

Craigmillar Learning for Community Participation and Action report: Chapter 5 – Organising meetings and events.

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A 'research group' of local people - to 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 Communiversitiy (see chapters 7 and 9)
The Estate of Bill Douglas (see chapter 7)

Chapter 5: Organising meetings and events

Introduction

People spoke widely of organising events, meetings and activities, the very practical activities that sustain community and neighbourhood life, for example:

- Community events, e.g. festivals
- Social events, e.g. lunch clubs
- Leisure activities, e.g. sports events
- Day to day meetings, e.g. committee or group meetings
- Public meetings, e.g. speakers talking on current matters
- Fundraising events and schemes, e.g. fairs, sales, bingo.

One person spoke about *'always having been a good organiser coming from a big family'*, whilst others have gained these skills in adult life. The advice that active people give on how to do this sort of organising fits into these sections within this chapter:

- Making meetings and events accessible to more people (pages 4-5)
- Supporting people in finding the confidence to join in (pages 6-7)
- Practical considerations; health and safety, and publicising (page 8)
- Final comments on a learning programme for people who are active in the community (page 9).

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.

Making meetings and events accessible to a wide range of people

The 'research group'¹ gave a list of things to consider when trying to make meetings open to a wide range of people:

When planning meetings and events consider:

- *childcare issues and other carers*
- *meetings can start too early for some people*
- *changing the times of meetings (need to give good notice)*
- *lunch/snack with meetings and dietary requirements*
- *right room – needs to be fully accessible*

This advice was aimed at training events but could apply to many other meetings and events.

Many other people felt strongly about making meetings widely accessible. Some members of Womanzone emphasised the need for childcare to be available:

Being a single parent and doing everything on your own. I have to get a baby-sitter myself; (things are) not set-up for single parents.

You may have a partner but still may not have help with childcare.

People with disabilities and older people spoke of what they feel helps or gets in the way of people getting involved:

Moving to the main road where we are accessible, it's got easier access, if you're blind or have artificial legs.

The Hays (Business Centre) next to the main road, feels better rather than walking through an estate. Other parts of Craigmillar have boarded up windows.

Install a lift or a ramp – as it could be you, your children, your wife, your family.

Finding volunteer drivers is a big problem for smaller projects. Getting buses through the Capacity Building Project is not a problem but it is hard to get drivers

¹ '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.

Another person raised the issue of being able to understand what is going on. Many people struggle with reading, which may affect how easy it is for them to join in a meeting:

(There are) literacy ads on TV as people can't read.

There are a significant number of adults in Scotland who struggle with reading, writing and using numbers – recent figures put it at 800,000 or 23% of adults in Scotland². If a lot of information at the meeting is likely to be written down, people who find reading and writing difficult might stay away and they may not even know the meeting is happening.

Likewise some people who are deaf can find reading and writing difficult. One Deaf person, who uses British Sign Language (BSL)³, said:

Communication is a key issue – meetings, doing interviews, getting work

Without a BSL/English interpreter they would not be able to join in, because they are using a different language! Other deaf people need induction loops, lip-speakers or speed text typists⁴ to support them in actively joining in meetings.

One person spoke of their concern to see blind people get access to Braille books and was thinking of developing a service to do this:

The Braille printing idea, it's important to involve blind people in the community. It's terrible for a blind friend not to be involved, and important that all vulnerable people aren't left on their own.

Comment on learning: There is clearly knowledge within the community of how to make meetings and events accessible. The crucial issue is bringing it together and getting a wider body of active people familiar and practised in accessing meetings in this way. A learning programme can support this process.

² See the introduction to the recent report on Adult Literacy and Numeracy published by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education on the internet at: www.hmie.gov.uk/documents/publication/clalns.html

³ British Sign Language is the first language of 50,000+ Deaf people in the United Kingdom – it is not a signed version of English but a different language and communication between a Deaf person and an English-speaking person involves using a BSL/English interpreter.

⁴ Induction loops allow someone with a hearing aid to 'tune in' and hear more clearly. Lip-speakers silently mouth a speaker's words so that lip-readers can follow what is being said. Speed text-writers type out what a speaker is saying so that deaf people who are fluent in written English can follow.

Having the confidence to join in

The thinking people did on this issue was particularly aimed at meetings and events where speaking within a larger group or publicly was crucial to joining in ... but this can flag up a wider issue of who feels able to take part even in social events. So for instance one person said:

I know of one brilliant worker who lack confidence in meetings

Several people pointed to the following that could help people take part in meetings:

Need to talk through the chair – instead of across the table

Working with a small group of 4 people

Doing the Participatory Appraisal research on the Urban Design Framework. That's been the best part. There are people on the Community Council whose view's I don't agree with but it's nice to sit down with them and do this (in small groups)

One woman highlighted that 'women only' was required in some situations particularly where women are seeking to build their confidence. She spoke of a women only course:

It was the first time for me in this context and was very important as some women were going through bad divorces or there were cultural issues

One worker from Women Onto Work⁵ said that many women often find meetings dominated by men and found coming on a course for women only made a real difference to their confidence.

One disabled man also made a similar point about the need to make meetings welcoming to disabled people:

People have to learn the 'able' way is not always the right way and even the best way for them or us – gasp!

His point was that if groups and organisations adapted meetings and events so that disabled people could join in, then it would not only suit people with disabilities but also many 'able-bodied' people too. Many people would find meetings easier places to be and to contribute to.

⁵ Women Onto Work runs 'intensive pre-vocational training courses and guidance programmes' for women, including the Women Onto Work course, which it runs in Craigmillar as well as other parts of Edinburgh, and the Active Women course; see www.womenontowork.org

One parents group that is presently made up solely of women, recognised the challenge that making a group open to others can bring; finding solutions is not always easy:

A father came along last week to the group but no other fathers are there so he didn't want to come back.

Comment on learning: There is a significant issue here that many people, who are active in the community, are trying to explore - the culture of meetings. They are exploring how to make them not only accessible but also welcoming and relaxed for a range of people with different cultural expectations. A learning programme can contribute to this 'opening-up' by supporting local active people to explore ways to make their meetings and events open to a more diverse range of people, and supporting them to share what they are learning with others.

Other practical considerations

Learning about Health and Safety

One person pointed out that groups need to learn about a range of health and safety, and 'self-protection' issues:

Groups need to consider food protection, data protection, health and safety, fire, insurance (£100 per year). For example, a Dunfermline group now need to pay for a privately ordered buffet in order to use Hospital dining room – they can't bring their own food in. A Stirling group are paying publisher's right for music for exercises (£60-100 per year).

One person who had been a worker in the past but was now involved in organising local activities on a voluntary basis found that training undertaken whilst a worker was 'useful; First Aid, Health and hygiene'.

Keeping in touch with what's happening

Chapter 2, which focuses on the communication in communities, highlighted some of the different ways people keep in touch and the difficulties they sometimes face. For instance: trouble getting community newsletters, the lack of community information on the web currently and the importance of keeping people informed if events get cancelled. Finding a variety of ways to keep the people you want to attract to your meetings and events informed of what's happening is crucial. There is no guarantee that any single method will be effective.

Comment on learning: Active people and groups can build up their knowledge of health and safety and insurance issues over time, and likewise of how to reach new people and new audiences, by trying out different ways of communicating. A learning programme can contribute to this learning and sharing of learning.

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

This is a strong, very practical area of knowledge that active people could consider through a learning programme. The knowledge is already out there within the community about how to effectively organise meetings. There are also clear signs of work between groups and organisations to join it up.

The 'We have the Power' campaign group, a group of local people involved in adult learning,⁶ worked with CALNET and the Capacity Building Project to produce a report and video called 'That wee word MON£Y (and other things) in Adult Learning'. It provides a detailed range of concrete suggestions and questions for making learning accessible to a wide range of local people. These suggestions include:

- getting the right funding in place
- getting the right, flexible support in place
- making sure services and groups are accessible to local people e.g. people can get there and get in
- childcare and other family support.

It is a powerful source of ideas and questions that can encourage active people and groups to think more carefully about how to make their events and meetings more open to others. It is one example of the sorts of 'committed dialogue', put forward by Jane Thompson⁷ and discussed in Chapter 1b, that are ongoing within this community.

These are dialogues that can be strengthened and added too. For instance, the work of 'We've got the power' could be taken further and developed into a straightforward guide that provides very practical information on the 'dos and don'ts' of organising meetings and events that are accessible to all. The guide can form the basis for discussions with local groups and organisations, as well as services, funders and decision-makers working outside the area. A learning programme can support local people in thinking about how to take the dialogues that matter to them forward.

⁶ 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 or www.craigmillarcapacitybuilding.org/

⁷ 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/>.