACT group spoke of the importance of recognising young people's rights in their work.

*Kids like affection, they keep coming back; violence breeds violence, caring breeds caring.*

The issue of rights was raised too in the report<sup>11</sup> from the young people involved in the Revolting Youth pilot course:

*"I liked being able to correct one of the workers about 'rights of the child' – I felt clever!"*

One person working with young people describe taking a group of children away for the day:

*One wee-boy who is a handful, energetic. His grandparents were really pleased. He had a great day and did fine, there was no need for a row. And they were really pleased.*

It was important to this person to understand the bigger picture of their work, which included:

*Seeing the real picture of what's going on: more drugs in the community, children needing more food, parents needing support as well*

*Children and young people (on trips) learning about new situations and going out in other areas, learning coping and surviving skills*

*Working with 'difficult kids' successfully benefits the whole community*

They saw their work as an opportunity to explore the bigger picture and to ask questions about the rights of young people, their families and the whole community to a decent way of life.

**Comment on learning:** People who are active in the community are seeing the importance of bringing into their participation:

- a framework of rights and values
- exploring the bigger picture of how people's lives connect up – what affects and supports people.

These are important areas for a learning programme to work with and support people in sharing their knowledge and experience.

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<sup>11</sup> See contact details for the Revolting Youth course and report in the previous section.

## **Learning about working in a group**

The ACT Group described their experiences of learning more about working in a group of people through the ACT youth work level 1 course. They did different activities working in groups and learning about being in a group, and described what they felt they had learnt from this training:

### 1. Gaining confidence in groups:

*Got a chance to speak in a group  
Gave us confidence  
I was totally withdrawn; I was a mouse now I'm a lion  
Now allowed me to speak in a group with you  
Gained nothing but confidence*

### 2. Using role-play:

*Role playing: everyone gets a chance to play different roles – actively.  
Role-playing: it was fun, not embarrassing; everyone was in the same position.*

### 3. Working with others:

*Teamwork  
See different people's point of view  
Sharing each others opinions*

### 4. Finding a new approach:

*I learnt to talk to other human beings again  
Whole new way of thinking – now you can't shut me up*

**Comment on learning:** Clearly the experience of being together in a group and working together to learn was powerful for this group of people. Working in groups isn't always so successful and so needs to be carefully planned, but finding ways to bring this into a learning programme would be very valuable, as it is such a crucial skill for people active in the community to master.

## Understanding leadership

One person with experience of work as the chair of various committees gave the following view, built from experience, of the work of a chair that provides leadership:

*A good chair can be in the background as long as the work is being done.*

Key aspects of leadership include:

*Develop your awareness - look behind to see other forces*

*Communication – bringing together the many spheres*

*Use your awareness and ask, ‘can we get half-way for everyone?’*

That is developing an awareness that sees across the group or committee, understands the different priorities and concerns that people are bringing, and how communication and leadership can work at finding ways of bringing these differences together:

*All depends on individuals in committees. You need to carry people with you and there are will be many spheres of thought on how to reach the target.*

Fundamental to this approach to leadership is the:

*Importance of people believing in you, having faith, (seeing you as) a ‘good egg’, with integrity*

The ACT group spoke of learning more about leadership. Using a model of 3 styles of leadership:

*Laissez-faire: that is going with the flow*

*Autocratic: that following a strong leader*

*Democratic: that is through negotiation and cooperation*

They concluded:

*You need a mix of these depending on the situation ... be wise to know when*

Another person spoke of the value of training for people chairing meetings:

*More training would be useful on chairing Boards, and on the role of the Chair and other Directors so that you feel a better chair. Discussion is needed beforehand sometimes so know more about the issues for the meeting and people don’t spring things on you out of the blue ... 2 hours before one meeting they gave me a great big agenda.*

*So I said this isn't good enough, from now on I need these papers a week before the meeting. Now I discuss them with a worker beforehand.*

This person also valued:

*Public-speaking training: pick a subject and talk for 5 minutes so that you can sound reasonable*

**Comment on learning:** Leadership is a complex skill with different elements, and a full understanding of it is beyond this chapter. However clearly people active in the community are thinking about it and how to apply it to their work, and recognising the tensions and difficulties that effective leadership brings. It is an area that local active people can find it useful to think about even if they are presently in or wanting to be in a leadership role. With such thought, they will be better placed to constructively support people who are taking leadership roles. Also, where there are difficulties within an organisation or situation, they could help work to resolve them. A learning programme therefore could valuably include leadership as a n area of learning.

## **Recognising conflicts and differences**

The experience of differences between people, the conflicts they can create, and how they might be resolved was, of course as in any community, widespread. One person working with young people highlighted a common experience within groups – people needing to adjust to their differences:

*I had an argument with one girl who attends ... but now we've learnt to accept our differences.*

Several people with learning difficulties and a support worker highlighted the difficulties they face with in getting involved in the community:

*Unwillingness of staff in a charity shop to take-up support role*

*Staff at a community group were uncomfortable with 'risks' involved – had a different attitude to 'risk-taking' than support services*

*Resistance from members of a community group to full involvement of people with learning difficulties e.g. couldn't be full members*

And a member of the community council saw value in accepting different views:

*We need to understand we've all got different points of view – never going to have 20 people around the table with the same points of view. It never works all the time but we're not unique in that, every community council will face what we're facing.*

**Comment on learning:** Clearly active people recognise conflict and difference as an important area to work with. Although no particular resolutions are described here that doesn't mean there aren't experiences and knowledge to tap into. Importantly within any learning programme it will be necessary to find ways of working with conflict that people can explore, check out and adapt to their needs. It is unlikely, however, that there will be straightforward answers to this.

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

This broad overview has introduced the wide range of skills and knowledge that people who are active in the community are bringing to their work. This is a wide range of skills to bring together and it takes time and practice to integrate them into what you are doing. The ACT course is one example where people are finding the space to work with each other and with tutors to develop their effectiveness.

Certainly these skills are invaluable in a wide range of community participation: skills such as building trust, leadership and working with conflict, for instance, are all crucial elements in any community activity.

Volunteer Centre Edinburgh<sup>12</sup> runs general courses for volunteers on:

- working with boundaries
- working with equal opportunities and difference
- working with difficult situations

These are 'transferable' skills that are usable in different situations. And they are skills and knowledge that fit well with what people have said within the research. This can be summarised as:

- general people skills: boundaries, ground-rules, listening, confidentiality
- group skills: using creativity, working with groups
- the bigger picture: of human rights, human needs, and human diversity
- working with 'difficult situations': building trust, handling conflict, leadership roles.

This can be a starting point for a learning programme in developing an ongoing 'committed dialogue' with local people about the people skills that they find useful. Such a dialogue mustn't only point in the direction of managing difficult situations and problems but should also see the context of where local people are coming from – a community with ongoing experience of poverty is one under great stress.

It will remain an ongoing challenge for such a learning programme to keep this learning relevant to the work of people who actively live in the community. As one person pointed out, the people they work with live next door to them, and pop into their house. This is very different to the work of professionals and staff who work in a different area to the one they live in. Boundaries cannot mean exactly the same thing in a community to a workplace. The way people use the idea in the community has to work with the ethos of the neighbourhood, with the way their neighbourhood works, as well as with legal considerations and guidelines from services and professional bodies.

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<sup>12</sup> Contact details and further information for the Volunteer Centre Edinburgh can be found on the internet on: [www.edinburghvolunteers.org](http://www.edinburghvolunteers.org)